

**Legislative Council
Panel on Constitutional Affairs
Meeting on 21st September 1998**

**Major Findings from the
Opinion Survey on Voting Behaviour in 1998**

Purpose

This paper provides the main findings of an opinion survey conducted by the Home Affairs Bureau on voting behaviour in the 1998 Legislative Council Elections for members' information.

Introduction

2. It has been the practice of the Administration to conduct surveys immediately after Legislative Council elections and District Boards elections to collect public opinion on voting behaviour. The survey on the 1998 Legislative Council Election (hereafter the Survey) was commissioned by the Home Affairs Bureau. This Survey, with a sample size of 3,037 respondents, is the *largest and most comprehensive* post-election survey conducted for the purpose of understanding people's voting behaviour in the 1998 Legislative Council Election.¹

3. Two copies of the Survey report have been sent to the Legislative Council Secretariat for information.

¹ Surveys on people's voting behaviour in 1998 were also conducted by the Hong Kong Institute of Asia Pacific Studies of CUHK during 28-29 May 1998 with a sample size of 378 voters; and by the Social Sciences Research Centre of HKU during 27-29 May 1998 with a sample size of 1,029 respondents. An exit poll was also carried out by the Social Sciences Research Centre of HKU on 24 May 1998 on 8,999 voters who left the polling stations after voting. But in this exit poll, questions asked were mainly about the candidates and political parties.

Objectives of the Survey

4. The objectives of the Survey were :
- (a) to gauge public awareness of the 1998 Legislative Council Elections;
 - (b) to identify sources of information about the Legislative Council Elections;
 - (c) to identify the profile of voters, non-voters, and non-registrants;
 - (d) to identify reasons of not registering, voting and not voting;
 - (e) to assess whether the polling stations are conveniently located;
 - (f) to assess whether the polling procedures in general are simple/complex; and
 - (g) to gauge public views on other issues relating to the Legislative Council Elections.

Survey Operation

5. The Survey was undertaken on the Monday 25 May 1998 immediately after the Legislative Council Elections (24 May 1998) when respondents' memory on their voting was still fresh. The survey fieldwork period lasted for about four weeks from 25 May 1998 to 19 June 1998.

6. Random sampling method was used with households to be interviewed randomly selected from the updated Hong Kong residential telephone directories. One respondent from each of these sampled households was randomly selected for interview over the telephone. Respondents comprised those aged 18 or above and are holders of Hong Kong Permanent ID Card. A total of 5,067 telephone calls were made, and 4,534 households were successfully contacted. Among the contacted households, 3,037 eligible respondents were successfully interviewed, representing a response rate of 67%.

Major Findings

Awareness :

7. People's awareness of the Legislative Council Elections was high at 89%, and is higher than that of the 1995 Legislative Council Elections (82%).

Sources of Awareness :

8. Television was the most effective media in drawing 89% of public attention towards the elections, mostly from TV news (40%) and Announcement of Public Interests (APIs) (38%). This is followed by candidates' campaign activities (62%), such as posters and banners (36%) and leaflets (23%).

Awareness of the Election Committee Subsector Elections :

9. About half (49%) of the respondents were aware of the Election Committee Subsector Elections.

Reasons for not registering in the Geographical Constituency :

10. "Not interested in election" (23%) was the main reason given. This percentage is lower compared with that in the 1995 elections (26%).

11. Relatively more younger people (aged 18-24) claimed that they "did not have time" (26%) and "did not know how to register" (25%) whereas "not interested in election" was found more common among those aged 25-34 (28%) and those aged 35-44 (29%). As for the middle age group (aged 45-54), "no time available" (31%) was the most prominent reason given for not registering while for the elderly (aged 55+), "do not know how to register" (23%) and "lack of knowledge of the election" (17%) were the hindrances to register.

Incidence of voting in 1995 :

12. Among the 1998 voters, 34% claimed that they had not voted in the 1995 Legislative Council Elections.

Reasons for voting :

13. “To fulfill the civic responsibility as a Hong Kong resident” was the reason most cited (68% of the voters). This percentage is substantially higher than that recorded in the 1995 elections (52%).²

14. Very few voters voted for the reason that they were “not satisfied with the performance of the government” (2%).

Reasons for not voting :

15. “No time available” was cited as the main reason for not voting (33% of voters). This percentage is substantially lower than that in 1995 (43%).

16. “Poor weather” was the second most cited reason for not voting (20% of voters).

17. Some cited “not aware of the location of polling station/had not received the polling card” (11%) as reasons for not voting. We suspect that the “not aware of the location of polling station” could be only a convenient excuse as the public gave a score of 8.7 (out of 10) to indicate that the polling stations were conveniently located.

Electioneering on the elections day :

18. Most voters (86%) did not find the candidates’ electioneering on the election day useful in helping them to decide on their votes.

Location of the polling stations :

19. Voters found that the location of polling stations very convenient (average score of 8.7 on a scale of 0 [very inconvenient] to 10 [very convenient]). The corresponding score in 1995 was also 8.7.

² “Fulfilling civic responsibility” as a reason for voting was also cited by 41% of respondents in the CUHK survey and 60% of respondents in the HKU survey.

Evaluation of voting procedure :

20. Voters found that the voting procedure was simple (average score of 8.4 on a scale of 0 [very complex] to 10 [very simple]). The corresponding score in 1995 was 8.5.

Automatic registration of voters and compulsory voting :

21. Most people (78%) agreed that all permanent residents aged 18 or above should be registered automatically as voters.

22. More than half (58%) of the respondents disagreed that voting should be compulsory, particularly among the non-voters (63%).

23. For more details of the abovementioned findings, please see pages 7 - 15 of the full Report.

Future Action

24. The Home Affairs Bureau intends to conduct similar surveys on voting behaviour immediately after future elections so that a historical trend can be established. Information so obtained could also assist in the improvement of publicity for and the conduct of future elections.

Home Affairs Bureau
September 1998

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METHODOLOGY

1. Pilot Test

Two pilot tests, each covered 30 successfully enumerated interviews, were conducted by using telephone interviewing method to test out the questionnaire. The first pilot test was conducted on 28 April 1998 and the second pilot test was conducted on 25 May 1998.

2. Main Survey

A total of 3037 interviews were conducted among those aged 18 or above and are holders of Hong Kong permanent ID card. Two-stage random sampling was adopted. For the first stage, households were randomly selected from the latest version of the telephone directory issued by Hongkong Telecom. In the second stage, a respondent within each of the sampled households was chosen randomly by using the Kish Grid.

At least three attempts were made to contact the households and another three attempts or more were made to contact the selected respondents for interview in order to ensure a high response rate. The effective response rate was 67% (vide Appendix 1).

Fieldwork was conducted between 25 May to 19 June, 1998.

All figures in this report were weighted to represent the total population under study.

3. Definitions

Registrants are those who registered as an elector in a geographical constituency in the 1998 Legislative Council Elections.

Voters are registrants who voted in the 1998 Legislative Council Elections.

Non-voters are registrants who did not vote in the 1998 Legislative Council Elections.

KEY FINDINGS

AWARENESS OF THE 1998 LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ELECTIONS

The awareness level of the 1998 Legislative Council Elections was 89%, which is higher than that of the 1995 Legislative Council Elections (82%). The awareness level was relatively higher among the registrants (94%); those aged 18-54 (over 90%); people with tertiary education (98%); professionals/managers (97%) and students (97%); and among the higher income groups (\$20,000+; over 98%).

(Tables 1-5)

SOURCES OF AWARENESS

The most prominent source of learning about the election was television (89%), mostly from TV news (40%) and Announcement of Public Interest (38%). This was followed by candidates' campaign activities (62%) such as posters/banners (36%) and leaflets (23%).

Other sources cited were newspaper (48%) and radio (25%).

(Table 6)

ELECTION COMMITTEE SUBSECTOR ELECTIONS

About half of the eligible registrants (49%) were aware of Election Committee Subsector Elections. The awareness level was lower among the non-registrants (39%), and the non-working population (i.e. home makers (38%), retired (41%) and unemployed (40%)).

(Tables 7-9)

REASONS FOR NOT REGISTERING AS AN ELECTOR IN A GEOGRAPHICAL CONSTITUENCY

“Not interested in election” (23%), “no time available” (22%) and “do not know how to register” (20%) were the main reasons for not registering as an elector. Comparing with the reasons cited in 1995, fewer people said that they were not interested in election (1995: 26%) but more people claimed that they did not have time (1995: 18%).

Relatively more younger people (aged 18 - 24) claimed that they “did not have time” (26%) and “did not know how to register” (25%) whereas “not interested in election” was found more common among those aged 25 - 34 (28%) and those aged 35 - 44 (29%). As for the middle age group (aged 45 - 54), “no time available” (31%) was the most prominent reason given for not registering while for the elderly (aged 55+), “do not know how to register” (23%) and “lack of knowledge of the election” (17%) were the hindrances to register.

It was also more likely for people with secondary education (28%), managers/professionals (32%) and those in income groups between \$10,000 - \$39,999 to cite “not interested in election” as a reason for not registering.

(Tables 10-14)

REASONS FOR VOTING

Sixty-eight percent (68%) of the voters quoted that the major reason for voting was “to fulfill the civic responsibility” as a Hong Kong resident, significantly higher than the percentage recorded in 1995 (52%). Some other reasons for voting were “to support their favourite candidates/parties” (25%) and “to have someone to fight for their interests” (14%). Very few voters voted for the reason that they were “not satisfied with the performance of the government” (2%).

(Tables 15-16)

CONVENIENCE OF THE POLLING STATIONS' LOCATION

Generally the voters found the location of polling stations very convenient (mean score of 8.7 on a rating scale of 0 (very inconvenient) to 10 (very convenient)). Same mean score was recorded in 1995. Furthermore in the present survey, the percentage of voters who gave a rating of 8+ (83%) is higher as compared to that of the 1995 Elections (80%). The mean score is slightly lower among those aged 25 - 34 (mean: 8.2).

(Tables 17-18)

USEFULNESS OF CANDIDATES' ELECTIONEERING ON THE ELECTION DAY

Most voters (86%) did not find the candidates' electioneering on the election day useful in helping them to decide on their votes.

On the other hand, relatively more people of age 55 or above (12%) and those who were less educated (no schooling/kindergarten: 16%; primary: 11%) found the candidates' electioneering useful.

(Tables 19-21)

EVALUATION ON THE VOTING PROCEDURE

Overall speaking, the voting procedure was considered simple (mean score of 8.4 on a rating scale of 0 (very complex) to 10 (very simple)), and is similar to the rating recorded in 1995 (mean score of 8.5).

(Tables 22-23)

REASONS FOR NOT VOTING

No time available” (33%) and “poor weather” (20%) were the main reasons for not voting. The former claim at 33% was substantially lower than that recorded in 1995 (43%).

Relatively more people aged 18 - 24 cited that they “did not have time to vote” (55%) while this was a less prominent answer among those aged 55 or above (14%).

Also, clerks/service workers (43%) and people in the income group of \$5,000-\$9,999 (49%) were more likely to cite “no time available” as a reason for not voting.

(Tables 24-28)

VOTING BEHAVIOUR IN 1995

Among the 1998 voters, 59% of them also claimed that they voted in the 1995 Elections, 34% did not vote and 7% did not remember or did not know whether they voted in 1995.

On the other hand, among the non-voters in 1998, only 24% claimed that they voted in the previous Legislative Council Elections. Almost all the non-registrants (97%) did not vote in the 1995 Elections.

(Table 29)

AUTOMATIC REGISTRATION OF VOTERS AND COMPULSORY VOTING

Most (78%) people agreed that all permanent residents aged 18 or above should be registered as voters automatically.

More than half of the eligible registrants (58%) disagreed that voting should be compulsory, particularly among the non-voters (63%). However, relatively fewer older people (aged 45 - 54: 49%, aged 55 or above: 31%) and less educated people (no schooling/kindergarten: 33%, primary: 38%) disagreed to compulsory voting.

(Tables 30-33)

PROFILE OF REGISTRANTS AND VOTERS

Registrants

Among the registrants, there were relatively fewer females (47%) and people of age 18-24 (11%) and 45-54 (16%).

Non-registrants

There were slightly more female (51%) and more in the age group 25-34 (28%) among the non-registrants. The average monthly personal income of the non-registrants was lower (\$8,343).

Voters

Among the voters, there were fewer females (47%), and people of age 18-24 (10%) and 45-54 (17%).

Non-voters

The non-voters were more in the age group of 25-34 (29%) or of those who worked as clerk/service workers (37%).

(Tables 34-36)

Voted in 1995 and registered in 1998

Among this group of people, there were relatively fewer females (42%) and people of age 18-24 (5%) and 25-34 (18%).

(Tables 37-39)

Voted in 1995 and 1998

Among this group of people, there were relatively fewer females (42%) and people of age 18-24 (5%) and 25-34 (17%).

Their main reasons for voting were “to fulfill the civic responsibility” (70%) and “to support their favourite candidates/parties” (27%).

(Tables 16, 37-39)

Voted in 1995 but did not register in 1998

This group consists mainly those aged 25-44 (75%), relatively more males (53%); people who worked as craft or plant and machine operators and assemblers/ elementary occupation (33%); and those in the monthly personal income range of \$10,000 - \$19,999 (44%) or not earning any income (31%).

Their major reasons for not registering were “not interested in election” (28%) and “do not know how to register” (24%).

(Tables 14, 37-39)

Voted in 1995 but did not vote in 1998

There were more people of age 25-44 (69%); clerk/service workers (33%); and people with a slightly higher monthly personal income (\$13,244).

Their major reasons for not voting were “no time available” (34%) and “poor weather” (22%).

(Tables 28, 37-39)

Did not vote in 1995 but registered in 1998

There were relatively fewer males (47%) and more clerk/service workers (30%) in this group.

(Tables 37-39)

Did not vote in 1995 but voted in 1998

There were slightly fewer males (45%) in this group.

They voted in 1998 so as “to fulfill the civic responsibility” (64%) and “to support the favourite candidates/parties” (23%).

(Tables 16, 37-39)

Did not vote in 1995 and did not register in 1998

There were slightly more females (52%) and more people of age 25-34 (27%) among this group. The average monthly personal income of these people was lower (\$8,279). Many did not have any personal income (39%).

The more prominent reasons for not registering were “not interested in election” (23%), “no time available” (22%) and “do not know how to register” (20%).

(Tables 14, 37-39)

Did not vote in 1995 and 1998

Among this group of people, there were slightly more in the age group of 25-34 (27%) and clerk/service workers (38%).

“No time available” (32%) and “poor weather” (19%) were their main reasons for not voting.

(Tables 28, 37-39)