

PRESS RELEASE

PRELIMINARY CAMPAIGNING GUIDELINES FOR GENERAL ELECTION UNDER COVID-19

1. The Elections Department (ELD) has drawn up a set of preliminary campaigning guidelines for the next General Election, given the likelihood that the COVID-19 situation could persist beyond April 2021, by which time the General Election must be held.
2. These are the key considerations in drawing up the guidelines:
 - a) **Protecting the health and safety of members of the public – including voters, candidates, and election officials – is of utmost importance.** The campaigning guidelines take reference from the prevailing Ministry of Health (MOH) guidelines.
 - b) **Ensuring voters have access to campaigning messages of all political parties and candidates, even amid the COVID-19 situation, so that voters can make an informed decision.** ELD will avail other modes of campaigning, such as additional TV airtime for political parties and candidates. This will allow all political parties and candidates to put their messages out to voters, while safeguarding public health and safety.
3. ELD has announced these preliminary campaigning guidelines, to give **political parties and candidates time to plan their campaigning activities.** These preliminary campaigning guidelines take reference from MOH guidelines pertaining to Phase 2 of the re-opening after the Circuit Breaker which were announced by the Multi-Ministry Taskforce on 15 June 2020, since this is the phase we are progressing toward. When new guidelines are issued for Phase 3, ELD will update the campaigning guidelines in accordance with the prevailing MOH guidelines as necessary.
4. The announcement of these guidelines has no relation to the timing of the General Election, which will be decided by the Prime Minister.

Restrictions on physical campaigning activities

Nomination proceedings

5. Nomination proceedings will be covered 'live' by the national broadcaster on its TV and online channels for voters to follow the progress of nomination proceedings. As large group gatherings are not allowed in Phase 2, the Returning Officer will only allow candidates, their proposers, seconders, assentors, and accredited media personnel entry into Nomination Centres. They must adhere to prevailing safe distancing measures at all times. Supporters will not be allowed entry and should not gather or loiter in the vicinity of Nomination Centres. Security personnel will be deployed to advise them to leave the area.

Walkabouts and door-to-door campaigning

6. Political parties and candidates may conduct walkabouts and door-to-door campaigning. Based on the safe distancing guidelines for Phase 2, any group doing a walkabout or door-to-door campaigning should be made up of not more than five persons, there should be no mixing between groups, and each group should remain at least one metre apart from other groups. During such activities, they are to take the necessary precautions, e.g. adhering to limits on group size, wearing masks, maintaining safe distancing, keeping all interactions and engagements transient (i.e. of short duration) and minimising physical contact, such as refraining from shaking hands. Candidates and political parties should also ensure that the members of the public they interact with adhere to prevailing safe distancing measures.

Use of perambulating vehicles for campaigning

7. Candidates may use perambulating vehicles for campaigning, but they will not be permitted to speak or livestream or broadcast music or videos from the vehicle. Police recognise that perambulating vehicles serve an important function during campaigning, in providing another mode for political parties and candidates to communicate their messages to voters. As large group gatherings are not allowed in Phase 2, Police will not grant permits for Thank-you vehicular processions after Polling Day. This is because such processions tend to attract crowds. Unlike campaigning activities, such processions are not critical to the campaigning process.

Election meetings

8. As large group gatherings are not allowed under the prevailing MOH guidelines, no Police permits will be granted for any election meetings, including rallies and gatherings at Assembly Centres on Counting Night for supporters to wait for election results.

Providing alternatives to physical rallies

9. In view of the COVID-19 situation, ELD strongly encourages political parties and candidates **to plan for modes of campaigning that do not involve physical group gatherings**. As at past elections, campaigning activities on television and the Internet can take place, in accordance with guidelines for such activities. Political parties and candidates can also continue to make use of posters, banners and printed campaign materials to reach out to voters.

Additional airtime on national TV for campaigning

10. In lieu of physical rallies, there will be more airtime on national free-to-air TV channels for political parties and candidates. This is to allow all political parties and candidates to put their messages out to voters, while safeguarding public health and safety. Voters are advised to watch these Party Political Broadcasts (PPBs)¹ from their

¹ Party Political Broadcasts (PPBs) refer to free broadcast airtime for political parties to share their campaigning messages with the voters during the campaign period. During General Election 2015, eight political parties that fielded at least six candidates were allocated between 2.5 minutes and 13 minutes of broadcast airtime to make statements in the four official languages across 13 TV and radio channels.

own homes, and not gather in groups beyond the sizes allowed under the prevailing MOH guidelines. These are the provisions for campaigning on national TV:

- a) Two PPBs, as per General Election 2015, but these will be aired on 19 TV and radio channels,² up from 13 in 2015; and
- b) [NEW] Constituency Political Broadcasts (CPBs) on MediaCorp's Ch5:
 - i. Each candidate contesting in a Single Member Constituency (SMC) will be given 3 minutes of airtime on national TV. For example, if Candidate A from Party X and Candidate B from Party Y are contesting in an SMC, they will each be given 3 minutes of airtime on national TV to reach out to voters. Candidates can choose to speak in any of the four official languages.
 - ii. Similarly, each group of candidates contesting in a Group Representation Constituency (GRC) will be given 12 minutes or 15 minutes respectively, depending on whether it is a 4- or 5-member GRC. For example, if Party X and Party Y are contesting in a 4-member GRC, they will each be given 12 minutes to reach out to voters. Parties can decide whether one or more members of the GRC team should speak during the allotted time for that GRC. Likewise, they can choose to speak in any of the four official languages.

11. The CPBs are special, one-off arrangements for the next General Election, in view of the COVID-19 situation.

12. Further details including dates of these broadcasts will be made available after the Writ of Election is issued.

Campaigning on the Internet

13. Candidates may also carry out campaigning activities on the Internet. The use of election advertising on the Internet, including through emails, on social media platforms and discussion forums, must abide by the Parliamentary Elections (Election Advertising) Regulations. This includes the requirement to declare to the Returning Officer the particulars of every Internet election advertising platform that will be used to publish election advertising by or on behalf of a candidate, as well as the use of paid election advertising on the Internet with additional details such as type of services used, source of funding, etc. This has been covered earlier in ELD's press release on 8 Jun 2020.

14. In lieu of physical rallies, candidates will have the option of holding e-rally livestreams. To facilitate the livestreams, the Government will provide venues that candidates can apply and use for live streaming at specific timeslots throughout the

² The six additional radio channels are: One FM 91.3, Kiss 92 FM, Class 95 FM, Gold 90.5 FM, Money FM 89.3 and 96.3 Hao FM.

day during the campaign period. These venues will be equipped with Internet connectivity. They will be provided at a subsidised rate, and their use should be limited to the e-rally livestreams, and not for other recordings or purposes. Candidates should ensure that the Internet platforms that the e-rallies are streamed on meet the relevant requirements, e.g. these platforms must have been declared to the Returning Officer. Similar to physical rallies, beyond the basic technical setup furnished onsite at the recording venues, candidates are expected to make their own arrangements for filming and live streaming at the site and ensure the successful delivery of their own livestreams. Use of the subsidised venues above is entirely optional. Candidates may campaign via live streaming outside of the provided venues and timeslots. Further details on the venues and timeslots will be made available after the Writ of Election is issued.

Use of films in campaigning

15. The use of films in campaigning is subject to the Films Act. Candidates who intend to publicly exhibit or distribute their films must first submit them to the Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA) for classification. Films that are only posted online need not be submitted for classification, but the content should comply with the Internet Code of Practice (ICOP).

16. Candidates and voters must not make, exhibit or distribute party political films.³ Party political films include films that are made by any person and directed towards any political end in Singapore, such as those intended or likely to affect voting in any election in Singapore. Factual and objective films that do not dramatise and/or present an inaccurate account, such as live recordings of events held in accordance with the law, factual documentaries, manifestos of the political party, or the candidate's declaration of policies, will not be considered party political films. For example, a recording of a livestream of an online rally that is not modified⁴ to present an inaccurate account is allowed. However, a recording of a livestream that employs dramatisation and/or animation to present an inaccurate account, sensationalise and mislead viewers on political matters is likely to be considered a party political film.

Advisories for the public

17. Members of the public are advised to watch the political broadcasts from their own homes, and not gather in groups beyond the sizes allowed under the prevailing MOH guidelines. They should also not gather at livestreaming facilities. Premises owners must ensure that there are no breaches of safe distancing or safe management measures on their premises.

³ The Films Act defines a party political film as a film 'which is an advertisement made by or on behalf of any political party in Singapore or any body whose objects relate wholly or mainly to politics in Singapore, or any branch of such party or body'. It is also one 'which is made by any person and directed towards any political end in Singapore'.

⁴ Allowed modifications would include the addition or removal of material which provides a description or translation of the audio content of the film, such as subtitles.

Campaigning activities not affected by COVID-19 situation

Posters and banners

18. Candidates can continue with the display of campaign posters and banners as long as they abide by the Parliamentary Elections (Election Advertising) Regulations. In general, posters (mounted on plywood or cardboard) and banners may be hung on street lamp posts and trees along public roads. No person shall display or cause to be displayed in any public place posters and banners without authorisation by the Returning Officer. The permit issued by the Returning Officer will stipulate conditions such as limitations to the location for display, manner of display, and number of posters and banners that can be displayed in the electoral division.

19. Any unauthorised posters and banners will be removed by the Returning Officer or persons authorised by him. Candidates will be required to bear the expenses to remove any unauthorised posters or banners put up by the candidate or his election agent. The amount to be borne for each removal of election poster or banner is S\$50. The cost of recovery will be considered as part of the candidates' election expenses.

Cooling-off period

20. A cooling-off period where all campaigning must stop will be observed from midnight on Cooling-off Day until after polls close on Polling Day.

Election financing

21. Candidates must keep within the election expenses limit stipulated in the Parliamentary Elections Act. The maximum spending limit for election expenses is currently S\$4 for every elector on the Register of Electors for the electoral division in which the candidate is seeking election to be a Member of Parliament.

No foreign interference and negative campaigning

22. The outcome of Singapore elections must be for Singaporeans, and Singaporeans alone to decide. As such, candidates must play their part to mitigate the risk of becoming vectors or victims of foreign interference. Candidates should enhance their understanding of the threat and be alert to suspicious behaviours and hidden agendas, so that their election campaign is free from foreign interference. Only Singapore Citizens⁵ can take part in elections and campaigning. Any Singapore Citizen who wants to conduct any election activity (whether online, offline or both) for a candidate must first be in possession of a written authority signed by the candidate or his election agent. Individuals who are not citizens of Singapore are prohibited from taking part in any election activity.

⁵ The following persons are prohibited from taking part in any election activity. This is regardless of their relationship with the candidate:

- 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; and
- d) A non-citizen of Singapore.

23. Candidates and their authorised representatives should conduct election campaigning in a responsible and dignified manner that befits the seriousness of the election process. They should steer away from negative campaigning based on hate and denigration of opposing candidates. They should not make false statements, for example, unfounded allegations of corruption or commission of criminal offences, or statements that may cause racial or religious tensions or affect social cohesion.

Participation in political activities and election campaigning by civic, business and professional bodies

24. Should any civic, business or professional body wish to participate in any political activity or allow its funds and/or premises to be used for political purposes, it needs to ensure that its constitution allows it to do so, and that this does not contravene any laws that govern the body. Likewise, should the civic, business or professional body wish to endorse certain candidates and publish advertisements or issue press statements expressing its support for a candidate, it needs to ensure that its constitution allows it to do so. If such advertisements or statements amount to election advertising, they must comply with the relevant rules under the Parliamentary Elections Act and its regulations.

A safe election for all

25. ELD will take all necessary measures to protect the health and safety of voters, candidates, election agents, and election officials, and had put out the safety measures for Nomination Day and Polling Day on 8 Jun 2020. Depending on the COVID-19 situation at the time the General Election is called, ELD will make the necessary adjustments to these preliminary campaigning guidelines and the safety measures, taking into account the prevailing MOH guidelines. ELD calls on all members of the public, candidates and their election agents to be socially responsible, and to play their part by adhering to safe distancing measures during campaigning and polling to ensure a safe election for everyone.

**ISSUED BY
ELECTIONS DEPARTMENT
PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE
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