

STRATEGIC AND PRACTICAL GUIDE

How to guide the poll watcher

How many, when, where, how — and what to do in each situation

Document complementary to the Poll-Watching Prioritization Report by Electoral Section — 2026 Election

An independent and **nonpartisan** resource for parties, coalitions, electoral authorities and observers. Its goal is to make the poll watcher's presence **effective**: being there is not enough — one must know what to observe and what to do.

This guide supports legitimate observation of the process; it neither asserts nor presumes fraud. The official rules are those of the Electoral Code and the TSE Resolutions in force.

1. Purpose and how to use this guide

The Prioritization Report showed where poll watching tends to pay off most (the sections with the greatest structural and operational vulnerability). This guide answers the **how**: how to allocate poll watchers, at what times, with what attitude, what to observe in each situation and whom to turn to. A well-placed poll watcher who cannot recognize the relevant situations produces ineffective oversight — this document exists to prevent that.

Important: the poll watcher's task is to **observe, document and report through the legal channels** — never to interfere with the voting, touch the voting machine or confront poll workers and voters. The integrity of the recorded votes is verified by other means (hashes, signatures and reproduction of totals); the focus here is in-person observation, whose deterrent effect alone is already valuable.

2. The poll watcher's role — what is and is not allowed

Allowed:

- Remain at the section, accredited, from opening to closing, observing every step.
- Witness the **zero tape (zerésima)** (the report showing the machine holds no votes before voting starts) and the closing, with the printing of the **poll tape (BU)**.
- Request a copy of the poll tape and of the zero tape, and record occurrences in the polling station minutes.
- Take notes, write down times and, where permitted, photograph posted documents (such as the poll tape on the notice board).

Not allowed:

- Interfere with the voting, touch the voting machine or enter the voting booth.
- Photograph any voter's ballot or violate the secrecy of the vote.
- Campaign, approach voters (electioneering at the polls, "boca de urna") or wear campaign clothing/material.
- Confront, embarrass or accuse poll workers/voters — every suspicion is recorded, not argued on the spot.

Always carry the credential issued by the party/coalition and a photo ID. Know the limits on how many poll watchers may remain in the section at the same time, under TSE rules, so as not to cause disorder.

3. How many poll watchers and how to allocate them

The ideal is **continuous coverage** (opening -> closing) of the priority sections. Since resources are limited, use the prioritization list to concentrate efforts. Recommendation by band:

Priority band	Recommended coverage	Poll watchers per section
ALTO	Continuous, from the start of the zero tape until the poll tape is printed. Top priority.	1 dedicated (ideally 2: one focused on the polling station table/voter enablement, the other on the closing/poll tape), with relief for meals.
MÉDIO	Ensure opening and closing (the most sensitive moments); partial observation during the day.	1 roving poll watcher per polling place, covering several sections; reinforcement at critical times.
BAIXO	Sampling as resources allow; prioritize the closing.	Roving/sample coverage.
Per POLLING PLACE	Coordination of the polling place (building with several sections).	1 polling place coordinator, who supports the poll watchers and centralizes occurrences.

The direct answer: ideally, **at least 1 poll watcher per voting machine/section** in the ALTO band and, at critical moments, also in the MÉDIO band. Where there are not enough people for all of them, **follow the order of the list** (highest-scoring sections first) and always cover the **opening and the closing**, which are the most sensitive stages.

Organization tips:

- Set up pairs and rotation schedules so that the section is never left uncovered at critical times.
- Have a **coordinator per municipality/zone** with a contact list and a fast channel (group/phone).
- Give each poll watcher: the credential, the section sheet, the checklist, the occurrence form and the official phone numbers.
- Avoid concentrating several poll watchers from the same party in one section while others are left empty — coordinate coverage.

4. Schedule for the day — when to be present

Time	Stage	What the poll watcher does
Before 7:00	Arrival and zero tape	Arrive before opening. Witness the printing of the zero tape: confirm that the machine is at zero (zero votes for everyone). Ask for a copy. Check the seals and the machine number.
8:00	Voting starts	Observe the flow, biometric identification and the organization of the line.
8:00–17:00	Voting	Observe voter enablement (biometrics vs. manual), any technical interventions, machine replacement and the conduct of the polling station. Write down the time of anything out of the ordinary.
17:00	Line closes	Check that after 17:00 only those already in line (who received a numbered ticket) vote. Record votes that do not meet this criterion.
After 17:00	Closing and poll tape	Most sensitive stage. Observe the closing, the printing of the poll tape, its reading and posting at the polling place. Ask for a copy of the poll tape and keep it.

If there is rotation, make sure the same person or pair covers the opening and, above all, the closing. The copy of the poll tape matters: it later allows the section result to be compared with what is officially published.

5. Attitude and conduct

- **Discretion and respect.** Be courteous to poll workers and voters; you are an observer, not an authority.
- **Stick to facts.** Write down what, when (time), where (section/machine) and who. Avoid interpretations; describe what you saw.
- **Do not confront.** When something seems odd, record it and report it through the channels — do not argue or accuse on the spot.
- **Know your rights and limits** (section 2). If you are improperly prevented from observing, record it and contact the coordination and the Electoral Justice.
- **Impartiality.** The goal is a fair election, not to favor a candidate or party. Treat all sides with the same rigor.
- **Take care of your credential and conduct** — any excess may invalidate your work and harm the cause.

6. What to observe — translating the report's criteria into the field

The report prioritized the sections using **structural** indicators (the section's context) and **operational** ones (signals in the voting machine record/log). Some the poll watcher observes live; others only show up in the log/poll tape. The table links each criterion to what the poll watcher sees and should do. **None of this is, by itself, proof of irregularity** — they are points of attention that justify a record.

Report criterion	What the poll watcher observes	What to do
Enablement without biometrics (B1)	Poll workers frequently enabling voters manually (without reading the fingerprint).	Note how often it happens and at what times; politely ask the reason (reader failure?). Systematic excess -> record it in the minutes and report it.
Administrative interventions (B4)	Technicians/poll workers carrying out procedures on the machine: restarts, administrative menus, media swaps.	Record each intervention with the time and the reason given. Unexplained interventions -> report immediately.
Replaced / non-original machine (A5)	The section's machine is swapped for a contingency machine during the day.	Note the time, number and seals of the removed machine and of the new one; observe the procedure; ask for it to be entered in the minutes. Keep the poll tapes of both, if any.
Votes outside hours (B3)	Voting continuing after 17:00 for people who were not in line at 17:00.	Record the time and a description. Remember: whoever was in line at 17:00 may vote — that is normal.
Bursts of votes (B2)	Hard to see with the naked eye; occasionally, an abnormally fast/robotic flow.	Note perceptions of an atypical pace. This signal is confirmed later, in the log — which is why the copy of the poll tape and the observation matter.
Isolation, size, few sections, low biometrics, atypical abstention (A1–A4, A6)	These are the context that made the section a priority; the poll watcher does not change them.	Know that vigilance must be doubled there: watch the polling station table, voter enablement and the closing more closely.

7. Poll watcher's checklist (tick on the day)

Opening

- I arrived before 7:00, accredited and identified.
- I saw the **zero tape** and confirmed the machine was at zero; I asked for a copy.
- I checked the machine number and the seals.
- I recorded the start time.

During the voting

- I observed voter enablement (biometrics vs. manual release) and noted how often manual releases occurred.
- I noted every technical/administrative intervention on the machine (time and reason).
- I recorded any machine replacement (numbers, seals, times).
- I observed the conduct of the polling station and the absence of campaigning/electioneering at the site.

Closing

- I confirmed that, after 17:00, only those in line voted.
- I observed the closing and the printing of the **poll tape**.
- I checked the reading and posting of the poll tape at the polling place.
- **I got a copy of the poll tape** and kept it. I recorded the closing time.

8. Identifying, recording and reporting an occurrence

How to record. For each relevant situation, write down: exact date and time, section/zone/municipality and machine number, an objective description of what you saw, who was involved (role, not necessarily name), and whether there are witnesses or documents (photo of what is posted, copy of the minutes). **Ask for the occurrence to be entered in the polling station minutes** — it is the most immediate official record.

Whom to report to (escalation order):

Level	To whom	When / what for
1	Presiding officer of the polling station	Ask for the occurrence to be entered in the minutes; correct simple procedural deviations.
2	Party/coalition poll-watching coordination	Always. It centralizes, advises and engages the legal team. Keep the fast channel open.
3	Electoral Justice — the zone's electoral judge	Irregularities the polling station does not resolve; improper obstruction of the poll watcher; need for a decision.
4	Electoral Public Prosecutor's Office (the zone's electoral prosecutor)	Signs of an electoral crime (coercion, electioneering at the polls, vote buying, fraud).
5	TSE/TRE channels (app/portal, ombudsman)	Formal and complementary record; complaints and questions.

Urgent vs. non-urgent. Urgent (coercion, violence, unauthorized people handling the machine, obstruction of the poll watcher): report **immediately** to the coordination and to the Electoral Justice/Prosecutor's Office. Non-urgent (procedural deviations, questions): record in the minutes and report to the coordination at the end of the stage.

Fill in before election day (local contacts vary by zone):

Contact	Name / phone (fill in)
Party coordination (zone/municipality)	_____
Party legal team	_____
Electoral registry office / the zone's electoral judge	_____
The zone's electoral prosecutor	_____
State Regional Electoral Court (TRE) / complaints hotline	_____

9. Possible situations and what to do

Situation	What to do
Zero tape not printed or not showing all zeros	Ask the polling station; record in the minutes; report to the coordination and the Electoral Justice before voting starts.
Excessive manual release (without biometrics)	Note frequency and times; ask the reason; record in the minutes if systematic; report to the coordination.
Machine replaced	Record numbers, seals and times of the old and new machines; observe the procedure; ask for the minutes; keep the poll tapes.
Voting after 17:00 by people who were not in line	Record the time and a description; report to the polling station and the coordination.
Unauthorized person handling the machine	URGENT: record and report immediately to the Electoral Justice/Prosecutor's Office and the coordination.
Poll worker steering the vote / pressuring a voter	URGENT: record; report to the Electoral Prosecutor's Office and the coordination. Do not confront on the spot.
Campaigning / electioneering at the site	Record (time, description); report to the Electoral Justice.
Poll tape not posted or copy refused	Request formally; record the refusal in the minutes; report to the coordination and the Electoral Justice.
Poll watcher improperly turned away	Show the credential; record; contact the coordination and the zone's electoral judge.
Technical failure / power outage	Observe and note how it was handled (contingency, times); this is normally covered by procedure.
Discrepancy between the section's poll tape and the published result	Keep the copy of the poll tape; report to the coordination/legal team — it can be verified later through the channels and the audit.

10. What NOT to do

- Do not touch the machine, do not enter the booth, do not interfere with the voting.
- Do not photograph anyone's ballot or violate the secrecy of the vote.
- Do not campaign, do not approach voters, do not use campaign material.
- Do not confront, accuse or pressure poll workers and voters — record and report.
- Do not spread unfounded accusations; describe facts. Suspicion is not proof.
- Do not leave the section at critical times (opening and closing).

Final word

Poll watching is an act of citizenship and a **duty of all** — not an instrument of partisan dispute. A poll watcher who is present, attentive and well guided protects the vote of every voter, whatever the result. This guide is offered, independently and without partisanship, so that this presence is effective.

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Michel Medeiros — MSc in Statistics and Data Science (UCF)

Document prepared independently and without partisanship, complementary to the Poll-Watching Prioritization Report. The official rules prevail: Electoral Code and TSE Resolutions in force.