

Libertarianz Submission on Broadcasting Funding Allocation

1. Grudging Recognition of the Rules

The current rules around election broadcasting are immoral. Any state funding of political parties and political advertising violates the principle of freedom of conscience. Nobody should be forced to fund the promotion of policies he or she disagrees with. It is repugnant that citizens should have tax extorted from them to promote policies to which they may be vehemently opposed.

However, it is the only game going. The Broadcasting Act also violates the principle of freedom of speech by banning the purchase of radio and television advertising with political parties' own money. This latter wrong breeds the former.

Since it is the only game going, Libertarianz will play by these rules and ask for as much money as we can get. We will then not spend it, thus not frittering away on a few seconds of television the taxes that some nurse or mechanic worked for many months to pay.

2. Criteria for Allocation

The Act lists six criteria for the Commission to consider when making the broadcasting allocation. We ask that the Commission shift the weighting from what it has applied at previous elections. The 2005 election was very close event - to the detriment of all of the smaller parties. We ask that less emphasis be placed on the number of votes cast than has happened in the past.

The Act lists Parliamentary representation as another of the criteria to be considered. During and since the last election it has become clear that many of the parties represented in Parliament have become accustomed to using public money to propagandise rather than to serve the needs of their constituents. Consequently, Libertarianz believes that the Commission should place less emphasis on Parliamentary representation during this deliberation. Justice would be served by denying public funds to those who have helped themselves elsewhere.

The most important provision is the fairness criterion. Labour passed the Electoral Finance Act with the intention of protecting incumbency and inhibiting dissent. At present there are only two major parties to choose from (and, arguably, only one set of policies). This stagnant situation leads to low interest in politics, low engagement with the electoral system and low election turnouts.

Providing opportunities for small parties to convey their policies will stimulate popular engagement with the electoral system. Smaller parties provide better distilled sets of policies and encourage centrist and populist politicians to occasionally take a stand on an issue, providing more genuine choice for voters and promoting substance over style.

3. Punching Above Our Weight

Libertarianz punches above its weight, despite routinely being classified as "other". Since the introduction of MMP many tiny fly-by-night political parties have come and gone, registered for one election and then never been seen again. Libertarianz is a permanent fixture on New Zealand's political stage, consistently representing a recognisable political position unlike so many other small parties that drift in and out of existence.

Libertarianz has been the real opposition since the last election. While National was quibbling about its leadership and Rodney was dancing with the stars Libertarianz leader Bernard Darnton was in the High Court attempting to hold Labour to account for its pledge card rort, raising serious questions about the government's conduct and highlighting important constitutional questions. While poll results place us at the edges of the election, our actions place us at the centre of the major political questions of the day.