HONG KONG: A YEAR IN CONTRADICTIONS
On 30 June 2020, the National People’s Congress (NPC) of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) passed the National Security Law (NSL) for Hong Kong that criminalised secession, subversion, terrorism and collusion with foreign forces, as well as any act that aids, abets or incites others to commit those offences. It expanded police powers and contained a presumption against bail for suspects arrested under the law. That same day, Carrie Lam 林鄭月娥, Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR), assured the UN Human Rights Council that the NSL would ‘only target an extremely small minority of people who have breached the law, while the life and property, basic rights, and freedoms of the overwhelming majority of Hong Kong residents will be protected’.¹
Police arrest fifty-five pro-democracy politicians who had taken part in a primary run-off election in July 2020 ahead of Legislative Council (LegCo) elections due in December of that year (but ultimately postponed until December 2021 on public health grounds). The authorities declare the primaries — in which 600,000 Hongkongers cast a vote — constituted ‘subversion’ under the NSL. Of those arrested, forty-seven will be formally charged with subversion. The court grants bail to only fifteen of the accused; the other thirty-two remain in jail as of the end of 2021, awaiting trial.

The Civil Service Bureau announces that all government employees — more than 177,000 people, from civil servants and teachers in government-run schools to beach lifeguards — must sign a declaration of loyalty swearing to uphold the Basic Law and pledge allegiance to the Hong Kong SAR or face dismissal. Any acts of dissent or expressions of support for the 2019 protest movement are regarded by the authorities as a breach of this oath of loyalty. The Union for New Civil Servants, formed during the 2019 protests, disbands, concerned that association with it could jeopardise its members’ employment.
The government requires district councillors to swear to uphold the Basic Law and pledge allegiance to the government; any who are deemed to have violated their oath (including retrospectively) will be barred from office. More than 300 district councillors, elected in the pro-democracy landslide 2019 district council elections, are forced out of office.

Patrick Li Pak-chuen 李百全, a career civil servant with no experience in media or broadcasting, is appointed Director of Broadcasting at public broadcaster Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK). Responding to criticism of RTHK by the government and pro-Beijing press, Li suspends shows, axes episodes of current affairs programs covering contentious political issues and replaces presenters.
The NPC Standing Committee passes the ‘Decision on Improving the Electoral System of Hong Kong’. Under the reformed system, a new Candidate Eligibility Review Committee and the Committee for Safeguarding National Security will screen all prospective election candidates for patriotism and loyalty. The Election Committee that selects the chief executive is expanded from 1,200 to 1,500 seats with more seats given to representatives of government-linked organisations, and corporate voting replacing individual voting for many seats. The LegCo is increased from seventy to ninety seats; the number of seats elected on a universal suffrage basis is reduced from thirty-five to twenty; professional and industry groups, known as functional constituencies, have thirty seats (reduced from thirty-five); and the Election Committee will choose forty seats from among their own number.


Former Democratic Party legislator Ted Hui-chi Fung 許智峯 goes into exile in Australia.

Pro-Beijing politicians and media accuse M+, Hong Kong’s new museum of visual culture, which is due to open in November, of breaching the NSL by planning to display work by dissident artists including Ai Weiwei 艾未未. Carrie Lam says she is sure museum staff can tell the difference between freedom of expression and works ‘meant to incite hatred … and undermine national security’, warning: ‘We will be on full alert in watching such matters.’

MARCH

The NPC Standing Committee passes the ‘Decision on Improving the Electoral System of Hong Kong’. Under the reformed system, a new Candidate Eligibility Review Committee and the Committee for Safeguarding National Security will screen all prospective election candidates for patriotism and loyalty. The Election Committee that selects the chief executive is expanded from 1,200 to 1,500 seats with more seats given to representatives of government-linked organisations, and corporate voting replacing individual voting for many seats. The LegCo is increased from seventy to ninety seats; the number of seats elected on a universal suffrage basis is reduced from thirty-five to twenty; professional and industry groups, known as functional constituencies, have thirty seats (reduced from thirty-five); and the Election Committee will choose forty seats from among their own number.


Former Democratic Party legislator Ted Hui-chi Fung 許智峯 goes into exile in Australia.

Pro-Beijing politicians and media accuse M+, Hong Kong’s new museum of visual culture, which is due to open in November, of breaching the NSL by planning to display work by dissident artists including Ai Weiwei 艾未未. Carrie Lam says she is sure museum staff can tell the difference between freedom of expression and works ‘meant to incite hatred … and undermine national security’, warning: ‘We will be on full alert in watching such matters.’

MARCH

The NPC Standing Committee passes the ‘Decision on Improving the Electoral System of Hong Kong’. Under the reformed system, a new Candidate Eligibility Review Committee and the Committee for Safeguarding National Security will screen all prospective election candidates for patriotism and loyalty. The Election Committee that selects the chief executive is expanded from 1,200 to 1,500 seats with more seats given to representatives of government-linked organisations, and corporate voting replacing individual voting for many seats. The LegCo is increased from seventy to ninety seats; the number of seats elected on a universal suffrage basis is reduced from thirty-five to twenty; professional and industry groups, known as functional constituencies, have thirty seats (reduced from thirty-five); and the Election Committee will choose forty seats from among their own number.


Former Democratic Party legislator Ted Hui-chi Fung 許智峯 goes into exile in Australia.

Pro-Beijing politicians and media accuse M+, Hong Kong’s new museum of visual culture, which is due to open in November, of breaching the NSL by planning to display work by dissident artists including Ai Weiwei 艾未未. Carrie Lam says she is sure museum staff can tell the difference between freedom of expression and works ‘meant to incite hatred … and undermine national security’, warning: ‘We will be on full alert in watching such matters.’

MARCH
Former legislator and barrister Dennis Kwok 郭榮鏗, one of four pro-democracy legislators ejected from the LegCo in 2020 for allegedly violating his oath of loyalty, goes into exile in Canada.

Hong Kong celebrates its inaugural National Security Education Day on 15 April 2021. National-security themed events are held at schools throughout the city. At a police training college open day, Hong Kong police drop British-style marching in favour of the mainland-style goose-step.

Nine of Hong Kong’s most prominent pro-democracy politicians and activists are convicted of organising and participating in an unauthorised peaceful protest, in which hundreds of thousands took part, on 18 August 2019. Pro-democracy media mogul Jimmy Lai 黎智英 (aged seventy-three), and former lawmakers Lee Cheuk-yan 李卓人 (sixty-four), ‘Long Hair’ Leung Kwok-hung 梁國雄, Cyd Ho 何秀蘭, and Au Nok Hin 區諾軒 are sentenced to between eight and twelve months’ imprisonment. Martin Lee 李柱銘 (eighty-two), who is widely regarded as the ‘father of Hong Kong democracy’, barrister and former lawmaker Margaret Ng 吳靄儀 (seventy-three), and former lawmakers Albert Ho 何俊仁 and Leung Yiu-chung 梁耀忠 (both in their late sixties) are given suspended sentences. On the same day, Lai, Lee Cheuk-yan, and former Democratic Party chair Yeung Sum 楊森 (seventy-three) are also sentenced to between six and eight months prison (Yeung’s sentence is suspended) for participating in an unlawful assembly on 31 August 2019.

Following criticism of the recent reforms to the electoral system, the government further amends Hong Kong’s electoral laws to make it a criminal offence to publicly incite others to not vote or to cast blank or spoiled ballots, punishable by up to three years’ jail.
Ten pro-democracy politicians and activists — including Jimmy Lai; former legislators Lee Cheuk-yan, Albert Ho, Cyd Ho, Sin Chung-kai and ‘Long Hair’ Leung Kwok-hung; Yeung Sum and activists Figo Chan, Avery Ng and Richard Tsoi — are sentenced to prison terms ranging from fourteen to eighteen months on charges of organising and participating in an unauthorised assembly in connection with a protest held on National Day in 2019.
Police ban the annual 4 June vigil in Victoria Park on public health grounds. Chow Hang-tung 鄭幸彤, barrister and vice-chair of the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China, is arrested and charged with inciting others to participate in an unlawful assembly after allegedly publicising the banned vigil on social media.

A seventeen-year-old school student and a forty-five-year-old woman are arrested and remanded in custody for alleged conspiracy to produce seditious publications after they reportedly photocopied and distributed leaflets promoting Hong Kong independence.

At the request of the Hong Kong police, Israel-based internet platform Wix disables the website of Hong Kong dissident group ‘2021 Hong Kong Charter’ on national security grounds. A few days later, Wix restores the website, saying the suspension was a mistake.

Five hundred police raid the offices of pro-democracy newspaper Apple Daily. CEO Cheung Kim-hung 張劍虹 and editor-in-chief Ryan Law 羅偉光 are arrested and, together with proprietor Jimmy Lai, are charged under the NSL with colluding with foreign forces to impose sanctions or engage in hostile activities against Hong Kong and China. Later, prosecutors charge four additional Apple Daily executives, editors and writers for the same crime. All seven are denied bail and remanded in custody. Police say the charges relate to more than thirty articles published by Apple Daily since 2019 — some pre-dating the enactment of the NSL — however, they decline to identify the offending articles. John Lee Ka-chiu 李家超, Hong Kong’s then-Secretary for Security, warns ‘ordinary journalists’ to ‘keep a distance’ from the staff of Apple Daily: ‘You should cut ties with these criminals before it’s too late to repent.’ Carrie Lam describes the issue of ‘press freedom’ as ‘completely irrelevant’ to the case. Days later, national security authorities freeze the company’s assets and bank accounts,
forcing it to cease operations. *Apple Daily*, founded in 1995, publishes its final issue on 24 June 2021 with a print run of one million copies, all of which sell out within the day.

Police arrest a man in his Mong Kok flat after a passer-by reports a banner with the slogan ‘Liberate Hong Kong, Revolution of Our Times’ hanging on a drying rack outside his window. Police arrest another man for ‘acts with a seditious intention’ and offences under the NSL after stickers bearing protest slogans are found on the front door of his flat in Chai Wan.

In a government reshuffle, Commissioner of Police Chris Tang Ping-keung 鄧炳強 is promoted to the post of Secretary for Security. The incumbent secretary, John Lee Ka-chiu (a former police deputy commissioner), is promoted to Chief Secretary — the second-highest position in the Hong Kong government. The three most senior positions below chief executive are now held by former members of the uniformed services. (Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs, Erick Tsang Kwok-wai 曾國衞, is a former director of immigration.) Pro-Beijing legislator Alice Mak Mei-kuen 參美娟 comments: ‘If it's a police state, why not? I don’t think there’s any problem with a police state.’

Official statistics reveal Hong Kong’s population has dropped 1.2 percent in the twelve months since the NSL was introduced, with net outward migration of over 89,000 people — the largest population decline in at least sixty years.
Police ban the annual 1 July protest march on public health grounds. On the evening of 1 July, fifty-year-old Leung Kin-fai 梁健輝 stabs a police officer before killing himself by plunging the knife into his own heart. The officer suffers a punctured lung.

A meeting of Hong Kong University’s student union holds a moment of silence for Leung in appreciation of his ‘sacrifice’. Following criticism from government and university authorities and the pro-Beijing press, union leaders apologise, retract the motion and resign. The university administration eventually withdraws recognition of the student union and evicts it from campus, declaring the university is not ‘a safe haven outside the law’. Police arrest four undergraduate student union leaders aged eighteen to twenty and charge them with ‘advocating terrorism’ under the NSL. Kevin Yeung 楊潤雄, Secretary for Education, insists the government ‘respects institutional autonomy and academic freedom’.

Police arrest five leaders of the General Union of Hong Kong Speech Therapists for publishing a children’s book depicting the Hong Kong people as sheep and the police and the Beijing authorities as wolves invading the sheep’s peaceful village. Two of the group — speech therapists Lai Man-ling 黎雯齡 (twenty-five) and Melody Yeung Yat-yee 楊逸意 (twenty-seven) — are charged with ‘conspiring to print, publish, distribute, display or reproduce seditious publications’ with the intention to ‘bring into hatred or contempt or to excite disaffection’ against the government and the administration of justice in Hong Kong.

The Cannes Film Festival screens the Hong Kong protest documentary Revolution of Our Times, directed by Kiwi Chow 周冠威. In November, the film wins best documentary at Taiwan’s Golden Horse Awards. The film cannot be screened in Hong Kong under new film censorship guidelines.
Numerous civil society professional groups that grew out of the 2014 Umbrella Movement — including the Progressive Lawyers’ Group, Progressive Teachers’ Alliance, Médecins Inspirés (representing the medical profession), HK Psychologists Concern, Financier Conscience (representing the finance industry), and Act Voice (representing the actuarial profession) — successively disband.

Carrie Lam comments: ‘I’d honestly ask you, what sort of freedoms have we lost? What sort of vibrancy has Hong Kong been eroded [sic]?’

Tong Ying-kit 唐英杰 (twenty-four) becomes the first person convicted of crimes under the NSL. Tong rode his motorcycle during protests on 1 July 2020 flying a ‘Liberate Hong Kong, Revolution of Our Times’ flag before accidentally running into police who tried to stop him. Tong is found guilty of terrorism and inciting secession and sentenced to nine years’ jail.

Hongkongers gather in shopping malls to cheer on fencer Edgar Cheung Ka-long 张家朗 as he wins Hong Kong’s first Olympic gold medal in twenty-five years at the Tokyo Games. A man is later arrested by police after being captured in video footage of the celebrations booing the Chinese national anthem during the medal ceremony — a crime under Hong Kong’s National Anthem Ordinance.
AUGUST

A song ostensibly about leaving a party early, ‘Gotta Go’ 係咁先啦, by local hip-hop artists MC $oHo 蘇致豪 and KidNey 许賢, is the hit song of the summer:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I'm heading off</th>
<th>走先喇</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gotta go</td>
<td>係咁先喇</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Let’s hang out next time</td>
<td>下次再玩吖</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>See you later</td>
<td>再見喇</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gotta go</td>
<td>係咁先喇</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>See you next time</td>
<td>下次見啦吓10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The pro-Beijing press criticises the government’s Arts Development Council for funding cultural organisations they say violate the NSL and labels three council members ‘troublemakers’; the three — actor Indy Lee 李俊亮, artist Chris Chan 陈锦成, and musician Adrian Chow 周博賢 — resign their positions, citing concerns for their safety.
Prominent political artist and activist Kacey Wong 黃國才 announces he has gone into exile in Taiwan in a video ‘Dear Hong Kong’ letter, bidding farewell to the city with a rendition of Vera Lynn’s ‘We’ll Meet Again’.11

Justice Anthea Pang 彭寶琴, one of the panel of three High Court judges who convicted and sentenced Tong Ying-kit in his NSL trial, is promoted to the Court of Appeal.

The Democratic Party announces its vice-chairman Lee Ming-tat 李永達 has gone into exile in the United Kingdom.

In advance of elections for the council of the Law Society of Hong Kong, Carrie Lam echoes warnings by state media that the solicitors’ self-regulatory professional body should avoid being ‘politicised’: ‘If the Law Society allows politics to hijack their legal profession, the government will ... consider severing its relationship with it.’12 One candidate withdraws his candidacy, citing threats to his and his family’s safety. Pro-establishment candidates win all available seats.

The Hong Kong Professional Teachers’ Union, founded forty-eight years ago and with 95,000 members representing more than 90 percent of the city’s educators, disbands after PRC state media described it as a ‘poisonous tumour’ that must be ‘eradicated’ and the Education Bureau declared it would no longer recognise the union.

The Civil Human Rights Front, a coalition of civil society groups that had organised numerous protest marches since its founding in 2002, including the annual 1 July march and many protests during 2019, announces its dissolution following pressure from the authorities and pro-Beijing press. The 612 Humanitarian Fund, which collected public donations to subsidise the legal, medical and welfare expenses of arrested protesters, dissolves after facing similar pressure.
Carrie Lam disputes the notion that the government is engaging in a ‘crackdown on civic society’, saying: ‘We respect civic society.’

Albert Wan 溫敬豪, the owner of the independent English-language bookshop Bleak House Books, announces:

It is with great sadness that I need to announce that Bleak House Books will be closing ... The backdrop to these developments is, of course, politics ... [My wife] and I can no longer see a life for ourselves and our children in this city.

Huang Liuquan 黃柳權, Deputy Director of the State Council’s Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office, proclaims that Hongkongers ‘are now universally patriotic, their hearts are set on development, and the place is teeming with positive energy’.
The Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China chair Lee Cheuk-yan and vice-chairs Albert Ho and Chow Hang-tung appear in court charged with inciting subversion under the NSL. They are denied bail and remanded in custody. Police freeze the assets of the group and raid the Alliance’s premises, removing exhibits from the shuttered 4 June museum, including a large cardboard cut-out of the iconic ‘Goddess of Democracy’ statue, which they haul into a police van.

The Hong Kong government amends the Film Censorship Ordinance to provide for censorship of films on national security grounds, empowering authorities to ban films and impose penalties of up to three years’ jail for screening a banned film. Documentaries are singled out for ‘even more careful consideration’, with censors instructed to be vigilant for ‘any biased, unverified, false or misleading narratives … and the tendency of such contents to lead viewers to commit or imitate any act or activity endangering national security’. Edward Yau Tang-wah, Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, commenting on the new censorship rules, insists that ‘[b]oth the NSL and the Basic Law state clearly that the freedoms we treasure, like the freedoms of speech and creation, are protected’.

Police arrest four members of the group Student Politicism, all aged between eighteen and twenty, on charges of conspiring to incite subversion, partly by ‘systematically providing resources to like-minded people who are jailed’ and ‘recruiting followers in prisons’. Confiscated evidence includes bulk supplies of M&M chocolates, crackers and sanitary pads intended for jailed protesters — despite all these appearing on the Correctional Services Department’s list of approved items that may be given to inmates. All four are denied bail and remanded in custody.
Prisoner welfare group Wall-Fare, founded by former pro-democracy legislator Shiu Ka-chun 邵家臻 (who had previously done time on public order charges arising from the 2014 Umbrella Movement), disbands.

The Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China, founded in 1989 in support of the Tiananmen Square-based pro-democracy protests and organisers of Hong Kong’s annual 4 June vigil, disbands. Xinhua welcomes the news of its disbanding and that of other groups as ‘an inevitable historic trend’ that ‘reflects the voice of the people of Hong Kong’.18

The China Human Rights Lawyers Concern Group, a civil society group formed in 2007 by pro-democracy lawyers in Hong Kong to support and advocate for human rights lawyers on the Mainland, disbands.

Speaking at the Hong Kong Foreign Correspondents’ Club, pro-government legislator Regina Ip 葉劉淑儀 says: ‘I think the freedom of expression is still alive and well ... Hong Kong Stand News, all these websites are still carrying on as usual ... I don’t think there is any really undue suppression of the expression of freedom in Hong Kong.’19

Secretary for Security Chris Tang 鄧炳強 warns that celebrating Taiwan’s ‘Double Tenth’ national day (marking the anniversary of the 1911 Xinhai Revolution) in Hong Kong may constitute the crime of secession under the NSL, adding: ‘If you really want to split Taiwan from China in your heart, we will definitely find evidence to prove what you’re thinking in your heart ... If you don’t have such intention, why are you celebrating this day?’20

Executive councillor Bernard Chan 陳智思 states: ‘The NSL has made very little dent to Hong Kong’s status. All the financial companies made tonnes of money in Hong Kong last year, so that has not impacted them at all.’21
On the 1 October National Day holiday, 8,000 police are deployed to the streets of Hong Kong to ensure official celebrations run ‘in a safe and orderly manner’ according to police.\(^{22}\)

The Hong Kong delegate to the NPC, Tam Yiu-chung 譚耀宗, says enactment of proposed additional national security legislation in Hong Kong under Article 23 of the Basic Law ‘will impact only a small group of people’.\(^{23}\)

The Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions, founded in 1990 and representing almost 100 pro-democracy unions with a total of around 145,000 members, announces it will disband, citing political pressure and threats to its leaders’ safety, after being attacked in the pro-Beijing media.

The Chinese University of Hong Kong Student Union, founded in 1971, dissolves because of the university’s decision to sever ties with the group, alleging it had made public statements in breach of the NSL.

Radio host and pro-democracy activist ‘Fast Beat’ 快必 Tam Tak-chi 譚得志 goes on trial for ‘uttering seditious words’. Prosecutors allege that his chanting of popular protest slogans such as ‘Liberate Hong Kong, Revolution of Our Times’ and ‘Five Demands, Not One Less’ at street stalls from January to July 2020 incited hatred and contempt of the central and Hong Kong governments.

With many of its leading figures in exile or in jail awaiting trial on NSL-related charges, the Democratic Party of Hong Kong, which had fielded candidates in every LegCo election since 1995, announces it will not be contesting the LegCo elections in December. Carrie Lam observes: ‘If a political group says it will never take part in Hong Kong’s elections and will not join the political system, then that’s a bit strange.’\(^{24}\)

Seven pro-democracy activists — former lawmakers Wu Chi-wai 胡志偉, Leung Kwok-hung, and Eddie Chu Hoi-dick 朱凱廸; former district
councillors Andy Chui Chi-kin 徐子見 and Tsang Kin-shing 曾健成; and activists Figo Chan 陳皓桓 and Tang Sai-lai 鄧世禮 — are sentenced to between six and twelve months’ jail on unlawful assembly charges in connection with an unauthorised protest on 1 July 2020.

At the annual Hong Kong marathon, a heavy police presence scrutinises the attire of runners at the race entrance. A woman with the ‘Hong Kong/Add Oil’ ambigram logo (popularised during the 2019 protests) printed on her shorts is banned from participating for ‘wearing political clothes’. Another runner is forced to cover a tattoo of the logo on his leg.

Amnesty International closes its two offices in the city, including its regional headquarters. Chair of Amnesty’s International Board, Anjhula Mya Singh Bais, says: ‘This decision, made with a heavy heart, has been driven by Hong Kong’s NSL, which has made it effectively impossible for human rights organizations in Hong Kong to work freely and without fear of serious reprisals from the government.’²²⁵ The pro-Beijing politician Holden Chow Ho-ding 周浩鼎 comments: ‘It is outrageous for any organisation to smear the NSL by unnecessarily closing their branches here.’²²⁶

The Hong Kong judiciary announces it will construct a new ‘mega courtroom’ to cope with ‘cases related to social events’ that will be capable of accommodating up to fifty defendants, 100 legal representatives, and 100 people in the public gallery.

Bishops and religious leaders from the Mainland’s official state-backed Catholic Church hold a day-long meeting with senior Hong Kong Catholic clergy to brief them on Xi Jinping’s 習近平 vision of religion with Chinese characteristics.
Police arrest four people aged between sixty-one and eighty-five in the Mong Kok shopping district for displaying a yellow banner printed with the words ‘We want genuine universal suffrage’ in Chinese, along with a yellow umbrella.

Ma Chun-man 馬俊文, a thirty-one-year-old food delivery worker, is sentenced to five years and nine months’ imprisonment for inciting secession under the NSL for shouting pro-independence and anti-government slogans in public. He is the second person to be sentenced under the NSL and the first convicted for pure speech acts.

Hong Kong police announce that, in the twelve months since its launch, the ‘national security hotline’ has received more than 200,000 tip-offs from the public.²⁷

Tony Chung 鍾翰林 (aged twenty) becomes the third person sentenced for crimes under the NSL, receiving a three year and seven month prison sentence for inciting secession, as well as money-laundering offences. The court finds Chung had promoted Hong Kong independence on social media and through the activism group Studentlocalism.

Hong Kong’s Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) issues arrest warrants for pro-democracy politicians Ted Hui Chi-fung 許智峯 and Yau Man-chun 丘文俊, both of whom are living in exile outside Hong Kong, for posts on social media inciting people to not vote at the upcoming LegCo election.
Kevin Yeung 楊潤雄, the Secretary for Education, states: ‘If we all have the right thinking [in relation to the NSL], we have nothing to worry about. Some worry about stepping over the red line or a narrowing of personal space — it’s impossible.’

ICAC Commissioner Simon Peh 白鶴六 states the ICAC is studying whether the Hong Kong Public Opinion Research Institute has violated election laws by including an option of casting a blank vote in a public opinion survey on election voting intentions. Erick Tsang, Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs, warns the Wall Street Journal in a letter to the editors:

I am shocked by your statement that ‘boycotts and blank ballots are one of the last ways for Hong Kongers to express their political views’. Please be advised that inciting another person not to vote, or to cast an invalid vote ... is an offense ... We reserve the right to take necessary action.

In advance of the LegCo election, ten people are arrested for allegedly inciting others to cast blank votes or not vote, including at least three arrested for sharing Ted Hui’s social media post.

Eight pro-democracy politicians and activists — Jimmy Lai; leaders of the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China, including chair Lee Cheuk-yan, vice-chair Chow Hang-tung, executive committee member Simon Leung Kam-wai 梁錦威, and liquidator Richard Tsoi 蔡耀昌; former Democratic Party chairman Wu Chi-wai; former LegCo member Leung Yiu-chung; and activist and journalist Gwyneth Ho 何桂籠 — are sentenced to prison terms of between four and fourteen months for participating in and inciting others to join the banned
4 June vigil in 2020. In her statement to the court in her defence, Chow Hang-tung calls the court’s decision ‘one step in the systemic erasure of history, both of the Tiananmen Massacre and Hong Kong’s own history of civic resistance’.  

In response to parents’ complaints that six-year-olds have been traumatised by a screening of graphic footage of the Nanjing Massacre in a primary school ‘patriotic education’ class, an Education Bureau spokesperson says: ‘History is history, we cannot avoid it.’

The first LegCo election under the new electoral system is held on 19 December 2021. Of the thirty-one pro-democracy legislators who successfully won seats in the previous LegCo election in 2016, twelve are in jail, five are on bail awaiting trial on NSL-related charges, four have left Hong Kong and are living in exile and the remainder have ‘withdrawn’ from politics. The election records the lowest turnout in Hong Kong’s history, with only 30 percent of the electorate voting (compared with 58 percent in the previous LegCo elections in 2016 and 71 percent in the district council elections of 2019). Informal votes form 2 percent of votes cast — also a record high.

In the dead of night, two days before Christmas, University of Hong Kong administrators send in workers to dismantle and remove Danish artist Jens Galschiot’s ‘Pillar of Shame’ sculpture. The eight-metre-high sculpture, depicting a pile of corpses and commemorating the 1989 massacre in
Beijing, had been in place since 1998. Overnight on Christmas Eve, a replica of the ‘Goddess of Democracy’ statue that had been in place for more than a decade is removed from the campus of the Chinese University of Hong Kong; Lingnan University administrators remove a wall relief sculpture commemorating 4 June, while City University administrators instruct the student union to remove a ‘Goddess of Democracy’ replica from the campus.

More than 200 police officers raid leading independent online news outlet *Stand News*. Six people — among them two editors, as well as former board members barrister Margaret Ng and activist pop singer Denise Ho 何韻詩 — are arrested by national security police on charges of conspiracy to print or distribute seditious materials with the intention to bring hatred, contempt or to excite disaffection and discontent towards the authorities. Police cite interviews with dissident figures and protest-related news reports they said were inaccurate or biased as being among the offending articles, with Senior Superintendent of the Police National Security Department Steve Li 李桂華 warning reporters: ‘When you handle the
views of some guys who may have a problem with national security, just [don’t] be biased. That afternoon, Stand News dismisses all staff and announces it is ceasing operations with immediate effect.

Responding to international criticism of the arrests, a spokesperson for China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs says:

> Those who engage in activities that endanger national security ... under the cover of journalism are the black sheep tarnishing the press freedom ... Since the implementation of the NSL, Hong Kong has returned to the right track, and the press freedom has been better protected in a more secure, stable and law-based environment. It is a fact that all the fair-minded cannot deny.

Secretary for Justice Teresa Cheng 鄭若驊 says the criticism is ‘in blatant violation of international law’, adding: ‘It is indisputable that the free flow of information in accordance with the law has always been well-respected in Hong Kong.'

In the course of 2021, Hong Kong government officials have written more than 130 letters to foreign media outlets, including the Financial Times, the Wall Street Journal, The New York Times and The Economist, complaining about their coverage of the NSL and electoral system reforms. The most common words used in these letters include ‘inaccurate’, ‘misleading’ and ‘baseless’.