



**Question 5: What if I shade more ovals than what is required?**

If, for example, you shaded 13 ovals on the ballot for the SENATOR position, when you should have selected only 12, we have what is called an OVERVOTE. In the old system, if you write the names of 13 senatorial candidates on your ballot, the 13<sup>th</sup> name you wrote down will not be counted. However, in the new system, wherein the names of candidates are listed alphabetically on the ballot, the ACM has no way of knowing which was the 13<sup>th</sup> oval you shaded. In this case, therefore, the ACM will not consider any vote for the SENATOR position. However, all the other valid votes in the ballot will still be counted.

It would be the same if you vote for two presidential candidates, instead of just one. The vote for that overvoted position will be voided, while still counting all the other valid votes for the other positions.



**Question 6: Will there be an ACM in my precinct when I cast my vote?**

No, there will be no ACMs at the precincts. The setup at the polling place will still be much like the manual procedure. There will still be the teachers, the voters' list, the ballot box, the voting booths and the ballots - only they will look different (as mentioned in number 4).

Upon the closing of polls, or when voting time is finished, the ballot boxes for the different precincts will be brought to a centralized counting center where an ACM will be located.

**Question 7: Aside from the new look of the ballot and the new way of indicating your vote, what would be the other major changes in the conduct of elections in 2004?**

As mentioned above, ballots will not be counted at the precinct anymore by the teachers. They will be counted at a centralized counting center by an ACM.

There will be added security features at different levels, aside from the current security features in the old system:

- (a) **The ballots will be printed with a security mark.**

This security mark will identify to the ACM if a ballot is genuine or if it has already been previously counted.

- (b) **The ballots will be coded per municipality.**

This means that ballots intended for a specific municipality will not be counted by a machine that is assigned to another municipality. This is to safeguard against ballot snatching. For example, ballots intended for Pasay City will not be counted by an ACM assigned to Manila.

(c) **The ACM accepts valid ballots only.**

Due to the security features built into the system starting from the printing of ballots, the machine is able to recognize only valid ballots for the municipality to which it is assigned. It will reject fake or spurious ballots, including photocopied ballots.

(d) **There will be a lesser risk in transporting ballots to the counting center.**

In the manual system, ballot box snatching usually occurs during the wee hours of the night since counting is usually finished at nighttime.

In the automated system, since the ballots will not be counted at the polling place, the ballot boxes from the entire polling center would be transported simultaneously to the counting centers, with escorts, immediately after the closing of polls at around 3:00 to 5:00 PM.

(e) **Immediate printing of the Election Returns.**

Immediately after all the ballots for one precinct have passed through the ACM for counting, the Election Returns for the precinct would be printed out, also by the ACM, with just one push of a button. Copies will still be distributed to the political parties.

In the much publicized "*Dagdag-Bawas*" operation in 1995, subject of a case filed by Senator Aquilino Pimentel, there were instances of adding a "0" to the end of a vote in the election reports, say "100", to make it "1000", or putting a "1" at the beginning to make it "1100".

In the new system, this can not be done by the machine since all it is programmed to do is to increment, or add, a vote for a candidate by "1" every time it encounters a shaded oval in the ballot corresponding to that candidate's name.

(f) **Computerized accumulation of results.**

The machine automatically adds the appropriate votes in each ballot to the total votes received by each candidate, as each ballot passes through the ACM.

The overall total of votes per candidate for all the ballots that are read by the machine can automatically be computed, with a corresponding printout of the result. This eliminates "*dagdag-bawas*" altogether because this is an automatic procedure. "*Dagdag-bawas*" happened due to the manual addition of a digit to a figure, either in the beginning or at the end.

(g) **Printed audit trail report.**

Each transaction on the machine is logged and printed out, with date and time stamps for actions, such as starting or stopping the machine, printing results, how many ballots read, reasons for stoppages, and the like.

(h) **Minimum human intervention.**

Human intervention is limited to telling the machine to:

- (a) count the ballots,
- (b) save the results to a CD, and
- (c) print the results.

That's it! Appreciation of ballots is entirely done by the machine. It is no longer possible to add a digit before or after a totaled number of votes. The machine operator cannot tell the machine to credit the vote of a candidate to another, or to increase or decrease a candidate's vote because it's just **NOT** what it is programmed to do.

**Question 8: What are the advantages of using a modernized election system?**

One of the causes of the delay in proclamation of winning candidates is pre-proclamation controversy, including complaints regarding appreciation of the ballots, which include allegations of mis-reading of candidate names during counting, and of miscalculating the results, either intentionally or unintentionally. With the use of a modernized election system, these procedures, which are very prone to human error, are delegated to machines which cannot be told to favor a certain candidate over another. The ACM is actually a dumb machine which only knows how to add a "1" for every shaded oval it sees on a ballot that corresponds to a candidate name. With this, cause for filing of pre-proclamation protest cases is greatly minimized.

In relation to this, winning candidates at the municipal level are forecasted to be known after a maximum of 2 days, at the provincial level, after a maximum of 5 days, and at the national level after a maximum of 7 days, including travel time from the lower to the higher canvassing levels.

**Question 9: How can I be sure that my vote will be counted correctly by the ACM?**

Before the ACMs are accepted by the COMELEC as government property, they have to pass rigorous testing for accuracy by the Department of Science and Technology (DOST), as witnessed by representatives from the COMELEC, the Senate and the House of Representatives. Afterwards, until before election day, the COMELEC will engage in massive information campaign to inform the public regarding the new system. Moreover, three days before election day, the machines will be sealed after a certification for accuracy has been signed by political party representatives, as mandated by law.

**Question 10: Why don't we use a touch-screen voting machine instead?**

Aside from the issue of cost, the law specifically prescribes the use of an Optical Mark Sense (OMR), or similar, technology for the modernized election system to be acquired by COMELEC - one which uses paper ballots for voting purposes.

A touch-screen machine is a voting machine, which would require the installation of at least one machine at the precinct. This would eventually replace the usual voting booths. In the current system, the COMELEC places 10 voting booths in the precinct so that 10 people can vote simultaneously. If one touch-screen machine costs, for example, 100,000 pesos, and there are 200,000 precincts nationwide, and there should be 10 machines in each, just compute how much that would cost! The current ACMs that the COMELEC will acquire will total to 1,991 machines nationwide, since they will be allocated on a per-municipality basis, at a rate of one for every 16,000 to 20,000 registered voters.

**Question 11: What is the possibility of the Florida experience, during the US presidential election involving George W. Bush and Al Gore, being repeated here?**

The election system in Florida that had a problem was a punch card system, wherein holes are punched on a ballot to indicate the votes for selected candidates, just like a bus conductor punching holes on your bus ticket. The problem came in when the *chad*, or the punched out portion on the ballot did not come off, thereby "confusing" the punch card readers on whether there is vote or not. The OMR technology, which the law provides, is a different technology which involves the shading of ovals opposite the names of the candidates of choice.

**Question 12: What are the possibilities of ballots-switching and ballot box snatching in the automated system?**

The possibility of ballots switching and ballot box snatching is always present. The COMELEC cannot promise to solve all the problems of the electoral process by acquiring counting machines that know how to count and consolidate votes accurately, reliably, and in a faster manner. What the new system cannot address have to be addressed in another way. However, with the new system, we can lessen the usual ills that some crafty people have the habit of ingeniously coming up with during elections.

When ballots are switched, they are usually replaced with fake ones - which can be detected by the ACM. Ballot boxes are usually snatched when certain candidates have knowledge that they are losing in certain precincts, and during the wee hours of the night. However, this time, they will not know, at the precinct level, how they fared in the election since the ballots are not counted there. Moreover, ballot boxes would be transported, after the closing of the polls, while there is still daylight, at around 3:00 to 5:00 PM, in plain sight of every one.

**Question 13: What about vote-padding and vote-shaving, or what is popularly known as "*dagdag-bawas*"?**

As mentioned above, this scam is no longer possible. The machine operator cannot tell the machine to credit the vote of a candidate to another, or to increase or decrease a candidate's vote because it's just **NOT** what the ACM is programmed to do. And with the rigorous test that the DOST has put in place, and with the help of well-meaning non-government organizations, such as the Philippine Computer Society, any glitches in the program, if any, will certainly be detected. And we must not forget the final test on the ACM, which the political parties and candidates themselves will have to participate in, and in which they have certify to its accuracy before they seal it prior to actual use on election day.

With the dissemination of election results being immediately available on-site at the centralized counting center, and with the dominant majority and minority political parties, including the accredited citizen's arm still being provided copies of the results, the paper trail is long and virtually everywhere. Any deviation from the true count, if any, will easily be traceable.

With so much safeguards in place, and with the help of the vigilant Filipino voter, this modernized election system will give the country the most accurate vote counting and consolidation it has ever seen.

**For other election-related information, please visit the COMELEC website:  
<http://www.comelec.gov.ph>.**