

The Impact of Pre-Election Protests in Electoral Autocracies: The Case of Hong Kong's Anti-ELAB Movement

STAN HOK-WUI WONG AND KELVIN CHUN-MAN CHAN

Scholars of electoral autocracies accord far more attention to post-election protests than pre-election ones, as the former have the potential to trigger a regime transition. We argue that pre-election protests can have a significant effect on election outcomes. In particular, they are likely to deepen social cleavages along two dimensions: age and immigrant status. The 2019 social unrest in Hong Kong provides a unique opportunity to evaluate the electoral impact of pre-election protests. Comparing public opinion data related to the 2019 and 2015 District Council elections, we find strong empirical support for our argument, as immigrant status and age are strong predictors of voting choices and voter turnout. Our findings imply that exposure to democratic protests may not help in bridging the gap in political attitudes between immigrants and natives.

KEYWORDS: Hong Kong elections; pre-election protest; electoral autocracy; public opinions; Anti-ELAB Movement.

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When studying protests, scholars of electoral autocracies have often focused on post-election protests. Some have observed that a rigged election provides a focal point for organizing mass mobilization that may at times topple the

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regime (Hafner-Burton, Hyde, & Jablonski, 2018; Tucker, 2007). Little is known about the effect of anti-regime protests on election outcomes in an authoritarian setting. This omission is unwarranted because democratic transitions are often a lengthy process punctuated by numerous elections and street-level protests. To gain a comprehensive understanding of democratic transitions or their failure, it is important to examine the dynamic relationship between protests and election outcomes.

From the vantage point of the opposition, organizing mass mobilization helps consolidate its support base while promoting its cause to would-be supporters. Successful mass mobilization should help the opposition build its political influences. Achieving this goal in an electoral autocracy is seldom easy because the authoritarian incumbent has exclusive access to state resources, the media, and law enforcement that the ruling elite can deploy to tarnish or clamp down on protests. In addition, when an anti-regime protest escalates into violent confrontations, it may intimidate bystanding citizens, thereby weakening its popular support. In the extreme, mass mobilization may expand the authoritarian incumbent's own support base.

In this paper, we examine the large-scale protest movement that engulfed Hong Kong in 2019 to investigate how anti-regime protests may impact authoritarian elections. As with the 2014 Umbrella Movement, the 2019 Anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill (Anti-ELAB) Movement also occurred before the District Council elections. Yet, while the Umbrella Movement fizzled out about a year prior to the election, the violent protests in 2019 escalated until a week before election day. This difference in timing helps us identify some potential effects of pre-election protests.

On the surface, the social unrest in 2019 brought a smashing electoral success for the opposition, as it won a landslide victory in the District Council elections that were held later that year: the opposition camp captured 388 out of 452 seats, winning the majority of all 18 District Councils. Beneath this unprecedented election outcome lies subtle electoral dynamics that should interest political scientists and Hong Kong observers alike. By analyzing data from Hong Kong Election Study (HKES) post-election surveys in 2019 and 2015, we identify three potential effects of the social unrest on the elections.

First and foremost, existing social cleavages seem to have deepened in the wake of the social unrest, as we find that immigrant status and age—two salient cleavages in Hong Kong's elections—became more powerful predictors of individual voting choices in 2019. The effects of these factors, however, underwent subtle changes. Our second striking finding is that while it was known that older immigrants were unlikely to be supporters of the opposition, young immigrants in 2019 also became significantly averse to the opposition camp. Finally, immigrant status and age can predict not only voting choice, but also camp defection in the 2019 elections.

Our findings highlight the potential effects of pre-election protests on authoritarian elections. Whether politicians on both sides choose to make use of mass mobilization to influence election outcomes is a subject that demands systematic investigation in future studies. Our findings also bear important implications for studies of Hong Kong politics. Recent studies have found that immigrants are unlikely to be supporters of the opposition, partly because of their lack of a common experience in a democratic struggle that natives share (Wong, Ma, & Lam, 2016). The difference may be bridged over time, however, as immigrants gradually acquire more common experience with natives (Wong, Ma, & Lam, 2018). The findings of this paper imply that common experience does not necessarily lead to a common political identification.

A caveat is in order. Hong Kong as a case has unique features that may limit the generalizability of its experience, yet it is not our intention to provide a definitive answer from a single case study of who (the authoritarian incumbent or the opposition) would benefit more from pre-election protests. Our objective is rather modest; we aim to identify two demographic factors through which pre-election protests may influence electoral outcomes. Since these factors also exist in other cases, albeit to a different degree, the implications of our argument are broadly comparative.

The remainder of this paper will be divided into seven sections. In the next section, we review extant studies of pre-election protests in electoral autocracies. We then present our argument in the third section. In the fourth section, we provide background information on the political cleavages in Hong Kong and discuss how the 2019 social unrest may have affected the electoral campaigns and the outcome of the 2019 District Council elections. We derive testable hypotheses in fifth section, followed by a section on the public opinion data. We present the data analysis in seventh section. We discuss the implications of our findings in the final section.

Pre-Election Anti-Regime Protests

We define pre-election protests as those that take place within one month prior to an election. While pre-election protests are not uncommon, whether they are beneficial to the opposition remains a subject of scholarly debate. On the one hand, organizing protests prior to an election may help opposition parties to rally electoral support. On the other, anti-regime protests, when escalating into large-scale conflicts, may heighten the sense of economic insecurity among bystanding citizens (Wang & Wong, 2021) and undermine the opposition's electoral chances in a number of ways.

First, opposition parties may pursue different objectives when staging anti-regime protests. Electoral autocracies can divide the opposition by barring some radical

opposition parties from participating in elections (Lust-Okar, 2005). While moderate opposition parties may want to stage a pre-election protest to drum up public support, radical opposition parties who have been banned from running may organize protests to delegitimize the election. The latter's attempt may damage the reputation of the former and undermine the opposition's unity.

Second, protest turnout can be an indicator of the unpopularity of a regime, but the signal it produces may create a dilemma for the opposition. If turnout is too low, the authoritarian incumbent may be tempted to suppress the opposition parties who organize the anti-regime protest (Hafner-Burton et al., 2018; Tucker, 2007). The authoritarian incumbent has a stronger incentive to rig the election or cancel it when the turnout is high, as it has a greater chance of losing (Bunce & Wolchik, 2009; Wahman, 2013).

Some extant works have pointed out that pre-election protests help consolidate and expand the opposition's support base. Protests give rise to new civic organizations, and they are often active in electoral mobilization (Amenta, Caren, Chiarello, & Su, 2010; McAdam & Tarrow, 2010). Analyzing Milosevic's rule in Serbia in the late 1990s, Bunce & Wolchik (2009) argue that pre-election protests help maintain the level of anti-regime sentiments, recruit new supporters, and enable opposition leaders to gain practical experience in refining strategies that pose bigger challenges against the regime. Schedler (2009) observes that opposition parties that organize pre-election protests perform significantly better than those that do not.

Extant works on this subject have focused on the strategic values of pre-election protests to the ruling and opposition elite, but how these protests may actually influence the voting behavior of ordinary citizens is not well understood. We argue that the attitudes of voters toward anti-regime protests are no less heterogeneous as the perceived interests of opposition parties in pre-election mobilization. To understand the impact of such protests on the electoral performance of the opposition, we must identify factors that give rise to heterogeneous attitudes among voters, a subject to which we now turn.

Our Argument

Generally speaking, the extent to which one benefits from the socio-economic status quo that these protests aim to subvert may influence one's attitude toward anti-regime protests.¹ The nature of these benefits is in turn determined by factors that vary

¹This is not to say that other factors such as identity and emotions play no role in shaping one's attitudes toward anti-regime protests. Van Stekelenburg and Klandermans (2013) provide a detailed overview of the social psychology of protests. Using a survey experiment, Chan, Nachman, and Mok (2020) show that mainlandization is a powerful cue to predict one's protest behavior.

from society to society. In the context of electoral autocracies, we argue that two factors are particularly relevant.

The first factor is age. The opposition that exists in contemporary electoral autocracies is often composed of diverse and even mutually hostile groups that share a single common goal of ousting the authoritarian incumbent (Beissinger, 2013; Howard & Roessler, 2006). Sustaining this “negative coalition” in a protest entails a movement frame that is acceptable to all. Democratic transition, electoral integrity, and independence are common movement frames that shape anti-regime protests. Younger generations tend to be more receptive to these post-materialistic causes than their older counterparts (Bennett, 2012; De Graaf & Evans, 1996; Inglehart & Flanagan, 1987; Tilley & Evans, 2014).

In addition, protest exposure also likely varies by age. By way of a natural experiment, Wong & Wong (2020) show that protest exposure through social media significantly increases Hong Kong students’ sense of political efficacy, while weakening their national identity. In addition, previous studies have shown that protests that rely on social media to organize events and mobilize supporters are more likely to attract youngsters since they are more sophisticated in utilizing social networks (Anduiza, Cristancho, & Sabucedo, 2014; F. L. Lee & Chan, 2015; Tufekci & Wilson, 2012). Shared experiences of protests are crucial for an individual to develop a sense of solidarity with other protestors and help them make sense of increasingly violent tactics during the protests. As senior citizens are less likely to participate in anti-regime protests, they are unable to receive on-site information shared by other protestors. Instead, senior citizens often rely on printed media or television news broadcasts to receive political information, which makes them vulnerable to censored information or disinformation that is common in electoral autocracies.

The second factor is immigrant status.² As Wong, Ma, and Lam (2018) point out, migration to electoral autocracies is becoming more commonplace. Immigrants move to these countries in search of better economic opportunities. It is not surprising that they are unsympathetic toward the cause of anti-regime protests, in part because their decision to immigrate is driven by materialistic concerns and in part because they did not experience the political struggles that many natives have endured.

The national origin of immigrants also matters (Aleksynska, 2011). If immigrants come from a polity that has a more oppressive political environment, they would find the political status quo of the receiving country to be highly satisfactory, however

²We define immigrants as people who were not born locally, while we refer to those who were locally born as natives.

unacceptable it is to the natives. Finally, given their weaker economic positions, immigrants may be more dependent on government welfare and more vulnerable to unemployment than natives (Riphahn, Sander, & Wunder, 2013). For this reason, they are likely to be averse to anti-regime protests that are often associated with negative economic consequences.

Electoral Competition at the District Council Level in Hong Kong: Changes and Continuities

Age

Consistent with the findings of Western democracies (Konzelmann, Wagner, & Rattinger, 2012; Smets, 2012; Tilley & Evans, 2014), senior voters in Hong Kong are conservative and support the incumbent pro-establishment parties that promote the status quo.³ Their influence in the District Council elections is amplified by the lower turnout of younger voters. Younger voters are less interested in voting on apolitical salient issues such as hygiene and transport at the constituency level where pro-democracy and pro-establishment parties have similar standpoints. As a result, senior voters have been overrepresented in previous District Council elections. In the 2015 election, for instance, the overall turnout rate was 47%, but the turnout rate among electors aged 61 years or above was 54.3%. In other words, they accounted for 33.1% of the votes while constituting 28.7% of all registered voters.

Pro-establishment parties have dominated in past District Council elections because they are more effective in swinging habitual senior voters to their flavor. Providing gifts to voters is an effective means for the governing party to garner support (Noren-Nilsson, 2015). The superior resources of pro-establishment parties enable them to capture the support of senior voters by providing free services for the elderly, such as providing health checks and periodically distributing daily necessities. These activities help them foster closer and frequent ties with their senior constituents and get them out to vote on Election Day.

Immigrant Status

Immigrants constitute a large proportion of voters in Hong Kong due to successive waves of immigration from Mainland China in the post-war period. A daily

³See the exit polls from the Public Opinion Programme of the University of Hong Kong.

permit quota of 150 has been in force since 1995 to allow mainlanders to gain the right of abode, creating a sizable immigrant population in Hong Kong. According to the 2016 by-census, 32.8% of all permanent adult residents aged 18 years or above are mainland Chinese immigrants.

Many have chosen to immigrate to Hong Kong for its economic opportunities. Past studies suggest that they are more satisfied with the level of civil liberties of Hong Kong and have a more positive view of the city's economy (Wong et al., 2016; Wong, Lee, Ho, & Clarke, 2019), making them more receptive to the governments of China and Hong Kong than natives.

Apart from their trust in the authorities, the portrayal of pro-establishment parties as patriotic may help them attract the support of immigrants. As many Chinese immigrants who moved to Hong Kong in the 1990s or later are not political refugees, they have no pre-existing aversion toward the Chinese government or to a Chinese cultural identity. Since immigrants often rely on their prior political knowledge to understand political developments in their new host country (Wals, 2013), the values promoted by pro-establishment parties fit the Chinese political discourse more than the Western liberal values promoted by pro-democracy parties.

Pro-establishment parties have aggressively courted the support of immigrants. Their electoral turnout and representation has also depended heavily on their being organized in voter registration and get-out-to-vote efforts (Barreto, 2005; Michon & Vermeulen, 2013). As they are able to easily reach out to immigrants with similar ethnic and cultural backgrounds, Beijing-controlled clan associations and immigrant organizations often collaborate with pro-establishment parties to provide gifts and organize activities exclusively for Chinese immigrants (Cheng, 2020; Yuen & Leung, in press). These measures allow pro-establishment candidates to develop closer personal ties with immigrant voters. Since Chinese immigrants often feel discriminated against by natives and struggle to integrate into mainstream society (New Home Association, 2016; Society for Community Organization, 2014), most of these immigrants prefer to communicate among themselves, increasing the difficulty for pro-democracy parties to reach out to immigrants as outsiders.

Apart from resource disparity, the demanding of immigrants to loosen residency qualifications for welfare benefits has also put them at odds with natives who argue that it is unfair to spend so many public resources on poor newcomers. As past studies show that parties advocating minority rights face backlashes from majority natives (Barreto & Collingwood, 2015; Dustmann, Vasiljeva, & Piil Damm, 2019; Otto & Steinhardt, 2014), pro-democracy parties in Hong Kong are discouraged from developing strategies to attract the support of immigrants.

As immigrants are concentrated in new public housing estates, the election results of these constituencies are indicative of their political orientation. While pro-democracy parties spent years offering community services in these neighborhoods quite a few candidates from this camp lost in these constituencies in the last District Council election. These results are consistent with the common impression that immigrants are more inclined to support pro-establishment parties.

The 2019 Anti-ELAB Movement

The 2019 Anti-ELAB Movement redefined the issues at stake in the election and encouraged voters to be more concerned with the ideologies of the candidates. The government introduced an amendment to the extradition law which would legalize the extradition of fugitives to China. Many citizens were alarmed that once the bill would be enacted into law, it could open the door for the Chinese government to arrest Hong Kong citizens by charging them with offenses that do not exist in Hong Kong's common law system. The fear was not unfounded, as some Hong Kong booksellers had been allegedly abducted to China only three years before.

Despite public concerns, few in Hong Kong at that time anticipated that the Anti-ELAB Movement would eventually develop into the most durable and violent anti-regime protests the region has ever seen. This is partly because Hong Kong's pro-democracy movement had undergone a long period of abeyance after the Umbrella Movement (F. L. Lee, Chan, & Chen, 2020). Social activists were arrested or denied the right to stand for elections. Internal strife among opposition groups continued. Pro-democracy candidates even lost by-elections, reflecting their waning public support. Except for some young people who embraced localism, most Hong Kongers seemed to have accepted the political reality.

Yet, mass protests gradually took shape in June 2019 as pro-establishment parties attempted to pass the bill in the legislature. With the protests spreading across the city, many neighborhoods were affected. The police also employed tear gas liberally, which caused widespread concerns for public health. Pro-establishment parties supported the heavy-handed approach of the police, arguing that it was the only way to restore public order and economic prosperity. In contrast, opposition parties sided with the protestors, advocating the "five demands" that included the end of police brutality and the implementation of universal suffrage. As violent street-level confrontations persisted until one week prior to the election, the social unrest became the single most relevant issue.

The protests also increased political participation and coordination, particularly among opposition supporters who were sympathetic toward the protests. For example, street booths were set up by concerned citizens to mobilize citizens to register as

voters. A historical high of 392,601 new voters registered in the 2019 electoral cycle. As the government announced that only around 142,000 applications were processed by the registration deadline, it is plausible that most of these newly registered voters registered only in the final few weeks. Second, some saw the election as an opportunity to advance the interests of the protesters, as elected officials could receive public funding to promote their political causes. A large number of new opposition candidates with no political experience ran in constituencies where the pro-democracy parties had not yet nominated any candidate. The 2019 election was the first election in which the pro-democracy camp managed to contest all constituencies.

Similar to other cases in which opposition parties form a unified coalition against the incumbent (Donno, 2013; Howard & Roessler, 2006), opposition supporters coordinated at the grassroots level with their fellows to tactically vote for the most winnable pro-democracy candidate. In the campaigning period of the election, opposition supporters designed their own posters and put them up on local “Lennon Walls,” public spaces where the protestors displayed promotion materials, to help voters distinguish the political affiliations of the candidates and frame the election as a referendum on the government. In a few constituencies with more than one opposition candidate, opposition supporters pressed the candidates to hold a primary or organize a straw poll to identify a single candidate to support in fear of diluting the votes.

All these measures were intended to attract new voters who had abstained or did not register in the 2015 elections. Table 1 illustrates how new voters contributed to the victory of the opposition camp. While the turnout of senior voters increased between the 2015 and 2019 elections, this difference was much smaller than in other age groups. Comparing their share of the vote with that of all registered voters, one can see that senior voters are no longer overrepresented. For this reason, the previous lead of pro-establishment parties among senior voters no longer effectively translated into success in the 2019 elections, as many pro-democracy candidates flipped

Table 1.
Voter Statistics in the 2015 and 2019 Elections

	Voter turnout		Vote share		Share of registered voters	
	2015	2019	2015	2019	2015	2019
18–40 years	37.6%	72.9%	24.8%	32.4%	31%	31.6%
41–60 years	49.1%	73%	42.1%	37.3%	40.3%	36.4%
61 years or above	54.3%	67.5%	33.1%	30.3%	28.7%	32%
Overall	47%	71.2%				

Source: Registration and Electoral Office, Hong Kong.

constituencies by taking a larger share of new voters than their opponents. The opposition's success with new voters is in some way analogous to the Brexit referendum in 2016 in which new voters were more likely to support the "exit" than habitual voters (Birch, 2016; Swales, 2016). These voters came out to vote because of the emergence of a relevant issue for which they had a strong preference.

Opposition parties captured 56.9% of the vote and pro-establishment parties 42.3%. However, the pro-establishment parties still performed much better in new public housing estates, where their electoral support ranged from 45.5% to 54%. The results suggest that pro-establishment parties still fared quite well in neighborhoods with a significant population of mainland immigrants.

While a dramatic increase in turnout helped opposition candidates to win the election, this does not imply that pro-establishment parties were losing support from senior and immigrant voters. It is noteworthy that in 314 out of 452 constituencies (69.5%), pro-establishment candidates actually received more votes in 2019 than in 2015. Since the winners were decided by plurality voting, the winner-take-all nature of the electoral formula helped to create an impression of a landslide defeat of the pro-establishment camp.

Hypotheses

The unprecedented scale and duration of the social unrest in 2019 had a massive impact on the District Council elections, as evidenced by the record-high turnout and landslide victory of the opposition. The smashing success of the opposition may have masked more subtle electoral dynamics that have a far-reaching impact beyond this election. According to our argument presented in the third section, we hypothesize that age and immigrant status would become stronger predictors of voting behavior in 2019 than in 2015. In particular, we posit the following.

Hypothesis 1: Immigrants were less likely to vote for the opposition in 2019 than in 2015.

Hypothesis 2: Turnout among immigrants was higher in 2019 than in 2015.

Hypothesis 3: Younger voters were more likely to vote for the opposition in 2019 than in 2015.

Hypothesis 4: Turnout among younger voters was higher in 2019 than in 2015.

The power of the social unrest in 2019 may have also manifested itself in changes of political orientation among the voters. Those who used to support pro-establishment parties may have chosen to vote for opposition parties and vice versa. Hence, we derive the following hypotheses.

Hypothesis 5: Immigrants were more likely to change their political identification in 2019 than in 2015.

Hypothesis 6: Younger voters were more likely to change their political identification in 2019 than in 2015.

Data

We tested our arguments using public opinion data from the Hong Kong Election Study. The data were collected within approximately one week after the 2019 District Council elections, which took place on November 24. The HKES team commissioned the professional survey company Dynata to implement an Internet survey with its online panel members. We made a total of 1,515 valid observations. As with many Internet surveys in Hong Kong, young people are overrepresented in the sample. To correct the sample bias, we calculated a post-stratification weight for each observation district using raking to match the population total over gender, age, and district.

Empirics

In Table 2, we examined the correlates of two dependent variables of interest: *votes for the opposition* and *turnout*. We analyzed the data using logistic regressions. To reduce omitted variable bias, we controlled for the effects of gender, education, and income. Wong and Wan (2018) show that homeownership is a strong predictor for political identification with the localist camp because the rising asset inequality has polarized inter-generational political preferences. For this reason, we also included a variable, *homeownership*, in the specifications. This is a dichotomous variable that is assigned a value of “1” if a respondent is a homeowner and “0” otherwise. A common belief holds that District Councilors in Hong Kong cultivate local support with small giveaways and consumables (Wong et al., 2019). We included a variable, *gift received*, that takes a value of “1” if a respondent has received any gift from a District Councilor and “0” otherwise. We controlled for district-fixed effects in all specifications.

For the sake of comparison, we also present the results based on HKES data from the 2015 District Council elections. Consistent with our expectations, immigrant status and age continue to be important predictors of voting behavior. However, we have found subtle changes in 2019.

Voting Choice

First, consider the variable *votes for the opposition*. The coefficient on the variable *age group* is negative and significant in 2019 across all specifications, but not in

Table 2.
Votes for the Opposition and Turnout: 2019 vs. 2015

Dependent variable	2019					2015						
	Votes for the opposition					Turnout						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
Immigrant	-0.755* (0.346)	-2.035** (0.584)	-2.096** (0.577)	-0.299 (0.312)	-0.293 (0.592)	-0.319 (0.599)	-1.048** (0.269)	0.575 (0.501)	0.573 (0.501)	0.284 (0.197)	-0.802** (0.265)	-0.762** (0.267)
Age group	-0.377** (0.087)	-0.462** (0.093)	-0.474** (0.094)	-0.238** (0.089)	-0.238* (0.096)	-0.240* (0.096)	-0.153* (0.071)	-0.089 (0.078)	-0.090 (0.078)	0.235** (0.051)	0.174** (0.056)	0.185** (0.057)
Immigrant × Age group		0.472* (0.217)	0.516* (0.216)		-0.002 (0.224)	-0.013 (0.227)	-0.477** (0.175)	-0.476** (0.175)			0.378** (0.122)	0.344** (0.125)
Female	0.075 (0.196)	0.055 (0.197)	0.053 (0.198)	-0.620** (0.206)	-0.620** (0.206)	-0.620** (0.206)	0.398* (0.194)	0.409* (0.195)	0.408* (0.196)	-0.414** (0.130)	-0.419** (0.131)	-0.396** (0.134)
Education	0.033 (0.103)	0.019 (0.102)	0.015 (0.102)	0.272* (0.110)	0.272* (0.110)	0.271* (0.109)	0.105 (0.099)	0.102 (0.099)	0.102 (0.099)	0.138 (0.072)	0.149* (0.072)	0.168* (0.073)
Income	-0.075 (0.063)	-0.073 (0.063)	-0.078 (0.062)	0.054 (0.063)	0.054 (0.063)	0.063 (0.061)	-0.024 (0.059)	-0.029 (0.060)	-0.029 (0.060)	0.102* (0.042)	0.103* (0.041)	0.087* (0.042)
Homeowner	-0.147 (0.212)	-0.167 (0.210)	-0.159 (0.210)	0.565* (0.229)	0.565* (0.229)	0.556* (0.231)	-0.179 (0.196)	-0.199 (0.199)	-0.199 (0.199)	0.648** (0.137)	0.657** (0.136)	0.635** (0.140)
Gift received			-0.326 (0.236)			0.360 (0.272)			-0.015 (0.189)			0.860** (0.141)
Constant	2.281** (0.642)	2.611** (0.670)	2.708** (0.677)	1.618* (0.690)	1.617* (0.696)	1.577* (0.694)	0.411 (0.653)	0.240 (0.657)	0.251 (0.671)	-1.549** (0.482)	-1.450** (0.510)	-1.897** (0.538)
Number of observations	1,132	1,132	1,132	1,481	1,481	1,481	1,119	1,119	1,119	2,112	2,112	2,112

Source: Hong Kong Election Study.

Notes: Respondents are sorted into five age groups: 18–25 years, 26–35 years, 36–45 years, 46–55 years, and 56 years or above. The estimation strategy is logistic regression. District-fixed effects are included in all specifications. Standard errors are in parentheses. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

2015. This result suggests that the generational divide in political identification became more pronounced after the social unrest in 2019. The data support Hypothesis 3.

Consistent with Hypothesis 1, immigrants are less likely to vote for opposition parties. Interestingly, the difference in 2015 between young immigrants and natives is statistically indistinguishable from zero, as evidenced by the insignificant standalone term of the variable *immigrant* in specifications (8) and (9). The effect of immigrant status is strong only when it is combined with the age effect. The negative and significant coefficient on the interaction term, *immigrant* \times *age group*, suggests that older immigrants were more averse to the opposition in 2015. In 2019, however, we find that the coefficient on the standalone term *immigrant* is negative and statistically significant across all specifications, implying that young immigrants in Hong Kong are less likely to support opposition parties than native Hong Kongers. Perhaps surprisingly, the coefficient on the interaction term is positive and statistically significant, suggesting that aversion to the opposition among immigrants is moderated by age.

Figure 1 shows the predicted probabilities of voting for the opposition based on age group and immigrant status. If we focus on native respondents (the solid lines), young people were more supportive of the opposition than older generations in both 2015 and 2019. The difference in their support widened in 2019, however, which is consistent with our argument that pre-election protests will polarize the electoral preferences of the young and old. It is notable that pre-election protests also drive a wedge between natives and immigrants. Interestingly, this difference experienced a subtle change. In 2015, young natives and young immigrants showed similar support for opposition parties, but older immigrants were less likely to vote for the opposition than older natives. In 2019, however, we observe reversed patterns. Electoral support for opposition parties among young immigrants dropped precipitously to become significantly lower than young natives while the electoral preferences of older immigrants and older natives converged.

What caused this reversal? Our conjecture is that it is due to the Umbrella and Anti-ELAB Movements having markedly different movement frames. In particular, the key movement frame of the Umbrella Movement was to democratize the political system (Ortmann, 2015). This pro-democracy cause appealed to young people regardless of their immigrant status. Since the Umbrella Movement, localism has been on the rise in response to accelerated economic and political integration with Mainland China (S. Y. Lee & Chou, 2020; Veg, 2017; Wong & Wan, 2018). The Anti-ELAB Movement reinforced localism while intensifying anti-mainland sentiments (F. L. Lee, Yuen, Tang, & Cheng, 2019), which were unlikely to be shared by young immigrants. By contrast, older immigrants were more sympathetic toward the feelings of natives due to their longer socialization.

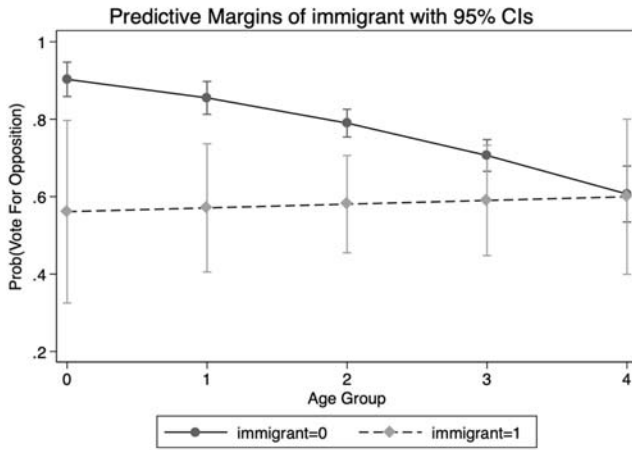
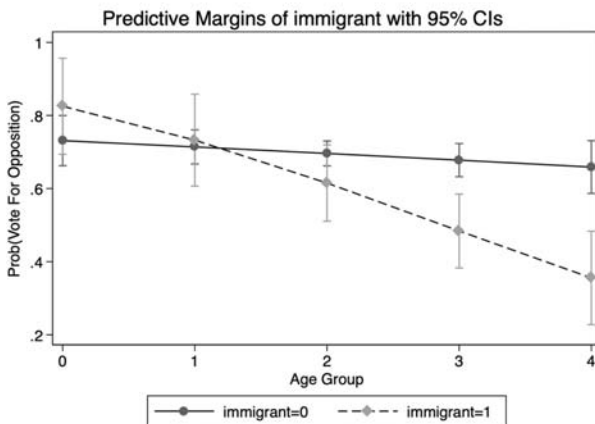
20192015

Figure 1. Probability of voting for the opposition: 2019 vs. 2015.

Turnout

When it comes to *turnout*, immigrants in 2015 were significantly less likely than natives to show up in the voting booth. Four years later, we can no longer detect any significant difference between immigrants and natives, suggesting that immigrants were equally eager to participate in the District Council elections. These remarkable results support Hypothesis 2, as immigrants in Hong Kong and elsewhere tend to be less politically active (Barreto, 2005).

The effect of age on turnout is worth noting, as we detected a dramatic change within four years. In particular, the coefficient on the variable *age group* is positive and

significant in 2015, but negative and significant in 2019. The results are consistent with Hypothesis 4. We believe that social unrest in 2019 provided young voters with a powerful impetus to choose their representatives to the District Councils, which have long been seen as an avenue to distribute spoils. The participation of young voters helps explain why the 2019 District Council elections achieved the highest turnout rate in Hong Kong's electoral history.

Switching Camps

An unprecedented turnout rate together with a landslide victory for the opposition camp suggests that many of those who came out to vote in 2019 but not in previous District Council elections were supporters of the opposition. More subtle electoral dynamics exist beneath this sweeping observation. A large-scale social movement like the social unrest in 2019 is likely to have an impact on one's political attitudes, and this manifests itself in two ways. The first is the reinforcement of one's existing beliefs. It is also possible that one may fundamentally change their political attitudes as a result of the event. In this subsection, we explore the latter effect.

The HKES survey contains a question asking respondents to recall whom they voted for in the 2016 Legislative Council elections. Comparing their answer to this question and their voting choice in the 2019 District Council elections, we constructed two variables: *opposition to establishment* and *establishment to opposition*. The former is a dummy variable that is assigned a value of "1" if a respondent defects from the opposition to the pro-establishment camp and "0" if otherwise. The latter variable is constructed the same way but in a different direction. We then regress these dependent variables on the same set of covariates in Table 1. For the sake of comparison, we also run parallel specifications with the 2015 HKES data. The results are presented in Table 3.

As may be seen from the table, no variable is a significant predictor of switching camps in 2015, except for gender in the specifications related to the switch from *establishment to opposition*. In 2019, however, age and immigrant status become crucial predictors of a change in camps, consistent with our expectations shown in Hypotheses 5 and 6. In particular, young immigrants are more likely than older immigrants to switch from the opposition to the pro-establishment camp. For natives, older generations are also more likely to desert opposition parties and vote for pro-establishment candidates. In an establishment-to-opposition switch, immigrant status has no significant effect while the variable *age group* has the expected outcome; older natives are significantly less likely to switch from the pro-establishment camp to the opposition camp. It is instructive to convert the coefficients into probabilities in order

Table 3.
Switching Camps: 2019 vs. 2015

Dependent variable	2019						2015					
	Opposition to establishment			Establishment to opposition			Opposition to establishment			Establishment to opposition		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
Immigrant	0.569 (0.372)	1.987** (0.577)	2.006** (0.580)	-0.007 (0.289)	-0.026 (0.492)	-0.027 (0.490)	0.175 (0.374)	-0.681 (0.554)	-0.663 (0.554)	-0.512 (0.269)	0.102 (0.300)	0.106 (0.301)
Age group	0.300** (0.105)	0.392** (0.119)	0.398** (0.120)	-0.225** (0.067)	-0.226** (0.071)	-0.227** (0.071)	0.043 (0.099)	-0.004 (0.107)	-0.002 (0.107)	0.023 (0.063)	0.053 (0.068)	0.053 (0.068)
Immigrant × Age group		-0.482* (0.210)	-0.511* (0.209)		0.008 (0.209)	0.010 (0.207)		0.270 (0.213)	0.260 (0.215)		-0.210 (0.149)	-0.213 (0.151)
Female	-0.232 (0.239)	-0.224 (0.241)	-0.222 (0.242)	0.024 (0.162)	0.024 (0.162)	0.023 (0.162)	-0.327 (0.254)	-0.335 (0.255)	-0.330 (0.254)	0.345* (0.169)	0.350* (0.168)	0.352* (0.167)
Education	-0.025 (0.123)	-0.019 (0.121)	-0.030 (0.122)	-0.007 (0.082)	-0.007 (0.082)	-0.007 (0.083)	0.076 (0.128)	0.082 (0.126)	0.084 (0.127)	0.143 (0.092)	0.140 (0.092)	0.142 (0.092)
Income	-0.001 (0.080)	0.001 (0.081)	0.013 (0.078)	-0.046 (0.049)	-0.046 (0.049)	-0.047 (0.050)	-0.101 (0.065)	-0.102 (0.065)	-0.107 (0.064)	0.013 (0.054)	0.013 (0.054)	0.011 (0.054)
Homeowner	0.211 (0.260)	0.233 (0.265)	0.234 (0.265)	0.056 (0.172)	0.056 (0.172)	0.057 (0.173)	-0.080 (0.277)	-0.071 (0.278)	-0.075 (0.278)	0.296 (0.173)	0.293 (0.173)	0.290 (0.174)
Gift received			0.383 (0.281)		-0.044 (0.210)	-0.044 (0.210)			0.152 (0.245)			0.053 (0.163)
Constant	-2.840** (0.809)	-3.176** (0.833)	-3.232** (0.835)	-0.044 (0.533)	-0.041 (0.540)	-0.036 (0.539)	-1.982** (0.680)	-1.864** (0.689)	-1.937** (0.697)	-2.345** (0.602)	-2.411** (0.594)	-2.436** (0.602)
Number of observations	1,515	1,515	1,515	1,515	1,515	1,515	2,160	2,160	2,160	2,160	2,160	2,160

Source: Hong Kong Election Study.

Notes: Respondents are sorted into five age groups: 18–25 years, 26–35 years, 36–45 years, 46–55 years, and 56 years or above. The estimation strategy is logistic regression. District-fixed effects are included in all specifications. Standard errors are in parentheses. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

to evaluate the effect size. Based on specification (6), the probability for natives who are aged 56 years or above to switch from the pro-establishment camp to the opposition camp is about 0.2, whereas it is 0.4 for natives aged 18–25 years. This difference is substantively important. It is notable that immigrants also show almost the same age difference. Unlike in 2015, gender is not a strong predictor of changing camps in 2019.

Discussion

We find strong empirical support for our argument that pre-election anti-regime protests divided voters along two dimensions of age and immigrant status. Our findings have practical implications for opposition parties participating in authoritarian elections. In particular, they are more likely to benefit from organizing pre-election protests if there are untapped youth votes that they can rally. The 2019 District Council elections in Hong Kong are a case in point. Traditionally, younger voters are reluctant to participate in District Council elections because of their perceived political insignificance (Wong, 2015). This implies the existence of a large amount of untapped youth votes for them to mobilize. Indeed, the landslide victory of the opposition camp is in part due to the record-high turnout of younger voters. Whether it can carry over this success to future Legislative Council elections remains unclear, not only because the untapped youth votes in legislative elections are significantly fewer, but also because Beijing has drastically changed the electoral rules of this city.

Similarly, the ruling elite also has its own untapped votes in the form of immigrants. Anti-regime protests are likely to sensitize a pro-status quo bias among immigrant voters and incentivize them to support the ruling coalition in the voting booth. In other words, a common experience of democratic protests does not necessarily bring immigrants closer to natives. For Hong Kong, where immigrants constitute about one third of the population, the pro-establishment camp possesses a potentially large electoral advantage.

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