Communicating Overseas Absentee Voting (OAV) to Filipinos in Finland: A transnational communication perspective

Ma.Irish Kaario

| **Author(s)** | |
| Ma.Irish Kaario | |

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The Philippines is one of the biggest sources of migrants in the world. Decades of migration resulted to around 10.2 million Filipinos currently living overseas including 50,000 in the Nordic Region. Recognizing the significant contribution of the diaspora and transnational ties to the homeland, the Philippine government through its institutions are urged to find ways that will strengthen its relationship with the diaspora. Hence, the Overseas Absentee Voting (OAV) was introduced in 2004 in a bid to officially incorporate overseas Filipinos in political affairs of the country. At the same time, the implementation of the OAV comes with the challenging task of enjoining overseas Filipinos to participate in the elections.

Statistics show the dismal performance of OAV by its failure to hit registration targets and low voter turnout from 2004 until the last elections in 2016. Although latest news said that registration for the May 2019 elections hit an all-time high following a massive campaign by the key implementing agency and this study's case organization, the Commission on Elections (Comelec), it remains to be seen if this trend will continue or how many of those who registered will cast their vote.

In the light of the challenges Comelec face in communicating OAV to Filipinos in Finland, this study argues for a transnational communication perspective, which recognizes the contextual factors affecting the propensity of overseas Filipinos to vote. Filipinos in Finland, like many diaspora populations, live in a complex space where they actively participate in two communities - the home country and the host country. This is the space that Comelec needs to carefully navigate as they aim to mobilize this group into participating in the elections.

This case study examined Comelec's current communication practices vis-à-vis the conditions of Filipinos in Finland. Initial development ideas were drawn from qualitative interviews. The next phase triangulated these ideas through a survey wherein findings were used to confirm and refine the initial ideas.

Findings revealed that Comelec has not fully optimized the channels and opportunities they have by focusing on formal channels of communication. Moreover, there is great potential in exploring more novel ways to communicate via informal and community-based channels. Thus, the final recommendations were constructed in a way that the domains in the transnational framework are covered, guided by the insights from empirical data.

| **Keywords** |
| transnational communication, diaspora communication, government communication, overseas voting, voter mobilization |

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1   Introduction

Migration or people moving from one place to another has always been an integral part of human history. It is driven by several factors such as the desire to improve their economic prospects, ensure a more secure living environment, re-unite with their family members, or avoid persecution in their country of origin (Kahanec & Zimmerman 2008). Especially for citizens of poverty-stricken nations, working overseas has become a goal in itself and is considered as the most viable option to provide for the needs of their families. A growing number of studies also point to the emigration of educated millennials who are driven by a sense of adventure, control and freedom to carve their own future.

Migration research looks at this global phenomenon as a product of globalization caused by a combination of economic, social, political, cultural, environmental, health, education and technological factors in communication and transportation (Thet 2014; Kahanec & Zimmerman 2008). Thus, the use of the closely related word 'diaspora' in the contemporary had watered down its brutal roots that refer to people crossing borders due to persecution or displacement. In the field of international communication, a diaspora community is a unique population or "public" because it is formed by a group of citizens of a home country who reside in one or more host countries (Bravo 2011, 3). Although diaspora populations are migrants *per se*, the ties that maintain their connection to the home country characterize them as such. In short, the concept of 'diaspora' carries with it a transnational element that is not fully captured in the word "migrant." Thus, the overseas Filipino group in this study will be referred to as the Filipino transnational community in Finland due to their continuing relationship with the home country, Philippines. This continuing relationship of people living in and between two countries – the home country and the host country - is enabled by the growth of the transportation and communication technology. Technology had become a crucial factor shaping the identities and practices of transnational communities.

In a United Nations report (2017) the migrant population accounts for 258 million or 3.4 percent of the total global population. Among the countries known for its large migrant population is the Philippines, a developing country in the southeast Asia with over 100 million population. There is a popular saying that one can find a Filipino in every corner of the world. This can be true considering that the overseas Filipino population currently stands at over 10 million, joining the ranks of countries like India, Mexico and Russia in the top 10 countries in the world with the largest diasporas. This phenomenon of mass migration has brought the government of the Philippines, and also of other countries with

large diaspora populations to consider their social, political and economic contributions by incorporating them in the affairs of their homeland.

The discussion on migration in the context of a globalized world thus resulted to a re-examination of the traditional notions of what constitutes political borders and governance, citizenship and democratic rights. Among these issues is the right to vote from overseas or absentee voting. A great manifestation of this is the provision for overseas absentee voting.

Overseas Filipinos, especially the Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) are considered as modern-day heroes for their remittances that help keep the Philippine economy afloat. This economic dependency on remittances has made migration institutionalized, systemic and deeply rooted in Philippine society's social and political fabric. Several migration-related government agencies and policies were established to support the country's labor export practices encouraged not only by the government but within family units as a desirable option in seeking a better standard of living. The close-family and community ties that define Filipino culture by their continued association even after migration is the corner-stone of their transnational practices. Thus, it is no wonder that the pressure to make overseas or absentee voting available came from the migrant population themselves realizing they still have a strong stake in democracy and the future of the country.

The right to suffrage is well enshrined in the 1987 constitution of the Philippines and has laid the foundation for the enactment of the overseas absentee voting law in 2003. This means that anyone who holds Filipino citizenship anywhere in the world has the right to vote. This also implies that the Philippine government is under the obligation to create measures and activities that inform and engage the different diaspora communities around the world about their right to vote and mobilize them to participate and exercise this right.

The Commission on Elections or Comelec is the country's principal election body. It is their mandate not only to organize the elections, but also to inform and educate voters. The OAV has already had a 15-year run, but challenges still abound. The registration targets have not been met, and voter turnout has been fluctuating, if not completely dwindling through the years. A lot of focus and resources have been given to more Filipino-populated areas like the Gulf region and North America. But with less populated countries like Finland who does not even have its own embassy, and conducts a less preferred voting method by post, how challenging is the OAV? How can these issues be addressed? Moreover, the conduct of this research also revealed a dearth in academic studies about

overseas voting beyond the issue of OAV law and practice. Thus, addressing issues related to voter mobilization and diasporic communication practices of the government beyond the territorial borders of the Philippines – transnational, in other words – will give this topic a fresh perspective.

This study locates the Filipinos between and across the transnational space of their home country, Philippines, and host country, Finland, and the role that the government through Comelec plays in communicating overseas voting right and responsibility. Furthermore, this study argues for the need to view the target audience as a diaspora community navigating the transnational domains, so they might be able to leverage the existing transnational networks and infrastructure in communicating OAV.

1.1 Case organization

This thesis was conducted for the benefit of Commission on Elections or Comelec, the official poll body of the Philippines who has been supervising elections in the country since 1940. In its website, it is stated that "the Comelec is the principal government agency tasked by the constitution to administer all laws and regulations concerning the conduct of regular and special elections" (Comelec 2017). Thus, Comelec must act independently from the three main branches of government: the executive, judicial and legislative. The constitution also grants Comelec full fiscal autonomy so that it can facilitate an orderly and honest elections without any political influence or interference.

Aside from enforcing and implementing the laws and regulation concerning elections, plebiscites, referendums, initiatives and recalls, Comelec also has the exclusive jurisdiction over election disputes or contest. All qualified voters, election candidates, political parties must register with the Comelec. In summary, the Comelec which is headed by a chairman and six (6) commissioners, functions both as an independent administrative and judicial body.

Another key function of Comelec that is most relevant to this study is that of education and information of the public. Under the central office is a department dedicated specifically for this function, the education and information department (EID). Their tasks include educating the public about election laws, the necessity of elections, obligation to register and vote. They also conduct research on information needs.

When the OAV law was enacted in 2003, Comelec created the office for OAV and has started to work closely with other agencies related to overseas Filipinos like the Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO), Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA)

and the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA). These agencies participate in different levels and scopes. Because of the missions abroad managed by the DFA through the missions abroad, it has become the main partner of Comelec in facilitating OAV.

1.2 Overview of Philippine elections

The Philippines has a presidential form of government. The chief executive is elected every six years without the benefit of re-election as compared to the vice-president. The legislative branch of government is held by two houses: The Senate and the House of Representatives. The senate has 24 members. The first set of 12 members are elected at the same time during the presidential elections and another set of 12 in the midterm elections that takes place after 3 years. Hence, the Philippines hold two national elections in which overseas voters can participate: The Presidential elections and the national midterm elections.

Meanwhile, the House of Representatives have no more than 250 members representing legislative districts among provinces and cities. In 1995, the Party-List system act was passed into law. It was in the 1998 elections when the law was first used. Party-list representatives representing marginalized sectors are given 20 percent or around 58 of the seats in the House of representatives. Only the party-list groups who garnered at least 2% of the total part-list votes will automatically get one seat on the House of representatives. The remaining seats, if any, will be filled by party-list groups who gained more than 2% of the votes. Only a maximum of three seats per party-list is allowed and they are elected every 3 years. Local elections are synchronized with the national elections. However, overseas voters are only allowed to vote for national positions.

1.3 Implementation of the OAV

Republic Act No. 9189, also known as "The Overseas Absentee Voting Act of 2003", is the law that ensures equal opportunity to all qualified citizens of the Philippines abroad in the exercise of their right to participate in. the election of President, Vice-President, Senators and Party-List Representatives. In addition, the Republic Act No. 9225 or the Citizenship Retention and Re-acquisition Act of 2003 grants natural-born Filipinos who have lost their Filipino citizenship through naturalization in a foreign country, the opportunity to retain or re-acquire their Filipino citizenship.

The passing of the OAV law linked the Commission on Elections and the Department of Foreign Affairs. Within Comelec, a sub-unit, the Committee on OAV, was created and a counterpart sub-unit in the DFA, Overseas Absentee Voting Secretariat. Being the coun-

try's main election body, the Comelec drafted the implementing rules and regulations on the whole election process which includes registration, voting, counting and canvassing. The DFA through its missions abroad was tasked with its implementation.

Overseas voting is administered in three ways: personal and postal method. Personal voting can be through manually filling up the ballot or through the voting machines in the assigned overseas posts. The mode of voting is decided by the Comelec on a country-to-country basis. In the last elections in 2016, 30 posts adopted the automated election system while 26 adopted postal mode and 26 adopted personal voting.

For the 2016 presidential elections, the Comelec targeted a total of two million overseas registration but only managed to reach 1.3 million. Nonetheless, this figure is considered an all-time high as it nearly doubled the number of registered voters from the previous election. The turnout also increased at 31.45% owing to the popularity of controversial presidential candidate Rodrigo Duterte who eventually won the seat.

Table 1: Total overseas Filipino voter population (Comelec 2016)

REGION	OVERSEAS FILIPINO VOTER POPULATION
Middle East and Africa	593,834
Asia Pacific	344,857
Northern & Latin America	275,689
Europe	161,687
TOTAL	1,376,067

In the Nordic region, only one post is assigned for all Filipinos living in Norway, Denmark, Finland, Sweden and Iceland. The post is in Oslo, Norway, where the only embassy of the Philippines covering the said region is located. As such, Filipinos living in Finland were assigned the postal mode as the services provided by the Philippine consulate general in Helsinki doesn't include organizing overseas voting.

Table 2: Nordic region voting population (Comelec 2016)

COUNTRY	LAND-BASED	SEAFARERS	OVERSEAS FILIPINO VOTER POPULATION
Norway	2,034	657	2,691
Denmark	651	235	886
Finland	643	78	721
Iceland	105	6	111
Sweden	739	91	830
TOTAL	4,172	1,067	5,239

1.4 Challenges in OAV 2004-2016

Before the May 2016 national elections, one of the issues observed was the increasing figures in registration and the inconsistent voter turnout. Based on a Comelec data presented in Table 4, voter turnout was the highest at 65% in the first OAV in 2004 but suffered a nearly 50% drop in 2007. A popular presidential candidate in the person of Benigno "Ninoy" Aquino in 2010 is believed to have caused the turnout to rise again at 27% before the figures dwindled back to 17% in the 2013 midterm election. Following the increase in overseas voter population in 2016, the turnout had also improved to 31% in the 2016 presidential elections, they year when popular politician Rodrigo Duterte ran for president.

Table 3. OAV Voter turnout 2004-2016 (Comelec 2016)

YEAR	REGISTERED VOTERS	VOTERS WHO ACTUALLY VOTED	VOTER TURNOUT
2016	1,376,067	432,706	31.45
2013	710,951	118,823	16.71%
2010	568,733	153,323	26.96%
2007	485,720	81,732	16.83%
2004	359,296	233,137	64.89%

Focusing on the Nordic region, Comelec data shows that 5,239 are registered under the OAV in the Nordic region. However, based on the last 2016 national elections, only 1,734 or 33% voted.

A few older studies on OAV pointed out the barriers for overseas participation in the elections. In terms of method, an ethnographic study by Salas (2004 in Alarcon 2012) on voting by mail found that this method caused lack of urgency in sending the votes since the migrants were given a full month to mail their ballot. In the same study, overseas Filipinos were found to be dissatisfied with reading the same old names in the list of candidates giving a sense of absence of choice. This reflects the deeply entrenched problem in the Philippine political system concerning political dynasties and families ruling the electoral system for decades, even centuries in some provinces. These same political dynasties who are known for corruption and patronage politics, are often from the elite class who possess wealth, popularity and political machinery to ensure electoral victory. A study by Mendoza, Beja, Venida & Yap (2012) mentioned that in the Philippines, the share of political dynasties is estimated between 50 percent and 70 percent.

Voting for party-list organizations was also deemed problematic. The public's lack of clear understanding about party-list system is well-known. Since the law makes no limit as to the number of party-list organizations, over a hundred party-list organizations usually turns up filing candidacy causing voters an overwhelming number of organizations to choose from. In the 2016 elections, there were a total of 115 party-list organizations, which is already less than the previous election in 2013 with 123 organizations. According to the law, a voter must choose only one organization. Without sufficient information about each of these groups, their representatives and their role in congress, casting the vote for party-list representative has become a confusing and burdensome experience for voters.

A 2010 policy study on the OAV identified geographic distance from voting posts, the fact that a president was not elected in 2007 as it was a mid-term election, and the requirement for Filipino immigrants to execute an Affidavit of Intent to Return (AIR) as some of the reasons behind the low turnout (Center for Migrant Advocacy 2011). The AIR was a tricky prerequisite for overseas registration because it asks the immigrant to declare that he/she will resume residency in the Philippines 3 years after the approval of registration. Because most have no intention to return to the Philippines within the prescribed period, overseas Filipinos chose to forego registration. Thus, the AIR was singled out as the most significant obstacle to increasing OAV registration and it was eventually scrapped in 2013.

Political apathy and cynicism of Filipinos in the electoral process was also identified as a big reason for the disinterest in elections. This phenomenon can be observed not only among overseas voters but even among Filipinos residing in the Philippines due to the rampant corruption taking place in various government institutions. Citing the damaging effects corruption, Olsson (2014) argued that corruption perceptions may discourage voter

turnout. Similarly, Schraufnagel, Buhler & Lowry-Fritz (2014) emphasized on the need to take into account the influence of political corruption as a potential explanation for variance in voter turnout rates in the countries of Southeast Asia. The Comelec themselves recognize the erosion of faith in the government and the need to restore it.

The high mobility of overseas Filipinos, particularly in the case of seafarers made registration and voting especially difficult. The same policy study also identified limited manpower in embassies and consulates; insufficient information campaign, and incorrect, or in some cases confusing addresses provided by the voters that made voting by post extremely difficult. Similarly, in areas like the Middle East, the lack of transportation and the safety of women travelling alone was a hindrance in casting votes in the assigned polling places.

Ambiguity in certain provisions in the OAV law have also caused disenfranchisement of voters. In January of 2013, more than 200,000 overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) were removed from the official voters list for failing to issue an intent to vote in the May 2013 elections after not being able to vote in the last 2 elections (2007 and 2010). According to Comelec, it had the purging authority based on Section 9.2. of the OAV law. But varying interpretations of the law maintained that while COMELEC have that authority, it is not required of them to do so.

1.5   Communication issues in overseas voting

Overseas voting is surrounded by complex and interrelated set of issues. There is probably not one single measure that will eliminate the factors that complicate it because it is bound by the provisions of the law and its implementing rules and regulations. Thus, most of the analysis concerning overseas absentee voting have focused on the administrative side. One of the important issues that often gets sidetracked is the communication component. This study addresses issues in information and education which is one of the mandates of Comelec as a poll body. The policy study (Center for Migrant Advocacy 2011) lamented the lack of budget for information and education for overseas Filipinos regarding absentee voting in the 3 elections that took place from 2004 to 2010. Due to budgetary constraints, Comelec was not able to fully utilize traditional media or had limited means to produce promotional materials. The same issue about minimal information campaign and limited budget emerged during a forum with stakeholders to assess the 2013 OAV elections. To mitigate Comelec's deficiency, different Filipino communities and their networks, overseas posts, the Manila Economic and Cultural Office (MECO) and the Center for Migrant Advocacy helped in the information and education efforts. For instance, the CMA printed out 50,000 flyers and 1,500 posters and distributed them to its different part-

ner organizations abroad, as well as the different Philippine embassies and consulates (Center for Migrant Advocacy 2011).

The study by Escobar, McCann & Arana (2016) showed that that institutional variables, such as registration, are important factors in shaping electoral participation, a result to be expected given not only the challenge of setting up the infrastructure to carry out elections abroad, but also communication and information barriers within the expatriate electorate.

Several steps were taken by Comelec to respond to the issues affecting the low registration rate. Based on the 2011 policy paper, the Comelec conducted mobile registration in tandem with the Department of Foreign Affairs or Philippine Consulate General (PCG) when they were on mission in the processing of passports to certain areas, or satellite registrations during gatherings of Filipinos as well as placing Data Capturing Machines (DCM) in churches OFWs frequent. To address the mobility of seafarers, Comelec implemented for the 2016 elections the AkyatBarko *(loosely translated as 'Ship climb')* program where registration booths are stationed in various ports. Agencies related to overseas Filipinos like the Philippine Overseas Employment Agency (POEA), Overseas Workers Welfare Association (OWWA) and overseas job recruitment agencies were tapped to make arrangements with regards registration.

For the 2016 elections, the Comelec sought for a bigger budget of PHP222 million for OAV from the previous election's budget of 100.9 million. They have also proposed to come up with media campaigns to combat apathy by showing that the OFWs are a force to be reckoned with in the elections, along with improving administrative procedures such as registration. Discussions about a bill amending the law to include a provision for Internet voting was also being considered to address a lot of issues related to the geographic location vis-à-vis voting station and schedule. The bill is touted as controversial, so it has not yet passed Congress. While seen to greatly ease the process of voting, the downsides to Internet voting concerns the sanctity of the vote by making sure the ballots are not compromised in this voting method.

The Comelec is continuously challenged to increase the voter turnout for overseas absentee voting. While latest registration figures had exceeded expectations by breaching the 2 million target, a positive development in itself, how this translates to actual voters is yet to be seen.

1.6   Research questions and goals

This thesis provides an impetus for Comelec to re-examine how it has conducted its overall communication with overseas Filipinos when it comes to the OAV. While the study may address communication challenges in general, the focus on Finland hopes to bring a nuanced take on communication that considers the context of a specific geographic location.

The Comelec has recently concluded registration which ran for 9 months from 1 December 2017 to 30 September 2018 in preparation for the May 2019 midterm elections. Latest registration figures show 2.5 million overseas voter registrations, which for the first time in its history has exceeded the 1.5 to 2 million target. However, how this translates to actual votes is yet to be seen. For instance, in Finland, the last elections only managed to get a measly 721 registered voters compared to the 3,500 population, and an even lower voter turnout during the actual elections. With the next national election coming in 2019, and for the succeeding elections, Comelec has to make improvements to increase OAV figures. Thus, this study hopes to contribute by providing research-based inputs as to how communication can be improved in Finland. Ultimately, the study shares the goal of Comelec to have an effective communication that will translate to an increased participation in registration and voting outcomes.

Thus, the main objective of this research is to draw up concrete and actionable improvement ideas towards the development of Comelec's conduct of communication about OAV that is responsive to the needs and circumstances of Filipinos in Finland as a transnational community. Thus, the study asks: How can Comelec apply transnational communication to develop its Communication of OAV to Filipinos in Finland?

To support the main research question, three sub-questions were asked:
- RQ1: What are the contextual factors surrounding OAV as seen from the 3 domains in transnational communication - Comelec, Finland and the diaspora member?
- RQ2: How do these contextual factors shape current OAV communication?
- RQ3: What development ideas can be developed based on the transnational communication?

2   Theoretical framework

Understanding the context of the Filipino diaspora is key to uncovering the communication needs that the situation necessitates. Thus, this chapter explores the historical background of Filipino diaspora leading up to the passing of the Overseas Voting Law in 2003 to gain a better understanding and appreciation to the OAV/diaspora dynamics in the Philippines. Findings from various studies elucidated their lived experiences, the impact of their migration to their families and to the society they left behind, and their transnational practices. This chapter also explored how overseas voting is conducted in the Philippines and in other countries, the challenges encountered and the crucial role that communication plays.

2.1   The Filipino diaspora

This section introduces the Filipino diaspora through a discussion of their history, their role and influence in Philippine society and a description of their transnational practices while living in another country. This section also leads to an understanding of the Filipino diaspora as an audience.

2.1.1   The extent of the diaspora

The population of the Philippines is growing steadily at 100.9 million (Philippine Statistics Authority 2015). In addition to the domestic population, some 10.2 million Filipinos work or reside overseas as shown in Table 1. The best way to appreciate these figures is by viewing it relative to the migration activities of other countries. The United Nations international report on migration has since 2010 consistently ranked Philippines in the top 10 of countries of origin with the largest diaspora. In 2016, Philippines was at the 8th rank while India was at the top with 16 million. To date, nearly half of the 10.2 million overseas Filipinos live on a permanent basis and around 11 percent are not properly documented. The rest are likely to be on temporary or transitory basis.

Table 4. Stock estimates of overseas Filipinos (Commission on Filipinos Overseas 2013)

REGION / COUNTRY	TOTAL
WORLD TOTAL	10 238 614
Americas / Trust Territories	4 313 476
Asia, West	2 489 430
Asia, East & South	1 668 827
Europe	866 187
Oceania	474 492
Seabased Workers	367 166
Africa	59 036

Table 1 shows that the largest Filipino diaspora is in the Americas with over 4 million, mainly in the United States and Canada. Over 2 million also work or reside in Western Asia where the gulf region is located. The gulf region had been a popular destination for overseas Filipino workers since the 1970s. Europe hosts more than 800,000 Filipinos with nearly 50,000 in the Nordic region. In Finland, records from the Tilastokeskus website shows that the total population of those with Filipino background is 4,346 as of 2017 (Tilastokeskus 2017).

Based on a 2016 survey, around 2.2 million of the 10 million Filipinos abroad are overseas workers (Philippine Statistics Authority 2017). However, an interview with a representative from the CFO said that the number of OFWs can be already about 5 million. OFWs fill up a large portion of jobs in jobs in various sectors and industries around the world. Based on Figure 1, the Philippine Statistics Authority (2016) noted that OFWs do mostly elementary occupations (34.5%), service and sales workers (19%) and plant and machine operators and assemblers (12.8%). The Philippines is also a major sending country of international healthcare workers. These facts give credence to the adage that wherever in the world, one is bound to find a Filipino.

1 - Managers
2 - Professionals
3 - Technicians and associate professionals
4 - Clerical support workers
5 - Service and sales workers

6 - Skilled agricultural forestry and fishery workers
7 - Craft and related trades workers
8 - Plant and machine operators and assemblers
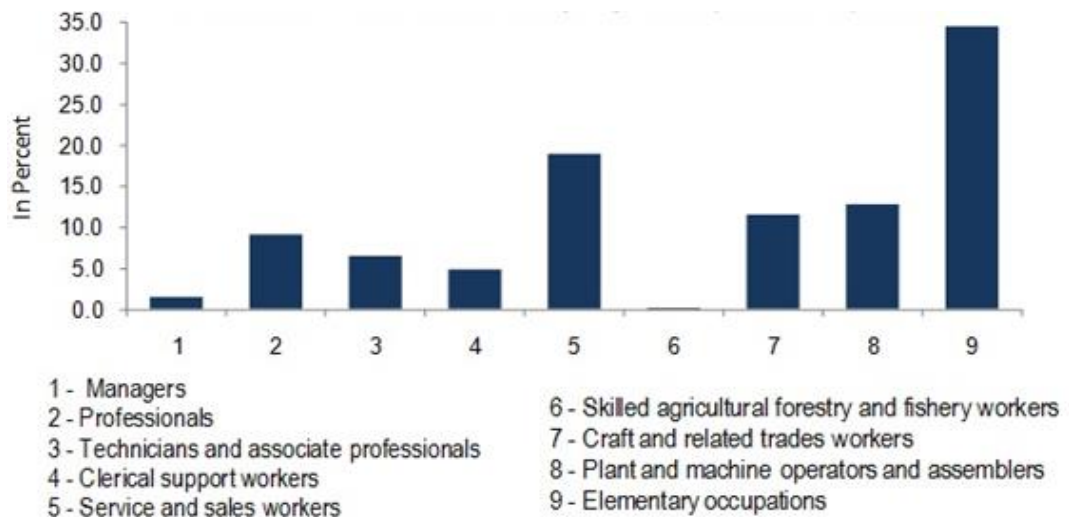9 - Elementary occupations

Figure 1. Distribution of OFWs by Major Occupation Group (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2015)

Migration had permeated Philippine society since the 20th century though it is noted that during the Spanish colonization period, Filipinos were already sent to work in Spanish trading ships known as galleon ships, as sailors and crew members sailing across the Pacific Onion from Manila to Acapulco, Mexico and back. This galleon trade lasted from 1565 until 1815.

One of the most documented large-scale migration of Filipinos took place during the American Colonial period in the early 1900s when workers were sent to the United States of America to work as sugar plantation workers and fruit pickers in Hawaii. Known as the first migration wave, migration activity was mainly to respond to labor demands of colonial America. Up until the 1960s, professionals like doctors, nurses, and engineers migrated to the USA, and to the Middle East in the 1970-1980s to support the booming economy in those regions. The 1970s marked the institutionalization of overseas employment by the government as a solution to the worsening labor and situation and stagnating economy in the country. Through the years, migration has become the hallmark of the Philippine society with institutions, government, media and pop culture taking on overseas Filipino issues on different levels and ways.

2.1.2   The consequences of diaspora

The social cost of the Filipino diaspora is widely discussed in the realms of academe, governance and civil society. The labor export policy reflecting the government's inability to uplift internal economy is a key driver of migration. In the process it has created a brain drain of local talents and, in the absence of adequate welfare and protection, has made overseas workers more susceptible to abuse in their places of work. According to Kahan-

ec and Zimmerman (2008), while migration may involve a new job with a higher pay, this also means losing old and establishing new social ties, as well as psychological costs of missing the homeland. In a country where family ties are so strong and deep, a parent leaving behind a husband/wife and children is perhaps the hardest sacrifice a migrant had to endure upon leaving the country. Family separation as one of the social costs of migration affecting the global south (Madianou and Miller 2011). In fact, many of the earlier studies explored overseas or long-distance parenting and conditions of children left behind. Results of these studies revealed the continuous task of parenting, 'global parenting' or the use communication technology (i.e. mobile phone) in parenting, as well as child-rearing that has become communal as children are entrusted to caregivers such as grandparents (Reyes 2008; Taylor 2008; Madianou& Miller 2011). Children of OFW were also described as performing at par or even better in school than the non-OFW children (Edillon 2008) demonstrating how children may have learned to cope in an OFW society.

Tanis (2013) explained that the culture of migration in the Philippines causes a normalization of migration, which leads to a non-reflectiveness on the practice. On the other hand, studies have also blamed migration as the cause of instability within the family, jeopardizing marriages and parents-children relationships (Asis 2012). Reyes (2008) argued that while technological mechanisms are available, it will still not replace the emotional bonding that can develop in the relationship when they are physically present and they will still miss the growing up years of their children and their value formation. However, despite some positive economic news in recent years, emigration is unlikely to slow down. And while this is still the norm, families are seen to continue coping with the situation as they have done so for many decades.

2.1.3 Socio-political influence of overseas Filipinos

While criticized as an unsustainable approach to economic development (Brabson 2013), the migrants' significant contribution the economy cannot be denied prompting the government to recognize them as modern-day heroes. Remittances are an important source of income for many Filipino families and thus a main driver of household consumption. On a bigger scale, the local economy benefits greatly as remittances account for approximately 10 percent of the country's GDP (Worldbank 2016). Data from the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas or the Central Bank of the Philippines (2017) shows that cash sent home by overseas Filipinos through banks hit a record $28.1 billion in 2017, or a 4.3% increase from 2016.

Besides growing remittances, Opiniano (2004) noted the migrants' intensifying socio-economic and political influence. This influence was highlighted following the 1995 execu-

tion of domestic helper Flor Contemplacion in Singapore following what many believed to be a wrongful conviction. The government's failure to save Contemplacion's life gained widespread indignation and inspired the formation of migrant organizations such as Migrante International and for other organizations to take on issues of migrant workers. The pressure for the government to act amidst growing number of abuses against OFWs had intensified. This resulted in the passage of the Migrants Workers and Filipinos Overseas Act of 1995 that instituted policies that protect and promote migrant welfare, especially those in distress situations. According to Seung (2009), the Contemplacion case was a cornerstone for the labour migration policy in the Philippines and at the same time, it helped the OAV advocates to mobilize OFWs by using the groundswell of anger as a catalyst.

The collective influence of OFWs was once again emphasized during the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997 when the government needed their remittances than ever before to keep the economy afloat. This event not only prompted the government to recognize their heroic role, but also the OFWs themselves realizing their force in the country's political landscape. Other factors such as the entry of the party-list in the election system in 1998 that allowed for representation of marginal sectors including that of the migrant sector in the Philippine Congress, and the growth of Internet use contributed to the solidification of the OFW voice (Seung 2009). This heightened political awareness and influence was demonstrated in the forming of the International Coalition for Overseas Filipinos' Voting Rights in 2001 consisting of more than 400 Filipino organizations around the world. In Alarcon's (2014) account, this umbrella organization lobbied intensively for the bill's passage, riding on the greater realization of the migrant's role in Philippine development following the Asian Financial Crisis. In retrospect, the lobbying efforts of overseas Filipino organizations have been instrumental in the successful passing of the OAV law in 2003. Thus, in a seemingly symbolic gesture, it can be concluded that the law permitting overseas absentee voting resulted from the Filipino overseas themselves demanding the same government who drove them to look for better opportunities overseas the right to participate in democracy back home.

2.1.4 Transnational practices of Filipino diaspora communities

In the field of diaspora studies, one of the themes that scholars have continuously tried to explain and understand are the transnational practices of diaspora communities. These transnational practices evolved out of the complex interactions taking place between the diaspora's self-identification, the connections in the home country and the conditions in the host country. While transnational practices vary from community-to-community, these

practices are used by diaspora communities to navigate and negotiate the different zones they find themselves in.

The transnational practices of overseas Filipinos are among the most documented in diaspora literature. The cornerstone of these practices lies in the maintenance of family ties and how they simultaneously adopt to and participate in the society of the host country. In addition, engagement with the Filipino diaspora community fills for them the gap that fully integrates them to the host country. In another sense, the close ties with the Filipino diaspora communities creates a barrier to fully integrate them to the host country. While there is a shortage of research regarding these, what research shows thus far is that the idea that associations with the diaspora community provides a semblance of relief that they are not alone in this experience. The Filipino diaspora communities and transnational networks help them adapt to the host country better and temporarily alleviate alienation and longing for home. It was observed in studies, for instance, among Filipino nurses in Finland (Vartiainen, Pitkänen, Asis, Raunio & Koskela 2016) and among Filipinos in Britain (Alcantara 2007) and Iceland (Skaptadottir and Innes 2017).

Overseas Filipinos participate in the day-to-day lives of the family back home via communication technologies. In their host country, they typically belong to a kinship group consisting of relatives and friends where they hold various social activities such as celebrations and eating meals together. Aside from socialization, having a Filipino community close by also turns out to be useful for getting assistance when problems arise or with practical matters related to housing, employment or other paperwork.

The availability and affordability of communication through social media and Internet-supported messaging services allow Filipino overseas greater agency to engage not only their networks back home but to a wider network of people both in host country and elsewhere in the world. Thus, more recent studies have geared towards an interest in the overseas Filipinos' use of social media in their day-to-day lives, including their political participation. This is primarily due to the "Internet as democratizer" (Duaqui 2011) particularly among the migrant publics. The democratizing effect of the Internet was made more interesting at the turn of the millennium where the country has seen the growth of the Internet usage among Filipinos.

According to the 2016 Digital Global Overview (Hootsuite and We are Social 2017), Filipinos spend more time on social media that anyone else in the world at 4.17 hours daily on social media. Social Media use has been strongly linked with the need of Filipinos to communicate with friends and family overseas. Social media has also been observed as a

platform for overseas' Filipinos participation in political discussions, a phenomenon that has been observed in diaspora populations as well. Research on diaspora Colombians for instance noted that the Internet was a major player in elections both at home and abroad (Escobar, McCann & Arana 2016). Denopra's (2017) study among overseas Filipinos in Belgium revealed how social media has exponentially intensified political discourse. Likewise, governments have also depended on Internet to communicate and engage their diaspora populations.

2.2 Government communication in the 21st century

This section discusses how the phenomenon of migration challenges governments to extend government policies and communication beyond their borders. Overseas voting is identified as one of the policies governments use to strengthen their relationship with their diaspora and reintegrate them into the affairs of the home country. However, literature also tells that governments must continue to find new ways to develop their relationship with the diaspora.

2.2.1 The evolving ways of government communication

The legitimacy of government programs and policies rely on public support and participation. In doing so, governments engage in different communication activities. Due to migration activity going on in many societies, governments are forced to rethink their communication practices in a way that reaches both those living in the home country and their citizens abroad with the Internet and technology shaping these communication practices.

Traditionally, government communication functions have focused on managing media coverage of their policies. According to the Leaders' Report which analyzed government and public sector communication practices across 40 countries, it was found that majority of governments still rely heavily on a broadcast model of communication aimed at a generic "general audience" (WPP 2016). In addition to that, the research revealed that many governments do not have the manpower and skills needed to foster engagement with the people within the new media landscape (WPP 2016). This proves to be problematic these days as the audience has taken more control over the messages they see and in what channels. A blanket view of the audience also assumes that they all exist within the same context. However, thinking about the differences in age, geographic location, media access, and other factors already tells that the audiences are too fragmented for mass communication. Thus, governments can no longer rely on mass media as the main communication channel.

Communication plays a critical role in government. Not only they have the duty to create policies for the public, they also should be able to communicate it effectively. According to Head (2007, 3) providing useful information by government to citizens, together with citizens and organizations having free access to official information and opportunities to provide ongoing feedback to government, are clearly essential for efficient and effective democratic societies. In fact, the United Nations Development Program (2011) stressed the importance of providing mechanisms that will enable citizen participation as a key governance principle. Moreover, the Asia-Pacific Economic Conference (APEC) recognizes e-governance as a tool that will facilitate ease of access and availability of information and services in the 21st century while at the same time reducing the cost of disseminating information (Asia-Pacific Economic Conference 2011).

The Leaders' Report (WPP 2016) also added that an effective government communication function must also:
– Interact with citizens directly on social media
– Produce high quality, rapid content
– Run long-term, strategic behavior change communication campaigns
– Help citizens access digital public services across multiple touch points
– Integrate communications across on- and off-line channels
– Create direct channels to engage with the public, so that government can communicate with citizens without dependence on the 'filter' of the media

An overview of what constitutes effective government communication in the 21st century clearly point to a public relations (PR)-based approach. Wood and Sommerville (2001) said that PR in government must involve open participatory government and dissemination of accurate information about policy making, as well as a commitment from government to be accessible, transparent and participatory. In short, government or political communication is concerned more with civic engagement that brings people together, create common experience and generate discussion (Eid and Antoine 2012) that simply getting a message across.

This is what makes new media, especially, social media relevant in 21st century government communication. The Pew Research Center's Internet and American Life project suggests social media as an umbrella term that is used to refer to a new era of web-enabled applications that are built around user generated or user-manipulated content, such as wikis, blogs, podcasts, and social networking sites (Liu & Briones 2012). Thus, an increasingly important dimension of political campaigning is the use of the Internet to manage the campaign and relate to supporters (Castells 2013, 230). While this research

doesn't focus on the use of new media for a political campaign by a specific candidate, the ideas also hold true for any campaign that aims to influence behavior, such as participation in elections.

2.2.2 Overseas voting as a form of diaspora engagement

Overseas voting is located under the broad range of efforts by governments to formally reincorporate their citizens in the affairs of the home country, along with provision for dual citizenship and reacquisition of citizenship.

Dual citizenship and re-acquisition of citizenship are the most formal ways to include a diaspora member. The Philippine Citizenship Retention and Re-acquisition Law of 2003 or RA 9225 was passed almost at the same time as the overseas absentee voting law was passed to formally incorporate diaspora members who wish to be part of the country's political affairs. Its declaration of policy states that "all Philippine citizens who become citizens of another country shall be deemed not to have lost their Philippine citizenship under the conditions of this act." (Republic of the Philippines 2003).

Overseas voting has been of interest for other countries following the increasing trend of migration globally and the changing policy landscape towards that of engaging the diaspora in the development of the home country. Governments have consequently noticed the growing demand for democracy in transnational arenas as an important political agenda (Anderson 2002, 9). The globalization of political, personal and professional life, the spread of democracy throughout the world and an increase in migration have all contributed to an increasing interest in voting rights for refugees, diplomats, members of the armed forces serving overseas and other people who are temporarily or permanently absent from their own country (Ace Electoral Knowledge Network 2007).

As of 2007, 214 countries allow overseas voting (Ace Electoral Knowledge Network 2007) and the number continues to grow. For instance, Chile held the first overseas elections in 2017 for their 800,000-diaspora population. This happened after years of debate, and notably after Chilean expatriates launched a campaign to approve the bill that will give them the right to vote overseas. Overseas voting may come as a demand from the citizens themselves as in the case of Philippines, El Salvador, Dominican Republic, Greece, Malaysia, Pakistan, and Ireland among others, who actively campaigned for their right to participate in the electoral process. On the other hand, some initiatives have come from the state or the government like Costa Rica and Panama for the purpose of expanding and strengthening the electoral regimes (Fiero 2016).

The extent to which overseas voting influence election outcome is viewed on a case-to-case basis. It is also, to some degree, used by different countries as a tool to achieve certain political goals. For instance, many Latin American countries like Chile used overseas election as a tool for the inclusion of many leftists who have fled authoritarian regimes in the 1960s in the electoral process (Erlingsson 2014). Overseas voting drew mixed reactions among the Lebanese diaspora especially among those who are Lebanese citizens only by virtue of hereditary citizenship but have little to no interest in maintaining a relationship with the country. This bore similarities with Uruguay when a plebiscite was held in 2009 and the votes favoring the overseas vote initiative failed to obtain a majority support (National Electoral Institute International Affairs Unit, 2016). These examples illustrate that while diaspora is a result of migration, migration does not automatically make a diaspora.

Time and resources were cited as the reasons that allow the more stable Colombian diaspora to participate more in political affairs of their home country as opposed to the newly arrived (Escobar, McCann & Arana 2016). Having a peculiar political climate may also generate political behaviors as observed in the case of the Philippines in 2016. The political message of the Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte has generated a huge interest among OFWs who have been demonstrating their engagement in local politics through Facebook. Duterte's positioning of himself during the campaign period in 2016 as a "bold, anti-oligarchy, and 'anti-establishment' politician who has also challenged the West in terms of his unexpected geopolitical moves and undermining universal conceptions of violence and human rights with his 'war on drugs'" (Denopra 2017, 12) appeared to appeal to the OFWs' sensibilities. While having a polarizing effect in the Philippine society, Duterte's political message has resonated strongly with Filipinos both locally and overseas evidenced by social media and high trust ratings.

2.2.3 Ways of engaging the diaspora

Without relegating the role of formal or legal measures for inclusion, literature on government-diaspora relationship shows a substantial interest in matters related to engagement and the diaspora's role in nation-building. This is in recognition of the decades of social, economic and intellectual contribution of the diaspora to their home country. Thus, states realize that diaspora integration has a lot more to do than formalizing one's status through citizenship.

Thus, strengthening ties with the diaspora had become a prevalent political agenda especially among countries with large diaspora populations or migrant-sending nations such as the Philippines. The reshaping of government communication with its diaspora is characterized by two main ideas consistent with the principles of good governance promoted by

international bodies such as the United Nations. First is engagement and second is inclusion in the development planning of the homeland. In response, governments try to reshape their policies to optimize the significant contribution of the diaspora in development.

One of the most well-known diaspora engagement approach is that of Mexico's. Their approach had been so successful and what they have done have set a good example when it comes to listening and understanding the conditions of their diaspora and providing services based on it. Among their many diaspora programs is the *Matricula Consular*. Cases of undocumented Mexicans in the United States is a major concern. Without any formal identification, it is impossible for them to open a bank account, which is major setback when trying to remit money back to Mexico. Thus, the government introduced the *Matricula Consular*, a form of identification card that can be obtained at the local consular office. Four years after it was introduced, not only did the *Matricula Consular* help the Mexican diaspora identify themselves, it had also facilitated the flow of remittances and significantly increasing it (Engstrom 2015).

India also has adopted a very active diaspora engagement policy wherein they focus on linking the diaspora to India. To do this, they hold the events such as the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas conventions, where Indian officials gather with diaspora representatives to honour high- profile Indians for their exceptional achievements, the Scholarship Programme for Diaspora Children (SPDC) that offers scholarships so overseas Indians can study in Indian universities, and the "Know India Programme" (KIP) that introduces the overseas Indian to the various aspects of contemporary Indian life, that is its cultural life, economic development, educational system and also through typical rural life in India (Hercog and Siegel 2011). For any person with Indian origin, the Indian government offers the program "Tracing the Roots," that provides the details of roots in India (where traceable) i.e. name of close surviving relative(s), details of the place of origin of their forefathers (paternal and maternal side) and a possible family tree will be made available to the applicant at the earliest (Government of India Ministry of External Affairs 2018).

2.2.4 Government communication in the age of social media

In addition to the examples discussed above which focuses on offline diaspora programs, governments are also urged to develop more novel ways of communicating with them. Just as private businesses developed and refined the tools of marketing to promote their products and expand their market share, so have public sector activities increasingly become subject to the techniques of modern marketing (Head 2007, 3).

With increasing Internet connectivity and social media use, enhancing the social media presence to boost diaspora communication is highlighted as an important channel used by many government institutions. In the Global Irish Communication Handbook (Government of Ireland 2013, 24), a major component of their approach is utilizing social media as a virtual community that is not only a place to find information, but also a place to organize events, express opinions, share photos, meet new people, promote your work, participate in campaigns and much more.

The heavy use of social media by governments in their communication with the public point to a kind of communication strategy that does not rely solely on traditional or formal channels. Social media provides an excellent channel for informal communication, which had been known to influence mutual learning (Hickey 2016) and is quickly becoming the type of communications that citizens desire (Landsbergen 2010).

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) released a handbook that underscores the important role of engaging the diaspora for development of the home country. In achieving this goal, the handbook mentioned the importance of both formal and informal channels such as websites (formal) and word of mouth (informal) as the two of the most effective tools for advertising projects (Aguanias and Newland 2012). As an example, the Handbook cited the EU-RQA program where it was found that the Internet searches as well as informal social networks and community organizations were the most commonly cited sources of information about the Afghan return program (Agunias and Newland 2012).

Literature points to social media revolutionizing the ways government institutions com-municates to the public and the significant contribution of social media in achieving their goals. Social media is seen as a platform that enhances formal communication by engag-ing the public in two-way communication in an environment that does not follow pre-scribed rules and procedures. This is not to say that social media provides total solution to all communication issues. Governments still need to carefully study their audience to find the clever solutions to deliver their message across.

This is what the city of Auckland, New Zealand did when they launched the "Show your love for Auckland" campaign during the 2016 elections. Combining print, radio, digital and out-of-home (OOH) advertising, it helped increased awareness and voter turnout as re-vealed in a study conducted by the Auckland Council after the campaign and election pe-riod (Williams, Allpress & Rootham 2018). They are also looking at applying behavioral insights to further transform their campaign for electoral participation that is more current

and innovative. While this campaign was made for local voters, important lessons can still be drawn that can be applied when addressing the challenges in reaching out to overseas voters.

2.3   Transnational communication and beyond

In everyday language, the words transnational, international or global are often used with slight differentiation. But in the communication practice, the differences are more recognized. Cambie & Ooi's (2009) book on international communications strategy used international and global interchangeably by focusing on the element of localization that is defined by common interests and values rather than geographic location. For instance, an OFW in Finland may find a news about a fellow OFW in Italy who shares the same experience of homesickness more local than news about US President Donald Trump visiting Finland.

The word 'global', as used in the concept of the 'global marketplace,' connotes interconnectedness or interdependence (Sadri & Flammia 2011). That is, what happens in another country is likely to have an effect on other countries. An example is the growing demand for healthcare workers from the East in response to the scarcity of such professions in the Western world. Wars and political conflicts in African Countries have caused the largest refugee crisis spreading all over Europe in the 21st century.

Anderson (2002) explained 'transnational' focusing on its prefix 'trans,' which means 'across' or transcending 'the national'—a crossing of borders and a bridging of dichotomies. In international or global public relations, the activities involve the planning and implementation of programs involving two or more countries (Theaker 2011). However, the audience are usually assumed to be the publics of other nations in the case of American companies targeting Hispanic audiences. In this case, diversity and cross-cultural perspectives become a major consideration. However, the government communicating to their own diaspora sits quite outside of this definition because of the shared identities and values between the communicator (Philippines government) and its publics (Filipinos anywhere in the world). However, the reality is that different countries have different conditions. A Filipino tends to organize his/her life in the foreign country based on these conditions. Thus, it is still important to examine these factors to create the most appropriate approach.

Technology has made transnational communication easier and faster. Organizations no longer have to be confined to their country of origin. With the use of the Internet, it is possible to communicate with the public in different countries with relative ease, in the same

way that contemporary diasporas are able to live their transnational lives using technology that aids in the maintenance of strong ties with their home country while actively participating in their host country. Thus, governments are presented with multiple means with which to engage their diaspora into the affairs of the home country in the transnational space.

2.3.1 Transnational perspective in overseas voting communication

With OAV, the government is engaging in activities that are transnational in nature. First, they transcended their policies to enable political inclusion of Filipinos overseas. Second, they communicate from beyond the national borders. However, enacting policies is one thing, and communicating them effectively is another. Studies revealed that public participation is a manifestation of effective communication. Without public participation, government institutions fail to advance the spirit of the law. OAV law is beneficial and good to have, but without participation, it is far from being a successful law. Based on past studies, Comelec's actions insofar as OAV is concerned have not been evaluated very well. Comelec's poor performance in informing and educating the overseas Filipinos has been deemed as problematic and largely criticized especially by migrant groups. In addition to that, political apathy and procedural errors also have had significant impact to the low OAV voter turnout.

The Filipino diaspora is known to have a relationship to the home and host country akin to living in two countries at the same time. Building a government-diaspora relationship through overseas voting poses communication challenges that have been limitedly addressed so far from the perspective of transnational communication. In her paper, Bravo (2013), claimed that the phenomenon of granting external voting rights to publics located abroad, has not been studied from the perspective of transnational government communications to understand the challenges and opportunities that governments face when trying to communicate external voting rights to a diaspora community. Furthermore, Cain, McDonald & Murakami (2008) claimed that the questions and gaps can be attributed to the fact that there has been no serious academic research to date on overseas voters. In the Philippine context, literature shows a dearth of scholarly studies about overseas voting especially beyond the issue of law and practice.

Because voting abroad is just too complex, Bravo (2013) urged to analyze transnational communication vis-a-vis the model of contextual factors she proposed to understand how these play a role in affecting the decision of external voters to cast their ballot while abroad. These contextual factors are seen in three levels: in the home country, in the host

country and in the diaspora member. Bravo (2013) explained the elements under each contextual factor below:

In the home country
• Effectiveness of the communication efforts developed by the home government to inform the diaspora community about voting rights (for instance, through dedicated websites and social media, or through ads/announcements in migrant-targeted newspapers and radio stations)

In the host country
• Complexity of the process to cast the external vote:
  − Time needed to cast the vote
  − Effort level needed to cast the vote (for example, mailing your vote versus casting the vote in person, traveling to a far-away consulate)
  − Investment needed to cast the vote (for example, transportation and lodging costs to register and to vote in a consulate, versus just paying the postage and visiting the local post office, in the case of a postal vote)
  − Size of the diaspora community (a larger community provides stronger social networks to obtain information through informal channels rather than just through institutional communication efforts

In the diaspora member
• Level of trust in the home government
• Strength of the transnational connections kept by the migrant with the home country (existence or not of social networks and political participation at home, for instance)

While Bravo (2013) examined Latin American countries, her conclusions are nonetheless useful in understanding the contextual factors that affect overseas voters in general such as the Filipinos transnational community in Finland.

Identifying the contextual factors present in each of the domains of transnational communication will elucidate the complexities and challenges in communicating with overseas Filipinos. Subsequently, knowledge of these contextual factors will help Comelec navigate the transnational space. In the process, it will reveal opportunities in creating the most effective ways to communicate voting to Filipinos beyond the country's national borders.

3 Conducting the Research

This chapter discussion the chosen approach of this study, and the steps undertaken to collect and analyse the data.

3.1 Case study

This study focuses on Comelec by examining their communication practices of OAV, and the contextual factors of their Filipino audience in Finland. The goal is to come to a deep understanding of the case in order to provide recommendations.

Case study is usually descriptive and explanatory in nature. It doesn't aim to make generalization but rather particularization, with the emphasis on uniqueness and understanding of the case itself (Stake 1995). Similarly, Thomas (2011), defined the case study method as a kind of research that concentrates on one thing, looking at it in detail, not seeking to generalize from it. The findings rely on the researchers own interpretation of data.

Swanborn (2010) argued that the character of case studies changed rapidly within the social and the behavioural sciences. One of these changes is the use of case study in applied research. In the absence of a consensus of what a case study is, Swanborn (2010, 22) defined case study as a study of a social phenomenon

- in one or only a few, of its manifestations
- in its natural surroundings
- during a certain period
- that focuses on detailed descriptions, interpretations and explanations that several categories of participants in the system attach to the social process
- in which the researcher starts with a broad research question on an ongoing social process and uses available theories, but abstains from pre-fixed procedures of data collection and data analysis, and always keeps an eye open to the newly gathered data in order to flexibly adjust subsequent research steps
- that exploits several sources of data (informants, documents, observatory notes)
- In which sometimes the participants in the studied case are engaged in a process of confrontation with the explanations, views and behaviors of other participants and with the resulting preliminary results of the research

A case needs to be examined in depth and from different angles in order to come up with a rich picture with many kinds of insights coming from different angles, from different kinds of information (Thomas 2011). In case study, the phenomenon is discussed extensively, typically using several data sources. For this reason, case studies tend to employ mixed qualitative and quantitative methods.

Thomas (2011) also recommends the use of storyboards to help design a case study. Similar to mind mapping, all the ideas related to your case as informed by literature will be

visualized in a story board. As the research goes further along, what was initially a loose set of ideas will become more focused and interconnected from where the analysis will be derived. Visualizing the elements in the case study helped this study find perspective and locate the elements needed to explain the case at hand. An initial sketch of ideas led to the construction of the framework in Figure 2 showing the overlapping relationships of the three (3) major domains in transnational diaspora communication that resulted from the literature review – the home country, host country (Finland) and the diaspora member.
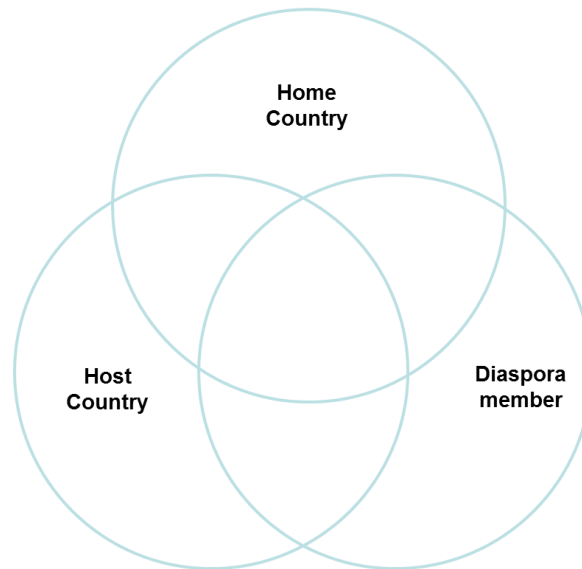
Figure 2. Framework of transnational communication

As the study progresses, the circles are populated with more and more concepts and variables that constitute each of the domain. It also allowed the researcher to locate the interactions that take place in between and among these variables. Furthermore, working with a framework allowed more focus into the phenomenon, which is what case study is all about. Thus, this sketch functioned as a framework with which to analyze transnational communication in the context of Comelec's communication of OAV.

The researcher also approached this study in what Thomas (2011) called as the local knowledge case where a study originated from something in the researcher's personal experience about which the researcher wants to find out more. It is seen as a strength in conducting case study to have a certain level of familiarity with the topic. However, despite this familiarity, Stake (1995) explains that a researcher enters to the scene with a sincere interest in learning how actor/s function in their ordinary pursuits and milieus and with a willingness to put aside many presumptions while we learn.

3.2   Data Collection

As a case study is supposed to provide an extensive explanation of a phenomenon, this study was conducted using qualitative and quantitative methods.

According to Rubin and Rubin (2012, 3), in-depth interviewing allows researchers to explore in detail the experiences, motives, and opinions of others and learn to see the world from perspectives other than their own. Moreover, the open-ended nature of in-depth interviews mean that the informants or interviewees have the opportunity to expound or elaborate their responses that will result to data that is rich and detailed.

Insights from the qualitative interviews guided the construction of the survey questionnaire. In the survey, the respondents were asked whether the proposed ideas would work for them or not. In this way, the researcher was able to not only test the development ideas that were formulated from the qualitative phase, but it also provided an opportunity to modify or refine the initial ideas that led to the final recommended solutions.

Data from the internal document of document was also incorporated, as well as social media sites to verify some claims made during the interviews. By employing several methods, this study practiced triangulation.

'Triangulation' is a process of verification that increases validity by incorporating several viewpoints and methods. In the social sciences, it refers to the combination of two or more theories, data sources, methods or investigators in one study of a single phenomenon to converge on a single construct and can be employed in both quantitative (validation) and qualitative (inquiry) studies (Yeasmin and Rahman 2012, 156). Through triangulation, issues on validity and reliability issues in qualitative research is addressed.

3.2.1   Qualitative phase

For the KIIs, a representative from the Comelec Office of the OAV Secretariat was engaged in a face-to-face interview to gain inside information since Comelec is the principal implementor of OAV and this study's case organization. The key informant is Catherine Fernandez, a lawyer working directly with the Head of the OAV Secretariat. In addition to this, an interview was also conducted with a partner agency, Commission on Filipinos Overseas, whose input in this study was not only about their role in OAV communication but also provided insights into the lives of overseas Filipinos, their general attitudes, how the government engages them, etc. It is important that this study is informed by the insights from the agency tasked "to promote and uphold the interests, rights and welfare of

overseas Filipinos and strengthen their ties with the Motherland" (Commission on Filipinos Overseas 2018). Thus, a face-to-face interview was conducted with the agency's head of policy, planning and research division, Rodrigo Garcia. The interviews with Atty.Catherine and Rodrigo took place in their respective offices in Manila, Philippines in July 2018.

To represent the organized Filipino community sector, a face-to-face interview was also conducted on 2 November 2018 with Riitta Vartti, a native Finn who is a board member of Filippiinit-Seura Ry. She has a long history of cooperation and involvement in the cultural and socio-political affairs of Filipinos both in Finland and the Philippines. She welcomes a lot of Filipinos weekly into her home in Helsinki where she also teaches Finnish language. Wonderfully, she also speaks Filipino or Tagalog, the Philippine's mother language, fluently.

The KIIs were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide which covered the following areas: background on their organizations' role in OAV, their communication practices, channels and messaging approach, their views about the overseas Filipinos as target audience, challenges/barriers to effective OAV communication, feedback of overseas Filipinos, desired improvements in OAV communication.

The second leg of interviews were among Filipinos living in Finland. Instead of setting a fixed number of focus interviews, this study used the data saturation approach. This data collection approach is conducted over a sustained period until such time when the same responses begin to emerge again and again (Holliday 2016). Once the researcher has assessed that saturation is achieved, it is assumed that sample sufficiency is also achieved.

There is no real consensus among scholars on what can be considered as sufficient sample in data saturation. It could occur within the first twelve interviews or earlier (Guest, Bunce and Johnson 2006). Usually the more homogenous the composition of the group, or the more the informants share the same characteristics as income and educational attainment, the faster saturation is achieved. In the same vein, Silverman (2010) explains that qualitative research is more concerned about the rationale behind the composition of a focus group, rather than the amount of data generated. To address this, the researcher still needs to do sampling techniques such as purposive sampling. First, the researcher made sure that the informants are qualified voters. According to the rules of OAV, any Filipino citizen who is at least eighteen (18) years old on 13 May 2019, who reacquired or retained Filipino citizenship, and other Filipino citizens with dual citizenship are qualified as an overseas voter. Second, they should have lived in Finland for at least 6 months so

that they have somehow settled and have a considerable living experience in Finland. All the informants are between 29-32 years old, consistent with the Filipino overseas' average age of 31 years old (Commission on Filipinos Overseas 2015). They have come to Finland to work as a practical nurse or through marriage with a Finnish national.

To find respondents, in-depth interview (IDI) invitations were sent to members of the two biggest Filipino Facebook groups. Some were also the researcher's personal contact. A total of eight (8) informants were interviewed when responses finally reached saturation. The interviews took place from 18 October to 2 November 2018.

The interviews were facilitated in two ways: face-to-face (among 3 informants) and instant messaging (among 5 informants). The instant messaging (IM) interview method was considered to accommodate informants living outside Helsinki or those with busy schedules. All interviews were set as an appointment to ensure that the informant has ample time and concentration to manage the conversation. Interviews lasted for about 45 minutes to 1 hour and 30 minutes. Interviews were conducted in mixed Filipino and English.

3.2.2 Quantitative phase

The insights developed from qualitative findings served as the foundation from which communication opportunities were first spotted and translated into development ideas. Thus, the questionnaire was built so that these ideas can be tested with a bigger group of people. Triangulating the ideas through a quantitative survey was crucial in constructing the final recommendations.

The structured questionnaire has three (3) major parts. The goal of the first part was to profile their past, present and future/planned participation in OAV. The questions were designed to find out what urged them to or prevented them from participating in the elections. The responses will be helpful in determining the barriers and enablers to election participation.

The second part is based on the idea that aside from giving informational and procedural messages, Comelec should also create messages that appeal to the overseas Filipinos' voter attitude. Thus, the objective was to find out the kind of message that resonates well to the audience about being a voter. The most prevalent attitudes are democracy-based (I want my voice to be heard) and responsibility or duty-based (It is my duty as a Filipino to vote). Using a 5-point Likert scale, respondents were asked to whether they agree or disagree to each of the ten (10) statements that correspond to those attitudes to find out which appeals the most to them.

The third part has thirteen (13) questions that correspond to the different communication activities. The respondent was asked, again, using a 5-point Likert scale whether each statement is helpful or not in encouraging him/her to participate in the elections.

3.3   Data analysis

Finding meaning through voluminous qualitative data is a tedious task for any researcher. To help make sense of all data collected, this study applied the open coding method. Open coding was identified as a method of generating a participant-generated 'theory' from the data (Blair 2015). It is commonly used in grounded theory where researcher builds constructs from the ground up. Instead of imposing pre-determined codes or categories, the researcher identifies and labels the codes culled from raw text. In doing open-coding, portions of the texts that were thought to be relevant, useful or significant were highlighted. Those thoughts that can be lumped together as one code were highlighted using one color. Then they were then labeled into topics of categories of data. The initial coding produced a long set of data categories. However, as the analysis progresses, several more similar codes were spotted and lumped together.

After the qualitative data were analyzed, initial assumptions or theories surfaced which will lay the groundwork for development ideas. Subsequently, the development ideas were triangulated using quantitative data. The survey result was analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Finally, using the diagram created by Atif, Richards and Bilgin (2013) shown in Figure 2, the qualitative and quantitative will be discussed side-by-side to check for similarities and differences.
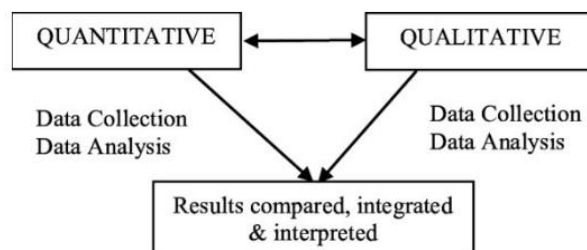

Figure 3. Visual diagram of mixed-methods concurrent triangulation strategy

The diagram illustrates that quantitative and qualitative have equal bearing into the analysis and that no method is superior than the other. An integrated analysis of data sources will then be used to construct the final development ideas.

4   Main findings

This section discusses the main findings from the data collection and where applicable, links the literature to research outcomes. The interviews were carefully examined and coded into several themes or data categories. In addition to the interviews, this section was also informed by looking into the official social media accounts of Comelec OAV and Comelec OAV's internal narrative report on the 2016 elections shared to the researcher during the interview. This helped in cross-checking some claims made by the informants during the interviews.

4.1   Qualitative findings

background on their organizations' role in OAV, their communication practices, channels and messaging approach, their views about the overseas Filipinos as target audience, challenges/barriers to effective OAV communication, feedback of overseas Filipinos, desired improvements in OAV communication.

how are they maintaining ties with the home country (families, friends and events in the Philippines, participation in Filipino groups and activities in Finland) and in what channels, awareness of OAV and its relevance to their own lives, participation in OAV, their opinions about how the government in general and Comelec communicates to them, and suggestions for improving OAV communication.

4.1.1 Home country - Comelec

One of the main goals of this research is to understand the current communication practices of COMELEC. Drawing from the interviews conducted, three key findings emerged. These are lack of formalized communication strategy for OAV, the prevalence of formal/instruction-based communication and underutilization of social media.

Lack of communication strategy

The lack of a clear communication strategy or guidelines denotes a critical gap in OAV communication. As the main election body of the Philippines, Comelec has the mandate and the resources to lead all activities that relate to the elections, both at the home country and overseas. A big part of their work is to communicate and mobilize voters to participate in the elections by first, registering to become a voter and second, to cast their vote during elections.

All the activities related to the implementation of OAV are lodged into a document called "The OFOV timeline of activities for the 2019 national and local elections". This document contains not only communication activities but other activities that are administrative in nature such as setting wages for personnel and the Resident Election Registration Board (RERB) hearing schedule for applications that have not been approved.

While the Comelec key informant decided to keep the detailed contents of the document confidential, she described that each activity, project or programs in the document has a defined objective, detailed timeline, and a definitive starting and completion dates. She also said that a major planning activity takes place before the end of the year to determine the activities that they plan to conduct for the preceding year. The activities are monitored and updated if necessary. For instance, the 2019 plan was made before the end of 2018 and the latest update had been made in April of 2018.

Noticeable also in Comelec's communication activities is their reliance on the DFA through the different missions abroad. They acknowledge that engagement can be best performed by the missions abroad because they have first-hand knowledge of the country where they are located. As such, Atty. Catherine believes that the DFA "knows best" when it comes to things that might or might not work in a country.

> It is in the law that Comelec really is the main organizer, but still we ask the opinions and suggestions of DFA to make information dissemination easier. (Atty.Catherine)

While this is true as DFA have technical and practical capabilities, Comelec tend to lose leadership of communication by not owning a clear strategy. For example, the main purpose of the consular outreach programs conducted by the DFA is to process consular affairs such as passport application and renewals and registration of birth or marriage. In the absence of an embassy in Helsinki, the team from Oslo usually conducts their outreach twice a year, the latest of which took place in a rented venue in Kannelmaki in Helsinki in September of 2018.

A partner agency, the CFO who also conducts promotional activities for OAV, seconded the absence of a communication strategy or plan though they have done some OAV campaigning independently from Comelec. Rodrigo said they pick up ideas for information dissemination from meetings and forums they conduct with civil society. Thus, their communication seemed to be approached based on the practical things that could work at a given time and circumstance.

With the lack of a communication strategy, it follows that the Comelec OAV Secretariat also lack the infrastructure (tools, people and skills) to engage in different communication activities. Atty.Catherine said that they don't have a specific staff assigned to handle the communication.

> In making infographics for the OFWs to increase their knowledge of those who are going overseas, we provide the budget and data but we leave it to the director of personnel and director of information technology because they have the know-how. (Atty.Catherine)

Within the OAV Secretariat office, Atty. Catherine said that they have an assigned person to answer questions received through their Facebook account and official e-mail address. These queries are usually about follow-ups of voter ID, and how to register.

Comelec also doesn't make any distinction between a permanent migrant and an overseas worker and their communication approach does not vary per country. For example, all their communication materials are directed towards one generic audience – overseas Filipinos – without taking into consideration whether they are temporary/contract-based or permanent migrant, or whether they live in Europe or the Middle East. This has critical implication because it had been identified in the Center for Migrant Advocacy (2011) policy study and confirmed during the interview with CFO that the migrants are more inclined to participate in voting than those who are in the host country on the basis of a temporary work contract. Each time an overseas Filipino move from one country-to-another, the change in jurisdiction requires them to register again.

> The OFWs, they change their location a lot. Sometimes they stay somewhere on a 2-year or 5-year contract. They either come home to Philippines or go to another country. Seamen are also so hard to reach. (Atty.Catherine)

The CFO is one of the partner agencies who signed an agreement with Comelec so that their office space can be used as a registration venue. Rodrigo said that every day, they encounter about 400-450 Filipinos who go their office to undergo the Pre-Departure Orientation Seminar (PDOS). The PDOS is a requirement to all Filipinos who are leaving the country to settle permanently overseas. A big segment of those who are required to undergo the PDOS is marriage migrants. According to CFO, they profile Finland as a top marriage migrant destination. This indicates that their residency status is more certain, similar to the big segment of Filipinos who have been living permanently in other parts of the world.

The only known distinction they have made is the campaign to increase registration among sea-based workers where they have put up registration booths in major sea ports around the world. Generally, in terms of communication approach, the Comelec have not addressed the different segments and situations of overseas Filipinos as they produce the same posters, infographics and messages for all directed to a single audience.

Prevalence of formal and instruction-based communication

Based on the Narrative Report for the 2016 Overseas Voting, Comelec has clearly conducted many activities to boost the registration figures. One of the main strategies of Comelec is to forge cooperation with different agencies and locations both in the Philippines and overseas that serve as touch-points for overseas Filipinos. This includes migrant-related agencies and even seaports to reach sea-based works. The focus is to make registration accessible to as many overseas Filipinos as possible. Thus, Comelec's communication involves formal organization-to-organization cooperation. In addition to that, they have also entered into agreements with mass media outfits in television, print and radio. In terms of messaging, their focused not only on addressing overseas Filipinos but also their audiences in the Philippines with the end view that they will relay the message to their relatives abroad.

Perhaps the most significant partnership Comelec have is with the Philippine Embassy in Oslo, Norway as they have direct point of contact to Filipinos in Finland through the consular outreach they conduct in Finland. These avenues mentioned are formal ways to reach the target audience. The announcement or advertisements are also noticeably instructional in form and content. The focus is on the 3Ws typical in any event invitation – when, why and how. Hence, the communication tends to be one-way. Comelec justifies that this kind of information is what people needs the most.

> "Most of the time, the overseas Filipinos want to be overseas voters. They know about voting because they are registered in the Philippines. They know that it's their right. What we give them is the information, the process how to register and how to vote." (Atty.Catherine)

The use of diplomatic spaces like embassies and consulates is an effective way. However, it can also be limiting and Comelec has no control of it. For example, if DFA has a scheduled consular mission, it is a common practice that the field registration will also be conducted at the same time and not the other way around. This means that the DFA will not arrange an outreach solely for registration purposes unless ordered and funded by

Comelec. The implication is that Comelec can only provide a limited chance for Filipinos to register in countries like Finland that has no embassy.

Underutilized social media

The findings thus far point to another fact – that is, the underutilization of social media as a communication channel.

One of the activities listed in the Narrative report of 2016 aimed at increasing registration rates was providing online alternatives and embarking on a massive information campaign using the internet and social media to entice overseas Filipinos to register. They set up a twitter account "Overseas voting PH" and Facebook account "Comelec OFOV." However, a look at the said social media accounts showed that they are not well-maintained and inactive.

The "Comelec OFOV" Twitter account only has 72 tweets from the period of 20 Jan 2011 to 13 Sept 2018 and 81 followers. Similarly, the" Overseas Voting PH" had intermittent postings from the period of 10 April 2010 to 5 May 2016 and with a follower base of only 338. A quick scan of its friends list showed that the Facebook account (Figure 4) has a poor network. For example, it does not have any friend that is a Filipino organization Facebook account.

Figure 4. Comelec OFOV Facebook account

In the same report, Comelec also mentioned that they produced traditional materials such as flyers and posters. Infomercials, instructional videos were also created to address apathy issues, launched the "Face of OV" campaign and engaged well-known media personalities, NGOs and Filipino organizations. None of these traditional channels were mentioned as source of information about OAV among all the informants interviewed.

Suggestions for improving communication

Consistency of communication emerged as the main improvement area in OAV communication. Consistency meant different things for CFO and Comelec. For the CFO, this meant constant messaging approach. Rodrigo said that registration happens for a year and a half, followed by a few months to process the data before the actual election. Thus, there is a gap or lull moment experienced during this period. The communication lie-lows cases the media not to talk about OAV for a while.

Rodrigo also said the Comelec should have a consistent set of materials in print or soft. OAV is an issue that is within the jurisdiction of multiple agencies dedicated to overseas voters. In one way or another, they participate in OAV communication in cooperation with Comelec or in their own capacities. This poses problems because each agency produces their own materials which may not conform to the Comelec strategy. However, this goes back again to Comelec's lack of strategy as the key implementor of OAV. In the absence of guidelines and shared understanding of how and what should be communicated to OAV, the communication tends to be scattered. In the case of CFO, they designed and produced their own posters, leaflets and flyers in the last 2016 elections which has a more "millennial" appeal than the ones produced by Comelec. They also produced their own audio-visual materials because what the Comelec have made did not appeal to their own approach.

When it comes, to budget, Comelec has the biggest budget when it comes to OAV. However, agencies like CFO take from their own budgets to drum up OAV communication. If the campaign was more organized and unified, the budget could be channeled appropriately.

> Comelec has the mandate and funds – if they can channel some of it to the other organizations, that would be good. Because in our case, we did it on our own, we produced the video, the PowerPoint, the print materials so we can produce the material that we like. (Rodrigo)

In the part of Comelec, they are focused on consistency in the sense that the communication should produce the outcome that matters the most to them – numbers. They would want to have communication that produces results. Hence, the only measure they consider evaluating is whether their communication campaign was successful or not is whether the registration or voter increased or not. However, from a communication point-of-view, issues such as how many was reached by what communication material, and how well the audience understand the message are important in gauging whether the communication worked or not.

4.1.2 Diaspora member – Filipinos in Finland

The informants described their life Finland in a very positive way. They have had tough beginnings coming to a country that is so different from the Philippines on so many levels. The dark and cold winters and the cultural norms were the most difficult to deal with. As expected, all of them experience homesickness every now and then. All but one remit money back to the Philippines. Those who do said that despite the homesickness, they would rather stay here so that they can explore the opportunities in Finland and provide what they can't if they stay in the Philippines. To cure their homesickness, they focus on their work and communicating regularly with their friends and families back home. They also hang out with their Filipino friends during their day offs and when there are some so-cial events like birthday parties.

Having Filipino friends supports assertions from earlier studies about the role that the Fili-pino diaspora communities and transnational networks play in helping them adapt to the host country better and temporarily alleviate alienation and longing for home.

> My Filipino friends are a major part of my social life ko here in Finland. (IDI7)

> Very important because even if we are away from our families because I don't have any other family here than my husband, who else can I share my problems with? (IDI3)

However, unlike the Philippines where a big social circle is major part, they tend to lie low in Finland and prefer to keep closer kin of networks. Their work and family life, which doesn't really give them a lot of free time and difficulty of establishing friendships with Finns are likely reasons for this. Most informants described themselves as passive mem-bers of offline Filipino communities. This means that while they aware of such organiza-tions, they are not in any way formally associated with those. Keeping in mind that inform-ants are in their late 20s to early 30s, membership in these organizations doesn't seem to match what they are looking for at this stage in their lives.

For IDI1, her Filipino friends who are in the same age as her, and the same stage in life can better relate with each other whereas with Filipino organizations has more diverse ages and might have different interests than her. She also shared how the friends she keeps in Finland replicates the kind of relationship she has with her cousins in the Philip-pines.

> Me and my cousins in the Philippines are almost the same age so we are like friends. My Filipino friends here are like that. They are like my cousins in Finland. (IDI1)

Others have also expressed some misgivings about joining Filipino organizations which they perceive to be mostly about parties and socials events.

> No, I don't like it. It's mostly just socials. I don't really like to mingle with them. (IDI7)

> They are only good with organizing and charging for parties. But when it comes to information, you cannot count on them. (IDI8)

Only one is an official member of a Filipino organization, Filippiinit-Seura whom IDI4 finds aligned with her interests such as discussions about socio-political issues in the Philippines and helping causes meaningful to her.

> I'm not much into partying like the usual Filipino organizations, I'm more political and they're a little bit political. And they help children of political detainees. (IDI4)

All of them said that they maintain constant, even daily, communication with their friends and family not only in the Philippines but also those who are located elsewhere in the world. For instance, IDI3 has a sister working in Saudi Arabia, and many of IDI4's circle of university friends are now based overseas. They keep chatgroups mostly in Facebook messenger and Viber and engage with each other in social networking sites like Facebook and Instagram.

They have a stable life and have found careers as cooks and practical nurses. Two are master students, and one is currently on maternity leave while caring for his young child and at the same attending preparation courses to enter vocation school. Of the 8 informants, 7 of them are permanent residents while 1 is a dual citizen. Due to the secured living condition in Finland with the prospect of further studies or continued employment, all the informants do not see themselves moving back to Philippines or to another country in the near future. In fact, most of their plans revolve around improving their lives in Finland.

> Next year, I want to study a profession – merkonomi and customer service. (IDI2)

> I want to have a baby and bring my sister and niece here to Finland. (IDI3)

Only one IDI5, a practical nurse who is also studying masters in global health, expressed intentions to go back to the Philippines within five years. However, he still seems to be open to the possibility of returning to Finland.

I will find another work (in Finland). And if I'm lucky to get into University, why not? After that, maybe I can go back to the Philippines to work. Or then I go back here to Finland if I fail to get a good job there and money gets tight. (IDI5)

Attitudes towards overseas voting

People vote for a variety of reasons. For the informants, while a feeling of frustration ("government is annoying", "too much bureaucracy") is evident, voting still means something to them as Filipinos. Two types of attitude surfaced to be the most salient based on the reasons they gave about what it means for Filipinos like them to be able to vote from overseas. The fist is based on voting as a right and the second is based on voting as participation in democracy. Rights-based attitude comes from the recognition that voting is an inherent right of every citizen.

> Of course, each Filipino has the right to vote, isn't? (IDI3)

> It is our right and privilege to be able to vote even if the government is sometimes annoying. (IDI6)

> I think it is a good thing, so they can practice their voting rights even if they're not in the Philippines. (IDI1)

Informants also see OAV as a means for overseas Filipinos to participate in democracy. In a democracy-based attitude, they see OAV as them the platform to voice their opinion by choosing the leaders they want.

> Through voting, you can choose the leader that you think can help the country. (IDI5)

> I want my voice to be heard, I want my vote to be counted. (IDI4)

The elections also mean for them that the exercise of democracy is not confined to Filipinos in the Philippines. Rather, it extends to Filipinos all over the world, which is the whole message of overseas voting as a transnational practice.

> It means we are still part of the community. Even if we are away, our opinions are still important and it's a reminder to us that we are still part of the nation even if we are not there at the moment. – IDI6

> They have the right to voice out their opinion through the elections. For me it's a good thing that overseas Filipinos can vote anywhere in the world. (IDI3)

Anywhere in the world, the Filipinos still has a voice. (IDI5)

The informants exhibited an understanding of the transnational space in which they are located. They recognize that they have already established a life in Finland and yet they still feel that they still have a stake in the future of Philippines. And one way to be part of the country's affairs is through the elections.

Presence of government is not felt

Informants have mixed feelings about the way the government is reaching out to them. Some are satisfied, which means that they agency they tried to contact for certain needs (e.g. Philippine Embassy in Norway) responded to them.

I have a friend who sent an e-mail and also called the embassy but got no response. But when I sent e-mail about the requirements for the change of last name in my passport, the responded to me. (IDI2)

In my case, when I followed-up my passport in Norway, they responded to me. (IDI3)

Some who shared negative feelings recalling their earlier experience of not being attended to promptly or lack of access when they needed consular services.

Sometimes, it takes so long for them to reply to my queries. (IDI6)

I think the communication is sorely lacking. I mean, if I have passport issues, I need to go to Norway or wait for the next outreach in Helsinki. The telephone number of the embassy in Norway is too busy, it's difficult to connect. And nobody is replying in the e-mail service. (IDI7)

The government offices in the Philippines like the BIR Bureau of Internal Revenue/Tax office) and PAG-IBIG (office for social housing) are so difficult to reach from here in Finland. (IDI5)

They also associate the lack of physical embassy in Finland with the government not being present enough in the lives of overseas Filipinos in Finland.

Maybe (not enough presence), because we don't even have an embassy here. (IDI4)

I don't feel their presence. (IDI2)

With the perceived lack of presence of government, they tend to turn to other sources of information such as social media.

Turning to other sources of information

All informants are members of at least one Filipino Facebook group. The most popular are Pinoys in Finland with 3115 members, Filipinos Community in Finland (FILCOM) with 1562 members and Filippiinit-Seura with 766 members. There are also groups specific to certain professions like cooks and nurses. Some groups are not as active as the others; some also does not have big membership.

Due to the social nature of Filipinos, Facebook is essentially used to create a sense of belongingness. For IDI3, she signed up to the Filcom Facebook group even before coming to Finland. In this manner, she had met her first few friends that turned from online to offline friendship. Aside from socialization, one of the main reasons why they joined these Facebook groups is to get information.

While the informants are admittedly not actively participating or sharing in the discussions taking place in these Facebook groups, many of them benefit from the information others share. They are also happy to respond to some members posting questions when they know something about the topic being asked.

> I joined to get information, I don't really directly communicate with them. (IDI3)

> I get details if there is an outreach. For example, my passport will expire soon. Or when I'm going home, I check if somebody who recently went home has shared some information about how much is the airport fee. (IDI2)

> I am a member of the group and that's where I see posts about the consular outreach. (IDI6)

It is clear that the Filipino Facebook groups function as major sources of information about consular outreach, and other OAV-related information such as registration dates or voting dates. And based on the stories of informants, they tend to rely on these Facebook groups for information rather than the government agencies themselves like Comelec or the Embassies through their official social media accounts.

Facebook group administrators like Riitta recognizes the insufficient information coming from government and the Filipinos' dependency on social media for information. Hence,

she and most likely other group administrators, took it upon themselves to utilize their group for this reason. She recalled creating several contents herself such as announcements that contains a photo and text to make the material look better. In fact, many graphics posted online are made through the effort of Filipinos themselves without any assistance from Comelec such as providing a ready-made material for sharing.

Suggestions for improvement in communication

Their preferred mode of communication reflects the communication channels that works here in Finland: combination of electronic and post. A big factor to this is the reliable internet infrastructure in Finland and the widespread use of electronic services in everyday life, which they got accustomed to and wished could also be the same when accessing consular services. Postal system is also widely used in formal communication by state agencies. The postal system is reliable, and their addresses are well-documented by the state agencies.

> I hope the services are accessible online. For example, I need a certain certificate or document, I will just have to log-in in a portal, select the type of product or service, then pay. Then the soft copy will be sent via e-mail and the hard copy via post. No need to travel and wait for many hours at the embassy." (IDI7)

Majority of the communication that takes place in their daily lives happens via the mobile phone. They are avid users of social networking sites like Facebook and Instagram and uses the messaging functions of these sites to communicate with their networks especially in the Philippines. They are also e-mail users and has a Gmail app on their phone for easy access of emails. Their online connectedness explains their preference for digital forms of communication when it comes to receiving messages related to OAV.

> Social media is the most effective because we use it every day to get in touch with people back home so we're always on Facebook anyway- most overseas Filipinos I know are on Facebook and they use it regularly." (IDI4)

> "My Gmail app is always open so when there's news to my subscriptions, I see it right away. (IDI8)

> I think mostly now, social media is the most accessible. But I think receiving a letter stating the necessary information is also a great way like here in Finland. You receive everything thru e-mail and post which is good because you can access both. (IDI6)

4.1.3 Host country - Finland

Factors affecting voter participation

Despite demonstrating interest in elections, the limited physical access to registration and a prevailing feeling among informants of not having enough information about OAV emerged as the biggest factors that hinder their participation in the elections. Some informants admitted to not having any knowledge at all about the OAV before emigrating. For IDI8 who has been living in Finland since 2015, she said that she did not know anything about OAV, which is the reason why she missed participating in the 2016 elections.

> It was my first time abroad. I did not know how things work overseas. I have a friend who once asked me if I already voted. And I was like, "what vote"? – IDI8

Among those who said that they are aware of the OAV were probed further about what they know about OAV. They we asked about the positions they can vote for in OAV. All of them gave incomplete or incorrect answers. For example, IDI4 mentioned only president, vice-president, and senators. Party-list representative was not mentioned. IDI5 also narrated that in the beginning, he did not know that one can only vote for national positions. He thought that he can also vote for local candidates in his hometown.

When asked about the source of information about matters related to OAV, all mentioned that they receive information about the consular outreach and registration from people who share information via Filipino Facebook groups in Finland. An example of such information is seen in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Post about OAV registration on the Filipinos Community in Finland Facebook page

Despite this, they feel that information is not readily available and that one has to search himself/herself to find out more about it. This is what happened to IDI4 during one time that she visited the embassy website.

> I remember seeing a video at the Oslo website about it (OAV). I saw the video first before I searched for more information. It was just a general overview, then a little bit about the process but not very detailed. (IDI4)

IDI8 expressed frustration over the lack of information saying that the Comelec should reach out more because overseas Filipinos are busy working.

> Do we really have to be the one to actively search for information on how to vote? Overseas Filipinos are busy working. (IDI8)

The brief exposure IDI4 got from the embedded video in the website piqued her interest to search for additional information. The problem, however, in this is that based on the interviews, the website does not seem to generate enough traffic, which indicates that it does not generate enough views of the OAV infomercial. All the informants do not regularly visit the Oslo website and none of them follow any official social media accounts of the embassy, DFA or Comelec.

Also, due to lack of information, IDI3 was not able to participate in the 2016 elections despite receiving a ballot by post. She recalled that she opened the letter and misplaced it around her house. Unaware if she can get a replacement ballot, she just let the issue go unresolved as she clearly did not know what to do in the case of a lost ballot.

Consular outreach is the best offline activity where the Comelec through the Embassy of the Philippines-Norway can reach Filipinos. Fortunately, one outreach took place on 14 September while data collection was ongoing. The researcher had personally observed and registered as OAV for the first time during the said event.

The main reason why Filipinos have been waiting for the consular outreach is to process their passports or other documents. Registration is treated as secondary purpose. Entering the consular outreach venue, the registration area was almost inconspicuous. The researcher had to ask several people to locate the registration table, how to go about the process, and if some forms needed to be filled out beforehand.

On the positive side, this scheme also proved to be convenient as they can attend to consular affairs and register in the same venue. IDI2 and IDI3 recalled that they had no prior knowledge about the OAV registration. They went to the consular outreach last February 2018 to apply a passport and ended up registering out of convenience.

> When I went to the outreach, that's when I found out that I can also register there. (IDI2)

> When I renewed my passport, I registered at the same time… When I was renewing my passport, they asked if I also want to register. Because I'm there anyway, I decided to register. (IDI3)

However, one informant was still not able to register despite going to the consular outreach for passport renewal. She had travelled from Jyväskylä to Helsinki and still missed the chance to register because of lack of information and advice from the outreach staff.

> Last year, I went to the consular outreach, but I did not know that I can register there on that time. Now, I'm too pregnant to travel so I did not go anymore. (IDI6)

While it is a good thing to make registration available in as many venues as possible, these are not fully optimized because the communication does not seem to spread as far as possible. Moreover, the consular outreach is limited and viable only to the people who has easy access to the venue. Usually, consular outreach takes place in capital or key cities like Helsinki. For Filipinos in Finland like IDI6 who lives in Jyväskylä, she had already missed the chance to register at the Helsinki outreach because of lack of information. She will have to wait for the next outreach and could not vote anymore as the registration period for the May 2019 elections had ended in September. This basically means that she is disenfranchised to vote in the next elections.

Voting as a private task

Perhaps one of the most unique characteristics of OAV in Finland is how different it is from the usual practice of elections in the Philippines. All the informants, including the researcher, have voted at least once and can attest to the elections in the Philippines as a community affair.

Riitta, a native Finn and board member of the Filippiinit-Seura, who was in the Philippines as a foreign election observer in the 2010 National Elections, witnessed how voting in the Philippines resembled a "party." As personally observed by the researcher, election day is

a national holiday where neighbours and relatives gather near their polling places, talking about their election bets, and experiences in voting (e.g. number of hours it took them to vote, etc.). Online, voters in the Philippines show off that they have fulfilled their civic duty online by uploading photos on social media showing the indelible ink or election ink that election officers apply on their index finger as proof that they have voted. Some examples are shown in Figures 6 and 7. The election ink can stay up to 3 days and will completely wear off after 10-30 days. Voters seem to wear this ink like a badge of honor and a good hook for reactions and comments from their networks.

Figure 6. Instagram photo showing off the indelible ink (Source: www.instagram.com/simplograph)

Figure 7. Instagram photo showing off the indelible ink (Source: www.instagram.com/jeezett)

This bore a stark difference in overseas voting especially in Finland where voting is done by postal method. In postal method, the ballot is sent to the voter's address and the voter

mails the ballot back to the embassy within a given period. This process can take place without anyone recognizing that one has just participated in the elections.

> "I don't know if they register or vote because we don't talk about politics" IDI7

> "Not all friends are registered, I think I only know one who is registered. But we don't talk about it because mostly we talk about our daily lives." IDI2

Since voting by post takes place in a private manner, it rarely makes it to the discussion among friends. They would rather talk about their lives and what goes on with their families back home.

4.2 Quantitative findings

Findings from the qualitative data revealed the contextual factors that affect voter participation were identified from the perspectives of Comelec, the host country- Finland, and diaspora members – Filipinos in Finland. Following the approach in case studies suggested by Thomas (2011), the initial sketch was expanded to include these contextual factors as seen in Figure 8.
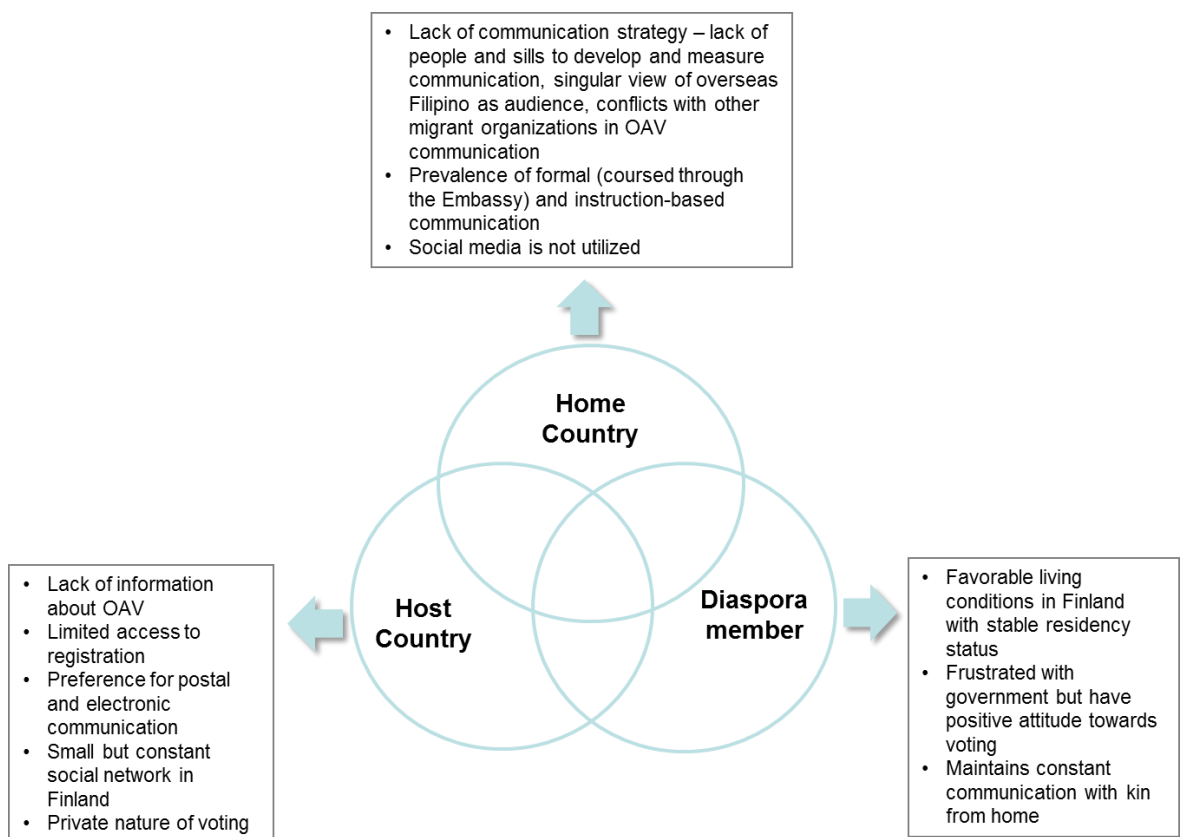

Figure 8. Diagram of contextual factors affecting voter participation in Finland

These contextual factors guided in constructing the questionnaire. For example, initial findings revealed the prevalence of formal communication on the part of Comelec in communicating to the Filipinos in their host country, Finland. However, Filipinos feel that the government information does not adequately reach them causing them to depend on online sources. Therefore, questions on informal channels were included to see whether these would be helpful in encouraging them to vote. Another example is the use of postal service and electronic communication in Finland. Respondents were asked whether these would work if Comelec use these channels. Postal voting as a private task was an interesting insight that surfaced in the qualitative phase. Thus, in the survey, the researcher was interested to find out whether bringing overseas voting into the conversation of Filipinos by making it a shareable experience

The survey was constructed and launched through SurveyHero.com. The link was then shared to the most active Filipino Facebook group, Filipino Community in Finland (Filcom) which currently has 1,579 members. At the end of the survey period, a total of 38 valid responses were collected.

4.2.1 Profile of respondents

Respondents have a mean age is 34.7 years old. Majority (n=20) are within the 31-40 years old age group, consistent with the age group of those who participated in the qualitative interviews, and the average age of 31 identified by the Commission on Filipinos Overseas (2015) as the average of a Filipino emigrant. The next biggest group are those who are between 20-30 years old (n=9), followed by 41-50 years old (n=7). Only n=1 is within 51-60 years old.

More than a half of respondents have lived in Finland for 1-6 years (n=12 lived for 1-3 years and n=12 lived for 3-6 years). There was also n=5 who have lived in Finland between 6-10 years and another n=5 who have lived in Finland for more than 10 years. Only n=4 have lived less than 1 year in Finland (but no less than 6 months). This indicates that, a big majority of respondents have lived in Finland long enough to experience the two (2) consular outreach events held in 2018 (February and September).

4.2.2 Participation in OAV

This section captured the incidence of participation in elections among overseas Filipinos. It covers both the registration and actual voting activities. Additionally, questions were also asked to find out the reasons why they participated or why they did not participate so it can be corroborated with the qualitative findings.

All respondents were asked if they have registered as overseas absentee voter in Finland. Less than half of respondents or 17 out of N=38 said that they have registered while 21 out of N=38 have not.

Table 5. Reasons for registering

Reasons	Total
I personally want it because it is my responsibility.	11
I have the right to vote.	6
I was enticed to register at the consular outreach.	3
Total who are registered	17

In Table 5, the 17 respondents who claimed to have registered were probed further to find out what are the reasons why they decided to register as an overseas voter. Respondents were allowed to provide more than one reason, if necessary. Based on their reasons, the sense of responsibility (n=11) and the attitude to voting as a right (n=6) came out as the top reasons. These responses are consistent with the responsibility-based attitude that was identified in the qualitative phase. It demonstrates that they have a good grasp of the essence of voting. It is also good to note that there were 3 who were enticed to register right at the consular outreach venue demonstrating that such formal event is an effective way to prompt Filipinos to register. This mirrors the qualitative findings wherein some of the informants find the convenience of consular affairs and registration in one venue enticed to them to register.

Table 6. Reasons for not registering

Reasons for not registering	Total
I am not aware of when and where to register	11
I am not interested in elections	4
I don't have the time to register	3
I forgot the registration schedule	3
The registration venue is too far from where I live	1
Total are not registered	21

In Table 6, the 21 respondents who did not register were asked further why they were not able to register. Lack of awareness about when and where to register emerged as the main reason (n=11), followed by disinterest in elections (n=4). For the others, they simply don't have the time to register (n=3) which would require them to go to the venue. This

seems to be a challenge especially for those who have busy schedules. Forgetting the registration schedule (n=3) is also one reason, as well as the distance of the registration venue (n=1). These reasons are consistent with the lack of information experienced by informants in the qualitative phase.

In the exercise of elections, registration is the first step to qualify as a voter. However, registration doesn't ensure participation in elections. To find out, those who have registered were asked if they ever actually voted. Results showed that slightly more voted (9 out of n=17).

Table 7. Reasons for voting

Reasons for voting	Total
The process is easy and convenient	4
I am supporting a candidate	3
I have the right for my vote to be counted	1
it is my right to be heard through elections	1
Total registered who voted	9

Looking at the reasons of those who voted in Table 7, the easy and convenient voting process was the most motivating reason for casting their vote (n=4). Supporting a candidate (n=3) also motivated them. Interestingly, it can be recalled in earlier discussions that lack of knowledge about candidates was identified as a barrier to voting. Supporting a candidate indicates that the voter has reached a certain level of familiarity that made the voter decide to vote for that candidate. Thus, it makes sense to see that supporting a candidate is a motivating factor. Looking at these reasons, practical reasons were the key motivating factors for voting.

Table 8. Reasons for not voting

Reasons for not voting	Total
I forgot to mail the ballot within the prescribed date	3
I was not yet in Finland the last elections 2016	2
I did not receive a ballot	1
I don't know the candidates	1
The people I know also don't seem to participate	1
Total registered who did not vote	8

On the other hand, Table 8 shows that failure to cast one's vote was mainly due to forgetting to mail the ballot within the prescribed date (n=3). Earlier studies have already argued that since the postal method typically last for a month, this method lacks a sense of urgency. And without appropriate reminders, voters will tend to forget to mail their ballots back. Not receiving a ballot (n=1), lack of awareness about the candidates (n=1) and because other people don't seem to vote (n=1) were also barriers to voting. There was also n=2 respondents who have not yet lived in Finland at the time that the May 2016 elections took place.

Table 9. Reasons for not voting in 2019

Reasons	Total
Depends if I know the candidates	2
Depends on whether I have time to fill out and send the ballot	2
Depends if I still believe that my vote is important	1
Total who will vote with condition	5

The next question was asked to see whether respondents are interested to participate in the 2019 elections, whether they are registered or not. The data as shown in Table 9 revealed that a great majority or 29 out of 35 respondents expressed interest in participating in the next elections. Only n=4 expressed an outright disinterest while the remaining n=5 said it depends on certain conditions such as if they know the candidates (n=2), whether they have the time to fill out and send their ballot (n=2), or whether they still believe that the vote matters (n=1).

4.2.3 Attitudes towards OAV

This part of the questionnaire refers to specific statements that relate to the two types of attitudes about voting that surfaced in the qualitative interviews. In earlier findings, it was found that Filipinos tend to carry attitudes that relate to OAV as responsibility or duty and OAV as an exercise of democracy. Thus, responsibility-based and democracy-based statements were constructed to find out which resonates among the respondents. The goal of this question is to help develop messages that could appeal to the emotion of voters. This idea was emerged out of the finding that Comelec focuses heavily on informational or procedural types of messages. While it is important, studies have also shown that communication that talk about voting as an identity-relevant behaviour (e.g. 'importance of being a voter') increase turnout much more than those that talk about voting just as a behaviour people do (e.g. 'importance of voting') (Williams, Allpress & Rootham 2018).

Respondents were presented with ten (10) statements that correspond to democracy-based and responsibility-based voting as those were the most prevalent voter attitudes that surfaced in the qualitative interviews. They were then asked to rate how much they agree or disagree with the statements using a 5-point Likert scale to see if they resonate more with voting as a democratic expression or voting as responsibility.

Table 10. Agreement rating of democracy-based attitude statements

	Strongly agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neither (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly disagree (1)	Mean Rating
A. All Filipinos anywhere in the world have the right to vote.	30	8	-	-	-	4,8
B. My opinion about the leaders that I want for my country is important and should be heard through voting.	24	6	4	4	-	4,3
C. I believe that the overseas Filipinos are still part of de-mocracy.	27	10	1	-	-	4,7
D. My vote as an overseas Fili-pino is important.	28	9	-	-	-	4,6
E. Voting is one way to I choose the leaders that I believe in.	23	15	-	-	-	4,6
Total	38	38	38	38	38	

Results shown in Table 10 illustrate that democracy-based statements resonate strongly with the respondents. Specifically, 30 out of 38 respondents strongly agreed to Statement A. All Filipinos anywhere in the world have the right to vote (mean mating = 4.8). Moreo-ver, it is also worth noting that respondents strongly agreed to statements about overseas Filipinos' vote as important (statement D, mean rating = 4.7) and overseas Filipinos as part of the democracy (statement C, mean rating = 4.6). On the other hand, in statement B, n=4 respondents thought that their opinion is not important in choosing the country's leaders while another n=4 feels unsure about it.

Table 11. Agreement rating of responsibility-based attitude statements

	Strongly agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neither (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly disagree (1)	Mean Rating
A. I can show my being Filipino through voting.	26	12	-	-	-	4,7
B. I want to be able to choose the leaders that I want for my country through voting.	22	11	1	4	-	4,3
C. It is my duty as a Filipino to participate in the elections even when I'm based over-seas.	22	13	3	-	-	4,5
D. Participating in the elections is a fulfillment of my duty and is something that I should be proud of.	24	9	1	-	4	4,3
E. Voting is a duty that every Filipino should fulfill.	21	12	-	2	3	4,2
Total	38	38	38	38	38	38

The statements regarding voting as a duty or responsibility likewise resonated strongly with respondents with ratings of mostly 5s. Referring to Table 11, majority of respondents strongly agree that voting is a duty or responsibility that comes with being a Filipino, even if they live overseas. Specifically, statement A indicating that voting is an expression of being a Filipino gained the highest agreement. Moreover, 24 respondents strongly agreed

that voting is something that they should be proud of because it means that they are doing their duty as a citizen. On the other hand, there were n=5 respondents who think that voting is not a must (statement E), and another n=4 who is not interested in choosing the country's leaders (statement B).

4.2.4 Communication channels

In next section of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to read a total and thirteen (13) statements that correspond to each communication channel. Using a 5-point Likert scale, they were asked to rate how helpful or not helpful the statements are when it comes to encouraging them to participate in the elections.

These questions were constructed to validate whether the initial development ideas will work or not. As explained previously, Comelec's focus on formal channels (e.g. through the embassy) have been effective in a way that Filipinos have a-stop shop where they can process their consular needs and register at the same time. However, when analysed against Filipinos' dependency on social media and CFO's idea of a more "millennial approach," it seems that informal channels and informal messages are also necessary to boost formal channels. Moreover, there is also potential in making the election as a shareable experience. According to Williams, Allpress & Rootham (2018), social norm messages (i.e. information on what other people are doing) have been found to be one of the most powerful ways of boosting voter turnout. The postal method tends to mystify the voting process as it is done entirely privately as opposed to physically going to the polling place. Thus, engaging voters in sharing their election experience on social media was included among the development ideas.

Table 12. Rating of formal channels of communication

	Extremely helpful (5)	Very helpful (4)	Slightly helpful (3)	Somewhat helpful (2)	Not at all helpful (1)	Mean Rating
A. Receiving information on important dates about the election registration and voting period from the Comelec/Embassy.	18	16	4	-	-	4,4
B. More conduct of consular outreach where I can also register	26	11	-	1	-	4,6
C. Receiving a letter of reminder from the Philippine Embassy or Comelec	28	10	-	-	-	4,7

	Extremely helpful (5)	Very helpful (4)	Slightly helpful (3)	Somewhat helpful (2)	Not at all helpful (1)	Mean Rating
D. Receiving OAV-related information via e-mail from Comelec/Embassy.	22	15	2	1	-	4,5
E. Receiving official information about the candidates, who they are and their platforms.	21	13	2	2	-	4,4
F. Receiving practical information about election such as the step-by-step procedures.	22	13	3	-	-	4,5
Total	38	38	38	38	38	4,5

Table 12 shows the result for the formal channels of communication. Nearly three-fourths or 28 out of 38 respondents find receiving a letter from official offices such as the Philippine Embassy or Comelec extremely helpful (statement C). A great majority or 26 respondents said that holding more consular outreach (statement E) is extremely helpful. This points to government agencies making a direct contact with the target audience as an effective way to communicate. Recalling the qualitative results, informants expressed dissatisfaction with the absence of an embassy in Finland. Thus, direct contact by way of mail and during consular outreach provides a semblance of official communication that Filipinos in Finland have been missing. Also, the perceived helpfulness of the mail supports the initial idea that the efficient postal system in Finland is a preferred channel for formal communication and may be also exploited by Comelec. To a lesser degree, e-mail (statement D) was also seen as helpful consistent with the suggestions made by some informants in the qualitative phase where post and electronic channels were the most preferred.

Table 13. Rating of Informal channels of communication

	Extremely helpful (5)	Very helpful (4)	Slightly helpful (3)	Somewhat helpful (2)	Not at all helpful (1)	Mean Rating
A. Receiving information on important dates about the election registration and voting period from Filipino Facebook groups	29	4	4	1	-	4,6
B. When the government expresses how important my vote is.	15	12	10	1	-	4,1
C. When there is one website o Facebook page where I can find and share all the information about OAV.	22	8	8	-	-	4,4

	Extremely helpful (5)	Very helpful (4)	Slightly helpful (3)	Somewhat helpful (2)	Not at all helpful (1)	Mean Rating
D. Availability of videos or livestreamed events (e.g. Facebook Live) that will add to my knowledge about the elections or about the candidates.	15	12	11	-	-	4,1
Total	38	38	38	38	38	4,3

Table 13 shows that among all the informal channels of communication, it is evident that Facebook groups are the preferred channel. For example, statement A or receiving information via Facebook was considered extremely helpful by 29 out of 38 respondents. A dedicated Facebook account or website that has the information was also found to be extremely helpful by a big majority.

Interestingly, receiving information on important dates about the election registration and voting is preferred via Facebook and not via formal or official communication. However, going back to the previous table, Table 12, getting reminders about election dates in statement C are preferred via formal communication. Respondents are not extremely convinced of government expressing their regard for overseas voters (statement B), although they did not completely shut the idea off. Finally, respondents are not so into livestreaming though many still said that it can be quite helpful.

These results demonstrate the power of Facebook in disseminating information among Filipinos in Finland and the extra push or nudge provided by formal communication straight from the Comelec as effective communication tactics.

Table 14. Informal channels of communication

	Extremely helpful (5)	Very helpful (4)	Slightly helpful (3)	Somewhat helpful (2)	Not at all helpful (1)	Mean Rating
A. When I see that my Filipino friends in Finland are also joining the elections.	14	10	9	5	-	3,9
B. When I see in social media that other overseas Filipinos in different parts of the world are participating in the elections	19	5	13	1	-	4,1
C. If there is a way where I can share my election experience in registration or voting to my fellow overseas Filipino that will also encourage others.	18	13	4	3	-	4,2
Total	38	38	38	38	38	4,1

Table 14 shows that community-based communication yielded slightly lower mean ratings compared to formal and informal channels. Nonetheless, majority ratings of 4 and 5 prove that this channel is still worth exploring as potentially effective in communicating OAV. For example, the combined scores of extremely helpful and very helpful in statements A and B implies that seeing others vote may help encourage them to vote. Moreover, respondents themselves are open to sharing their own election experiences to their fellow overseas Filipinos if given the chance. The idea of "seeing and being seen" explored in this survey attempted to address the private nature of postal method. In the process, the overseas voter himself/herself becomes an OAV campaigner influencing fellow overseas Filipinos in Finland or elsewhere.

5   Summary

In response to research sub-questions 1 ('what are the contextual factors surrounding OAV as seen from the levels of Comelec, Finland and the diaspora member?) and sub-question 2 ('How do these contextual factors shape current OAV communication?') find-ings revealed that life in Finland is relatively safe and secured compared to those in the Middle East where life is more volatile. In of the qualitative interviews, IDI8 recognizes that aside from the regular consular services, Filipinos in Finland are not in need of major ser-vices in the way that Filipinos in known hotspots for conflicts or migrant worker abuses like Kuwait or Lebanon. Finland also has very effective telecommunication infrastructure and all modes of communication works excellently – mobile, digital, post. They use technology daily to maintain their communication with friends and families outside Finland, and for other services they need in Finland. With an effective postal system and stable residency conditions, they are less likely to move around making the postal method suitable for Fin-land and can be exploited further other than when sending the ballot.

Although they tend to keep a low-profile social life, they expressed openness to receive and share election experiences in social media. Seeing that others are also voting is seen as helpful and somehow reconnects them to their fellow overseas Filipinos by creating a shared experience of voting.

An analysis of the contextual factors revealed what communication channels have been used so far and what can still be further developed. The results of this analysis directly respond to research sub-questions 3 which asked, 'What communication ideas can be developed based on the transnational communication framework?' For example, the study found that home country (Comelec) to host country (Finland) communication had been mainly conducted via formal channels (e.g. Philippine Embassy in Oslo that holds jurisdiction over Finland) and that Comelec has very weak social media presence. However, an analysis of the Filipinos in Finland revealed that they find information through sources such as Facebook. The Comelec also depends a lot on mass media channels despite its inconsistency. As the CFO official had noted, the media picks up topics only when it's sensational. If OAV is no longer relevant at a certain point in time as when the registration had already ended months before the actual election, media coverage will also wane. Thus, an opportunity was spotted by way of developing further the informal channels of Comelec.

Similarly, through an analysis of the Filipinos in Finland, it was found that they are heavy social media users and considers it as the main source of information about OAV. They rarely talk about OAV and most are unaware about others' participation. This is due to the private nature of postal voting wherein the whole process can be completed privately as opposed to voting physically at the post where there is a chance to see others voting, too. Postal method leaves no trace akin to the indelible ink used in Philippine elections that people usually take a picture of and share on social media like a badge of honor. Thus, community-based communication focuses on making the OAV a shareable experience. In the process, the overseas Filipino himself/herself becomes a grassroots campaigner.

Jenkins (in Fuchs 2014) said that the main characteristics of social media is that they are 'spreadable media,' which "empower" consumers and "make them an integral part" of a commodity's success. It means that consumers in this model are grassroots advocates for materials which are personally and socially meaningful to them" (Jenkins et al. in Fuchs 2014). Grassroots campaign is one of the components of a campaign infrastructure (Castells 2013). This is the basic idea of enabling a community-based communication among Filipinos in Finland.

Finally, in response to the main research question, "How can Comelec apply transnational communication to develop its Communication of OAV to Filipinos in Finland?", it was evident that using the transnational framework proved to be useful in locating the communication practices of Comelec side-by-side the contextual factors affecting OAV communica-

tion in among Filipinos in Finland. Thus, the case study sketch is presented in Figure 9 below in its final form as this study comes to a close.
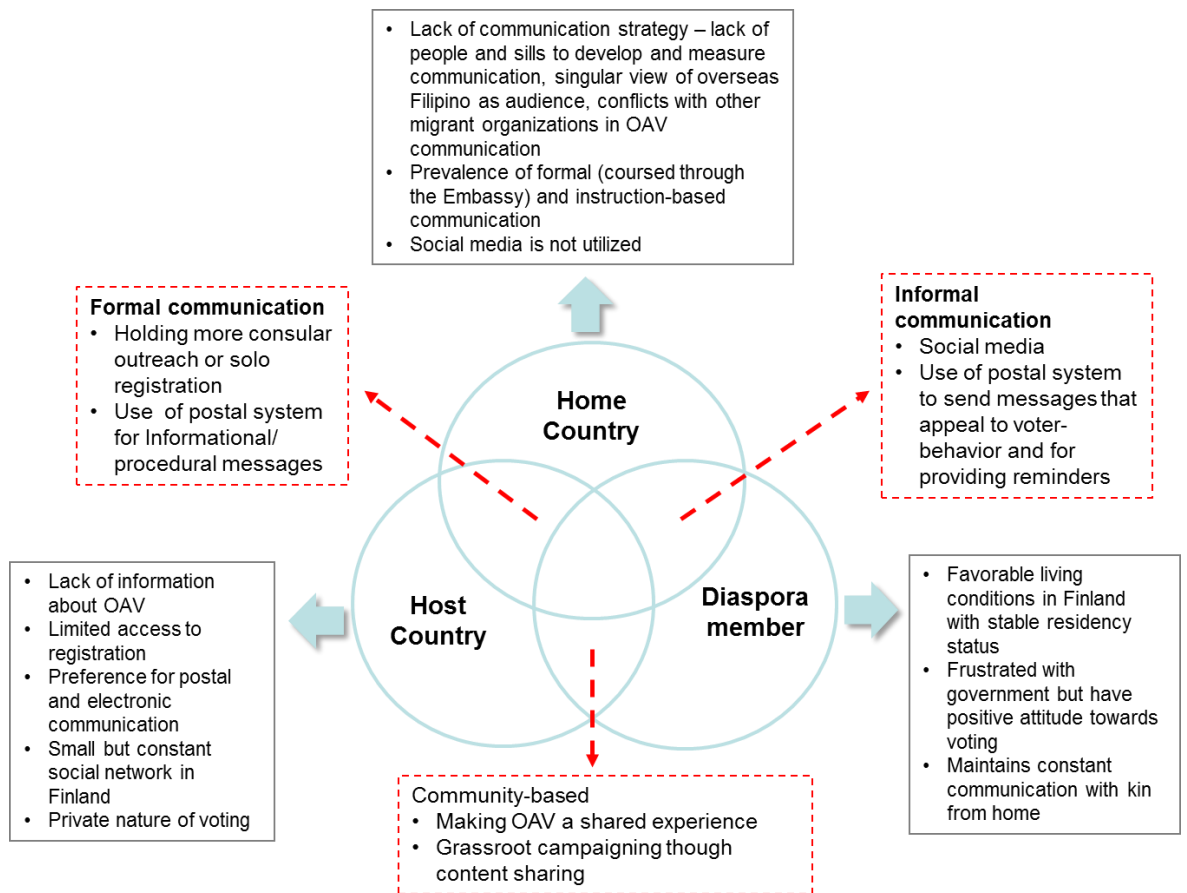

Figure 9. Transnational communication framework for OAV communication

The formal, informal and informal communication channels were introduced as they were found to be suitable in addressing in the different contextual factors that links one domain from another.

6   Conclusions

6.1   Towards a transnational communication perspective

Filipinos in Finland, like many diaspora populations, live in a complex space where they actively participate in two communities - the home country and the host country. The country where they live shapes their everyday lives. Thus, while they are Filipinos, they have also adopted to the lifestyle and practices of their host country. This is the transnational space that Comelec needs to carefully navigate the communication opportunities that exists within this space.

This case study also shows that Comelec's lack of communication strategy clearly prevents them from advancing their efforts in promoting OAV. According to the handbook for engaging the diasporas in development (IOM and MPI 2012), diaspora engagement is a process that requires sustained attention across a broad front and requires a strategy. In the absence of a communication strategy, Comelec loses sight of the contextual factors and missing communication opportunities in the process. Not having an embassy in Finland also leaves Filipinos feeling neglected thus, they turn to other sources of information particularly in Filipino Facebook groups. If they are not able to respond to this information need, they lose the opportunity to connect with more Filipinos.

The transnational communication framework shows that Comelec can explore multiple channels suitable to the needs and situations of Filipinos in Finland. Thus, it is only through a thorough understanding of the different diaspora communities, Finland in this case, can the Philippine government through the Comelec find the most effective ways to communicate voting to Filipinos beyond the country's national borders.

Formal channels can be used to fill the gap when it comes to their physical presence. The most important formal channel is through consular outreach. Organizing more consular outreach within the registration period or a stand-alone registration should be taken into consideration.

Formal channels should also ensure continuous flow of information on the important dates regarding registration and/or voting, step-by-step procedures or list of requirements in registration and voting, and including information about the candidates, who they are and their platforms.

On the other hand, Comelec can actively engage Filipinos by improving their social media handling. Social media can be both informative and entertaining. Producing videos or organizing events via live streaming (e.g. Facebook Live) will provide additional platforms to increase the voters' knowledge about the election and in making their presence consistent in social media. An interactive website of all things OAV that is linked to the social media accounts are also quite promising. Atty.Catherine mentioned that they are developing a website for launch this year or next year so including these suggestions may help make the website more effective.

Using the postal method, the Comelec can send messages crafted creatively and packaged informally i.e. postcard-style. It should have specific instructions telling the recipient to take a photo to share via social media. In creating a shared OAV experience, Comelec can develop a hashtag. And come election time, they can also utilize user-generated unofficial tally of overseas via open data mapping tool. This tool lets a voter report that his/her vote had already been cast. The open data portal shows a running total of votes cast tallied by area. it could also show locations of polling stations or the remaining days left to cast the vote either by post. For OAV, the voters typically have one month to cast their votes. A close example of open data in elections is the "I voted" button on Facebook. Such button was used in elections in USA, UK and India, among others, and it was found to help boost voter turn-out. It also creates a kind of global community of overseas absentee voters.

6.2   Leaning outcomes

This thesis proved to be a great learning experience. First, it has enriched the researcher's knowledge about the topic which led to the development of ideas presented in this study. Because the topic is already too familiar from the beginning, it was surprising that new findings and insights surfaced. This highlights the importance of conducting research in order to understand an issue deeply and uncover hidden meanings and improvement opportunities.

This research could also be one of the first attempts to formally make sense of Comelec's OAV communication practices and evaluate it in a systematic manner. This study contributed to the current understanding and improvement of OAV communication by applying the transnational communication perspective. This is an important step considering that Comelec doesn't have a communication strategy at the moment. All the more that producing this research underscores the importance of taking a strategic path in communicating OAV in order to develop messages and choose channels that will maximize the effectiveness of communication.

7   Limitations and recommendations for future research

This study explored the situation of Filipinos in Finland. Unfortunately, the Filipino population in Finland is not as big compared to other countries. This poses as a limitation in terms of applicability of findings to other countries. In addition to that, nearly half of all the posts worldwide adopt the postal method. However, not all these countries have the same efficient postal system and Internet connectivity as Finland. Nonetheless, findings of this study can still be used as a benchmark for other countries that has similar characteristics than Finland like those in the Nordic region. The survey can also be rolled out to the whole Nordic region to obtain a greater feedback about the ideas covered in the current survey.

More importantly Comelec should conduct country-specific studies, or at least, region-specific studies to understand better the lifestyles, concerns, as well as what works and what does not work in a particular country or region. Doing this study in Finland helped tremendously in drafting recommendations that are tailor fit to the specific conditions of Filipinos living in Finland. In this way, formal, informal, and community-based communication channels can be exploited to advance OAV communication given the contextual factors observed in a given geographic location.

For future studies, it is recommended to test specific messages and materials to find which are the most appealing for the voters in terms of the aesthetics and messaging in a design-based approach. This can also be done by segments. For example, communication materials that target sea-based workers, temporary overseas workers, dual citizens or permanent residents.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Interview Guide for CFO

1. Background about CFO
2. What are the different ways by which the government with the diaspora?
3. What is your role in OAV communication?
4. Do you customize communication per country?
5. How do you approach countries with small diaspora population? (probe for Finland)
6. What are the platforms and channels do usually use in your communication?
7. Can you describe the communication functions of your office? Do you follow a communication strategy?
8. What are the challenges in communicating to our Filipinos overseas?
9. How do you wish to change or update the ways Comelec communicate to overseas Filipinos?
10. How do you frame OAV messages? What is the key idea that you sell to the overseas voters?

Appendix 2. Interview Guide for COMELEC

1. What is the general strategy of Comelec when it comes to its communicating to our migrant population?
   a. Is it formalized or documented as an official "Comelec OAV communication strategy" of some sort? (ask copy, if possible)
   b. do you follow a specific framework or model for your communication activities?
   c. How was this developed?
2. Does the Comelec have a single strategy used for all its information and communication campaigns to ALL voters – local or overseas?
3. How does Comelec describe or picture overseas Filipinos as target audience?
4. Do you segment the target audience? How are they segmented and what are the considerations for the segmentation?
5. What are the channels or platforms do usually use in your communication?
6. How do you engage them?
7. What are the essential things prevalent in all your communication to the overseas Filipino community about OAV?
8. How do you manage country-to-country nuances and how does this reflect in communicating with Filipinos in these countries?
9. What are the challenges in communicating to our Filipinos overseas?
10. In what ways and how much of the overseas Filipinos' feedback, complaints, suggestions considered when you make plans?
11. Are there weaknesses or loopholes in the OAV law that makes communication more difficult?
12. How do you wish to change or update the ways Comelec communicate to overseas Filipinos?
13. How do you frame OAV messages? What is the key idea that you sell to the overseas voters?

Appendix 3. In-depth-interview guide among Filipinos

Introduction

1. How long have you been living in Finland and what brought you here?
2. Where are you from in the Philippines?
3. Do you have friends and relatives who are also living in Finland?
4. How would you recall your first days in Finland?

PART I – Transnational practices

5. Do you send money to your relatives in the Philippines?
6. How often and in what ways do you communicate with friends and relatives in the Philippines?
7. Do you also have Finnish friends, or friends of different nationalities than Filipinos?
8. Is it important for you to be updated about what's going on in the Philippines? In what ways do you keep yourself updated?
9. Do you belong to any organized Filipino community group at church or in your area? What do you get from being part of these groups?
10. How often do you come home to visit the Philippines?
11. What does it mean to you to be in close contact to your friends and relatives in the Philippines?

PART II – Role of OAV in transnational life

1. Are you aware of the overseas absentee voting (OAV)? What do you know about OAV?
2. How much do you know about OAV? (schedule, process, method, location, etc.)
3. From where do you usually hear/read information about OAV?
4. Are you registered/planning to register/not planning to register?
5. If registered or planning to register: what motivated you to register?
6. Is this something that is important to you as a Filipino living abroad?
7. What do you think are the difficulties in participating in OAV here in Finland?
8. What does it mean to you as an overseas Filipino that you have the right to vote while living in Finland?
9. What can be improved to improve participation in OAV?
10. Do you feel that you are given enough information here in Finland?
11. What can encourage overseas Filipinos in Finland to participate in OAV?

Appendix 4. Online survey questionnaire

PART I. Profile of respondent:

Q1 Name: (OPTIONAL)

Q2 Age:

Q3 Years in Finland:

Q4 How do you describe your residency status in Finland?

1	Dual citizen
2	Permanent/continuous
3	Temporary
4	Undocumented

Q5 Are you a registered overseas absentee voter in Finland?

1	Yes, proceed to Q5.1
2	No, proceed to Q5.2

Q5.1 If answered yes in Q5, what are the reasons why you registered?

1	I was encouraged by another person
2	I personally want it because it is my re-sponsibility.
3	I have the right to vote.
4	I was enticed to register right at the consu-lar outreach.
5	I was encouraged by what I saw in social media
6	I was encouraged by the information I saw from the official website of the Embas-sy/Comelec

Q5.2 If answered no in Q5, what are the reasons why you did not register?

1	I did not know when or how to register
2	I do not have time to register
3	I forgot the schedule of registration
4	The registration venue is too far from my place

5	I am not interested in elections

Q6 Ask if registered voter in Q5: Did you vote in the last elections?

1	Yes, proceed to Q6.1
2	No, proceed to Q6.2

Q6.1 If answered yes in Q6: What are the reasons why you voted?

1	The process is easy and convenient
2	Because it is my responsibility even if it's inconvenient
3	I supported specific candidate/s
4	I have the right to vote and be counted
5	I was encouraged by another person

Q6.2 If answered yes in Q6: What are the reasons why you did not vote?

1	The process is difficult and inconvenient
2	I forgot the mail my ballot during the pre-scribed time
3	I lost my ballot
4	I did not receive a ballot
5	I do not know the candidates
6	I don't have interest in elections
7	The people I know here also do not vote

Q7 Ask all: If you are registered, would you vote in the 2019 elections?

1	Yes
2	No
3	It depends

Q7.1 Ask if answered 'It depends' in Q7: Your participation in the 2019 elections depends on what?

1	Whether I have the time to fill out and mail the ballot
2	Whether I remember to mail the ballot with-in the prescribed time
3	Whether I know the candidates

| 4 | Whether the people I know will also participate |
| 5 | Whether I believe that my vote still matters |

PART II. Attitude towards OAV

Please state how much you agree or disagree with the following statements.

5	Strongly agree
4	Agree
3	Neither Agree nor disagree
2	Disagree
1	Strongly disagree

Q8 All Filipinos anywhere in the world have the right to vote.
(Lahat ng mga Pilipino saan man sa mundo ay may karapatan bumoto.)

Q9 I can show my being Filipino through voting.
(Maipapakita ko ang pagiging Pilipino ko sa pamamagitan ng pagboto.)

Q10 I want to be able to choose the leaders that I want for my country through voting.
(Gusto ko na makapili ng mga lider na gusto kong mamuno sa bansa sa pamamagitan ng pagboto)

Q11 My opinion about the leaders that I want for my country is important and should be heard through voting.
(Ang opinion ko sa kung sinong lider ang dapat mamuno sa bansa ay mahalaga at dapat pakinggan sa pamamagitan ng pagboto.)

Q12 I believe that the overseas Filipinos are still part of democracy.
(Naniniwala ako na ang overseas Filipino ay bahagi parin ng demokrasya.)

Q13 It is my duty as a Filipino to participate in the elections even when I'm based overseas.
(Tungkulin ko bilang Pilipino na makilahok sa eleksyon kahit nakatira ako sa ibang bansa.)

Q14 Participating in the elections is a fulfillment of my duty and is something that I should be proud of.
(Ang pagsali sa eleksyon ay pagtupad sa tungkulin at dapat ipagmalaki.)

Q15 Voting is a duty that every Filipino should fulfill.
(Ang pagboto ay tungkulin na dapat gampanan ng mga Pilipino.)

Q16 My vote as an overseas Filipino is important.
(Ang boto ko bilang overseas Filipino ay mahalaga.)

Q17 Voting is one way to I choose the leaders that I believe in.
(Ang pagboto ay isang paraan para piliin ang lider na pinaniniwalan ko.)

PART III. How helpful or not helpful are the following to encourage you to partici-pate in the elections?

5	Extremely helpful
4	Very helpful
3	Somewhat helpful
2	Slightly helpful
1	Not at all helpful

Q18 Receiving information about the important dates about the election registration and voting period from Comelec/Embassy.
(Ang makatanggap ng mga impormasyon tungkol sa mga takdang araw tungkol sa eleksyon mula pagrehistro hanggang pagboto mula sa media.)

Q19 Receiving information about the important dates about the election registration and voting period from Filipino Facebook groups.
(Ang makatanggap ng mga impormasyon tungkol sa mga takdang araw tungkol sa eleksyon mula pagrehistro hanggang pagboto mula sa media.)

Q20 More conduct of consular outreach where I can also register.
(Mas marami pang pagsasagawa ng consular outreach kung saan maaari ding magparehistro.)

Q21 Receiving a letter of reminder from the Philippine Embassy or Comelec.
(Kung makakatanggap ako ng sulat ng pagpapalala mula mismo sa Comelec/Embassy.)

Q22 Receiving OAV-related information via e-mail from Comelec/Embassy.
(Kung makatanggap ako sa email ng mga impormasyon tungkol sa OAV.)

Q23 When the government expresses that my vote matters.
(Kung ipinapahayag ng pamahalaan kung gaano kahalaga ang aking boto.)

Q24 Receiving information about the candidates, who they are and their platforms.
(Kung bibigyan ako ng impormasyon tungkol sa mga kandidato, sinu-sino sila at ano ang kanilang mga plataporma.)

Q25 Receiving practical information about election such as the step-by-step procedures.
(Kung bibigyan ako ng praktikal na impormasyon tungkol sa paraan at mga hakbang sa pagboto.)

Q26 When I see know that my Filipino friends in Finland are also joining the elections.
(Kung nakikita ko na ang mga kaibigan kong Pilipino sa Finland ay nakikilahok din sa eleksyon.)

Q27 When I see in social media that other overseas Filipinos in different parts of the world are participating in the elections.
(Pag Nakita ko sa social media na ang ibang mga overseas Filipinos sa iba't-ibang panig ng mundo ay nagpaparegister din at bumoboto.)

Q28 When there is one website o Facebook page where I can find and share all the information about OAV.
(Kung merong website o Facebook page kung saan nandun na lahat ng impormasyon tungkol sa OAV at pwedeng i-share.)

Q29 If there is an opportunity to share my election experience in registration or voting to my fellow overseas Filipino that will also encourage others.
(Kung mayroong paraan na maibahagi ko ang karanasan ko sa pag-rehistro o pagboto sa mga kapwa ko overseas Filipino at mahikayat din sila.)

Q30 If there are events to watch via live streaming (e.g. Facebook Live) that will add to my knowledge about the elctions or to get to know more about the candidates.
(Kung mayroong mapapanood via live streaming katulad ng Facebook Live para madagdagan pa ang kaalaman ko tungkol sa eleksyon at makilala pa ang mga kandidato.)