Focus Group Research Report on Political Parties in Hong Kong

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Research conducted by

APCO Asia Limited

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NDI NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE
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OVERALL SUMMARY

Below is a summary of the common views and values found across eight focus groups on voters' experiences and attitudes, perception of political figures, and expectations of political parties.

(a) On Voting Experiences

A majority of focus group participants (77%) have voted before in either Legislative Council or District Council elections; half of them voted in both elections.   Most participants believe in election and voting as a way to execute their civic duty, although some expressed that "*there is a lack of good candidates to choose from.*"   Many participants said they voted "by elimination" or adopted a "negative vetting method", and cast their votes from the remaining choices.   An interesting finding across different groups is that participants often describe "voting" as a <u>duty</u> ("I *have to* vote."), rather than a <u>right</u> ("I *can* vote.").

About a quarter of participants (23%) had no prior voting experience.   Non-voters said that they found previous elections were "*a waste of time*" because "*virtually no suitable candidates were available*". Participants also said they lacked confidence in political candidates.   Some participants expressed concerns that they may have voted for the *"wrong"* candidates, who would not fulfill their obligations. These participants hence chose not to vote and "*let other (voters) make the decision and bear the responsibility*".

(b) On Candidates' Selection Criteria

Participants outlined two different sets of selection criteria for Legislative Council and District Council election candidates.   They viewed that for District Council elections, the candidates' genuine knowledge of the needs of the constituency is more important than their track record in public services. They said candidates' party affiliation and election principles, such as advocacy for greater democratization, would have less relevance to voters' decisions in future District Council elections.

Despite party affiliation, participants view ideology and stance as important factors when choosing from the Legislative Council candidates.   They took the candidates' <u>personal intention</u>, and their (party) affiliation's <u>organization structure</u> and <u>management style</u> into consideration when voting.   Most participants expressed a strong desire to understand the "*overall policy direction*" of various political parties before voting for their candidates.   Participants were inclined to support candidates who can explain the government's policy in a clear and concise manner.   They wanted to learn about the candidates' policy platforms, and generally did not like their election slogans.   One interesting finding is that participants across different groups are, to a certain extent, influenced by their family members in making their decisions during an election.

(c) On the Performance of Political Parties

Participants deliberated on the limitations of Hong Kong's existing political system.   Given no elected parties can ultimately transform into a "ruling" majority, they observed that political parties *"do not plan for long-term goals and directions, but pursue impromptu and short-term targets instead".*

Most participants felt that political parties are overly reliant on "political celebrities", riding on the charisma of a few individuals.   But at the same time, participants also felt that Hong Kong *lacks* "political stars" to create "a vibrant political environment". By "vibrant", most participants meant "a

diversity of talents".   As a result, almost all participants found that the platforms of different parties have become very _similar_ to each other.

Participants said that political parties have failed to _incubate succession planning_, resulting in weak second- / third-tier support and fragile party structure.   Without prompting, participants were still able to recap press reports of internal struggles of almost all political parties over the past eight years, signifying that negative media coverage has a long-lasting impact on the public.

Many participants valued the capability, strategy (and even the intention) of some political parties in facilitating communication with the Mainland government.   Some policy initiatives taken by individual politicians, such as the advocacy of labor rights and introduction of policies promoting economic growth, were welcomed by participants.

(d)   On the Behavior of Individual Councillors

Participants have reiterated their abhorrence of some of the behaviors and gestures of the politicians. Radical behavior such as lying on the street and showcasing a coffin during protests were seen as jeopardizing social order and stability.   In addition, participants complained that politicians have spent excessive time quarrelling with each other in meetings instead of deliberating constructively on issues.

On the other hand, participants recognized some politicians with positive character and attributes, which include logical presentation of arguments, professional knowledge, impartiality and integrity, and even good manners and etiquettes.

Participants recognized broadcast news, followed by press articles, as the most direct and accessible channels through which to learn about political figures.   However, banners and posters posted in public areas also seem to have long-lasting impact on a councillor's image.   Participants commented that the content of such banners were trivial and slogan-driven, and most participants said the candidates tend to "_over-state their achievements_".   Interestingly, participants noticed not only the content and design of these banners, but also the _negative visual impact_ that these banners had on the local environment.

(e)   On the Expectations and Aspirations of Political Parties

There were consistent opinions across different groups that political parties should collect and _gauge public opinion systematically_ and channel them to the government.   _Welfare_, _livelihood_ and _education_ were popular topics frequently mentioned by respondents as areas that political parties should "_come up with more practical solutions_".   Participants hoped that political parties could set aside their differences, focus on the above key policy areas in a concerted manner and develop the ability to connect and communicate with the Mainland government.

Despite uncertainties about future political party development, all participants were of the view that political parties must invest in training the next generation of politicians.

A Brief Introduction of the

National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI)

The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) is a nonprofit organization working to strengthen and expand democracy worldwide. Since 1997, NDI has conducted a series of assessment missions to Hong Kong to consider the development of the HKSAR's "post-reversion" election framework, the status of autonomy, rule of law and civil liberties under Chinese sovereignty, and the prospects for democratization beyond the 10 year transition period set forth in the Basic Law. In 2002, NDI established a field office in Hong Kong.

NDI works with political parties and democratic activists to encourage public discussion and debate on political reform. The Institute shares information with and provides technical assistance to Hong Kong political parties, political groups, and civil society organizations seeking to increase their ability to increase citizen participation in the HKSAR's political life. NDI does not provide funding to any political party or political group in Hong Kong.

Since 2002, NDI has provided technical assistance to Hong Kong's political parties and political groups to address issues such as: membership recruitment; media relations; communicating with constituents; voter contact; and fundraising. Through multi-party and single party workshops as well as consultations with party leaders, NDI has worked with all of the HKSAR's major parties to discuss the external political environment and the parties' internal structural weaknesses. Participating parties and political groups have included the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong, the Democratic Party, the Liberal Party, The Frontier, the Hong Kong Progressive Alliance, the Citizens Party, and the Article 45 Concern Group.

A BRIEF INTRODUCTION OF THE APCO ASIA RESEARCH TEAM

APCO Asia was founded in 1997 and currently has offices in Hong Kong, Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Jakarta, Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, Singapore and a network of close affiliates in all Asian capitals. As a public affairs consultancy, APCO Asia believes in researched-based strategic counseling --- using research as a tool to analyze clients' current positions, immediate needs and long-term aspirations. APCO understands that all our clients are different, and hence have diverse needs. Therefore, we offer customized market and opinion research work with detailed data analysis for them, followed by recommendations and strategic counseling as we move forward with the client.

APCO's research offerings include:

<u>Market & Consumer Research</u> – Proprietary perception audit research software, unaided awareness surveys, focus groups, in-depth consumer / user experience analysis, etc.

<u>Opinion & Polling Research</u> – Public opinion polling via phone or proprietary online platform.

<u>Economic & Trade Research</u> – Product profiling and intelligence gathering, executive interviews, economic and impact analyses, demand projection, etc.

Standing at the nexus of business, government and the media, APCO is well-placed to assist clients with research projects of various types, and we have a proven track record of in-depth market research and global benchmarking research studies. Beyond our network in Asia, APCO also has an international team throughout Europe, the Middle East, Africa and the Americas.

1. BACKGROUND & OBJECTIVES

In March 2006, the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) commissioned the Hong Kong Transition Project of the Hong Kong Baptist University to conduct an opinion poll investigating Hong Kong people's attitude towards political parties. The study generated valuable information for gauging the general public's views on the existing governance system, political parties and the recent constitutional reform package of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

Although the study accumulated a large amount of useful and trustworthy quantitative data, NDI sought a more in-depth probing of certain issues in order to tap into the public mind and elicit insight. Therefore, NDI appointed APCO Asia Limited (APCO) to undertake a focus group study in May 2006 for a different analysis of the public's perception of the current political climate and political parties in Hong Kong. The two studies, which comprise both quantitative and qualitative components, allow readers to draw a more comprehensive picture of public sentiments.

The major objectives of the focus group research are to explore and assess issues including:

- Perception and ratings of political parties in Hong Kong;

- Factors determining voters' voting behavior;

- Voters' expectations of political parties;

- Impact of new political parties (e.g. Civic Party) on the political landscape; and

- Effectiveness of promotional channels used by political parties.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Choosing the Appropriate Method

Focus groups are a form of exploratory research designed to uncover informative qualitative data about a certain research area, capitalizing on ideas generated by the synergy and dynamics of participants. It brings a group of targeted audience together in a face-to-face, interactive discussion on specific topics under the guidance of trained interviewers.   For each research project, a minimum of six discussion sessions, lasting approximately 50-90 minutes each, should be conducted for accurate results.

There are several key functions and benefits that only focus group research can bring as compared to other forms of research instruments.   Through *investigation*, focus groups help to gauge the perception and views of participants on certain issues.   *Insightful* group interactions elicit insight and information from participants and allow *in-depth* probing of issues.   While surveys have pre-set and close-ended questions, the fluid design of the focus group research helps reveal the unexpected and *inspire* information flow.   Focus groups' *exploratory* nature can examine the language used by participants for messaging and are thus good *interactive* platforms for message / language / advertising / product testing.   To complement quantitative survey and polling questions, focus groups can have a *validating* effect.

In Hong Kong, focus group research is commonly utilized by private companies and the public sector to elicit opinions on and attitudes towards a specific topic / issue, or a particular type of products.   While using focus group interviews in the political arena as a method to detect public sentiment is relatively new to Hong Kong, international experience has proven that focus groups are effective in gaining insight into a political issue and pinpoint problems or areas for improvement for a political figure or organization.

2.2 Research Subject Recruitment

In this focus group exercise, all focus group participants were recruited by phone, selected from two major channels:
*   APCO's proprietary "research and survey panel" of over 3,000 research subject profiles
*   The Hong Kong Transition Project's database from the current telephone polling survey

Both outlets were successful in sourcing and recruiting respondents for the focus groups.   A small monetary incentive was also provided for volunteers who participated in this research.

2.3 Group Composition

Eight one-hour focus group sessions were conducted, involving a total of 69 participants, from April 28 to May 15, 2006.   Each group consisted of six to 10 participants representing different socio-economic division and age segments, as described below:

Table 1: Composition of Focus Groups

Group 1 Young Grassroots 18 to 29 years old; Non-university degree holder	Group 2 Mature Grassroots 30 years old or above; Non-university degree holder	Group 3 Young Professionals 35 years old or below	Group 4 Mature Professionals 36 years old or above
Group 5 Small Business Owners Company with fewer than 20 employees	Group 6 Homemakers 30 years old or above	Group 7 Retirees 60 years old or above	Group 8 University students 19 to 24 years old

To ensure diversity in the discussions, research subjects in all groups above were screened so that no more than two subjects expressed strong preference over a particular political / public figure and / or political organization.   No more than three subjects in each group have met in previous studies.

2.4 Research Procedure

The sessions were convened and facilitated in Cantonese by two moderators from APCO, using a structured discussion guide with open-ended questions (please refer to Appendix A) and according to interactions between the participants.   An NDI representative was also present at all sessions as a silent observer.   All discussions were audio-recorded; two APCO staffers revisited the audio records after each session to document relevant comments in verbatim.   The notes were used for comparison and analysis across all eight groups.   Relevant comments made on political parties and politicians were taken out first and listed out separately (c.f. Chapter 4).   Four staffers then independently selected the most relevant quotes of each group on the performance of political parties in general.

2.5 Reference Group / Pilot Session

A pilot focus group discussion was conducted on April 28, 2006, with a group of senior professionals resembling that of Group 4, to ascertain whether responses to the data form and the focus group discussion guide provided the necessary information.   It helped to determine the appropriateness of the questions and identify areas that needed to be modified, deleted or added.   The pilot focus group also provided an approximation of how much time each focus group would entail.   The discussion results of this group were used as reference data juxtaposed with other groups.   Slight modifications were made to the discussion questions subsequent to the pilot group, which include simplifying the language and adding more relevant and follow-up questions to probe insight.

3. KEY FINDINGS (I): UNIQUE CONCERNS OF EACH GROUP

While the focus groups shared common views on certain issues, different groups also expressed distinctive opinions that reflected unique characters.

Group 1: Young Grassroots
18 to 29 years old (Non-university Degree Holders)

Overall Impression of Political Parties –

Political parties operate like travel agencies, organizing trips and snake banquets all the time. They only care about the affluent but not the poor.
(政黨像旅行社，只懂辦旅行團和蛇宴。服務只會惠及富人，窮人反而不理。)

Political parties need to enhance their transparency and understanding of the public towards the party, and not just increase promotion and exposure.
(政黨要增加其透明度及增加市民對其之認識，而並非單單增加宣傳和曝光。)

First, there are pro-China political parties; then, there are pro-government parties. But pro-China does not necessarily mean pro-government.
(先有親中的政黨才有親政府的政黨，但親中不一定親政府。)

All political parties have lost sight of their original aims and their platforms all look similar now.
(所有政黨都忘記了當初成立的目標，現在個個黨的政綱都差不多。)

I prefer councillors who are well-mannered, speak in an orderly manner and would not quarrel with others on TV programs.
(喜歡比較「斯文」，不會在電視節目中吵架，而說話有條理的議員。)

The candidates' pictures on the banner are usually too large and impractical.
(街牌張相太大，無實際作用。)

To me, neighborhood committees and TV programs are effective promotion channels.
(透過業主立案法團及電視節目作宣傳，對於我而言是有效宣傳渠道。)

Political parties have to conduct more surveys to understand our needs.
(政黨要多做調查，方知道我們要什麼。)

Political parties need to contribute more at district level. For instance, building more zebra-crossings, developing an MTR line on Cheung Chau, and extending more bus routes to Heng Fa Chuen.
(政黨要多做地區事務，如建多點斑馬線、在長洲建地鐵、更多巴士通往杏花村。)

District Councils have too many elected members that are not from the local constituency. I tend to vote for candidates who grew up in my district and have solid community service experience.
(區議會有太多跨區、太多空降的議員。我會選區內土生土長、有建設的候選人。)

Coming from a less favorable social stratum, participants in this group expressed that they wanted to see changes and reform in the society. It is therefore not surprising to see that participants in this group repeatedly mentioned newer parties like the Civic Party and the League of Social Democrats. Furthermore, most participants saw *education* as the key to the future and would urge politicians to

focus on this policy area.   Participants in this group specifically asked politicians to come up with "practical initiatives" that can expand and deliver educational opportunities to them.

Although the young grassroots said that they expect radical reform in the society, they also expressed that they prefer politicians to adopt a rational approach when pursuing their goals.   Participants of this group said that they would support candidates who are *well-educated and well-mannered*.   They generally admitted to having a limited understanding of the current political scene, and preferred more effective and direct promotion with clear and concise messaging.   Without prompting, they suggested text messaging in mobile phones and email as the preferred medium of communication.

Group 2: Mature Grassroots
30 years old or above (Non-University Degree Holders)
Overall Impression of Political Parties –

Councillors need not be good looking.   Don't be so fake.
(議員不用好樣，不要太假。)

Political parties are interested in slogans.   Legislative Council members are only "political vases" without much political clout.   It's more practical to enhance communication with the Mainland.
(政黨宣傳流於口號，立法會議員又係政治花瓶，權力不大，不如加強與大陸溝通更實際。)

I agree that political parties should try to have more communication with Beijing, Beijing controls our fate.   If you cannot even talk to them, you are just shouting.
(我同意政黨多些和北京溝通，北京掌握我們的命運。如你不能和他們對話，你只是在大叫。)

Political parties should be there in LegCo to monitor the government and let the public know what's happening.   But I won't put the emphasis on grassroots, livelihood stuff.   In fact, I want them to point out the mistakes made by the government and help Hong Kong find its positioning.
(政黨需要在立法會監察政府並要讓公眾知道有什麼事情發生。但我不會太強調草根、民生的事。事實上，我需要政黨指出政府的錯誤，並幫助香港找出其定位。)

I think when property developers reclaim the harbor, the councillors should go and stop them.
(我覺得當地產商填海時，議員應該去制止他們。)

I don't know what the councillors are doing, nor do I know what I can ask the councillors to do.
(我不知議員們在做什麼，也不知我可以叫議員做什麼。)

During elections, councillors mail you a lot of pamphlets, and even though I know who I will vote for, I would still read other candidates' pamphlets.
(當選舉時，議員先會寄很多單張給你。我雖知道會投誰人，但我會照讀其他單張。)

Councillors argue with each other all the time.   They have no tangible contribution to the society. In spite of the lack of good candidates, I would still vote as it is my civic duty.
(議員不斷互相對罵，沒有建樹。雖然無好議員作選擇，不過投票係公民責任。)

None of the political parties attempt to resolve issues.   Councillors just aim to gain political chips for themselves.   They don't come up with feasible solutions.
(沒有黨為件事好，議員只是各自在爭取政治籌碼，根本沒有可行方案。)

Politicians should do something to improve people's livelihood, such as hygiene, transportation and taxation.   It is better than making politics.
(為生活領域做點事，如衛生、交通、稅務，好過只搞政治。)

The "Mature Grassroots" participants generally felt that they have enjoyed a more stable financial status over the past two years. Nevertheless, they still expect politicians to fight for "better welfare". According to their understanding, better welfare does not necessarily mean direct subsidy; rather, they said they would prefer more *training and employment opportunities*. .

The "Mature Grassroots" said that councillors should possess three distinctive qualities: *pragmatism*, *be direct* and *vocal*. In contrast to the "Young Grassroots", this group of participants said that they "prefer strategies with quick-win results" rather than radical reforms. They also stressed that they are aware of the actual contributions of different councillors in their districts, and claimed that they would normally vote for councillors who have a list of solid, proven track records.

Group 3: Young Professionals
35 years old or below

Overall Impression of Political Parties –

I am curious, that's why I vote.
(我好奇，所以我投票。)

Voting is a civic responsibility. I would vote particularly in times of political instability. More participation from society would mean better representation.
(投票係公民責任。政治開始不穩定，我就出來投票；多些人參與，要求可以平均一點。)

Political parties have more and more high ideals which just confuses everyone. Eventually it will be harder for us to cast our votes.
(政黨理念越來越多，令人覺得混淆視聽，將來投票也愈來愈難。)

Even if I don't support any of the candidates, I will still vote through negative vetting because I support the ideology of election.
(無鍾意的候選人都會用剔除的方式去投票，因為我支持「選舉」這個理念。)

All political parties don't think about their direction anymore, and tend to follow the herd.
(政黨不再思考方向性的問題，大家做事隨波逐流。)

Political parties are like football teams. I hope they would play better by having a better form.
(政黨似一隊足球隊。我希望政黨打波打得比較有隊型一些。)

All political parties claim they are pursuing democracy.
(所有政黨都說自己在爭取民主。)

What's wrong with being pro-China? The situation has changed a lot now. Even the policies on the Mainland have changed.
(親中有什麼問題？現在的情況不同了，大陸也改變了政策。)

The key to success of a political party is to groom the next generation political talents as soon as possible.
(政黨的成功在於盡快培育下一代的政治人才。)

District Councils are mainly about community affairs. When choosing those candidates, we would be less concerned about their party affiliation. As for Legislative Councillors, however, we would be concerned about their ideology.
(區議會以地區事務為主，所以選區議會不會理會黨派。立法會議員則着重意識形態。)

Participants of this group said that they usually voted once or twice but they "*placed a high importance in voting*". They also said that they believed "*every vote matters*". This group also thinks that they are more capable of making "***informed choices***" during an election – provided that they have "*sufficient information about the candidates and the respective political parties beforehand*". However, participants were of the view that the policy platforms of different political parties lacked substance making it hard to differentiate one from the other. Also, they criticized political parties for having accumulated too many similar assertions, making their stances confusing.

The "Young Professionals" expressed that politicians must be able to guide their thoughts with sound and logical arguments, and more importantly, *a clear vision*. They also said that they appreciated well-designed promotional materials, including advertisements, posters, banners and party brochures.

Group 4: Mature Professionals

36 years old or above

Overall Impression of Political Parties –

> *After every election, each political party "sheds its skin". The present situation can be described as one party is consolidating, while the other is disintegrating.*
> (每次選舉後各政黨也會退一次皮。現在的情況是一黨在整合，而另一黨被肢解。)
>
> *Political parties have not changed but the world has changed. Political parties must have a stronger sense of risks and crises.*
> (政黨沒變，但世界變了，政黨要加強危機感。)
>
> *Too many street banners and too much nitty-gritty content on those banners. Their designs are bad. Torn banners greatly affect the aesthetics of the environment.*
> (街牌太濫，內容太瑣碎、設計差。爛的街牌毀壞市容。)
>
> *Comparing community work of rich and poor parties is like trying to compare apples and oranges.*
> (比較多錢和無錢政黨的地區事務係比較蘋果和橙。)
>
> *All political parties want to be affiliated with the Mainland – it's just a matter of degree.*
> (個個政黨其實都想親中，只是程度不同。)
>
> *The existing political structure is unfavorable for checks and balances. Political parties can only foster the formation of public opinion to influence the government.*
> (體制不利實質制衡，政黨只能製造輿論影響政府。)
>
> *A party's primary stance is of utmost importance. I would also look into a candidate's team profile.*
> (政黨基本立場最重要。選候選人則看重班底、團隊。)
>
> When the succession team takes up the baton, a party will have more structure and grow organically.
> (有第二梯隊接棒，組織就有系統，可以有「organic growth」(自然生長)。)
>
> *A party with strong organization and penetration can better attract the middle class. This will naturally make them bigger and stronger.*
> (政黨的組織及滲透力強，能吸納中產，勢力便自然能越來越大。)
>
> *Operating a political party must involve politics. "Playing politics" doesn't mean making no contribution. But you must be organized.*
> (做政黨有時必須要有手段，玩政治不等於不做事，但要有組織。)

Most "Mature Professionals" said that they still have a simplistic view of the political arena, and perceived the current situation as involving only the Democratic Party and the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong (DAB).   The group pointed out that most political parties do not have proper organizational management, nor effective planning and allocation of resources. They said that *financing* and *management* are pivotal to the success of political parties.

Participants of this group expressed that they would like political parties to put more emphasis on the *message over the medium*.   The "Mature Professionals" also said that they found most parties rely too much on personal charisma of a few "political celebrities".   Some claimed that even though they may disagree with the propositions of some parties, they admire their efforts in campaigning.

Group 5: Small Business Owners
Fewer than 20 employees
Overall Impression of Political Parties –

I always vote – But I usually cast an "abstained vote" (i.e. a blank ballot) to express that I don't support any candidate.
(我每次都有投票 － 但次次都投棄權票以表示我不支持任何一個候選人。)

There has to be a diversity of views.   Every party will of course have its own agenda, but as long as 30% of what they do is for the public, then it is acceptable to me.
(要有多元聲音才有化學作用。政黨一定有其政治目的，但只要他們做的事情中有 30%是為市民做就已可接受。)

Political stars attract people, and charisma is very important.   Politicians who have charm can score two or three extra points, and having charm could help reach out to the grassroots.
(政治明星吸引人，魅力最重要。有 charm〔魅力〕加 2、3 分。有 charm 便可接觸到基層。)

Good presentation skill is a basic requirement for Councillors; It's about leaders and their packaging.
(好的 presentation〔作簡報的〕能力是議員的基本要求。所有事都看領袖和他們的包裝。)

Councillors should not just satisfy the needs and demands of the citizens.   They should have the guts to discuss things that have long-term benefits.
(議員應非純粹滿足市民訴求，應夠「薑」講有利長遠事情。)

I would only be interested in politics if legislators can really help me achieve something.   May be it is easier to do it at the district level. I am just an ordinary citizen and don't think LegCo can help me.
(如果議員可以幫到我，我會對政治更有興趣。或者在地區事務上比較容易，但我只是個普通市民，我認為立法會應該沒有特別事情可以幫到我。)

Some councillors look weird, but they do put our interests at heart – better than talking with no action at all.
(有些議員看來雖然很奇怪，但真的有把我們的利益放在心中 － 較只說不做好。)

Street banners have some subliminal effects, but the messages are problematic.   They appear to be too boastful about the candidates' trivial contributions.
(街牌有潛移默化的作用，但街牌內容太褒獎自己，所爭取的其實好小事。)

The banners really affect the aesthetics of the environment, and their sizes are inappropriate. Political parties never consider where would be the best location for the banners.
(街牌影響市容，形狀大小又不合適，政黨從不考慮街牌應該放在哪裡最好。)

Small business owners stressed the importance of *political leadership* and said "*even political parties should embrace the concept of strong governance*".　Specifically, they pointed out that a key element for them to evaluate the leadership of a politician is his or her presentation skills.　On the other hand, they expressed worries regarding strategies with "quick-win" results, and said they would support politicians with *visionary goals* that can sustain the economic growth of Hong Kong.　Similar to both the young and mature professionals, small business owners believed that a major function of political parties is to *provide training* for younger party members, saying that this is crucial to the future growth of a party.

Small business owners also emphasized that "*any longer-term policy planning must require detailed delineation of milestones, deadlines and performance indicators at each stage*".　As such, participants of this group expressed doubts for newly formed political groups and concern that such groups may "*focus too much on the theoretical principles, rather than the pragmatic side of an issue*".

Group 6: Homemakers

30 years old or above

Overall Impression of Political Parties –

Political parties are a mess. The government is a mess. HK is a bigger mess.　It's a vicious circle.
(政黨亂、政府亂、香港更亂；這是惡性循環。)

Legislators should not just show up when it is election time.　It is important to show up and discuss with the people at all times.
(議員不要只在選舉時候才出現，常常出現與市民討論是非常重要的。)

I would support female candidates who are concerned about education.　Education reform is an important issue.　They should conduct surveys to better understand the situation.
(我會支持關心教育的女性做候選人。教改係重要議題，要做問卷了解情況。)

I would vote for candidates whose image makes me feel comfortable – I need to feel their commitment in doing something for Hong Kong.　Simply put, they have to have a heart, have a point and be inspiring.
(我會投給形象感覺舒服的候選人，即是要感覺到她真正有心為香港做事的。簡單來說，就是有 heart(有心)、有 point(有論點)、有 feel(有感染力)。)

I don't see any problems in being pro-China, but I am unhappy with being pro-government.　I am unhappy with the government's education and middle-class policies.
(我看不出親中有何問題，但我不喜歡親政府。我不喜歡政府的教育及中產政策。)

Political parties should help their members establish the ability to communicate with Beijing.
(政黨應協助其黨員建立與北京溝通的能力。)

Political parties are too pushy.　This will damage the image of councillors.　Even though some councillors may be well-versed in Hong Kong's laws, their subjective opinion may mislead the public.
(政黨做事太過急進，會破壞議員形象。即使議員熟知法律，其個人主觀也可能會誤導市民。)

> *Why would you pick someone to upset the community?*
> (為什麼要選一個破壞社區的人呢？)
>
> *All political parties have become too political after 1997. They are all similar.*
> (所有政黨在 1997 後都太政治化，每一個都差不多。)
>
> *I forgot the name of the candidate who I voted for last time. But he helped my building to fight against a government order. So, quite selfishly, I voted for him.*
> (我記不起我上次投票的候選人的名字，但他幫我幢大廈與政府的法令周旋。所以自私地，我投他一票。)

Participants of this group repeatedly emphasized that *social harmony* should be the top priority of the society. The "Homemakers" said that they detest politicians who take radical actions against the government. Their primary concern is a candidate's behavior and the way that candidates speak and act, rather than their political affiliations. On the other hand, this group said that politicians must be "*presentable, elegant and approachable*" and that they are inclined to support female candidates. They also indicated that they like candidates that project good virtues and "*act like themselves*".

Without prompting, almost all participants in this group could recall some content on the "street banners", but they criticized the banners for putting too much emphasis on the candidate's "insignificant contributions". They prefer politicians who state their policy platforms and *commitment to the society*, particularly on issues such as education reform and middle-age unemployment.

Group 7: Retirees
60 years old or above

Overall Impression of Political Parties –

> *Everybody should be pro-government, we are Hong Kong people.*
> (所有人都應該親政府，我們是香港人。)
>
> *All political parties now seem to care only about fighting for similar facilities to the government. One said that he successfully fought for a bus stop, another one would then say he fought for a closer bus stop, then yet another one would say that he fought for there to be a roof over the bus stop.*
> (現在所有政黨似乎只關心向政府爭取差不多的設施。一個話爭取到多個巴士站、一個又話爭取到巴士站搬近了、再有一個話爭取到巴士站多個頂。)
>
> *Political parties in the past focus only on making connections and treating people to meals. In recent years, there are more "people with heart", who are willing to listen to people's views, converse with citizens and serve the community.*
> (政黨以往多用拉攏方式，只懂請食飯 ；近年多「有心人」，肯聽市民意見、肯與市民「傾計」、肯為市民服務。)
>
> *If the Chief Executive knows how to work, then you elect councillors who know how to talk; if the Chief Executive knows how to talk, then you elect councillors who know how to work. Then, you have achieved equilibrium.*
> (特首懂做事的話、便選一些懂說話的議員；特首懂說話的話、便選一些懂做事的議員。這樣才有平衡。)

Participants of this group adopted the traditional Chinese perspective that those who are public figures must possess sufficient *knowledge* – As they said that intelligence and knowledge are keys to success in implementing policy initiatives.   They supported politicians who are well-educated and those who are keen on self-improvement.   Social stability and cohesion were also treasured by these participants, who disapproved of political parties that "*oppose for the sake of opposing*".   They also supported politicians who emphasize other traditional Chinese virtues, such as filial piety.

Retirees expressed that they expect two roles for politicians: to *serve the community*; and to *assist the head of the government*.   Upon clarification, "serving the community" means "*helping the community to improve its living environment and get better facilities*".   They compared the Chief Executive to an ancient Chinese emperor, and likened the councillors to his mandarin officials. Therefore, "assisting the government" means "*filling in for the shortcomings*" of the Chief Executive, such that the strengths of the politicians can complement weaknesses of the Chief Executive.

Group 8: University Students
19 to 24 years old
Overall Impression of Political Parties –

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Similar to the "Younger Grassroots" (Group 1), participants in this group said that they have limited knowledge of the political climate of Hong Kong.　They claimed to be easily affected by external influences on their voting decisions, such as advice and comments of classmates and family members. Also similar to the "Younger Grassroots", "University Students" expressed that *education* is their key concern, but their focus is on education reform and how this may impact their future.　In addition, they agreed that the internet and mobile phones are effective communication platforms for them.

"University Students" tended to support politicians with *strong charisma* and *political leadership*, which are similar to the comments made by the "Small Business Owners" (Group 5).　Furthermore, participants of this group said that they considered *knowledge* and *sound arguments* as the two keys to success for politicians – These are similar to the points made by the "Retirees" (Group 7) and "Young Professionals" (Group 3) respectively.

Finally, this group expressed that they were "*quite receptive to political ideology and principles*" – This is a comment noted only in this group but not in any of the previous seven groups.

4. KEY FINDINGS (II): PERCEPTIONS OF DIFFERENT POLITICAL PARTIES

Listed below are comments made by the participants on each political party (listed in alphabetical order according to the name of each party).

Civic Party

All eight groups of participants managed to give comments for the Civic Party. In particular, the "Homemakers" (Group 6) and the younger participants, i.e. "Young Grassroots" (Group 1) and "University Students" (Group 8), were able to give more comprehensive views.

It is hard to define the Civic Party, as it does not seem to fit-in with the other parties. The positioning of the Civic Party is relatively ambiguous. They're like a group of aristocrats promoting Communism.
(四不像，有格格不入的感覺。地位比較模糊，似一班貴族在攪共產。)

The Civic Party is high-profile, appealing, professional and moderate. I have high expectations for it.
(公民黨高調、吸引、專業、不慍不火，我對它有期望。)

Audrey Eu does not speak as if she was quarrelling with others when she is on television programs. She speaks in an orderly manner.
(余若薇在電視節目中不像吵架，說話有條理。)

The Civic Party is more rational and with clearer goals. It is quite refreshing.
(公民黨比較理性，目標清晰，感覺頗清新。)

The image of the Civic Party with lawyers creates a sense of righteousness, such as Margaret Ng.
(公民黨的律師形象有正義感，例如吳靄儀。)

They may not know much about economics and infrastructure issues, but they may be able to contribute a lot on salient issues such as constitutional affairs.
(他們未必懂得經濟、基建，但對於大事大非，如憲制討論，他們會貢獻良多。)

The founding members of the Civic Party are mostly lawyers. I have high expectations of legal practitioners as I believe Hong Kong will deteriorate without the rule of law.
(公民黨的建黨成員多數是律師。我對法律界人士寄予厚望；如果沒有法律，香港會淪落。)

A male classmate voted for Audrey Eu and said she is beautiful. I voted for Audrey as she gave me a good impression. She gave a speech at my school.
(有男同學投票支持余若薇，說她長得漂亮。我投票給余若薇，因她予人一個好印象；她曾到過我的學校演講。)

Only if the Civic Party manages not to snatch away the votes from the Democratic Party can they truly be said to have attained more democracy for society and be considered successful.
(公民黨若能不搶走民主黨的票，才算為社會取得較大的民主，才算成功。)

Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong (DAB)

Participants generally compared the DAB and the Democratic Party side-by-side.   In particular, the "Retirees" (Group 7) had more comments for the DAB than the others.

Although members of the DAB act like weird people, they do have our interests at heart.
(民建聯的人雖然「騎呢」(古怪)，但貼近市民。)

With universal suffrage, the DAB would lose votes and the Democratic Party would gain more seats.
(當普選開始，民建聯會失票，民主黨會得到更多議席。)

The DAB is the only party that is capable of serving the public.   I have no positive comments about the other political parties.
(只有民建聯懂實幹、做群眾工作，其他政黨乏善足陳。)

The DAB has meticulously planned its promotion strategies.   Initiatives such as distributing fans to HKCEE students on the day of result announcement are impressive.
(民建聯用心搞宣傳工作，如派扇給中五放榜學生，令人印象深刻。)

The DAB's agenda is tailored for people's livelihood and for affairs in the neighborhood, which leave a good impression.
(民建聯貼近民生，多辦地區事務，令人留下好印象。)

Now the general public is less resistant to pro-Chinese attitudes and accepts the DAB more easily. The DAB's overall packaging is weak but has great potential.
(現在市民對親中沒有以前那麼抗拒，對民建聯的接受程度較高。民建聯的包裝很差，但很有潛力。)

Jasper Tsang listens to the opinions of the public and is willing to communicate with the citizens.
(曾鈺成聽市民意見，肯與市民「傾計」。)

> *Jasper Tsang's stance is unclear and his position fluctuates from time to time.*
> (曾鈺成立場不堅定，係騎牆派。)

> *I have a bad impression of Choy So Yuk.　When she answers questions, she never gets to the point.*
> (對蔡素玉印象差，她答問題時經常顧左右而言他。)

> *The DAB has good support from its second-tier members and a systematic organizational structure. It's been hiring new members especially from the middle-class in the last couple of years. As such, it is becoming more powerful. The Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions also emphasizes its capability of penetration.*
> (民建聯有第二梯隊接棒，組織有系統。它吸納新面孔，近年吸納中產，勢力越來越大。工聯會亦講求吸納性。)

Democratic Party (DP)

Similar to the DAB, the DP receives more comments from the mature groups, particularly the "Mature Professionals" (Group 4) and "Small Business Owners" (Group 5).

> *The DP does not have the ability, strategy and intention to communicate with Beijing.*
> (民主黨沒有和北京溝通的能力、策略和意向。)

> *The selling point for the DP is its political stars, but these stars are indeed declining.　What the DAB sells is policy, which is more substantial.*
> (民主派依靠明星作賣點，但民主黨的政治明星開始沒落。民建聯則主力推廣政策，較具體。)

The DP has a lot of young supporters.　Its members generally lack social experience but they know how to leverage the media to disseminate their messages.
(民主黨有很多年輕支持者，黨員缺乏社會經驗，但懂得利用傳媒聲音。)

The organizational structure of the DP is too weak.　It only focuses on discrete street campaigns and ignores the party's internal affairs.
(民主派組織太薄弱，只顧搞個別街頭運動，不理黨內事務。)

The pan-democratic camp lacks cohesion – They rely on small donations from fundraising in the street. The DAB has staunch financial support and even has its own clinics for members, but the DP lacks resources. Their contribution in community affairs cannot be directly compared.
(民主派太分散，只倚靠「入箱仔」籌款。民建聯有較多資源，甚至有自己的診所；民主黨沒有資源，兩者的地區事務不能直接比較。)

The media is also responsible [for the current situation], as they only focus on big issues. The DP has also supported the government on many issues.
(傳媒都有責任，傳媒只着眼於重大事件。民主黨也曾在多個議題上支持政府。)

I would give two extra points to the pan-democratic camp.　I vote for them just to keep the government on its toes.　I do not mind if they voted against something just for the sake of it.
(逢泛民加兩分。我投票給民主派，因為他們可以制衡政府；我不介意他們為反對而反對。)

The DP is getting worse and worse and attracts too much negative news.　The second-tier members fail to pick up and have no actual contribution.
(民主黨越來越不濟，有太多負面新聞；第二梯隊不能接棒，沒有實際貢獻。)

The policy line was very clear during the Szeto Wah and Martin Lee era.　However, James To is now reluctant to apologize and unwilling to bear the political consequences.　Cheung Man-kwong says stupid things about the teachers' benchmarking examinations.
(以前司徒華李柱銘時代的黨路線好清晰；現在涂謹申不肯認錯，又不肯承受政治結果，張文光基準試又講「蠢嘢」。)

Liberal Party (LP)

Most participants gave comments for the Liberal Party only after they were prompted.　Such a low "unaided awareness" may suggest that the LP needs to build stronger "emotional ties" with its targeted voters strategically in order to reinforce its image.

Among all the LP members, I only recognize Selina Chow.　She has put a lot of effort in fighting for the Individual Visit Scheme for Hong Kong.　Since the LP specializes in tourism development, they should promote heritage preservation as well, rather than stir up political conflict.
(自由黨中我只認識周梁淑怡，她盡力為港爭取自由行。既然自由黨專注旅遊發展，應當推廣保護文物，好過搞政治。)

The LP only deals with business matters and is irrelevant to me.
(自由黨只談生意，與我無關。)

I feel distant from the LP.　It seems to only represent Li Ka-shing.　We are from a totally different

Other Councillors

"Long Hair" – Among individual councillors, almost all participants had the strongest impression of Leung Kwok-hung. Yet, only participants from the "Mature Grassroots" group (Group 2) and the "University Students" (Group 8) groups have expressed support for him.

The way Long Hair showcases coffins is nonsensical, idiotic and disgraceful.
(長毛搬棺材，無聊白痴，不懂大體。)

I dislike Long Hair; his behavior makes me sick.   He is often not well-prepared for LegCo meetings.
(不喜歡長毛，行動令人反感，沒有準備就去開會。)

What Long Hair has done has tainted the image of legislators.   I hope to meet Long Hair and ask him not to run for elections anymore.
(長毛做事太破壞議員形象。我希望見長毛，叫他不要再選。)

Long Hair does rational things in an irrational way, and actually he is quite nice.
(長毛用不理性方法做理性的事，其實他幾好人。)

The image of Long Hair is clear and radical. He came to the university to hold discussions with the young people.
(長毛形象鮮明及激進，又肯來大學與年青人溝通。)

Other current councillors – A number of councillors were also mentioned by participants several times during the focus groups discussion.   Some of their key comments on these councillors are listed below

I regret voting for Emily Lau.   She used to be very kind and nice, but has changed to an entirely different person now.
(後悔投票給劉慧卿，以前和藹可親，現在判若兩人。)

I have a good impression of Lee Cheuk Yan as he helps the working class to fight for their rights and promotes democracy.
(我對李卓人的印象良好，因為他為工人爭取權利和爭取民主。)

Previously elected councillors – Some participants repeatedly mentioned several previously-elected councillors and used them as a benchmark against existing councillors.

Cyd Ho has a good image as she is pragmatic. I attended a LegCo meeting once and she asked me sensible questions. Some legislators were falling asleep during that meeting, I was impressed by her.
(何秀蘭形象好，係做事的人。我有次要到立法會答辯，何秀蘭問我問題，她的問題很合理；相反，有議員在開會時打瞌睡。所以我對何秀蘭的印象最深刻。)

I have a deep impression of Gary Cheng. I used to admire him a lot, but was disappointed by him.
(對程介南印象深刻，初時好仰慕，但後來好失望。)

In the past, I really liked Christine Loh.   She helped fight for women's rights.
(以前我鍾意陸恭蕙，她為婦女爭取權益。)

Andrew Wong used ICQ to communicate with young people.   It was quite creative.
(發叔(黃宏發)用 ICQ 同年輕人溝通，幾有創意。)

5. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the perception of participants of the eight focus groups, we concluded that there are three "generic strategies" adopted by political parties (or politicians):

1.	Oppose	versus	Support
2.	Breadth	versus	Depth
3.	Charisma	versus	Achievements

One should note that the above categorization is only drawn from "perceptions" of the participants. For example, even though a political party is perceived as adopting a "support strategy", that party may not necessarily have agreed to such approach in reality. Also, the above opposing pairs do not form a simple dichotomy, i.e. a political party or politician only adopts one of the two strategies. Instead, the two contrasting descriptions form a spectrum. For example, the public would not expect a political party to take a "supporting stance" all the time, but would still have a general impression that this political party "tends to support the government more often than the others".

Each of these pairs contains a contrasting and opposing strategy and will be regarded as three distinct "value dimensions" for political parties or politicians in Hong Kong. Upon closer investigation of the values represented by these strategies, the group of strategies on the left-hand column is opposing to the entire group of strategies on the right-hand column. Furthermore, according to the quotes from the above eight groups, strategies on the left-hand and right-hand columns are more frequently related to what the public generally referred to as the "pan-democratic alliance" and the "pro-establishment / government camp" respectively.

Numerous experts in different fields have already argued that dilemmas cannot be "eliminated" but can only be "reconciled". Thus one should try to successfully integrate opposing values instead of repressing and denying only one side. We shall use this principle as our basis in discussing each of the three value dimensions below.

1. Oppose versus Support

This dilemma is usually found at the party or organizational level. Most participants tend to categorize a political party as either "supporting" or "opposing" the government, which may create a stereotype to members affiliated with a particular political organization. However, participants also criticized those who maintain a "neutral stance" (usually independent councillors without political affiliation), saying that they could not remember those who do not have a clear positioning.

The key to reconcile this dilemma does not lie in explaining to the public how many "aye" or "nay" votes a party or a politician has cast in the past. Rather, it is how a councillor delivers an argument that actually matters. Logical arguments supported by theories and data are essential for politicians to uphold an argument, and the public expects that these arguments will be discussed in a calm manner.

To help the public understand these arguments better, some participants urged councillors at all levels to conduct research to understand what the public actually needs; while others asked for a clear and concise summary of what is happening in the Legislative Council on a routine basis.

2. Breadth versus Depth

This dilemma is usually found in the messages and the promotional materials that a political party or a politician put forward to the public. Most participants found that political parties and politicians focused too much on "exposure". The fact that many participants found that the photos on the street banners are "too big" suggested that they would like to see more content in those banners – i.e. The public wants to "go through the looking glass" to understand the "real person" behind those photos.

The key to reconcile this dilemma is to embrace the concept of "branding", "messaging" and most importantly, "strategic communications". Carefully crafted messages and appropriate choice of delivery methods are essential in target audience outreach (i.e. breadth). On the other hand, in order to enable the target audience to understand and retain the key messages, they must be repeated in different channels at appropriate times (i.e. depth).

To maximize both "breadth" and "depth", political parties and politicians must plan ahead any opportunities they have with the public and the press, and try to orchestrate a coordinated campaign that project the same key messages to the public at any given period of time. A fully thought-out campaign plan should: (a) assign specific roles to party members at all levels; (b) include several scenarios of possible actions taken by different stakeholders before, during and after an election; and (c) be updated on a regular basis.

3. Charisma versus Achievements

This dilemma is usually found at the individual or personal level. Some participants commented that many politicians rely solely on their charisma and are weak in devising a solid policy platform; while others criticized those councillors who "love to brag about their minor achievements". This issue is also seen at the party level, leading to concerns about the over reliance of "political celebrities" and the lack of overall strategic direction of political parties.

The key to reconcile this dilemma is to focus on the key messages to convey to voters, rather than depending solely on personal charisma or policy platform.   Political parties need to devise compelling messages that are clear, direct and concise.   They need to recognize that key messages are not slogans or policy platforms.   In fact, policy platforms back up key messages; while personal charisma facilitates message dissemination.

As such, political parties and politicians must fully utilize all speaking opportunities to convey their key messages, rather than focusing on sound bites, questions, criticisms and explanations.   Of all communication channels, face-to-face discussions would be the most effective in conveying one's key messages, followed by public speeches and media interviews.

One Final Word: Perhaps the most important dilemma that needs to be reconciled is the "fundamental dilemma" elicited from the left- and right-hand columns above.   The key to reconciling this dilemma, however, is for the "pro-establishment camp" and the "pan-democratic alliance" to have more constructive interaction and open communication in the future.

APPENDIX 1 DISCUSSION GUIDE

(A) Warm-Up Questions (15 minutes)

1. Could you tell us about your previous voting experiences? (How many times / When / Where / Why they decided to vote at that time / Vote for whom or which party / Most memorable personal incidents)

2. Which are the most important factors that determine your support for a political candidate in an election, e.g. political affiliation, appeals of the election campaigns, election platform, familiarity and personal charisma of politicians? Are these factors equally important for District Council versus LegCo elections?

(B) Political Parties in Hong Kong (25 – 30 minutes)

3. What are your overall views for each political party in Hong Kong? (Do not prompt which party) Did your views change over the years (referred to the various election mentioned in Section A above)?

4. What are the roles of these political parties? What issues do you expect them to address?

5. Do you have one or more preferred political parties / politicians? Why are they so appealing to you?

6. What do you think about the "pro-Chinese" and "pan-democratic" camps in Hong Kong? Do you agree with these labels? Do these labels impact your perception of the political parties?

7. (OPTIONAL) What do you think about the launch of the Civic Party by the Article 45 Concern Group? How would this impact…

    (a) The pan-democratic camp? And also…

    (b) The overall political scene in Hong Kong?

(C) Promotional Channels and Materials (10 – 15 minutes)

8. From which channels do you usually receive information about political parties and politicians? Do you find the information useful?

9. Could you comment the promotion materials that you remembered, particularly on their content and presentation? How can they be improved?

At the end of the session, the participants are asked to write down additional points that they may have on a piece of blank paper. (5 minutes)

APPENDIX 2   DEMOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF PARTICIPANTS

The following tables detailed the make-up of focus groups.   Out of 69 participants, 35 were male and 34 were female.

Participants' Gender

Gender	Percentage
Male	50.7
Female	49.3

The research attained a wide and even representation of different age segments.   The participants' age ranged from 18 to 72 years old.

Participants' Age

Age	Percentage
Under 20	13.0
20 -29	17.0
30-39	27.0
40-49	17.0
50-59	16.0
60 or above	10.0

The following tables list the participants' occupation, education level and marital status respectively.

Participants' Occupation

Occupation	Percentage
Business owner	10.0
Home-maker	10.0
Professional	26.0
Retired	15.5
Secretary	1.5
Service worker	17.0
Student	20.0

Participants' Level of Educational Attainment

Level of educational attainment	Percentage
Tertiary level	62.0
Form 6 to 7	22.0
Form 1 to 5	7.0
Primary level	9.0

Participants' Marital Status

Marital status	Percentage
Divorced	1.0
Married	30.0
Never married	38.0
Not disclosed	31.0