

Extend Campaigning Period

The Straits Times Forum Online Story (March 29, 2011)

CAMPAIGNING is important in a general election because politicians would seek to reach out to their constituents and correspondingly canvass for votes on polling day.

Election campaigns serve a myriad of purposes.

First, voters would want to know more about the candidates contesting in their constituencies and their views. Even though new faces would have been unveiled in advance, constituents would know of the candidates in their areas only on Nomination Day. Campaigning also allows voters to interact with candidates, thus testing the latter's communication skills.

Second, campaigning allows voters to weigh the varying messages and manifestos put forward and make an informed decision. Dialogues on national concerns or policy recommendations would be more focused and increasingly substantive.

Finally, as the electoral battle intensifies, the candidate's and party's ability to deal with criticisms and rhetorical salvos under pressure will reveal their crisis management abilities.

Given these reasons, the 10-day minimum period for campaigning (which includes the eve of Polling Day, in which no campaigning is allowed), would be counter-intuitive.

A mere nine days is insufficient to explain policies and introduce new faces, and benefits the incumbents. Campaigning duties would be especially demanding for candidates in group representation constituencies, given the geographical spread and sheer number of residents.

A longer period for campaigning will also dismiss criticisms that parties are unwilling to have their policies or track records scrutinised and deliberated upon. With the proliferation of social media and the Internet, increased campaigning time will grant segments of grassroots Singaporeans who feel disenfranchised or hard done by a valuable opportunity to voice their dissatisfaction and opinions and have them heard.

It is only during a general election that the population is most sensitive, attuned and reactive to this multitude of sentiments.

A more viable period for campaigning would be between two and three weeks, which would grant candidates a minimum of two weekends to walk the ground and connect with the constituents.

It would also be a test for the parties and candidates to manage their manpower and resources, and increase their outreach productively and efficiently.

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