



Partisan selective exposure and the perceived effectiveness of contentious political actions in Hong Kong

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between political identification and perceived effectiveness of formal political actors and contentious political actions to influence government policy in a polarized city state. Results based on a national survey of 923 citizens showed that identifiers of the pro-democracy parties and those who use pro-democracy news media were more likely to perceive contentious political actions as more effective to influence government while the pattern of findings were the opposite for identifiers of the pro-establishment parties and those who use pro-establishment media. Moreover, there was evidence of partisan selective exposure on subsequent perceptions, such that identifiers were more likely to consume news media congruent to their political stance, which in turn reinforced existing partisan attitudes. Implications of the findings are discussed.

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Hong Kong, our home, is suffering from quite a serious divisiveness and has accumulated a lot of frustration. My priority will be to heal the divide and to ease the frustration – and to unite our society to move forward.

The above quote was spoken by Carrie Lam's in her victory speech upon confirmation as Chief Executive-elect on 26 March 2017. She acknowledged that there were deep divisions and grievances within Hong Kong society, which were exacerbated by increasing economic inequality in the city state and its tumultuous path towards greater democratization while under China's sovereignty (Ortmann, 2016). Within the legislative chamber, the tumult has been characterized by increased inter-party confrontation, which has adversely affected the ability of the government to enact legislation and its policies. Without, there has been an increasing number of citizen-led street protests and rallies every year to express grievances towards the government (Cheng, 2016). Noteworthy were the Umbrella Movement where protesters occupied key roads in Hong Kong for 79 days in 2015 (Lee, Chen, & Chan, 2017), as well as violent protests and clashes with police during the anti-extradition protests in 2019 (Purbrick, 2019). Both events were unprecedented and demonstrated the radical and violent actions some people were

willing to take for their personal beliefs. Thus, Hong Kong has become increasingly polarized politically and socially between citizens who demand greater political freedoms and those who prefer the status quo and cordial relations with China.

In any aspiring or developed democracy, competing citizen needs and demands are mediated through discussion, debate and compromise. This is exemplified by elected legislatures where formal political actors representing political parties negotiate among competing interests as part of the policymaking process (Martin & Vanberg, 2014). Civil society groups also have roles through such activities as lobbying and social movements. Implicit in these processes is that they are conducted in a lawful manner, such that any form of physical violence to achieve political goals is renounced by all (Schwarzmantel, 2010). However, not all citizens may share such an ideal view. A Hong Kong opinion poll showed that 6% of respondents disagreed that ‘activities demanding political reforms in Hong Kong must be peaceful and non-violent’ while 22% were ambivalent about the use of violence to attain political goals (CCPOS, 2016). In a U.S. survey, 9% of Republicans and Democrats agreed that violence is ‘at least occasionally acceptable’ to advance their goals (Kalmoe & Mason, 2018). While it is unlikely that these respondents would themselves engage in these kinds of contentious political actions, the sizable proportion of them willing to tolerate or even accept violence as a viable means to influence politics and government policy would be a cause for concern because they run counter to the tenets of a civilized society. More practically, tolerance of violent acts can be construed as a tacit endorsement of violence as a means to influence policy. Yet, little research at the individual level has examined the antecedents of citizens’ attitudes towards violent political actions beyond the interaction between personality traits (i.e. aggression) and exposure to commercials featuring violent language (Kalmoe, 2014), and justification of violence espoused in websites of terrorist organizations (Weimann, 2008).

This study is based on the premise that partisans are more likely to use news media that are congruent with their political views (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009) and that such partisan selective exposure can lead to greater political and social polarization (Stroud, 2010). It examines the mediating role of partisan news use on the relationship between political identification and the perceived effectiveness of formal political actors and contentious political actions to influence government policy. In doing so, this study also continues an important recent strand of research that examines the effects of different social identities on media selection (Dvir-Gvirsman, 2018; Wojcieszak & Garrett, 2018), but in an Asian context. It also demonstrates how Hong Kong’s high-choice partisan media environment can engender and reinforce political differences in society and attitudes towards the perceived effectiveness of contentious political actions.

Political identity and perceptions of government and politics

Party identification is defined as ‘a long-term, affective, psychological identification with one’s preferred political party’ (Dalton, 2016) and it is one of the most consequential variables that shapes citizens’ political attitudes and political behaviors (Lewis-Beck, Jacoby, Norpoth, & Weisberg, 2008). From a social identity perspective (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) it is one of many social identities that is mentally activated to accentuate the distinctiveness and status of the in-group versus the out-group. In politics, voting in an election is

one of the most direct ways to further such interests at the expense of the out-group because political party interests are synonymous with self-interests.¹ In the case of Hong Kong's multi-party system, party identification has a broader meaning as around 20 political parties and groups coalesce around three distinct ideological camps (pro-establishment, pan-democrats and localists). Therefore, a broader *political identity* with a political camp implies the internalization of that camp's goals, beliefs, norms, values and ideologies, which shape subsequent political attitudes and behaviors. As noted by Finkel and Opp (1991), those who identify with different 'party groups' prioritize different policy goals as well as the 'moral propriety of attempting to achieve those goals through conventional and unconventional political action' (p. 345). For example, in the U.S. self-identified Republicans generally opposed the Occupy Wall Street Movement while Democrats supported it (PEW, 2011). This can be attributed to a combination of belief, value and ideology in shaping Republicans' priorities on law and order issues and Democrats' priorities on social justice issues.

A similar divide permeates Hong Kong politics. Even though it is under the sovereignty of China's one-party system, it retains in theory a high level of autonomy under the 'one country two systems' principle after the 1997 handover. But, unlike the ideological conservative/liberal divide that is common in Western democracies, partisan divisions in Hong Kong have long been divided by the pace and substance of democratic reform. On the one hand, pro-democracy parties and supporters have long fought for universal suffrage for the legislative and the executive branches. On the other hand, pro-establishment parties and supporters emphasize the interests and will of the Chinese government, which would not under any circumstances allow the prospect of a pro-democracy chief executive voted in through universal suffrage. Thus, the institutional design of the legislature has been historically stacked against the pro-democracy parties. Despite winning the popular vote in every legislative council election since the handover, they have always formed the minority bloc in the Legislative Council and thus have very limited formal political influence in the policymaking process.

Space does not allow an extensive discussion of the decades-long democratic reform negotiations and the extensive annual rallies and protests calling for greater democracy in Hong Kong (Cheng, 2016). Suffice to say that differences within the pro-democracy camp on its strategies to achieve universal suffrage led to the formation of splinter parties advocating more radical and confrontational tactics, such as street protests and provocative actions in the legislature (e.g. throwing bananas at the chief executive, filibusters etc.) because they felt that the traditional political strategies of negotiation and lobbying through formal political actors were not effective to influence the democratic reform process. Moreover, the Chinese government decided on 31 August 2014 that all candidates for the Chief Executive must be vetted by a 1,200-member committee before they can be put forward for an election. In effect, this eliminated any possibility of a pro-democracy candidate as the committee would have a substantial pro-establishment majority. It was a decision that eventually led to the 2014 Occupy Central/Umbrella Movement and has become a key demand in the 2019 anti-extradition protests. The former was conceived as a civil disobedience movement that espoused the principle of non-violence similar to other notable movements such as Occupy Wall Street (DeLuca, Lawson, & Sun, 2012); the 2019 protests were marked by the unprecedented level of violent actions by the

police and protesters. These contentious political actions disrupt and violate dominant social norms of society and challenge the legitimacy of the existing political order.

Given that political parties and their leaders provide important ‘behavioral cues’ for their followers (Finkel & Opp, 1991) and that high identifiers are more likely to conform to in-group norms and act in their groups’ interests (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987), it is reasonable to expect that those who identify with the pro-democracy parties are more likely to perceive contentious political actions as more effective to influence government policy and formal political actors as less effective, especially for those in the more radical wing of the pro-democracy camp. After all, the pro-democracy parties have little substantive power in the legislature and their sustained efforts through formal political actors since the 1997 handover had made little headway towards greater democratization in Hong Kong. And despite the worldwide attention and support generated by the largely peaceful Umbrella Movement in 2014, it ultimately proved unsuccessful in achieving universal suffrage for Hong Kong citizens in the election of the Chief Executive. Those who identify with the pro-establishment parties, however, would tend to favor the status quo and are unlikely to endorse contentious political actions to influence government policy and perceive them to be effective. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1a. Pro-democracy party identifiers will perceive contentious political actions as effective and formal political actors as ineffective to influence government policy.

H1b. Pro-establishment party identifiers will perceive contentious political actions as ineffective and formal political actors as effective to influence government policy.

The mediating role of partisan news media

Partisan selective exposure: from political identity to news media use

Partisan selective exposure occurs when individuals seek out media content that is congruent with their own political dispositions. Studies in the U.S. suggest that partisan selective exposure is quite prevalent, with conservative and liberal leaning news audiences choosing news outlets that match their political ideologies even when the news topics are not related to politics (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009). Over time, this leads to the strengthening of one’s pre-existing attitudes, which can then lead to greater political polarization between citizens who hold different political ideologies and values (Stroud, 2010). Past studies further distinguished two types of partisan media selection: ‘selective approach’ (i.e. seeking pro-attitudinal information) and ‘selective avoidance’ (i.e. avoiding counter-attitudinal information), and demonstrated that in general ‘approach’ is more prominent than ‘avoidance’ (Garrett & Stroud, 2014).

The mechanisms underlying partisan selective exposure have often been explained through cognitive dissonance theory, which posits that congruent stimuli elicits positive feelings whereas incongruent stimuli elicit discomfort (Festinger, 1963). More recent scholarship has focused on explanations based on social identity theory where the self is construed in terms of one’s social categorization (e.g. ‘I am a democrat’) and that individuals are inclined to favor the in-group versus the out-group as a way to maintain positive distinctiveness and self-esteem (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Recent experiments demonstrated

support for the identity-based perspective. For example, priming national identity among immigration opponents led to greater selection of anti-immigration news stories (Wojcieszak & Garrett, 2018) and those with stronger political identities were more likely to choose congenial information compared with those with weaker political identities (Dvir-Gvirsman, 2018). Applying these insights to the Hong Kong context, this may mean that those who identify with the pro-democracy parties would more likely select pro-democracy media and avoid pro-establishment media, and vice versa for those who identify with the pro-establishment parties. Those who do not explicitly identify or show a preference for either political camp may not exhibit selective approach nor avoidance behaviors. This is possible because Hong Kong's media system is characterized by a high-choice media environment and 'political parallelism'. The partisan and ideological diversity of the Hong Kong media generally reflects differences within the political system (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). For example, the two most popular mass tabloids: *Oriental Daily* and *Apple Daily* are generally considered pro-establishment and pro-democracy respectively when reporting on political affairs, which in turn influences how they frame and report on protests and other contentious actions (Lee, 2014). Therefore, citizens in Hong Kong can readily engage in partisan selective exposure through accessing and consuming political information that is congruent with their own political beliefs and values (Chan & Lee, 2014; Garrett & Stroud, 2014). To examine these various possibilities two hypotheses are raised:

H2a. Political identification is positively related to congruent news media use

H2b. Political identification is negatively related to incongruent news media use

From news media use to perceptions of government and politics

In addition to political parties, another important source of behavioral cues for citizens is the news media, which may exhibit its own partisan agendas, political leanings, and biases. This can manifest in several ways, such as giving more prominent coverage to news that favors in-group and biased against the out-group (Baum & Groeling, 2008), or using opinionated reporting that favors the in-group perspective (Feldman, 2011). Hong Kong's high-choice media environment facilitates perspectives from both sides of the political divide. While its press and Internet do not fall under China's tight censorship, surveillance, and ideological control, the Chinese state nevertheless has exerted influence over time through the cooptation of Hong Kong media owners who have business interests in China (So & Chan, 2007). More recently, Television Broadcasts Limited (TVB), which has a virtual monopoly in the Hong Kong free TV market, has also fallen under Chinese influence and ownership (Cheng, 2017). Whether TVB has exhibited an explicit partisan bias since its acquisition is hard to substantiate, but certain segments of the population and critics have adopted the moniker 'CCTVB' for the company, which draws from the name of China's powerful state broadcaster China Central Television (CCTV). Just one mainstream news outlet (*Apple Daily*) can be considered pro-democracy and it is known for criticizing both the Hong Kong and China governments, especially in the areas of democratic development and human rights. Its former owner Jimmy Lai has been an outspoken supporter for pro-democracy parties and has participated in and was arrested during anti-government protests and pro-democracy rallies. Thus, while

the news media in Hong Kong do not explicitly align to specific political parties or camps, their partisan leanings are reflected in the coverage of local and mainland political affairs. For example, pro-establishment newspapers tend to adopt the protest paradigm when reporting on political protests, portraying them as deviant and against society's interests (Lee, 2014). Of course, this does not mean that pro-establishment media will never criticize or report negative stories about the Hong Kong government, which they do. It simply means that they would not directly challenge the pre-existing structures and arrangements that shape Hong Kong's political system and its relationship with China.

One outcome of the increased political interference has been the rise and popularity of the *online alternative news media*, which provide not only news coverage and opinions that are generally more sympathetic to pro-democracy views, ideologies and causes, but also a platform for protesters and activists to initiate discourse and mobilize collective action (Yung & Leung, 2014). In a very short period of time, online alternative media platforms have achieved an online reach that have surpassed many online platforms of the traditional mass media, contributing to the emergence of what P. S. N. Lee et al. (2017) call a 'counter-China hegemonic public sphere' (p. 338) that is able, to some extent, to resist pro-China discourses in the mainstream media by emphasizing pro-democracy, anti-government, and anti-China discourses. One such example is Stand News, which was established in 2014 and is sustained through a combination of advertising and public donations. An important contributory factor to the emergence of online alternative media in Hong Kong is Facebook, which is by far the most popular social media platform with over 80% penetration among those who use the Internet (Newman, Fletcher, Kaloogeropoulos, Levy, & Nielsen, 2017). It offers numerous affordances for alternative media news sites to disseminate their news content. Of course, news organizations using social media to market their brand and distribute content is a common practice in many parts of the world (Hermida, Fletcher, Korell, & Logan, 2012). But social media holds special significance for online alternative media in Hong Kong because these outlets do not have the same resources as traditional established media to generate revenues and promote their news sites. Therefore, most alternative media news sites have prominent URL links to their own Facebook pages. Stand News for example has over a million Facebook followers. Social media serves as an integral and essential distribution platform for alternative news media in Hong Kong, which draws its audience from pro-democracy identifiers. Thus, the social media space in Hong Kong 'exhibits an overall liberal and pro-democracy "bias"'. (F. Lee, Lee, So, Leung, & Chan, 2017, p. 9). They provide an important outlet for more radical voices and opinions to advocate more radical opinions and confrontational tactics to be disseminated, which can then lead to collective action and protest (Chan, 2016). This further strengthens the political parallelism between the political and media spheres because the radical and localist wings of the pro-democracy parties and their supporters have discursive spaces of their own in which to express views and agendas that would most probably not see the light of day in the mainstream media. In contrast, the dominant pro-establishment media sustain the status quo and espouse the common narratives of 'social stability' and 'economic development' in line with the discourses of the ruling party and Hong Kong government.

Towards the 'center' of the political spectrum are media outlets such as the public broadcaster RTHK, which operates TV and radio channels, and the newspaper Ming Pao Daily, which is known to emphasize journalistic professionalism (Lee, 2014). Both media are

consistently ranked among the most trusted news sources in Hong Kong (Newman, Fletcher, Kalogeropoulos, & Nielsen, 2019). With the considerations of Hong Kong's high-choice and partisan media environment in mind, the following hypotheses are raised:

H3a. Pro-democracy news media use is positively related to perceived effectiveness of contentious political actions and negatively related to perceived effectiveness of formal political actors.

H3b. Pro-establishment news media use is negatively related to perceived effectiveness of contentious political actions and positively related to perceived effectiveness of formal political actors.

From partisan selective exposure to perceptions of government and politics

Combining previous insights and hypotheses lead to the examination of possible indirect effects of political identification on perceptions through news media use. This is because political identification influences the selection and avoidance of partisan news media that is more likely to be positive or negative towards the in-group. Selecting news that is congruent with one's political values and ideology reinforce an individual's existing attitudes and beliefs because it increases the salience of one's in-group political identity relative to the out-group (Iyengar & Sood, 2012) and can gratify the need to maintain a positive self-identity (Chan, 2014). In Hong Kong's polarizing media environment, pro-democracy news media are more likely to report in more sympathetic and positive terms on contentious political actions that strive for greater democratization in Hong Kong and be more willing to disseminate anti-China and anti-government news and discourses. Conversely, the pro-establishment media are more likely to feature reporting that is congenial towards the Hong Kong and central governments and critical of the pro-democracy camp and contentious political actions. Taken together, one would expect several indirect effects as shown in Figure 1. Thus, the following hypothesis is raised:

H4. News media use will mediate the relationship between political identification and perceived effectiveness of contentious political actions and formal political actors.

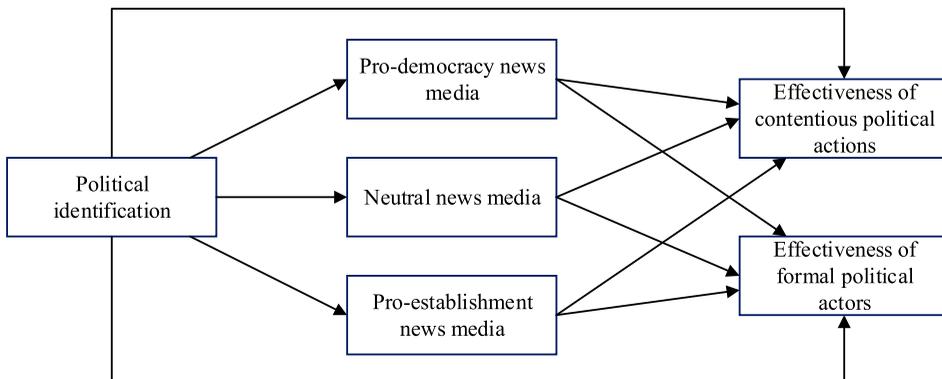


Figure 1. Theoretical framework of partisan selective exposure on perceived effectiveness of formal political actors and contentious political actions

Method

Computer-assisted telephone interviewing was conducted among local Cantonese-speaking residents ages above 18 from 8 to 20 September 2016 by a university-affiliated research center in Hong Kong. The sampling frame was based on the latest residential landline telephone directories. To account for non-listed numbers, the last two digits were replaced by random values between 00 and 99 and the most recent birthday method was used to select respondents within each household. A total of 924 valid interviews were completed with a response rate of 76.6% following AAPOR RR6 (AAPOR, 2016). The margin of error of the sample was $\pm 3.2\%$ and confidence interval was 95%. Compared with the 2016 census data (<https://www.byccensus2016.gov.hk>) the study sample had slightly more males and tended to be more educated and have higher income. Therefore, a weighting adjustment was applied.

Dependent variables

Perceived effectiveness of political actions and actors

Previous measures on the effectiveness and support for violent political actions based on the U.S. context had wordings that would not be suitable for the Hong Kong context (e.g. ‘Some of the problems citizens have with government could be fixed with a few well-aimed bullets’, from Kalmoe, 2014). Therefore, it was necessary to construct original measures for this study. Respondents stated their agreement (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*) to two statements: ‘radical actions are an effective way to influence government’ ($M = 2.27$, $SD = 1.24$) and ‘violent actions are an effective way to influence government’ ($M = 1.79$, $SD = 1.10$). The adjective ‘radical’ in Chinese is generally used in news and political discourse to describe unconventional actions that generally violate social norms, though may not be considered illegal. Two questions focused on the perceived effectiveness of formal political actors: ‘rational discussion between opposing political parties is an effective way to influence government’ ($M = 2.35$, $SD = 1.16$), and ‘deliberation and compromise is an effective way for Legco to enact laws’ ($M = 3.22$, $SD = 1.29$). Confirmatory factor analyses with maximum-likelihood (ML) estimation were conducted using Mplus 7 to examine whether the four items load as expected into two distinct factors. The expected two-factor solution showed acceptable fit: $\chi^2(1) = 22.37$, $p < .001$; CFI = .97, RMSEA = .15, SRMR = .03, whereas the single factor solution did not: $\chi^2(2) = 189.00$, $p < .001$; CFI = .78, RMSEA = .32, SRMR = .15. Thus, the first two items were combined and averaged to form a scale of perceived effectiveness of contentious political action ($M = 2.03$, $SD = 1.06$, $r = .66$, $p < .001$) and the latter two items were combined to form a scale of perceived effectiveness of formal political actors ($M = 2.78$, $SD = 1.01$, $r = .39$, $p < .001$).

Independent variables

Political identification

Respondents were asked which political camp they identified with from a list of ‘localist’, ‘radical democrat’, ‘moderate democrat’ (variants of the pro-democracy parties); ‘establishment’, ‘union/trade’, ‘pro-China’ (variants of the pro-establishment parties); ‘middle party’ and ‘no party identification’. These categories are commonly used in Hong Kong public opinion surveys. Overall, 87.2% of the sample stated that they identified with a

political camp. All variants of the pro-establishment parties were combined into one measure. The three variants of the pro-democracy parties are analyzed separately as the camp has splintered in the past few years due to certain ideological differences.

News media use

Respondents stated the frequency (1 = *never*, 2 = *rarely*, 3 = *sometimes*, 4 = *often*) in which they use various media to get news about politics in Hong Kong, regardless of whether they were accessed offline or online. To obtain a broad picture of the Hong Kong media environment the most popular news channels were chosen based on the *Reuters Institute Digital News Report* (Newman et al., 2017). For television, this included news from ‘TVB’ ($M = 2.80$, $SD = 1.04$) and ‘NowTV’ ($M = 2.08$, $SD = 1.10$), Hong Kong’s most dominant free and paid TV service, respectively. For newspapers, these included the top two mass tabloids ‘Oriental Daily’ ($M = 1.81$, $SD = 1.07$) and ‘Apple Daily’ ($M = 2.33$, $SD = 1.26$), as well as the broadsheet ‘Ming Pao’ ($M = 1.82$, $SD = 1.04$). For radio, this included ‘RTHK’ ($M = 2.40$, $SD = 1.19$), which has the most radio stations in Hong Kong. Given the growing influence of online alternative media in Hong Kong (Chan, 2016), respondents were asked whether they get news from alternative news sites, such as *inmediahk* and *Stand News* ($M = 2.25$, $SD = 1.23$). And finally, respondents were asked about the frequency of getting their news from Facebook ($M = 2.31$, $SD = 1.31$). While not an exhaustive list, the above news sources constitute a broad representation of the news media environment in Hong Kong.²

To create scales of partisan news media use, confirmatory factor analyses were conducted to examine whether the eight news media items can be grouped according to their expected political leanings. The expected three-factor solution showed good fit: $\chi^2(17) = 61.56$, $p < .001$; CFI = .94, RMSEA = .05, SRMR = .04, compared with a single-factor solution: $\chi^2(20) = 193.38$, $p < .001$; CFI = .78, RMSEA = .10, SRMR = .08. *Alternative media*, *Facebook*, and *Apple Daily* ($M = 2.03$, $SD = 1.06$, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .67$) loaded in the ‘pro-democracy news media’ factor; *RTHK*, *NowTV*, and *Ming Pao* loaded in the ‘neutral news media’ factor ($M = 2.03$, $SD = 1.06$, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .62$); and the *Oriental Daily* and *TVB* loaded in the ‘pro-establishment news media’ factor ($M = 2.03$, $SD = 1.06$, $r = .42$, $p < .001$). The appendix further summarizes the key study variables grouped by political identification.

Demographics and controls

Demographic included age (Median = 8; 50–54), education (Median = 5; Grades 13–14), monthly household income (Median = 4; HK\$30,000–HK\$39,999, equivalent to about US\$3850–US\$5100), and gender (52.2% female). Additional controls included the level of agreement (1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree) to the questions ‘I am interested in political issues in Hong Kong’ (political interest; $M = 3.10$, $SD = 1.12$) and ‘I have the ability to understand Hong Kong politics’ (internal efficacy; $M = 2.43$, $SD = 1.17$).

Results

Perceptions of formal political actors and contentious political actions

H1a and H1b proposed that identification with pro-democracy and pro-establishment parties would influence the perceived effectiveness of formal political actors and contentious

political actions to influence government policy. Hierarchical linear regression analyses were performed, and the results are summarized in Table 1. Initial diagnostic tests show no serious threats to the assumption of linearity or the normality of distributions of the dependent variables. Respondents with no political identification served as the baseline category. All models were statistically significant (formal political actors, $R^2 = .24$, $F(14,882) = 19.74$, $p < .001$; and contentious political actions, $R^2 = .33$, $F(14,891) = 31.49$, $p < .001$) and demonstrated divergent perceptions based on political identification. Localists ($B = 1.03$, $p < .001$), radical democrats ($B = .92$, $p < .001$) and moderate democrats ($B = .19$, $p < .05$) were more likely to perceive contentious political actions as effective to influence government policy, though only localists were likely to perceive formal political actors as less effective ($B = -.59$, $p < .01$). Meanwhile, those who identified with the pro-establishment parties perceived formal political actors as effective ($B = .56$, $p < .001$) and contentious political actions as less effective ($B = -.24$, $p < .05$). H1a was only supported for localists while H1b was supported. No significant findings were found for identifiers with middle parties.

Political identification and news media use

H2a and H2b proposed that political identification was positively related to congruent news media and negatively related to incongruent news media, respectively. The results of hierarchical linear regression analyses are summarized in Table 1. All models were statistically significant (pro-establishment news media, $R^2 = .12$, $F(11,902) = 10.65$, $p < .001$; neutral news media, $R^2 = .08$, $F(11,903) = 7.47$, $p < .001$; and pro-democracy news media, $R^2 = .41$, $F(11,903) = 57.10$, $p < .001$). Localists ($B = .37$, $p < .001$), radical democrats ($B = .63$, $p < .001$) and moderate democrats ($B = .24$, $p < .01$) were more likely to consume pro-democracy news media, but they were not less likely to consume pro-establishment news media. Pro-establishment identifiers were more like to consume pro-establishment

Table 1. Predictors of dependent and news media use variables.

	Formal political actors	Contentious political actions	Pro-establishment news media	Neutral news media	Pro-democracy news media
<i>Demographics</i>					
Gender (Female)	.09	-.81	-.05	.07	-.02
Age	-.03**	.01	.03**	.03**	-.14***
Education	-.01	-.02	-.03	.05**	.06***
Income	-.01	-.02**	-.01	.01	.01
Political interest	-.01	.06*	-.05*	.12***	.15***
Internal efficacy	.09***	.09***	-.01	.04*	.07**
<i>Political identification</i>					
Localists	-.59**	1.03***	-.20	.32**	.37***
Radical democrats	-.33	.92***	-.21	.34*	.63***
Moderate democrats	-.08	.19*	-.08	.23**	.24**
Middle party	.12	-.02	.03	.10	-.10
Establishment	.56***	-.24*	.51***	-.02	-.29***
<i>News media</i>					
Pro-establishment	.21***	-.14***			
Neutral	-.04	.03			
Pro-democracy	-.21***	.21***			
Total R^2	.24	.33	.12	.08	.41
<i>N</i>	896	905	913	914	914

Note: *** = $p < .001$; ** = $p < .01$; * = $p < .05$; # = $p < .10$.

Betas are unstandardized coefficients. 'No party' served as the baseline for political identification.

news media ($B = .51, p < .001$) and less likely to consume pro-democracy news media ($B = -.29, p < .001$). Again, no significant findings were found for identifiers with middle parties. H2a was supported while H2b was only supported for establishment party identifiers.

News use and perceptions of formal political actors and contentious political actions

H3a and H3b respectively proposed that pro-democracy (pro establishment) news media use was positively (negatively) related to perceived effectiveness of contentious political actions and negatively (positively) related to perceived effectiveness of formal political actors. As summarized in Table 1, use of pro-establishment news media was related to greater perceived effectiveness of formal political actors ($B = .21, p < .001$) and ineffectiveness of contentious political actions ($B = -.14, p < .001$) whereas the use of pro-democracy news media had the opposite finding for formal political actors ($B = -.21, p < .001$) and contentious political actions ($B = .21, p < .001$). No significant findings were found for neutral media use. Both H3a and H3b were supported.

Indirect effects of political identification on perceptions through news media use

H4 proposed that news media use mediates the relationship between political identification and perceived effectiveness of contentious political actions and formal political actors. To prepare the data for the analysis, a partial correlation matrix was created by correlating the study variables and partialling out the variance of demographics (age, gender, education, income), political interest, and political efficacy. Structural equation modeling using Mplus 7 was then performed to examine the relationships proposed in Figure 1. The model component paths were informed by the previous regression models such that only significant relationships among variables were included. Therefore, the variables middle party and neutral media were removed from the model. Figure 2 shows the final model with the following fit statistics: $\chi^2(6) = 16.54, p < .01$; CFI = .98; RMSEA = .04; SRMR = .02. Based on recommended cut-off criteria this indicated a model with good fit.³

Table 2 summarizes the specific indirect effects of the component pathways. Pro-democracy news media mediated the relationship between party identification and perceived effectiveness of formal political actors for localists ($B = -.10, p < .001$), radical democrats ($B = -.16, p < .001$), moderate democrats ($B = -.07, p < .001$) and pro-establishment identifiers ($B = .18, p < .001$) while the pattern was reversed for contentious political actions: localists ($B = .09, p < .001$), radical democrats ($B = .15, p < .001$), moderate democrats ($B = .07, p < .001$) and pro-establishment identifiers ($B = -.08, p < .001$). The only significant mediating effect of pro-establishment news media was from establishment identifiers to formal political actors ($B = .05, p < .01$) and contentious political actions ($B = -.05, p < .001$). H4 was supported.

Discussion

Hong Kong citizens as a whole tended to perceive contentious political actions as not being effective to influence government policy (see Appendix). Only the mean scores of

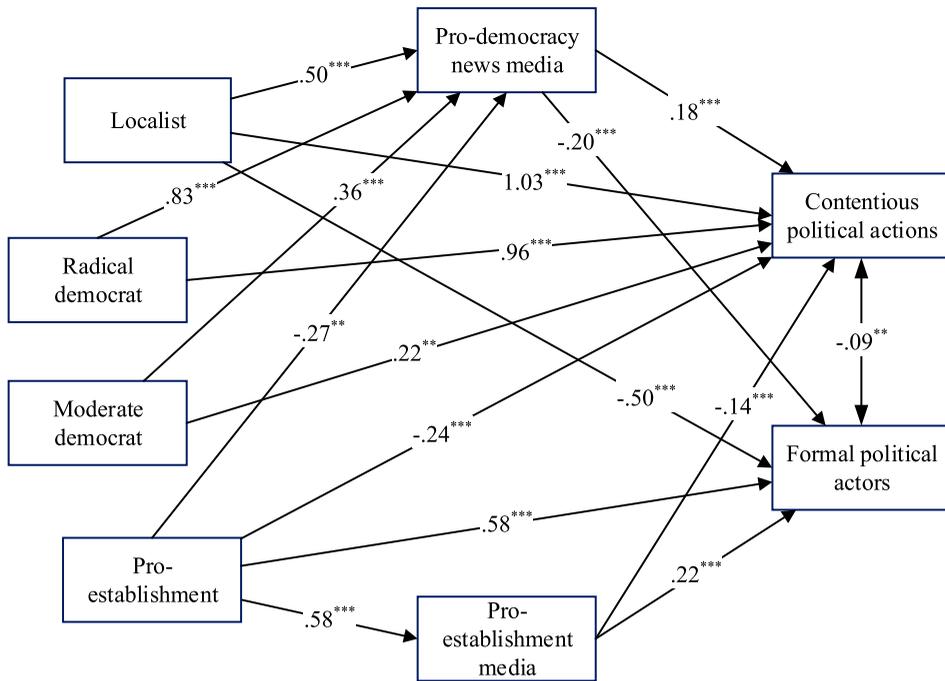


Figure 2. Final path model of partisan selective exposure and perceived effectiveness of formal political actors and contentious political actions. Figures are unstandardized beta coefficients. Model fit: $\chi^2(6) = 16.54, p < .01$; CFI = .98; RMSEA = .04; SRMR = .02; $N = 894$.

radical democrats and localists were at or above the mid-point. Conversely, the perceived effectiveness of formal political actors was above the mid-point for only pro-establishment identifiers. It is important to emphasize that the pro-democracy parties do not themselves advocate violence to advance their agendas. For example, the localist party *Demosistō*, which was founded by Umbrella Movement student leaders and subsequently won a seat in the 2016 Legco Elections, was explicit that it would pursue its goals through ‘non-violent means’. What the results show is that identifiers to such parties tended to agree that radical and violent acts can be effective to influence government policy.

The findings also provided evidence of partisan selective exposure from both ends of the political spectrum. This supports previous experimental findings (e.g. Dvir-Gvirsman, 2018; Iyengar & Hahn, 2009) showing that partisans select and consume news media that

Table 2. Summary of indirect effects of political identification on perceptions through news media use.

	Formal political actors	Contentious political actions
<i>Indirect effect through pro-democracy news media</i>		
Localist	-.10***	.09***
Radical democrat	-.16***	.15***
Moderate democrat	-.07***	.07***
Establishment	.18***	-.08***
<i>Indirect effect through pro-establishment news media</i>		
Establishment	.05**	-.05**
<i>N</i>	894	894

Notes: *** = $p < .001$; ** = $p < .01$; * = $p < .05$. Betas are unstandardized coefficients.

are congruent with their views. However, only pro-establishment identifiers exhibited selective exposure *and* avoidance whereas pro-democracy identifiers only exhibited selective exposure, which echoes Garrett's (2009) assertions that selection and avoidance may entail different psychological mechanisms. One possibility in the context of Hong Kong is that pro-democracy news media often use more critical or profane language towards the Hong Kong and Chinese governments, which establishment party identifiers may find off-putting. From a social identity perspective, selective avoidance is one way to protect and maintain the status of one's in-group identity. Interestingly, the regression findings showed positive relationships between pro-democracy identifiers and use of neutral media (RTHK and Ming Pao). A possible reason is that while these media nominally adhere to norms of political neutrality and journalistic objectivity, they tend to be liberal-progressive in their outlook (Lee, 2014), which aligns ideologically with democratic ideals. However, they are still 'neutral' in the sense that they do not exhibit a clear partisan bias when compared to pro-democracy and pro-establishment media, and hence they did not serve as significant mediators between political identification and perceptions of formal political actors and contentious political action.

An important consequence of partisan selective exposure is that existing attitudes may be sustained or reinforced, which over time may lead to greater political polarization (Stroud, 2010). The significant indirect pathways shown in Figure 2 provide evidence of such reinforcement, but the degree varied according to one's party identification. For localists, the indirect effect through pro-democracy media to contentious political action is relatively small (.09) in proportion to the direct effect (1.03). For radical democrats, the indirect effect is similarly small (.15) in proportion to the direct effect (.96). Given that localists and radical democrats are toward the extreme end of the pro-democracy camp it is understandable that they may have more ingrained political ideologies, beliefs, and attitudes that are already amenable to radical and political actions. In comparison, the indirect effect is proportionately larger for moderate democrats (.07) when compared with the direct effect (.22). This suggests that partisan selective exposure may have more substantive consequences for those with moderate rather than strong political beliefs and views. For pro-establishment party identifiers, the negative indirect effect through pro-establishment news media (-.05) reinforces the direct effect (-.24) on the perceived ineffectiveness of contentious political actions and the negative indirect effective of avoidance of pro-democracy news media (.18) reinforces the direct effect (.58) that formal political actors are effective to influence government policy. Future research into the specific mechanisms of partisan selective exposure and avoidance is needed to better understand these differences.

Before concluding the study and its contributions some limitations and avenues for future research should be addressed. First, the data was collected in 2016, which is over two years before the months-long 2019 anti-extradition protests. Therefore, perceptions towards radical and violent political actions in this study can only serve as a 'baseline' reference. Indeed, more recent polls indicated that a substantive percentage of protesters agreed that 'Peaceful, rational and non-violent protests are no longer useful'. Thus, attitudes towards the efficacy of political violence can vary and the role of partisan selective exposure may change over time and under different conditions. Second, future studies may use more robust measures for contentious political actions, such as measuring the effectiveness and acceptance of different actions at different levels of severity (e.g. spraying

graffiti on a building and throwing a petrol bomb towards a building) as well as attitudinal measures. In the latter case for example, Kalmoe and Mason (2018) distinguished between moral disengagement, lack of empathy in the pain of others, and the outright support of physical harm of others as predictors of political violence tendencies. Third, the eight media used in this study do not represent the full spectrum of news media sources in Hong Kong. Moreover, there may be some disagreement as to whether Facebook in the strictest sense constitutes a 'news' source. However, given that it has over 80% penetration in Hong Kong, and it is closely tied to online alternative news media as a dissemination platform, it is necessary to include it in the study. Fourth, political identification was measured through a simple binary scale of whether respondents identified with the party or not. Self-categorization theory (Turner et al., 1987) presupposes that different people can identify with a political party at different levels of intensity, such that high identifiers are more likely to internalize in-group norms, values and ideologies compared to low identifiers (Dvir-Gvirzman, 2018), which may lead to more partisan selective exposure and avoidance tendencies. It is also worth reiterating that *political* identity is one of many social identities. In Hong Kong especially, one's ethnic identity (i.e. Hongkonger vs Chinese) can play a role in the processing of information (Chan, 2017) and a highly politicized Hong Kong social identity can engender collective action (Ji, Zhou, & Kim, 2017). Future research can examine the dynamics of multiple social identities and their influence on news media use and its consequences. Finally, it is important to mention that while the use of landline-based surveys is still the most optimal method for obtaining a representative population sample, its reliability and validity has in past decades been challenged by increasing nonresponse and noncoverage bias (Couper, 2017). Indeed, residential landline penetration in Hong Kong has declined to under 90% whereas mobile penetration has increased to over 280% (OFCA, 2020). Therefore, mixed-mode surveys would be necessary to overcome the limitations of landline-based CATI surveys.

To conclude, most of the literature on party identification, partisan selective exposure, and perceived effectiveness of contentious political actions have focused on mature democracies in the West. This study contributes to the literature by examining the interplay of these aspects in the context of an Asian society that once aspired towards democratization but is now better described as being mired somewhere in between a liberal authoritarian and electoral authoritarian state (Fong, 2017). More recently, it has been engulfed in a months-long political and social turmoil related to the anti-extradition bill protests that has seen unprecedented levels of violence by both the police and protesters. It should be emphasized that these events did not happen out of a vacuum; but are reflective of the widening of public opinion and further polarization in Hong Kong politics and society, and the continuing radicalization of politics in Hong Kong where protests and radical actions are perceived by some to be the only way to influence an undemocratically elected government that caters more to the interests of the Chinese government than its citizens (Cheng, 2014; Ortmann, 2016). Top government officials openly admit that Hong Kong society is divided, but as yet do not seem to have concrete proposals in place to alleviate the divide.

This study highlights two contributory factors to the divide: political identification and partisan news media, which engenders partisan selective exposure. The former resides in people's minds and the latter is shaped predominantly by market forces. So, there is little the Hong Kong government can do to forcibly alter these factors other than presenting its

citizens with a concrete roadmap for democratic reform of the city state, which it appears unwilling or unable to do under the current hybrid regime in which China has become increasingly assertive. In the meantime, some pro-democracy voices have become more radical, engendered to some degree by pro-democracy news media that help to disseminate congruent messages and mobilize action. Thus, the continuing examination of the conditions in which people are predisposed to radical actions and political violence to influence government policy is a necessary undertaking as is the role of the partisan news media that may engender such attitudes.

Notes

1. This 'psychological' conception of party identification thus differs from 'party membership' or 'party affiliation', which implies a formal tie between the individual and the political party (e.g. registered member).
2. Admittedly, 'alternative media' and 'Facebook' as news sources are not analogous to the other named news sources. This was due to practical reasons as it was not possible in a telephone survey to provide an exhaustive list of specific online and social media outlets. Nor can one assume that there are no pro-establishment Facebook news sites. Nevertheless, as stated earlier the social media space in Hong Kong by and large exhibits a pro-democracy bias that engender an online 'subaltern public sphere' in Hong Kong (Lee et al., 2017). Therefore, these are adequate indicators for the purposes of obtaining a measure of partisan news media use.
3. Hu and Bentler (1999) recommends $CFI \geq .95$, $RMSEA \leq .06$, and $SRMR \leq .08$.

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Appendix

Descriptive statistics of study variables by complete sample and by political identification

	Localist		Radical democrats		Moderate democrats		Middle party		Establishment party		All	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
<i>News media</i>												
Pro-establishment	2.02	.66	1.99	.62	2.18	.78	2.30	.77	2.80	.85	2.31	.82
Neutral	2.24	.79	2.38	.73	2.19	.75	2.02	.76	1.93	.71	2.10	.76
Pro-democracy	3.06	.84	3.01	.88	2.48	.94	2.05	.87	1.70	.81	2.29	.98
<i>Perceived effectiveness</i>												
Political actors	2.09	.82	2.27	.92	2.64	.90	2.93	.94	3.51	.87	2.78	1.02
Contentious political actions	3.15	.94	3.01	.86	2.10	.96	1.72	.87	1.40	.81	2.03	1.06
N	109		43		345		125		183		923	