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WORLD | ASIA

Hong Kong Elections: New Faces Occupy Winners' Circle

Pro-democracy camp retains veto power to block pending bills

By **CHESTER YUNG**

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HONG KONG—New—and in many cases young—candidates pressing for a more confrontational stance toward mainland China won seats in Hong Kong's first major elections since massive street protests two years ago, underscoring deepening political divisions.

Monday's results added candidates calling for more autonomy from the mainland to the pro-democracy camp, helping it retain its veto power to block pending bills, which requires control of a third of the chamber's 70 seats. It also kept a simple majority among the 35 geographically based seats, which are directly elected.

The new group of lawmakers number only six—not enough to wield much power in the 70-member Legislative Council, whose elections took place on Sunday to record turnout. But the wins reflect a growing disillusionment here—particularly among young people—with Hong Kong's leaders, and their ability to stand up to the mainland for the territory's interests.

The outcome also underscores deepening political divides between the more radical newcomers, mainstream moderate democrats and pro-Beijing loyalists. It could also herald heightened tensions with the mainland, which has labeled some of the new groups—particularly those advocating independence from China—dangerous secessionists. The government barred several candidates calling for Hong Kong's complete independence from China from running in the election.

One of the new parties, Demosisto, champions “political and economic autonomy from the oppression of the Communist Party of China and capitalist hegemony,” according to its website. The party's chairman, Nathan Law, a 23-year-old college student who was a



Police stood guard behind Sixtus Leung from Youngspiration on Monday after he won a seat in Hong Kong's Legislative Council. *PHOTO: REUTERS*

main leader of the protests in 2014, captured a seat with more than 50,000 votes. He will become the youngest lawmaker in history to serve in the Legislative Council.

“The political winds of change are blowing,” said Kevin Lai, an economic and political analyst at Daiwa Capital Markets. “The new incumbents will make the outcome of future legislative events even more unpredictable.”



Officials counted ballots following Hong Kong's Legislative Council election at the central counting station on Monday morning. Voters turned out in record numbers Sunday. *PHOTO: BLOOMBERG NEWS*

China's Hong Kong Macau Affairs Office, in a statement carried by the Xinhua News Agency, said it took note that some candidates had advocated Hong Kong's independence and warned that such acts might incur punishment.

The statement, citing an unnamed spokesman, noted that ‘Hong Kong independence’ violates China's constitution and Hong Kong laws, harms the territory's “prosperity and

stability and doesn't suit the basic interests of the vast number of Hong Kong people." It said it supports the Hong Kong government in legally punishing "Hong Kong independence' activities."

Sunday's election was the first Legislative Council poll since the 2014 Occupy protests, where thousands of citizens blocked streets for 79 days, angered at the unwillingness of Beijing and the Hong Kong government to let the territory's citizens nominate their own candidates for chief executive in 2017. Hong Kong has partial autonomy from the Communist Party-ruled mainland under a "one country, two systems" policy.

Those protests ended without the government budging from its stance. Instead, the demonstrations left a widening gap between those in Hong Kong who want to work with Chinese leaders to make the city's government more democratic and groups espousing everything from greater autonomy to independence from the mainland.

Another victor from the new camp is 40-year-old Lau Siu-Lai, who became known for holding "classes" on democracy during the Occupy protests. According to results, she received more than 38,000 votes. Eddie Chu, a 38-year-old social activist, claimed victory with 84,000 votes.



People lined up to vote shortly before polls closed Sunday night in Hong Kong. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE/GETTY IMAGES

"I think the central message is very clear," said Dixon Sing, a political analyst at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology. "A lot of Hong Kong people want to have a political change in tactics from the more mild confrontational one adopted by the [moderate democrats] to more confrontational one adopted by these new [groups]."

Just over half of Hong Kong's Legislative Council is selected by popular vote, while the rest is chosen by constituencies that represent largely pro-Beijing and business

interests. That has meant comfortable legislative majorities for mainland-friendly politicians and policies.

The dissatisfaction with government in Hong Kong has also been fed by a ballooning gap between the rich and the poor, combined with signs that the mainland is trying to tighten its grip over the territory.

“My family doesn’t agree with my political preference and tells me politics is none of my business,” said Wai-Ying Wong, a 21-year-old university student and supporter of the Occupy protests who was voting for the first time Sunday in western Hong Kong island. “There is nothing wrong with being pro-democracy, and I want to voice my opinion.”

—*Jenny W. Hsu contributed to this article.*

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