

*Full Length Research*

# **How party politics and media communication affect election results in Hong Kong: forecasting party strategies in the 2015 district council and 2016 legislative council elections**

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**This study analyzes the electoral outcomes of Hong Kong's District Council and Legislative Council elections in 2011 and 2012 respectively. It focuses particularly on the role that the media and intra-alliance party coordination played in influencing those electoral outcomes. Empirical evidence shows that the dissemination of negative information through the media and lack of coordination between members of the pro-democratic camp contributed to its electoral setbacks in recent elections. In the wake of the 2012 election, all political parties began to rethink of how to better manage their media exposure in order to enhance reelection probabilities of their members who are going to face popular scrutiny in the 2015 District Council and 2016 Legislative Council elections. Personal accounts of various political parties' leaders reveal that parties are developing more effective media strategies to be used in future elections and recognize the importance of maintaining unity among alliance members.**

**Keywords:** Legislative Council election, District Council election, political reforms, media communication strategy, Occupy Central

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## INTRODUCTION

Media coverage influences voter intentions (Iyengar and McGrady, 2006). The media's campaign coverage and the public's consumption of media information can either boost or tarnish candidates' popularity and in turn significantly shape their electoral prospects. The ability of parties to manage how their candidates are portrayed in the media and how such information is disseminated to the public can make all the difference in winning elections.

Political scientists have explored the association between mass media and politics from two perspectives. The liberal perspective, particularly the scholarship associated with the 'Third Wave of democratization,' depicts mass media—including its online and wireless forms—as a representative institution that is conducive to democracy (see Diamond 2008 and Lipset 1994). The media can enhance voter turnout by easing information costs that arise as the electorate develops voting preferences. The media can also foster social movements

by mitigating collective action obstacles that emerge when organizing group activities. Further, the media can empower citizens by facilitating political cognitive development that in turn can elevate their sense of internal and external efficacy. The democratic effects of mass media therefore hinges on its institutionalized capacity to mobilize and inform society and to serve as a non-legislative arena of political contestation.

Other scholars have asserted that the development of a free, institutionalized, and inclusive mass media may not occur even as polities experience socioeconomic modernization and political elites ease up on political suppression (Bueno de Mesquita and Downs 2005; and Schedler 2010). Indeed, as the scope of mass media is broadened in hybrid regimes or competitive authoritarian regimes, its ability to perform "strategic coordination"—that is, to enable the political opposition to organize itself, gain electoral appeal, and exert policy influence—can be

significantly curtailed by incumbent rulers seeking to preserve the political status quo (Bueno de Mesquita and Downs, 2005). Schedler (2010) observes that as rulers face greater challenges from representative institutions such as the media and civil society groups, they are more likely to use a range of manipulative tactics like pitting associations against each other, co-opting influential societal figures, interfering with media content such that misinformation and disinformation arises, inducing self-censorship through indirect forms of intimidation, among other tools of manipulation.

Both perspectives contribute insights into the interplay between media and politics in Hong Kong. On the one hand, the mass media has facilitated the creation of an arena of contestation in which groups seeking pro-democracy reforms have been given effective voice opportunities. This has been exemplified by the fact that various media outlets have served as channels of societal mobilization, as witnessed most recently in the Occupy Central movement. Yet, close observation of how Hong Kong's media operates indicates that it lacks institutional autonomy within the "one country, two systems" policy framework upon which Hong Kong's Basic Law is based. The one-party authoritarian regime in Mainland China has employed the kinds of tactic described by Schedler (2010) to undercut the press's claim to independent authority in the public sphere by subverting its information, mobilization, and contestation functions. The result of this dichotomy is that while numerous media outlets along with other civil society organizations have been committed and genuine agents of political change, institutional manipulation has led to infiltration and indirect control of civil society by autocratic elements and, consequently, causing structural fragmentation and disorganization in the

civil society arena.

It is in this complex political environment that this study examines the campaign-media link in Hong Kong in the context of the District Council election in 2011 and especially the Legislative Council election in 2012. The authors argue that the media's exposure of the campaigns leading to both elections had an important effect on the election prospects of parties and candidates. In the wake of these elections, the leadership of political parties assessed how they were impacted by media coverage and organizational weaknesses and began devising new communication strategies to be deployed in future electoral contests.

This paper is divided into four sections. The first part will elaborate on Hong Kong's political system—focusing particularly on recent developments in Hong Kong's political party system. The second part will analyze the electoral results of recent Legislative Council and District Council elections. The third section analyzes the challenges that pan-democrats faced during the recent LegCo election. Further, this section will include personal accounts—based on interviews—of different party leaders about the experiences their parties witnessed. Finally, the paper will elaborate on the measures that the pan-democratic group is planning to implement in preparation for the 2015 District Council and 2016 Legislative Council elections.

### **Hong Kong's Political Party System**

On July 1, 1997 Hong Kong became a Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) of the People's Republic of China (PRC) after being under British rule for 156 years.

The Basic Law—the constitutional document of Hong Kong—establishes the basic policies of the PRC towards

Hong Kong and the political institutions of the HKSAR. Under Article 2 of the Basic Law, the HKSAR is to “exercise a high degree of autonomy and enjoy executive, legislative, and independent judicial power.” Further, Article 5 states that “The socialist system and policies [of the PRC] shall not be practised in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, and the previous capitalist system and way of life shall remain unchanged for 50 years” (Hong Kong Basic Law, 1997).

An important task of the HKSAR government was to ensure that the first HKSAR Legislative Council was established as soon as possible. The Basic Law provides that the HKSAR Legislative Council shall be constituted by election. The election of the Legislative Council (LegCo) was to be conducted in accordance with the legal framework set out in the election law enacted in October 1997. Under the election law, the electoral process is to be supervised by an independent Electoral Affairs Commission and members of LegCo are to serve four-year terms. The Basic Law establishes that changes to the methods of selecting the Chief Executive (CE) and LegCo after 2008 require the approval of the incumbent CE, two-thirds of LegCo, and the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress (NPC). Thus, the success of any electoral reforms, especially the implementation of universal suffrage<sup>2</sup>, is contingent upon eliciting consent of

key veto players—that is, Hong Kong’s pro-Beijing and pan-democratic groups, and the one-party communist regime in Mainland China (Ma 2011, 55-6).

Elections to the first HKSAR Legislative Council took place on May 24, 1998. The government was committed to ensuring that the arrangements for the election were fair, open, honest and acceptable to the Hong Kong people. As Table 1 shows, the Legislative Council (LegCo) currently has 70 seats that are contested through a mixed system. Accordingly, 35 seats are contested in five local-level geographical constituencies via proportional representation electoral rules, with five to nine seats apportioned to each constituency. Approximately 3.4 million eligible voters select legislators to these seats. The remaining 35 seats are contested in functional constituencies. Five of those seats are selected by the regional-level new functional constituency known as the district council; 30 seats are allocated to 28 traditional functional constituencies (FCs) representing major professional sectors, business associations, certain social organizations, and political institutions. Voters who are not eligible to vote in the traditional functional constituencies—only 240,735 voters can—are automatically eligible to vote in the new constituency (Yip and Yeung, 2014).

The Alliance for True Democracy (ATD) is a coalition of

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<sup>2</sup> In the June 2014 White Paper on the political meaning of “one country, two systems,” universal suffrage is referred to as “a legal objective” of The Basic Law of the HKSAR. The five-month public consultation on elections for the executive and legislative branches between December 2013 and May 2014 launched “the relevant procedures for introducing universal suffrage” for those elections. In the

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White Paper and in the general public discourse, universal suffrage refers to a method of electing public officials, that is to say, letting all legal Hong Kong residents as opposed to functional groups or committees choose their leaders (See Information Office of the State Council 2014).

**Table 1.** Legislative Councils

<b>Membership</b>	<b>First term (1998-2000)</b>	<b>Second term (2000-2004)</b>	<b>Third &amp; Fourth term (2004-2012)</b>	<b>Fifth term (2012-2017)</b>
Elected by geographical constituencies through direct elections	20	24	30	35
Elected by functional constituencies	30	30	30	35
Elected by an election committee	10	6	---	---
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>70</b>

pan-democrats that has focused on promoting universal suffrage, and more generally, ensuring continued democratization in Hong Kong. As Oksanen (2011, 483) points out the pro-democracy forces “support a more rapid pace [of political reforms] and keeps fighting for the maximum degree of autonomy” from Beijing. Formed in March 2013, the alliance is comprised of pan-democratic groups that used to be part of the Alliance for Universal Suffrage (AUS) which was formed in 2010 and disbanded in January 2013. The pro-democracy camp represents factions that subscribe to liberalism, liberal conservatism, and anti-communism. In the electorate it draws its support from the legal profession, academics, journalists, bankers, social workers, Christian church workers, and middle class households (Oksanen 2011, 483). The ATD includes the Democratic Party, Civic Party, Hong Kong Association for Democracy and People's Livelihood, Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union, Hong Kong Social Workers General Union, Labour Party, League of Social Democrats, Neighbourhood and Workers Service Centre, Neo Democrats, People Power, Power for Democracy, and Professional Commons.

The pro-establishment or pro-Beijing camp is comprised

of 11 groups that maintain an ideological affinity with the one-party communist regime in Mainland China. Once dominated by traditional leftist parties, the pro-establishment camp now has pro-business groups who dominate the traditional FCs. Nevertheless, as Oksanen (2011, 483) notes, “the pro-Beijing approach means ... endorsing China’s hegemonic role over the territory [and its] rhetoric ... usually evoke the conservative view, sprinkled with doubts about democratization.” The pro-establishment groups include: Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress (DAB), Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions, New People’s Party, Liberal Party, Kowloon West New Dynamic, Civil Force, Pro-establishment Independent, and a few other small parties.

Although ideological differences exist among pro-democrats, it is attitudinal differences about the pace of political change and method with which to catalyze change that has divided pan-democrats. A division between the moderate and radical factions in the pan-democratic movement emerged in the 2000s about how to reboot the process of democratization after a decade in which no significant reform breakthroughs had

been achieved. Whereas the pro-democracy radicals employed a confrontational approach toward Beijing that used social activism and legislative maneuvers to achieve quicker and consequential democratic reforms, the moderates opted for a conciliatory strategy which called for negotiating and compromising (“pact-making”) with Beijing to bring about incremental reforms (Ma 2011).

After the 2008 LegCo elections, the League of Social Democrats and the Civic Party floated the idea of orchestrating a “de facto referendum”—a strategic political maneuver aimed at shaking the political regime loose from “transition fatigue” and leading to meaningful reforms such as eliminating the FCs and securing universal suffrage. The logic was that if pan-democratic legislators resigned collectively to signal their disenchantment with the pace of political development while declaring their intent to compete for those vacated seats, “the resulting by-elections would amount to a popular canvass on democracy” (Ma 2011, 58). The reelection of pro-democratic incumbents would not only demonstrate Hong Kongers’ support for democracy, but would also pressure Beijing to facilitate democratic reforms. As moderates, the Democratic Party and other members of the AUS, distanced themselves from the radicals’ political demands and their strategy, and launched negotiations with Beijing in early 2010. The deal reached with Beijing set in motion a political consultation process that would culminate into instituting universal suffrage for the 2017 CE and modified the selection method and seat allocation of LegCo in 2012 and beyond.

Recently, Occupy Central has thrown into sharp relief the attitudinal differences between the pro-democracy and pro-establishment forces concerning the path of Hong Kong’s political development. Occupy Central is a

pro-reform protest movement inspired by the civil rights activism of Martin Luther King and Mahatma Gandhi which plans civil disobedience action in July 2014 only if the current negotiations about instituting universal suffrage for Hong Kong’s future elections fails to deliver an acceptable deal for the pro-democracy forces. As Benny Tai Yiu-ting, a leading figure of the mass campaign notes, “the key point of the movement is about developing a democratic culture of rational discussion and consensus building by the people themselves” (cited in But and Cheung, 2013). The movement, in other words, is not just about broadening and deepening democratic reforms, but also about securing greater autonomy from Beijing. The latter aim is what has drawn the support of some of Hong Kong’s bankers recently who are concerned that Beijing’s continued, if not growing, influence in Hong Kong’s affairs could interfere with its free-market capitalist system and undermine social stability (Buckley, 2014). However, indicative of the continuing divisions within the pro-democracy movement, radicals have criticized how the moderates have spearheaded Occupy Central. *VJMedia*, an online media outlet aligned with pro-democracy radicals, has regarded “the movement as merely seeking negotiations with the Chinese Communist Party, instead of standing for the local interest of Hong Kong and empowering civil society” (Tang 2014, 158).

Beijing and pro-establishment forces in Hong Kong have pushed back against Occupy Central’s main objectives. Ma Fung-kwok, a Hong Kong deputy to the National People’s Congress conveyed the concerns of Zhang Dejiang, the NPC’s leader the following way: “You cannot just move or copy (the electoral system) from abroad, otherwise you might very easily find it can’t adapt to the local environment and become a democracy trap ... and

**Table 2.** District Council Elections

<b>Parties</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2011</b>
Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress (PB)	62	115	136
HK Federation of Trade Unions (PB)	6	15	34
Democratic Party (PD)	95	59	47
Liberal Party (PB)	13	14	9
Civic Party ((PD)	7	9	7
Association for Democracy and People's Livelihood (PD)	24	17	15
Neighbourhood and Workers Services Centre (PD)	4	4	5
Others	318	314	244
Total seats	529	534	507
Total votes	1,080,000	1,148,815	1,180,809
Voting rate	44.4%	38.83%	41.49%

possibly bring a disastrous result” (cited in Pomfret 2014). Similarly, Rita Fan, an NPC delegate observed: “This direct electoral system cannot damage the motherland’s sovereignty, safety and future development, nor damage the China-Hong Kong relationship” (cited in Pomfret 2014). The pro-establishment forces have sought to take the wind out of the movement by invoking the specter of economic hardship and social disorder. Young DAB chairman, Holden Chow Hoding, remarked that “It is clear that citizens generally have been worried that the Occupy Central movement would subsequently lose control and that would hit Hong Kong’s economic development” (cited in The Standard 2014).

### RESULTS OF RECENT ELECTIONS

As Table 2 illustrates, the strength of the pro-establishment camp has gradually increased in district councils. In the 2003 elections, the pro-democrats fared well as a result of the controversy concerning Chief Executive Kong Tung Chee Hwa’s efforts to pass legislation to activate the

anti-subversion provisions of Article 23 of the Basic Law. The 2007 district council elections put the pro-establishment camp on top. The DAB saw its seats increase from 62 in 2003 to 115 in 2007, while the Democratic Party’s dropped from 95 in 2003 to 59 in 2007. The pro-democrats suffered more electoral losses in the 2011 district council elections. The losses were attributed to the fact that pro-establishment parties—particularly the DAB—had received huge sums of political donations and that pro-democracy groups—especially the Liberal Party—promoted a foreign domestic workers right position that was unpopular in the electorate.

In the 2012 LegCo elections, 17 parties participated in the geographical constituency contests, 8 parties competed in the traditional functional constituencies, and 4 parties participated in the new district council. Sixty-seven candidates competed for seats in the geographical constituencies, 51 candidates competed for seats in the traditional functional constituencies, and 7 candidates competed for seats in the district council (Yip

**Table 3.** Results of 2012 Legislative Council Elections

	Geographical Constituencies			Traditional Functional Constituencies		District Council
	Vote %	Change 2008-12	Seats	Seats	Change 2008-12	Seats
Civic Party	14.1	+0.4	5	1	0	0
Democratic Party	13.7	-7.0	4	0	-1	2
People Power	9.7	--	3	0	--	0
Labour	6.2	--	3	1	--	0
League for Social Democrats	4.9	-5.2	1	0	0	0
Neighbourhood and Workers Service Centre	2.4	-0.4	1	0	0	0
Association for Democracy and People's Livelihood	1.7	-1.1	0	0	0	1
Neo Democrats	1.6	--	1	0	--	0
Professional Teacher's Union	--	--	--	1	--	0
Pan-democratic Independent	1.9	--	0	3	--	0
<b>Total for Pan-democratic group</b>	<b>56.2</b>	<b>-3.3</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>
Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress	20.2	-2.7	9	3	0	1
HK Federation of Trade Unions	7.1	+1.4	3	2	0	1
New People's Party	3.8	--	2	0	--	0
Liberal Party	2.7	-1.6	1	4	-3	0
Kowloon West New Dynamic	1.9	--	1	0	0	0
Civic Force	1.3	--	0	0	--	0
Other Alliance Parties	1.2	--	0	5	--	0
Pro-Beijing Independents	4.5	--	1	10	0	0
<b>Total for Pro-establishment group</b>	<b>42.6</b>	<b>+2.9</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>

and Yeung 2014, 2). Because public discontent with Chief Executive Leung Chunying's administration was growing at the beginning of the campaign cycle it was widely believed that legislative elections would deliver huge gains in votes and seats for the pro-democrats. Hitherto, the pro-establishment and pan-democracy groups had secured about 40% and 60% respectively of the votes and seats in the geographical constituencies in each election since 1995. The pan-democrats have typically performed better than the pro-establishment camp in direct elections. However, the pro-democracy camp was not able to

capitalize on the government's plummeting popularity. The pan-democracy alliance won 27 seats whereas the pro-establishment camp won the remaining 43 seats giving it a solid majority. Still, with slightly more than one-third of the seats, the pro-democrats can veto proposed constitutional reforms and major pieces of legislation backed by the pro-Beijing camp.

As Table 3 shows, in the geographical constituencies' contests, the pro-establishment camp saw its share of popular votes increase to 42.6% giving it 4 additional seats while the pro-democrats saw their share of votes drop to



56.2% contributing to a loss of 1 seat. In the district council (new functional constituency) contest, pan-democrats secured 3 of the 5 seats and obtained 48.19% of the votes. In the traditional functional constituencies, the pro-establishment camp was dominant as was well expected given the pro-Beijing dispositions of the sectors representing those constituencies. Of the 30 seats available, 24 went to the pro-establishment camp.

As the authors will discuss below, the lack of intra-alliance party coordination and negative media coverage contributed in part to the pro-democracy's lackluster legislative performance in 2012. However, another reason for the loss of seats at all levels was the fact that the alliance failed to address "livelihood issues" which polls showed figured largely on the minds of voters. As Dixon Sing, associate professor at Hong Kong University of Science and Technology observed, "Livelihood issues are competing against core values. Voters were more concerned about economic issues [such as growing wealth gap and housing affordability] and weren't aware of the 'magnitude of the threat' against values like human rights and democracy" (cited in Lee 2012).

### **INTRA-ALLIANCE INFIGHTING AND NEGATIVE MEDIA COVERAGE**

The 2012 LegCo elections made evident two realities that undermined pan-democrats' ability to achieve success: internal rifts within the alliance and negative media coverage. These factors, in addition to the fact that the Basic Law concentrates power in the executive and thus limits the power of political parties in LegCo, have led to the erosion of public support for Hong Kong's political parties. A 2012 survey indicated that barely 5% of the

public was satisfied with the performance of parties. Additionally, 15% stated that their views of political parties had deteriorated just over the past 10 years.

The pan-democrats' poor electoral performance was owed in part to the factional splits among pan-democratic alliance parties, a problem triggered by different factors. As Yip and Yeung (2014, 3) observe, "the 2012 LegCo election marked a remarkable departure from the trend of prior campaigns in the sense that markedly fierce internal conflict occurred within each political camp during this election. In the pan-democracy camp, discontent with moderates' acceptance of a compromise reform package and engagement in negotiations with Beijing officials caused radicals to continually attack moderates throughout the campaign." Similarly, Lee and Lay (2012, 3) note that "intense infighting within the [pro-democracy camp] ... was seen in their lack of co-ordination in fielding candidates, leading in part to a failure to split the votes effectively among their candidate lists." This was put in full display with the Civic Party's adversarial election strategy. As James Sung Lap-kung of the City University's School of Continuing and Professional Education (cited in Lee and Lay 2013, 3) remarks:

From the start, the Civic Party vowed to grab two seats in the Hong Kong Island and New Territories West constituencies respectively. But that required more than 80,000 votes in Hong Kong Island and over 90,000 ballots in New Territories West, which was very difficult. This strategy harmed others and did not benefit [the party].

The manifestation of internal divisions within the pan-democratic camp is also attributed to the emergence

of new parties and, more generally, fledgling nature of party politics in Hong Kong. As a party established in the early 1990s, the Democratic Party has struggled to broaden its appeal throughout the electorate in recent elections, thus creating a window of opportunity for newer parties to fill the void. In an editorial piece, the *South China Morning Post* (2012, 12) observed that “the proliferation of pro-democracy parties such as the Civic party, the Neo Democrats and the radical People Party is partly attributable to the Democratic Party’s failure to reinvent itself.” That stale profile of the Democrats was an issue raised by the Democrat leader Albert Ho Chun when he stepped down from his leadership position in the wake of the 2012 LegCo election: “We need to rejuvenate the party’s image and to be more lively when we express our ideas. Our leadership right now still believes firmly that being rational and practical is the right direction forward” (cited in Cheung 2012, 5).

The news media has also posed challenges for the pan-democratic camp. One aspect of the problem is that the media has fallen short of consistently upholding high standards with respect to political reporting. Consequently, candidates from both camps have been able to use the media as a platform to assail each other—often with the use of false and negative statements—much to the disservice of the public. For example, the debates that took place among legislative candidates prior to the 2012 LegCo elections, according to Alice Wu (2013), a former associate director of the Asia Pacific Media Network at UCLA, “turned into slugfests” that were not conducive to “a more informed citizenry.” The media outlets that organized these debates, as Wu observes, showed “a blatant disregard for their social responsibilities and public duty.” Specifically, “They should have taken the time to research

issues, candidates and positions. They should have held candidates accountable to their word ... have weeded out the spin, the empty slogans and the election rhetoric, and pinned these candidates down on the real issues.”

The other aspect of the media-related problem concerns the politically-motivated targeting of pan-democrats. Rikkie Yeung (2008, 54 and 60) observes that the pan-democratic camp was the target of media sabotage—such as spam emails, online account hacking, and fraudulent websites. It is no secret that the Liaison Office of the Central People’s Government in HKSAR and Beijing-backed groups have been involved in some of these cyber attacks and they have been connected to reported threats and intimidation against pro-democracy journalists. What is more, the media has generally moderated its criticism of PRC-backed political figures because of cooptation and economic interests. On the one hand, several media owners have been brought into the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference and some have been members of the National People’s Congress. On the other hand, many carry out commercial ventures in Mainland China with the help of PRC officials. Such political and economic connections with the one-party communist regime have induced self-censorship by the largest media outlets in Hong Kong.

The interviews of politicians reveal a number of insights about how pan-democrats plan to prepare themselves for future elections in light of these challenges. Former Democratic Party chairman Albert Ho pointed out that many District Council candidates were the victims of malicious attacks via the media which ended up costing some of those candidates their reelection bid. The same problem happened again in the 2012 Legislative Council elections. Incorrect and negative news about the

Democratic Party led to the loss of LegCo seats in that election. Ho believes that democrats need to establish a task force to combat negative news.

Democratic Party Vice Chairman Luo Jianxi stated that it was time to change mass communication strategy in preparation for 2015 District Council and 2016 Legislative Council elections. The goal is to improve public relations by establishing a dedicated team with members from other pan-democratic parties tasked with dealing with negative and fraudulent news about the party and coordinating district campaigns. The team will also take the initiative to communicate with the media, and take a proactive approach to set the record straight upon the surfacing of negative news. Luo Jianxi also stated that Democrats will work with other pan-democratic parties to devise a set of methods to help more candidates win in the 2015 and 2016 elections. Civic Party leader Alan Leong has also shared these ideas.

Labour Party chairman Lee Cheuk Yan said that during the 2011 District Council and 2012 Legislative Council elections, he was the victim of negative message attacks that resulted in his defeat to rival candidates. He asserts that the impact of negative attacks cannot be underestimated for once it reaches the attention of voters such messages are difficult to expunge from their minds. In his view, it is instrumental for alliance parties to coordinate in establishing a unified pan-democratic propaganda apparatus to defend against and combat negative news. And, the apparatus must be well staffed and have sufficient resources to do its job well.

Chairman of the People Power Liu Jiahong pointed out that his party in the 2012 Legislative Council election was able to add one seat but remarked that the party's media strategy could be improved. People Power's media

communication approach involved using online discussion and Internet radio station—such as *Hong Kong Reporter* and *Hong Kong Political Talks*—to pique the general public's interest about Hong Kong politics. In the future, the party will continue to dig up negative news about opposition parties and expose them through the modern media. People Power also will make use of independent online radio propaganda “power of the people”, showcasing its media offensive strategy.

As the largest party in the Legislative Council, the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress, under the leadership of Tam Yiu-chung, proved more capable than pan-democrats at defending itself against negative targeting. During the election, the pan-democrats often discredited the DAB message in the media. The DAB worked effectively at containing and dispelling these accusations in a systematic and comprehensive manner using various channels of modern media. The fact that there was less internal conflict in the pro-establishment camp and that it had built effective community networks enabled pro-establishment forces to minimize the damage from negative media coverage.

### **A UNIFIED STRATEGY FOR THE FUTURE**

The pan-democratic camp has been developing a unified media publicity strategy comprised of several components. The overriding objective of the strategy is to enhance its relationship with the media and leverage the information and organizational advantages of modern media to enhance the visibility and electoral appeal of pan-democratic candidates. First, in preparation for the 2015 and 2016 District Council and Legislative Council elections, pan-democrats have created a set of common external information dissemination mechanisms. A spoke-

man for pan-democrats—one who has been elected on consecutive terms—and a dedicated outreach team will be responsible for handling media issues related to election matters, communicating the policy views of pan-democratic parties, and formulating unified opinions on the election propaganda.

Second, when pan-democratic parties nominate candidates to different District Council electoral contest, the candidates will be coached on how to respond to constituency questions and concerns. In a one-two strategy, the candidate will first propose solutions to the problem, and then the pan-democratic camp's outreach team will immediately launch a unified large-scale publicity campaign to reinforce and update problem-solving solutions.

Third, a dedicated advocacy team composed of members of the pan-democratic camp will leverage various media outlets and forms to put their opponents on the defensive by criticizing their platforms and public statements. The goal is to point out to the public the drawbacks and liabilities of supporting the opponents and draw voter support away from them. Further, the team will coordinate counteractions when negative publicity is leveled against candidates from the pan-democratic camp.

Fourth, the pan-democratic alliance will set up an online platform that provides real-time election information—for example, continuous updating of each constituency candidate's latest work and of online clips of candidates' activities. Fifth, online platform discussion sessions will be established that involve pan-democratic camp candidates from each constituency; additionally, public discussion forums will be set up as a means of increasing public awareness of candidates.

The use of electronic media figures largely in the publicity strategy of pan-democrats for two reasons. First, the credibility and freedom of Hong Kong's traditional media has dropped, as illustrated by evidence of self-censorship and its declining ranking in the World Press Freedom Index—sliding from 34 in 2010, to 58 in 2013. Second, an increasing number of Hong Kongers are turning to the Internet to get news (Li 2014, 159-60). As Tang (2014, 156) observes, as the reputation of newspapers and television has plummeted, online news outfits such *The House News*, *In-media*, *VJMedia*, among others “serve as ... important [alternative] platform[s] for the expression and discussion of opinions critical of the government, and for pursuing news agenda that focus more on issues of social injustice.” Thus, pan-democrats understand the importance of leveraging online news sites to penetrate Hong Kong society and cultivate supporters.

In September 2013, the pan-democratic camp launched consultations with members about preparation for the selection of representatives to stand for elections in the 2015 District Council and the 2016 Legislative Council. A set of new mechanisms for evaluating these upcoming elections has been used. First, the camp will prioritize the reelection of incumbent district councilors from pan-democratic parties. Second, if an incumbent does not seek reelection on behalf of an affiliated party, an alternate candidate will be selected in consultation with elected representatives from pan-democratic parties. The ultimate aim is to minimize electoral competition among pan-democrats in small constituency elections.

The HKSAR Government has scheduled Legislative Council elections for 2016, and the Chief Executive Election for 2017. Consultation began recently to determine the selection methods to be used in each

upcoming election contest. Recently, pan-democrats have developed a unified response to PRC's guidelines for the 2017 Chief Executive election. The PRC has made known that Hong Kong's first popularly directly elected Chief Executive must possess "patriotic" credentials, in other words must be supportive of the PRC's system of one-party communist regime. Additionally, the PRC has asserted that the 1,200 member Election Committee that has approved candidates since the first Chief Executive election in 1997 should act as the nominating committee for the 2017 election. The pan-democrats' coordinated response to Beijing guidelines comes in the form of "three-track system"—that is allowing voters, political parties, and a nominating committee to nominate candidates. In essence, pan-democrats seek to lower the nominating threshold, advocating the civil nomination method, to make it easier for its most effective candidates to enter the race. As Brian Fong Chi-hand, a political scientist from the Hong Kong Institute of Education observes, "Pan-democrats have been claiming the moral high ground to demand public nomination, whereas the government and Beijing loyalists have claimed the legal high ground to ban their ideas" (cited in Lam 2014). Ultimately, the nomination method that the Task Force on Political Reform endorses must be approved by a two-thirds majority in LegCo, making pan-democrats a pivotal veto player in this process.

## CONCLUSION

As Hong Kong continues along the path of political development, the roles of political parties as agents of social mobilization, sources of political identity, and channels of political control are likely to become increasingly institutionalized. As the *South China Morning*

*Post* (2012, 12) observes:

The development of party politics is an irreversible step in [Hong Kong's] quest towards democracy. The pan-democrats are well on their way to better organizing themselves for future electoral contests. The promise of universal suffrage is expected to open more opportunities for [political parties]. They should better engage the people and prove that they can play a more important role in governance.

While pan-democrats have worked toward establishing a collective media strategy, enhancing inter-party alliance coordination, and strengthening party-constituency linkages only time will tell whether such a spirit of collaboration will replace divisiveness and contribute to better electoral results and enhanced political influence in the future.

Additionally, if the release of Beijing's June 2014 White Paper on the political implications of the "one country, two systems" policy signals what is to come, we can expect that the building of party politics and the media's role in this process will not result in the diminution of Beijing's influence and control in Hong Kong's political future. By reaffirming that Beijing "has comprehensive jurisdiction" over HKSAR and that its autonomy "comes solely from the authorization by the central leadership," it is clear that the one-party communist regime is not ready to concede Hong Kongers the right to chart their own political destiny.

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