

Bills Committee on the Legislative Council (Amendment) Bill 2003

Allocation of Seats under the List Voting System

Introduction

At the meeting of the Bills Committee on 5 May 2003, Members requested the Administration to provide information on how seats could be allocated under the various list voting systems, and to compare these with the current list voting system proposed for the 2004 Legislative Council (LegCo) geographical constituency (GC) elections. This paper is prepared in response to the request.

Methods for allocation of seats

Option A – Allocation of seats according to predetermined ranking on a candidate list

2. This is the system which has been used in Hong Kong for returning LegCo Members from GCs since 1998. Under this system, each voter may only vote for a particular list of candidates in his own constituency, but not individual candidates within a list. Seats will be distributed among the lists in proportion to their vote shares. Seats won by a list will be allocated to candidates on the list according to the ranking shown on the ballot paper. This ranking is predetermined by political parties or the candidates concerned.

3. This system is easy to understand and to operate. The decision which voters have to make on the ballot paper is a simple one. The vote counting and seat allocation procedures are also straightforward.

4. This voting system is used for allocating seats in the Proportional Representative lists in countries such as Germany, Italy, Portugal, Spain and Israel.

Option B – Allocation of seats according to the “personal votes” cast for individual candidates

5. The alternative method to Option A is one which allows voters to choose individual candidates in addition to choosing their preferred lists. There are a number of variations to this voting system, and the more common ones are described below.

(i) Choosing only one candidate

6. Under this method, each voter has one vote. He votes by choosing one candidate among the lists of candidates contesting in his constituency. The vote for a particular candidate will be translated into a vote for the list to which the candidate belongs.

7. Seats will then be allocated to the lists according to the percentage of votes obtained by the respective lists. Within the same list, candidates are ranked by the number of votes obtained by each of them, and those receiving the most votes will fill the seats. This system is used in Finland.

(ii) Preferential list system

8. Under this system, a list will contain a number of candidates who are ranked in order of priority predetermined by the party or candidates concerned. Each voter has one vote to cast for the list he supports (the list vote), and one or more optional votes for individual candidates on the same list for which the list vote has been cast (the personal vote).

9. The list votes obtained by the respective lists will determine the number of seats to be allocated to each list. The personal votes that each candidate gets may alter the ranking of candidates to fill the seats as predetermined by the party or candidates concerned. This system is used in countries such as Denmark and Sweden.

(iii) Panachage

10. Under this system, a voter may cast as many votes as there are seats to be returned in his constituency. A voter may choose different candidates across the lists. Each vote will be translated into a vote for the list to which the candidate belongs, and seats will be allocated to the lists based on the percentage of votes obtained by the

respective lists. Within the same list, candidates will fill the seats in order of the number of votes they receive. This system is used in Switzerland and Luxembourg.

The Administration's views

11. Each of the list voting systems discussed above has its pros and cons. As explained in paragraph 3, the main attraction of the system now in use for the LegCo GC elections is that it is simple and straightforward. It is well understood by voters and candidates alike, and is easy to administer. It is broadly accepted by the community.

12. By contrast, the other voting systems outlined in paragraphs 6 to 10 are designed to give voters more specific choices on which candidates (as distinct from which lists) they want to elect. To achieve this, however, the operation of the systems is much more complicated. In consequence, it would be more difficult to educate voters on the choices they have to make when filling out the ballot papers, and to explain to the general public how the allocation of seats are arrived at. Further, to the extent that the ranking of candidates on a list may be altered by voters' choice, this could have implications for the development of party politics and candidates' electioneering strategies.

13. Although both our current system and these other systems are all variants of list voting system, the underlying philosophy and the operation are very different. At this stage, we do not see a case for Hong Kong to adopt any of these other systems, bearing in mind in particular that the current system is operating smoothly. If changes were to be contemplated in the future, thorough consideration would need to be given to issues such as acceptability to voters and candidates, ease of administration, and implications for the development of party politics. A system which is too complex could deter public participation in the electoral process.

Constitutional Affairs Bureau
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