

NSP Calls for GRCs to be Scrapped

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The National Solidarity Party (NSP) has called for the Group Representation Constituency (GRC) system to be abolished and replaced by single-seat constituencies, with some reserved for minority MPs.

Constituencies reserved for minorities would be determined in the way that the current electoral boundaries are drawn up, the party said in a paper released yesterday.

The Constituency Reserved for Minorities (CRM) scheme would ensure multiracial representation in Parliament just as well as GRC but "without most of its major flaws", the NSP said.

The scheme is not a new one. It was put up as an alternative proposal during the debate to introduce the GRC system in 1988.

But it was rejected on the grounds that some residents would be forced to accept Malay-only candidates and if the minority constituencies were then rotated around to overcome this problem, it would affect the relationship between MP and resident. This was "fallacious reasoning", the NSP said.

It acknowledged that the GRC system has succeeded in "enshrining multi-racialism".

But it also "hinders political competition, fortifies the incumbents and works against democracy", it added.

In Singapore today, winning an election by appealing to voters on the basis of ethnicity is also "highly improbable", it added.

NSP's key criticism of the GRC is that it does not abide by the "one-man-one-vote" rule - a voter in a GRC can elect four to six MPs with one vote, while a SMC voter can only elect one.

"There is a lack of parity between the weight of the votes," said secretary-general Jeannette Chong-Aruldoss at a press conference yesterday, attended by about 25 people.

The CRM scheme would also "lessen allegations of gerrymandering" and not allow new candidates to "ride on the coat-tails of heavyweight candidates" to enter Parliament, the paper said.

Yesterday, political analysts said such a scheme would raise the danger of race-based politics.

Institute of Policy Studies senior research fellow Gillian Koh said residents who do not want to be "locked into a CRM with a particular racial orientation" may move to other constituencies, leading to segregation.

National University of Singapore sociologist Tan Ern Ser said the proposal could "reinforce consciousness of ethnic differences".

A better approach would be to retain but reduce the size of GRCs to no more than three, until race matters less, he said.

Mr Zaqy Mohamad, a PAP MP in Chua Chu Kang GRC, said that minority MPs still face challenges due to cultural sensitivities or language barriers.

"There is still a gap, especially among the older generation. I have managed to bridge this over time, but it's still an investment," he said.