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**The State of Democratic Governance in
Hong Kong**

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Introduction and Summary

Hong Kong started its gradual democratization in the 1980s, and had remained only partially democratic for more than 20 years, with the government still not popularly-elected by 2008. However, the Asian Barometer 2007 survey of Hong Kong showed that the Hong Kong public gives a high evaluation on various aspects of performance in governance: including rule of law, control of corruption, protection of freedom, and believe that the system is largely fair and equal. The Hong Kong public also has reasonable confidence in the government's power being in check, and in the responsiveness of the government. This ability of the Hong Kong government to deliver "democratic" political goods without being democratically-elected leads to a general contentment with the current non-elected regime, dampening the drive for full democracy.

On the other hand, compared to other Asian cases, Hong Kong showed a remarkably low level of political efficacy and political participation. Despite recent mobilizations for democracy, many Hong Kong people remained "attentive spectators". The political interest or support for democratic values are not too low if compared with other Asian countries, at least as reflected from the survey, but the level of electoral participation is dismal. This should have a lot to do with a general contentment with the current political situation, a pragmatic acceptance of Beijing's control, and lack of success of previous movements. A combination of positive evaluation of government performance, especially in the realm of rule of law and freedom, and low efficacy and participation mean that the Hong Kong people can accept the current state of slow development of democracy, and are not too strongly urged to mobilize to change the status quo. This enables Hong Kong to remain a partial democracy for an extended period of time.

Historical Background

The British colony of Hong Kong had its all-powerful Governor appointed from London, and the whole legislature (the Legislative Council, Legco) appointed by the Governor before 1985. In the early postwar years, the colonial government adopted a quite high-handed attitude

towards dissidence and social movements. The process of liberalization started in the 1970s, as civil liberties gradually improved and the non-elected government showed more respect public opinion, allow much better freedom of speech and press and social protests. Partial democratization started after the signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration in 1984, which promised repatriation of Hong Kong to Chinese sovereignty in 1997. The Joint Declaration stipulated that the post-1997 legislature “will be constituted by elections” and the Chief Executive (CE) will be appointed by the Chinese government “on the basis of the results of elections or consultations to be held locally.”

The colonial government began to introduce partial elections into the legislature in 1985, when 12 Legco seats were elected by functional constituencies (FCs) and another 12 elected by district or municipal councilors. The FCs represent the most powerful business and professional groups, with a very limited franchise of a small percentage of the population. Government officials or appointees made up the remaining 33 seats of the 57-member Legco in 1985. The proportion of appointed and official seats gradually decreased afterwards, but the executive branch remained non-elected until 1997. In 1991, popular elections were introduced to the Legco for the first time, with 18 members or about 30% of Legco elected by universal suffrage with a double-seat plurality formula. The rest of the Legco had 21 seats elected by FCs, 17 appointed by the Governor, and three government officials.

Since the 1980s, democratization in Hong Kong was shaped by a three-way struggle between Britain, China and the Hong Kong forces. Before 1985, Britain had thought she could push democratization during decolonization, just as they did in other former colonies. This was echoed by a burgeoning local democracy movement, as a new locally-born middle class pushed for more progressive democratization before and after 1997. Beijing was always skeptical about full democracy in Hong Kong, and made explicit that political reform before 1997 had to get China’s consent. Reluctant to antagonize China, Britain delayed democratization in Hong Kong before the 1990s. However, the Tiananmen crackdown in 1989 tarnished China’s international

image, creating pressure on the Tory government to offer more protection to the Hong Kong people after 1997. Chris Patten was appointed the last Governor in 1992, who proposed a more progressive reform package for the 1995 Legco election. Patten's proposal extended the franchise of the FCs from about 160,000 professionals and corporations to 2.7 million of working adults, divided by occupation into different "functional" constituencies. It also proposed to use the first-past-the-post (FPTP) system to elect the 20 popularly-elected seats in 1995. The Chinese government was furious that they were not consulted about the reforms beforehand, and was concerned that the FPTP formula and the widened franchise would benefit the more popular pro-democracy parties. Subsequent negotiations about the reforms broke off; Britain pushed ahead and ran the 1995 elections according to the Patten formula. The electoral formula allowed the democrats to win about half of the 60 seats, allowing them to effect some government policy changes in the years 1995-97.

Beijing's response was to declare the Patten proposal unconstitutional, and formed its own Provisional Legco, elected by an appointed Selection Committee, which served from July 1997 to May 1998. The Provisional Legco changed the electoral rules for the Legco after 1997. Most of the 2.7 million working population was again disenfranchised in the FCs after 1997, with voting rights reserved to corporations and professionals only. The electoral formula of the popular election component was changed to proportional representation. The net effect of the changes was to reduce the number of seats that the more popular pro-democracy parties can win in the Legco elections. With the pro-democracy groups unable to win support from the usually conservative business corporations, the democrats have had limited success in the post-1997 FCs. Despite getting on average 60% of the popular votes in the three Legco elections after 1997, the pro-democracy groups were reduced to a minority in the Legco, with about 40% of the seats over the years.

The post-1997 constitutional structure of Hong Kong was stipulated by the Basic Law, the mini-constitution of Hong Kong, drafted by a committee appointed by Beijing in 1985. Under the

Basic Law, the proportion of popularly-elected Legco seats increases gradually from one-third in 1998 to one-half to 2004. (See Table 1) The Chief Executive is elected by an 800-member Election Committee which represents mostly the major business groups and professional elites. Many of the Election Committee members, however, were under heavy influence of Beijing, making it a *de facto* appointment from Beijing. The Basic Law, however, promises that the Chief Executive (CE) and the whole Legco will ultimately be elected by universal suffrage, but offers no exact timetable. Annex I and II of the Basic Law specify the electoral methods of the CE and the Legco up until 2007/08. Changes to the current electoral methods require the support of the CE and two-third majority of the Legco, and the final approval of the Central Government.

Table 1 about here

Since 1985, Hong Kong has been a semi-democracy. Only the Legco is partially popularly elected, but the Hong Kong people enjoy a high level of personal and economic freedoms. Democratization has been very gradual, always in a stop-and-go manner, decided by iterated bargaining between major players. The issue of democratization has been the dominant political cleavage in Hong Kong since the 1980s. For years, the pro-democracy opposition in Hong Kong has been demanding a faster transition to full democracy. This was thwarted by intransigence of Beijing and opposition of local conservatives including the business elites and the pro-Beijing political groups. In almost every election, the issue of democratization was the most dominant campaign issue, with political parties divided along the pro-democracy/conservative cleavage.

Economic downturn, unsatisfactory government performance after 1997, and the impending enactment of a national security legislation that was widely perceived to be threatening Hong Kong's long-cherished freedom, drove 500,000 or about 1/10 of the Hong Kong adult population

onto the streets on July 1, 2003. The rally was a major boost to the democrats, who claimed that full democracy can improve governance and better protect freedom and rule of law in Hong Kong. The democrats wasted no time in pushing universal suffrage for CE in 2007 and for the whole Legco in 2008. In 2003 to 2005, the annual July 1 rallies in support for democratic reform drew crowds of hundreds of thousands. The rebirth of the democracy movement invited direct intervention from Beijing. In April 2004, the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPCSC) ruled that the 2007 CE cannot be popularly elected, and the proportion of Legco members elected popularly cannot be changed. Mobilizations and repeated lobbying from the democrats continued after 2004. In December 2007, the NPCSC ruled that while the 2012 CE cannot be popularly elected, the 2017 CE "can be popularly elected." The NPCSC also ruled that the proportion of popular seats in the 2012 Legco cannot be changed, but the Legco can be fully elected by as early as 2020. The democrats doubt if these would eventually be delivered, and suspect that Beijing will still try to control the nomination of CE before the candidates are put to popular vote in 2017. The debate and struggle for democratization in Hong Kong will drag on for some time.

Socio-Political Profile of Hong Kong

Table 2 compares selected indicators of Hong Kong with those of other countries in East Asia. It shows that while Hong Kong is economically much more affluent than average East Asia countries, its income distribution is much more unequal. The Freedom House indices showed a gap between the civil liberties index (2) and the political rights index (5). This testifies to the claim that Hong Kong is a "liberal autocracy" with a high level of civil liberties but a non-elected government.¹ When it comes to governance indicators, Hong Kong has a much higher score than most of East Asia, with the exception of maybe only Japan and occasionally Singapore. Most of the governance indicators of Hong Kong rank in top 10% in

¹ Kuan Hsin-chi and Lau Siu-kai, "Between Liberal Autocracy and Democracy: Democratic Legitimacy in Hong Kong," *Democratization* 9, 4 (Winter 2002): 58-76.

East Asia, showing that Hong Kong has a high level of civil liberties, rule of law, effectiveness and accountability and have a low level of corruption if compared with other East Asian countries. Political right, however, as the government is still non-elected, lags behind other less-economically-developed countries in the region.

Table 2 about here

The ABS Survey

Sampling and Fieldwork

The Asian Barometer Survey Hong Kong was conducted in September to December 2007 by a territory-wide household survey. The target population is Hong Kong Chinese aged 18 or above.² The list of interviewee addresses was obtained by a list of permanent residential addresses kept by the Census and Statistical Department's computerized sub-frame of Living Quarters. With the assistance of the Department, 2,500 addresses were randomly drawn from the sampling frame. After excluding vacant, demolished, unidentifiable addresses, addresses without Chinese inhabitants, and addresses unused in the survey, the actual sample size was 1,813. Interviewers were required to call at each address and list all households residing there. If there were two or more households, only one would be selected by using the random selection table pre-attached to each address assignment sheet. Having selected the household, the interviewer was required to list all eligible household members in an order according to age. The respondent was then selected based on a random selection grid (a modified Kish Grid) pre-attached to each address assignment sheet.

Face-to-face interviews were conducted by 158 interviewers recruited from local tertiary institutions. All interviewers were required to attend a half-day training session about the content of the questionnaires, sampling procedures and interviewing techniques. Of the 1,813

² For practical reasons, those who live in temporary structures and marine areas, and non-Chinese speakers are not included in the sampling frame.

valid samples, 814 cases were successfully completed, a response rate of 46.8%. The margin of error was 3.43% at the 95% confidence interval. On average each interview took 33.3 minutes. The quality and reliability of the data was ensured by repeated checks on data by the fieldwork checker, a follow-up telephone, double coding and double entry of data, and range check and logical check for the data by the SPSS software.

QUALITY OF GOVERNANCE IN HONG KONG

A. Rule of Law

The figures showed that the Hong Kong people express a high level of confidence in the rule of law in Hong Kong: 77.4% agree that the courts will always punish the guilty even if they are high-ranking officials, while only 17.4% disagree. Our 2007 survey also shows, consistent with findings from other surveys, that among the major political institutions in Hong Kong, the courts enjoy the most trust from the people except the police force, with as many as 78% expressing trust in the 2007 survey. (See Table 4) The 2007 survey also shows that the Hong Kong people believe that the government officials are mostly law-abiding. About 53% believed that government officials abide by law most of the time or all the time, with only about 10% believing that they “rarely” or “never” did so.

Compared to other Asian countries, the 77.4% figure was among the highest, rivaled or surpassed only by Singapore, Indonesia and Vietnam, while much higher than that of Japan, Korea, Philippines and Mongolia. In terms of confidence in law-abiding government, Hong Kong’s figures compare favorably with Malaysia, Japan, Korea, Thailand, Indonesia, and Mongolia, but the confidence is lower than those of Vietnam and Singapore.

For years Hong Kong has been renowned for having a high level of rule of law and of independence of courts. This survey shows that Hong Kong people have more confidence in the courts as an institution than in the law-abiding propensity of the government officials.

Compared to other Asian countries, Hong Kong's confidence on the courts and law-abiding government remains quite high.

Table 3 and Table 4 about here

In the 2007 survey, the answers to all three questions related to the rule of law show a higher level of confidence than in the 2001 survey. In 2001, public perception towards rule of law was affected by a number of scandals. For example, in 1998 the government refused to prosecute newspaper owner Sally Aw for fraud, although three of her subordinates were found guilty of falsifying accounts.³ Some suggested that Aw was not prosecuted because she was a personal friend of Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa, and she was an advisor for the Chinese government as a National People's Political Consultative Committee (NPPCC) delegate. Similar cases followed in the coming months or years, when people related to influential figures were lightly sentenced or let off, leading to questions about equality before the law. By 2007, these worries about rule of law may have tempered for the absence of similar prominent cases, leading to a more positive perception on the rule of law in Hong Kong.

Controlling Corruption

The 2007 survey shows a good confidence in corruption control in Hong Kong. About three-fourths of respondents believed that government officials are largely clean, while only about 10% believe in widespread corruption (See Table 5). About 36% of the respondents think that the government is doing its best to clamp down on corruption, while 53.6% think that the government is "doing something" (Table 6). Only 3.6% think that the government is doing very little or doing nothing to stifle corruption. Bivariate analysis shows that the impression on corruption is not significantly related with media exposure (Q18) and self-proclaimed interest in

³ See Johannes Chan, "Civil Liberties, Rule of Law and Human Rights: The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region in its First Four Years," in Lau Siu-kai ed., *The First Tung Chee-hwa Administration: The First Five Years of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2002), pp.89-122.

politics (Q17).

The above results are consistent with public perception and international indicators. Hong Kong had widespread corruption before the mid-1970s. In 1974, with the colonial government showing strong determination to clamp down on corruption, the all-powerful Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) was established. Widespread corruption in public and private sectors was largely stemmed out in a few years' time, and Hong Kong in recent years has been considered a place largely free of corruption. By 2007, Hong Kong's Corruption Perception Index at Transparency International is 8.3, ranked as second cleanest in Asia (after only Singapore), and 14th cleanest all over the world. The result of the 2007 Asian Barometer survey largely fits this public perception. Looking at the second-wave surveys, only Vietnam has 77% believing most officials are clean, the only country to have a higher figure than Hong Kong's 73.6% (Singapore data not available).⁴ All the other countries in Asia have a lower rating than Hong Kong.

Table 6 shows that in the 2001 survey, about 41.4% had a negative impression when they compared the level of corruption under the post-1997 regime to that of the Patten government (1992-97). Table 5 nonetheless shows that the respondents have a more positive evaluation of the corruption situation in 2007 than in 2001. This should at least partly have to do with the aforementioned incidents (Sally Aw and others) in the early post-1997 years, which had led some people to believe that the corruption situation impaired after the sovereignty changeover. With more and more Hong Kong firms doing business in the mainland, the contagion of corrupt practices from across the border worried many in Hong Kong. On the other hand, because of ostensible business dominance in the political structure, and several events that smacked of government favoritism towards individual tycoons or conglomerates, there were more public accusations of government-business collusion after 1997.⁵ The higher confidence in corruption

⁴ Vietnam, however, was seen as a very corrupt place by Transparency International, ranking 123rd in the world.

⁵ For example, the Tung government was often accused of favoring the conglomerate of tycoon Li Ka-shing, including the famous Cyberport scandal in 1998, when the government handed development rights of a valuable land project to Li's son without competitive tender.

control in the 2007 survey more or less reflects a general recovery of confidence in governance in recent years, especially after Donald Tsang, a former civil servant, replaced shipping tycoon as Chief Executive in 2005.

B. Competition

Respondents have mixed responses as to whether or not the Legco elections in Hong Kong⁶ provide real choice. About 11% said “absolutely”, 32% said “usually yes”, 27% said “occasionally”, while 13% did not think the elections gave real choice.

Partisanship of the respondents is measured by the response to the question: “which political party/group do you most identify with?” About a dozen responses for the question were recoded into three categories: those who identify with conservative or pro-Beijing parties (12.7% of total), pro-democracy groups (20.5%), and those who claimed that they are identified with none (66.8%). The high proportion of respondents saying that they are not identified or affiliated with any party more or less reflected the underdevelopment of party politics and low level of party identification in Hong Kong.

Table 7a about here

Studying Table 7a, one would think that those who do not identify with any parties have less confidence with the half-baked democratic elections in Hong Kong. It is also plausible that because they are dissatisfied with the current-serving party politicians, they do not identify with parties and are less happy about the current range of choices in elections. The respondents who support the conservative parties are more content with the current range of choices, while those who identify with the pro-democracy parties are somewhere in between the conservatives and the non-identifiers.

Respondents are generally happy about the equal access to mass media during election

⁶ Note that the survey did not ask respondents’ opinion on the Chief Executive election, since most of the Hong Kong citizens did not have a chance to cast a vote in the two post-1997 CE “elections”.

campaigns. About 76% agreed that the parties and candidate in Hong Kong have equal access to the mass media during legislative elections; only 12.4% disagreed. There are several features of the electoral rules in Hong Kong that help this perception. Hong Kong does not allow election ads in electronic media. It sets a tight campaign expense ceiling, exceeding which will disqualify the candidate. For example, a candidate in the New Territories West constituency, with an electorate of more than 800,000, was not allowed to spend more than 2.5 million Hong Kong dollars (USD 320,000). It is equivalent to about 40 US cents per voter in campaign spending. These tight campaign finance rules make the electoral campaigns in Hong Kong less capital-intensive, reducing the rich candidates' edge. Election forums were run by public and private broadcasters, but there is an "equal time rule", making sure that all candidates have the same amount of time in broadcast forums. In addition, Hong Kong has been boasting one of the freest media in the region, with a collection of newspapers and media with different political stands. Candidates with different political persuasions can find support from newspapers of different ideological backgrounds. Despite recent trends of self-censorship and editorial shift towards more pro-government,⁷ this survey shows that the Hong Kong people are still generally confident that the mass media are providing a level playing field in the limited Legco elections.

Similar to the situation on the general competitiveness of the elections, the respondents who identify with the conservative parties are happier with the general fairness of the media (See Table 7b). Although the Hong Kong media has become increasingly conservative and pro-government in recent years, which means there are nowadays more conservative media than progressive ones, Table 7b shows that the democrats' supporters, compared to the non-identifiers and the sample average, are not much more negative about the fairness of media access.

Among the 479 respondents who were registered voters in the 2004 election and who were asked the question: "Do you think the process of the last (2004) Legco election is fair?", 12.7% considered it "very fair", 53.9% saw it as "basically fair but with minor problems", while 9.8%

⁷ Ma Ngok, "State-Press Relationship in Post-1997 Hong Kong: Constant Negotiation amidst Self-Restraint," *The China Quarterly* 192 (December 2007): 949-970.

saw it as “fair but with major problems”, and 3.1% seeing it as “unfair”. This figure is higher than that of Korea and Philippines, similar to that of Japan and Thailand, but lower than those of Malaysia, Vietnam, Singapore and Indonesia.⁸ Crosstabulations showed that the pro-democracy party supporters have a higher percentage considering the elections unfair, while those who identify with the conservative parties consider the elections fairer.

The issue of fairness of elections in Hong Kong can be analyzed from two different perspectives. The biggest inequality of the Hong Kong Legco elections lies in that most of Hong Kong people can only vote for one half of the legislature, with only 200,000 electors or 3% of the population eligible to vote in the FCs or vote for the Election Committee members. However, the popular election component of the Legco elections has been run in a mostly free and fair manner, with more or less fair media access, and multiple parties of different ideological persuasions competing for the popular votes freely. When the respondents are asked about fairness of the electoral system (albeit the questionnaire includes “process of election”), it really depends on to what level of fairness the respondents are addressing in their minds. In this light, it is natural that the pro-democracy supporters are more likely to see the current system as “unfair”, as they had long wanted the Legco to be fully popularly-elected. On the contrary, the conservatives will be more content with the status quo and the slow growth of democracy in Hong Kong, and thus more satisfied with the range of choices or the general “fairness” of the electoral system.

C. Participation

Electoral Participation

In the 2007 survey, 44.4% of the respondents said they had voted in the last Legco election in 2004. This is somewhat lower than the official voter turnout of 55.6% in 2004. The

⁸ Note the operation of the Hong Kong survey is different from the others. Respondents who said they had not voted in the last election would be spared the question of “Do you think the last Legco is fair?” For this reason, the frequency distributions are a little bit different from those of other countries.

explanation is simple: the official turnout rate has the registered voters as basis of calculation, whereas the survey sampled all Chinese-speaking adults of Hong Kong. The survey showed very low levels of other forms of electoral participation. Only 1.6% of respondents said they had participated in election rallies or meetings in 2004, 1.5% said they had campaigned for parties or candidates, and 4.7% said they had tried to persuade others to vote for a certain candidate or party.

Table 8a about here

Compared to other Asian countries in the second wave, Hong Kong has the lowest rate of participation in all aspects. The voter turnout is lowest in the region, which can be partly explained by the Hong Kong's elections not electing a government, and that only part of the legislature is popularly elected. However, the rate of participation in election rallies and campaigning also rank lowest in the region. While on average 20% of respondents had attended election rallies, and two to 17 per cent had helped in campaigns in other Asian countries, Hong Kong's participation figures remained noticeably low.

There was not much change if we compare the 2007 survey figures with those of 2001. In the 2001 survey, 2.1% said they had attended campaign rallies, 0.7% had campaigned for some candidates, while 5.5% said they had persuaded others to vote for a certain candidate or party. In the 2001 survey, 44.6% reported that they had voted in the 2000 election, the actual turnout in 2000 being 43.6%.

This low level of electoral participation fits the past conception of the Hong Kong public as "attentive spectators".⁹ Survey research in the 1980s and 1990s had shown that the Hong Kong public had reasonably good knowledge of political or public affairs, but they had very low level of political participation, organizationally and individually. The major explanation was low political efficacy, that the Hong Kong public did not believe that their participation can change

⁹ Lau Siu-kai and Kuan Hsin-chi, "The Attentive Spectators: Political Participation of the Hong Kong Chinese," *Journal of Northeast Asia Studies* 14, 1: 3-24.

the course of events. More recent researches showed that the Hong Kong citizens actually had more “modern” political attitudes than their mainland Chinese and Taiwanese counterparts, but their participation was hampered by the inadequacy of institutional channels (i.e., the slow development of democratic institutions).¹⁰ After the 500,000-strong rally on July 1, 2003, there was renewed optimism about the democratic aspiration and political mobilization of the Hong Kong public.¹¹ However, if we compare the figures of political participation, political interest and political efficacy in 2001 and 2007, there is very little improvement in terms of electoral participation. It implies that the movements in 2003-04, when hundreds of thousands participated in anti-government rallies and supported universal suffrage, had not led to a marked improvement in electoral participation afterwards.

Crosstabulations showed that the level of electoral participation was not related to gender and education. The figures showed a higher proportion of females saying that they had voted in 2004, but the result was statistically insignificant at the 0.05 level. People of higher education level did not have a higher propensity to vote or participate in other forms. For other forms of participation, given the low level of participation, it was not surprising to find that participation was not significantly related to gender or education.

Table 8b about here

Political Interest

The data on political interest and efficacy more or less confirm the “attentive spectators” thesis. In the 2007 survey, 2.9% said they were very interested in politics, 21.1% said they were quite interested, but 53.6% said they were “not interested”, and 20.1% said “totally not interested.” This gives a whopping three-fourths of respondents lacking interest in politics. However, 44.6% said they read political news every day, 11.3% said they read it “several times a

¹⁰ Kuan Hsin-chi and Lau Siu-kai, “Traditional Orientations and Political Participation in Three Chinese Societies,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 11, 31: 297-318.

¹¹ See, for example, Ma Ngok, “Civil Society in Self-Defense: The Struggle Against National Security in Hong Kong,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 14, 44 (August 2005): 465-482.

week”, which means about 55% can be considered frequent consumers of political news. This means in Hong Kong, quite a few people read about political news every day without really considering themselves interested in politics. Comparing the 2007 figure with the 2001 figure, there is a slight improvement in the self-proclaimed interest in politics, but exposure to media political news remained largely unchanged. It shows that even after the 2003 rally and numerous rallies in support of democracy, the overall interest in politics remained low.

Table 9a about here

Comparing to other Asian countries, Hong Kong’s political interest is almost lowest in the region, comparable to Singapore—about 24% claiming themselves very interested or somewhat interested. Both lag significantly behind the corresponding figures of Vietnam (74.2%), Japan (68.7%), and Malaysia (57%), not that much behind Indonesia (34%). When it comes to attention to news, Hong Kong’s figure look less bad; its interest is much better than Singapore and Indonesia and at a similar level with Malaysia. These figures more or less reaffirm the “attentive spectators” thesis: the Hong Kong public keep themselves informed about what is happening, but do not feel a strong interest and are not participative in politics.

Political Efficacy

Figure 9b shows that political efficacy remains low in Hong Kong. Only less than 1% can be considered highly efficacious, feeling strongly that they can understand and participate in politics. Only about 10% agree that they have the ability to participate in politics, and about 20% think that they can understand politics. This, however, is an improvement over the 2001 figures, which were 4% and 15% respectively. The change from 2001 to 2007 can be explained by the effects of the July 1 march and subsequent movements, which seem to have increased the efficacy of a small group of more politically active public, although it did not bring about significant increase in political interest or electoral participation, as shown by previous sections.

Table 9b about here

Compared to other countries in Asia, Hong Kong's efficacy again ranks among the lowest. For the self-perceived ability to participate in politics, Hong Kong is clearly the lowest. For the self-perception of ability to understand politics, Hong Kong is better than Thailand, at a similar level as Indonesia, slightly lower than Malaysia, and way lower than other Asian countries.

Table 9c about here

Table 9c shows that political efficacy in Hong Kong is significantly related with gender and education level. The male respondents have a higher efficacy than the female, and people who have higher education level are more efficacious. These results fit the common experience and findings worldwide. It is noteworthy that respondents with college education or above have a significantly higher efficacy, but their participation level is not higher than others. This shows that the explanation of political efficacy alone may not be sufficient to explain the "attentive spectators" phenomenon of Hong Kong. While the more educated think that they are capable of participating, there is a lot of cynicism and they still largely refrain from taking part in electoral politics.

D. Vertical Accountability

Most of the respondents (62.1%) agreed that they did not have the power to replace a government they do not like. This is not surprising, considering that the Hong Kong government is not popularly-elected. The much-aligned CE Tung Chee-hwa was re-elected uncontested in 2002, by dint of support of Beijing.¹² On the other hand, it seems that the Hong Kong government has successfully created an image of open and transparent government. Only

¹² The Hong Kong questionnaire did not include the question "between elections, people have no way of holding the government responsible". This is because the Hong Kong public cannot elect the government, and can only elect part of the legislature.

8.5% believed that the government always withholds information from the public, 13.1% believing that they do it “most of the time.”

Table 10 about here

Compared to other Asian countries, Hong Kong’s perception of power to change an unpopular government is lowest, largely due to the government not being popularly elected. When it comes to open government, Hong Kong government’s public image is not bad comparatively. The 21% figure believing that the government “always” withholds information from public or “most of the time”, is only higher than that of Thailand, but substantially lower than those of other Asian countries. It is noteworthy that there is only 17% who believed that the government rarely or never withholds information, which is not the highest figure among the Asian countries. On this count, respondents in Malaysia, Japan, Vietnam, Korea and Mongolia all showed better confidence in information openness than Hong Kong.

E. Horizontal Accountability

Survey results show good general confidence on horizontal accountability. As many as 58.4% of respondents think that the Legco is capable of checking the government, with only less than 30% seeing it as incapable. This confidence in the checking ability of Legco of Hong Kong ranks in the middle in Asia: higher than that of Japan, Korea, Thailand, and Mongolia, comparable to that of Indonesia and Philippines, and lower than that of Vietnam, Malaysia, and Singapore. The survey did not include the question on the ability of the courts to check the government. But given the high public confidence on rule of law and law-abidedeness of the government, it is expected that the Hong Kong people would believe that the courts play an important checking role on the government as well.

Table 11 about here

This result is a little bit surprising, considering that the Hong Kong political system is considered “executive-led”, with most of the decision-making power in the hands of the executive branch. Government proposals usually command majority support in the Legco which is only partly popularly-elected. The Legco mostly plays a public opinion and oversight role, criticizing government misdeeds, keeping an eye on government spending, but is relatively powerless in forcing government policy changes. These figures on horizontal accountability more or less show that the Hong Kong public are content with the level of control on government power even without being able to elect the government; that they are quite satisfied with the way public opinion, the media, the civil society, and not the least the partially-elected Legco have been preventing abuse of government power in semi-democratic Hong Kong.

F. Freedom

The Hong Kong public expresses great confidence in their freedom. About 84% believe that they can freely speak what they think without fear, and 80% believe that they can join any association they like without fear.¹³ Hong Kong’s figures are higher than those of all other Asian countries except Indonesia. It fits the public conception that Hong Kong is still a very free place, with civil liberties rivaling those of Western liberal democracies. Freedom House gives a score of 2 for Hong Kong in 2007, which is largely commensurate with the public perception.

Table 12 about here

G. Equality

Despite high income and social inequality, the perception on equality is quite good in Hong Kong. In the 2007 survey, 63.4% of respondents said they agreed that everybody is treated equally by the government. Only 33% disagreed. About 78% agreed that everybody has basic

¹³ The two questions on freedom were not included in the 2001 survey.

necessities; only 20% disagreed. The perception of equality ranks high in Asia —only lower than Vietnam and Indonesia and similar to Singapore, but higher than all other Asian countries. The perception of adequacy of basic necessities lies in the middle of all Asian cases: higher than those of Mongolia, Indonesia, Japan and Korea, almost the same level as Malaysia and Thailand, and lower than those of Singapore, Philippines and Vietnam.

Table 13a about here

It is noteworthy that this perception of equality is not significantly related to self-perceived social class.¹⁴ Looking at Table 13a, one might be struck by the very similar response of all the different classes, with the exception of the (self-perceived) upper class. However, of the 849 respondents, only one claimed himself/herself to be of upper class. Statistically, the two measures of perception of equality are not significantly related with the self-perceived class status of the respondents. This shows that despite high income inequality in Hong Kong, many in Hong Kong believe in the capitalist ideology of equal opportunity, of equality before the law, of the basic openness and fairness of the system. Also in the relatively affluent society, most people believe that the basic necessities are met, even with a lot of people living in poverty. This ideological dimension should have a lot to do with the relative contentment with the political inequality of the system, which contributes to the low level of participation and mobilization in Hong Kong.

H. Responsiveness

The respondents are equally divided on the responsiveness of the government. About 43.6% think that the government is responsive, and 49.2% think that the government is not responsive. Similarly, about 33% think the government is likely to solve the most important problem in their mind, while more than 50% think that it is not likely. Compared to other Asian

¹⁴ Instead of asking respondents to rank their social status from 1 to 10, the Hong Kong survey chose an easier-to-understand method of asking the respondents to identify themselves as (1) upper class; (2) middle-upper class; (3) middle class; (4) lower-middle class; (5) lower class.

countries, Hong Kong people's confidence in government responsiveness lies in the middle, lower than those of Malaysia, Vietnam, and Singapore, while higher than Japan, Korea, Philippines and Mongolia, at the same level with Indonesia and Thailand. The confidence in government's ability to solve the most important problem, however, is low. The Hong Kong figure is only higher than that of Japan, comparable to Philippines and Taiwan, but lower than all other Asian countries.

Table 14 about here

Crosstabulations show that the two variables are statistically related. It is natural that those who think the Hong Kong government is highly responsive show better confidence in the government solving the most important problem. Those who think that the government is not responsive tend to have less confidence in the government's problem-solving capability.

In Hong Kong's political context, while the Hong Kong government has never been popularly elected, years of "consultative democracy" and general responsiveness to public opinion under the colonial regime have enhanced public confidence in the openness and responsiveness of the government. In comparison, public confidence in government capacity to solve problems seems to be lower. This may have a lot to do with post-handover inability of the government to solve many social and economic problems, weakening public confidence towards the capacity of the regime.¹⁵

I. A Summary of Quality Assessment

Chart 1 summarizes the quality assessment of the respondents on Hong Kong's quality of governance and democratic development. In general, the scores concerning rule of law, control of corruption and freedom are high. The scores concerning political efficacy and electoral participation are quite low. Despite high income inequality, the people of Hong Kong have a quite positive evaluation of the equality of the system. The assessments on qualities related to

¹⁵ Note that the most common problem people mentioned is "economic problem" or "livelihood problem", which to many people it is natural to assume that it cannot be easily solved in the next five years.

democratic governance are only moderate: including the assessment on vertical and horizontal accountability, competition and responsiveness of the government.

Chart 1 about here

Assessing the overall quality of governance in Hong Kong, it seems that a relatively clean and law-abiding government and adequate protection of civil liberties are instrumental in bringing about positive assessments about the non-elected regime. After all, usually corruption and abuse of human rights are two major ills of authoritarian governments, and Hong Kong has avoided both. This partly explains the low level of electoral participation in Hong Kong, as people are relatively content with the state of affairs even without a democratic system. However, the overall assessment of the “democratic qualities” of the system, such as responsiveness, accountability, and competitiveness, is not high. But because of low efficacy and the provision of political goods such as freedom, fairness and rule of law, the general public does not see an urgent need to participate in politics.

J. Quality of Governance and Regime Legitimacy

Table 15 shows the correlation analysis of the various indicators of support for democracy and the performance indices computed in part I and perception of economic conditions. In general, contentment with the current political situation, including satisfaction with the (albeit slow) development of democracy and diffuse regime support, is correlated with positive evaluation of the regime performance, but not correlated with subjective evaluation of the economic conditions (personal or collective). The correlation coefficients do not show very strong correlation between the tested variables.

Table 15 about here

The regime performance indicators show a weaker correlation with the support for democracy indicators. In general, those who are more supportive of democracy are unhappier

about the responsiveness and the vertical accountability of the current regime, but they have a more positive evaluation of the state of rule of law in Hong Kong. Support for democracy is also negatively correlated with the evaluation of equality of the current system; which means democracy supporters are more likely to be unhappy about political inequality in Hong Kong. Perception of economic conditions is only negatively correlated with the rejection of authoritarian alternatives, but not to support for democracy.

The important lesson from the above analysis is that the satisfaction with regime performance in the protection of rights, equality, and rule of law, and absence of corruption, is a major reason why many in Hong Kong are content with the slow development of democracy and show general support towards the non-elected regime. On the other hand, the perception of economic conditions is not related with regime support or satisfaction with political democracy, showing that in Hong Kong's case, the delivery of systemic political (and not economic) goods are more relevant to sustaining regime support. As Hong Kong is only partly democratic, and the government is still not popularly elected, a higher satisfaction with the current regime will mean a weaker urge for genuine democratic institutions. Those who stress the more intrinsic values rather than instrumental values of democracy are more likely to be unhappy about the responsiveness, accountability and inequality of the Hong Kong political situation, but these may be in the minority.

Conclusion

Two observations stand out from the data of the Hong Kong 2007 Asian Barometer survey. Firstly, although Hong Kong does not have a popularly-elected government, the public has a very good evaluation on various governance indicators: most notably freedom, rule of law, control of corruption, and equal treatment by the government. They also believe that the government's power is being kept in check by the legislature and other channels. This leads to a general contentment towards the slow growth of democracy in Hong Kong, and a low level of

mobilization for changing the current regime. Simply put, the Hong Kong people get a good level of governance which usually are associated with consolidated liberal democracies. The Hong Kong people get a lot of “democratic” political goods without having full democratic institutions.

Secondly, the political interest and political efficacy of Hong Kong people remain very low, at least if compared with other Asian countries. This may have at least partly to do with the general satisfaction with the political situation mentioned above. A good level of rule of law and freedom, low corruption, and moderate responsiveness, all means a less urgent need to participate and change the institutions. In addition, Hong Kong as a Special Administrative Region, and not an independent political entity, has its constitutional rules decided by Beijing or Britain (before 1997), which also served to weaken political efficacy and interest.

These two features help to explain why Hong Kong can stay as a partially-democratic regime for a long period of time, without major political upheavals or governance crises. Delivery of “democratic” political goods without full-fledged democratic institutions has served to weaken the urge for democracy. Despite a general support for democracy, low efficacy and interest, coupled with good perception of government performance, brings a low level of mobilization that is difficult to overcome the intransigence of Beijing and local conservatives. Temporary impairment of governance in the early post-1997 years, sometimes violating the ethos of rule of law, equality or procedural due process, brought people onto the streets on July 1, 2003, and led to a short-term boost in democratic aspirations. But when government performance improves, or at least the public perceive it to be so, participation quickly subsided. The pragmatic and inefficacious Hong Kong people quickly convinced themselves that they can settle for this slow delivery of democratic institutions. If the non-elected government can maintain this high level of “democratic” performance without democratic institutions, the Hong Kong regime can remain hybrid for a long period of time.

Tables

Table 1 Composition of Hong Kong's Legco, 1985-2004

	Government Officials	Appointed Unofficials	Election Committee	Popular Election	Functional Constituency	Total
1985	11	22	12	-	12	57
1988	11	22	12	-	14	59
1991	4	17	-	18	21	60
1995	-	-	10	20	30	60
1998	-	-	10	20	30	60
2000	-	-	6	24	30	60
2004			-	30	30	60

Table 2 Comparison of Region Indicators

	GDP per capita (PPP) in 2006 (USD)	Gini Co-efficient (2007)	ENPP in 2004	Freedom House Political Right Score in 2006	Freedom House Civil Liberty Score in 2006	WBGi Rule of Law indicator in 2006	WBGi Government Effectiveness indicator in 2006	WBGi Voice and accountability Indicator in 2006	WBGi Control of corruption Indicator in 2006
Hong Kong	35393.	0.533	9.8	5	2	1.45	1.76	0.55	1.71
Average of East Asia	14995.7	0.3892		3.38	3.08	0.25	0.50	-0.18	0.15

Table 3 Evaluation on Law-abiding Government: Hong Kong

2007 Survey

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree	DK/NA
Court always punish guilty even if they are high-ranking officials	9.1	68.3	15.5	1.9	5.1

N=849

	Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	DK/NA
How often do govt. officials abide by law?	15.7	37.3	21.8	8.8	1.1	14.6

N=849

Table 4 Trust in Major Institutions

	2006 survey		2001 survey	
	Yes	No`	Yes	No
Chief Executive	71.5	18.3	N/A	N/A
Courts	78.0	9.4	69.6	15.3
Chinese Government	67.1	21.1	55.6	32.5
Hong Kong Government	74.0	17.3	49.3	41.2
Legislative Council	57.1	24.9	51.5	33.0
Political parties	26.7	47.0	22.0	55.0
Civil servants	64.6	19.9	59.5	26.4
People's Liberation army	61.6	12.1	62.4	13.9
Police	84.4	8.6	N/A	N/A
N=		849		811

Table 5 Perception of Corruption: Hong Kong

	2001 survey	2007 survey
Hardly anyone involved	6.9	16.4
Not a lot of officials involved	53.5	57.2
Most officials are corrupt	18.2	9.8
Almost everyone is corrupt	1.1	0.6
Don't Know/No answer	20.1	15.8
N	811	849

Table 6 Perception of Controlling Corruption

2001 survey

Corruption is under control	Compared with the Patten government,					
	Much better	Somewhat better	About the same	Somewhat worse	Much worse	NA/DK
Percentage	0.5	14.9	26.6	35.9	5.5	16.5
N= 811						

2006

Is the government working to crackdown corruption and root out bribes?	Doing its best	Doing Something	Not doing much	Doing Nothing	DK/NA
	36.4	53.6	3.1	0.5	6.4
N = 849					

Table 7a Assessment of Election Competitiveness

Party Identification	Do you think the Legco elections provide you with real choice of parties/candidates?					Total
	Absolutely	Usually	Occasionally	No	DK/DNA	
None	8.0	32.5	26.0	14.7	18.8	100.0
Democrats	19.0	32.8	33.6	12.4	2.2	100.0
Conservatives	24.2	37.4	23.1	6.6	8.8	100.0
Total	11.9	33.2	27.0	13.3	14.6	100.0
N = 654						

Table 7b Assessment of Equal Access to Mass Media

Party Identification	Do you agree that parties /candidates have equal access to the mass media in the Legco elections ?					Total
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	DK/DNA	
None	2.2	72.3	11.3	1.1	13.0	100.0
Democrats	7.3	75.9	14.6	0.0	2.2	100.0
Conservatives	1.1	86.8	7.7	0.0	4.4	100.0
Total	3.0	74.7	11.5	0.8	10.0	100.0
N= 766						

Table 7c Fairness of Elections

Party Identification	Overall speaking, how would you rate the fairness of the last election?					Total
	Very fair	Fair but with minor problems	Fair but with major problems	Unfair	DK/NA	
None	11.2	52.2	11.2	1.8	23.6	100.0
Democrats	18.4	58.3	6.8	8.7	7.8	100.0
Conservatives	13.6	65.2	10.6	0.0	8.8	100.0
Total	13.3	55.5	10.1	3.1	18.0	100.0

N= 445

Table 8a Level of Electoral Participation: Hong Kong in 2001 and 2007

	2001 survey	2007 survey
Electoral Participation		
Said they voted	44.6	44.0
Participated in Campaign Rallies	2.1	1.6
Persuaded others to vote	5.5	4.7
Campaigned for candidates	0.7	1.5
Did all of the above	0.4	0.8
N	811	849

Table 8b Demographic Background and Electoral Participation: Hong Kong 2007 Survey

Participation	Gender		College or above	High School	Education			Total
	Male	Female			Some High School	Primary School	Little or no Education	
Voted	43.6	45.1	54.9	44.6	38.3	44.4	39.3	44.4
Attended Rallies	1.8	1.5	2.2	1.0	0.8	2.5	3.3	1.6
Campaign for Candidates	1.8	1.3	1.6	0.5	0.8	3.1	3.3	1.5
Persuaded others to vote	4.9	4.6	7.7	3.6	2.5	6.9	1.6	4.7
Did all	1.0	0.7	0.5	0.0	0.8	1.9	1.6	0.8

N = 849

Table 9a Political Interest: Hong Kong in 2001 and 2007

	How interested are you in politics?					DK/NA
	Very interested	Somewhat interested	Not very interested	Not at all interested		
2001 survey (N=811)	1.6	16.0	55.1	25.9	1.4	
2007 survey (N= 849)	2.9	21.1	53.6	20.1	2.2	

	How often do you follow news about politics?					
	Everyday	Few times per week	Once or twice per week	Rarely	Never	DK/NA
2001 survey (N = 811)	46.5	12.8	12.8	20.3	6.9	0.6
2007 survey (N= 849)	44.6	11.3	13.7	18.8	0.0	11.5

Table 9b Political Efficacy: Hong Kong 2001 and 2007

	I think I have the ability to participate in politics					DK/NA
	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree		
2001 survey (N=811)	0.1	3.8	80.4	11.3	4.3	
2007 survey (N= 849)	0.2	10.2	63.7	19.6	6.3	

	Sometimes politics and government seems so complicated that a person like me can't really understand				
	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree	DK/NA
2001 survey (N=811)	6.9	73.1	14.9	0.4	5.3
2007 survey (N=849)	9.8	66.0	19.2	0.7	4.4

Table 9c Political Efficacy and Demographics: Hong Kong 2007

	Gender		Percentage of People with Efficacy					Total
	Male	Female	College or above	High School	Some High school	Primary school	Little or no	
Perceived ability to participate in politics	16.1	7.1	19.8	8.7	9.0	8.5	7.4	11.2
Politics too complicated for me to understand	74.2	83.6	59.6	78.1	87.3	90.2	90.1	79.4

Table 10 Evaluation of Vertical Accountability: Hong Kong 2007

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree	DK/NA
People have power to change a gov't they don't like	1.2	27.0	56.3	5.8	9.8

	Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	DK/NA
How often does the gov't withhold information from public? N= 849	8.5	13.1	45.8	12.0	4.9	15.7

Table 11 Evaluation of Horizontal Accountability: Hong Kong 2007

	Very Capable	Capable	Not Capable	Not Capable at all	DK/NA
Is the Legislative Council able to keep the government in check? Percentage N= 849	2.1	56.3	25.2	4.1	12.3

Table 12 Evaluation of Freedom: Hong Kong 2007

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	DK/NA
People are free to speak what they think without fear	6.7	77.1	12.5	0.5	3.2
People can join organization they like without fear	6.0	74.1	13.8	0.1	6.0

Table 13a Social Status and Equal Treatment: Hong Kong 2007

Equal Treatment		Self-perception of Class					Lower	DK/NA	Total
		Upper	Upper Middle	Middle	Lower Middle	Lower			
Everyone treated equally by govt	Agree	100.0	61.9	62.1	64.0	64.4	64.2	63.4	
	Disagree	0.0	38.1	35.7	34.1	28.8	28.8	33.1	
	DK/NA	0.0	0.0	2.2	1.9	6.8	7.0	3.5	

N= 849

Equal Treatment		Self-perception of Class					Lower	DK/NA	Total
		Upper	Upper Middle	Middle	Lower Middle	Lower			
Everyone has basic necessities	Agree	100.0	76.2	80.9	75.8	79.5	64.5	78.0	
	Disagree	0.0	23.8	18.8	22.9	17.1	19.4	20.0	
	DK/NA	0.0	0.0	0.4	1.3	3.4	16.1	2.0	

N= 849

Table 14 Evaluation of System Responsiveness: Hong Kong 2007

		How likely is the govt. going to solve the most important problem in the next 5 years?					Total
		Very likely	Likely	Not very likely	Very unlikely	DK/NA	
How well do you think the govt. respond to people's wishes	Very responsive	23.1	4.1	1.8	3.5	5.0	3.5
	Largely responsive	61.5	51.3	37.1	24.4	33.3	41.1
	Not very responsive	15.4	40.1	57.2	60.5	36.7	48.7
	Not responsive at all	0.0	0.4	1.4	11.6	0.0	2.1
	DK/NA	0.0	4.1	4.1	0.0	25.0	4.6

Chart1: Summary of Quality Assessment: HongKong in 2006

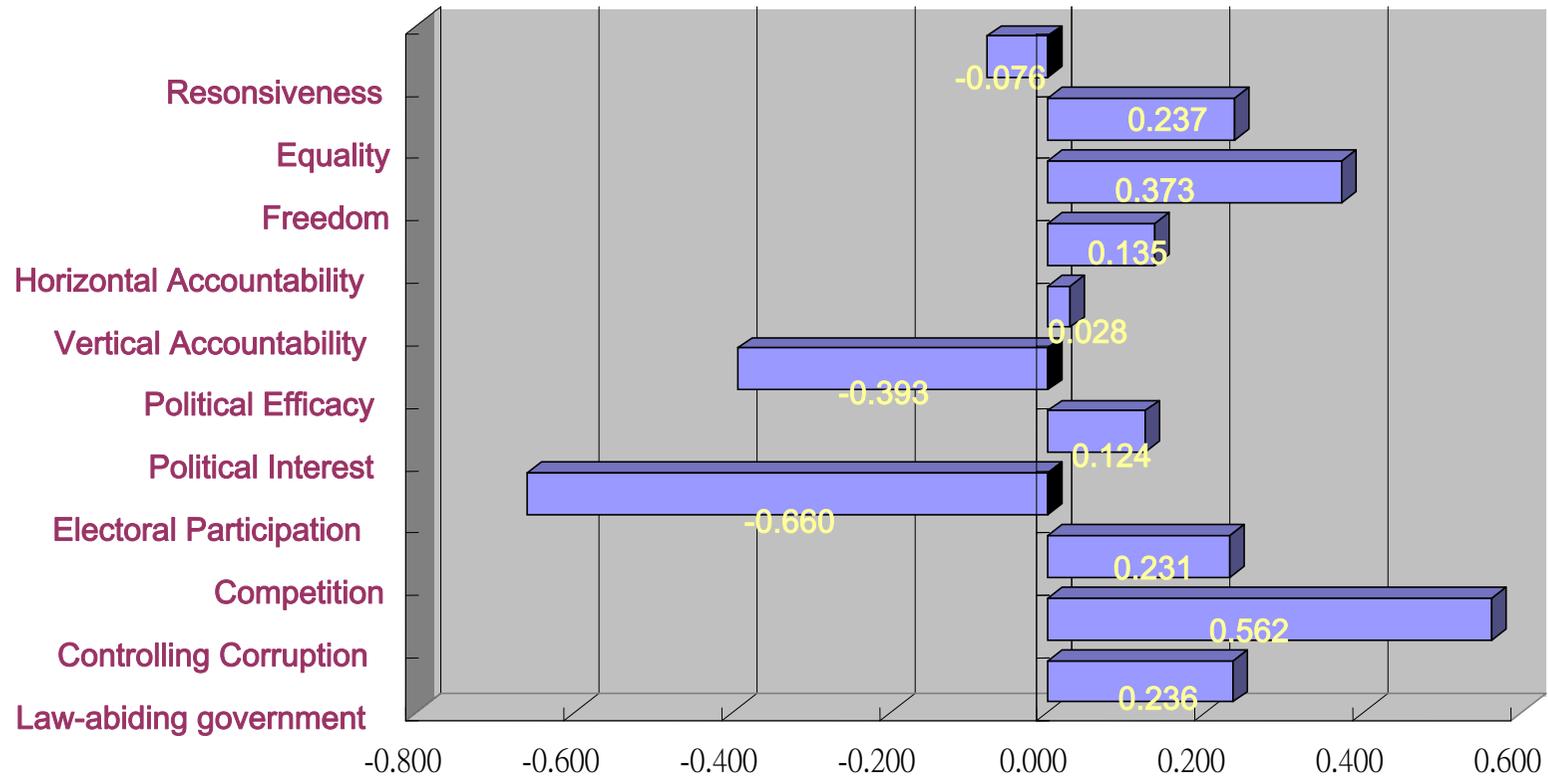


Table 15: Quality of Democratic Governance and Regime Legitimacy

Correlation Analysis of Hong Kong 2007 Survey				
	Satisfaction with Democracy	Support for Democracy	Detachment from Authoritarianism	Best for Our Country
Rule of Law	--	--	--	--
Law-abiding government	0.13**	0.13**	0.10**	0.17**
Controlling corruption	0.08**	0.06	0.19**	0.09**
Competition	0.16**	0.03	0.06	0.21**
Participation	--	--	--	--
Electoral participation	-0.03	0.02	0.04	-0.01
Political Interest	-0.05	-0.03	-0.01	0
Political efficacy	-0.08*	0.04	0.03	-0.16**
Vertical Accountability	0.20**	0.03	-0.09**	0.16**
Horizontal Accountability	0.19**	0.11**	0.01	0.21**
Freedom	0.14**	-0.03	0.04	0.14**
Equality	0.20**	-0.08*	-0.14**	0.22**
Responsiveness	0.32**	0.13**	-0.10*	0.21**
Country's Economic Condition	-0.05	-0.10	-0.13**	-0.06
Personal Economic Condition	-0.06	-0.05	-0.13**	0
N=849				
**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).				
*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).				