Party Models in a Hybrid Regime: Hong Kong 2007-2012

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Hong Kong 2007–2012*

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Abstract

In this article, I argue that traditional party models may be meaningfully applied to the case of Hong Kong, which is a hybrid regime. This is due to the unique constitutional arrangement separating sovereign Beijing from the Hong Kong polity, allowing opposition parties to compete freely in some elections. Due to the lack of a ruling party, elections are highly competitive among political parties. A “stunted but contested” party system is in place. The major parties in Hong Kong are then classified as elite, mass, catch-all, or cartel according to their characteristics, structure, and resourcefulness. The resulting typology is shown to have good explanatory power with regard to parties’ polling patterns, even when compared with other popular frameworks for political parties in Hong Kong. The study also has implications for hybrid regimes as it demonstrates that a highly competitive party system is possible.

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In this article, I argue that political parties in Hong Kong, which is a hybrid regime—neither fully democratic nor authoritarian—share a similar typology to those of full democracies. With the aim of adding to research on political parties in Hong Kong based primarily on the ideological divide between pro-Beijing and pro-democracy, I assess the utility of party models based on the electoral and organizational dimensions of parties. Depending on whether the organization of a party is top-down or bottom-up and on the size of a party’s financial resources, each party is classified as being one of the four types commonly seen in Western democracies: elite, mass, catch-all, and cartel. Using election data from 2007 to 2012, I argue that my suggested typology is useful for explaining the polling patterns of individual parties.

This research contributes to the study of Hong Kong politics in several ways. First, by studying the organizational and electoral dimensions of political parties irrespective of their ideology, I offer a fresh perspective on party organization and strategy instead of one that merely focuses on the familiar pro-Beijing/democracy divide. This is a timely addition as the latter aspect might become less relevant in the future (more on this below). Second, the current study provides a framework for understanding party types and transformations. Perhaps more important, I propose empirical indicators for replicating the study with future election data. This opens up the possibility of long-term research on political parties in Hong Kong. Finally, by building my proposed typology on the existing literature, this study also provides a theoretical foundation for possible convergence with research on political parties in established democracies. This could prove valuable, given Hong Kong’s supposed progression toward full democracy.

The use of existing typologies on the political parties of Hong Kong is far from straightforward. Sartori warns about applying party models that largely originated from Europe and the United States to other countries. Given Hong Kong’s hybrid political system, it might seem likely that a direct application of traditional party models would not be possible. However, I argue that the unique “one country, two systems” arrangement between Hong Kong and sovereign Beijing paradoxically sustains a party system resembling a democratic one with a certain level of competitiveness. Before developing the arguments further, it is important to briefly introduce the political background of Hong Kong, especially the nature of its political and party systems.
Democracy is commonly conceptualized as possessing two dimensions: civil liberties and competitive elections. Hybrid regimes are defined as those systems with one or other component missing. As I will show below, the election of Hong Kong’s highest office, the chief executive (hereafter CE), is largely removed from the will of the general public. Therefore, Hong Kong is generally considered to be an example of liberal authoritarianism, where civil liberties are largely protected, but the government is not elected by universal suffrage.

The arrival at the current political system may be attributed to Hong Kong’s historical status as a colony. Since the gradual opening up of the political system in the 1980s, Hong Kong has been democratizing in a “tortuous” manner, with the process complicated by the transfer of sovereignty from Britain to China in 1997. Although the Basic Law—the local mini-constitution—guarantees that the CE and the Legislative Council (Legco) will eventually be elected by universal suffrage, the openness of the nomination process, the timetable, and the pathways of the implementation of suffrage are by no means certain.

Political parties in Hong Kong are free to compete in some elections. However, elections do not serve to legitimize the political system in Hong Kong as well as they do in other polities. Starting from 2004, half of the seats in the Legco (increased from 30 to 35 in 2012) and over 400 seats in 18 District Councils (DCs) are directly elected. Nonetheless, this situation exists within the model of an “executive-dominant” government. It is important to note that, despite having some degree of competitiveness, the election for the executive office is largely cut off from political parties. The CE is nominated and elected from a small electoral college (expanded from 800 to 1,200 members in 2012), which in turn is formed by a limited franchise of about 200,000 professional, political, and business elites (out of a total population of seven million). Even within the college, the system is plagued with malapportionment (for example, the Employer’s Federation elects 11 members among 112 voters versus 20 out of 78,840 in the education subsector). In 2006, 36 percent of the seats were returned uncontested. With a largely nonpartisan electorate, political parties do not wield a lot of influence in the contest for executive office. In fact, only two partisan candidates, both of them from opposition parties with no realistic chance of winning, have ever managed to get enough nominations from within the college to join the election.
The structural bias against parties in the system is further reflected by the requirement that the CE must not have any party affiliations. Although candidates can simply quit their party before assuming office, this requirement effectively deprives political parties of any chance to govern. Lau and Kuan’s account of the reluctance of Tung, the first CE, to form his own party, despite tremendous difficulties in governing, is illustrative of this point.\(^{10}\)

In addition, the direct election of legislators is further checked by the built-in mechanisms of the Legco. The other half of the seats in the Legco are returned by Functional Constituencies with a limited franchise (similar to the electoral college above); these usually consist of corporate voters and unopposed candidates. Filled overwhelmingly with pro-Beijing members, they have veto power over any private bills put forward by fellow legislators. Conversely, only a simple majority is required for government bills to be passed. Moreover, there is a rule preventing legislators from proposing, without prior approval from the CE, bills that affect “public expenditure or political structure or the operation of the government.”\(^{11}\) Such measures greatly limit the role of individual legislators, and thus political parties.

1. Stunted but Contested Party System

The above political system design, according to Lau and Kuan, reflects Beijing’s reluctance to see strong parties in Hong Kong, whether governing or in opposition. It also contributes to creating a “stunted” party system, which is chiefly characterized by the absence of a ruling party.\(^{12}\) According to Ian Scott, the poorly coordinated and developed institutional arrangements between the executive, the legislature, and the bureaucracy have even led to the “disarticulation” of the political system as a whole.\(^{13}\) While I do not disagree with these authors’ arguments about the malfunctioning of the system and its adverse effects, this article argues that the party system resembles that of a democracy more so than that of an authoritarian state. A “stunted but contested” party system is in place. While the election of the executive office is not fully competitive, electoral competition (or public contestation) is not precluded in other arenas.\(^{14}\) It follows that Western party models might be meaningfully applied in Hong Kong.

I begin the argument by returning to the analysis of hybrid regimes. In hybrid regimes (or any nondemocratic countries, for that matter), the
party or dictator in power is simultaneously the sovereign and the government. Regardless of whether multiparty elections are allowed, those in power usually organize themselves as a political party/group. A crucial constitutional design makes the case of Hong Kong unique in this regard. The key lies in the position of the sovereign power. In the arrangement of “one country, two systems,” Hong Kong is promised a “high degree of autonomy” with its freedom and rule of law before the handover in 1997 kept intact. Although it is highly controversial whether Hong Kong’s autonomy is being undermined, for the purpose here, the arrangement prevents the Chinese Communist Party, or the Central People’s Government, to operate openly in the political sphere of Hong Kong. This leads to the separation of sovereign Beijing from the local government. As neither the sovereign nor the government has a presence in the party system, the political arena is more open than would be allowed in a nondemocratic regime. Although somewhat competitive elections are possible in some authoritarian regimes, the level of contestation in Hong Kong’s party system is greatly enhanced by the lack of a dominant government or ruling party, leading to the formation of a “stunted but contested” party system.

With the sovereign power residing outside the system, opposition parties are free to criticize the government without fear of retaliation or repression, and they are able to consistently enjoy an electoral advantage over pro-Beijing parties. This advantage is directly reflected by the fact that the pro-democracy camp won three out of five seats in the region-wide proportional election in 2012. Although the opposition camp cannot gain access to the executive office or attain a majority in the legislature due to the design of the political system (for example, Functional Constituencies), they provide a high level of contestation in the limited political arena open to them.

On the other hand, as political co-optation is performed by Beijing, unless instructed otherwise, pro-Beijing parties have no obligation to align their interests with those of the Hong Kong government. For example, two pro-Beijing parties, the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong (DAB) and the Liberal Party (LP), were often considered as “coalition partners,” with members incorporated into the Executive Council, an advisory-cabinet nominated by the CE. The bulk of the political power of the LP also resides in the co-opted section of the system. During election years, however, it is not uncommon for the LP and the DAB to criticize the government,
sometimes more fiercely than the formal opposition. As long as they steer away from politically sensitive issues (for example, democratization and freedom in China), they are free to capitalize on major issues at the expense of the government’s popularity and legitimacy. As their interests at times diverge from those of the government, they are distinguished from the purely pro-establishment parties or ruling coalitions commonly found in authoritarian regimes. In short, although the party system is “stunted” in that there can be no ruling party or party with substantive power, the very lack of a ruling party greatly increases the level of contestation in the system.

To understand the importance of the location of the sovereign power and the existence of a ruling party, one can easily contrast the above scenario with that in Singapore, another hybrid regime with a very similar historical background and development trajectory to Hong Kong. The key difference is that Singapore is an independent sovereign state. Opposition groups in Singapore have always been suppressed forcefully by the People’s Action Party government, which is essentially the sovereign power. In contrast, opposition parties in Hong Kong enjoy a relatively large degree of freedom to operate in the limited political arena. This highlights the unique nature of the party system in Hong Kong.

2. Political Party Models

The study of Hong Kong politics is dominated by the focus on ideological alignment for good reason. The most popular framework used by scholars and the public is characterized by the cleavage between pro-Beijing and pro-democracy ideologies, besides the traditional socio-economic left–right divide. The practical significance of the former dimension is apparent. Many voters allocate their vote strategically among parties from the same camp to try to maximize the number of seats held by their preferred camp; the media focus a great deal more on the electoral fortunes of the entire camp than that of individual parties. Notwithstanding the formation of new parties, the pro-democracy camp consistently enjoys a vote share edge of 60:40 over pro-Beijing parties. However, this electoral advantage does not translate well into political power, as it is nullified by several factors. First, the abovementioned electoral system always renders the democratic camp a minority in the legislature despite the majority support, as most Functional seats are filled by pro-Beijing members. Second, pro-Beijing parties have better
access to financial resources. This is reflected by their domination in DC elections, which depend a great deal on constituency services and thus financial resources. Finally, the internal strife within the pro-democracy camp over a wide range of issues stands in stark contrast to the seamless coordination among pro-Beijing parties.  

Summarizing party models in democracies, Krouwel formulates four main characteristics that sufficiently capture major party differences: party origins, electoral, ideological, and organizational, all of which may be further captured by two axes. The goal in this study is to devise a suitable framework for the context of Hong Kong. In view of the gradual democratization, political parties are expected to change their positions as well as alignment. Thus, models based on electoral and organizational dimensions are the most relevant as they are dynamic and can capture party transformations over time. The present model is formed based on two important aspects of the parties in Hong Kong: the structure of party organization and their level of financial resources.

The first axis, party organization, is regarded by many to be the core feature of party models. Organizationally, the degree of power concentration within a party usually goes hand in hand with its openness of recruitment, and vice versa. This allows us to come up with the two distinct types of organizational arrangement: top-down versus bottom-up. The divide is especially apparent in Hong Kong, which has exactly two levels of popularly elected office: Legco and DCs. Top-down parties emphasize the importance of party leaders, who are usually Legco members. With their status as legislators, they build the party organization around themselves with weak district foundations, and as a result concentrate power in their hands. Bottom-up parties, by contrast, have a larger structure of district organization vis-à-vis the central party. Their strong local bases make for a more decentralized party with an open structure, drawing power away from the leading legislators.

The level of financial resources forms the other axis of the model. It determines the developmental strategy of political parties. If they have a high level of financial resources at their disposal, office-seeking parties would try to gain wide electoral appeal and expand their organization ambitiously; otherwise, they might focus their effort on selected key strongholds that would arguably be less resource-intensive. It has to be noted that, as discussed, pro-Beijing parties enjoy a great advantage in this regard. The resulting framework, when the level of resources is combined with the top-down/bottom-up nature of parties, places the four party models as shown in Table 1.
Table 1: Party Models in Hong Kong

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party centralization/organizational structure</th>
<th>Financial resources</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bottom-up</td>
<td>Mass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top-down</td>
<td>Elite</td>
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In the following section, I describe each party model in greater detail and classify all major parties in Hong Kong accordingly (see below for inclusion criteria). Needless to say, parties seldom fall perfectly into an ideal type. Without a rich literature on Hong Kong parties to act as a guide, some classifications might be viewed as somewhat subjective. Most parties also do not have clearly established structures and internal decision-making mechanisms (or they are not made available to the public). As there is no party law in Hong Kong, there is financial information only on those parties registered under the Companies Ordinance (see the appendix for details). Therefore, whenever possible, I try to base my judgment on observable facts, notably on origin, election results, and ratio of legislators/DC members. Also, with the exception of the DAB, no party in Hong Kong has a membership of over a thousand. When I speak of, say, mass parties, no implication is made regarding their actual size.

A. Elite Parties

Elite parties are first created by a small cadre of individuals with high socioeconomic status who feel the need to coordinate their parliamentary work. Loosely and informally organized, this type of party is described as a closed caucus of prominent individuals. One of the main features of elite parties is the weakness of local organization as the members are leaders of the communities nominally represented. Local organizations, if any, would not be very different from the personal networks of the elites, and would mainly be dormant outside election periods.

In the suggested typology, elite parties have a top-down structure and relatively few resources (see Table 1). In Hong Kong, the Civic Party (CP) is arguably the best example of an elite party. Originating from a special interest group formed by barristers, academics, and professionals in a bid to stop the National Security Bill in 2003, the party was
established officially in 2006. It had six legislators at the time of its formation, four of them barristers, which fits very well with Duverger’s description of a party formed by individuals from the upper classes. With a particular focus on the rule of law and other civil liberties, it enjoyed a high popularity among the middle classes. On the other hand, it has a low level of income (the lowest out of the four parties with available data; see the appendix), and thus less well established community services and district networks with only a handful of DC members. Nonetheless, CP leaders have been very successful in repeatedly getting elected into the Legco, riding on their personal popularity. The CP should therefore be classified as an elite party in Hong Kong.

The League of Social Democrats (LSD) is a more ambiguous case. Founded in 2006, it adopts a strong leftist platform including the adoption of a minimum wage, fair-competition laws and state-provided universal retirement protection. It also engages in confrontational tactics not usually seen in Hong Kong. Drawing support from people dissatisfied with the government and traditional pro-democracy parties, it initially exhibited a strong momentum, with three legislators and a handful of district councilors. However, following a fierce internal struggle between two factions, it suffered a split in 2011 that saw the departure of two legislators and the establishment of a new party. A massive exodus of members ensued, reflecting the nature of the LSD as an organization relying heavily on the personal charisma of its leaders. Since the split, it has had a top-down, centralized structure with one legislator, no DC members, and next to no local organization to speak of. Although the leaders of the LSD are of lower socioeconomic status and speak the language of the masses, the leader-centric style and the organizational structure prompt the classification of the LSD as an elite party even before the split, as it is arguably an organization based on prominent individuals, and an extension of their personal networks.

People Power (PP) is the new party founded in 2011 by the two outgoing LSD legislators. Led by highly charismatic ex-radio host Yuk-man Wong, the PP was formed in no small part due to the leadership of Wong and the other legislator. It builds its support by relentlessly attacking the Democratic Party, supposedly an ally within the pro-democracy camp, for their compromise with Beijing on political reform. In the 2012 Legco elections, the PP increased its number of legislators to three. Comparatively, the PP has not been very successful in district
elections and returned only one DC member in 2011. As a result, PP has a heavily top-down structure with virtually no base organization. Although it fielded quite a large number of candidates in the 2011 DC election, it is unclear whether the party spent a lot on organizational development. I therefore classify PP as an elite party with a centralized structure and top-down organization. As it is a spin-off organization from the LSD, it is not surprising that both of them fall into the same category.

B. Mass Parties

Mass parties are traditionally created when segments of the electorate previously excluded from the political process are mobilized. These parties are explicitly representative of these segments, and are considered parties of social integration. Trade unions are often the basis for mass party organization if they are allowed to form before the extension of suffrage to the working class. In addition, mass parties need to maintain mobilization. They are supported by extensive organization networks providing a range of services including proto-welfare services. Nevertheless, mass parties in my framework are still characterized by a low level of financial resources.

The Democratic Party (DP), traditionally the flagship party of the pro-democracy camp, was once the largest and most popular party in Hong Kong. It was formed in 1994 as a result of the merger of two major political groups. It has over the years fulfilled the role of a mass party in mobilizing people to fight for democracy. It was organizationally intertwined with pro-democracy trade unions before their disagreement over socioeconomic platforms in the late 1990s. Although the DP has been considered to be in decline since as early as a decade ago, it has proven quite resilient, thanks to its good community network and long-standing record of promoting democracy. Despite having less than half the number of district councilors that the leading party of the pro-Beijing camp has, the DP's figure of about 50 is already greater than the sum of all other pro-democracy parties. Over the years, it has developed strong regional bases with district services. Besides its significant number of DC members, the DP's bottom-up nature was demonstrated in the aftermath of its compromise on political reform with Beijing in 2010. Due to this highly criticized move, a group of 30 members, including eight DC members, quit and formed a new party (not included in this study) that
was successful in electing a Legco member in 2012. All members of this group came from the New Territories East constituency, with many of them standing for election in adjacent districts. This reflects the decentralized and bottom-up organization of the DP, which allows for such a region-based split. Regarding its financial situation, DP has always been able to acquire funding through donations, membership fees, raffle tickets, and so on. However, its income of about HK$10 million is only a small portion of the amount received by pro-Beijing parties. In short, the DP has been one of the best examples of a mass party, but over time it has demonstrated some elements of a catch-all party, including its split with the trade unions and its effort to appeal to a wider population, as shown by the compromise made with Beijing.

The Association for Democracy and People’s Livelihood (ADPL) is also regarded as a mass party. It was originally formed as a local pressure group when the political system was opening up in 1986. As a pro-democracy party, it nonetheless places grassroots interests over its resistance to cooperating with Beijing. It is strongly pro-welfare and appeals to the lower class in densely populated areas. Over the decades, it has developed an extensive service structure concentrated in Kowloon West. With the support of dozens of district councilors in the region, the party had always managed to have their veteran legislator Fredrick Fung elected in the constituency, but they were less successful in expanding their reach. In 2012, Fung was elected to Legco via the new Functional Constituency covering the entirety of Hong Kong. However, his ADPL successor was unable to retain his Kowloon West seat. With strong but narrowly targeted, region-specific links to grassroots supporters, few resources for expansion, and a bottom-up organization, the ADPL should be classified as a mass party.

Another mass party is the Federation of Trade Unions (FTU). As a pro-Beijing trade union, it has traditionally had strong community networks and services. Although its level of resources is reflected by its member centers, which provide a huge variety of services from vocational training and medical checkups to all kinds of cultural and art classes, it was initially more appropriately classified as a mass party as it had not been very active in elections and party expansion. Until recently, it did not participate much in electoral activities as the DAB formally served this function for the pro-Beijing camp—the memberships of the two groups overlap anyway. This situation began to change as the camp
started to grow and the FTU expanded the camp’s support base by attracting voters of lower socioeconomic status. The recent establishment of a “political committee” in 2012 signified the FTU’s intention to actively participate in elections. Accordingly, the FTU participated in elections for four (out of five) Legco Geographical Constituencies and the new popularly elected Functional Constituency. In the end, the FTU won a seat in the latter and three in the former. For the period under study, the FTU is regarded as a mass party with its trade union structure and strong regional foundation, but a transformation toward a catch-all party model is possible, as reflected by its ambition to increase electoral participation, and its higher level of financial commitment for that purpose.

C. Catch-All Parties

As one can infer from the name, catch-all parties try to bridge socioeconomic (and other) cleavages within the electorate in order to attract a wide range of supporters. As a result, they no longer serve the traditional purpose of representing predefined sectors of society. Compared with mass parties, catch-all parties downplay their ideological profile and are most sensitive to loss and gain of electoral support. In my typology, a catch-all party has a bottom-up structure and a high level of financial resources for elections and organizational purposes.

DAB, the flagship of the pro-Beijing camp, should be regarded as a catch-all party. It was established in 1992 by pro-China forces to compete with the democrats in elections. It suffered from anti-Communist sentiments at the beginning, but over time has gained ground with the waning of such fears and the help of solid local networks. It has been one of the few parties without financial difficulties, thanks to donations from businesses with Beijing connections. It has received about nine times the income of the CP or six times that of the DP (refer to the appendix for details). With ample resources at its disposal, it has been able to build an extensive foundation of networks at the district level, such as mutual aid committees in public housing estates, resulting in sweeping victories in the DC elections. Currently, it controls over one-quarter of the total number of DC seats. As the largest party in terms of the number of legislators (nine from direct elections), district councilors (136), as well as members, the DAB is no doubt the strongest party in Hong Kong at the moment. Its electoral appeal is wide-ranging, from strong constituency services to a professional image targeting the middle
classes. It offers a potential career path for aspiring political talent—a very rare trait for local political parties. For example, it is currently the only party with members recruited into the government as secretaries, undersecretaries, or political assistants through the political appointment system. Influential figures may likewise be rewarded with seats in the National People’s Congress or Political Consultative Conference, equivalent to the two legislative chambers in China. In summary, the DAB is successful in attracting grassroots support with a strong base at the community level, and at the same time appeals to elites with its exclusive participation in government and even state organizations. For all intents and purposes, therefore, the DAB is a good example of a catch-all party.

D. Cartel Party

A cartel party is characterized by its collusion with the state, forming a state–party cartel. These parties employ state resources for their own benefit and subsequently become agents of the state. Developed relatively recently, this new and emerging model is increasingly evident in established democracies. Given the lack of a ruling party in Hong Kong and the nonpartisan nature of the executive branch, a party can assume the cartel party model only if it relies heavily on support from Beijing.

Three pro-Beijing parties are included in this study. As explained, the FTU and the DAB are by themselves strong parties with a solid mass support base (although all of them benefit from their Beijing connections, especially financially). The only exception here is the conservative Liberal Party (LP). Its political power is drawn mainly from the business sector, which wields a disproportionate influence in the legislature. After the election in 2000, all eight of its legislators belonged to the Functional section of the legislature. In 2003, the LP forced the government to abandon an unpopular National Security Bill, an achievement that paid off when it elected two members through the Legco direct elections the following year (while maintaining the number of Functional members at eight). Since then, however, it has been caught having to balance business interests and public approval. Arguably, it failed to do either, as it was wiped out in direct elections in 2008; moreover, the majority of its Functional legislators quit the party, allegedly displeased at the party’s emphasis on direct elections. In 2012, the LP was able to make a small
comeback in popular elections for the Legco. Regardless, it is apparent that the party’s support base is very fragile, as reflected by its volatile electoral performance in popular elections and its small number of district councilors. As a party representing the interests of business, it has a high level of financial resources, although not as high as the DAB. Compared with the DAB and the FTU, the LP should be regarded as a cartel party relying heavily on political power granted by the state in the form of functional legislators. Although dominated by members of higher socioeconomic status, it cannot really be considered an elite party as its survival and development do not depend on its leaders. A summary of preliminary party classifications may be found in Table 2.

Table 2: Party Classification in Hong Kong

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mass</th>
<th>Catch-all</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADPL DP FTU</td>
<td>DAB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elite</td>
<td>Cartel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CP LSD PP</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Refer to the list of abbreviations at the end of this article for full party names.


Having formulated the party models and categorized the parties, I will seek in the second half of the article to demonstrate the framework’s explanatory power for party dynamics in elections. I do that by looking at patterns of votes obtained in the Legco and DC elections. It is argued that these patterns are a direct result of the organizational and developmental strategies that parties adopt, and as such may readily be predicted or explained by the suggested model.

Why do I compare the two levels of elections rather than, say, perform a longitudinal study of Legco elections? First, this setting corresponds to the suggested framework very well. A comparison of Legco and DC elections illustrates the top-down versus bottom-up nature of a party. Second, it should be emphasized that I am not particularly interested in the electoral success of a party, which is important but less relevant for the development of a party model. For example, a small party might be structured in a similar manner to a large party, but their share of votes received would be very different. Third, the Legco and DC are the only democratically elected representative institutions in
Hong Kong. All active political parties participate in these elections as much as possible. In contrast to just five Legco constituencies, DC elections are held in over 400 districts, providing a wealth of data for empirical research. An analysis based on this design will simply be more reliable than one based solely on Legco elections.

In this study, two Legco elections (2008, 2012) are paired with two DC elections (2007, 2011) with a ten-month gap in between the two levels of election. The timing of these elections carries significance. The previous elections in 2003/2004 were preoccupied by a democratic push for universal suffrage and a strong dissatisfaction with poor governance. The momentum about these issues had largely dissipated after four years. Perhaps critically, the prospect of full democracy in 2007/2008 was first ruled out by Beijing’s interpretation of the Basic Law in 2004. This is confirmed empirically by Wong and Wan, as voters placed greater emphasis on practical community services during the “depoliticized” 2007 DC elections. Then, in late 2007, public support for democratization was further weakened as Beijing suggested the possibility of universal suffrage for the CE and Legco in 2017 and 2020, respectively, despite doubts about the credibility of such a guarantee. Through such maneuvers, Beijing has succeeded in excluding democracy (full suffrage) as a “vote-getting issue” for the democrats. Hence, the 2007/2008 elections, and arguably the 2011/2012 ones, may be characterized somewhat as “politics as usual.” As they were not dictated by a strong democratic agenda, these elections are more suitable for studying individual party performance.

4. From Party Models to Voting Patterns

My typology is based on two factors: (1) centralization of party leadership and the openness of elite recruitment and (2) the level of financial resources. I suggest that the two factors can predict vote “differential” and “deviation,” respectively. Vote differential measures the average performance of parties in DC elections relative to that in Legco ones in terms of vote share (DC vote percentage minus Legco vote percentage), while vote deviation measures the standard deviation of vote shares obtained across all DC elections. These two indicators tell us little about the actual outcome in elections. A lower differential means only that the party generally did better at the Legco level vis-à-vis the DC level, regardless of how it actually performed, whereas a lower deviation tells
us that the share of votes obtained was more stable across electoral
districts. Next, I discuss how the two outcomes can reasonably be
explained by the corresponding dimensions.

A. Organizational Structure—Differential

Differential captures, on average, how much larger is the share of votes
obtained by a party in DC elections than in Legco ones. I argue that the
organizational nature of a party has a high correlation with this measure.
With stronger local structures, parties tend to do better in DC elections.
A more extensive local party apparatus also means a less centralized
party bureaucracy. Therefore, a bottom-up party (mass and catch-all) is
expected to be characterized by a high differential. On the other hand,
parties with a top-down structure will have a low differential. This is due
to the fact that such parties (elite and cartel) focus on the leadership of
the elites at the party central and have very weak local organization.
This results in a better performance in Legco elections due to the popu-
larity of the party leaders, as compared to weaker showings in district
elections, due to the minimal local presence.

As an example of the calculation of differential, in the 2011 DC
elections, the DAB participated in 144 districts in total (excluding uncon-
tested ones), obtaining an average vote share of 54.3 percent across all
districts. In the 2012 Legco elections, it participated in all five Legco
constituencies, with multiple lists in the ones of higher magnitude.
Combining all DAB lists, it garnered 20.0 percent of votes, averaged
over the five constituencies. As a result, the differential for the DAB in
2011/2012 was 34.3 (54.3–20.0) percent. The figures for all parties and
elections are available in the appendix.

B. Financial Resources—Deviation

Electoral stability may arguably be explained by the level of the party’s
financial resources. The variable I use, deviation, measures the standard
deviation of DC vote share across all constituencies participated in by
the party.\textsuperscript{58} Therefore, a lower deviation means greater electoral stability.
Parties with a narrow focus (mass and elite) will have a smaller devia-
tion of the vote share obtained across constituencies thanks to their
stronger linkage with supporters. These parties have fewer resources for
electoral expansion, and tend to field candidates in strongholds only.
This leads to greater stability in the vote share and a low deviation.
the other end of the spectrum, parties with a high level of resources will have a higher deviation. For example, catch-all parties can ambitiously compete in as many constituencies as possible with fewer financial constraints, leading to higher instability in vote shares. Following the previous example, in 2011, the standard deviation of vote shares obtained by the DAB across all DC constituencies was 16.01 percent.

C. Caveats

Several challenges may be raised against this exercise. Most important, it could be argued that voters are strategic in first-past-the-post DC elections, which always offer less party/candidate choice than proportional Legco elections. A vote cast for a party at this level might not carry the same meaning as that at the legislative level. For example, even if her favorite party is represented in a DC election, a strategic voter might support another party’s candidate to prevent her least favorite candidate from winning. I argue that this is not a major concern here. In this article, it is suggested that one can predict and explain polling patterns from the type of model a party assumes. In particular, where strategic voting is concerned, a voter might switch her allegiance to a party with a higher chance of winning in a DC election precisely because of the stronger local organization and network of the party. The vote share in district elections, then, is a direct consequence of a party’s local strength. The same goes for strategic coordination between parties of the same camp, which is usually based on the level of constituency support.

Second, it has long been suspected that many independent candidates, excluded from this research, are supported by the pro-Beijing camp. I classify parties based solely on the information provided by the candidates at the Electoral Affairs Commission. As I am interested in the effect of party development and operations on elections, support for self-proclaimed independent candidates cannot in any way be attributed to parties, even if they are helped from behind the scenes. It is also unrealistic to assume that voters are well aware of such implicit connections.

Third, party memberships within the pro-Beijing camp sometimes overlap. At the time of this study, a considerable number of candidates are simultaneously members of the DAB and the FTU. For example, there were 15 such candidates in the 2011 DC elections. As there is no way to split voters’ support, overlapping memberships are treated as
though the candidates represented both parties. The vote share for a DAB/FTU candidate (who reported both affiliations in official election documents) is considered as the same amount of support for both parties. The results are largely the same if such candidates are instead excluded from the analysis.\textsuperscript{60}

Finally, the precision and reliability of the empirical indicators depend on the number of cases underlying the calculation, that is, the number of DC constituencies contested by the party.\textsuperscript{61} As a precautionary measure, only parties with at least 20 valid observations in a pair of elections are included in this study so that a reasonable reliability of the indicators may be guaranteed.\textsuperscript{62}

5. Explaining Voting Patterns

Detailed figures for the indicators may be found in the appendix. I find that the suggested framework has good explanatory power in relation to the two electoral indicators. Results with ordinary least squares regressions are shown in Table 3. The elite party is omitted as the reference unit. From models 1 and 2, it may be seen that all coefficients for party models are significant at conventional levels (at least 10 percent, two-tailed) in explaining differential and deviation. The R-squared indices of the two tests are .63 and .81, respectively. Next, an assessment was performed to show how the party models fare against the traditional framework of pro-Beijing/democracy and socioeconomic positions. A dummy variable was included to indicate whether the party belongs to the pro-democracy camp. Measures of left–right socioeconomic position of parties come from an 11-point expert judgment in the macro report for Hong Kong from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems.\textsuperscript{63} A higher value indicates a more right-wing position. In models 3 and 4, neither of these controls is significant in predicting the variables. Most important, the coefficient for the mass party model on differential remains significant at the 1% level. The same goes for the cartel party model in the regression on deviation. It may be seen that the party models here have good explanatory power with regard to the two voting patterns; the effects largely persist even if the framework is placed alongside the dominant dimensions preferred by the literature.
Table 3: Effect of Party Models on Elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
<th>(4)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dependent variable</td>
<td>Differential</td>
<td>Deviation</td>
<td>Differential</td>
<td>Deviation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mass</td>
<td>16.77***</td>
<td>1.992*</td>
<td>11.06***</td>
<td>0.934</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3.988)</td>
<td>(1.058)</td>
<td>(2.611)</td>
<td>(1.030)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catch-all</td>
<td>14.91**</td>
<td>2.889*</td>
<td>6.206</td>
<td>1.694</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(5.510)</td>
<td>(1.462)</td>
<td>(4.497)</td>
<td>(1.773)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cartel</td>
<td>10.63*</td>
<td>9.934***</td>
<td>2.646</td>
<td>9.899***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(5.510)</td>
<td>(1.462)</td>
<td>(5.428)</td>
<td>(2.140)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro-democracy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-4.349</td>
<td>0.0271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(3.243)</td>
<td>(1.279)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left–right</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.143</td>
<td>-0.232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.680)</td>
<td>(0.268)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>17.46***</td>
<td>13.24***</td>
<td>26.59***</td>
<td>15.13***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2.945)</td>
<td>(0.781)</td>
<td>(4.366)</td>
<td>(1.722)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>.633</td>
<td>.811</td>
<td>.801</td>
<td>.880</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Standard errors are in parentheses. The elite party model is the reference category. Dependent variables are differential (models 1 and 3) and deviation (2 and 4).

$p = .10$. **$p = .05$. ***$p = .01$.

Figure 1: Classification of Political Parties in Hong Kong: 2007–2012

Note: Observations are labeled with party abbreviations and year of data. Refer to the list of abbreviations at the end of this article for full party names. The dotted line cuts the two axes at their respective means. PP was formed in 2011.
A graphical presentation of the political parties is shown in Figure 1, with deviation and differential as the two axes. To complement the statistical tests, this figure shows the effect of party models on electoral patterns, and how closely they correlate. The cutoff between high/low is at the mean (dotted lines). Comparing Figure 1 with Table 2 on Page 85, except for a few changes over time (to be discussed below), it may be seen that the correspondence between them is very good. For both pairs of elections in 2007/2008 and 2011/2012, the classifications for ADPL, CP, DAB, and LSD are accurate. The PP entered the scene in 2011 and is rightly considered an elite party. Despite its weak district performance, it consistently obtained a solid vote share across the two elections. Remarkably, it has a differential of 0.9 percent, meaning that its level of support is virtually identical in DC and Legco elections; a quick comparison with other parties shows that this is no small feat (other parties, on average, had 29.5 percent fewer votes in Legco elections).

Three parties underwent major changes over the time period covered. The DP is one of them. As discussed, the DP engaged in a controversial compromise with Beijing over political reform, thereby losing some core supporters while potentially gaining new ones. This is reflected by the movement of the DP up the deviation axis, showing greater electoral instability. It also places the DP among other catch-all parties. It would be interesting to see if the party opts to continue this strategy of expanding its supporter base and potentially transform into a catch-all party. However, it has to be noted that this change does not seem to be accompanied by a higher level of financial resources. Contrast this with the case of the FTU. Riding on its electoral success, the FTU greatly increased the extent of its electoral participation at all levels, which might also reflect the amount of financial resources contributed for the cause. The outcome is apparent in Figure 1: the deviation of vote share obtained by the FTU shot up in 2011. An increase in electoral instability with higher financial commitment might signal a stable transformation from mass to catch-all party. Finally, the LP, accurately classified as a cartel party in 2007/2008, assumed the position of a catch-all party in the subsequent period. This reflects the small comeback in popular elections achieved by the party in 2012, when the party may be said to have rebuilt some of its connections with supporters and was less reliant on the state–cartel relationship to survive. This partial transformation is also in line with its long-lived aspiration to
become a mass-based conservative party. According to the model, while the LP is not constrained financially, the success of the transformation to catch-all party depends on its effort to build party organizations locally.

6. Conclusion

Traditional party models, developed for Western democracies, are assumed to be less applicable in hybrid regimes as their political systems are in general less competitive and open. However, this article argues that the party system in Hong Kong is much more competitive than one would expect in a hybrid regime. Paradoxically, despite the reluctance of Beijing to allow the rise of strong parties in Hong Kong, the “one country, two systems” arrangement puts sovereign Beijing outside the polity. As a result, even if the party system is “stunted” in that no ruling party is permitted, it is highly competitive, with opposition parties free to mobilize and participate in certain elections. They may also criticize the government in power without fear of retaliation or repression. As a result, they enjoy a stable electoral advantage in the arena open to them. The level of contestation is also reflected by the fact that, while pro-Beijing parties are definitely more supportive of the government, they do not shy away from criticizing it, especially during election times, in order to increase their electoral appeal. The competition among parties culminates in a peculiar “stunted but contested” party system within the hybrid regime.

This point is reinforced by the fact that a typology of political parties borrowed from established models in the literature, may be applied in the case of Hong Kong. Major parties are classified into one of the four party models—namely, mass, elite, catch-all, and cartel—along electoral and organizational dimensions. This is done by looking at the organizational structure and the level of financial resources available to the party. It is then argued that the typology has strong explanatory power over voting patterns in elections. The organizational form of a party is reflected by the share of average vote differences obtained by the party in the legislative and district elections (differential). A bottom-up organization results in a higher differential, that is, a relatively better result in district elections vis-à-vis legislative ones, and vice versa for a top-down organization. The level of resources, on the other hand, is
found to explain electoral stability, measured by the standard deviation of vote share obtained across all DC constituencies (deviation). A party with wide but weak appeal will have a higher deviation, that is, more unstable performance in vote share across the region.

Through statistical analysis, the party models are shown to have significant effects on predicting the two variables; the effects are still considerable even after I controlled for the divide between democratic and pro-Beijing camps—an influential dimension in Hong Kong politics—as well as the parties’ socioeconomic left–right positions. Finally, after plotting the parties along the two axes, the positions of the parties correspond to the suggested typology very well. Exceptions are potential party transformations that may be explained by some recent development of the individual parties. The suggested party models are shown to have good explanatory power over voting patterns, highlighting their utility in understanding party politics in Hong Kong.

Political parties in Hong Kong are usually conceived through the pro-Beijing/democracy and socioeconomic axes, and it is acknowledged that this framework is still very important. The typology suggested here complements our understanding of parties by looking at their organizational and electoral dimensions irrespective of ideology. Currently, the resources dimension is quite similar to the pro-Beijing/democracy dimension, especially after the movement of the FTU, as pro-Beijing parties are all characterized by high levels of financial resources, and the opposite holds true for the democratic camp. It would be interesting to see if in the future any variation arises in this dimension. In addition, this framework contributes to the literature by bringing continuity to the study of parties in Hong Kong should the primary divide become less applicable if, for example, the internal conflict within the democratic camp intensifies, or if universal suffrage eventually takes place. This study also provides a theoretical foundation for convergence with research on political parties in established democracies.

This research has further implications for the study of hybrid regimes. It is usually believed that liberal authoritarianism is a relatively unstable form of political system. This is because social groups are strengthened by liberalization and pressure within the system builds up when there is no electoral release. It is also difficult to justify why political rights alone should be withheld while other rights have been granted. The peculiar case of Hong Kong provides an example of the
possibility of accommodating a highly contested party system within a hybrid regime. In the long run, it would be worth noting whether such an arrangement increases the pressure for democracy or offers a proxy for “electoral release,” otherwise unavailable in this kind of system.

Abbreviations
ADPL Association for Democracy and People’s Livelihood
CE Chief Executive
CP Civic Party
DAB Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong
DC District Council
DP Democratic Party
FTU Federation of Trade Unions
Legco Legislative Council
LSD League of Social Democrats
LP Liberal Party
PP People Power

Appendix A: Empirical Indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Cases</th>
<th>Differential (%)</th>
<th>Deviation (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADPL</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>38.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CP</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>25.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAB</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>30.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DP</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>29.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FTU</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>34.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LSD</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LP</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>26.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PP</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Refer to the list of abbreviations above for full party names. PP was formed in 2011. The number of cases refers to the number of district elections participated in by the party with a presence in the corresponding Legco constituency.
Appendix B: Average Income by Party

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Yearly income (in millions of HKD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CP</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAB</td>
<td>63.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DP</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LP</td>
<td>22.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Refer to the list of abbreviations for full party names. Figures are the average total income received by the party in 2008/2009 (an election year) and 2009/2010 (a nonelection year).

Notes

8. Ibid.
9. Simon N. M. Young and Richard Cullen, *Electing Hong Kong’s Chief Executive* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010).
11. Article 74, Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.
12. Lau and Kuan, “Hong Kong’s Stunted Political Party System.”


19. An interesting (but not necessarily significant) episode occurred in January 2011 (an election year). The DAB and the LP sided with the democrats to reject funding for the government’s bid to host the 2023 Asian Games. The CE, Donald Tsang, noted that the government had been “slipped and stabbed in the back.” See major newspapers, 14 January 2011.

20. I do not intend to argue that competitiveness entails the possibility of government-affiliated parties criticizing the government, which would make most democracies uncompetitive. This discussion is used to illustrate the fact that even pro-government parties do not always align their interests with those of the government, strengthening my point about the lack of a dominant/ruling party in the system, and the resultant level of contestation. I thank an anonymous reviewer for highlighting this point.


22. Pang-kwong Li, *Hong Kong from Britain to China: Political Cleavages, Electoral Dynamics and Institutional Changes* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000); Ngok Ma, “Changing Political Cleavages in Post-1997 Hong Kong: A Study of the Changes through the Electoral Arena,” in *Crisis and Transformation in China’s Hong Kong*, edited by Ming K. Chan and Alvin Y. So (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2002), pp. 111–138; Ma, *Political Development in Hong Kong*. In daily discussion of politics in Hong Kong, the “left” sometimes refers to pro-Beijing and the “right” to pro-Taiwan or pro-Kuomintang political forces. This conception is not used in this paper.

23. Ma, *Political Development in Hong Kong*.

27. The introduction of financial resources is where the suggested typology departs from traditional ones, in particular Krouwel’s.
28. Campaign expenses are available at the candidate level, but might not reflect the financial standing of the party.
32. Alan Ware, Citizens, Parties and the State (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987), p. 120.
33. Krouwel, “Party Organization.”
34. Duverger, Political Parties.
36. Duverger, Political Parties.
42. Cheng, “Elections and Political Parties.”
47. Ma, “Decline of the Democratic Party in Hong Kong.”
48. Lau and Kuan, “Hong Kong’s Stunted Political Party System.”
50. The exception is the New People’s Party, whose limited electoral participation precludes it from this study.
52. Ibid.; Katz and Mair, “Ascendancy of the Party in Public Office.”
53. Sing, “Hong Kong’s Democrats Hold Their Own.”
57. Sing, “Hong Kong’s Democrats Hold Their Own.”
58. With candidates also participating in the corresponding Legco constituency. This operationalization is required to align the included cases with the differential measure.
59. See, for example, Sing, “Hong Kong’s Democrats Hold Their Own.” This practice has a long history. The FTU indicated that 12 of its members competed in the 1988 District Board (predecessor of District Council) elections but revealed only two names. Cheng, “Elections and Political Parties.”
60. Although the FTU would then be excluded from the study in 2007/2008 with fewer than ten DC observations.
61. With candidates also participating in the corresponding Legco constituency. See note 58.
62. This excluded the Frontier in 2007/2008, the Neighborhood and Workers’ Service Centre in both 2007/2008 and 2011/2012; the Civil Force, New People’s Party, and NeoDemocrats in 2011/2012. The Labor Party was formed after the 2011 DC elections with its members running under other banners in the election.
64. Lau and Kuan, “Hong Kong’s Stunted Political Party System.”
65. Ibid.
66. See Ma, “Changing Political Cleavages.”