Press Statement
May 14, 2019, 18:00H

NAMFREL on the seven-hour election data outage

In light of the delay in the flow of election results from COMELEC's Transparency Server which occurred on election night, the National Citizens' Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL) today offered some suggestions to the public on how to maintain the integrity of the data in the Transparency Server:

1. Verify the accuracy of the transmitted precinct results published by the COMELEC online by comparing these to any of the 30 printed copies of the Election Returns released by the clustered precinct Board of Elections (BEI);

2. Focus on the ongoing Random Manual Audit, conducted for 715 selected clustered precincts, where the number of votes indicated in the paper ballots are manually tallied and the totals are compared with the electronically transmitted results;

3. Ensure that votes cast in clustered precincts where Vote Counting Machines (VCMs) malfunctioned were actually inserted into the VCM and transmitted. NAMFREL is trying to do this with clustered precincts in which its volunteer observers reported malfunctioning VCMs; and

4. Request the Commission on Elections to open the logs of the whole automated election system (AES), including those of all VCMs, CCS servers, all other servers, as well as those of all the network appliances used or still being used. A log is a recording of events that happened inside the machines which would indicate how the system performed, and can identify irregularities if any, and to come up with solutions to resolve any problems identified and prevent them from recurring. While not observable by the public, the AES generates a lot of election-related data held in logs.

For the 2019 Midterm Elections, NAMFREL intended to develop an Open Election Data website through which the public can access detailed election-related information that could be used for their own analyses. NAMFREL has previously requested the COMELEC to have access to AES data, including the different kinds of logs, but the COMELEC did not grant this request. NAMFREL is prepared to conduct a review of the AES logs if requested.

To explain the delay in the transmission of results on election night, NAMFREL believes that the process got stalled as the Transparency Server pushed the data to different media recipients. Based on NAMFREL's previous experience receiving electronic

results from the COMELEC Transparency Server, the data went through a process of conversion during transmission. On election night, the data was not formatted correctly. A thorough testing of the system prior to the elections could have prevented this problem. It is likely that the AES used for the 2019 elections only got a limited test. It did not go through a complete end to end test on how the data would flow from one device component to another until it reaches the end point.

As a response to the 2016 elections incident in which an employee of Smartmatic was able to introduce a program script to correct the Spanish character ñ, the COMELEC now requires an En Banc resolution to touch the AES servers. Such an En Banc resolution was issued only just before midnight on election night, after which a debugging was finally performed, and data started flowing after 1am.

To prevent occurrences like this in future elections, NAMFREL reiterates its call for the COMELEC to be more open and transparent with AES data, to make such information more open to local IT experts, and not to restrict these only to itself and to the foreign technology vendor. COMELEC may push for a law that will allow Filipino experts to develop an automated election system for the country, and not rely on foreign technology providers like Smartmatic. Lastly, NAMFREL is making a call to the country's leaders to consider making COMELEC a purely management body that will administer the conduct of elections, spinning off its adjudication function to perhaps a new body. This will make Philippine elections more efficient, with the COMELEC to be strengthened led by information technology, project management, change management, and logistics and supply chain management experts.

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