

Online Appendix for  
*Differential Public Support and the Independence of  
Anti-corruption Agencies*

April 23, 2023

# Contents

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| <b>A Public Opinion Surveys</b>                               | <b>1</b>  |
| <b>B Historical Roots of ICAC Responsiveness</b>              | <b>3</b>  |
| <b>C Where the Government Fails and the ICAC Succeeds</b>     | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>D Robustness Checks</b>                                    | <b>7</b>  |
| <b>E Additional Analyses</b>                                  | <b>13</b> |
| <b>F Sample selection strategy for the ICAC Annual Survey</b> | <b>16</b> |
| <b>G Survey Questions and Answers</b>                         | <b>17</b> |
| <b>H The Cases of India and Argentina</b>                     | <b>19</b> |

## A Public Opinion Surveys

Citizen appraisals of the Hong Kong government as a whole have gone through ups and downs since the transfer of sovereignty in 1997, with a general trend of deteriorating favorability. The public are concerned with Hong Kong's increasing economic dependence on mainland China, Beijing's political influences over the city's autonomous institutions, and potential corruption spillovers from the mainland jurisdiction. In response to public demands for effective counter-veiling measures and negative public sentiments against the government, the ICAC has relied on diligent propaganda and enforcement campaigns to demonstrate its effectiveness. The highly attentive approach has shaped public perceptions and developed distinctively favorable citizen attitudes towards the ICAC that differentiates the agency from the overarching political regime. Robust public support in turn provides the agency with discretionary power and operational independence under a relatively distrusted and unpopular ruling regime.

The volatile and cyclical patterns of public assessments of the government since 1997 stand in contrast to the consistently robust support for the ICAC as a more reliable and responsive institutional recourse in the post-1997 era. Based on the ICAC's survey responses, even though Hong Kongers were originally concerned about more severe corruption post-1997, they have become nevertheless more optimistic over time about the anti-corruption outcomes.

Such effective outcomes has provided a strong support base for the agency, especially after the transfer of sovereignty. Figure A1 compares popular attitudes expressed towards the ICAC versus those towards the HK government in general. In Figure A1(A), the black line indicates the proportion of respondents who believe that the ICAC "*deserves your support*," which has never fallen below 95%. Public opinion surveys on the Hong Kong government were conducted by the Hong Kong Public Opinion Research Institute (PORI).<sup>1</sup> The blue dotted line shows the ratio of positive responses to the question "*On the whole, do you trust the HKSAR Government?*" The red dotted line shows the positive response ratio for the question "*Are you satisfied with the performance of the HKSAR Government?*" The government surveys do not have questions that directly ask about respondents' support for the HKSAR government, therefore the questions on trust and satisfaction are used as proxies for governmental support.

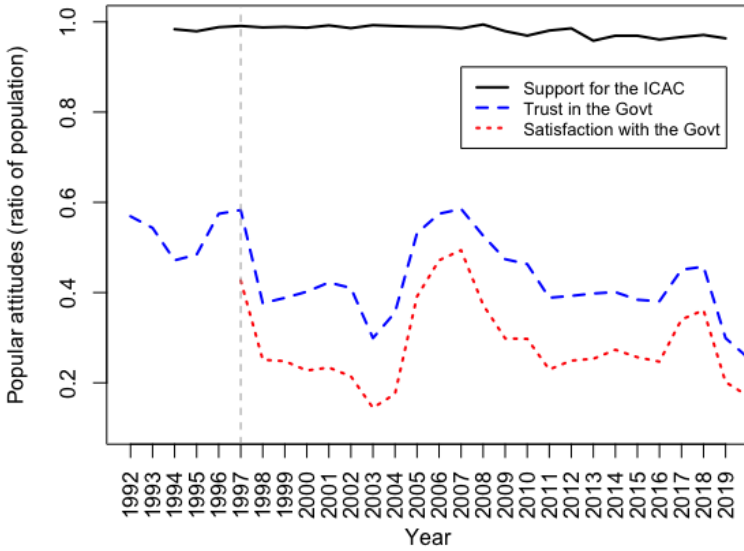
Figure A1(A) shows that popular opinions towards the ICAC have been much more

---

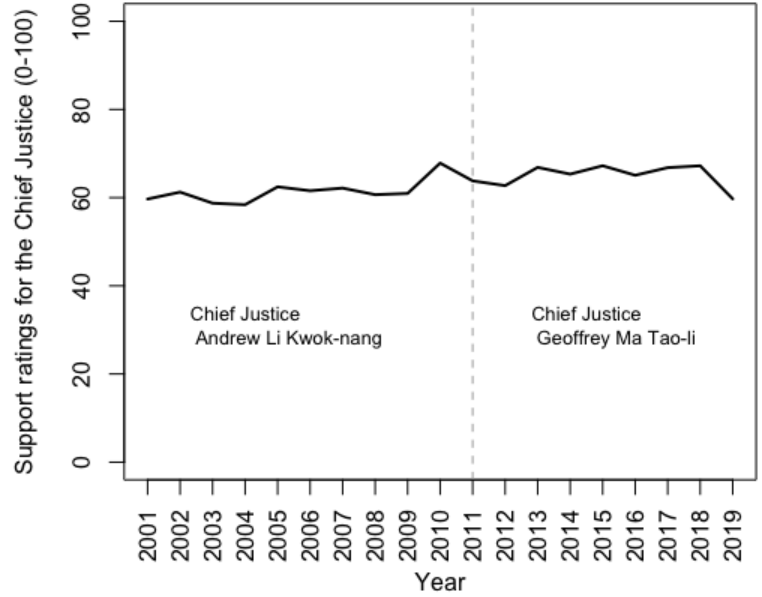
<sup>1</sup>It is formerly known as the Public Opinion Programme (POP) of The University of Hong Kong. Details of the survey results and methodology can be accessed at <https://www.pori.hk/pop-poll/government.html?lang=en>.

**Figure A1. Distinctively Robust Popular Support for the ICAC**

(A) ICAC v.s the Government

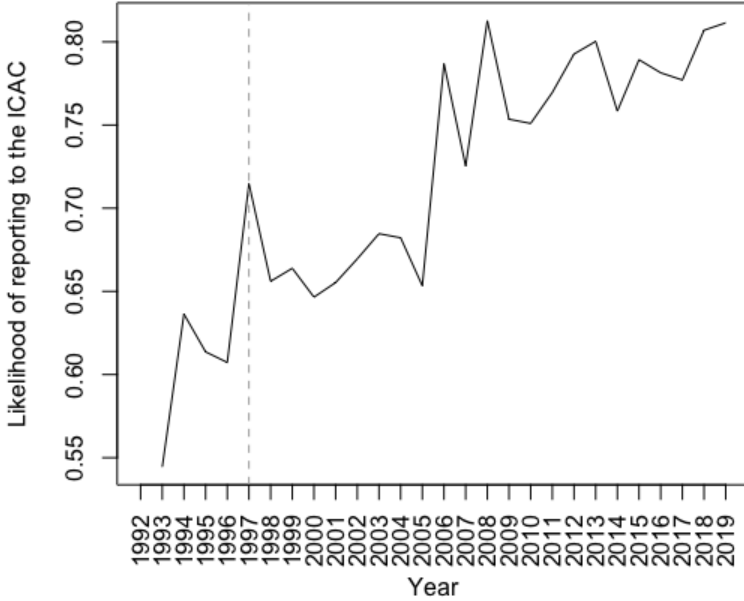


(B) The Chief Justice

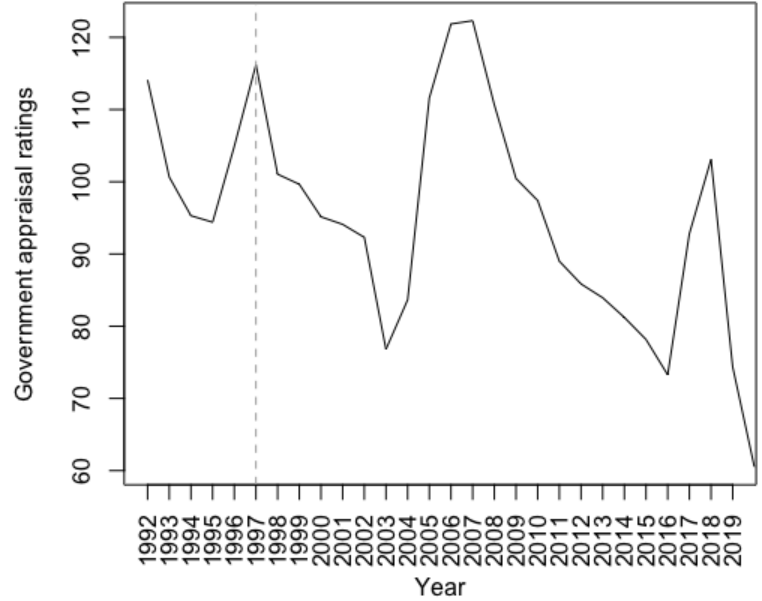


(C) Contrasting Institutional Support

*Reporting to the ICAC*



*Government appraisal*



positive and also more stable than those towards the HK government as a whole. This is notable for two reasons: (1) the ICAC is organizationally a part of the HKSAR government, as it answers directly to the Chief Executive; and (2) popular attitudes towards the government exhibit cyclical fluctuations that correspond to the election cycles of the Chief Executive, while no such cycles exist for the ICAC. These empirical patterns point to the

robust popular support enjoyed by the ICAC that transcends other government branches. Citizens seem to attribute the success of corruption reduction in Hong Kong, as shown in Figure 3, mostly to the ICAC instead of to the overarching regime.

Figure A1(B) uses PORI survey data on public support for the Chief Justice of the Court of Final Appeal of Hong Kong from 2001 to 2019.<sup>2</sup> The longitudinal responses also exhibit noticeable ups and downs in public moods towards one of the most reputable public official in Hong Kong (Tam 2017; Young and Ghai 2014).

Figure A1(C) uses an another way to compare the different levels of institutional support for the ICAC versus the HK government. The left plot shows the proportion of respondents indicating the willingness to report corruption to the ICAC if they were aware of corrupt activities. The right plot depicts the changes in Government Appraisal (GA) scores compiled by the PORI. The GA score has 4 components: the degree of support for the Chief Executive in office, the willingness to vote for the Chief Executive in office, the level of satisfaction with the HK government, and the level of trust in the HK government.<sup>3</sup> An important feature of the GA score is that it captures people's attitudes towards both the specific Chief Executive in office as well as the institution of governance.

Public enthusiasm in reporting corruption saw a dramatic jump in 2006, the year when the legislature started the attempt to bring the Chief Executive under the ICAC's oversight through the Prevention of Bribery Ordinance (POBO). Chief Executives also started to omit mentioning the ICAC in their policy addresses after 2005, a break from the annual ritual, which may reflect Chief Executives' declining political commitment to the role of the ICAC (Scott and Gong 2018). The growing hostility between the ICAC as a legacy institution and the ruling regime also corresponds to the widening divergence in public support for the two institutions after 2006. Overall, the empirical patterns offer evidence that the ICAC is endowed with distinctive popular support to empower its institutional independence against regime influences.

## B Historical Roots of ICAC Responsiveness

Bolstered by public grievances against rampant corruption and dissatisfaction with the ineffectiveness of the Royal Hong Kong Political Force, the newly-created ICAC launched aggressive enforcement campaigns in the 1970s against corrupt police syndicates and won

---

<sup>2</sup>The question asks: *Please use a scale of 0-100 to rate your extent of support to the Chief Justice Geoffrey Ma Tao-li (Andrew Li Kwok-nang), with 0 indicating absolutely not supportive, 100 indicating absolutely supportive and 50 indicating half-half. How would you rate the Chief Justice Geoffrey Ma Tao-li (Andrew Li Kwok-nang)?*

<sup>3</sup>A methodology note on how the GA score is compiled (in Chinese) can be accessed at [https://www.hkpop.hku.hk/english/features/PSI/PSI\\_method\\_note\\_20170713.pdf](https://www.hkpop.hku.hk/english/features/PSI/PSI_method_note_20170713.pdf).

several important “turf wars” (Quah 2003; Yep 2013; Scott 2017). The police officers staged demonstrations and protests against the ICAC’s aggressive enforcement tactics, and in 1977 the ICAC announced a “partial amnesty” for most corruption offenses committed before 1977. This decision by the governor of British Hong Kong severely damaged public confidence in the ICAC, as reflected in the sharp drop in the number corruption reports that the agency received in 1977 and 1978 (shown in Figure 1).

The ICAC’s Community Relations Department (CRD), created in 1975 exclusively for the purpose of enlisting public support, played a crucial role in regaining public trust. In response to such public outcry, CRD officers adopted a “penetration” approach of outreach campaigns to engage in face-to-face contacts with local residents in every corner of the society to solicit their support. CRD went to knock on the doors of households and spoke with residents to emphasize that the ICAC was still in business. CRD also held focus groups to reach “at risk” and “hard to reach” groups such as hawkers and fishermen, and put up exhibitions in schools and housing estates to publicize its continued strong stance against corruption. The liaison work was carefully designed such that it was often conducted in the evenings in order to reach citizens working in daytime. The ICAC has also largely kept its promise of handling corruption reports responsibly and timely by responding to complaints within 48 hours and completing investigations of the reports within 12 months (Scott and Gong 2015; Gong and Xiao 2017). The face-to-face campaigns and further investigations, arrests, and publicity reestablished the credibility of the ICAC, and the number of corruption complaints was restored to previous levels (Scott and Gong 2018).

## **C Where the Government Fails and the ICAC Succeeds**

In the main text, we argue that the ICAC is highly sensitive and responsive to salient public concerns about corruption while the government is relatively inactive towards such sentiments. We also show the importance of perceived anti-corruption effectiveness for institutional support. In this section, we use another source of public opinion survey data, the Hong Kong Election Study (HKES) surveys (Wong and Ho 2022; Wong 2015), to investigate the determinants of public perceptions of worsened corruption conditions as well as the behavioral factors that reduce citizen satisfactions with the legal system. This analysis reveals the features of respondents’ political attitudes that would shift their perceptions of Hong Kong’s corruption conditions.

The first outcome variable is a binary indicator of whether the respondent thinks that the corruption problem in recent years “Got a little worse” or “Got a lot worse” (1) or

otherwise (0).<sup>4</sup> The second outcome variable is a binary indicator of whether the respondent thinks that the rule of law in Hong Kong “Got a little worse” or “Got a lot worse” (1) or otherwise (0). We find evidence that government engagement with the public, media interactions, and China’s cross-border influences all play important roles in shaping such perceptions, which is consistent with the enforcement focus on the ICAC. Respondents who are concerned about corruption spillovers from mainland China and those who actively engage with the media are more likely to hold negative views about corruption control outcomes, while respondents who have had experiences interacting with public officials are less likely to hold such views. These results provide the rationale for the ICAC’s comprehensive anti-corruption strategy focusing on both enforcement and messaging campaigns, including media engagement, community outreach, face-to-face contact, and other publicity and propaganda initiatives.

We use three variables to capture mainland China’s political-economic influences over Hong Kong, a salient public concern about corruption spill-overs. The first variable measures respondents’ beliefs about the most important sources of influence on Hong Kong politics.<sup>5</sup> The binary indicator *Beijing influence* equals 1 if the respondent believes “Beijing” or “The Liaison Office” are the most or the second most important sources of political influence. The binary indicator *Business tycoon influence* equals 1 if the respondent thinks that “Hong Kong’s business tycoons” are among the top 3 important sources of influence. This measure corresponds to existing findings that HK business elites often act as proxies to represent Beijing’s interests (Fong 2014b). The binary indicator *Chinese immigrants* equals 1 if the respondent “Agrees” or “Strongly agrees” with the statement that “Hong Kong has too many immigrants coming from Mainland China.”

We use two variables to explore the impact of media engagement on corruption perceptions. *Share news* is a binary indicator of whether the respondent has “share[d] news/commentaries/cartoons/videos about public issues on social media” over the past 12 months. *Produce media content* is a binary indicator of whether the respondent has “produce[d] news/commentaries/cartoons/videos about public issues on social media” over the past 12 months. Finally, we use two binary variables to capture the potential effectiveness of the direct outreach programs of government agencies. *Contact public official* equals 1 if the respondent has “contact[ed] a public official” over the last 12 months, and 0 otherwise. *Discuss public issue* indicates whether the respondent has “discuss[ed] a public issue with someone online” over the last 12 months.

We run a series of logit regressions to investigate the potential behavioral determi-

---

<sup>4</sup>The other options include “Got a little better”, “Got a lot better”, “Stayed the same”, and “Don’t know.”

<sup>5</sup>See the codebook of Wong and Ho (2022) for the full list of choices.

nants of corruption perceptions. All models include fixed effects for the five waves of survey conducted (*Survey FEs*).<sup>6</sup> Table C1 presents the results. In Models (1) and (3), all three indicators of perceived mainland China's influence over Hong Kong (*Beijing influence*, *Business tycoon influence*, and *Chinese immigrants*) are positive and significant for both perception outcomes. The results suggest that respondents concerned with Beijing's direct or indirect political influence and corruption contagion through cross-border exchanges are more likely to view corruption and the rule of law as worsening in Hong Kong. Such relationships remain robust after controlling for a wide range of individual characteristics of the respondents, as shown in Models (2) and (4). Also, respondents who are willing to share news or produce media content online tend to have negative views about corruption situations in the city, which underscores the importance of government media engagement. Crucially, respondents who have had experiences contacting public officials are less likely to have pessimistic views about corruption and the legal system. The results are also robust to controlling for personal characteristics. Meanwhile, discussing public issues online only affects respondents' perceptions about the rule of law, without discernible impact on corruption perceptions.

Overall, the findings underline the perception-shaping roles of citizens' (1) concerns about cross-border corruption influences, (2) interactions with the media, and (3) engagement with government officials. The empirical patterns support the comprehensive anti-corruption strategy of the ICAC focusing on active public engagement, media communications, and robust education campaigns in building institutional legitimacy.<sup>7</sup> Such propaganda tools should also be accompanied by vigorous enforcement efforts targeting salient corruption issues, notably the perceived cross-border corruption spillovers.

---

<sup>6</sup>The surveys were conducted around the timings of 5 major elections in Hong Kong. See Section G of the Appendix for more details.

<sup>7</sup>See the description on the ICAC's website at <https://www.icac.org.hk/en/crd/work/mco/index.html>.



Table C1. Determinants of Worsened Corruption Perceptions

|                              | <i>Dependent variable:</i> |                      |                      |                      |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
|                              | Worse Corruption Problems  |                      | Worse Rule of Law    |                      |
|                              | (1)                        | (2)                  | (3)                  | (4)                  |
| Beijing influence            | 0.852***<br>(0.072)        | 0.859***<br>(0.073)  | 0.896***<br>(0.075)  | 0.932***<br>(0.077)  |
| Business tycoon<br>influence | 0.224***<br>(0.071)        | 0.223***<br>(0.072)  | 0.227***<br>(0.072)  | 0.231***<br>(0.074)  |
| Chinese immigrants           | 0.750***<br>(0.052)        | 0.756***<br>(0.052)  | 0.778***<br>(0.052)  | 0.769***<br>(0.052)  |
| Contact public official      | -0.281***<br>(0.076)       | -0.300***<br>(0.077) | -0.437***<br>(0.076) | -0.432***<br>(0.077) |
| Share news                   | 0.428***<br>(0.042)        | 0.406***<br>(0.042)  | 0.404***<br>(0.044)  | 0.390***<br>(0.044)  |
| Produce media<br>content     | 0.138***<br>(0.047)        | 0.136***<br>(0.048)  | -0.037<br>(0.049)    | -0.030<br>(0.049)    |
| Discuss public issue         | 0.001<br>(0.042)           | 0.007<br>(0.043)     | -0.133***<br>(0.043) | -0.100**<br>(0.044)  |
| Survey FEs                   | Yes                        | Yes                  | Yes                  | Yes                  |
| Respondent characteristics*  | No                         | Yes                  | No                   | Yes                  |
| Observations                 | 14,283                     | 14,283               | 14,283               | 14,283               |

*Note:* Respondent characteristics include gender, age group, geographical constituency, occupation, industry of occupation, and education level.

\* $p < 0.1$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.01$

## D Robustness Checks

In Table 2 of the main text, we use two-sample t tests to show the ICAC's operational sensitivity to public opinion, especially when its independence is under threat from external influences. To supplement the main results as well as the findings from the above section, we conduct small sample regressions to further demonstrate that the ICAC's responsive operations distinguish itself from other government institutions under challenging external environments, which may explain the resilient legitimacy bestowed upon the agency.

We firstly examine how aggregate levels of public support for the ICAC affect the

agency's investigations. Public support is measured as the percentage of respondents indicating that the ICAC "deserves your support," which covers 1994-2019. When we merge the annual ICAC investigation count with the year-varying measurement of public support, we are left with 26 observations. In all model specifications, we control for Hong Kong's yearly GDP per capita and the latest measurement of corruption levels provided by the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) project ([Coppedge et al. 2021](#)).

In Table D1, Model (1) is the baseline specification that shows a positive and significant coefficient for *ICAC support*, after controlling for existing levels of corruption and economic development. The result is also substantively meaningful: one percentage point increase in the proportion of respondents indicating support for the ICAC is associated with 660 more investigations. Given the overall high level of public support for the ICAC (all above 95%), the result suggests that the agency is highly sensitive and responsive to public opinions in Hong Kong.<sup>8</sup> In contrast, Models (2) and (3) show that the prosecution and conviction of corruption cases brought by the ICAC are not affected by mood swings of the population. The two coefficients are much smaller than the one in Model (1) and also statistically insignificant. This provides evidence for the unique institutional responsiveness of the ICAC compared with other branches of the government: the agency has limited authority over prosecution, which is ultimately at the discretion of the Secretary for Justice, and also cannot control court judgements on convictions.<sup>9</sup>

In Models (4) and (5), we examine how ICAC investigations are particularly responsive to popular support, from which it derives the independent power, when the threats of external influences are high. Concerns about undue interference focus on two sources: one from the HKSAR government and one from mainland China. First, a lack of government responsiveness to popular demands, in particular a lack of top-down commitment and political will to fight corruption, may impede and even obstruct the work of the ICAC. Second, increased economic integration with mainland China and cross-border activities have been suspected of importing corruption from mainland China ([Jones 2015](#); [Fong 2014a](#); [Scott and Gong 2018](#)). In Model (4), we examine the effect of *ICAC support* conditional on popular attitudes towards the government, as measured by government appraisal scores where low scores reflect public dissatisfaction with government performance generally speaking. In Model (5), we examine the effect of *ICAC support* conditional on Hong Kong's degree of economic integration with mainland China, which is

---

<sup>8</sup>We acknowledge the limited statistical power of our results given the small sample size. Yet, the large effect size of this non-experimental study combined with the small sample size would mitigate concerns about statistical significance ([Gerber, Green and Nickerson 2001](#)).

<sup>9</sup>[Scott and Gong](#) (2018: 105-107) discuss the political problems associated with the prosecutorial decisions of the Secretary for Justice.

Table D1. Sensitivity of the ICAC to Public Opinion

|                                    | <i>Dependent variables:</i> |                      |                      |                     |                   |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
|                                    | Investigations              | Prosecutions         | Convictions          | Investigations      |                   |
|                                    | (1)                         | (2)                  | (3)                  | (4)                 | (5)               |
| ICAC support                       | 0.712***<br>(0.203)         | 0.035<br>(0.203)     | 0.017<br>(0.174)     | 2.629***<br>(0.893) | -0.518<br>(0.713) |
| Govt appraisal                     |                             |                      |                      | -0.008<br>(0.010)   |                   |
| Trade dependence                   |                             |                      |                      |                     | 0.357<br>(0.739)  |
| Corruption levels                  | 2.267<br>(1.438)            | 0.812<br>(1.439)     | 0.898<br>(1.234)     | 2.407*<br>(1.359)   | 2.269<br>(1.751)  |
| GDP per capita                     | 0.157<br>(0.385)            | -1.558***<br>(0.385) | -1.334***<br>(0.330) | 0.262<br>(0.352)    | -0.171<br>(0.479) |
| ICAC support ×<br>govt appraisal   |                             |                      |                      | -0.020*<br>(0.010)  |                   |
| ICAC support ×<br>Trade dependence |                             |                      |                      |                     | 1.206*<br>(0.694) |
| Observations                       | 26                          | 26                   | 26                   | 26                  | 26                |
| Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>            | 0.474                       | 0.654                | 0.642                | 0.567               | 0.586             |

Note:

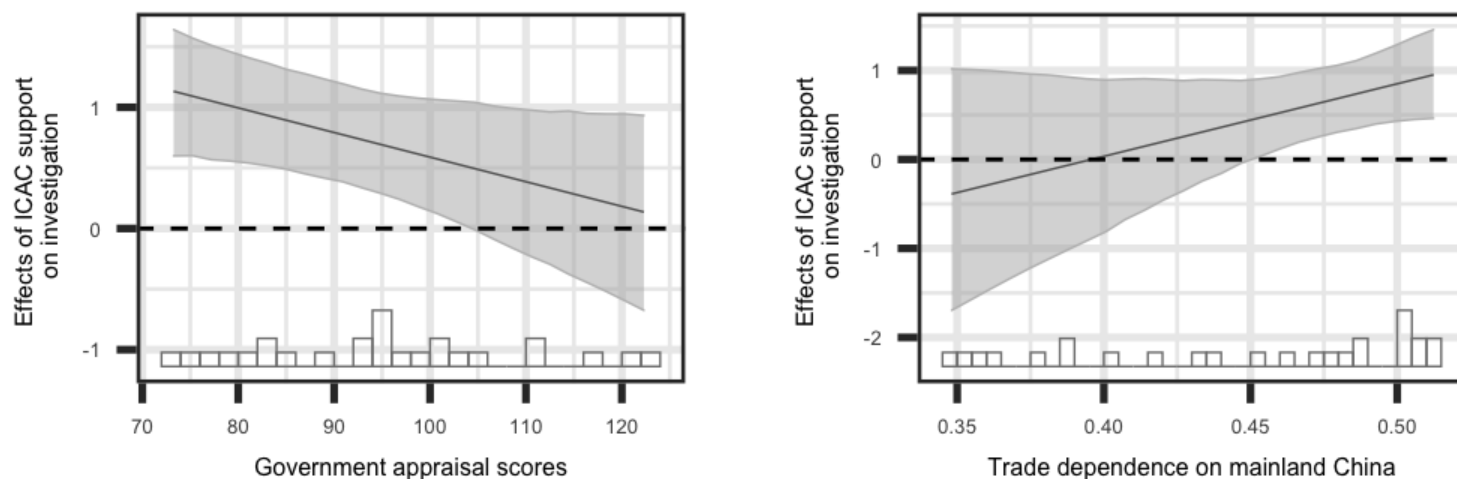
\*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01

measured by trade dependence. *Trade dependence* is the ratio of Hong Kong's total trade with mainland China over its total trade with all countries or territories in the world.<sup>10</sup> We plot the two conditional effects in Models (4) and (5) in Figure D1.

The left-hand plot shows that ICAC investigations are more incentivized by upticks in public support when government approval ratings are low. The positive relationship between ICAC support and investigations diminishes as the government becomes more popular. The result suggests that the ICAC becomes invigorated and acts as a counterforce against the unpopular government when the latter fails to satisfy popular demands.

<sup>10</sup>Trade data is obtained from the Census and Statistics Department of Hong Kong at <https://www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/scode230.html#section5>.

**Figure D1. Responsiveness of ICAC Investigations under External Influences**



This has important implications for upholding political integrity for a government with limited electoral accountability to the citizenry and increased vulnerability to authoritarian influence. The right-hand plot shows a similar pattern. Public support for the ICAC boosts its investigations only when trade dependence on mainland China is high. As cross-border corruption becomes a more challenging issue, public concerns drive the ICAC to be more active in investigating corruption cases. This result may explain the fact that economic and cultural exchanges between the two jurisdictions did not result in a significant spill-over of corruption into Hong Kong, although such concerns were common both before and after the sovereignty transfer (Cheng 2007; Li 2016). In short, Hong Kongers rely more on the ICAC when the ruling regime fails to address their concerns.

Table D2 shows further evidence that ICAC investigations are uniquely responsive to popular anti-corruption demands. Model (1) shows a positive and significant interactive effect between *ICAC support* and *Corruption levels*, as measured by the V-Dem indicator, on the number of investigations. Notably, no such interactive effect is found for the number of prosecutions or convictions.<sup>11</sup> Figure D2 plots the marginal effect of *ICAC support* on investigation and prosecution respectively, conditional on corruption levels. The results imply that the ICAC carries out its duties actively in response to popular demands for corruption prevention. Moreover, given the relatively small variation in *ICAC support*, the empirical patterns suggest that ICAC actions are highly sensitive to even small boosts in public support. Meanwhile, other government functionalities, noticeably the prosecution, are more prone to inaction because they lack such a popular opinion connection and do

<sup>11</sup>There are also no such interactive effects for prosecution or conviction when the conditional variable is government appraisal score or trade dependence, as used in Models (4) and (5) of Table D1.

Table D2. Potential Empowerment Effect of Popular Support of the ICAC to Popular Demands

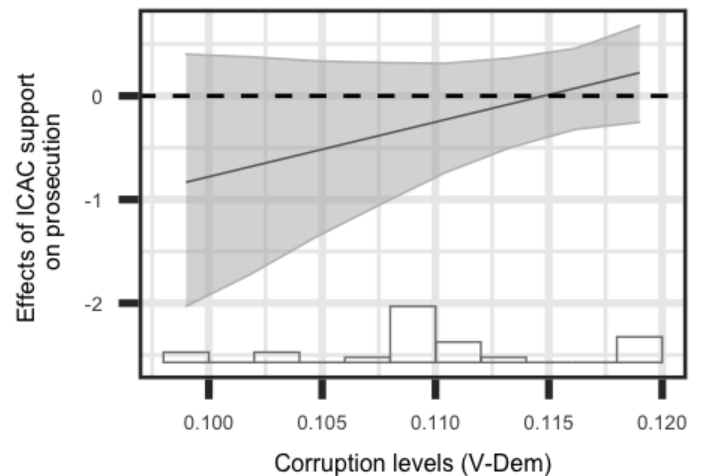
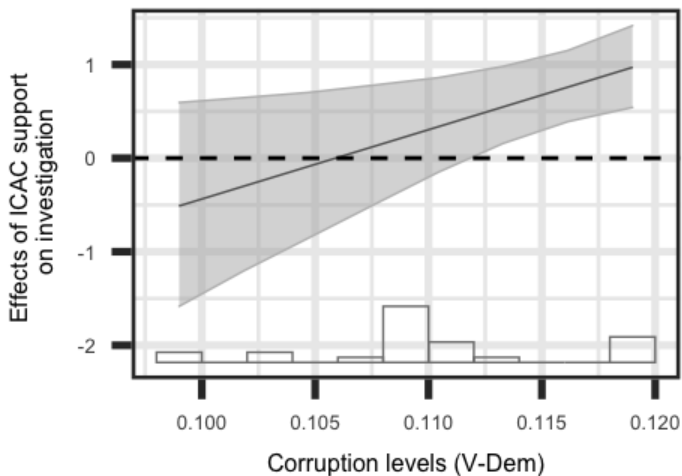
|                                     | <i>Dependent variables:</i> |                      |                      |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
|                                     | Investigations              | Prosecutions         | Convictions          |
|                                     | (1)                         | (2)                  | (3)                  |
| ICAC support                        | 2.450***<br>(0.721)         | 1.297<br>(0.771)     | 1.061<br>(0.664)     |
| Corruption levels                   | 5.000***<br>(1.696)         | 2.795<br>(1.812)     | 2.539<br>(1.560)     |
| GDP per capita                      | -0.465<br>(0.427)           | -2.009***<br>(0.456) | -1.708***<br>(0.393) |
| ICAC support ×<br>Corruption levels | 4.398**<br>(1.765)          | 3.191<br>(1.886)     | 2.640<br>(1.624)     |
| Observations                        | 26                          | 26                   | 26                   |
| Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>             | 0.574                       | 0.681                | 0.666                |

Note: \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01

Figure D2. Greater Responsiveness of the ICAC to Popular Demands

DV: Investigation

DV: Prosecution



not derive their power as much from popular support.

In summary, the above regression results support the claim that the ICAC sensitively responds to public opinion in its operations, especially during an adverse anti-corruption

environment. This implies that ICAC's independent functioning draws from popular support as its source of power against potential undue interference. Citizen demands for government integrity prompt the ICAC to act as an alternative accountability mechanism when the executive branch is much less responsive.

Overall, these empirical patterns offer further evidence that the ICAC is uniquely responsive under challenging conditions: corruption levels are high, the government as a whole is unpopular, and economic interactions with mainland China are extensive. In comparison, other government institutions are more operationally constrained and isolated from prevailing public demands.

## E Additional Analyses

We also conduct additional analyses to address several concerns of endogeneity issues related to the t-tests in the main text and the regression analyses above. The results are in Table E1.

First, one potential confounding variable is the extent of media coverage of corruption incidents and of the ICAC, given Hong Kong's vibrant media environment. It could be the case that media attention to corruption scandals and framing of the ICAC's image contribute to both positive attitudes towards the ICAC and more activities undertaken by the agency. If so, then the ICAC is not actively responding to public opinion and shaping public perceptions, but instead passively limiting the damage of media exposure on its favorability. Therefore, we control for the degree of media coverage by including a count measurement *Media coverage*. It is the number of news articles published by Hong Kong media in a given year which contain both the words "corruption" and "the ICAC" in either the title or the main text of the news article. According to independent surveys conducted by The Chinese University of Hong Kong, South China Morning Post (SCMP) has been consistently viewed as the most trustworthy newspaper in Hong Kong.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, we mainly rely on the news archive of the SCMP to construct the measurement.<sup>13</sup> The result in Model (1) suggests that the effect of *ICAC support* is not affected by controlling for media attention to corruption incidents and the ICAC. In Models (6)-(8), we include all Chinese-language media outlets in Hong Kong,<sup>14</sup> and similarly count their mentioning of "corruption" and "the ICAC" in the news article's title or main text. The results remain the same: public support only affects ICAC investigations, with no effects for prosecutions or convictions of corruption cases.

Second, strong public support for the ICAC may simply reflect a high level of trust in government institutions. If so, then the ICAC's active enforcement is not trying to appeal to popular support, but rather being empowered by the government's popularity. The descriptive findings in Figure A1 already indicate large discrepancies between public attitudes towards the ICAC and towards the HKSAR government. To further mitigate this

---

<sup>12</sup>See results of the multi-year survey on newspaper credibility from 1997 to 2010 at [http://www.com.cuhk.edu.hk/ccpos/en/research/Credibility\\_Survey%20Results\\_2010\\_ENG.pdf](http://www.com.cuhk.edu.hk/ccpos/en/research/Credibility_Survey%20Results_2010_ENG.pdf). For more recent survey results, see <https://ccpos.com.cuhk.edu.hk/public-evaluation-on-media-credibility/>.

<sup>13</sup>The archive of historical news reports can be obtained from <https://www.proquest.com/publication/26858/citation/6466B1D2103945D9PQ/1?accountid=10371>.

<sup>14</sup>A comprehensive archive of all Hong Kong newspapers can be accessed at [http://libwisearch.wisers.net/wortal/index.do?srp\\_restore=discard&new-login=true](http://libwisearch.wisers.net/wortal/index.do?srp_restore=discard&new-login=true). One limitation compared with the SCMP measurement is that the starting year is 1998, while the SCMP coverage starts in 1993.

Table E1: Robustness Checks

|                             | <i>Dependent variable:</i> |                     |                      |                      |                      |                     |                      |                      |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|---------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
|                             | Investigations             |                     |                      | Prosecutions         | Convictions          | Investigations      | Prosecutions         | Convictions          |
|                             | (1)                        | (2)                 | (3)                  | (4)                  | (5)                  | (6)                 | (7)                  | (8)                  |
| ICAC support                | 0.746***<br>(0.214)        | 0.806***<br>(0.211) |                      |                      |                      | 0.923***<br>(0.233) | -0.174<br>(0.214)    | -0.187<br>(0.181)    |
| Willingness to report       |                            |                     | 0.578*<br>(0.290)    | -0.225<br>(0.225)    | -0.387<br>(0.245)    |                     |                      |                      |
| Corruption levels           | 2.119<br>(1.480)           | 1.991<br>(1.437)    | 1.278<br>(1.834)     | 1.077<br>(1.423)     | 0.866<br>(1.550)     | -0.091<br>(2.398)   | -0.225<br>(2.206)    | 1.274<br>(1.866)     |
| GDP per capita              | 0.376<br>(0.531)           | 0.211<br>(0.526)    | -1.957***<br>(0.659) | -2.107***<br>(0.511) | -1.733***<br>(0.557) | 0.162<br>(0.409)    | -2.037***<br>(0.376) | -1.716***<br>(0.318) |
| Media coverage<br>(SCMP)    | 0.122<br>(0.200)           | 0.087<br>(0.195)    | -0.132<br>(0.228)    | -0.379**<br>(0.177)  | -0.446**<br>(0.193)  |                     |                      |                      |
| Media coverage<br>(Chinese) |                            |                     |                      |                      |                      | 0.280<br>(0.180)    | -0.212<br>(0.166)    | -0.292*<br>(0.140)   |
| Trust in govt               |                            | -0.246<br>(0.161)   | -0.253<br>(0.200)    | -0.252<br>(0.155)    | -0.173<br>(0.169)    | -0.184<br>(0.164)   | -0.149<br>(0.151)    | -0.097<br>(0.128)    |
| Observations                | 26                         | 26                  | 27                   | 27                   | 27                   | 22                  | 22                   | 22                   |
| Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>     | 0.458                      | 0.491               | 0.248                | 0.748                | 0.691                | 0.604               | 0.786                | 0.783                |

Note:

\*p&lt;0.1; \*\*p&lt;0.05; \*\*\*p&lt;0.01

concern, we also control for the level of popular trust in the HK government. In Model (2). *Trust in govt* is the percentage of respondents who answered “Trust” to the question “On the whole, do you trust the HKSAR Government?” The result shows that *ICAC support* remains a significant determinant of the number of ICAC investigations. Therefore, support for the ICAC is not simply a reflection of support for the HK government in general. The results suggest that the agency indeed acts as a unique political entity that transcends public reception of the dominant regime of governance and common inter-branch relations (Clark 2010). Moreover, the sign of *Trust in govt* is negative, which is consistent with the expectation that greater trust in the government would reduce the relative standing of the ICAC in popular support and hence discourage anti-corruption activism.

Lastly, the percentage of respondents in the annual surveys who express support for the ICAC remains high, consistently above 95%. We argue that this provides evidence for the sensitivity of ICAC enforcement to public sentiments, given the magnitude of the effect size and substantive significance of *ICAC support*. But the concern may be that there is not enough variation in this key explanatory variable. Therefore, we also use citizens’ willingness to report corruption to the ICAC as a proxy measurement of its public sup-



port. This proxy variable ranges from 54.4% to 81.3%. In Model (3), the proxy's coefficient remains positive and significant for the number of investigations, although with a smaller effect size and a lower significance level than those in Models (1) and (2). Meanwhile, the proxy indicator has no discernible effect on prosecutions or convictions (Models (4) and (5)), proceedings over which the ICAC does enjoy full authority. The null results for prosecution and conviction are also consistent with using *ICAC support* in the main analysis.

Controlling for *Trust in govt* is crucial to estimating the effect of respondents' willingness to report corruption to ICAC officials, because the latter may be affected by how much people trust the government to protect reporters' confidentiality and to prevent retaliation against the reporters. This control variable teases out personal safety concerns in reporting corruption to authorities and focuses on beliefs about the ICAC's effectiveness.

## **F Sample selection strategy for the ICAC Annual Survey**

For the ICAC Annual Survey between 1992 and 2009 (telephone interview): Residential telephone numbers were obtained from residential telephone directories as supplied by the fixed-line telephone service providers in Hong Kong. Systematic random sampling technique was then employed to draw a set of “seed numbers” from all residential telephone numbers. To cover the possibly unlisted numbers, another set of telephone numbers was generated by adding and subtracting 2 to every seed number. The final sample was obtained by combining these two sets of telephone numbers with duplicated numbers removed.

For the ICAC Annual Survey between 2010 and 2019 (in person): All permanent quarters and quarters in segments which are for residential purpose in Hong Kong are covered. Records in the frame of quarters are first stratified by geographical area and type of quarters. Systematic sampling is then applied for the sample selection. One member aged between 15 and 64 in the sampled quarter will be invited for the interview. If there are more than one member in the selected household, the target respondent will then be randomly selected on the basis of “Next Birthday” method.

## G Survey Questions and Answers

Table G1. Questions in the ICAC surveys

| Variables                     | Year      | Questions   | Responses   |
|-------------------------------|-----------|---|---|
| More corruption in the future | 1992-1996 | Do you think the 1997 issue would cause an increase, or decrease, or no change in present level of corruption?              | 1 Increase<br>2 Decrease<br>3 More or less the same as present  |
|                               | 1997-2019 | In the next year, do you think the level of corruption would increase, decrease, or remain more or less the same as before? | 8 Don't know / no opinion   |
| Corruption in common          | 1993-2019 | How common do you think corruption is in Hong Kong?   | 1 Very common<br>2 Quite common<br>3 Uncommon<br>8 Don't know / no opinion  |
| Observing corruption          | 1993-2009 | Have you come across corruption in Hong Kong in previous year?  | 1 Yes<br>2 No   |
|                               | 2010-2019 | In the past 12 months, have you ever come across corruption in Hong Kong?   | 8 Don't know / no opinion   |
| Support for the ICAC          | 1994-2019 | Does the ICAC deserve your support?   | 1 Deserve<br>2 Does not deserve<br>8 Don't know / no opinion  |
| ICAC effectiveness            | 1992-2019 | Do you think ICAC's anti-corruption work is effective?  | 1 Very effective<br>2 Quite effective<br>3 Neutral<br>4 Not quite effective<br>5 Very ineffective   |
| Excessive power               | 1994-2009 | Do you think the ICAC's powers are too large, too small or appropriate  | 1 Too large<br>2 Too small<br>3 Appropriate<br>8 Don't know / no opinion  |
|                               |           | Do you think the external supervision & control for the ICAC should be increased, decreased or unchanged?                   | 1 Increased<br>2 Decreased<br>3 Unchanged<br>8 Don't know / no opinion  |
| Educational level             | 1992-2019 | What is your highest level of educational attainment?   | 1 primary school or below<br>2 middle school<br>3 junior college or above<br>999 no answer  |
| Age                           | 1992-2019 | How old are you? (age group)  | 1 15 – 19 years old<br>2 20 – 24 years old<br>3 25 – 29 years old<br>4 30 – 34 years old<br>5 35 – 39 years old<br>6 40 – 44 years old<br>7 45 – 49 years old<br>8 50 – 54 years old<br>9 55 – 59 years old<br>10 60 – 64 years old |
| Income                        | 1992-2019 | What is your monthly personal income?   | Ordinal scale   |

Table G2. Questions in the HKES

| Description / Question  | Responses   |
|---|---|
| Rule of Law   | Got a lot better<br>Got a little better<br>Stayed the same<br>Got a little worse<br>Got a lot worse<br>Don't know |
| Corruption problem  | Got a lot better<br>Got a little better<br>Stayed the same<br>Got a little worse<br>Got a lot worse<br>Don't know |
| "Hong Kong has too many immigrants coming from Mainland China."   | Strongly agree<br>Agree<br>Neither agree nor disagree<br>Disagree<br>Strongly disagree<br>Don't know              |
| Have you engaged in any of the following activities over the last 12 months?<br><br>– Share news/commentaries /cartoons/videos about public issues on social media (e.g. Facebook, WeChat, Whatsapp)<br><br>– Produce commentaries /cartoons/videos about public issues on social media (e.g. Facebook, WeChat, Whatsapp)<br><br>– Discuss a public issue with someone online (including Facebook, WeChat, Whatsapp)                      | No<br>Yes<br>Don't know   |
| Have you engaged in any of the following activities over the last 12 months? Please select all those apply.<br><br>– Contact a public official  | No<br>Yes<br>Can't remember   |
| What do you think are the three most important sources of influence on the outcome of the Chief Executive election? (Please rank 1, 2, 3, with 1 being the most important)<br><br>1 Beijing; 2 The Liaison Office; 3 Hong Kong people<br>4 The United States; 5 Hong Kong's business tycoons;<br>6 Hong Kong's civil servants; 7 Pan-democratic parties;<br>8 Localist parties; 9 Pro-establishment parties;<br>91 Other (Please specify) | Most important<br>Second important<br>Third important   |

Table G2. Questions in the HKES (continued)

| Description / Question | Responses  |
|------------------------|--|
| Election               | 2015 District Council Election<br>2016 Legislative Council Election<br>2017 Chief Executive Election<br>2018 Mar Legislative Council By-election<br>2018 Nov Legislative Council By-election |

## H The Cases of India and Argentina

In many instances, even relatively independent and reliable judiciaries cannot protect the integrity of ACA functions. For example, the Supreme Court of India attempted to save India’s Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) from political interference by granting it independent statutory status and making corruption acquittals in court more difficult. However, the agency has not been able to tap into public dissatisfaction with other branches of the government and is not trusted by citizens as their primary response to corruption — it receives less than 25% of all corruption reports. Hence, the CVC has continued to be hampered by India’s political environment and not producing desirable results (Meagher 2004). In contrast, the Argentinian Anti-Corruption Office (ACO) lacks legal and administrative safeguards of independence, as its staffers are political appointees who can be easily removed. However, the ACO has very good relationships with a variety of civil society actors, including NGOs, the media, and leading pollsters that provide the agency with current public opinion data. The agency is thus very visible and well-regarded in major media outlets. Therefore, Argentinian presidents have not yet made any direct effort to obstruct its work, and the agency’s investigations have enjoyed strong de facto independence (Meagher 2004).

## References

- Cheng, Joseph YS. 2007. *The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region in Its First Decade*. City University of HK Press.
- Clark, Tom S. 2010. *The limits of judicial independence*. Cambridge University Press.
- Coppedge, Michael, John Gerring, Carl Henrik Knutsen, Staffan I. Lindberg, Jan Teorell, Nazifa Alizada, David Altman, Michael Bernhard, Agnes Cornell, M. Steven Fish, Lisa Gastaldi, Haakon Gjerløw, Adam Glynn, Allen Hicken, Garry Hindle, Nina Ilchenko, Joshua Krusell, Anna Luhrmann, Seraphine F. Maerz, Kyle L. Marquardt, Kelly McMann, Valeriya Mechkova, Juraj Medzihorsky, Pamela Paxton, Daniel Pemstein, Josefina Pernes, Johannes von Römer, Brigitte Seim, Rachel Sigman, Svend-Erik Skaaning, Jeffrey Staton, Aksel Sundström, Ei tan Tzelgov, Yi ting Wang, Tore Wig, Steven Wilson and Daniel Ziblatt. 2021. "V-Dem Country-Year/Country-Date Dataset v11."  
**URL:** <https://www.v-dem.net/en/data/data-version-11/>
- Fong, Brian CH. 2014a. *Hong Kong's Governance Under Chinese Sovereignty: The Failure of the State-business Alliance After 1997*. Routledge.
- Fong, Brian CH. 2014b. "The partnership between the Chinese government and Hong Kong's capitalist class: Implications for HKSAR governance, 1997–2012." *The China Quarterly* 217:195–220.
- Gerber, Alan S, Donald P Green and David Nickerson. 2001. "Testing for publication bias in political science." *Political Analysis* 9(4):385–392.
- Gong, Ting and Hanyu Xiao. 2017. "Socially embedded anti-corruption governance: Evidence from Hong Kong." *Public Administration and Development* 37(3):176–190.
- Jones, Carol AG. 2015. *Lost in China?* Cambridge University Press.
- Li, Li. 2016. "Measuring the subjective perceptions of the social censure of corruption in post-1997 Hong Kong." *Crime, Law and Social Change* 65(1-2):93–112.
- Meagher, Patrick. 2004. *Anti-corruption agencies: A review of experience*. IRIS Center College Park, MD.
- Quah, Jon ST. 2003. *Curbing corruption in Asia: A comparative study of six countries*. Marshall Cavendish Academic.
- Scott, Ian. 2017. "The challenge of preserving Hong Kong's successful anti-corruption system." *Asian Education and Development Studies* .
- Scott, Ian and Ting Gong. 2015. "Evidence-based policy-making for corruption prevention in Hong Kong: a bottom-up approach." *Asia Pacific Journal of Public Administration* 37(2):87–101.
- Scott, Ian and Ting Gong. 2018. *Corruption prevention and governance in Hong Kong*. Routledge.
- Tam, Waikeung. 2017. "Citizens v. Government: litigation outcomes before the Hong Kong court of final appeal." *China Review* 17(3):167–180.
- Wong, Stan Hok-Wui. 2015. *Electoral politics in post-1997 Hong Kong*. Springer.
- Wong, Stan Hok-Wui and Karl Ho. 2022. "Core Data of the Hong Kong Election Study."  
**URL:** <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/OXUDPG>
- Yep, Ray. 2013. "The crusade against corruption in Hong Kong in the 1970s: Governor MacLehose as a zealous reformer or reluctant hero?" *China Information* 27(2):197–221.

Young, Simon NM and Yash Ghai. 2014. *Hong Kong's Court of Final Appeal: The Development of the Law in China's Hong Kong*. Cambridge University Press.