

# **GUIDE FOR POLLING AGENTS FOR GENERAL ELECTION 2020**

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## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1. This guide is prepared by the Elections Department (ELD) for polling agents at General Election 2020. It summarises the role and obligations of polling agents under the Parliamentary Elections Act (PEA).
- 1.2. This guide does not take precedence over the law. It is not legal authority and should not be cited as such in a court of law. Candidates and their agents should therefore read this guide in conjunction with the statute book. If candidates and their agents are unsure of their rights or obligations, they should seek legal advice from an advocate and solicitor. It is not the function of ELD or the Returning Officer to interpret the law for candidates or their agents, or to provide them with legal advice.

## **2. Role of Polling Agents**

- 2.1. Polling agents must be appointed by election agents. The role of a polling agent is to observe that polling at the polling station is carried out in accordance with the law.
- 2.2. A polling agent may do the following on Polling Day at the polling station he is assigned to –
  - (a) Before the start of poll at 8 am, be present at the polling station to observe the sealing of ballot boxes by Presiding Officers (POs);
  - (b) Between 8 am and 8 pm, observe the polling process within the polling station; and
  - (c) After the close of poll at 8 pm, witness the sealing of ballot boxes and election materials; and the transportation of sealed ballot boxes from the polling station to the counting centre.
- 2.3. Any person may be appointed as a polling agent, so long as he is not –
  - (a) A student attending a primary or secondary school;
  - (b) A person who has an order of supervision made against him under the Criminal Law (Temporary Provisions) Act (Cap. 67);
  - (c) An undischarged bankrupt; or
  - (d) A non-citizen of Singapore.

### **3. Number of Polling Agents**

- 3.1. For polling in Singapore, the number of polling agents that may be admitted to a polling station for an electoral division is 1 polling agent per candidate/group of candidates for every 1,000 voters (or part thereof) allotted to vote at a polling station.
- 3.2. For polling overseas, every political party with candidate(s) standing for election and every independent candidate may appoint one polling agent to be present at each overseas polling station.

### **4. Admittance to Polling Stations**

- 4.1. On Polling Day, when entering a polling station for the first time, a polling agent must produce before the PO:
  - (a) A duly completed and signed copy of *Oath of Secrecy and Appointment of Polling Agent Form*; and
  - (b) His original NRIC or passport.

*NOTE – Photocopies of the Oath of Secrecy and Appointment of Polling Agent Form will not be accepted. Candidates and polling agents have to take their oath of secrecy (i.e. approach a Justice of the Peace or Commissioner for Oaths beforehand) and must give their completed forms to the PO before entering the polling station. In order to allow election officials to focus on the conduct of polling, they will not assist to administer oath of secrecy for candidates and polling agents.*

- 4.2. After checking, the PO will retain the polling agent's *Oath of Secrecy and Appointment of Polling Agent Form* and issue the polling agent a Polling Agent Pass and a Polling Agent Re-entry Card (bearing the polling agent's name, NRIC number, and the polling station's name) before admitting the polling agent into the polling station.
- 4.3. The polling agent must wear the Polling Agent Pass conspicuously at all times while he is in the polling station. If the polling agent leaves the polling station, he must return the Polling Agent Pass to the PO but retain the Polling Agent Re-entry Card. When the polling agent returns subsequently, the PO will check the polling agent's NRIC or passport against the Polling Agent Re-entry Card before issuing him with a Polling Agent Pass for admission to the polling station.
- 4.4. For re-entry into the same polling station, the polling agent needs only to produce the Polling Agent Re-entry Card with his NRIC or passport. If the polling agent seeks to enter another polling station to observe the polling process there, he must submit a new and duly completed and signed *Oath of Secrecy and Appointment of Polling Agent Form* to the PO at that polling station.

## 5. Polling Procedures

- 5.1. It is important that polling agents are clear about the polling procedures and are aware of the legal powers and duties of POs at the polling station. Polling agents must not delay or disrupt the polling process and must not prevent the conduct of election according to the law.

### Before start of poll

- 5.2. Before the start of poll, POs will show to the candidates and polling agents present in the polling station that the ballot boxes and their covers are empty before sealing the boxes. Ballot boxes are sealed in such a way that ballot papers cannot be taken out without having to break the tamper-proof seals. The sealing of ballot boxes starts at 7.50 am, 10 minutes before poll opens. Polling agents must be punctual if they wish to observe the sealing of the ballot boxes. In order to ensure that polling starts on time, POs will proceed with the sealing even if the candidates or polling agents are absent.
- 5.3. As soon as the ballot boxes are sealed, the POs will direct voters to the registration tables and open the poll at 8 am.

### Polling process

- 5.4. Every person whose name is on a Register of Electors (referred to as a voter) is entitled to one ballot paper and has only one vote. No ballot paper will be issued to any person if his name is not found in the polling station register (PSR) of electors for that polling station.
- 5.5. A voter must cast his vote in person; no proxy voting is permitted. Before issuing a ballot paper to a voter, the PO will –

#### *At voter registration counter*

- (a) ask the voter to lower his mask momentarily and show the photo of his personal identification document (i.e. original NRIC, passport, or identity cards issued by the Singapore Armed Forces, Singapore Police Force and the Singapore Civil Defence Force are acceptable) for authentication of identity;
- (b) authenticate the identity of the voter against the NRIC photo; and
- (c) ask the voter to scan his identification document at the e-Registration system. If a voter requires assistance in scanning his identification document, the PO will ask the voter to sanitise his hand and put on the disposable gloves before handing the identification document over.

The voter may next choose to join any queue for issuance of ballot paper.

*At ballot paper issuance counter*

- (a) ask the voter to place his personal identification document and poll card on the table for verification;
  - (b) ask the voter to sanitise his hands (with the available hand sanitiser) and wear the disposable gloves provided;
  - (c) check that the ballot paper is authentic i.e. it bears the official mark on it;
  - (d) read aloud voter's serial number (referred to as "voter serial number") and name;
  - (e) write the voter serial number on the counterfoil of the ballot paper;
  - (f) fold the ballot paper in half, detach and hand it to the voter; and
  - (g) ensure that voter retrieves and keeps his personal identification document and poll card.
- 5.6. At each polling station, the polling agents will be seated where they will be able to observe the polling proceedings, but not in a position that will compromise the secrecy of the ballot. Polling agents should pay close attention when the POs are reading out the particulars of the voters. They must not ask the PO to repeat the voters' particulars or check their own copy of the register (obtained from their political party or candidate) against the PO's copy, as this will disrupt the orderly conduct of poll.
- 5.7. The polling agent may, before poll closes, ask the PO for the total number of voters who have voted at the polling station. The PO may provide the information at his discretion. If the polling agent needs to leave the polling station before the close of poll, he must leave his own copy of the register behind. The polling agent may bring his own copy of the register out of the polling station only after the close of poll.

Legal powers of POs during voting

- 5.8. The PO or any other person authorised by him may explain the method of voting to a voter who requests for an explanation. Polling agents may listen in if they wish to.
- 5.9. The PO may, only on the request of a voter, help the voter to mark his ballot paper if the voter is visually impaired or unable to mark the ballot paper as a result of the voter's physical disability. The PO will mark the ballot paper according to the voter's directions and then guide the voter to place the ballot paper in the ballot box. No polling agents are allowed to be present when the PO is helping the voter to mark the ballot paper. This is to ensure voting secrecy. Every PO is under oath to keep the voter's ballot a secret.
- 5.10. For the visually impaired voter who wishes to mark the ballot paper on his own, a plastic stencil will be provided for use. The PO will insert the ballot paper into

the stencil and pass the stencil to the voter to allow him to feel the cut-out boxes on the stencil. The PO will then speak clearly and audibly to the voter (so that the polling agents may also hear) as to the sequence of the candidates' names or group of candidates printed on the ballot paper. The voter will then proceed to mark the ballot paper at the polling booth. After marking, the voter will remove the ballot paper from the stencil, fold the ballot paper into half before dropping the ballot paper into the ballot box. The PO will collect the stencil from the voter and guide him out of the polling station.

- 5.11. If a PO notices that a voter is taking an unusually long time at the polling booth, the PO may take such steps as are necessary to expedite the process.
- 5.12. No person, except a PO acting for a purpose authorised by the law (such as explaining the method of voting or assisting a voter with special needs), is allowed to communicate or attempt to communicate with any voter after the voter has received a ballot paper and before the voter has placed it in a ballot box.

#### Spoilt votes

- 5.13. If a voter claims that he has made a mistake on the first ballot paper given to him or that he has accidentally spoilt it, the PO may issue the voter another ballot paper. The PO will take back the spoilt ballot paper and mark "CANCELLED" on it before sealing it in an envelope.

#### Overseas voters voting at polling station in Singapore

- 5.14. If the PO ascertains from the register that the voter is registered as an overseas voter, the PO will take one additional step before registering the voter. The PO will ask the voter to declare that he has not already cast a vote overseas or elsewhere in the same election by signing a statutory form. The PO will register the voter only after the declaration is made.

#### Tendered ballot paper

- 5.15. A tendered ballot paper (which is blue in colour) will be issued to a person who applies to cast his vote even after the PO has informed the voter that according to the register, he has already voted, i.e. the voter had been registered in the e-Registration system at the same polling station earlier.
- 5.16. Before a tendered ballot paper is issued, the person is first required to make a declaration using the *Oath of Identity* form to confirm his identity and to declare that he has not already voted in the election. The PO will then write the voter's serial number on the back of the ballot paper. The voter serial number shall also be entered on a tendered votes list.

### After close of poll

- 5.17. After the close of poll at 8 pm, the slits through which marked ballot papers are dropped into the ballot boxes are sealed to ensure that nothing else can be dropped into them. Polling agents may observe the packing of the election materials into envelopes and affix their seals on the envelopes if they wish to do so. They may also affix their seals or sign on the ballot boxes after the POs have completed sealing of the ballot boxes. However, the polling agents must be careful not to paste over the official security seals or damage them in the process of pasting their own.

## **6. Transportation of Sealed Ballot Boxes from the Polling Stations to the Counting Centres**

- 6.1. The candidate or his polling agents may observe the process to transport the sealed ballot boxes from the polling stations to the counting centres.
- 6.2. For polling stations that are co-located with or near the counting centres, the candidate or one of his polling agents may accompany the sealed ballot boxes when they are carried by the POs from the polling station to the counting centre. For each polling station, only one person per candidate (or group of candidates in the case of a GRC) will be allowed to participate.
- 6.3. Where a vehicle is used to transport the sealed ballot boxes from the polling stations to the counting centres, the candidate or one of his polling agents may board the vehicle. The candidate or his polling agent must notify the PO of his intention to participate and submit a duly completed *Indemnity Form* to the PO before 6 pm on Polling Day.
- 6.4. The candidate or his polling agent should be present and ready to board the vehicle after the ballot boxes are sealed and not delay the transportation process. The vehicle will not wait for the candidate or polling agent who is late even if he has submitted his *Indemnity Form* earlier.
- 6.5. For each vehicle, only one person per candidate (or group of candidates in the case of a GRC), i.e. either the candidate himself or one of his polling agents, will be allowed to participate. If there is already one polling agent representing the candidate (or group of candidates) on the vehicle, other polling agents representing the same candidate (or group of candidates) will not be allowed to board. Candidates may obtain in advance the sequence of the polling stations that the vehicle serves via Candidate Services on ELD website before Polling Day.
- 6.6. The candidate or polling agent on board the vehicle must comply with the following rules, failing which, the PO has the right to evict the candidate or polling agent from the vehicle:

- (a) Candidates and polling agents must comply with instructions of POs and shall not behave in a manner which may affect the transport operations, or undermine the security of the ballot boxes;
- (b) No persons, other than POs, shall handle the ballot boxes during the transportation process;
- (c) Candidates and polling agents must adhere to the vehicle seating plan and remain seated at their designated seats on board the vehicle;
- (d) Photography, audio and video recording are not allowed on the vehicle; and
- (e) Smoking, eating or drinking are not allowed on the vehicle.

## **7. Polling under COVID-19**

### Safety measures at polling stations

7.1. Polling agents and candidates who wish to observe proceedings at polling stations must be physically well. Polling agents are to take note of and comply with the following measures to ensure the safe and smooth conduct of polling:

- (a) Temperature screening
  - i. Temperature screening at the start of the queue to detect persons with fever or acute respiratory infection symptoms<sup>1</sup>.
  - ii. Temperatures of all candidates and polling agents who wish to enter the polling station will be taken. Candidates and polling agents detected with fever or acute respiratory infection symptoms will be refused entry.
- (b) Contact tracing
  - i. Polling agents and candidates will have to use SafeEntry to check-in/out for contact tracing.
  - ii. Voters are not required to use SafeEntry, as the e-Registration system records the time when voters register at the polling station and can be used for contact tracing if necessary.
- (c) Safe distancing at polling stations
  - i. Safe distancing will be enforced at all times for voters waiting to enter the polling stations and within the polling stations.
  - ii. The seating area for election officials and polling agents will be spaced out to keep them at least 1m apart.
  - iii. Voters will be allotted a recommended 2-hour voting time-band, which will be indicated on their hardcopy poll card and e-Poll card (on the SingPass mobile app), to spread out voters across polling hours. Voters are encouraged to cast their ballots during their

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<sup>1</sup> Acute respiratory symptoms, in the context of COVID-19, include cough, sore throat, runny nose, anosmia (loss of smell), and shortness of breath in severe cases.

allotted time-bands, although they may do so at any time when the polling stations are open.

- (d) Quick and contactless voting
  - i. With e-Registration, each voter should not need to spend more than 5 minutes within the polling station (including registering, sanitising their hands, putting on disposable gloves, and voting).
  - ii. As voters will self-scan their NRIC for registration, no contact with election officials is required.

#### Special arrangements to safeguard health of senior voters

- 7.2. Senior voters aged 65 years old and above will be allotted recommended 2-hour voting time-bands from 8 am to 12 noon. Senior voters who require assistance may be accompanied by one household member. Those senior voters who are unable to vote during their allotted time-bands in the morning can still do so at other times of the day where they will be able to join priority queues.

#### Observation of polling at special polling stations for voters on Stay-Home Notice at designated facilities

- 7.3. Voters on Stay-Home Notice at designated facilities (e.g. hotels) will vote at special polling stations away from other voters as permitted under the Parliamentary Elections (COVID-19 Special Arrangements) Act 2020. Votes cast at each special polling station will be counted at designated counting centres.

### **8. Do's and Don'ts for Polling Agents**

- 8.1. The list of do's and don'ts for polling agents below is not exhaustive:

Polling agents must:

- (a) Present their signed *Oath of Secrecy and Appointment of Polling Agent* Form upon request;
- (b) Wear and display their identification passes while in the polling station;
- (c) Comply with all lawful instructions of the POs;
- (d) Maintain the secrecy of the ballot – they must not give information to anyone as to who has or has not voted, before the close of poll;
- (f) Sit in the designated area and not unnecessarily move around the polling station; and
- (g) Observe safe distancing measures.



Polling agents must not:

- (a) Display any campaign material or wear any badges, symbols or slogans in support of or against any particular candidate;
- (b) Consume food and/or beverages<sup>2</sup>, or use mobile phones and video-taking and photo-taking devices<sup>3</sup> within the polling station;
- (c) Interfere with the work of the POs or orderly conduct of the voting;
- (d) Approach and communicate with voters as they enter/leave the polling station; and
- (e) Remove their marked copy of Register of Electors before the closing of poll.

8.2. Polling agents should be properly attired. Polling agents dressed in singlets, shorts, slippers or other inappropriate attire may not be allowed into the polling station.

ELECTIONS DEPARTMENT  
PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE  
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<sup>2</sup> Complimentary bottled drinking water will be provided. Polling agents must keep the area clean and dispose of empty drinking bottles in recycling bags/bins provided. Those who wish to consume food and other beverages must do so outside the polling stations.

<sup>3</sup> The use of audio-visual equipment and mobile phones is prohibited at the polling stations to safeguard secrecy of the vote. Polling agents may use their mobile phones outside the polling stations.