

Toward an Enlightened Electorate: **CenPEG's Voter Education and Poll Watch Training**

CenPEG's election education in its various forms was held nationwide and in cooperation with various universities and schools, political parties and Partylist groups, poll watch groups, interfaith institutions, IT and business organizations, teachers, students, communities, foreign delegations, as well as trimedia.

I. Background

Under CenPEG's institutional vision, critical research on the Philippines' electoral reform occupies a key part in its programs, which include governance, security and foreign policy, special studies like the Bangsamoro struggle, human rights, and others. Electoral reform thus became a major study since August 2008 when the proposed automated election system (AES) was "pilot tested" in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). With the startling findings of the "pilot test" observation, CenPEG pursued further research as the Comelec's plan to fully automate the May 10, 2010 synchronizing national and local elections was quickly taking off. Thus its initial observer's report on the ARMM automated poll was followed by five more major studies on the automated elections in 2009-2010 which include this report.

One of such studies is "The 30 vulnerabilities and 30 safeguards in the AES 2010," which was a work in progress from February 2009 until it was published in October the same year. The findings in the "30 vulnerabilities and 30 safeguards" revealed that the Comelec's chosen technology, its wanton disregard of the safeguards as well as its race-against-the-clock implementation appeared to undermine voters' rights, make the system prone to fraud and, worst, could lead to a big-scale voter disenfranchisement.

With all these valuable and critical information, the next step was to disseminate this wealth of information to the public, who at the time was still in the dark about the May 10 automated elections. While CenPEG since its founding in 2004 had conducted voter education and election briefings, the discovery of flaws in the planned automated election system – and the urgent proposals for corresponding safeguards – posed a challenge to the research institution on how to prepare the voters as well as poll watch groups for the May 2010 elections.

The principle of "people empowerment" in the context of elections is to uphold voter's rights and make sure that elections express the sovereign will of the people in their choice of government. But how this can be made possible in an election run by a "modern technology" that is provided by a foreign consortium – and its implementation compliant with the law – became a daunting task for a research institution like CenPEG. Even more so as the electorate's political culture and level of technological comprehension was unprepared for a voting technology that was not only untested in Philippine conditions but demanded the voter to adjust to the machine, instead of the other way around.

Guided by CenPEG's experiences from its institutional Education and Training (EdTra) program, a campaign to conduct political and technical briefings, public forums, and eventually, a systematic voter education and poll watch training was rolled out. The idea of institutionalizing an election education program took seeds when CenPEG, through its Policy Study, Publication, and Advocacy Program (PSPA) began to organize public forums on the AES in February 2009. The forums, held initially through the auspices of the UP College of Engineering's computer studies and its facilities, were thereafter followed by technical and political briefings, and so on.

It should be noted, at this point, that CenPEG's election education in its various forms was held nationwide and in cooperation with various universities and schools, political parties and Partylist groups, poll watch groups, interfaith institutions, IT and business organizations, teachers, students, communities, foreign delegations, as well as trimedia¹. Through these activities, CenPEG's election studies were shared and were supplemented by PowerPoint presentations, handouts, and audio-visuals. Findings of AES preliminary studies were also circulated through the internet, and through CenPEG's online magazine (www.cenpeg.org) which was followed later by another website, www.eu-cenpeg.com under its Project 3030. Primarily involved in the election education and training were CenPEG's Fellows and various consultants and, later, by its researchers and project partners.

The EU-CenPEG Project 30-30, which kicked off in January 2010, had voter education and poll watch training as among its main components. The project specifically indicated that it will "use all forms of formal and informal modes of communication, popular forms of education and trainings to reach out to the biggest number of voters as possible..."

With the AES being a highly technical issue, there arose the need to simplify and laymanize the language and media used in the election education and training and in spreading such campaign to the broader community of voters. However, the use of the internet, though fast and universal, posed limitations as far as reaching out to the barangay-based voters is concerned. More to the point, in an underdeveloped country such as the Philippines, one can only expect only a few of the population being exposed to internet and computers at a functional level.

The digital divide

According to the Functional Literacy, Education and Mass Media Survey (FLEMMS) of the National Statistics Office (NSO, 2003) cited in a report by the Asian Institute of Journalism and Communication in 2009, only 7 percent of households owned personal computers. Moreover, the same report also cited the 4As Media Factbook (2004)² findings that personal computer penetration is estimated at 1.9 for every 100 persons.

Meanwhile, in terms of internet use, 32 percent (or about 24 to 35 million) have accessed the internet across the 22 major cities in the Philippines, including Metro Manila. This is based on a study conducted by Internet giant, Yahoo! and international research firm, The Nielsen Company in February 2010³. In CenPEG's preliminary GIS (geographical information system) study in 2009, only 10 percent of the country's 46,000 public schools that will be used as voting centers have internet connectivity.

The numbers, albeit in millions, are not exactly comforting especially when confronted with the antithesis to the claim of a digital age: The digital divide.

Hosken and Lyons (2003)⁴ explained digital divide as a term used "to express the idea that certain people and groups have less access to computing resources than others". These, they said, include "the financial problems of computer access, the lack of telecommunications resources in remote areas and a lack of basic literacy which would lead to computer use (Hosken and Lyons, 2003).

Referring to the Yahoo-Nielsen Net Index 2010, Internet access is revealed to be driven by the upper middle socio-economic classes (82%) compared with the lower classes (68%), the report said.

In her study on mobile phone and Internet usage in Philippines and India, Mendoza (2009) posits that huge divides exist between the few high income economies and the rest of the economies of the low to lower-middle income such as the Philippines and India in terms of household access and individual use of computers and - particularly - internet.⁵

However, Bolt and Crawford (2000) argue that access to digital technology is just the starting point of a broader discussion about the role of computers in our culture. He said:

“Words like “cyberspace,” “internet,” “multimedia,” “on-line,” “e-mail,” and “microprocessor” seem commonplace in our media. Yet the stark reality is that tens of millions of Americans are not at all conversant with digital tools, and tens of millions more have only a passing familiarity with the most basic applications: word processing and e-mail.” (p.20)

Getting to know the Filipino voter

Understanding technology is most especially challenging to the Filipino voter. As discussed earlier, only 3 in 10 Filipino city-dwellers have accessed the internet. Thus, the rural dwellers, which comprise majority of the country's population, are outside the radar of these internet penetration surveys. Moreover, internet users are mostly 10-19 years old⁶ while the voter's age is at least 18 years old. Having said that, the figures could be even less if we are talking only about the voters.

Picking up on what Bolt and Crawford (2000) pointed out earlier, the data on internet and computer access should be understood vis-à-vis the education and literacy rate of the concerned populace, such as voters.

Based on the 2000 Census of Population and Housing survey projection, the 2004 election had 49 million voters where only 66% have completed some elementary or high school education; 15 percent are college undergraduates; and only 7 percent are college degree holders. In addition, there were about 1.6 million voters who have no education.⁷

As of late, while no data (projected or actual) is available on the educational attainment of the 2010 voters, the 2003 FLEMMS findings suggest that the profile of voters in terms of education may not have been significantly different. Looking at the estimated 69 million population (2003) of Filipinos age 6 and above, 29 percent of them, or three out of 10 persons in that age group, have attended elementary school but did not complete the elementary level, while one in every 10 had no formal education (9.0%).

The statistics are disturbing, given that the automated elections system cannot be fully understood without close scrutiny of how it actually works. Avoiding technical jargons is nearly impossible in answering questions as to how the votes are counted, transmitted, and canvassed. How secure is the system from tampering? What are the steps taken to ensure the security of the system? These are the essential questions that voter education needs to address.

II. Simplifying the AES

In the course of CenPEG's research, intensive discussions and workshops were held to discuss the various aspects of the AES such as the source code, digital signature, and transmission of election results. Understanding these highly technical issues became a complex process. It took even the most seasoned social scientists who were involved in the research some time for the AES concepts to sink in. The workshop discussions also took up the AES' management and legal issues.

Evidently, at that point, the problem was how to laymanize the AES to be understood by the general public, most especially the basic masses. Although a challenging undertaking, CenPEG believed that a genuine voter education is one that is “responsive to the critical questions of the AES,” especially after finding out the numerous vulnerabilities of the AES which posed a threat to the rights of Filipinos to clean, transparent, and credible elections.

Moreover, a genuine voter education is also one that leads to the empowerment of the electorate which is not merely through the sheer exercise of their right to vote, but also by ensuring that votes will be accurately counted while, at the same time, demanding from the implementers of the AES transparency and implementation of safeguards against its vulnerabilities.

With these as foundations for voter education, CenPEG developed a module that was as comprehensive as possible, covering three major areas: (1) basic voter education, (2) technical briefing, and (3) five major technical issues.

Project 3030 basic voter education

An attempt to simplify voter education, this module basically teaches the voter what to expect on election day, and other pertinent preparations and reminders needed. Nonetheless, a discussion on the basic background of the manual elections vis-à-vis the AES is also included to serve as foundation for the first-time AES voter.

The module outlines first the process of voting which involves the following activities:

1. Finding the name up in the voters' list
2. Confirming identity with the BEI
3. Receiving of election materials (ballot, secrecy folder, and marking pen)
4. Proceeding to the voting area to vote
5. Feeding the ballot into the PCOS machine
6. Getting the finger inked by the BEI

Second, it teaches the voter how to shade the ballot correctly. Voters are instructed to fully shade the oval using the marking pen so that the machine will not mistake the vote as an ambiguous mark. An ambiguous mark, when not corrected, may cause the machine to reject and invalidate the ballot. Lastly, voters are informed about the proper treatment of ballot in order to avoid rejection, and eventually invalidation of the ballot such as crumples, folds, and stray marks especially on the bar codes.

Voters were also reminded to vote only the correct number of candidates: 1 vote for president, 1 vote for vice-president, and so on. Failure to do so will result in an *overvote*, which will render the vote for that particular contest invalid. On the other hand, *undervoting* or voting less than the number of positions in an office is allowed (e.g., voting only 10 out of 12 senatorial positions is valid).

Other reminders include bringing a list of selected candidates to make ballot-shading easier and faster, checking the clustered precinct assignment before election day, etc.

This module is rarely given on its own. It is always supplemental to the technical briefing and/or the five major technical issues.

Technical briefing

The technical briefing explains in the most meticulous, yet simple way the process and components of the AES. It starts with explaining the similarities and differences of the AES with manual election. The discussion then proceeds to the examination of the PCOS and CCS machine's hardware and software components. And drawing from CenPEG's 2009 policy study, the technical briefing includes an extensive discussion on the 30 vulnerabilities of the AES and the corresponding 30 safeguards. Finally, the technical briefing also included basic voter education.

The strength of this module is its uniqueness and thoroughness. It is unique because it is derived from an original study; and it is thorough because it presents both positive and negative aspects of the system with the goal of stimulating critical thinking and making the voter more informed. Despite its highly technical content, this type of briefing can be given to anyone. It is in the strategy of the trainer, combined with the internally agreed methods, on how to simplify the explanation.

For instance, in explaining the concept of the source code, the analogy of the "recipe" is used. A recipe consists of the list of ingredients, the right amount, and the step-by-step instructions that should be observed

in order to achieve the desired outcome. Similar to the source code, it consists of a set of instructions that commands the machine to perform certain actions such as how to count the votes.

Because of its comprehensive content, the technical briefing takes at least three hours to conduct. Moreover, since the module is loaded with technical jargons and concepts, it is most effective for the trainer to take time in explaining. In turn, the trainee is also given time to absorb and understand the subject. Thus, as a matter of policy, although not in a strict sense, EU-CenPEG requires at least three hours for the conduct of the technical briefing.

Five major technical issues

This module is an abridged version of the technical briefing, highlighting only the 5 major technical issues or the five major and urgent concerns involving program and data integrity of the AES. The 5 issues are: verifiability of voter's choice; program correctness and integrity verification; protection of transmitted data; system administration; and transmission/connectivity.

Because of its compressed form, this module is best used in forums or short lecture sessions.

III. Multimedia materials

Recognizing the limited reach of voter education through classroom-style instruction, Project 30-30 produced multimedia materials that will cater to a wider range of audience. The following materials were distributed during trainings, forums, and other gatherings; other materials were distributed throughout the Philippines for general public visibility.



30 Vulnerabilities and
30 Safeguards (English)
30 Peligro, 30 Remedyo (Filipino)



AES Primer (English)
Prayer sa AES (Filipino)
Prayer sa AES (Bisaya)



Pollwatcher's Guide



Website (www.eu-cenpeg.com)

The EU-CenPEG Project 3030 website (www.eu-cenpeg.com) was launched in March 2010 as a medium for fast and broad dissemination of project studies, researcher's journals, education and training modules, election-related events, critical analysis and commentaries, news, special reports, top stories, and other information. It is designed to serve as a one-stop shop for election education, information, and research. Many of its downloadable content materials were contributed by project researchers, poll watchers, student volunteers as well as CenPEG consultants and analysts.

IV. Reach of Project 3030 voter education

The Project 30-30 voter education facilitators are the project's researchers - as well as other resource persons from project partners - who were closely involved in the AES study. Although not all are IT professionals, they are very well trained on the various aspects and processes of the AES and have development studies, communication, political science, and other disciplines as academic background. The trainers always placed themselves in the shoes of the trainees, and in anticipation of their needs. This thus made them more effective in responding to the basic questions of the voters regarding the AES.

In the course of the nation's preparation for the automated elections, CenPEG received numerous invitations to conduct voter education and AES briefing. However, manpower limitations prevented CenPEG from responding to all requests, most especially in cases where multiple trainings are conducted in a single day. However, to the best of its capacity, the center was still able to reach at least 15 areas in Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao since Project 30-30 was launched in January 2010.

<u>Luzon</u>	<u>Mindanao</u>	<u>Visayas</u>
Quezon City	Cotabato	Bohol
Manila	Marawi	Iloilo
Batangas	Bukidnon	Bacolod
Tagaytay	Cagayan de Oro	Cebu
Isabela		
La Union		
Bicol		

In its four-month voter education and related activities, Project 30-30 reached out to various sectors in society such as students, farmers, workers, religious organizations, women's groups, people's organizations, poll watchers, and others. Even political parties, candidates and media outfits who were interested in listening to the technical briefing invited CenPEG to enhance their knowledge of the AES.

During the same period, more than a thousand individuals took part in the training modules of Project 30-30, a relatively low figure compared to the millions of Filipinos who had very limited or no knowledge and access to information on the AES. But the center also believes in providing quality education and information for the voters, which will then be passed on to their friends and families, and within their circles of influence. Moreover, many of the voter education and training participants were key leaders and opinion makers in their various sectors and communities thus serving as multipliers of the information and issues brought to them by CenPEG. In many respects, CenPEG's "30 vulnerabilities and 30 safeguards" also served as a guide for major TV networks in setting up their own election monitoring systems for the May 10 elections.

Beyond the thousands of direct participants of voter education and poll watch training conducted by Project 3030, beneficiaries of other voter education seminars and forums using the modules developed by Project 3030 and supplemented by PowerPoint slides, visuals, pamphlets, primers, and other multimedia materials would reach tens of thousands more.

Media advocacy served as another tool for election information and education, where CenPEG's resource persons and IT consultants brought various issues and concerns related to the automated elections before millions of TV audiences.

Voter education and poll watch training were further enriched by studies, reports, and other information resources posted on the Project 3030 website, www.eu-cenpeg.com, which was launched in March 2010, operates to this day, and is subscribed to by Filipino as well as foreign readers.

V. Reorienting voter education

Project 30-30 strived for a meaningful voter education that centered on the voters' right to information, one that enhances empowerment and inspires critical thinking. It is vital to let the voters know their rights in an automated election system in relation to the different provisions in the law that is supposed to ensure these rights. In the same way, it is also important to let the voters know whether the law is being implemented faithfully by the Comelec.

For instance, part of the technical briefing is a discussion on the voter's choice verifiability as a right specified under Section 7 of RA 9369. The law specifies that the system must "provide the voter a system of verification to find out whether or not the machine has registered his or her choice." However, it was very clear that the Comelec failed to address this by disabling the function in the PCOS machine that will show how it interpreted the ballot.

No other voter education campaign, not even the PPCRV's, took the critical stand in matters such as this. Sadly, the lone accredited citizens' arm missed this very important aspect of the AES which violates the right of voters to be able to verify their votes as interpreted by the PCOS machine.

The experiences in the last May 2010 elections show that there is so much more about voting and elections that the public needs to know. It is a long and tedious process but necessary in order to help create a more informed and involved Filipino electorate ever assertive of its right to a credible and transparent election.
EU-CenPEG Project 3030

End Notes

- 1 CenPEG resource persons, (IT, legal, and political analysis), for instance, gave AES briefings to ANC/ABS-CBN, GMA7 and other media groups.
- 2 The 4As Media Factbook is a publication of the Association of Accredited Advertising Agencies-Philippines
- 3 Yahoo-Nielsen Net Index (2010)
- 4 Hosken, Martin and Melinda Lyons. 2003. Crossing the digital divide: computer resources to aid minorities. Conference on language development, language revitalization and multilingual education in minority communities in Asia, 6-8 November 2003, Bangkok, Thailand. 5 p. <http://www.sil.org/asia/ldc/>
- 5 The GLOBALdigital divideCountry Focus:The Philippines and India. Elaissa Marina E. Mendoza (2009)
- 6 Yahoo-Nielsen Net Index (2009)
- 7 Based on a report, "Profile of Filipino Voters" by Carmelita Nuguid. Erica and Florante C. Varona. A paper presented at the PSA Annual Conference on November 12, 2003, Sulu Hotel, Quezon City