

What Do UK Hongkongers Want in the Upcoming General Election?

■ April 2024

Executive summary

Vote for Hong Kong 2024 (V4HK) is a campaign run by recent immigrants from Hong Kong in the UK, with the aim of mobilising British Nationals (Overseas) (BN(O)) and other eligible Hongkongers in the UK to participate in the upcoming UK general election. V4HK endeavours to serve as a conduit of information between Hongkonger new arrivals and Westminster, bridging the former's priorities with the latter's policy-making.

To support our work with empirical evidence, V4HK conducted a survey on the priorities and political preferences among Hongkongers in the UK between mid-November 2023 and early January 2024. To supplement the findings from the survey, we ran two additional focus group sessions to gain a deeper understanding of our participants' political views. This report highlights some key findings about the political leaning, perspectives on various societal issues in Britain, and policy preferences of Hongkongers currently in the UK.

- 1. Most new Hongkonger immigrants came to the UK via the British National (Overseas) (BN(O)) visa scheme and intend to settle permanently in the UK, although they remain strongly attached to Hong Kong and their identity as Hongkongers.** More than three-quarters (76.1%) of our respondents live in the UK as BN(O) visa main applicants and 16.5% as dependants. 85.9% of survey respondents say they plan to stay in the UK in the foreseeable future. As discussed in the focus groups, most relocated to the UK to flee the deteriorating political situation in Hong Kong. Nevertheless, they remain strongly attached to their identity as “Hongkongers”, which continues to drive their political participation in the UK.
- 2. Hongkongers are keen to exercise their newfound political rights in the UK. A significant portion have already registered as voters.** BN(O) visa main applicants, who are BN(O) citizens, are eligible to vote in the upcoming general election. BN(O) dependants, who are not BN(O) citizens, will only become eligible to vote in general elections after they obtain British citizenship. More than four-fifths (81.0%) of the respondents have already registered as voters, with 7.5% planning to do so. Among the registered voters, 88.5% intend to remain in the UK, and we expect them to be potential voters in the 2024 elections and beyond. Focus group participants agreed that voting is an important way of fulfilling their basic civic responsibility as UK residents.
- 3. Hongkongers view foreign policy toward China and Hong Kong as the most important UK social issue to them. They are also least satisfied with the UK's performance on this issue.** The survey results unambiguously show that UK Hongkongers rate “foreign policy toward

China and Hong Kong” as the most important issue in UK society and politics: 55.7% of respondents — the highest proportion across all issues — rate foreign policy as “very important”. Almost all focus group participants agreed they prefer candidates with a clear and robust stance towards China. At the same time, more than half of the respondents are dissatisfied with the UK’s “foreign policy toward China and Hong Kong”, with only less than 15% reporting being satisfied with the government’s performance on this issue.

4. **Regarding specific policy measures, Hongkongers prioritise policies aimed at countering authoritarianism in China and Hong Kong, with a particular focus on transnational repression.** More than half of the respondents rate “tackling transnational surveillance and harassment by the Chinese and Hong Kong governments” (62.2%), “sanctioning Chinese and Hong Kong government officials responsible for human rights abuses” (59.0%), and “shutting down Confucius Institutes in the UK” (52.2%) as “very important”. Hongkongers view it as vital for the UK government to protect UK Hongkongers’ political freedoms from various sources of Chinese influence and transnational repression and to counter the global spread of authoritarianism. Such priority will also likely be a prominent factor in Hongkongers’ vote choice.

5. **The majority of Hongkongers have no clear preference for any UK political parties.** They either have no preference (31.2%) or do not know which party they support (13.4%). The Conservative Party, supported by 20.8% of survey respondents, remains the most popular party among Hongkongers, but its popularity has already seen a marked decline from another [survey](#) conducted in June 2023, which saw over half of Hongkongers in the UK supporting the party. Coming in second and third are the Liberal Democrats (15.9%) and Labour (7.2%). Since most Hongkongers are undecided about which party to vote for, we expect all parties to have a real chance at courting their support, especially in the marginal seats outlined in the [research](#) that Hong Kong Watch has conducted.

Table of contents

Executive summary	1
Table of contents	3
Introduction.....	4
Methodology.....	5
Key findings	7
1. An overview of Hongkongers in the UK and their political participation.....	7
2. What do Hongkongers in the UK care about?	13
3. Where do Hongkongers stand in the upcoming UK general election?	18
Discussion and conclusion	21
Acknowledgement	23
Appendix: Demographic profile of respondents	24

Introduction

Since the introduction of the British National (Overseas) (BN(O)) visa scheme on January 31, 2021, Hongkongers in the UK have quickly grown in numbers and have become a significant stakeholder group in British society. Official data indicate that as of December 2023, as many as 140,300 Hongkongers have arrived in the UK via the BN(O) route, with more than 190,000 visas granted under the scheme.¹ BN(O) visa main applicants, who count as BN(O) citizens, are eligible to vote in the upcoming general election, and BN(O) dependants will become eligible to vote in general elections after they obtain British citizenship.² In other words, just including those that have already arrived, the UK can expect more than 140,300 new potential voters in the upcoming elections and beyond.

Despite Hongkongers' growing presence in the UK, there have been few systematic efforts to understand the political inclinations of this burgeoning immigrant group and its potential impact on UK electoral politics. This report represents one of the first attempts to investigate 1) the political potential of Hongkongers as a voter bloc and 2) the electoral preferences of UK Hongkongers.

The first section of this report discusses the methodology of our research. We conducted a two-stage polling exercise consisting of an online survey and subsequent focus group discussions. The second section describes the key findings of our survey and focus group discussions. The third section summarises the findings and discusses the implications for the upcoming general election.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-system-statistics-year-ending-december-2023/safe-and-legal-humanitarian-routes-to-the-uk#british-national-overseas-bno-route>

² In Scotland and Wales, citizens of another country who have permission to enter or stay in the UK, or who do not need such permission, are classified as 'qualifying foreign nationals/citizens' and are eligible to vote in their local elections and the elections in their respective devolved parliaments.

Methodology

Our research consisted of two stages: an online survey and follow-up focus groups for in-depth discussions of survey findings.

Stage 1:

An online survey targeting Hongkongers across the UK was first conducted between 24 November 2023 and 7 January 2024, during which the questionnaire was spread by V4HK and its various partner organisations through digital platforms (i.e. our webpage, Facebook, Instagram, X, Telegram, Signal, and WhatsApp). Flyers with QR codes for the questionnaire were also distributed at community events in different cities in the UK, where we could directly engage with Hongkongers residing in those cities. The questionnaire was available in both traditional Chinese and English.

Due to the lack of comprehensive official demographic information about the Hong Kong community in the UK, a convenience sampling approach was adopted. Everyone satisfying all the following requirements at the time was eligible to participate in the survey: (1) aged over 18; (2) self-identifies as a Hongkonger, and; (3) currently resides in the UK (including England, Scotland, Wales, or Northern Ireland). We received 1273 responses in total, of which 1,220 met all the criteria and were adopted as effective responses for our analysis. The demographic profile of respondents is attached in the appendix.

Stage 2:

Of those effective responses, 334 respondents expressed their interest in participating in focus group sessions as follow-up research. In February 2024, 256 invitations were sent through email. Invitees were selected based on their gender, age, and region of residence in the hopes of forming focus groups that broadly follow the demographic patterns of our overall sample. Subsequently, two focus group sessions were successfully held in March 2024, each with 4 participants and lasting around 1 hour and 45 minutes. The sessions were all held online in Cantonese. During the sessions, facilitated by a representative from V4HK, participants were encouraged to share their personal experiences before and after moving to the UK, as well as their perspectives on UK politics and societal issues. Both the full questionnaire for the survey from Stage 1 and the full discussion outline for the focus group in Stage 2 have been uploaded to our website.³

There are several limitations to our methodology. While random sampling is effective at eliminating bias, it was not feasible for our survey design. This is because our team did not have information about the full population of UK

³ For the survey questionnaire and the focus group discussion outline, please head to <https://www.vote4hk.uk/survey-report>

Hongkongers and, therefore, could not create random samples from the larger population. Convenience and snowball sampling methods were the next best alternatives. Our team leveraged our access to Hongkonger community networks for sampling. We solicited survey responses from UK Hongkongers via online advertisements and in-person community events. Respondents were then encouraged to spread the survey among their networks. The focus group participants were also recruited on a voluntary basis, which tends to select those who are more invested in the discussion topics.

These sampling methods may introduce selection bias and overrepresent those Hongkongers who are active in the Hong Kong community in the UK. However, as our findings are broadly consistent with the discourse observed in diasporic Hongkonger media channels, there are few reasons to believe that such bias has led to major inaccuracies.

Key findings

1. An overview of Hongkongers in the UK and their political participation

Immigrants from Hong Kong are quickly becoming a significant group of stakeholders in British society. This section describes the characteristics of UK Hongkongers as an immigrant group. We find that the majority of UK Hongkongers are 1) planning to settle permanently in the UK, while retaining strong ties with Hong Kong; 2) beneficiaries of the British National (Overseas) route; 3) keen prospective voters in UK elections, and; 4) stressed but generally content with life in the UK. A more complete description of our sample's demographic profile can be found in the appendix.

Most Hongkonger immigrants intend to settle permanently in the UK, although they remain strongly attached to Hong Kong and their identity as Hongkongers. According to survey results, most (90.0%) of all respondents moved to the UK within the last three years (*Table 1*). 85.9% of all respondents plan to stay in the UK in the foreseeable future; only 3.2% plan to leave. The rest (10.9%) are uncertain of whether they will continue living in the UK (*Table 2*). Focus group participants uniformly cited the deterioration of political freedoms in Hong Kong as the primary reason for immigrating to the UK. Some participants, for instance, described Hong Kong's political environment as “suffocating” (啱唔到氣). Participants commonly referred to the imposition of the Hong Kong National Security Law in 2020 as a critical event prompting them to consider leaving Hong Kong. For some, the decision to leave originated in 2019, when the anti-extradition protests erupted in Hong Kong. One of them posited an even longer timeframe, linking the emigration desires to the stagnation of Hong Kong's democracy movement since the early 2000s.

	n=1,218
Born and raised in the UK	0.2%
Less than six months	9.0%
Six months to one year	10.3%
One to two years	32.4%
Two to three years	38.2%
Three years or more	9.4%
Prefer not to say	0.4%

Table 1. Respondents' length of residence in the UK

	n=1,217
Staying in the UK	85.9%
Planning to move to another country or return to Hong Kong	3.2%
Don't know	10.9%

Table 2. Respondents' intention to stay in the UK

All focus group participants identified strongly as “Hongkongers”, with some expressing a clear desire to preserve their Hongkonger identity in the UK. The Hongkonger identity, they perceived, was threatened by growing censorship in Hong Kong, as “certain things,” including the exercise of basic freedoms of speech and press, “can’t be done in Hong Kong” (有啲嘢係香港做唔到). The UK provided them with a haven to keep sharing Hong Kong’s unique story and history. Furthermore, participants commonly viewed the Hongkonger identity as distinct from the Chinese, owing to Hong Kong’s unique history and a different perception of China and the Chinese Communist Party. Nearly half of the participants favoured a more institutionalised distinction between Hongkongers and Chinese, such as listing “Hongkonger” as a separate ethnicity from Chinese in employment and bank application forms.

Notably, the strong Hongkonger identity does not prevent them from developing a British identification. Some identified themselves as British Hongkongers (英國香港人), stressing that a Hongkonger identity is compatible with a UK identity. They preferred using a hyphenated identity over a “purely British” identity because they did not want to abandon their Hongkonger identity. Some participants highlighted the difference between British residents and citizens. They expressed that they are “not yet” British — they are just “residents” for now — but if and when they obtain British citizenship after the “5+1” scheme, they may identify as British Hongkongers.

While Hongkongers are keen to participate in British politics, is their identity as Hongkongers an important part of such political participation? Some evidence suggests that it is. A brief search on the UK’s Companies House register yielded around 30 groups that are Community Interest Companies, charities, or other incorporated entities with the primary aim of serving new Hongkonger immigrants in the UK. Many more such groups exist informally or are unincorporated, such as a prominent community group based in Sutton in Greater London. These groups, incorporated or not, are important nexuses for networking and collective action for Hongkonger immigrants in the UK, facilitating actions ranging from organising facilities to launching petitions to members of Parliament.

However, our survey results indicate that most (66.4%) do not actively participate in Hongkonger communities after moving to the UK (*Figure 1*). Focus group participants attributed this to the time and effort needed for them to settle down properly and secure their livelihood in the UK, which reduced their availability for social and political action. Nevertheless, precisely because they see Hong Kong’s distinct identity and values being threatened by censorship and erasure by Hong Kong authorities, many of them feel a responsibility to fully utilise the freedoms they enjoy in the UK and preserve their identity and culture as a diaspora. This partly explains why many Hongkongers are keen to share their cultural and political experience with people from other countries, a sentiment echoed by many focus group participants.

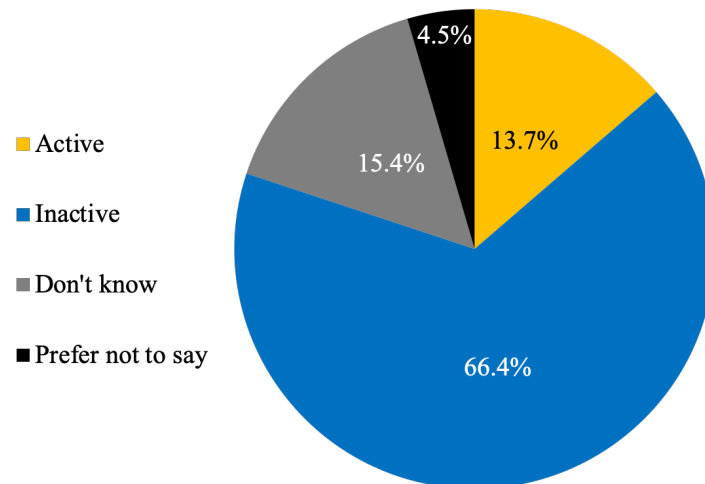


Figure 1. Respondents' engagement in Hongkonger community after moving to the UK

Most immigrated via the British National (Overseas) (BN(O)) route, which entitles them to certain political rights. According to official data, around 140,300 people have arrived in the UK via the BN(O) route between January 31, 2021 and December 2023.⁴ Our survey and focus group data reflect the outsized role of the BN(O) route to the Hongkonger community in the UK. More than three-quarters (76.1%) of our respondents are living in the UK as BN(O) visa main applicants and 16.5% as dependants (*Table 3*). Focus group participants attributed their choice to immigrate to the UK, as opposed to other countries, to a variety of factors. The most prominent factor was the perception that immigration through the BN(O) route was relatively easy and likely to succeed. As one participant described, BN(O) eligibility requirements are more straightforward and easier to meet compared to other popular destinations for Hongkonger immigrants, such as Canada, Australia, or Taiwan. Another factor was Hongkongers' cultural and historical affinity with the UK.

A large number of Hongkonger immigrants are currently eligible or will be eligible to vote in a general election. BN(O) visa main applicants, who count as BN(O) citizens, are eligible to vote in the upcoming general election. BN(O) dependants will only become eligible to vote in general elections after they obtain British citizenship.⁵ Together with those currently with British citizenship, 81.2% of our respondents are eligible to vote in the upcoming general election (*Table 3*).

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-system-statistics-year-ending-december-2023/safe-and-legal-humanitarian-routes-to-the-uk#british-national-overseas-bno-route>

⁵ In Scotland and Wales, citizens of another country who have permission to enter or stay in the UK, or who do not need such permission, are classified as 'qualifying foreign nationals/citizens' and are eligible to vote in their local elections and the elections in their respective devolved parliaments.

	n=1,215
BN(O) visa (main applicant)	76.1%
BN(O) visa (dependant)	16.5%
Work / Global talent / Student visa	1.0%
British citizen or spouse	5.1%
Asylum seeker or refugee	0.2%
Other	0.3%
Prefer not to say	0.7%

Table 3. Respondents' current visa category

Hongkongers are keen to exercise their political rights as voters. UK Hongkongers are fairly aware of their political rights in the UK. More than two-fifths (41.4%) of survey respondents report a “good” (32.4%) or “very good” (9.0%) understanding of their political rights in the UK (e.g., whether they have voting or candidacy rights and what elections they can participate in). 42.9% report an average understanding. Only a relatively small portion (15.6%) report a “poor” (13.9%) or “very poor” (1.7%) understanding (*Figure 2*). This is reflected in their voter registration statistics. More than four-fifths (81.0%) of the respondents have already registered as voters, with 7.5% planning to do so (*Table 4*). Among the registered voters, 88.5% intend to remain in the UK (*Table 5*), and we expect them to be potential voters in the 2024 elections and beyond.

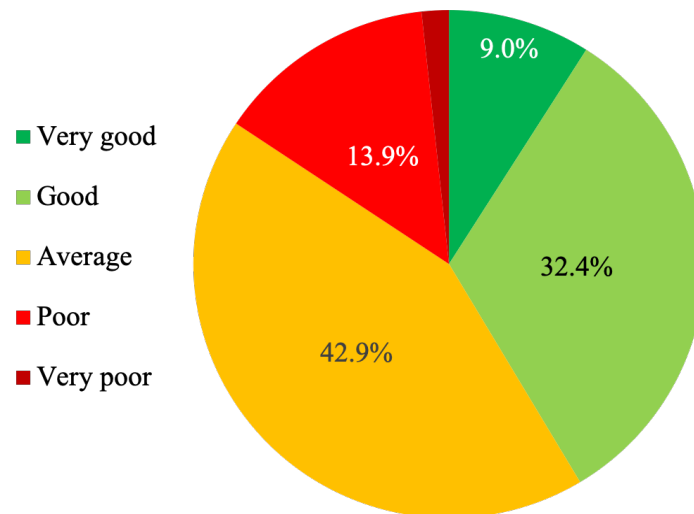


Figure 2. Respondents' understanding of their political rights in the UK

	n=1,219
Registered voter	81.0%
Not registered, but I plan to register	7.5%
Not registered, and I do not plan to register	0.9%
Not eligible to vote	6.3%
Don't know if I am eligible to vote	3.6%
Don't know if I am a registered voter	0.7%

Table 4. Respondents' current voter registration status in the UK

	n=986
Staying in the UK	88.5%
Planning to move to another country or return to Hong Kong	2.0%
Don't know	9.4%

Table 5. Intention to stay in the UK among registered voters

Most focus group participants agreed that voting is an important way of fulfilling their “basic civic responsibility” (基本嘅公民責任) as UK residents. Nearly half of the participants have already voted in UK council elections in their respective districts since coming to the UK in 2021. They were familiar with elections, and their prior voting experience in Hong Kong served as a reference point. Some of our respondents stated that the loss of liberty and democracy in Hong Kong motivated them to cherish voting opportunities in the UK even more.

However, certain barriers to their political participation remain. A major impediment is a lack of familiarity with UK politics. Only nearly a fifth (19.8%) of survey respondents think they have a “good” (16.5%) or “very good” (3.3%) understanding of British politics, with about half (50.9%) characterising their knowledge as “average” (Figure 3). Some focus group participants refrained from voting in local elections due to insufficient knowledge about UK political parties and their candidates. Others viewed the local elections as less consequential to their priority of influencing UK foreign policy toward Hong Kong. In general, focus group participants were keen to learn more about UK politics in order to participate better in the upcoming general election.

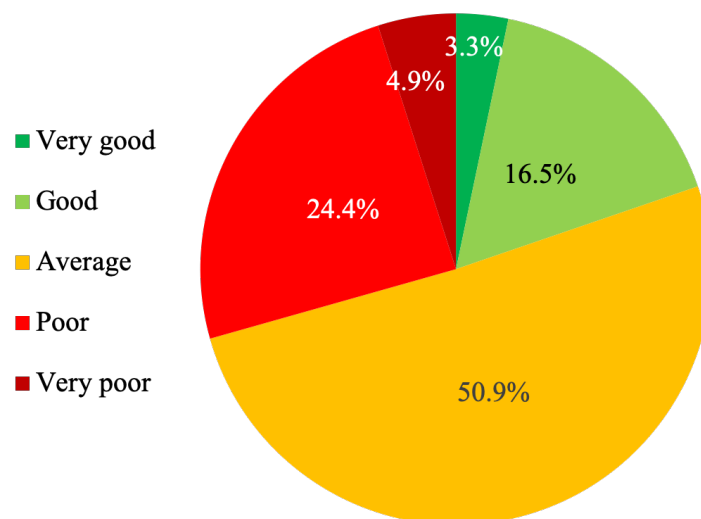


Figure 3. Respondents' understanding of UK politics

Hongkongers are stressed but generally content with life in the UK. Over half (50.1%) of all survey respondents describe their quality of life as “good” (45.8%) or “very good” (4.3%). 43.8% report an “average” quality of life. Only 5.9% think their quality of life is “poor” (5.1%) or “very poor” (0.8%) (Figure 4). Happiness levels show even more positive results, with 60.7% reporting being “happy” or “very happy” (Figure 5).

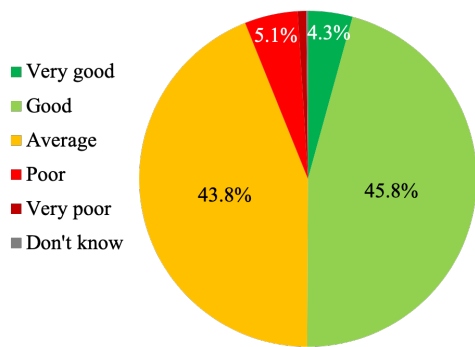


Figure 4. Respondents' quality of life in the UK

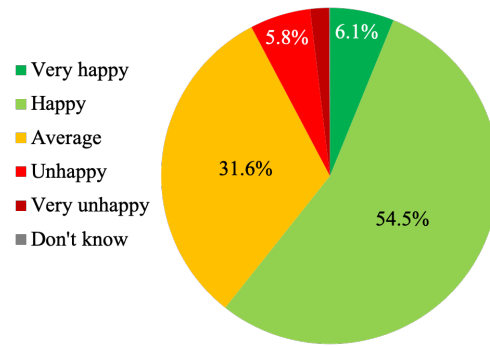


Figure 5. Respondents' level of happiness in life in the UK

However, stress levels are substantial. While 31.2% rate their stress in life in the UK as “high” (27.6%) or “very high” (3.6%), only less than a fifth (18.2%) of them rate their stress in life in the UK as “low” (14.0%) or “very low” (4.2%) (Figure 6). When asked to list the things that have created the most stress for them, more than half (51.5%) of respondents reveal they are bothered by the “cost of living”, followed by “employment opportunities” (35.4%) and “taxes” (35.0%). Notably, a number of them also report “surveillance and harassment by the Chinese and Hong Kong governments” (30.7%) and “political and social conditions in Hong Kong” (28.2%) as sources of stress for them (Figure 7).

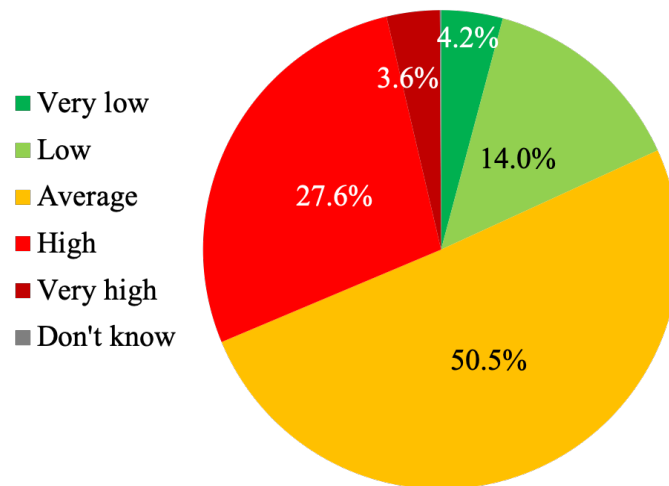


Figure 6. Respondents' level of stress in life in the UK

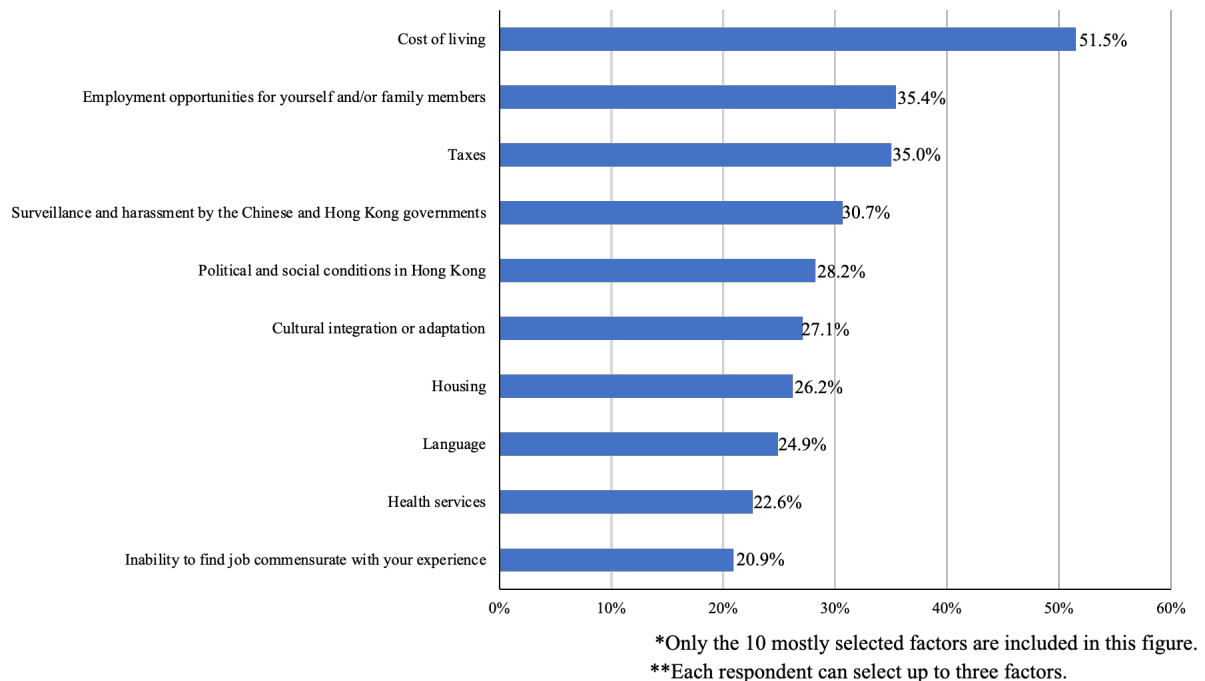


Figure 7. Factors creating the most stress to respondents during their living or planning to move to the UK

2. What do Hongkongers in the UK care about?

Given that a large number of UK Hongkongers are already eligible or will become eligible to vote in UK elections, it is important for politicians, activists, and other interested parties to probe the electoral choices of this burgeoning group of voters. One of the most promising approaches to understanding UK Hongkongers' vote choices is to study their policy preference. This section aims to enrich our understanding of UK Hongkongers' electoral preferences by describing how they rank the importance of socio-political issues, how satisfied they are with each of these issues, and what specific policy measures they view as important. Our main findings are as follows:

UK Hongkongers prioritise foreign policy toward China and Hong Kong. Survey respondents were asked how important they view a set of UK societal issues. The results unambiguously show that UK Hongkongers rate “foreign policy toward China and Hong Kong” as the most important issue in UK society and politics: 55.7% of respondents—the widest margin across all issues—rate foreign policy as “very important” (Figure 8). This finding is confirmed when we translate the importance rating into a five-point scale, where 0 is “not at all important”, 2 is “neutral”, and 4 is “very important”, “foreign policy toward China and Hong Kong” has the highest mean score of 3.47 (Figure 9).

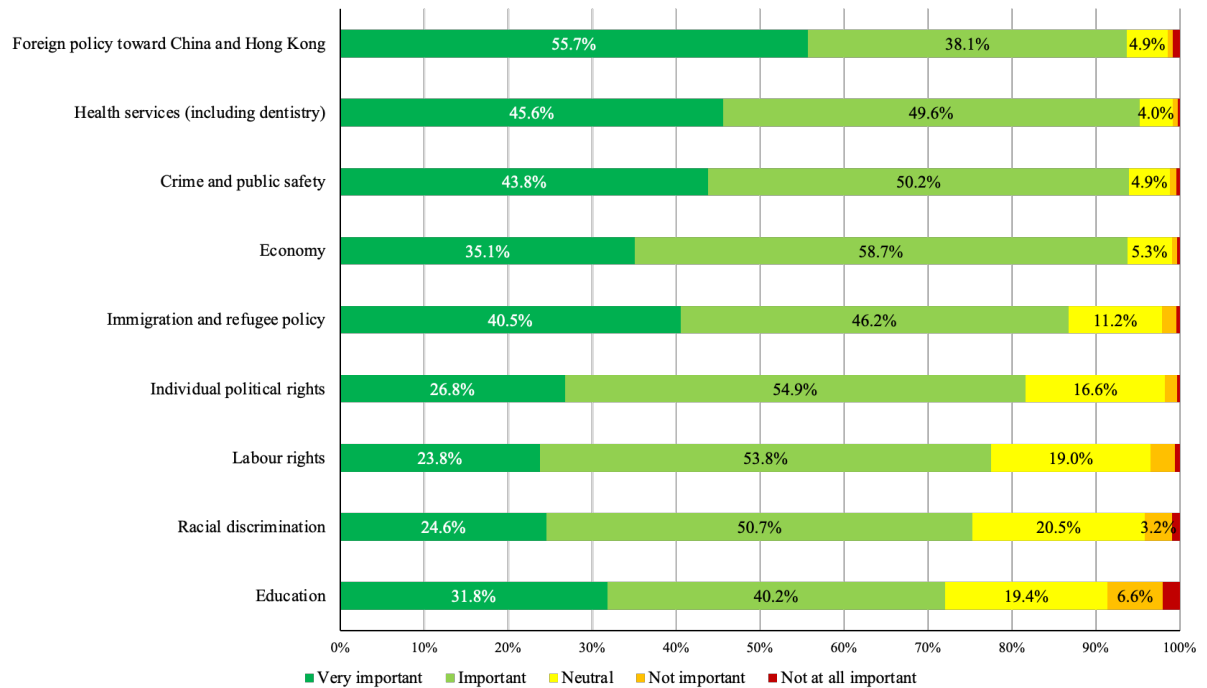


Figure 8. Respondents' perception of the importance of different societal issues in the UK

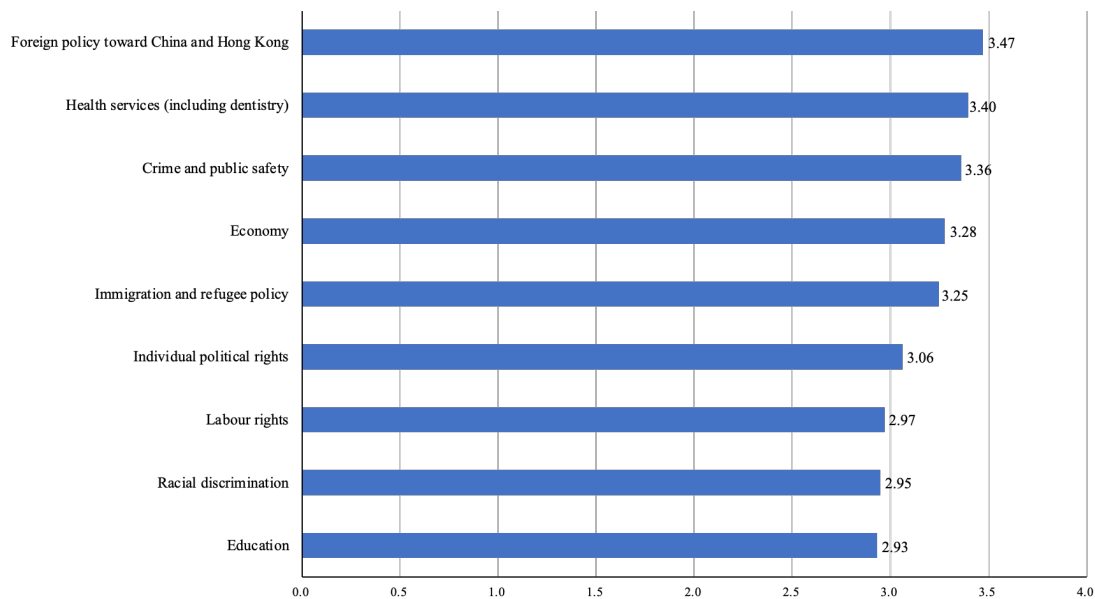


Figure 9. Mean score of respondents' perception of importance toward different UK societal issues

Focus group sessions confirmed Hongkongers' prioritisation of foreign policy across all issues. However, they also revealed a more nuanced view of the limits of an excessive focus on foreign policy and the need to balance external strength with internal development. Nearly all focus group participants agreed that UK foreign policy toward China and Hong Kong — specifically, having a clear and robust stance towards China (對華強硬) — should be prioritised and that the survey results matched their understanding of other Hongkongers' preferences. A few went as far as to suggest that they would “definitely vote for a hawkish, anti-CCP candidate”. A participant noted that while a robust policy toward China is

preferred, livelihood issues (民生) should nevertheless be prioritised because they determine British national strength in the long run. It was added that mainstream British people would also prioritise domestic issues over foreign policy, and Hongkongers, as a minority group in the UK, might have difficulty shifting the policy focus of Westminster to foreign policy issues they care about. Another noted that while a tough stance toward China is a top priority, a candidate who can competently solve domestic livelihood issues is preferred. This, as further explained, is most conducive to domestic stability and development and, hence, the most sustainable way for the UK to counter China.

This does not imply that other issues are irrelevant to Hongkongers' voter choice. "Crime and public safety", for instance, is the third most important issue (Figures 8 & 9), and some participants alluded to a perception of pervasive crimes in their community. Employment and education were also mentioned during the focus group sessions. However, the salience of these issues varied among participants, contrasting with the unanimous prioritisation of foreign policy. **The bottom line is while individual Hongkongers might disagree about the priorities of domestic bread-and-butter issues, they overwhelmingly agree that foreign policy toward Hong Kong and China should be prioritised.**

UK Hongkongers are also the least satisfied with the UK's performance on foreign policy. Survey respondents were asked how satisfied or dissatisfied they were with the same set of societal issues. More than half (50.9%) of the respondents are either "very dissatisfied" (14.4%) or "dissatisfied" (36.4%) with the UK's "foreign policy toward China and Hong Kong", with only 0.8% being "very satisfied" and 13.3% "satisfied" (Figure 10). The results were translated into a five-point scale (Figure 11), where 0 is "very dissatisfied", 2 is "neutral", and 4 is "very satisfied." As shown in Figure 11, UK Hongkongers are satisfied with "individual political rights" (2.59), "racial discrimination" (2.37), labour rights" (2.36), and "education (2.34). They are dissatisfied with "foreign policy toward China and Hong Kong" (1.50), "economy" (1.60), "crime and public safety" (1.77), "health service" (1.81), and "immigration and refugee policy" (1.95).

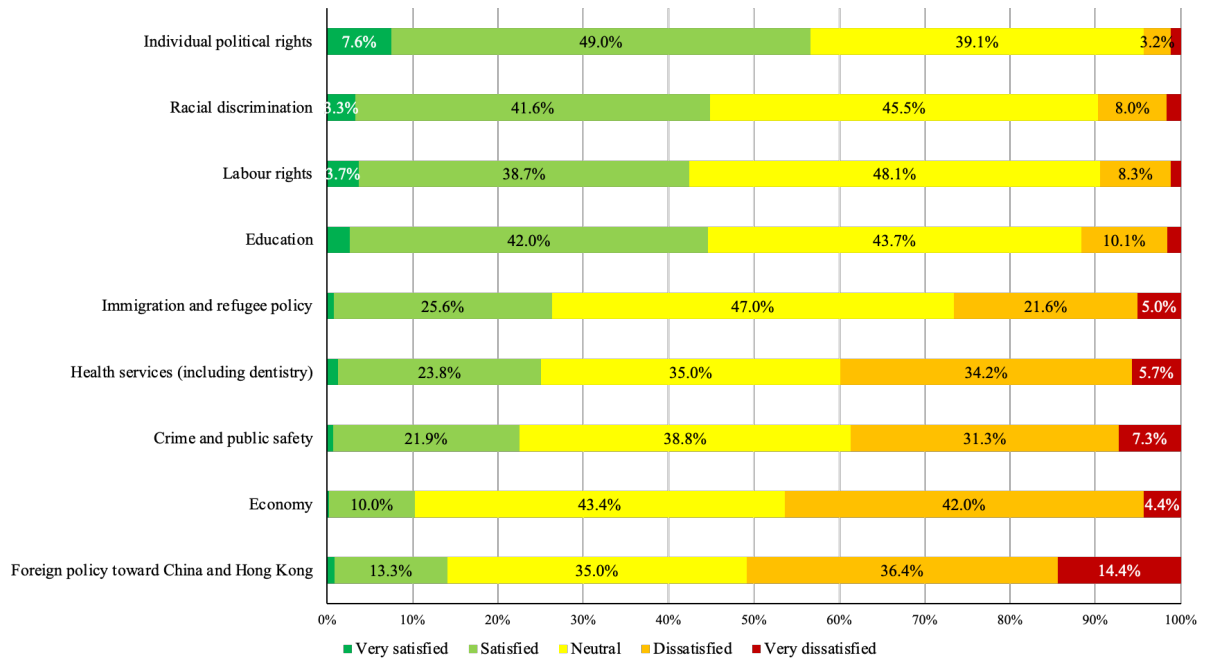


Figure 10. Respondents' satisfaction with different UK societal issues

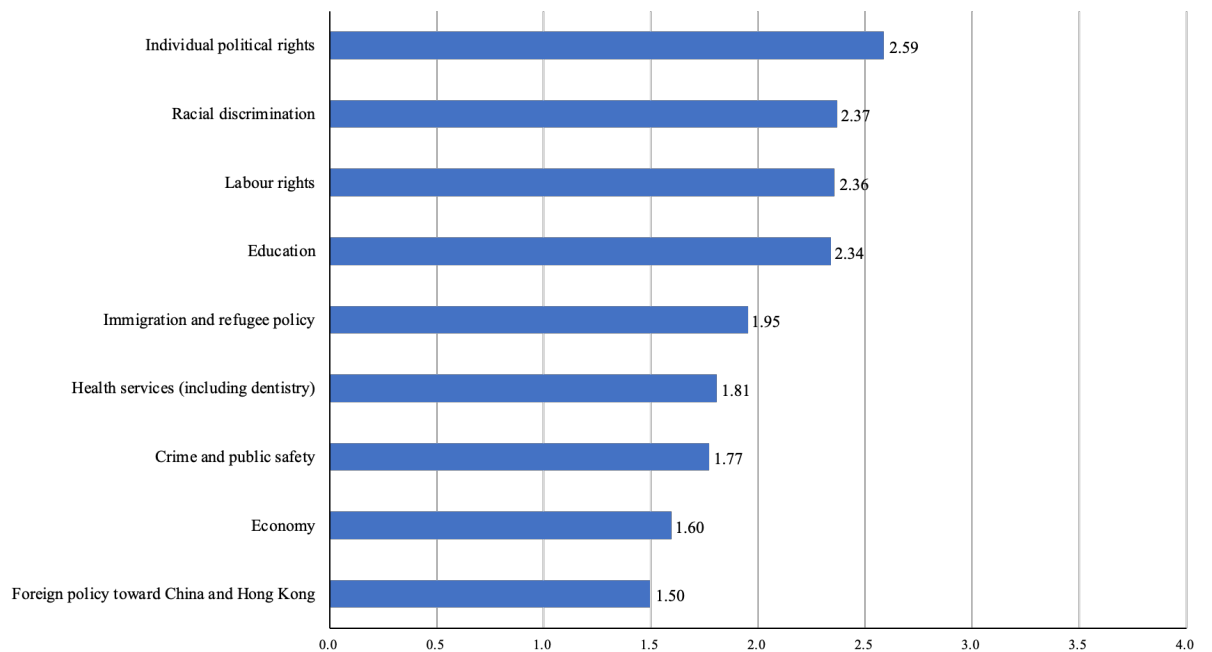


Figure 11. Mean score of respondents' satisfaction with different UK societal issues

Regarding specific policies or measures, Hongkongers tend to prioritise the government's response to political repression by the Chinese and Hong Kong governments. Survey respondents were asked to rate the importance of various hypothetical policies or measures. More than half of the respondents rate “tackling transnational surveillance and harassment by the Chinese and Hong Kong governments” (62.2%), “sanctioning Chinese and Hong Kong government officials responsible for human rights abuses” (59.0%), and “shutting down Confucius Institutes in the UK” (52.2%) as “very important” (Figure 12). When the results were translated into a five-point scale, where 0 is “not at all important”, 2

is “neutral”, and 4 is “very important”, “tackling transnational surveillance and harassment by the Chinese and Hong Kong government” has the highest mean score (3.55) (Figure 13), indicating a strong preference for the measure among Hongkongers in the UK.

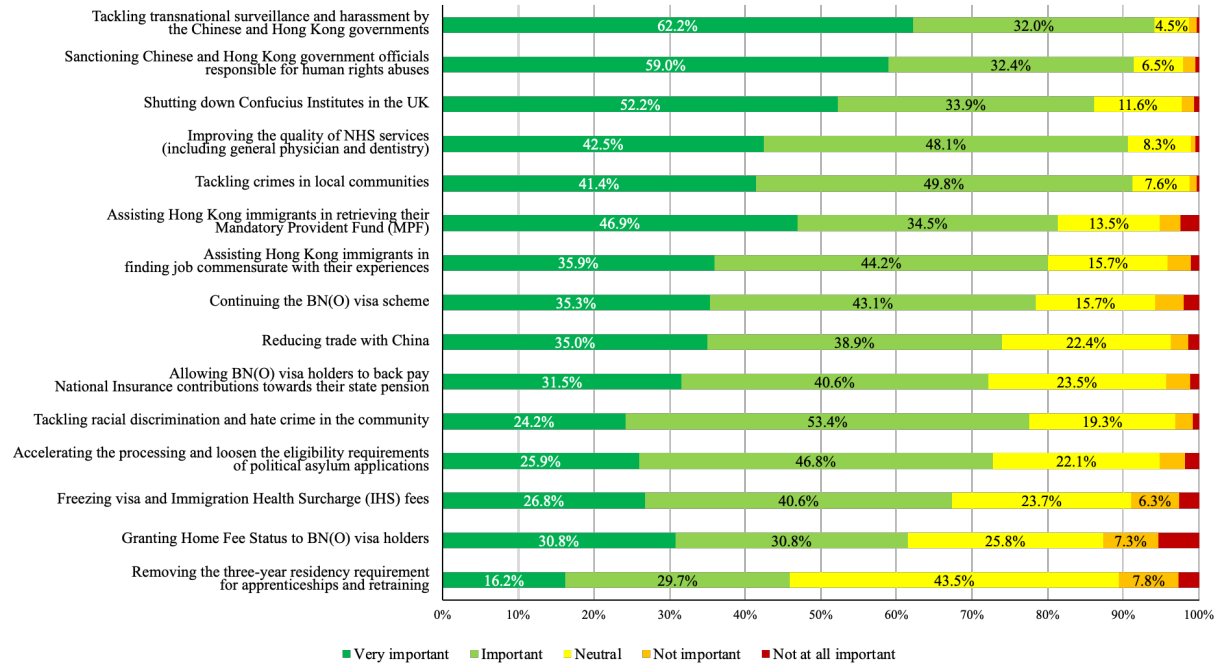


Figure 12. Respondents’ perception of the importance of different policies or measures

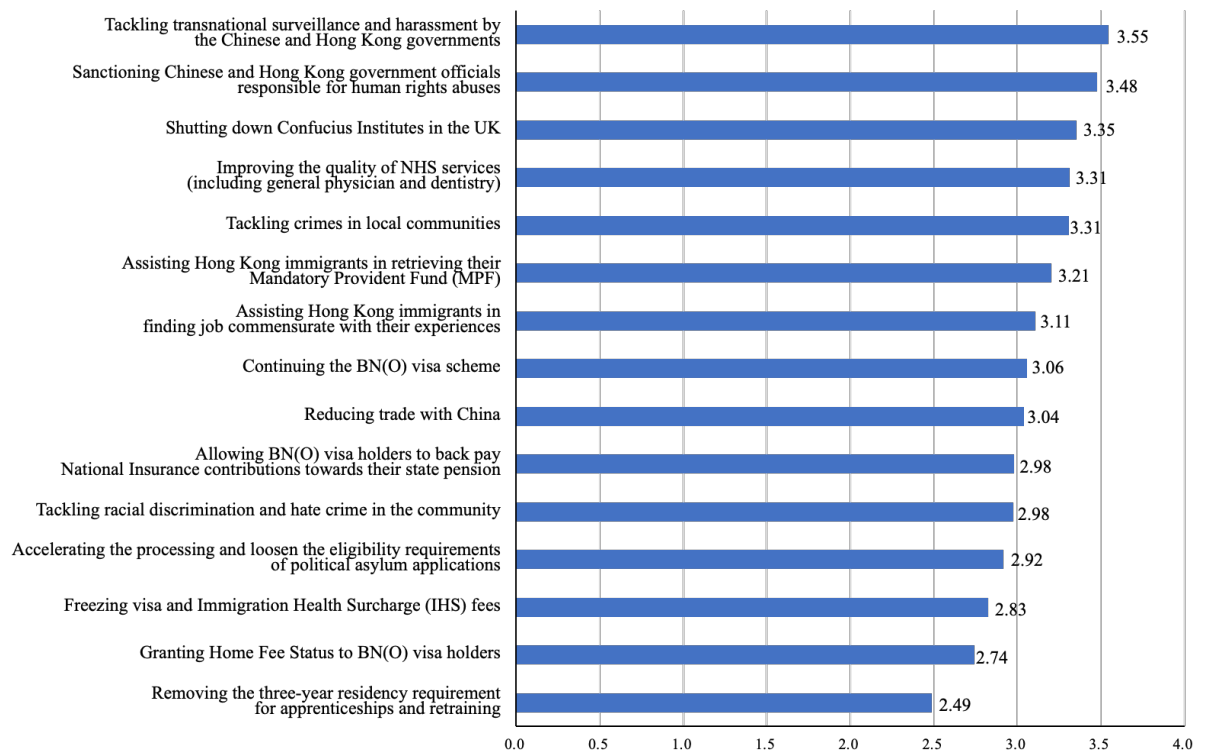


Figure 13. Mean score of respondents’ perception of importance toward different policies or measures

Considering that many UK Hongkongers left Hong Kong due to its deteriorating political freedoms, it is unsurprising that they prioritise policy measures aimed at countering Chinese surveillance in the UK and deterring further repression in Hong Kong. Most of the focus group participants expressed some degree of anxiety over surveillance in the UK, and such anxiety has prevented them from fully exercising their rights and freedoms. Some described having experienced transnational surveillance or even repression first-hand, such as being photographed or videotaped by alleged CCP supporters in assemblies/protests organised by Hongkongers in the UK or being harassed online. Some participants characterised Confucius Institutes as a conduit of Chinese infiltration and propaganda; to them, closing these institutes was more important than sanctioning Hong Kong and Chinese officials responsible for human rights abuses. A few focus group members floated policy ideas that were not listed on the survey. For instance, one participant urged the UK government to raise the international profile of political prisoners in Hong Kong, such as Jimmy Lai. Another suggested the UK align more closely with other democratic countries to combat global authoritarianism. In short, Hongkongers view it as vitally important for the UK government to protect UK Hongkongers’ political freedoms from various sources of Chinese influence and transnational repression and to counter the global spread of authoritarianism.

3. Where do Hongkongers stand in the upcoming UK general election?

Another way to understand Hongkongers’ electoral choice is to analyse their preferences for or identification with UK political parties. Survey respondents were asked which political party in the UK they were inclined to support. Results show that **the majority of UK Hongkongers have no clear preference for any UK political parties. They either have no preference (31.2%) or do not know which party they support (13.4%).** A minority of respondents (4%) do not support any (*Figure 14*). This suggests that UK Hongkongers, as a voting bloc, are largely undecided about how they would vote in the upcoming general election.

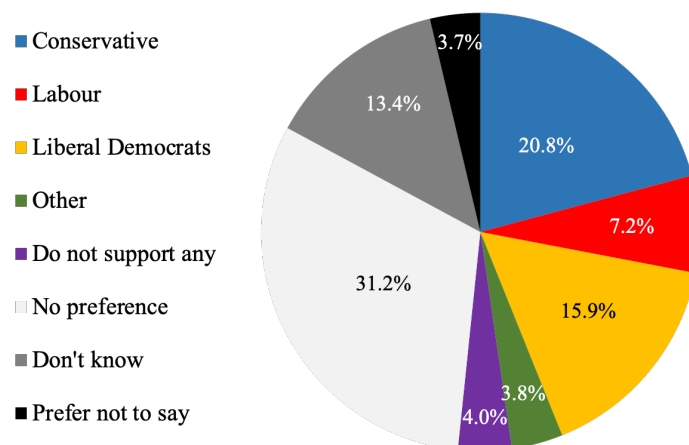


Figure 14. Respondents’ party preference

Among those who indicated a preference, respondents are most inclined to support the Conservative Party (20.8%), which is followed by the Liberal Democrats (15.9%) and Labour (7.2%) (Figure 14). The same pattern is present across all but one of the five regions where most of our respondents reside (Greater London, North West England, South East England, West Midlands, and South West England)⁶. The South East is the only region of the five where the Liberal Democrats (24.8%) lead the Conservatives (20.0%). The proportion of respondents who chose “no preference” (37.2%) and “don’t know” (17.1%) is the highest in the West Midlands (Figure 15). The Conservative Party seems more appealing to middle-aged and senior Hongkongers. While about a fourth of respondents aged 45-54 (26.1%) or 55 or above (24.9%) express their preference toward the Conservatives, only 12.5% of young Hongkongers (age 18-34) are inclined toward the Conservative Party. Young Hongkongers are more inclined to support the Liberal Democrats (19.6%), preferring it over Labour (12.1%) by a narrow margin (Figure 16).

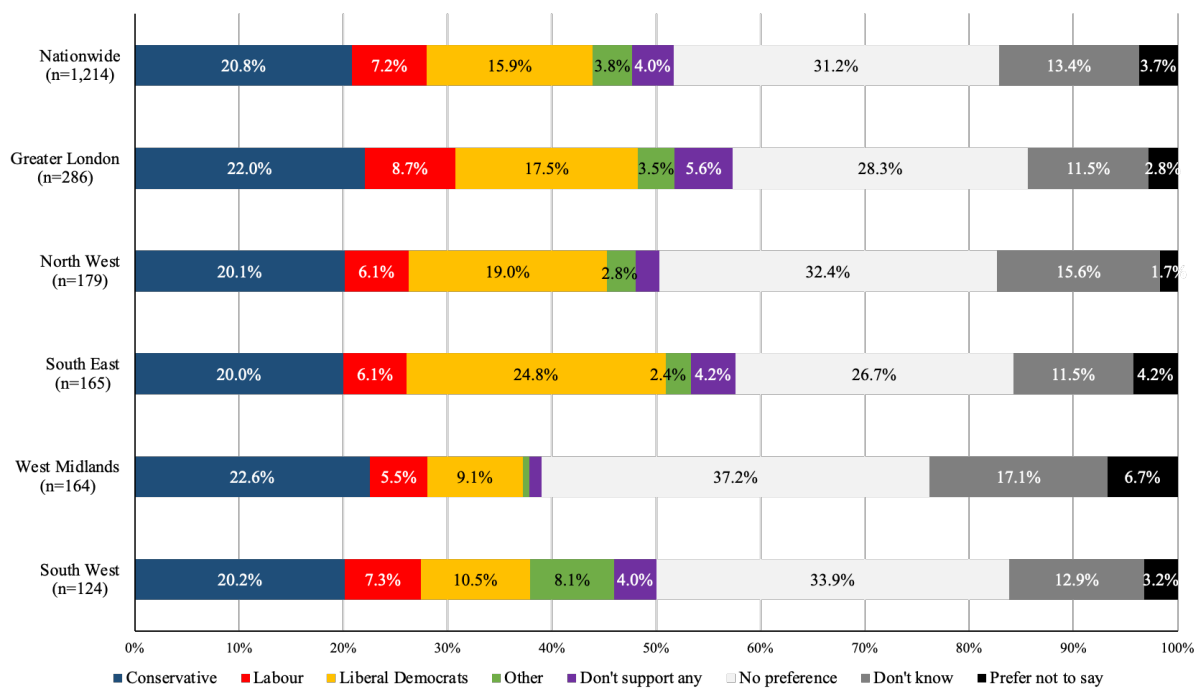


Figure 15. Party preference from regions with the largest population of Hongkongers

⁶ The other regions (East Midlands, East of England, Yorkshire and the Humber, North East England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland) are not included due to the small sample sizes of respondents from those regions, and the samples are thus insufficiently representative. Please refer to the appendix for the distribution of respondents across different regions.

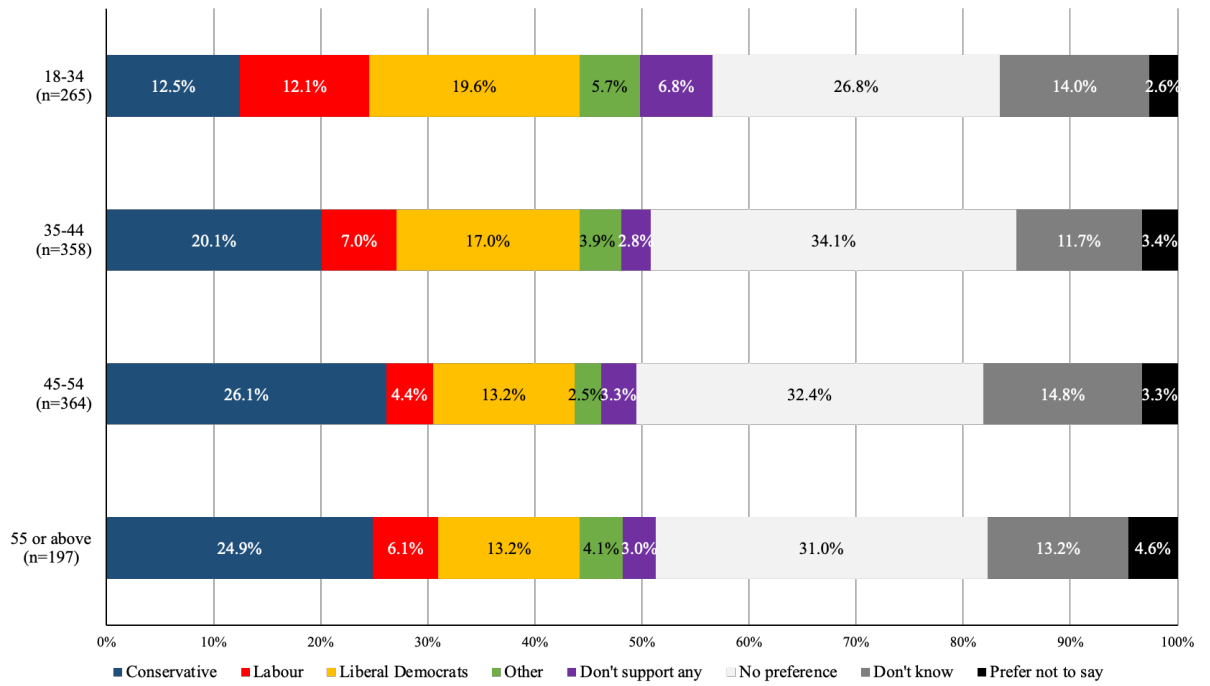


Figure 16. Party preference among different age groups

Discussion and conclusion

To summarise, this study has achieved **two main objectives**. **First, it is one of the earliest attempts to probe the potential of Hongkongers as a political force in the UK since the BN(O) immigration route was announced in January 2021**. Most of the recent immigrants from Hong Kong intend to settle permanently in the UK. Having immigrated via the BN(O) route, the majority of Hongkongers in the UK are either currently eligible or will become eligible to vote in general elections. In fact, most of them have already registered as voters, and a number of them have already voted in UK local elections. Since many of them moved to the UK to flee Hong Kong's deteriorating political situation, they are eager to exercise the political rights that were denied to them in Hong Kong but were subsequently regained in the UK. They will be **keen voters** in the upcoming general election and beyond.

Second, this study has probed UK Hongkongers' electoral preferences. It is suggested that Hongkongers are highly sensitive to issues related to countering authoritarianism in China and Hong Kong. Survey and focus group results unambiguously demonstrate that UK Hongkongers view **foreign policy toward China and Hong Kong** as the most important issue to them. This also happens to be the issue that they are most dissatisfied with. The combination of high importance and low satisfaction ascribed to foreign policy could mean that improvements in this issue area could substantially improve a political party's electoral prospects. They also strongly favour policies that **address political repression** by the Chinese and Hong Kong governments. Tackling transnational repression, sanctioning officials culpable of repression in Hong Kong, and shutting down Confucius Institutes in the UK are the three most important policy measures to them. In short, Hongkongers are likely to display **issue-voting** behaviour, i.e., casting votes based on candidates' performance on issues they consider salient. A candidate's stance on issues related to Hong Kong and China will likely be a prominent factor in Hongkongers' vote choice.

Most Hongkongers surveyed have not formed a strong opinion toward major political parties. **Nearly half of our respondents reported either having no preference or not knowing which party to support**. While the survey results indicate that the Conservative Party—supported by 20.8% of all survey respondents—remains the most popular political party among Hongkongers, its ability to win votes from Hongkongers should not be overstated. It is curious that a substantial portion of UK Hongkongers have maintained their support for the Conservative Party, contrary to national trends. This may, in part, be explained by the Party's image of being more “tough” on China, which will find favour among Hongkonger voters who demand a tougher policy stance on China and Hong Kong. Another reason is that some of the most recognisable British political figures for Hongkongers are Conservative. For instance, Lord Chris Patten, the last governor of British Hong Kong and an outspoken supporter of the city's democratic movement, continues to be one of the most popular British political figures among Hongkongers. While the BN(O) visa scheme received cross-party support

in Parliament when it was introduced, a sizeable portion of the UK Hongkonger community associated the visa scheme with the current government, if not Boris Johnson, who was Prime Minister then. Likewise, the Liberal Democrats, which can claim a much longer track record of championing BN(O) rights than both the Tories and Labour, enjoy a comparable level of popularity among Hongkongers.

Issue voting remains the most plausible account of how Hongkongers are likely to vote. Their strong focus on Britain's foreign policy towards China and Hong Kong sets Hongkongers apart from other demographics. This is perhaps best understood by the fact that just like many first-generation immigrants in the UK, the politics of new Hong Kong immigrants is still deeply shaped by their recent experiences in Hong Kong. Such priorities are also continually shaped by the strong transnational ties they have with Hong Kong. Many of the political problems in Hong Kong from which they fled are still troubling them in the UK.

As the Chinese and Hong Kong governments intensify repression at home and abroad, with a growing body of draconian national security laws, Hongkongers in the UK have a strong and legitimate interest in foreign policy-related issues. For the thousands of Hongkonger families that have resettled in the UK, international politics will continue to constitute a major part of their lived experience. In short, when voting in the UK, Hongkonger voters still care about Hong Kong and will likely vote accordingly, not just because of emotional ties but because of very practical concerns.

The Vote for Hong Kong 2024 team will continue to convey such concerns to relevant stakeholders and work hard to ensure that such concerns are considered as parties draft and finalise their party manifestos for the upcoming general election. The responses from each party on these issues will be closely monitored, collated, and relayed to Hongkongers as they consider which candidate to vote for. We endeavour to help UK Hongkongers exercise their civic and political rights and, in the process, strengthen British democracy.

Acknowledgement

V4HK would like to thank all partner organisations supporting our work, individuals offering valuable advice and assistance, more than a thousand UK Hongkongers participating in the survey, and countless Hongkongers all over the world persistently fighting for our freedom and democracy.

Appendix: Demographic profile of respondents

Gender:	n=1,215
Male	50.0%
Female	45.3%
Non-binary	0.4%
Prefer not to say	4.2%

Age:	n=1,215
18 – 24	5.8%
25 – 34	16.1%
35 – 44	29.6%
45 – 54	30.1%
55 – 64	13.5%
65 or above	2.7%
Prefer not to say	2.1%

Education:	n=1,214
Primary school or below	0.4%
Secondary school	11.3%
Higher education: Non-degree courses (including diploma / certificate / associate degree programmes)	14.4%
Higher education: Degree courses (including bachelor's degree / postgraduate programmes)	72.8%
Prefer not to say	1.1%

Current employment status:	n=1,218
Full-time employment	41.6%
Part-time / Self-employed / Freelance	20.4%
Student	5.1%
Homemaker	8.9%
Retired	8.9%
Unemployed / Between jobs / Other non-employed	13.1%
Other	0.8%
Prefer not to say	1.1%

Region:	n=1,211
Greater London	23.6%
South East England	13.6%
South West England	10.3%
West Midlands	13.5%
North West England	14.9%
North East England	1.9%
Yorkshire and the Humber	2.8%

East Midlands	4.6%
East of England	3.1%
Scotland	7.3%
Wales	1.7%
Northern Ireland	0.3%
Prefer not to say	2.1%

-END-