

PRESS RELEASE

ELD'S FINDINGS ON SUSTAINED QUEUES AT SOME POLLING STATIONS IN GENERAL ELECTION 2020

1. To safeguard public health and safety for General Election 2020 (GE2020), ELD implemented a set of precautionary measures at Polling Stations (PSs) to assure voters that voting was safe. These measures were necessary and effective. Local voter turnout was also the highest in more than a decade since GE 1997, at 95.63%. There were no reported Covid-19 community cases affecting voters and election officials as a result of their participation in GE2020.
2. However, the precautionary measures also contributed to a reduction in the efficiency of polling. On Polling Day, 10 July 2020, there were longer than usual queues at about 18% of the PSs (199 out of a total of 1,097 PSs) in the morning. By 11 am, the queue situation had improved in most PSs. However, 68 PSs (~6% of all PSs) saw sustained long queues in the afternoon and 47 PSs (~4% of all PSs) with sustained long queues throughout the day¹.
3. ELD has since done a thorough review to understand **why there were abnormally long queues at some PSs** and what **lessons we can draw for future elections**.

Factors that caused sustained long queues at some PSs

4. Through our data review and consultation with election officials (EOs) on the ground, ELD found that the following factors contributed to the long queues at some PSs.
 - i. Safe management measures. To ensure public health and safety, and assure voters that it was safe to vote, ELD had implemented safety measures for voters, such as temperature taking, putting on disposable gloves and hand sanitising. However, these new measures took up additional time. The 1m safe distancing requirement also contributed to the lengthening of queues.

To reduce the waiting time, ELD did away with the requirement to don disposable gloves in the early part of the morning of Polling Day, as voters

¹ Based on data from VoteQ system, which was implemented for the first time in GE2020 to enable voters to check the queue situation at their PS before going to vote.

would have already sanitised their hands. With this, the queue situation at most PSs improved significantly by 11am.

Nevertheless, the **other necessary precautionary measures** (temperature taking, hand sanitisation and ensuring safe distancing among voters) **meant that voters, in general, spent a longer time to queue and vote, as compared with past elections.**

- ii. Large PSs should have been better resourced. In GE2020, there were 1,097 PSs, up from 832 in GE2015, to allow for safe distancing. 36,000 EOs were deployed, 20% more than in GE2015. The average number of voters per PS was about 2,400. However, 25 PSs (or 2.3% of PSs) had more than 4,400 voters, of which 22 experienced long voter queues.

There were also a number of large PSs in previous GEs, so size alone was not a factor for the long queues. But size combined with the precautionary measures must have aggravated the situation.

Some premises also had two PSs, and the two queues merged into one some distance away from the polling area, further lengthening the queues.

These 25 large PSs should have been better resourced (e.g. with more EOs or e-Registration devices).

- iii. Voter turnout was not evenly spread out across the voting hours. ELD had allocated recommended time-bands for GE2020. However, the allocated time-bands did not succeed in spreading out voter turnout evenly through the day.

For example, time-bands in the morning were allocated to senior voters, but one-third of voters in the morning were non-senior voters. The higher concentration of senior voters in the morning also slowed down voter flow-through rate, as more of them required support and assistance from EOs.

At the same time, some PSs with significantly high proportions of younger voters also saw queues in the afternoon, due to the large number of voters and the smaller 7-hour voting window (after excluding the morning window reserved for seniors and the 7pm to 8pm Special Voting Hour).

- iv. Issues with the e-Registration devices. For e-Registration, the pre-COVID-19 plan was for EOs to scan the NRIC of voters. However, with the COVID-19 situation, voters were asked to self-scan their NRICs. ELD had intended to do roadshows to familiarise voters with the e-Registration

device, but these had to be called off due to the COVID-19 situation. As a result, voters were unfamiliar with the e-Registration devices, and this process took longer than planned.

Survey findings on GE2020 voters' experience

5. To gauge voters' experience with the polling process in GE2020 and identify areas for improvement, ELD commissioned MCI REACH to conduct a survey.² This found an overall high satisfaction with the polling process and the conduct of EOs:

- **78%** of the voters agreed that the polling process (i.e. from registration, collecting of ballot paper to casting of vote) was well organised, compared to 17% who were neutral and 4% who disagreed.
- **77%** of voters agreed that the EOs were helpful to voters when carrying out their election duties, while 20% were neutral and 4% disagreed.
- **Overall, 7 out of 10 voters (70%) were satisfied with their experience at the PSs.** However, those who voted at schools and community centres/clubs (i.e. which housed PSs with more voters) registered a poorer voting experience because of the length of time it took to vote.

6. The survey also found that **about 80% of voters surveyed said they spent less than 30 minutes to vote**, while about **9 per cent said they took 45 minutes or more to vote**. Voter satisfaction decreased significantly with increasing time voters took to cast their vote, with a 'cliff effect' observed when the voting time reached 30 minutes.

- While **84% of voters who took less than 10 min to vote agreed they were satisfied** with their overall polling experience at the PS;
- **Only 54% of voters who took 30 to 44 minutes were satisfied** with the polling process.
- **Only 10% who took more than 1 hour to vote were satisfied.**

Proposed improvements for future elections

7. Given the above findings, ELD will be making the following improvements for future elections:

² The survey conducted by MCI REACH, from 23 to 30 July 2020, sampled 1,000 Singapore citizens aged 21 and above. The analysis - rounded to the nearest whole figure - was weighted by gender, race and age to ensure that findings are demographically representative.

- i. Increase pool of reserve manpower and equipment. We will increase the reserve pool of EOs, who can be deployed quickly to PSs to augment the onsite team to handle contingencies, including any unforeseen build-ups in queues. As the e-Registration devices have generally sped up the registration process, we will provide more e-Registration devices, and also put in place more robust redundancies to replace faulty devices. For GE2020, the procurement of eRegistration devices was done before COVID-19, and the vendor could not supply more devices to create a comfortable buffer in time to match the increased number of PSs due to the COVID-19 situation.
- ii. Reduce the number of voters at large PSs. Wherever feasible, ELD will split large PSs. For GE2020, larger PSs at HDB void decks and pavilions were split into two due to their small available spaces, but larger PSs at schools and community clubs were not. If it is not feasible to split the PS (e.g. due to a lack of alternative premises in the area), the large PSs will be better organised and resourced, including with additional manpower and equipment.
- iii. Review the need for time-bands. Should ELD decide to continue with time-band allocation, fewer voters will be allocated in the morning, to provide a comfortable buffer for other voters who vote outside their time-band, as the morning window is generally preferred by voters.

In retrospect, we should not have concentrated all senior voters in the morning. Going forward, we will see how best to spread out senior and non-senior voters across time-bands. Given our ageing population, we will also review the logistics (e.g. wheelchairs and availability of seats), and the location and set-up of our PSs to ensure that they are well accessible to our senior voters.

ELD's commitment to improve systems and processes

8. Through this review, ELD has drawn lessons from GE2020 and will put them right for future elections. We recognise that the GE2020 precautionary measures, while intended to protect public health and safety, reduced the voting efficiency for Singapore voters and led to sustained queues at some PSs. Even though the MCI REACH poll found that 7 in 10 voters were satisfied with their experience at the Polling Stations, that 3 in 10 voters had a less than satisfactory voting experience is not acceptable. We apologise for this, and thank voters for their patience. We would like to assure voters that ELD will improve our systems and processes as we prepare for future elections.

9. We would also like to thank all EOs for their dedication and hard work. They gave their best under difficult conditions, and did well in ensuring that the polling process remained fair, robust and safe for Singaporeans despite COVID-19.

**ISSUED BY
ELECTIONS DEPARTMENT
PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE**

10 SEPTEMBER 2020