

THE ROLE OF MEDIA IN THE 2004 ELECTION

A Multi-sectoral Conference

(December 10, 2003)

The conference commenced with the national anthem. Thereafter, the master of ceremony Ms. Kissy Sumaylo of Institute for Politics and Governance greeted and recognized the significant guests and participants from different forms of media, civil societies and organizations.

The conveners were composed of **ATTY. RODOLFO DIZON**, Supervising Political Affairs Officer 1, Office of Rep. Jesli Lapus; **MR. FERDINAND RAFANAN**, Director of Education and Information, Division of Commission on Elections (COMELEC); **DR. TEOTICA C TAGUIBAO**, Chief of Programs Division, Commission on Higher Education; and **MR. RAMON CASIPLE**, Chairman of Consortium on electoral Reforms.

Welcome Remarks

For starters **ATTY. RODOLFO DIZON**, Supervising Political Affairs Officer 1 from the Office of Representative Jesli Lapus, as one of the conveners, delivered his welcoming statement. He mentioned the success of the Voters' Education Summit and believed that the holding of the forum runs complimentary to the objective of developing an informed and responsible electorate. He said that accuracy and timeliness now more than ever must be the guiding principles of the media practitioners because the political and electoral panorama is changing in a dynamic pace. And with this, he believed that our citizens need to be informed in an instantaneous yet precise manner.

He also mentioned the Overseas Absentee Voting Law that empowers Filipino citizens worldwide to make a legitimate choice as to who will be our country's next leaders. He said that the committee on absentee voting law continuously monitors development and takes note of them in aid of further legislation.

He stressed that the role of media in May 2004 elections is crucial, that their power to say public opinion instantly is irrefutable.

DIRECTOR FERDINAND RAFANAN, Department of Education and information, COMELEC, as a newly designated head articulated his happiness due to the existence of groups / organizations that are willing to work side by side with COMELEC to accomplish a common goal that is voters' education in line with the May 2004 elections.

He uttered that COMELEC will definitely serve as an encouragement and will empower every group constituting the assembly to achieve a more vital electoral process.

In behalf of the Commission on Higher Education, **DR. TEOTICA TAGUIBAO**, Chief of Programs Divisions, forwarded the message that Consortium on Electoral Reform should be commended for organizing activities such as this (The Role of Media in the 2004 Election Conference).

She stated that electoral success in the Philippines is progressively more dependent upon candidates' media strategies and media placement on political issues. She proceeded with enumerating types of media effects in the electoral process such as dissemination of information persuade individuals to support or oppose a candidate, setting the agenda for political campaign, influencing the criteria on which electoral preferences are based. She cited that candidates with more media activities are in a better position to get their message to a greater number of voters and thus have greater chances of winning. Media, therefore, is definitely a vital instrument both to the candidates and the voters.

Though he expressed his support both to civil society and the government, **UNDERSECRETARY JOSE LUIS GASCON** of the Department of Education raised several issues. One issue is the full automation or partial automation of election that was needed to be clarified, another one is the integrity of the machine, and still another one is the protection of rights of teachers with the use of voting machines.

He reinstated that recommendations which came out in the Voters' Education Summit will have to be set aside because most of them must require action by congress which had other priorities than addressing electoral reform.

He believed that as concerned citizens and important stakeholders in electoral process, priorities must be reassessed as the election is fast approaching.

MR. RAMON CASIPLE of Consortium of Electoral Reform, being the last one to deliver his speech, believed that a lot had been said by the speakers before him. Nevertheless, he still gave emphasis on the critical role of the media in the forthcoming elections. He reminded each and everyone present that media would play the major part of the voters' education. Thereby he expressed to all that he's hoping that there would be resolutions on how media are going to handle itself during the election period.

Plenary Input

THE MODERNIZED ELECTION PROCESS

➤ Director Ferdinand T. Rafanan
Director, Department of Education and Information
COMELEC

COMELEC is modernizing so as to move away from the old system of election.

COMELEC is created by constitution thus is an independent constitutional body which is responsible for conducting honest, orderly, peaceful and credible election. The commissioners sit in COMELEC upon confirmation by the law making body.

For the modernization of electoral processes there is the Republic Act 8159, the System of Daily Registration. For its implementation COMELEC has been conducting daily registration of voters and precinct mapping project which makes the cleansing of voters' list to become a sole responsibility not just of COMELEC but of all responsible citizens.

Modernization was not merely a plan by commissioners nor by Commission on Elections but rather a law that came into existence during the term of former President Fidel V. Ramos, the Republic Act 8436 or what is called the Election Modernization Law. This law provides for the kind of counting machines that we should have. Listed in this is the description of the counting machine, feature by feature (more than 10 are listed), such as what should the counting machine be, what should be its characteristic features.

The only basic issue that should be raised is whether the Automated Counting Machine that congress prescribed complies with the description embodied in RA 8436.

It is the command of the law that election shall be modernized. COMELEC has the political will to implement what the law provides and that is the reason why 1,991 Automated Counting Machines were already been purchased.

He challenged everyone to send experts in information technology to examine the software of the counting machines. Whether we shall have honest election using the machines.

The machine is user friendly, he said, and can be manipulated easily by anyone even those who do not have any degree in BS Computer Science.

He reinstated that COMELEC is just an implementer of the law and gave an assurance that they have the will to implement what the law provides and that COMELEC is for nationwide automation of the counting process.

MEDIA IN 2004 ELECTION

➤ Mr. Sonny Fernandez
Producer, Balitang-balita
ABC 5

Changes in electoral processes set new demands for media responsibility. In decisive number of times media the Philippines media accompanied the masses in small and big struggles towards a small and big victories for strict electoral changes.

The 2004 elections is not just traditional media coverage for this event. In May 2004 the Filipino people and media will be witness to unfolding of a new chapter in electoral democracy.

There will be two major breakthroughs: (1) the use of modernized system of voting and counting; and (2) the Absentee Voting of OFWs. Thus, media should already be starting voters' education that can erase all doubts in mind of every Filipino voter and help COMELEC to deliver HOPE (Honest, Organized, Peaceful Election). ABC 5 has started "Smarteng Botante", a voters' education segment incorporated in newscast with its own vision of empowerment, and mission to deliver critical stories for the people to be able to think in the right direction.

Because the upcoming poll is new to all, there are weaknesses in the implementation of modernization scheme. Making it hard for the media to cover the event especially that of the Absentee Voting. Nevertheless, media will be critical in every step of the computerization process because no one can ever know when human intervention can come in. But an improved voter should be able to deter these accidents that might happen.

Media should not only pursue policy advocacy or intervention for social changes but most importantly the people. An informed voter is an empowered voter and that is precisely what the media is for, the "voter empowerment".

VOTER BEHAVIOR OF THE FILIPINO ELECTORATE

➤ Ms. Marison Atienza-Liñan
Program Coordinator, Research and Public Information
IPER

CULTURAL AND STRUCTURAL INFLUENCES ON VOTER BEHAVIOR

➤ Mr. Francisco Cinco
Senior Trainor
Institute for Popular Democracy

Structural influences on voter behavior:

- ▶ Electoral System and Procedure – which dictates the chances of a candidate
- ▶ Voters' Demographic – A marginalized society is vulnerable to patronage vote
- ▶ Poverty – Election becomes an instrument to earn a living
- ▶

Cultural influences on voter behavior:

- ▶ Patron client
- ▶ Private relationship to masses of public servants – serving only those who helped the elected official
- ▶ Characteristic Traits
- ▶ Tolerance of Filipinos
- ▶ Classification of Voters – Politicians ride with the wants and expectations of the voters

OPEN FORUM

| QUESTION | ANSWER |
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| <p>Addressed to Director Rafanan: 1.What is the update on filtering illegal voters because it is still rampant in Mindanao area?</p> <p>2. Is there an extension for registration of voters in Lanao del Sur?</p> | <p>1.Many illegal registrants have been caught and are now under investigation by 5 lawyers assigned to the case. The data-capturing machine, the first phase of modernization, helped to combat illegal registration.</p> <p>2.Extension of registration in Lanao del Sur had already been granted and is done already. Law mandates the illegal registration within 120 days of election. The reason is that the final list of voters is needed in preparation by the COMELEC.</p> |
| <p>Addressed to Director Rafanan: 1.Totoo bang ang Data Capturing Machines ay di dumaan sa</p> | <p>1.It is not mandated by law. Ang Automated Counting Machines</p> |

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| <p>DOST?</p> <p>2. Paano ang transmission ng results?</p> | <p>lang ang kailangang dumaan sa DOST. And only one ACM did not pass the standard of COMELEC, the one with 99.998% rating given by DOST.</p> <p>2. The counting machine is a stand-alone machine. The results will be saved in a CD, and will be fed to a computer that will send the result using VSAT.</p> |
| <p>Addressed to Dir. Rafanan.</p> <p>1.Gagamit din ba ng counting machines sa Absentee Voting?</p> <p>2. When will you start information dissemination to OFWs?</p> | <p>1. Yes, will use ACM for absentee voting.</p> <p>2. Information Dissemination will start on January 2004. There will be a special committee for OFWs.</p> |
| <p>Addressed to Dir. Rafanan</p> <p>What happened to the unit that has grade of 99.998 %?</p> | <p>It was rejected by COMELEC because the ranking did not pass the standard of COMELEC.</p> |
| <p>Addressed to Dir. Rafanan</p> <p>How soon can you come up with the official result of the election?</p> | <p>Counting will be over for less than 7 hours considering the flow of process</p> <p>ACM counting</p> <p>Precinct level</p> <p>↓</p> <p>Print out results</p> <p>↓</p> <p>Saved to CD</p> <p>↓</p> <p>Computer stand alone</p> <p>↓</p> <p>VSAT/Modem</p> <p>↓</p> |

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| | Provincial & National Counting and Consolidation Centers |
| Addressed to Dir. Rafanan Hanggang saan ang pananagutan ng mga teachers? | The general instruction is that ballots should be brought by the teachers to common counting centers. Chances of ballot switching are very nil. Still, the responsibility of the teachers is “to guard the ballots” more so because of our uncertainties and fears. |

WORKSHOP

Guide questions for the 2 groups:

1. What are your current public information programs concerning electoral education?
2. What do you envision as possible partnerships with the civil society organizations and NGOs for public information campaigns regarding the modernized election process and civic education?

Group 1

Current public information programs concerning electoral education:

A. Tri-media

Television : (ABS-CBN’s Halalan 2004) guesting in TV talkshows

Radio : (ABS-CBN’s Halalan 2004) guestings

Print : through press releases

B. Internet

ABS-CBN’s Halalan website

- ▶ Public may send questions directed to candidates through email and will be answered through TV shows
- ▶ Information dissemination regarding absentee voting
- ▶ Inclusion of candidates’ profiles, uploading new documents from COMELEC
- ▶ Facilitation of SWS exit poll

C. Mobile

- ▶ Can access TV programs via mobile phones (Php 20/min)
- ▶ Can download logos, ring tones of favorite candidate(s) / party(ies)
- ▶ Can send complaints and tallies from respective precinct
- ▶ Can conveniently send instant information regarding election updates to registered subscribers

D. Education

- ▶ Seminars, workshops, conferences
- ▶ Leaflets
- ▶ Billboards
- ▶ Community organizations/activities

Resolutions

1. Develop, promote, prepare, popularize materials (for media and the public)
2. Lobby that the COMELEC HOUR during which majority of audiences are watching
3. Availability of civil society groups when media needs them for interview and etc.
4. Analysis, classification and identification of certain political leanings of media
5. Explore “komiks” as means for information dissemination