



Guidelines for Party Representatives: Observing Special Ballot Counting at Elections Canada's Administrative Centre

This document is Elections Canada's guideline OGI 2023-08.

Introduction

You have been chosen as a political party representative for this federal election. These guidelines have been prepared to help you perform your duties in accordance with applicable rules, policies and legislation while attending the count of special ballots at the office of the Special Voting Rules Administrator (Elections Canada's administrative centre).

The following is provided for your guidance. The final authority is the *Canada Elections Act*. At Elections Canada's administrative centre, the designated election officer has the final say on the application of the Act. The designated election officer will be the Special Voting Rules Administrator or an individual identified by the Special Voting Rules Administrator. They will be identified when you present yourself at the administrative centre.

During a general election, Elections Canada provides access to political party representatives who wish to observe the counting of special ballots returned by mail. All special ballots must be received at Elections Canada's administrative centre in the National Capital Region no later than 6:00 p.m. on election day in order to be counted. The administrative centre is located at 440 Coventry Road in Ottawa, Ontario.

While at Elections Canada's administrative centre, the role of political party representatives is to observe the counting process being performed by special ballot officers under the supervision of the Special Voting Rules Administrator and staff. The presence of observers is not mandated by the *Canada Elections Act* but helps ensure the level of scrutiny necessary to a fair, secure and transparent process.

Note: If you interfere with the counting process, engage in any misconduct or fail to obey the directions or decisions of the Special Voting Rules Administrator, election officer or an individual identified by the Special Voting Rules Administrator, you may be asked to leave or be removed from the administrative centre.

Political parties are asked to provide, by no later than the 21st day before election day, the number of representatives that they plan to send to Elections Canada's administrative centre on each day of counting. We expect counts to occur daily starting on the 10th day before election day (volumes permitting), and we anticipate that a second daily shift of counting will be added near the end of the election period. A schedule will be posted in the Political Entities Service Centre the day before.

We encourage political parties to provide the names of their representatives as early as possible in the election period. Elections Canada will send an email to the people identified, containing:

- An authorization form to be completed ahead of time (top section only);
- Details about an information session on the counting procedures at Elections Canada’s administrative centre; and
- Instructions on how to access the building at 440 Coventry Road.

Since the counting procedures at Elections Canada’s administrative centre differ from those at the polls, political party representatives will be required to attend a mandatory information session.

Authorization of a Political Party Representative

Before you can act as a political party representative at Elections Canada’s administrative centre, the *Authorization of a Political Party Representative* (EC 20074) form must be properly completed and then signed by the relevant election officer. Speak with the person from your party who is responsible for coordinating observation at the administrative centre to provide you with the signed form, as it is required to access the office.

At Elections Canada’s administrative centre, the authorization process will be completed as follows:

- Before you can be admitted to the administrative centre, you must present the authorization form signed by the political party to the designated election officer.
- The original form or a physical copy of it will be accepted; a digital copy cannot be accepted.
- The designated election officer will verify that the top section of the form has been properly completed.
- You will be required to make a solemn declaration and sign the authorization form in front of the designated election officer.
- The designated election officer will provide you with a *Political Party Representative Identification Badge* (EC 20902) inside a *Clear Plastic Hanging Badge Holder* (EC 20909).
- The badge displays your name, your political affiliation and the name and signature of the designated election officer who issued it.
- You must not write on or add anything to the badge.

The *Authorization of a Political Party Representative* (EC 20074) form authorizes you to act as an observer at the administrative centre for the current federal election.

Special Voting Rules

Any elector who cannot or does not wish to vote at a polling station during an election may vote using a special ballot. With a special ballot, an elector can vote by mail or in person at the office of any returning officer or additional assistant returning officer. If the elector is away from their electoral district, inside or outside Canada, they can also register to vote with Elections Canada in Ottawa. Voting by special ballot is governed by the Special Voting Rules, set out in Part 11 of the *Canada Elections Act*.

In the offices of returning officers, registration and voting services are offered to two types of electors:

1. *Local electors – Canadian electors in their electoral districts during the election*

Canadian citizens who will be 18 years of age or older on election day and who, during an election, cannot or do not wish to vote at the advance or election day polls, may apply to vote by special ballot in their own electoral districts.

2. *National electors – Canadian electors temporarily away from their electoral districts during the election*

Canadian citizens who will be 18 years of age or older on election day and who live in Canada but who expect to be absent from their electoral districts, either in Canada or abroad, during an election may apply to vote by special ballot.

At Elections Canada’s administrative centre, registration and voting services are offered to four types of electors:

1. *National electors – Canadian electors temporarily away from their electoral districts during the election*

Canadian citizens who will be 18 years of age or older on election day and who live in Canada can apply outside their electoral district, either in Canada or abroad, during an election to vote by special ballot.

2. *International electors – Canadian electors who reside outside of Canada*

Canadian citizens who will be 18 years of age or older on election day, who reside outside of Canada and have lived in Canada at some point in their life, may apply to vote by special ballot.

3. *Incarcerated electors – Canadian electors who are in a correctional institution or a federal penitentiary in Canada*

Canadian citizens who will be 18 years of age or older on election day and who are in a correctional institution in Canada may apply to vote by special ballot.

4. *Canadian Forces electors – Canadian electors that are a member of the regular, reserve or special forces of the Canadian Forces*

Canadian citizens who will be 18 years of age or older on election day and are a member of the regular, reserve or special forces of the Canadian Forces may apply to vote by special ballot.

Counting Ballots at Elections Canada’s Administrative Centre

- Special ballots are counted by two special ballot officers.
- The special ballot officers examine each outer envelope carefully to identify the electoral district.
- The special ballot officers verify all outer envelopes for the elector’s signature, or the signature of an election officer if the elector has received assistance in voting.
- The special ballot officers open the outer envelopes and extract the inner envelopes without opening them. The unopened inner envelopes are set aside until all outer envelopes have been opened to maintain the secrecy of the vote.
- Finally, the special ballot officers remove ballots from their inner envelopes and count the votes.

As a political party representative observing the counting of the ballots, you MUST:

- Be authorized as a political party's representative;
- Respect and help maintain the secrecy of the vote and the confidentiality of preliminary results;
- Display your *Political Party Representative Identification Badge* (EC 20902) when acting as your political party's representative;
- Respect the decisions of the special ballot officer; these decisions will prevail unless overruled later by the Special Voting Rules Administrator or a judge;
- Observe the work being performed by a pair of special ballot officers, provided that your presence does not interfere with their work;
- Stand in the designated areas for political party representatives; and
- Attend a training session (date and time to be determined) on the counting process at Elections Canada's administrative centre.

As a political party representative during the count, you MAY NOT:

- Interfere with the counting process;
- Systematically challenge a special ballot officer about the counting process;
- Talk directly to a special ballot officer; you may address your comments, questions or objections only to the Special Voting Rules Administrator or an individual identified by the Special Voting Rules Administrator;
- Take any photographs or make any audio or video recording of the counting procedures;
- Handle, manipulate or in any way touch a ballot during the count;
- Sit at the same table as the special ballot officers;
- Display literature or other material that could be taken as an indication of support for or opposition to the election of a candidate or political party; or
- Use or wear colours or emblems that would identify your candidate or party, with the one exception of the *Political Party's Representative Identification Badge* (EC 20902) issued by Elections Canada.

If Elections Canada becomes aware of any potential contravention of the *Canada Elections Act*, the matter is referred to the Commissioner of Canada Elections for consideration and possible investigation. The Commissioner is the independent officer whose duty is to ensure that the *Canada Elections Act* is complied with and enforced.

Communication of Results

Once the special ballots for every electoral district are counted at Elections Canada's administrative centre, voting results are communicated to each relevant returning officer. Those results, known as "SVR Group 1," include:

- Canadian Forces electors;
- Canadian citizens residing outside of Canada;
- Incarcerated electors whose address for voting purposes was in the electoral district; and
- Electors temporarily outside of their electoral district.

Access to Elections Canada's Administrative Centre

Elections Canada's administrative centre is located at 440 Coventry Road, in Ottawa, Ontario, in a warehouse behind the RCMP building.

- The counting of the ballots takes place on the 2nd floor; there are no available elevators (if necessary, a freight elevator can be used).
- The office is in a warehouse with concrete floors; appropriate and comfortable footwear is recommended.

Parking

- There is **no** parking available on the premises.
- Daily passes allowing you to park at the Canadian Tire store located at 330 Coventry Road are available from the commissionaire at 440 Coventry Road. The cost of the parking pass remains to be determined. The walk between the parking lot and Elections Canada's administrative centre takes about five minutes.
- Public transportation: The nearest bus stop is #18 Belfast/Coventry; the nearest O-Train station is St. Laurent.

Additional Information

For up-to-date information on health and safety measures, visit elections.ca.

Rules governing the conduct of representatives at Elections Canada's administrative centre, local Elections Canada offices and polling places differ. If you are observing proceedings at a polling place, please refer to the *Guidelines for Candidates' Representatives: Advance, Ordinary and Mobile Polls* (EC 20045). If you are observing proceedings at a local Elections Canada office, please refer to the *Guidelines for Candidates' Representatives: Service Centres in Local Elections Canada Offices* (EC 78058).

If you have questions about your role, please contact Elections Canada:

Email:

For portal and election support: csep-pesc@elections.ca

For general information on elections: info@elections.ca

Phone:

1-800-486-6563

TTY: 1-800-361-8935

Mail:

30 Victoria Street

Gatineau, QC K1A 0M6