8

DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION FRUSTRATED

The Case of Hong Kong

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DESPITE FULFILLING THE PREREQUISITE socioeconomic conditions of democratization in the 1970s, Hong Kong has never had a full democracy. Initially, the United Kingdom—Hong Kong's colonial ruler—set the pace of Hong Kong's democratization. In 1997 sovereignty reverted to the People's Republic of China (PRC), and Hong Kong became a Special Administrative Region (SAR) of China, governed under a Basic Law promulgated by the National People's Congress in Beijing. Although the Basic Law guarantees the Hong Kong SAR "a high degree of autonomy" and anticipates direct democratic election of the chief executive and legislature "by universal suffrage," the extent of such autonomy and the timetable for political reform are determined by Beijing. At the time of our survey, election procedures were far from democratic and many citizens felt insecure in their enjoyment of political rights.

Yet our survey—conducted from September through December 2001—revealed a strong commitment to democratic values on the part of Hong Kong people. Most studies of Hong Kong political culture have focused on the low level of political participation and the rarity of large-scale collective mobilization. Scholars have experimented with various characterizations of Hong Kong's political culture: apathetic, utilitarian, alienated, cynical, depoliticized,

and so on (for example, Lau and Kuan 1988, 1995; Lam 2003). By looking at popular understandings of democracy and commitment to its ideals, our study offers a different perspective. The lack of complete democracy in Hong Kong is not a sign of lack of commitment by its people.

We find that although there is some ambivalence about the possible conflict between democratization and economic efficiency, the people of Hong Kong have a passion for democracy, whether procedurally or substantively understood. Additionally, they have made strong demands on the government with regard to its democratic performance. Modernization has produced the readiness for democracy, but cannot by itself provide the institutions.

1. HONG KONG'S PARTIAL DEMOCRACY

Prior to the 1980s, the only government body with elected members under the British colonial system was the Urban Council, a local assembly with limited jurisdiction. In 1973, the maximum number of eligible voters was likely under six hundred thousand out of a population of around 4.2 million (Miners 1975:177). Universal suffrage was introduced in 1981, which was the colonial government's first step toward democratic reforms. A District Board (later renamed District Council) was established in each district, with members directly elected by all voting-age citizens in the district. But the territory's highest legislative body, the Legislative Council, did not have an elected component until 1985. At that time, an indirectly elected element was introduced by giving members of the District Boards, the Urban Council, the Regional Council,[1] and various functional constituencies the right to return twenty-four out of a total of fifty-seven seats (Hong Kong Government 1984).

In the 1980s Britain and China began negotiations over the future status of Hong Kong (Lo 1997; Kuan 1991). By the Sino-British Joint Declaration of 1984, Britain agreed to return the territory to Chinese sovereignty on July 1, 1997. China promised to preserve Hong Kong's capitalist system and grant the territory a high degree of autonomy for at least fifty years after the handover in an arrangement known as "one country, two systems." In 1990 China's National People's Congress enshrined the arrangement in the Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR), which was to become the constitutional document of the territory after the handover.

Meanwhile, democratization in Hong Kong proceeded slowly. It was not until 1991 that the colonial government allocated eighteen seats for direct

election by geographical constituencies in the sixty-member Legislative Council. The number of indirectly elected functional constituency seats was increased to twenty-one, while the number of government officials sitting on the council was decreased to four. These reforms were in line with what the Basic Law promised, but they fell short of the people's aspirations.

With the arrival of Chris Patten as Hong Kong's last colonial governor in 1992, some significant political and administrative reforms resonating with the people's desire for greater democracy were introduced. Although Patten was limited in what he could do to speed up the democratization process, he managed to work within the boundaries of the Basic Law to give the people of Hong Kong a taste of a more democratic legislature. In the 1995 Legislative Council elections, apart from the twenty seats already allocated for direct election by geographical constituencies, the number of functional constituency seats was increased from twenty-one to thirty. Patten redefined the functional constituencies in such a way that more than 1.1 million voters became eligible to participate in functional constituency elections, a dramatic increase from the seventy thousand eligible just four years earlier. Furthermore, all official and appointed seats in the Legislative Council were abolished.

Beijing viewed these protodemocratic developments with suspicion. As tensions heightened in 1996 ahead of the handover, China announced that it intended to replace the partially elected legislature with an appointed Provisional Legislative Council at the time of the handover. To serve as the first chief executive of the HKSAR, Beijing selected Tung Chee-hwa, a local shipping tycoon.

The Basic Law envisages a "gradual and orderly" program of democratic transition. Universal suffrage (meaning in this context direct election of the legislature and chief executive) is proclaimed as the long-term goal. But no definite date is given for this to be realized. In the meantime, the Basic Law calls for the chief executive of the HKSAR to be indirectly elected by an election committee of delegates, who in turn are selected on the principle of functional representation. The sixty-member legislature is made up of three different constituencies: the election committee, functional constituencies, and geographical constituencies. To ensure an executive-led government and to prevent the popularly elected representatives from controlling a legislative majority, the proportion of seats directly elected from geographical constituencies was set to reach one-half of the total body only in 2007. Such were the institutions in place at the time of our survey.

The nature of elections in this partial democracy was not to form the government. Elections were not contests between the incumbent government and its challengers, and consequently could not serve to ensure political accountability. Apart from the denial of universal suffrage and the violation of the "one person, one vote" principle, the Basic Law also stipulated severe limitations on the legislature's constitutional competence. Legislators were not allowed to introduce bills related to public expenditure, constitutional structure, or the operation of the government. Nor could they introduce bills relating to government policies without the written consent of the chief executive. In addition, for an individual member's bill (called a private member's bill in Hong Kong) to pass, a majority vote in both the directly elected category as well as other indirectly elected categories was required.

This arrangement ensured that at the time of our survey the chief executive would control the legislature and thus the government as a whole—just as the governor did during the colonial era. While the appointed members of the Executive Council assist the chief executive in policymaking, the day-to-day operations of government are left to the discretion of the civil servants, supposedly politically neutral, who in theory function with optimum efficiency. However, under this system Tung Chee-hwa proved even more of a hands-on executive than his British predecessors. While the last British governors had been happy to leave domestic policies to the civil service, Tung initiated major reforms in many policy areas, catering to Beijing's preferences.

In 2005, Donald Yam-kuen Tsang, formerly chief secretary of the HKSAR government, replaced Tung as the second chief executive (without competition). The fifth report of the Constitutional Development Task Force, one of his key policy initiatives, escalated the heat of debates on the political development of Hong Kong. Although it failed to provide a roadmap for democratic development, the report contained several significant reform initiatives that would have moved Hong Kong institutions in a more democratic direction. But the proposals failed to pass in the Legislative Council.

There has never been a mass democracy movement in Hong Kong. One reason may have been the deep divisions in the territory's robust civil society. Before the advent of political parties in the 1980s (a result of the introduction of partial elections), Hong Kong had numerous social organizations and an active mass media, most of which were popularly labeled as supporters of either Beijing (the Communist Party) or Taipei (the Nationalist Party). Popu-

larly identified as the left and right respectively, the bitter struggle between these two groups provided the territory with many of its political intrigues. In the middle, civic groups such as the Reform Club of Hong Kong and the Hong Kong Civic Association took up the liberal banner. Such groups thrived under a colonial policy that exalted personal freedom and individuality even as they suppressed the development of any collective communist identity or communist affiliation (Lam 2004).

In the 1980s, a range of groups and parties emerged to compete in the limited elections that the colonial government and the Basic Law allowed. They represented various sections of the public and diverse political views, but were basically differentiated by the extent to which they were proestablishment or prodemocracy, although this is not the only political cleavage in Hong Kong (e.g., Li 2000). The Democratic Party was critical of both the Chinese and the Hong Kong governments and supported a quicker pace of democratization. The Democratic Alliance for the Betterment of Hong Kong (now the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong), however, was made up of local supporters of Beijing and was consistently progovernment. The Liberal Party was composed mainly of businesspeople and also adopted a largely progovernment stance.

The political divisions in society rendered consolidation of a strong democratic force difficult. Also, given their limited role in government, all parties encountered difficulties in recruitment, and their limited social bases in turn made them weak leaders for democratization (e.g., Lau 1998). Support for the democrats tended to fluctuate with concerns over Beijing's interference in Hong Kong. As such concerns abated, support for the democrats eroded.

As a partial democracy, Hong Kong's major challenge was not democratic consolidation or the improvement of the quality of democracy, but the completion of democratic transition. Although the relations between economic development, political culture, and democracy are indeterminate (Inglehart 1997), the public's belief in democratic legitimacy matters. Democratic legitimacy, defined as citizens' belief in the legitimacy of, or their commitment to, democracy as the most preferred regime type, will serve as a critical condition of successful democratization if and when that opportunity comes (Montero et al. 1997; Kuan and Lau 2002:59, 65). In addition, Hong Kong, as a society of Chinese origin long under Western rule, serves as an interesting point of comparison for our other Asian cases. These reasons lead us to ask how Hong Kong people feel about their partial democracy. Do they want further democratization? As we will show, Hong

Kong's people, although politically frustrated, have not given up their aspiration for democracy.

2. HYBRIDITY IN CONCEPTIONS OF DEMOCRACY

As with other countries in the survey, we began our analysis with the question, "What does democracy mean to you?" (see chapter 1, table 1.3). In Hong Kong, the largest percentage (34%) of respondents understood democracy in terms of freedom and liberty, offering responses related to the freedoms of speech, press, association, belief, and individual choice. This liberal conception of democracy was the most popular in all but one of the countries surveyed. In the case of Hong Kong, its strength reflects the colony's liberal tradition, as the colonial government had always been more willing to offer individual freedoms than political rights. Hong Kong's legacy as an immigrant society probably also played a part—since so many residents were refugees from the Chinese mainland who came to Hong Kong in pursuit of a better life, the love of freedom has become a salient element of the local identity. The second-largest cluster (17%) of responses mentioned political institutions and procedures, which include items such as elections and competitive party systems.

Although liberal (freedom and liberty) and participatory (democratic institutions and processes) notions are tied to each other, they relate to distinct aspects of the democratization process. Scholars have pointed out that the differentiation between these two ideas is significant in that it delineates both the distinctiveness and the interconnectedness of the processes of liberalization and democratization. While liberalization encompasses the struggle for individual rights and liberties, democratization aims to create a system of government representative of the citizenry through popular participation in competitive elections. Without liberalization, democracy may exist only in form. Without democratization, liberalization may be manipulated and reversed (Lo 1997; O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986b). The processes of liberalization and democratization converge if popular rule is recognized to be the best guarantee of individual rights and liberties.

A third conception of democracy emphasizes social equality and justice, social entitlements, and government that is responsive to popular needs. We found that such understandings of democracy (constituting three lines in the table) are endorsed by a significant number (16.6%) of Hong Kong people. Such values may draw from the concept of *minben* (people as the basis) in traditional Chinese political culture. *Minben* emphasizes government *for*

the people rather than *of* the people and is grounded in the substantive outcomes of governance. Thus a substantial proportion of Hong Kong citizens interpreted democracy as a political mechanism to create responsive and benevolent institutions capable of promoting social justice.

In short, Hong Kong people's notion of democracy is hybrid, incorporating liberal, institutional, and substantive values drawn from both Western notions of individualism and traditional Chinese understandings of good governance.

3. EVALUATING THE TRANSITION

At the time of our survey, Hong Kong had been under Chinese sovereignty for four years. The territory had been hit hard by the Asian financial crisis of 1997 and 1998, which exacerbated long-standing structural weaknesses in the economy. Between 1997 and 2001, the rate of GDP growth had slowed. In 2001 the rate of growth at constant (2000) market prices fell to 0.5%, while unemployment rose to 5.1%. During the same period, income for the lowest-earning quintile fell by 28%, while that of the top quintile rose by 4%.

However, Beijing's political restraint had been more conscientious than expected, and by most appearances little had changed in the human rights situation. Despite praise from international observers such as the European Commission and the UN Human Rights Commission, critics lamented that the mere possibility of intervention from Beijing was enough to inhibit the territory's political freedoms. There were signs of self-censorship in the media. And observers were startled by the January 2001 resignation of the head of the civil service, Anson Chan, after she was criticized by Beijing for insufficient loyalty to Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa. Chan, a fiercely independent Chris Patten appointee, had been regarded as a symbol of the civil service's political neutrality.

Still, the changes in Hong Kong's political climate were gradual and subtle, and it remained to be seen how they were perceived by the general public. In this section, we will examine the Hong Kong public's evaluations of democratic progress and governmental performance in the Tung era.

3.1. PERCEPTIONS OF REGIME CHANGE

Respondents were asked to rate both the current and the past regimes on a 10-point scale, ranging from 1, "complete dictatorship" to 10, "complete

TABLE 8.1 PERCEPTIONS OF PAST AND CURRENT REGIMES: HONG KONG

(Percent of respondents)

REGIME TYPES	PAST REGIME	CURRENT REGIME
Very dictatorial	2.7	5.4
Somewhat dictatorial	20.5	47.1
Somewhat democratic	55.8	32.9
Very democratic	8.5	2.6
DK/NA[a]	12.5	12.1
Total	100.0	100.0
Mean on a 10-point scale	6.6	5.2

Notes: Regime types are based on the respondent's ranking of the regime on a scale from 1, "complete dictatorship," to 10, "complete democracy." Scores of 5 and below are degrees of dictatorship and scores of 6 and above are degrees of democracy.

N = 811.

[a] DK/NA = Don't know/no answer.

democracy." Although our respondents did not consider the Patten regime to be fully democratic, they judged Tung's government as being even less so. Table 8.1 shows that the majority of our respondents (64.3%) rated the colonial government under Chris Patten (the "past regime") either somewhat democratic or very democratic. Only about 35.5% placed the HKSAR regime under Tung in these categories. While only 23% of Hong Kong people considered the Patten government to be somewhat or very dictatorial, nearly 53% gave those labels to the Tung regime. Overall, Tung's government received a mean score of 5.2, below the minimum threshold for being perceived as a democracy, whereas the Patten government, despite being a colonial regime, received a mean of 6.6, somewhat above that threshold.

Figure 8.1 displays the distribution of regime change scores. Sixty-seven percent of our respondents saw the change from the colonial regime to the SAR regime as a step backward toward dictatorship. Nineteen percent saw no change in the democratic character of the regime, while 14.3% saw the change as an advance in the democratic direction.

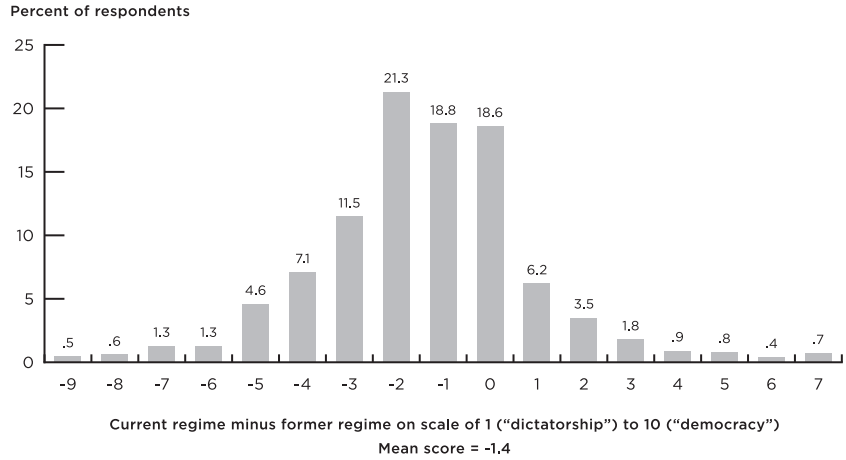

FIGURE 8.1 Perceived Regime Change: Hong Kong

Table 1.7 in chapter 1 analyzes the same data in a different way and in comparative perspective. In the seven other Asian societies, a majority of citizens saw their country's change in regime as leading to greater democracy. The pattern in Hong Kong was the sole exception. About 40% of our respondents considered the change from the colonial to the SAR regime to be a move in the "more dictatorial" direction (defined as the previous regime having been democratic and the new regime nondemocratic), by far the highest percentage of respondents in any political system. Nearly 17% saw both regimes as dictatorial in nearly the same degree. Thirty-four percent classified both the colonial and the SAR regimes as being in some degree democratic, which was another category of response given more frequently by Hong Kong people than by residents of other regions on Asia.

3.2. COMPARING PAST AND PRESENT REGIMES

The EAB survey in Hong Kong contained a battery of questions asking respondents to compare the performance of the current and past regimes in six policy domains.[2] The results are presented in table 8.2, along with their Percentage Differential Indices (PDIs). Hong Kong citizens perceived a

TABLE 8.2 **PERCEIVED PERFORMANCE OF CURRENT AND PAST REGIMES: HONG KONG**

	MEAN[a]	SD[a]	NEGATIVE CHANGE[b]	POSITIVE CHANGE[b]	NO CHANGE[b]	PDI[c]	VALID %[d]
Democratic performance							
Freedom of speech	-0.16	0.77	34.1	18.3	47.6	-15.8	91.7
Freedom of association	-0.14	0.70	27.9	15.4	56.7	-12.5	86.6
Equal treatment	-0.46	0.79	52.8	12.2	35.0	-40.6	84.8
Popular influence	-0.26	0.69	31.4	10.0	58.6	-21.5	78.2
Independent judiciary	-0.34	0.80	44.1	13.7	42.2	-30.4	78.1
Average	-0.27	0.75	25.0	26.3	48.8	-24.1	83.88
Policy performance							
Anticorruption	0.00	0.81	25.0	26.3	48.8	1.3	86.4

Notes: N = 811.

Past regime is defined as pre-1997.

[a] Scale ranges from -2 (much worse) to +2 (much better).
[b] Percent of valid sample.
[c] PDI (percentage difference index) = percent seeing positive change minus percent seeing negative change.
[d] Percent of sample giving a valid answer to this question.

significant deterioration in the government's policy performance. Although there was virtually no net change in the perceived effectiveness of government action against corruption, the government's performance in all areas concerning democracy and the rule of law was perceived as worsening, with an average decline in the mean rating of 0.27 and an average PDI score of -24.1. Equal treatment, popular influence, and judicial independence all experienced dramatic declines.

Such perceived deterioration probably reflected the interruption of progress toward greater democracy with the transition to Chinese rule, as well as a series of policy missteps by the post-1997 government. For example, the SAR government abolished municipal councils. Because these councils contained significant directly elected elements, the move was interpreted as an attempt by the government to decrease the influence of prodemocratic grassroots forces and to centralize power. In addition, the government reintroduced appointed seats in the district councils after they had been abolished by the Patten administration, thus weakening the democratic function of the councils. The government invited the Standing Committee of China's National People's Congress to interpret the Basic Law, following a controversy regarding the right-of-abode stipulations in that document. The move was widely criticized as detrimental to Hong Kong's autonomy. The government was also frequently denounced for its perceived collusion with business elites. A 1999 decision granting development rights of the Cyberport project to Li Tzar-kai, the son of a leading real estate magnate, was criticized as a blatant act of cronyism. Even the government's macroeconomic policies, such as a series of attempts to shore up local property prices, were believed to favor well-placed real estate developers.

Despite these problems, the perceived decline of government performance with regard to civil liberties (freedom of speech and association) was relatively modest. Studies during the colonial era suggested that Hong Kong people were relatively satisfied with the government because it provided high levels of freedom even though it was not democratic.[3] The new regime was perceived as similarly undemocratic, and the extent of freedom as diminishing subtly. This was consistent with the outside rating by Freedom House. Freedom House's rating scale ranges from 1 to 7, with 7 being the least free. In the scale of political rights, Hong Kong received a rating of 4 for most of the years from 1980 to 1997, fell to 6 in 1997, and then recovered to 5 for 1998 and years following. On the scale of civil liberties, Hong Kong declined from a 2 to a 3 with the 1997 handover (Freedom House 1981–2006).[4]

4. APPRAISING INSTITUTIONS

This section examines popular assessments of various institutions of the body politic—specifically respondents' assessments of their own perceived capacities for democratic citizenship, perceptions of corruption in government, and popular trust in the territory's political institutions. We found that compared with their neighbors, Hong Kong people had especially low estimations of their participatory capacities and were the most alienated from the political process. However, the vaunted integrity of the civil service appeared largely intact and Hong Kong people continued to invest confidence in most institutions of the regime.

4.1. POLITICAL EFFICACY

Do Hong Kong people believe that they have the capacity to understand the political process and influence it? Some answers can be gleaned from a pair of items in the EAB survey probing the respondent's self-perceived ability to understand the complexities of politics and to participate actively. The findings are reported in chapter 1, table 1.4.

The Hong Kong people's self-perception of their participatory capacities was the lowest in Asia. Only 1.5% believed that they were capable of both understanding and participating in politics. Another 14% believed they could understand politics but lacked the ability to participate, and only 2% were confident of their ability to participate despite a professed inability to understand politics. The bulk of respondents (82.5%) believed that they had neither the ability to understand nor to participate in politics.

Accompanying the low level of perceived political efficacy was a pervasive sense of alienation from the political system. When asked to evaluate the statement, "The government is run by a powerful few and ordinary citizens cannot do much about it," 69% of Hong Kong people agreed. When asked to evaluate the statement, "People like me don't have any influence over what the government does," 79% agreed. These numbers were the highest of any political system in our survey, reflecting frustration over the public's thwarted democratic aspirations since the handover. Feelings of inefficacy are statistically linked to the perception of low system responsiveness. The more a respondent finds the system unresponsive, the more likely he or she is to feel disempowered. The correlation between these two factors is 0.31, significant at the .000 level.[5]

4.2. PERCEIVED CORRUPTION AND INSTITUTIONAL TRUST

One of the great policy successes of the colonial government came in the area of corruption control. Before the mid-1970s, Hong Kong had been plagued by endemic corruption in the civil service and police. In 1974 a high-profile scandal involving a senior police official spurred the government to take action, and it established the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) under the direct supervision of the governor. Pursuing a vigorous three-pronged strategy of punishment, prevention, and public education, the ICAC established its credibility among the public and perceptions of corruption quickly declined. The Hong Kong experience achieved international renown as a model of successful corruption control.

At the time of the handover there was concern about whether the new government would continue to control corruption effectively (Rose-Ackerman 1999:159–162). Five years into the new era, we found that the perceived level of corruption remained in check. As shown in table 8.3, only 19% of respondents believed that most or all officials were corrupt, the third-lowest level among the countries in the study after China and Thailand.

The perceived integrity of government officials must be a factor behind the high level of trust enjoyed by government institutions in Hong Kong. The EAB survey asked respondents how much trust they had in eight public institutions, and found that with the exception of political parties, all of them were trusted by more than half of the respondents (see figure 8.2). The

TABLE 8.3 PERCEPTION OF POLITICAL CORRUPTION: HONG KONG

(Percent of respondents)	LOCAL GOVERNMENT
Hardly anyone is involved	6.6
Not a lot of officials are involved	**53.6**
Most officials are corrupt	**17.8**
Almost everyone is corrupt	1.0
Don't know/no answer	**21.0**
Total	**100.0**

Notes: N = 811.

Percentages above 10 are in boldface.

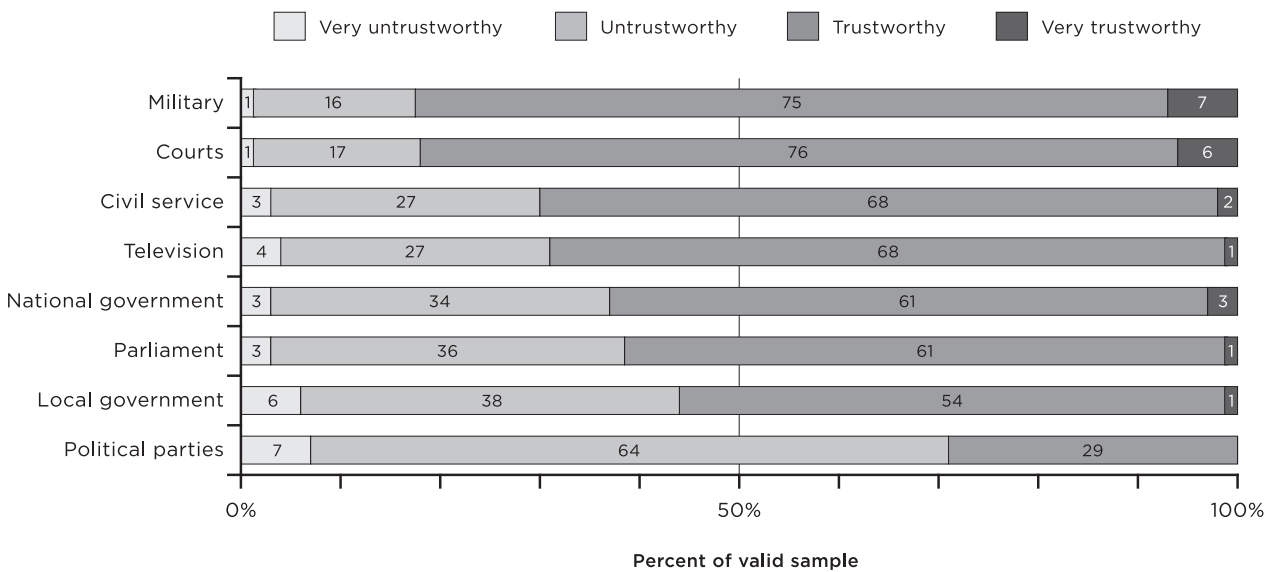

FIGURE 8.2 **Trust in Institutions: Hong Kong**

most highly trusted institutions were the professional organs of the state: the military, the courts, and the civil service. Television was also highly trusted, perhaps reflecting the media's long tradition of independence dating back to the colonial era. Relatively speaking, the political institutions of the regime were less trusted, although even the HKSAR government was trusted by 55% of respondents despite its perceived performance failures. The only institution distrusted by a majority of respondents was political parties. Their disrepute may be related to their perceived ineffectuality and hypocrisy—the progovernment DAB, for instance, had gained a reputation for grandstanding in front of the media while doing the government's bidding in the legislature. However, distrust for political parties is universal across East Asia, and overall Hong Kong citizens exhibited one of the highest levels of institutional trust compared to other countries in our survey.

As an overall measure of regime satisfaction, the EAB survey included an item asking, "On the whole, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way democracy works in Hong Kong?" Fewer than half (48%) of Hong Kong people reported being satisfied with the performance of the current regime as a democracy, while 36% expressed dissatisfaction. These numbers represent one of the lowest levels of regime satisfaction in the EAB survey.

5. AMBIVALENCE IN COMMITMENT TO DEMOCRACY

Previous studies have found that in Hong Kong, political discontent strengthens rather than undermines the legitimacy of democracy as the best form of government under all circumstances (Kuan and Lau 2002:68). If that were the case, one would expect that popular discontent with the Tung administration would have reinforced Hong Kong people's commitment to democracy. Did that happen? Our data suggest that while hybridity is one salient characteristic of the political culture in Hong Kong, ambivalence is another. Although Hong Kong people desire democracy as an ideal, they do not always consider it suitable—mainly because of conflicting priorities between democratic participation and efficient governance.

5.1. ATTACHMENT TO DEMOCRATIC POLITICS

There is no doubt that the people of Hong Kong aspire to democracy in the abstract. When asked to indicate how much democracy they desired on a

10-point scale, 87.6% of Hong Kong people selected a value of 6 or above. Nearly 37% desired "complete democracy" (10 on the 10-point scale) and another 39.5% chose 8 or 9 on the scale (chapter 1, table 1.8). For 93.5% of our respondents, the level of democracy they said they desired was pegged at a higher level than the level of democracy they perceived the SAR as currently enjoying, reflecting a pervasive desire that the system move in a more democratic direction.[6]

But respondents' belief in the suitability of democracy for Hong Kong lagged behind their belief in its desirability. On a 10-point scale from 1 "total unsuitability" to 10 "total suitability," about two-thirds (66.8%) chose a score of 6 or above, with 42% selecting a score of 8 or above. While this is a solid vote of confidence for democracy, it is less robust than our respondents' belief in the desirability of democracy.

This seems to reflect Hong Kong people's commitments to certain values that compete with democracy. Hong Kong people placed great emphasis on the importance of economic development, with fewer than one-fifth according democracy equal or greater importance (chapter 1, table 1.8). Only 40% considered democracy always preferable to other forms of government and only 39% were confident that democracy could solve the problems facing society. Hong Kong had the lowest figures of all the Asian societies we surveyed on the variables of democratic efficacy, preferability, and priority.

Such findings may reflect the fact that Hong Kong people have been intensively exposed to a vision for a depoliticized Hong Kong, especially after 1997 when PRC leaders argued that Hong Kong should become an "economic city" instead of a "political city." Hong Kong's survival, some have argued, is dependent on the development of its economic prowess and the suppression of destabilizing political demands. In this view the people of Hong Kong are primarily economic animals, and the primary goal of Hong Kong society should be the flourishing of economic activities. Hong Kong people are often warned against an excess of democracy, and they are told time and again that too much democracy would achieve nothing but an inefficient government, and that there is no place within a democratic system for the resolution of the territory's increasing polarization (Lam 2004). Demands for a faster pace of democratization are often denounced for their "malicious" intent. Although the alleged contradictions between democracy, economic development, and efficiency may not exist, the dominance of the depoliticizing discourse has made them appear real to our respondents.

If democracy is not desired for its ability to deliver economic development and solve the problems of society, what do Hong Kong people find

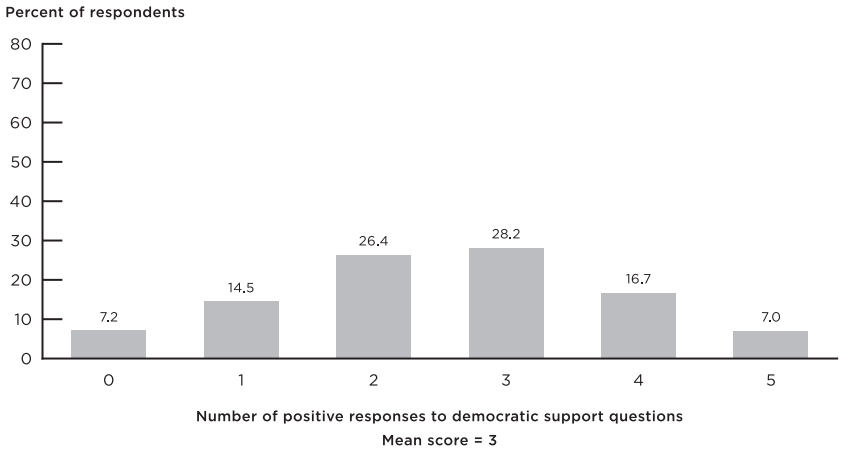

FIGURE 8.3 Democratic Support: Hong Kong

appealing about it? Since our respondents overwhelmingly associated democracy with freedom and rights, these values may be the chief attractions. Nonetheless, the public's commitment to democracy is conditional, maintained only if democracy, defined as freedom and rights, is not in conflict with economic development and efficiency concerns.

To measure the overall level of attachment to democracy, we constructed a 6-point index ranging from 0 to 5, aggregating the number of prodemocratic responses regarding desirability, suitability, efficacy, preference, and priority (see figure 8.3). Hong Kong averaged 3, one of the lowest scores among the societies surveyed. Only about 7% responded affirmatively to all five questions, with an additional 17% responding affirmatively to four out of five questions.

5.2. DETACHMENT FROM AUTHORITARIANISM

Considering their ambivalent attitude toward democracy, one might expect Hong Kong people to be receptive to some form of undemocratic rule as long as the system can deliver effective governance. After all, Hong Kong achieved its economic miracle without the benefit of democratic rule, and many might be loathe to jeopardize the political stability that has been the bedrock of the territory's economic prosperity. However, because of Hong Kong people's familiarity with life under authoritarian rule, one might also

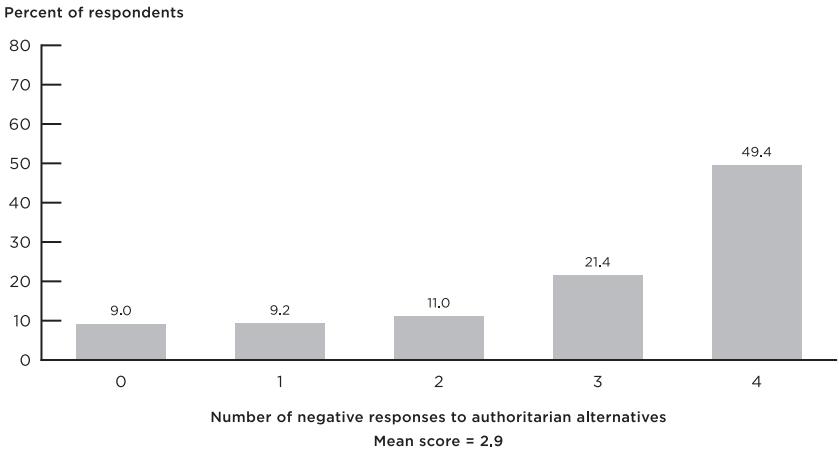

FIGURE 8.4 Authoritarian Detachment: Hong Kong

expect them to resist at least some types of nondemocratic regimes. Given these countervailing influences, how did Hong Kong people feel about various nondemocratic alternatives?

The EAB survey probed for support for four types of dictatorial alternatives (see chapter 1, table 1.9). The results were clear: A compelling majority in Hong Kong (72%) opposed the dictatorial rule of a strong leader, and an even larger number (86%) rejected rule by the military. A one-party dictatorship was likewise unwanted (62%), and close to three-quarters (74%) were opposed to the rule of technocratic experts.

To summarize the overall level of detachment from authoritarianism, we constructed a 5-point index based on the four questions just described. The mean score for Hong Kong was 2.9, with nearly half (49%) of our respondents rejecting all four authoritarian alternatives (see figure 8.4). Although a significant minority (9%) did not reject any of the alternatives, Hong Kong people overall were comparable to their East Asian neighbors in their level of authoritarian detachment.

5.3. OVERALL SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRACY

Taking into account both the depth of democratic attachment and the completeness of authoritarian detachment, we identified seven patterns of re-

gime orientation for each of the eight EAB societies (defined in the notes to table 1.11, chapter 1). The results for Hong Kong are presented in figure 8.5. Hong Kong has the second largest proportion among our Asian societies of strong opponents of democracy, defined as respondents who give no more than two of the five possible answers in favor of democracy and who accept two or more of the four authoritarian alternatives. Although Hong Kong people in general desired democracy, for some the commitment to democracy is maintained only insofar as democracy is not seen to be in conflict with considerations of economic development and efficiency.

Yet in comparative perspective, Hong Kong exhibits a middling level of democratic support. As in Taiwan, the Philippines, and Mongolia, the segment made up of democratic opponents, skeptical democratic supporters, and those holding mixed views ranged from one-third to half of the population. However on the whole, democratic supporters considerably outnumbered opponents.

The robustness of democratic support in Hong Kong may reflect a dynamic by which discontent with democratic progress and dissatisfaction with the government's policy performance has reinforced the desire for fuller democracy, rather than weakened it as is the case elsewhere in Asia. In support of this conjecture, we found a statistically significant inverse relationship between "satisfaction with how democracy works in Hong Kong" and the level of commitment to democracy (Pearson's r = -0.096, significant at the 0.05 level). We also found that democratic supporters judged the government's

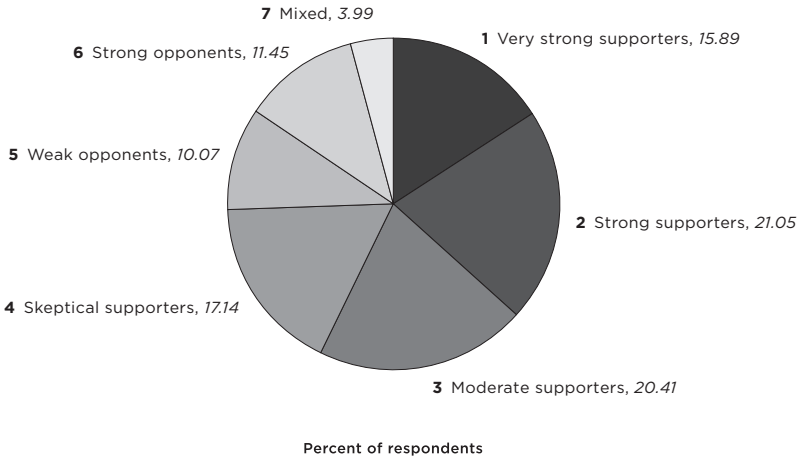

FIGURE 8.5 Patterns of Commitment to Democracy: Hong Kong

performance during the past five years more negatively than democratic opponents. For example, while most strong supporters of democracy perceived no change in judicial independence, strong opponents of democracy were more likely to perceive improvements under the Tung regime. Likewise, strong supporters were more likely to believe that the freedom of expression in Hong Kong was decreasing, while strong opponents were more likely to see it as getting better. Similar patterns were found between the level of democratic support and other aspects of regime performance.

6. EXPECTATIONS FOR EXPANDING DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

Hong Kong people know that the pace of the Special Administrative Region's democratization will be determined in Beijing, where the authorities have signaled that they want the pace to be slow. Accordingly, when we asked respondents to indicate where they expected the territory's political system to stand on a 10-point scale from dictatorship to democracy five years into the future, most were pessimistic (see table 8.4). On the 10-point scale, they expected their system to progress from 5.2 to 5.9 on the scale of democracy, an increment of only 0.7. Their expected rate of progress was the lowest of all the countries surveyed. Only about 34% believed that five years from now their government would be at least somewhat democratic, which is only slightly higher than the 32% that felt the same about the current regime, and far lower than any other political system in the survey. Although respondents who expected the regime to be dictatorial five years from now are fewer than those who considered the regime dictatorial today (29% versus 52%), most of the decrease seems to be accounted for by the "don't know" category, which amount to over 30% for the future regime. While this high level of uncertainty is not unique to Hong Kong, the other countries in the study all exhibited greater optimism about democratic progress.

We identified seven patterns of expected regime transformation based on the respondents' current and expected future regime ratings (see chapter 1, table 1.12). Among respondents who considered the current regime to be authoritarian, the majority expected little progress. Over 39% of those who indicated their expectations expected authoritarian persistence, while only slightly over half that number (22%) expected either limited or advanced democratic transition, most of them the former. Even among those who

TABLE 8.4 CURRENT AND EXPECTED FUTURE REGIME TYPE: HONG KONG

(Percent of respondents)

RATING	CURRENT REGIME	FUTURE REGIME	CHANGE[a]
Very dictatorial (1–2)	5.4	4.6	–0.7
Somewhat dictatorial (3–5)	46.3	24.1	–22.2
Somewhat democratic (6–8)	32.4	34.2	1.8
Very democratic (9–10)	2.6	6.7	4.1
DK/NA	13.3	30.4	17.0
Total	100.0	100.0	
Mean on a 10-point scale	5.2	5.9	0.7

Notes: N = 811.

Scale runs from 1, "complete dictatorship," to 10, "complete democracy."

Future regime is five years from time of survey.

[a] Change in percent of respondents rating the regime at the given level when the object of evaluation shifts from the current to the future regime.

considered the current regime to be somewhat democratic, the majority expected only stagnation. Nearly 30% expected Hong Kong to remain a struggling democracy, while only 7% expected the territory to be fully democratic in five years. Overall, these findings reveal a lack of optimism consistent with the perception of Beijing's timetable, and consistent as well with respondents' low sense of political efficacy and their poor evaluation of the government's performance over the past five years.

7. CONCLUSION

Our study has uncovered political frustration among the people of Hong Kong. They aspire to democracy because it embodies certain values that they treasure. The people's attachment to liberal values and their strong substantive demands on the government follow the precepts of *minben* (people-as-the-basis). These values are especially strong among residents who were born in Hong Kong and among those who are better educated, younger, and have relatively high incomes, supporting the conventional wisdom that the sources of democratic

support are drawn mostly from the middle class, the younger generations, and those with a strong Hong Kong identity.

The people of Hong Kong conceivably might have done more to encourage Beijing to increase the pace of democratic change. The population's ambivalence about democracy and its sense of political powerlessness are part of the reason why this did not happen. If Hong Kong people suffer from a low sense of political efficacy, this is aggravated by the perceived nonresponsiveness of the government and by setbacks in democratic governance and the rule of law during the posthandover era. Decisions made in Beijing have helped to create a sense of powerlessness, and this sense of powerlessness has helped to create the conditions for Beijing to have its way with Hong Kong.

NOTES

1. The Urban Council and the Regional Council were the same in structure and function but responsible for the administration of different geographical districts. They were abolished in 1999.
2. We asked only one of the four policy performance questions asked elsewhere in Asia.
3. Previous studies support our argument. In a 1995 study, 63.5% of respondents agreed with the statement, "Although the current political system is imperfect, it is still the best under the circumstances." In studies conducted in 1985 and 1990, 74% and 59% respectively agreed with this statement.
4. The Political Rights rating was 4 for the years 1980 through 1992, 5 for 1993 and 1994, 4 for 1995 and 1996, 6 for 1997, and 5 for 1998 through 2006. The Civil Liberties rating was 2 for the years 1980 through 1987, 3 for 1988 through 1992, 2 for 1993 through 1996, 3 for 1997 through 2003, and 2 for 2004 through 2005.
5. The four items were grouped into two summary measures, one for perceived personal political efficacy and one for perceived system responsiveness. Each summary measure yields on an ordinal scale ranging from -4 to +4. A great majority of respondents are rated in the 0 to -2 range in both the citizen empowerment measure (84.8%) and the system responsiveness measure (85.4%). As noted in the text, the two measures are strongly correlated.
6. The difference between the desired level of democracy and the current perceived level of democracy ranged from one to nine points.