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**GRASSROOTS PARTICIPATION IN HONG KONG:
2007 DISTRICT COUNCIL ELECTIONS AND THE AFTERMATH**

Hak Yin LI

Yongnian ZHENG

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China House
University of Nottingham
University Park
Nottingham NG7 2RD
United Kingdom
Tel: +44 (0)115 846 7769
Fax: +44 (0)115 846 7900
Email: CPI@nottingham.ac.uk
Website: www.chinapolicyinstitute.org

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Summary

The Hong Kong District Council Election took place on 18 November 2007. The voting rate declined from 44.10% in 2003 to 38.83% in 2007, with the pro-democracy camp suffering a blow in the election. The number of seats garnered by the Democratic Party in the District Council dropped sharply from 95 in 2003 to 59 in 2007 while the Civic Party only got 8 seats after sending 42 candidates. The Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong -- a major pro-Beijing political party in Hong Kong -- won 115 seats compared with 62 in 2003.

The main factors leading to the lower voter turnout were the lower political significance of the District Council with its limited political capacities; the changing political and social atmosphere in Hong Kong; as well as the different voting patterns among Hong Kong people reflecting their different attitudes towards the District Council and Legislative Council Elections.

Although the pro-Beijing camp seems to have had an overwhelming victory in terms of the number of seats it won in the District Council, the low voting rate suggests that some of the pro-democracy supporters were not mobilised to vote in the election, while some pro-democracy candidates lost to their pro-Beijing opponents by only a very narrow margin.

New political groups took part in the 2007 District Council Election. These included the Civic Party, the League of Social Democrats (LSD) as well as independents. The Civic Party fought against leading figures of the pro-Beijing political parties. Several LSD candidates were pitted against other pro-democracy candidates from the Democratic Party and the Civic Party even though a coordinating mechanism had been present within the pro-democracy camp. These new forces have added momentum to political development in Hong Kong.

The result of the 2007 District Council Election had expanded the pro-democracy camp's votes in the Legislative Council By-Election in the District of Hong Kong Island in December 2007. It would probably exert a similar influence over the 2008 Legislative Council Election. The 2007 Legislative Council By-Election was regarded as the "War of the Century" among many Hong Kong people, not only because there were altogether eight candidates vying for a seat, but also because two of them -- Anson Chan and Regina Ip -- were former senior civil servants. Chan was Chief Secretary after the 1997 Handover -- which marked the end of British rule and the transfer of Hong Kong's sovereignty back to Chinese rule. She had long been regarded as "the conscience of Hong Kong". In contrast, Ip, the former Secretary of Security, had been blamed for pushing the controversial Article 23 legislation, an anti-subversion law in 2003.

The "war" between Chan and Ip became a "war" between the pro-democracy camp and the pro-Beijing camp. Though Chan and Ip did not belong to any political party, the pro-democracy camp contributed to Chan's election campaign while the pro-Beijing camp, particularly the DAB, demonstrated its mobilisation strength, which had been proven in the District Council Elections, in its support of Ip. Chan eventually won with 175,874 votes, some 38,324 votes more than those garnered by Ip.

The National People's Congress Standing Committee in Beijing confirmed that China will allow

the Hong Kong Chief Executive to be elected by universal suffrage in 2017, and that all members of the Legislative Council may be similarly elected starting from 2020. This decision is expected to play a huge role in expanding the significance of the District Council Elections. Political democratisation is expected to unfold rapidly in Hong Kong in the coming years.

Grassroots Participation in Hong Kong: 2007 District Council Elections and the Aftermath

Hak Yin Li and Yongnian Zheng*

Low Voting Rate: A Setback to Political Participation?

- 1.1 Hong Kong has established a system of electing the Chief Executive, Legislative Councillors and District Councillors at regular intervals. However, the whole electoral system cannot be regarded as fully democratic. Under the Basic Law, the Chief Executive is elected by 800 Election Committee members which are supposed to represent the interest of the 7 million Hong Kong people. Only half of the seats of the Legislative Council are filled via universal suffrage carried out in five geographical constituencies; the remaining 30 seats are elected through the so-called functional constituencies representing different professional and business sectors such as education, law, information technology, and finance. The District Council is seen as the most “democratic” since 405 of its seats are elected by universal suffrage in 18 geographical constituencies; however, there are still 102 appointed members and 27 ex officio members.
- 1.2 It is also important to note that the Hong Kong government is an executive-led system, which is different from the western parliamentary or presidential system; the councillors in the Legislative and District Councils do not have much power in determining the policy agenda or proposing a bill. The Legislative Council can only veto a bill proposed by the Chief Executive, whereas a bill proposed by councillors have to get a double majority which means it has to pass through a vote by the first 30 elected representatives of the geographical constituencies and another by the remaining 30 representatives of the functional constituencies. Up till now, all bills related to universal suffrage and other political reforms have always been rejected in the second round because of the generally pro-Beijing members in the functional constituencies. The District Council acts more or less like a consultation organ, having no actual power. Nevertheless, the 2003 mass demonstration in which 500,000 people took to the streets to protest against the legislation of Article 23 and the inefficiency of the administration of then-Chief Executive Tung Chee Hwa has set the tone for political development in Hong Kong.
- 1.3 The 2003 District Council Election was seen as a political watershed in the history of Hong Kong by many democrats, not only because the voting rate was the highest since the 1997 Handover – the transfer of sovereignty to China from the U.K. -- but also because many pro-Beijing District Councillors were ousted by new voters mobilised in the so-called “First of July Impact” in 2003. A classical example was the defeat of Yip Kwok Him, a Legislative Councillor who had served his constituency for 18 years, to pro-democracy candidate Cyd Ho who held no previous experience of working in Yip’s constituency.

* Hak Yin Li is a PhD student in the School of Politics and International Relations, and Yongnian Zheng is Professor of Chinese Politics, Head of Research at the China Policy Institute, The University of Nottingham.

1.4 The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region was established in 1997. The first District Council Election took place in 1999 with a voting rate of only 35.82%. Due to various factors including an economic downturn, the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) epidemic and a controversial anti-subversion legislation, the 2003 District Council recorded a voting rate of 44.10%, the highest since 1997, and saw the pro-democracy camp winning a landslide victory. However, the latest 2007 District Council Election only saw a voter turnout rate of 38.83% which was higher than that of the 1999 elections but lower than that of the 2003 elections.¹

1.5 Paradoxically, while the number of registered voters had increased steadily since 1999, rising from 2,279,504 in that year, to 2,418,078 in 2003 and 2,958,953 in 2007, the voting rate did not increase in the 2007 District Council Election. With the increase in the number of registered voters, there were actually about 300,000 more votes cast in the 2007 District Council Election than in 2003 (see Table 1), based on the voting frequency. Therefore, the drop in the voting rate did not mean a setback to the development of political participation in Hong Kong.

Table 1: Number of Registered Voters and Voting Rate in District Council

| Year | 2007 | 2003 | 1999 |
|-------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Registered Voters | 2,958,953 | 2,418,078 | 2,279,504 |
| Voting Rate | 38.83% | 44.10% | 35.82% |

1.6 Rather, the fact that there were more registered voters suggested that Hong Kong people had been prepared to vote, but not necessarily in the District Council Election. Those registered voters could also cast their ballots in the coming 2008 Legislative Council Election. Even though the voting frequency had increased slightly, several factors had led to the low voter turnout in the 2007 District Council Election.

Why the Low Voting Rate in 2007 District Council Election

2.1 The District Council Election does not carry the same significance as the Legislative Council Election because the District Council is a consultative organ instead of a decision-making body. The voting rates of the 2000 and 2004 Legislative Council Election were 43.57% and 55.64% respectively, which were higher than the 35.82% and 44.10% of the 1999 and 2003 District Council Elections. Voters are more inclined to cast their ballots in the Legislative Council Election, rather than in the District Council Election mainly because of the limited influence of the District Council over domestic affairs.

¹ Various figures such as the voting rate and total number of registered voters are available on the Web site of the Hong Kong government at <http://www.elections.gov.hk/dc2007/eng/index.html>.

- 2.2 Ever since the 1980s, District Board Elections have seen low voting rates. These elections only attract the voters at the grassroots level because they “had a greater need for District Board members who were expected to articulate their interests, help to redress their grievances, explain to them government policies and show them the proper channels to obtain the necessary services from relevant government departments. This utilitarian element of participation in District Board elections not only partially explained the motivation to vote but also helped to answer why voter turnout rates were usually lower in middle-class urban districts.”²
- 2.3 Till today, the role of District Council has not really expanded. The 2005 Fifth Report of the Constitutional Development Task Force suggested including District Councillors in the election committee that selects the Chief Executive, but the pro-democracy camp refused to pass the bill holding that election of the Chief Executive should be carried out through universal suffrage rather than determined by the election committee.³ The Hong Kong government then carried out a public consultation of the function of District Council in early 2006. The Council’s power was expanded slightly thereafter to include the making of decisions on public utilities construction starting in 2008. Nonetheless, the District Council is still regarded as a consultative body, and its election a stepping stone to the Legislative Council Election.⁴
- 2.4 Apart from the lower political significance of the District Council, the changing political atmosphere also led to the low voting rate in the 2007 District Council Election. In 2003, Tung Chee Hwa’s government was blamed for causing an economic slump in Hong Kong due to its mismanagement of the SARS epidemic. The public also saw a threat to their right to freedom of expression in the provocative legislation of the Article 23 anti-subversion law. On 1st July 2003, more than 500,000 Hong Kong people took to the streets to protest against the legislation, and to demand the resignation of Tung as well as universal suffrage for the Chief Executive and all Legislative Council members. A few months later, the pro-democracy camp, which took advantage of the “1st of July movement” as their main campaign theme, won a landslide victory with the help of a high voting rate.
- 2.5 In response to the massive social discontent in Hong Kong, Beijing proposed a Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA), allowed Chinese citizens from more Mainland provinces to visit Hong Kong (Free Walk Scheme), and even sent China’s first astronaut and 2004 Olympic gold medal winners on a trip to Hong Kong. The CEPA and tourists from China effectively helped to boost the Hong Kong economy. More significantly, Tung stepped down eventually in March 2005, citing “personal health” problems. As a result, the dissatisfaction of Hong Kong residents towards the government had been steadily fading away. In addition, Beijing leaders such as Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao have been calling for social harmony and economic development in Hong Kong. The result of all these events

² Joseph Y. S. Cheng, “Elections and Political Parties in Hong Kong’s Political Development” in *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, Vol. 31, No. 3, 2001 Ibid, p.355.

³ For The Fifth Report of the Constitutional Development Task Force on the website of Constitutional Affairs Bureau, see: <http://www.cab.gov.hk/cd/eng/report5/index.htm>

⁴ Anthony Cheung Bing Leung, “Reform of District Council has to be innovative”, *Ming Pao Daily*, 11 January, 2006.

was a less confrontational political atmosphere in Hong Kong in 2007 compared with 2003, which translated into a lower voting rate in the 2007 District Council Election.

2.6 Besides the flexible policies offered by the Chinese leaders in Beijing, Tung's successor, Donald Tsang, also helped to diffuse the political and social tensions among different political parties and interest groups. With the spotlight in Hong Kong maintained on the universal suffrage of the Chief Executive and all Legislative Councillors, Tsang promised to provide an answer in his second term during his election campaign against pro-democracy candidate Alan Leong in March 2007. Tsang's government soon delivered the Green Paper on Constitutional Development in July 2007 in order to gather a consensus on the implementation of universal suffrage. He also agreed to review the government's position on minimum wage legislation in 2008 as well as re-examine the policy on the conservation of natural, cultural and historical relics, following public protests most notably those against the demolition of the historic Star Ferry Pier, which was regarded by some as a key part of the "collective memory" of people in Hong Kong. Even though Tsang's government had not been able to immediately resolve many of the above-mentioned contentious issues, many Hong Kong people adopted a "wait and see" attitude towards the administration. This attitude once again translated into a lower voting rate in the District Council Election in 2007.

2.7 The Legislative Council By-Election in the constituency of Hong Kong Island attracted much interest from voters of the 2007 District Council Election. The By-Election took place on 2nd December, two weeks after the District Council Election. Mass media coverage had been focusing on the By-Election since early September because of the record number of eight candidates vying for one seat. More significantly, Anson Chan and Regina Ip, formerly the Chief Secretary for Administration and Secretary for Security respectively, were also in the competition. Although only registered voters of the constituency of Hong Kong Island were able to vote in the By-Election, many Hong Kong people had been expecting a showdown between the pro-democracy and pro-Beijing camps. Nevertheless, there appeared to be little correlation between the imminent By-Election and the District Council Election. This meant that the By-Election did not generate any political issues for debate in the run-up to the District Council Election. Furthermore, without the support of an event like the "1st of July Impact", a low voting rate in the District Council had been expected.⁵

New Political Forces in the 2007 District Council

3.1 A more important development in the 2007 District Council Election was the emergence of new political forces. Formed in March 2006, the Civic Party is made up by various professionals including accountants, architects, barristers, engineers, journalists, lawyers and academics. Its representative, Alan Leong, had challenged Donald Tsang in the 2007 Chief Executive Election. The Civic Party sent 42 candidates to the District Council Election, some of whom fought against leading representatives of the pro-Beijing parties such as the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong (DAB) and the Liberal Party.

⁵ Choy Chi Keung, "The Prospect of the District Council Election", *Ming Pao Daily*, 15 November 2007.

- 3.2 The League of Social Democrats (LSD) was founded in October 2006. The party, led by famous ex-radio host Wong Yuk Man, defined itself as an opposition faction, representing grassroots' interests. Some of its members, such as "Long Hair" Leung Kwok Hung, Albert Chan Wai Yip and Andrew To Kwan Hang, had been seen as radical democrats. There were 30 LSD candidates in the District Council Election. Even though a coordinating mechanism had existed within the pro-democracy camp, several of the LSD representatives competed with other pro-democracy members of the Democratic Party and the Civic Party.
- 3.3 After its catastrophic defeat in the 2003 District Council and 2004 Legislative Council Election, the pro-Beijing Hong Kong Progressive Alliance (HKPA) merged with the DAB in February 2005. Since the DAB and HKPA share more or less the same political view, the DAB was expected to gain in strength with the combination of the two parties' local networks as well as human and financial resources. The DAB had also carried out a series of reforms including the recruitment of more young and professional members and the provision of greater election participation opportunities to second-tier candidates. The DAB demonstrated its ambition to reclaim the HKPA's losses in 2003 by sending 177 candidates to the District Council Election in 2007.
- 3.4 Besides the political parties, there were many "independent" candidates who claimed to support democracy and were not affiliated to any political party. Scholar Ma Ngok believes that some of these "independent" candidates represented an "invisible left wing", and that their appearances were orchestrated by the pro-Beijing camp. Based on the experience of the "1st of July Impact" event, the pro-Beijing camp desired to take advantage of the "invisible left wing" to dilute the pro-democracy votes and hence weaken the support of pro-democracy candidates. However, it was difficult to point a finger at the "invisible left wing" because of its ambiguous relationship with the pro-democracy camp.⁶

The 2007 District Council Election: A Blow to the Pro-Democracy Camp?

- 4.1 The results of the 2007 Election showed that DAB was the biggest winner while the pro-democracy camp suffered a blow in terms of the number of seats it won in the District Council. The DAB garnered 115 seats, or 65% of the total number of candidates it sent out more than doubling its seats in the District Council. In 2003, the DAB only got 62 seats, representing a winning rate of 30%. Another pro-Beijing political party, the Liberal Party, gained two more seats, giving it a total of 14 seats, or a winning rate of 25%, in contrast to 2003, when it won 12 seats, or 48% (see Table 2). Though the Liberal Party sent more candidates to the 2007 election, its winning record was not significant.
- 4.2 The Democratic Party only won 59 seats, or 55%, when compared with the 95 seats, or 79%, it had in 2003. The Association for Democracy and People's Livelihood (ADPL) also suffered a setback with 17 seats, or 46%. In 2003, the ADPL won 25 seats, or 68%. Frontier got 3 seats, or 20%, compared with 6 seats, or 43% in 2003. The Civic Party, in

⁶ Ma Ngok, "The Left Will Come Back in the 2007 District Council Election", *Ming Pao Daily*, 14 November 2007.

its first appearance in the District Council Election, got 8 seats, or 19%. The LSD only garnered 6 seats with the rest of its 24 candidates coming back from the election empty-handed.

Table 2: Result of the 2007 District Council Election

| Political Party | Number of Seats | | Winning Rate | |
|------------------|-----------------|------|--------------|------|
| | 2007 | 2003 | 2007 | 2003 |
| ADPL | 17 | 25 | 46% | 68% |
| Civic Party | 8 | NA | 19% | NA |
| DAB | 115 | 62 | 65% | 30% |
| Democratic Party | 59 | 95 | 55% | 79% |
| Frontier | 3 | 6 | 2% | 43% |
| LSD | 6 | NA | 20% | NA |
| Liberal Party | 14 | 12 | 25% | 48% |

4.3 After the District Council Election, the pro-democracy camp recognised its deficiency in terms of a weaker local network of supporters compared with the DAB, which believed the change in political atmosphere contributed to their victory. The chairman of the Democratic Party, Albert Ho Chun Yan, acknowledged that the DAB had built up a stronger local network, strived to resolve local cases and won the support of many newly-registered voters. The chairman of the ADPL, Frederick Fung Kin Kee, and the leader of the Civic Party, Audrey Eu Yuet Mee, shared more or less the same views with the Democratic Party, and conceded that their financial as well as human resources cannot be compared with the DAB. Tam Yiu Chung, the chairman of the DAB, acknowledged that his party has worked very hard in building up its local network of supporters but said that opponents from the pro-democracy camp had also done likewise. Therefore, according to Tam, demands for a harmonious society and economic development – the theme of the party's election campaign -- was the decisive winning factor for the DAB amid a period marked by fewer social confrontations.⁷

4.4 The pro-democracy camp could be seen as suffering a defeat in terms of the number of seats it won in the District Council. Nevertheless, there were still indications of the pro-democracy camp's influence in various districts. Firstly, some of the pro-democracy candidates who had been defeated actually received more than 1000 votes, which were only about 100 to 300 votes fewer than those received by their pro-Beijing opponents. The Democratic Party's Cheung Yin Tung got 1321 votes compared with the 1684 votes his

⁷ Interviews of different political parties were carried out by the RTHK, which can be assessed on the following website: http://www.rthk.org.hk/rthk/radio1/openline_openview/20071119.html

opponent won in the M20 Wang King District. The DAB's Legislative Councillor Li Kwok Ying beat the Civic Party's Tsang Kwok Fung with merely 189 votes in P01 Tai Po Hui District.

- 4.5 It is worth paying particular attention to the Civic Party since the party was only established in March 2006. This meant that the party had no more than 20 months to prepare for their first appearance in the District Council Election. Though the Civic Party finally won only 8 seats out of a total of 42 candidates it sent, half of them got more than 1000 votes while 60% of them could be regarded as having lost by a very narrow margin.⁸ A symbolic, as well as significant, victory of the Civic Party was apparent in the district of A04, The Peak, where the Civic Party's barrister Tanya Chan defeated Mark Lin of the Liberal Party. The Peak had been the traditional stronghold of the Liberal Party, where James Tien, chairman of the Liberal Party, had been District Councillor from 1999 to 2003 and subsequently succeeded by Mark Lin. The pro-democracy camp was apparently still able to garner substantial support in the local district.
- 4.6 Secondly, the pro-democracy camp had not yet mobilised their potential supporters. The 2007 District Council Election saw 80,000 newly registered voters casting their ballots; of these, 50,000 voted for the DAB. It was reported that the DAB had launched a huge campaign in 2006 to encourage new immigrants from Mainland China as well as elderly people to register as voters.⁹ However, the pro-democracy camp had not been cultivating their network of potential supporters. Without the help of a significant event like the "1st of July Impact" and a clear political agenda as in 2003, the pro-democracy camp failed to mobilise their potential voters. Therefore, the very narrow margin between the pro-democracy and pro-Beijing candidates could be attributed to the DAB's newly recruited supporters. In short, the pro-democracy camp still wields an influence though that has somewhat been overshadowed by the DAB's success in mobilising elderly people and new immigrants.
- 4.7 Thirdly, the low voting rate of 38.83% in the 2007 District Council Election suggested that the pro-democracy camp had not been able to mobilise its existing supporters. Given that the role of District Council is politically less important than that of the Legislative Council, and that the political and social atmosphere in Hong Kong had been less confrontational than in 2003, the pro-democracy camp had been hard pressed to form a clear political agenda to mobilise its supporters to vote in the District Council Election. However, that did not mean that the pro-democracy camp had lost the support of Hong Kong residents, especially since the voting rate of the Legislative Council Election had usually tended to be higher than that of the District Council Election in the past, amounting to 43.57% and 55.64% in 1999 and 2003 respectively.
- 4.8 This voting pattern implies that Hong Kong voters vote differently in District Council and Legislative Council elections. People voting in the District Council Election are concerned about local infrastructure, public utilities and welfare, which stand in sharp contrast to the issues of political agendas and democratisation process that are characteristic of the Legislative Council Election. Therefore, pro-democracy supporters may still be greatly

⁸ See "The Rise of Civic Party in the Local District", *Ming Pao Daily*, 20 November 2007.

⁹ See the front page of *Ming Pao Daily*, 20 November 2007.

motivated to vote in the coming 2008 Legislative Council Election. Indeed, it is too early to say that the DAB has won a landslide victory and that the pro-democracy camp has suffered a heavy blow in the 2007 District Council Election.

Implications for Political Development in Hong Kong

- 5.1 The result of the 2007 District Council Election helped boost the pro-democracy camp's votes in the Legislative Council By-Election in Hong Kong Island District in December 2007. It would probably have the same effect on the 2008 Legislative Council Election. As mentioned above, Hong Kong voters deal with District Council and Legislative Council differently. In addition, the pro-democracy camp suffered a defeat due to the DAB's studied mobilisation skills and tactics, which would probably raise concerns among pro-democracy supporters, in particular, free-riders who support the pro-democracy camp but have not yet registered as voters or those who did not vote in the District Council Election. To support pro-democracy candidates, existing and potential pro-democracy supporters are expected to cast their vote in the coming elections.
- 5.2 The 2007 Legislative Council By-Election was seen as the "War of the Century" among many Hong Kong people, even though only voters in Hong Kong Island District could cast their votes. Not only because there were a total of eight candidates vying for one seat in the mere eight to nine months leading to the 2008 Legislative Council Election, but also because two of the candidates, Anson Chan and Regina Ip, were former senior civil servants. Chan was Chief Secretary after the 1997 Handover. She had long been regarded as "the conscience of Hong Kong" while Ip was Secretary of Security, who was blamed for pushing the controversial Article 23 legislation in 2003. The "war" between Chan and Ip expanded to a "war" between the pro-democracy camp and the pro-Beijing camp. Interestingly, neither Chan nor Ip represented any political party. However, the pro-democracy camp had offered to help Chan while the pro-Beijing camp, particularly the DAB, once again demonstrated its strength of mobilisation in its support of Ip. Chan eventually won the election with 175,874 votes, 38,324 votes more than those received by Ip.
- 5.3 The 52% voting rate of the 2007 By-Election was a little bit lower than the 57.62% rate in the 2004 Legislative Council Elections. Nevertheless, it was much higher than the 2000 By-Election, which stood at only 33.27%. More significantly, Hong Kong residents have tended to be more willing to participate in the Legislative Council Election. Besides, the defeat of the pro-democratic camp in the 2007 District Council Elections may in fact encourage free-riders to vote in the 2008 Legislative Council Elections. Based on this argument, the pro-democracy camp would have to implement concrete policies to turn their potential supporters into real supporters. However, this line of thinking may also be applied to the pro-Beijing camp.
- 5.4 Encouraging new supporters to register as voters has become the main strategy of both the pro-democracy and pro-Beijing camps. The pro-democracy camp is targeting the young, educated and professional people to register as voters while the pro-Beijing camp

is aiming at new immigrants from the Mainland and elderly people. The issue of voter's registration has helped to raise civil awareness among Hong Kong residents who had long been regarded as politically apathetic before the massive 1st of July demonstration. Even though the voting rates had been low in the District Council Elections, those registered voters may amount to a powerful political force in the future should controversial political issues again crop up.

5.5 More importantly, the temporary defeat of the pro-democracy camp in the 2007 District Council Election is likely to force pro-democracy parties to reform in order to compete with the DAB. This is especially true for the Democratic Party which has been experiencing various problems such as a lack of coherence and the rise of the "Young Turk" within the party.¹⁰ Lee Wing Tat, a Legislative Councillor of the Democratic Party, recognised that his party needed to change because the political atmosphere in Hong Kong was now different from the past and that the middle class would never cast its vote based on the name of democracy alone.¹¹

5.6 The ADPL and the Frontier are also challenged by the rise of the Civic Party which has targeted the middle class, educated people and professionals in Hong Kong. Their first task would be to improve local networking strategies and review their campaigning tactics. In view of such a tough opponent, the pro-democratic camp is expected to launch a series of reforms in the coming future. This would be beneficial for the long-run political development of Hong Kong.

5.7 Last but not least, the National People's Congress Standing Committee in Beijing confirmed that the Hong Kong Chief Executive will be elected by universal suffrage in 2017, and probably all members of the Legislative Council will be elected in the same way starting from 2020. This decision plays a huge role in increasing the significance of the District Council Elections. Hong Kong's political mobilisation starts from the bottom. The number of seats each of the 18 district constituencies gets is determined according to its population as a proportion of the total. Thus, every district has a different number of seats. Every District Councillor faces around 15000 to 20000 citizens in his or her own district. However, there are only 5 Legislative Council's constituencies: New Territories East and West, Kowloon East and West as well as Hong Kong Island. Candidates of the Legislative Council Elections would have to rely heavily on the support of their colleagues, the District Councillors, in numerous small and local districts. Otherwise, it would be impossible for candidates to reach out to the huge population within their own constituency. More importantly, the candidates' colleagues in the District Council would probably be able to exercise some influence within their local districts, transferring his or her support to the candidates running for Legislative Council Elections.

5.8 The role of the District Councillor was highlighted in the campaign period of the 2007 By-Election. As Chan and Ip were not connected to the local districts, both the pro-democracy camp and the pro-Beijing camp had to mobilise all their District Councillors in Hong Kong Island in order to transfer the support they had at the District Council level

¹⁰ Ma Ngok, "The Decline of The Democratic Party in Hong Kong" in *Asian Survey*, vol.41, no.4, July / August 2001

¹¹ Lee Wing Tat expressed his view during the interview with TVB on 19 November 2007.

to the Legislative Council level. Admittedly, though there is no direct correlation the two levels of support, the District Councillors do help the candidates of the Legislative Council Election by providing access to the local network and necessary human resources. Therefore, the universal suffrage of the Chief Executive and all members of the Legislative Council will help raise the status of the District Council and its Councillors within the political party. Clearly, the District Council had been regarded as a consultation organ only because of the apparent lack of linkage between its Councillors and the Chief Executive. The changing power relationship means that in the coming years, the District Councillors will likely be empowered to handle more influential regional affairs in return for their support in the Chief Executive Election.