

Executive Summary

Since the establishment of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (hereafter called “HKSAR”) in 1997, the Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People’s Republic of China (hereafter called “Basic Law”) has come into force. As stipulated by the Basic Law, the Legislative Council (Legco) is the legislature of the HKSAR, and its main functions are to enact, amend and repeal laws; to examine and approve budgets, taxation and public expenditure; to raise questions about the work of the government; to debate any issues concerning public interest; and so forth¹.

On par with the social progress and political development of the HKSAR, there have been major changes in the formation of the Legco. The Legco now has 70 members, with 35 members returned by geographic constituencies through direct elections and 35 by functional constituencies².

The advancement of information technology has helped to raise public awareness of and concern about the Legco’s affairs. Recently, different public views were witnessed on the roles and functions of the Legco in response to the phenomena of frequent filibustering, radical behaviour and a chaotic voting procedure. The relationship between the government and the Legco has caught the spotlight of Hong Kong society, as well. This has brought considerable challenges to the governance of the HKSAR.

The Legco is a pivotal component of the HKSAR’s political structure and carries with it a specific mandate. What are the views of young people on the roles and functions of the Legco, as well as on its current phenomena? How do they think about their connection with the Legco?

This study aims to investigate young people’s perceptions of the roles and functions of the Legco. Recommendations will be put forward in an attempt to improve the status quo. In conducting this research, data was collected for analysis through a random sampling telephone survey, face-to-face case studies of young people and interviews with scholars and experts.

¹ Basic Law Article 73.

² The Legislative Council website. http://www.legco.gov.hk/general/english/intro/about_lc.htm

Major Findings

- 1. The respondents held positive views about the roles of the Legco, and in particular they valued the role of the Legco in monitoring the government. However, the respondents rated the performance of the Legco in this regard as relatively low.**

The results of the case studies showed that respondents held positive views about the Legco's roles as a chamber for procedural discussions and as a facilitator for helping people understand different issues, as well as in monitoring the government on behalf of the public, reflecting public opinion and in being an influential platform from which people might speak. Some respondents pointed out that the role of the Legco in monitoring the government was particularly important considering its poor governance in recent years.

The survey results showed that 15.4% of the 539 respondents believed that the Legco was able to check on over some controversial issues, and of all the current term legislature's abilities, this was the one for which they were the most grateful. However, when asked about the performance of the Legco in monitoring the workings of the government, the respondents only gave an average score of 4.56 points on a scale of 0-10 (10 points denoting full marks, five points being a passing score).

- 2. The respondents sensed a frosty relationship between the government and the Legco, and half of them believed that all parties should be held responsible for this problem. The case-study respondents believed that a lack of political communication ability among the officials had intensified the problem.**

The survey results revealed that more than half (56.0%) of the respondents had perceived there to be a poor or very poor relationship between the government and the Legco in recent years. Of these respondents, most (48.7%) said that all parties bear responsibility for this situation. However, a quarter (25.7%) blamed the Chief Executive for causing the problem. A significant percentage of respondents put the blame on the Legco's members (7.3%) or on the Principal Officials (6.2%).

Quite a number of the case-study respondents blamed the worsening relationship between the administrative and the legislative bodies on the way that the government has handled business with the Legco. For example, the government submitted bills to the Legco even though they remained controversial. As a result, challenges from Legco members were expected. The lack of communication ability, along with the stiff and stony attitudes, of the Officials intensified this antagonistic relationship.

- 3. The diversity of voices in the current chamber was the most appreciated element of the current term chamber for respondents, while respondents' largest criticism was the Legco's lack of rational discussion. The respondents showed low levels of acceptance of the radical behaviour in the chamber.**

The survey showed that over a quarter of the respondents (27.5%) considered the diversity of voices to be the element of the current term chamber that they most appreciated. This was followed by the current term chamber's ability to arouse public awareness of important issues (21.0%).

In terms of the Legco's shortcomings, close to one third (32.7%) of the respondents criticized its lack of room for rational discussion, close to 30% (29.4%) pointed to its disorderly procedures, some accused it of lacking efficiency (14.9%) and others noted its lack of a spirit of mutual respect (13.4%).

The respondents showed low levels of acceptance when asked about their stance on the following behaviours taken by the members of the chamber: throwing objects, shouting abusively, assaulted the chairman, and walking out. The acceptance levels of these behaviours stood, on average, at 2.24 points, 2.46 points, 2.47 points and 3.65 points, respectively (on a scale of 0-10; lower points denoting lower acceptance, five points denoting average acceptance).

On the whole, over half of the respondents (58.2%) were not satisfied with the performance of the Legco. Those who were satisfied with the

Legco's performance constituted less than 30% (29.6%) of the total responses.

- 4. The respondents considered personal integrity, followed by critical thinking skills and analytical ability, to be the most important traits that a Legco member should possess. Case-study respondents desired that Legco members be cautious when expressing their views, exercising power and making decisions.**

The survey results show that over half (55.3%) of the respondents admitted that the Legco's work closely affected their own lives. Of all the respondents, over one-third (35.6%) said that personal integrity was the most important trait a Legco member should possess, followed by critical thinking skills and analytical ability (18.4%), and political belief (15.1%) and so forth. More than forty percent (44.5%) of the respondents agreed that it was their responsibility to monitor the performance of the Legco's members, while 47.1% thought otherwise.

Case-study respondents took the view that the Legco members should be cautious when expressing their views, exercising power and making decisions, for their views and decisions have an influential impact on the wellbeing of the public. Some respondents considered critical thinking ability and speech quality to be the basic attributes that a Legco member should possess in order to effectively monitor the workings of the government.

- 5. Over half of the respondents were registered voters. Close to 60% of the respondents reported that they did not trust the Legco. A larger proportion (66%) said that they did not trust the SAR government. Some case-study respondents expressed their belief that they did not have many opportunities to get in touch with the Legco.**

Over half of the respondents (52.7%) indicated that they were registered voters. Of these, 76.7% said that they would cast their votes in the upcoming Legco elections. Of all the respondents, 32% believed the

greatest value in voting was the fulfillment of their civil responsibility. Other possible values of voting, according to the respondents, included electing the representative (26.6%), exercising civil rights (15.5%), and so forth.

Case-study respondents said that their right to vote was their most direct link to the Legco. However, they also reported that this connection faded out after an election. The reason for this, they explained, was that they were unfamiliar with the opportunities – apart from voting – that could enable them to directly participate in the Legco’s affairs. Some respondents pointed out that they might have received distorted information about the Legco, as the media is usually biased.

Main Discussions

- 1. The respondents reported that they uphold the roles of the Legco. They have expectations of the Legco, especially of its job in monitoring the workings of the government. In the eyes of young people, however, the Legco’s performance is far from satisfactory. There is a gap between youth expectations and reality.**

The young people who participated in this study held positive views towards the roles and functions of the Legco. The performance of the Legco, however, especially in monitoring the workings of the government, did not meet the respondents’ expectations. In the long run, the sense of helplessness felt by these young people is worthy of concern, as it will affect their views on the Legco.

- 2. Tensions exist between the government and the Legco, and these tensions have intensified in recent years, obscuring the development and improvement of policy. Prolonged frictions hinder the overall governance and development of society.**

The respondents sensed a deteriorating relationship between the government and the Legco, and they believed that all parties should be held responsible for this situation. According to the respondents, the

SAR government tends to display a stiff and stony attitude, and the Officials are ineffective in explaining policies and in lobbying. These weaknesses have created even more tension.

- 3. The respondents emphasized the importance of the Legco having a more rational image, including the ability of its members to engage in high-quality debates and policy discussions. The respondents reported that they tend to be intolerant towards the filibustering and radical behaviour that occur in the chamber. The question of how the Legco might return to engaging in more rational discussions is worthy of concern.**

The respondents detected a lack of rational discussion in the chamber and at the same time observed chaotic voting procedures. They had low levels of acceptance for radical behaviour in the chamber. They saw personal integrity as the most important trait for a Legco member to possess, followed by critical thinking skills and analytical ability. The meaningless or erratic speech of the Legco's members undermined the respondents' trust in their monitoring of the government. Results show that the youth attached importance to the Legco having a rational image and to its members' ability to engage in high-quality policy discussions.

The Legco is a place for policy discussion and debate. The prolonged irrational parliamentary culture, poor level of debate and loss of an orderly and respectful atmosphere have all aroused dissatisfaction and challenges from the public. The Legco should garner public support and trust by establishing a quality parliamentary culture and by encouraging higher standards for the debating of policy. It is worth discussing how the Legco might return to engaging in rational discussion.

- 4. Information from the media cannot comprehensively evaluate the performance of the Legco. Young people have limited interaction with the Legco. There is a need to strengthen the connections between the youth and the Legco and to increase young people's confidence in the Legco.**

The Legco primarily monitors and examines bills. It is convenient, yet confining, for the public to rely on the media to evaluate the performance of the Legco. Additionally, there have been limited opportunities for young people to get in touch with the Legco. The legislature is a pivotal part of the Hong Kong political structure, but there is not much trust in the Legco among the youth. More should be done to assist the public in comprehensively monitoring and evaluating the work of Legco and to increase young people's confidence in the Legco.

Recommendations

This study proposes the following recommendations.

1. Re-establishing a parliamentary culture that encourages rational discussion.

The respondents were concerned about the quality of discussion and policy debate among the Legco's members, and they had expectations of the Legco in its monitoring of the workings of the government. The Legco's members should seriously take these points into consideration. Members should also take an active role in establishing a rational image of and a quality parliamentary culture for the Legco.

2. Re-building a relationship of trust between the government and the Legco.

Both the SAR government and the Legco have their roles and functions. The government holds the leading role of formulating policies and bills. The government should garner public support before putting forward a policy or a bill, doing so through better research and consultation exercises and with the hope that this might improve the policy's quality while building public confidence in and support for that policy. After formulating a policy, the government should take an active role in explaining that policy to the public and lobbying for it, at the same time engaging in better communication with the chamber.

The Legco should improve the quality of its policy examination as well as the quality of its discussions and debates. It is recommended that a kind of policy discussion recognition scheme be introduced into the chamber in order to raise the standard for and quality of its debates and discussions.

3. Strengthening the connection between the public and the Legco.

The Legco should be proactive in connecting with the public, including making good use of various media outlets to facilitate that interaction. With reference to the parliaments in some other regions, the Legco might consider:

- a) Launching a mobile exhibition car, the design of which would resemble the chamber, that includes a mock-voting simulation. The exhibition car should regularly tour through different districts, welcoming their citizens.
- b) Making good use of the public space in the Legco building by providing diverse public events that encourage citizens to visit that building.
- c) Regularly publishing Legco online magazines, helping the public to understand the latest news about the Legco through attractive designs and easy-to-read content.
- d) Further developing the Legco's online social platform, enhancing interactions between it and the public.