An Exploration of the State of Social Cohesion in Hong Kong

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Meaning of Social Cohesion

- Best understood from a commonsensical approach

- "Cohesion" — "a tendency to stick together"

- "Social Cohesion"—members of a society sticking together

Meaning of Social Cohesion

- "Sticking together"
  - Trust
  - Willingness to Cooperate and help
  - Sense of Belonging

Defining Social Cohesion

- Social cohesion is a state of affairs concerning both the vertical and the horizontal interactions among members of society as characterized by a set of attitudes and norms that includes *trust*, a *sense of belonging* and the *willingness to participate and help*, as well as their behavioral manifestations.

Measuring Social Cohesion

- A 2X2 framework – two dimensions and two components

  - **Vertical** dimension = government-society relationship

  - **Horizontal** dimension = interaction within society

  - **Subjective** component = attitudes, opinions

  - **Objective** component = behavior that reflects the corresponding subjective feelings above

Measuring Social Cohesion

	Subjective component	*Objective component*
Horizontal dimension	A	B
Vertical dimension	C	D

Measuring Social Cohesion

- Items from cell A include:

  - General trust with fellow members of society

  - Willingness to cooperate and trust members of different social groups

  - Sense of belonging

Measuring Social Cohesion

- Items from Cell B include:

  - Social engagement in intermediate groups

  - Helping friends and neighbors

  - Voluntarism and donations

Measuring Social Cohesion

- Items from Cell C include:
    - Trust in public figures
    - Confidence in major political and social institutions

Measuring Social Cohesion

- **Items from Cell D include:**
  - ❑ Political concern (e.g. reading newspapers or listening to the news report)
  - ❑ Political participation (voting)

Data Collection

- Door-to-door questionnaire survey
- Duration: Mid August to mid October
- Completed interviews: 1054
- Response rates: 71%
- Conducted by Policy 21 of HKU

Key Findings

- ## Community

  - Considerable commitment to society
  - A moderately low level of general trust
  - A low level of social engagement

Findings: Community

- ❑ Economic background not a basis for trust in/cooperation with specific groups
- ❑ Tend not to cooperate with Indians/Pakistanis and homosexuals
- ❑ Tend not to trust Indians/Pakistanis, people having different political ideologies, and homosexuals

Findings: Community

- Relatively low level of social engagement in terms of
    - Membership in intermediate organizations
    - Donation
    - Volunteering
    - Helping friends and neighbors

Findings: Community

- Pattern: The younger, more educated and higher income groups show higher levels of social engagement

Key Findings

- **Politics**

  - ❑ Attentive but lacking confidence in political institutions

Findings: Politics

- Concerned with public affairs

- More than one-third reported to have voted in every single LegCo and District Board/Council elections

Findings: Politics

- Lack confidence in political institutions, particularly the CE and his cabinet

- Confidence in enforcers and safeguard of law and order (ICAC, the Ombudsman, the police, and the judiciary) is higher than that of political institutions

- Alarm: confidence in the judiciary is lowest among the enforcers/safeguard of law and order

Findings: Politics

- Pattern: The younger, more educated, and higher income groups are more suspicious of political institutions

Key Findings: Perceptions

- Perception of groups/individuals as *undermining* social cohesion in descending order:
  - ❑ The HK Government (policies, style of governance, CE, ministers)
  - ❑ Pro-China groups
  - ❑ Pro-Democracy groups and Business groups

Key Findings: Perceptions

- Perception of groups/individuals as *strengthening* social cohesion in descending order:
    - The police
    - Academics
    - Professional associations
    - Religious groups
    - Labor unions

Key Findings: Perceptions

- Perception of forces as *undermining* social cohesion (in descending order):
  - **Economic issues**
    - Unemployment
    - Negative equity
    - Youth unemployment
    - Polarization between rich and poor

Key Findings: Perceptions

- Perception of forces as *undermining* social cohesion (in descending order):
    - **Political conflicts**
        - Government v. citizens
        - Pro-democracy groups v. Pro-China groups

Key Findings: Perceptions

- Perception of forces as *undermining* social cohesion (in descending order):
  - **Class issues**
    - Capitalists v. labor
    - Taxpayers v. CSSA recipients

Key Findings

- **Perceived vertical cohesion worse than horizontal cohesion:**

<p align="center">4.44 vs. 6.14</p>

(Scale 1-0, 5.5 or above counts towards cohesion)

Overall Conclusion

- **Glue:**
  - Considerable commitment to society
  - Considerable confidence in systems of justice administration
- **Weakness:**
  - Political leaders, political parties and intermediate groups failed to integrate members of society

Overall Conclusion

- **Concerns:**

  - Societal issues/conflicts most damaging to social cohesion: **unemployment**
  - Most damaging group: **the Hong Kong government**

Overall Conclusion

- **Concerns:**

  - Given the failure of political institutions and a moderately low level of general trust, independent enforcers and safeguard of law and order become critical to maintaining social cohesion

  - Alarm: public confidence in the judiciary is the lowest among law-and-order enforcers/safeguard

Overall Conclusion

- **Concerns:**
  - Alarm: Society tends to be less willing to trust and cooperate with
    - Indians/Pakistanis
    - People with different political ideologies
    - Homosexuals