TAKSHASHILA INSTITUTION

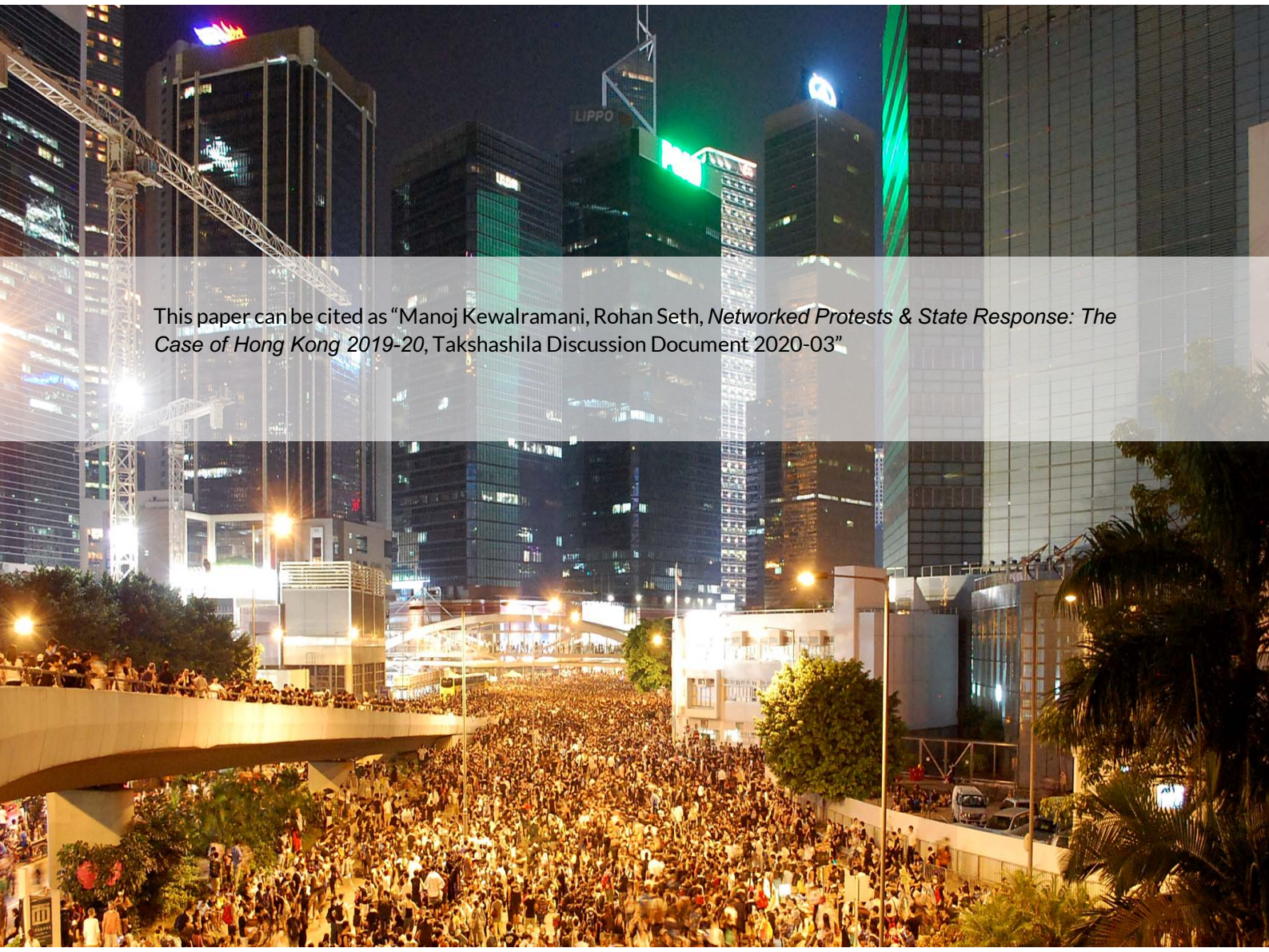
Takshashila Discussion Document

Networked Protests & State Responses: The Case of Hong Kong 2019-20

Discussion Document 2020- 03

12 April, 2020

By Manoj Kewalramani | Rohan Seth



This paper can be cited as "Manoj Kewalramani, Rohan Seth, *Networked Protests & State Response: The Case of Hong Kong 2019-20*, Takshashila Discussion Document 2020-03"

Executive Summary

Digital technologies and Internet connectivity are enabling rapid mobilisation of large groups of individuals around a common cause. The defining feature of such a Radically Networked Society (RNS) is the scale and pace of its operations. Consequently, RNS movements pose a serious challenge for the hierarchically ordered state structures, which tend to lack the dexterity and speed to respond.

In this paper, we apply the RNS framework to the 2019-20 Hong Kong protests. We conclude that the protests were the product of underlying fissures over issues of identity and political autonomy. The region's thriving Internet ecosystem and hyper-connected society enabled the development and expansion of networked communities around these issues. This fuelled sustained, leaderless mobilisation, resulting in large-scale disruption and electoral advances for pro-democracy activists.

Meanwhile, the state's response was rooted in a strategy of attrition. This minimised costs and proved somewhat effective in that the movement failed to achieve the broader objective of earning universal suffrage for Hong Kongers. Yet, the protests have managed to fundamentally reshape state-society relations and shift the narrative around the region's future.

Introduction

The past decade has witnessed an increasing role of digital technologies and Internet connectivity in fuelling mass mobilisation. The potential for networked movements to scale up rapidly and challenge state authority was perhaps first evident during the 2011 uprisings across Middle East and North Africa.[1] Since then, there has been an increase in the number of cases wherein large and often disparate groups of individuals have leveraged the power of the Internet to mobilise demonstrations in the pursuit of shared objectives.

The convenience afforded by the Internet has led to the rise of hyper-connected individuals, linked by both real and imagined identities and motivated by a common immediate cause. The defining feature of such a Radically Networked Society (RNS) is the scale of its operation.[2] Given the nature of the tools of mobilisation, RNS movements tend to have a wide reach and greater ability to evade conventional national security measures.

Beyond this, over the different contexts within which RNS movements have emerged, there have been three common traits across them.

The Sociological Aspect: People belonging to an RNS share a common imagined identity. To maintain internal solidarity, they undergo socialisation processes such as internalising common myths/facts.

The Political Aspect: An RNS tends to mobilise people based on a common immediate cause. This cause becomes a rallying point for protecting the group identity.

The Network Aspect: The most fundamental aspect of an RNS is its speed and scalability. The first two aspects are proportional to the depth of the network. It is in this aspect that the Internet as a medium has thoroughly altered the way mobilisations occur.

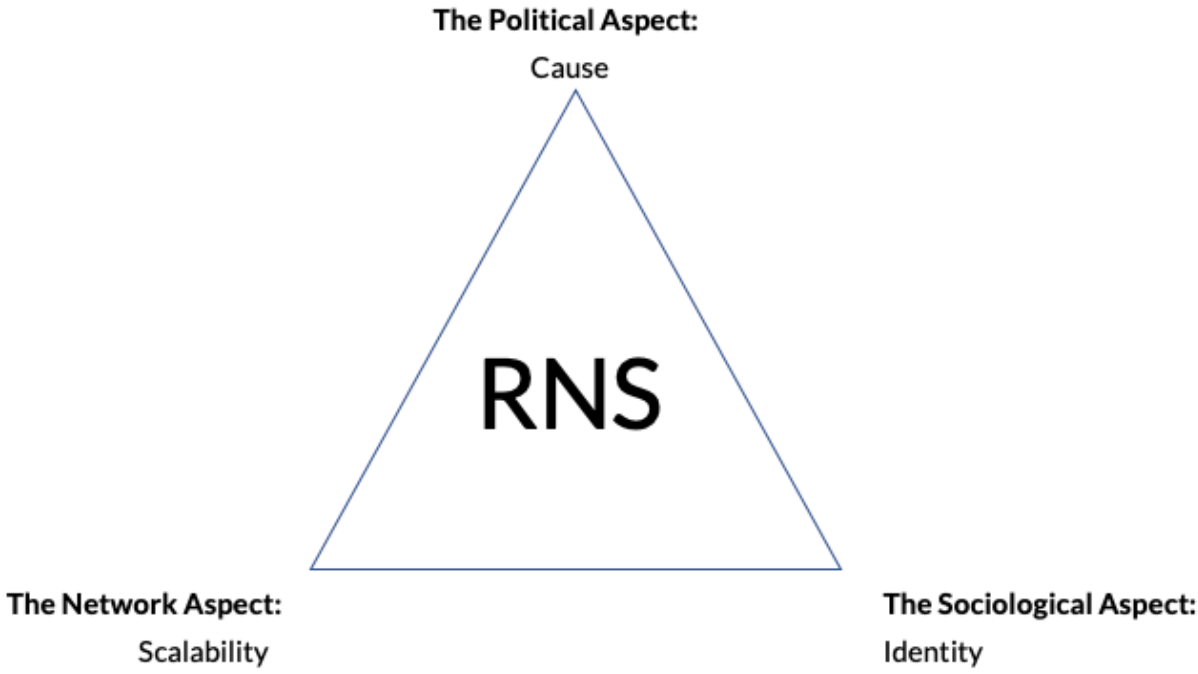


Figure 1. Graphical Representation of a radically networked society (ibid)

Scalability, in recent times, has not only helped sustain and reinforce common causes and identities but has also helped build them from scratch. The usage of hashtags on platforms like Twitter and Instagram has led to ever easier convergence of like-minded individuals while serving as budding grounds for new identities.

All of this poses a serious challenge for hierarchically ordered state structures, which tend to lack the dexterity and speed to respond. In general, states over the past decade have tended to either act too slowly, incoherently or heavy-handedly, undermining their legitimacy.

Faced with violent protests over livelihood issues and subway fares in 2019, the Chilean government declared a state of emergency and deployed the armed forces.[3] In late 2019, the Iranian government, faced with angry, networked protesters, decided to shut down the Internet across the country.[4] On the other hand, in democratic France, continuous protests over economic issues, which began an online petition against the fuel tax, saw the outbreak of the worst riots in Paris in half a century.[5]

Yet it is worth noting that states appear to be learning, adapting, and devising new approaches to deal with RNS movements. Often, these entail a mix of negotiation

and attrition, while leveraging new technologies. Each state's response is unique and dependent on several factors, such as history, state structure and capacity, economic implications, social norms, etc.

In this context, this discussion document studies the 2019-2020 protest movement in Hong Kong to examine the challenge posed by networked protesters and the instruments that the state used to tackle them. Starting in March 2019, a series of protests over ten months brought the Asian financial hub to a standstill. The movement, which began over the issue of amendments to the region's extradition laws, morphed into a broader political struggle. At its peak, the demonstrations attracted people cutting across social divisions, with nearly two million in a city with a population of seven million marching on the streets on June 17, 2019.[6] The initially peaceful protests, however, devolved into frequent violent clashes between protesters and the police. While the state responded with greater use of force, the protesters increasingly grew radical and violent in their methods. The outcome has been a political stalemate damaging Hong Kong's political and economic stability.[7]

The choice of Hong Kong as a case for assessment is deliberate, given its uniqueness. First, Hong Kong's is a hyper-connected society, which is deeply integrated with the global economy and remains critical for the PRC's broader economic interests. A large number of Chinese companies, including large state-owned enterprises, prefer operating via Hong Kong, considering the territory's financial infrastructure and favourable regulatory environment, such as the absence of capital controls and the advantage of international exposure.

Moreover, Hong Kong is critical in the effort to internationalise the renminbi. The economic costs of heavy-handed state action in Hong Kong, therefore, are far greater. Second, the One Country, Two Systems model applicable in Hong Kong lends itself to a peculiar political dynamic, shaping the incentives of a diverse set of actors. Third, Beijing has long mooted the One Country, Two Systems formulation as a potential model for the "reunification" of Taiwan. A dramatic failure of the system, therefore, will have ripple effects.

With that said, the rest of this paper is structured as follows. The next section provides a brief timeline of the 2019-20 Hong Kong protests, breaking them down into three distinct phases. The paper then applies the RNS framework, discussed above, to the movement. After that, the paper discusses the state's response by

outlining the different instruments that have been used and sums up the assessment.

HK Protests: Causes & Phases

This section outlines the causes of the protests and provides a broad timeline of events, breaking it down into three phases.

In February 2019, the government of Hong Kong proposed changes to the territory's extradition laws, sparking widespread protests. According to the Hong Kong Government, the impetus to amend the legislation came in light of a murder of 20-year-old Poon Hiu-wing, a Hong Kong resident, by her boyfriend during a holiday in Taiwan in February 2018.[8] Following the crime, the accused, Chan Tong-kai, fled to Hong Kong. In March, he was detained and charged on counts of theft and money laundering. The following month, he was sentenced to 29 months in jail.[9] At the same time, Taiwanese authorities identified Poon's body. In the months that followed, the Taiwan Prosecutors Office reportedly reached out to officials in Hong Kong seeking assistance in the probe, without making much headway.[10] Subsequently, in December 2018, Taiwanese authorities issued a warrant against Chan and sought extradition.*

Meanwhile, Hong Kong's Security Bureau proposed amending the Fugitive Offenders Ordinance and the Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters Ordinance in February 2019.[11] The Security Bureau argued that the existing regime was deficient, given the lack of mechanisms to deal with such cases. Although, Hong Kong has mutual extradition treaties with 20 countries, there are no legal arrangements to deal with criminal cases when it comes to Taiwan, Macau, and mainland China.

The amendments essentially proposed a case-by-case approach to transfer fugitives to any jurisdiction, where a formal agreement was lacking. Hong Kong's pro-democracy lawmakers immediately criticised the amendments as a "Trojan horse," that may undermine the barrier between the legal systems in Hong Kong and the mainland. Analysts argued that the changes virtually eliminated legislative oversight with regard to the extradition process while empowering the Chief Executive.[12]

Questions were raised about the authority of Hong Kong's courts to deny extradition. In March 2019, the Hong Kong Bar Association argued that "replacing

* Following the initial request, Taiwanese authorities backed away and then subsequently again demanded his extradition.

legislative vetting with executive authorization for the arrest and surrender of persons lowers the bar for the liberty and security persons who may be subject of requests from other places which do not provide internationally recognized minimum standards for criminal trials and dealing with prisoners or engage in practices that infringe human rights."[13]

The brewing opposition to the amendments coalesced into a protest movement first on March 31, 2019. A call by the Civil Human Rights Front, an umbrella body of human rights groups, resulted in thousands of people taking to the streets. Three days later, the government introduced the amendments in the Legislative Council.[14] This, in turn, galvanised public opposition, cutting across different sections of society, including business groups, human rights bodies, students, and lawyers.[15]

This sparked the widespread protest movement which can be classified into three phases. The first of these entailed largely peaceful mobilisation calling on the government to withdraw the proposed legislation. During this time, however, Hong Kong's Chief Executive, Carrie Lam, sought to fast track the approval process in the Legislative Council.

Events turned sinister on June 12, 2019. Thousands of protesters converged on the Legislative Council, which was to debate the proposed amendments, resulting in a scuffle between the authorities and the protesters. Amid these scuffles, the police fired rubber bullets and used tear gas and batons to disperse the crowd. Hong Kong's Police Chief Stephen Lo Wai-Chung subsequently termed the day's events as a "riot." Such categorisation entailed harsh legal consequences. In the weeks that followed, there was an increase in the number of clashes between the police and protesters.

On June 16, nearly two million people marched against peacefully the Government's actions. In a public statement, Lam apologised and "suspended the legislative amendment exercise."[16] The police also sought to draw a distinction between protesters and people whom they saw as rioters. However, the battle lines hardened. There were repeated protests and crackdowns in the days that followed. With Government promises ringing hollow, the protesters laid out precise demands which went beyond the withdrawal of the legislation to include an inquiry into the police's actions and retraction of the riot label.

On 1 July, as Hong Kong marked the 22nd anniversary of the handover from British to Chinese rule, a group of protesters stormed the Legislative Council once again, defacing symbols of the Hong Kong government. A week later, Lam termed her government's work on the extradition legislation a "total failure."[17] However, she did not formally withdraw the amendments. That decision was taken on September 4, after six weeks of periodic clashes between the police and protesters. Until then, however, a number of events had taken place. The first formal charges of rioting were filed against four protesters on July 30. The movement gained international recognition after the occupation of Hong Kong airport. Violence on the streets intensified, with police resorting to water cannons, tear gas, and plastic bullets. Discussion over the use of technology for mobilisation, narrative dominance, surveillance and evasion, gained immense traction.

By late August 2019, it was clear that the Lam government's efforts were ineffective. The protest movement, on the other hand, evolved clearer objectives, entailing five core demands along with seeking Lam's resignation. These included:

- Formal withdrawal of the legislation
- Amnesty for those arrested
- An independent inquiry into the use of force by police
- Retraction of protests being characterised as riots
- The revival of Hong Kong's political reform process

In the third phase of the movement, Lam followed her withdrawal announcement with an attempt to expand public outreach. Those attempts fell flat. In turn, Hong Kong was rocked by violent unrest on October 1, 2019, as the Communist Party of China celebrated the 70th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic. The day saw the first case of the police using lethal force to shoot and injure a protester.[18] Three days later, Lam invoked a colonial-era Emergency Regulations Ordinance to ban people from wearing facemasks in public. The ban was not only challenged in court and subsequently deemed unconstitutional, but also sparked greater outrage, drawing more protesters out onto the streets. Over the next three months, there was an intensification of violent clashes.

The protesters employed a mix of approaches from carrying peaceful marches, violating the mask ban, engaging in street clashes, setting off fires and damaging public property to pitching positions in university campuses and publishing information about the police online. The city's authorities and police, meanwhile, used greater force. Increasingly, protesters were denied permission to march. Incidents of police firing increased, with brutal use of toxic tear gas and water cannons. The police expanded arrests, with reports suggesting abuse of detainees in custody, and targeted individuals using coloured dyes for subsequent identification.

Sieges were laid at universities, with protesting students barricading themselves within campuses. The longest of these was at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, lasting 12 days. While police action continued on November 24, 2019, a record turnout of over 71% of registered voters delivered a landslide victory for the pan-democrats in the district council elections. Any thoughts of reconciliation between the government and protesters were rendered null soon after, as Hong Kong's new Police Commissioner Chris Tang defended the police's actions and rejected the prospect of an independent inquiry. In the final few weeks of 2019, clashes continued between riot police protesters in and around shopping centres and hotels across Hong Kong.

As of March 2020, official estimates suggest that over 7,700 people have been arrested in the police crackdown, with over 1,000 facing trial.[19]

A Networked Movement

This section applies the RNS framework to the 2019 Hong Kong protest movement and highlights that the demonstrations were the outcome of deep-seated fissures over Hong Kong's unique identity and political autonomy. These combined with the proximate objective of defeating amendments to the extradition legislation. This objective evolved to broader issues over time in large parts owing to the penetration and use of connected digital networks, which enabled mobilisation, evasion from state authorities and contestation of official narratives.

The Sociological Aspect

Individuals belonging to an RNS are bound by a common, imagined identity. This identity is cultivated and strengthened through a process of socialisation, which entails internalisation of certain common myths and facts. For Hong Kongers, this common, imagined identity has been decades in the making, with British colonial rule in the territory shaping a self-perception distinct from that of the Chinese mainland.

In 1997, Hong Kong was far more integrated into the global economy than the mainland. At the time, the mainland was deeply dependent on the region's vitality as an aviation, shipping, and financial hub. Hong Kong's GDP in 1997 constituted 18.4% of China's overall GDP.[20] This would change dramatically over the next two decades. But, at the time of the handover, as a former British colonial territory and a trading hub, Hong Kong's economic structure, legal system and political outlook were very different from those of the mainland. This is evident from the fact that public polling in 1997 revealed a relatively strong sense among locals about Hong Kong being a free and democratic society.[21, **]

This distinct sense was further codified in the Basic Law; a document signed between the Chinese and British Governments in 1984 to serve as a constitution for the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) under the principle of One Country, Two Systems.[22] As per the document, Hong Kong was promised "high degree of autonomy" in terms of executive, legislative and judicial power for fifty years.[23] Consequently, as economic, physical, and political linkages deepened

** Note: HK Pori data reveals that Hong Kongers in 1997 rated the region 7.7 on 10 when it comes to freedom and 6.7 on 10 on the question of degree of freedom. These ratings have never since been eclipsed.

with the mainland, civil society in Hong Kong acted to preserve the region's unique characteristics.

This is evident from the fact that despite returning as a sovereign PRC territory, Hong Kong preserved symbols of its identity, such as language and flag. For instance, Article 9 of the Basic Law gives both English and Chinese official language status. With regard to the latter, Cantonese is the dominant language in Hong Kong rather than Mandarin, which is commonly used in the mainland.*** According to the 2016 by-census, 88.9% of Hong Kong's population speaks Cantonese commonly, while 1.9% speak Mandarin.[24] The comparative figures in 1996 were 88.7% and 1.1%. Another stark example of the identity divide between the mainland and Hong Kong is the annual commemoration of the Tiananmen Square massacre in Hong Kong's Victoria Park.

At the same time, however, there has been a palpable erosion of the autonomy that Hong Kong was promised.[25,****] In addition to this, China's rise has had economic implications for the region, fuelling growth, but also amplifying income and social inequalities.[26] A consequence of this has been wider disaffection with the mainland. This is reflected in public polling data. For instance, at the time of the handover in 1997, around 34.9% of people identified themselves as Hong Kongers. As of December 2019, this number is at an all-time high of 55.4%.[27]

The legal pledge of autonomy, the experience of independent institutions of the state, the practice of the rule of law along with a sense of distinctness from the mainland are the cornerstones of the Sociological Aspect of Hong Kong's RNS. Nevertheless, it is important to note that this does not imply a serious desire for independence among people in Hong Kong. Public polling shows that anywhere from 11%[28] to 17% of Hong Kongers desire independence.[29] In other words, an overwhelming number still see their future tied to the mainland. However, as the graphs below show, confidence in the One Country Two Systems framework is deeply damaged.[30] This implies that there is a high probability of continued instability in the years to come.

*** Note: According to the 2016 by-census, 88.9% of Hong Kong's population speaks Cantonese commonly, while 1.9% speak Mandarin.22 The comparative figures in 1996 were 88.7% and 1.1%.

**** To get a sense of the erosion of Hong Kong's autonomy, read Vigil: Hong Kong on the Brink by Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom.

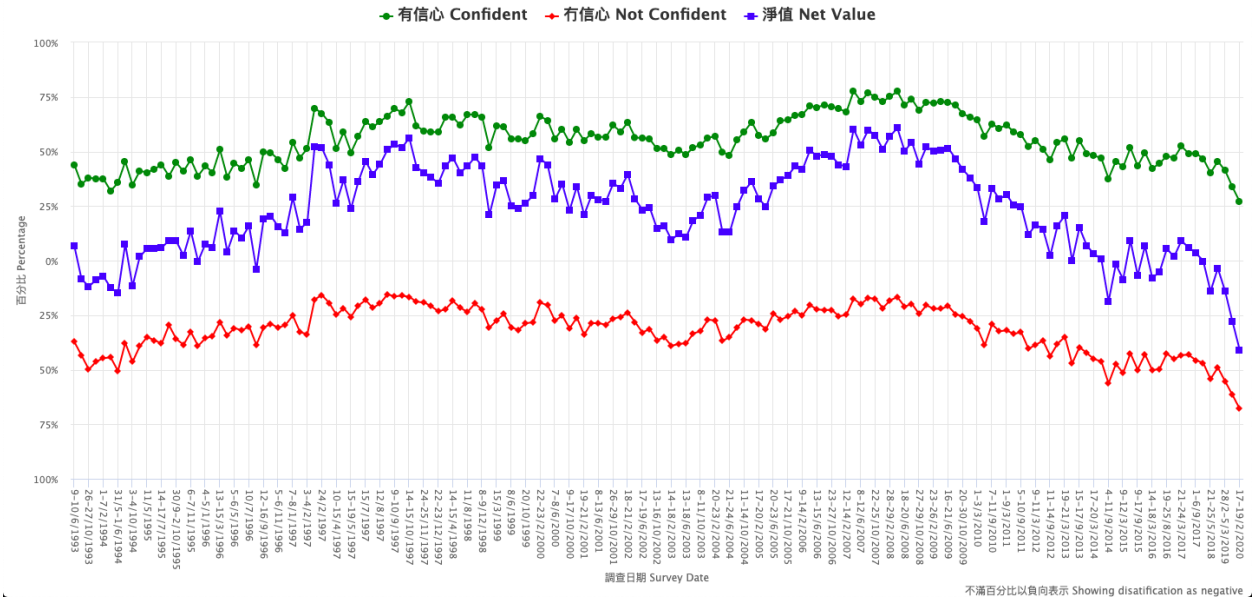


Figure 2. Poll- On the whole, do you have confidence in "One Country, Two Systems"? (Per Poll) (6/1993 - 2/2020) (ibid)

The Political Aspect

An RNS tends to mobilise people based on a common immediate cause. This cause becomes a rallying point for protecting the group identity. In the case of the 2019 protests in Hong Kong, the common cause became a dynamic, evolving element. Initially, the protestors were rallying against the changes to laws pertaining to extradition. As things developed and clashes with the police escalated, the common cause evolved to also include investigation of police brutality. This further morphed to include a common dissatisfaction against the Chief Executive Carrie Lam.

Eventually, in its broadest form, the movement sought to address issues related to the revival of Hong Kong's political reform process. This is linked to the Basic Law and its promises. Article 158 of the document provides the central leadership

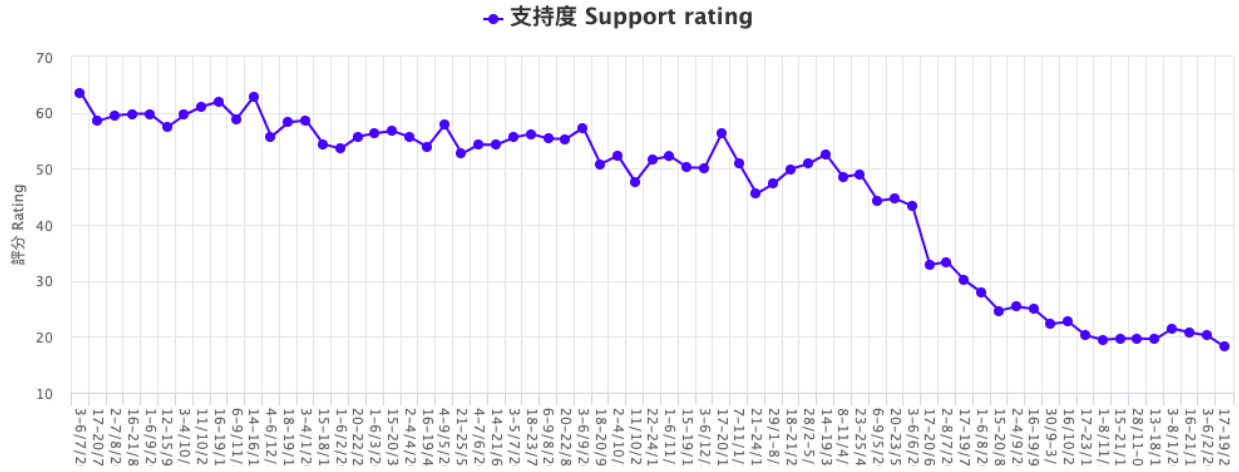


Figure 3. Poll- Please use a scale of 1-10 to rate your extent of support to the Chief Executive Carrie Lam, (Per Poll) (7/2017- 2/2020) [32]

in Beijing the authority to interpret the Basic Law if the following three criteria are met: [31]

A. Interpretation must concern affairs that are the responsibility of Beijing or the relationship between Beijing and Hong Kong.

B. The interpretation must be issued at the request of the Hong Kong Court of Final Appeal (CFA), except when concerning China's sovereignty.

C. The power should be limited to interpretation and not amendment of the Basic Law.

This gives Beijing an enormous amount of power, which it has leveraged to stymie Hong Kong's electoral reform process. For instance, on August 31, 2014, China's National People's Congress' Standing Committee issued a decision on the question of universal suffrage in Hong Kong.[32] The NPC mandated that any candidate for the position of Chief Executive must win the support of more than half the members on a pro-Beijing nominating committee. This sparked off a series of pro-democracy protests, which came to be known as the Umbrella Movement.[33] While that movement abated by the end of 2014, the demands for autonomy and universal suffrage resurfaced as part of the 2019 anti-extradition legislation movement.

The Network Aspect

The most critical aspects of an RNS are speed and scalability, with the depth of connectivity enabling faster mobilisation. In this context, the 2019 protests in

Hong Kong present a fascinating case, wherein a highly-networked population mobilised leveraging network connectivity while seeking to navigate the challenges of surveillance. Given this, certain trends emerged.

First, planning and mobilisation took place on encrypted platforms. Second, public platforms were used for fundraising and narrative contestation. Third, there were specific steps taken to avoid the use of certain tools to counter the threat of state surveillance during protests. Before discussing each of these, however, it is essential to highlight that Hong Kong enjoys a very high degree of Internet penetration of nearly 90%.[34] And that Hong Kongers are world leaders when it comes to ownership of connected devices, estimated at 2.7 per individual.[35] These two data points underscore the depth of the network that can enable rapid mobilisation.

Recent history teaches us that social media has played a pivotal role for coordination among protestors. However, the public nature of platforms like Twitter and Facebook makes them vulnerable to state surveillance. This was among the key lessons learned by protesters from the state's crackdown against the leaders of the Umbrella Movement in 2014.[36] Consequently, in 2019, protesters moved planning and coordination efforts to encrypted platforms.

Another aspect of the effort to evade the long arm of the state was to undermine the authorities' ability to capture data using routine public infrastructure. For instance, face masks, umbrellas and lasers were routinely used by demonstrators to blind CCTV cameras and thereby render facial recognition ineffective.[37] At the same time, when gathering for rallies, people avoided using their Octopus cards for routine transactions, particularly while using public transport and opted to pay cash.[38] Such has been the concern over the ubiquity of cameras and surveillance by the state that it led to a furore over a smart lamp posts programme, resulting in the withdrawal off the company providing core components for the lamp posts.[39]

In addition to being wary of the internet and evading surveillance by the state, protestors used the internet for mobilisation in the following ways:

Real-time voting: Given that the protests were leaderless, large groups of individuals used online platforms to conduct polls and take decisions based on data-based consensus. These decisions, however, were not always uniformly adhered to. For instance, on the evening of June 21, around 4,000 protesters voted in a Telegram group to determine whether the crowd would return home in the

evening or continue to protest outside Hong Kong police's headquarters. Only 39% voted to take the protests to the police headquarters - but there was still a six-hour siege of the building.[40]

Coordination and Logistics: It is a monumental task to coordinate a march that involves hundreds of thousands, if not over a million individuals. Apps that were encrypted and allowed people to form groups of more than 20,000 people were preferred platforms for communication. For instance, protestors used platforms like Telegram to create public channels to share information and smaller private groups to organise actions quickly.[41] This is underscored by the fact that Telegram grew 323% year-over-year in July 2019 in Hong Kong, adding 110,000 new users as opposed to 26,000 in July 2018.[42]

Another platform that was widely used was LIHKG, a Reddit-like forum which grew in popularity.[43] The nature of the platform is such that it has minimal entry requirements, with users not required to share emails or provide any sensitive personal sensitive information. This made it a useful tool to avoid surveillance. Reports show that LIHKG added 120,000 new users in July 2019, a massive year-on-year jump compared to the 12,000 new users added in July 2018.[44]

Throughout, LIHKG was used to mobilise individuals, raise funds and ensure supplies. LIHKG was also useful as a platform to coordinate to reconvene protests once the protestors had to disband from areas where they faced violence. In carrying out these functions, it was also reflective of the decentralised and leaderless nature of the protests.

In some instances, large numbers of people gathered together and jammed signals, using apps like Firechat to share practical information. such as blocked areas or those with police presence, as well as identifying areas where fellow protesters needed help. Applications such as Firechat and Airdrop were also useful in instances where no mobile networks were available.[45]

Fundraising: The protestors also used technology to run fairly successful fundraising campaigns. One of the most notable efforts was a campaign to raise funds to get international attention at the 2019 G20 Summit in Osaka. The draft ad on the gogetfunding.com page read: "We now need your support: get our voices heard at your governments and consulates; let freedom prevail at the upcoming G20 summit and beyond".[46] One campaign raised HK $5 million for front page newspaper ads, reaching HK $5 million within hours of its launch.[47,48]

Narrative contestation: There was also a contest online between the authorities and demonstrators to win the hearts and minds of people. This, for obvious reasons, played out on public platforms. Over the course of the protest, social media was used to share images of peaceful protesters marching through the city's streets and cleaning up after themselves to videos highlighting police violence against unarmed protesters. For instance, a video of a sea of protesters giving way to an ambulance went viral on June 16, 2019.[49] In July, there was a video of an elderly woman facing down the riot police that caught the public imagination.[50] Likewise, there were videos and accounts shared showing protesters46 and lawmakers being attacked,[51] the storming of trains by the police,[52] spraying of the Kowloon mosque[53] and reckless use of firearms by the police.[54]

Finally, another reason why the networked aspect of the protests in Hong Kong makes for an interesting case study is because it is possible to witness how the internet fuelled the internalisation of myths and beliefs, contributing to the sociological aspect of the RNS. For instance, during the protests, the use of certain hashtags (#hongkongprotests, #antiELAB, #standwithHK, #freedomHK, #weareHongKongers, #sosHK, #antimasklaw, #FollowBackHongKong, #hkpolicestate, #policebrutality, #hkpoliceviolence, #hkpoliceterrorism, #teargas) began to significantly increase in volume, peaking around major events.[55]

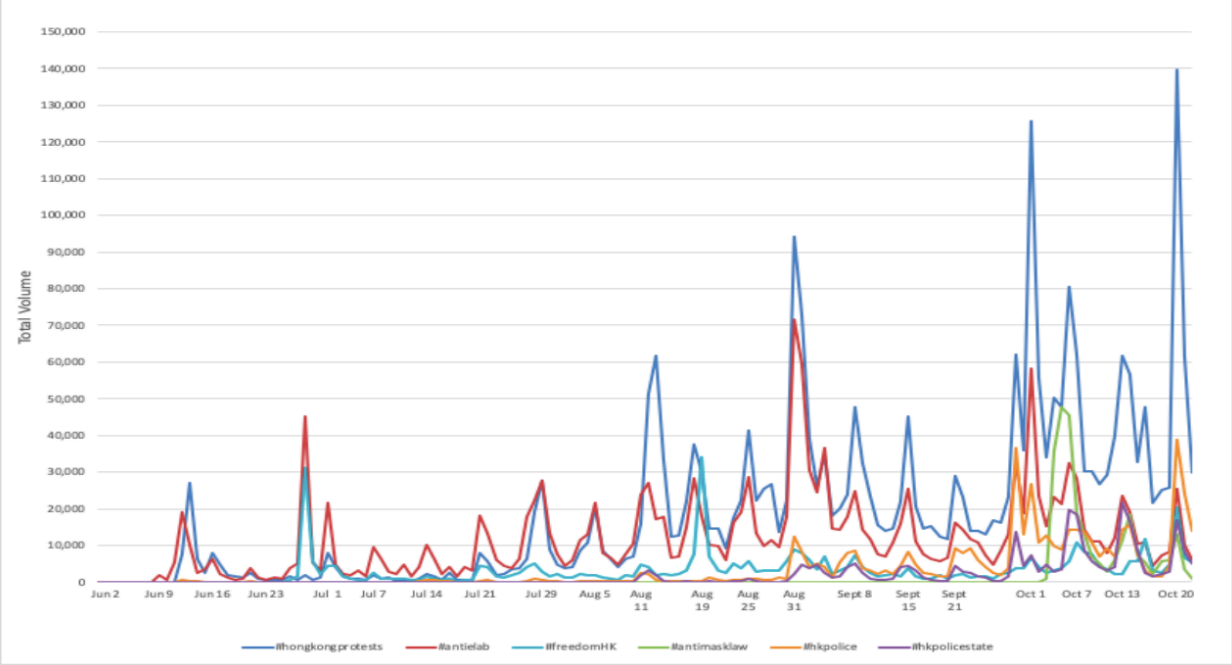


Figure 4. Total volume of six hashtags of the anti-extradition bill movement from June 1 to October 22 (ibid)

Hashtags	Total Posts	Date of Peak Postings	Posts on Date of Peak Postings
#hongkongprotests	27,59,274	Oct-20	1,39,720
#antielab	17,14,864	Aug-31	71,704
#antimasklaw	2,56,406	Oct-05	47,598
#hkpolicestate	2,63,807	Oct-13	21,690
#hkpolice	4,85,348	Oct-20	38,742
#freedomhk	4,43,292	Aug-19	34,006

Figure 5. Hashtags, total posts, and date and volume of posts on date of peak postings (ibid)

The above graph tells us that social media played a critical role in building narratives, and facilitating mobilisation around certain shared identities and objectives. In addition to the hashtags significantly increasing in volume around important developments, the internet and social media also contributed to strengthening identities during periods of (relative) calm.

For example, Glory to Hong Kong, which went on to become the unofficial national anthem for the protests was posted by a local musician to LIHKG.[56] The

song began being sung at shopping malls, football stadiums, and also flash mobs[57], providing Hong Kongers with a sense of identity.[58]

In addition to the anthem, multiple images were shared across social media platforms, bringing about a sense of collective identity. For instance, a photo of a child crying after being exposed to tear gas became iconic after being shared widely, going viral and helping internalise the feeling that the Chinese state was immoral.[59]

Examining State Response

Any assessment of the state's response to the 2019 protests needs to take into account the actions taken by local authorities in Hong Kong SAR and the central leadership in Beijing. There is little evidence to suggest that the leadership in Beijing had a direct role in the Lam government's decision to amend extradition laws.[60] However, as the protests intensified and expanded in scope, the central leadership did play a much more public role.

Reports over the year indicated differences of views between the Lam administration and the central leadership.[61] For instance, on more than one occasion, Lam was candid enough to admit to governance failures, while also expressing remorse over causing "unforgivable havoc" in Hong Kong. Her statements from late July till late September, which included the announcement of the formal withdrawal of the controversial legislation, suggested a willingness to adopt a more flexible approach of engaging with the protesters, without necessarily accepting their demands.

There were also reports over the course of 2019, suggesting differences between the political leadership in Hong Kong and the police force. A case in point is the argument over setting up an independent commission to inquire into police brutality. Leaked recordings of a meeting in late August 2019, published by Apple Daily, suggest that resistance from the police forces had resulted in Lam refusing to accede to the demand.[62] In turn, in early September, Lam approved an inquiry by the Independent Police Complaints Council (IPCC) to examine the allegations of police misconduct.

In contrast to the Lam administration, the central leadership in Beijing sought to project strength. It largely operated via established institutions such as The Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region and the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office (HKMAO), while also using Party-state media and affiliated entities to seize the narrative on social media. For instance, very early on Beijing raised the spectre of foreign interference, termed the movement as a colour revolution in the making and sought to discredit the protesters as terrorists. Framing such a narrative, Beijing doubled down on the use of coercive measures.

The broad range of instruments used by both the HKSAR authorities and central leadership are categorised and discussed below, along with a brief assessment of whether these yielded desired outcomes and broader implications.

Coercive Use of the Law

Following the failure of the Umbrella Movement of 2014, the authorities in Hong Kong intensified the coercive use of legal and political means to target the leaders of the movement. This trend intensified during the 2019 protests, with the authorities denying permissions for protests, using colonial-era emergency laws to clamp down on gatherings and carrying out mass arrests. At the same time, Beijing's decision to use terms like influence of foreign "black hands," terrorism and colour revolution implied harsh legal consequences for protesters.

During the first few months, the Lam administration failed to offer a political response to the protests. Instead, the administration announced that it would move ahead with the second reading of the bill in the Legislative Council on June 12. As protesters gathered outside the LegCo building in Admiralty, violence broke out. Lam and Police Commissioner Police Stephen Lo Wai would later term the day's events as an "organised riot."[63] This was significant given that individuals charged under the colonial-era Public Order Ordinance could face up to 10 years in prison.[64] This characterisation was partially withdrawn later, with a distinction drawn between those who had engaged in violence and those who had protested peacefully.[65] Yet arrests of protesters continued through the year as the violence escalated. This included the arrest of injured protesters from hospitals, which also has implications from a data privacy perspective.[66]

Another example of the use of coercive colonial-era legislation entailed banning the wearing of face masks in public after the violence on October 1.[67] The ban was challenged in court and subsequently deemed unconstitutional.[68] This provoked Beijing's ire, with the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress challenging the authority of Hong Kong's courts to rule on the constitutionality of legislation under the Basic Law.[69]

Finally, authorities in Hong Kong used their power to deny permissions for even peaceful demonstrations. This created the legal pretext for mass arrests of protesters over time. The first such denial in the context of the 2019 movement came on July 1, when the police asked for the venue to be shifted.[70] Subsequently, permissions for marches were routinely denied in the months that followed and

those disregarding the orders were charged with unlawful assembly.[71] Perhaps, the most significant arrest since the protests began in the March 2020 arrest of media baron Jimmy Lai, who was charged with unauthorised assembly on August 31, 2019.[72]

Assessment: The state's use of coercive legal tools failed to yield desired outcomes. Labelling the events of June 12 as a riot led to deeper public agitation. Public polling data show that Hong Kongers' perceptions with regard to the state of freedom and rule of law in the region are hovering around historic lows. Trust in government and the police are also deeply shaken. Essentially, more people now feel alienated with the ruling class than at any other time since 1997. This reflected in the results of the District Council election in November. Yet, it is unlikely that Hong Kong's authorities will alter their approach in the near term. A rebuke from the courts hearing protest cases perhaps could force some course correction.

Use of Force

Human Rights Watch claims that over the course of the protests in 2019, the police fired more than 16,000 rounds of teargas, 10,000 rubber bullets, 2,000 beanbag rounds, and 1,900 sponge grenades.[73] A September 2019 Amnesty International report charges the police with deploying "reckless and indiscriminate tactics" in dealing with the protests, while also indulging in torture and ill-treatment of those detained.[74] Videos shared on social media also showed the police pulling off people's masks and eyewear to spray tear gas in their faces. The police also indiscriminately used water cannons spiked with an indelible blue dye to ensure the subsequent tracking of protesters.[75]

The fact that there was a systematic decision to intensify violent suppression of the protests was evident from the reported changes to the official guidelines on the use of force. The changes, which came ahead of October 1, diluted the liability that officers would encounter in case of use of force.[76] It is worth noting that it was during the October 1 demonstrations that the police fired the first live rounds.[77] More such instances would follow in the months ahead. Another worrying trend that emerged through the movement was that of officers concealing their credentials, with uniforms not carrying any identification numbers or ranks. The fact that Chief Superintendent John Tse announced in late October that frontline officers would wear white identification tags underscores the veracity of these concerns.[78] The police also admitted to another troubling

practice, that of using undercover "decoy" with plain-clothed officers disguising themselves as protesters while conducting violent crackdowns.[79,80]

The identification controversy also sparked a debate over the embedding of officers from the mainland's police and paramilitary forces within the rank and file of Hong Kong Police Force.[81] While that remains debatable, Beijing did seek to project strength by publicising the rotation in the PLA's Hong Kong Garrison[82] and exercises by the People's Armed Police in Shenzhen.[83] Beijing's tolerance for the use of force was also evident in the engagement with new Hong Kong police commissioner Chris Tang Ping-Keung in December 2019. During the visit, Guo Shengkun, secretary of the Central Political and Legal Affairs Commission, told him that Beijing "firmly support(s) Hong Kong police in strictly enforcing the law, and fully support the force in restoring the city's law and order."[84]

Assessment: The increasing use of force by Hong Kong police impacted the nature of the protest movement in different ways. In the initial days, use of force by the police galvanised larger sections of society to join the protesters. Soon, an investigation into police action became one of the key drivers of the movement, thereby expanding its scope beyond the extradition legislation. In time, as violence escalated, there was a chilling effect along with the emergence of divisions between what were seen as radical and peaceful protesters, with the former resorting to vandalism, violent attacks on police stations, road blockages and doxing. This provided fodder for the state in its efforts to delegitimise the movement. Polling shows that the underlying movement still enjoys much public support, but many have been critical of protesters' use of violent means, which has allowed some leeway for the police. Despite that, in a broader sense, the state's use of force engendered a deep rift between the police and society at large. Public opinion polls following the escalation of violence in mid-2019 shed light on this. An October 22 poll by HKPORI found that 60% of respondents believed that the police had colluded with triads and were being supported by the PAP. In November 2019, participants in an HK PORI survey gave the police just 35.3 marks out of 100.[85] A recent Gallup poll shows that six out of 10 Hong Kongers lack confidence in the police.[86] The Reuters-HKPORI poll mentioned above also shows that nearly two-thirds of the respondents want an independent inquiry into alleged police brutality.

Digital Disruption & Surveillance

Despite months of protests, it is noteworthy that the authorities in Hong Kong did not cut off access to the Internet. This is quite unlike the state response in many other countries, including the mainland, when faced with RNS movements. The prospect of a shutdown, however, did loom large from August to October. In August, reports surfaced of the HKSAR government contemplating an executive order calling on internet service providers to stop some applications selectively.[87] The Hong Kong Internet Service Providers Association was quick to respond, arguing that such a policy "would start the end of the open internet of Hong Kong, and would immediately and permanently deter international firms from depositing their business and investments in Hong Kong."[88] At the same time, the #Keepiton coalition issued an appeal, warning that an Internet shutdown "could conservatively cost Hong Kong $425,000,000 per day in direct economic impact."[89] Any such decision would, therefore, have alienated broader sections of society and deepened the prevailing economic turmoil.

Instead of shutting down the Internet, the approach adopted in Hong Kong appeared to be a mix of targeted denial of service, attempts at breaking encryption, laying pressure on multinational firms and surveillance using big data. For instance, both LIHKG and Telegram, platforms which were widely used by protesters, faced distributed denial of service (DDoS) attacks.[90] A DDoS attack aims to disable the target site by sending a flood of traffic that overwhelms its computers. For protesters, the collapse of encrypted communications platforms would render them vulnerable. Apart from this, reports also suggest that the police sought to exploit vulnerabilities in platforms like Telegram to identify protesters.[91]

What also had a direct impact on protesters was the removal of the Apple's HK Map Live app, which had been used by protesters and residents to locate police movements and demonstrations.[92] Apple had, at first, rejected the app, only to authorise it later. The approval was followed by a People's Daily commentary warning Apple to "think about the consequences of its unwise and reckless decision."[93] Soon after, the app was pulled. Quartz' news app was another product that faced a similar fate on the App Store.[94] Likewise, Google Inc also pulled an app called The Revolution of Our Times for apparently violating rules related to "sensitive events."[95]

In addition to the above, there have been concerns about data privacy and the use of AI and big data by the government to track and target protesters. Over the

course of 2019, reports suggest that officials have accessed facial recognition[96] and Octopus card transaction data[97] to track down protesters.

Assessment: Clearly, both the protesters and Hong Kong authorities have learned lessons from the 2014 Umbrella Movement. While the state was slow to respond to the challenges in 2019-20, it gradually adapted, using targeted measures rather than blunt instruments like a shutdown. What enabled this was the high rate of internet penetration in Hong Kong along with the extensive use of digital technologies for communication, service provision and governance. Despite this, what the 2019-20 protests have shown is that RNS movements continue to evolve and adapt with greater agility in the cat and mouse game with the state.

Narrative Contestation

While protesters leveraged digital media and courted support from foreign governments, the HKSAR and mainland authorities used traditional and digital media platforms to contest the narrative. After a long period of silence, in late July 2019, HKMAO held its first press conference to discuss the protests. The themes that spokespersons Yang Guang and Xu Luying touched upon formed the basis of Beijing's narrative over the following months. They broadly backed Carrie Lam and police in Hong Kong, hit out at "irresponsible remarks" by some Western countries and underscored that Beijing viewed the situation from a national security perspective and a challenge to its authority.[98] A few days later, HKMAO held another press conference. This time, the tone was sharper, and there was also an attempt to distinguish between those who might have genuine concerns and "a small group of radicals."[99] Besides, there was a clear message for people to distance themselves from these individuals.[100,****]

Essentially, the attempt was to leverage and further socio-political fissures in Hong Kong to defang the movement. In early August, Global Times reported that HKMAO hosted more than 550 people, including HKSAR deputies to the National People's Congress, national and provincial political advisors from the HKSAR, leaders of patriotic political and social organisations in Hong Kong, and representatives from youth, education, and professional organisations and mainland enterprises operating in Hong Kong to talk about the crisis.[101] It was during this meeting that for the first time, the movement cast in the light of a

**** Note: Jimmy Lai, Martin Lee, Anson Chan and Albert Ho were identified as the new "Gang of Four," acting as agents for the West.

"colour revolution." In the weeks to follow, the Chinese foreign ministry would be locked in regular exchange of barbs with American legislators and officials, attacking foreign "black hands" active in Hong Kong.[102] The sharpest of these exchanges came in the context of the passage of the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act.[103] At the same time, there would be pressure on the business community to disavow the movement, which resulted in a number of them taking out newspaper advertisements to this effect.[104]

Apart from this, there is evidence that Beijing sought to carry out a coordinated social media campaign on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to undermine the movement in Hong Kong. Following a probe, all three platforms suspended a number of accounts traced back to the PRC and with links to the Chinese government for engaging in coordinated behaviour to sow discord in Hong Kong deliberately.[105] Beyond this, the police in Hong Kong also used social media to counter the protestors' messaging. For instance, apart from sharing official information, views and updates, HKPF also routinely highlighted the violent nature of the protests and injuries to officers.[106]

In addition, HKPF frequently shared videos of protestors disrupting and destroying public property. One particular incident that stands out is the controversy over the November 11, 2019, incident in which a man was set on fire. Details are scant as to what led to the incident, but the authorities were quick to blame "black-clad rioters," a term used to denote pro-democracy protesters.[107] The incident also provided much fodder for Chinese state media.[108] Finally, as mentioned above, Carrie Lam used her public appearances to suggest that her government acknowledged its mistakes and was open to talks. While doing so, she refused to address the political issues at the heart of the protests.

Assessment: The Chinese state's propaganda effort was aimed at serving three distinct objectives. The first was to drum up nationalism within the mainland against the protesters. The effectiveness of the state's efforts in this context is difficult to assess, given the tight controls over mainstream and social media in the mainland. Some reports suggest that public opinion in the mainland has varied from hostility and disdain towards the protesters to even some admiration. Yet, this effort can be seen as successful, given that there was no spillover effect in the mainland.

Second, there was an attempt to contest the depiction of the police's use of force as excessive and pin the blame of escalation on the protesters. This was done to

sow social discord. And third, the attempt was to frame the state as reflective and open to negotiation. Continued protests and polling data from Hong Kong show that the efforts in regard to these two objectives have not yielded desired outcomes.

Economic Coercion & Incentives

When it comes to economic issues, the authorities in Beijing and Hong Kong engaged in what can be described as a *good cop, bad cop* approach. While the central leadership threatened and used coercion, the Lam administration offered incentives. The People's Daily warning to Apple Inc, discussed above, was but one case where Beijing sought to threaten a multinational enterprise with reprisals if it didn't fall in line. Through 2019, there were multiple instances where multinationals were asked to disavow the protesters. For instance, when the staff of KPMG, Ernst & Young, Deloitte and PricewaterhouseCoopers reportedly crowdfunded a pro-protest advertisement, Chinese tabloid Global Times called on the companies to "fire employees found to have the wrong stance on the current Hong Kong situation." Dong Shaopeng, an advisor to the China Securities Regulatory Commission, told the paper that the move would bring the companies into "disrepute" and that they were "obligated to give an explanation and not tolerate anti-government forces." (ibid) Fashion retailer Zara and Japanese sports drink Pocari Sweat also found themselves caught in controversies, targeted by boycott campaigns in the mainland.[109] However, the two standout cases were those of Hong Kong carrier Cathay Pacific and the US National Basketball Association. In the first case, on August 9, 2019, the Civil Aviation Authority of China issued a directive calling for the suspension of staff who supported or participated in the demonstrations. Thereafter, reports inform of individual staff members of the airline being targeted, routine searches of the crew's phones and social media accounts being carried out and the resignation of the airline's chief executive and chairman.[110,111] In late August, Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions termed Beijing's persecution of the airline as a case of "white terror."[112] The NBA case was sparked by a tweet by Houston Rockets' General Manager Daryl Morey. Amid a boycott of games and severing of ties by key NBA's partners in China, Morey issued an apology. In contrast, the NBA issued a statement expressing disappointment, which led to outrage in the US, resulting in a retraction. Consequently, a chill persists, with state Chinese broadcaster CCTV continuing to boycott NBA games.

In contrast, the HKSAR administration sought to offer economic incentives in order to address anxieties among the youth and businesses with regard to their future in the region. In a televised policy address in October, Lam focussed on new initiatives to address issues of housing, land supply, improving people's livelihood and economic development.[113] Estimates also suggest that from August to November, the Hong Kong government provided a range of subsidies, fee waivers and cash incentives, totalling $2.67 billion, in order to address economic causes of unrest.[114] Following this trend, in his February 2020 budget, Financial Secretary Paul Chan Mo-Po announced a range of measures to boost the economy. This included a $15.4 billion relief package and a one-off payment of $1,200 to all adult permanent residents,[115] despite concerns over the deficit hitting record highs.[116] Public polling data, however, show that these efforts haven't been able to allay public concerns about either economic[117] or livelihood[118] problems.

Assessment: Economic coercion by Beijing clearly had an impact on multinational firms, which by-and-large fell in line. The NBA's case was an anomaly given the political furore in the United States that followed its initial statement. Yet, none of this necessarily undermined the protest movement. In fact, if anything, such coercion likely underscored for many the need for greater autonomy from the mainland. On the other hand, the economic incentives offered by the HKSAR government also appear to have failed to blunt the protests. In addition, economic dissatisfaction remains high in Hong Kong. But more importantly, polling data shows that Hong Kongers view the movement as an issue that needs a political solution rather than an economic one. Therefore, the use of economic measures is unlikely to sway people.

Critical Appraisal of the Movement

This section offers a critical appraisal of the 2019-20 protest movement in Hong Kong. We begin by outlining the movement's strengths and weaknesses before finally assessing it on three parameters - its disruptive, narrative, and electoral capacities.

Strengths & Weaknesses

In our assessment, four key strengths drove the movement, allowing it to scale up. First, Hong Kongers have a long history of public demonstrations. This is evident from the annual vigils at Victoria Park to mark the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre. What's important is that over time these protests have been effective too. For instance, the 2003 anti-Article 23 movement forced the government to back down on controversial national security legislation. Likewise, demonstrations in 2012 forced the government to walk back proposed moral and national education reform[119]. Finally, while the 2014 Umbrella Movement did not fully succeed in terms of its stated objectives, it created a new consciousness about the erosion of the city's autonomy and the long battle ahead between individuals and the state. The 2014 movement also revealed another trend, i.e., the impact of digital technologies to enable rapid mobilisation of individuals. This historical experience, along with the learnings from past failures, and the presence of a technologically savvy and highly-networked society lent great potency to the 2019-20 protests.

Second, much like past demonstrations, the 2019-20 movement saw people framing their core demands within the language of the Basic Law. In other words, the protesters were demanding that the state uphold the principles of and fulfil the promises and values enshrined in the Basic Law. This provided moral and legal justification, enabling larger mobilisation. Moreover, at different points of time, they relied on the judicial system to challenge the government. Petitions against denial of permissions to protest and the overturning of the mask ban are a few examples of this. At the same time, while demanding universal suffrage, the protesters did not boycott the electoral system. In fact, they sought to leverage it to demonstrate the appeal of their proposition. For instance, the November 2019 District Council election saw the highest turnout in post-handover Hong Kong, with pro-democracy candidates winning 389 of 452 elected seats, up from 124 in

2015.[120] This was a repudiation of the argument that the protests were being fuelled by foreign forces aiding separatism in Hong Kong.

Third, unlike the 2014 Umbrella Movement, the 2019-20 demonstrations were leaderless. Discussing this trend, Joshua Wong explains that "Hong Kong people have learned from the Umbrella Movement.[121] We know that if you have a specific individual leader, that leader just gets targeted, arrested, prosecuted, and jailed, so we have no single individual leader. Instead of having a single leader, we have more and more facilitators, hundreds, that take charge and take part in different campaigns of the movement." Consequently, in 2019, while the early protest calls were issued by the Civil Human Rights Front (CHRF), soon the movement took on an independent character with a disparate set of networked individuals and groups mobilising on the streets, as discussed in the previous section. The pace and unpredictability of this mobilisation posed a challenge for the hierarchical state, as did the fact that there were no leaders that could be targeted to clamp down on the movement.

Fourth, what was remarkable was that despite being leaderless, the demonstrators were largely able to craft a strong common message, and express it in terms of five core demands. These demands began with the withdrawal of amendments to the extradition legislation but expanded on the basis of broader social grievances. Implicit in the five demands is a reflection of Hong Kong's identity as a territory governed by rule of law, unlike the mainland.

On the flip side, the fact that the initial protest morphed from a specific objective of withdrawing amendments to extradition legislation to a maximalist position, challenging the legitimacy of the Chinese central government's authority, severely undercut the chances of its success. In other words, when the protesters simply sought the withdrawal of the extradition legislation amendments, there was a clarity of action that was being demanded. In fact, this objective was eventually achieved. It can be argued that this was also the case with the demand for the resignation of Carrie Lam and an inquiry into police brutality. These were specific action points, but far more difficult to achieve, given that the former at least directly challenged Beijing's authority. This was even more so the case once the five demands included the call for universal suffrage and were articulated with the slogan "five demands, not one less."[122] Such a proposition would be a non-starter for the central leadership, which in any case had indicated that it favoured a hardline approach than a negotiated settlement. Consequently, even if the local authorities desired negotiations, these were unlikely to bear fruit.

This ties into another limitation of leaderless, networked protest movements. There is essentially no individual or group that the state can negotiate with in order to arrive at compromises. But the larger challenge for such movements is to ensure coherence in messaging and actions. Over the course of the past year, it is evident that while the movement's messaging has largely remained tied to the five demands, there have been fissures. For instance, the protesters tended to articulate their demands within the constitutional bounds of the Basic Law. Yet, there were certain individuals and groups that sought external, particularly American, intervention.[123] Moreover, while a majority of the protesters have sought to remain peaceful, radical elements resorted to coordinated violence, vandalism and destruction of public property.

This, in turn, undermined public support and permitted the state greater leeway in using force, which clearly was carefully calibrated. In responding to the protesters, the state in Hong Kong did not resort to overwhelming use of force. This is not an argument exonerating the police. Instances of police brutality in Hong Kong over the past year are well documented. Instead, we believe that the central government and leadership in Hong Kong have adopted a calibrated policy of attrition to tackle the protests. Consequently, the state relied on riot police and refrained from deploying the armed forces, despite repeatedly suggesting that this was one of the options that remained on the table. Moreover, on occasion, even police inaction appeared to be well thought out. For instance, during the July 1 protests, the police stood quietly allowing the protesters to break into the Legislative Council building and damage property. This appeared to be a simple effort in allowing radical groups to undermine the moral legitimacy of the movement.

Outcomes Appraisal

In her landmark book *Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest*, Zeynep Tufekci discusses networked social movements in terms of their capacities to "change the narrative, threaten disruption or bring about electoral or institutional change." We assess the 2019-20 Hong Kong protests within this framework to examine what, if anything, they were able to achieve.

Generally, such movements are heavily equipped with narrative capacity. Using the low-cost scale afforded by the internet, they can change and modify narratives rather quickly. What's more difficult, however, is to achieve disruptive

and electoral capacities. In Hong Kong, over the course of the past year, not only did the movement display significant narrative capacity and gather widespread international support, but there also was widespread disruption and some electoral gains.

The disruptive capacity of the protests is evident by the large numbers of individuals who repeatedly took to the streets through the year. As per Lam's admission, the city saw over 11,000 marches and gatherings in 2019 - 10 times the number in 1997.[124] In addition, increasing violence near government offices and around apartment complexes, shopping malls and parks threw normal life out of gear. So much so that Lam's policy address in October had to be shifted due to disruptions. At one point, Hong Kong International Airport was paralysed.[125] Key sectors like tourism, hospitality and retail have suffered, with the economy contracting for the first time in a decade.[126]

In terms of the narrative capacity, the movement has had a profound impact in many respects. First, there is a fundamental change in Hong Kongers' perception of their government and police, once termed as Asia's finest.[127] In both cases, public confidence is at historic lows. Second, there is a normalisation of violence that has taken place. The conventional understanding of Hong Kongers achieving change via peaceful demonstrations has gone out the window, with violence and attrition becoming the norm. Third, Hong Kong's reputation as a stable business and tourist destination governed by rule of law has taken a severe beating. Fourth, Hong Kong's political status and autonomy are increasingly becoming part of a broader ideological and geopolitical contest between the PRC and the US. This is evident in the US government enacting a new law that mandates an annual review of Hong Kong's autonomy to justify its special status.

Finally, from an electoral and institutional change perspective, a sustained push by pro-democracy activists in Hong Kong has yielded some gains over the years. But in many ways, this has been a one step forward, two steps back process. For instance, in 2016, pro-democracy candidates won 30 out of 70 seats in the Legislative Council.[128] This number provided them with veto power[129] to block attempts to enact pro-Beijing laws. Unfortunately, a controversy surrounding oath-taking by three legislators resulted in their disqualification.[130] Likewise, in 2019-20, the protests did manage to ensure that the amendments to the extradition legislation were withdrawn along with earning a sweeping win in the District Council elections. However, universal suffrage and a popularly elected Legislative Council remains a mirage. In fact, the past years' experience has

resulted in the state doubling down on harsher security measures while seeking to establish "comprehensive legal and enforcement mechanisms" to safeguard national security.[131]

Conclusion

This paper examined the 2019-20 protest movement in Hong Kong within the context of the RNS framework. It argued that the movement, which began to derail proposed amendments to the extradition legislation, is, in fact, a product of underlying fissures over political identity and autonomy between a significant community of Hong Kongers and the Chinese state. Hong Kong's thriving Internet ecosystem and hyper-connected society enabled the development and expansion of networked communities around these issues, fuelling sustained, leaderless mobilisation. The demonstrators used public networking platforms for fundraising and narrative contestation, while encrypted services were used for planning and coordination.

This is indicative of the Chinese state's increasing capacity to disrupt digital services and carry out surveillance activities. Such enhanced capacity, along with a consideration of economic costs, were perhaps critical factors in the HKSAR government's not to shut down the Internet. Yet, these actions constitute one part of the overall response, which entailed the use of several different instruments. Broadly, Chinese authorities responded to a question of political legitimacy using economic and security tools. They deployed coercive legal instruments, violence, and economic incentives to create and leverage fissures in society while also engaging in extensive narrative contestation. What's interesting to note is that despite repeated threats, the central leadership resisted the temptation to deploy the armed forces on the streets of Hong Kong. This suggests a calculated use of force, keeping in mind broader economic and political costs. In essence, considering Hong Kong's unique circumstances, the Chinese state's response has been rooted in a strategy of attrition.

REFERENCES

1. Tufekci, Z. Twitter and Tear Gas. in *Twitter and Tear Gas* (Yale University Press, 2017).
2. Pai, N. & Kotasthane, P. Liberty & Security in Radically Networked Societies : A Challenge for Every Generation 1. (2016).
3. DW. Chile declares state of emergency amid student riots. *DW* https://www.dw.com/en/chile-declares-state-of-emergency-amid-student-riots/a-50896834 (2019).
4. Newman, L. How the Iranian Government Shut Off the Internet. *WIRED* https://www.wired.com/story/iran-internet-shutoff/ (2019).
5. Financial Times. 'Look at me, I exist': French protesters send message to Macron. *Financial Times* (2018).
6. BBC. Hong Kong protest: 'Nearly two million' join demonstration. *BBC* https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-48656471 (2019).
7. Siu, P. Hong Kong economy contracted 1.9 per cent in 2019, IMF forecasts, as protests and weak global growth take toll. *SCMP* (2019).
8. Victor, D. & May, T. The Murder Case That Lit the Fuse in Hong Kong. *The New York Times* (2019).
9. The Standard. Chan Tong-kai, suspect in Taipei killing, jailed for money laundering. *The Standard*.
10. ejinsight. Taiwan issues arrest warrant for HK youth suspected of murder. *Enijsight* (2018).
11. Chan, H. 'Trojan horse': Hong Kong's China extradition plans may harm city's judicial protections, say democrats. *Hong Kong Free Press* (2019).
12. Kellogg, T. Hong Kong's Proposed Extradition Law and International Human Rights: Legalized Kidnapping? *Lawfare Blog* (2019).
13. Hong Kong Bar Association. Summary of the Observations of the Hong Kong Bar Association ("HKBA") on the Security Bureau's Proposal to Amend the Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters Ordinance, Cap. 525 ("MLAO") and the Fugitive Offenders Ordinance, Cap.503 ("FOO"). *Hong Kong Bar Association* https://www.hkba.org/sites/default/files/Summary of HKBA%27s Observations %28Eng%29 Final.pdf (2019).
14. Tam, K. Over concerns, Hong Kong introduces revised extradition laws. 2019.

15. Pang, J. & Torode, G. Thousands take to Hong Kong streets to protest new extradition laws. *Reuters* (2019).

16. Creery, J. Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam apologises over extradition row, as crowds occupy roads demanding her resignation. *Hong Kong Free Press* (2019).

17. Kwok, D. & Roantree, A. M. Hong Kong leader says extradition bill is dead, but critics unconvinced. *Reuters* (2019).

18. Yeung, J., Griffiths, J. & George, S. Hong Kong protesters hit the streets as China marks 70 years of Communist rule. *CNN* (2019).

19. Hong Kong Watch. Protest Prosecution Database. *Hong Kong Watch* (2019).

20. Financial Times. Hong Kong since the handover in chart. *Financial Times* (2017).

21. Hong Kong Public Opinion Research Institute. Social Indicators: Survey Results. *Hong Kong Public Opinion Research Institute* (2019).

22. Information Services Department, H. *Hong Kong fact sheets - education*. vol. 2009 http://www.gov.hk/en/about/abouthk/factsheets/docs/education.pdf (2015).

23. Seventh National People's Congress. The Basic Law of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China. (1997).

24. White, C. Cantonese isn't dead yet, so stop writing its eulogy. *Quartz* (2017).

25. Wasserstrom, J. Vigil: Hong Kong on the Brink. in *Vigil: Hong Kong on the Brink* (Penguin Randomhouse, 2020).

26. Fisher, M. 'One Country, Two Nationalisms': The Identity Crisis Behind Hong Kong's Turmoil. *The New York Times* (2019).

27. Hong Kong Public Opinion Research Institute. Poll: Ethnic Identity-Chinese in Hong Kong. *Hong Kong Public Opinion Research Institute* (2019).

28. Cheng, K. Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam's popularity rating drops by over 2% to another historic low – poll. *Hong Kong Free Press* (2019).

29. Pomfret, J. & Jim, C. *Exclusive: Hong Kongers support protester demands; minority wants independence from China - Reuters poll*. (2019).

30. Hong Kong Public Opinion Research Institute. Poll: Confidence in One Country, Two Systems. *Hong Kong Public Opinion Research Institute* (2019).

31. Huang, Z. & Huang, E. A brief history: Beijing's interpretations of Hong

Kong's Basic Law, from 1999 to the present day. (2016).

32. China.org. Full text of NPC decision on universal suffrage for HK Chief Executive selection. *China.org* http://www.china.org.cn/china/2014-08/31/content_33390388.htm (2014).

33. Iyengar, R. 6 Questions You Might Have About Hong Kong's Umbrella Revolution. *TIME* (2014).

34. International Telecommunication Union. Individuals using the internet, 2005-19. https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx (2018).

35. World Bank. Mobile cellular subscriptions (per 100 people). (2018).

36. Hargreaves, S. Online Monitoring of 'Localists' in Hong Kong: A Return to Political Policing? http://library.queensu.ca/ojs/index.php/surveillance-and-society/index (2017).

37. Lee, T. Hong Kong Protestors Are Using Lasers To Avoid Facial Recognition Cameras. *Ubergizmo* https://www.ubergizmo.com/2019/08/hong-kong-protestors-use-laser-facial-recognition/ (2019).

38. Hui, M. Why Hong Kong's protesters were afraid to use their metro cards. *Quartz* (2019).

39. Chan, H. Hong Kong tech firm pulls out of smart lamppost programme after surveillance accusations and staff threats. *Hong Kong Free Press* (2019).

40. Vincent, D. How apps power Hong Kong's 'leaderless' protests. *BBC* (2019).

41. Lai, R. & Wu, J. Protesters in Hong Kong Have Changed Their Playbook. Here's How. *The New York Times* (2019).

42. Goovaerts, D. Hong Kong unrest spurs app downloads. 2019.

43. Yeo, R. Explainer | Hong Kong protests: how the city's Reddit-like forum LIHKG has become the leading platform for organising demonstrations. *SCMP* (2019).

44. Shao, G. Social media has become a battleground in Hong Kong's protests. *CNBC* (2019).

45. Hui, M. Hong Kong's protesters put AirDrop to ingenious use to breach China's Firewall. *Quartz* https://qz.com/1660460/hong-kong-protesters-use-airdrop-to-breach-chinas-firewall/ (2019).

46. Jim, C. & Roantree, A. M. Hong Kong activists crowdfund for anti-extradition bill voice at G20. *Reuters*

https://www.reuters.com/article/us-hongkong-extradition-crowdfunding/hong-kong-activists-crowdfund-for-anti-extradition-bill-voice-at-g20-idUSKCN1TQ0OH (2019).

47. Cheng, K. Hongkongers raise over HK$5m for front-page newspaper ads urging G20 action over extradition crisis. *Hong Kong Free Press* (2019).

48. Creery, J. 'Stand with Hong Kong': G20 appeal over extradition law crisis appears in over 10 int'l newspapers. *Hong Kong Free Press* (2019).

49. Huiwen, N. Videos of Hong Kong extradition Bill protesters giving way to ambulance garner praise online. *The Straits Times* (2019).

50. Brennan, D. Video of 'Furious and Fearless' Elderly Woman Confronting Hong Kong Police and Protesters Goes Viral. *Newsweek* https://www.newsweek.com/viral-video-furious-fearless-elderly-woman-confronting-hong-kong-police-protesters-1451540 (2019).

51. Cheng, K. Officer removed lawmaker's goggles to pepper spray him as he displayed 'passive resistance,' Hong Kong police say. *Hong Kong Free Press* (2020).

52. Chui, A. Violent scenes as Hong Kong police storm train. *AsiaTimes* (2019).

53. South China Morning Post. Hong Kong protests: Kowloon mosque sprayed with blue dye from police water cannons during march in Tsim Sha Tsui. *Young Post, SCMP* (2019).

54. Yu, E., Ives, M. & Wong, E. Hong Kong Police Shoot Protester Amid Clashes. *The New York Times* (2019).

55. Chung, R., Siu, A., Lee, W. & Lam, V. Anti-Extradition Bill Movement People's Public Sentiment Report. *Hong Kong Public Opinion Research Institute* 3–65 https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5cfd1ba6a7117c000170d7aa/t/5df3158f04b7db043c7da1bd/1576211867361/PCF_Anti_Extradition_Bill_Stage+3_rpt_2019dec13_first+edition.pdf (2019).

56. BBC. Glory to Hong Kong: How the protesters got a new song. *BBC* https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-49661135 (2019).

57. Chow, V. Singing showdowns in Hong Kong pit the city's unofficial new anthem against China's. *Quartz* https://qz.com/1707883/glory-to-hong-kong-is-citys-new-unofficial-anthem/ (2019).

58. Chow, V. I've Been Waiting for a Song Like 'Glory to Hong Kong' My Whole Life. *New York Times* (2019).

59. AFP. The child was crying after being exposed to tear gas in Hong Kong --

not deliberately pepper sprayed by police. AFP https://factcheck.afp.com/child-was-crying-after-being-exposed-tear-gas-hong-kong-not-deliberately-pepper-sprayed-police (2019).

60. Lo, K. Chinese ambassador to Britain rejects claims that Beijing had a hand in Hong Kong extradition bill. *SCMP* (2019).

61. Kewalramani, M. Eye on China. https://mailchi.mp/fa2b15e39b6c/eye-on-china-xis-economic-vision-ai-social-credit-pharma-opportunity-beijings-hk-stance-misris-take-trade-war-flip-flops?e=[UNIQID] (2019).

62. Cheng, K. Hong Kong police strongly oppose independent investigation into conduct, says Chief Exec. Carrie Lam in leaked recording. *Hong Kong Free Press* (2019).

63. Ives, M. Extradition Protesters in Hong Kong Face Tear Gas and Rubber Bullets. *The New York Times* (2019).

64. Purbrick, M. A Report of the 2019 Hong Kong Protests. *Taylor Fr. Online* **50**, 465–487 (2019).

65. Kang-chung, N. & Lok-kei, S. Police roll back on categorisation of Hong Kong protests as a riot, with only those who threw bricks or used metal poles now likely to face most severe charges. *SCMP* (2019).

66. Creery, J. Broken bones, blisters and bruises: Hong Kong underground clinic volunteers grapple with influx of protest injuries. *Hong Kong Free Press* (2019).

67. Wang, C. Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam invokes emergency powers, announces face mask ban. *CNBC* (2019).

68. DW. Hong Kong court rules face mask ban unconstitutional. *DW* https://www.dw.com/en/hong-kong-court-rules-face-mask-ban-unconstitutional/a-51290217 (2019).

69. Reuters. China says Hong Kong courts have no power to rule on face mask ban. *Reuters* https://www.reuters.com/article/us-hongkong-protests-npc/china-says-hong-kong-courts-have-no-power-to-rule-on-face-mask-ban-idUSKBN1XS2OV (2019).

70. Ehrenkranz, M. Hong Kong Hospitals Accused of Leaking Protestors' Patient Data to Cops. *Gizmodo* (2019).

71. Cheng, K. Hong Kong activist arrested for organising unlawful assembly after police denied permission for Yuen Long protest. *Hong Kong Free Press* (2019).

72. Yu, E. Jimmy Lai, Hong Kong Media Baron, Is Arrested Over Role in

Protests. *The New York Times* (2020).

73. Human Rights Watch. Hong Kong: Create Independent Investigation of Police. *Human Rights Watch* (2020).

74. Amnesty International. Hong Kong: Arbitrary arrests, brutal beatings and torture in police detention revealed. *Amnesty International* https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/09/hong-kong-arbitrary-arrests-brutal-beatings-and-torture-in-police-detention-revealed/ (2019).

75. Bain, C. Why Hong Kong police are spraying protesters with blue dye. *SBSNews* (2019).

76. Jim, C. Hong Kong police change guidelines on use of force in protests: documents. *Reuters* (2019).

77. Ives, M. Hong Kong Police Shoot a Protester, 18, With a Live Bullet for the First Time. *The New York Times* (2019).

78. Chan, H. Hong Kong police say officers will wear unique identifiers as force defends recent treatment of journalists. *Hong Kong Free Press* (2019).

79. BBC. Hong Kong protests: Police defend use of 'disguised' officers. *BBC* https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-49324822 (2019).

80. Marcolini, B. Police Dressed as Protesters: How Undercover Police in Hong Kong Severely Injured People. *The New York Times* (2019).

81. Wo-Lap Lam, W. Will Xi Jinping Deploy the PLA Garrison to Quell Hong Kong's "Turmoil"? *The Jamestown Foundation* https://jamestown.org/program/will-xi-jinping-deploy-the-pla-garrison-to-quell-hong-kongs-turmoil/ (2019).

82. Xinhuanet. PLA garrison in Hong Kong conducts 22nd routine rotation. 2019 http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-08/29/c_138346677.htm.

83. Goh, B. & Torode, G. In 'clear warning', Chinese paramilitary forces exercise near Hong Kong. *Reuters* https://www.reuters.com/article/us-hongkong-protests-pap/in-clear-warning-chinese-paramilitary-forces-exercise-near-hong-kong-idUSKCN1V50LV (2019).

84. Leung, C. & Lee, A. New Hong Kong police chief Chris Tang tells top Beijing officials that 'hard and soft' tactics will be used to thwart protest crisis. *SCMP* (2019).

85. Cheng, K. Hong Kong police receive lowest public satisfaction rating among all disciplinary forces – survey. *Hong Kong Free Press* (2019).

86. Keating, E. & Reinhart, R. Hong Kongers' Confidence in Institutions

Damaged in Unrest. *Gallup* https://news.gallup.com/poll/284189/hong-kongers-confidence-institutions-damaged-unrest.aspx (2020).

87. Lok-kei, S., Lum, A. & Lam, J. Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam leaves door open on invoking sweeping emergency powers to deal with violent anti-government protests. *SCMP* (2019).

88. Hong Kong Internet Service Providers Association. Urgent Statement of HKISPA on Selective Blocking of Internet Services. *Hong Kong Internet Service Providers Association* https://www.hkispa.org.hk/139-urgent-statement-of-hkispa-on-selective-blocking-of-internet-services.html (2019).

89. Access Now. #KeepitOn: Joint letter on keeping the internet open and secure. *Access Now* https://www.accessnow.org/cms/assets/uploads/2019/09/Joint-letter-to-keep-the-open-net-in-HK-Eng.pdf (2019).

90. Banjo, S. Hong Kong Protester Forum Says Some DDoS Attacks Came From China. *Bloomberg* https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-09-02/hong-kong-protester-forum-says-some-ddos-attacks-came-from-china (2019).

91. Schectman, J. Exclusive: Messaging app Telegram moves to protect identity of Hong Kong protesters. *Reuters* https://www.reuters.com/article/us-hongkong-telegram-exclusive/exclusive-messaging-app-telegram-moves-to-protect-identity-of-hong-kong-protesters-idUSKCN1VK2NI (2019).

92. Mickle, T., Horwitz, J. & Kubota, Y. Apple, Google Pull Hong Kong Protest Apps Amid China Uproar. *Wall Street Journal* (2019).

93. Taylor, G. China warns Apple over 'unwise' support of Hong Kong protesters in wake of NBA flap. *Washington Times* (2019).

94. Statt, N. Apple removes Quartz news app from the Chinese App Store over Hong Kong coverage. *The Verge* (2019).

95. Ghaffary, S. Google employees are fighting over their company's decision to ban a Hong Kong protest video game app. *Vox* (2019).

96. Bloomberg. Hong Kong's police force said to have access to facial recognition AI tech – but are they using it? *SCMP* (2019).

97. SCMP. Hong Kong protests: police use court orders to obtain protesters' digital fare payment details in another weekend of petrol bombs, tear gas and fires on the streets. *SCMP* (2019).

98. SCMP. As it happened: how Beijing expressed 'resolute support' for Hong

Kong's government. *SCMP* (2019).

99. SCMP. Hong Kong's government and police 'completely capable' of protecting law and order, key Beijing official says, ruling out need for PLA to be mobilised. *SCMP* (2019).

100. CGTN. 'Gang of 4': Who is misleading the young in HK? *CGTN* https://news.cgtn.com/news/2019-08-15/-Gang-of-4-Who-is-misleading-the-young-in-HK--JbabOpaus0/index.html (2019).

101. Sheng, Y. Central govt official identifies HK turmoil as 'color revolution' for first time. *Globaltimes* http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1160700.shtml (2019).

102. Xinhuanet. Commissioner's office of Chinese foreign ministry urges U.S. politicians to remove 'black hands' from Hong Kong. *Xinhuanet* http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-09/28/c_138431591.htm (2019).

103. Cochrane, E., Wong, E. & Bradsher, K. Trump Signs Hong Kong Democracy Legislation, Angering China. *The New York Times* (2019).

104. Sha, S. Big Four accounting firms assailed on HK stance. *Globaltimes* http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1161617.shtml (2019).

105. Kelly, M. Facebook and Twitter uncover Chinese trolls spreading doubts about Hong Kong protests. *The Verge* https://www.theverge.com/2019/8/19/20812621/twitter-facebook-china-hong-kong-protests-information-operation-disinfo (2019).

106. Twitter, H. K. P. Tweet Thread. *Twitter* https://twitter.com/hkpoliceforce/status/1196010243693498369 (2019).

107. Straitstimes. Hong Kong man set on fire after arguing with democracy protesters. *Straitstimes* (2019).

108. Chen, L. Wife of Hong Kong man set on fire after row with vandals tells Chinese state television of heartbreak at injuries. *SCMP* (2019).

109. Japan Times. From Pocari Sweat to Cathay Pacific, Hong Kong pro-democracy 'sins' fuel boycott calls in China. *Japan Times* (2019).

110. Cheung, E. & May, T. 'Big Brother' in the Sky: Cathay Pacific Workers Feel China's Pressure. *The New York Times* (2019).

111. May, T. Cathay Pacific's Chairman Resigns as China Pressures Hong Kong Business. *The New York Times* (2019).

112. Kwok, D. & Roantree, A. M. Hong Kong unions urge Cathay Pacific to end 'white terror'. *Reuters* (2019).

113. The Chief Executive's 2019 Policy Address. *HK Govt* https://www.policyaddress.gov.hk/2019/eng/pdf/PA2019.pdf (2019).

114. Cheung, T. Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam announces fourth round of relief measures for economy battered by anti-government protests. *SCMP* (2019).

115. Kang-chung, N. Tax breaks, goodies in HK$120 billion package aimed at keeping 'still fertile' Hong Kong afloat through social unrest and coronavirus outbreak. *SCMP* (2020).

116. Tsang, D. *et al.* Hong Kong budget to hit record deficit of HK$139 billion with relief measures of HK$10,000 per individual and full loan backing for small firms. *SCMP* (2020).

117. Hong Kong Public Opinion Research Institute. Poll: Economic Problems in Hong Kong. *Hong Kong Public Opinion Research Institute* https://www.pori.hk/pop-poll/current-condition/n006 (2019).

118. Hong Kong Public Opinion Research Institute. Poll: Livelihood Problems in Hong Kong. *Hong Kong Public Opinion Research Institute* https://www.pori.hk/pop-poll/current-condition/n009 (2019).

119. Ying-kit, L. & Tam, J. CE shelves national education guidelines after panel report. *SCMP* (2012).

120. Lai, R. & Wu, J. Hong Kong Election Results Mapped. *The New York Times* (2019).

121. Allegretti, D. Toilet Stops and Encrypted Apps: How Hong Kong's Protests Are Coordinated. *VICE* (2019).

122. BBC. The Hong Kong protests explained in 100 and 500 words. *BBC* https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-49317695 (2019).

123. Westcott, B., Hollingsworth, J. & Hu, C. Hong Kong protesters march to US Consulate to call for help from Trump. *CNN* (2019).

124. RTHK. CE says huge rise in protests proves HK is free. *RTHK* https://news.rthk.hk/rthk/en/component/k2/1518853-20200404.htm (2020).

125. BBC. Hong Kong protests: Flights cancelled as thousands occupy airport. *BBC* (2019).

126. Jim, C. & Zaharia, M. Hong Kong recession deepens as virus outbreak darkens outlook. *Reuters* (2020).

127. Wordie, J. How Hong Kong police, once considered 'Asia's finest', fell from grace. *SCMP* (2019).

128. Chan, Y. Oathgate will hurt Hong Kong democracy. *Al Jazeera* (2016).

129. Al Jazeera. Pro-democracy groups gain ground in Hong Kong election. *Al Jazeera* https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/09/counting-key-hong-kong-elections-160905035900730.html (2016).

130. HKFP. 4 more elected pro-democracy lawmakers to be ousted following Hong Kong court ruling. *Hong Kong Free Press* (2017).

131. Wong, N. Hong Kong at 'critical point' in safeguarding national security, Beijing's envoy says. *SCMP* (2020).