

**HONG KONG POLITICS IN 2011:
GOVERNMENT CREDIBILITY AND
POLITICAL AWARENESS**

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Executive Summary

1. Despite the leadership of two Chief Executives (CE), the Hong Kong government still faces a governing conundrum. It seems nowhere near to resolving the lack of public confidence in the government.
2. Hong Kongers are skeptical about whether the government is truly serving the interests of the society. The Chief Executive is considered as lacking in popular mandate as he is elected by a 1,200-member Election Committee (EC), normally described as “small circle” election, instead of universal suffrage.
3. The worry is whether the CE is accountable only to his power source, business interests affiliated to Beijing that wield significant voting power in the EC and the central government. The people are uncomfortable with the government’s performance on livelihood issues and the safeguarding of Hong Kong’s “core values”, such as respecting rule of law and human rights.
4. The worries were reinforced by society’s resentment towards tycoons, particularly property developers, and unease with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). In 2011, “end property hegemony” had become a catch phrase. Public confidence in the “One Country, Two Systems” model has dipped to the 2004 level.
5. The year 2011 witnessed three important developments on the domestic front in this context. First, policy reversals were made in the face of public outcry. Second, government’s tougher postures on freedom of press, protests and speech stoked concerns on the fate of Hong Kong’s “core values”. Third, social attitudes were ambiguous in terms of their changing directions.
6. Policy reversals were most evident in the Budget in February and in the CE’s policy address in October. These U-turns show that policy making is largely driven by public opinion. The government faces a governing conundrum when it is unable to set its own agenda on policy formulation and implementation.

The third CE, who will be elected in March 2012, will possibly face similar challenges.

7. However, where the social dynamics are precisely heading remain uncertain. Three perspectives prevail: political orientations are either shifting towards the left, towards the right, or have always been slanted to the right.
8. While some cite examples of minimum wage law legislation and establishment of Labour Party as well as leftist bodies as Hong Kong's turning left, other observers perceive the society as shifting to the right through which narrow self-interests were championed and "core values" were left secondary.
9. Although the pro-establishment camp continued to get higher vote shares than the pan-democrats in the 2011 District Council election due to its superiority of working with the grassroots, the results are not sufficient for drawing a concluding remark on where the social forces are driving.
10. Notwithstanding the economic materialism of Hong Kongers, evidences indicate that the society has not cast values aside. This implies pan-democrats' strategies of getting support through fighting for democracy and posing checks and balances to safeguard Hong Kong's core values are not necessarily losing efficacy. The forthcoming Legislative Council election in 2012 could be an indicator of the trends.