

Philippines test E-Voting

The Philippine Commission on Elections introduced e-voting for its general elections in 2010.

The first mechanized voting device was patented in the United States in 1892, and for nearly a century the United States was the only country using automated voting equipment. Since the 1980s, Brazil, India, the Netherlands, the Philippines, Russia, and Venezuela have introduced e-voting systems. E-voting is not a panacea, but when properly implemented, it can be a useful tool for democratic elections.

Countries that are considering e-voting should take note of the 2010 elections in the Philippines. Last year more than 38 million Filipinos had their votes counted by optical scanning machines and their experience shows technology's potential for enhancing electoral integrity.

Comelec initiated e-voting. The Philippine Commission on Elections (COMELEC) initiated plans for e-voting after a chaotic 2004 presidential election. In 2009 COMELEC awarded a contract valued at USD 150 million to Smartmatic, a Venezuelan company, for more than 80,000 precinct count optical scan machines and associated counting, election management, and transmission sub-systems to support the 2010 elections.

COMELEC also awarded a competitive bid contract for testing to SysTest Labs of the United States - now known as SLI Global Solutions - an ISO 9001:2008 accredited company that specializes in testing automated election systems. COMELEC used voting system guidelines

from the United States as the baseline for testing since none exist elsewhere. This testing proved to be a significant aspect of the success of the 2010 Philippine elections.



Presenting the certification of source codes

Testing. The highly charged political environment in the Philippines made testing essential for the credibility of the Smartmatic system. COMELEC took the leadership to ensure Smartmatic's cooperation with the testing program. This experience underscores the need for voting equipment procurements to include requirements for vendors to cooperate with independent testers.

SysTest Labs kept COMELEC informed of testing and code review progress along with discrepancies identified as the program progressed. Testing also helped to ease the anxiety of election stakeholders regard-

ing the source code for the election system. Ultimately, SysTest Labs recommended certification of the Smartmatic system for the 2010 elections based on the testing and code review results.

After the election, Tim Diaz de Rivera, Director General of the National Computer Center of the Philippines, remarked that independent testing played a key role in the credibility of the elections. Unlike previous elections, the e-voting system helped Filipinos know the winner of the presidential election within 48 hours after the polls closed, which was a victory for the people.



Richard Soudriette,
President, Center for
Diplomacy and Democracy
Colorado Springs, Colorado