

HONG KONG IN 2015: POLITICAL TRENDS

LIM Tai Wei

EAI Background Brief No. 1094

Date of Publication: 28 December 2015

Executive Summary

1. When the Occupy Central Movement wound down and slowly dissipated from media coverage, socio-political differences known as political contradictions (*maodun*) in Chinese terminology spilled over to other areas of Hong Kong's society and politics.
2. On 18 June 2015, 28 pan-democrat legislators threw out the political reform plan that required a committee to screen through all chief executive candidates before the election.
3. Pan-Democrats find the reform plan objectionable as it would explicitly mean the acceptance of a candidature process pre-screened by pro-Beijing forces within the territory and implicitly accept the presence of the Chinese Communist Party in the selection process.
4. As Hong Kong's legislative council voted down the reform package for universal suffrage in June 2015, the 2017 chief executive will once again be chosen by the old system of committee votes.
5. The current system relies on a nominated and unelected 1,200-member committee made up chiefly of Hong Kong's wealthy elites, labour union members, agriculturalists and members of left-wing associations and other organisations that are deemed to be pro-Beijing.
6. On 22 November 2015, the local district councillors elections became yet another post-Occupy barometer of Hong Kongers' political preferences.
7. Some Occupy Central demonstrators won in the elections while pro-Beijing candidates also gained seats in other districts. The ambivalent results mean that the stalemate continues at the local level in Hong Kong.

8. The battle for the hearts and minds of the Hong Kong people appears to have started. As the pro-democracy crowd hardened their political opinions against the reform package, the authorities clamped down on the book sale of Mainland-banned publications. Both sides of the political spectrum are adopting clearer political positions in the public realm.
9. University appointments were also seemingly controlled; Johannes Chan, professor of law, was rejected for a higher appointment (pro-vice chancellor) with the University of Hong Kong based on different politically contentious reasons cited by both pro-Beijing and pro-democracy supporters.
10. The year 2015 is an eventful year for trendspotting in the post-Occupy Central period. The differences between various stakeholders have shifted from the streets to the legislature, mass media, universities and the different social classes. Hong Kong continues to seek socio-political equilibrium in managing social relations and maintaining political freedoms.