

CHAPTER 02:10  
REFERENDUM

ARRANGEMENT OF SECTIONS

SECTION

GOVERNMENT OF BOTSWANA

# REFERENDUM ACT

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## CHAPTER 02:10

### REFERENDUM

#### ARRANGEMENT OF SECTIONS

##### SECTION

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Schedule - Forms

Act 16, 1987,  
Act 17, 1987,  
Act 5, 2001.

**An Act to provide for the holding of a Referendum.**

*[Date of Commencement: 7th August, 1987]*

**1. Short title**

This Act may be cited as the Referendum Act.

**2. Interpretation**

(1) Unless the context otherwise requires or this section otherwise provides, terms used in this Act shall have the same meaning as that which they have under the Electoral Act.

(2) In this, Act unless the context otherwise requires-

"poll" means a poll conducted in accordance with this Act;

"polling day" means the day appointed by writ as the day upon which a poll shall be taken under this Act;

"writ" means a writ issued under section 5.

**3. Procedural requirement**

Where under any law, any matter is required to be sub-mitted to a vote of the electors qualified to vote in the election of the Elected Members of the National Assembly for approval by a majority of them, it shall be submitted in accordance with the provisions of this Act.

**4. Matter to be posed as a question**

The matter requiring the approval of the majority of the electors shall be submitted in the form of a question requiring an affirmative or negative reply and shall, where it is an amendment to any law, contain a full text of the proposed amendment.

**5. Writ of referendum**

(1) When any matter is required under any law to be submitted to a vote of the electors qualified to vote at an election of the Elected Members of the National Assembly, the President shall issue a writ in Form A set out in the Schedule under the Public Seal of Botswana addressed to the Secretary to the Independent Electoral Commission fixing the day and the hours for the taking of the poll and setting out the matter on which the poll is to be taken.

(2) If at any time between the publication of the notice under subsection (1) and polling day, the President is satisfied that it is expedient in the public interest to do so, he may, by

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proclamation published in the *Gazette*, adjourn the taking of the poll to some other day specified by him.

(3) A proclamation made under subsection (2) shall apply only to such constituencies as are specified in the proclamation, and not to any other constituency.

#### **6. Persons entitled to vote**

(1) Subject to the provisions of section 18, any person registered as a voter in any constituency shall be entitled to vote, at the polling station at which he has been so registered, in accordance with section 54 of the Electoral Act.

(2) No person shall be entitled to vote-

- (a) more than once at a referendum;
- (b) at a referendum if he is at the date of the referendum, disqualified from voting at any election under the provisions of the Electoral Act or any other law pursuant to section 67(4) of the Constitution.

#### **7. Form of ballot and manner of voting**

(1) The ballot of every person voting at a referendum shall consist of a ballot paper in a form to be determined by the Independent Electoral Commission and having a serial number printed or stamped on it.

(2) A voter wishing to vote on the question posed by the referendum shall do so by placing a mark in the space provided on the ballot paper to indicate the manner in which he wishes to vote.

#### **8. Polling hours**

(1) Every poll shall commence at six-thirty o'clock in the morning and close at seven o'clock in the evening, unless the Secretary to the Independent Electoral Commission otherwise orders.

(2) Different hours for the taking of the poll may be ordered by the Secretary to the Independent Electoral Commission in respect of different constituencies or different polling stations, and in such case the returning officer shall amend any notice issued in terms of subsection (1) accordingly.

(3) Notwithstanding the provisions of subsections (1) and (2), a presiding officer may, where voters are waiting to vote, extend the closing time for a period not exceeding two hours.

#### **9. Control of polling stations**

(1) In the absence of the presiding officer from any polling station, a polling officer nominated by the returning officer shall act as presiding officer.

(2) A polling officer may be authorized by the presiding officer to do any act which the presiding officer is required or authorized to do at a polling station, except that he may not order the searching of any voter, the arrest of any person or the exclusion or removal of any person from the polling station.

#### **10. Arrangement of polling stations**

(1) On polling day at every polling station there shall be-

- (a) outside the polling station in a conspicuous place, a notice setting out the name of the polling station;
- (b) both within and outside the polling station notices, setting out the question posed by the referendum;
- (c) one or more polling booths in which voters may handle their ballot papers in secrecy, each containing notices of the kind referred to in paragraph (b), a table and a discard box;
- (d) one or more ballot boxes placed in front of the presiding officer; and
- (e) a copy of the election roll for the constituency, a sufficient number of ballot papers, and other things necessary for the poll to be properly and expeditiously carried out.

(2) Every presiding officer shall be in possession of a seal supplied by the Secretary to the Independent Electoral Commission.

#### **11. Ballot boxes and discard boxes**

(1) Every ballot box shall be provided with a lock or other device for securing it when closed, and shall be so constructed that ballot papers can be put therein when it is closed but cannot be removed therefrom once it has been sealed in terms of subsection (2).

(2) Immediately before the commencement of the voting the presiding officer at each polling station shall show each ballot box empty to such persons as may lawfully be present so that they may see that it is empty, and shall, before placing it in position, close and place his seal upon it in such manner as to prevent it from being opened without breaking the seal and shall keep it so closed and sealed.

#### **12. Method of voting**

The voting at a referendum shall be conducted in the following manner-

- (a) every voter desiring to record his vote shall present himself at the polling station in respect of which he is registered to vote, and shall produce his voter's registration card and his identity card to the presiding officer;
- (b) the presiding officer, after satisfying himself-

- (i) that the name of such voter appears on his copy of the election roll for that constituency and in the section thereof relating to that polling station;
  - (ii) that such voter has not already voted at that election; and
  - (iii) that such voter has not become disqualified from voting,
- shall deliver to him such ballot paper as is required for the poll;
- (c) immediately before the presiding officer delivers a ballot paper to any person-
    - (i) the number and name of the voter, as stated in the election roll, shall be called out;
    - (ii) a mark shall be made on the copy of the election roll against the number of such voter to show that he has been issued with a ballot paper; and
    - (iii) the voter's registration card shall be marked by the presiding officer with the date and his initials;
  - (d) subject to the provisions of paragraph (g), a voter, on receiving a ballot paper, shall go immediately into a polling booth and shall there secretly record his vote;
  - (e) he shall then fold his ballot paper and return to the presiding officer and drop the ballot paper into the ballot box in front of the presiding officer;
  - (f) every voter shall vote without undue delay and shall leave the polling station as soon as he has voted;
  - (g) on the application in person of any voter who is incapacitated by blindness or other physical cause from voting, the presiding officer shall, in the presence of the person with whose assistance the blind person came to cast his vote, secretly record the voter's vote by putting a mark in the space provided on the ballot paper to indicate the manner in which the voter wishes to vote and shall then fold the ballot paper and put it into the ballot box.

### **13. Assistance to voters by election officers**

Except as provided in this Act, the presiding officer or polling officers shall not give any assistance or explanation to a voter beyond-

- (a) directing him to a polling booth where he may vote;
- (b) informing him of the nature of the notice posted inside the polling booth; and
- (c) informing him of the procedure he should follow after entering the polling booth.

### **14. Interference with voters**

Except as provided in this Act, no person shall approach, interfere with, speak to or assist a



voter from the time he has received his ballot paper to the time he has completed voting.

#### **15. Voters objected to**

(1) If a voter makes, before the presiding officer, a written declaration on oath in Form B set out in the Schedule that he verily believes and undertakes to prove that a person applying for or in possession of a ballot paper-

- (a) is in fact not the voter whose name he assumes to vote;
- (b) that such person has voted before in the same referendum; or
- (c) that such person is disqualified from voting in such referendum,

the presiding officer shall, unless that person makes a written declaration on oath in Form C set out in the Schedule before the presiding officer that the statements in the first-mentioned declaration (which shall be read to him) are false, prohibit the issue of a ballot paper to that person or, if a ballot paper has already been issued to him but he has not yet entered the polling booth, impound and cancel the ballot paper and endorse on the ballot paper the reason for the cancellation and make an appropriate endorsement on the marked copy of the election roll.

(2) If that person has already voted, or thereafter votes, the presiding officer shall cause the words "protested against under section 15" to be placed against the name of the person on the marked copy of the election roll.

(3) A ballot paper so impounded and cancelled shall be treated as a spoilt ballot paper.

(4) The presiding officer is authorized and required to administer the oath referred to in subsection (1).

(5) A person who makes any false statements in a declaration referred to in subsection (1) shall be guilty of an offence unless he proves that he did not know that the statement was false, and shall, on conviction, be liable to the penalties prescribed by law for perjury.

#### **16. Spoilt ballot papers**

A voter who has accidentally dealt with his ballot papers in such manner that it may not properly be used as a ballot paper may, on delivering such ballot paper to the presiding officer and after satisfying the presiding officer that it had been spoilt by accident, obtain another ballot paper in place thereof and the spoilt ballot paper shall be immediately cancelled and the presiding officer shall make an appropriate endorsement on the marked copy on the election roll.

#### **17. Personal attendance**

A vote may not be recorded by a voter except by his attending in person at the polling station and recording his vote in accordance with this Act.

## **18. Where to vote**

Subject to the provisions of section 19 no person shall be permitted to vote at any polling station other than one in respect of which he is registered.

## **19. Voting by election officers and police officers**

(1) So far as practicable, polling officers and police officers on duty at polling stations shall be assigned to polling stations in respect of which they are registered.

(2) Polling officers and police officers on duty at polling stations in respect of which they are registered shall so inform the presiding officer, who shall himself supervise the formalities necessary for the casting of their votes.

(3) If a presiding officer is on duty at a polling station in respect of which he is registered a polling officer shall supervise the formalities necessary for the casting of such presiding officer's vote.

(4) Where election officers and police officers entitled to vote are unable to or likely to be unable to vote on the date of the poll by reason of not having been assigned to the polling stations in respect of which they are registered, the Secretary to the Independent Electoral Commission shall, for the purpose of enabling such officers to vote-

- (a) fix such times, places and days, not earlier than 15 days before the date fixed under section 5 for the taking of any poll;
- (b) appoint presiding and returning officers for each place fixed by him under paragraph (a); and
- (c) at least two days prior to the day fixed under paragraph (a), inform all political parties with registered symbols of the times, places and days upon which a poll will be taken.

(5) Subject to the provisions of subsections (6) and (7), the provisions of Part VII of the Electoral Act relating to the conduct of polls shall, with such modifications as may be considered necessary by the Secretary to the Independent Electoral Commission, apply to any poll conducted under subsection (4).

(6) The presiding officer of each polling station as soon as practicable after the closing of the poll, shall-

- (a) place all the ballot papers containing the votes of each constituency in a separate packet and seal it with his seal; and
- (b) transmit all the documents relating to the referendum in safe custody to the returning officer of the constituency in respect of which the votes were cast.

(7) The returning officer of each constituency to whom documents relating to the referendum have been transmitted in accordance with the provisions of subsection (6) shall retain such documents unopened in safe custody until after the close of the poll on the date



fixed under section 5 and the documents shall be dealt with in accordance with the provisions of section 27.

#### **20. Tendered ballot papers**

(1) If a person representing himself to be a voter named in the election roll and being in possession of a voter's registration card in such name applies for a ballot paper after another person has voted in such name, the applicant shall, after making a declaration on oath in Form D set out in the Schedule be entitled to receive a ballot paper in the same manner as any other voters, except that such ballot paper (hereinafter referred to as a "tendered ballot paper") shall be crossed in the manner of a registered letter.

(2) The name of such voter, his number in the election roll and the number of the tendered ballot paper issued to him shall be entered on a list to be called the tendered votes list, which shall be admissible in any legal proceedings arising out of the referendum.

#### **21. Control of polling station**

The presiding officer shall regulate the admission of voters to the polling station and shall exclude all other persons except any other person who has lawful reason to be admitted, and shall keep order and ensure compliance with this Act at the polling station.

#### **22. Removal of persons misconducting themselves**

If any person misconducts himself at a polling station or fails to obey any lawful order of the presiding officer he may, by order of the presiding officer (but not of any other polling officer), be removed from the polling station by a police officer or any other person authorized by the presiding officer, and a person so removed shall not, without the permission of the presiding officer, again enter the polling station during the day of the election:

Provided that the powers conferred by this section shall not be exercised so as to prevent any person who is otherwise entitled to vote at a polling station from voting.

#### **23. Adjournment of poll in case of riot**

(1) If the proceedings at any polling station are interrupted or obstructed by riot or open violence, the presiding officer shall adjourn the proceedings until later in the day or until the following day after taking such precautions as are necessary to safeguard the ballot boxes and papers and other referendum requisites, and shall forthwith notify the returning officer, who shall in turn notify the Secretary to the Independent Electoral Commission.

(2) If the poll is adjourned at any polling station the hours of polling on the day to which it is adjourned shall be the same as for the original day, and references in this Act to the closing of the poll shall be construed accordingly.

#### **24. Closing of poll**

When the hour appointed for the closing of the poll has been reached, the presiding officer

shall declare that no more persons shall be admitted to the polling stations, and thereafter only the persons already inside the polling station, or any area set aside for waiting voters, shall be permitted to vote.

#### **25. Procedure on closing poll**

(1) The presiding officer of each polling station as soon as practicable after the closing of the poll, shall, make up into separate packets, sealed with his seal-

- (a) the unused ballot papers, the spoilt ballot papers and the ballot papers cancelled in terms of subsection (2);
- (b) the marked copy of the election roll together with any documents received from the returning officer under section 19; and
- (c) the tendered votes list.

(2) Any ballot papers which are left in the polling booth shall be cancelled by the presiding officer.

(3) Every unopened ballot box shall be secured by the presiding officer and sealed with his seal in such manner that it cannot be opened and nothing can be inserted therein without the seals being broken.

(4) The presiding officer shall despatch each such packet and ballot box in safe custody to the returning officer, together with a statement by the presiding officer (hereinafter referred to as the "ballot paper account") showing-

- (a) the number of ballot papers entrusted to him;
- (b) the number of ballot papers issued;
- (c) the number of ballot papers contained in the packet referred to in paragraph (a) of subsection (1).

#### **26. Counting of votes**

(1) The returning officer shall make arrangements for counting the votes, at a place to be determined by him, as soon as practicable, after the closing of the poll, and shall, as far as practicable proceed continuously to comply with the provisions of sections 27 and 28 until the counting is completed allowing only reasonable time for refreshment.

(2) Except with the consent of the returning officer, no person other than the returning officer, and the assistant returning officers, may be present at the counting of the votes.

#### **27. Verification of ballot papers accounts**

(1) When all the ballot boxes have been received by the returning officer, he shall proceed to verify the ballot paper accounts of each polling station in the constituency by opening the

sealed packet containing unused, spoilt and cancelled ballot papers in it and comparing the number of ballot papers in it and the total number of ballot papers found in the ballot boxes for that polling station.

(2) The returning officer shall prepare a statement as to the result of the verification.

(3) After examination the returning officer shall return the unused, spoilt and cancelled ballot papers to the packet from which they were taken and shall reseal such packets with his seal.

(4) When the procedures set out in subsections (1), (2) and (3) have been completed in respect of each polling station in the constituency the returning officer shall mix together all the ballot papers found in the ballot boxes for the constituency and shall then count the votes in the manner set out in section 28.

#### **28. Method of counting**

(1) After verifying the ballot paper accounts in the manner set out in section 27 the returning officer shall then open each ballot paper and put the ballot paper into a separate pile or receptacle according to the mark thereon.

(2) The returning officer shall not open the tendered ballot papers but shall put them all together into a separate pile or receptacle.

(3) The returning officer shall reject and endorse the word "rejected" on any ballot paper on which anything except the serial number is written or marked by which the voter can be identified.

(4) In this section, "returning officer" includes any assistant returning officer authorized by the returning officer to perform the duties of a returning officer under this section.

#### **29. Rejected ballot papers**

The returning officer shall prepare a statement showing the number of ballot papers rejected.

#### **30. Returning officer's decision final**

The decision of the returning officer on any question arising in respect of any ballot paper shall be final, and shall not be questioned in any legal proceedings except on a petition to have the referendum declared null and void.

#### **31. Method of dealing with papers**

(1) At the conclusion of the counting of the votes the returning officer shall seal up in separate packets the counted ballot papers, the rejected ballot papers and the tendered ballot papers.

(2) The returning officer shall at no time open the sealed packet containing the marked copy

of the election roll or the sealed packet containing the tendered votes list.

### **32. Certificate and declaration of result**

After counting the votes and having ascertained the result of the poll the Secretary to the Independent Electoral Commission shall-

- (a) certify by endorsement on the writ the result of the poll;
- (b) return the writ so endorsed to the President.

### **33. Publication of result**

(1) The Secretary to the Independent Electoral Commission shall notify the Clerk to the National Assembly of the return of the writ and shall cause the result of the referendum to be published in the *Gazette*.

(2) The Secretary to the Independent Electoral Commission shall, on the completion of any referendum, submit a report on the exercise of his functions under this Act to the Minister for the time being responsible for matters relating to the holding of a referendum and that Minister shall, not later than seven days after the National Assembly next meets after he received the report, lay it before the Assembly.

### **34. Documents to be delivered to High Court**

(1) The returning officer shall deliver all documents relating to the conduct of the referendum to the Registrar of the High Court, who shall ensure their safe custody.

(2) The Registrar of the High Court shall retain for six months all such documents relating to a referendum forwarded to him in accordance with this section and then, unless otherwise ordered by the court, or unless he is aware that legal proceedings are pending in respect of such referendum, shall cause them to be destroyed.

### **35. Corrupt and illegal practices**

The provisions of sections 91 to 95, 102 to 104, 108 to 111 and sections 113 and 114 of the Electoral Act shall *mutatis mutandis* apply to a referendum.

### **36. Who may present a petition**

A petition complaining of an undue return of the writ of referendum by reason of any corrupt or illegal practice, irregularity or by reason of any other cause whatsoever, may be presented to the High Court by any person entitled to vote at that referendum.

### **37. Presentation of petition**

A petition referred to in section 36 shall be signed by the petitioners and shall be presented within 30 days after the day on which the result of the referendum was published in the

Gazette.

**38. Registrar to give notice to the Attorney-General**

The Registrar of the High Court shall, upon receipt of a petition, give notice in writing of the presentation of the petition to the Attorney-General.

**39. Trial of petition**

The provisions of section 121 of the Electoral Act shall *mutatis mutandis* apply to the trial of a petition of undue return of a writ of referendum.

**40. Form of petition**

A petition of undue return of a writ of referendum shall be in such form and shall state such matters as may be prescribed by rules of court made in that behalf.

**41. Offences**

The provisions of Part XI of the Electoral Act shall *mutatis mutandis* apply to a referendum and any reference to a candidate therein shall be read and understood to be a reference to the manner in which a voter voted or is about to vote, as the case may be.

**SCHEDULE  
FORMS**

**Form A  
WRIT OF REFERENDUM**

**BY  
HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT OF BOTSWANA**

Referendum Act

To the Secretary to the Independent Electoral Commission

WHEREAS by section 5(1) of the Referendum Act it is provided that when any matter is required under any law to be submitted to a vote of the electors qualified to vote at an election of the elected Members of the National Assembly, the President shall issue a writ under the Public Seal of Botswana, addressed to the Secretary to the Independent Electoral Commission for the taking of a poll and setting out the matter on which the poll is to be taken;

AND WHEREAS the matter herein set out has arisen for submission to the said electors;



NOW THEREFORE I, .....  
the President of the Republic of Botswana do hereby direct that you the said Secretary to the  
Independent Electoral Commission shall take a poll on the ..... day of  
....., 20 ....., on the following matter  
.....  
.....

and that you do endorse this writ with the result of the poll and return it to me.

GIVEN under my hand and the Public Seal of Botswana this ..... day of ....., 20 .....

Seal

.....  
*President*

(Reverse side of Form)

The matter submitted to the electors under the Referendum Act on the ..... day of  
..... 20.....  
has been \*(1) by them.

**Form B**  
**OBJECTION TO VOTER**

Referendum Act

(section 15)

I, ..... being  
a registered voter in the ..... constituency do hereby  
declare and undertake to prove that the person applying for/in possession of a ballot paper in  
the name of .....  
who is registered on the existing election roll for the .....  
polling station under number .....

\*(2) (a) is not the person he purports  
to be

\*(3) (b) has voted before at this  
referendum

- \* (4) (c) is disqualified from voting at this referendum by reason of the fact that

.....  
Signature

Sworn to before me, this ..... day of ..... 20 ..... at .....

.....  
Presiding Officer

..... Polling Station

**Form C**  
**DECLARATION BY VOTER**

Referendum Act

(section 15)

I, .....  
(full name in block capitals) of .....

..... (address) hereby declare that-

- (a) (i) I am the person whose name appears as ..... on the existing election roll for the ..... polling station; and
- (ii) I have not voted before at this referendum; and
- (iii) I am not disqualified from voting at this referendum; and
- (b) the statement concerning my eligibility to vote in this referendum made by ..... which has been read out to, and is understood by me, is false.

.....  
Signature

Sworn to before me, this ..... day of ..... 20 ..... at .....

.....  
*Presiding Officer*

.....  
*Polling Station*

**Form D**  
**DECLARATION OF IDENTITY BY A VOTER**

Referendum Act

(section 20)

I, .....  
(full name in block capitals, placing surname first) hereby declare that I am enrolled as a voter  
at the .....polling station.

My present address is .....

My voter's registration card number is ..... and I further declare that I have not voted  
before at this referendum.

.....  
*Signature*

Date .....

Sworn to before me, this ..... day of ..... 20 ..... at .....

.....  
*Presiding Officer*

.....  
*Polling Officer*

## Endnotes

### 1 (Popup - Popup)

endorse "approved" or "rejected" as the case may be

### 2 (Popup - Popup)

Delete as necessary

### 3 (Popup - Popup)

Delete as necessary

### 4 (Popup - Popup)

Delete as necessary