

Supermarket Lottery:

How Political Parties Use Closed Party Lists to Maintain Control

Imagine going to the supermarket and instead of selecting items and brands due to their taste and price, you have to choose between pre-filled shopping carts offered by the macedonian supermarkets. In this scenario consumers are asked to make a choice between pre-filled shopping cart 1, shopping cart 2, shopping cart 3, or shopping cart 4 from one of the supermarkets above. The catch is the stores get to choose what's inside the cart you buy. Consumers surrender decision-making to the supermarket on which products to buy and place their blind trust in the selected supermarket and how they decide to fill the shopping cart.

Proportional electoral model

Likewise, since 2002 the electorate in North Macedonia has been electing parliamentarians to the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia in a proportional election model, where citizens need to select a slate of 20 candidates (pre-filled shopping cart) from a particular political party (supermarket). In the current system, voters do not have an option to prioritize candidates lower down the party candidate lists.

The Republic's Constitution states that members of parliament are citizen representatives that should vote their conscience (Article 62). As the constitution prescribes, citizen representation is a cornerstone of representative parliamentary democracy. Yet, citizens in North Macedonia often feel overlooked by their elected representatives. Arguably, one of the root problems is the perception that MPs are accountable to party leaders because they decide which candidates are on the party lists, thereby reinforcing the perception that party leaders are “constituents of one” for their party’s MPs.

Some countries in the region, like Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, and Kosovo have adopted a model of preferential voting (open lists), where voters can choose individuals anywhere on a party’s candidate slate of candidates. Candidates lower down the lists are frequently chosen when they are more well known by voters or from a particular region or town. Using the supermarket analogy a bit more, this would mean customers (voters) would be able to choose what to buy from a grocery list of items (open list of MPs) available at a favorite supermarket (political party). This method would allow customers to have greater choice when shopping and voters more direct choice over who represents them in the

Assembly. With preferential voting elected members of parliament are arguably more accountable to their constituencies for reelection which could also inform their voting patterns.

One of the political parties called for amendments to the electoral code introducing preferential voting, or open lists in their 2016 and 2020 campaign platforms. The proposal faced opposition from other parties that were concerned how the electoral changes would impact on their political party. As it remains a pre-election campaign promise for the party who promoted the idea for open lists, preferential voting could be revisited as a legislative proposal.

To better understand public perception on the topic and the general perception on the work of the Assembly, through the Parliament Support Programme (PSP), the Institute Democracy Societas Civilis Skopje (IDSCS) conducts annual face to face surveys with a representative sample of citizens of North Macedonia and a margin of error +/-3%. PSP supports the institutional development of the Parliament and is implemented by the National Democratic Institute, the IDSCS, and Center for Change Management, with funding from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. The latest survey was conducted by IDSCS from February 17 - March 6, 2000.

Whom Do MPs Represent?

When asked whom MPs represent in Parliament, citizens surveyed responded that MPs represent their personal interests (73%) and interests of their party (73%) (See line graph.). Fourteen (14) percent believe MPs represent the interests of citizens from their electoral districts. Fewer than 1 out 10 surveyed replied that

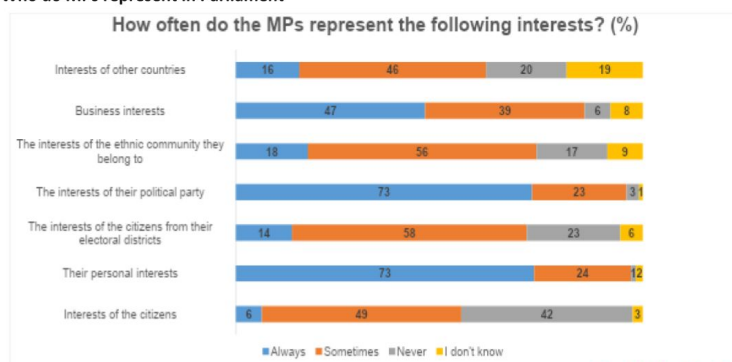
MPs represent the interests of the citizens. Both the interests of other countries (16%) and interests of the ethnic community to which MPs belong (18%) were evaluated as being better represented by MPs



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V. Who do MPs represent in Parliament



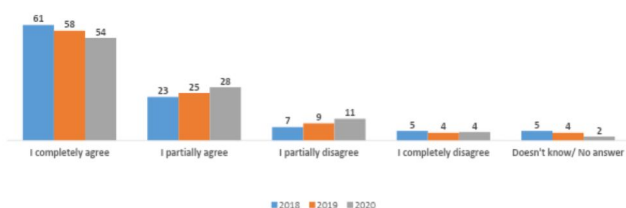
than the interests of citizens. To mitigate this perception, MPs need to be perceived as being closer to citizens and representing their specific regional and policy needs.

Overdependence on Party Leaders?

With 80 new MPs or two thirds new turnover in the new Assembly mandate, MPs have limited job security and ability to cultivate relationships over time with their constituents. Traditional high turnover limits effective advocacy for the communities that members serve. Citizens were asked to assess how



MPs are fully dependent on the will of political party leaders (%)



dependent MPs are on their party leaders (See line graph.). Five out of 10 citizens' surveyed fully agree MPs have an overdependence on party leaders, while 28% partially agree. Fifteen (15) percent partially or completely disagree that MPs are dependent on party leaders. With perceived or actual MP dependency on party

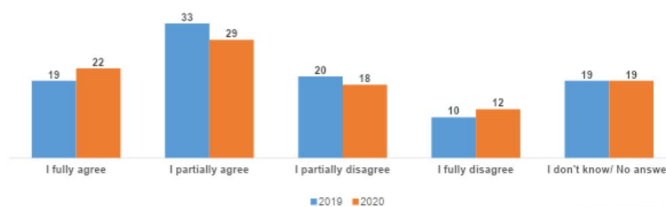
leaders, it is hardly surprising political parties will willingly relinquish such influence without the public's insistence.

Can an Electoral Model Change Reduce Dependence on Party Leaders?

Citizens were asked whether a change in the way MPs (electoral models) are elected could contribute to reducing the dependence of MPs from party leaders. Five out of 10 surveyed respondents fully or partially agreed that a change in the election model was needed



Can the change in the way MPs (electoral models) are elected on parliamentary elections contribute to reducing the dependence of MPs from party leaders? (%)



to reduce the dependence on party leaders (See line graph.). Three out of 10 surveyed fully or partially disagreed with the statement, while 19% did not know or refused to answer. Preferential voting is one method to maintain the proportional election model while giving voters consequential choice in who represents them in the Assembly. Other parties have considered a return to the majoritarian model used in 1994, using the “first past the post” principle, with single member districts similar in size to municipalities that elect members to represent them in national legislatures. In 1998, the country also tried a mixed member majoritarian model that combines the “first past the post” principle with a proportional election model. When considering changes to the election model, equitable gender representation and consideration of smaller ethnic communities should also be addressed encouraging greater inclusion.

Seven out of 10 citizens believe MPs represent their personal interests and the interests of their political party. Eighty-two (82) percent of survey respondents either fully or partially perceive that MPs are dependent on party leaders, while 51% of citizens favor a change in the electoral model to reduce MP dependency on party leaders. Preferential voting is but one example how to achieve this. For citizens to be prioritized by MPs and their political parties, citizens arguably need a greater stake in the electoral process. Most consumers in a supermarket, like most voters at a polling station, want to know what they are getting. When parties pre-fill candidate lists (shopping carts), the MPs are dependent on them, not voters. When political parties make these choices on the behalf of voters, it is a lottery. Voters are not able to individually select parliamentary candidates they feel more accurately represent their interests.