



COUNCIL
FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF THE
SOUTH AFRICAN
CONSTITUTION

Media Statement

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Parliament should take up Mantashe's electoral reform challenge

CASAC notes the comments made by ANC Secretary General, Gwede Mantashe, that the electoral system used for local government elections be reviewed. He said that the overall result appeared not to reflect the result of the votes in individual wards.

The Local Government Elections makes use of a hybrid electoral system that combines individual wards and proportional representation (PR). In all municipalities (except District Councils) voters are presented with 2 ballot papers, one for the ward candidate and one for the PR party list. Wards are determined by the candidate who receives the highest number of votes, regardless of whether they cross the 50% mark.

Where candidates on a ward ballot are also members of parties that feature on the PR list their votes in the ward ballot are added to the PR list ballot before a formula is applied to achieve a result that reflects the proportional support for that party overall in the municipality (adding the ward votes to the PR votes for that party). Through this mechanism parties who win few or no wards are nevertheless rewarded with representation in a council based on the adjusted PR ballot if they meet a minimum threshold. It may appear to be a complex system but it is ultimately a fair one reflecting the total aggregate proportion of the support that the party received.

Regardless of which aspect of the hybrid system Mr Mantashe refers to, his comments should nevertheless prompt us to enter into a national discussion about the electoral system generally. The most acute need for reform is in fact at the national and provincial levels where we make use of a closed party list proportional representation system, without any wards or constituencies.

It is a system incorporated in the interim and final Constitutions and was designed to be inclusive. The Constitution required the system to be reviewed after the second democratic elections in 1999. This was done by the Committee chaired by Dr Frederik Van Zyl Slabbert in 2003. It produced a comprehensive report that contained majority and minority recommendations but Cabinet decided to continue with the existing system without any modification. Regrettably the report has also not been properly considered by Parliament.

CASAC is cognisant that each electoral system has inherent strengths and weaknesses. While pure constituency systems might promote better responsiveness and accountability, PR systems promote greater inclusivity, diversity and representivity. Our local government

CASAC MEDIA STATEMENT

electoral system tries to harness the maximum benefits of both, and it is therefore at a national and provincial level that we should be looking at electoral reform. Although there may be slight adjustments required to the local government electoral system for simpler PR calculations, this should form part of a more comprehensive debate on electoral reform.

CASAC believes that in order to strengthen and consolidate democracy it is incumbent upon us to review the van Zyl Slabbert report and its recommendations, as well as survey other changes to the electoral system that may enhance it. We therefore call on Parliament to initiate a discussion on the electoral system.

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