

REFORMING OUR FLAWED VOTING SYSTEM

What is the problem with our voting system?

HECTOR BARRIOS

I believe we can all agree that an election is an act of the people. Our Constitution says that “Sovereignty resides in the people and all government authority emanates from them.” As such, elections are not governed or defined by the Constitution, as the latter is just a product of an election.

When we say therefore that the voting system is flawed, what is our basis? Well, the voting systems of today derive from time-worn and tested concepts handed down the centuries. These are: public casting of individual votes, public guarding and counting and public proclamation, all in a continuous sequence. The practice of these concepts empowers the people in the exercise of their sovereign act.

We have a problem because the voting system that we have been using since 2010 (for three elections now) violates these concepts, thus impairing the electoral act and disempowering the people. This came about when we transitioned from the manual system to an automated (computerized) one.

The effect of automation. Automation introduced an entirely different concept. Instead of only the sovereign people doing the electoral act, it is now done by two parties: the people and the machine. Moreover, the division of labor is heavily in favor of the machine. The only role left to the people is to cast their individual votes; everything else is done by the machine. For this reason, we say that the essential flaw of the AES is the disempowerment of the people.

A deadly side effect. The AES brought a deadly side effect – inability to check electoral fraud. Computerized systems are vulnerable to fraud from within the system and the damage can be massive, or even catastrophic. To be sure, safety measures and controls can be installed within the system to minimize fraud, but the most important controls are the outside controls and, in an ironic twist, the AES does not have these because the electorate has been pushed out of the act and cannot verify what the machine does.

Recap of the voting system flaw. To reiterate, the basic flaw is the disempowerment of the people and it has a deadly side effect which is the people’s defenselessness against electoral fraud.

We have to recognize this flawed system for what it is -- an attack on our political system. We must pull back from this Orwellian precipice. Elections are exclusively our act; we must be the active party and assume full responsibility. If we fail to do so, “government by the people” will be just a memory.

WHAT CAN BE DONE ABOUT THIS PROBLEM?

First, we must accept that the AES is irreparable. It is not just wrong in concept, but it is also self-contradictory; so it is impossible to actualize -- it will always be in a state of non-compliance. The outside controls mentioned above are exercised by the system's user or customer – this is the “voter verification” requirement which however is not possible precisely because the machine has taken over the act. In short, no matter how you retrofit it, the AES will never be able to comply with the requirements for voter verification and transparency. Therefore, it has to be replaced.

There are three conceivable options: (1) go back to the manual system that was used before, (2) buy a new system, or (3) build a new system.

The best is option # 3. There is ample time to do it before the 2019 polls. There is no need to source it from abroad, our local professionals are second to none. What's more, they can be engaged transparently and economically. All they will need is to know the objective of the project and definition of the user and use of the system.

CLOSING REMARKS