



Center for  
**Applied Social and Economic Research**  
应用社会经济研究中心

# The Social Impact of COVID19 in Hong Kong

The survey is conducted by the Center for Applied Social and Economic Research (CASER) at Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (PI, Xiaogang Wu). The Hong Kong Panel Study of Social Dynamics (HKPSSD) project is the first-ever household panel study in Hong Kong that aims to track social and economic changes in the city and their impact on individuals. It uses a stratified replicated sampling design and a randomly selected sample of addresses from the latest Frame of Quarters of the Census and Statistics Department, HKSAR government, with the stratification factor being the types of housing and district. For more information about the project, please see Wu (2016) and visit the project's official website: [http://caser.ust.hk/en/?act=project\\_hkpssd](http://caser.ust.hk/en/?act=project_hkpssd).

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## Executive Summary

Based on the most recent city-wide representative survey data about social life during COVID-19, this report systematically documents the impact of the pandemic on Hong Kong society. It empirically analyzes how lives and attitudes have been affected by the pandemic's third wave as of early September 2020, and how the impact varies across social groups such as gender, birthplace, birth cohort, education, housing ownership, and personal and political identities.

## Summary

- The pandemic has severely affected Hong Kong residents' lives, and its impact varies across social groups. Women, those born in mainland China-born, those in older age groups, the less educated, and non-homeowners were all more likely to lose or expect to lose their jobs, have reduced food standards, work outside the home more often, and have no or lower incomes at the household level during the pandemic. The distribution of job loss and dietary reduction patterns did not vary much by personal and political identities, but the distribution of work pattern did.
- The pandemic has largely affected individuals' physical and mental health. Citing financial hardship, 41.27% of respondents reported a reduction in the quantity or quality of diet. On average, Hong Kong residents described their mental stress as occasionally feeling nervous or shaky inside. Women, Hong Kong locals, younger individuals, those with less education, and non-homeowners tended to have higher levels of stress. Stress was also higher among respondents with a pro-Hong Kongnese identity or a pro-democracy tendency.
- Social and political trust has changed as a result of the pandemic. On average, Hong Kong residents' trust in their neighbors declined slightly, but trust in strangers declined substantially. Both trust in the Chinese and Hong Kong governments declined, and the former dropped less than the latter. Hong Kong locals, younger individuals, and those with higher education tended to demonstrate a greater decline in trust in the Chinese and Hong Kong governments. Those with a pro-Hong Kongnese identity or a pro-democracy political standing also trusted both the Chinese and Hong Kong governments much less.
- The pandemic has affected the political and policy attitudes of Hong Kong citizens. Hong Kong locals, younger cohorts, the highly educated, those with a pro-Hong Kongnese identity, and those with a pro-democracy political identity were more likely to have strong negative opinions about Hong Kong's national security law and the "one country, two systems" framework. They

were also more likely to disagree with the “Individual Visit Scheme” and agree with restricting immigration from mainland China.

### **Important Findings**

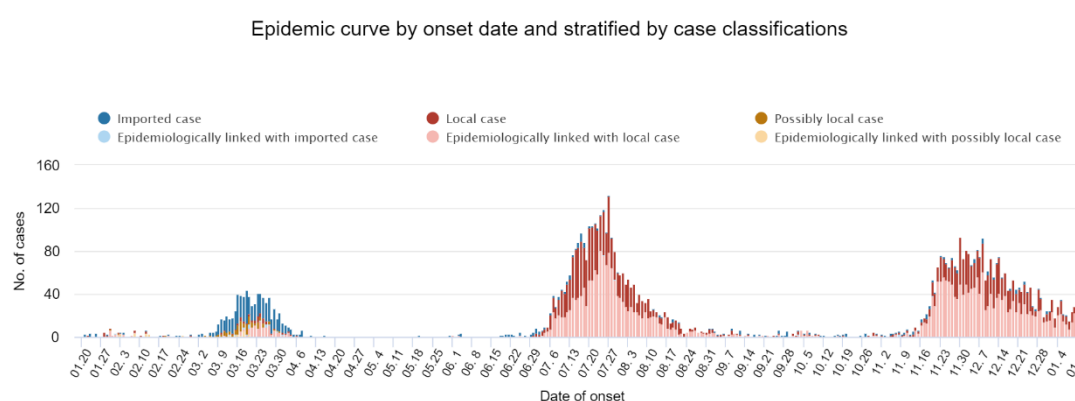
- Social groups have been affected differently by the pandemic. The social groups most affected by the pandemic are women, those born in mainland China, those in younger age groups, the less educated, and non-homeowners.
- In terms of opinions and attitudes, Hong Kong locals, residents in younger cohorts, the highly educated, those with a pro-Hong Kongnese identity, and those with a pro-democracy political identity generally express strong negative views toward both the Chinese government and Carrie Lam’s administration. They also disfavor the “free flow” of individuals between mainland China and Hong Kong.
- Political and policy attitudes in Hong Kong vary greatly by age, education, and personal and political identity, suggesting a deep sociopolitical divide in Hong Kong.

## The Social Impact of COVID19 in Hong Kong

### 1. Introduction

Since the spread of the coronavirus first to Hong Kong on 23 January 2020, there have been four waves of the pandemic in the city within a year. According to the latest official data (HKSAR, 01/15/2021), Hong Kong has had 9,453 confirmed cases, with 8,684 recoveries, and 161 deaths as well as 41 critical cases. As Figure 1.1 shows, the sharpest increase in coronavirus cases occurred in July, with more than a hundred cases reported several days in a row until early August. The mean effective reproductive number for local cases also reached its peak at 4.54 in this third wave (HKU, 01/15/2021).

Figure 1. Four Waves of the COVID-19 Pandemic in Hong Kong



Source: Medical School of Public Health, Hong Kong University, 01/15 2021

To determine how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected Hong Kong society, this research examined data from the special wave of the Hong Kong Panel Study of Social Dynamics (HKPSSD) survey on COVID-19.<sup>1</sup> A representative sample of 1,890 adults over the age of 18 were interviewed from July 18 to September 5, 2020. The survey collected extensive information about the impact of the pandemic on individuals' work, attitudes, family, and community life. To the best of our knowledge, the survey provides the first up-to-date micro-level social survey data specifically on COVID-19 with a city-wide probability sample in Hong Kong.

<sup>1</sup> The survey is conducted by the Center for Applied Social and Economic Research (CASER) at Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (PI, Xiaogang Wu). The Hong Kong Panel Study of Social Dynamics (HKPSSD) project is the first-ever household panel study in Hong Kong that aims to track social and economic changes in the city and their impact on individuals. It uses a stratified replicated sampling design and a randomly selected sample of addresses from the latest Frame of Quarters of the Census and Statistics Department, HKSAR government, with the stratification factor being the types of housing and district. For more information about the project, please see Wu (2016) and visit the project's official website: [http://caser.ust.hk/en/?act=project\\_hkpssd](http://caser.ust.hk/en/?act=project_hkpssd).

This report documents demographic patterns of social life and attitudes in Hong Kong during COVID-19. It also analyzes the pandemic's impact on the lives of individuals, families, and communities in Hong Kong by social group, such as gender, birthplace, birth cohort, education, homeownership, and personal and political identities. In particular, the report shows that the pandemic's impact is closely tied to individuals' age, education, and personal and political identities, revealing a deep divide in Hong Kong society.

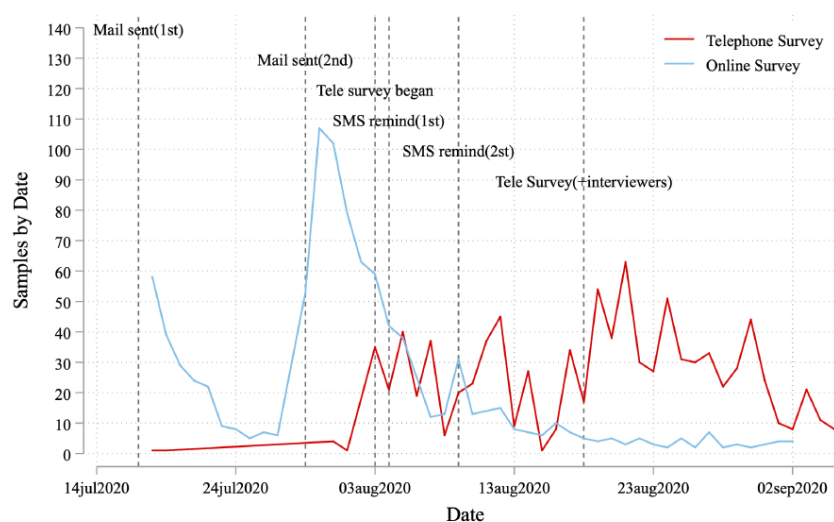
## **2. Characterizing the Sample**

### **2.1 Background, Procedures and Profiles**

Following 21 days of no confirmed local cases in Hong Kong, there was an increase in confirmed COVID-19 cases in July. On July 5<sup>th</sup>, a restaurant chef was confirmed positive. On July 7, 16 individuals were locally infected in multiple districts, the highest increase in local cases since the start of the pandemic in Hong Kong. Since then, the number of new confirmed cases has been increasing daily, reaching a high of 132 cases on July 27. To slow spread of the outbreak, the Hong Kong government announced a series of measures on July 19, including a policy of mandatory mask wearing in indoor public places (*South China Morning Post*, 07/19/2020.) In early August, the city government, with help from the Chinese central government, introduced a free voluntary testing program for COVID-19 to all residents within two weeks (*The Straight Times*, 08/07/ 2020). The third wave of the outbreak continued until early September (see Figure 1).

To capture the impact of COVID-19 on Hong Kong society in a timely fashion, the Hong Kong Panel Study of Social Dynamics (HKPSSD) project started a special wave in mid-July. The sample was collected through two methods: 970 cases via online survey and 920 cases via telephone survey. Emails about the online survey went out on July 14<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>; and the survey began on July 18<sup>th</sup>. The telephone survey began on August 4<sup>th</sup>, with two text message reminders on August 3<sup>rd</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>. The data collection process ended in early September, together with the end of the third wave of the outbreak in Hong Kong. Figure 2 shows the timeline of the survey process.

Figure 2.1. Completed Samples by Date



A benchmark comparison of local demographics from the 2016 Hong Kong Census with the demographics of respondents shows that the sample closely represents the overall Hong Kong adult population. As Table 2.1 shows, the mean age in the survey data is 49.81 years, compared to 48.07 years in the 2016 Census. The proportion of males in the sample is close to that of the local population. The percentage of Hong Kong residents born locally is higher than in the sample data (64.07% vs. 56.14%), but the percentage born in China is about the same. Household size is smaller in the survey data, but slightly higher than in the census if we limit household size to less than seven members. Finally, the survey sample seems to have a smaller proportion of individuals with lower education and a higher proportion of individuals with higher education than does the 2016 Census, with a difference of about 7%.

Table 1. Benchmark Comparisons of Selected Characteristics

Characteristics	HKPSSD COVID-19			HKPSSD Wave 4	Census 2016 <sup>1</sup>
	Combined	Online	Telephone		
Age	49.81 (17.47)	43.08 (15.25)	57.26 (16.74)	52.29 (19.08)	48.07 (17.77)
Male %	45.40	48.14	42.50	44.97	44.88
Birth of Place %					
Hong Kong	64.07	71.75	55.98	57.94	56.14
Mainland China	33.12	25.67	40.98	39.01	33.31
Others	2.80	2.58	3.04	3.02	10.54
Household Size	3.01 (1.27)	3.14 (1.22)	2.87 (1.32)	3.01 (1.31)	3.45 <sup>2</sup> (5.54)
Education %					
Primary and below	13.44	3.51	23.91	26.97	20.99
Middle School	17.78	11.96	23.91	19.99	16.83

High School	30.21	32.58	27.72	29.64	30.75
College/Associate	13.44	15.46	11.30	8.66	10.19
Bachelor and above	25.13	36.49	3.15	14.44	21.24

Notes: <sup>1</sup>The age of Census2016 was restricted to 18+ years old. <sup>2</sup>The household size is 2.90 (1.17) if we restricted to less than seven household members (98%).

## 2.2 Socioeconomic Status

According to the data, about 32% of respondents have a junior high school education or less, about 30% are high school graduates, and about 28% have at least some college education. Males have a higher percentage of college degrees or more than females (42.31% vs. 34.47%).

More than half (53.65%) of respondents are homeowners. About one-third (33.21%) of respondents have a monthly household income of less than 15,000 HKD. 27.12% have a household income from 15,000 to 29,999 HKD a month, and another 27.90% have a monthly household income from 30,000 to 59,000 HKD. As usual, higher education predicts higher household income. The correlation coefficient is 0.478 in the data ( $p < .001$ ).

About half of respondents (53.10%) are employed. Among them, 60% are males and 40% are females. The vast majority (88.33%) are full-time workers, but most of them (95.95%) have only short-term contracts rather than long-term. Most (78.68%) work in the private sector, and 91.27% are employees rather than employers. 31.70% are managers or professionals, 22.33% are clerks, and another 16.35% are service and sales workers. The average work week is 41.64 hours, with a median of 44 hours.

## 2.3 Personal and Political Identities

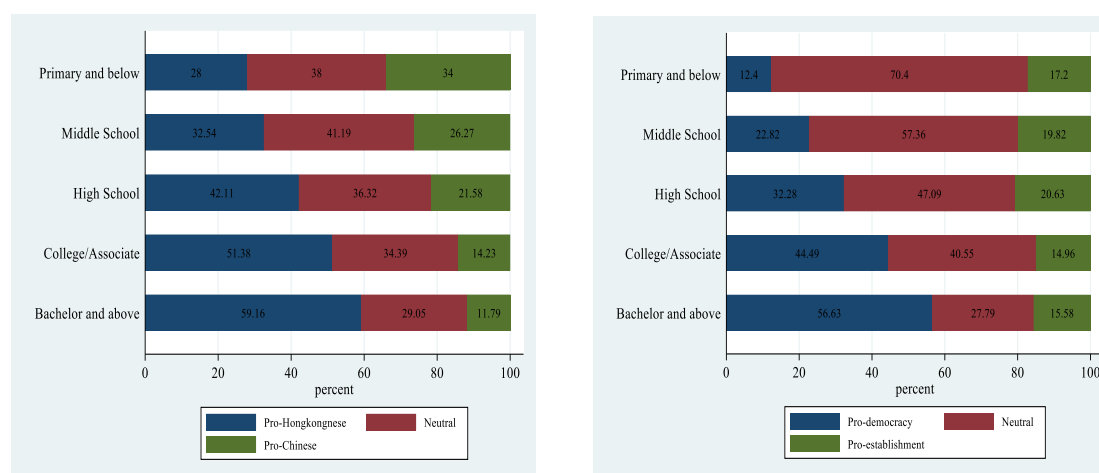
In Hong Kong, identity is an important dimension of social and political life (Ping and Kwong 2014; Kevin Ho & Tang 2020; Kwong 2016; Wong et al. 2020). In the survey, we asked respondents to rate their personal identities on a scale of 1-7, with 1 being “I’m Hong Kong,” 4 “I’m both Hong Kong and Chinese,” and 7 “I’m Chinese.” Results show that 30.70% of respondents strongly identified as Hong Kong citizens, and 13.38% identified as pro-Hong Kongnese citizens. More than a third (35.32%) identified as both Hong Kong and Chinese citizens, while 13.12% strongly identified themselves as Chinese only.

We also asked respondents to identify their political preferences on a 1-7 scale, with 1 representing the pro-democracy camp, 4 being neutral, and 7 representing the pro-establishment camp (or the pro-China camp). Results show that 35.76% of respondents supported the pro-democracy camp, 46.25% were neutral, and 17.99% supported the pro-establishment camp.



Educational attainment was significantly correlated with identity. As Figure 2.2a shows, the higher the education level, the more respondents tended to identify themselves as Hong Kong people rather than Chinese people. Figure 2.2b further shows that the higher the education level, the more likely respondents were to support the pro-democracy camp, and the less likely they were to remain neutral in terms of political orientation.

Figure 2.2. Personal and Political Identities by Education



a) By personal identity

b) By political identity

## 2.4 Political Participation

The survey also asked respondents whether they had participated in activities against the Fugitive Offenders Bill<sup>2</sup> or in support of the Hong Kong Police Force in 2019. The data shows that 19.65% of respondents participated in activities against the Fugitive Offenders Bill, but only 6.74% participated in activities related to supporting the Hong Kong Police Force. Participation by level of education revealed that 36.25% of respondents with a bachelor's degree or above participated in activities against the bill, but only 6.37% said they demonstrated in support of the Hong Kong Police Force.

Identities are also related to political participation. More than a third (38.60%) of pro-Hong Kongnese respondents participated in activities against the Fugitive Offenders Bill, but only 2.33% of pro-Chinese respondents did this. Similarly, half of the pro-democracy respondents opposed the Fugitive Offenders Bill, but only 1.48% of the pro-establishment respondents did so. Conversely, only 1.21% of pro-Chinese and

<sup>2</sup> The bill was proposed by the Hong Kong government in February 2019 to establish a mechanism for transfers of fugitives between Hong Kong and places outside of Hong Kong. The introduction of the bill caused widespread criticism and multiple protests. On 4 September, after 13 weeks of protest, Hong Kong's Chief Executive Carrie Lam officially promised to withdraw the bill. On 23 October, the Hong Kong government formally withdrew the bill.

0.60% of pro-democracy respondents supported the Hong Kong Police Force, while 16.84% of pro-Chinese and 26.04% of pro-establishment<sup>3</sup> respondents engaged in activities to support the Hong Kong Police Force.

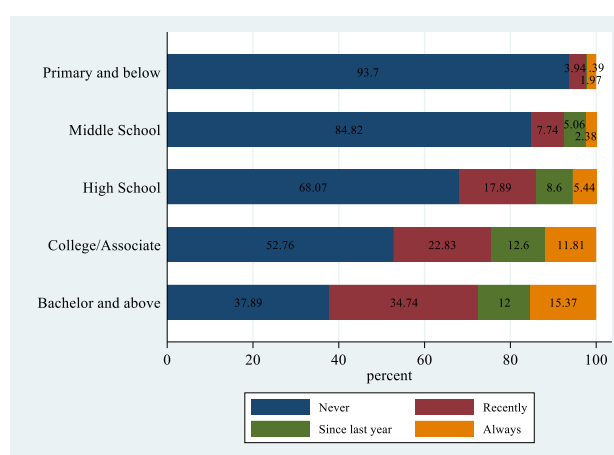
## 2.5 Plans to Emigrate

The data show that while 64.85% of respondents never had plans to emigrate, recently 19.11% of them reported thinking about emigrating. Of these respondents, 8.26% had been considering a move since last year, and 7.78% said they always had plans to emigrate.

The distribution of having plans to emigrate varied by education. As shown in Figure 2.3, the more educated respondents were, the more likely they were to plan to emigrate earlier. Particularly, we see that only 37.89% of respondents with a bachelor's degree or higher have never thought about emigrating, compared to 93.70% of those with a primary education or lower.

Personal and political identities also relate to emigration plans. A little less than half (43.25%) of pro-Hong Kongnese respondents and 34.38% of pro-democracy respondents have never planned to emigrate, compared to a majority (86.34%) of pro-Chinese respondents and pro-establishment respondents (87.87%). Overall, these results suggest that education and identity have polarized confidence in the future of Hong Kong.

Figure 2.3. Plans to Emigrate by Education



<sup>3</sup> There are two major political camps in Hong Kong. One is the pro-democracy camp, which supports increased democracy, i.e., universal suffrage for the Chief Executive and the Legislative Council under the framework of "one country, two systems" granted by the Basic Law. The other camp is the pro-establishment camp, the pro-China camp, which generally supports the Beijing Central Government's policies toward Hong Kong.

## 2.6 Summary

Descriptive statistics on characteristics selected from our citywide representative survey data show that education is significantly correlated with personal and political identities in Hong Kong, as well as political participation and plans to emigrate. Specifically, respondents with higher education, a pro-Hong Kongnese identity, or pro-democracy party preference were more likely to act against the Fugitive Offenders Bill and have plans to emigrate.

## 3. The Pandemic's Impact on Personal Life

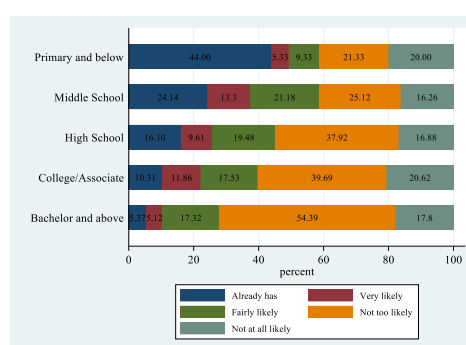
### 3.1 Employment and Job Loss

Due to the pandemic and subsequent economic instability, our results show that 14.68% of Hong Kong workers have lost their jobs or sources of income. In addition, 26.99% of those still employed believed they were likely or quite likely to lose their jobs in the next 12 months. Overall, 41.67% of respondents have lost or expect to lose their jobs.

Women were more likely to lose their jobs than men. Among survey respondents in the working population, 18.04% of women and 10.63% of men have lost their jobs. Of those still employed, 26.84% of women and 27.18% of men expected to lose their jobs or income sources within a year.

The distribution of respondents by actual and expected job loss varied by birthplace, birth cohort, education, and homeownership. While 39.77% of Hong Kong natives have lost their jobs or expect to, that percentage is higher at 46.01% for those born in mainland China. About 63% of the 61-70 age group and 43% of the 41-60 age group have lost or expect to lose their jobs, while the figure for those ages 18-30 was about 36%. Figure 3.1 shows that education helped secure jobs during the pandemic: 44.00% of the less educated and only 5.37% of those with a bachelor's degree or more suffered unemployment. Homeownership also contributed to job security, as evidenced by 35.86% of homeowners who lost or expected to lose their jobs, compared to 48.23% of non-homeowners. The distribution of job loss patterns varied little by personal and political identities.

Figure 3.1. Distribution of Actual and Expected Job Loss by Education



### 3.2 Work Patterns

The pandemic has also affected work patterns. The survey asked respondents whether they must work outside a lot during the outbreak, and 64.28% of those still employed reported “yes.”

Among respondents currently employed, women were slightly less likely to work outside a lot than men (62.30% vs. 66.27%). Native Hongkongers were less likely than those born in mainland China to work outside a lot during the pandemic (61.76% vs. 71.65%). Respondents in the younger age groups were also less likely to work outside a lot than those in the oldest age group. The highest percentage of individuals working outside a lot was in the 70+ age group (85.71%), compared to about 65% in the other age groups. Work patterns also varied considerably by level of education. More than 90% of the least educated group had to work outside the home frequently, compared to about half of the most educated group. About 60% of homeowners worked outside a lot, compared to about 70% of non-homeowners. The pattern also differs by personal and political identities, with 57.84% of pro-Hong Kongnese respondents and 72.89% of pro-Chinese respondents saying they needed to continue working outside the home during the pandemic.

### 3.3 Physical Health

The pandemic has severely affected the quantity and quality of food some Hong Kong people are consuming. Our data show that 41.27% of respondents have reduced their dietary standards due to financial difficulties.

Approximately 63% of women have reduced food quantity or quality for financial reasons, but this figure is about 54% for men. More than 55% of Hong Kong-born respondents have lowered their dietary standards, compared to about 65% of mainland China-born respondents. Those in the 41-50 age group were more likely to be affected by the pandemic: 67.23 % of them reported lowering their food standards due to economic hardship, compared to only 45.56% of respondents older than 70 and about 60% of those ages 18-30. In general, the higher the level of education, the less likely a respondent was to lower food standards due to economic hardship: about 65% of respondents with less than a middle school education reported lowering food quantity or quality for financial reasons, but only 48.63% of those with a bachelor’s degree or higher reported doing so. Homeowners were less likely than non-owners to reduce their food standards during the pandemic (61.94% vs. 66.76%). The pattern does not vary much by personal and political identities.

### 3.4 Mental Health

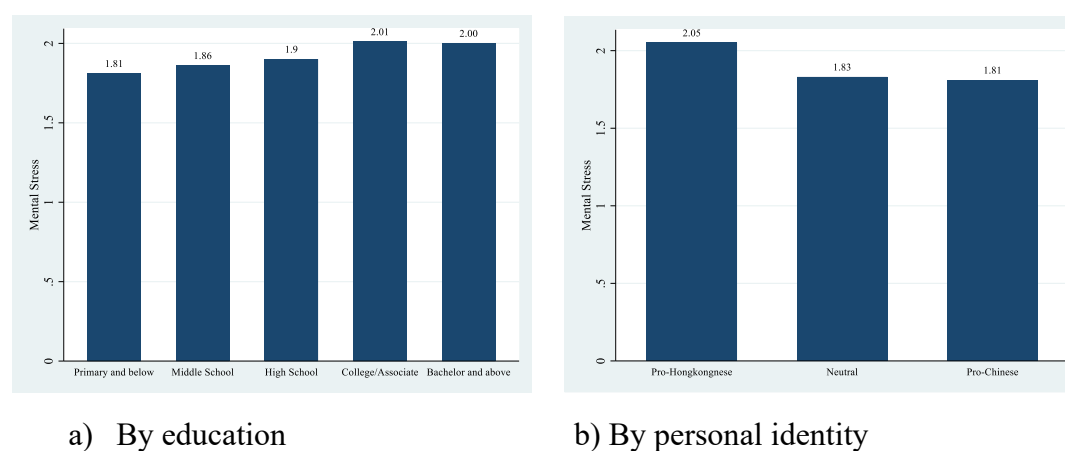
The pandemic has induced mental stress among the Hong Kong people (Dean et al. 2021; Tso and Park 2021; Zhao et al. 2020). To measure this stress, the survey used a

5-point Likert scale known as the Hopkins Symptom Checklist (HSCL-5). The HSCL-5 is a validated and widely used assessment of anxiety and depressive symptoms (Schmalbach et al., 2019). It consists of five questions about the frequency of several emotions in the past week: nervousness or shakiness inside, feeling fearful, feeling blue, worrying too much about things, and feeling hopeless about the future. The response categories are rarely (<1 day), occasionally (1-2 days), often (3-4 days), and always/usually (5-7 days). The survey also asked respondents whether they received psychological comfort or experienced negative feelings during the outbreak.

Our data show that about 35% of respondents reported feeling nervous or shaky inside more than 3 days in the past week; around a quarter often or always felt fearful, blue, or worried too much about things; and 35% often or always felt hopeless about the future. Only 6.56% of respondents reported that they often received psychological comfort from friends, and 63.60% of respondents rarely or never had friends who did not exhibit and pass on negative emotions.

We then average the five HSCL-5 measures on a scale of 1 to 4 (rarely=1, always/usually=4). The mean level of mental stress is 1.92, suggesting that the average Hong Kong resident occasionally feels nervous or shaky.

Figure 3.2. The Mean Levels of Mental Stress by Education and Personal Identity



Comparisons between groups show that women tended to have higher levels of stress than men (2.01 vs. 1.81). Native-born Hong Kongers tended to have slightly higher level of stress than those born in mainland China (1.94 vs. 1.89). Members of younger cohorts were more likely to experience stress than their elders. Those born after 1990 had the highest mean level of stress (2.17), while those born before 1949 had the lowest level of stress (1.68). Further, as shown in Figure 3.2a, the less educated groups were less likely to experience stress than the more educated groups. Those with less than a middle school education had lower mean levels of stress (1.81) than any other educational group. Homeowners also had lower average stress than non-owners (1.87 vs. 1.99). Finally, Figure 3.2b shows that respondents with a pro-Hong Kongnese

identity tended to have higher levels of stress than those with a pro-Chinese identity (2.05 vs. 1.81).

### 3.5 Receiving Supplies and Helping Others

The survey asked respondents whether they had received supplies from civil society groups/political parties or relatives/friends. Results show that 55.45% of respondents obtained supplies from civil society groups or political parties, and 51.69% from relatives or friends.

Slightly more women than men received supplies from relatives and friends (49.71% vs. 46.62%) rather than from civil society groups or political parties. Compared to those born in mainland China, Hong Kong locals also tended to receive supplies from public rather than private sources. Members of younger age groups were more likely to receive supplies from relatives or friends. The same pattern was observed among those with higher education. Almost half (42.53%) of respondents with a bachelor's degree or higher received supplies from civil society groups or political parties, while 56.63% received supplies from relatives or friends. Finally, respondents with a pro-Chinese identity were more likely to receive supplies from civil society groups or political parties than those with a pro-Hong Kongnese identity.

Many individuals also tried to help others during the pandemic. The survey shows that since the pandemic began, 6.24% of Hong Kong residents have volunteered, 21.85% have donated money or goods, 48.47% have helped family members or friends in need, and 17.88% have helped their neighbors. Overall, only 38.47% of respondents have done none of these pandemic.

### 3.6 Summary

Overall, the pandemic has seriously affected the personal lives of Hong Kong residents. Almost half (41.67%) of respondents lost or expected to lose their jobs. More than half (64.28%) of employed respondents needed to work outside frequently during the pandemic. Further, 41.27% of respondents had reduced their dietary standards due to financial difficulties, 55.45% of respondents received supplies from civic groups or political parties, and 51.69% received supplies from friends and relatives. More than 60% of the respondents have helped others in various ways.

Women, those born in mainland China-born, members of the older age groups, the less educated, and non-homeowners were more likely to lose or expect to lose their jobs. They were also more likely to reduce their food standards during the pandemic. The distribution of job loss and dietary reduction patterns did not vary much by personal and political identities. In a similar vein, mainland China-born Hong Kong residents, members of the older age groups, the less educated, non-homeowners were more likely to work outside a lot during the outbreak. The work pattern, nonetheless, differed by

personal and political identities.

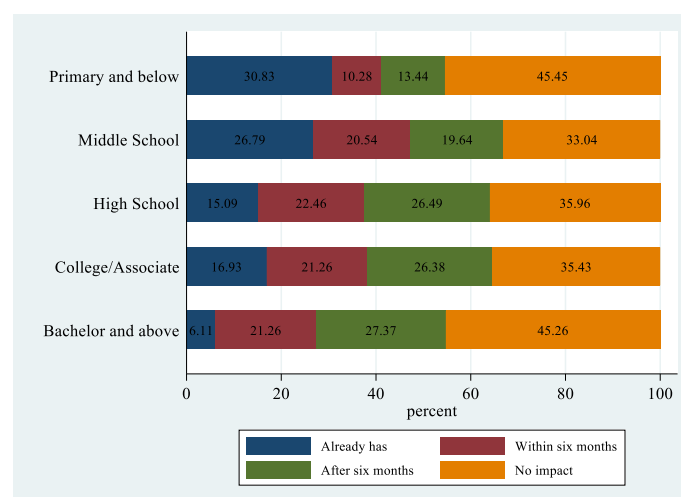
In terms of mental health, on average, Hong Kong residents occasionally felt nervous or shaky. Stress was higher among women, Hong Kong locals, youth, those with less education, and non-residential property owners. Respondents with a pro-Hong Kong identity or a pro-democracy tendency also tended to have higher levels of stress.

## 4 The Impact of the Pandemic on Family Life

### 4.1 Family Financial Difficulties

The pandemic has caused much financial hardship. Of those surveyed, 17.27% reported that their families were experiencing financial difficulties due to the pandemic: 20.02% expected to experience economic hardship in the next six months, and another 23.73% expected to experience financial difficulties after six months.

Figure 4.1. Distribution of Actual and Expected Family Financial Difficulties by Education



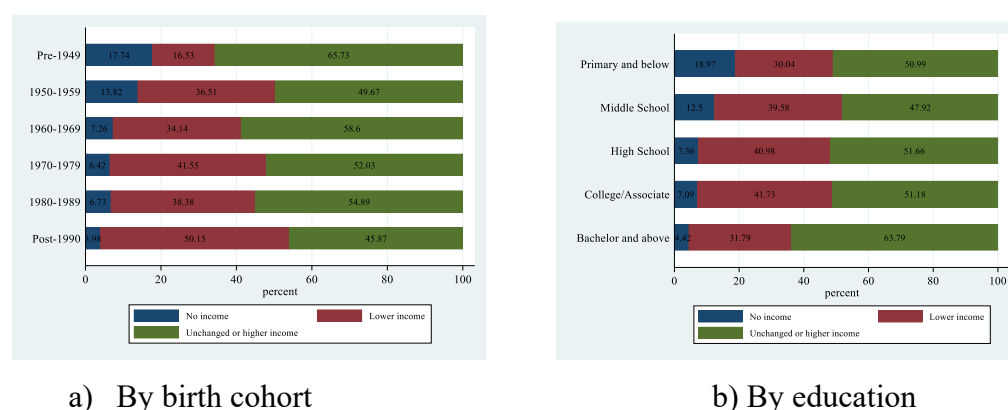
Women were more likely than men to report that their household had experienced economic hardship (18.83% vs. 15.38%). Those born in mainland China were much more likely than Hong Kong natives to have experienced economic hardship at the household level (13.79% vs. 24.32%). Families in younger age groups were slightly less likely to be affected pandemic than those in older age groups (see also Lum et al. 2020). Approximately 60% of respondents ages 70+ and 40% of the 51-70 age group were unaffected by the pandemic, but the figures for those ages 18-50 were slightly higher than 30%. Figure 4.1 shows that the highly educated were less likely to be affected by the pandemic in terms of household finances: 6.11% of respondents with a bachelor's degree or higher and 16.93% with some college education reported having financial difficulties, compared to 30.83% of respondents with a primary education or

less. Homeowners were much less likely than non-owners to experience household financial difficulties (11.64% vs. 23.80%). Respondents with a pro-Hong Kongnese identity were a little less likely to have financial difficulties than those with a pro-Chinese identity (15.90% vs. 20.36%). Respondents with a pro-democracy political identity were also a little less likely to experience financial hardship than those with a pro-establishment political stance (12.95% vs. 15.38%).

## 4.2 Family Income Change

Data show that 9.05% of respondents had no family income during the pandemic, and 37.06% had lower family income. Family income change also varied by social group. A slightly higher proportion of females than males reported no or lower income among household members (47.48% vs. 44.46%). Among those born in mainland China, 13.26% reported no income during the pandemic, compared to 7.02% of Hong Kong natives. Members of younger cohorts were less likely than those in older cohorts to have no family income, but they were much more likely to have lower family income during the pandemic, as indicated in Figure 4.2a. Figure 4.2b further shows that the less educated group tended to have higher rates of no income or lower income at the household level: 49.01% for those with a primary education or lower in contrast to 36.21% for those with a bachelor's degree or higher. Homeowners were more likely to have family income unchanged or higher than non-owners (58.54% vs. 48.52%). Finally, the proportion of respondents with no income during the pandemic was similar across personal and political identities, but pro-Hong Kongnese and pro-democracy respondents were more likely to have lower family income, both around 39%, compared to pro-Chinese and pro-establishment respondents at around 32%.

Figure 4.2. The Distribution of Family Income Change by Birth Cohort and Education



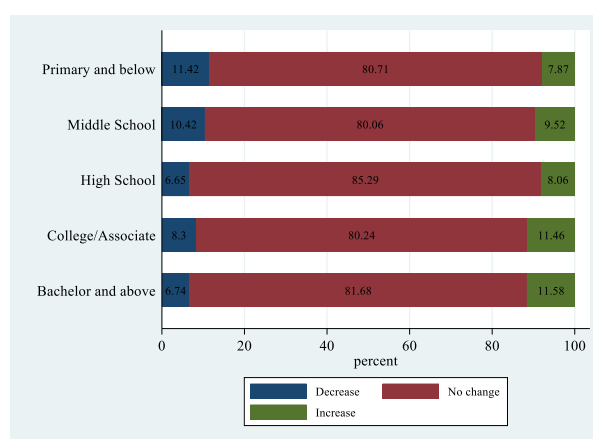
## 4.3 Family Relationship Change

The pandemic in Hong Kong also led to changes in family relationships, as 8.21% of respondents reported decreased family relationships and 9.63% reported increased



family relationships. A slightly higher percentage of females than males reported that their relationships with family members declined during the pandemic (9.30 % vs. 6.88 %), and a higher percentage of respondents born in mainland China than in Hong Kong reported declining family relations (9.90% vs. 7.36%). The pattern of family relationship change varied little across birth cohorts, but as shown in Figure 4.3, higher levels of education generally predicted lower levels of declining family relationships and higher levels of increasing family relationships. In addition, homeowners tended to have better relationships with family members than non-owners; 6.12% of them had declining family relationships, compared to 10.62% of non-owners. The pattern of family relationship change did not vary much by individual and political identities, but respondents with pro-China tendencies had a slightly lower percentage of declining family relationships and slightly higher percentage of increasing family relationships.

Figure 4.3. The Distribution of Family Relationship Change by Education



#### 4.4 Panic Buying and Mask Receiving

To understand household reactions to the pandemic, the survey also asked respondents whether their families participated in any panic buying-- rushing out to purchase necessities such as food, toilet paper, and other daily consumables. About 40% of respondents answered “yes.” A slightly higher percentage of women than men reported this (41.67% vs. 36.71%). Younger cohorts were more likely than older cohorts to buy items they were afraid they might not find later. More than half of the 18-30 age group reported doing so, compared to about 20% of the 70+ age group. The more educated the respondent, the more likely they and their family members exhibited panic-buying behavior. The pattern did not vary by birthplace or housing ownership, but pro-Hong Kongnese respondents were more likely than pro-Chinese respondents to report panic buying behavior in their households (44.70% vs. 33.51%).

In addition, the survey asks whether respondents or their family members received the free “copper core anti-pandemic masks” distributed by the government; about 70% said “yes.” The response pattern did not vary by gender or homeownership, but varied

considerably by birthplace, birth cohort, education, and personal and political identities. Those born in mainland China were more likely to receive the free masks than those born in Hong Kong (76.20% vs. 63.17%). The older cohorts were more likely than the younger cohorts to receive the masks: about 80% of respondents over 60 years of age reported this, compared to 52.91% of respondents ages 18-30. Respondents with higher education levels were generally less likely to receive the free masks. About 75% of those with middle school educations or less received the free masks, but only 57.68% of those with a bachelor's degree or more did. Personal identity was also associated with the act of receiving masks. Around 85% of respondents with a pro-Chinese or pro-establishment political identity received the free masks from the government, while about half of respondents with a pro-Hong Kongnese or pro-democracy political tendency did so.

#### 4.5 Summary

The pandemic in Hong Kong has led to changes in family life. Of those surveyed, 17.27% reported that their families were experiencing financial difficulties due to the pandemic. Some 9.05% of respondents reported no family income, and 37.06% reported lower family income. Women, residents born in mainland China, younger age groups, the less educated, and non-homeowners were more likely to experience household financial difficulties. They also had a higher percentage of no or lower household income. Respondents with a pro-Hong Kongnese or a pro-democracy identity were a little less likely to experience financial hardship than those with a pro-Chinese or a pro-establishment identity. However, they were more likely to have lower family income than pro-Chinese and pro-establishment respondents.

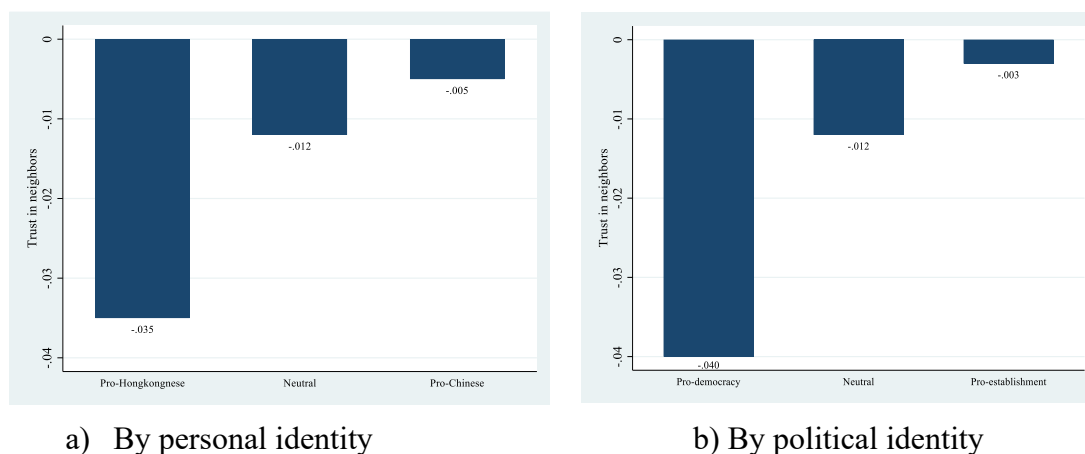
In addition, family relations changed during the pandemic, as 8.21% of respondents reported decreased family relationships and 9.63% reported increased relationships. While change varied little by gender, birth cohort, individual and political identities, individuals with higher socioeconomic status, such as those with higher education and home ownership, tended to have better relationships with family members.

### 5 The Impact of the Pandemic on Community Life

#### 5.1 Trust in Neighbors

How has trust in neighbors changed over the course of the pandemic? Results show that after the outbreak, 3.02% of respondents increased their trust in neighbors, and 5.03% decreased their trust. On a scale of -1 to 1 (decrease=-1, increase=1), trust in neighbors averaged -.02, meaning that Hong Kong people's average trust in their neighbors has slightly decreased.

Figure 5.2. Change of Trust in Neighbors by Personal and Political Identities



A slightly higher percentage of women than men reported increased trust in their neighbors (3.29% vs. 2.68%), and the pattern did not vary significantly by birthplace. Across birth cohorts, those in their 40s had the greatest decline in trust (-.03), and those over 70 increased their trust in neighbors (.016). Trust in neighbors decreased the most among those with a middle school education (-.027) but increased slightly among those with a primary education or below (.008). In addition, homeowners' trust in their neighbors declined more than non-owners (-.027 vs. -.011). Figure 5.3a shows that during the pandemic, pro-Hong Kongnese respondents' average trust in their neighbors declined more than pro-Chinese respondents'. Figure 5.3b further shows that respondents in the pro-democracy camp lost trust in their neighbors more than those in the pro-establishment camp.

## 5.2 Trust in Strangers

How did Hong Kong residents' trust in strangers change during the course of the pandemic? Results show that after the outbreak, 1.64% of the respondents increased their trust in strangers and 32.40% decreased their trust. On a scale of -1 to 1 (decrease = -1, increase = 1), the average trust in strangers was -.308, implying that average trust in strangers has dropped significantly.

A higher proportion of females than males experienced a decrease in trust in strangers (35.85% vs. 28.24%), and the pattern did not differ much across places of birth. Across birth cohorts, those in their 40s had the greatest decline in trust in strangers (-.348), while those in the 70+ age group had the lowest decline in trust (-.235). Trust in strangers also declined the most among those with a high school education (-.330), and the least among those with a primary education or less (-.240). In addition, homeowners experienced a slightly higher decline in trust in strangers than non-owners (-.317 vs. -.297). Finally, pro-Hong Kongnese respondents' average trust in strangers declined less than pro-Chinese respondents' (-.305 vs. -.338), and pro-democracy respondents' trust in strangers dropped less than pro-establishment respondents (-.289 vs. -.325).

### 5.3 Summary

On average, Hong Kong peoples' trust in their neighbors declined slightly, but trust in strangers declined substantially. Women were a little more likely than men to increase their trust in neighbors, but they were more likely to decrease their trust in strangers. Across birth cohorts, those in their 40s experienced the greatest decline in trust in both neighbors and strangers. Trust in neighbors declined the most among those with less than a junior high school education, but trust in strangers declined the most among those with a high school education. Homeowners' trust in neighbors and strangers both declined more than non-owners. Pro-Hong Kongnese and pro-democracy respondents' average trust in neighbors declined more than pro-Chinese and pro-establishment respondents', but their average trust in strangers declined less.

## 6 The Impact of the Pandemic on Political Trust and Attitudes

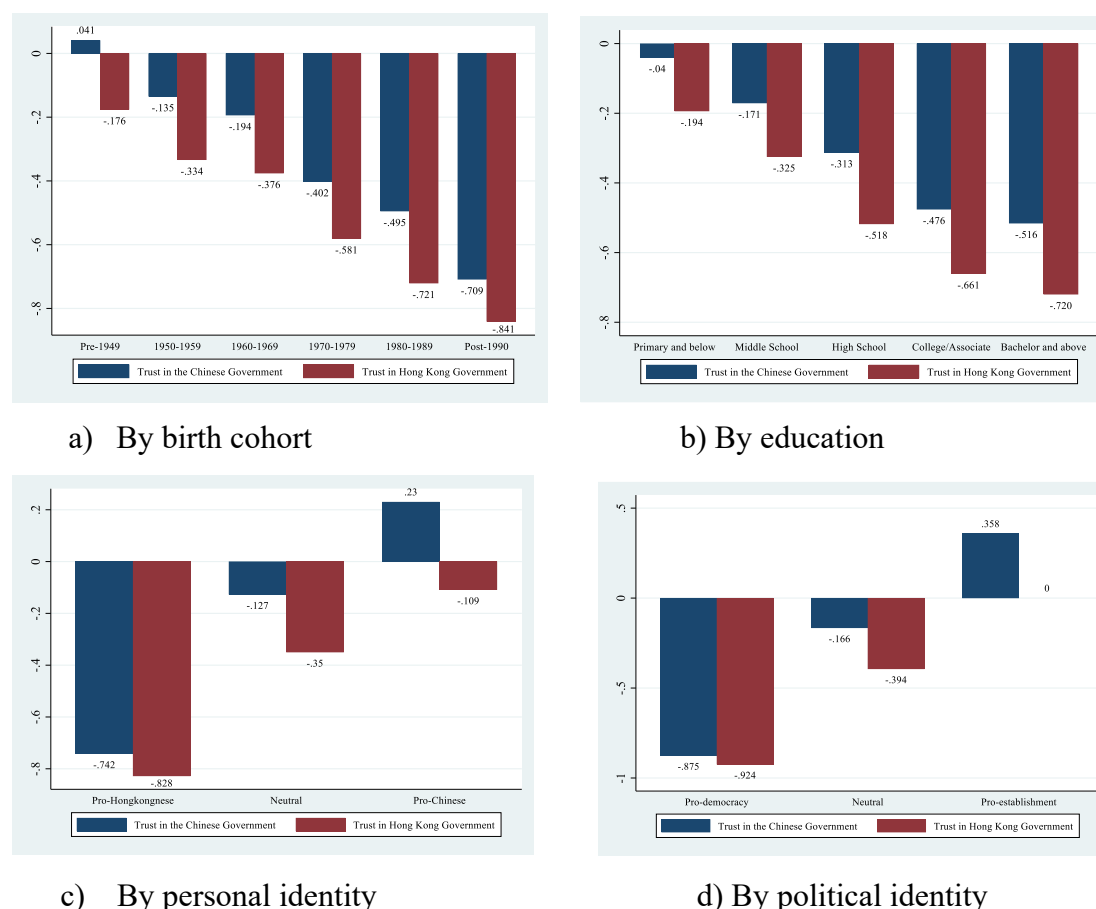
### 6.1 Trust in the Chinese and Hong Kong Governments

Overall, Hong Kong people's trust in both the Chinese and Hong Kong governments tended to decline, although the former dropped less than the latter. Nearly half (45.83%) of Hong Kong residents decreased their trust in the Chinese government, and 58.59% trusted the Hong Kong government less than they did before the pandemic's onset. Only 13.38% and 7.53% of respondents increased their trust in the Chinese and Hong Kong governments, respectively. On a scale of -1 to 1 (decrease = -1, increase = 1), average trust in the Chinese government was -.324, and average trust in Hong Kong's government was -.511.

Average trust in the Chinese government was -.339 among women and -.307 among men, indicating that men's trust in the Chinese government declined slightly less than that of women. Conversely, women's average trust in Hong Kong government was -.509 compared to men's -.512, implying that trust in Hong Kong government has declined slightly less for women than for men.

Moreover, Hong Kong locals' average trust in the Chinese and Hong Kong governments declined more than that of those born in mainland China. Their average trust in the Chinese government was -.590, compared to -.365 for mainland China-born Hong Kong residents. Their average trust in the Hong Kong government was -.426, compared to -.134 for those born in mainland China.

Figure 6.1. Change of Trust in The Chinese and Hong Kong Government by Birth Cohort, Education, and Personal and Political Identities



Across age groups, Figure 6.1a shows that the youngest cohort experienced the greatest decline in trust in both the Chinese and Hong Kong governments (-0.709 and -0.841, respectively), while those in their 70s experienced an increase in trust in the Chinese government (0.041) and the smallest decline in trust in the Hong Kong government (-0.176). In general, the higher the level of education, the greater the decline in trust in the Chinese and Hong Kong governments. As Figure 6.1b shows, the average trust in the Chinese government was -0.516 for those with a bachelor's degree or higher, but the figure was -0.04 for those with primary education or less. Figure 6.1c shows that respondents with a pro-Hong Kongnese identity had the largest decrease in trust in both the Chinese and Hong Kong governments, while those with a pro-Chinese identity reported the opposite. Descriptive statistics show that individuals with a pro-Chinese identity even increased their trust in the Chinese government (.23). Figure 6.1d shows that pro-democracy respondents also experienced the greatest decrease in their trust in the Chinese and Hong Kong governments, while pro-establishment respondents increased their trust in the Chinese government and their trust in Hong Kong government was unchanged. This pattern shows that pro-Hong Kongnese and pro-democracy respondents tended to blame both the Chinese government and Carrie Lam's administration for fallout from the pandemic, while the opposite was true for pro-Chinese and pro-establishment respondents.

## 6.2 Attitudes toward Political Systems

How do the Hong Kong people perceive their current political systems? In the survey, we asked respondents to rate their attitudes toward Hong Kong's national security law<sup>4</sup> on a scale of 0-10, with 0 indicating very opposed and 10 indicating very supportive. We also asked respondents to rate their confidence in the political framework of "one country, two systems," also on a scale of 0-10, with 0 being "not at all confident" and 10 being "very confident."

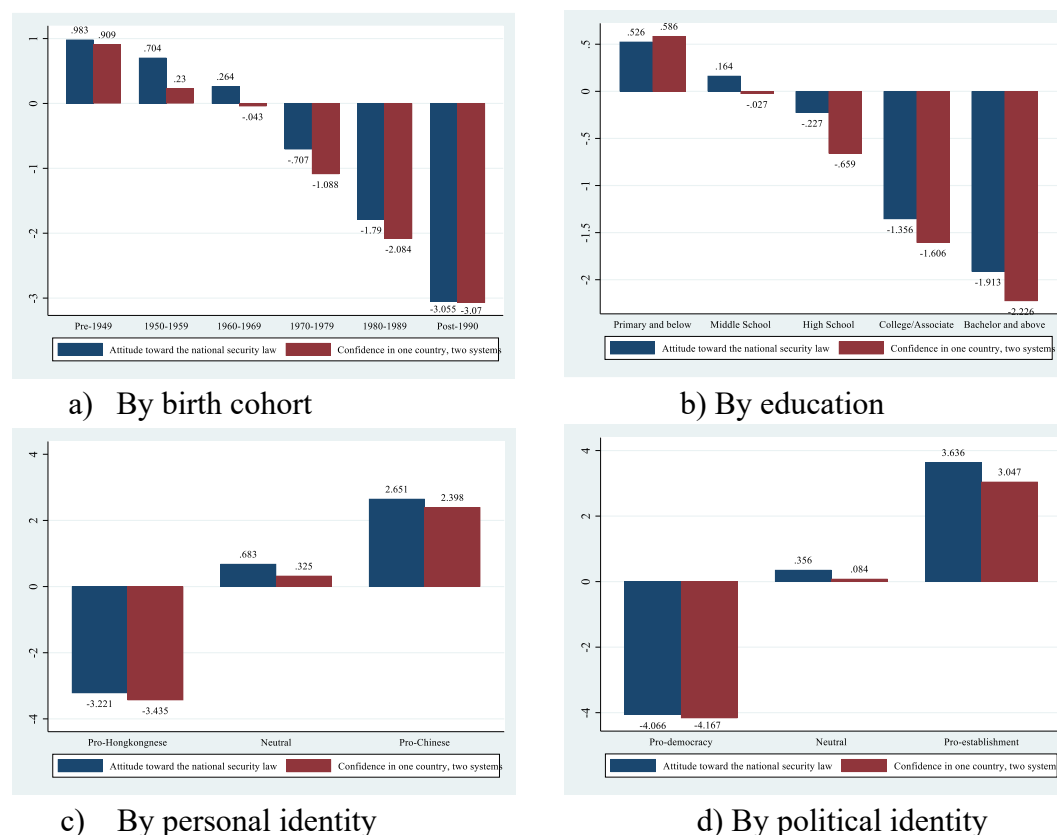
Our data show that 29.83 % of respondents were very much against Hong Kong's national security law, while another 12.37% were somewhat against it. On the other side, 16.66% of respondents were very much in favor of the national security law, while another 13.55% were somewhat for it. On a scale of -5 to 5 (very opposed = -5, very supportive = 5), the mean attitude of respondents towards the national security law was -.637, indicating that Hong Kong residents were generally against the law. Our data also revealed that, 31.21% of respondents had no confidence in "one country, two systems," another 16.85% had no confidence in the framework in general, while only 13.88% had full confidence in it, and another 16.32% had some confidence. On a scale of -5 to 5 (not at all confident = -5, very confident = 5), the average confidence was -.904, indicating that in general Hong Kong residents were not confident in the political system.

Views differed by gender, birthplace, birth cohort, education, homeownership, and personal and political identities. Men had a more negative view of the national security law than women (-.712 vs. -.575). They also had less confidence in "one country, two systems" than women (-.944 vs. -.870). Those born in mainland China had a positive view both toward the national security law and "one country, two systems" framework, with a mean attitude of .309 and .144 respectively, but those born in Hong Kong had much stronger negative views, with a mean attitude of -1.111 and -1.452, respectively. Different age groups had similar attitudes toward national security law and framework of the political system. As shown in Figure 6.2a, older age groups tended to have supportive attitudes toward the national security law and "one country, two systems," but younger age groups tended to have strong negative opinions, with the most negative political attitudes among those ages 18-30. Figure 6.2b shows that the higher the education level of respondents, the more likely they were to hold negative views on the national security law and the political system. Figure 6.3c further shows that pro-Hong Kongnese respondents on average had negative attitudes towards national security laws and the political system, while pro-Chinese respondents had exactly the opposite. Finally, Figure 6.3d shows a similar pattern: pro-democracy respondents had a strong negative view of the law and the system in Hong Kong, while pro-establishment respondents reported the opposite.

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<sup>4</sup> Hong Kong's national security law is a national security legislation enacted on 07/07/2020. It has generated widespread criticism and domestic protests in Hong Kong.

Figure 6.2. Political Attitudes and Confidence by Birth Cohort, Education, and Personal and Political Identities



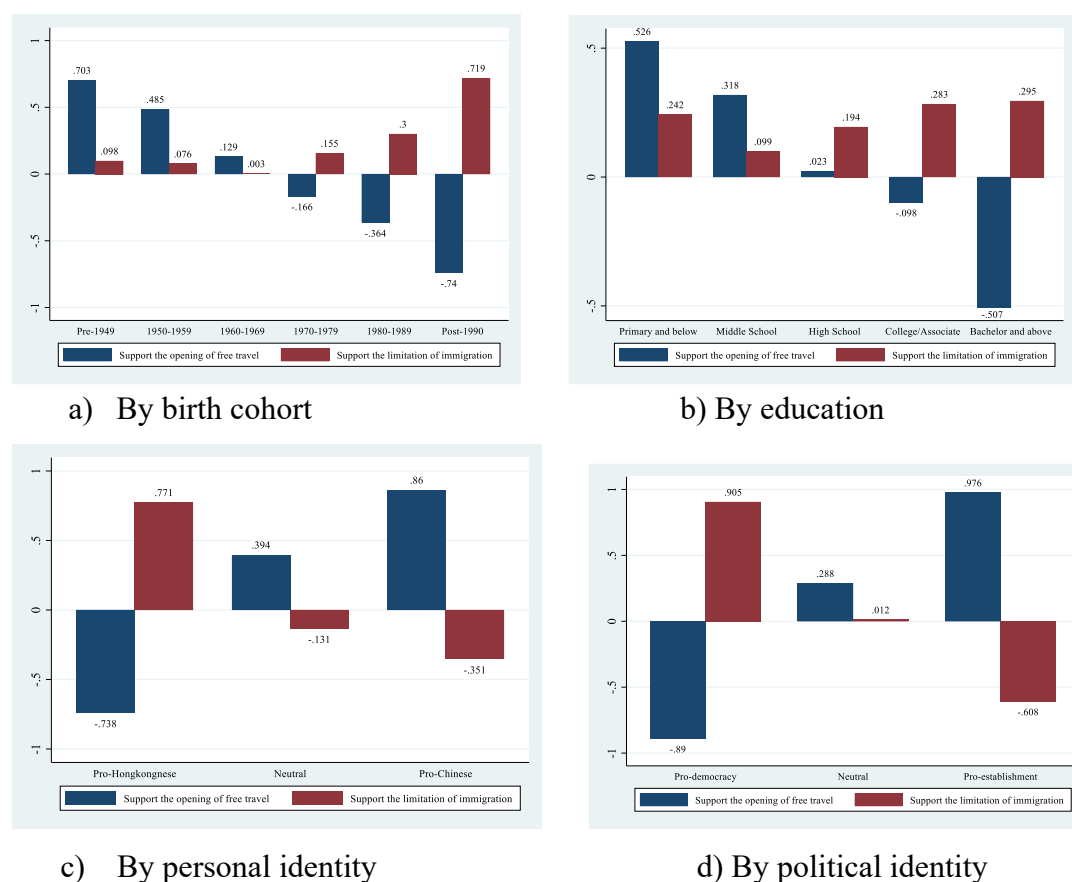
### 6.3 Attitudes toward Border Control and Immigration Policies

The pandemic in Hong Kong has also affected people's attitudes toward border control and immigration policies. In the survey, we asked respondents how they felt about the opening of the Individual Visit Scheme after the pandemic. We also asked respondents for feedback on the following statement: "In order to prevent future outbreaks of infectious diseases similar to coronavirus, we should limit immigration from the mainland to Hong Kong."

The survey showed that one-third (33.12%) of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the opening up of the Individual Visit Scheme after the outbreak, about one-third were neutral, and another one-third agreed or strongly agreed. The mean value of this attitude is  $-.006$  ( $-2$ =strongly disagree,  $2$ =strongly agree), indicating that on average, respondents were mostly neutral about the "free flow" of individuals between the mainland and Hong Kong. In addition, 26.90% of respondents did not support restricting immigration from the mainland to Hong Kong, 34.56% were neutral, and 38.54% preferred restricting immigration policies. The mean value of this item is  $.221$  ( $-2$ =strongly disagree,  $2$ =strongly agree), suggesting that on average, respondents support restricting immigration.

Attitudes toward the policies also varied by demographics. On average, females tended to favor border control (-.073), but males did not (.072). Females were also more likely than males to support limited immigration policies (.290 vs. .138). Those born in mainland China tended to support the “Individual Visit” to Hong Kong (.345), but those born in Hong Kong in general disagreed (-.195). Figure 6.3a shows that the younger cohorts were more likely than older cohorts to disagree with the “Individual Visit Scheme” and agree with restricting immigration from mainland China. Figure

Figure 6.3. Policy Attitudes by Birth Cohort, Education, and Personal and Political Identities



6.3b shows that those with a bachelor's degree or more strongly disagreed with the Individual Visit Scheme, while those with a middle school education or less tended to agree. The group with the highest education level also favored restricting immigration policies the most.

Figure 6.3c shows that pro-Hong Kongese respondents strongly disagreed with the Individual Visit Scheme and strongly agreed with the policy of restricting immigration from mainland China, but pro-Chinese respondents reported exactly the opposite. Figure 6.3d shows a similar pattern: respondents in the pro-democracy camp strongly disagreed with the “Individual Visit Scheme” and strongly agreed with restricting immigration policies, but the opposite was true for those in the pro-establishment camp.



## 6.4 Summary

Overall, Hong Kong people's trust in both the Chinese and Hong Kong governments has declined, although the former dropped less than the latter. In general, Hong Kong residents were somewhat against the national security law and were not confident in the political framework of "one country, two systems." On average, respondents were mostly neutral about the "Individual Visit Scheme," but they tended to support restricting immigration from mainland China to Hong Kong.

Hong Kong locals' average trust in the Chinese and Hong Kong governments declined more than that of those born in mainland China. The youngest cohort experienced the greatest decline in trust in both the Chinese and Hong Kong governments. In general, the higher the level of education, the greater the decline in trust in the Chinese and Hong Kong governments. Respondents with a pro-Hong Kongnese or a pro-democracy identity had the largest decrease in trust in both the Chinese and Hong Kong governments, while respondents with a pro-Chinese or pro-establishment identity reported the opposite.

Hong Kong natives, younger cohorts, the highly educated were more likely to have strong negative opinions on Hong Kong's national security law and the "one country, two systems" framework. They were also more likely to disagree with the "Individual Visit Scheme" and agree with restricting immigration from mainland China. Pro-Hong Kongnese and pro-democracy respondents had a strong negative view of the law and the political system in Hong Kong. They also strongly disagreed with the Individual Visit Scheme and strongly agreed with the policy restricting immigration from mainland China. The attitudes of pro-Chinese and pro-establishment respondents were exactly the opposite. Clearly, political and policy attitudes in Hong Kong are deeply divided (see also Zhang 2021).

## 7 Summary and Conclusion

This report systematically and quantitatively analyzes the impact of the pandemic on Hong Kong society based on the most recent city-wide representative data about social life during COVID-19. Results show that the pandemic has severely affected Hong Kong people's personal and social lives, and its impact has varied by demographics and identities. According to the data, 41.67% of respondents lost or expected to lose their jobs. In response to financial difficulties, 17.27% of respondents reported that their families were experiencing financial difficulties due to the pandemic: 9.05% reported no family income during the pandemic, 37.06% reported lower family income, and 41.27% said they had reduced their dietary standards.

Women, those born in mainland China, the older age groups, the less educated, and non-homeowners were more likely to lose or expect to lose their jobs, have reduced

food standards, work outside a lot during the outbreak, experience household financial difficulties, and have no or lower family income. In terms of mental health, women, Hong Kong locals, youth, those with less education, non-homeowners, and those with a pro-Hong Kongnese or pro-democracy identity all tended to have higher levels of stress.

The pandemic has changed individuals' views and attitudes. We find that pro-Hong Kongnese and pro-democracy respondents' average trust in neighbors declined more than pro-Chinese and pro-establishment respondents', but their average trust in strangers declined less. We also find that Hong Kong locals, younger individuals, those with higher education tended to have a greater decline in trust in the Chinese and Hong Kong governments. In addition, respondents with a pro-Hong Kongnese or a pro-democracy identity had the largest decrease in trust in both the Chinese and Hong Kong governments, while respondents with a pro-Chinese identity or pro-establishment identity reported the opposite.

The pandemic has further affected the political and policy attitudes of Hong Kong citizens. Hong Kong locals, younger cohorts, the highly educated, those with a pro-Hong Kongnese identity, and those in the pro-democracy camp were more likely to have strong negative opinions on Hong Kong's national security law and the "one country, two systems" framework. They were also more likely to disagree with the "Individual Visit Scheme" and agree with restricting immigration from mainland China. The pro-Chinese and pro-establishment respondents reported exactly the opposite.

These findings suggest that the social groups most affected by the pandemic are women, those born in mainland China, younger age groups, the less educated, and non-homeowners. They suffer disproportionately from unemployment, economic hardship, and emotional stress. In terms of opinions and attitudes, Hong Kong locals, younger cohorts, the highly educated, and those with a pro-Hong Kongnese or pro-democracy identity generally expressed strong negative views about the Chinese government, Carrie Lam's administration, and the "free flow" of visitors and migrants between mainland China and Hong Kong, while the opposite was true for pro-Chinese and pro-establishment respondents.

These findings also suggest that, in addition to socioeconomic status, personal and political party identities influence Hong Kong people's behavior and thinking. Political and policy attitudes in Hong Kong are polarized in terms of age, education, personal and political identity. In this sense, through systematic empirical evidence, this study contributes to the understanding of how the pandemic interacts with identities to shape the socio-political divide in Hong Kong.

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