

Chapter 13

Automated Elections

I. SITUATIONER

The conduct of elections in the Philippines for the past four decades has remained largely unchanged. Philippine elections rely heavily on manual tallying and canvassing of votes thus making them vulnerable to control and manipulation by traditional politicians and those with vested interests. The cost of winning an elective post is highly expensive, and the absence of mechanisms to check and limit sources of campaign funds become fertile grounds for corruption and divisiveness.

In recent years, initiatives to reform the electoral system included the enactment of the following laws: Republic Act (RA) 8046, establishing a pilot program modernizing the registration and vote counting process in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, the Party List Law, Fair Elections Act and the Absentee Voting Act. To address the inadequacies and limitations of the electoral process, RA 8436 or the Election Automation Act of 1997, was passed authorizing the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) to use automated election system for vote counting and canvassing in the national and local polls. The law provided for the generation of a national computerized voters list, establishment of a voters identification card system and the automation of the vote counting.

However, sectoral issues still hinder reform efforts in the electoral process. The following have been identified as basic problems afflicting the electoral system: (a) outdated electoral process; (b) failure to implement the electoral modernization law; (c) limited administrative and regulatory capabilities of the COMELEC; (d) ineffective educational/information campaigns on new laws and policies; (e) weak political party system; (f) unaccountable political financing; and (g) defective party list system (Governance Assessment, 2003).

II. GOALS, STRATEGIES AND ACTION PLANS

To ensure a credible and transparent electoral process, the modernization of the electoral system through computerization shall be supported to ensure the credibility of polls and correct the deficiencies in the electoral system. Likewise, the Omnibus Election Code shall be further revised and amended to respond to the needs of the present electoral system.

Measures to strengthen the party system and regulate the activities of political parties shall be created. State financing of political parties shall also be considered through the passage of the Campaign Finance Bill.

The COMELEC's capacity to raise the level of political discourse and educate citizens regarding their right to vote will be enhanced. This will be done through conduct of continuing citizen and voter education through partnership with civil society groups and other government

institutions. The electorate must be empowered with information that would help them vote intelligently. The challenge is to develop the people's appreciation of their vote as a means to reform the government and receive better services from it. Part of this challenge is the need to raise the awareness of the electorate on relevant issues and the corresponding platforms of the candidates, if the country is to shift from the politics of personality to the politics of party programs.