

GUIDE FOR COUNTING AGENTS OF GENERAL ELECTION 2025

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This guide is prepared by the Elections Department (ELD) for counting agents at General Election 2025. It summarises the role and obligations of counting agents under the Parliamentary Elections Act 1954.
- 1.2 This guide does not take precedence over the law. It is not the 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 Counting Agents

- 2.1 The role of a counting agent is to observe that the counting of votes at a counting place is carried out in accordance with the law. Counting agents are advised to acquaint themselves with counting procedures and be aware of an election official's legal powers and duties, so as not to cause unnecessary delay or disruption to the counting process. Details on the conduct of count can be found on ELD website (https://www.eld.gov.sg/candidate_parliamentary_counting.html).
- 2.2 Counting agents may do the following on Counting Night at the counting centre they are assigned to:
 - (a) before the start of count, be present at the counting centre by 7.30 pm to observe the pre-counting test of the counting machines (each candidate/group of candidates may have only one counting agent to observe this process);
 - (b) after the ballot boxes have arrived, inspect and ensure that the seals on the ballot boxes are intact before they are opened at a counting place;
 - (c) during the count, observe the counting process at a counting place and give views upon request to the Assistant Returning Officer who is adjudicating the votes; and
 - (d) at the close of count, witness the sealing of the depository boxes containing the ballot papers and election materials.
- 2.3 Counting agents appointed to observe the counting of overseas votes may do the following:

- (a) before the start of count, be present half an hour before the commencement of proceedings, to observe the pre-counting test of the counting machines for use during the counting of the votes cast at overseas polling stations;
- (b) after the ballot boxes containing the votes cast at overseas polling stations and carton boxes containing the return envelopes have arrived, inspect and ensure that the seals on the ballot boxes are intact before they are opened;
- (c) observe the pre-count examination of the postal voting papers (comprising the return envelope with the postal ballot paper enclosed) and the retrieval of postal ballot papers from the return envelopes;
- (d) observe the process for the counting of overseas votes and postal voting papers, and give views upon request to the Assistant Returning Officer who is adjudicating the votes; and
- (e) at the close of count, witness the sealing of the depository boxes containing the ballot papers cast at overseas polling stations, postal voting papers and election materials.

2.4 Any person may be appointed as a counting agent, so long as he is not –

- (a) below 16 years of age;
- (b) a person who has an order of supervision made against him under the Criminal Law (Temporary Provisions) Act 1955; or
- (c) a foreigner.

3 Number of Counting Agents

3.1 Counting agents must be appointed by:

- (a) For Single Member Constituencies (SMCs) – the candidate or his election agent; or
- (b) For Group Representation Constituencies (GRCs) – any candidate in a group of candidates, any election agent of a candidate in the group or the principal election agent for the group.¹

3.2 For counting of votes cast in Singapore, only one counting agent for each candidate/group of candidates may be present to observe the counting at each

¹ Candidates, principal election agents or election agents who appointed the counting agents will need to issue the *Appointment of Counting Agent* form to each counting agent that they appoint and provide them with an *Oath of Secrecy* form. The forms can be downloaded from ELD's Candidate Services (https://www.eld.gov.sg/candidate_parliamentary_online.html). Hard copy forms will also be provided to candidates at the end of nomination proceedings on Nomination Day.

counting place at any one time. There are usually three to seven counting places at each counting centre.

3.3 For counting of votes cast by overseas voters, not more than five counting agents for –

- (a) each political party that has one or more candidates in a contested election²;
- (b) each group of independent candidates in a contested election; and
- (c) each independent candidate (not being part of a group of candidates) in a contested election,

may be appointed to observe the proceedings of the pre-count examination of postal voting papers and the counting of postal ballot papers and ballot papers cast at overseas polling stations.

4 Admittance to Counting Centres

Counting centre for votes cast in Singapore

4.1 When entering a counting centre for the first time, the counting agent must produce to the election official:

- (a) evidence of his appointment in the form of a duly completed and signed Appointment of Counting Agent form;
- (b) a duly completed and signed Oath of Secrecy form; and
- (c) his original NRIC (physical or digital) or valid passport.

Note: The Appointment of Counting Agent and Oath of Secrecy forms must bear the original signatures of the candidate, principal election agent (for GRC) or election agent and Justice of the Peace or Commissioner for Oaths respectively, photocopies will not be accepted. Candidates and counting agents must take their oath of secrecy (i.e. before a Justice of the Peace or Commissioner for Oaths beforehand) and must give their duly completed and signed forms to the election official at the entrance of the first counting centre. In order to allow election officials to focus on the conduct of counting, they will not assist to administer the oath of secrecy for candidates and counting agents.

4.2 After checking the documents mentioned above, the election official will retain the counting agent's *Appointment of Counting Agent* and *Oath of Secrecy* forms and issue him a Counting Agent Pass (affixed with a sticker of the candidate's symbol) and a Counting Agent Re-entry Card (bearing the counting agent's

² Political parties are required to manage the appointments of the five counting agents, i.e. assign one candidate, election agent or principal election agent from amongst the candidates/groups of candidates they have fielded to sign each *Appointment of Counting Agent* form.

name and NRIC number, the counting centre's name, the election official's signature and a sticker to acknowledge that he has submitted his *Oath of Secrecy* form) before directing him to a counting place. The counting agent must wear the Counting Agent Pass conspicuously at all times while he is in the counting centre.

- 4.3 If the counting agent leaves the counting centre, he must return the Counting Agent Pass to the election official but is allowed to retain the Counting Agent Re-entry Card.
- 4.4 For re-entry into the same counting centre, the counting agent is only required to produce the Counting Agent Re-entry Card with his original NRIC (physical or digital) or valid passport to the election official. After checking, the election official will issue the counting agent with the Counting Agent Pass for admittance into the counting centre.
- 4.5 For entry into another counting centre to observe the counting process there, the counting agent must submit a new duly completed and signed *Appointment of Counting Agent* form as the appointment is specific to a counting place. He must also show his Counting Agent Re-entry Card (i.e. the one issued by the election official at the first counting centre he visited) to the election official at that counting centre. The counting agent does not need to submit another *Oath of Secrecy* form. With a valid Counting Agent Re-entry Card (with acknowledgement sticker), it would mean that the counting agent had previously submitted a duly completed and signed *Oath of Secrecy* form.

Counting place for overseas votes

- 4.6 The same procedures for checking and collection of the forms and issuance of Counting Agent Pass and Counting Agent Re-entry Card (i.e. paragraphs 4.1 to 4.5) will apply to each appointed counting agent before he is allowed to enter the counting place for overseas votes.

Note: A counting agent, who had been appointed as a polling agent on Polling Day and issued a Polling Agent Re-entry Card (affixed with the sticker to acknowledge he has submitted his Oath of Secrecy form), does not need to submit another Oath of Secrecy form at the first counting centre he visits on Counting Night or at the counting place for overseas votes, as long as he is able to produce the Polling Agent Re-entry Card (with acknowledgement sticker) as proof.

5 Persons Allowed to Observe the Proceedings at the Counting Place for Overseas Votes

- 5.1 The Returning Officer may demarcate –
 - (a) one or more areas to conduct the pre-count examination of postal voting papers; and

- (b) one area to conduct the counting of overseas votes cast in respect of a specified electoral division (i.e. ballot papers cast at overseas polling stations and postal ballot papers for the specified electoral division).
- 5.2 There will be a maximum number of representatives allowed at each area demarcated for the conduct of the pre-count examination of postal voting papers and counting of overseas votes.

Pre-count examination of postal voting papers

- 5.2.1 If three or fewer areas are demarcated, a maximum of four representatives can be in those areas for –
- (a) each political party that has one or more candidates in a contested election,
 - (b) each group of independent candidates in a contested election; and
 - (c) each independent candidate (not being part of a group of candidates) in a contested election.
- 5.2.2 If four or more areas are demarcated, one representative is allowed in each of those areas for each political party/ group of independent candidates/ independent candidate.

Counting of votes cast by overseas voters

- 5.2.3 In the demarcated area for the counting of overseas votes cast in respect of a specified electoral division, only representatives of –
- (a) a political party that has a candidate /group of candidates; and
 - (b) an independent candidate/a group of independent candidates,

who contested in the specified electoral division, will be allowed to be present. The maximum number of representatives that the political party/independent candidate/group of independent candidates may have in the demarcated area is $X + 1$, where X is the number of Members of Parliament to be returned for the specified electoral division.

- 5.3 Definition of “Representative”. The representative must be –

- (a) in relation to a political party, a candidate of the political party or a counting agent for the political party; or
- (b) in relation to a group of independent candidates, an independent candidate in the group or a counting agent for the group; or
- (c) in relation to an independent candidate (not being part of a group of candidates), the independent candidate or a counting agent for the independent candidate.

6 Do's and Don'ts at Counting Centres and Counting Place for Overseas Votes

6.1 The list of do's and don'ts for counting agents below is not exhaustive:

- (a) Candidates and counting agents must comply with the instructions of the election officials and must not behave in a manner which may cause unnecessary delay or disruption to the counting process, failing which, the election official is empowered to evict the candidate or counting agent from the counting centre (or counting place for overseas votes).
- (b) Counting agents should be properly attired. Counting agents dressed in singlets, shorts, slippers or other inappropriate attire will not be allowed into the counting centre (or counting place for overseas votes).
- (c) Candidates and counting agents must wear their election passes at all times.
- (d) For the pre-count examination of postal voting papers at the counting place for overseas votes, before disallowing any postal voting papers from counting, the Assistant Returning Officer at each area demarcated for the conduct of pre-count examination will show the return envelope without opening it, to candidates or their counting agents (if present). Candidates or counting agents may give their views, but the decision of the Assistant Returning Officer as to whether to disallow any postal voting papers from counting is final. The representative may observe the pre-count examination process at each demarcated area within designated boxes marked out on the floor.
- (e) Candidates and their counting agents (or representative in the context of the counting of overseas votes) may observe the counting process from behind the yellow demarcation line or queue poles. However, they should not interfere with the counting process. They should not attempt to read the number printed on the back of a ballot paper, as doing so constitutes an offence.
- (f) Before rejecting a ballot paper which is unmarked or does not show clearly the intention of the voter, the Assistant Returning Officer at each counting place will show the ballot paper to candidates or their counting agents (if present). Candidates or counting agents may give their views on the ballot paper in question, but the decision of the Assistant Returning Officer on the validity of the ballot paper is final. When all the ballot papers at the counting place have been counted, the Assistant Returning Officer will announce the result over the table.
- (g) After the Returning Officer declares that a candidate/group of candidates is duly elected, or if overseas votes may have an impact on the election results, declares the number of votes cast in Singapore in favour of each candidate/group of candidates (together with the date and venue at which the overseas votes will be counted), the ballot papers and other election materials will then be sealed up in depository boxes if no recount

of the votes cast is to be conducted. Candidates and their counting agents may affix their seals or sign on these boxes, if they so desire. But they should be careful not to paste over the Returning Officer's seals or damage the Returning Officer's seals in the process.

- (h) The use of handphones, video and photo-taking devices in the hall where counting takes place is prohibited to safeguard the secrecy of the vote. Candidates and their counting agents may however use their devices outside the hall.
- (i) Smoking is not allowed in counting centres, principal counting centres or counting place for overseas votes.

IMPORTANT REMINDER

Counting agents are reminded to treat all persons in the counting centre with respect. The Returning Officer may take action against any counting agent whose behaviour disrupts the counting process or election official from carrying out his official duties.

ELECTIONS DEPARTMENT
PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE
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