

A Case Study

CALOOCAN CITY: IT MANPOWER SHORTAGE, TRANSMISSION FAILURES & OTHER HITCHES

Most disappointing, said the poll watchers and voters, were the long lines they believed could have been caused by the clustering of precincts. They said voting should not be this painstaking.

Caloocan is the third largest city in Metro Manila, next to Quezon City and Manila. Composed of two congressional districts, the north (District 1) and the south (District 2), Caloocan cuts through two other cities, Quezon City and Valenzuela. The city is home to a popular historical marker, the Bonifacio Monument, erected in 1933 in commemoration of the first battle of the Philippine revolution.

As of 2008, Caloocan has a total population of approximately 1.5 million. Based on a report by the Asian Development Bank (2004), 2010 population projection in 2010 would have reached 1.59 million and about 1.87 million in 2017.¹

The same report also noted that most of the high-density commercial and residential activity in the city is concentrated in the south district, while the north district is still relatively underdeveloped. Evidently, the country's biggest shopping malls, SM and Robinson's, can be found in the south district.

Moreover, a separate study by the ADB² revealed that "the number of urban poor families grew by a staggering 165% in the 3rd district of the NCR," which includes Caloocan. Other cities in the 3rd district are Valenzuela, Malabon and Navotas.

This contrasts the findings of the National Statistics and Coordinating Board's (NSCB) Poverty Incidence Data in 2000 where the 3rd district of NCR belongs to the top ten list of provinces with low poverty incidence. In fact, ADB data shows that in the same year, 33.5% (84,000 households) of all households in Caloocan were below the poverty threshold.

Other key problem areas in Caloocan the ADB had identified were unemployment³, and poor delivery of social services such as education⁴ and healthcare⁵.

Profile of Voters

For the May 2010 elections, Caloocan City had registered 653,000 voters thus making it among the most vote-rich cities in Metro Manila. Moreover, the largest barangay in the Philippines, Barangay 176 or Barangay Bagong Silang, can be found in the southern district of Caloocan. Residents also proudly claim Bagong Silang to be the largest barangay (village) in Asia with some 200,000 residents.



Total No. of Barangays	188
Total No. of Established Precincts	4,045
Total No. of Registered Voters	653,003
Total No. of Clustered Precincts	791
Total No. of Voting Centers	78

* Based on 2010 Project of Precincts (www.comelec.gov.ph)

In terms of voting population, Bagong Silang has 77,791 registered voters. These voters shared 90 clustered precincts subdivided into five polling places located in the following schools: Bagong Silang Elementary School, Kalayaan Elementary School, Bagong Silang High School (Kalayaan Annex), Star Elementary School, and Bagong Silang Public High School.

Meanwhile, in the northern district, among the hugely populated was Maypajo Elementary School which served as the lone polling place for nearly 20,000 voters across four barangays (Barangay 32 to 35) and Kaunlaran Elementary School, which served as the lone polling precinct for the 15,634 voters of Barangay 12.

Caloocan Politics

The Asistios can be considered as the most prominent political family in Caloocan. A historical account of Caloocan politics published in www.gmanews.tv⁶ noted that the Asistios' rule on Caloocan started in 1952 when their patriarch, Macario Sr., was elected as municipal mayor. From then on, Macario Sr. served as mayor until 1971. He did not return to politics until he ran and won the congressional race in the 2nd district in 1992. However, during his break from politics, his brother Macario 'Boy' Asistio Jr., took the mayoral post from 1980 to 1986 and again from 1988 to 1995.

This 12-year rule ended when movie actor turned politician Reynaldo Malonzo defeated Boy Asistio in the mayoralty race in 1995. Malonzo went on to serve for three consecutive terms. For his third and last term in 2001, he again won against an Asistio, Luis 'Baby' Asistio, who once served four terms as 2nd district representative.

In trying to protect their stronghold in Caloocan, the Asistios filed an election protest against Malonzo but the Comelec eventually ruled in favor of Malonzo. Previously, however, Malonzo was already suspended after the Office of the then president Joseph Ejercito Estrada filed cases of graft and corruption against him and several other city officials. Estrada is a known friend and ally of the Asistios.

Former Caloocan congressman Enrique "Recom" Echiverri claimed the mayoral seat in 2004 defeating yet again another Asistio, Boy Asistio, and Gigi Malonzo, wife of then incumbent mayor Reynaldo Malonzo, who both attempted to stage a comeback in Caloocan politics.

Last May 2010 elections, Echiverri won as mayor for the third and last term, again beating an Asistio, Luis "Baby" Asistio. Meanwhile, Malonzo won against Boy Asistio in the vice-mayorality race.

About the Case Study

This case study was conducted in the second week of June 2010. With assistance from Project 30-30's NCR coordinator, a series of one-on-one interviews and focus group discussions (FGD) were held among various election stakeholders. Specifically, this researcher was able to get a hold of poll watchers from the north and south districts, a group of first-time voters and a Smartmatic supervisor.

Moreover, incorporated in this case study are incident reports that were entered into the Project 3030 election monitoring Ushahidi website, documents from various sources, including the internet, as well as accounts from the on-site observations during the RMA and canvassing events.

ELECTION DAY

Queuing

Caloocan's huge voting population per polling place meant crowded clustered precincts with nearly a thousand voters. Despite the anticipations, the gravity of the situation did not become clear until the morning of May 10.

Based on accounts by poll watchers, a mass of voters filled up the grounds and hallways of the polling centers by the time polls opened at 7 a.m. *"Kaya dagsa ang tao, lahat sa umaga,"* (Reason why people crowded, everyone went in the morning) said a poll watcher stationed at Kaunlaran Elementary School.

The same scenario was observed in Bagong Silang Elementary School where queuing took as long as 3 to 8 hours. The sight is nothing like the previous elections, said the pollwatcher.

"Grabe ang pila; worst ito na nakita ko."

(The line is just too much; this is the worst I've seen.)

Managing hundreds of voters proved to be a challenge for BEIs. In Horacio dela Costa Elementary School, Barangay 179, Lagro, only 5 voters were allowed to enter the precincts in 30 minutes. This is more than double the estimated time spent by one voter to complete the voting process. Going on for around 4 hours already, from around 9 a.m. to 1 p.m, poll watchers started to suspect that the delay was deliberate. Therefore, they decided to talk to the BEIs and tell them that the line had been unusually slow. After this, the line went noticeably faster.

Gathered in a focus group discussion (FGD) were first-time voters who narrated their experiences voting in Eulogio Rodriguez Elementary School and Kaunlaran Elementary School. A 21-year old male student said he lined-up at 9 a.m. and was able to finish in two hours. However, another 21-year old female student lined-up twice as long:

"Sakin four hours kasi paalis-alis ako sa pila. Kasi ang init tapos may hinihimatay pa dun...yung mismong teacher [BEI]."

"It took me four hours because I leave my line once in a while. Because it's too warm, then even the teacher [BEI] passed out."

For a lot of voters, the long lines and slow processing of voters was too much for their patience. In one polling place, for instance, nearly half of the voters opted to go home to attend to other tasks that day, according to a poll watcher in Bagong Silang High School. Moreover, at least 20 cases of voters in the same school also went home after not being able to find their names in the voter' list. The weather was also especially warm that day, which did not make queuing any easier. In addition to the BEI who passed out, an old woman who was a voter of Eulogio Rodriguez Elementary School, reportedly died of exhaustion while on queue.

A poll watcher described the scene as "stampede". According to him, the number one problem faced last May 10 was the result of clustering precincts.

Lastly, also observed inside the clustered precincts is the non-use of UV lamps. Specifically, poll watchers in Kaunlaran Elementary School and Libis Talisay Elementary School did not recall the BEIs using UV lamps.

PCOS Problems

Causing further crowd build-ups are sporadic episodes of PCOS machines conking out for various reasons (auto-shut down, paper jam) throughout election day. These incidents stalled the voting process in certain clustered precincts.

“Automated nga, ang bagal naman ng makina; nago-overheat, nasisira,” (It's automated and yet the machine was slow; it overheated, it broke down) said one of the poll watchers.

As early as 8 a.m., one PCOS machine in Llano Elementary School in the north district was reported to be out of order. A similar case happened in Caloocan High School in the south district where PCOS machines conked out, with some suspecting it to be due to sweat dripping into the electrical connections. In Kaunlaran Elementary School, the poll watcher recalled two cases wherein data from the CF card was “lost” but was retrieved. One PCOS in Cecilio Apostol Elementary School also went on auto shutdown in the middle of printing of the ER. One of the worst, a Smartmatic supervisor said, was a case of a back-up battery that burned after it was wrongly attached.

While these were attended to and repaired by Smartmatic technicians on duty, there is this one case of a PCOS machine in Grace Park Elementary School covered by Project 3030 watchers, which since morning, had been repeatedly experiencing technical problems. The Smartmatic technician reportedly requested for a replacement unit but to no avail. However, the supervisor recalled during their training that a “contingency box” will be provided:

“Ang usapan sa amin before, bawat polling center o bawat presinto merong contingency box kung saan pag nasira ang PCOS, meron ka agad pamalit. Wala naman kaming contingency box na nakuha.” (We were told before that each polling center or precinct will have a contingency box wherein if a PCOS breaks down, there is a ready replacement available. We didn't get any contingency box.)

This “contingency box” was supposed to be stored near the precincts, such as the office of the principal, but this did not actually happen on election day.

Other incidents, the supervisor recalled, include problems with the thermal paper as there were cases where it did not fit the 2.5 inches thermal paper slot. Some thermal papers were also observed to have no Comelec logo.

Technical Support

Expected to respond to these problems are the Smartmatic field personnel or technicians. However, at a ratio of only one to two technicians to one polling center, responding to each clustered precincts with haste proved to be very difficult. For the very same reason, they were also not able to report and document every incident of malfunction as it happens. This is according to a Smartmatic supervisor, who had ten technicians under him.

“Kung ikaw ang technician, hindi mo mababantayan lahat...Nahirapan sila. Dito sa Bagong Silang Elementary School, 32 PCOS diyan; dalawa lang ang technician ko diyan. Tapos imaginin mo kung gaano kalalayo yung mga building.” (If you are the technician, you can't take care of everything... They had a difficult time. Here in Bagong Silang Elementary School, there were 32 PCOS; I only have 2 technicians there. And imagine how far apart the buildings are.)

The Smartmatic supervisor also felt that the technicians on field were ill-equipped. For one, there were technicians in his team who were as young as college students, something he believes Comelec should have avoided especially when launching a project as huge as the automated elections. His concern stems from the fact that aside from the technical training itself, technicians should also be able to confidently handle technical problems and manage the situation especially when dealing with BEIs and voters if they become

irate. Moreover, the Smartmatic technician is also not sure of the quality of the technicians who “passed” the training:

“Minsan, ipinapasa nalang kasi kulang ng quota...Basta mairaos lang yung eleksyon na may mga tao dun, may mga mababantay, mag-aayos diyan, lahat naco-control natin, so dapat bata yan. Pag professional baka maraming tanong...sa area namin ganun nangyari...”
 (Sometimes they let someone pass just to satisfy the quota...Just to get through the elections with people stationed there to secure and fix the area whom we can control, so they should be younger. Professionals might have many questions... That's what happened in our area...)

Placewell International Services Corp., a third party manpower agency, handled the manpower needs of Smartmatic in Caloocan.

CF Cards

When the Comelec announced the nationwide retrieval of all CF cards as a result of the flawed Final Testing and Sealing (FTS) exercise on May 3, majority of the country failed to conduct the said test 3 to 7 days before election as stated in the Comelec Terms of References (TOR). In the case of Caloocan, FTS was conducted as late as May 8 or 9. Worst, Bagong Silang High School had their FTS 6 a.m. on election day.

As to whether he can vouch for 100% FTS of all PCOS machines, the supervisor cannot say for certain. Again, he pointed to manpower shortage preventing them from actually checking every PCOS in their jurisdiction.

The tight window between the FTS and election day leaves little room for correction should there still be errors found, said the Smartmatic supervisor. Moreover, worst are those precincts which received the reconfigured CF cards but malfunctioned on election day as what happened in one of the clustered precincts in Bagong Silang. As a contingency, the BEIs still continued with the elections, manually keeping all ballots inside the ballot box. The corrected CF cards came two days later. Only then were the BEIs able to feed the ballots and transmit results at the municipal hall.

Transmission

Even a highly urbanized city like Caloocan was not spared from transmission woes as in the case of Bagong Silang High School, Libis Talisay Elementary School and Cecilio Apostol Elementary School.

Accounts of poll watchers stationed in Phase 3 of Bgy. Bagong Silang revealed that transmission in one clustered precinct was put on hold for two days allegedly due to weak telecommunication signal. Worst, in Phase 1, one PCOS machine was brought to the school's rooftop in a bid to get a signal. Libis Talisay was able



Cases of defective CF cards which affected 8 municipalities stirred up tension and stalled canvassing. These CF cards were only replaced 3 days after election.

to transmit at 11 p.m. while Cecilio Apostol finished at 12 midnight. In the case of Bagong Silang Elementary School with 32 clustered precincts, only 6 were able to electronically transmit. The rest of the CF cards had to be brought to the municipal hall.

Nonetheless, the Smartmatic supervisor did not entirely blame the difficulty in acquiring telecommunication signal for the problem in transmission, saying that the area has signal since they are able to use their mobile phones everyday. For some reason, however, BEIs still had difficulty in

completing the transmission process, which means successful transmission to three servers: the Municipal Canvassing Center, PPCRV Server and the Comelec Central Server. He said:

“Lahat naman may signal yun nga lang tiyatiyagain mo talaga [ang pag-transmit]. Pero ang problema naman, bukod sa signal, given na may signal, hindi parin lahat ng BEI nakapag-transmit ng maayos...Meron akong mga na-encounter na BEIs na sa dalawa lang [server] nakapag-transmit.”
(There is signal in the area but you have to really work on the transmission. But the problem is that aside from the signal, granting there is signal, still not all BEIs were able to transmit properly...I have encountered BEIs who were able to transmit to only two [servers].)

Another factor that contributed to the delay in transmission is the insufficient number of modem units. For instance, one polling center with almost 20 clustered precincts shared only three modem units. Therefore, to avoid further delays, the BEIs concerned no longer waited for their turn to use the modem and decided to hand-carry the CF cards to the municipal hall in the morning of May 11:

“Nainip na dahil sa sobrang dami kaka-hintay [ng modem] tsaka syempre mahina rin talaga ang signal kaya ang ginawa ng principal, gumawa nalang ng kasulatan ng doon nalang sa munisipyo i-transmit.” (They grew tired of waiting [for the modem], and of course signal was also difficult so the principal had it in writing to just transmit at the municipal hall.)

With regard to training, the Smartmatic supervisor noted that they were not able to do hands-on transmission exercises from setting-up the modem up to the actual transmission.

Canvassing

In addition to the transmission problems from the precincts to the canvassing center, the canvassing server itself was reported to have bugged down on May 11 for unknown reasons. Poll watchers said that the data in the server couldn't be retrieved and the Smartmatic technicians on duty did not know what to do. As a result, around 50 concerned citizens composed mainly of poll watchers staged a protest action right outside the city hall. The problem was eventually fixed by Smartmatic and the next day, the Random Manual Audit (RMA) proceeded as scheduled.

While the RMA was being conducted, transmission and canvassing were also ongoing in another room. In the transmission room just across the RMA room, at least 30 clustered precincts were scheduled to transmit out of some 36 clustered precincts that were unable to transmit on May 10, said a staff member manning the transmission and canvassing area. Several PCOS machines were being used for this purpose. But for clustered precincts that did not at all have the reconfigured CF cards on election day, a special procedure called “special voting,” according to a city hall employee, was being done to process the ballots. For instance, one clustered precinct in Star Elementary School, Bgy. Bagong Silang underwent “special voting” which included feeding of ballots into the PCOS machine using the reconfigured CF card, and transmitting right away to the CCS machines located in the same room. Two PCOS units were used for this purpose.

The municipal canvassing was concluded almost 11 p.m. on May 12.

Random Manual Audit

The Project 30-30 team including this researcher, personally observed the conduct of the RMA at the Caloocan Municipal Hall which started at around 5 p.m. Being audited that evening were Cluster # 691 (Caloocan High School - Dist. 2), Cluster # 239 (Camarin Elementary School - Dist.1), Cluster #567 (Sampalukan Elementary School - Dist. 1), Cluster #23 (Morning Breeze Elementary School - Dist. 1) and Cluster #344 (Cielito Zamora Elementary School - Dist. 1)

Poll watchers participated in the RMA by doing their own *taras* as the RMAT member read the votes aloud. Project 3030 joined the pool of watchers doing their own *taras* for Cluster #23 and #691. In Cluster #23, the national contest showed 100% match in the manual and electronic count. The local contest likewise

showed 100% match, except for the mayoral contest where electronic count for Asistio was 98 while the manual count was 99. The RMA member explained that the 1-vote discrepancy could have been caused by this particular oval that was not fully shaded thus prompting the machine to disregard this vote. Nonetheless, the RMA counted this as a valid vote and inputted the figure as 99 for Asistio in the official RMA tally sheets. In Cluster #691, a variance of 1 vote was recorded in the national contest.

The RMA and the poll watchers also got confused when ballots from precinct #0088A were not found inside the ballot box for Cluster #23. Based on Comelec's Project of Precincts, Cluster #23 includes precinct #0088A. The ballot box label for Cluster #23 also included precinct #0088A. And upon checking the minutes of the BEIs, precinct #0088A was also noted to belong to Cluster #23.

In the case of Cluster #229, the election returns for the national level were not found in the ballot box, as well as the minutes of the BEI last May 10. Also, observed in Cluster # 567 were cases of over-votes of around 2 to 4 candidates per seat both in national and local positions. *EU-CenPEG Project 3030*

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End Notes

- 1 Asian Development Bank (2004). City Development Strategies to Reduce Poverty. Retrieved on September 9, 2010 from http://www.citiesalliance.org/ca/sites/citiesalliance.org/files/ADB_CDStoReducePoverty.pdf
- 2 Asian Development Bank (2005). Poverty in the Philippines: Income, Assets and Access. Retrieved on September 9, 2010 from <http://www.adb.org/Documents/Books/Poverty-in-the-Philippines/chap3.pdf>
- 3 In 2000, 23.13% of the work force was unemployed – 84,000 more than the 1997 level of 45,000 unemployed.
- 4 There is one classroom for every 112 public elementary school students.
- 5 There is one hospital bed for every 2,124 people.
- 6 Legazpi, A. (2010) No permanent allies, rivals in Caloocan politics. Retrieved September 9, 2010 <http://www.gmanews.tv/story/190007/no-permanent-allies-rivals-in-calooacan-politics>

Annex



A group of residents in Caloocan shared their experiences poll watching the first automated elections. (Photo by EU-CenPEG Project 3030)



One of the big populated polling places, Kaunlaran Elementary School in Caloocan housed 16 clustered precincts for 15,634 registered voters. (Photo by EU-CenPEG Project 3030)



For precincts which failed to transmit due to faulty CF cards, a “special voting” took place at the Caloocan City hall where, as seen in this photo, ballots were fed into the PCOS machine after the corrected CF card arrived 2 days after elections. (Photo by EU-CenPEG Project 3030)



The RMAT team in Caloocan during the actual conduct of the random manual audit held at the Caloocan City hall. (Photo by EU-CenPEG Project 3030)