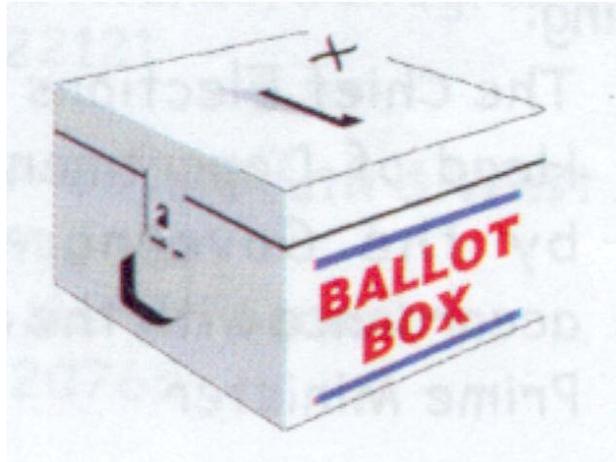


Election Day Guidelines For Polling Agents



***Elections and Boundaries Department
Belize***

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About This Manual

An attempt has been made in this Manual to present the basic rules and regulations, which pertain to Elections in Belize. Its preparation was guided by the assumption that it will be used as a quick reference and guide only, and not as a substitute for the careful reading and study of the source material laid out in the Representation of The People Act (ROPA), Chapter 9 of the Laws of Belize, and other Acts pertaining to Elections.

The Manual was updated in May of 2005 to include Statutory Instruments as follows:

- ***The Representation of The People Act***
 - No. 43 of 2003
 - ❑ To allow for more Counting Agents and more ballot boxes to be counted simultaneously for General Elections
 - No. 65 of 2004
 - ❑ Incapacitated persons to be allowed to bring to the Polling Station a person of his/her choice to mark the ballot paper on his/her behalf and place such in the ballot box
 - No 66 of 2004
 - ❑ Persons entitled to vote are those persons whose names appear on the register of electors as existing on the Nomination Day
- ***Town and City Councils***
 - No. 68 of 2004, No. 67 of 2004
 - ❑ Persons entitled to vote are those persons whose names appear on the register of electors as existing on the Nomination Day
 - ❑ Incapacitated persons to be allowed to bring to the Polling Station a person of his/her choice to mark the ballot paper on his/her behalf and place such in the ballot box

The Elections and Boundaries Department, in keeping with its commitment to continuous improvement, would welcome recommendations and suggestions to increase the utility and value of this Manual.

1. To the Polling Agent and Candidate

As stakeholders in the voting process, the role of the Polling Agent is essential in providing an environment of transparency in the Polling and Counting Stations. These guidelines are documented in accordance with Election Rules and Management Rules to assist Candidates and Agents in the performance of their duties effectively on Election Day.

Whereas Polling Agents and Candidates are expected to protect their interests, the Presiding Officer is the Manager of the Polling Station and the Returning Officer and his/her Assistant are the overall Administrators. Their decisions are final. Decisions of the Returning Officer et al are subject to be petitioned by interested Parties after Election day, as per The Representation of The People Act Chapter 9 Part VIII, “Disputed Elections,” Sections 45 - 63.

2. Polling Agents

Who Are Polling Agents

Polling Agents are representatives of Candidates officially designated to witness the polling and counting processes on behalf of their Candidates at specific Polling and Counting Stations.

Each Candidate may appoint Polling Agents to attend at Polling and Counting Stations in a constituency/municipality being contested. No more than **two** Polling Agents per Political Party are allowed within a Polling Station at any one time. No more than **three** Polling Agents per Political Party are to be appointed to a Counting Station.

“**Runners**” visit Polling Agents from time to time. While inside the Polling Station, a “**Runner**” must limit his/her time and not interfere/influence the voters nor the process.

Appointment of Polling Agents

Appointment of an agent is made in writing to the Returning Officer, indicating the name and address of the appointee and duly signed by the Candidate. Application Forms can be obtained from Returning Officers and the Central Office of the Elections and Boundaries Department. Applications are to be filed no later than **twenty-four hours** before the commencement of Polls.

Roles of The Polling Agent

- To witness all aspects of the voting and counting processes
- Prior to the opening of polls, examine the ballot box to ensure it is empty; and inspect the voting booth to ensure there is nothing there, which may in anyway, influence the voter
- May, through the Presiding Officer challenge and/or verify the identity of an elector
- To witness the marking of ballots of Incapacitated Voters

Responsibilities of The Polling Agent

- To perform their functions in accordance with the election rules
- To cooperate fully with the instructions of the Election Officers
- To bring to the attention of the Presiding Officer/Returning Officer any action which they consider is not in accordance with the provisions of the election rules
- To refrain from speaking to, or attempting to influence any voter, from the time the voter enters the Polling Station, until he/she leaves the Polling Station

Non-Attendance of Candidates and/or Agents will not invalidate the Voting and/or Counting proceedings.

3. Types of Elections in Belize

General Elections

National Elections are conducted approximately every five years to elect leaders to the National Assembly. Twenty-nine Area Representatives are elected.

Municipal Elections

Town and City Council Elections are conducted approximately every three years to elect leaders at the municipal level. One Mayor and six Councillors are elected.

Village/Community Council Elections

A general Village Council Election is called every three years to elect leaders at the village level. One Chairman and six Members are elected.

Referendum

A Referendum can be called at anytime for electors to approve specific issues of national importance. The National Assembly passes a resolution to declare that a certain matter is of sufficient national importance, and electors exercise their franchise to vote for or against the issue.

4. Who Are Election Officers

Appointment

The Chief Elections Officer monitors the conduct of Elections before, during and after the Polls. It is the Election Officers who conduct and manage the Elections. All Election Officers are senior public officers who are appointed by the Elections and Boundaries Commission through the Chief Elections Officer. An Election Officer must take an Oath of Office. Election Officers are:

- Returning Officers
- Election Clerks

Returning Officer

A Returning Officer is assigned to an Electoral Division or a Municipality. The responsibilities of the Returning Officer are:

- Overall management of the election procedure in his Electoral Division
- Distribution of election supplies to Presiding Officers and other election officers
- Accepting proxies and maintaining a record of such
- Supervision of counting
- Announcing of results
- Reporting of final results to the Chief Elections Officer on the completion of counting
- Certification of final results to the Chief Elections Officer

The work of the Returning Officer starts immediately with his appointment. He works closely with the Elections and Boundaries Department from the time of his appointment to the announcement of the election results. The first assignment is the receipt of nominations for candidates contesting the election.

The Returning Officer coordinates the work of his officers and ensures a state of preparedness. Before polling, he visits his Polling Stations accompanied by Presiding Officers to ensure that the stations are secure and that the environment both inside and outside is adequate for voting.

On Election Day, the Returning Officer visits, at intervals, each Polling Station in his jurisdiction during polling to satisfy himself that all is well. He consults with the Presiding Officer, offers advice and solves problems when necessary.

After the close of polls, he supervises the counting of votes and announces the results.

Election Clerk

The Election Clerk is to assist the Returning Officer. The Returning Officer can assign any election duty to his Election Clerk before and during the day of election.

Presiding Officer

The Presiding Officer is responsible for the supervision of the taking of the poll in the Polling Station on Election Day and ensures that the station functions efficiently and effectively. Other responsibilities of the Presiding Officer are to:

- Collect from the Returning Officer, prior to Election Day, all supplies for use in the Polling Station
- Inspect the Polling Station and satisfy himself that it is prepared for Election Day. He must arrange the station in a manner that will facilitate orderly voting
- Inspect and open all ballot boxes in the presence of witnesses i.e., Candidates or Polling Agents or Electors
- To ensure that ballot boxes are empty before the opening of poll
- Make the required entries in the Station Diary, signed by witnesses
- Declare the Polling Station open for voting
- Regulate the number of voters within the Polling Station
- **Initial** each ballot paper before issuing to voter
- Ensure that the voter's right forefinger, to at least the first joint, is dipped in indelible ink
- Mark the register to indicate that the voter has voted
- Cancel and **initial** spoiled ballot papers by marking "Cancelled" across them
- Ensure that **only** authorized persons are allowed inside the Polling Station
- Resolve any problems inside the Polling Station in an amicable manner
- Assist incapacitated voters, in the presence of Polling Agents
- Ensure that information on any elector not permitted to vote is recorded in the Station Diary
- Ensure that the Polling Agents are permitted to witness the process without interfering with the electors and the proceedings
- Seal ballot boxes, at the close of polls, in the presence of Polling Agents

- Escort ballot boxes to the Counting Station

Poll Clerk

The Poll Clerk is to assist the Presiding Officer. He is required to be at the Polling Station at least one hour before the polls are opened. The Poll Clerk inspects the identification card of every elector entering the Polling Station, to ensure that his/her name is on the Voters' List or in the Electoral Binder. He sends the elector to the Presiding Officer for a ballot paper. The Poll Clerk assists with the process of sealing all documents and ballot boxes at the close of polls at 6:00 p.m. The main functions of the Poll Clerk are to:

- Assist in monitoring the smooth flow of electors inside the Polling Station
- Call the name of the elector and inspect the identification card to ensure that the name appears on the Voters List
- Mark a line with ink over the name of the elector on the Voters List to indicate that the elector has voted
- Assist the elector to dip his right forefinger up to the first joint in indelible ink
- Observe that the elector deposits his ballot paper inside the ballot box

Counting Clerk

The Counting Clerk works in the Counting Station. He assists in the reconciliation and counting of votes under the supervision of the Returning Officer.

5. Polling Stations and Election Supplies

Polling Station

Establishing the Polling Station

The Polling Station refers to the room or building where voting takes place. It is usually a public building e.g. classrooms, and should be accessible to all voters. It comprises furniture, ballot boxes and voting booths. All instructions to electors are placed outside of the Polling

Station. Entry and exit signs are to be visible at all times.

Limits of The Polling Station

There will be a demarcation of one hundred (100) yards from the Polling Station where no person can assemble or congregate. The law prohibits politicians and campaigners to canvass an elector within the line. The Presiding Officer can request the assistance of the Police in removing persons violating the law.

Hours of Voting

The Polls open at **7:00 a.m.** and closes at **6:00 p.m.** When the Presiding Officer announces the close of Polls at **6:00 p.m.**, one Police Officer on duty will stand behind the last person in the line to deter other persons from joining the line. Voting continues until all persons in the line have voted.

Who May Visit the Polling Station

The Returning Officer

The Returning Officer is the person who is in charge of the conduct of elections in a constituency/municipality.

The Election Clerk

The Election Clerk is the assistant to the Returning Officer and can visit the Polling/Counting Stations in a constituency/municipality.

The Chief Elections Officer

The Chief Elections Officer (CEO) is the head of the Elections and Boundaries Department. The CEO may appoint other staff to visit any Polling/Counting Stations.

The Candidate

Candidates representing any of the Political Parties are authorized to visit any Polling Station within their Electoral Division. While inside the Polling Station, the candidate must limit his/her time and not interfere/influence the voters, nor the process.

The Polling Agent

Polling Agents are persons appointed by candidates to represent them inside the Polling Stations. They observe the process and report to their Candidates. They are not allowed to question any voter. Not more than **two** agents per Political Party are to be allowed in the Polling Station and not more than **three** in the Counting Station.

“**Runners**” are allowed limited time to consult with Polling Agents in the Polling Station **only**.

6. Nomination Procedure

Each candidate deposits with the Government Treasury:

- For General Elections - \$200.00
- For Town Council Elections - \$ 25.00
- City of Belmopan and Belize
City Councils Elections - \$ 50.00

The original receipt issued by the Government Treasury is to be shown to the Returning Officer.

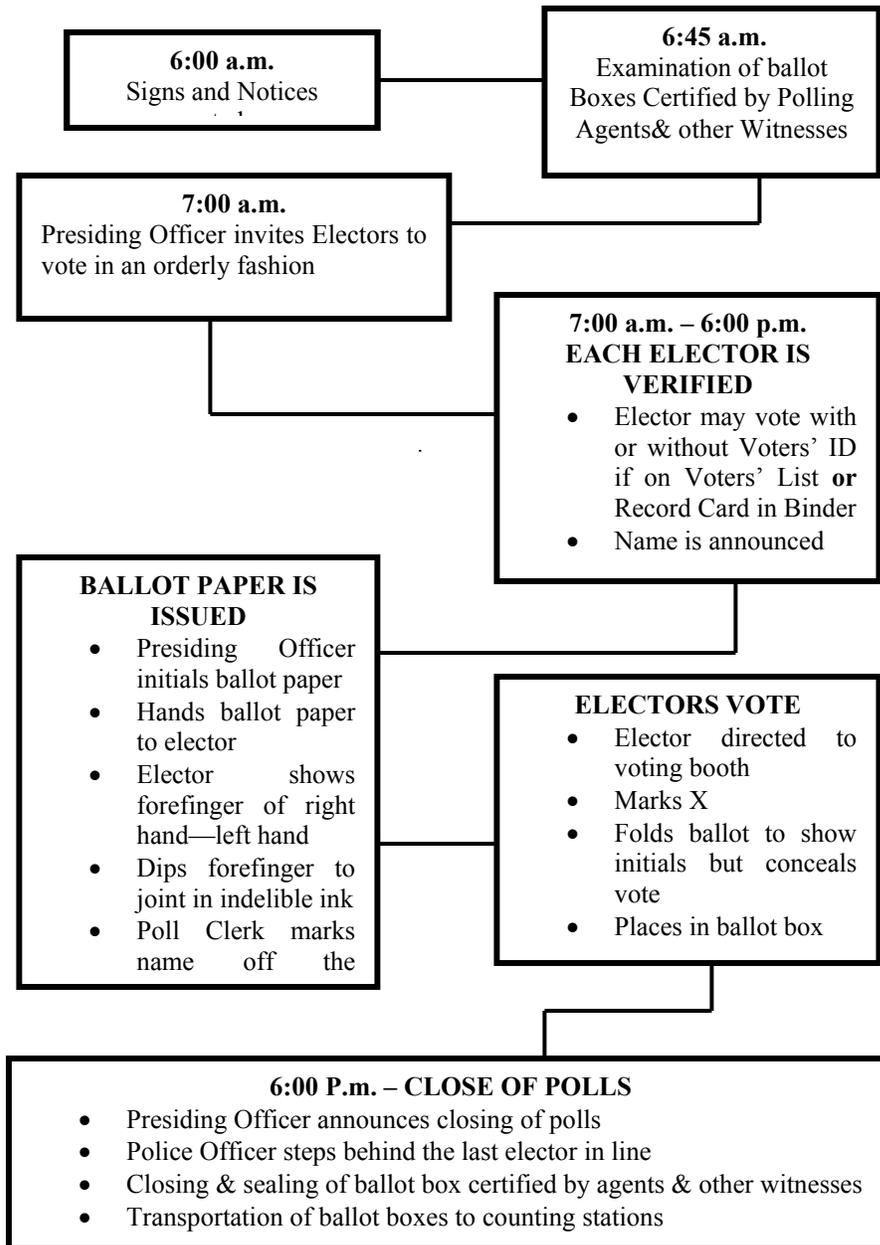
The Returning Officer receives nominations from all candidates of a constituency/municipality.

The Returning Officer gives the nomination paper to the persons nominating.

- For **General Elections** six persons whose names appear on the Voters' List sign the nomination form as witnesses for a Candidate. The Candidate assents to the nomination by signing on the nomination form. If at four o'clock in the afternoon only one Candidate has been nominated for the seat to be filled, the Returning Officer declares such Candidate to have been elected and certifies by endorsing the return of that Candidate on Form 20 and returns the Writ to the Chief Elections Officer for transmission to the Governor-General

For **Municipal Elections** two persons whose names appear on the Voters' List sign the nomination form as witnesses to the Candidate. The Candidate assents to the nomination by signing on the nomination form. One hour is given for nomination—11:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon.

8. Voting Procedure



Only registered electors can vote in a Referendum, Municipal or General Election. An elector can vote **with** or **without** a Voters' Identification Card if his name appears on the Voters' List and/or has a Record Card in the binder. See the following examples.

- i. A voter is **not** on the Voters' List but **has** a record card in the Binder; he is to be allowed to vote

- ii. A voter **has** an Identification Card, but is **neither** on the Voters' List **nor** in the Binder; he is **not** to be allowed to vote.

The Presiding Officer is to record such occurrences in his diary.

Other Rules

- Any candidate or polling agent may challenge the identity of an elector
- The elector may be refused a ballot paper if he does not comply with the staining of the forefinger of the right hand or the left hand if no right

Questions That May be put to the Voter

If the elector's identity is called into question, the Presiding Officer has the right to ask questions of the elector relating to age, place of residence etc. for example:

1. Are you the same person whose name appears on this Voters' List?
2. Have you voted in this election?

The Presiding Officer may ask the above questions of any voter at the time of voting. The Candidate or Agent may ask the abovementioned questions through the Presiding Officer.

Spoilt Ballot

Should an elector spoil his ballot paper, the Presiding Officer is to issue another after retrieving, canceling and recording the initial ballot paper. The elector delivers the spoilt ballot paper to the Presiding Officer who issues another ballot paper to the elector. The Presiding Officer cancels the spoilt ballot paper by writing the word **Cancelled** across the face of the ballot. He initials and retains the cancelled ballot paper.

9. Counting Procedure

Who May be Admitted into The Counting Station

1. Only the following are allowed inside the Counting Station by the Returning Officer and his/her Assistant:
 - *Election Officers*
 - Returning Officer
 - Election Clerk
 - Presiding Officer
 - Counting Clerk
 - Police Officers
 - The Chief Elections Officer and/or Staff
 - The Candidate
 - Town and City Council Elections
 - Not more than **two (2)** candidates as **Observers**
 - General Elections
 - Not more than **one (1)** candidate as **Observer**
 - The Agents
 - Town and City Council Elections
 - A maximum of **two (2)** Agents per box per Party/Independent Candidate
 - General Elections
 - A maximum of **two (2)** Agents per box per candidate

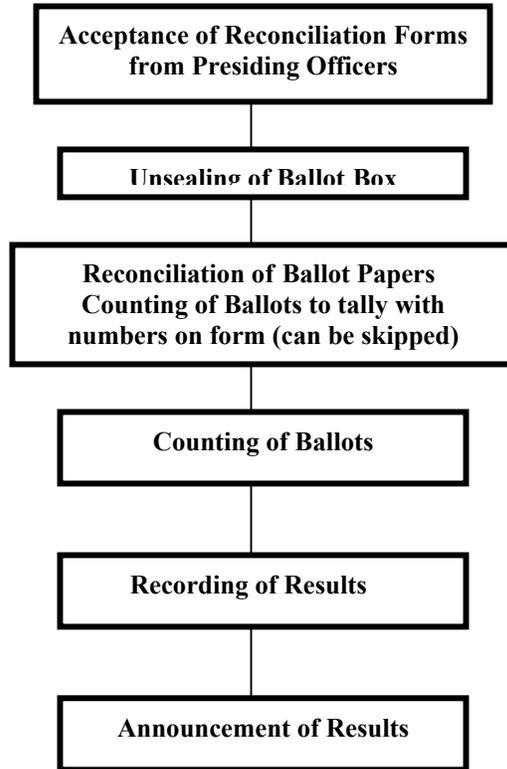
Counting of Votes—The Process

The Returning Officer receives all ballot boxes from the Presiding Officers. He then reads the rules of conduct and the count. He dismisses the Presiding Officers and welcomes the Counting Officers, Polling/Counting Agents and Observers. Tally sheets issued by the

Elections and Boundaries Department are to be used to record the

count. The Returning Officer is to ensure that the Reconciliation Forms presented by the Presiding Officers are arithmetically accurate before dismissing them.

Flow Chart of The Counting Process



Counting Rules

Rejected Ballot Papers

The Returning Officer shall declare **“Rejected”** void and not count a ballot paper if:

- The ballot paper does not have the Presiding Officer’s initial on the back of it
- The elector has voted for more candidates than there are seats
- The ballot paper is not marked for any candidate

10. Overall Management Election Rules

The Polling Agents

Not more than two agents per Political Party are allowed within the Polling Station at any one time; and not more than three agents are allowed within the Counting Station at any one time. “**Runners**” are allowed limited time to consult with Polling Agents in the Polling Station only. Polling Agents and Runners are strictly prohibited from campaigning within the one hundred yards line.

The Press at The Polling Station

The Press is **not** allowed within the one hundred yards line of the Polling Station nor inside the Polling Station. Once the Returning Officer has updated the Chief Elections Officer, he may pass the information to the Press beyond the one hundred yards marker. The Chief Elections Officer will brief the media on a timely basis.

Weapons and Cellular Phones

No weapon is allowed within the one hundred yards line of the Polling Station and the Counting Station.

Cellular phones with vibrators are acceptable. The ringing of cellular phones will not be allowed inside the Counting Station. Should an Agent wish to respond to a vibrating cellular call, he/she is to do so outside of the Counting Station.

Counting Station

The Returning Officer sets the rules in the Counting Station. His/her decision is final. Anyone who disagrees may file a petition after Election Day as per The Representation of The People Act Chapter 9 Part VIII, “Disputed Elections”, Sections 45 - 63. Refer to the Counting Rules and the following as guidelines to these rules.

Number of Agents

1. Belize City Council

- **Polling Station**
 - Not more than **two (2)** Agents per Party/Independent Candidate
- **Counting Station**
 - A maximum of **two (2)** Agents per box Party/Independent Candidate

2. Belmopan City Council

- **Polling Station**
 - Not more than **two (2)** Agents per Party/Independent Candidate
- **Counting Station**
 - A maximum of **two (2)** Agents per box per Party/Independent Candidate

3. Town Council

- **Polling Station**
 - Not more than **two (2)** Agents per Party/Independent Candidate
- **Counting Station**
 - A maximum of **two (2)** Agents per box per Party/Independent Candidate

4. General Elections

- **Polling Station**
 - Not more than **two (2)** Agents per candidate
- **Counting Station**
 - A maximum of **two (2)** Agents per box per candidate

2. Only Polling Agents appointed by Candidates and on the roster of the Returning Officer will be allowed into the Counting Station. The Polling Agent may be requested to provide Identification by the Returning Officer.
3. Any Polling Agent who leaves the Counting Station will **not** be allowed to re-enter **nor** will he/she be replaced with an alternate.
4. Only the Returning Officer and his/her Assistant, the Police Officer and the Chief Elections Officer and staff is allowed to use a cellular phone inside the Counting Station.
5. All Polling Agents will be provided with Tally Sheets and pens/pencils, deemed to be the only supplies needed in the Counting Station.

Produced By
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