

PREDICTING ANTI-DEMOCRACY VOTES THROUGH ATTITUDINAL VARIABLES:
A STUDY ON THE 2019 HONG KONG DISTRICT COUNCIL ELECTION

A Thesis
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On my honor
I have neither given nor received
unauthorized aid on this thesis.

Kelly Yue
Spring 2021

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ABSTRACT

This study uses 2019 Hong Kong District Council post-election data to challenge existing demographic narratives on the electoral split and to explore alternative factors in identifying population segments that are more prone to anti-democratic ideologies. This ideological tendency is operationalized as voting for the pro-Chinese Community Party (CCP) camp. With the use of bivariate analyses and logistic regression models, this study finds that Hongkonger identity, societal pessimism, and political agency serve as more precise and effective predictors of Hongkongers' voting preference than demographic variables which are commonly cited by political elites. In general, individuals that identify as Chinese rather than Hongkonger, are less pessimistic about the city's future, and have lower political agency are more likely to vote for the pro-CCP camp.

On 1 July 1997, the sovereignty of Hong Kong was transferred from the United Kingdom to the People's Republic of China, ending a century of British colonial rule and starting a new era guided by "One Country Two Systems (1C2S)." Under this principle, Hong Kong became a "Special Administrative Region (SAR)" in which it would retain its capitalist system, governmental system, and control over legal, economic and financial affairs. The Chinese central government would only assume authority over the SAR's military and diplomacy.

"The socialist system and policies shall not be practiced in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, and the previous capitalist system and way of life shall remain unchanged for 50 years," reads Chapter 1, Article 5 of the Hong Kong Basic Law, the constitutional document of the Hong Kong SAR.

To some Hongkongers with little confidence in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), 1C2S was deemed to fail from the very beginning. But to many more, it was the year 2019 that drove them to the realization that 1C2S was no longer feasible. 2019 will be remembered in Hong Kong history as the beginning of the CCP's blatant suppression of civil liberties, illegitimate disqualification of pro-democracy lawmakers, and intense polarization between the pro-democracy and pro-CCP camps.

In February 2019, the Hong Kong government proposed The Fugitive Offenders and Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters Legislation (Amendment) Bill 2019 in response to a Hong Kong man allegedly murdering his girlfriend when traveling in Taiwan. This extradition bill would establish a mechanism for case-by-case transfers of fugitives to any cities that lack a formal extradition treaty with Hong Kong, including Taiwan and mainland China (Hong Kong Legislative Council 2019). It incited strong opposition among the legal profession and the general public. "The proposed changes to the extradition laws will put anyone in Hong Kong doing work related to the mainland at risk," said Sophie Richardson, China director at Human Rights Watch. "No one will be safe, including activists, human rights lawyers, journalists, and social workers."

On June 9, three days before the bill's second reading in the Legislative Council, one million Hongkongers, estimated by the organizers, marched on the streets to urge for the withdrawal of the bill. The Hong Kong government issued a statement that night, saying the second reading debate on the bill would be held as planned (The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region 2019). This statement prompted many opponents of the bill to recognize how the government's disregard of public opinion was an outcome of its undemocratic formation.

A protest against the proposed extradition bill soon became a full-fledged call for political reform and universal suffrage. Although the government announced the formal

withdrawal of the extradition bill in September, protests escalated into violence and protesters called for fundamental reform to the city’s undemocratic structure. Following the death of a 22-year-old student in a confrontation with the police, protesters planned a week-long city-wide strike starting on November 11 by blocking traffic. Two local universities became battlefields between protesters and the police. The city came to a halt as the protest reached its peak: all schools were suspended for a week and the cross-harbor tunnel was closed for two weeks.

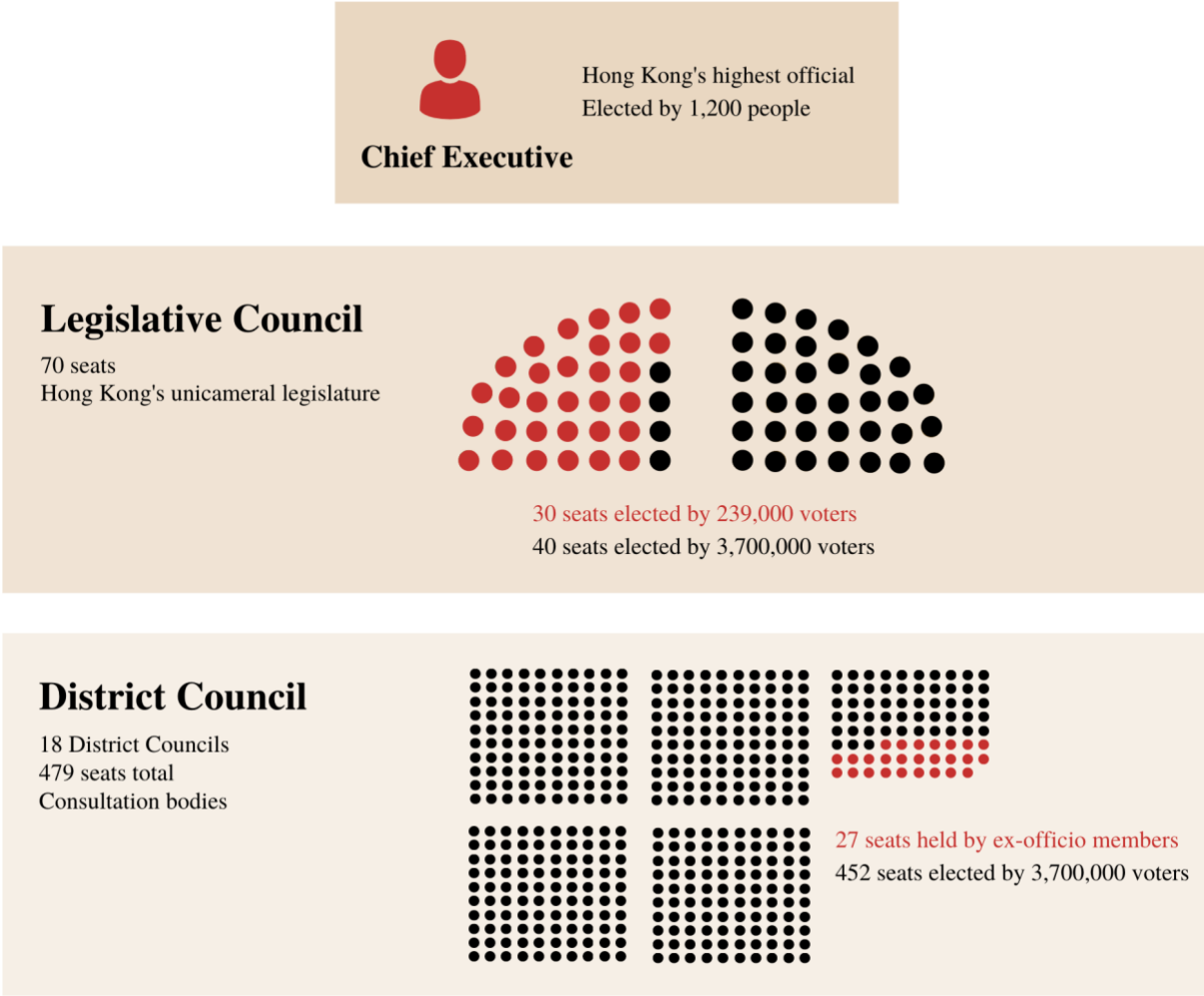


Figure 1. Composition of Chief Executive, Legislative Council, and District Council

The District Council Election happened on November 24, just one week after the city-wide strike ended. The 18 District Councils in Hong Kong are seldom under the media spotlight as they are only consultation bodies that make recommendations to the government and do not yield any legislative powers. In spite of their limited powers, District Councils are the most democratic elected bodies in Hong Kong as shown in Figure 1 since 452 out of the 479 seats are directly elected by 3.7 million registered voters (Hong Kong Legislative Council 2017). On the contrary, the Chief Executive is elected by 1,200 people, and only half of the seats in the Hong Kong Legislative Council are filled by direct voting. The democratic nature of District Councils

in addition to the election's close proximity to the severe clashes meant the election was a de facto referendum on the ongoing protests. In contrast to the past average turnout of barely over 40 percent, the 2019 election saw a historical turnout of 71.2 percent (Electoral Affairs Commission 2019a). With three million voters casting ballots, the pro-democracy camp took 57.4 percent of the votes in contrast to the 41.3 percent won by the pro-CCP camp, marking the first time ever that the pro-democracy camp won the majority votes in the district-level election (Electoral Affairs Commission 2019b).

The pro-democracy camp victory in the 2019 election did not deter the CCP from increasing its authoritarian grip. If anything, it prompted the CCP to speed up its takeover of Hong Kong. In November 2020, one year after the election, the CCP granted the Hong Kong government the power to unseat lawmakers that "threatened national security," which later led to the disqualification of four pro-democracy lawmakers (Reuters 2020). The pro-CCP camp commented, "from now on, Hong Kong only needs a loyal opposition" (Jan Tin 2020). It is widely expected that unless they prove their loyalty to the CCP, pro-democracy politicians will be barred from running in future elections. The CCP officially shredded the thin façade of democracy that it had established in Hong Kong in the past two decades.

A study on the 2019 election enables a thorough examination into public opinion on the largest democracy movement Hong Kong has seen. Yet, this study's greater significance lies in its ability to shed light on the population segments that voted for the erosion of democracy in favor of autocracy. Despite its electoral loss in the 2019 District Council Election, the pro-CCP camp was able to secure 41.3 percent of the votes. This study proposes the use of attitudinal factors to identify population segments that are more attracted to anti-democratic ideologies, in addition to challenging narratives upheld by political elites in the two camps that account for the 2019 electoral divide.

LITERATURE REVIEW

While Hong Kong's complex geopolitical entanglement makes this election study a unique one, this paper intends to situate Hong Kong politics within the broader context of authoritarianism by reviewing electoral systems in other authoritarian regimes. More importantly, by analyzing the association between attitudinal variables and voting preference, this paper reveals how both the pro-democracy and the pro-CCP camps fail to recognize the larger forces at play that influence Hongkongers' voting preference.

Elections in Authoritarian Regimes

Since the end of World War II, about 75 percent of all non-monarchical authoritarian governments have held at least some national elections (Geddes 2005). Surprised by the high

percentage, scholars coined terms such as “electoral authoritarian regime” and “hybrid regime” to highlight the fact that elections are not exclusive to democracies and to further study the significance of elections in authoritarian regimes. They found a strong correlation between holding elections and the tenure of authoritarian regimes (Geddes 2005; Magaloni 2006; Lust-Okar 2006; Gandhi and Przeworski 2007; Gandhi 2008; Gandhi and Lust-Okar 2009). In particular, authoritarian regimes that hold regular elections last three times longer than those without elections (Geddes 2005).

“Elections are costly and risky, but most authoritarian regimes hold them nevertheless because, if handled well, they help solve the dictator’s central problem, survival in office” (Geddes 2005). Holding elections enables authoritarian regimes to obtain information about the distribution of support, establish legitimacy at home and abroad, work out policy concessions, deter challenges from regime insiders, and most importantly, divide and co-opt opposition (Geddes 2005; Magaloni 2006; Lust-Okar 2006; Gandhi and Przeworski 2007; Gandhi 2008; Gandhi and Lust-Okar 2009).

By institutionalizing the opposition, such as enabling their participation in elections and offering them limited legislative powers, the regime provides the opposition with guaranteed political presence and influence. Opposition groups are therefore split between those who continue their resistance against the current regime which could cost them their entire political career and those that align themselves with the regime in exchange for continued political presence. Magaloni (2006:45) wrote “...autocratic elections fundamentally work at dividing the opposition camp. The nature of the electoral game is such that some opposition players will be individually better off playing as ‘loyal opponents,’ while leaving others to engage in violent battles on their own.” A fragmented opposition front thus prolongs the tenure of the regime (Magaloni 2006; Gandhi 2008).

The extensive literature on the political significance of elections in authoritarian regimes urges scholars to break away from the binary perception that elections either exist merely as façades for autocrats to point to as evidence of their democratic credentials, or that elections serve a liberalization purpose that sows the seed for democratic transitions (Lust-Okar 2006; Gandhi 2008).

Elections in Hong Kong

In spite of the absence of universal suffrage and the fact that elections do not alter the CCP’s control over Hong Kong, Hong Kong is not a typical electoral authoritarian regime (EAR). First, “Hong Kong’s people have since the 1980s enjoyed a rule of law and an array of civil liberties that can bear comparison with anything available in any Western democracy” (Ma 2011:55). Second, while most EARs are centered around a ruling party that assumes dominant

control over the legislature (Gandhi and Przeworski 2007; Gandhi and Lust-Okar 2009; Smyth, Bianco, and Chan 2019), Hong Kong has multiple loyal pro-CCP parties rather than a hegemonic ruling party. Third, rulers in most EARs serve as leaders within the ruling party (Gandhi and Przeworski 2007; Smyth et al. 2019), but Hong Kong’s Chief Executive does not have any party affiliations; historically they have either been pro-CCP business people or have managed to climb to the top of the civil servant system. Smyth et al. (2019) concluded that by dispersing legislative power in the hands of multiple political parties and designating a Chief Executive with no party affiliation, the CCP is able to maintain its unquestionable authority over Hong Kong’s legislative and executive branch.

Furthermore, Smyth et al. (2019) posited that while the absence of a ruling party in Hong Kong has protected the CCP’s dominance over the city, it has also led to its inability in dictating legislative outcomes as the Chief Executive and the various pro-CCP parties represent different business interests on top of their shared loyalty to the CCP. Instead of vetting candidates or bribing legislators, canonical strategies employed by the majority of EARs, the CCP until very recently had only relied on carefully-crafted legislative arrangements to retain its power in altering the policy agenda.

One of the most prominent legislative arrangements is having different electoral bases in the two constituencies (Smyth et al. 2019), which has enabled the pro-CCP camp to win majority seats in the Legislative Council despite winning fewer popular votes in every election. “CCP, in other words, wants the legitimacy of an ‘electoral democracy,’ but does not want to give up control and accept the uncertainty that elections bring” (Ma 2011:66).

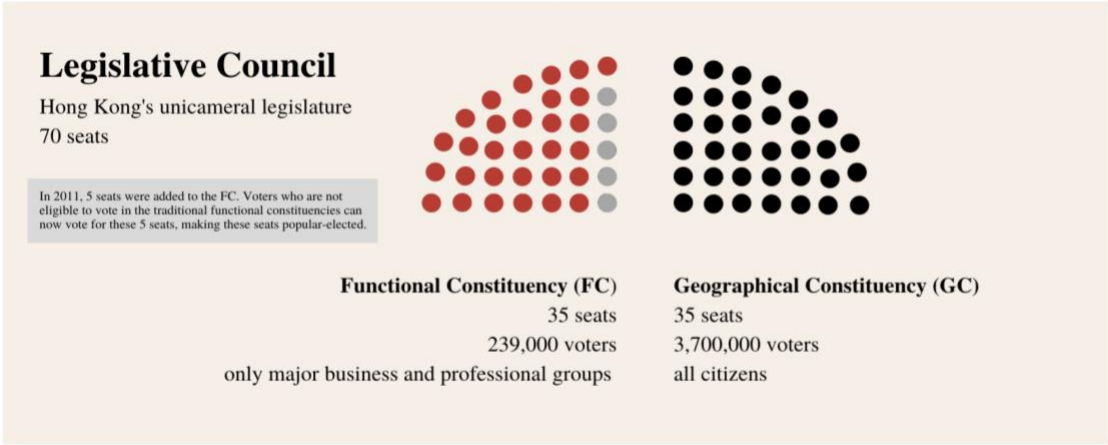


Figure 2. Composition of Hong Kong Legislative Council

Motivating Factors for Political Participation in Hong Kong

In nature, elections in Hong Kong serve the same purpose as those in authoritarian regimes – to protect the interest of the ruling party. However, Hongkongers, by the time this

paper is written, still enjoy a rule of law and civil liberties unseen in authoritarian regimes, making Hong Kong an example of “liberal autocracy” or “liberal authoritarianism” (Ma 2011). Hong Kong ranked 11 out of 179 countries in the Corruption Perceptions Index, performing better than countries such as Belgium, Austria and Iceland (Transparency International 2020). The absence of election fraud and bribery means that delivering benefits or scrambling a portion of the spoils, which motivate political participation in authoritarian regimes (Magaloni 2006; Lust-Okar 2006; Gandhi and Lust-Okar 2009), are rarely motivating factors for political participation in Hong Kong.

When examining voting patterns in Hong Kong, different camps and scholars have presented varying perspectives. The pro-democracy camp often perceives the democracy movement as a fight between generations: the younger, more educated, and progressive generation who values democracy and the establishment of a more just society versus the older, less educated, and conservative generation who values stability and the preservation of the status quo. An example of the generational divide is the use of two specific terms: the term 廢青 (trashy teens) was first used by counter-protesters to describe protesters; the pro-democracy camp later came up with a new term 廢老 (trashy elders) to describe counter-protesters. This division is remarkably similar to the growing tensions between the younger and older generations in the United States.

The generational divide portrayal is based on many public opinion surveys that point to the demographic split in terms of age and educational level. Individuals who are younger and with high education levels are more likely to support the pro-democracy camp. When asked “how do you think the Hong Kong government handled public opinion during the anti-extradition bill protest?”, 81 percent of respondents under the age of 30 but only 51 percent of those above 60 said “very poor.” This discrepancy is observed in education level as well: 48 percent of respondents with elementary education, 54 percent with high school education and 73 percent with bachelor’s or above said “very poor” (Hong Kong Public Opinion Research Institute 2020).

On the other hand, the pro-CCP camp takes on a vastly different narrative by framing the movement as a housing-induced crisis. Xinhuanet, a Chinese state-controlled media, published an editorial in September 2019 titled “Solving Hong Kong Society’s Deep-Rooted Contradictions by Starting with the Housing Crisis.” Four days later, ATimes, another Chinese media published a similar editorial titled “Unceasing Turmoil in Hong Kong: Why should the Extradition Bill Take the Blame for the Housing Crisis? (Sung 2019).” This narrative emphasizes that the protesters’ discontent is prompted by their frustration with housing unaffordability, instead of their desire for democracy. Therefore, the solution to ending the protest is to provide affordable housing to the population, not to introduce universal suffrage or democratize elections.

Similarly, this narrative finds support in literature. Lee and Yu (2012) proposed that homeownership maintains the legitimacy of authoritarian rule through their case study on Hong Kong and Singapore. Despite sharing many similarities in politics and economics, the two governments have significantly different levels of legitimacy: the government support in Hong Kong was 44.4 percent in contrast to 83.4 percent in Singapore. They concluded that this difference in legitimacy was a result of the different levels of homeownership since only 47.5 percent of the Hong Kong population lived in public housing, whereas in Singapore, the figure was 82 percent. Furthermore, Wong and Wan (2018) found homeownership status to be the best economic predictor of Hongkongers' political preference: homeowners are more likely to support pro-CCP parties in order to preserve their status quo, while non-homeowners tend to support pro-democracy parties that attempt to subvert the status quo.

It is evident that both the pro-democracy and the pro-CCP camps have developed distinctive narratives on the movement; the former narrative focuses on the division by age and education level while the latter narrative is based on housing unaffordability. One may start to wonder whether there are alternative factors that can account for the electoral divide in the 2019 election. This paper proposes three attitudinal variables to capture Hongkongers' voting preference: Hongkonger identity, societal pessimism, and political agency.

Hongkonger Identity and Nationalism

The Hongkonger identity is often discussed in tandem with the rise of localism since the 1997 handover. Localism can be vaguely defined as “Hong Kong nationalism” that is centered around the construction and preservation of Hong Kong's identity and culture, often by distancing or negating one's Chinese identity (E. Wong and A. Wong 2014; Ramzy and Wong 2017; Wong and Wan 2018). Localism became a changing force in the political landscape when a localist politician, Edward Leung, won 15.3 percent of the votes in the 2016 Legislative Council by-election (Electoral Affairs Commission 2016b). Although localist politicians soon became the primary target of government crackdowns (Leung himself was sentenced to jail in 2018 for participating in violent protest), localist ideals grew mainstream. Leung's 2016 election slogan 光復香港 時代革命 (Liberate Hong Kong, Revolution Now) became the most common slogan to be chanted in the 2019 democracy movement. A study that aims to predict Hongkongers' voting preference in the 2019 election thus must take into consideration the influence of localism as a form of nationalism, which is measured by one's extent of identification as a Hongkonger.

The measurement of national sentiment is often complicated in places where the idea of “nation” is ambiguous. When Heath, Taylor, and Brook (1999) were studying the explanatory power of British nationalism on voting preference, they formulated a specific question for residents in Scotland as their national identity could be based on Great Britain or Scotland. The

question asked how respondents saw themselves and came with five options “Scottish not British/ More Scottish than British/ Equally Scottish and British/ More British than Scottish/ British not Scottish.” This serves as a reference for how this study can measure nationalist sentiment in Hong Kong where one’s perception of the nation could be China or Hong Kong or both.

Scholars have found nationalist sentiments to be an effective predictor of voting preference as it is able to capture nuances that are often left out by demographic variables or left-right ideological tendencies (Heath et al. 1999, Whitehead, Perry and Baker 2018). Whitehead et al. (2018) emphasized nationalism as an independent ideology that influences voting behavior. Their study on the 2016 American Presidential Election showed that one’s adherence to Christian nationalist ideology was a robust predictor of voting for Trump, even after controlling for sexist, racist, Islamophobic, and xenophobic sentiments as well as economic dissatisfaction.

Societal Pessimism

In the 2020 End of Year Survey, Hong Kong was found to be the world’s second most pessimist and third most unhappy place (Gallup International 2020). The overwhelming sense of pessimism in Hong Kong is reflected in its emigration numbers. The United Kingdom Home Office estimated that between 258,000 and 322,400 British National Overseas (BNO) status holders in Hong Kong will move to the U.K. in the coming five years, which accounts for 10 percent of BNO status holders in Hong Kong and 5 percent of Hong Kong’s total population (Home Office 2021).



Figure 3. “The Ultimate Worst Day” by Baak Sui Comic (The News Lens)

While the phrase “today is the worst day for Hong Kong’s democracy” has become trite due to its over usage in recent years, it is proof that widespread pessimism has undermined Hong Kong society. However, there is little to none literature studying its effects on Hongkongers’ political involvement, posing the need for this study to examine the association between pessimism and voting preference.

The effects on societal pessimism on political behavior is studied worldwide. In his case study on Guatemala, Copeland (2011) concluded that decades of political violence and stalled reforms caused widespread pessimism within rural indigenous Guatemalans in the town of San Pedro Necta. These trends have led to political disempowerment and disengagement such that few “remotely believe in the power of the vote as a means to exercise meaningful collective agency in pursuit of the common good” (Copeland 2011, 513). Additionally, the societally pessimistic are less likely to support progressive politics and instead turn towards conservative parties.

Steenvoorden and Hartevelt (2018) expanded on the relationship between societal pessimism and extreme politics in their comparison of voters in eight European countries. They found that societal pessimism is distributed in a tilted U-curve along the political spectrum: the highest pessimistic levels are observed among radical right voters; the next highest score is radical left voters, followed by mainstream left and mainstream right. A more in-depth analysis on voting prediction showed that when controlling for demographic variables, the only attitudinal factor that differs between mainstream right and radical right voters is societal pessimism. Their study demonstrated that societal pessimism is a strong predictor of voting preference especially towards the extreme ends.

Political Agency

Political agency describes whether one feels empowered to participate politically and whether one perceives their political involvement to bring about change. While voting is an important component of political involvement, full suffrage is not a precondition for the development of political agency. This understanding is important as we discuss the impacts of political agency on voting preference in the context of Hong Kong, where universal suffrage has not been realized.

An example demonstrating the distinctive yet related development of political agency and full suffrage is the study of American women holding public education offices in the nineteenth century (Nicholas 2018). Across the United States, women ran for educational offices before they had the right to vote for school boards and general elections. Nicholas (2018) pointed out that the absence of women suffrage in some cases enhanced the political agency of women as they felt like their involvement in shaping local education policies and influencing local politics would pave the way for women suffrage. The backlash encountered by female officeholders, including repeated court challenges on the constitutionality of women office-holding, did not deter women from running for office, but rather strengthened their resolve to bring about women suffrage through direct involvement in politics.

Other scholars have examined the impacts of political agency on voting behavior in EARs. In their case study of Zimbabwe, Croke et al. (2016) found that self-perceived political agency influences voting behavior. Their proposed theory of “deliberate disengagement” posits that educated voters disengage from politics and refuse to vote as they do not feel their participation would yield any significant change in the political scene and would instead legitimize the regime. Their further analysis showed that when elections are more competitive and less corrupted, political disengagement is reversed as educated voters see the value of their votes.

To analyze attitudinal variables that help predict Hongkongers’ voting preference in the 2019 District Council Election, we must first situate Hong Kong in the broader picture of EARs. By recognizing the political significance of elections to the survival of authoritarian regimes, we are able to scrutinize how the design of the Hong Kong legislature works to ensure the unfettered dominance of CCP over Hong Kong. It is then followed by a critical overview of the narratives employed by the pro-democracy camp (generational divide) and pro-CCP camp (housing crisis) on the democracy movement and the 2019 election. This paper aims to compare the effectiveness of these assumed factors (age, education level, homeownership) versus the three proposed attitudinal factors (Hongkonger identity, societal pessimism, political agency) in predicting Hongkongers’ voting preference in the 2019 election. Ultimately, it seeks to provide possible explanations to why certain segments are more prone to anti-democratic ideologies.

METHODS AND DATA

This paper uses a post-election survey collected immediately after the 2019 District Council election. The survey, which is part of a larger election study project known as the Hong Kong Election Study (HKES), was implemented by YouGov and Dynata using its online panel. The HKES survey includes conventional demographic characteristics, opinion questions on the overall political climate and the two political camps, as well as feelings thermometers on social issues.

This study uses Stata statistical analysis software to analyze the factors affecting voting preference. The primary dependent variable measures if respondents voted for pro-democracy or pro-CCP candidates, who is a proxy for the respondents’ tendency to anti-democratic ideologies. Notably, the question provided four options regarding candidates’ affiliation – pro-democracy, localist, pro-establishment (pro-CCP), and independent. Prior to the Anti-Extradition Bill protest, politicians that identified as pro-democracy and localist had diverging views on the fight for democracy as the former embodied moderate approaches while the latter advocated for radical strategies. Yet, the protest has mended many gaps between the two groups – both pro-democracy and localist candidates referred to themselves as belonging to the broader “pro-democracy camp” in this election. This further underpinned the perception of the election as a referendum between

the pro-CCP camp and the pro-democracy camp. Based on these circumstances, this paper thus categorizes both pro-democracy and localist candidates under the umbrella pro-democracy camp.

Another point to note is that in order to focus on the pro-democracy and pro-CCP split, this study omits respondents that voted for independent candidates, voted blank, did not vote, cannot remember who they voted for or whether they voted or not. The HKES survey contains 1,515 respondents; however, after omitting observations that fall in the categories above and have missing answers, the number of observations used for this study drops to 827.

A series of independent variables serve as control variables in this study, including gender, location of birth, foreign residency, and income level. Location of birth and foreign residency are dichotomous variables of whether respondents were born in Hong Kong or not and whether they have residency in a foreign country or not. The income level variable measures the respondent's monthly household income and comes in four income brackets. The currency indicated is in Hong Kong Dollars (1 USD = 7.78 HKD).

Primary Independent Variables

There are two sets of primary independent variables. The first set includes age, education level, and homeownership. The first two are based on the "generation divide narrative" from the pro-democracy camp and homeownership is based on the "housing crisis narrative" from the pro-CCP camp. This study codes respondents who live in public rental housing estate or government-subsidized "home ownership scheme flat" as non-homeowners, and respondents who live in private property as homeowners.

The second set includes three attitudinal variables: Hongkonger identity, societal pessimism, and political agency. This study compares whether the first set or the second set of independent variables accounts for more variance in voting preference, which will lead to a better understanding of voting behaviors in the 2019 election and a critique of the narratives employed by the two camps.

The first attitudinal variable is Hongkonger identity, which is measured by the survey question "do you think of yourself as: Chinese / Chinese but also Hong Konger / Hong Konger but also Chinese / Hong Konger." Such measurement is informed by Heath et. Al (1999) as they crafted a similar question to measure the Scottish national identity in contrast to the British national identity. In order to highlight the distinction between the Chinese and Hongkonger national identity, this study collapses the first three survey options – identities that contain the Chinese identity – into a single category and retained the Hongkonger option as its own category.

The second attitudinal variable is societal pessimism, which is measured by a composite containing five measures that ask whether respondents think Hong Kong has gotten worse or better in the past four years in crime situation, health service, educational system, environment, and civil liberties. A higher value of this variable represents a more pessimistic attitude. The overall Cronbach's alpha for this composite variable is 0.75, indicating a high coherence between the variables.

The third attitudinal variable "political agency" has two facets: the degree of political involvement and the perceived impacts of one's involvement. The composite includes four questions regarding the respondent's self-assessed activeness and influence in public affairs, as well as whether respondents perceive their involvement as benefitting society and themselves. A higher value of this variable corresponds to higher political agency (i.e., more political involvement and more positive outlook of the impacts of their involvement). The overall Cronbach's alpha for this composite measure is 0.66, thus the variables have moderately high coherence with one another.

Due to the rather small number of questions incorporated into the two composites, an observation must not have missing answers for any of the questions in order to be incorporated into the composites. A descriptive statistics table is available in Appendix A, with more information on the dependent variable, the control variables, as well as the two sets of primary independent variables. Appendix B includes a description of questions that were incorporated into the two composite attitudinal variables.

To analyze the variables, I first conducted bivariate analyses between voting preference and each of the primary independent variables by running cross-tabulations for the first set of primary independent variables (age, education level, and homeownership) and Hongkonger identity, as well as t-tests for the remaining two attitudinal variables (societal pessimism and political agency). While political agency has a normal distribution, societal pessimism does not; hence warranting the Wilcoxon Rank-Sum Test which confirmed the findings of the t-test. Lastly, I used multivariate logistic regression to analyze voting preference with six different models. I also ran a test for multicollinearity to ensure that the variables were operating independently and I found no highly correlated variables.

RESULTS

This study develops a more comprehensive outlook on Hongkongers' voting preference in the 2019 election by examining the effectiveness of the two sets of primary independent variables in predicting voting preference.

I first ran cross-tabulations for the first set of primary independent variables. The results show that only age and homeownership have a significant association with voting preference, but not education level. The support for the pro-CCP camp increases by age and there is a significant and moderate relationship between age and voting preference ($\chi^2(4) = 36.27$; $p = .00$; $V = .21$). Homeownership displays a significant but weak relationship with voting preference ($\chi^2(1) = 6.09$; $p = .01$; $V = .09$) with more homeowners voting for the pro-CCP camp. The relationship between education level and voting preference is insignificant and very weak ($\chi^2(3) = 1.44$; $p = .70$; $v = .04$). Appendix C provides further results of the cross-tabulations. Figure 4 is a visual representation of the cross-tabulations.

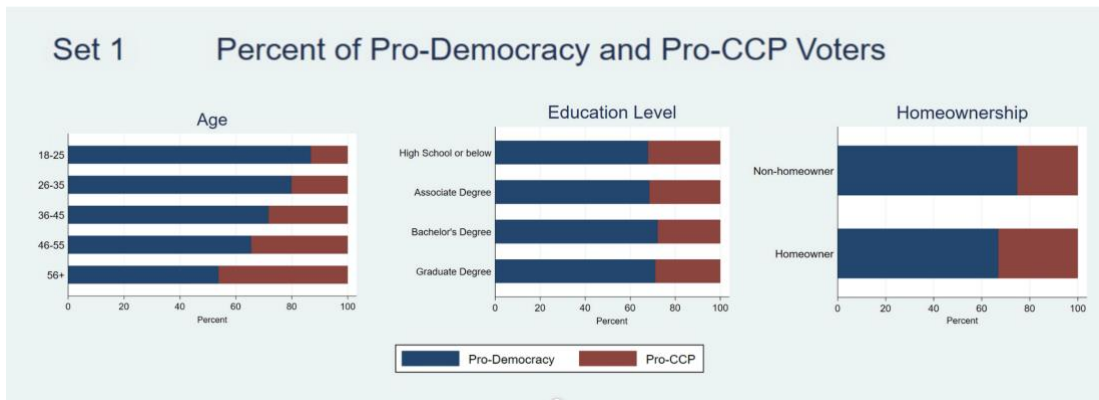


Figure 4. Comparison of Voting Preference by the First Set of Primary Independent Variables

I then analyzed the three attitudinal variables in the second set, which are proposed in this study as alternative predictors. The cross-tabulation results indicate a significant and moderately strong relationship between Hongkonger identity and voting preference ($p = .00$; $V = -.47$). While 54.3 percent of Chinese-identifying respondents voted for the pro-CCP camp, the number dropped to 10.9 percent for respondents that identified as Hongkonger.

I next ran t-tests and the Wilcoxon Rank-Sum tests on the two composite variables (societal pessimism and political agency). Both variables show significant differences in means between pro-CCP and pro-democracy voters and the results of the Wilcoxon Rank-Sum tests support this claim. Both societal pessimism ($p = .00$; $d = -.63$) and political agency ($p = .00$; $d = -.61$) have large effects on voting preference, as indicated by the Cohen's d values associated with the t-tests. Further results of these t-tests are available in Appendix D. Figure 5 illustrates the analyses conducted on the three attitudinal variables.

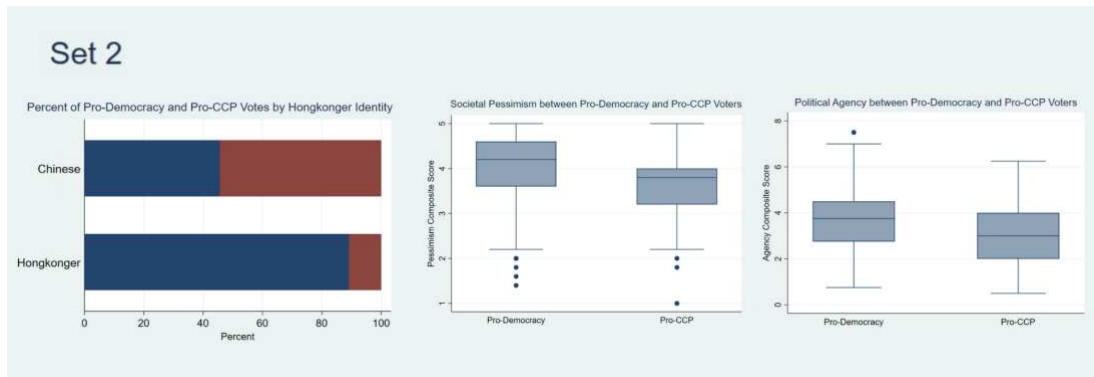


Figure 5. Comparison of Voting Preference by Second Set of Primary Independent Variables

As seen in the above analyses, variables in the second set appear to have more substantial and significant effects on voting preference than those in the first set. I further ran a multiple logistic regression to compare the effectiveness of the two sets of variables in predicting Hongkongers' voting preference, which is displayed in Table 1. I conducted six regression models: model 1 only includes the control variables, model 2 incorporates the first set of primary variables, models 3 to 5 are three individual regressions with each variable from the second set of primary variables, and model 6 is a full model with all variables. The models analyze the effects of variables on the likelihood of voting for the pro-CCP camp in the 2019 election. I will also report the percentage of observations that were correctly predicted in each model, calculated using Stata's estat classification command.

Table 1. Logistic Regression of Pro-CCP Votes on Selected Predictors

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Pro-CCP Voters						
Gender						
Ref: Male						
Female	1.16 (0.18)	1.24 (0.20)	1.51* (0.28)	1.45* (0.25)	1.17 (0.19)	1.67** (0.33)
Place of Birth						
Ref: Hong Kong						
Not Hong Kong	0.47** (0.12)	0.46** (0.12)	0.65 (0.19)	0.47** (0.13)	0.44** (0.12)	0.62 (0.19)
Foreign Residency						
Ref: No						
Yes	1.26 (0.47)	1.17 (0.45)	1.13 (0.49)	1.03 (0.42)	1.27 (0.51)	1.07 (0.49)
Income Level						
Ref: Under \$20,000						
\$20,000-\$39,999	1.03 (0.30)	1.05 (0.32)	1.10 (0.37)	1.10 (0.35)	1.01 (0.32)	1.10 (0.40)
\$40,000-\$79,999	1.02 (0.28)	1.01 (0.30)	0.85 (0.28)	0.98 (0.30)	1.11 (0.34)	0.92 (0.33)
\$80,000 or more	1.62 (0.50)	1.52 (0.52)	1.40 (0.54)	1.37 (0.49)	1.58 (0.56)	1.33 (0.55)

<i>Primary Variables Set 1</i>						
Age						
Ref: 18-25						
26-35	1.68	1.56	1.64	1.33	1.25	
	(0.71)	(0.73)	(0.71)	(0.57)	(0.60)	
36-45	2.74*	2.28	2.76*	2.09	1.84	
	(1.14)	(1.04)	(1.17)	(0.88)	(0.87)	
46-55	3.51**	2.89*	3.35**	2.74*	2.25	
	(1.47)	(1.33)	(1.43)	(1.16)	(1.08)	
56+	5.99***	4.28**	5.86***	4.00**	2.92*	
	(2.59)	(2.03)	(2.58)	(1.76)	(1.44)	
Education Level						
Ref: HS or below						
Associate Degree or Diploma	1.18	1.20	1.19	1.29	1.19	
	(0.29)	(0.33)	(0.31)	(0.33)	(0.35)	
Bachelor's Degree	1.16	1.43	1.14	1.26	1.47	
	(0.26)	(0.36)	(0.26)	(0.29)	(0.39)	
Graduate Degree	0.91	1.05	0.97	0.95	1.07	
	(0.28)	(0.36)	(0.30)	(0.29)	(0.38)	
Homeowner						
Ref: Non-homeowner						
Homeowner	1.29	1.23	1.25	1.31	1.24	
	(0.22)	(0.24)	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.25)	
<i>Primary Variables Set 2</i>						
Hongkonger Identity						
Ref: Chinese						
Hongkonger		0.11***			0.13***	
		(0.02)			(0.03)	
Societal Pessimism						
			0.41***		0.42***	
			(0.05)		(0.06)	
Political Agency						
				0.66***	0.63***	
				(0.05)	(0.05)	
Observations	827	827	827	827	827	827
Classification	70.5%	70.9%	78.5%	71.1%	73.3%	79.9%

Exponentiated coefficients; Standard errors in parentheses
 * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Among the four control variables, gender and place of birth exhibit a significant effect on voting preference in certain models. When Hongkonger identity and societal pessimism are added to the regression, gender becomes a significant factor on voting preference. Similarly, once Hongkonger identity is added into the regression, the negative effect of not being born in Hong Kong on voting for the pro-CCP camp is mediated. Further research may look into the association between the two control variables and Hongkonger identity and societal pessimism, in addition to their impacts on voting preference.

The percentage of correctly classified observations slightly increased by 0.4 percent (from 70.5 percent in model 1 to 70.9 percent in model 2) when the first set of primary independent variables were added to evaluate the effectiveness of the two camps' narratives in predicting voting preference. Notably, age is the only variable that shows a significant effect as the likelihood of voting for the pro-CCP camp increases when age goes up. The age group of 56+ displays the highest likelihood of voting for the pro-CCP camp (OR=5.99, $p < 0.001$).

Model 3, which includes Hongkonger identity, correctly predicted 78.5 percent of the observations, the highest percentage among models 1 to 5. This indicates that Hongkonger identity is the single most effective predictor of voting preference. Compared to Chinese-identifying respondents, those that identify as Hongkonger have a significantly lower likelihood of voting for the pro-CCP camp (OR=0.11, $p<0.001$). Models 4 and 5 correctly classified 71.1 and 73.3 percent of the observations respectively, which were lower than model 3 but still higher than model 2. Thus, all three variables in the second set are more effective in predicting voting preference than the first set. Both societal pessimism (model 4) and political agency (model 5) significantly decrease the likelihood of voting for the pro-CCP camp (OR=0.41, $p<0.001$; OR=0.66, $p<0.001$). Within the second set, political agency has the strongest mediating effect on age as the odds ratio for 56+ drops from 5.99 in model 2 to 4.00 in model 5.

Model 6, the full model, takes into account both sets of primary independent variables. This model had a classification percentage of 79.9 percent, the highest across all models. All variables in the second set, Hongkonger identity (OR=0.13, $p<0.001$), societal pessimism (OR=0.42, $p<0.001$), and political agency (OR=0.63, $p<0.001$), lead to lower likelihood of voting for the pro-CCP camp, with Hongkonger identity having the most substantial impact. Notably, 56+ is the only age group that retains significance (OR=2.92, $p<0.05$) in model 6, which shows that much of the effect of age on voting preference is mediated by the three attitudinal variables.

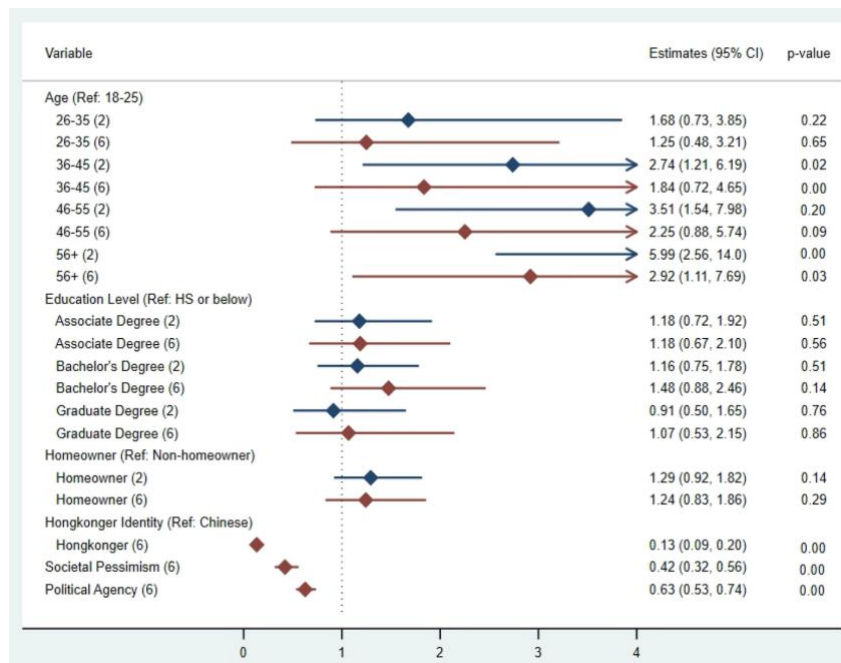


Figure 6. Logistic Regression Results of Models 2 and 6

Figure 6 presents results from models 2 and 6 of the logistic regression table and provides a clearer comparison between the first and second set of primary independent variables. With the control variables omitted in the visual representation, model 2 (red) includes only the first set of the primary independent variables, while model 6 (blue) incorporates both sets. Two observations should be noted. First, all variables in the second set have high degrees of precision as the compatibility intervals are tightly-bounded around the estimate, whereas the degrees of precision for variables in the first set are much lower. Second, a large amount of the substantial positive effect of age on voting for the pro-CCP camp is mediated by attitudinal variables in the second set as shown in model 6. This is of particular importance as age was the only variable in the first set that had substantial effect on voting preference along with low p-values in model 2.

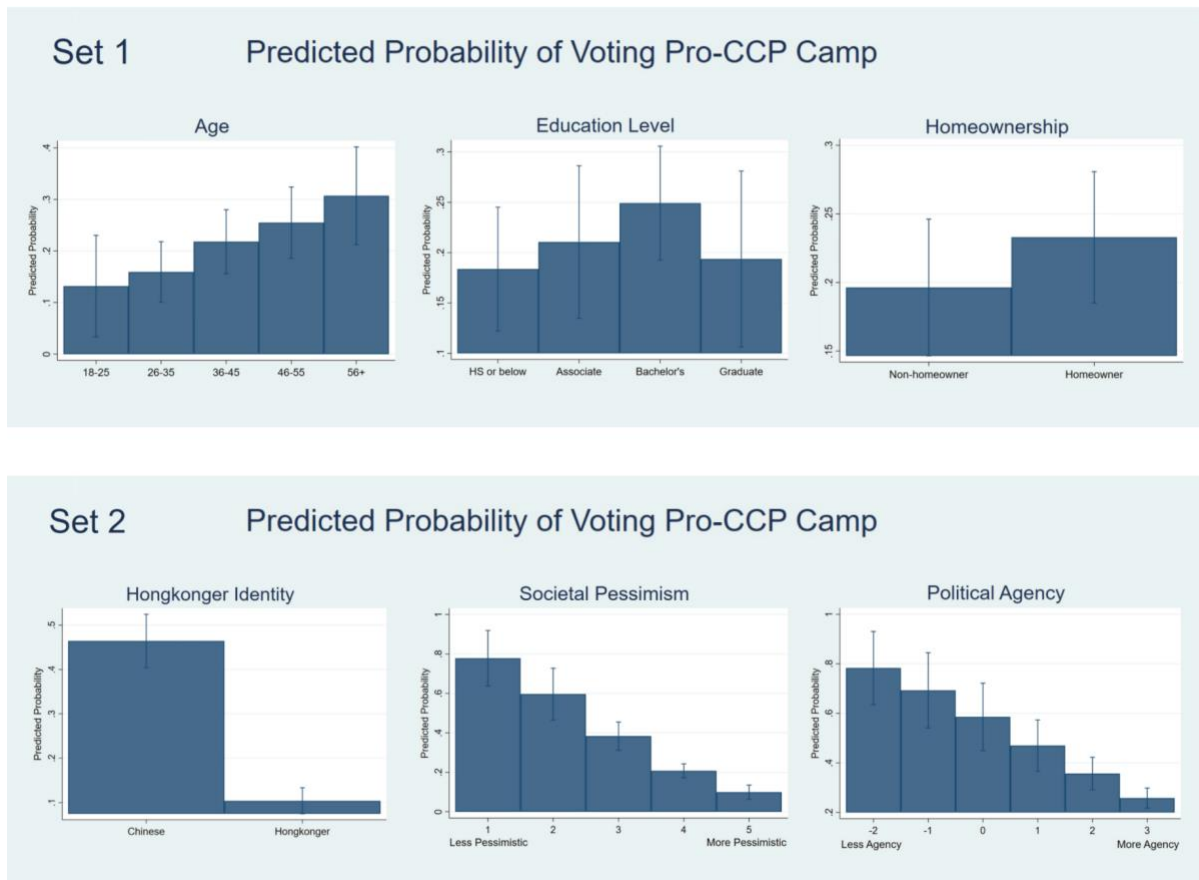


Figure 7. Predicted Probability of Voting for the Pro-CCP Camp

Figure 7 illustrates the predicted probability of voting for the pro-CCP camp. The margins (predicted probabilities) were calculated based on model 6 results in which all control and primary independent variables were incorporated. The shorter confidence intervals in the second set indicate that the three attitudinal variables are more precise predictors of voting preference.

Whereas Chinese-identifying respondents had a 46.4 percent of predicted probability of voting for the pro-CCP camp, the percentage dropped to 10.4 percent for Hongkonger-identifying individuals. Moreover, both societal pessimism and political agency show negative effects on voting for the pro-CCP camp. As the attitude transitions from the least pessimistic to the most pessimistic, the predicted probability of voting for the pro-CCP camp decreases from 78 percent to 10 percent. Similarly, those that had the least political agency had a 78.3 percent predicted probability of voting for the pro-CCP, as opposed to 25.8 percent for those with the most political agency.

DISCUSSION

This study was conducted while the Hong Kong government detained 47 pro-democracy legislators, district councilors, and activists en masse under the National Security Law for “inciting subversion” on 28 February 2020. A headline on the Washington Post wrote “with new mass detentions, every prominent Hong Kong activist is either in jail or exile.” Weeks later, with 2,895 in favor and zero against, China’s National People’s Congress passed a Hong Kong electoral reform plan. The plan drastically reduced the percentage of directly elected legislators in the Legislative Council and stripped political power away from the pro-democracy-camp-controlled District Councils. These recent developments reinforce the necessity of situating Hong Kong in the broader picture of electoral authoritarian regimes and investigating the motivating factors for authoritarian regimes to hold elections (Ma 2011; Smyth et al. 2019).

As anti-democratic norms become more prevalent in Hong Kong, the 2019 District Council election is likely to be the last election with unrestrained participation of the pro-democracy camp. The significance of this study therefore lies in its time sensitivity – its ability to examine Hongkongers’ voting preference between the pro-CCP and pro-democracy camps before the latter disintegrates from the public eye.

This paper set out with one goal: to identify population segments that are more prone to anti-democratic ideologies, which was operationalized as voting for the pro-CCP camp. The narratives heavily used by political elites in both camps to account for the electoral split served as a springboard for this research; age, education level, and homeownership formed the first set of the primary independent variables. This study then proposed three attitudinal variables: Hongkonger identity, societal pessimism, and political agency, which constituted the second set of variables. A series of cross-tabulations, t-tests as well as logistic regressions indicate that the three proposed variables in the second set served as more effective and precise predictors of Hongkongers’ voting preference in the 2019 election. In particular, much of the effects of age, which was the only variable in the first set to have significant effects on voting preference, was mediated by the second set of variables.

To the pro-democracy camp, such findings meant that their generational divide narrative not only failed to help them understand their supporter base, but might have also alienated many potential supporters of older age. On the other hand, if the pro-CCP camp is determined to address social unrest in Hong Kong, it should cease to view the Anti-Extradition Bill protests as fueled by housing unaffordability and instead respond to people's demands for democratic reform.

Overall, this study finds that population segments that are most attracted to anti-democratic ideologies tend to be older (although most of its effects are mediated by the subsequent factors), identify more as Chinese than Hongkonger, are less pessimistic about the city's future, and have lower political agency. In particular, the identification as Chinese or Hongkonger plays the largest role in determining one's voting preference.

Before we discuss how this study contributes to the broader body of research on voting patterns, one must first recognize that the popular political spectrums of left-right or progressive-conservative often cannot be applied to Hong Kong. When asked about their political ideologies, Hongkongers are far more likely to identify as pro-CCP or pro-democracy instead of left-right or progressive-conservative. Thus, while there has been substantial literature on how nationalist sentiments, societal pessimism, and political agency affect voting preference in terms of conventional political spectrums (Copeland 2011; Steenvoorden and Hartevelde 2018; Whitehead et al. 2018), it is difficult to pinpoint how findings from this study add on or challenge existing scholarship. Yet, this study confirms the importance of attitudinal factors as effective predictors of voting preference and their ability in capturing nuances left out by demographic variables as emphasized by Heath et al. (1999) and Whitehead et al. (2018).

This paper omits respondents that voted for independent candidates or did not vote in the election in order to compare voting preferences between the two camps. A future research direction is to examine voting patterns within these often-neglected population segments which may broaden our understanding of voting behaviors in Hong Kong. For example, future studies can look into whether the theory of deliberate disengagement by Croke et al. (2016), which suggests that educated voters refuse to vote as a form of resistance to the regime, applies in Hong Kong's context. As discussed earlier, 5 percent of Hong Kong's population is estimated to immigrate to the United Kingdom in the next five years. It can be reasonably assumed that those that intend to leave are more resistant towards the CCP, more pessimistic about Hong Kong's future, and have a certain level of financial security. Future research should investigate the effects of mass migration on the local population's political behavior. It is too early to say what the future holds for Hong Kong: will pro-independence voices become mainstream, or will the pro-democracy camp adopt more moderate approaches in exchange for their continued presence in the political scene? With the CCP announcing only "loyal opposition" will be allowed to run

for office, how will election dynamics play out? Future research on Hong Kong elections may take on unexpected routes depending on the political development.

APPENDIX

Appendix A: Descriptive Statistics of Regression Variables (N=827)

Dependent Variable	Percent (N)			
2019 Voting Preference				
Pro-democracy (Reference)	70.4 (582)			
Pro-CCP	29.6 (245)			
Independent Variables				
<i>Control Variables</i>				
Gender				
Male (Reference)	52.6 (435)			
Female	47.4 (392)			
Location of Birth				
Hong Kong (Reference)	91.2 (754)			
Not in Hong Kong	8.9 (73)			
Foreign Residency				
No (Reference)	95.9 (793)			
Yes	4.1 (34)			
Monthly Household Income (in HKD)				
Less than \$20,000 (Reference)	9.7 (80)			
\$20,000-\$39,999	27.1 (224)			
\$40,000-\$79,999	46.8 (387)			
\$80,000 and above	16.4 (136)			
<i>Primary Variables Set 1</i>				
Age				
18-25 (Reference)	7.3 (61)			
26-35	23.6 (195)			
36-45	27.0 (223)			
46-55	26.4 (218)			
56+	15.7 (130)			
Education Level				
Secondary or below (Reference)	26.5 (219)			
Associate Degree or Diploma	16.9 (140)			
Bachelor's Degree	43.2 (357)			
Graduate Degree	13.4 (111)			
Homeownership				
Non-homeowners (Reference)	43.3 (358)			
Homeowners	56.7 (469)			
<i>Primary Variables Set 2</i>				
Hongkonger Identity				
Chinese (Reference)	43.7 (357)			
Hongkonger	56.8 (470)			
	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Societal Pessimism	3.94	.70	1	5
Political Agency	-.00	.70	-2.0	2.25

Appendix B: Description of Composite Variable Measures

Societal Pessimism	<i>Cronbach's Alpha: 0.75</i>	<i>Minimum: 5</i>
Variable Description	Options	
Compared with 4 years ago, do you think the condition of the crime situation in Hong Kong these days is:	A lot better A little better The same A little worse A lot worse Don't know	
Compared with 4 years ago, do you think the condition of the health service in Hong Kong these days is:		
Compared with 4 years ago, do you think the condition of the educational system in Hong Kong these days is:		
Compared with 4 years ago, do you think the condition of the environment (e.g. air and water quality) in Hong Kong these days is:		
Compared with 4 years ago, do you think the condition of the civil liberties (e.g. freedom of speech, freedom of assembly) in Hong Kong these days is:		
Political Agency	<i>Cronbach's Alpha: 0.66</i>	<i>Minimum: 5</i>
Variable Description	Options	
"Being active in public affairs is a good way to improve the lives of people in Hong Kong."	Strongly agree Agree Neither agree nor disagree Disagree Strongly disagree Don't know	
"Being active in public affairs is a good way to get benefits for my family and myself."		
On a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means "not active at all" and 10 means "very active", how active are you in public affairs?	10 9 8 7 6 5	
On a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means "no influence at all" and 10 means "great deal of influence", how much influence do you have on public affairs?	4 3 2 1 0 Don't know	

Appendix C: Cross-Tabulation of Age Group, Education Level, Homeownership, Hongkonger Identity with Voting Preference

	Percent of Pro-CCP (N)	Percent of Pro-Dem (N)	
<i>Set 1</i>			
Age Group			
18-25	13.1 (8)	86.9 (53)	$\chi^2(4) = 36.27$ $p = .00$ $V = .21$
26-35	20.0 (39)	80.0 (156)	
36-45	28.3 (63)	71.8 (160)	
46-55	34.4 (75)	65.6 (143)	
56+	46.2 (60)	53.9 (70)	
Education Level			
HS or below	32.0 (70)	68.0 (149)	$\chi^2(3) = 1.44$ $p = .70$ $v = .04$
Associate	31.4 (44)	68.6 (96)	
Bachelor's	27.7 (99)	72.3 (258)	
Graduate	28.8 (32)	71.2 (79)	
Homeownership			
Non-homeowners	25.1 (90)	74.9 (268)	$\chi^2(1) = 6.09$ $p = .01$ $V = .09$
Homeowners	33.1 (155)	67.0 (314)	
<i>Set 2</i>			
Hongkonger Identity			
Chinese	54.3 (194)	45.7 (163)	$\chi^2(1) = 184.07$ $p = .00$ $V = -.47$
Hongkonger	10.9 (51)	89.2 (419)	

Appendix D: T-Test Comparing Means of Societal Pessimism and Political Agency with Voting Preferences

Variable	Pro-CCP	Pro-Dem	Difference	<i>t</i> -statistic	Cohen's <i>d</i> (corrected for uneven groups)
Societal Pessimism	3.64 (.69)	4.06 (.67)	-.42	-8.21***	-.63
Political Agency	-.28 (.72)	.12 (.66)	-.41	-7.95***	-.61

*Two-tailed test of significance; standard deviations in parentheses. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$ Wilcoxon rank sum tests conformed to the results displayed here*

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