



## Citizen-aided news in the Philippines

On 30 June 2010 Benigno Aquino III has taken his oath as the 15th president of the Philippines. A unique part of the previous election was the spread of new forms of citizen participation in the news making process that this chapter discusses. Aquino was sworn in 30 June 2010. He won by a landslide margin of 5.7 million votes in the May election, well ahead of his closest rival Joseph Estrada. The former president secured 9.5 million votes despite being ousted in 2001 and convicted for plunder.

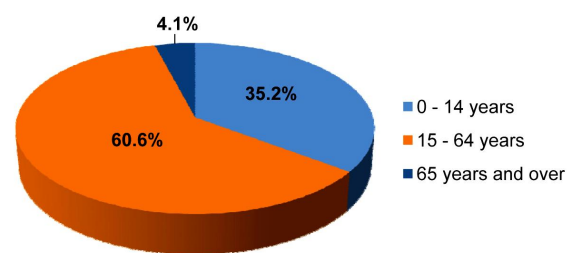
Many media groups in the Philippines have embraced their audiences. Principal among them are the two biggest television networks, ABS-CBN and GMA. Three in every four dollars of total advertising revenue in the Philippines goes to television, and the top two networks share 90 per cent of that money. Maria Ressa is senior vice president for news and current affairs at ABS-CBN, the largest network in the Philippines. "This network reaches every Filipino around the world is our boast," she chuckled during an interview in her office in Quezon City. The formal interview took place on 10 June 2010 in Manila, after initial research two days earlier. Ressa took up her position at the start of 2005, after 18 years with CNN, mostly recently as bureau chief in Jakarta.

Audience demographics in the Philippines are reflected in ABS-CBN's structure. Only 7 per cent fall in the AB category (professional people with money). The bulk of the population falls into the C1, C2, D and E categories. Ressa noted the "huge gulf" between the AB group and the rest of the market. For that reason her network has segmented its output. ABS-CBN targets the C1, C2, D and E categories while ANC, its 24-hour cable news English channel, targets the AB group.

The huge size of its reach gives ABS-CBN the ability to cultivate possibilities with its huge audiences. "We are in a unique position in our country and in the world," Ressa said. In a speech to the Asia Media Summit in Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia in May 2008, Ressa said the world media had moved from the age of information to the "age of empowerment". "We have to define it for ourselves as journalists [and] understand technology [and] its effects on what we do – and how all that affects the societies we live in."

From its headquarters in Manila ABS-CBN runs a network of 19 provincial television stations and six overseas bureaus (two in North America, and one each in the Middle East, Europe, Australia and Japan). Ressa manages about 1,000 journalists. They produce a national radio network, bulletins for two free-to-air channels in the native Filipino language, Tagalog; a cable TV channel; and a range of Internet and mobile phone services. Ressa is managing director of ANC. The radio service is also broadcast on cable TV: a fixed camera broadcasts presenters in their studios. Another channel, Studio 23, focuses on the youth market. ABS-CBN has leveraged the reach of all those networks to build audiences and attract information and content from its audience: "When you have that much market share you have a tremendous ability to shift [public opinion]." Internet penetration

Philippines demographics: Age structure



Source: [indexmundi.com](http://indexmundi.com), 2010  
Population: 97.7 million (2009 est.)



in the Philippines is low by world standards, at about 15 per cent in the capital Manila but nationwide only about 5 per cent. Yet almost everyone has a mobile phone. The Philippines leads the world in the use of SMS, better known as text messaging or texting. Almost half of the population of 88 million is aged under 18. Regardless of age, the nation sends about two million SMS a day.

In 2007 ABS-CBN ventured into this area. It involved audiences with their mobile phones in what Ressa calls the merging of the mass base of traditional media with the grassroots and participatory nature of new media. She conceived and launched the program Boto Mo, Ipatrol Mo (BMPM), which translates as “patrol your vote”. “Patrollers” as they came to be known contribute story tips and information in a range of ways. ABS-CBN took the traditional power of broadcast media and cable television and combined it with the Internet and especially mobile phones to create the world’s first example of a media company’s campaign to get citizens to work together to “patrol” their votes and push for clean elections. The message was simple, Ressa said: “Get the people to care and take action. If you see something wrong or good, tell us. If you see someone trying to buy votes, snap a picture on your cell phone and send it to us. If you see a town mayor using public vehicles for his campaign, shoot a video with your cell phone and send it to us. If you see violence, tell us about it, and after a verification process, we will put it to air.” Ressa said the campaign was about empowerment: “We wanted to send the message

that vigilance was important, that should not become part of the problem but provide the solution – and that if you want a better future, you are not alone.”

To build the audience for BMPM Ressa and her team ran a series of all-day, on-air and multi-platform workshops and registration drives. These included youth activities, summits, concerts, gatherings and workshops. The team also gave more than 50 lectures and talks nationwide. Before each BMPM workshop the network publicised the events and ran stories about them in news bulletins. “People registered to vote in their area and registered to be a Boto Patroller. We had a minimum of 1,000 people [attend the workshops] every month. It was exhilarating. We saw a thirst for hope. They were looking for something to do.” At these events Ressa and three of her senior news managers talked about journalism. “We talked about what we do and why we do what we do.” They also discussed ABS-CBN’s standards and ethics manual.

“Those workshops were great for getting a sense of where people were and what they wanted.” Three quarters of the population is aged between 5-40. “It is an extremely young population.” Ressa said journalists were not educators, but given that 90 per cent of the population of the Philippines got their information from television news, it was inevitable that news would have an “advocacy” role. The Western journalist does not get involved, she said. But it was different in the Philippines. “Journalists are always first responders in any disaster. So what do we do?” ABS-CBN set up a public

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service arm for when disasters strike. "We deploy our public service team and we deploy our journalists at the same time. They go together. I want our team to report but they cannot report if no one is helping in a disaster. We are an activist news organisation and I have embraced it [that concept]."

The other members of the team that ran the workshops were Glenda Gloria, chief operating officer for ABS-CBN's news channel (a former investigative journalist and former managing editor of *NewsBreak*, an investigative magazine); Beth Morrissey, Princeton in Asia Fellow (who worked for the Off the Bus citizen involvement program during the Obama campaign in 2008); Charie Villa, head of online and mobile news; and Arlene Burgos, new media manager for Boto Mo iPatrol Mo.

Ressa described a typical workshop that ran on 3 February 2010. At the workshop, Ressa opened the session by describing Boto Mo iPatrol Mo and its community and talked about journalism and patrollers' potential role in the May 2010 election. Burgos described what patrollers had done elsewhere, what stories the network was looking for, and how to put a story together. Glenda Gloria talked about the basics of journalism and the importance of ethical journalism. She discussed how technology was changing journalism and its role in citizen journalism. Morrissey described how citizen journalism operated in other countries, and outlined the basics of citizen journalism with a mobile phone: how to take photographs, how to upload them to social network sites and onto the BMPM site. She also talked about staying safe as a citizen journalist. Noted Ressa: "It's nuts and bolts kind of things; how to use your mobile phone for reporting." Charie Villa talked about visual journalism. "She was great at showing people how to use pictures to tell the story," Ressa said. Villa then elaborated on social media and citizen journalism, and discussed what was ahead of BMPM. More information can be found at the campaign's web site <http://bmpm.abs-cbnnews.com>.

A song started each workshop. "We wrote a song for the occasion," Ressa said. The workshop generally included lunch. "We did questions and answers after each session." Ressa said the workshops ran for up to five hours, and the participants stayed

throughout. "They stay with us. Though we do feed them," she said with a laugh. "The cell phone is the [newsgathering] tool. It is ubiquitous in the Philippines. Everyone has one. So a big chunk of the workshop is showing people how to use it for newsgathering."

The success in the "patrol" campaign in terms of engaging the audience has been phenomenal. ABS-CBN set up a database to keep track of all the "patrollers". The number of contributors totalled 81,146 as of 7 June 2010. Each day they send an average of 3,058 text messages, 500 emails and more than 100 voice-mails to the newsroom. These tips have led to a range of stories. BMPM also had 19,127 Twitter followers, and 102,391 Facebook fans. Ressa said the audience was 400 per cent more engaged and almost half of the patrollers (49 per cent) were aged 18 to 24, a hopeful sign of future involvement in the political process.

In 2008 the International Association of Business Communications (IABC) gave ABS-CBN its Gold Quill award for the Boto Mo, iPatrol Mo campaign. The IABC called BMPM an effective campaign that was well executed despite having only a "modest budget". It made "thoughtful use" of strategic partners – "all based on a bold, honourable mission". The 2007 campaign was also successful in terms of revenue: profits from that year's election were almost four times higher than in the 2004 presidential election. In terms of brand awareness, the campaign was "priceless," Ressa said.

The BMPM campaign came about because Ressa is a strategic thinker. She recognised the power of what Malcolm Gladwell refers to as the "tipping point" in his book of the same name. The concept comes from the science of epidemiology, when a virus multiplies below the radar screen and hits the point when it changes the entire system. Malcolm Gladwell wrote: "That moment in an epidemic when a virus reaches critical mass. It's the boiling point." That is the point at which change happens, often quite quickly. "We took a tipping point approach, step by step by step," Ressa said. "Change is not revolutionary but gradual," Ressa said. Media has converged. In some countries, all forms of news come from one combined newsroom. Audiences have also converged, in the sense that they will go

anywhere in search of the content and information they need to live their lives. "Convergence represents a cultural shift as consumers are encouraged to seek out new information and – more importantly – to make connections. We are changing the way we think and interact," Ressa told the Asia Media Summit in Kuala Lumpur.

This "participatory culture" was a stark contrast to the passive way people used to consume media, watching television or listening to the radio with no way of talking back. "Now rather than saying media producers and consumers occupy separate roles, we are starting to see them as participants who interact with each other according to a new set of rules we are all just defining," Ressa told the Kuala Lumpur summit. Ressa cited the book *Crowd-Sourcing* by James Surowiecki in our Manila interview in June 2010. "Large groups of people are smarter than an elite few, no matter how brilliant – better at solving problems, fostering innovation, coming to wise decisions." Four criteria are required for this process to operate: The first was diversity of opinion – each person should have private information; the second was independence – people's opinions were not determined by the opinion of those around them; the third was decentralization – where people were able to specialise and draw on local knowledge; and the fourth was aggregation – where some mechanism existed for turning private judgments into a collective decision. The BMPM campaign satisfied those criteria, Ressa said.

*"Each of us finds our meaning and creates our interpretations, personal myths and world views from the information we consume – all to try to make sense of our daily lives."*

The "patroller" campaign also deliberately set out to educate viewers and audiences about freedom of expression and freedom of information. "Public education about journalism is not great [in the Philippines]. We realised we have to talk about these kinds of things and explain them to our viewers." Ressa admitted it was difficult to measure the impact of the workshops. Audiences would always come to television news be-

cause of the quality of the storytelling. Ressa said it took time to get audiences to contribute video because culturally it was not something that Filipinos did, and data charges were expensive. Patrollers sent video to the station's web site, and posted it on YouTube. "We embraced the stuff [technologies] already available to citizens: Gmail, YouTube and Facebook. We used other people's servers," she chuckled. "Each of us finds our meaning and creates our interpretations, personal myths and world views from the information we consume – all to try to make sense of our daily lives."

Examples of patroller's contribution to news

The Maguindanao Massacre in southern Philippines in November 2009 was the country's worst election-related violence. At least 60 people were killed including 30 journalists. It was premeditated murder and also the deadliest single attack on journalists anywhere in the world.

Here is an example of a tip from a "patroller" at 3:47pm about the massacre on 23 November 2009: "Maguindanao gubernatorial aspirant Toto Mangudadatu's wife was kidnapped together with 2 sisters of Mangudadatu and media men as well as legal counsels enroute to Shariff Aguak to file certificate of candidacy for gubernatorial position in behalf of Toto Mangudadatu. The PNP ARMM were immobile because they were under the command/control of the incumbent Maguindanao governor-Ampatuan family. The 6id [infantry division] army have played dumb and blind despite heightened reports that there is a plot against Toto Mangudadatu."

At 3:58pm another text message followed: "we plead that this incident be given attention and that in depth investigation be given as well as impartial report. The atrocities of Ampatuan family in Maguindanao is a secret public knowledge. All are immobile for their fear of life. These people are playing gods here."

At 8:48pm a "patroller" sent ABS-CBN photographs of corpses at the massacre taken with a mobile phone.

Another major news event was patrollers' coverage of cyclone Ondoy that hit Manila the evening of 25 September 2010. Coverage started the Saturday the storm hit. That evening ABS-CBN started broadcasting video from patrollers of their homes and communities. "The videos [were] of floating cars and stranded people. People sent video even though they were in danger."

Ressa noted the drive for better quality video on the web in mid 2010, and a move to high definition (HD) images on television, which meant audiences were expecting high quality video. ABS-CBN was preparing for HD, while accepting it was expensive. The quality of video from citizen journalists was often not great, and not as good as what some viewers were used to. "But if the story is good enough, if the video is compelling enough, it does not really matter about the quality of the video. Journalism is evolving and technologies are merging. Probably 75 per cent of what viewers remember is the video," Ressa said. Television news is more than an intellectual exercise, Ressa said. "More than anything the storytelling requires emotion. Natural sound helps capture that [emotion]."

#### Major floods in the Philippines – GMA responds

Typhoon Ondoy, which unleashed a months worth of rain in just 12 hours on Manila in September 2009, was a catalyst for GMA's attitude to audience participation in the news. Howie Severino is editor-in-chief of the network's web site, GMANews.tv. He said GMA's involvement with audiences differed from ABS-CBN's approach.

GMA had set up a citizen involvement site called YouScoop two years before Severino arrived but it lapsed as the company looked at other innovations. YouScoop was initially a platform where citizen journalists could submit election-related reports. Severino revived the site after he arrived at GMA in June 2009. "We revived YouScoop because it was a necessity, not because we read about any new trends." The necessity became evident during the flooding caused by Ondoy, which trapped many people. "We had to rely on the crowd to give us information about where the worst-hit areas were. It was very difficult to move around." The flooding had stranded many of Severino's journalists and they could not come to

work. "Nobody alive could remember rain of that volume. There was a huge demand for information." Landlines were down or overcome with thousands of calls, but people could still communicate by mobile phone. Severino said traditional media like television or newspaper photojournalists needed to be on location to get visuals. "We saw an opportunity to use the crowd. They had access to information. Most of the information came through SMS. GMA used its television and radio networks to tell people about its Facebook fan page and encouraged people to submit photographs and stories to that site. Severino's newsroom created stories from the submissions but he decided that this form of reporting was not enough. "We thought of other things we could do to become more interactive."

GMANews.tv has about 35 staff, including 10 reporters and five multi-media editors, plus another 15 copy editors. His staff had been studying how news web sites in other countries used mapping tools like Google Maps and mash-ups. "A lot of people wanted to know what was happening in particular places, and we had information with geo-location. We started plotting information we received on our Facebook fan page on a Google map." At the same time Severino used his Twitter account (@howieseverino) to call for help from people with skills and knowledge in geography. "A lot of people wanted to volunteer. A lot of people knew people who were affected by the floods. People came here to help us plot information on the Google map." The team inserted information about the condition of roads and bridges, and what was happening in particular communities.

Severino went on television to show audiences how they could use maps and insert their own data on the network's web site. "Google maps are things that only the web can do, that television cannot do." Severino had previously worked for a decade as a television journalist. "This was something we had been thinking about for a long time but was on the backburner. Then this disaster happened and maps were something we could do on the fly. It involved very little planning. It was something we felt needed to be done because our city was in danger."

Twitter became a powerful tool for GMA during the disaster. Severino tweeted about

the floods and people started sending him updates via Twitter and Facebook. "I was in the eye of the storm, so to speak: I was managing the data processing and uploading, talking to the public [via Twitter and Facebook], liaising with GMA's network television. Not everyone has a computer but everyone has television and a cell phone." The disaster also attracted a huge audience from the large expatriate Filipino community and local authorities. Almost 15 million Filipinos live overseas and send money home, so they maintain a keen interest in what happens in the country. (As an aside, these expatriates send home at least \$US 13,000 million a year. They have become a major target for online advertisers in the Philippines, because print media cannot reach them.)

As GMA's online service harvested information from the audience, Severino became aware of the huge potential of this kind of newsgathering and distribution. "The experience taught us that social media was not just trendy and cool, not just a way to tell people what you had for breakfast. It could be about life and death situations. It was a baptism of fire and we decided in future social media could be used as a vital public service. It also created a lot of traffic for our web site." Details appear later in the chapter. GMA's coverage of the typhoon also generated a lot of goodwill for the network.

"People overseas said 'thank you', you were our lifeline to knowing what was happening in individual communities and areas." Severino and his staff tweeted updates to overseas Filipinos so those people had immediate updates on affected areas of the city.

Severino said he and his staff applied what they learned from typhoon Ondoy to the May 2010 elections. "It's about crisis information. A flood is a crisis, and if people are experiencing election violence, it's a crisis." GMA used Google maps and YouScoop to categorise problems and successes with the 2010 elections. People were encouraged to send stories and tips via their mobile phones. It was the country's first automated election, and critics were predicting a "train wreck" from failure of technology and violence at election booths. GMA adapted Google maps to colour code events on a YouScoop map and also mapped candidates travels around the country.

The election generated huge traffic on the network's Facebook fan page and GMA-News.tv web site. The latter attracted a record number of page views during the election. On 11 May 2010 the site got 12 million page views, which was three times more than the previous high during the Cory Aquino funeral on 5 August 2009. Severino attributed the success to the fact the GMA site had the best election data, boosted by the Google maps.

The network received and distributed news via its Twitter site. It also pioneered a form of social media election reporting called "rapid reports". Reporters sent short reports to the newsroom's online in-box via SMS texts. Editors checked the copy and posted news in the form of status updates on the network's Facebook fan page and Twitter sites. "It was like Twitter but we wanted to have a form of editorial screening before it appeared, so we can say the news went through a vetting process. Reporters are under a lot of

The screenshot shows the GMA News TV website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with categories like News, Public Affairs, Videos, and iGMA.tv. A search bar is located in the top right corner. The main content area features a large headline: "Palace: Huge public spending resulted in economic growth". Below this, there are several news reports and video thumbnails. One prominent report is titled "Eleksyon 2010 President/VP Count Per Province". Another report is titled "Ang Pamana Ni Gloria". The interface also includes a "NATIONAL COUNT LOCAL COUNT" section and a "Top Stories" section. The bottom of the page features social media links for Facebook and GMA News TV.

time pressure and [reporting can be] frantic and we did not want to put too much pressure on them to be absolutely accurate all the time. We had editors who checked names and facts, so our audience could be confident the news went through an editing process. Plus our editors add background material and enhance the content."

GMA continues the traditional newsroom structure of reporters in the field and copy or sub editors in the office. The latter's role is to check the quality and accuracy of the content from the field. The multi-media team adds videos from GMA's television channels. These are edited for brevity and made more appropriate for the web. The multi-media team also finds related videos on other sites such as YouTube and link to other useful sites. "As much as possible we aim to turn every news story into a multi-media experience. That's what makes us different." Severino noted that the Philippines has plenty of news and journalists needed to find innovative ways to deliver that news and tell stories in new ways.

Innovation at smaller news groups While big media dominated the information landscape in the Philippines, innovation in the 2010 election also came from smaller news organizations. The Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ) offered diverse probing coverage in its election site (<http://i-site.ph/2010elections/>). Its stories, audio, video and photos were picked up and spread widely through Blogwatch (<http://blogwatch.ph>), an active opinionated community of bloggers as well as the Philippine Online Chronicles ([www.thepoc.net](http://www.thepoc.net)) which describes itself as "a media network and news aggregator, a platform for alternative viewpoints and a synthesizer of ideas." This site offers an alternative to traditional reporting by going to less heard voices such as blogs, student newspapers, and alternative publications.

A small but important player in the 2010 election was VERA Files – *vera* means truth in Latin – an online site (<http://verafiles.org>) published by six well-respected award-winning veteran Filipino journalists: Yvonne Chua, Luz Rimban, Booma Cruz, Chit Estella, Jennifer Santiago and Ellen Tordesillas. These six women act as the board of trustees and among them have 162 years of journalism experience. The site's slogan

"Truth is our business" is a breath of fresh air. "We wanted an outlet for stories we felt strongly needed to be written, stories, not just news stories but feature stories, reports," co-founder Yvonne Chua told the Advanced Reporting M.A. class at Asian Center for Journalism (ACFJ) in Manila in June. "Not necessarily competing with mainstream media but complementing or filling in the gaps of mainstream media."

The original plan to publish a monthly magazine fell through when the recession hit in 2008, but Chua and Luz Rimban (the other co-founder) had an important investigative report in the works, so they decided to write the story and syndicate it to mainstream newspapers. Chua said a number carried the story on their front pages. Buoyed by that success Chua and Rimban built a website "in an afternoon" and VERA Files was launched in March 2008 as multimedia site with text, photos, slide shows, videos and podcasts.

It remains different from other websites. "We agreed we didn't want the whistles and bells. We would let content drive the site," Chua explained. The site is built like a blog with links to supporting documents, Twitter, Facebook and RSS feeds. But unlike many websites VERA Files offers no opinion writing or open forum for reader comments. Chua said that was a deliberate decision to keep the focus on content. "We're a reporting centre, a journalism centre that deals with a whole range of stories. We do plain news stories, feature stories, explanatory pieces to investigative reports. What you do not see in VERA Files are opinion pieces. We agreed all our stories should be factual and leave the opinion out. "Opinion and reader comments are handled by blogger-trustee Ellen Tordesillas on her blog site ([www.ellentordesillas.com](http://www.ellentordesillas.com)).

As part of their mission the trustees struck a pact to do training and in particular to mentor: "We have mentored journalism students, community journalists, people from NGOs who would like to do journalism. It's the best way to propagate good journalism and it has helped us a lot," Chua said. VERA Files runs on a shoestring. The co-founders spent (\$US 21) to register with the Security Exchange Commission. VERA Files sells or syndicates its news stories, features, in-depth and investigative stories to main-

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stream print and broadcast outlets; the trustees report and write for free. Perhaps that's why five of the six have other jobs as writers, editors or journalism educators. This allows VERA Files to pay non-trustee writers agreed freelance rates when it sells a story to mainstream media. "More than half of proceeds from syndication goes to the writers. That's our commitment," Chua said. "We have found that a lot of good investigative in-depth reports can be put together without a lot of money. All you need is a little creativity, imagination, initiative and hard work and a little money for transportation and photocopying." For the first two years the trustees operated the business out of their homes as "satellite offices", each taking responsibility for administration, collection, billing and the web. In April 2010, they rented a small 12 square meter office in Quezon City to coordinate election coverage.

#### Vote 2010

The 2010 national elections provided VERA Files with an opportunity to add new voices to election coverage. Chua said the networks and big papers had already partnered with each other – GMA with the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* and ABS-CBN with the *Philippine Star* and their online divisions.



With funding from the Asia Foundation and the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives, VERA Files partnered with 20 civil society groups including church, environmental and youth groups along with 10 community newspapers to provide national coverage of the elections. "We had a network just like a national newsroom, with correspondents from Luzon, Abra, to Tawi-Tawi to Mindanao," Chua says. VERA Files took a different approach to training its NGO citizen journalists compared with what ABS-CBN did. VERA Files went into communities and held three-day training programs for civil society groups that included news writing, how to take pictures, video, how to write captions, headlines and how to use on line tools to communicate with VERA Files.

"We believe in training non-journalists, but we also strongly believe in supervised journalism, that has professional and ethical standards," Chua says. VERA Files' message to all the citizen journalists was "you have to be accountable for what you do". The coverage caught the attention of Yahoo! Philippines Purple Thumb and another partnership was formed. "Can you imagine our stories were carried by a news website that had 4 million unique visits during the election period."

On May 9, VERA Files opened a live blog that ran until May 19 to cover breaking events across the country with people uploading comments, photos, and video. "While we were running the incidents, producers were putting together stories as data came in." The solid reporting and innovation of VERA Files is receiving accolades. Trustees Yvonne Chua and Luz Rimban with contributor Diosa Labiste received top award of distinction at the 2009 Jaime V. Ongpin Awards for Excellence in Journalism (JVOAEJ) for their 2008 investigative report "Quedancor swine program another fertilizer scam". Judges said the three-part report was "a substantial contribution to the urgent necessity to understand the link between the country's continuing poverty and corruption, and which manages to hold reader attention while provoking thought as well as outrage".

In June 2010 VERA Files also received the first ever New Media award from the Rotary Club of Manila at its annual journalism awards ceremonies. The citation lauded "its exhaustive investigative reports on the Assets and Liabilities of government officials, particularly of the President and the First Gentleman, highlighting the people's right to information". The success of Vote 2010 and the awards are evidence to the trustees at VERA Files that they're on the right track. "This time we have reached a wider audience," Chua said. "The formula that we began with that we should be driven by content rather than all those whistles and bells works after all."

Chua said it was difficult to determine how many people were reading their work because a lot of other publications carry their stories. "If you look at the traffic of the site it's not really a good indicator. For example, our stories are carried by Yahoo. Sometimes they link back to us; sometimes they read



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the whole story there. We used to be nowhere. Now according to alexa.com we are around the million mark," said Chua.

VERA Files adds an important dimension to the media scene and civic discourse in the Philippines. "We're competitive but we also know there's room enough for stories like ours, for everyone. We don't even assume we can replace another news organization similar to ours. We just hope we can complement their work." q