

ELECTORAL SYSTEMS, REPRESENTATIONAL ROLES AND LEGISLATOR BEHAVIOUR: EVIDENCE FROM HONG KONG

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In this paper we tackle a question that has been frequently raised but less often addressed with appropriate data. We ask whether the electoral system and legislators' perceptions of their role have an impact on the behaviour of legislators.

Electoral systems are credited with a variety of consequences: for the party system, for government formation, and for the socio-demographic composition of parliaments. Arend Lijphart concludes that electoral systems can make an even bigger difference than this, and that in countries that are close to the model of "consensus democracy", of which proportional representation is a key element, the record of government is "kinder and gentler" than in "majoritarian democracies", which do not employ proportional representation (Lijphart 1999:258–300). In this paper we will concentrate not on any of these possible consequences but on an aspect that has received less attention from researchers, namely whether electoral systems have an impact on legislator behaviour. Primarily, we shall be attempting to examine the extent to which the electoral system affects legislators' allocation of their time, with a particular focus on the amount and nature of their interaction with their constituents. We shall do this by means of a study of members of Hong Kong's Legislative Council (LegCo).

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The concept of representational roles is widely discussed in studies of legislators. Some studies devise role typologies and attempt to fit legislators into these; others cast doubt on the utility of using the concept of roles in the first place. We will not in this paper rehearse the familiar general arguments (for a good overview of these, see Saalfeld and Müller, 1997), but we will test the proposition that legislators' role perceptions have an impact upon their behaviour.

Our project rests on the assumption that those members of parliament (MPs) who wish to be re-elected are likely to behave in such a way as to maximise their chances of re-election. We will ask, first, whether the precise kind of behaviour that such a desire for re-election entails is related to the way in which MPs are elected and, second, whether MPs' own role preferences affect their behaviour.

Legislator behaviour

Past research has attempted to tackle these questions in a variety of contexts. Whether the electoral system has any bearing on the amount of time that MPs devote to constituency work is a question that surfaces in political debate as well as in academic research. In Britain, for example, defenders of the existing method of election (simple plurality in single-member constituencies) are inclined to argue that the link between MPs and constituents is closest under this system. As one writer puts it:

One merit of single-member constituencies, whatever their drawbacks, is that each member represents a specific constituency. Thus there is achieved in the British system a closer contact between an MP and his constituents than can be achieved with the multi-member constituencies that are necessary for party list or STV systems (Punnett 1994:68).

One MP is unambiguously responsible for the whole constituency, and if a constituent approaches the MP with a problem, the MP cannot "pass the buck" to any other constituency representative. Some proponents of the current British electoral system see the link between MPs and their constituents in almost sacrosanct terms, and speak of the "sacred trust" and "inalienable bond" between MPs and their local constituents, as Crewe puts it (Crewe 1985:45). This closeness, they, believe would be weakened by any system that meant that each constituency would be represented by several MPs, none of whom might be prepared to accept responsibility for tackling difficult problems. However, others believe that this reflects altogether too rosy a view of the status quo, and point out that because of the large number of voters who cast their votes for defeated candidates under this electoral system, many voters do not feel at all well represented by an MP who may hold very different views from their own (Crewe 1985:55).

At the same time, in some other countries quite different electoral systems are alleged to have precisely the same consequence as Punnett attributes to the British single-member plurality system, namely intensifying the closeness of the link between MPs and constituents. This has been argued particularly strongly about those electoral systems that allow voters to make a choice among candidates of the same party, something that creates electoral competition both among and within parties. Incumbent MPs are vulnerable to losing their seat to a candidate of another party, and they are also vulnerable – perhaps, indeed, they are especially vulnerable – to being ousted by another candidate of their own party. This, it has been suggested, makes them especially attentive to the wishes and caprices of their constituents.

Whereas those who see the British electoral system as having this consequence usually take a benign view of this, in other countries the results are more likely to be evaluated negatively. In Japan, the intra-party competition between candidates of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) that existed under the single non-transferable vote (SNTV) system was blamed for drawing LDP MPs into a pattern of behaviour that involved delivery of as many particularistic and general benefits as possible to their constituency, which in turn led them to prioritise the raising of money to fund their activities and campaigns and resulted in a high degree of corruption and government ineffectiveness. Whether or not these putative causal links were really as strong as was alleged, this line of argument was a powerful factor in leading to the alteration of Japan's electoral system in the mid-1990s, with SNTV being replaced by a new system that removed the element of intra-party electoral competition (Shiratori 1995:87). In Ireland, which employs the single transferable vote (STV), and where as in Japan incumbent MPs are competing against other candidates from their own party as well as candidates from other parties, there are complaints, especially from politicians, that this intra-party competition encourages extravagant constituency effort, “imposes a time-consuming and unproductive drudgery on Dáil members, and consequently lowers the calibre of representative” (Hussey 1993:57–61). Academic assessments are much more cautious about the possible existence of any cause and effect (Sinnott 1999:17–23).

As these examples demonstrate, in the abstract it is perfectly possible to construct equally plausible but very different arguments as to why one electoral system rather than another might lead to greater pressure on MPs to undertake constituency work. When it comes to the empirical evidence, the picture that emerges from past research is indeterminate.

In the mid-1980s Vernon Bogdanor coordinated a cross-national project that examined the relationship between electoral systems and MPs' constituency work in a number of countries across the world. It found what seemed to be a pattern of shapeless variation, according to which the main determinants of the constituency-related workload on MPs were not the electoral system at all but, rather, factors such as the availability of alternative avenues of redress, the strength of local government, and the level of knowledge of the citizens. This led the coordinator to conclude that “electoral

systems are *not* fundamental in determining parliamentary / constituency relationships”, and that “electoral systems are, perhaps, rather more passive elements ... than either supporters or opponents of electoral reform tend to believe” (Bogdanor 1985:299). In a somewhat similar vein, Michael Mezey observes that although students of particular countries are inclined to feel that the time spent by their country’s MPs in dealing with requests for individual assistance from constituents is unusual, in fact “members of every type of legislature say that they are subjected to an incessant flow of such [casework] demands, and they indicate that coping with them requires a substantial portion of their time and resources” (Mezey 1979:159). These two studies disagree about whether there is real variation in the extent to which MPs undertake casework, but agree that, in any case, there is no evidence of the electoral system causing variation.

A more systematic cross-national study was undertaken in 1990 by Bowler and Farrell. They surveyed members of the European Parliament (MEPs) to find out whether there was any variation, related to electoral system differences, in the amount of constituency activity undertaken by MEPs. Their conclusion was unambiguous: “we see that a major impact on how MEPs allocate their time is due to electoral system effects” (Bowler and Farrell 1993:62). They found that those MEPs elected under “candidate-centred” electoral systems received more constituency requests than MEPs elected under party-centred systems. Moreover, MEPs elected in countries using small district magnitude (constituencies returning a small number of members) received more constituency requests than those elected at regional level, who in turn received more than those elected at national level (Bowler and Farrell 1993:55–6).

Wood and Young embarked on a two-country study, comparing the constituency workloads of British and Irish MPs. They noted that the STV electoral system used in Ireland could be expected to lead to MPs there undertaking more constituency work than their British counterparts, and this was borne out by their evidence. Moreover, there were some signs that British MPs undertook constituency work partly as a matter of role choice, whereas for Irish MPs the main motivation was fear of electoral punishment if they did not do it (Wood and Young 1997). Studlar and McAllister, studying Australian MPs, also emphasise the importance of roles, concluding that those MPs who believe that they are in parliament to promote the interests primarily of their voters tend to undertake rather more constituency work than MPs who have a different focus of representation (Studlar and McAllister 1996:79–80).

The other pieces of empirical research have not measured the constituency activity of MPs; instead, they have sought the perceptions of actors (MPs or voters) concerning this activity. Katz, having interviewed a number of MPs and party officials in Britain, Ireland and Italy, concludes that the different electoral systems employed in these countries are responsible for variations in the attention that politicians pay to their local constituency, with Ireland’s combination of a low voters-to-MPs ratio and intra-party electoral

competition explaining the high priority its MPs give to taking care of the grass roots (Katz 1980:86–7).

Curtice and Shively (2000) approached the question by seeking information not from MPs but from voters. Drawing on data gathered from 19 countries in the mid-1990s, they find that in countries using electoral systems with single-member constituencies there is greater contact between voters and MPs, and greater voter recognition of candidates, than where a PR system is used. However, in most of the PR systems for which they had data, voters had no power to choose among individual candidates, so it remains an open question whether there is more contact under systems that allow this choice, since MPs then have a strong incentive to cultivate a personal vote.

One problem that a number of comparative studies face is that by definition they cannot keep constant a whole range of factors that may affect the nature of links between MPs and constituents. It may be that differences in political culture, in the accessibility of the state bureaucracy, or in any number of other factors are stronger determinants of variation in these links than differences in the electoral system. For example, despite Katz's explanation of the high level of contact between MPs and constituents in Ireland in terms of the electoral system, other research has argued that the electoral system may well have little to do with this (Gallagher and Komito 1999). This is a powerful argument in favour of a study that manages to compare the outcomes under different electoral systems within one country. The advantage of a single-country study is that it can be assumed that the *demand* from constituents for MPs' services is fairly constant, but the *supply* is not, as MPs' incentives to provide an active service vary according to the electoral system (Carey and Shugart 1995).³

Thinking along these lines, in the 1980s Lancaster and Patterson interviewed members of the German Bundestag, who are elected by two different routes: half of them from single-member constituencies, and the other half from lists (these lists are closed, so voters cannot affect the order of candidates drawn up by the candidate selectors). They found, as they had expected, that the MPs from single-member constituencies were more likely than the list MPs to seek "pork" projects for their constituency – the rationale being that these MPs knew that they could claim all the credit for delivering the largesse, and this would be believed by the voters, whereas the list MPs knew that even if they did achieve a project for an area they represented, other list MPs would probably try to claim credit (Lancaster and Patterson 1990:467–8). Their results can plausibly be attributed to the effects of the different electoral systems under which German MPs are elected, though it should be noted that in most cases the differences between the two categories of MPs were fairly slight.

³ The only qualification to be made to this is that MPs may be able to alter the level of demand; demand can be increased by MPs' advertising their availability, performing well, and generally creating the impression that they are likely to achieve something for the constituent, and it can be decreased by the opposite kind of behaviour.

Putting these findings together, it is clear that there is plenty of room for enquiry. From some parts of the literature, a clear expectation emerges that MPs' constituency behaviour is related to the electoral system under which they operate, but different writers have different expectations as to the precise nature of the link. The empirical research conducted to date supports the view that the electoral system makes a difference, but this research tends to be suggestive rather than conclusive.

The Legislative Council of Hong Kong as a case study

Hong Kong's parliament, the Legislative Council (LegCo), in many ways provides the ideal case for examining the impact of electoral systems upon MPs' behaviour. Its main asset for research purposes is that since 1984 its members have been elected (using this word in its widest sense) by a remarkable number of different routes. Broadly speaking, there have been three different methods: election from geographical constituency, election from functional constituency, and appointment.

Prior to 1985, all members were appointed by the Governor. The number of members in this category has been steadily declining, and in addition their method of "election" has changed. By 2001, when we undertook our survey, only 6 MPs (10 per cent of the total) had come to LegCo by this route, these MPs having been elected by an 800-member Election Committee.

In 1985, the election of members from "functional" constituencies was introduced. Under this essentially corporatist scheme, those working in particular sectors – insurance, accountancy, medicine, tourism etc – elect MPs to represent them. Prior to 1995 the electorate in these constituencies was in effect confined to the leadership of the relevant interest group(s), but in that year it was expanded greatly, with all employees in the sector having a vote. Combined with an increase in the number of functional constituencies, this meant that most residents of Hong Kong were eligible to take part in electing an MP from a functional constituency. In 1997, though, following the handover to China, the electorate was dramatically reduced again, from 2.7 million to 232,000 (Lam 2000:34). In 2001, 30 of the 60 MPs (LegCo Members) were elected this way.

Election from geographical constituencies, the norm for parliaments elsewhere in the world, came late to Hong Kong, being introduced only in 1991. There has been significant change in the electoral system employed. In 1991, the geographical MPs were elected in 2-member constituencies under the block vote (in other words, each voter had 2 votes). In 1995 this was changed to election from single-member constituencies under the simple plurality system. In 1998 there was a further change, this time to a closed PR list system: 24 MPs were elected this way, with one constituency returning 6 members, two returning 5 members and two returning 4 members.

There is, then, a striking amount of variation in the independent variable, i.e. the electoral system, both over time and at any one time. If method of election really is a key factor that is likely to affect the way MPs behave in order to secure re-election, then we should be able to find evidence of its impact by studying the behaviour of Hong Kong MPs.

At the same time, it must be accepted that there are some respects in which LegCo is less than an ideal testing ground for this research. First, the assumption that MPs want to be re-elected and that their behaviour is affected by this desire may not be as true of LegCo as of many other legislatures. LegCo, after all, is usually dismissed as possessing very little power; it can veto government proposals, but that is about the extent of its role. It cannot vote the executive out of office, it cannot initiate legislation that would entail the spending of money, and it cannot subject members of the executive to intense questioning (Lam 2000:80). Moreover, a place in LegCo is not often a stepping stone in the process of recruitment to a position of executive or administrative power, as might be the case in some other supposedly weak parliaments. Hence, the low power (and perhaps prestige) of LegCo members might lead to a less intense desire for re-election than in other legislatures. (This possibility was one that we tested, by asking MPs how important it is to them that they be re-elected.)

Second, the lack of power of LegCo may mean that MPs do not have – or, at least, feel that they do not have – much power to influence their fate. Unless MPs have – or believe they have – some way to impress those with the power to re-elect them, their behaviour may not be affected at all by the desire for re-election. The closed list system used for the geographical constituencies might reinforce this feeling of powerlessness, since it means that an MP's fate may be determined simply by his or her position on the list; a high position guarantees re-election, whereas a low position makes re-election impossible whatever the electoral popularity of the MP.

However, there are reasons to believe that these concerns are not as substantial as they might seem at first sight. Regarding LegCo's lack of power, it could be argued that LegCo is not really so different from most parliaments around the world. While it is true that on paper most parliaments have more power than LegCo does, in practice their role in the policy-making process is hardly significantly greater than LegCo's role. Students of parliaments who start out trying to distinguish "strong" from "weak" parliaments have great difficulty in finding any cases, beyond the US Congress, of strong parliaments – even assuming that the difficulty of operationalising these terms can be overcome. For example, Mezey, categorising parliaments in terms of their policy-making powers, places the US Congress in the "strong, active" category and the parliament of every west European country in the "modest, reactive" category (Mezey 1979:36). Recent research, indeed, argues persuasively that the "government versus parliament" framework is not a particularly fruitful perspective for examining the work of parliaments, and that we should instead focus on other aspects of what MPs do (Andeweg and

Nijzink 1995). In addition, much of LegCo's work is done in committees, where government bills are scrutinised and often amended.

It is true that LegCo differs from the typical parliament in that the degree of fusion between government and parliament in Hong Kong is far less than in most countries. LegCo might superficially be seen as resembling a west European parliament in which all the members are opposition backbenchers, with little power, little attachment to the executive, and little expectation of ever being members of the executive. However, we should bear in mind that LegCo does have the power to reject government proposals, and therefore the government needs to build either ad hoc or durable bases of support in LegCo. Even if government cannot be explicitly be voted out of office, the life of a government could be made impossible by LegCo. In many ways LegCo resembles the European Parliament more than it resembles a typical west European parliament.

The second reservation expressed above, that LegCo members might be resigned to their fate at the next election and might thus be disinclined to modify their behaviour patterns, believing these to be irrelevant as far as their electoral prospects are concerned, is something that will be tested empirically in the present study. We must emphasise, though, that existing research certainly does not bear this suggestion out. For one thing, the functional members are elected from single-member constituencies under the simple plurality rule and are thus not "hidden away" somewhere on a party list. For another, even though a closed list system might seem to provide virtually no incentive to MPs to cultivate a personal vote (Carey and Shugart 1995:424–6), it does not have this effect in Hong Kong. First, the small district magnitude means that all candidates have a strong incentive to ensure that the voters know them personally. With party support in each constituency reasonably predictable, it will be clear to voters that the last seat will be fought out between, say, the second candidate on one party's list and the top candidate on another's. In consequence, "voters are always de facto choosing between familiar individuals", and "while the party label is still important, each candidate will try their best to cultivate their particularistic personal votes" (Ma Ngok 2000:16, 14). Second, as a result candidate selectors naturally give priority to voter appeal when selecting and ranking candidates on the list, so MPs have good reason to believe that establishing their personal popularity will assist their chances of re-election.

We cannot treat LegCo as a "typical" legislature, then, along the lines of a European parliament, though it is not quite so atypical as it might initially appear to be, but in some ways its uniqueness is an asset as far as research is concerned. The complete separation of government and parliament means that there is relatively little "coat-tails effect" on the electoral prospects of individual MPs. In many countries, after all, whether a government MP is re-elected depends more on the record and popularity of the government than on the performance of the individual MP. In LegCo, in contrast, MPs' fates are, to a considerable extent, in their own hands.

The rapid changes in the composition of LegCo mean that there is little past research on the roles and behaviour of elected MPs. The only previous study whose findings can be directly compared with our own was carried out by Kathleen Cheek-Milby, who undertook two surveys of MPs, one in 1987–88 and the second in 1992–93 (Cheek-Milby 1995). Cheek-Milby found that there was indeed a relationship between the focus of representation of an MP and the way in which he or she was elected (Cheek-Milby 1995:166–7, 200, 216). Our survey replicated some of Cheek-Milby's questions, and we shall draw explicit comparisons with her data when we come to present our own findings.

Legislator behaviour in Hong Kong

To gauge legislator behaviour in Hong Kong, we conducted a total of 17 in-depth interviews with MPs in the period March-June 2001. Most of our interviewees were current MPs, though a few were no longer serving. Although some had direct personal experience of different modes of election (or appointment), all could be clearly categorised into one of three main modes. Of our 17, 4 had been elected by the Election Committee, 5 represented a functional constituency, and 8 represented a geographical constituency. With each interviewee, we spent roughly one hour exploring electoral systems, representational roles and legislator behaviour. Our first task was to determine whether there were any systematic differences between the three categories of MP. Our second task was to assess whether any observed differences could cast any interesting light on debates about legislator behaviour. Our question about intentions regarding re-election generated no clear conclusions. For Election Committee members, the question was not really applicable, as this mode of election is being phased out. Most MPs elected by this route told us that they would not seek re-election (by an alternative route). For members from functional and geographical constituencies we got variable responses and could find no clear links to behavioural patterns.

We began by probing legislators' relationships with their constituents, and with civil society more generally. Here we found that the broader the franchise the larger the number of requests handled by legislators and the more frequent the contact with individual constituents. In general, MPs elected by the Election Committee received very few requests for action, and tended to take informal soundings among elite groups as a means of gauging the flow of public opinion. MPs elected from functional constituencies naturally engaged in constant exchange with members of their functional group, and frequently acted to promote the interests of that group. Legislators with a genuinely democratic mandate fielded most requests from the public, and tended to deal with individual constituents rather than interest groups. The vast majority of all requests put to geographical MPs concerned problems related to housing. However, within this broad picture we found two important sub-themes. The first was that party could cut across the tripartite

divide among legislators and disrupt patterns of legislator-constituent relations. This was particularly notable in the case of members of the Democratic Party, who have always had principled objections to undemocratic franchises, and who acted to undermine them by practical means. We thus found that even Democrats chosen by the Election Committee acted as if they had been elected through a geographical constituency, setting up offices in constituencies with limited or no Democratic representation, holding weekly surgeries, and interacting as much as possible with individual constituents. Whereas non-Democratic members chosen by the Election Committee reported only a handful of requests for action per week, Democratic members put the number at around 20-30, reflecting their more activist interpretation of their role. The second was that over time even MPs elected by undemocratic means tended to be partially drawn into the kinds of activities undertaken by their democratic counterparts. Whereas MPs for geographical constituencies reported that the number of requests for action received by their offices remained largely stable over time, MPs for functional constituencies and from the Election Committee reported an increase over time. We ascribe this differential experience to a dual process of social learning. On the one hand, Hong Kong people have over the years become aware that even MPs from non-geographical constituencies can be used as a resource for putting questions in LegCo or to the executive, giving advice, and so on. On the other, the media exposure given to all LegCo members, irrespective of franchise, means that they come to be seen by the public, and particularly by interest groups, as in some ways indistinguishable.

Turning to self-perceptions, we found substantial similarities at some levels. For instance, when we asked whether legislators felt it was most important to be a representative of all the people of Hong Kong, of all the people in their constituency, or of all the people who voted for them, almost all ranked all the people of Hong Kong first. This was unsurprising in the case of Election Committee members, for whom the two alternatives made little or no sense. It was more surprising in the case of members representing functional and geographical constituencies, and contrasts with the findings of Cheek-Milby, who traced a decline in a focus on all the people of Hong Kong and an increasing focus on MPs' own constituencies between 1988 and 1993 (Cheek-Milby 1995:199). In fact, members from functional constituencies stood out somewhat, tending to argue that they placed Hong Kong people and their constituents equally. They sought to square the circle of potential conflict by using variations on the theme of what's good for General Motors is good for America: most believed that what was good for their functional constituency was certainly good for Hong Kong.

An additional similarity was found at the level of role perception. An earlier study had found that a clear majority of MPs in all categories said they would give priority to their own convictions over the views of their constituents (Cheek-Milby 1995:202), and we discovered that little had changed by 2001. Most of our interviewees held that in any conflict between the views of their constituents and their own personal convictions they would

hold firm to their convictions, again maintaining that such a conflict was unlikely to arise. Probing further, we found that almost all legislators had a rather elevated notion of duty and calling. They had come to LegCo, they maintained, out of a sense of responsibility for the collective welfare and of commitment to public service. Members for functional constituencies in particular expressed a desire to further the interests of their constituents which, as we have said, they tended to see as synonymous with those of Hong Kong as a whole. But all of our interviewees saw themselves as responding to the needs of Hong Kong and doing their bit for the collective good.

Nevertheless, there were some significant differences at the level of MPs' self-perceptions. The most striking is that the time and energy devoted to legislative work declines with distance from a democratic electorate. Whereas MPs elected from geographical constituencies saw themselves as full-time legislators, those from functional constituencies tended to take some time away from LegCo business and those chosen by the Election Committee devoted only about half their time to the legislature. Furthermore, in this respect the impact of party was limited. Whilst Democrats chosen by the Election Committee sought to interact with a wide constituency, they still claimed to be only part-time legislators. Here the pattern was almost entirely uniform, with time spent being a LegCo member standing at about 50 per cent for Election Committee members, 75 per cent for functional constituency members and 100 per cent for geographical constituency members. In a linked respect, the differences generated by distinct franchises were less marked. As expected, Election Committee members reported a clearer focus on LegCo work than members from functional and geographical constituencies, who tended to undertake some constituency and party work. However, the cross-cutting party dimension again confused things somewhat, with Democrats in particular seeing themselves as active party members and constituency workers even if they had no clearly defined constituency. The result was that even some Election Committee members had a constituency office, though this contrasted somewhat with the two or three such offices usually run by geographical members. Moreover, some geographical members might have support bases that cut across constituency boundaries; one, for example, was identified strongly with a particular Chinese group within Hong Kong, and regularly responded to requests from members of that group even when they lived in other parts of the territory.

Members representing functional constituencies were notable in reaching out to their well-defined membership by means of regular newsletters, consultation forums, and attendance at key gatherings.

Conclusion

Our study of Hong Kong's LegCo confirms the conclusion reached by others, that electoral system effects are important in shaping legislator behaviour. We found that allocation of time is clearly shaped by mode of election to LegCo,

with legislators elected by more democratic routes devoting more time to legislative business. The amount of interaction with constituents was higher for functional and geographical members than for Election Committee members. Within the first two of these groups, the nature of contact differed. Whereas functional members tended to develop relationships with a clearly defined group, geographical members dealt with their constituents mainly on a one-to-one basis.

Our findings therefore confirm electoral system effects, and in particular they support the conclusion of Bowler and Farrell to the effect that legislators elected under “candidate-centred” electoral systems have a strong incentive to respond to their voters’ particularistic concerns (Bowler and Farrell 1993). We also found, though, that isolating these candidate-centred electoral systems is not as straightforward as might at first appear. LegCo members operating in single-member constituencies (the functional constituencies) felt that their work-rate in dealing with constituents would make a significant difference to their re-election prospects; but so did those members operating under a closed list system, one where voters are unable to determine which individual candidates from the list are elected (the geographical constituencies). The latter felt, contrary to some suggestions in the literature that individual candidates are virtually invisible under such systems, that their degree of commitment would determine their chances of re-election. One reason was that they believed that the party’s candidate selectors would take work-rate into account when deciding the order of candidates on the list, and would be very unlikely to demote a hard-working legislator who has built up personal popularity among the voters. In this, they resemble legislators in Belgium, who also work very hard for their constituents under a closed list system, mainly to impress the candidate selectors and thereby improve their chances of being placed in a high position on the party list at the next election (De Winter 1997:141–2). The second reason is that given small district magnitude (an average of just five members per constituency), each LegCo member knows that at the next election he or she may be perceived to be fighting for the last seat, so his or her personal record and image matter electorally. When district magnitude is large, we can expect, as the literature shows, that legislator behaviour will be quite different depending on whether the lists are open (with voters deciding which of the party’s candidates are elected) or closed (with the party’s candidate selectors determining a list order that the voters are unable to alter). When it is small, the nature of the lists may make very little difference, and that seems to be the case in Hong Kong – a point hitherto not fully appreciated by researchers.

Cutting across these results were, however, important role perception effects. Most notable were the actions of Democrats in seeking to negate the electoral system effects just described. Even when chosen by the Election Committee, Democrats sought to engage with an imagined constituency far broader than the few hundred electors who had put them into LegCo. In so doing, they partially, though never wholly, undermined electoral system effects. Such role perception effects also had a more extended impact, generating a

certain embarrassment among Democrats elected by the Election Committee, and a desire to switch to a more democratic franchise if returned in the future. At the other extreme, committed paternalists wedded to the belief that Hong Kong has little desire or need for democratic politics were very happy to disengage from party and constituency politics, both of which struck them as inappropriate to the territory. Perceptions were also affected by other factors, such as the legislators' position within community networks, which might sometimes lead them to respond to requests for assistance from people not even in their own constituency.

Our findings therefore confirm electoral system effects, with the important qualification that role perception effects, mediated by party, are also significant.

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