

Singapore Management University

Institutional Knowledge at Singapore Management University

Student Publications

SMU Student Publications

8-2015

A Guide to General Elections in Singapore

Grace MORGAN

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ink.library.smu.edu.sg/studentpub>



Part of the [Political Science Commons](#)

Citation

MORGAN, Grace (ed.). A Guide to General Elections in Singapore. Singapore: SMU APolitical, 2015.
Available at <http://ink.library.smu.edu.sg/studentpub/2>

This Edited Book is brought to you for free and open access by the SMU Student Publications at Institutional Knowledge at Singapore Management University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Student Publications by an authorized administrator of Institutional Knowledge at Singapore Management University. For more information, please email cherylds@smu.edu.sg.



A Guide to General Elections in Singapore

Edited by Grace Morgan



A GUIDE TO GENERAL ELECTIONS IN SINGAPORE

Copyright © 2015 Grace Morgan

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.

Published by SMU Apolitical

c/o Singapore Management University

81 Victoria St

Singapore 188065

Website: www.smuapolitical.com

A CIP record for this book is available from the National Library Board, Singapore.

Design by Intent Design

ISBN: 978-981-09-6776-5

Printed in Singapore

A Guide to General Elections in Singapore

Edited by Grace Morgan

An SMU Apolitical initiative in partnership with the Singapore Management University:



About SMU Apolitical: Formed in 2010, SMU Apolitical provides platforms for the Singapore Management University (SMU) community to gain a better understanding of the policy-making process and the issues that affect our society today. We regularly organise dialogues and forums on a diverse range of topics, and strive to address the apathy that is prevalent among the youth today.

About the Singapore Management University: A premier university in Asia established in 2000, the SMU is internationally recognised for its world-class research and distinguished teaching. SMU is known for its highly interactive, collaborative and project-based approach to learning.

About the editor: Grace Morgan graduated from the SMU School of Law in 2014 and is a former executive committee member of SMU Apolitical. She now works at a law firm in Singapore.

Contributors: Amos Maximilian Lee, Damien Chng, Grace Maria Adam,
Mohamed Salihin Subhan

Special thanks to:

**intent
design**

Intent Design is a design firm that
believes in intrigue, innovation
& ideas that leave an intente
impression.

www.intentdesign.com.sg

KHIL
PRINTING

Associate Professor Eugene Tan, Dr Jack Lee, Benjamin T H Tan, Lisa
Farrah Ho, Hairil Rajis, Patrick Tay Wei Sheng, SMU Office of Corporate
Communications & Marketing, SMU Office of Student Life



Contents

- 08** Introduction
- 12** The Singapore Parliament
- 18** A side note on by-elections
- 22** The election process
- 34** Casting your ballot
- 40** The major political parties in Singapore
- 44** Milestones in Singapore's electoral history
- 48** An introduction to voting systems
- 56** Glossary of key terms & acronyms
- 62** Final word about voting

Introduction

Most of us regard democracy an important principle in governance. At the very heart of democracy is arguably the process of elections, as it is the means by which citizens decide who should be in power. Elections are fundamental to people choosing their representatives. They existed as early in history as in ancient Rome to select rulers such as the Holy Roman Emperor and the Pope, though voting was limited to specific segments of society.

Singapore has a system of representative democracy. This is a form of democracy where the people vote for candidates to represent them in Parliament. These representatives make laws and develop policies on their behalf. Representative democracy can be contrasted with direct democracy, such as in Switzerland, where the people vote to decide directly whether they support certain laws or policies.

Democracy

The term “democracy” originates from the Greek word δημοκρατία (dēmokratía), which combines two shorter words – δῆμος (dêmos), meaning “people”, and κράτος (krátos) meaning “power” or “rule”.

The right to vote

Voting is a vital aspect of our democratic process. In fact, the right to vote is recognised as an implied constitutional right that Singaporeans enjoy.

In Singapore, there are two separate electoral processes – the **parliamentary** process and the **presidential** process.

Within the parliamentary process, there are general elections and by-elections.

A general election must be conducted within five years of the first sitting of Parliament after the previous general election. Once this five-year period is over, Parliament is automatically dissolved by the operation of law. However, it is open to the Prime Minister to advise the President to dissolve Parliament and call for an election before this maximum period is up. In fact, this is what usually happens. A general election must be held within three months of Parliament being dissolved.

By-elections are held in between general elections when a seat is vacated. This may happen, for instance, if a Member of Parliament (MP) passes away or resigns from the political party he was in.

Presidential elections, on the other hand, are conducted every six years. The President's term is independent of Parliament's term because the President serves to "check" Parliament under certain circumstances. The next presidential election is due to be held in August 2017.

The focus of this primer is on parliamentary elections.



The Singapore Parliament

This chapter provides an introduction to the composition of Parliament, the formation of the Government and electoral boundaries.

Composition

The Singapore Parliament is composed of three types of Members of Parliament (MPs) – fully-elected MPs, Non-Constituency Members of Parliament (NCMPs) and Nominated Members of Parliament (NMPs).

Fully-elected MPs

They are the candidates who received the highest number of votes cast in their respective electoral divisions. Fully-elected MPs can vote on any motion or bill that comes before Parliament.

NCMPs

In 1984, the Constitution and Parliamentary Elections Act were amended to allow losing candidates who do not belong to the party or parties that form the Government (known as Opposition Members) to become NCMPs. At present, the maximum number of NCMPs allowed in Parliament at any given time is nine.

NCMPs are not “selected” by any committee or authority. Rather, there is a precise formula for determining the number of NCMP seats available, and who gets to be an NCMP.

At each general election, the available number of NCMP seats is calculated by subtracting the number of popularly elected Opposition Members from nine (being the maximum number of NCMPs allowed).

For example, at the 2011 General Election, there were six Opposition Members elected through popular vote. Accordingly, only three NCMP seats were available.

The NCMP seats are then allocated to the “best losers” among the Opposition Members, starting with the candidate or team of candidates with the highest percentage of votes cast. This is subject to a maximum of two NCMPs from an electoral division. Candidates who meet the criteria are declared to be elected as NCMPs.

In Parliament, NCMPs do not enjoy the complete set voting rights that fully-elected MPs have. For instance, NCMPs cannot vote on any motion relating to bills to amend the Constitution and votes of no confidence in the Government, or removal of the President from office.

NMPs

NMPs were first introduced in 1990 with the intention of bringing more independent voices to Parliament. Unlike fully-elected MPs and NCMPs, NMPs do not stand in elections and have a fixed two-and-a-half year term.

NMPs are appointed by the President on the recommendation of a Special Select Committee chaired by the Speaker of Parliament. To be nominated, a candidate must have rendered distinguished public service, brought honour to the Republic, or have distinguished themselves in the field of arts, culture, the sciences, business, industry, the professions, social or community service or the labour movement. The NMPs appointed should reflect as wide a range of independent and non-partisan views as possible.

Like NCMPs, NMPs have limited voting powers in Parliament.

How a Government is formed

After a general election, the political party which secured at least 50% plus one of the seats in Parliament (*i.e.*, the majority in Parliament) will form the Government. The President will appoint an MP who is “likely to command the confidence of the

majority of MPs” – typically the MP who is that winning party’s Secretary-General – to be Prime Minister. Other MPs from the same party will then be appointed as Ministers, and, together with the Prime Minister, they will form the Cabinet (or Government).

Coalition Governments

If no political party secured a majority of the seats in Parliament, the result is known as a hung Parliament. Political parties will usually enter into negotiations with one another and may form a coalition so as to achieve majority support in Parliament. As such, the Cabinet may eventually be made up of MPs from more than one political party.

The UK, for instance, experienced a hung Parliament following its general election in 2010. A coalition Government was formed between the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrats.

Minority Governments

If the political parties represented in Parliament cannot reach agreement on forming a coalition government, the party with the largest number of seats may try to form a minority government. Such a government is unstable as it is vulnerable to a vote of no confidence in the Prime Minister by elected MPs from other political parties. The PM could then call for Parliament to be dissolved and for another

general election to be held, or another MP with majority support would have to be appointed as PM. Since a minority Government does not have more than 50% of the seats in Parliament, it would also need co-operation from other political parties to enact laws and amend the Constitution.

Electoral boundaries

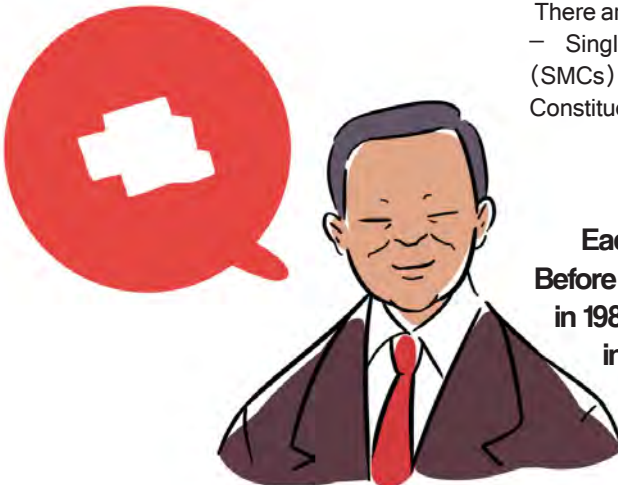
The number of elected MPs in each term of Parliament depends on the number of electoral divisions – or constituencies – there are. This is not permanently fixed by any law. An Electoral Boundaries Review Committee (EBRC) is usually appointed just before a general election to make recommendations on the boundaries. The Prime Minister may accept its recommendations. The list of electoral divisions is usually declared by the Prime Minister one or two months before the general election.

Electoral Boundaries Review Committee (EBRC)

The EBRC comes under the purview of the Prime Minister's Office. While its composition is not permanently fixed by any law, the 2015 EBRC comprised five members, which included the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Singapore Land Authority, the CEO of the Housing and Development Board and the Chief Statistician. The EBRC examines factors like population changes in making recommendations on the number and size of constituencies. It is not legally required to give reasons for its recommendations.

There are two types of constituencies – Single Member Constituencies (SMCs) and Group Representation Constituencies (GRCs).

SMCs
Each SMC returns one MP.
Before GRCs were introduced in 1988, all electoral divisions in Singapore were SMCs.



GRCs

In a GRC, MPs are voted into Parliament as a group.



A GRC can have between three and six MPs, and at least one member must belong to the Malay, Indian or another minority community of Singapore. The reasons for introducing the GRCs are first, to ensure minority representation in Parliament, and second, to reap economies of scale in estate management. The precise numbers of GRCs and MPs in each GRC, and whether the minority MP must be from the Malay community or the Indian or another minority community, are not permanently fixed by any law. This is declared by the Prime Minister when he announces the SMCs and GRCs for the general election.

The candidates in a team contesting in a GRC must either all be from the same political party, or all be independent candidates standing as a group.

Town councils

The elected MP (or MPs, in the case of GRCs) is in charge of running the town council in that electoral division. Town councils manage, maintain and improve the common areas of HDB flats and estates, such as the common corridors, void decks, lifts, water tanks, external lighting and the open spaces surrounding the estates. Its functions are stated in the Town Councils Act. However, in practice, town councils operate more like private companies rather than statutory boards.

A side note on by-elections

If a fully-elected MP's seat is vacated, for example because of death, the seat "shall be filled by election" under Article 49(1) of the Constitution. In a 2013 Court of Appeal decision, this phrase was interpreted to mean that the Prime Minister must call for a by-election within a reasonable time. However, there is no specified time frame and the Prime Minister is entitled to take into account all relevant circumstances. The Prime Minister may, for instance, decide not to hold a by-election if there is an upcoming general election.

2012 Hougang By-election

In May 2012, a by-election was held in Hougang SMC after the then-MP Yaw Shin Leong was expelled from the Workers' Party (WP). This led to a "showdown" between the People's Action Party's (PAP) Desmond Choo and the WP's Png Eng Huat. Png eventually won, with 62.09% of the votes.

2013 Punggol East By-election

In January 2013, a by-election was held in Punggol East SMC after then-Speaker of Parliament Michael Palmer resigned from the PAP. This time, four candidates vied for the position — Lee Li Lian (WP), Koh Poh Koon (PAP), Kenneth Jeyaretnam (Reform Party), and Desmond Lim (Singapore Democratic Alliance). Lee emerged victorious, winning 54.5% of the votes cast.





The election process

Who's who in a general election?

Prime Minister: person who advises the President to dissolve Parliament by Proclamation in the *Government Gazette* and to issue the Writ of Election

Returning Officer: person who oversees the entire election process and performs major functions such as issuing the notice of election and declaring the results

Presiding Officer: person appointed by the Returning Officer to preside over each polling station

Candidate: person contesting in the election

Election agent: person who is appointed by the candidate and is responsible for the conduct of the candidate's campaign

Polling agent: person appointed by the election agent to oversee polling at polling stations on the candidate's behalf

Counting agent: person appointed by the candidate or his election agent to oversee the vote counting process on the candidate's behalf

I advise the President to dissolve Parliament and to issue the Writ of Election



I oversee the entire process, from issuing the Notice of Election to declaring the results



I am appointed by the Returning Officer to preside over each polling station



I am contesting in the election



I am responsible for the conduct of the candidate's campaign



I oversee polling at polling stations on the candidate's behalf



I oversee the voting counting process on the candidate's behalf



Legislation

The key statutes relating to general elections include the Constitution, the Parliamentary Elections Act (PEA) and the Political Donations Act (PDA).

President issues the Writ of Election



The entire process begins with the President dissolving Parliament by Proclamation in the *Government Gazette* and issuing the Writ of Election. The President does so while acting on the Cabinet's advice.

The Writ of Election is a formal written order directing the Returning Officer to hold the election.

Once this writ is issued, details of Nomination Day will be announced by the Returning Officer. These include the date, time and places for the nomination of candidates, and the documents that candidates must submit on Nomination Day.

Nomination Day

Aspiring candidates submit the Nomination Paper (a prescribed form) to the Returning Officer and lodge an election deposit within the nomination period of between 11 am and 12 noon.



The election deposit is set at 8% of the annual allowance of MPs and was \$16,000 per candidate at the 2011 General Election. A candidate will lose this deposit if he receives less than 12.5% of the votes in the division he contested in. For GRCs, all candidates in the team will lose their deposits if they receive less than 12.5% of the total votes in the GRC. The purpose of the election deposit is to ensure that only serious candidates step forward, and to dissuade frivolous candidates from contesting.

At the 2011 General Election, the SDA's Desmond Lim lost his election deposit after garnering only 4.45% of the votes in Punggol East SMC.

Aspiring candidates also have to produce a Political Donation Certificate when filing the Nomination Paper. The Certificate is issued by the Registrar of Political Donations certifying that rules relating to political donations have been complied with.

Under the PDA, donations above \$10,000 must be declared. Donations can only be made by "permissible donors", who are (1) Singaporeans aged 21 and above,

(2) Singapore-controlled companies based in Singapore, and (3) the candidate's political party. Also, the maximum amount allowed for anonymous donations is \$5,000. This is to ensure transparency in the funding of electoral campaigns.

For GRCs, the Nomination Paper must be accompanied by either a Malay Community Certificate or Indian and other Minority Communities Certificate. This is to certify that at least one candidate in the team belongs to the requisite minority community.

After the nomination period ends at 12 noon, half an hour is set aside for aspiring candidates to scrutinise one another's application forms. If they have any objections, they must raise it in writing to the Returning Officer during this time. If the Returning Officer allows an objection against an aspiring candidate, he or she will not be eligible to contest in that election.

At 12.30pm, the Returning Officer will declare a contest if there are two or more eligible candidates in a particular electoral division. If so, the registered voters in that division will have to vote.

If there is no contest, the unopposed candidate will be elected by default. This is also known as a walkover.

So you want to be an MP?

To be an MP, one must, among other requirements, be 21 years old or above on Nomination Day, a Singapore citizen and must have lived in Singapore for periods adding up to at least 10 years before nomination.

Also, undischarged bankrupts, and persons convicted and sentenced to more than a year's imprisonment or a fine of more than \$2,000, among others, cannot become MPs.

Campaigning

Campaigning can begin immediately after a contest is declared and the eligible candidates announced.

This can technically last for up to 55 days, but usually lasts for nine days. The traditional modes of campaigning include rallies at designated locations, visits to homes and neighbourhoods, and political party broadcasts on television.



To hold rallies, candidates must apply for permits from the Commissioner of Police. The dates and venues for rallies are fixed by the police, and candidates may apply for permits on a first-come-first-served basis. The venues range from open fields and stadiums, to the heart of the business district for lunchtime rallies.

The rules on Internet election advertising were also relaxed in 2010. Candidates may now use the Internet to conduct their campaigns. This includes websites, discussion forums, video and photograph sharing websites, e-mail, micro-blog posts (such as Twitter), electronic media applications, blogs and social networking services like Facebook.

Finally, the maximum amount a candidate can spend on election expenses is fixed by law. For GE 2015, this limit has been increased from \$3.50 to \$4.00 per voter in each electoral division. For GRCs, it is \$4.00 per voter in each GRC divided by the number of candidates in the team. This increase is to account for inflation.

Cooling-off Day

Cooling-off Day is the day before Polling Day. On this day, no new advertising or campaigning is allowed. However, advertising material that is already out in the public domain can remain. Cooling-off Day was introduced in 2010, and first observed in the 2011 General Election. It is intended to provide voters with a day to get over the excitement and emotion of campaigning, and reflect on the issues in a rational manner.



Polling Day

Polling Day is the day that all voters cast their votes. It is, by law, a public holiday. No campaigning is allowed, though the candidates may inspect the polling stations. Polls usually close at 8pm.

The counting process



After the polling stations have closed, the Presiding Officer for each polling station will send the ballot papers as well as other election

documents to the counting places. There may be multiple counting places for each electoral division if the Returning Officer so directs.

At the counting places, the ballot boxes are opened, all the ballot papers from the different boxes are mixed, and the votes are counted in the presence of the candidates or their counting agents.

A ballot paper must be rejected as invalid if:

- a) It does not bear the signature of the Presiding Officer or the complete authentication marks;
- b) Votes are given for more than one candidate or team;
- c) Information that can lead to the identification of the voter is written or marked on the paper (apart from the serial number printed on the back);
- d) The paper is unmarked; or
- e) The vote is void for uncertainty.

However, if the voter's intention can be clearly identified, the vote cannot be rejected only because it has not been marked according to guidance given to voters on how ballot papers should be marked. For example, if the guidance says that the ballot papers should be marked with an 'X' but the voter puts a '√' instead, the vote is still valid if it is clear who the voter intended to vote for.

Before rejecting a vote, the Returning Officer must also obtain the views of the candidates or their counting agents. This is done by showing them the specified ballot paper while preventing them from seeing the serial number printed on the back.

The Returning Officer's decision is final.

Overseas voting

Singapore citizens abroad can cast their votes at the overseas polling stations if they have registered themselves as overseas electors. Polling overseas may take place before polling starts in Singapore, but has to close before polling ends in Singapore. After an overseas poll closes, the ballot boxes are brought back to Singapore for counting. They must reach the Returning Officer no later than 10 days after Polling Day in Singapore.

Recounting of votes

Candidates are entitled to ask for a recount if the difference in votes between the candidates or teams of candidates in an electoral division is 2% or less, for instance, where Candidate A secures 42.1% of the votes cast and Candidate B secures 43.8%.

The law only allows for one recount per electoral division during each election. Candidates or their counting agents must also be given reasonable opportunity to ask for a recount before the results for that electoral division are declared.

One interesting example is the result at Potong Pasir SMC during the 2011 General Election. The margin was so slim that a recount was carried out. The eventual winner, Sitoh Yih Pin of the PAP, won a mere 114 votes (or 0.8% of the total number of votes cast) more than his opponent, Lina Chiam of the Singapore People's Party (SPP) – a close race indeed!

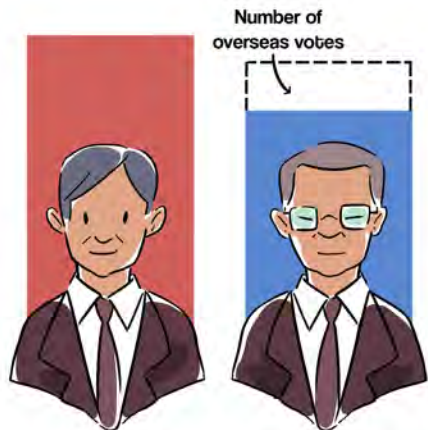
Declaration of the election results

The Returning Officer declares that the local votes counted for the electoral division are “conclusive of the results” if, based on the margins the winner will not change



even after the overseas votes are taken into account.

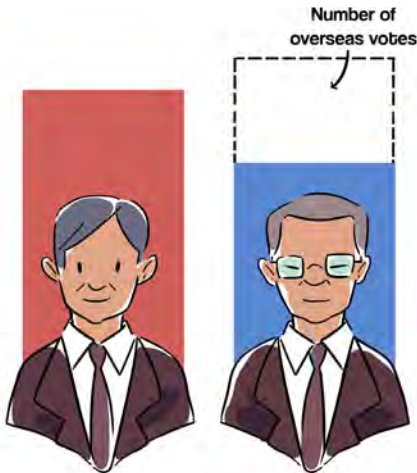
For instance, let's say that after counting the local votes, Candidate A got 50.6% and Candidate B 48% of these votes. The vote difference between the candidates is 2.6%. Assuming that the overseas votes in that electoral division amount to 1.5% of the votes cast, even if all the overseas voters cast their ballots for Candidate B he would only get 49.5% of the vote.



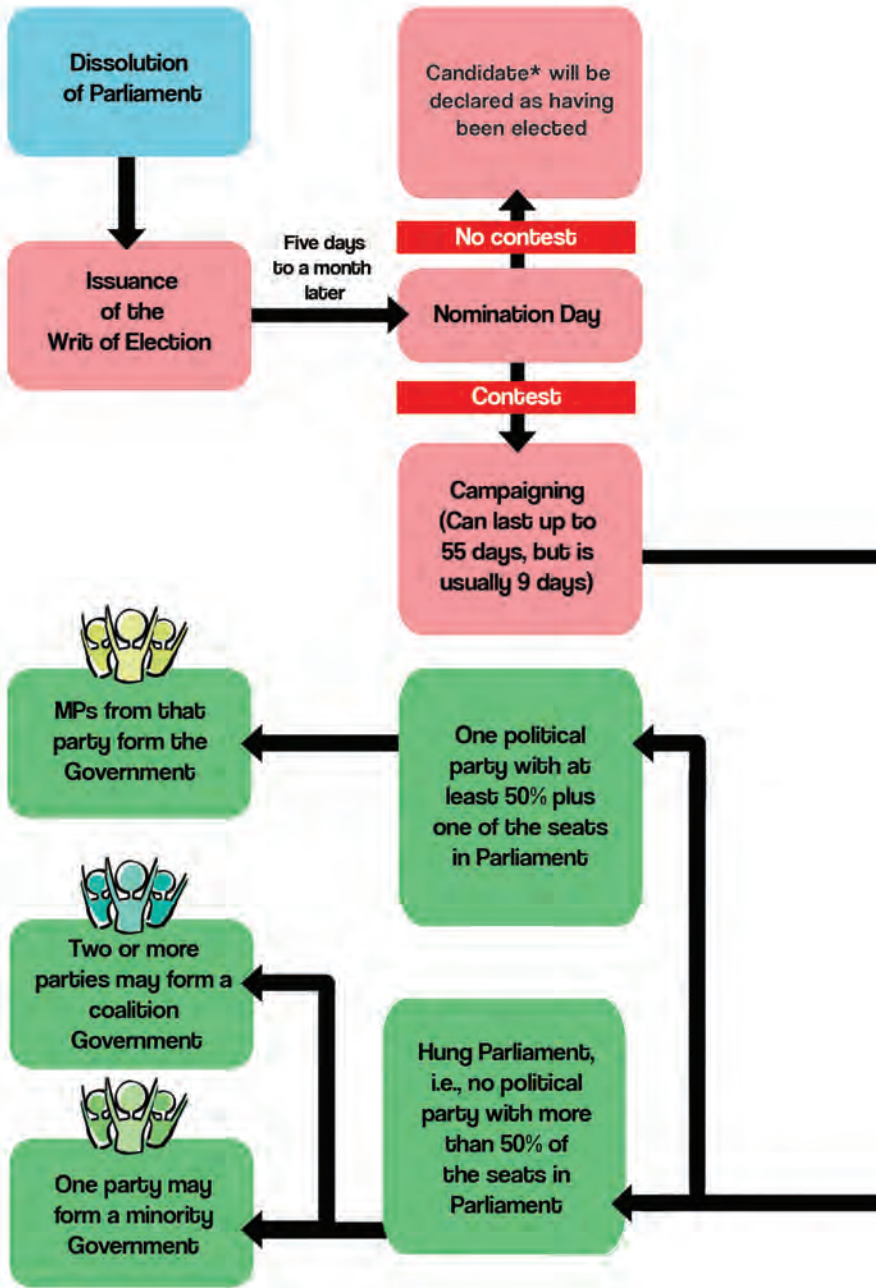
The Returning Officer can declare on Polling Day that Candidate A has conclusively won the election, as the overseas votes will not affect the outcome.

However, if, based on the number of overseas votes and margins between the candidates, the winner could potentially be different if the overseas votes are taken into account, the Returning Officer will declare that the local votes counted are “inconclusive of the results”.

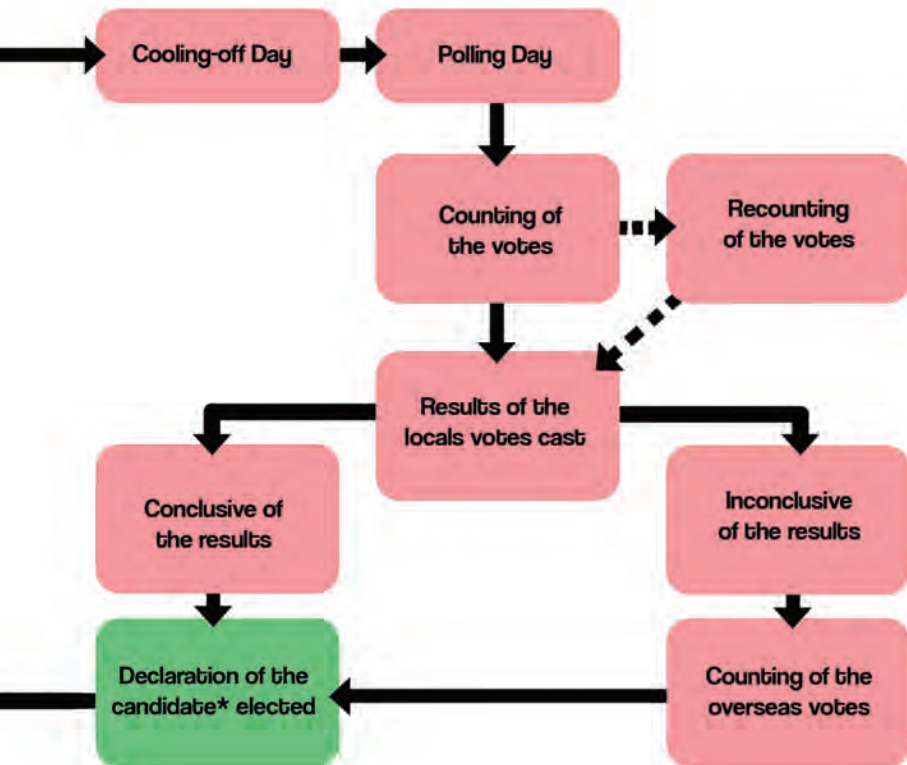
This is where, for instance, after counting the local votes the difference between Candidates A and B is 2.6%, and the overseas votes in that electoral division amount to 3.5% of the votes cast. This means that the confirmed results for that electoral division will only be announced after the overseas votes are counted.



Yam Ah Mee, the Returning Officer of the 2011 General Election, quickly shot to fame following the televised coverage of his declaration of the election results. He was praised for his calm demeanour and pleasant voice, with many YouTube videos made in support of him.



The entire process in a nutshell



* candidates in the case of a GRC

Casting your ballot

Voting is a crucial aspect of a representative democracy like ours, where elected officials make decisions on behalf of the people. This is in contrast to a direct democracy, where referendums are often held.

Even though the right to vote is not expressly written in the Constitution, it has been recognised by the Government as an implied constitutional right of Singapore citizens.

Eligibility to vote

Voting is compulsory for all eligible voters in a contested electoral division.

To be eligible to vote, one's name must have been included in the latest certified Register of Electors for that electoral division. To be included in the Register of Electors, one must be a Singapore citizen aged 21 and above and ordinarily resident in Singapore at an address in the electoral division.

Eligible voters will receive their poll cards by mail, without the need for registration. The poll card tells the voter which polling station to cast his or her ballot at.

Voters requiring special assistance

Arrangements are made at polling stations for disabled persons who require help to vote. People who cannot mark ballot papers by themselves can give instructions to elections officials who will mark the papers on their behalf, and visually impaired voters can use a stencil to mark their own ballots.

Your vote is secret.

The law guarantees the secrecy of votes, for example, by requiring everyone authorised to be present at polling stations or counting places to make an oath of secrecy. After the election, all ballot papers and documents relating to the election are sealed and placed in the ballot boxes, which are stored securely at the Supreme Court for six months before being destroyed. Representatives of candidates at the election are invited to check that the ballot boxes have not been reopened, and to witness the sealed boxes being burned in the incinerator.

The serial numbers on ballot papers are to enable strict accounting of all ballots issued and cast. They also prevent allegations of voter impersonation, when another person pretends to be a registered voter and votes on his or her behalf. While serial numbers could potentially compromise ballot secrecy, ballot papers can only be examined under strict conditions. This is similar to practices employed in countries such as the UK and the Philippines.

Four steps to making your choice count:

1 On Polling Day, go to the polling station stated on your poll card. Polling stations will be open from 8am to 8pm.

Voters must bring along the original of one of these three identification documents:

- NRIC; or
- Singapore passport; or
- for uniformed personnel, the identity card issued by the Ministry of Defence, Singapore Police Force or Singapore Civil Defence Force.

2 At the polling station, present your poll card and ID to the election officials on duty, and follow their directions. You will receive an official ballot paper. Proceed to the voting booth.

3 Inside the booth, mark your choice on your ballot paper clearly with an 'X' in the empty box-space beside the name, photo and symbol of the candidate (or candidates for GRCs) of your choice.



Do not sign or make any marks on the ballot paper that may identify you, and do not show your ballot paper to anyone else in the polling station.

4 Fold your ballot paper over your mark so as to cover your choice. Drop the folded ballot paper into a ballot box and leave the polling station.



The major political parties in Singapore

While Singapore has a one-party dominant system, it is not a one-party state. In fact, since Singapore gained independence in 1965, there have been at least 30 registered political parties. Opposition parties differ in ideologies and policy proposals, and are in fact quite diverse.



Democratic Progressive Party (DPP)

The DPP was first set up in 1973 by several former members of the Workers' Party. It was named the Singapore United Front during its formation, and renamed the Democratic Progressive Party in 1992. The party is currently led by Benjamin Pwee.



National Solidarity Party (NSP)

The NSP was formed in 1987. It was a founding member of the Singapore Democratic Alliance (SDA), but withdrew from the alliance in 2007. The NSP has participated in every general election since 1988. In the 2011 General Election, the NSP was the opposition party that fielded the largest number of candidates.



People's Action Party (PAP)

The PAP is the dominant and ruling party in Singapore's political scene. Since winning a majority in the 1959 General Election, the PAP has unflinchingly held on to power with a convincing majority. For many years, the secretary-general of the PAP was the late Mr Lee Kuan Yew who served as the Prime Minister of Singapore from 1959 to 1990. Goh Chok Tong then took over as Secretary-General in 1991. The current Secretary-General of the PAP is Lee Hsien Loong, who has also been Singapore's Prime Minister since 12 August 2004.



People's Power Party (PPP)

The PPP was formed by former NSP Secretary-General Goh Meng Seng. The application to register the party was submitted on 15 May 2015 and approved in July 2015.



Pertubuhan Kebangsaan Melayu Singapura (PKMS), also known as the Singapore Malay National Organisation

The PKMS originated as an extension of the Johor Bahru branch of the United Malay National Organisation (UMNO) after World War II. In 1961, it became registered as the Singapore United Malay National Organisation (SUMNO), and assumed its current name in 1967.

Reform Party (RP)



The Reform Party was formed on 3 July 2008, and was founded by the late Mr J B Jeyaretnam. It contested in West Coast and Ang Mo Kio GRCs at the 2011 General Election. The party is currently led by Kenneth Jeyaretnam.

Singapore Democratic Alliance (SDA)

The SDA is a coalition of political parties, which was registered in 2001. While not a formal merger, parties in the alliance contest in elections under the SDA banner. The alliance is presently led by Desmond Lim as its Secretary-General.



Singapore Democratic Party (SDP)

The SDP was founded in 1980 by Chiam See Tong, who left the party in the 1990s. The party is now led by Chee Soon Juan. It has recently sought to refresh its party image and now publishes detailed policy papers on a regular basis.



Singapore Justice Party (SJP)

The SJP was established in 1972 by a group of shipyard workers. It remains a member of the SDA.



Singapore People's Party (SPP)

The SPP was formed in 1994. In 2001, the SPP became a founding member of the SDA, together with three other parties. However, SPP withdrew from the alliance in 2011 and contested independently in the general election held that year.



Singaporeans First Party (SingFirst)

Officially registered on 25 August 2014, SingFirst is one of the newest political parties in Singapore. The eleven founding members include ex-grassroots leaders, ex-civil servants and architects. SingFirst is currently led by former presidential candidate Tan Jee Say.



Workers' Party (WP)

The WP was founded in 1957 by Singapore's then-Chief Minister, David Marshall. In 1981, the party's then-leader J B Jeyaretnam became the first opposition MP to be elected to Parliament since Singapore's independence in 1965, when he defeated the PAP in a by-election at the constituency of Anson. Jeyaretnam later resigned from the WP, which is now led by Low Thia Khiang. The WP has maintained a consistent presence in Parliament.



Milestones in Singapore's electoral history



Reinstatement of the Legislative Council after WWII

After World War II, the Legislative Council system used in the pre-war period was reinstated when Singapore became a Crown Colony in 1946. Provisions were made to allow for more local representation in the government, though colony-appointed officials held the majority of seats. Voting rights were extended to British subjects only.

Establishment of the Legislative Assembly

In 1953, a Constitutional Commission, headed by Sir George Rendel, was set up to review the constitutional arrangements then. The Rendel Commission's recommendations, which included the transformation of the largely-appointed Legislative Council into a largely-elected Legislative Assembly, were implemented in 1955.

1955 and 1959 Legislative Assembly Elections

The 1955 Legislative Assembly election saw a record 79 candidates contesting for 25 seats. The Labour Front, led by David Marshall, won 10 seats. Marshall hence became Singapore's first Chief Minister.

In 1958, the Singapore (Constitution) Order in Council was issued. It created the position of the Prime Minister and a fully-elected 51-seat Legislative Assembly.

The 1959 Legislative Assembly General Election had 13 political parties contesting for seats in 51 electoral divisions. The PAP achieved a landslide victory, winning 43 seats. Lee Kuan Yew, who was the Secretary-General of the PAP, became Singapore's first Prime Minister on 5 June 1959.



Establishment of the Parliament of Singapore

During the merger with Malaysia in 1963, Singapore was allocated 15 out of 127 seats in the federal legislature. Under the State Constitution, Singapore also kept her own executive government and Legislative Assembly. Singapore maintained considerable powers over finance, labour and education, but left control over foreign affairs, defence and internal security to the central government.



Following the separation from Malaysia in 1965, the Legislative Assembly was reconstituted as the Parliament of Singapore. In 1966, the PAP became the sole party in Parliament after MPs of the Barisan Socialis opposition party resigned.

1968, 1972, 1976 and 1980 General Elections

The 1968 General Election marked the first time that the PAP (or any single party) won every single seat in Parliament. The PAP's success was repeated in subsequent elections, winning all 65, 69 and 72 parliamentary seats in 1972, 1976 and 1980 respectively.



1981 By-election

J B Jeyaratnam of the WP won the by-election for the Anson electoral division – the first opposition victory since Singapore's independence. It was a three-cornered fight between Jeyaratnam, the United People's Front candidate Harbans Singh and the PAP candidate Pang Kim Hin.



2011 General Election

A record 82 out of the 87 seats in Parliament were contested, with the WP winning the five-seat Aljunied GRC. It marked the first ever opposition victory in a GRC. The PAP nonetheless retained its parliamentary dominance, winning 81 out of the 87 seats available.

An introduction to voting systems

A voting system is the method by which voters express their choices, and how these choices are translated into the eventual election of candidates into public office. Voting systems vary significantly. These differences often lead to tangible differences in determining who gets elected, the formation of the Government and hence governance in the country.

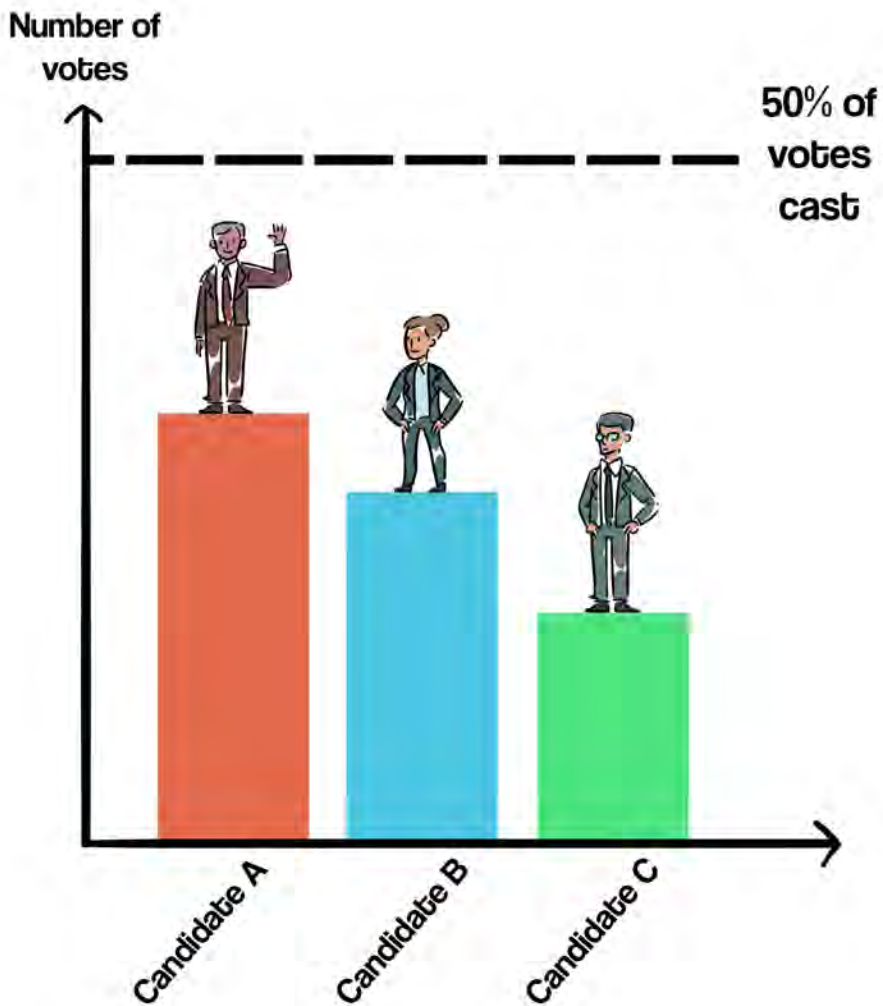
First-past-the-post system

In Singapore, we use the first-past-the-post (FPTP), or simple plurality, system for both parliamentary and presidential elections. This means the candidate with the most number of votes will be the winner, regardless of the actual winning margin.

Another effect of the FPTP system is that the eventual winner may not actually have the majority (more than 50%) of votes – he just needs to have more than the rest. This is more likely to happen when there are more than two candidates taking part.

For example, during the 2011 Presidential Election, four candidates contested. The votes were mostly split between three of the candidates, and Tony Tan Keng Yam emerged victorious with 35.2% of the votes cast.

Hence, a candidate can win an election by gaining even just one vote more than his opponent(s)!



Under the FPTP system, Candidate A wins the elections as he has more votes than Candidate B or C. This is even though he did not get a majority (more than 50%) of the votes.

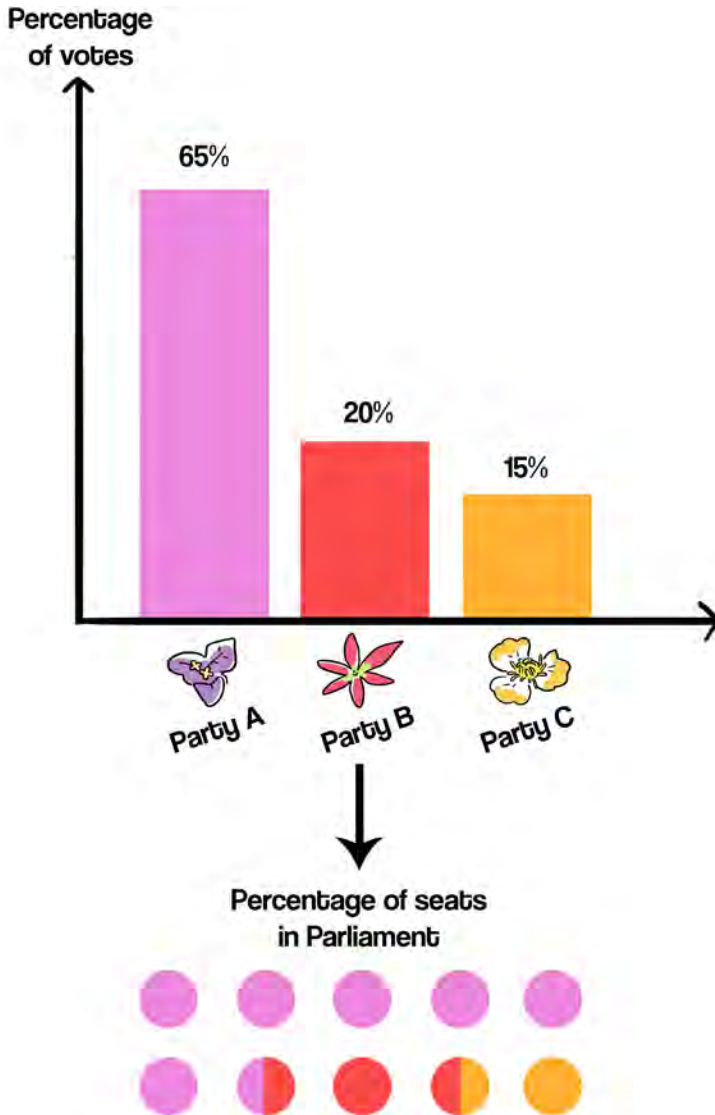
Proportional representation

In proportional representation (PR), seats in Parliament are allocated in proportion to the overall percentage of votes each party receives. For instance, if a political party received 20% of the votes cast at a general election, then 20% of the parliamentary seats will be allocated to that party.

While there are several variants of the system, PR is generally better for smaller parties as they can be allocated seats without having to defeat a bigger party outright in any electoral division like in the FPTP system.

Related to this is the fact that PR almost always leads to a coalition Government. Depending on the country, this may result in delayed decision-making and less stability if political parties cannot agree amongst themselves. For instance, in Belgium, a coalition Government was finally formed in 2011 – 540 days after the election.

Other countries with PR include the Netherlands and Indonesia.



In PR, the overall percentage of votes each party won at the election will generally translate into the percentage of the seats in Parliament each party gets. This is subject different rules and requirements each country may have.

Electoral college system

In an electoral college system, voters do not actually vote for the candidates who will enter office. Instead, voters elect persons known as electors who will then make the choice on their behalf.

For example, in the United States, citizens do not vote directly for the President. Instead, they vote for an elector in their state, who will then vote for the President as part of the Electoral College. Electors are usually pledged to a particular presidential candidate. While they may not be required by law to honour a pledge, electors in the US rarely vote contrary to a pledge.



Glossary of key terms & acronyms

Bill

Draft legislation

Ballot box

A box into which voters place the ballot papers that they have marked

Ballot paper

A piece of paper printed with the candidates' names, photos and party symbol on which a voter indicates whom he or she has voted for

By-election

An election held in between general elections to fill a parliamentary seat that has become vacant

Constitution

Constitution of the Republic of Singapore (1985 Revised Edition, 1999 Reprint), which is the supreme law of Singapore. Ordinary laws that are inconsistent with the Constitution are void

Counting places

Designated locations other than polling stations where votes are counted

Court of Appeal

The highest court in Singapore and court of final appeal

EBRC

Electoral Boundaries Review Committee, which is appointed by the Prime Minister to help decide if there should be changes to the number of SMCs and GRCs, and the boundaries of the constituencies, in the next general election

Electoral division

Geographical area of which the electorate is represented by a seat (for SMCs) or seats (for GRCs) in Parliament, also known as a "constituency"

FPTP

The first-past-the-post system of voting where the candidate with the most number of votes in an electoral division wins a seat in Parliament

Government

Gazette

An official journal issued regularly in which laws, legal notices and the other government matters are published

GRC

Group Representation Constituency, an electoral division in which a group of candidates is voted into Parliament as a team

Hung Parliament

The situation where no political party has the majority (*i.e.*, at least 50% plus one) of seats in Parliament

MP

Member of Parliament

NCMP

Non-constituency Member of Parliament, who is declared elected to Parliament from among opposition MPs who did not succeed in the polls but were the “best losers”

NMP

Nominated Member of Parliament, who is not elected but appointed to Parliament by the President on the recommendation of a Special Select Committee of Parliament

Nomination Paper

Form to be submitted to the Returning Officer by a potential candidate, along with other documents such as the Political Donation Certificate, between 11 am and 12 noon on Nomination Day

PDA

Political Donations Act (Chapter 236, 2001 Revised Edition, which seeks to ensure transparency in the funding of electoral campaigns by forbidding foreign pdonations and requiring information about people who make large donations to be disclosed

PEA

Parliamentary Elections Act (Chapter 218, 2011 Revised Edition), the main law setting out rules on how elections to Parliament are to be held

Poll card

A card which is sent by post to a voter to tell him or her which polling station to visit to vote

Polling station

Place where voters cast their votes

Political Donation Certificate

Document issued by the Registrar of Political Donations certifying that the requirements in the PDA have been complied with

PR

The proportional representation system of voting where parties are allocated seats in proportion to the overall number of votes received

Proclamation

A formal announcement made by the President which is published in the *Government Gazette*

Representative democracy

A form of democracy where elected officials represent the people in making laws and developing policies, as opposed to direct democracy in which the people vote directly for or against certain laws and policies

SMC

Single Member Constituency, an electoral division in which a single candidate is elected into Parliament

Walkover

A situation where there is only one eligible candidate (or team of Candidates for GRCs) in an electoral division, who is (are) then elected by default

Writ

A formal written order



Final word about voting

Be informed!

Get to know the candidates contesting in your electoral division by reading up about them and attending their rallies. Also, be familiar with the national issues affecting Singaporeans, and how the various political parties propose to address these issues. This will help you make an informed choice.

Be prepared!

On Polling Day, go to the polling station stated on your poll card. Polling stations will be open from 8am to 8pm. Only registered voters will be allowed entry into the polling area. For voters with special needs, election officials will be there to assist.

Bring along your original NRIC, Singapore passport or other identity card for uniformed personnel.

Be counted!

At the polling station, present your poll card and ID to the election officials. You will receive an official ballot paper.

Mark your choice on your ballot paper clearly with an 'X' in the empty box-space beside the name, photo and symbol of your chosen candidate (or candidates for GRCs).

Do not sign or make any marks on the ballot paper that may identify you, and do not show your ballot paper to anyone else in the polling station.

Leave the polling station after casting your ballot.



Voting is compulsory



Your vote is secret



**Every vote matters, so
make your choice count!**

With GE2015 well underway, this guide contains everything you need to get up to speed on general elections in Singapore. In this rapidly changing and increasingly contested political landscape, we should strive towards being an informed citizenry and electorate. This guide seeks to provide information in an accessible manner, from the who's who in a general election, to the stages of the electoral process and political parties in Singapore, with infographics and illustrations to aid the reader.

This booklet is the second of a series of primers introducing public law concepts to the general public in an easy-to-understand way. The first, *The Singapore Constitution: A Brief Introduction*, was launched in January 2014.

ISBN 9789810967765



9 789810 967765