

Chapter 1

Introduction

“Organization is the road to power, but it is also the foundation of political stability and thus the precondition of political liberty.” Samuel Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*

Political repression is pervasive in China. Direct elections do not exist beyond the village level. There is no opposition party in sight. In fact, it is not just the opposition party, as one would neither find any non-state-sanctioned civil society organization with a national presence. The absence of such an organization is the result of the state’s stringent regulations on civil society. This heavy-handed control reflects the Chinese authorities’ fear of subversive mass mobilization organized at the national level. An effective way to reduce such kind of collective political actions is to segregate social groups from each other. When social groups cannot freely communicate with each other, the authorities can effectively nip subversive elements in the bud. This is why Chinese authorities also dictate the media with an iron fist. Many foreign Web sites, including *Facebook* and *YouTube*, are blocked in China. Sensitive words – that is, words that are censored from online search engines – number in the hundreds. Hundreds of thousands of undercover online commentators, known as the “fifty-cent party,” are also reportedly hired to manufacture public opinions.

The manifestations of political repression discussed above, namely, the low degree of media freedom, the absence of a robust civil society, the paucity of electoral competition, and the lack of a resilient opposition force, form a popular impression of the Chinese authoritarian state. But an interesting question to ask is, will democracy arrive in China when these unfavorable factors recede? Or to put it in another way, can authoritarianism survive in China without such political repression?

The best way to find an answer to these questions is to conduct a political experiment: introduce direct elections of government officials, permit the existence of opposition parties, remove regulations on civil society, and tear down the controls of the media. Then, after implementing all these changes, observe whether or not

the single-party dictatorship can maintain its dominant position. Such an experiment would no doubt sound like a sheer fantasy to many. But few are aware that a similar political experiment has actually been running for more than 15 years somewhere in China. That experiment is called Hong Kong.

It was in 1997 when the British transferred sovereignty of Hong Kong back to China, and since then, Chinese authorities have demonstrated a high degree of self-restraint in their management of Hong Kong affairs. They have also shown willingness to preserve and adapt to the political order left by the colonial administration. Remarkably, the “one country, two systems” principle allows Hong Kong to retain its own political institutions that are distinct from those in the PRC. Hong Kong people have continued to more or less enjoy the same level of civil liberties that they had in the last decade of British colonial rule. For instance, opposition media have been permitted to exist, so, too, with prodemocracy opposition parties whose political ascendancy was largely built upon an anti-Communist sentiment pervasive in Hong Kong prior to the sovereignty transfer. They can contest half of the legislative seats in competitive elections that are generally considered free and uncorrupted. However, tolerance does not mean endorsement. While Beijing allows these opposition parties to exist, it has cultivated political parties to represent its own interests and, above all, to counter the political influences of the opposition force.

This book is about this ongoing political experiment that Beijing has run since 1997. It studies how a relatively liberal media environment, competitive elections, and the interaction of these factors have shaped the balance of power between the opposition force and the Beijing-sponsored elite in the democratic enclave of China that is Hong Kong.¹ Paradoxically, it is the latter who consistently benefits from the mixture of these seemingly prodemocracy factors. In this book, I provide an explanation for why Hong Kong’s prodemocracy elite ends up failing to turn these factors to their own advantage.

The book centers on the politics of Hong Kong, which is only one city in China. The lessons drawn from a single city may have limited bearings on other parts of this vast country. However, what makes Hong Kong a valuable analytical case is precisely its uniqueness. There is no other place in China where people can enjoy such a high degree of media freedom. The heavy-handed state repression that is commonplace in China is also absent in Hong Kong. However unique Hong Kong is, the strategies Beijing has deployed to rule the city should not look wholly unfamiliar to students of Chinese politics. As I will show in the subsequent chapters, there are actually striking similarities between Beijing’s Hong Kong policies and the strategic maneuvers of the early Chinese Communist Party (CCP). For this reason, by studying how Beijing manages Hong Kong and succeeds in sidelining the prodemocracy opposition, we are able to see that repression is not the only factor underpinning the long-running resilience of its authoritarian rule.

¹By calling Hong Kong a “democratic enclave,” I do not mean that the political system of Hong Kong is fully democratic. I use the term in the same sense as Gilley (2010) does; a democratic enclave is defined as a well-defined geographical region “where the authoritarian regime’s writ is substantively limited and is replaced by an adherence to recognizably democratic norms and procedures (p. 390).”

Of course, this book is also intended to engage the literature on Hong Kong politics. Many extant studies in this field focus predominantly on events and changes that occur in Hong Kong, paying surprisingly little attention to Beijing's overarching strategy, which has cast a long shadow on the political development of postcolonial Hong Kong. This glaring omission is unwarranted. As I will show in this book, one cannot fully understand contemporary Hong Kong politics without considering the Beijing factor.

1.1 Media Environment and Civil Society in Hong Kong

Although the government of Hong Kong has never been democratically elected, Hong Kong citizens have retained a high degree of civil liberties, including media freedom, despite the city's sovereignty transfer to the People's Republic of China in 1997. According to the 2013 World Press Freedom Index, published by Reporters Without Borders, Hong Kong ranked the world's 58th, a notch below Italy.

The high level of freedom of expression can be attested by the presence of a relentless opposition media company, Next Media. Its flagship newspaper, the *Apple Daily*, habitually produces cartoons, opinion pieces, political commentaries, and even online videos which openly mock or lambast government leaders. Thanks to its diligent paparazzi, this tabloid-style newspaper also regularly features exposés of the wrongdoings of political figures and government officials. More remarkably, Next Media dares to challenge not only local leaders but even the Chinese authorities. Its editorials frequently complain against the Chinese authorities for mishandling Hong Kong affairs, including their lack of commitment to the implementation of universal suffrage in the city. Because Hong Kong citizens generally support democratization, the *Apple Daily's* daring approach and unambiguous prodemocracy stance help earn it huge readership, making it one of the most widely circulated newspapers in Hong Kong for the past two decades.²

In addition to a high degree of freedom of its press, residents of Hong Kong continue to enjoy unbridled access to the Internet. Political Web sites are not blocked from public access, nor does there exist a list of sensitive keywords which are made invisible from online search engines. No one has also been sued for posting negative comments about political leaders on the Internet.³

²This is not to say that political interference in the media is completely absent in Hong Kong. Ma (2007b) points out that media companies and frontline reporters do face subtle political and economic pressures from the authorities, and self-censorship is not uncommon among some media workers. In recent years, there have also been a few incidents in which the government sued or arbitrarily detained reporters.

³Mainland citizens are blocked from seeing many Hong Kong newspapers and Web sites. Although in some regions of China citizens are able to watch Hong Kong's live television broadcasts, there exists a real-time monitoring system that replaces politically sensitive contents with TV commercials.

If citizens perceive no fear of political persecution, they would not restrain their contempt for the people in power. Indeed, many Hong Kong people feel comfortable using the Internet to express their discontent with the government. *Facebook* and *Weibo*, the Chinese version of *Twitter*, are the most common tools, as they allow users to leave and share quick comments on current affairs. There is also a panoply of online discussion forums where users can find a specific page dedicated to the discussion of political events. Apparently, not every citizen can afford the time of writing political commentaries or engaging in lengthy political discussion. Yet even busy citizens are able to benefit from these online media because, for example, they can easily subscribe to the *Facebook* fan pages of online opinion leaders and thereby constantly get updates on the latest political talking points.

The high degree of media freedom that Hong Kong enjoys is remarkable, considering that nondemocratic governments generally dislike free media. This is not only because autocrats, like ordinary people, are averse to criticisms, but also because free media undermine their political power. When media are controlled, citizens hear mostly the glorification of the regime. News about policy failures goes unreported and citizens can hardly receive information about the regime's unpopularity.⁴ This lack of access to true political information and criticisms of rulers prevents any effective mass mobilization against the regime for one obvious reason: deposing an autocrat is an extremely risky endeavor. Citizens are generally reluctant to participate in anti-regime activities unless they are certain that a large number of people are also willing to get involved (Chwe 2003). No one would be willing to take the risk of being the only person protesting on the streets against an autocrat.

When media are free, citizens have easy access and read both good and bad reports about the autocracy. They can also initiate public discourse on policies, exchange views on the regime, and, perhaps more importantly, communicate among themselves about possible collective actions. When the unpopularity of the ruling elite becomes common knowledge, every disgruntled citizen is aware that he is not alone in his dissatisfaction. Their disincentive for participating in anti-regime protests therefore decreases as a result.

For fear of such collective political actions, many autocracies are willing to spend a considerable amount of state resources limiting media freedom as a way of suppressing the communication of subversive ideas. Common tactics include silencing critics using legal or illegal means, blocking the free flow of information with media censorship and online surveillance,⁵ and manufacturing public opinions through the use of propaganda or undercover commentators.

⁴Many studies have shown that media freedom is conducive to good governance. See, for example, Adsera et al. (2003), Brunetti and Weder (2003), and Treisman (2007)

⁵Some media are easier to control than others because the technologies involved are more centralized. Edmond (2013) provides a formal model to show that more decentralized sources of information, epitomized by social media, make overthrowing a dictator easier.

Given the high level of media freedom in Hong Kong, it is not surprising to see that the city's media have played an important role in facilitating political activities. The prime example that illustrates the mobilization power of media is the July 1, 2003 protest, where half a million people took to the streets to vent their anger at the Chief Executive. Although at that time, social media had yet to gain its current popularity, the Internet itself already showed its great potential as an effective mobilization tool; prior to the protest, many people voluntarily sent mass emails and instant messages to urge their friends and relatives to take part in the rally. The high turnout was in part due to the unprecedented emergence of a huge volume of these online messages. One indicator of this word-of-mouth effect according to one study (Chan and Chung 2003) is that 93 % of the demonstrators joined the protest in the company of their acquaintances. More interestingly, more than half of the respondents could not remember whether the idea of joining the demonstration was first raised by themselves or their friends. Taking to the streets became not only common knowledge but also a common calling.

Some traditional media also took an active role in mobilizing the political rally. In the month leading up to the protest, popular phone-in radio programs were swamped with calls of angry citizens who made harsh comments about the administration. As expected, Next Media also published numerous news articles and reports that faulted the government for mishandling the economy and for other policy failures. On the day of the protest, the *Apple Daily* even featured a full-page, colored protest poster that read "No Tung Chee-hwa," in reference to the former Chief Executive. During the procession, countless demonstrators were waving this poster while chanting "Down with Tung."

The July 1, 2003 protest is arguably a highly unusual political event such that its effective use of information technology for popular mobilization has not been exploited in other collective political actions. For one thing, no public demonstration after 2003 has achieved the same level of turnout, despite the increasing prevalence of social media and smart phones. However, Hong Kong observers generally agree that collective political actions have shown no sign of abatement in Hong Kong since 2003, as evidenced by the proliferation of politically active concern groups focusing on different social issues, ranging from the conservation of historic buildings and the right to local self-government to a movement against politically indoctrinated education. All of these groups have tried, in one way or another, to take advantage of the mobilization power of the Internet. Their basic tool kits include Web sites, *Facebook*, and *Twitter*. Activists with technology savvy would also produce eye-catching multimedia objects such as infographics and videos to attract followers and promote their movements.

There are also cases where a movement itself was born from the Internet. A notable example was the 2012 Anti-Patriotic Education Movement, which culminated in an occupation of the government headquarters by tens of thousands of citizens. The movement was directed against the government's plan of implementing a national education curriculum, which was viewed by many as political indoctrination. The causes of such a large-scale social movement were complex, but suffice it to say that the movement did not gain traction – or go viral – until several

concerned parents created a *Facebook* page entitled “National Education Parents Concern Group” just two months prior to the occupation. That page provided a focal point for concerned citizens to share information and connect with each other.

1.2 Elections in Hong Kong

As already discussed, a free media creates opportunities for undermining authoritarian regimes. Given the high degree of freedom of expression and an increasingly vocal civil society in Hong Kong, one would expect that opposition parties would have an easy time building their political clout. Surprisingly, the reality is quite the opposite.

A useful indicator of parties’ political influences is their seat shares in the parliament. In Hong Kong, although the Chief Executive is not democratically elected, half of the seats of the city’s legislature, known as the Legislative Council (or the LegCo), are decided by universal suffrage every four years. These elected seats, also known as the geographical constituencies, are the major battlefield between two political camps: (a) the pro-establishment camp consisting of Beijing-sponsored parties and (b) the pan-democratic camp constituted by prodemocracy opposition parties.⁶ These two political camps are archrivals. While the latter actively promotes the cause of democratization, the former advocates a Chinese-style patriotism, namely, supporting the single-party regime.

In the final years before the city’s sovereignty transfer, the opposition elite had gained a dominant position in the colonial legislature, owing to its prodemocracy political stance, which held a strong appeal for the former colony that had been gripped by a fear of Communist rule. After 1997, Beijing wielded the power to rewrite the rules of the game in the city. It kept a limit on the number of directly elected seats for fear that the opposition elite would ride on the wave of its popularity to control the legislature of the newly established Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR). The non-directly elected seats, known as the functional constituencies, have been overrepresented by pro-Beijing interests and have been widely perceived to be a stumbling block to the city’s democratization.

While the existence of the functional constituencies has significantly limited the influence of the pan-democrats in the legislature, the geographical constituencies provide a relatively level playing field for the pan-democratic camp to demonstrate its popular support and hence political power vis-à-vis the pro-establishment camp. The vote and seat shares of the two political camps in the geographical constituencies are displayed in Fig. 1.1.

As seen clearly from the graphs, the pan-democratic camp has consistently obtained more than 50 % of the vote in all elections. Nevertheless, what is striking

⁶In this book, the terms “pan-democratic camp” and “prodemocracy elite” are used interchangeably.

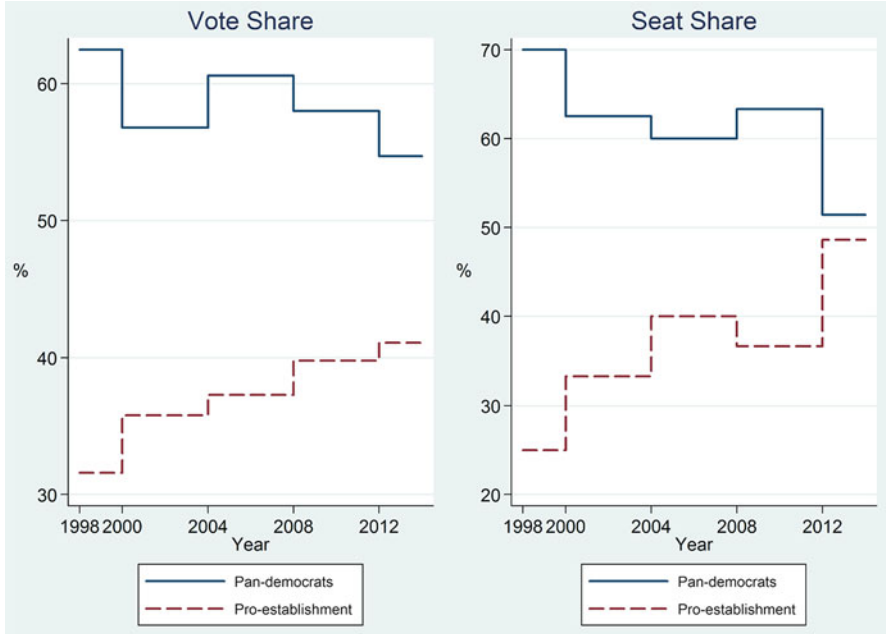


Fig. 1.1 Vote and seat shares of the two political camps in Hong Kong's geographical constituencies since 1997

about Fig. 1.1 does not lie in the levels, but in the changes. The gap between the two camps with respect to either their vote share or their seat share has been narrowing over time. In particular, the vote share of the pro-establishment camp (dashed line) has steadily increased at the expense of the pan-democratic camp. More strikingly, the difference between their seat shares has shrunk more rapidly than that of their vote share. Within 12 years, their seat share difference had been reduced from about 40% to less than 4%. If the vote share received by a party in a direct election is a valid measure of its popularity among voters, Fig. 1.1 would no doubt indicate an unambiguous rising trend of the pro-establishment camp's popularity.

1.3 The Puzzle

Juxtaposing the electoral performance of the pro-establishment camp with our early discussion of Hong Kong's media environment, one sees a puzzling picture. On the one hand, because of the existence of a high degree of freedom of expression and freedom of association, there are Hong Kong media outlets that are highly critical of the government, and such media are popular among the people. Also, the city possesses an increasingly vocal civil society that has demonstrated in various

occasions its readiness for and its capability of mass mobilization (most notably, the July 1, 2003 protest and the 2014 Umbrella Movement). On the other hand, Hong Kong is witnessing an uninterrupted rising trend in the electoral popularity of some Beijing-sponsored pro-establishment parties, who are well known for their lack of support for the promotion of democratization. Compared with mass mobilization, the participation cost of voting is significantly lower. When more people are willing to take part in costly mass mobilization to defend their interests, why would fewer and fewer people use a relatively low-cost means – that is, their votes – to punish the parties that stand in the way of universal suffrage, their fundamental political right?

On the surface, one possible explanation is that those who participate in mass mobilization are not a representative sample of the population. That is, while mass mobilization has increased in number and scale, the majority of citizens remain inactive in these social movements, and the silent majority actually favors the political status quo or could be indifferent to democratization.

However, upon closer examination, this explanation is factually problematic. While it is true that frontline social activists are always in the minority, the demand for democratization in Hong Kong is by no means feeble. The Basic Law of Hong Kong, the city's mini-constitution, stipulates that the selection of the Chief Executive will be ultimately conducted by universal suffrage. How to reform the current political system in order to achieve that ultimate aim has been an ongoing and highly charged public issue in Hong Kong since the sovereignty transfer. At each round of the negotiations between the government and the pan-democratic camp over political reforms, polls conducted at different points in time found overwhelming public support for implementing universal suffrage at the soonest possible time. For instance, in 2007, the Public Opinion Program of the University of Hong Kong showed that almost 60% of the respondents opined that Hong Kong should be ripe for universal suffrage by 2012, the time when the next Chief Executive is selected. The Chinese University of Hong Kong conducted a similar survey in 2011 and found that 79% of the respondents supported the immediate implementation of universal suffrage in both the Chief Executive and the LegCo elections. These surveys present essentially the same picture: the majority of the Hong Kong population has deemed political democratization long overdue. The fact that most people remain inactive in social movements does not imply that they are complacent about the political status quo.

Nor can electoral frauds explain away the puzzle. Most authoritarian regimes that hold elections adopt a secret ballot (Geddes 2005), as in the case of Hong Kong. In other words, for ordinary voters, the cost of voting against the pro-establishment camp is actually very low. Furthermore, electoral violence is virtually nonexistent in Hong Kong, and there have never been reports of voters being coerced to vote (or not to vote) for a certain party. Although several incidents of “ghost votes” were discovered in the 2011 District Council election, no evidence shows that these votes, which were too sporadic, had ever decided any election outcome. In the absence of other electoral frauds such as ballot stuffing and postelection vote rigging, elections of the geographical constituencies in Hong Kong are generally viewed as free and uncorrupted.

Economic factors also have limited explanatory power. Since 1997, the small open economy of Hong Kong has weathered the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, the 2000 Dot-Com Bubble Burst, and the Global Financial Crisis between 2007 and 2008. Despite the occurrence of these economic shocks, the pro-establishment camp, as Fig. 1.1 shows, has managed to maintain an uninterrupted rising trend with respect to its vote share received in legislative elections. Their resilient electoral performance, however, does not imply that the government has done a great job managing the economy, such that voters would show their approval of the government by voting for the pro-establishment parties. In fact, the first Chief Executive, Tung Chee-hwa, stepped down in the midst of a protracted economic downturn. His successor, Donald Tsang, was widely viewed as incapable of containing the soaring housing price and eradicating the perceived “collusion between government and business.” Tsang’s term ended in 2012, with his popularity rating plummeting to 39%, only slightly higher than Tung’s record low. Remarkably, in the same year, the pro-establishment camp achieved its best electoral performance in history.

Part of the reason why the pro-establishment camp could stay unaffected by unpopular Chief Executives is that the executive branch has been made insulated from party politics; the law stipulates that the Chief Executive cannot be a member of any political party. As a result, despite the brazen image of the pro-establishment parties as staunch supporters of the government, they can at times distance themselves from policy failures committed by the Chief Executive. This shows why economic factors have only limited explanatory power over the increasing popularity of the pro-establishment camp.

This book aims to provide a more nuanced explanation for why voters who support democracy nevertheless vote for pro-Communist policy makers. This puzzle cannot be solved without a thorough understanding of the strategic interaction between the ruling elite and the opposition parties in the presence of a high degree of media freedom and diverse voter preferences. The coexistence of the increasingly popular ruling elite and an increasingly assertive civil society and relatively liberal media environment is, as I discuss later, not a coincidence. It is precisely the presence of this liberal media environment that sets a limit on the electoral appeal of the opposition force among voters, which in turn helps the ruling elite strengthen its own electoral support. In other words, quite contrary to the conventional wisdom, the analysis in this book provides a different perspective on the effects of media freedom in authoritarian regimes. Media freedom is a double-edged sword; it can limit the opposition’s popularity in the same way that it can undermine political support for the authoritarian incumbent.

1.4 My Argument

In democracies, an important function of elections is to allow voters to choose desirable policies. When the incumbent’s policy fails to deliver results, voters can oust him by voting for the opposition that advocates an alternative policy. Even

if the policies of the incumbent and the opposition sometimes look very much alike, this does not imply politicians ignore what voters want. On the contrary, their similarity in policy may suggest that voter preference has affected both the incumbent and the opposition such that they both adopt voters' most preferred policy in order to maximize their respective chances of getting elected. Scholars who study voting behaviors (Black 1958; Downs 1957) have long observed that such policy convergence occurs most often in a majoritarian election system.

Elections in authoritarian regimes are quite different. Although many consider elections as a defining feature of democracies, a large number of autocracies actually hold regular, and somewhat competitive, elections, especially after the end of the Cold War (Levitsky and Way 2010). Some view such elections as no more than a facade of democracy. However, a fast-growing literature in comparative politics shows that elections in authoritarian regimes do have significant political effects such as enhancing regime survival (Cheibub et al. 2010; Gandhi 2008; Magaloni 2006). This is not to say that by holding elections, an autocracy can become forever immune to political instability. Some studies show the possibility of "democratization by election," in which the authoritarian incumbent is voted out of office, resulting in a transition to democracy (Lindberg 2006; Schedler 2002; Bratton and Van de Walle 1997). Such a possibility notwithstanding, few would dispute that a level playing field is nonexistent in autocratic elections, and the opposition elite has to fight an uphill battle against the incumbent (Levitsky and Way 2010). In most cases, the chance of defeating the incumbent is vanishingly small.

When removing an incumbent through elections is very unlikely, elections lose their function of providing a mechanism for voters to select policies.⁷ Voters cannot simply replace the incumbent who carries out the policy, no matter how unpopular an existing policy is, with an opposition party that advocates an alternative. Under such circumstances, voters in authoritarian regimes should have little incentive to vote for the opposition (or to vote at all). Nevertheless, we do observe that opposition parties in many authoritarian elections receive a considerable amount of voter support. Why is it possible?

I argue that voters in authoritarian regimes, even fully aware of the flimsy chance of replacing the incumbent with the opposition through elections, would still vote for the latter for two reasons. First, they vote for the opposition in order to demonstrate their dissatisfaction with the incumbent. Even if they know that the opposition has a low chance of getting elected due to the lack of a level playing field, they may enjoy supporting the opposition because doing so can suppress the margin of victory of the incumbent party. A low margin of victory not only makes the incumbent party lose face but may also undermine the political stability of the regime. Magaloni (2008) observes that autocratic leaders have an incentive to run an expensive election campaign, even though the opposition is too weak to pose any serious challenge.

⁷This does not imply that citizens in autocracies have no way of affecting policies. Many studies show that even in authoritarian regimes, citizens still have some room to effect policy changes through channels other than elections such as public demonstration (O'Brien and Li 2006).

This is because by securing a high margin of victory through intensive campaigning, autocratic leaders can demonstrate their invincibility and hence prevent defection within the ruling elite, which is a major source of political instability in autocracies.⁸

In addition to the expression of dissatisfaction with the incumbent, voters in autocracies may vote for the opposition because of a personal connection. By personal connection, I refer to all kinds of personal relationships that connect a voter with an opposition candidate. For instance, they may come from the same clan, neighborhood, school, or religious sect. Apart from this primordial bonding, another common form of relationship comes from the distribution of patronage; the voter has received from the opposition candidate some personal favors, ranging from perks and privileges to constituency services such as grievance redress and legal consultation.⁹ Motivated by a sense of kinship, reciprocity, or moral obligation, voters may throw their support behind an opposition candidate, regardless of the candidate's chance of getting elected.

Assuming voters have heterogeneous preferences for protest and relationship with respect to voting, some cast the vote with an intention to punish the incumbent, while others are driven more by the personal relationship with the opposition candidate. Let us further assume that protest voters are more critical of the incumbent than relationship voters.¹⁰ From the opposition's point of view, attracting the protest vote and attracting the relationship vote both require different strategies and resource inputs. Given the significant resource constraint faced by the opposition in autocracies, an opposition candidate needs to solve a maximization problem: how to distribute his limited resources between the protest vote and the relationship vote in order to maximize his overall chance of getting elected.

This is where media freedom comes into play. When the media¹¹ environment is relatively liberal, which implies that the opposition is able to publicly question, challenge, or even condemn the ruling elite, the cost of attracting the protest vote would decrease relative to the cost of attracting the relationship vote. The opposition elite would be incentivized to take a more radical position against the incumbent.

⁸ This is not to say that voters who vote for the opposition are necessarily conscious of this indirect effect of their vote; that is, the probability of defection within the ruling elite is increased by suppressing the incumbent's margin of victory. For most who vote for the opposition, they simply vote to protest against the incumbent.

⁹ Many have written about the distribution of patronage in authoritarian regimes (e.g., Lust-Okar 2009; Diaz-Cayeros et al. 2003). But the extant literature focuses primarily on the political machine of the incumbent. In this book, I argue that even the opposition parties, once they get elected, can gain access to some form of resources that can help them provide constituency services or other patronage activities. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the incumbent enjoys far more resource advantages over any opposition party because the former has monopoly of access to state resources.

¹⁰ One interpretation of this assumption is that because these voters hold the incumbent in low regard, they are more inclined to cast a protest vote.

¹¹ In this book, I define the media as all kinds of channels through which ordinary citizens can acquire political information. By my definition, the media include newspapers, radio broadcasts, television stations, online forums, social media, and the like.

For example, members of the opposition elite may become more critical of the ruling elite, refuse to negotiate with the government, decry major government policies, organize more street protests, or simply try to “act tough” in the media. These moves are likely to please the protest voters, but not without cost. First, focusing on the protest vote inevitably reduces resources for the relationship vote. For instance, when members of the opposition elite devote more time on organizing street protests or appearing in radio talk shows to lambast the incumbent, their time spent on strengthening grassroots organization, including the provision of constituency services, is likely to decrease. Consequently, they may lose support from some voters who value such services. Second, pandering to the protest vote stimulates political radicalism, which is likely to move the ideological position of the opposition elite farther away from that of moderate voters. The electoral implication of this is that when moderate voters find the opposition’s virulent attack on the ruling elite deviate too much from what they have seen and personally experienced, they may start to question the opposition’s credibility or find the opposition unable to represent their interests, thereby reducing the opposition’s electoral support.

Moderate voters most likely exceed radical voters in number. Any rational opposition party, of course, would not court the protest vote at the expense of the relationship vote. However, a prodemocracy movement may consist of other stakeholders than a single opposition party. This is especially the case when the authoritarian state permits a certain degree of civil liberties. For example, civil society organizations may exist and actively participate in a prodemocracy movement. It is also possible to have multiple opposition parties, with some more radical than the others.¹² In short, not all stakeholders within a prodemocracy movement may share the same objective and face the same constituency as a “rational” opposition party that has an eye on moderate voters. Different political objectives lead to different kinds of opposition tactics. If the media are free to cover the opposition movement, civil society organizations or radical parties are likely to crowd out moderate opposition parties in the news due to the formers’ willingness to adopt unconventional, if not controversial, tactics. When radical views dominate the media’s coverage of the prodemocracy movement, moderate voters are alienated. This explains why we may observe a decline in electoral support of the entire opposition camp even in the presence of opposition parties that build political support on the relationship vote.

From the ruling elite’s point of view, undermining the opposition’s electoral support is not a sufficient guarantee of its political survival. Holding an election would entail political uncertainties, however small they are, because voter preference is never perfectly predictable. Dictators do not want to hold elections unless they find that the risk of being ousted is vanishingly small. For all dictators,

¹²I use “moderate” and “radical” only in a relative sense. A “radical” party is defined as one that is more receptive to the use of extreme methods to achieve its political goals and less willing to make compromise. Extreme methods do not necessarily imply political violence.

they have to face a quintessential question: How can they calculate the electoral uncertainty *ex ante*?¹³ Investing in the relationship vote is an effective way to reduce such an electoral uncertainty. Attracting the relationship vote requires a large-scale distribution of patronage, which cannot be accomplished without a well-functioning political machine. It is this political machine that assists the ruling elite to collect detailed information on voter preference (Blaydes 2010). Such information is useful not only for calculating its electoral risk but also for efficiently allocating resources to buy political support.

My theory highlights a strategic dilemma confronting the opposition elite. As Schedler (2002) observes, the prodemocracy opposition has two political objectives when participating in an authoritarian election. On the one hand, it attempts to capture elected offices in the formal political institution. On the other hand, it struggles to change the same political institution that is the source of the fundamental political inequality. While some scholars view that these two objectives are mutually reinforcing – that is, gaining a seat in a dictator-controlled legislature is conducive to the overall democratization prospect – my theory suggests that the relationship between the two is more complicated. For one thing, courting the protest vote may increase the probability of getting elected by shoring up the support of the protest voters, but it runs the risk of alienating the moderate voters and thereby limiting the popular appeal of the opposition as a credible leading force behind a prodemocracy movement.

My theory can be applied to understand the political development of Hong Kong after 1997 and explain the puzzle discussed above. Thanks to the existence of a relatively liberal media environment, the media have been playing an important role in monitoring the government. Media companies, most notably Next Media, frequently expose not only the wrongdoings of the government but also the undemocratic nature of the political system. In the 1990s and early years after the sovereignty transfer, opposition parties were major beneficiaries of this liberal media environment. As the prodemocracy media openly criticized the undemocratic political institutions, the opposition force, just by virtue of being an opposition to the regime, could automatically establish credentials as a defender of political rights for ordinary people. Such credentials paid off handsomely during early post-transfer elections.

Beijing-sponsored parties, as part of the ruling elite, knew that they could hardly compete with their opposition counterparts over the protest vote. However, they could encroach on the opposition's relationship vote. Since 1997, major pro-establishment parties such as the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong (DAB) have stepped up their effort in the provision

¹³The incumbent, when defeated, always has an option of rigging the vote after the election. But vote rigging involves additional political uncertainties. Blatant electoral fraud would provide a focal point for mass mobilization of voters to protest "stolen elections" (Bunce and Wolchik 2006). In other words, *ex post* vote rigging is not necessarily a solution to the incumbent's *ex ante* risk of being deposed in an election.

of patronage activities and the development of grassroots support networks and organizations. This has posed a serious challenge to the pan-democrats, who needed to spend significantly more for resources over constituency services, if they wanted to compete with Beijing-sponsored parties. In other words, the grassroots efforts of the Beijing-sponsored parties have substantially increased their rivals' cost of attracting the relationship vote. This also implies that for the pan-democrats, the relative cost of attracting the protest vote has been lowered. A practical consequence of this is that political radicalism has been on the rise in the past decade, and many opposition parties find it more cost-effective to shore up political support by acting tough on the government, which can often get media attention, rather than to commit more resources on mundane constituency services. The gradual change in the ideological position of the opposition camp has weakened its electoral support as a whole for two reasons. First, it has alienated some of the moderate supporters of the prodemocracy movement. Second, as the opposition parties provide fewer constituency services, they have lost relationship voters and have been crowded out by pro-establishment parties in local districts. A shrinking grassroots network poses a serious threat to the long-term development of these opposition parties.

A caveat is in order. Although my argument suggests that free media may limit the opposition's electoral strength under a given condition, this is not to suggest that a liberal media environment is necessarily an obstacle to democratization. Media freedom certainly helps citizens monitor the ruling elite and communicate with each other, reducing the information cost of mass mobilization. Nor do I argue that elections are the only possible means of democratic transition. Indeed, the majority of authoritarian leaders in history were toppled through revolutions and coups d'état. The ouster of Hosni Mubarak, the former dictator of Egypt, is a case in point. He was overthrown by hundreds of thousands of ordinary Egyptians who gathered in Cairo's Tahrir Square in protest of his autocracy. Although the media environment of Egypt under Mubarak was far from liberal, protesters did use social media to organize among themselves at least in the early stage of the protest. Some Western media even characterize Egypt's uprising as a Facebook Revolution (Huffington Post 2011; Washington Post 2011).

Perhaps one day Hong Kong's civil society will be able to produce similar mass mobilization as in Egypt which demolished the authoritarian edifice. But this will not downplay the political significance of opposition parties in the struggle for democracy, which is the focus of this book. The reason is that the current opposition parties will not vanish after a successful democratic transition. Rather, they will play a decidedly more important role in a democratic system. If these parties are ineffectual, the nascent democratic system may not be able to take root, as with the case of post-Mubarak Egypt.

This underlines the importance of studying elections if one wants to understand Hong Kong politics. Hong Kong is in the midst of a protracted democratic transition. The tug-of-war between Beijing and the prodemocracy elite over whether, when, and how universal suffrage should be implemented has eclipsed all other issues in the realm of politics. But successful democratization does not end in the moment when universal suffrage is adopted. The political survival of a democratic system

depends on whether the ruling and opposition coalitions both accept that democratic elections are the “only game in town.” For this reason, studying how authoritarian elections have benefited or undermined opposition parties is central to our ability to understand Hong Kong’s democratization in the past and future and hence Hong Kong politics in general. This is also the reason why this book focuses on electoral politics.

1.5 Why Hong Kong?

In this book, I have developed a theory about the competition between the ruling elite and the opposition force in authoritarian regimes that run regular elections (also known as competitive authoritarianism). My theory, which centers on the effects of two domestic factors – media environment and patronage activities – on electoral competitions, is broadly comparative because these factors exist to varying degrees in contemporary authoritarian regimes. Consider patronage activities. The scope and scale of patronage activities vary from autocracy to autocracy. While personalist regimes tend to deliver huge patronage benefits to a coterie of supporters, more institutionalized autocracies can mobilize their political machine to dole out privileges to more individual citizens.¹⁴ As for media environment, although many may equate autocracies with media controls, some authoritarian regimes actually have a relatively high tolerance of media freedom. Figure 1.2 displays the relationship between press freedom¹⁵ and political regimes.¹⁶ As may be seen from the figure, although press freedom is positively correlated with democracy in general, substantial variations exist within regime types. In fact, autocratic regimes such as Burkina Faso, Haiti, and Mauritania rank significantly higher in press freedom than many democracies including India, Mexico, and Turkey.¹⁷

The empirical evidence supporting my theory is drawn from the experience of Hong Kong after the sovereignty transition. I select post-1997 Hong Kong as my case for two reasons.

The first reason is that the unique experience of Hong Kong helps identify the causal effect of the variables of interest. On the surface, Hong Kong does not make

¹⁴Scholars of authoritarian politics have long noted that party institutionalization varies from autocracy to autocracy (Cheibub et al. 2010; Geddes 1999).

¹⁵The 2013 Press Freedom Index in Fig. 1.2 is published by Reporters Without Borders. It has been rescaled such that a high value indicates a high ranking of press freedom.

¹⁶The measure of political regime in Fig. 1.2 is taken from the Polity IV Project’s variable Polity2, which runs from –10 (full autocracy) to +10 (full democracy).

¹⁷Egorov et al. (2009) provide one explanation for why some autocracies tolerate relatively free media. They argue that free media help the incumbent in checking the performance of the bureaucrats. Even in China, criticisms of political leaders are not strictly prohibited. King et al. (2013) provide an interesting empirical analysis of millions of social media posts, which shows that online censorship is mostly aimed at forestalling social mobilization.

strength of the incumbent, which is precisely the outcome that one wants to study in the first place. As Gandhi and Lust-Okar (2009) correctly point out, two possibilities exist as to why opposition parties manage to oust the incumbents through elections in some authoritarian regimes:

It may be that electoral coalitions among opposition parties lead to their victory and control over the chief executive office, but it is equally plausible that already-weakened incumbents both allow opposition coalitions and desist from using fraud and manipulation as part of a predetermined 'step out' of power (p. 416).

Their observation suggests that unless we researchers can intervene in the data-generating process – that is, imposing a (strong) opposition force on an authoritarian regime that runs elections – we cannot measure to what extent the media empower or undermine the opposition, as the identified media effect by itself may merely signal the underlying strength of the incumbent, which is seldom observable.

Hong Kong serves as a valuable analytical case because it experienced an exogenous event in 1997. The sovereignty of Hong Kong was transferred to a resilient single-party dictatorship. In the decade before its handover, the city had witnessed the emergence of a strong prodemocracy opposition force, arguably fostered by the former colonial government. In other words, the nondemocratic government established in Hong Kong in 1997 was forced to inherit an opposition force, whose political power had been cultivated in the previous sovereign state. The strength of the opposition force at the time of the sovereignty transfer was therefore independent of the strength of the newly established government backed by the single-party dictatorship of the PRC. This helps eliminate the above methodological problems; that pro-Beijing parties can win seats in elections is not because the opposition parties are inherently weak, unpopular, or unknown to voters in the first place. Nor does the opposition's strength originate from an innate regime weakness. That is, it is not that the ruling elite, who came to govern Hong Kong after 1997, is lacking in organizational capacity or in resources that has led to the empowerment of the opposition.

In other words, Hong Kong's sovereignty transfer, unique as it is, provides a useful quasi-experimental setup, in which a strong incumbent is made to confront a strong opposition. It is useful because it helps deal with important confounding factors, so that we can single out the causal effect of the variables of interest. Concretely, when we can identify a certain effect of the causal variable on the election outcome, we are confident that the effect comes from the causal force of the variable of interest, rather than from other spurious relationships.

The analytical advantage of the Hong Kong case is also relevant to the studies of the Chinese authoritarian rule for the same reason. Political repression has been given much attention when analyzing the resilient performance of the regime such that one may wonder what else the single-party dictatorship can count on to sustain its rule in the absence of its iron fist. It is difficult to uncover other important factors because repression has already become an inseparable part of Chinese politics. In this regard, Hong Kong, with its political system largely unmolested by the Chinese

government's repressive rule, presents an instructive analytical perspective to this question.

1.6 The Methodology

Because my argument is concerned with not only electoral competitions between the ruling elite and the opposition but also with civil society – in particular the role of the media – there is no single research methodology that is able to deal with so many issues all at once. I have to rely on a combination of methods to tackle various research challenges. For instance, when analyzing how opposition parties use the media as a mobilizing agent, I conduct a content analysis of thousands of news articles published during elections. When studying the causal effect of controlling District Councils on the election outcomes of the Legislative Council, I have to employ “large-N” statistical analyses. To verify the existence of “gerrymandering,” I need to make use of techniques related to geographic information systems (see Chap. 5 for details). The most daunting challenge is to assess Beijing's strategic considerations for governing postcolonial Hong Kong. Authoritarian regimes are opaque, and the PRC is no exception. Beijing would not announce how it plans to marginalize Hong Kong's prodemocracy parties.

One way to overcome this challenge is to plow through political leaders' speeches, memoirs, and biographies to look for clues. Speeches by top leaders such as Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin are easy to come by, but they usually contain only general guidelines. Fortunately, more and more senior Chinese officials in charge of Hong Kong affairs during the 1980s and 1990s have retired and published memoirs.¹⁸ Their works reveal more details about their political operations and the logic behind them. Biographies of important figures such as Liao Chengzhi and Deng Xiaoping provide an ample source in order to corroborate the data.

However, what is told in those publications may not accurately reflect the reality. Even if these senior leaders speak their mind, their plans can go seriously awry when it came to implementation due to the lack of cooperation from local officials. For this reason, in addition to written publications of senior leaders, I also conduct extensive interviews with many grassroots members of pro-Beijing parties in Hong Kong to gain insight into their perception of grassroots politics and the inner workings of the political machine that they run. I would not discount the possibility that the interviewees give biased comments or incomplete answers. Yet my experience suggests that these politicians, even those coming from the pro-Beijing camp, turn out to be more candid than I expected. Part of the reason is perhaps that many of them occupy a relatively low position in their party structure. As “foot soldiers” of a large political machine, they feel less pressured to guard the party's political

¹⁸They include Chen Zuoe, Li Hou, Lu Ping, Qian Qichen, Xu Jiatusun, Zhang Junsheng, and Zhou Nan.

strategies (or are less sensitive to such a need). Despite their willingness to share their experiences, I remain cautious on what they tell me and take advantage of the multiple interviews to cross-examine the validity of the interviewees' answers whenever possible.

All my pro-establishment interviewees occupy an elected office known as the District Councils. Altogether I interviewed about thirty current and former District Councillors between the mid-2012 and the mid-2014. While some of them identified themselves as politically independent, most District Councillors I interviewed come from either the pro-establishment camp or the prodemocracy one. Each interview lasted for at least an hour, and most of them took place in the District Councillors' office. In addition to District Councillors, I also interviewed some leading social activists and ordinary voters. For a list of my interviews conducted, see the Appendix.

1.7 Plan of the Book

This book is organized as follows. Chapter 2 presents my theory. In particular, I provide a simple game-theoretic model to explain how media freedom and patronage activities have shaped the electoral strategies of both the opposition and the pro-establishment elite. The game-theoretic model is not a mere formality. It allows me to derive testable hypotheses, which will be examined in the subsequent chapters.

Chapter 3 presents an overview of Hong Kong's political system and the development of the city's civil society. How did Hong Kong become China's democratic enclave? Why would the Chinese authoritarian state, which is notoriously draconian, permit the city to keep a relatively liberal political and media environment? How did the Chinese authoritarian state design the political institutions of Hong Kong in order to defend its political interests? I address these questions based on an analysis of the formal political institutions of postcolonial Hong Kong and the city's political developments in the 1980s and 1990s.

What pan-democratic parties did to overcome the obstacles to democratization, including the rising electoral challenges of the pro-establishment camp, is the focus of Chap. 4. I discuss the changing strategies of different pan-democratic parties and their causes. In particular, I highlight an underappreciated long-term electoral effect of the July 1, 2003 protest, the largest mass mobilization since the sovereignty transfer; it has diverted many pan-democrats' attention from the relationship vote to the protest vote.

Chapter 5 deals with a puzzle: why would some pro-establishment parties devote an enormous amount of resources to capturing the District Councils, the lowest elected tier of the government that has been generally viewed as politically insignificant? To answer this question, I first define pro-establishment parties in Hong Kong and touch on the changes and continuities of their relationship with the regime in China. Then I discuss how Beijing-sponsored parties have endeavored to

uproot the relationship vote as well as the grassroots network previously developed by the pan-democratic parties. The seemingly insignificant District Council offices turned out to carry far-reaching political influences, as they have become the political tool of the pro-establishment camp to undermine its rival. The reason for focusing on the District Councils is that as part of the formal government structure, the District Council office provides access to government resources, not to mention grassroots networks. Drawing on my interviews with the pro-establishment elite, I would discuss the inner workings of its grassroots political machine, and how this machine contributes to the electoral success of some Beijing-sponsored parties.

Chapter 6 examines the actual electoral effect of the relationship vote-oriented grassroots strategy of Beijing-sponsored parties and the pandering of the pan-democrats to the protest vote. Did the Beijing-sponsored parties' grassroots strategy really achieve their intended effect? In this chapter, I demonstrate not only how their grassroots strategy led to their electoral successes in the District Councils but also how occupying the District Councils allowed them to marginalize the pan-democrats in the major battlefield, the Legislative Council. The empirical evidence again challenges the conventional wisdom that the District Councils are politically insignificant.

In Chap. 7, I conclude with a discussion on possible lessons we can derive from the experience of postcolonial Hong Kong with respect to electoral competitions between the incumbent and the opposition in the setting of competitive authoritarian regimes.