



## **NATIONAL CITIZENS' MOVEMENT FOR FREE ELECTIONS (NAMFREL)**

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**Press Release**

### **NAMFREL proposes enhancements to the Automated Elections System**

MANDALUYONG CITY (Aug. 31, 2021) — The National Citizens' Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL) today, in a press briefing, outlined several proposals to the Commission on Elections (Comelec) to improve the efficiency and transparency of the country's Automated Elections System (AES). The proposals are part of a position paper entitled "Enhancing the AES with the Adoption and Implementation of Technical Standards," that the group submitted to COMELEC and to Congress for consideration as early as June this year. NAMFREL hopes that the proposals will be adopted by the Comelec for the 2022 national and local elections.

The proposals are the following:

#### **1. Use of Open Source Licensing**

NAMFREL proposes the use of open source election software for the AES. The group said this would open up the process to more prospective bidders for this component, instead of Comelec being usually tied up with the same company supplying the hardware. NAMFREL also encouraged the Comelec to open up the local source code review of the software to more IT experts, and to allow the participants to use other methods they deem fit to test the source code. According to NAMFREL, adopting these enhancements would make the AES more competitive, less costly, and more transparent.

#### **2. End-to-end use of Election mark-up language (EML)**

NAMFREL said that in the current AES, data has to be converted from the election mark-up language (EML) format to another format called comma-separated values (CSV) during electronic transmission of results from the vote counting machines to the servers of stakeholders such as the media, political parties, and election monitoring organizations. This conversion process has caused delays in past elections, and has resulted in doubts over the credibility of the transmitted data. NAMFREL proposes that the Comelec just use the EML format throughout the AES process to avoid possible delays and to increase the credibility of the results. The group also said that adopting this standard would make it easier to do an end-to-end test of the AES prior to the elections.

#### **3. Re-formatting the ballot**

NAMFREL proposes listing down candidates on ballots, not alphabetically by surname, but chronologically based on unique numbers assigned to each candidate. The numbers may be drawn randomly at the COMELEC in the presence of the candidates and parties or their representatives, and the assigned numbers announced to the public just before the start of the campaign. The numbers to be randomly assigned will be based on the number of candidates per position to be voted for. The table below explains the numbering system further:

<b>Position</b>	<b>Number of Candidates</b>	<b>Randomly Assigned Numbers</b>
President	8	1 to 8
Vice President	5	9 to 13
Senator	36	14 to 39
Party List	69	40 to 99
Representative	5	District Prefix + 1 to 5
Governor*	3	Province Prefix + 6 to 8
Vice Governor	2	Province Prefix + 9 to 10
Provincial Board	20	Province Prefix + 11 to 30
Others		Prefix + 31 to n

According to NAMFREL, adopting this proposal will address several problems:

- It will make it easier for voters who cannot read or with poor eyesight to be able to vote as they will just have to search for the numbers assigned to their chosen candidates.
- Sequencing will just be by number and not alphabetical. This will also do away with the practice of certain candidates having an alias just to be at the top or near the top of the list when sequencing is alphabetical.
- This will minimize the importance of name recall and the advantage of having well-known surnames during the campaign.
- As the candidates will be using their assigned numbers for the campaign, pre-election campaigning can be minimized as numbers assigned to the candidates can only be released by Comelec just before the start of the campaign period.
- Possible solution to having no votes, or undervotes, for the position of the Vice President and Party List, as voters will make sure that they will have the numbers of their chosen candidates on hand just before voting.

#### **4. Use of QR codes on election returns (ER) and VVPAT**

NAMFREL proposes the printing of QR codes on both the election returns (ER), and the voter verifiable paper audit trail (VVPAT) or the receipt that comes out of the vote counting machines after voting. NAMFREL said that the QR codes would enable stakeholders such as election monitoring organizations and political parties, or any interested individuals, to be able to aggregate results, if they have devices with QR code readers for the purpose of vote counting. Having QR codes on both the ERs and the VVPAT would also facilitate audit check of the results, even right there in the polling precinct. According to NAMFREL, adopting said proposals would make the counting process more participatory and transparent.

#### **5. Correct implementation of digital signatures**

NAMFREL is also calling for the correct implementation of the digital signature. According to NAMFREL, the digital signature to be included in the electronic results of the election should be those of the members of the electoral boards (EBs) or of the boards of canvassers (BOC), instead of signatures from the machines supplied by the Comelec. NAMFREL likens digital signatures coming from polling precinct staff to handwritten signatures on a sealed envelope, while VCMs' digital signatures are like rubber stamps that could be used by other people besides the election staff of the polling precincts where results are coming from. NAMFREL said that the technology for such use of digital signatures is already available in the country, and that adopting said proposal could ensure that electronic results can be verified as authentic, even if the VCM results were not able to be transmitted electronically, as is the case in many parts of the Philippines where internet signal is still poor.

NAMFREL said that the proposals would not require additional legislation, and that the Comelec could choose to adopt and implement them for the 2022 national and local elections.

The group also said that it aims to deploy observers throughout the country to monitor the conduct of the 2022 polls. NAMFREL recently launched a website, Vote For Us ([www.VoteForUs.org.ph](http://www.VoteForUs.org.ph)), to encourage and assist Filipinos to register for the elections and to participate in the entire electoral process. NAMFREL said it aims to provide relevant election-related information to voters through the said website. ###