

Review of the 1998 Legislative Council Election Environmental Aspects of Election Campaigning

The Guidelines on Election Related Activities in respect of the 1998 Legislative Council General Elections (Guidelines) issued by the Electoral Affairs Commission (EAC) specified matters such as fair and equal treatment to candidates, corrupt or illegal practice, privacy of citizens, etc. However, environmental consideration was hardly emphasized. Citizens Party recommends that environmental consideration be made one of the considerations in election campaigning so that resources can be more efficiently used.

Candidates need to get their messages out to the public. If the Administration and the EAC would commit to provide more systematic channels of communication between the public and the candidates, much resource—both natural and human—could be saved.

Citizens Party makes the following recommendations:

1. Direct Mail - Free Postage

According to the Guidelines (Ch 6 para 15), free postage was provided “to enable the candidate to mail election advertisements to promote or advertise himself and in relation to that election to electors in the constituency.” Geographical Constituent/Functional Constituent/Election Committee candidates were eligible for two such free mailings to each electors in their constituency while there was one free mailing for candidates of a subsector in the Election Committee.

The Geographical Constituencies are now so large that one mailing is already in the order of some 600,000-700,000 pieces. Members of the public have also complained about the amount of election materials they received. To avoid wastage of paper and resources, we recommend:

- a) Election advertisement to be sent to each household instead of each individual voter. Members of a household can be grouped together according to their addresses. The government could provide the free mailing labels in this form. In the last election, some candidates regrouped addresses to do that but since new labels had to be printed, the government-provided labels were wasted and thus maximum savings could not be made; and
- b) Reduce the two free mailings to one for each candidate. Since the government has up-graded its “Election Special” booklet this can be further developed to provide more space to candidates.
- c) Furthermore, if the “Election Special” can be better done, then even the one free mailing may not be necessary especially if other recommendations (see below) can also be implemented.

2. Electronic Media

a) TV/Radio-Provide “Election Channel” for 4 weeks

Electronic media can be better and more widely utilized. The government can provide a special TV channel and radio frequency for the 4 weeks election period. Candidates can be given equal time to broadcast their platforms.

While the various election TV forums organized by the different broadcasters each had its own style and uniqueness, a joint broadcast for each geographical constituency would save time and resources for both the media and the candidates.

b) Internet

As the Internet is becoming more widely used, its role in election campaigning is expected to increase. The government can provide a basic web site covering news of election, platforms of the candidates as well as interviews and forums—both recorded broadcast and interactive ones.

3. Posters

Under the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance, candidates who wish to display their election advertisements on land/property other than government land/property must obtain the prior written consent of the owner or occupier [s 104A of Cap 132].

We suggest that obtaining oral consent of the private owner/occupier is sufficient. An owner/occupier would remove any posters which he has not authorized. As such, there is no need to obtain written consent in each and every case. This requirement makes it more work for the candidate, the government and the owner/occupiers.

Furthermore, the usage of posters can be reduced if the government would provide a systematic medium (such as display boards) in public areas allowing candidates to put up their advertisements.

4. Banners

While the Guidelines suggest that old street boards can be reused, the reality is that most of the low cost wooden boards are not reusable after a period of outdoor exposure. If the government can design public display boards, as suggested above, then there is perhaps less need to allow street banners.