

Im Fokus

The 2007 Chief Executive Elections in Hong Kong: Democratic Warm-Up or the Way towards Populist Authoritarianism

Die Wahlen des Hongkonger Regierungschefs 2007: Demokratische Aufwärmübungen oder der Weg in einen populistischen Autoritarismus

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Abstract

In order to understand the prospects for further democratic development and the impact of the recent Chief Executive Elections in Hong Kong, this article analyses the Hong Kong election system. The investigation is complemented by recent survey research results on attitudes towards election system, democracy and government, before the most important events of the election process are summarized. The main conclusion is that prospects for full democracy in Hong Kong remain slim. However, certain mid- and long-term effects from the recent election campaign and the current unbalanced institutional configuration make renewed public pressure for democratisation a real possibility.

Keywords: Hong Kong, Elections, Election System, Functional Constituencies, Political Economy, Democratisation

Introduction

On the 25th of March Hong Kong has re-elected its incumbent Chief Executive (CE) Donald Tsang Yam-kuen. The 2007 elections were outstanding since Donald Tsang, being the favourite of the Central Government and the powerful Hong Kong business elites, had to face a competitor from a pan-democratic alliance – barrister and elected legislator Alan Leong Kah-kit. However, Tsang finally won by a large margin as expected. He received 649 (84%) of 772 valid votes. His opponent got 123 votes (16%), nine less than the 132 nominations that he initially received. So, what seems to be a common, clear-cut election victory for the incumbent is a more complex matter when inspected in the light of the

underlying political constellation.¹

Hong Kong's political system is a highly interesting case not only for China watchers, but also for researchers with a comparative interest in institutional development and democratisation processes. Despite the belated introduction of democratic elements by the British administration in the 1980s and its further development under the regulations of the Hong Kong Basic Law, the current election system does not yet hold up to democratic standards; a fact that makes Hong Kong an "anomaly for modernization theory" (Sing 2004). However, despite certain limitations Hong Kong is overall characterized by the rule of law and a great deal of civil liberties. Hence, it would be fair to simply label the city "authoritarian" too.

The current election system chooses the Hong Kong CE indirectly through an election committee. While this is common in other polities, such as in the United States presidential elections, the composition of the electoral body in Hong Kong is very much unusual. It is highly biased in favour of candidates endorsed by Beijing and unrepresentative of the Hong Kong population. The CE elections in Hong Kong have thus often been termed "small-circle elections". Furthermore, a similarly constrained election modus is used to select half of the Legislative Council (LegCo), the Hong Kong parliament, through Functional Constituencies (FC).

Further significance is added to Hong Kong's democratic development due to its status under the "One-Country, Two-Systems" policy. It is often believed that the Special Administrative Region (SAR) might have the potential to be the "tail that wags the big dog" of the Chinese Mainland should democratic forces succeed in their push for "universal suffrage". Hence, not only observers and foreign governments, but also Beijing keeps a close watch on the city. On the one hand, the central government is interested in keeping political control over Hong Kong as tight as possible. On the other hand, too blunt interference would undermine the persuasive power of the Hong Kong model for a reunification with Taiwan; arouse international pressure; and possibly threaten Hong Kong's prosperity. An important part of the middle path Beijing has chosen is the current

¹ I would like to thank Prof. Wong Yiu-chung from Lingnan University, Prof. Sing Ming from City University, and Scott McKay from the Chinese University in Hong Kong, as well as Katrin Willmann and Dr. Günter Schucher from the Institute of Asian Studies in Hamburg for their helpful comments and support.

election system. It obviously makes sense to take a closer look at it for several reasons, not the least of which is to understand the role of the current elections in the further development of Hong Kong. Therefore, the guiding question will be: "What are the prospects for further democratisation in Hong Kong and what is the impact of the recent elections in this regard?" In order to attempt an answer to this question, it is necessary to understand the political system and particularly the electoral arrangements for the LegCo and the Chief Executive. The following review of recent research will thus focus on the development, nature, effects, "raison d'être" of and interests behind the current system. The analysis will be supplemented by available survey research regarding the HK public opinion on its government and election system. This is done to get an idea about the legitimacy of the political system, a fact likely to be one decisive element for the future development. Finally, the events and effects of the current election campaign, again supplemented by poll results, will be briefly recapitulated before the guiding research question shall be tentatively answered.

Hong Kong's Election System

Hong Kong is well known for its liberal, business-friendly economic model and its outstanding economic success in the second half of the 20th century. Although being catapulted into the ranks of the developed economies and being endowed with internal push factors for democratisation such as a large middle class, high income levels, and a high level of education, Hong Kong failed to democratise so far. From 1987-1999 all "higher-income economies", as defined by the World Bank, except four oil-exporting states, Singapore and Hong Kong were democratic. This makes the city an "anomaly for modernization theory" that demands explanation (Sing 2004:1-9). Reasons suggested for this were: 1.) a Confucian apathetic political culture; 2.) sufficient political support for the colonial state given its satisfactory performance; 3.) a divided elite; 3.) a hegemony of business elites who saw their interests endangered through democratisation; 4.) and of course the dependent status on first the United Kingdom and later the PRC (Kuan 1991; Lau and Kuan 1988; Loh 2006b; Sing 2004; So 2000).

It is without question that the ultimate power to decide Hong Kong's fate lies in Beijing nowadays. However, the city's dependent status was not sufficient to explain Hong Kong's (failed) democratisation. Strategic internal alliances and bargaining processes, it has been argued, were at least equally important.

Probably the most important alliance was and is Hong Kong's characteristic government(-business) elite coalition (Sing 2003, 2004; So 2000). Its most obvious institutional expression today, which at the same time distinguishes the city's election system from a fully democratic one, is the FC system. Therefore, the following review of recent research will focus on this factor.

Article 68 of the Hong Kong Basic Law states: "The ultimate aim is the election of all the members of the Legislative Council by universal suffrage" but the vague formulation of change to be "in accordance with the principle of gradual and orderly progress" leaves wide room for interpretation. Any change, furthermore, needs a two-thirds majority in the LegCo, the consent of the CE and approval of the Standing Committee of the Chinese National People's Congress (SCNPC) (BL 1990). The 2004 re-interpretation of the Basic Law by the SCNPC ruled out any changes in 2008 (Ahl 2004).

For the LegCo the status quo since 2004 is that directly-elected Geographical Constituency (GC) members of parliament comprise 30 seats, or half of the assembly. The other half is elected through indirect FC elections. The FC seats are elected from 28 sectors at present. Apart from the Heung Yee-Kuk (the representation of the traditional rural interests), the trade unions, the district councils, social welfare, and the sports, performing arts and culture sector, the remaining 24 seats represent sectors of the economy. All FCs, except the trade unions that elect three legislators, elect one seat. It is important to note that FC electors are not necessarily "natural persons" but can also be a "body" – in most cases these are business corporations. This fact further narrows the elective franchise and has important consequences for voting behaviour. Currently only 10 of the 28 FC seats were solely elected by individuals. 8 FCs elect their candidates solely through corporate-voters, while the remaining 10 have mixed systems. The number of electors, hence, varies enormously. The two biggest FCs (Education and Health Services) that adopt individual-voting systems comprise 57% of registered FC voters alone. In the 2004 LegCo elections, around 190,000 voters (individuals or corporations) or 5.25% of the total registered GC voters, were eligible to vote in the FC election (Kwok 2006; Young and Law 2006).

A similar system has been adopted for the Chief Executive Election Committee (CEEC) elections. Article 45 of the Basic law states again that: "the ultimate aim is the selection of the Chief Executive by universal suffrage". However, this shall be done "upon nomination by a broadly representative nominating committee in accordance with democratic procedures". Change, as for the LegCo elections,

shall be “in accordance with the principle of gradual and orderly progress” and requires the same high hurdles of consent. Changes for 2007 were equally ruled out by the SCNPC in 2004 (Ahl 2004; BL 1990).

664 of the 800 members of the CEEC are selected through elections in 28 “corresponding subsectors” of FCs and 5 further subsectors. For a detailed list of FCs and corresponding subsectors compare: EAC (2006). Compared with the LegCo elections, the impact of functional representation is obviously even more profound in the CE elections. From the 33 subsectors, 11 adopt a corporate voting system, 12 have a natural persons voting system, and 10 have mixed systems. In terms of the total number of registered voters, Education and Health Services again represent the largest electorate (exceeding 78,000 and 35,000 voters respectively). The total number of registered voters for the CEEC elections in December 2006 amounts to roughly 220,000. The remaining seats in the CEEC are determined either *ex-officio* (96), including all LegCo legislators and Hong Kong deputies to the Chinese National People’s Congress, or by appointment from religious bodies (40) (BL 1990; CEO 2006) Because of the similar nature the term FC is adopted to describe both the FC system and the CEEC subsector elections system in the following.

It is obvious that the functional representation system for LegCo and CE elections is an extremely complex matter, unlikely to be understood by people with little political education or interest in the subject matter. Dubious legislation almost leads to the impression that transparency was never really intended. While the public is, since 2001, allowed to check the register of voters for the FCs, anyone who “reproduces or permits another person to reproduce’ [it ...] for any purpose other than a purpose relating to an election commits an offence” and faces “up to six months in prison” (Hong Kong Electoral Affairs Ordinance as cited in Loh 2006c:2).

A brief look into the development of this extraordinary arrangement sheds light on its current implications. The first FCs were introduced in the middle of the 19th century. The British administration faced the problem of creating a system that reflected pressure from British citizens in Hong Kong for more say in government, without introducing non-rationally selective elections, since that would effectively have jeopardized colonial rule. The colonial regime opted for limited indirect elections in order to co-opt strategically important circles of society – at the time the British entrepreneurial elite – with two indirectly elected seats in the Hong Kong LegCo. The first FCs were phased out by the 1970s

and replaced by an enlarged appointment system for the LegCo, the Executive Council (Exco, the equivalent of a cabinet in Hong Kong) and consultative bodies to give the colonial government a less authoritarian face (Goodstadt 2006). However, the appointees were carefully selected. Until the 1980s, appointed members of LegCo and Exco were chosen predominantly “from the leading merchants, bankers, and property developers” (Chui 1996:151).

The underlying logic of this arrangement was described as the “colonial governing formula”. Elites were granted influence and “regular access to decision makers” (Loh 2006b:31, 32) while the government kept the upper hand by having the power to “appoint”. By providing influence and information, low taxes, and a business friendly environment, the colonial government successfully fended off any attempts to bargain for subsidies or industrial development projects as they have been carried out in other Asian Tiger states. This balance, wrapped in the “quasi-ethical and ideological appeal” (Loh 2006b:32) of “positive non-interventionism” together with economic growth and basic social welfare gained widespread public acceptance until the mid 1980s.

FCs were re-introduced in the LegCo elections of 1985. The further adoption and expansion of this method was written into the Basic Law by committees which, on the Hong Kong side, were heavily dominated by the business elite. However, one crucial difference between the colonial government structure and the post-1997 arrangement is that the government is not merely “granting influence” to the powerful business elite, but is remarkably “dependent” on it. The CE is elected by a committee dominated by those groups and the government no longer has the right to “appoint” LegCo members.

However, as Chinese Vice-Premier Qian Qichen reiterated in 2002, FCs exist “to safeguard the prosperity and stability of Hong Kong” and allow that “people from various walks of life can have balanced participation in political life” (as cited in Young and Law 2006). Yet, a sober analysis reveals that the balanced participation argument can hardly stand up to a rational assessment. The FC system is neither based on a coherent theory of sector representation or definition, nor does it follow a consistent approach to determine voting power. It is also flawed through its use of a confusing and irregular system of voting and most evidently breaches the “One Man, One Vote” principle (Young and Law 2006). Making matters worse in terms of a democratic election process is the nomination process for the CE elections. Aspirants for the CE post need to receive at least 100 non-anonymous nominations from the CEEC to become official candidates.

This means CEEC members are potentially subject to huge political pressure. Furthermore, in subsectors prone to e.g. economic punishment on the Mainland market CEEC member candidates are very unlikely to be elected at all, if they intend to vote for a CE candidate not endorsed by the central government. This is particularly likely if the voters are corporations and not individuals. The prosperity argument does not fare much better. As Van der Kamp and Lai convincingly point out: the FC-spurred economic policy undermines an efficient market and tends to support “corporate welfare”. Hence, they conclude that “capitalism only works when capitalists cannot twist the rules for themselves” (Van der Kamp and Lai 2006:287). Qian’s “stability argument” must then be the overriding rationale behind the existence of FCs.

A look at the actual voting patterns of FCs and GC LegCo emphasizes this conclusion. A study of LegCo voting patterns in political and economic matters between 1998 and 2003 reveals: in the (relatively seldom) contested cases GC representatives tended to vote down government bills while FC representatives tended to refuse amendments to those bills proposed by the first side. The majority of FC legislators tended to disagree with GC amendments in favour of public sector accountability, human rights protection, democratic development and rule of law in the political realm. In the economic realm, FC representatives opposed enhanced competition in the economy, employment and wage protection, better labour conditions, and rights to strike and bargain collectively (Kwok 2006). So the core of the “stability” argument is that the FC’s are an effective way to ensure a majority “against demands for quicker pace of democratic reforms” (Loh 2006a:331) that can be conveniently controlled through economic incentives and political pressure. FCs effectively represent a bargain between Beijing and the Hong Kong business elite and the term “[b]usiness friendly and politically convenient” (Goodstadt 2006) seems to be warranted. Sing provides an interesting detail that exhibits Beijing’s cooption strategy of Hong Kong capitalist. Members of the Basic Law Drafting committee owned 43.5% of all stock value listed on the Hong Kong stock market. The respective figures for the Preparatory Committee 1996-97, the Chief Executive Election Committee 1996-97 and the first provisional legislature 1996-97 were 44.88, 60.20 and 12.20% (Sing 2004:206).

Having briefly reviewed the nature of the FC system, the view of the Hong Kong public on the election system, its government and democracy should be of interest to understand the legitimacy of the current political system. In the

end, it was wide-spread public unrest which marked the beginning of the end for former CE Tung. Furthermore, in the absence of universal elections the struggle over public sentiment was the center of the current elections. It was the challenger's ultimate goal to, as he stated, "reveal the unfairness of the election system" (Leong 2006) through his candidature.

Public Opinion

Meanwhile it seems common sense that the Hong Kong public is in favour of universal suffrage by a great margin, not at least since half a million Hong Kongers voiced their dissatisfaction with the government in 2003. Indeed, surveys constantly find at least 69% of respondents support or strongly support direct CE elections and at least 66% support or strongly support fully universal LegCo elections between 2003 and 2006 (HKTP 2006). Furthermore, Sing (2005) argues the results of his survey data analysis indicate a significant political culture change that makes continued support for democracy likely.

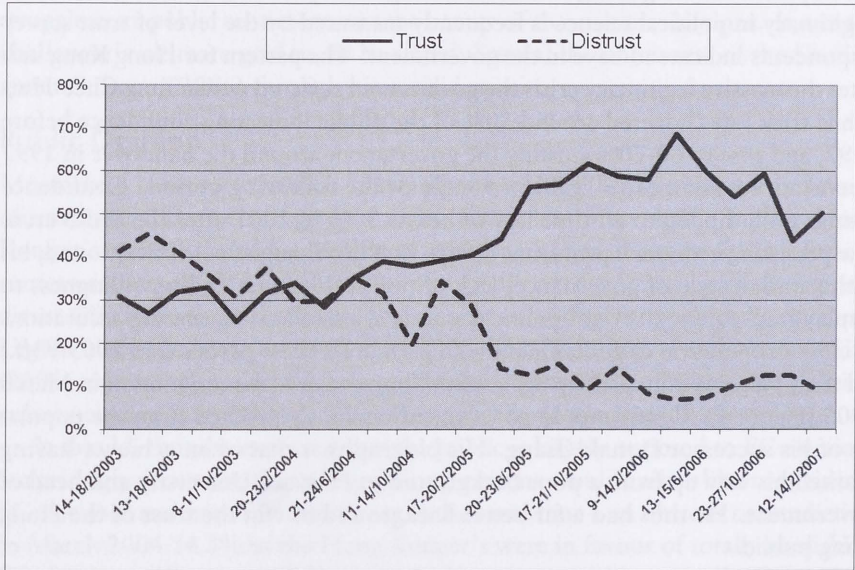
It should, thus, be expected that the public is largely opposed to FC elections. Surprisingly, however, many Hong Kong citizens would rather like to maintain FC elections and have full democracy at the same time – an obvious contradiction. In March 2004 14.3% of the Hong Kongers were in favour of totally abolishing FC elections. However, 60.9% supported increasing or keeping the FC seats in the 2008 LegCo elections. At the same time 60.5% percent of the respondents were in favour of universal suffrage for 2008. Of those claiming wish universal suffrage 63.8% contradicted themselves with their view on FC elections. Further analysis revealed that the understanding of the FC system is indeed very poor in the Hong Kong public. At the same time, however, the more the respondents knew about it, the more likely they were to abolish FC elections (Chan and Chan 2006). The author also assumes that, despite lack of evidence, the legitimizing "legend" of a strong business interest in parliament being "good for the economy" is a popular notion among the Hong Kong public.

Moreover, further survey research revealed, the issue of "Democratic Development" is not top-priority for the Hong Kong public at the moment. Only 5.7% of respondents from a March 2007 Lingnan University poll revealed "democratic development" should be the main concern for the new CE. Much more importance is attached to issues like "economy transformation" (28.8%) "the gap between rich and poor" (26.6%), "education problems" (12.5%), "environmental protection" (9.3%) and "food safety" (6.4%) (LU PGP 2007). Another

important background public sentiment for the current elections and the political development in Hong Kong is the level of legitimacy that the government enjoys. Legitimacy in political science is frequently measured by the level of trust survey respondents indicate to have in the government. The pattern for Hong Kong indicates the massive legitimacy crisis the government suffered under Tung Chee-Hwa. While trust rates hovered around 50% of the public indicating confidence before 1997, and rose to 60-70% trusting the government around the handover in 1997, a constant loss of trust is visible throughout the following period. Confidence ratings even dipped to all-time low of below 30% in 2003 after the SARS crisis. The persisting economic problems, Tung's wealthy Shanghainese background, his authoritarian style of governance, lack of political instinct and unwillingness to display transparency, several political scandals, as well as continuing accusations of close cooperation of government with certain business parties (Ho 2005:93ff.) led trust patterns only pick up again after Tung declared his resignation in March 2005 (Figure 1). Confidence in government obviously profited from the popularity of his successor Donald Tsang. His biography is that of an achiever having worked his way up from a poor background to Harvard University and head of government. He thus had a far better background to win the trust of the Hong Kong public.

However, from April 2006 onwards the ratings were on a downward trend again, as was Donald Tsang's popularity (HKU POP 2007; TS, 28.12.2006). The government's dependence on business interests is likely to have played a role here again. Tsang was not able to win enough support for a cross-sector competition law, a fact that makes Hong Kong unique in the realm of developed economies and provoked criticism from the EU and the WTO (Van der Kamp and Lai 2006). Also the introduction of a minimum wage, in order to deal with the phenomenon of working-poverty and the increasing wealth gap failed. The same was true for tougher measures against the growing air-pollution problem. All issues raised widespread public awareness. Legislation could, however, not be enacted against the fierce resistance of the business community; most notably in the form of the Liberal Party, the quasi coalition partner of the Tsang government (SCMP, 27.10.2006; TS, 12.10.2006). The party retains 8 of their 10 LegCo seats from FC elections – naturally not a big incentive to make compromises even when a large section of the public are concerned. A government plan to accommodate the Mainland's 11th five year plan, was smashed by scholars as an uncreative "political show" simply representing "vested interests" (*Xingdao Ribao*

Figure 1 Trust and Distrust in the Hong Kong Government 2003-2007



Source: HKU POP 2007:7. The question wording was: "On the whole, do you trust the HKSAR Government?" Answers for "trust very" and "quite trust" as well as "very distrust" and "quite distrust" were collapsed in this diagram. Answers for "half-half" and "don't know" were omitted. Sample size varies between 1,004-1,045 people. For more detailed tables and background information please refer to the HKU POP website as referred in the references.

2007). Furthermore, plans for a new Goods and Service Tax (GST) to broaden the government's tax base – despite a budget surplus – received stern opposition from all sides and had to be finally abolished (TS, 04.01.2007). Another point of harsh criticism aroused around the demolition of the famous Star Ferry Pier for a land reclamation project at Victoria Harbour in December 2006. A last-minute, unsuccessful resistance movement gained notable popularity. For some Hong Kongers the demolition and government performance surrounding it obviously served as a symbol of a government remote from the public, despite Tsang's earlier promises for a "people-based" government (C.a., 1/2007:139-104; SCMP, 14.12.2006; TS, 04.01.2007). Not the least of which is because

“technical difficulties” prompted the environmental impact assessment, which argued against the project, not to be published online (SCMP, 14.12.2006).

The 2007 Chief Executive Elections Campaign

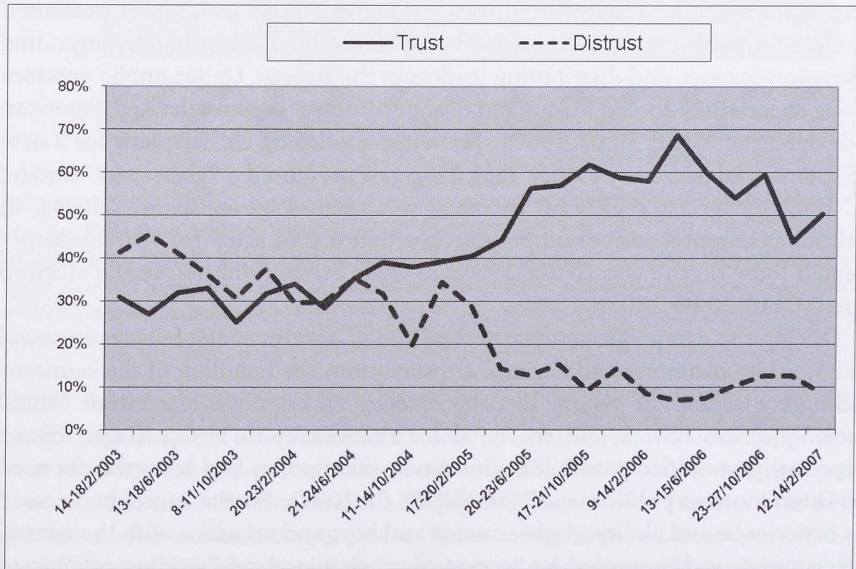
Thus, Alan Leong declared his bid for the top post in October (TS, 04.10.2006) against the backdrop of a government increasingly under pressure. He was supported by a pan-democratic alliance comprised mainly of the established but recently troubled Democratic Party and the newly founded Civic Party, for which Leong holds a GC seat in the LegCo. In December pan-democratic candidates in the CEEC subsector elections scored a surprise victory by securing 114 seats (BBC website 2006). This enabled Leong to become the first official democratic candidate in a CE election in only the second contested CE election since 1997.

The following election campaign resembled a democratic election campaign more than anything Hong Kong has seen before. Both candidates presented an election platform, were busy in the community shaking hands, attending discussion forums, and distributing leaflets in the streets. Under public pressure Leong successfully forced incumbent Tsang to engage in two televised American-style debates (SCMP, 30.01.2007). Just after abolishing earlier plans for a new GST, Financial Secretary Henry Tang Ying-yen presented a “give-away” budget. EC Tsang pledged to review his voluntary minimum-wage legislation scheme. In addition, a comprehensive competition law that was blocked for years suddenly seemed to be on the way to legislation as news broke right before the election date (SCMP, 20.03.2007b).

During the campaign Leong attacked the government for failures in social policy, urban planning, and heritage conservation; the handling of the economy; and a general lack of vision. Yet, his overriding issue was the unfair “small-circle” election system and the need for democracy in Hong Kong. Tsang, surprisingly, conceded past failures in conservation policy and admitted the need “to listen more to public views” (SCMP, 12.01.2007). Furthermore, he stressed his experience and ability in governance and his good relations with the central government, and presented an “action plan” that stressed “guiding officials to act proactively to listen to public opinions” (TS, 02.02.2007). The incumbent’s strategy was to expose Leong’s pledges as unrealistic against his sober approach exemplified by his election slogan “I will get the job done”. Overall, Tsang’s strategy worked well. While his popularity was faltering towards the end of 2006, the election boosted his public standing. At no point could challenger Leong gain

any substantial ground in hypothetical voting surveys. Despite being recognized as a skilled debater in the two public contests, his vote share never exceeded 15%. Leong was not even able to gain a majority among people with a democratic preference (compare HKU POP 2007). Donald Tsang finished the race with an impressive “vote” of over 80% (Figure 2). A number that is remarkably close to the vote he received in the CEEC. Furthermore, a rally for universal suffrage on the 18th of March drew merely 5,000 supporters and exposed the bitter rift that is spreading through the democratic camp, with a vocal minority group around maverick legislator “Long Hair” Leung Kwok-hung viciously opposing Leong’s candidature as legitimizing an unfair system (TS, 19.03.2007). Seen from this side Leong’s campaign must be seen as a failure.

Figure 2 “Hypothetical” Vote, CE Elections 2007 (26.02. – 23.03.2007)



Source: HKU POP 2007. The question wording was: “If you were to vote for the Chief Executive tomorrow, which one would you choose?” Daily sample size varied between 250+ - 250+ people. For more detailed tables and background information please refer to the HKU POP website as referred in the references.

However, there are some possible mid and long-term effects of this contest: 1.) Many have speculated that the elections might have changed the Hong Kong political culture. Hong Kongers generally welcomed the contested election and might not easily accept uncontested elections in the future. 2.) The election may also have an educational effect. Since public knowledge about the election system is very poor, the Hong Kong public might be better informed than before since the election method was widely discussed during the campaign. 3.) The two biggest democratic groups, the Democratic Party and the newly established Civic Party, cooperated extraordinarily well during the campaign, to the point that even rumours about a merger are spreading. A closer alliance has always helped democrats in the past (Sing 2003), and might help them in the future. Furthermore, the Civic Party now tops the popularity ratings of Hong Kong political groups and the Democratic Party also improved its popularity over the course of the campaign (SCMP, 28.02.2007). 4.) The election also brought Donald Tsang closer to one of his “natural” allies, the Beijing orientated DAB, which was initially sceptical of his past in the colonial administration. However, an obvious rift evolved between Tsang and his second “natural” ally, the Liberal Party. The Liberals fiercely opposed a number of Tsang’s proposals, including a comprehensive competition law and minimum wage legislation. Threats of blank votes if Tsang would not change his stance on issues “that would harm business interests and increase spending on underprivileged groups” apparently made Beijing “very worried” (SCMP, 30.01.2007). Political pressure was applied from above when “some people [... were] spoken to” (SCMP, 10.03.2007) to refrain from blank voting. This and James Tien Pei-chun’s (the Liberal Party chief) announcement to decline a new offer for a post in the Exco, because a too close association with Tsang’s government “would cost votes in forthcoming [LegCo] elections” (SCMP, 27.03.2007), are reminders of the difficulties that Tsang will have to push through popular measures that go against the interests of business and the Liberal Party.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the first attempt to challenge a candidate endorsed by Beijing has proved to be a bitter learning process for the Democrats. Overall they were not successful in bringing the public to support their cause. However, with the possible effects on the political culture, public education, and with enhanced cooperation in the mainstream democratic camp, their efforts might eventually

bear fruit.

Yet, whatever the outcome of the coming fights for reform of the election system by 2012, the chances for fully equal and universal suffrage in Hong Kong are slim to say the least. In addition to Beijing's reservations, FCs and the voices they represent are attached to their influential position. For full democracy they would have to abolish themselves – a move that would defy any political logic. Donald Tsang is aware of this when he says Hong Kong needs to take into account “historical developments and the interests of different sectors” for democratic development. Although factually inaccurate for this context, his remarks that “no advanced countries with universal suffrage and a single legislative chamber elected that chamber using one man, one vote” (SCMP, 20.03.2007a) seem to prepare the public for a compromise. Hence, Hong Kong will likely continue on its particular course of political development because circumstances are unusual and politics tend to develop on paths. The question is merely how strong democratic elements will be in the future. The success or failure of Tsang's new term is likely to play a part in that matter, because it will influence the strength of pressure for change from below.

To come back to the title of this paper, the SAR is now caught between democracy and authoritarianism. The way to “real” authoritarianism, such as in Singapore, seems unlikely to be accepted by the populace. For now, however, democracy seems not to be the top public agenda either. But, what the unrest about the Star Ferry, air pollution, the gap between rich and poor and the competition law etc. show is that Hong Kongers want a government that listens to their needs and sentiments, bridges social conflicts, and balances short-term revenue with long-term interest. This is basically what Tsang promised. Hence, he tries to steer Hong Kong towards some kind “populist” authoritarianism. The crucial question will be whether a political system such as the present one can deliver this. The reviewed research indicates that it will be difficult for Tsang to keep his promises. Hence, a lot of high hopes may be disappointed in the months and years to come. Donald Tsang might need all his political talent and experience to prevent a new governance and legitimacy crisis.

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