

District Council Election Forecast November 2003

Based on a survey conducted 4-12 November 2003 (N = 835)

Civic Exchange/Hong Kong Transition Project

Michael E. DeGolyer, Briefing author
Director, Hong Kong Transition Project

Political tsunami

Civic Exchange commissioned and the Hong Kong Transition Project conducted a random telephone survey of 835 permanent residents of Hong Kong between 4 and 12 November. The survey, mainly focused on constitutional reform issues, included questions examining voters and non-voters attitudes toward the current functioning of aspects of the present political system, including performance of the Chief Executive, the government, and political parties. While the main report of this survey on constitutional reforms will be released in mid-December, those aspects relevant to November 23rd's District Council elections are released below.

At 54 percentage points, the total range difference between the Democratic Party (DP) and the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment of Hong Kong (DAB) has never been greater in any election in which the two parties have competed (since 1994). The gap is the difference between those dissatisfied with a party and those satisfied with the party's performance. More dissatisfied than satisfied gives a minus number; more satisfied than dissatisfied gives a plus number. At plus 6 points for DP versus minus 48 percentage points for the DAB, the range is thus a total of 54 points, from plus 6 to minus 48. In 1999 the range was 10 points (+4 to -6)

Table 1 Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Hong Kong parties and leaders (Nov 2003)

	Dissatisfied 2003	Satisfied 2003	Difference +/- Nov 2003	know about party 03	Dissatisfied 1999	Satisfied 1999	Difference +/- NOV 1999	% know about party 99
Democratic Party led by Yeung Sum	47	53	+6	75	48	52	+4	79
DAB led by Tsang Yok-sing	74	26	-48	77	53	47	-6	69
LP led by James Tien	45	55	+10	71	60	40	-20	65
Frontier led by Emily Lau	49	51	+2	70	35	65	+30	72
CTU led by Lau Chin-shek	31	69	+38	65	29	71	+42	70
FTU led by Cheng Yiu Tong	60	41	-19	62	38	62	+24	57
HKPA led by Ambrose Lau	73	26	-47	39	67	33	-34	39
Citizens Party led by Alex Chan	45	54	+9	32	28	72	+44	62
HKADPL led by Fredrick Fung	29	71	+42	53	29	71	+42	59
New Century Forum by Ng Chingfai	56	44	-12	33	--	--	Nonexist	

*Numbers are percentages of those who plan to vote

The Liberal Party (LP) stands at the most positive position it has ever had. The FTU, a pro-government trade union is, for the very first time surveyed, in a negative position with likely voters, and at its largest gap with the CTU (57 points difference). The CTU is an independent albeit pro-democracy union association. All the pro-government parties but the LP show clear and huge drops in satisfaction with their performance. Only the Frontier and the Citizens Party (CP) among pro-democracy groups show a significant rise in dissatisfaction. Frontier has dropped from a positive 30-percentage point difference between those dissatisfied and satisfied in 1999 to a barely positive showing of plus 2 points in 2003. Citizens Party has fallen from 62 percent knowing about the party in 1999 down to only 32 percent in 2003, while those dissatisfied with its performance have risen from 28 percent in 1999 to 45 percent in 2003, though the CP remains in the positive by 9 points.

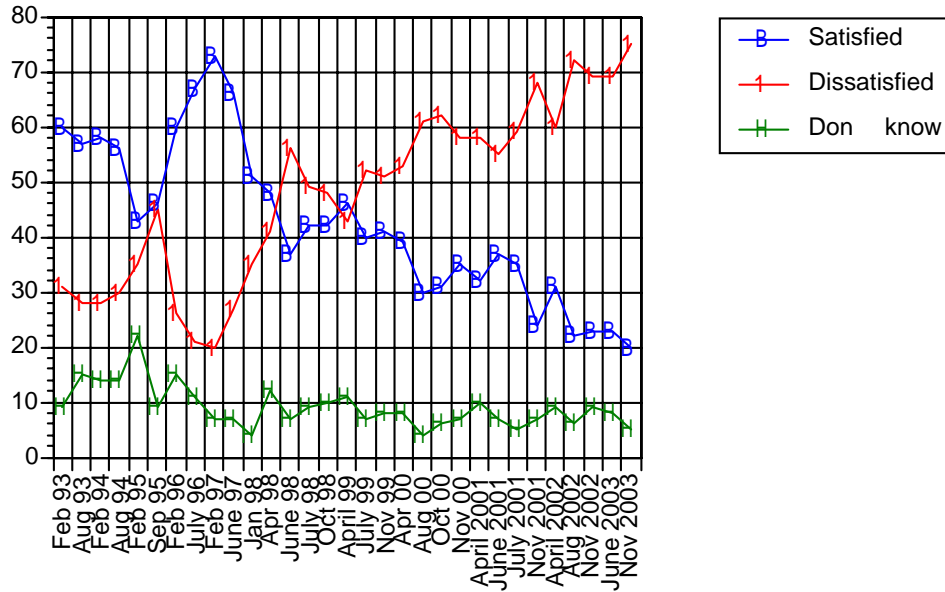
In terms of satisfaction with the Hong Kong Government's performance, never have so many been so dissatisfied, particularly among those who plan to vote. Only 17 percent of those planning to vote say they are satisfied with government's performance, while 78% of likely voters are dissatisfied, a statistically significant difference from the overall sample responses of 20 percent satisfied and 75 percent dissatisfied. A survey conducted two weeks before the 1 July march of over 500,000 people found 23 percent satisfied and 69 percent dissatisfied. If people marched in protest in surprising numbers on 1 July with a 69 percent level of dissatisfaction, a 75 percent level generally and a

78 percent level of dissatisfaction among those planning to vote should lead to a massive march to the polls on 23 November.

Table 2 Are you currently satisfied or dissatisfied with the general performance of the HK Government?

	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Don't know
Feb 93	60	31	9
Aug 93	57	28	15
Feb 94	58	28	14
Aug 94	56	30	14
Feb 95	43	35	22
Sep 95	46	45	9
Feb 96	60	26	15
July 96	67	21	11
Feb 97	73	20	7
June 97	66	27	7
Jan 98	51	35	4
Apr 98	48	41	12
June 98	37	56	7
July 98	42	49	9
Oct 98	42	48	10
April 99	46	43	11
July 99	40	52	7
Nov 99	41	51	8
Apr 00	39	53	8
Aug 00	30	61	4
Oct 00	31	62	6
Nov 00	35	58	7
Apr 01	32	58	10
June 01	37	55	7
July 01	35	59	5
Nov 01	24	68	7
Apr 02	31	60	9
Aug 02	22	72	6
Nov 02	23	69	9
June 03	23	69	8
Nov 03	20	75	5
Plan to vote	17	78	4

Chart of Table 2



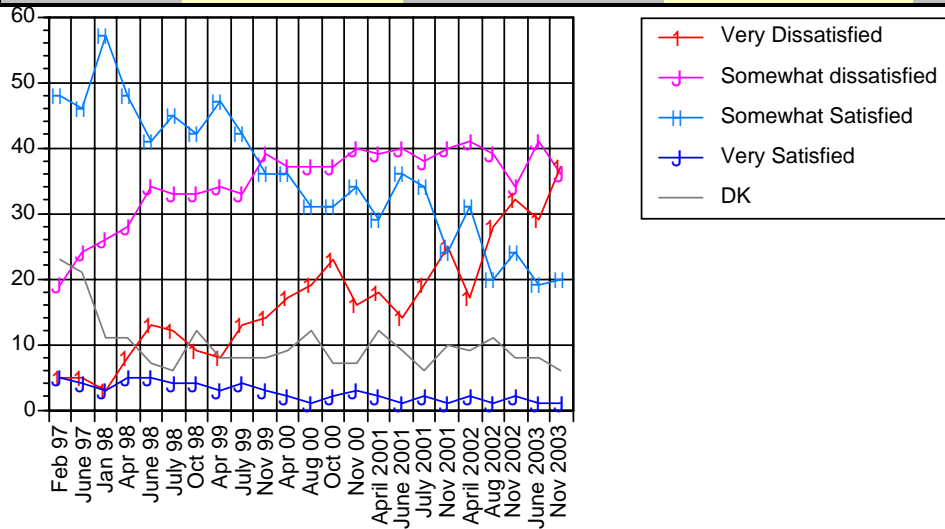
The same pattern of more intense dissatisfaction among those planning to vote can also be seen with those satisfied or dissatisfied with the performance of Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa. While levels of satisfaction with his performance are about the same in November as in June 2003, two weeks before the massive July march, dissatisfaction has risen considerably, from 29 percent very dissatisfied in June 2003 to 37 percent in November, the highest level of very dissatisfied yet recorded.

Among likely voters, 41 percent are very dissatisfied with the Chief Executive’s performance, an intensity level easily 3 times as high as that in November 1999 before the previous District level elections. The attempts to turn these high, intense levels of dissatisfaction with the performance of Tung Chee-hwa against those parties affiliated with the government stems from these widespread sentiments.

In terms of the effect on turnout of the above extremely high levels of dissatisfaction with the government and with pro-government parties, the likelihood is high that the 34 to 39 percent average range of voter participation in District Council elections will be exceeded. If the voting turnout rate breaks 40 percent by a significant margin, and if voters cast ballots against parties and candidates affiliated with pro-government stances in very large numbers, as seems highly likely, then the Tung administration will face another crisis. Greater still will be the crisis facing its supporters. They will face the prospect of going into the Legco election season ahead badly crippled by their association with a government and leader held in very low esteem by a very large proportion of Hong Kongers.

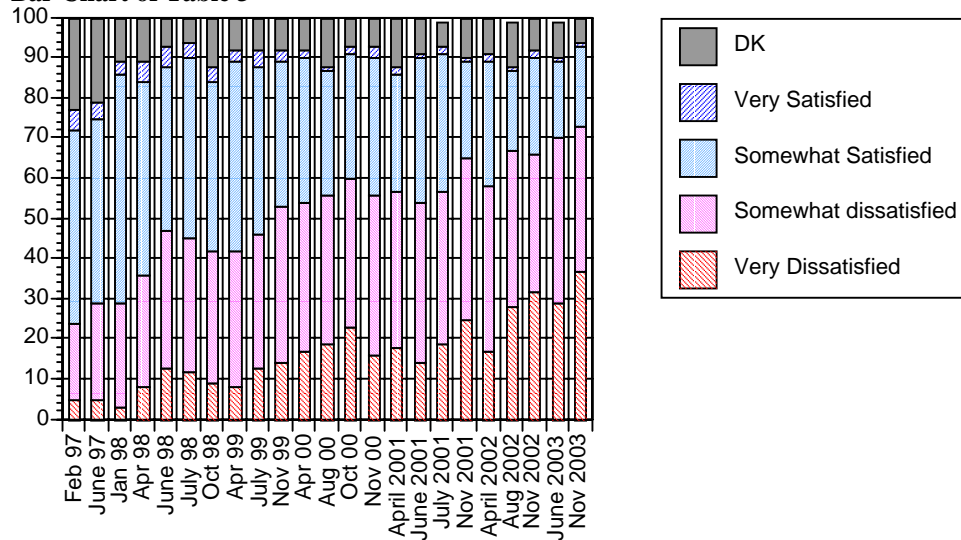
Table 3 Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with performance of C. E. Tung?

	Very Dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Very Satisfied	DK
Feb 97	5	19	48	5	23
June 97	5	24	46	4	21
Jan 98	3	26	57	3	11
Apr 98	8	28	48	5	11
June 98	13	34	41	5	7
July 98	12	33	45	4	6
Oct 98	9	33	42	4	12
Apr 99	8	34	47	3	8
July 99	13	33	42	4	8
Nov 99	14	39	36	3	8
Apr 00	17	37	36	2	9
Aug 00	19	37	31	1	12
Oct 00	23	37	31	2	7
Nov 00	16	40	34	3	7
Apr 01	18	39	29	2	12
June 01	14	40	36	1	9
July 01	19	38	34	2	6
Nov 01	25	40	24	1	10
Apr 02	17	41	31	2	9
Aug 02	28	39	20	1	11
Nov 02	32	34	24	2	8
June 03	29	41	19	1	8
Nov 03	37	36	20	1	6



The stacked bar chart below of Table 3 above illustrates in unmistakable terms the near disappearance of satisfaction with the Chief Executive as well as the rising intensity of that dissatisfaction.

Bar Chart of Table 3



The proportions of this crisis of affiliation with the Tung Administration may be glimpsed in the figures of Table 4 and following.

Table 4 Plan to vote by Satisfaction with performance of Tung Chee-hwa

	Plan to vote	Plan NOT to vote	DK	Total	Difference between likely voter vs non voter
Very dissatisfied #	203	19	22	244	
%	41	33	33	39	+8
Somewhat dissatisfied #	182	17	25	224	
%	37	29	38	36	+7
Somewhat satisfied #	87	16	9	112	
%	18	28	14	18	-10
Very satisfied #	6	0	3	9	
%	1	0	5	1	+1
DK #	20	6	7	33	
%	4	10	11	5	-6
Total #	498	58	66	622	
%	100	100	100	100	

Table contents: Count
Percent of Column Total
836 total cases of which 214 are missing (those not registered to vote)

Of those planning to vote, as shown in Table 4, 78% are dissatisfied with Tung and just 18% satisfied. Those planning NOT to vote show 62% dissatisfied with Tung versus 28% satisfied. Clearly dissatisfaction with Tung is a factor in mobilizing turnout. Those very dissatisfied show an 8-percentage point higher likelihood of intending to vote. Those somewhat dissatisfied show 7-percentage points higher likelihood of turning out to vote. Those satisfied with Tung's performance show 10 percentage points higher likelihood of NOT planning to vote. The total gap between those planning to vote who are dissatisfied with Tung and those planning to vote is 24 points (-9 to +15). The proportions of these two groups is, at 77 percent dissatisfied versus 19 percent satisfied, 58 percentage points apart. The odds are high that if the dissatisfied go to the polls as they now say they intend to do, and if the satisfied stay at home as they now say they are planning to, those candidates who are critical of the Tung regime and who can convince voters their opponent(s) support Tung will win by large margins. Even those who don't know about Tung's performance who plan to vote is much lower, by 6 percentage points, than those who don't know and plan not to vote. Hong Kong people appear to have made up their minds about the government, and it appears very likely, at this point, that overwhelmingly more dissatisfied than satisfied voters will turn up at the polls on Sunday.

Clearly, dissatisfaction with Tung’s performance pushes the likelihood of planning to vote up while those satisfied with his performance are much less motivated to plan to vote. If the pro-democracy camp uses a “Show Tung you are dissatisfied and want change, vote for democratic camp”, then they may more effectively reach and attract the anti-Tung voters. Pro-government supporters can only hope their record of support for Tung will be ignored by voters, but this likelihood appears remote for many voters, as the tables below indicate.

Table 5 Plan to vote by Satisfaction with Democratic Party

	Plan NOT to vote	Plan to vote	Total
Very dissatisfied #	38	43	81
%	11	9	10
Somewhat dissatisfied	86	144	230
%	25	29	28
Somewhat satisfied	106	190	296
%	31	38	35
Very satisfied	4	18	22
%	1	4	3
DK	104	103	207
%	31	21	25
Total #	338	498	836
%	100	100	100

Table contents: Count
 Percent of Column Total
 Chi-square = 17.71 with 4 df p = 0.0014

Supporters of Democrats look much more likely to vote than supporters of the DAB. While 42 percent of those satisfied and very satisfied with the DP plan to vote, versus 32 percent of those satisfied with the DP who plan not to vote, a difference of 10 percentage points, the DAB as seen in Table 6 get only a 2 percentage point boost between those satisfied and planning to vote (21 percent) and those satisfied with DAB who do not plan to turn out (19 percent). The opposite also holds, while 38 percent of those who are dissatisfied with the DP plan to vote, 36 percent do not, a difference of just 2 points. Those dissatisfied with the DAB and planning to vote, however, stack up at 60 percent versus just 52 percent of dissatisfied planning not to vote, a difference of 8 percentage points. This means that those dissatisfied with the DAB are more likely to plan to vote than those dissatisfied with the DP.

Table 6 Plan to vote by Satisfaction with DAB

	Plan NOT to vote	Plan to vote	Total
Very dissatisfied	75	158	233
%	22	32	28
Somewhat dissatisfied	102	139	241
%	30	28	29
Somewhat satisfied	59	98	157
%	18	20	19
Very satisfied	3	7	10
%	1	1	1
DK	99	96	195
%	29	19	23
Total	338	498	836
%	100	100	100

Table contents: Count
 Percent of Column Total
 Chi-square = 16.57 with 4 df p = 0.0023

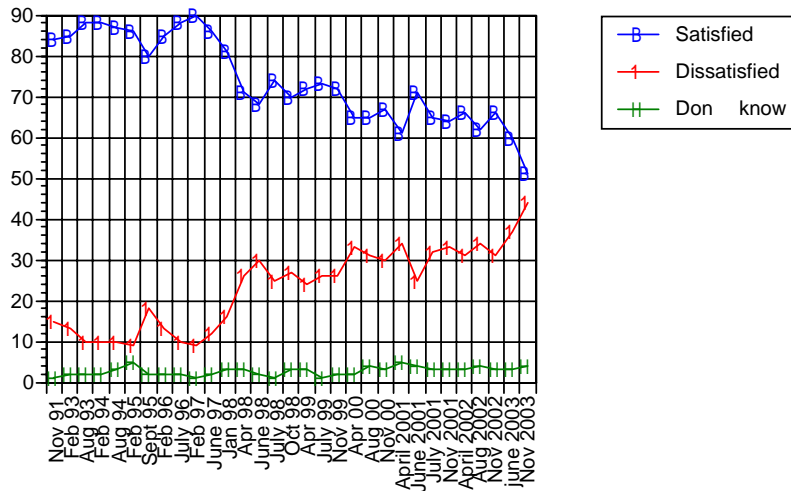
With Tung supporters more discouraged and planning to vote in lower proportions than Tung opponents, the odds of this District Council election becoming, in effect, a referendum on support for Tung and issues like Article 23 and a mandate to candidates calling for faster and greater democratization appear to be growing. This District Council election may very well turn out to be the most unusual and significant since the first District Board elections in 1982, which heralded the first territory-wide universal suffrage elections in Hong Kong’s history.

Three Aspects, One Conclusion

There are three other aspects which need examining to formulate a more rounded picture of this District Council election and what it means. First, as shown in Table 7, Hong Kong people are more dissatisfied with their life in Hong Kong now than ever before. Plummeting from colonial era averages in the mid and upper 80 percent being satisfied, today it is within the range of error that less than a majority are satisfied. At 51 percent with a plus or minus range of error of 4 points at the 95 percent confidence interval (meaning that 95 percent of the time samples of this size fall within plus to minus 4 points of the real views of the whole population), satisfaction could be below a majority. This 51 percent signals a sharp drop of satisfaction with life in Hong Kong, well below that registered in June just 2 weeks before the massive 1 July march.

Table 7 Are you currently satisfied or dissatisfied with your life in Hong Kong?

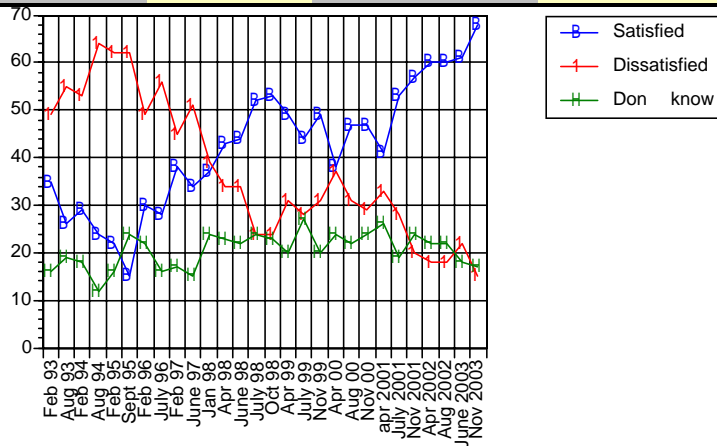
	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Don't know
Nov 91	84	15	1
Feb 93	85	13	2
Aug 93	88	10	2
Feb 94	88	10	2
Aug 94	87	10	3
Feb 95	86	9	5
Sept 95	80	18	2
Feb 96	85	13	2
July 96	88	10	2
Feb 97	90	9	1
June 97	86	12	2
Jan 98	81	16	3
Apr 98	71	26	3
June 98	68	30	2
July 98	74	25	1
Oct 98	70	27	3
Apr 99	72	24	3
July 99	73	26	1
Nov 99	72	26	2
Apr 00	65	33	2
Aug 00	65	31	4
Nov 00	67	30	3
Apr 01	61	34	5
June 01	71	25	4
July 01	65	32	3
Nov 01	64	33	3
Apr 02	66	31	3
Aug 02	62	34	4
Nov 02	66	31	3
June 03	60	37	3
Nov 03	51	44	4



In sharp contrast to opinion toward the Hong Kong Government shown in Table 2 above, satisfaction with the PRC government in ruling China is at an all time high. The “China Factor” as it used to be known, which influenced politics in Hong Kong and in elections and was described as a threat and example of disorder, poverty or brutality is truly dead. Today, the mainland government offers examples of brisk action when threatened with events such as SARS, breathtaking economic growth, and technological accomplishments such as becoming the third nation to independently put a human in space.

Table 8 Are you currently satisfied or dissatisfied with the performance of the PRC Government in ruling China?

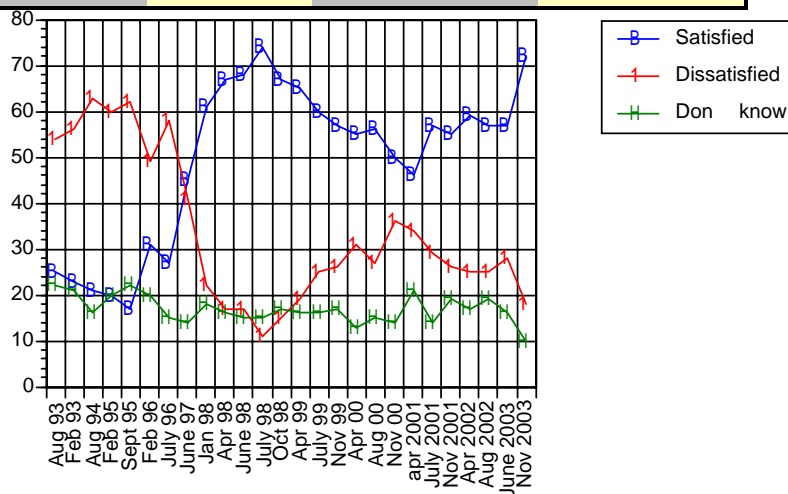
	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Don't know
Feb 93	35	49	16
Aug 93	26	55	19
Feb 94	29	53	18
Aug 94	24	64	12
Feb 95	22	62	16
Sept 95	15	62	24
Feb 96	30	49	22
July 96	28	56	16
Feb 97	38	45	17
June 97	34	51	15
Jan 98	37	39	24
Apr 98	43	34	23
June 98	44	34	22
July 98	52	24	24
Oct 98	53	24	23
Apr 99	49	31	20
July 99	44	28	27
Nov 99	49	31	20
Apr 00	38	37	24
Aug 00	47	31	22
Nov 00	47	29	24
Apr 01	41	33	26
July 01	53	28	19
Nov 01	57	20	24
April 02	60	18	22
Aug 02	60	18	22
June 03	61	22	18



The one blot on the central government's copybook, the Article 23 legislation which it strongly pushed, has, once withdrawn, seen a sharp recovery in attitudes toward the way the central government deals with Hong Kong. The CEPA agreement, the bridge to western Pearl River Delta, the opening up of visa-free travel, individual rather than group tourism, increases in funds allowed into Hong Kong and so on have had a dramatic impact.

Table 9 Are you currently satisfied or dissatisfied with the performance of the PRC government in dealing with Hong Kong affairs?

	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Don't know
Aug 93	25	54	22
Feb 93	23	56	21
Aug 94	21	63	16
Feb 95	20	60	20
Sept 95	17	62	22
Feb 96	31	49	20
July 96	27	58	15
June 97	45	41	14
Jan 98	61	22	18
Apr 98	67	17	16
June 98	68	17	15
July 98	74	11	15
Oct 98	67	15	17
Apr 99	65	19	16
July 99	60	25	16
Nov 99	57	26	17
Apr 00	55	31	13
Aug 00	56	27	15
Nov 00	50	36	14
Apr 01	46	34	21
July 01	57	29	14
Nov 01	55	26	19
Apr 02	59	25	17
Aug 02	57	25	19
June 2003	57	28	16



The bottom line in this election is that the “China Factor” appears disconnected from assessments of the Hong Kong government or pro-government parties. Appeals to patriotism or to the “threat” from Beijing seem to have very little resonance today, in sharp contrast to the situation in elections in 1991 and 1995. “Normal” politics have arrived in Hong Kong, meaning that people judge political leaders and parties on the basis of their performance, on the delivery of the goods and services they demand, and on their willingness to heed their supporters’ views and meet their needs. The DAB has a good record of delivering constituency services, a record which has seen a steady increase in support at the polls, particularly District Council polls. However, when the DAB became affiliated with the government and Tung Chee-hwa, when it voted consistently to back the Chief Executive and when it insisted, as it still insists, that Article 23 restrictions on freedoms need be enacted against all public protest, then voters seem determined to show that such refusal to heed their voice cannot merit support at the polls. “One country, two systems” appears to cut both ways. While Tung asserts one country, the people seem to be insisting on two systems, particularly in governance. One country may mean pride; it no longer means blind obedience, especially to those patently unworthy of such trust. This survey only indicates the mood and inclinations of those who plan to voter and the general public. That mood is decidedly not in the favor of those who support the Tung administration blindly.

Those like the Liberals who show they have a line beyond which they will not cross have clearly gotten respondent's approval, so support of the government alone is not the kiss of death. But Hong Kong people do seem to want politicians who listen to them, and who will take courageous action like James Tien's resignation from the Executive Council when the circumstances call for it. Those who wish to ignore the public, and who support restrictions on their freedoms, will lose support despite their appeals to patriotism, for patriotism no longer seems to be the code word for blindly supporting Tung Chee-hwa. The voter's verdict will be made clear to all when the results are tallied: results for and respect towards the views of the public are the bottom line in Hong Kong politics. If democracy is making the voice of the people heard no matter how hard political leaders try to stop up their ears and close their eyes, then this election may become the most "democratic" in Hong Kong's history.

* Civic Exchange, an independent think tank directed by Christine Loh and the Hong Kong Transition Project, a long term multi-university research project directed by Michael DeGolyer, collaborated in a survey on constitutional reform issues and process, funded by an anonymous donation to Civic Exchange. At the 95% confidence level, range of error is plus or minus 4 points. Other surveys referred to above are HKTP surveys.

N=	Nov	91	902										
	Feb	93	615	Aug	93	609							
	Feb	94	636	Aug	94	640							
	Feb	95	647	Aug	95	645							
	Feb	96	627	July	96	928	Dec	96	326				
	Feb	97	546	June	97	1,129							
	Jan	98	700	April	98	852	June 98	625	July 98	647	Oct 98	811	
	Apr	99	838	July	99	815	Nov 99	813					
	Apr	00	704	Aug	00	625;	Aug 00	1059	Oct 00	721	Nov 00	801	
	Apr	01	830	June	01	808	July (media)	831	July (party)	1029	Nov 01	759	
	Apr	02	751	Aug	02	721	Nov 02	814					
	June	03	776	Nov	03	835							

All Figures are in percentages unless otherwise stated All references should be to the Hong Kong Transition Project, which has project members at Hong Kong Baptist University, Hong Kong University, and University of Macau. The Hong Kong Transition Project is funded via a competitive grant from the Research Grants Council of the University Grants Committee of the Hong Kong Government (HKBU 2033/01H) and is a participating research project with the David C. Lam Institute of East-West Studies. None of the institutions mentioned above is responsible for any of the views expressed herein.