

香港青年對立法會選舉 的參與形態研究

**A Study on the Participation of Hong Kong Youth
in Legislative Council Elections**

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SUMMARY REPORT

1. Introduction

With the development of a representative government, 1991 saw the introduction of direct elections to the Hong Kong Legislative Council. Three years later, in 1994, the Hong Kong Government lowered the voting age to 18. Under the principles of "One Country, Two Systems" and "Hong Kong People Ruling Hong Kong", youth participation in electoral affairs began to attract a great deal of attention. The second Legislative Council elections of the HKSAR are to be held on 10 September 2000.

The aim of this study, undertaken through a territory-wide opinion survey and focused-group discussions, is to assess the election culture of young people in Hong Kong. It will pay particular attention to the voting habits of young people in the following three ways: (1) their personal political beliefs and attitudes; (2) the role of the media and public opinion and (3) their personal socio-economic backgrounds.

This study hopes to be able to provide a comprehensive analysis for the reference and assistance of the HKSAR Government and youth work organizations in formulating relevant policies and measures for the future.

An opinion poll was conducted from 24 July to 2 August 2000, by means of random sampling. A total of 756 young people aged from 18 to 29 were successfully interviewed by phone. The success rate is 31%. Three focused group interviews were conducted from 4 August to 8 August 2000, and a total of 20 youth were interviewed.

2. Discussion

2.1 **A comparison between figures in the 1995 (before the Handover) and 1998 (after the Handover) LegCo elections showed that turnout rates for youth aged 18 to 30 have increased from 30% to 50 %. However, the increase was lower than that of the overall turnout rates. The registration rate of this group for the coming LegCo Elections (2000) is also lower than the overall registration rate.**

An initial reflection of the data indicates that the willingness of youth to show up to vote increases, but they are less active than those in older age groups. Nonetheless, there are several intervening variables whose effects are yet to be seen.

In the LegCo Elections of 1991, 1995 and 1998, around 18% of the Hong Kong people that voted were 30 years old or under. The voter turnout rates of this group was, 41.2%(1991), 30.6%(1995) and 49.5%(1998) respectively. The turnout rate decreased from 1991 to 1995 and increased from 1995 to 1998. However, we cannot conclude that there is a trend of increasing turnouts, as the following three factors may affect the situation:

- a. The 1998 LegCo Elections were the first elections after the Handover and the factors affecting the willingness to vote are numerous;
- b. The increase in 1998 may be attributed to the fact that the size of registered young voters was smaller in 1998 than in 1991. In fact, in the 1991, 1995 and 1998 elections, there was a phenomenon of, "the higher the registration rate, the lower the voter turnout rate";
- c. In the 1998 Elections, the voter turnout of registered youth aged 18 to 20, was 63.5%, 31.6% higher than in 1995. Obviously, the increase was mainly caused by higher participation of youth of this sub-group. However, since the age of voting has been lowered to 18 only from 1994, data of the group aged 18 to 20 was only available from two LegCo Elections. It is therefore still early to conclude the pattern of their participation in elections.

Regarding the voter registration rate of youth in 1991, 1995 and 1998, two notable increases were found in 1995 and 2000 respectively. The fluctuations imply that further observations should be made before concluding the trends of youth participation.

It is worth noting that voter turnout rates of youth in 1995 and 1998 were lower than the respective overall rates by about 4 to 5 percentage points. About 55% (a total of 587,224) of youth aged between 18 to 30 registered as voters for the coming 2000 LegCo elections. This rate is lower than the overall registration rate by 12.6 percentage points. All this data shows that older groups of Hong Kong people participate more actively in elections.

2.2 Most of the respondents said that “fulfilling a citizen’s duty”, “exercising the right to vote” and “ supporting the candidates they preferred” are their major reasons for voting. In the focused groups, most respondents also affirmed that participation in the elections was an important means of society building. Many thought that it was only the first step in social participation.

The poll survey showed that 60% (472 persons) of respondents were registered voters. Among them, about 70% said that they would vote in the coming elections. However, since those not interested in voting, might also refuse to be interviewed, the participation rate could be higher. In this study, more emphasis was put on the difference in social participation between those “who will vote” and those “who will not vote”.

Among the 335 respondents who said that they would vote in the coming LegCo elections, the majority (51%) said they would vote because they wanted to fulfill their civic duty. Others said that they wanted to exercise the right to vote, or to support the candidates they preferred. Those who said that they would not vote, gave the reasons that they “were not interested / did not care” and/ or “had no knowledge about the elections.”

Fifty percent of respondents said that they would actively consult the candidates’ election advertisements, while 44% of respondents said they would pay attention to news about the elections. Respondents who were registered voters and who said that they would vote, are obviously more alert when coming across with elections advertisements. However, less than 5% of the respondents said they would take part in election campaigns or canvassing. It seems that most youth would only participate in the elections by casting votes.

Through the interviews with the focused groups, it was found that most young respondents believed that voting was an important way to express their opinions, to exert their influence, to learn about democracy and to support the election system. Some thought that it was an important means of society building. Others thought that it was a citizen's duty to vote after careful consideration, while others said it was just the first step towards social participation.

2.3 In this study, it was found that factors concerning the background, affiliation and sense of civic duty of respondents showed a significant relationship between whether they were registered voters and whether they would vote. On the other hand, factors such as the respondents' subjective feelings towards their ability to influence policy-making, political interest, evaluation of government performance, evaluation of the LegCo performance and political parties performance, were irrelevant to their participation in the elections.

In order to understand the attitude of respondents, this study adopted similar dimensions and questions used in studies from other places. All the factors were checked by cross tabulation (see Table 5.45). The results showed the following:

A. Respondents' Background

Respondents from an older age group (25 to 29), of higher educational attainment, who were professionals or semi-professionals, who had religious beliefs (particularly Christianity), were more active in participating in election activities, especially in elections registration. Respondents whose parents had participated in previous elections also showed a greater tendency to register as voters and vote.

According to the cross tabulation, respondents' background, including age, educational attainment, occupation and religion, is relevant and with statistical significance, as to whether they were registered voters. Most of the respondents in each of the following groups are registered voters: those between the ages of 25 and 29; those with higher educational attainment; those who were professionals or semi-professionals; and those with religious beliefs, particularly Christianity. According to some scholars, registered voters of a higher socio-economic status are more concerned with politics and tend to participate in elections. The findings of this study agree with the experiences and research findings in many other places. Further studies may be needed on why those who have religious beliefs, particularly Christianity, are more active.

Some interviewees in the focused groups said that their parents participated actively in the elections, and that had an influence on them, even though they might not be interested.

B. Affiliation of Respondents

Those respondents who joined student unions, church organizations, groups organized by youth centres, trade unions, professional organizations and volunteer services, seemed to participate more actively in elections, particularly in voter registration.

Our poll findings showed that most of the respondents did not join the seven kinds of organizations listed. About 41% of respondents had joined volunteer service teams, and about 31% said that they had joined student unions. Some (from 1% to 15%) said that they had joined church organizations, groups organized by youth centres, professional organizations, trade unions and political forums. According to Dr. Tsang Wing-kwong's study of 1995, most young people did not join any organization. The result of this study reflects this phenomenon that young people still do not get organized into groups.

However, cross tabulation showed that respondents who joined the above-mentioned organizations were more active in participating in elections, particularly in voter registration. It seems that organizing young people into groups may be one way to encourage their participation in elections.

C. Respondents' Sense of Civic Duty

Respondents who thought that the work of LegCo were closely related to their lives and who claimed themselves concerned with political matters, were more active in voter registration and voting.

Since 1991, some seats in the LegCo were elected through universal suffrage. Young people thus have more opportunity to understand the work of the legislature. The findings of this study showed that most of the respondents (68%) agreed that the work of the LegCo were closely related to their lives. It reflects that young people have some knowledge on the work of the LegCo. However, the findings also showed that young respondents were reluctant to be political, with nearly half of the respondents claiming that they did not care about politics. About 76% of the respondents agreed that politics was very difficult to understand.

According to the cross tabulation, respondents who believed that LegCo's work is closely related to their lives and who showed themselves concerned with politics, were more active in participating in voter registration and voting. Certainly this finding reflects the respondents' sense of civic duty is directly relevant to their participation. However, further study is needed to understand whether this is because sense of civic duty causes them to participate more, or *vice versa*. Nonetheless, it is one possible way to encourage the participation of youth in elections through works to arouse their sense of civic duty.

D. Respondents' Evaluation on Individual Political Efficacy

Most of the respondents did not think that they could influence governmental policies. They also thought that demonstrations were a way to increase the influence of citizens. However, this has no significant statistical relationship with their electoral participation.

The poll findings showed that about 61% of respondents disagreed with the statement that “the SAR Government listens to youth opinion.” Another 54% of respondents thought that they had no influence on the government. All this shows is that young respondents valued their political efficacy as very low. Meanwhile, about 58% of respondents believed that “citizens can increase their influence on government policies through demonstrations.”

It is interesting to point out that according to the cross tabulation, how the respondents evaluated their political efficacy has no significant statistical relationship with their participation in elections. In other words, although most of the respondents thought that they could not influence government policies and also believed that “participation outside the legislature” could increase their influence, such impression did not necessarily affect their registration and voting.

Findings in the focused groups may provide some explanation to the above phenomenon. Although interviewees in focused groups had different opinions towards individual political efficacy, they considered expressing their opinions through legislature elections and to participate in the coming elections. This reflects that young people, while actively participating in the legislature elections, may not necessarily decrease their support to demonstrate peacefully.

E. Political Interests of Respondents

70% of respondents were dissatisfied with the pace of political development in Hong Kong. Another 57% thought that economic development was more important than democratic development. However, this has no significant statistical relationship with their participation in elections.

The poll findings show that 70% of respondents were dissatisfied with the pace of development in the political system of Hong Kong. Another 57% thought that economic development was more important than democratic development. However, cross tabulation showed that this had no significant statistical relationship with their participation in elections.

F. Evaluation of Respondents on the Performance of the SAR Government

Although 60% of respondents were satisfied with the relationship between the Chinese and SAR Governments, they were reserved toward the performance of the SAR Government and the Civil Service as a whole. However, this has no significant relationship with their electoral participation.

In response to “the evaluation of the performance of the SAR Government, the poll findings showed that about 60% of respondents expressed their satisfaction “with the present relationship between the Chinese Government and the SAR Government.” However, they were more reserved toward the performance of the SAR Government, and only 23% of the respondents being satisfied. 40% of respondents agreed with the statement “I am satisfied with the performance of the Civil Service as a whole,” which is 16% higher than those who disagreed.

However, cross tabulation showed that this had no significant relationship with their election participation. It reflected that the culture of participation in elections was deeply rooted in the mind of young people. This culture of elections might be maturing with the fact that there was no significant relationship between respondents’ “evaluation of the work of the government” and their “participation in elections.”

G. Respondents’ Evaluation on LegCo

There was a mixed response regarding the respondents' impression of LegCo and the performance of LegCo members. Poll findings showed that those who found the performance of LegCo members satisfactory, had a greater desire to vote in the upcoming Elections.

The impression of the Legislative Council received a mixed response. 49% of respondents had positive impressions toward the LegCo. Those positive impressions include “reflecting public opinion”, “passing Bills”, “discussing current issues”, and “monitoring the Government”. On the other hand, 47% of respondents had negative impressions toward the LegCo, including the Chamber being “non-influential”, “a fighting field”, “non-representational” and “a mere rubber stamp”. Among all the impressions, 15% of respondents respectively felt that the LegCo was either “non-influential” or “reflected public opinion”. About half of the respondents said they were “satisfied with the performance of LegCo members,” which is 7.2 percentage points more than who were dissatisfied.

However, cross tabulation showed that such findings had no statistical relationship as to whether the respondents were voters and whether they would cast their votes.

H. Evaluation of Respondents on Political Parties / Political Figures

Respondents had mixed feelings toward political parties. A majority of the respondents said the existence of political parties helped towards development of a democratic system in Hong Kong. However, many of the interviewees believed that politicians were concerned more about their personal interests than the public interest. Datas showed that those who disagreed that “political figures in Hong Kong cared about personal interests more than the public interest” had a greater desire to vote in the election.

Poll findings showed that 73% of the respondents believed that the existence of “political parties are helpful to the development of the democratic system in Hong Kong”, while another 61% felt that “political parties in Hong Kong have political ideals.” About 70% of the interviewees thought that so far “no political parties could represent (adequately their) interests and points of view.” Such findings showed that respondents have mixed feelings toward political parties and people participating in politics.

Cross tabulation showed that those who did not agree with the statement “political figures in Hong Kong weigh personal interests higher than public interest” had a greater desire to vote in the coming elections.

- 2.4 The majority of respondents said they voted based on their independent judgement, without being influenced by others; 18% of them agreed that they were most influenced by political parties; about 70% of them thought that no political parties at the moment could represent their interests and points of view. Results showed that the ‘Political Party Effect’ on young voters was not obvious. However, the results of focused group interviews showed that if political parties had an in-depth analysis or a set of political ideals on social policies, they would have had a greater influence on youngsters. As for the influence of mass media, most respondents disagreed that “poll findings could influence (their) voting choice.”**

A. Individual Influence

The questionnaire lists six categories of people including ‘parents’, ‘siblings’, ‘friends’, ‘political parties’ and ‘the interviewees themselves’, and asked the respondents which category had the most influence on them when they were casting their votes. Results showed that most young people (56%) thought they made their own independent judgement without external influence.

The study also showed that a majority (36%) of respondents considered that their votes were based on the candidates' platforms and about 30% based their choice on "past performances of the candidates."

B. Influence of Political Parties

The results showed that only 1% of respondents had joined political parties / group. 18% said that among the six categories of influential people, political parties had the most influence on them, whereas about 70% of them thought "no political parties at the moment could represent (their) interests and points of view". Results showed that a 'Political Party Effect' on young voters was not obvious.

However, results of focused group interviews showed that political parties could have a greater influence on young people's voting choice if they could respond to their requests. Although many respondents had negative comments about political parties, such as "they not (being) serious", "having internal conflict", "reckless", "ambiguous in their political ideals" and "exaggerating only to please voters", many still hoped that political parties would be able to have a set of political ideals and more in-depth analysis on social policies.

Although results showed that political parties had limited influence on young people, there was still much scope for getting their support if political parties could respond to their requests.

C. The Influence of Mass Media and Polls

The result of our telephone interviews showed that most young people interviewed held a positive attitude toward media reports and public polls on elections. 67% of those interviewed believed that "the media is impartial when reporting on elections", while 68% thought that polls on elections were reliable.

About 60% of the respondents said they "pay attention to the poll results on related elections", while another 60% of them disagreed that the "result could influence their own voting choice."

2.5 Results of the study showed that 61% of the respondents disagreed that "the SAR Government was willing to listen to young people's opinions". They were also not very convinced with the performance of the Government.

The result showed that 61% of respondents disagreed that "the SAR Government was willing to listen to young people's opinions," while a 54% thought that they "had no influence on the Government." The findings also

showed that this same group of young people was less satisfied with the relationship between the Chinese and SAR Governments, and the performance of the SAR Government and the Civil Service as a whole. It is therefore an important issue to the SAR Government on how to enhance better communications with young people if she wants to be supported by the new generation.

3. Conclusion

1. Young people's behavioral inclinations and attitudes towards electoral participation have much to do with the future of the entire society. With respect to the fluctuations in both the number of registered voters and their turnout rates in the latest three Legislative Council Elections, it is still too early to form a conclusion on the trend of youth participation. If we want to encourage electoral participation among youth, it is important to continuously get hold of, to understand, and to respond to, the pattern of young people's behavioral inclinations and its related findings.
2. The results of our survey showed that among the registered voters, a vast majority said that they would vote in the coming elections. Through the interviews with focused groups, it was found that most young respondents believed that voting was an important way to express their opinions, to exert their influence, to learn about democracy, and to support the electoral system. It reveals that the culture of electoral participation is already rooted deeply in their mind. The role of young people in social participation is not negligible and should therefore receive greater attention.
3. Our survey revealed that those respondents who joined student unions, church organizations, groups organized by youth centers, trade unions, professional organizations and volunteer service teams, seemed to participate more actively in elections. Furthermore, those who believed that the work of the Legislative Council was closely related to their lives, and those who claimed that they cared about politics, were more enthusiastic to register themselves as voters and to vote in elections.
4. Cross tabulation indicated that some factors had no significant relationship with young people's participation in elections. These included: respondents' evaluation on their individual political efficacy; their political interest; their evaluation of the performance of the SAR Government; their evaluation of the Legislative Council; and their evaluation on political parties/political figures.
5. Statistics showed that young people, when compared to an older age group, were less enthusiastic. This means that there is still room for development

in youth participation in elections. This study provides several suggestions for further consideration to encourage their greater participation. These are highlighted below:

- a. The survey results showed that young people, who had affiliations or participated in student unions, youth centres and volunteer work, were more eager to participate in elections. These affiliations may have acted as miniatures of society that nurtured an interest in participation. In this respect, opening up more affiliation channels could be an effective way to foster young people's participation in social and electoral affairs.
- b. The survey results also revealed that respondents whose parents participated in previous elections showed a greater tendency to register as voters and vote. The importance of parents in acting as role models for their children's participation is clear. The role of families in sending messages on civic duties and responsibilities should be clearly stated.
- c. As shown in this study, there was a mixed reaction towards young people's impressions of the Legislative Council and the performance of LegCo members. At the same time, data showed that those respondents who thought that the work of Legislative Council was closely related to their lives, were more active in voter registration and voting. There is reason to believe that by putting forth more youth-related issues into the agenda of LegCo meetings, Legislative Councilors could gain more understanding and support from young people. This would help curb scuffles between parties and encourage electoral participation in the future.
- d. Last but not least, the survey results indicated that for those respondents who did not think that “the Government was willing to hear the opinions of young people,” their comments towards the Government's performance were also less positive. It is therefore an important issue for the SAR Government to enhance better communications with young people if she wants to be supported by the new generation.