



Slow Fade: Hong Kongers, Hope & Democracy

AUGUST 2021

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Executive Summary

The 2019 pro-democracy demonstrations and the success of pro-democracy candidates in the November 2019 District Council elections was initially viewed as a harbinger for universal suffrage in Hong Kong. However, developments throughout 2020 and 2021 proved otherwise. Over the last two years, Hong Kong has experienced intense democratically regressive social and legal reforms. Instead of being a springboard to universal suffrage in Hong Kong, the 2019 demonstrations are quickly turning into the apex of a now suppressed civilian-led pro-democracy movement. The draconian National Security Law (NSL) was imposed in response to the 2019 protests and concern over pro-democracy electoral success. The actions of the Beijing and Hong Kong governments under the NSL have rapidly reshaped the political foundation of Hong Kong society by marginalizing the voices of pro-democracy activists and politicians. Further, even the voices of everyday citizens are marginalized: revoking their right to peacefully protest, increasing censorship of the media they consume, and controlling who they can vote for by vetting candidates.¹

As Hong Kong society closes, collecting accurate unbiased information on citizen opinion is becoming simultaneously more challenging and more important. In this new political environment, data and analysis of public sentiment towards recent changes is imperative to inform international and domestic policy discourse on Hong Kong. As the National Democratic Institute (NDI or the Institute) was sanctioned by China in 2019 and the political environment increases the risk associated with participating in any activity seen as pro-democracy, NDI commissioned an anonymous secure online survey to measure public perception in Hong Kong on the postponement of the 2020 Legislative Council (LegCo) election, the disqualification of pro-democracy LegCo members and changes in governance. The data collected by NDI through the online polling technology illustrates a society politically polarized around support for democracy and how decisions should be made.

The data collected by NDI through the online polling technology illustrates a society politically polarized around support for democracy and how decisions should be made.

There were split views on whether Beijing or Hong Kong should be the seat of decision-making in Hong Kong. When asked whether Hong Kong, Beijing or both should be the seat of decision making, the largest proportion of respondents wanted Hong Kong to be the sole seat of decision making (42 percent). In total, 77 percent of respondents wanted Hong Kong to either be the sole seat of decision making or equal to Beijing in governing the city. Those born in Hong Kong were much more likely to support Hong Kong as the seat of decision making and also support pro-democracy sentiments, such as disagreement with the disqualification of pro-democracy lawmakers and the postponement of the LegCo election, and more likely to consider leaving the city based on the results of the upcoming LegCo election. However, there were a few areas where the majority of all Hong Kong residents agreed: that they lack confidence in a free and equal election for LegCo candidates and maybe most importantly, that the 2021 LegCo elections is likely a pivotal moment in determining Hong Kong's future.

Furthermore, one finding in particular is critical in consideration of recent developments: the correlation between the type of media consumed and respondent opinion of candidates' ability to participate in a free and equal election. Those who lacked confidence in the elections trusted social media the most overall for news and trusted Apple Daily the most among various newspaper sources. Since NDI's poll was conducted, Apple Daily was forced to shut down, ceasing all publication

¹ "Dismantling a Free Society," Human Rights Watch, June 25, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/feature/2021/06/25/dismantling-free-society/hong-kong-one-year-after-national-security-law>

despite a large display of public support.² In addition, an Israeli company, Wix, was pressured to remove pro-democracy online content published by the Hong Kong diaspora community.³ Limiting access to certain media pushes a pro-Beijing and anti-pro-democracy narrative over allowing citizens access to a variety of perspectives to form their own opinion on the health of Hong Kong's political system.

This survey reveals critical information that can help decipher the rapid changes occurring in the Hong Kong political, social and governance structure, such as the following critical findings:

1. **Democracy in decay:** The majority of Hong Kongers can see the decay of democratic and fundamental freedoms in the city and, whether they support the recent reforms or not, recognize the city is at a pivotal moment that will determine its democratic or authoritarian future.
2. **Rigged election process:** There is an overarching narrative of citizen concern for the durability of Hong Kong's democratic process, with the majority believing it is not possible for candidates to campaign in a free and equal election environment.
3. **Impending exodus:** People born in Hong Kong are more democratic leaning compared to those not born in Hong Kong and the reforms are leading to a much larger proportion of them considering leaving the city if the LegCo election results do not align with their political beliefs.
4. **Media sources matter:** Those who trust social media networks for news, especially Facebook and Instagram, are much more likely to support pro-democracy stances; meanwhile, those who trust TV news sources the most are more likely to support pro-Beijing positions.
5. **Censorship on rise:** The Hong Kong government is willing to censor pro-democracy news sources which foreshadows decreased media and internet freedom within the city.⁴

The Hong Kong government is willing to censor pro-democracy news sources which foreshadows decreased media and internet freedom within the city.

In addition to the societal and governance changes captured in this survey, new developments have already rapidly occurred. This includes electoral system changes in March 2021, the spike in sentencing of pro-democracy figures through early 2021 and the shutting down of Apple Daily in June 2021, one of the most trusted news sources in Hong Kong. These changes bring new significance to data on trust in the electoral process and in media sources. This report is a necessary step to decipher the complex political environment in Hong Kong and inform the multitude of domestic and international stakeholders engaged in discussions on Hong Kong. It can help ensure differing resident perspectives are equally available and incorporated in all discussions despite increased censorship.

² Elaine Yu, "Hong Kong's Apple Daily Newspaper Prints Last Edition as Free-Press Era Ends," Washington Street Journal, June 23, 2021, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/hong-kongs-apple-daily-will-close-after-government-choked-funds-11624437029>

³ Paul Mozur, "In Hong Kong, Short-Lived Censorship Hints at a Deeper Standoff," New York Times, June 28, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/03/technology/hong-kong-internet-censorship.html>

⁴ Primrose Riordan, Tabby Kinder, and Nicolle Liu, "Hong Kong privacy law change will let government block social media," Financial Times, July 22, 2021. <https://www.ft.com/content/814d6340-2b20-4e3c-90bf-b2dd20a24781>

Introduction

The 2019 pro-democracy demonstrations served as a catalyst to widening political polarization and discord in Hong Kong, culminating in further erosion of the city's democratic principles and fundamental freedoms following implementation of the National Security Law (NSL). Since the NSL went into effect on June 30, 2020, the space for people in Hong Kong to safely and openly voice political dissent has all but dissolved. The law caused fear to permeate Hong Kong prompting self-censorship and creating unprecedented impacts on everyday life and institutions. Hours after the law's promulgation, civil society organizations disbanded and pro-democracy activists started to flee the city. Despite an auspicious outcome in the November 2019 District Council (DC) elections where pro-democracy candidates won an overwhelming majority of votes, hope and optimism to strengthen democratic space in Hong Kong through elections was swiftly quashed. Following the NSL, in July 2020, the Hong Kong government announced the postponement of the 2020 Legislative Council (LegCo) elections to 2021 and by November 2020, the Hong Kong government disqualified four sitting pro-democracy lawmakers, triggering the remaining 15 opposition lawmakers to resign en masse. The LegCo is now left with only 43 members, 41 of whom share pro-Beijing views.

This survey captures Hong Kongers' sentiments surrounding political and electoral developments at the end of 2020 after a turbulent year that transformed the future of democratic governance in Hong Kong. As safe and secure avenues for free speech and dissent in-person and online shrink in Hong Kong, there is an increased need to develop secure avenues for Hong Kongers to continue to voice their concerns to the international community. Through this survey, NDI aims to capture and amplify Hong Kong voices and to provide impartial data to global stakeholders to support a more nuanced understanding of Hong Kong citizens' views in global policy discourse.



Photo credit: Image by Studio Incendo is licensed under CC BY 2.0.

Methodology

The National Democratic Institute commissioned a study on the Hong Kong public's perception on political and electoral developments in Hong Kong. The anonymous survey collected data on voter behavior, opinions on the Hong Kong government's decision-making, preferred sources for information and news on elections, sentiment towards campaign processes, and future outlook following the 2021 Legislative Council (LegCo) elections.

The first wave of data was collected in Hong Kong from October 20 to November 8, 2020, receiving over 6000 responses. In response to political developments in November 2020, namely the disqualification of four pro-democracy lawmakers and resignation of 15 others, NDI launched a second wave of the survey. The Institute collected additional data from December 4 to December 16, 2020, garnering over 4400 respondents. Going forward, wave 1 and 2 will be referred to as "October" and "December" waves, respectively.

Overview

The technology for this survey allows for the rapid capture and assessment of large samples of broad, randomized opinion and perception data on an ongoing basis. It delivers anonymous opt-in surveys to online users, with access to the entire global internet population. When users stumble upon one of the hundreds of thousands of domains, these random non-incentivized users are filtered through a series of proprietary algorithms to ensure there are no non-human respondents and then invited to participate in a survey.

The technology geo-targets respondents automatically and provides participants with a language- and context-appropriate survey. This survey methodology has been successfully deployed in mainland China, Myanmar, Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Azerbaijan and other closed or closing spaces. Any web-enabled device can access surveys and the technology cannot be blocked by state surveillance, internet controls and ad-block technologies. Although the survey collects and reports the age, gender and geo-location of all respondents, no personally identifiable information is collected or reported. No enticements are used and participants can easily exit the survey at any time. Furthermore, demographic information for Hong Kong from the U.S. Census Bureau's International Data Base was used to weight data by age and gender post-stratification using a raking algorithm to estimate what the nationally-representative population perceives.

Anonymity & Security of Respondents

The survey employs strategic security measures at all levels of the survey design, respondent experience, and data storage phases. Security measures are specific to the topic and security risks in the region of deployment and can be adjusted as new information and geopolitical developments unfold. These security measures ensure no response is traceable to an individual. All respondents are informed of their anonymity, security and privacy when they randomly access a survey, which assists in the collection of otherwise sensitive and unsafe answers, or socially undesirable perceptions.

Limitations

Due to the scale of internet users, and the ability to randomly sample the entire internet-using population of a country, it is possible to achieve very large samples in a short amount of time. It is also possible to engage previously marginalized voices in data collection as respondents are not part of a panel or discussion group, who usually come from specific demographic subsets. Further, anonymity makes it possible to ask extremely sensitive questions, garner honest responses, and maintain respondent safety.

The benefits are simultaneously the drawbacks. As an internet based technology, it cannot reach those without internet access. As no identifiable information is known about a respondent, it is not possible to follow up with a respondent. Finally, since respondents are not incented or pressured to remain, some leave the survey. Many measures and strategies are used to engage and retain participants, including optimizing the survey instrument for ease of participation on all device screens and bandwidths, as well as clear, concise language for immediate comprehension.

Other methodologies are best suited for research that requires long-term follow-up, group discussions, interviews with known key informants, known participants or those who have absolutely no access to the internet, or a minuscule demographic subset of the population (e.g. women police officers with three or more children). However, the benefit of anonymous, safe, honest responses to sensitive questions and a truly random sample of the internet population, including voices in closed or closing spaces, counteract the limitations.

No one methodology is perfectly representative or accurate in its findings. This data is one stream of insight and should be understood in tandem with other sources of data to collectively uncover the larger reality. These findings can suggest how to nuance or adjust current efforts to better reflect what the citizens reveal are their values, priorities and perceptions.



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Overview of Results

Demographics

The survey captured a diverse range of views including various age, gender, education and income ranges. The demographic tables below outline the unweighted and weighted breakdown of respondents by age, gender and month of data collection. As depicted in Table 1, respondents fit into the expected demographic range based on the natural population breakdown of internet usage by demographic. The majority of survey respondents were born in Hong Kong (64 percent), with 36 percent born outside of Hong Kong. Fifty-six percent of respondents reported having a bachelor's degree or postgraduate degree, with 44 percent having a secondary education or lower. Sixty-one percent of respondents reported a monthly income of HK\$30,000 or less (~US\$3,800), while 18 percent reported monthly earnings above HK\$61,000 (~US\$7,800).

Age	October		December	
	Unweighted	Weighted	Unweighted	Weighted
18-24	21%	8%	24%	9%
25-34	26%	14%	28%	16%
35-44	20%	17%	19%	17%
45-54	15%	19%	13%	16%
55-64	12%	22%	10%	18%
65+	6%	20%	6%	24%
n =	40380		23580	

Table 1. Breakdown of respondents by age categories showing both unweighted and weighted data from October and December waves.

Gender	October		December	
	Unweighted	Weighted	Unweighted	Weighted
Male	63%	44%	66%	47%
Female	37%	56%	34%	53%
n =	40380		23580	

Table 2. Breakdown of respondents by gender showing both unweighted and weighted data from October and December waves.

Voting Behavior

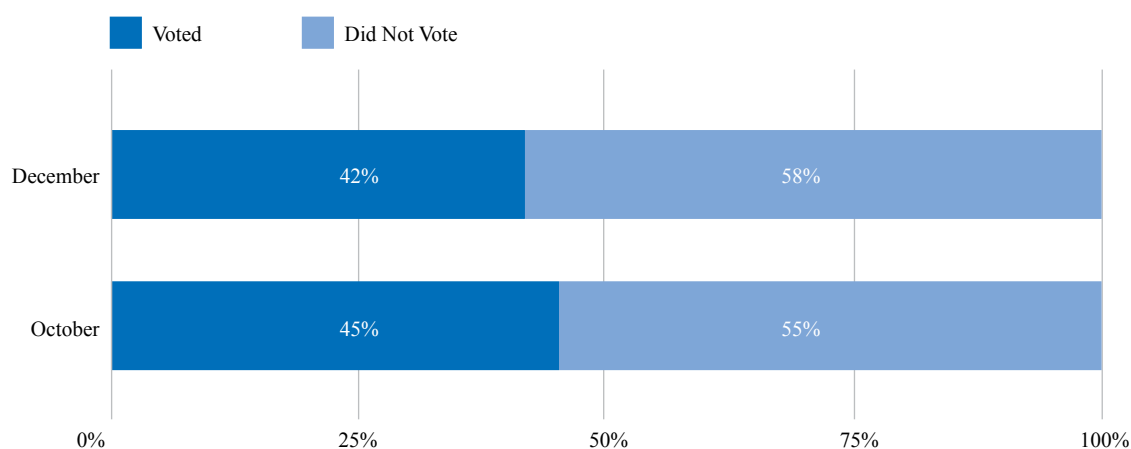
As the 2019 pro-democracy movement gained momentum, many Hong Kong citizens saw voting as key for increasing pro-democratic voices among elected officials and realizing universal suffrage. In November 2019, 2.94 million Hong Kong citizens participated in the District Council (DC) elections compared to about 1.47 million in the 2015 DC elections.⁵ However, the political environment in Hong Kong dramatically changed when the NSL came into effect on June 30, 2020. Pro-democracy figures have since faced increased scrutiny for political activities and speech, as well as increased risk of imprisonment, inspiring many to leave Hong Kong. On November 11, 2020, between this survey's first and second wave, four pan-democratic LegCo members were removed from their seats, which prompted an additional 15 pro-democracy LegCo members to resign in solidarity.

⁵ "Voter Turnout Rate," District Council Election 2019. <https://www.elections.gov.hk/dc2019/eng/turnout.html>

2016 Legislative Council elections

The survey revealed that 56 percent of respondents did not vote in the 2016 LegCo elections, which is higher than expected when compared to previous polling commissioned by NDI. In survey results captured by NDI in early 2020, 40 percent of respondents stated that they did not vote in the 2016 LegCo elections. It is possible people stated they did not vote to keep their vote private and avoid further questions, alternatively the survey may be accessing a less politically active demographic. Respondents aged 45-54 and 55-64 were more likely to say they had voted in 2016 (47 and 50 percent, respectively) compared to all other age groups (between 38 and 43 percent). Those born in Hong Kong reported higher participation in the 2016 elections (59 percent) than those born outside of the city (34 percent). When comparing results across the two waves, fewer respondents in December stated they voted in 2016 (42 percent) compared to October (45 percent). This points to the possibility that political events, such as the November 11 disqualification of four pro-democracy lawmakers and the following mass resignation of LegCo opposition members, may have influenced respondents in between the first and second waves.

Fewer Respondents in December Said that They Voted in 2016 Compared to October



2020 Postponed Legislative Council elections

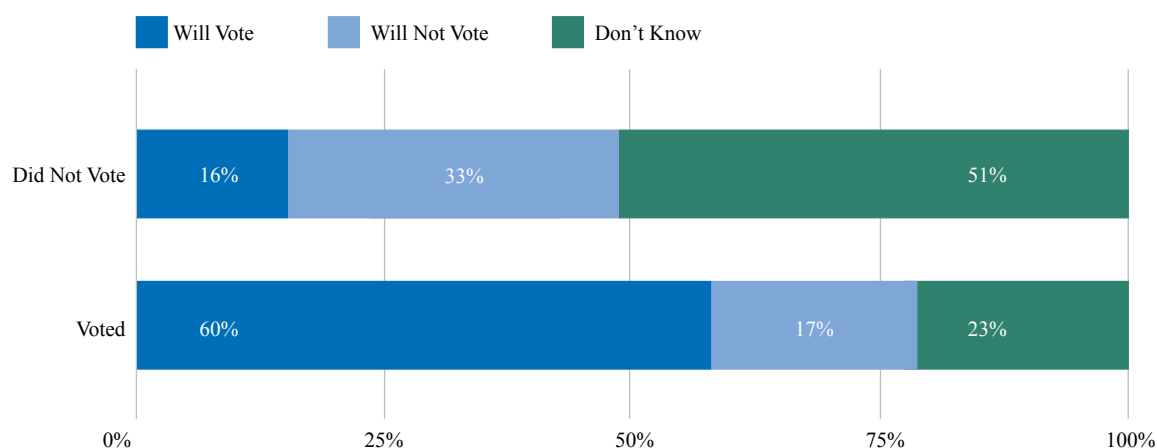
Only 46 percent of respondents indicated that they had planned to vote in the 2020 elections before they were postponed. Similar to the 2016 voting results, those aged 45-54 and 55-64 were more likely to say they planned to vote in 2020 (48 and 52 percent, respectively) compared to all other age groups (42-45 percent). Those born in Hong Kong were more likely to say they planned to vote in 2020 (64 percent) compared to those born outside of Hong Kong (37 percent). Again, fewer people in the December wave revealed that they were planning to vote in 2020 (43 percent) compared to the October wave (47 percent).

2021 Legislative Council elections

In line with respondent voter participation in 2016 and voting plans in 2020, when asked about their plans to vote in 2021, only 35 percent plan to vote in 2021 while 39 percent stated they don't know whether they will vote. Those aged 45-54 and 55-64 were again the most active group planning to vote in 2021 (37 and 39 percent, respectively), compared to other age groups (between 33 and 35 percent). Although 26 percent of men and women stated they will not vote in 2021, more men stated that they will vote in 2021 (37 percent) compared to women (34 percent). When comparing the two waves, fewer respondents in December indicated that they will vote in 2021 (33 percent) compared to respondents in October (37 percent). However, the percentage saying they will not vote remained at 26 percent, suggesting there is growing uncertainty in voting intentions. As observed in other voting behavior questions, fewer respondents in December said they planned to vote which may indicate growing caution towards Hong Kong's democratic process.

Respondents who voted in 2016 are more likely to vote again in 2021, with 60 percent saying they will vote in the future election. As seen previously, those born in Hong Kong were much more likely to say they will vote in 2021 (57 percent) compared to those not born in Hong Kong (31 percent). In addition, those who say they follow LegCo election news closely or very closely are much more likely to say they will vote in the 2021 election (58 and 62 percent, respectively) compared to those who don't follow the news closely or at all (24 and 25 percent, respectively). Respondents' confidence in the candidates' ability to campaign in a free and equal election also correlates to their likelihood to vote in 2021, with those confident or very confident more likely to vote (51 and 52 percent, respectively) than those not very confident or not at all confident (43 and 38 percent, respectively).

Majority of Those Who Voted in 2016 Will Vote in 2021

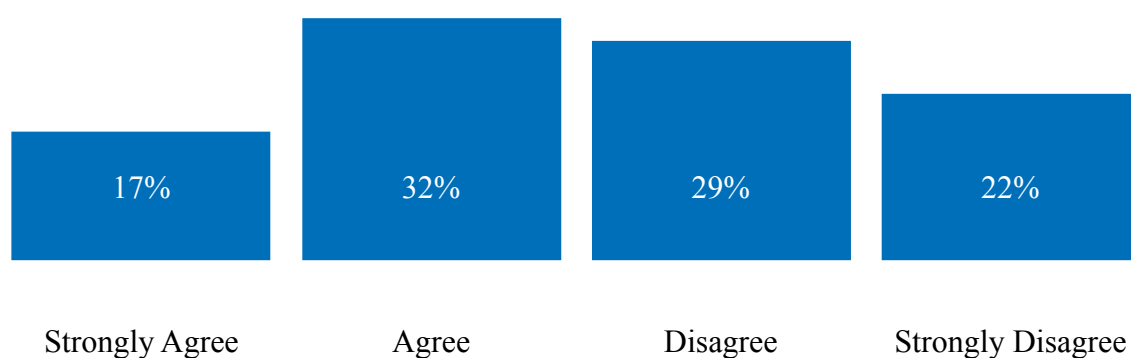


Sentiment Towards Election Postponement

On July 31, 2020, it was officially announced that LegCo elections planned for September 2020 would be postponed until September 2021.⁶ The Hong Kong government claimed the postponement was necessary due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, many pro-democracy supporters saw it as a politically motivated move to prevent a potential pro-democracy LegCo majority following the pan-democrats' success in the November 2019 District Council elections. Just prior to the postponement announcement on July 13, twelve pro-democracy candidates and four pro-democracy LegCo members had been disqualified from running in the 2020 LegCo elections. The increasing difficulty for pro-democracy figures to run for and hold office peaked in November with the removal of four pro-democracy LegCo members and the resignation of 15 others.

Events surrounding the LegCo elections disqualification and postponement decisions were politically polarizing. As seen in the voting behavior section, those born in Hong Kong were more likely to vote or plan to vote, and were more likely to disagree with the postponement and disqualifications, while supporting the pan-democratic resignations. There was also correlation between closely following elections news and opinion on the postponement, disqualifications, and resignations. For respondents who very closely followed election-related news, 60 percent agreed or strongly agreed with the postponement and 67 percent agreed with the disqualifications and 71 percent agreed with the resignations. Comparatively, for those who closely follow the news 58 percent, 60 percent and 65 percent strongly agreed or agreed with the postponement, disqualification and resignations, respectively.

Just Over Half of Respondents Disagree or Strongly Disagree with the Postponement of the Election



⁶ On April 13, 2021, the elections were further postponed until December 2021.

Decision to postpone 2020 Legislative Council elections

As with results on plans to vote in 2021, the survey indicates split views on the Hong Kong government's decision to postpone the 2020 LegCo elections. Forty-nine percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the postponement decision. When looking at younger age groups, 45 percent of 18-24 year olds and 47 percent of 25-34 year olds agreed or strongly agreed with the postponement. Respondents who were born in Hong Kong were slightly more likely to disagree with postponement (53 percent) compared to those not born in Hong Kong (49 percent), however, disaggregated by gender and waves showed. For participants who chose TV as their most trusted source of news, 67 percent agreed or strongly agreed with the postponement of the election. Meanwhile, 63 percent of those who selected social media as their most trusted source of news disagreed or strongly disagreed with the election postponement.

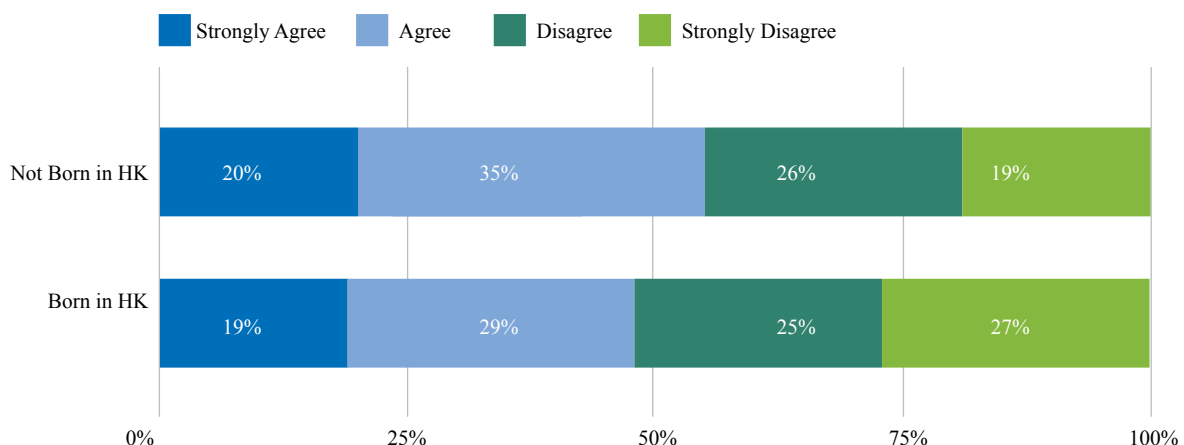
For participants who chose TV as their most trusted source of news, 67 percent agreed or strongly agreed with the postponement of the election. Meanwhile, 63 percent of those who selected social media as their most trusted source of news disagreed or strongly disagreed with the election postponement.

Out of those who trusted social media the most for news, respondents who trusted Facebook/Instagram disagreed or strongly disagreed with the LegCo postponement 72 percent of the time compared to those who trusted Twitter (60 percent), YouTube (53 percent), LIHKG (66 percent) or WhatsApp/Signal/Telegram (67 percent). Interestingly, people's level of confidence that LegCo candidates can campaign in a free and equal election strongly positively correlates with their level of agreement with the postponement of the election. For example, 79 percent of respondents that strongly agreed with the postponement of the election were confident or very confident that candidates can campaign in a free and equal election, compared to only 20 percent of those who strongly disagreed with the postponement.

Disqualification of Legislative Council members

When asked about their views on the disqualification of pro-democracy LegCo members, 50 percent of respondents said they disagree or strongly disagree with the decision while the majority of those aged 45+ agreed or strongly agreed with the decision. Agreement with the decision to disqualify the members also varied by gender, with men more likely to agree (54 percent) than women (47 percent). Place of birth also impacted people's views on the disqualifications, with significantly more people born in Hong Kong strongly disagreeing (27 percent) compared to those born elsewhere (19 percent).

Those Born in Hong Kong Are Less Likely to Agree With the Disqualification



Resignation of pro-democracy lawmakers

Just over half of respondents (51 percent) agreed or strongly agreed with the pan-democrat LegCo members' decision to resign en masse. Men were more likely to strongly agree with the resignations (22 percent) compared to women (17 percent). Furthermore, people born in Hong Kong were slightly more likely to agree or strongly agree with the resignations (57 percent) compared to those born elsewhere (49 percent). There was a strong positive correlation between how closely people follow election news and their level of agreement with the LegCo members' resignation. The majority of those following the news very closely strongly agreed with the resignations (56 percent), whereas 50 percent of those not following the LegCo election at all strongly disagreed with the resignations. As explained in further detail, however, where and how respondents consume their news provides further nuance to the data. A similar strong positive correlation was also seen between people's level of confidence that candidates can run in a free and equal election and their level of agreement with the resignation decision.

Legal Decisions and Governance

Since 2019, the Hong Kong government has been more influenced by decisions made in the National People's Congress (NPC) in Beijing regarding Hong Kong issues. Furthermore, the NSL created new institutional structures under the purview of Beijing, imposed opaque criminal provisions and increased Beijing's oversight on Hong Kong's judicial process.⁷ These changes called into question whether Hong Kong could maintain autonomy from Beijing as outlined in the Basic Law, as some in the pro-Beijing political camp sought to build a closer relationship between Hong Kong and mainland China. Respondent beliefs on who should make decisions for Hong Kong and whether Hong Kong's electoral process was transparent varied significantly across age and gender.

Seat of decision-making

The largest proportion of respondents believe legal and constitutional decisions on Hong Kong should be made solely in Hong Kong (42 percent). A total of 77 percent of all respondents expressed that Hong Kong should be the sole seat of decision making or equal to Beijing when it comes to governing the city. Unsurprisingly, those born in Hong Kong show more support for Hong Kong as the sole place of decision making (53 percent) than those born elsewhere (31 percent). Women showed higher support for Hong Kong as the seat of decision-making (46 percent) compared to men (39 percent). Respondents' sentiment towards the seat of decision-making also varied with their engagement and attitudes towards the LegCo election. Those with minimal or no confidence that candidates can run in a free and equal election were much more likely to believe decisions should be made in Hong Kong (54 percent) compared to 34 percent of those who were confident in the election environment and 25 percent of respondents that were very confident. For those that were very confident or confident in a free and equal election environment, 39 and 44 percent, respectively, believed that decisions should be made in both Hong Kong and Beijing.

The largest proportion of respondents believe legal and constitutional decisions on Hong Kong should be made solely in Hong Kong (42 percent).

Transparency and credibility of the electoral process

Regarding sentiments towards the electoral process in Hong Kong, respondents were randomly assigned a question about their views on either the credibility or transparency of Hong Kong's elections. In both cases, just over half of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the electoral process is transparent or credible (55 percent). Respondents in the 18-24 age range were more likely to either disagree or strongly disagree that the electoral process is transparent or credible. In addition, the data showed that women were also more likely to disagree or strongly disagree that the electoral process is transparent or credible (48 percent) compared to men (44 percent).

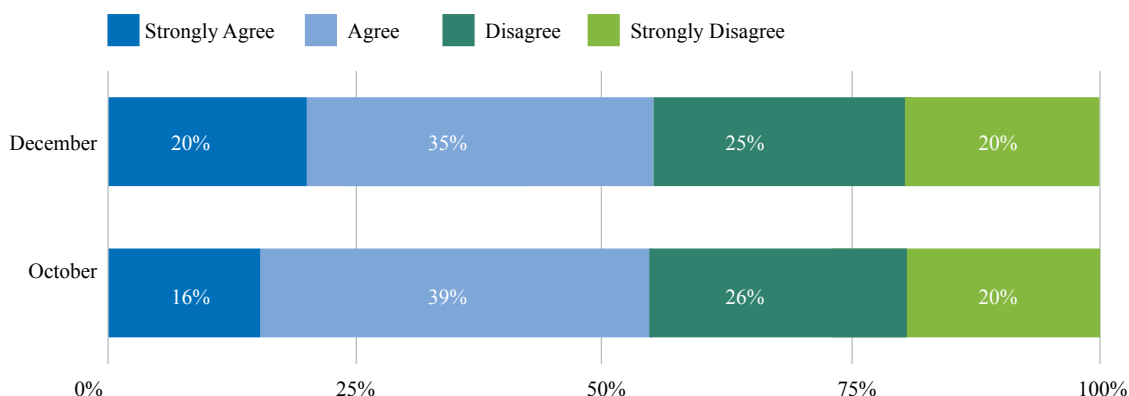
No changes were recorded in people's beliefs about the credibility of the electoral process between the two waves,

⁷ "Revoked Promises: Hong Kong in Crisis," National Democratic Institute, April 2021, https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI%20April%202021%20Report%20-%20Revoked%20Promises_Hong%20Kong%20in%20Crisis.pdf

however, belief in transparency rose from October to December 2020. In December, 20 percent strongly agreed that the government's electoral process is transparent, up from 16 percent in October. While respondents born in Hong Kong and respondents born abroad felt the same towards the credibility of the electoral process, those born in Hong Kong were more likely to strongly disagree (22 percent) that the government's electoral process is transparent compared to those born outside of Hong Kong (18 percent).

The level of confidence people have that LegCo candidates can run in a free and equal election is also strongly correlated with how much they believe the electoral process is transparent or credible. A large majority of respondents who are very confident agreed or strongly agreed that the electoral process is transparent or credible (89 percent).

Belief in Transparency Rose from October to December



Consumption of Election Information

As political developments resulted in drastic changes in the LegCo, Hong Kong residents used various news sources to stay up to date on governance changes and the future of Hong Kong. In particular, respondents born in Hong Kong and the older generation were more likely to report following election news closely. However, there was correlation between where respondents got their news and their confidence in the LegCo election process. This finding is particularly interesting when considering the information environment in Hong Kong and how disinformation and misinformation is spread.⁸

Interest in election news

Data show that 58 percent of respondents said they are closely or very closely following news surrounding the LegCo elections. Those aged 45-64 were most likely to say they were closely following the election, with 59 percent of 45-54 year olds and 65 percent of 55-64 year olds claiming they were following closely or very closely. When disaggregated by gender, 20 percent of men stated they follow LegCo election news very closely compared to 18 percent of women. The majority of those born in Hong Kong claimed to follow the election closely or very closely (65 percent), just under half of those born elsewhere claimed the same (48 percent). Respondents' level of confidence that candidates can campaign in a free and equal election was strongly linked to how closely they followed the election, with confidence increasing the closer they followed election news.

Trusted source for news on Legislative Council elections

When asked about their preferred source for news on the election, television (24 percent) and social media (20 percent) were the most trusted sources. Within the selected sources, Television Broadcasts Limited (TVB) was the most trusted source for broadcast news, Apple Daily for newspapers and Facebook/Instagram for social media.

Within the selected sources, Television Broadcasts Limited (TVB) was the most trusted source for broadcast news, Apple Daily for newspapers and Facebook/Instagram for social media.

⁸ "Polarized Lens: Disinformation, Misinformation, and Hong Kong's Divided Media Landscape," National Democratic Institute, August 2021.

Respondents under the age of 35 displayed more trust in news from social media, 25 percent of 18-24 year olds and 23 percent of 25-34 year olds, compared to respondents aged 45-54 and 55-64 who largely relied on TV news sources, 28 and 31 percent, respectively. Respondents born in Hong Kong were more likely to trust traditional news sources. The trust people have in TV and social media was also strongly related to their level of confidence in the election. Twenty-two percent of respondents not at all confident in a free and equal election environment trusted social media the most, with only 12 percent trusting TV. Similarly, 25 percent of those not very confident in the election environment trusted social media and 20 percent trusted TV sources. In contrast, those who are confident or very confident in a free and equal election trust social media less, 16 and 15 percent, respectively. Meanwhile, 28 percent of those who were very confident in the election environment and 34 percent of respondents who were confident selected TV as a trusted source for news.

Views on the Campaign Environment

Pro-democracy candidates in Hong Kong have been disqualified from running in elections for a variety of reasons. This has coincided with Beijing's increased political influence in Hong Kong and involvement in Hong Kong's governance. This survey aimed to gauge the Hong Kong public's view on electoral development that has intensified since the NSL and disqualification of pro-democracy candidates in the postponed 2021 LegCo elections. When respondents were asked about their confidence in a free and equal election environment and on the disqualification of pro-democracy candidates, there were differences in sentiment across age, place of birth, and gender, potentially indicating a degree of demographic political polarization.

Confidence in a free and equal election environment

Over half (52 percent) of respondents stated they have minimal or no confidence that candidates are able to campaign and operate in a free and equal election environment. Men were more confident or very confident that there will be a free and equal election (51 percent) compared to less than half of women (45 percent). Notably, respondent confidence in a free and equal election rose and shifted from confident to very confident from October to December, as 20 percent of respondents said they were very confident in December compared to 16 percent in October. However, those born in Hong Kong reported being less confident that candidates are able to run in a free and equal election, with 56 percent having minimal or no confidence compared to 51 percent of those born elsewhere. This lack of confidence in the electoral process by those born in Hong Kong falls in line with the previously expressed disagreement towards the disqualification of LegCo members shown between those born in Hong Kong and born elsewhere.

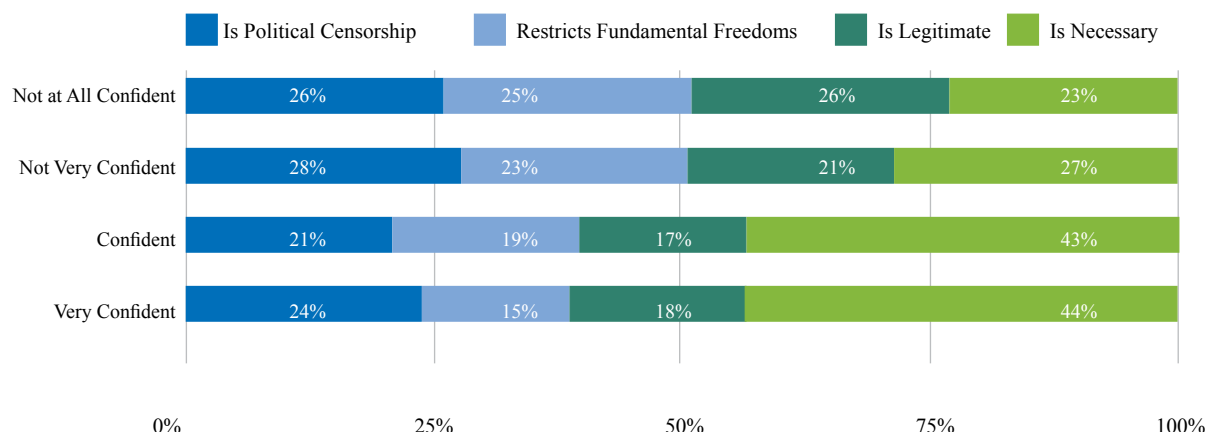
Over half (52 percent) of respondents stated they have minimal or no confidence that candidates are able to campaign and operate in a free and equal election environment.

Views on preventing candidates from running in the Legislative Council elections

More than half of respondents (54 percent) positively viewed preventing pro-democracy candidates from running. Furthermore, 34 percent said it was necessary and 20 percent said it is legitimate. By comparison, 25 percent of respondents claimed it was political censorship and 21 percent said it restricts fundamental freedoms. The data showed that younger people are split on the matter. Twenty-six percent of respondents aged 18-24 and 29 percent of those aged 25-34 believe it is necessary to prevent candidates from running, while 20 and 21 percent, respectively, think the move is legitimate. Similarly, 23 percent of respondents aged 25-34 believe it restricts fundamental freedoms and 26 percent consider it political censorship, compared to 28 and 26 percent for those aged 18-24. Women were also slightly more likely to have negative opinions towards stopping pro-democracy candidates from running (48 percent) compared to men (44 percent). Similarly, those born in Hong Kong were slightly more likely to have negative opinions towards preventing pro-democracy candidates (48 percent) compared to those born elsewhere (44 percent).

A clear majority of those who claimed to follow election news less closely had more favorable views towards preventing pro-democracy candidates from running in elections (59 percent). In addition, people who expressed more confidence that there will be a free and equal election showed greater support for the prevention of pro-democracy candidates in LegCo.

There is a Positive Correlation Between Confidence in a Free Election and Supporting the Elimination of Pro-Dem Candidates



Future Outlook: Impact of Legislative Council Elections and Exit

Many pro-democracy activists, as well as other Hong Kong residents, have fled Hong Kong since the NSL was promulgated to places like the United States, United Kingdom and Taiwan. As political developments accelerated in Hong Kong throughout 2020, respondents were asked about whether the LegCo election would impact Hong Kong's future and if they would consider emigrating from Hong Kong if the election results were not in their favor. The vast majority of respondents felt the elections would impact Hong Kong's future to an extent, and many young respondents felt they would consider leaving Hong Kong. This is aligned with what the international community has witnessed since July 2020 with Hong Kong residents increasingly seeking to emigrate.

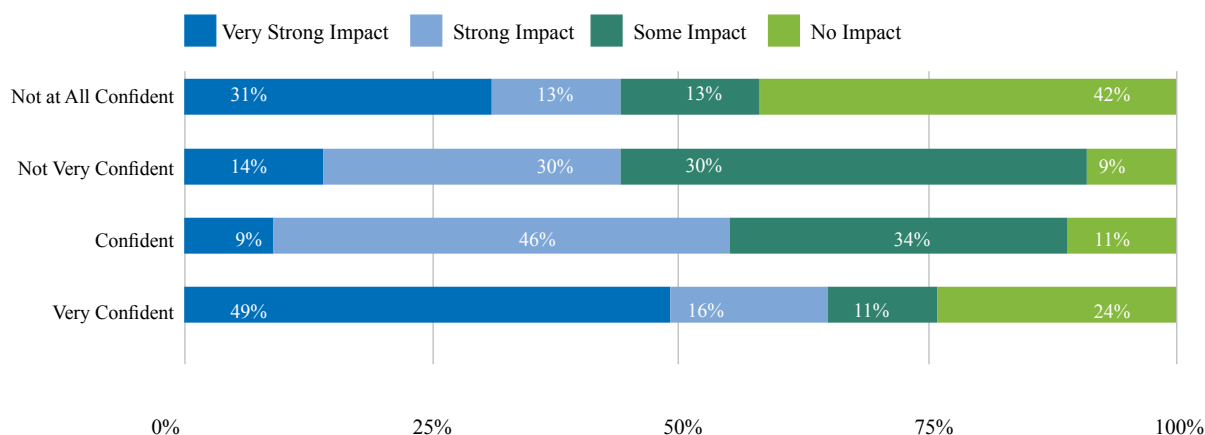
Impact of Legislative Council elections on Hong Kong

At the end of 2021, over half of respondents reported that the 2021 LegCo elections will have a strong or very strong impact on the future of Hong Kong (51 percent), with 81 percent of respondents believing the election will have at least some impact. People born in Hong Kong were more likely to believe that the LegCo elections will have a strong or very strong impact on the future of Hong Kong (54 percent) compared to those born outside of Hong Kong (46 percent).

At the end of 2021, over half of respondents reported that the 2021 LegCo elections will have a strong or very strong impact on the future of Hong Kong (51 percent), with 81 percent of respondents believing the election will have at least some impact.

Disaggregating by income categories only showed slight differences in how strong of an impact respondents believed the election will have, with those of the highest income category more likely to believe the election will have a very strong impact or no impact at all. For instance, 28 percent of those that made over 61,000 Hong Kong dollars said the elections would have a very strong impact, while 31 percent said it would have no impact. In addition, there is a strong positive correlation between people following news about the elections closely and believing it will have a strong impact on Hong Kong's future. For respondents that watched the news very closely or closely, 77 and 63 percent, respectively, believed the elections would have a strong or very strong impact. Confidence level in free and equal elections also positively corresponded with beliefs about the election's impact. For respondents who were very confident in a free and equal election environment, 49 percent felt it would have a very strong impact. Conversely, 42 percent of those who were not at all confident in a free and equal election believed the election would have no impact. Whereas, those who had more moderate beliefs about the likelihood of a free and equal election also had moderate beliefs about the importance of the election itself.

Strong Feelings of Great or Low Confidence in the Election Correlates to Believing it Will Have a Strong Impact on Hong Kong



Consideration to leave Hong Kong

Respondents were starkly divided in whether they would consider leaving Hong Kong if the election was not in their favor, with 37 percent saying they considered or were most likely to consider leaving Hong Kong and 38 percent saying they probably would not leave and 24 percent undecided. Those in age groups 18-24 and 25-34 were more likely to consider leaving Hong Kong if the election results are not in their favor, 46 and 44 percent, respectively, compared to only 30-37 percent of other age groups. More people born in Hong Kong (42 percent) said they were considering or most likely considering leaving Hong Kong if the election results are not in their favor, whereas only 28 percent of those born elsewhere reported considering the same. More people born in Hong Kong (42 percent) said they were considering or most likely considering leaving Hong Kong if the election results are not in their favor, whereas only 28 percent of those born elsewhere reported considering the same.

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Those not following election news at all and those following very closely are the groups most considering leaving Hong Kong. Respondents who are confident or very confident that candidates can run in a free and equal election are more likely to say they are not at all considering leaving (30 and 35 percent, respectively) compared to those with minimal or no confidence (12 and 13 percent).

Conclusion

The political environment in Hong Kong continues to deteriorate and the rights of pro-democracy activists, politicians and everyday citizens are increasingly infringed upon. Their rights have been violated by limiting access to free and independent media, revoking the fundamental right to protest and vetting candidates to prevent a credible election where all political views are represented. Following the implementation of the NSL, participating in activities or associating with organizations that can be viewed as pro-democracy carry a heavy risk of detainment or even imprisonment. The increased political pressure on organizations and people within the city makes it more difficult, or at times impossible, to collect data domestically that could be seen as pro-democracy despite the use of techniques to prevent bias.

NDI worked to address this information gap by using technology that can anonymously and securely collect data in closed societies, with minimal risk to respondents. The survey results presented in this report depict a variety of views within the pro-democracy and pro-Beijing camps. However, Hong Kongers are concerned about the political changes occurring in the city. The majority of Hong Kongers want Hong Kong to be the sole decision maker for Hong Kong or to have a role equal to Beijing (77 percent), however, having Hong Kong be the sole seat of decision making was the most popular response (42 percent). Alas, Hong Kongers are unified in their lack of confidence that candidates can run on a free and equal election, and belief that the 2021 LegCo election will be a critical point in determining Hong Kong's future.

Hong Kongers are unified in their lack of confidence that candidates can run on a free and equal election, and belief that the 2021 LegCo election will be a critical point in determining Hong Kong's future.

Furthermore, the survey also highlights the targeting of pro-democracy media sources, such as the Apple Daily, that pro-democracy respondents indicated was their most trusted news source for newspapers.

The information presented in this report is critical as it provides a holistic view of the different political perspectives present in Hong Kong. Its data should be used by international and domestic stakeholders to inform discussions and recommendations on political reforms in Hong Kong and the desires of the Hong Kong people.

Appendix

Survey Questions

0	What is your age and gender?
	Male
	Female
1	Did you vote in the 2016 Legislative Council Elections?
	Yes
	No
2	Did you plan to vote in the 2020 Legislative Council Elections before they were postponed?
	Yes
	No
3	Will you vote in the 2021 Legislative Council Elections?
	Yes
	No
	Don't know
4	Do you agree with the Hong Kong government's decision to postpone the Legislative Council Elections for up to one year?
	Strongly agree
	Agree
	Disagree
	Strongly disagree
16	Do you agree with the Hong Kong government's decision to disqualify the four Legislative Council members?
	Strongly agree
	Agree
	Disagree
	Strongly disagree
17	Do you agree with the Legislative Council members who resigned following the disqualification decision?
	Strongly agree
	Agree
	Disagree
	Strongly disagree
5	Any legal and constitutional decisions should be made in...
	Hong Kong
	Beijing
	Hong Kong and Beijing

6a	Do you agree or disagree: Hong Kong government's electoral process is transparent?
6b	Do you agree or disagree: Hong Kong government's electoral process is credible?
	Strongly agree
	Agree
	Disagree
	Strongly disagree
7	In general, how closely are you following the news related to the Legislative Council Elections?
	Very closely
	Closely
	Not closely
	Not following at all
8	Which is your most trusted source for news on the Legislative Council elections?
go to 8a	TV
go to 8b	Newspapers
go to 8c	Social media
	Friends and family
	Radio
	Other
8a	Which is your most trusted TV source for news on the Legislative Council elections?
	Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK)
	NowTV
	CNN
	TVB
	British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)
	ViuTV
	Hong Kong Cable Television (i-Cable)
8b	Which is your most trusted newspaper source for news on the Legislative Council elections?
	Ming Pao
	Sing Tao / Headline Daily
	Apple Daily
	South China Morning Post (SCMP)
	Hong Kong Free Press (HKFP)
	Ta Kung Pao (TKP)
	Stand News
	Oriental Daily
8c	Which is your most trusted social media source for news on the Legislative Council elections?
	Facebook / Instagram
	Twitter
	Youtube
	LIHKG
	WhatsApp / Signal / Telegram

9	How confident are you that all Legislative Council candidates are able to campaign and operate in a free and equal election environment?
	Very confident
	Confident
	Not very confident
	Not at all confident
10	Which of the statements below best reflect your view? Preventing pro-democracy candidates from running in the Legislative Council Elections...
	is political censorship
	restricts fundamental freedoms
	is legitimate
	is necessary
11	Do you believe the 2021 Legislative Council Elections will have a significant impact on the future of Hong Kong and its citizens?
	Very strong impact
	Strong impact
	Some impact
	No impact
12	If you had the resources to do so, would you consider leaving Hong Kong if the results of the Legislative Council elections are not in your favor?
	Yes
	Most likely
	Probably not
	No
	Undecided
13	Were you born in Hong Kong?
	Yes
	No
14	What is the highest level of formal education you have received?
	Primary education or lower
	Secondary education
	Tertiary (Non-degree)
	Bachelor's degree
	Postgraduate Studies (Master's degree or above)
15	What is your monthly income?
	Less than HK \$10,000
	HK \$11,000-20,000
	HK \$21,000-30,000
	HK \$31,000-40,000
	HK \$41,000-50,000
	HK \$51,000-60,000
	Above HK \$61,000

The National Democratic Institute:

The National Democratic Institute (NDI) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, nongovernmental organization working to strengthen and respond to the aspirations of people around the world to live in democratic societies that recognize and promote basic human rights. Founded in 1983, NDI has worked with local partners in 156 countries and territories, bringing together individuals and groups to share ideas, knowledge, experiences and expertise. NDI works with political parties, civic groups, parliaments, and other organizations and individuals to strengthen democratic institutions, safeguard elections, advance citizen engagement, and promote open and accountable government. NDI's multinational approach reinforces the message that while there is no single democratic model, certain core principles are shared by all democracies.



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