

Parties gear up for GE with new guidelines in place

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Analysts believe ELD's release of campaigning guidelines means the next general election is imminent.

This would see it held in phase two of Singapore's reopening, which begins today, after the circuit breaker measures put in place to deal with Covid-19.

Asked for comment, a spokesman from the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) said: "As the guidelines have only just been issued by the ELD, we will study the details closely and will adhere to them fully."

Opposition party leaders welcomed the increased airtime on national television for candidates, even as they raised concerns about the loss of in-person rallies.

Pasir Ris-Punggol GRC MP Zainal Sapari said candidates would have to "think out of the box" to engage voters given how the election has become an "online contest".

He cited how he has held webinars and Zoom sessions, adding that residents are getting used to it.

Many opposition party leaders said the move to grant three minutes to every candidate on national television would provide a good platform for them to increase the reach of their messages.

People's Power Party chief Goh Meng Seng said the new constituency political broadcasts would shift the focus to the quality of each candidate, rather than the party branding.

Other party leaders said the loss of physical rallies would disadvantage opposition parties - a point some analysts concurred with.

National University of Singapore's political science don Bilveer Singh said the PAP "does very badly in rallying", adding: "The only way the opposition is able to compensate (for their disadvantage)... is to see shifts on the ground in the nine days of campaigning."

Institute of Policy Studies' deputy director for research Gillian Koh felt the shift to online campaigning could tilt the playing field towards less-well resourced parties.

"The bigger and well-resourced (political parties) were more able to do the mass public rallies. Now they can't," she said. "Now, the smaller ones can run their campaign rallies out of their party premises."

Mr Zulkifli Baharudin, a former Nominated MP, bemoaned the absence of physical rallies.

"They generate discussion across the whole island. It's almost a festive occasion... I go there because I want to know what everyone else is talking about. You feel the pulse.

"My sense is that the (broadcasts and e-rallies) won't generate that same level of discussion," he added.