

Enhance voting mechanisms for stability and prosperity, pluralism

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Hong Kong's political system must excel on three features: maintaining stability and prosperity, effective executive-led government, and – towards those ends – a pluralistic political culture.

Functional constituencies (FCs) are important for stability and prosperity. They comprise the businesses and professionals that run the engines of the economy. FCs elect half the legislature. The other half is elected by universal suffrage through geographical constituencies (GCs). This is bicameralism, a checks and balance mechanism common among democracies.

FCs were prescribed by the Basic Law, which named stability and prosperity as a basic purpose for the Special Administrative Region. Most Hong Kong people apparently agree. Public opinion surveys have consistently shown more people for than against retaining FCs. This mandate for FCs should be formally established by one person one vote, i.e. “universal and equal suffrage”. Indirect election by majority mandate is as democratic as direct election. The election of all members of Legislative Council by universal suffrage envisaged in the Basic Law would then be realized.

Voters would more readily grant the mandate if endorsement is to be renewed, say, decennially. Likewise, voters should be able to choose from unchanged, lower, or higher ratios of corporate to individual votes within FCs.

In many countries, the ruling party – the party in majority – can impose its policies until the election tide is reversed. By comparison, our Basic Law-prescribed system of executive-led government is more conducive towards continuity, social harmony, and therefore stability. The administration has to continuously seek majority support in the legislature for its policies to be passed. But ensuring such passage simply by having a large enough “loyalist” camp would not produce the best policies or foster social harmony. It, too, would lead to eventual reversal of the election tide.

This is because our electorate is astute and increasingly well-educated. It seeks to strike a balance between enabling the administration to pass policies, and sufficient diversity in the legislature to sustain the capacity for rigorous scrutiny and rich dialogue. Only then can there be top-flight legislation, and policies in keeping with the interests of all elements of society and with Hong Kong's role as China's leading world city. In fact, some recent election gains by the “loyalists” might be explained by their increased readiness to take officials to task.

The voting mechanism should be refined to provide a much-needed option for pluralism and balance. For the GC elections, each voter might be given a hundred votes. He can cast all 100% for Party A's ticket as at present, or reserve some votes for other candidates, who may be of the other camp, for their individual contributions. He can also choose candidates outside

his GC. If a candidate wins more votes than the number needed for his election, the “surplus” votes would be transferable. All these ensure accurate representation of voters’ preferences.

Low turnout in the last District Council (DC) elections was symptomatic of problems including narrowness of choice. With 18 DCs divided into 405 constituencies, 907 candidates ran for 405 seats. Compared to, say, elections in LegCo or in Mainland Chinese villages, most voters know much less about their DC candidates. The average voter probably has little time or means to find out about district-level issues and who did what at the DC. Since constituencies are small, there are few constituency-specific issues, especially for old middle-income neighbourhoods.

Hence the ability of parties and candidates to make inroads to DC electors depends mainly on their ability to provide personal service, i.e. resolving grievances/difficulties, organizing activities with attractive benefits etc. To fill an increased number of LegCo seats with DC councilors could draw more accusations of the elections being contests of resources. Currently, DCs themselves hold seats in LegCo and those seats are mooted to increase.

Given this complex picture, the average voter is likely faced with some not very satisfactory options such as: simply cast his single vote for the party closest to his own views on SAR-level issues – if he is lucky enough to find that one of the two candidates of his constituency is from that party; simply reward the incumbent with a vote for the services he rendered; or give up and not vote.

To help the voter, again give him 100 votes with which he can vote for one or more parties/candidates running in his district – not just constituency.

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