

**Your Vote.
Our Future.
a module for citizen-voters' education**

I. The Right of Suffrage

The human right to vote is embodied in three instruments: Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR); the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; and in the 1987 Philippine Constitution. The Philippines is governed by these three documents which similarly mandate **universality of the right; equality in access to public service; and secrecy of votes.**

<p>Article 21 (1-3) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (December 10, 1948)</p>	<p>Art.25 (a-c) of International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, (March 1976)</p>	<p>Art. V, Sec. 1-2 of The 1987 Philippine Constitution</p>
<p>1 Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.</p> <p>2 Everyone has the right to equal access to public service in his country.</p> <p>3 The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of the government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections, which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.</p>	<p>Every citizen shall have the right and the opportunity, without any of the distinctions mentioned in article 2 and without unreasonable restrictions:</p> <p>(a) To take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives;</p> <p>(b) To vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot, guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the electors;</p> <p>(c) To have access, on general terms of equality, to public service in his country.</p>	<p>1 Suffrage may be exercised by all citizens of the Philippines not otherwise disqualified by law.</p> <p>2 The Congress shall provide a system for securing the secrecy and sanctity of ballot as well as a system for absentee voting by qualified Filipinos abroad. The congress shall also design a procedure for the disabled and the illiterates to vote without the assistance of other persons. Until then, they shall be allowed to vote under existing laws and such rules as the Commission on elections may promulgate to protect the secrecy of the ballot.</p>

The people's right to suffrage is the foundation of the electoral process. If people are not allowed to vote freely, then the whole process of elections becomes absurd and superfluous.

Suffrage: *"The right to vote, or the exercising of that right."* –Andrew Heywood; *Politics (Second Edition)*; p. 432.

The right to suffrage, as a human right, is related to the concept of democracy and people's sovereignty.

Sovereignty is often defined as the principle of absolute and unlimited power. Under the democratic 1987 Constitution, it is the people alone who can exercise sovereignty. They can therefore make decisions that are binding on all individual citizens, groups and institutions—including the selection of leaders who will run the government.

Art. II, Sec. 1 of The 1987 Philippine Constitution: *"The Philippines is a democratic and republican State. Sovereignty resides in the people and all government authority emanates from them."*

Qualifications and Disqualifications of a Voter

All citizens of the Philippines, eighteen years of age or over, and residents of the Philippines for one year and for at least six months in the city or municipality wherein he/she proposes to vote immediately preceding the election are qualified to vote.

The following shall be disqualified from voting:

- a. Any person who has been sentenced by final judgment to suffer imprisonment for not less than one year. However, he/ she may reacquire the right to vote upon expiration of five years after service of sentence.
- b. Any person who has been adjudged by final judgment by competent court or tribunal of having committed any crime involving disloyalty to the duly constituted government such as rebellion, sedition, violation of the anti-subversion and firearms laws, or any crime against national security, unless restored to his/her full civil and political rights in accordance with law: Provided, That he/she shall regain his right to vote automatically upon expiration of five years after service of sentence.
- c. Insane or incompetent persons as declared by competent authority.

In addition, RA 9189 or the Overseas Absentee Voting Law entitles all Filipino citizens overseas, not otherwise disqualified by law, and immigrants and permanent residents with affidavit of intent to resume residence in the Philippines, to vote for elective positions on the national level: President; Vice-President; Senators; and Party-List Representatives.

II. History of Elections

A system of election was first practiced in the Philippines during the Spanish and American colonial period. The process, however, was limited only to male, educated, and landed voters and was more ceremonial rather than a genuine democratic mechanism.

Sectoral struggle and political participation were only realized in 1937: when Act 4112, granting women the right of suffrage, was implemented; and when the peasant movements gained meaningful participation in political parties and in actually the filling of government positions.

The first democratic election after WW II was the 1946 election for President and Vice-President of the Republic, members of the Senate and of the House of Representatives. From then on, the country operated on a two-party system wherein two major political parties, the Nacionalista Party and the Liberal Party, figured in succeeding elections.

When Marcos declared Martial Law in 1972, the 1935 Constitution was scrapped, an Interim Batasang Pambansa was created and a new (1973) Constitution was adopted. Marcos ruled as both president and prime minister, with legislative powers, under transition provisions—a one-man dictatorship.

Under popular pressure, he called for the election for an Interim Batasang Pambansa in 1978. The *Kilusang Bagong Lipunan (KBL)* became the administration party. The election claimed to restore Philippine democracy but Marcos' intent was to gain legitimacy for his undemocratic administration and to create a rubber stamp legislature. The exercise defied democratic procedures, and was characterized by rampant electoral manipulation by the Marcos government to ensure victory.

Local elections in 1980 were characterized by widespread terrorism, violence and wholesale fraud. Intense opposition came from both the urban and rural citizenry.

In 1981, Marcos submitted himself to the electoral process to regain legitimacy. The event was boycotted by the political opposition and who instead launched a broad-based anti-dictatorship movement.

The Aquino assassination in 1983 resulted in waves of protest forcing the creation of wider democratic space. Marcos, in a bid to defuse the protests, held the Batasang Pambansa elections in 1984 to replace the Interim Batasang Pambansa. The exercise was intended to divert the people's attention away from the Aquino assassination and was once again boycotted by the political opposition. Still, the period was marked by weakening popularity of Marcos and the people's growing political movement against the Marcos dictatorship.

Under domestic and international pressure, Marcos called for snap presidential elections in 1986. The widespread election manipulations and irregularities and the worsening social, political and economic order triggered the EDSA uprising in the same year. The mass action known as the People Power Revolution of 1986 led to the ouster of Marcos, the collapse of KBL and the installation of Corazon Aquino as President.

Aquino's program of restoring democracy, promoting stability and establishing political legitimacy involved three major electoral exercises: a national plebiscite for the approval of the 1987 Constitution in February 1987; the election for members of the Senate and House of Representatives in May 1987; and local elections in January 1988. The 1987 Constitution provided for a multi-party system.

During the 1992 synchronized national and local elections, the people voted for president for the first time under the 1987 Constitution. The main campaign issue was doing away with "trapo" or traditional politics. In 1995, congressional and local elections were held. A new form of fraud dubbed as "dagdag-bawas" or the subtraction of votes from one candidate to be added to the contending candidate was a practice during these two major elections.

In 1998, the first party-list elections were held. Joseph Estrada was elected as President of the Republic with popular support. However in January 2001, EDSA 2, a repeat of the 1986 People Power, removed Estrada from Malacañang and seated Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo as the new president.

Four months later, senatorial and local elections were held simultaneously which proved to be a major victory for the new administration after its allies gained a majority in both Houses of Congress, along with winning most of the elected local posts.

However, President Arroyo had become so unpopular that, by 2004, she only narrowly won over her closest rival, actor-turned politician Fernando Poe, Jr. A year later, in June 2005, President Arroyo was confronted by the "Hello, Garci" controversy, wherein her alleged taped conversations with COMELEC Commissioner Garcilano with the intent of rigging the elections was leaked to the media. This generated large street demonstrations, reminiscent of EDSA I and II.

While President Arroyo was able to stay in power, she was not able to endear herself to the majority of the people, resulting in a resounding victory for the opposition in the senatorial elections of 2007.

However, the 2007 elections also signaled the entry of trapos into the party-list system, which drew significant votes away from the top performers in the party-list elections. This sudden interest of traditional politicians in the party-list system was ironically brought about by the success of the party-list representatives themselves to gain equal treatment from their district colleagues.

Time and again, the struggle for our independence and for democratic governance resulted in a kind of political system, political leaders and the electorate that we have right now. Elections have been a major feature and mechanism in practice and through a more informed electorate are hoped to continue to serve as vehicles towards genuine democratic governance.

III. Elections and Democracy

- The Constitution guarantees that we are a sovereign people, from where *all* government authority derives. Sovereignty or the power to govern is exercised directly through suffrage and direct democracy instruments, and indirectly through officials elected by the people as their public servants. The will of the people, then, is expressed in clean, orderly and honest elections.
- Elections are part of the system of representative democracy, complemented by the system of direct democracy.
- Direct democracy may take various forms and categorizations of direct people's participation in governance. Among these are plebiscites, referenda, people's initiatives, recall, and *barangay* assemblies.
- Studies have indicated that people enjoy a higher degree of freedom if direct democracy mechanisms are put in place.
- The representative democratic structure, in which the people govern through elected representatives, is based on the principle of "consent of the governed". Thus, the government officials chosen and elected by the people become servants and not masters of the people from whom and for whom these officials exercise their power and authority.
- The citizen voters in a representative democracy are entitled to free and informed choices for whom to vote and the choices must be dictated by the genuine welfare of the majority. Every individual political choice and decision made by the citizen voters will determine the kind of government that will serve them.

Specific Mechanisms

- Since the enactment of the 1987 Constitution, elections for President and Vice-president are held every six years, while elections for Senators and members of the House of Representatives and local government officials occur every three years.
- At the local level, *barangay* elections and *Sangguniang Kabataan* elections are also held periodically.
- From 1993 onwards elections for the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) were held. The 1996 and the 2008 ARMM elections also served as a pilot-test for the automated system of elections.

Aside from voting in elections, our Constitution mandates other mechanisms to advance democratization and citizen's participation in governance.

- The system of initiative and referendum gives the people power to directly enact, propose and reject laws both at the local and national levels.

- Also through initiative, the people may directly propose amendments to the Constitution by a petition of at least 12% of the total number of registered voters, in which 3% of registered voters in each legislative district is represented.
- Through plebiscites or referenda, the people approve or reject the call for a constitutional convention to propose changes to the Constitution, approve or reject proposed changes in the Constitution and, at both the local and national levels, express their will with respect to certain issues.
- The role of non-government organizations in governance is recognized.
- The party-list system of representation allows for marginalized and underrepresented sectors to be represented in the national legislature. The system serves as an attempt to depart from the personalistic character of the political and electoral system by giving focus to the party and its issue-based platform.
- The Constitution and the 1991 Local Government Code (LGC) mandate sectoral representation in the legislative bodies of local governments.
- People participation is also provided for by the Local Government Code through representation in consultative bodies such as the local health boards, local school boards, local peace and order councils and local development councils at all local levels.
- There is also the LGC-mandated *barangay* assembly (*peoples' assembly or meeting of all over-15-year-old-residents of the barangay*). The assembly has the power to hear and pass upon the report of the Sangguniang *Barangay's* (SB) performance. It can also recommend measures for legislation by the SB.
- The *Barangay* Assembly is one manifestation of people's power and a (truly) direct and participatory democratic exercise.
- The latest development in upholding the right of suffrage is Republic Act 9189, which provides for a system of absentee voting for qualified Filipinos abroad.

IV. Election Process in 2010 and Beyond

This section will guide the citizen-voter not only in the exercise of right to vote but also in monitoring the electoral process, in an automated election system (AES).

Modernization and automation of the electoral process dates back to the 1992 COMELEC's Modernization and Excellence Project or Operation MODEX, which includes development in eight (8) components: *legal framework; registration; election process; education campaign; information technology system; facilities; institutional structure; and, personnel*. Election modernization and automation generally aims to speed up the election process and come up with results; and reduce the risk for human error or fraud.

Republic Act 9369, enacted in 2007, amended Republic Act 8436 or the Election Automation Law, which mandated the use of an automated election system (AES) in the country. This system will comprise the use of appropriate technology for registration, voting, counting of votes, and canvassing/transmittal of election results.

Previous attempts at modernization in terms of automating the election process include: (1) a pilot test of Optical Mark Reader (OMR) technology in the 1996 Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) Elections; (2) the partial automation using OMR technology in the ARMM provinces during the 1998 national and local Elections; (3) the halted nationwide implementation of a centralized automated counting system for the 2004 elections; (4) the pilot test of a fully automated election system in the 2008 ARMM Elections.

In the 2010 national and local elections, the citizen-voter takes part in the country's first nationwide fully Automated Election System (AES) – from **shading marks in the official ballot, counting of votes to transmission and canvassing of election results.**

Features of the System

The Election Automation Law provides for the following features of the automated system: a) **use of appropriate ballots**; b) **stand-alone machine which will count and consolidate elections results**; c) **provision for audit trails**; d) **minimum human intervention**; and e) **adequate safeguard and security measures.**

Official Ballot (image of sample ballot)

The official ballot consists of an oval shaped paper ballot corresponding to the pre-printed names of candidates. The ballot accommodates 300 names of candidates, with 150 names per side of ballot. To prevent tampering and use of fake ballots, the ballot has a watermark and ultraviolet (UV) features, and one barcode which corresponds to each ballot. A designated color will correspond to the different elective positions. A marking pen will be provided by the BEI during Election Day.

The voter personally feeds the ballot into the machine at any orientation. The machine scans both sides of the ballot simultaneously and generates and stores a digital image.

Stand-Alone Machine

Throughout the voting process until the printing of the initial 8 copies of election returns, the PCOS machine is not connected to any transmission cable or modem. Only after the printing of initial ERs will the BEI connect the links for transmission to eliminate doubts that the PCOS can be manipulated remotely.

Audit Trail

The machine generates an audit log which documents and reports the activities processed by the machine at a particular date and time. A random manual audit will be conducted in randomly-selected precincts chosen by the Commission thru a composite committee with representation from a citizen's arm.

Minimum human intervention

The voter personally feeds the ballot into the machine, while only the BEI members operate the PCOS. Transmission is done electronically, with sufficient system back-up.

Security Measures

Aside from the previously mentioned safeguards, the automated election system has the following security measures:

- ❖ Use of password and personal identification number (PIN)
- ❖ Digital signatures of BEI Members
- ❖ Encryption, the same security system used by banks (i.e., 128-bit encryption, random encryption, no single/master decryption code)
- ❖ Less-than-2-minute transmission speed
- ❖ Multiple data source (i.e., paper ballot, digital ballot image, scanned data)
- ❖ Hard copies for distribution
 - 30 copies of election returns at the precinct level
 - 30 copies of certificate of canvass at municipal level
 - 14 copies of certificate of canvass at provincial level
- ❖ Audit Log
- ❖ Data storage device
- ❖ Transmitted data (i.e., results, reports)
- ❖ Activity reports (i.e., Initialization/Zero Report, Transmission Reports, Audit Log)
- ❖ Series of systems tests (i.e., mock election, testing and sealing, 2 areas etc.)
- ❖ Back up batteries (16 hours capacity)
- ❖ Back up PCOS units

Pre-Election Phase

Registration

Preliminary to the voting exercise is the registration of voters. The registration process is guided by RA 8189 or the Continuing Voters' Registration Act of 1996 and by COMELEC Resolution No. 8514 rules and regulations on the Continuing Registration of Voters.

During the **registration** process, qualified applicant will have to appear personally at the local COMELEC office.

The applicant's identity and residence will be verified thru presentation of a valid ID with photograph and signature. The applicant's status of registration will also be verified. After a successful verification, the applicant shall receive and fill out an application form in 3 copies.

The applicant's **biometrics** will then be digitally captured, i.e., digital images of a voter's **photograph, fingerprints, and signature** will be taken using COMELEC's **Data Capture Machine (DCM)**. An Acknowledgment Receipt will be given to the applicant afterwards.

The **Overseas Absentee Voting (OAV)** Law applies the mechanics in RA 8189 of personal registration either with the Election Board of Inspectors in their place of residence before their

departure or with the representative of the Commission in the Philippine embassies, consulates and other foreign service establishment in their temporary residence overseas.

With the implementation of AES, the regular or “established” precincts identified in previous elections will now be grouped into “**clustered**” precincts, i.e. up to seven (7) established precincts comprise a clustered precinct which will be assigned one (1) Precinct Count Optical Scan (PCOS) machine each.

Testing and Sealing of Machine

At least three (3) days before Election Day, the public shall accomplish **test ballots**, which in turn will be manually counted. After which, election returns from the manual count shall be accomplished.

The same set of ballots that underwent manual counting shall be fed into the counting machine. Results generated from the manual count shall be compared with the results indicated in the automated count/print-out of the election returns.

Once the public is satisfied that the manual count is the same as the automated count, the print-out and manually prepared election returns shall be signed-off by the witnesses. The PCOS Machines shall be sealed without any connection to transmission links.

The public shall be allowed to secure the polling places where the PCOS machines are installed and shall be opened only on Election Day in the presence of watchers

Election Day

On Election Day, the voter proceeds to the polling place to cast his/her vote. The Board of Election Inspectors (BEI) will administer the conduct of elections. The BEI will now include, as member, an information technology-capable person, who is trained or certified by the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) to use the AES.

All voters – as many as 10 voters at a time – whose name appear on the list of voters, will be allowed to vote. Official candidates, registered political parties and party-list groups, and accredited election observers and monitors are represented in the precincts by watchers.

The voting period is from 7:00 am until 6:00 pm. Before voting starts, BEI shows the empty ballot box, turns on/ initializes PCOS machine, and prints Initialization Report or “Zero Report” to show that there is no entry/vote in the machine’s memory.

Casting of Votes

The casting of votes shall proceed in the following manner: (*illustration*)

- ❖ The voter looks for his/her name in the list of voters posted outside the polling place.
- ❖ The voter presents an ID to the BEI in assigned clustered precinct.

- ❖ Upon verifying the voter's identity, BEI gives voter a ballot containing the list of candidates for various vacant elective positions.
- ❖ The voter shades, the entire oval () corresponding to her/his choice of candidate, using a special marker.
- ❖ Voter personally feeds the accomplished ballot into the PCOS Machine. The ballot will go straight to a translucent ballot box. The machine will store the data and take a photo of the ballot.
- ❖ The BEI member marks voter's finger with indelible ink.

Counting, Canvassing, and Transmittal of Votes

After voting ends at 6:00pm, the voter continues to be vigilant in the counting, canvassing, and transmittal and canvassing of votes.

- ❖ The BEI executes a closing function on the machine to prevent it from accepting additional ballots/votes. The machine automatically starts automated counting of the votes and prints eight (8) copies of the Election Returns (ERs).
- ❖ The BEI distributes the initially printed ERs. One copy is posted outside the precinct for public viewing.
- ❖ The BEI attaches transmission cable/modem to the machine.
- ❖ The BEI performs transmission function which starts transmittal of data to the (a) Municipal Board of Canvassers (MBC); (b) COMELEC central database; and (c) data server of accredited groups including the Kapisanan ng mga Broadcasters sa Pilipinas (KBP), political parties, and citizens' arm thru the machine. After the transmission, BEI performs a function for the machine to print the remaining twenty-two (22) copies of the ERs for other accredited parties.
- ❖ After collecting the transmitted election returns, the MBC starts its canvassing the results by undergoing the same precinct process: The MBC prints its own Initialization or "Zero" Report; prints eight (8) copies of Municipal Certificate of Canvass (MCOC); attaches transmission cable/modem to the machine; transmits data to the Provincial Board of Canvassers (PBC); and prints the remaining 22 copies of MCOC. The MBC then proclaims the winners.
- ❖ From the municipal level, the data will be transmitted to the Provincial Board of Canvassers which will print a Zero Report, print eight (8) copies of Provincial COC (PCOC), attach transmission cable/modem, transmit to the National Board of Canvassers (NBC), and print the remaining six (6) PCOC.
- ❖ The electronically transmitted results will be used as basis for canvassing/consolidation and proclamation of winning candidates for: city/municipal officials; provincial officials; district and party-list representatives; and senators.
- ❖ Congress will receive electronically transmitted results and will use either the transmitted results or the printed results as basis for the proclamation of the President and Vice-President. The 1987 Philippine Constitution authorized the Congress to promulgate rules for canvassing of results for President and Vice-President
- ❖ The data from the COMELEC database will appear in the COMELEC Quick Count in real time as unofficial and partial results.

V. Powers and Functions of Public Servants

The Philippines is a republican and democratic state. The constitution provides the basic right of suffrage, and recognizes the people as the only source from which sovereignty and all government power come from.

There are three branches in the Philippine Government namely, the executive, the legislative and the judiciary.

Executive power is vested in the President of the Republic. This power covers:

- control of all executive departments and all implementing agencies of the government;
- appointment of high officials in the government (heads of executive departments/cabinet members, ambassadors, public ministers, consuls, officers of the armed forces);
- seeing to the execution and implementation of laws and policies that the legislative branch has created

Local government units also exercise executive functions through the governors of provinces, municipal and city mayors.

Legislative power is lodged in the Congress of the Philippines: the Senate and the House of Representatives. Legislative functions include:

- Statute making, constitution making, and amending of constitution;
- Appropriations/financial function – power of the purse;
- Oversight function;
- Informational or the power to conduct inquiries in aid of legislation.

Legislative functions are carried out at the local level by the different “*sanggunians*” or local legislative bodies.

In the law-making process, the president can either approve or veto a law passed by Congress. It would require 2/3 vote by the legislative body to finally pass a bill into law. At the local level, chief executives can also veto any ordinance on the ground that it is prejudicial to the public. In turn, the *sanggunian* or the local legislative body can override the veto, also by 2/3 vote of the whole *sanggunian*.

The Judiciary, on the other hand, is tasked to resolve the conflicts that may arise from the interpretation of the laws created by congress and is seen as the ultimate arbiter between the executive and the legislative branches of the government, with the Supreme Court being the highest Court of the land. Members of the Judiciary are appointed by the President.

The members of the Judiciary are appointed and are not elected.

The Constitution lays down specific criteria on who can become public servants.

In the 2010 elections, we will be voting for the 15th president of the Republic of the Philippines. At the same time, a new vice-president shall also be elected together with 12 senators, a number of representatives and our local government officials.

The President

The President is the head of the executive branch of the government. In order to run for the position, aspirants should be:

1. natural born citizen of the Philippines;
2. a registered voter;
3. able to read and write;
4. at least forty years of age on the day of the election and;
5. a resident of the Philippines for at least ten years immediately preceding election.

The next president after Ms. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo will be tasked to rebuild the democratic institutions which have been damaged through time and were extremely jeopardized amidst the current administration's political scandals.

The Vice-President

In the event that the President is unable to perform his/her duties because of death or permanent disability, or should the president be impeached, the Vice-President shall take over responsibility.

The Vice- President shall be elected and can be removed from office in the same manner as that of the President.

The Senate and the House of Representatives

Where no President and Vice President shall have been chosen or shall have qualified, or where both shall have died or become permanently disabled, the President of the Senate or, in case of his/her inability, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, shall act as President until a President or a Vice President shall have been chosen and qualified. (1987 Philippine Constitution)

Those who wish to run for Senate should have the same qualifications as that of the President or Vice-President except that he/she need only be 35 years old and above. Those who intend to run for the lower house should at least be 25 years old and should possess the same qualifications as that of the President, et al.

Aside from the general qualifications required of the political candidates, voters must also consider looking into the candidates' track records.

VI. Voter Behavior and Elections

- A 2003 IPER update study on voter behavior suggest the top four factors determining the vote of Filipino electorate:
 1. candidate's public servant image;
 2. political machinery;
 3. candidate's popularity; and
 4. endorsement of a traditional network and organizations which include the family, the church, the ward leaders, and formal groups and associations.
- According to the March 2004 Pulse Asia Survey, the youth do not differ from other age groups in their desired traits for a national leader (top traits were: pro-poor, is knowledgeable and has experience in management of government, trustworthy, can enforce the law equally for influential and ordinary people, prays often to God, godly, sincere, and fights anomalies in government).
- In March 2007, Pulse Asia conducted the same survey, with the following results as the most important characteristics that a national leader should possess: hard working, relates well to others, can give hope to most Filipinos, has integrity and a good reputation, produces good results, announces his/her stand on important issues and his/her proposed programs.
- Furthermore, it has been reported that about 79% to 90% of registered voters below 55 years old were aware of political ads in 2004 and with a slight increase to 88% to 94% in 2007.
- The conduct of elections is made complex by the practices and values, which in turn are reflective of the behavior and attitudes of the electorate and the politicians and of the actual practices before, during and after elections. Further, voter behavior reflects the personalistic and patronage orientation of traditional Filipino politics or "trapo".
- Patronage politics thrive in a culture where the government leader becomes a politician who serves as a patron accommodating special favors to dole out money or provide jobs, recommendations and contracts to only a few in exchange for votes in the succeeding elections or support for a political agenda.
- A common element of patronage culture is *utang na loob*. The powers-that-be use this to ensure that their political and economic interests will be served. For instance, a "powerful" politician may invite a candidate to run under his political party and in return, the candidate will feel indebted and eventually feel pressured to support the political agenda of his benefactor (even if he is opposed to said agenda).
- For the poor, giving their support to a candidate is seen as an investment so that they can depend on the politician for help, e.g. donations, medicine, school fees. Campaign supporters view their help as a personal favor that the elected official should perceive as *utang na loob*. In return, they expect the official to accept personal invitations from their

organizations, to comply with personal requests for donations, to award them perhaps with a government position upon electoral victory.

- In preparation for a coming election, people with plans of running for public office would be seen attending public functions from the barangay (community) to the provincial level. For constituents at the national level, candidates engage themselves in media exposure.
- Conversely, voting has always been determined by popularity of the candidate and financial and party machinery, which enhances the popularity of a candidate. Elections now become a high-spending process to the detriment of the candidates who have neither the financial resources nor the machinery, which can provide for posters and airtime in mass media.
- Consequently, the electoral system becomes bereft of the real issues affecting the electorate. Venues to seriously discuss programs of action and performances of candidates become less relevant in determining who gets elected to office.
- The traditional guns, goons, and gold element of Filipino politics continue to be a real phenomenon in certain districts, provinces, and regions particularly at the local level.
- Massive election fraud and violence are employed in order to win elections. Instances of cheating range from use of flying voters, registration of disqualified voters, vote-buying, ballot and ballot box switching, padding of votes through *dagdag bawas* and other forms, tampering the canvass of votes, etc. Again, these practices become more detrimental to candidates who have neither the financial nor political machinery to guard the integrity of the votes and election results. However, the most powerful safeguard against election fraud is the awareness and vigilance of every voter.
- Voters tend to be responsive to audio-visual tools and experiential discussions in voters' education forums. Recipients of voter education programs become more socially aware and are able to realize their stake in the electoral process.
- There is a general observation by voters' education trainers/educators that voters are seemingly more intelligent and critical now, but their motivations remain highly incentive-driven (What will be their personal gain in voting for this person? It may not exactly be a monetary value, but as earlier stated, voters tend to go for someone who has the economic power to aid them in whatever means possible).

VII. Vision of Good Government, Leaders and Citizen Voter

The UN Handbook on the Legal, Technical, and Human Rights Aspect of Elections (1994) defines "suffrage" as more than the right to vote during elections. It identifies "four essential and interlocking rights: the right to take part in government, the right to vote and be elected, the right to equal access to public office, and the right to self-determination." (Commission on Human Rights 2008)

Ideally, an electoral system should never be tainted with fraud, rigging, violence etc. in order to produce a legitimate result. The legitimacy of the next government resides in the honest and free exercise of the peoples' right to suffrage and in the Commission on Elections' open management of the system.

The government, the leaders and the citizen voters are now faced with the challenge of advancing various reforms in the system and in attitudes and perceptions towards a system of wider and genuine participation of the grassroots in politics and governance, and towards citizen's political maturity.

Government

- ✓ Advancing democratization and good governance
- ✓ Making available a meaningful and accessible election process
- ✓ Maximizing the benefits of democratic mechanisms for the interest and welfare of all sectors of society, particularly the marginalized and underrepresented sectors.
- ✓ Ensuring that the government agenda and programs of action are genuinely reflective of the peoples' agenda.
- ✓ Advocating new politics and new kinds of leaders that engage the participation of citizen voters in running the affairs of the government

Leaders

- ✓ Capitalizing on the program of action and public service rather than on popularity in winning elections
- ✓ Promoting the envisioned government and engaging the citizens' stake in governance

Citizen-Voters

- ✓ Exercising the right to vote and the duty of guarding the integrity of the vote itself from any fraudulent maneuvering
- ✓ Using conscience in choosing the right leader
- ✓ Safeguarding and defending the democratic mechanisms and institutions

VIII. Action Points for Citizen-Voters

Below are some action points for the citizen-voters in his/her exercise of the right of suffrage.

General

- Set up voters' assistance desks
- Link volunteers to existing groups working on different aspects of electoral reform
- FAQ's on poll automation

Pre-Elections

Engage in preparatory activities that would enable him/her to exercise the right of suffrage and the right to an informed and free choice.

- Register during the period allotted for voter registration
- Be informed of the issues, platforms and personalities of the political candidates
- Set specific guidelines in choosing government leaders in terms of the candidates' social affiliations and interests, competence, lifestyle, performance records.
- Conduct/participate in public debates that would inform citizens and gain the commitment of the candidates to integrate foremost the interests and welfare of the citizens in their program of government. This process can be used to remind and hold the elected leaders accountable to the promises made during the campaign.

During Elections

Exercise vigilance and the right to vote

- Vote according to your conscience
- Practice vigilance by protecting the integrity of your own vote from any undue influence, volunteering in organizations that work for clean and peaceful elections, watching out for instances of cheating in the elections, and informing the rest of the electorate of such activities.

Post-Elections

Practice continued vigilance and participate in governance

- Be vigilant in the counting and canvassing of votes.
- Another arena of participation is open to the citizen voter once the candidates they have voted for assume office.
- Participate in local governance through development planning on the barangay level, consultations and public hearings, representation in local special bodies.
- Aside from direct exercise of legislative power through the system of initiative and referendum, citizen voter can participate in legislating laws through legislative advocacy, a process of engaging with the legislature and other governmental and social institutions to ensure that the concerns and welfare of the general electorate be articulated in the deliberations of bills and other legislative measures as well as in the final versions of laws.
- The citizen voter can also engage in the political and electoral process in other ways such as:
 - a. running for office.
 - b. supporting/campaigning for a political party, candidate or party-list group.
 - c. supporting initiatives of civil society organizations to ensure honest and peaceful elections.
 - d. making views known to the elected representatives.