

「青年看香港民意的收集與反映」研究

A Study on Young People's Views on the Collection and Reflection of Public Opinion in Hong Kong



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Summary Report

Youth are the future of Hong Kong. The further development of Hong Kong greatly depends on the extent of the participation of its youth. It is therefore important that the HKSAR Government asks them to express their views and enhance their participation.

The HKSAR Government has claimed that it recognises the importance of paying close attention to public opinion in formulating policies. However, the position of the HKSAR Government over some current issues such as the enactment of legislation under Basic Law Article 23, keeping pets in public housing estates, polling hours during District Council elections and the reclamation project in Central have aroused a lot of controversy. As a result, the HKSAR Government is in a dilemma and the issue of their response to public opinion is one of widespread concern.

How do Hong Kong youth and the population in general view the collection of public opinion in Hong Kong and the way in which it is reflected in government policy? Is there any obstacle to communication between the HKSAR Government and the public? Is there any problem in the way the HKSAR Government processes public opinion? To what extent does the HKSAR Government's grasp public opinion?

These questions have been addressed in this study through (1) opinion survey conducted among Hong Kong people; (2) interviews with scholars and specialists; and (3) youth focused group discussions. It is hoped that the study will provide a clearer picture of the issues and will result in suggestions and recommendations for a better assessment of public opinion.

The survey was conducted from 2 to 14 October 2003. By means of random sampling, 1,017 Hong Kong people aged 15 or above, were successfully polled, yielding a response rate of 33.0% with a standard error of $\pm 1.6\%$. To avoid uneven age distribution, a weighting method to adjust the proportion of respondents' ages to keep them in line with the age proportion in the 2001 Census was adopted. For the sake of comparison, the survey categorizes respondents into two age groups, youth (aged 15 to 24) and adults (aged 25 or above).

A total of 15 scholars and experts were interviewed between August and September 2003. Meanwhile, 3 youth focused group discussions were conducted with a total of 16 young people comprising 11 males and 5 females aged between 16 and 30.

Summary

1. Both youth and adults believed that the HKSAR Government did not listen to public opinion. In comparing the two age groups, younger respondents were more positive than their older counterparts.

Of the younger respondents, 55.0% thought that Government Officers did not go out of their way to listen to public opinion whereas 48.7% said the Government did not care about collecting the views of the public. Further, 67.8% claimed that the Government did not care about collecting the views of youth.

Of the older respondents, 70.8% thought that Government Officers did not go out of their way to listen to public opinion whereas 64.2% said the Government did not care about collecting the views of the public. Also, 70.9% claimed that the Government did not care about collecting the views of youth.

In comparing the two age groups, younger respondents were more positive than their older counterparts. It is important for the HKSAR Government to appreciate the rationale behind the views of youth and to enhance its communication with young people if it wants support from the younger generation.

2. Both youth and adults surveyed thought that the HKSAR Government had not established adequate channels for gauging the views of the public.

57.2% of younger respondents thought that the Government had not established adequate channels for gauging the views of the public compared with 62.3% of the older respondents.

Moreover, 89.6% of the younger respondents compared to 85.2% of the older respondents were of the view that the Government had not established adequate channels through which young people could express their views.

3. Both youth and adults said the public's views were not well enough represented by members of Advisory Bodies.

The majority of both younger and older respondents (63.8% and 67.5% respectively) said that their views were not well enough represented by members of Advisory Bodies.

Advisory and Statutory Bodies have an important role to perform in giving advice to the HKSAR Government in the initial stage of policy-making. Government officials and members of the public are appointed to serve on these bodies. Does the way in which the HKSAR Government obtains the public's views and invites participation through the work of these bodies deserve further attention?

4. Both youth and adults claimed that professionals and professional bodies were more representative of public opinion.

Both younger and the older respondents claimed that professionals and professional bodies were more representative of public opinion, giving them a mark of 6.4 and 6.2 respectively out of a maximum of 10.

The HKSAR Government should consider incorporating the views of the professionals and professional bodies into its decision-making process in order to get the support of the public.

5. Both youth and adults believed that members of the public were willing to express their views on Government policy but that they rarely did so.

Of the younger respondents, 71.4% believed that members of the public were willing to express their views on Government policy, while 59.4% agreed that youth were concerned about current affairs. However, only 26.6% said they had actually expressed their views on Government policy in the past 12 months.

Of the older respondents, 62.1% said that the public were willing to express their views on Government policy, while 54.1% agreed that youth were concerned about current affairs. Also, only 29.4% said they had actually expressed their views on Government policy in the past 12 months.

The figures were similar for both age groups and the findings showed although both groups had thought the members of the public were willing to express their views on Government policies, few of them personally had done so.

6. Both youth and adults said that the public criticized Government policy without offering constructive suggestions.

59.7% of the younger respondents and 58.9% of the older ones said that the public criticized Government policy without making constructive suggestions.

Given that popular Government policy to a certain extent depends on constructive ideas from the public, it is important for Government not only to urge the public to express their views but also to encourage them to offer constructive suggestions.

7. Both youth and adults thought the HKSAR Government lacked transparency in the processing of public opinion. Comparatively, the younger age group was less pessimistic.

88.4% of the younger respondents thought the HKSAR Government lacked transparency in processing public opinion. Their assessment of the HKSAR Government's policy on responding to the views of the public rated only an average score of 4.8 out of a possible 10. Furthermore, 47.3% did not agree that the HKSAR Government was willing to listen.

Of the older respondents, 87.8% also thought the HKSAR Government lacked transparency in processing public opinion. Their assessment of the HKSAR Government's policy on responding to the views of the public rated only an average score of 4.5 out of a possible 10 while 56.6% did not agree that HKSAR Government was willing to listen.

The figures were similar for both age groups but the youth were less pessimistic than their older counterparts.

- 8. Both youth and adults claimed that the SAR Government had failed to grasp the public's points of view. Younger respondents believed that the opinion of the People's Republic of China had great influence on the HKSAR Government, whereas older respondents thought tycoons were more influential.**

Most younger and older respondents (87.4% and 88.0% respectively) claimed that the HKSAR Government had failed to grasp public views very well, while 53.7% and 58.7% respectively said the HKSAR Government had failed to incorporate the opinions of different sectors of the community.

38.5% of younger respondents believed that the opinion of the People's Republic of China had great influence on the HKSAR Government, whereas 42.9% of the older respondents thought tycoons were more influential.

- 9. Both youth and adults thought the HKSAR Government should open channels for opinion and listen to people who held different views in order to collect public opinion more effectively.**

On a scale of 0-10, respondents were invited to assess the effectiveness of 6 proposed means suggested by the survey for collecting public opinion. Both the younger and older respondents gave the highest ratings to proposals that the HKSAR Government should open opinion channels and listen to people who held different views (youth rated each at 7.7; adult ratings were 8.5 and 7.9 respectively)

In short, the results of the Survey showed that even though youth were more positive than adults, the former believed that Government Officers did not go out of their way to listen to public opinion; the Government did not care about collecting public or young people's views; and did not establish enough channels for gauging these views. Regarding the reflection and processing of public opinion, youth thought that the members of Advisory Bodies were not representative enough of public opinion and claimed that professionals were more representative. Moreover, they thought that the HKSAR Government lacked transparency in its processing of

public opinion and said that the HKSAR Government had failed to grasp public opinion. The HKSAR Government should face up to these problems in order to regain the support of the public.

Some experts / scholars interviewed and the respondents in the youth focused group discussions claimed that the HKSAR Government had established a mechanism to gauge public views. However, where processing public opinion was concerned some experts / scholars pointed out that the extent to which the HKSAR Government paid close to public opinion, whether or not the Advisory Bodies incorporated different views, involved them hearing only what they wanted to hear. They also said that during the decision making process the HKSAR Government responded only to views expressed by those in power who were not representative of the public as a whole. It is therefore important for the HKSAR Government to enhance its communication with the public in order to regain support and confidence.

Recommendations

- (1) Selective attention when listening to the views of the public needs to be eliminated. A range of opinions must be incorporated in decision making: public opinion is dynamic and subject to varying interpretations. Public opinion should also act as an important reference for policy makers while formulating policies. The way in which Government incorporates opinions in the decision making process is a matter for concern. Indeed, the Government should be open and listen to views of different sectors of the community. Further, Government should encourage people with different views to participate in the policy formulating process in order to deal with the problem of selective listening.**

- (2) Open up channels for opinion and attract talented people onto Advisory and Statutory bodies are important channels for giving advice to the Government: this study showed that both youth and adults believed that professionals are more representative of public opinion than the Advisory Bodies. The HKSAR Government should actively strive to open channels for discussion and to engage professionals on various advisory and statutory committees and organisations.**

- (3) Be willing to listen and respond to public opinion: the Government should keep in touch with citizens through various means in order to hear their views clearly. There should be adequate opportunities for young people and the public to take part in the initial stage of policy consultation on major issues in order to achieve a better decision-making process.
- (4) Encourage youth to express their opinions and build up their confidence to participate: the expression of views by youth on current issues does not only show they care about their society, but is also part of the learning process that leads to social participation. In this study, youth were more positive than adults towards the HKSAR Government. The Government should encourage and provide platforms for youth, on the Internet, via the youth councils and through their appointment on Advisory Bodies to allow them to express opinions, thus paving the way for long-term investment in and nurture of the younger generation.