



**Policy brief**

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**Sexual Orientation and Politics in Hong Kong:**

**93% of LGB people surveyed view a pro-gay rights politician positively.**

**76% of the public surveyed either view a pro-gay-rights politician positively or think a pro-gay-rights stance does not matter to them.**

**52% of the public surveyed view an anti-gay-rights politician negatively; only 14% view an anti-gay-rights politician positively.**

**75% of LGB people surveyed view a politician negatively if he/she refuses to take a stance on gay rights.**



## **Executive Summary**

The rights of lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) people in Hong Kong have become a heated topic in the politics of Hong Kong in recent years. In Hong Kong, there is now an openly gay legislative councilor, and more and more politicians who have openly adopted various stances towards LGB rights issues, such as legislation against discrimination on the ground of sexual orientation and same-sex marriage.

Against this background, Prof. Suen Yiu Tung, Assistant Professor of the Gender Studies Programme and Associate Director of the Gender Research Centre at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, conducted two surveys to investigate the attitudes of the public as well as LGB people in Hong Kong towards politicians with various stances on the rights of LGB people.

It was found that, if a politician supports equal rights for gay men and lesbians, the politician can gain support from the LGB community, without losing as much support from the public as it may have been imagined. However, if a politician opposes equal rights for gay men and lesbians, the politician is viewed negatively both by the LGB people and the public alike. Even among people with religious beliefs or pro-establishment political stances, anti-gay-rights politicians do not enjoy as much support as one might assume.

It was also found that a majority of LGB people in Hong Kong have negative views even towards politicians who refuse to take a stance on equal rights for gay men and lesbians.

The remainder of this policy brief will describe the research methodology and findings, as well as explore the implications of the findings in greater detail.

## **Research Methodology**

This research is a two-part study consisting of one representative public telephone survey and one LGB online survey which were both conducted in August 2016.

### 1. Public telephone survey

We commissioned The Centre for Communication and Public Opinion Survey at The School of Journalism and Communication, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, to conduct a territory-wide representative telephone survey from 3<sup>rd</sup> August to 15<sup>th</sup> August, 2016. A random sample of 1013 people who are Chinese-speaking and aged 18 and above was successfully contacted. Data collected from the survey was weighted according to gender, age and educational level to align with the distribution of the Hong Kong population. The overall response rate for the survey was 38%, with a sampling error of  $\pm 3.1\%$  at 95% confidence level.



## 2. LGB online survey

We conducted an ongoing online survey in August 2016 which targeted individuals who self-identified as non-heterosexual. A total of 997 participants who are aged 18 and above completed the anonymous online questionnaire as at 16<sup>th</sup> August. The online survey was distributed through social networks such as non-governmental organizations working with and for LGB people, and the participants were asked to forward the survey to their contacts (i.e. snowball sampling was adopted). The data was anonymized to protect the confidentiality of the participants.

This study follows the procedures of ‘Survey and Behavioral Research Ethics’ of the Chinese University of Hong Kong and has received the approval from the committee before the fieldwork.

## **Findings**

### **1. A politician taking a pro-gay-rights stance: Winning LGB support without losing much public support**

It was found that a politician taking pro-gay-rights stance would win support from LGB people. 92.8% of the respondents in the LGB online survey indicated their positive views towards a pro-gay-rights politician.

At the same time, a pro-gay-rights politician would not lose much public support. It is found that 34% of the public view a pro-gay-rights politician positively, and another 42% indicated that the pro-gay-rights stance does not matter at all. In other words, a total of 76% either view a pro-gay-rights politician positively or think a pro-gay-rights stance does not matter to them. The proportion of public respondents who view a pro-gay-rights politician positively (34%) also exceed those who view such a politician negatively (23%).

Question: If a politician openly supports gay men and lesbians to fight for their equal rights, do you have a very positive, positive, neutral, negative, very negative view towards this politician?	
Very positive	11.5%
Positive	22.6%
It does not matter	41.6%
Negative	11.1%
Very negative	11.7%

Table 1: Public views on a politician who openly supports gay and lesbian equal rights<sup>1</sup>(N=1013)

<sup>1</sup> Percentages do not sum up to 100 due to the small percentage of respondents who responded ‘don’t know/refuse to answer’.



## 2. A politician taking an anti-gay-rights stance: Losing LGB as well as public support

It appears that if a politician takes an anti-gay-rights stance, the politician would lose both LGB and public support. 92.1% of LGB respondents view an anti-gay-rights politician negatively. At the same time, more than half of the public surveyed (52%) view an anti-gay-rights politician negatively, with only a small minority (14%) viewing an anti-gay-rights politician positively.

Question: If a politician openly opposes gay men and lesbians to fight for their equal rights, do you have a very positive, positive, neutral, negative, very negative view toward this politician?	
Very positive	7.5%
Positive	6.6%
It does not matter	32.6%
Negative	32.3%
Very negative	19.9%

Table 2: Public views on a politician who openly opposes gay and lesbian equal rights (N=1013)

## 3. People with religious beliefs: 44% view an anti-gay-rights politician negatively

Even among respondents with religious beliefs, 44% view an anti-gay-rights politician negatively, and 27% view a pro-gay-rights politician positively.

Religion	A politician openly supports gay and lesbian equal rights			A politician openly opposes gay and lesbian equal rights		
	Positive view	It does not matter	Negative view	Positive view	It does not matter	Negative view
No religion	37.7%	43.4%	17.1%	11.1%	30.9%	56.4%
With religion	26.9%	37.2%	35.1%	20.8%	35.4%	43.5%

Table 3: Public views, by religion, on a politician who openly supports or opposes gay and lesbian equal rights (N=1013)



#### 4. Political stance: Respondents who support localism and the pro-democratic camp view a pro-gay-rights politician most positively

In terms of political stance, 68% and 42% who support localism and pro-democratic camp view a pro-gay-rights politician positively.

Among respondents with pro-establishment political stances, 35% view an anti-gay-rights politician negatively, while 32% of them think it does not matter.

Political stance	A politician openly supports gay and lesbian equal rights			A politician openly opposes gay and lesbian equal rights		
	Positive view	It does not matter	Negative view	Positive View	It does not matter	Negative View
Localism	68.2%	22.0%	9.9%	6.2%	19.4%	74.4%
Pro-democratic camp	41.8%	42.7%	15.3%	10.7%	22.9%	66.4%
Centrality	29.2%	42.1%	26.9%	14.0%	48.2%	37.8%
Pro-establishment	13.5%	37.5%	47.4%	31.2%	32.1%	35.1%
No political stance	28.9%	47.1%	22.2%	14.4%	34.7%	49.0%

Table 4: Public views, by political stances, on a politician who openly supports or opposes gay and lesbian equal rights (N=1013)

#### 5. A politician refusing to take a stance on gay and lesbian equality issues

It is notable that 75% of the LGB respondents also view negatively a politician who refuse to take a stance on gay and lesbian equal rights. The findings also indicate that there are nearly as many LGB people who have negative views towards a politician who refuses to take a stance on sexual orientation anti-discrimination laws (73%) as those who have such views towards a politician who refuses to take a stance on same-sex marriage (67%).

A politician refuse to take a stance on:	Positive view	It does not matter	Negative view
Anti-discrimination legislation on the ground of sexual orientation	2.4%	21.8%	73.3%
Same-sex marriage	2.2%	28.3%	66.8%
Gay and lesbian equal rights in general	2.1%	20.5%	74.7%

Table 5: LGB respondents' views on a politician who refuses to take a stance on sexual orientation anti-discrimination legislation, same-sex marriage and gay and lesbian equal rights in general (N=997)



## **Discussion**

In Hong Kong, it has sometimes been claimed that if a politician were to support gay rights, the politician could easily lose support from the public because the topic is controversial. However, it has been demonstrated in this study that a politician can gain support from the LGB people for supporting their equal rights, without losing much support from the wider public. Indeed, such politicians would enjoy a net gain of public support from those who view them positively, which outnumbers those who view them negatively. Politicians might not need to fear such a strong public backlash as it may have been imagined for supporting equal rights for LGB people

To the contrary, some politicians in Hong Kong have openly opposed the rights of gay and lesbian people. The findings in this study indicate that such anti-gay-rights politicians might lose support from both the LGB people as well as the wider public. Even among people with religious beliefs or pro-establishment political stances, anti-gay-rights politicians do not enjoy as much support as one might assume.

The findings also indicate that even a politician who refuses to take a stance on equal rights for LGB people would still be viewed negatively by a majority of LGB people (75%). Notably, a politician who limits his/her support to sexual orientation anti-discrimination laws but refuses to take a stance on same-sex marriage may still not be able to expect much support from LGB people in Hong Kong.

In summary, this study suggests that in Hong Kong, supporting LGB rights might win a politician support from LGB people as well as the public, while opposing LGB rights might lose a politician support from LGB people as well as the public. Although a minority in society, LGB people could still influence politics with their votes, especially in an election where the race between candidates is tight.

## **About the authors**

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