



# **ZERO IN** **PH 2025 polls: Red-tagging** **emerging as top electoral** **violation**



International Observers Mission  
on the 2025 Philippine Elections  
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# Red-tagging is Emerging as Top Campaign Violation in 2025 Midterm Elections

Red-tagging finds its way on top of the list of campaign violations for the 2025 Philippine midterm elections. A prevalent human rights violation characterized as harassment, intimidation and vilification, in the Philippines it is an act of labelling individuals and groups as members, supporters or affiliates of armed communist insurgents. Overwhelmingly, it comprises 78.7 percent of the violations monitored by election watchdog and 2025 IOM partner Vote Report PH as of April 30.

Red-tagging traces its roots in McCarthyism during the 1940s and 1950s in the United States. Under the backdrop of a Cold War against the Soviet Union, the US government engaged in a widespread witch hunt for individuals suspected of espousing left-leaning beliefs and ideologies. The Philippine state has similarly engaged in red-tagging for decades, often targeting progressive individuals, activists, human rights advocates, and anyone it perceives as critical of its policies. It has seen an unprecedented spike under the Duterte administration and continues without let up under the Marcos Jr. government.

On May 12, Filipinos will exercise their right to vote in the 2025 midterm elections. Aside from being one of the hallmarks of democracy, the election season is also the period when the Filipino population is the most politically active. It is a natural time for people and candidates to have vibrant and honest discussions about the problems faced by the Filipino people, including the hurdles that stand in the way of genuine economic progress, peace, and security, and solutions to these problems.

On February 20, 2024, the Philippine Supreme Court declared in their groundbreaking decision on *Derudo v Vinoya* that the practice of red-tagging is a threat to the fundamental right to “life, liberty, and security.”<sup>1</sup> On February 19, 2025, the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) also issued Resolution No. 11116 which says that “branding individuals, groups, or organizations as “vocal dissenters,” “activists,” or sympathizers of subversive or terrorist groups” without evidence is considered unjust labeling and could lead to penalties. Individuals red-tagged by state institutions and their agents are accused of supporting the communist insurgency and are harassed, threatened, even disappeared or killed. Despite the Supreme Court ruling, the Marcos Jr. administration has failed to take measures that would end red-tagging, including abolishing the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC).

This government task force was formed under Duterte and has persistently carried out the practice against activists, leaders of people’s organizations, journalists and lawyers. UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression Irene Khan in her visit to the Philippines last January 2024 recommended that the NTF-ELCAC be abolished, a move supported by the Commission on Human Rights (CHR).

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<sup>1</sup> <https://sc.judiciary.gov.ph/sc-red-tagging-threatens-right-to-life-liberty-and-security/>

But despite these legal deterrents and strong condemnation by several institutions, data from election watchdogs show that red-tagging continues unabated. Progressive electoral candidates regardless of affiliation are targeted in these elections.

The multi-faceted character of red-tagging has earned it the distinction of being an electoral violation, a human rights violation, and an international humanitarian law (IHL) violation all at the same time. Red-tagging also constitutes a war crime since civilians' lives are endangered when they are linked to the armed movement of the Communist Party of the Philippines - New People's Army - National Democratic Front (CPP-NPA-NDF). In some cases, red-tagging is followed by surveillance, harassment, abduction, and even outright killing.

The massacre of the Fausto family in Negros Occidental clearly shows the dangers of red-tagging. Billy Fausto and his wife Emelda Fausto, along with their two minor children Ben and Raben were massacred inside their homes in the late night of June 14, 2023. Prior to the horrific killings, Billy Fausto and his family have been routinely red-tagged and accused of being supporters of the NPA. There were also instances when Billy was forced by the military to guide them in their nightly patrolling in the area. Billy and his spouse were merely members of a local farmers and farmworkers association.

Swaying people from casting their vote for any candidates through fear, intimidation, and disinformation campaigns is the opposite of a fair, free, clean and honest election process. Red-tagging silences those discussions by trying to discredit, through misinformation and harassment, solutions promulgated by candidates that run counter to business as usual and dynastic politics. These discussions give substance to the right to vote by giving voters the chance to engage with and affirm candidates that have the political will to respond to the pressing problems faced by the people.



Photo: Aninaw Productions thru Bulalat

# Case Studies

## Karapatan criticizes NTF-ELCAC for video red-tagging Kabataan Partylist Rep. Raoul Manuel

On February 18, 2025, human rights group Karapatan criticized the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) for releasing a video that “Red-tagged” Kabataan party list Rep. Raoul Manuel. The group was referring to a video posted on the Facebook page of the NTF-Elcac on Feb. 6, which tagged Manuel as a recruiter for the New People’s Army (NPA).

## Comelec Red-tagged by Fellow Government Agency.

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On February 20, 2025, the Commission on Elections (Comelec) yesterday accused a fellow government agency of “red tagging” the poll body, even as it issued a new policy prohibiting discriminatory and harassment acts during the campaign period for the May elections. Comelec Chairman George Garcia said the agency, which he declined to identify, sent a letter warning the poll body against issuing the new policy.

## Makabayan Candidates File Complaint Against NTF-ELCAC for Red-tagging

On April 22, 2025, leaders and candidates from the Makabayan coalition filed an election offense complaint in the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) against the NTF-ELCAC Executive Director Ernesto Torres Jr. for a series of red-tagging and defamatory statements against the coalition’s candidates during the campaign period. They said Torres Jr. violated COMELEC Resolution No. 11116 which prohibits “labeling” of individuals or organizations as terrorists, dissenters, and criminals without evidence.