

# Generational Differences in Local Identities, Participation in Social Movements, and Migration Intention Among Hong Kong People

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## Abstract

We adopt and extend Hirschman's (1970) *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty* framework to investigate the associations between local identities, participation in social movements, and migration intention in Hong Kong. Data are from random sampled surveys collected from February to April 2021, June to August 2021, and March to June 2022 ( $N=3,003$ ) from people in Hong Kong with the British National (Overseas) status. The findings show that the Hong Konger identity is associated with a higher level of participation in social movements and a stronger migration intention. There are few variations in these associations across the generations. Furthermore, participation in social movements is a strong push factor to migration, and no generational difference in the association is found.

Overall, the findings imply that when political freedom is in decline, as in the case of Hong Kong, a local identity is associated with voicing for reforms. In the case of failed social movements, a local identity and previous experiences in voicing out are associated with a higher chance of exit to another country.

## Keywords

Hong Kong, migration, social movements, local identity, Hong Konger

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## Introduction

The mass protests that occurred in Hong Kong (HK) in 2019, followed by the enactment of the National Security Law in 2020, have led many HK residents to consider emigration. The UK government has introduced a new visa scheme for HK residents with a British National (Overseas) (BN(O)) status and their family members. We have conducted three rounds of surveys in HK to understand the push and pull factors for migration decisions of HK BN(O) citizens. Data were collected from February to April 2021, June to August 2021, and March to June 2022, with a total sample size of 3,003 in HK.

In this study, we analyze these data to investigate the relationships between subjective local identities, participation in social movements, and migration intentions among HK people. We employ and extend the theoretical framework developed by Hirschman's (1970) treatise *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty* to test the relationships between a local HK identity, participation in social movements, and migration intention.

Hirschman's (1970) theoretical framework concerns the mechanisms that consumers respond to a perceived decline in the quality of goods and services that firms and organizations offer. There are two mechanisms. One scenario is that consumers convey their resentment and strain directly to firms, urging them to make changes and improvements (i.e., voice). The other involves exit. Consumers exit by shifting to a different product when firms were not able to introduce improvement effectively. In Hirschman's model, the relationship between voice and exit is often understood as an either-or pathway and is conditioned by the concept of loyalty. Loyal consumers or members are more likely to voice, as they are more emotionally bonded with their organizations. In situations where consumers could perform voicing effectively and demands were heard, they would be less inclined to exit. In other words, *successful* voicing delays or reduces the likelihood of exit. In the commercial setting, a customer will trade off the costs and benefits of "voice" and "exit" depending on their level of loyalty to the company. Customers may choose to move to another company rather than voicing their dissatisfaction if they do not see improvements in the services likely to happen (Hirschman, 1970, p. 88). On the other hand, loyal customers may be more inclined to voice their opinions rather than exit, especially when they feel that their voices are going to improve the services (Hirschman, 1970, pp. 77–78). A strong loyalty may prevent exit even when customers feel strongly dissatisfied with the services (Hirschman, 1970, p. 98).

Hirschman's theoretical framework has been applied to political studies. When public dissatisfaction with the state policies is high, citizens may "voice" their opinions for the sake of the public good rather than individual benefits (Hirschman, 1980). The social and political situations in HK are ideal for testing Hirschman's theory in a political context. First, the change of sovereignty from the UK to China has created conflicting expectations in civil rights and political freedom between the state and the citizens and the public demands for political reforms were high. We can test if a local identity (i.e., a sentiment of belonging to HK) is linked to a higher chance of "voicing" for reforms (i.e., participation in social movements). Second, the crackdown on of

social movements, the decline in political freedom, and the newly introduced BN(O) migration scheme for HK people create motivations and opportunities for people to “exit” (i.e., migration). We can test if a local identity and participation in social movements are associated with a higher intention to migrate. We can also test if the associations between a local identity, social movement participation, and migration vary across the generations in HK (whether “loyalty” varies across the generations).

## **Political Backgrounds, the COVID-19 Pandemic, and the Migration of HK People**

### *Historical Backgrounds and Political Situations in HK*

HK was a colony under the British Empire from 1841 to 1997. On July 1, 1997, the sovereignty of HK was handed over from the United Kingdom back to the People’s Republic of China. As a special administrative region, HK enjoys “one country, two systems,” a two-tiered political system that allows HK to retain its own political administration and capitalist economy from Mainland China until 2047. HK has been promised a high degree of autonomy, civil liberties, and an independent judicial system. As a hybrid regime (Cheng, 2016), however, the Chinese state maintains a certain degree of political influence over HK’s governance. Beijing, for example, maintains control over the territory’s foreign affairs and the legal interpretation of the Basic Law, HK’s “mini constitution.” This complexity in the structure of governance is reflected in political identities as well. Although HK shares similarities in terms of ethno-cultural lifestyles with Mainland China, differences in language, political values, judicial system, and market configurations have created tension between the local HK identity and the national Chinese identity (Mathews, 1997).

Post-handover HK has been characterized by heightened political unrest, the emergence of a local identity discourse valorizing political agency, and more frequent social movement participation. As HK and Mainland China experienced accelerated economic and social integration since the handover of sovereignty, HK people had shown a growing positive attachment toward a national Chinese or a more hybridized identity in the 2000s (Steinhardt et al., 2018). Yet, some of the HK government’s efforts to foster a sense of belonging to the Chinese state and reluctance to roll out democratic reforms backfired (Yuen, 2015). As conflicts between civil society actors and state actors had become more frequent, political instability intensified in the 2010s (Lee et al., 2020). These events coincided with the growing appeal of a local identity discourse that values democracy and political autonomy, as well as stronger boundaries differentiating the local HK identity from a Chinese identity (Veg, 2017).

The Umbrella Movement in 2014 and the Anti-Extradition Bill Movement in 2019 were two major examples of this growing state–society confrontation. The Umbrella Movement was a large-scale protest sparked by Beijing’s rejection of a completely popular Chief Executive election. On August 31, 2014, the National People’s Congress of China declared that the Chief Executive election in 2017 would be elected by

popular vote, yet each candidate would be reviewed and approved by a committee of 1,200 people. The public saw this as the state's denial of full liberal democracy in HK (Ma & Cheng, 2019). The movement began with a class boycott and then evolved into a spontaneous and large-scale occupation of central areas in the city. Survey results show that among the participants, 81% self-identified as Hong Kongers (Cheng, 2016, p. 402). The 79-day movement subsided in mid-December 2014, resulting in a growing gap between the Chinese state and HK's civil society, paving the way for further radicalization of political confrontations (Cheng, 2016).

Frustrations about the stagnation in democratic reforms again culminated in the anti-extradition bill movement in 2019, following a series of political control such as the disqualification of legislators and the imprisonment of activists of the Umbrella Movement. The protest initially started with protestors demanding a withdrawal of a proposed revision to the Fugitive Offenders Ordinance that would allow Mainland China to extradite fugitives from HK. Unlike previous major protests in the city, the anti-extradition bill movement was characterized by a decentralized structure and more confrontational and violent tactics (Lee et al., 2019). Although the protest began with a peaceful march with a million participants on June 9, 2019, more frequent violent police–protester confrontations were observed as the movement progressed. Meanwhile, the movement's demands expanded as well. Survey results show that the public was dissatisfied with the police's use of violence in the protest (Lee et al. 2019). Protesters proposed the government retract their definition of the protest as a "riot," address the police's handling of the movement with excessive force, not arrest protesters, and install democratic elections and reforms. The movement's momentum was stalled by the escalation of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the aftermath of the movement, HK's civil society has witnessed tightened forms of political control. In June 2020, the Chinese government enacted the National Security Law which criminalizes acts of session, subversion, terrorism, and collusion with foreign forces. The Law also allows the appointment of judges by the Chief Executive of HK in court cases involving national security. While according to the Chinese state, the legislation of the law came with the intention of generating social stability and effective governance (Lau, 2021), several incidents following the enactment of the law have intensified political insecurity for HK people. These events include the amendment of electoral rules, the mass arrests of pan-democrats, and the closure of several media presses.

Given these political changes, neither the Umbrella Movement nor the anti-extradition bill movement was considered successful in a pragmatic sense. The former has never produced its intended result (i.e., the implementation of universal suffrage). For the latter, although the HK government formally withdrew the bill in October 2019, in a broader sense, recent studies report that the heightened legalization of political control and influence has exacerbated worries and fear about the deterioration in civil liberties and freedom of expression (Lee & Chan, 2022; Mak et al., 2022). This has driven a significant proportion of HK people to consider international migration in order to exit political instability (Lui et al., 2022; Wong et al., 2023).

## The COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic itself too, has acted as a further push factor for migration in HK. The HK government's delayed response at the initial stage of the COVID-19 pandemic and measures in the later stage—such as compulsory vaccination for certain population groups and ad-hoc neighborhood lockdowns—further aggravated public dissatisfaction (Yuen et al., 2021). Zhou et al. (2023) show that the number of local COVID-19 infections is positively associated with people's migration intention in HK, particularly for younger and university-educated people.

## The BN(O) Visa Scheme

Among multiple destinations, the UK has become one of the most popular destinations for emigration (Kan et al., 2021), and there is currently a sizeable HK diaspora in the UK. In July 2020, the UK Home Office announced plans to alter the entitlement attached to British National (Overseas) status holders. On January 31, 2021, the UK formally introduced an immigration route for BN(O) status holders from HK and their dependents to come to the UK, providing them with a bespoke pathway to citizenship and residency. By the end of December 2022, 160,700 applications for the scheme had been received (UK Home Office, 2023). In 2021, there were 117,714 HK people residing in England (Office for National Statistics, 2022).

BN (O) is a form of citizenship that the UK government provided to HK citizens who were born before July 1, 1997, before the sovereignty of HK was returned to China. BN(O) status holders had no right of abode in the UK when the status was first introduced. The BN(O) status could only be obtained before July 1, 1997 and could not be passed to spouses or their descendants.

For BN(O) status holders in HK, the new visa route has made exiting their origin society more viable and less costly. Compared to other standard immigration or work visa routes, the BN(O) visa was more relaxed in terms of its eligibility and terms of settlement (Benson, 2021). Upon the introduction of the current scheme, HK residents who came to the UK on a BN(O) visa would be eligible to apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain after staying 5 years in the UK, along with other requirements. They would also be eligible for citizenship after a year of ILR status. On April 29, 2022, the UK further amended the policy, allowing HK residents born on or after July 1, 1997 with at least one parent holding the BN(O) status to apply for the scheme. The UK government estimated that the scheme will allow 5.4 million of HK residents (including 2.9 million of BN(O) status holders and 2.5 million family members) to apply to migrate to the UK (Foreign & Commonwealth Office, 2020).

## Identities and Migration from the Perspective of the Exit-voice-loyalty Framework

A large body of work in the social sciences emphasizes the important role of identity *after* migration, but fewer studies discuss the importance of identity *before* migration,

as a component of migration pushes and pulls, or its role in migration decision-making. Of those that do, some have highlighted the role of “global” and cosmopolitan identities (Skrbis et al., 2014), and others have shown how ethnic minority identities may be relevant to the migration decision to the extent they are associated with out-group discrimination as a push factor (Golovics, 2020). The strength of local identity has been linked with staying rather than leaving (Williams et al., 2018), although such an association is likely to be disrupted in politically tumultuous contexts.

Political conflicts are known to have a strong effect on international migration, as are feelings of insecurity and distrust (Etling et al., 2020). The literature focused on political aspects of migration suggests that political identities may have heightened importance in places where political dissatisfaction is high, perhaps particularly when discontents cannot be democratically expressed. Hiskey et al. (2014), for example, show that lower quality of government and democracy are associated with higher levels of migration. We adopt Hirschman’s theoretical framework to test how a local identity might have acted as a conducting factor for social movement participation and how this might have interacted with the social movement outcome to affect migration decisions.

## Participation in Social Movements and Migration as “voice” and “exit” in HK

Hirschman’s framework has been picked up by migration scholars to study the relationship between movers’ identity or attachment to their origin society and transnational migration. A recent contribution of this in the case of the HK diaspora is that of Wong et al. (2023). The authors were primarily concerned with the relationship between loyalty and exit. They argue that people identifying with a local HK identity were more likely to depart because they are also more likely to be dissatisfied with the outcomes of the social movements.

In this paper, we extend this framework in two ways. First, instead of *successful* voices, we focus on the role of *failed* voices underpinning HK people’s aspiration to exit their origin society and relocate. Second, we investigate the complexity of loyalty. We test if the relationship between voice and exit would be uniform across different birth cohorts who might share differential patterns, and meanings, of “loyalty” (i.e., local identity).

In Hirschman’s theory, loyalty often leads to voice, as loyal consumers or organizational members tend to demand improvements by directly articulating their frustration. In comparable ways, strong sentiments on local identity could have provided motivation for movement mobilization and participation in the anti-extradition bill protest in 2019. Although successful voicing may discourage exit as predicted in Hirschman’s model, failed voice may have a different influence. Failed voice—that is, participation in social movements or political actions to demand changes that have failed to achieve their agenda—could have fueled motivation for HK people to leave and move to the UK.

In times when voicing has become ineffective, frequent and prior engagement in social movements, and political conflicts might have acted as a push factor for exit

(i.e., outward migration). Just as organizational members may signal their dissatisfaction with a product or service by exiting and devoting their loyalty to another provider when firms fail to respond to the demands of their members, political actors, too, may behave similarly, especially those who were loyal (i.e., with a strong local identity). The more loyal they are, the more likely they may channel their political grievances from a failed movement into the intention to exit and relocate away. In the context of HK, this might be particularly relevant as the perceived opportunity structure of democratic reforms has been greatly attenuated and the ease of exiting has been greatly improved with the BN(O) visa route. Lui et al. (2022), for example, find that pro-democrats and moderates are more likely to intend to move when compared to pro-government respondents.

Although the relationship between voice and exit is conditioned by the concept of loyalty, as proposed by Hirschman, the heterogeneous nature of “loyalty” has often been underexplored. Past research on the generational differences in subjective understanding of local identity among HK people has hinted at this complexity. Highly educated people and the younger generation tended to identify with a local HK identity, as they were more committed to the search for democracy and civic rights (Steinhardt et al., 2018). Similarly, Chow et al. (2020) find that the tendency to identify with a local HK identity was associated with support for anti-authoritarianism and proactive political participation. Young people embracing a strong local identity highlighting civic-based ideals and political agency saw the ethnically defined Chinese identity promulgated by the Beijing government as increasingly conflicting (Veg, 2017). Older people, on the contrary, show the strongest identification with a Chinese national identity and a higher trust in political institutions (Chow et al., 2020).

The complexity of “loyalty” has also been reflected in the generational differences in political attitudes and participation in social movements. While the anti-extradition bill movement was decentralized and had a wide range of actors of different demographic backgrounds (Choi, 2022), younger cohorts, especially those who are highly educated, played a significant role in the movement (Ku, 2020). In Lee et al.’s survey (2019), 69% of protestors were between the age of 20 to 40. Seventy-eight percent reported having a bachelor or diploma degree. Young people were more likely to have engaged in radicalized and confrontational tactics, class strikes, and political consumerism in order to express their political claims and to urge for policy change (Chan & Pun, 2020; Lee et al., 2020).

In addition to “loyalty,” marital status, education, and health status, pre-migration could have contributed to migration decision-making as well. Married couples tend to emigrate in order to secure their children’s physical safety and future prospects (Lui et al., 2022). Younger and more educated people are also more likely to consider moving away from HK than planning to stay (Kan et al., 2021; Zhou et al., 2023).

## Hypotheses

Hypotheses 1a and 1b are concerned about participation in social movements, that is, “voice” in Hirschman’s theoretical framework. Hypotheses 2a, 2b, 3a, and 3b are about migration intention, that is, “exit” in Hirschman’s term. We test generational

differences in the associations in hypotheses 1b, 2b, and 3b, as we suppose people in different birth cohort will show varying levels of “voice” and “exit” patterns based on their identities, that is, they have differential patterns and meanings of “loyalty.”

First, given the facts that people with a stronger local HK identity tend to have civic-minded, pro-democracy, and anti-authoritarian values (Chow et al., 2020; Steinhardt et al., 2018; Veg, 2017) and that the political freedom has been in decline in HK, we hypothesize that the Hong Konger identity will have been a conducive factor to social movements (i.e., “voice”).

**H1a:** People identifying as “Hong Kongers” are more likely to have participated in social movements since 2019.

The younger generations are more likely to identify as “Hong Kongers” (Steinhardt et al., 2018; Veg, 2017) and the political meaning of the Hong Konger identity may differ among generations. Hence the patterns of “loyalty” will vary across generations.

**H1b.** The association between the Hong Konger identity and social movements participation differs among generations.

People who identify themselves as local people tend to stay rather than migrate (Williams et al., 2018). However, the recent migration trend in HK was initiated by the introduction of the National Security Law and mass demonstrations in association with the 2019 anti-extradition movement. People with a strong sense of a local identity in HK are more likely to be worried about the loss of political autonomy, civic rights, and freedoms. The changes in political contexts are also likely to have acted as push factors for migration for people who identify themselves as Hong Kongers. That is, they are more likely to “exit.”

**H2a.** Identifying as Hong Konger is positively associated with migration intention.

Nevertheless, the “push” and “pull” factors associated with the Hong Konger identity are likely to differ for different age groups, reflecting the emergence of politicized identities. That is, the consequences of “loyalty” vary across the generations.

**H2b.** The association between Hong Konger identity and migration intention differs among generations.

Sentiments on a local identity may have provided a motivation for participation in the anti-extradition bill movement in 2019. Using Hirschman’s (1970) framework, when political dissatisfaction failed to be resolved by social movements, people tend to emigrate, that is, “exit.”

**H3a.** The level of participation in social movements is positively associated with migration intention.

Again, the levels of “loyalty,” that is, tendency to stay or exit, are likely to vary across generations.

**H3b.** The association between participation in social movements and migration intention differs among generations.

## Data and Variables

### Data

We conducted three rounds of surveys to investigate the migration intention of HK people with the BN(O) status. Samples were drawn randomly from landline and mobile telephone numbers by using the digital dialing method. Invalid numbers are dropped. The total sample size is 3,003. 1,003 BN(O) citizens were interviewed in HK from February to April 2021; 1,000 from June to August 2021; 500 from March to June 2022. Five Hundred people aged 18 to 24 who are children of BN(O) were oversampled in the third round of the survey because the BN(O) visa scheme has been extended to include adult children of BN(O) citizens. The response rates of the three rounds of the survey were 71.3%, 70.5%, and 70.3% respectively.

As the surveys were conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic when social distancing policies were enforced, questionnaires were sent to respondents prior to the interview, and the interviews were conducted in Cantonese or Mandarin by phone or via a social media interface such as FaceTime, WhatsApp, and WeChat.

To ensure the representativeness of the findings, in the analysis the data were weighted based on the distribution of age, gender, and educational levels of the HK population (calculated from the 2016 HK Population by Census data).<sup>1</sup>

### Variables

#### Key Variables

*Participation in Social Movements.* Respondents were presented a continuous scale of 0 to 10 where 0 indicated “no participation” and 10 “high participation” and asked “How often have you participated in social movements in HK since 2019?” They could also answer “no opinion/prefer not to say.” As the question is politically sensitive, a relatively large proportion of respondents answered, “no opinion/prefer not to say” (7.6%). We imputed the non-response values by multiple imputation methods. The variables used for the imputation include birth cohorts, whether identifying as “Hong Konger,” gender, marital status, employment status, educational level, whether having a poor health, and whether a political event happened 7 days prior to the interview.

*Intention to Migrate.* Respondents were asked “Do you intend to move to a country outside HK and China in the future?.” Their answers include “Yes,” “I am considering,” “No,” and “Don’t know.” In our sample, 8.2% of the respondents answered “Yes,” 15.3% answered “I am considering,” and 76.5% replied “No” or “Don’t Know.” In the

analysis, we recode this variable into 1 if the response is “Yes” or “I am considering,” and 0 if otherwise.<sup>2</sup>

*Birth Cohorts.* We classify respondents into four birth cohorts: after 1997 (reference category), 1980s to 1997, 1965 to 1970s, and before 1965.

*Subjective Identities.* Respondents were asked, “Which of the following best describes your identity? 1. Hong Konger; 2. Chinese; 3. Hong Kong Chinese; 4. Chinese Hong Konger; 5. Other, specify\_\_” In our sample, 60.6% of the respondents chose option 1; 9.4% chose 2; 8.02% chose 3; 21.8% chose 4; 0.2% chose 5. In our analysis, we recode the responses into a binary variable: Hong Konger=1; all other categories=0.

*Other Variables.* Our models control for gender (female=1; male=0), partnership status (married or cohabiting=1; non-married=0), employment status (employed or self-employed=1; non-employed=0), parental status (have a child under 18=1; otherwise=0), educational level: secondary or below (reference category), post-secondary, and degree or above, and whether the respondent suffers from a poor health (Yes=1; No=0).<sup>3</sup>

## Analytical Strategies

We first present descriptive statistics of the analytical samples. We then examine how participation in social movements is associated with birth cohorts, the Hong Konger identity, and other socio-demographic variables. Furthermore, we test the associations of migration intention with birth cohorts, the Hong Konger identity, and participation in social movements. We run ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions to predict participation in social movement. OLS regressions are considered to be appropriate because social movements participation is measured in a scale of 0 to 10 and distance between scale points are deemed to be equally weighted. It is also a common method to model political participation (See for example, de Zúñiga et al., 2014). Furthermore, we run logistic regressions to predict the migration intention of HK people. We test for generational differences and identity differences with a set of interaction terms, and also include a set of interactions by survey round to control for outward migration selection effects over the fieldwork period.

## Findings

### *Descriptive Statistics*

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics by cohort. We define the youngest birth cohort as post-1997, as we assume that people who were born after the post-colonial period may have different values and self-identification, as well as intention to participate in social movements and migration. However, this cohort was only included in the third round

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics.

Variables	Birth cohort						Interview period							
	After 1997		1980s–1997		1965–1970s		Before 1965		February–April 2021		June–August 2021		March–June 2022	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Frequency in participation in social movements since 2019 (0 no participation—10 high participation)	2.94	2.55	2.36	2.51	1.25	2.14	1.17	1.97	1.30	2.14	1.56	2.27	1.97	2.40
Intention to migration (0 = No/Don't know; 1 = Yes/Considering)	0.27	0.44	0.39	0.49	0.24	0.43	0.10	0.30	0.21	0.41	0.20	0.40	0.29	0.45
Identifying as “Hongkonger” but not “Chinese” (0 = No; 1 = Yes)	0.81	0.39	0.80	0.40	0.61	0.49	0.44	0.50	0.55	0.50	0.72	0.45	0.57	0.50
Female (0 = No; 1 = Yes)	0.46	0.50	0.54	0.50	0.53	0.50	0.52	0.50	0.53	0.50	0.53	0.50	0.53	0.50
Married/cohabiting (0 = No; 1 = Yes)	0.03	0.17	0.47	0.50	0.75	0.43	0.62	0.49	0.52	0.50	0.65	0.48	0.61	0.49
Having a child under 18 (0 = No; 1 = Yes)	0.01	0.10	0.35	0.48	0.33	0.47	0.02	0.13	0.20	0.40	0.23	0.42	0.21	0.41
Employed/self-employed (0 = No; 1 = Yes)	0.52	0.50	0.86	0.35	0.82	0.38	0.37	0.48	0.63	0.48	0.68	0.47	0.66	0.47
Secondary or below (0 = No; 1 = Yes)	0.40	0.49	0.42	0.49	0.71	0.46	0.89	0.32	0.69	0.46	0.69	0.46	0.64	0.48
Post-secondary (0 = No; 1 = Yes)	0.28	0.45	0.20	0.40	0.11	0.31	0.04	0.19	0.12	0.32	0.11	0.31	0.12	0.33
Degree or above (0 = No; 1 = Yes)	0.32	0.47	0.38	0.49	0.19	0.39	0.08	0.27	0.19	0.40	0.20	0.40	0.23	0.42
Having a bad health (0 = No; 1 = Yes)	0.06	0.24	0.05	0.23	0.05	0.22	0.17	0.37	0.08	0.28	0.08	0.27	0.12	0.33

Notes: Data are from Rounds 1 to 3 of the Hong Kong Migration Study. The post-1997 cohort figures are derived from data of Round 3 only. All other figures are based on data from Round 1 to 3. All figures are weighted.

of the survey and were aged 18 to 24 at the time of the fieldwork. The remaining three cohorts are present in all three rounds of data and are thus 1 year older in round 3 (March–June 2022) than in round 1 (February–April 2021). These are defined as those born between 1980s to 1997 (aged 24–41 in round 1), 1965 to 1979 (age 42–56 in round 1), and pre-1965 (age 57 and older in round 1). We find that the two younger cohorts have participated more frequently in social movements (i.e., higher levels of “voice”) since 2019, with average scores of 2.94 and 2.36 on a 0 to 10 scale, compared to 1.25 and 1.17 among the older cohorts. Intention to migrate (“exit”) is the highest among the 1980s to 1997 cohort, with 39% considering migrating, compared to 10% of the oldest cohort. In terms of subjective identity, we find the two younger cohorts equally likely to identify as a Hong Konger (“loyalty”) but not Chinese (81% and 80%) and at a far higher rate than the older cohorts (61% among the 1965–1979 group, and 44% among the pre-1965s). We see demographic patterns matching expectations by age, for example, fewer of the post-1997 cohort are married or have children, and poor health is more common among older people. The middle two groups, being of working age, are more likely to be active in the labor market, and the younger groups have higher levels of educational attainment (lower rates of having a degree in the post-1997 group likely reflects that some will still be studying).

Comparing across the three fieldwork periods, we find higher levels of reported levels of participation in social movements in round 3 (1.97) compared to round 1 (1.30). Rates of intention to migrate were similar in the first two rounds (21% and 20% respectively) but rising to 29% in March–June 2022. These shifts are due to a certain extent to the oversampled of the post-1997 cohort in round 3 of the survey (50%). The second round had higher levels of Hong Konger identities (72% compared to 55% in round 1 and 57% in round 3) which may also reflect some complex dynamics of the shifting political situation, as well as ongoing outward migration.

### *OLS Regressions Predicting Participation in Social Movements*

Due to the data structure, with the youngest cohort available only in round 3, we examine just the three older cohorts across all rounds of data (Tables 2a and 3a), and separately all four cohorts in round 3 (Tables 2b and 3b).

Firstly, we examine the antecedents of “voice,” namely participation in social movements; Table 2a shows that the two oldest cohorts are less likely to participate than those born between 1980 and 1997, even when controlling for HK identity, gender, marital status, employment status, education, and health. The control variables show that education has a strong and significant positive association with participation frequency (having a degree  $b=0.660$ ,  $SE\ 0.118$ ) and being married or cohabiting has a negative association compared to single ( $b=-0.239$ ,  $SE\ 0.101$ ). We find here, perhaps surprisingly, that poor health is associated with higher frequency of participation. One interpretation of this might be that the stressful political circumstances of participation itself has brought about worse health.

Turning to identity in Table 2a, we find a positive association of identifying as a Hong Konger and participation in social movements (0.357,  $SE\ 0.095$ ), although, as

**Table 2a.** OLS Regressions Predicting Participation in Social Movements (Before 1997 Cohorts).

Independent variables	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Interviewed June–August 2021	0.227* (0.108)	0.331* (0.183)	0.238* (0.109)	0.344* (0.183)
Interviewed March–June 2022	0.577*** (0.107)	1.030*** (0.158)	0.581*** (0.107)	1.034*** (0.158)
Born 1965–1970s	-0.771*** (0.119)	-0.774*** (0.118)	-0.510* (0.216)	-0.504* (0.215)
Born before 1965	-0.683*** (0.137)	-0.695*** (0.137)	-0.391* (0.209)	-0.403* (0.208)
Hongkonger identity	0.357*** (0.095)	0.723*** (0.155)	0.657*** (0.191)	1.027*** (0.227)
Female	-0.111 (0.089)	-0.115 (0.089)	-0.108 (0.090)	-0.112 (0.089)
Married or cohabiting	-0.239* (0.101)	-0.219* (0.101)	-0.234* (0.101)	-0.214* (0.101)
Have a child under 18	-0.094 (0.125)	-0.102 (0.124)	-0.092 (0.125)	-0.100 (0.125)
Employed or self-employed	0.215* (0.110)	0.187* (0.110)	0.204* (0.110)	0.176 (0.110)
Post-secondary	0.709*** (0.147)	0.698*** (0.147)	0.703*** (0.147)	0.692*** (0.147)
Degree or above	0.660*** (0.118)	0.682*** (0.118)	0.647*** (0.118)	0.668*** (0.118)
Have bad health	0.287* (0.152)	0.263* (0.152)	0.268* (0.152)	0.244 (0.153)
June–August 2021 × Hongkonger		-0.236 (0.227)		-0.240 (0.227)
March–June 2022 × Hongkonger		-0.825*** (0.213)		-0.826*** (0.213)
Born 1965–1970s × Hongkonger			-0.343 (0.252)	-0.357 (0.251)
Born before 1965 × Hongkonger			-0.436* (0.239)	-0.433* (0.238)
Constant	1.419*** (0.177)	1.236*** (0.188)	1.186*** (0.219)	1.000*** (0.228)
Observations	2500	2500	2500	2500
R-square	0.099	0.105	0.100	0.106
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.095	0.100	0.095	0.100

Notes: Data are from Rounds 1 to 3 of the Hong Kong Migration Study.

The reference categories are: Interviewed February to April 2021, Born 1980s to 1997, Not Hongkonger, Male, Non-married, Childless, Non-employed, Secondary or below, and Do not have bad health.

Standard errors in parentheses.

\* $p < .10$ . \*\* $p < .05$ . \*\*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\*\* $p < .001$ .

**Table 2b.** OLS Regressions Predicting Participation in Social Movements (Before and After 1997 Cohorts).

Independent variables	(1)	(2)
Born 1980s–1997	–0.558* (0.335)	–0.288 (0.675)
Born 1965–1970s	–0.959** (0.360)	–0.673 (0.665)
Born before 1965	–0.892** (0.341)	–0.226 (0.634)
Hongkonger identity	0.059 (0.160)	0.713 (0.682)
Female	–0.040 (0.153)	–0.034 (0.152)
Married or cohabiting	–0.428* (0.175)	–0.394* (0.175)
Have a child under 18	0.046 (0.210)	0.001 (0.210)
Employed or self-employed	0.004 (0.185)	–0.020 (0.186)
Post-secondary	0.807*** (0.241)	0.738** (0.242)
Degree or above	0.779*** (0.200)	0.716*** (0.201)
Have bad health	0.713** (0.236)	0.659** (0.236)
Born 1980s–1997 × Hongkonger		–0.332 (0.754)
Born 1965–1970s × Hongkonger		–0.293 (0.743)
Born before 1965 × Hongkonger		–1.182 (0.727)
Constant	2.581*** (0.347)	2.122*** (0.621)
Observations	1000	1000
R-square	0.074	0.081
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.064	0.068

Notes. Data are from Round 3 of the Hong Kong Migration Study.

The reference categories are: Born in or after 1997, Not Hongkonger, Male, Non-married, Childless, Non-employed, Secondary or below, and Do not have bad health.

Standard errors in parentheses.

\* $p < .10$ . \*\* $p < .05$ . \*\*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\*\* $p < .001$ .

we show in models 2, 3, and 4, this masks heterogeneity by fieldwork period and generation. The interactions reveal that the association of HK identity and participation was strongest in early 2021 (the reference category) and weakened by mid-2022 (models 2 and 4). These findings probably reflect that there are selection effects in the sample. For example, some people who identify as Hong Kongers and have participated in social movements might have emigrated and therefore were not observed in the latter two rounds. In terms of generational differences, the association between Hong Konger and participation in social movements was stronger among the 1980s to 1997 cohort and the 1965 to 1970s cohort (models 3 and 4). Taken together, the interactions suggest heterogeneous and shifting meanings of HK identity and its political consequences.

The findings from round 3 (Table 2b) are largely similar. It is the youngest cohort, post-1997, who are most likely to participate in social movements, even more likely than the 1980s to 1997 cohort. The effects of the control variables marital status and education are confirmed here, and the positive effect of health has a larger effect size and greater significance in this round of data ( $b = 0.713$ ,  $SE 0.236$ ). The main effect of HK identity does not reach significance here, when comparing with the post-1997

cohort. However, consistent with the results in Table 2a, the association between a Hong Konger identity and participation in social movements is weaker in the before 1965 cohort when compared with the 1980s to 1997 and the 1965 to 1970s cohorts.

In sum, we find supportive evidence for **H1a** and **H1b** on the association between loyalty and voice: identifying as a Hong Konger is positively associated with the level of participation in social movements. The association is weaker for people born before 1965 for whom the HK identity may invoke a less politicized loyalty.

### *Logistic Regressions Predicting Migration Intention*

In Tables 3a and 3b, we turn our attention to “exit,” that is, migration intention. The cohort variables in Model 1 confirm the bivariate patterns presented in Table 1, with the 1980s to 1997 cohort being the most likely to report that they are considering migrating away from HK, a difference that is statistically significantly lower among the pre-1965 cohort. We can also see from Table 3a that the before-1965 cohort is less likely to emigrate than the 1980s to 1997 cohort ( $b = -0.807$ ,  $SE = 0.240$ ). Confirming the bivariate association, we see that migration intention is higher in round 3, though in the multivariate model it is also apparent that migration intention was lower in round 2 than round 1. Looking at the control variables we find that in contrast to the associations for participation, that the married or cohabiting are more likely to be considering migration ( $b = 0.401$ ,  $SE = 0.164$ ), as are those with children ( $b = 0.450$ ,  $SE = 0.156$ ). As expected, being in poor health decreases migration intentions ( $-0.822$ ,  $SE = 0.245$ ), again an example where the antecedents of migration are not matched with the antecedents of participation in social movements. Education has a positive association with migration intentions as well as participation in social movements.

We include participation in social movements (“voice”) as an explanatory variable, and find, as hypothesized, a positive association: the higher the level of participation in social movements, the more likely is one to emigrate ( $b = 0.212$ ,  $SE = 0.0253$ ). As further hypothesized, those who identify themselves as Hong Kongers are also more likely to be considering migration ( $b = 0.767$ ,  $SE = 0.157$ ), supporting the idea that “loyalty” can be a push factor in this political context. Models 2 to 5 include interaction terms to test hypotheses 2b and 3b. None of the participation interaction terms are significant, suggesting that its association with migration intention is the same in the different cohorts. The interaction term between the Hong Konger identity and the pre-1965 cohort is positive and marginally significant. That is, the Hong Konger identity may be acting as a stronger push factor for migration for the oldest generation. Regarding the interactions with survey round, we find that the identity–intention association is significantly weaker in round 2 compared to round 1 (model 3), perhaps suggesting selection effect due to the ongoing migration and the heterogeneous and evolving consequences of a HK identity.

In Table 3b, which also considers the post-1997 cohort, it confirms it is the 1980s to 1997 cohort who are most likely to be considering migration. As we found in the full sample, both participation and Hong Kong identity have significant positive associations with migration intention, though at the time of the round 3 fieldwork, there are

**Table 3a.** Logistic Regressions Predicting Migration Intention (Before 1997 Cohorts).

Independent variables	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Interviewed June–August 2021	-0.291* (0.145)	-0.270 (0.192)	0.320 (0.311)	-0.286* (0.145)	-0.302* (0.145)
Interviewed March–June 2022	0.386** (0.149)	0.512** (0.190)	0.332 (0.289)	0.385** (0.150)	0.390** (0.148)
Born 1965–1970s	-0.220 (0.144)	-0.213 (0.144)	-0.221 (0.145)	-0.354* (0.175)	-0.555 (0.268)
Born before 1965	-0.807*** (0.240)	-0.802*** (0.240)	-0.788*** (0.237)	-0.795** (0.280)	-1.380*** (0.398)
Frequency in participating in social movements	0.212*** (0.0253)	0.240*** (0.0399)	0.215*** (0.0258)	0.193*** (0.0296)	0.214*** (0.0252)
Hongkonger identity	0.767*** (0.157)	0.754*** (0.158)	0.934*** (0.223)	0.767*** (0.158)	0.377* (0.198)
Female	0.0753 (0.127)	0.0775 (0.127)	0.0690 (0.127)	0.0816 (0.127)	0.0693 (0.127)
Married or cohabiting	0.401* (0.164)	0.399* (0.165)	0.400* (0.165)	0.393* (0.164)	0.391* (0.163)
Have a child under 18	0.450** (0.156)	0.455** (0.156)	0.448** (0.154)	0.449** (0.158)	0.455** (0.156)
Employed or self-employed	-0.0637 (0.178)	-0.0705 (0.181)	-0.0580 (0.178)	-0.0597 (0.179)	-0.0224 (0.180)
Post-secondary	0.697*** (0.178)	0.699*** (0.179)	0.700*** (0.180)	0.694*** (0.178)	0.713*** (0.177)
Degree or above	1.324*** (0.151)	1.328*** (0.150)	1.304*** (0.150)	1.324*** (0.151)	1.345*** (0.152)
Have bad health	-0.822*** (0.245)	-0.804*** (0.241)	-0.847*** (0.247)	-0.825*** (0.246)	-0.802** (0.251)
Interviewed June–August 2021 × participation in social movements		-0.0135 (0.0570)			
Interviewed March–June 2022 × participation in social movements		-0.0625 (0.0583)			
Interviewed June–August 2021 × Hongkonger			-0.779* (0.346)		
Interviewed March–June 2022 × Hongkonger			0.0905 (0.340)		
Born 1965–1970s × participation in social movements				0.0735 (0.0565)	
Born before 1965 × participation in social movements				-0.0102 (0.0731)	
Born 1965–1970s × Hongkonger					0.421 (0.303)
Born before 1965 × Hongkonger					0.843* (0.443)
Constant	-2.607*** (0.295)	-2.654*** (0.288)	-2.730*** (0.313)	-2.561*** (0.293)	-2.329*** (0.303)
Observations	2,500	2,500	2,500	2,500	2,500
Log pseudo-likelihood	-7277215.7	-7272051.9	-7246475.6	-7269061.1	-7253732.3
Pseudo-R-square	0.2041	0.2047	0.2074	0.2050	0.2067
d.f.	13	15	15	15	15

Notes: Data are from Rounds 1–3 of the Hong Kong Migration Study.

The reference categories are: Interviewed February to April 2021, Born 1980s to 1997, Not Hongkonger, Male, Non-married, Childless, Non-employed, Secondary or below, and Do not have bad health.

Robust standard errors in parentheses.

\* $p < .1$ . \*\* $p < .05$ . \*\*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\*\* $p < .001$ .

**Table 3b.** Logistic Regressions Predicting Migration Intention (Before and After 1997 Cohorts).

Independent variables	(1)	(2)	(3)
Born 1980s–1997	0.961*** (0.273)	0.547 (0.371)	1.057* (0.538)
Born 1965–1970s	-0.195 (0.373)	-0.617 (0.453)	-0.113 (0.582)
Born before 1965	-0.456 (0.393)	-0.253 (0.495)	-0.649 (0.628)
Frequency in participating in social movements	0.184*** (0.0442)	0.120* (0.0561)	0.187*** (0.0448)
Hongkonger identity	0.918*** (0.261)	0.850** (0.267)	0.887** (0.389)
Female	0.225 (0.240)	0.229 (0.243)	0.216 (0.238)
Married or cohabiting	0.995** (0.318)	1.004** (0.322)	0.990** (0.319)
Have a child under 18	0.150 (0.273)	0.182 (0.278)	0.164 (0.272)
Employed or self-employed	-0.0752 (0.300)	-0.0530 (0.304)	-0.0479 (0.306)
Post-secondary	0.416 (0.309)	0.384 (0.311)	0.443 (0.312)
Degree or above	1.383*** (0.270)	1.403*** (0.275)	1.409*** (0.274)
Have bad health	-1.194*** (0.354)	-1.194*** (0.362)	-1.190*** (0.356)
Born 1980s–1997 × participation in social movements		0.137 (0.0835)	
Born 1965–1970s × participation in social movements		0.144 (0.105)	
Born before 1965 × participation in social movements		-0.204 (0.134)	
Born 1980s–1997 × Hongkonger			-0.131 (0.549)
Born 1965–1970s × Hongkonger			-0.121 (0.588)
Born before 1965 × Hongkonger			0.374 (0.722)
Constant	-3.118*** (0.434)	-2.850*** (0.427)	-3.133*** (0.485)
Observations	1,000	1,000	1,000
Log pseudo-likelihood	-2751025.3	-2707281.9	-2746655.6
Pseudo-R-square	0.2532	0.2651	0.2544
d.f.	12	15	15

Notes. Data are from Round 3 of the Hong Kong Migration Study. The reference categories are: Born in or after 1997, Not Hongkonger, Male, Non-married, Childless, Non-employed, Secondary or below, and Do not have bad health. Robust standard errors in parentheses. +  $p < .1$ . \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

no significant differences between the cohorts in terms of the effects of participation and identity. We should note that, however, the significance level of the coefficients in the models of Table 3b may reflect the smaller sample size in these models ( $n = 1,000$ ).

To sum up, we have found supportive evidence for **H2a**: loyalty, in terms of identifying as a Hong Konger, is linked to a higher likelihood of considering emigration. There is some supportive evidence for **H2b**, but the borderline significant difference is only found in the oldest generation: the Hong Konger identity has a stronger positive association with migration intention for people born before 1965. The findings support **H3a** but not **H3b**: the level of participation in social movements is positively associated with migration intention, thus suggesting a role for “failed voice” and exit intention. However, there is no significant difference across the generations in this association.

### *Robustness Checking of Results*

First, we run Heckman selection models to predict participation in social movements. We include all variables in the main models as stated in Table 2 as well as whether a political event happened in the 7 days before the interview in the first stage selection model. Furthermore, we recode participation in social movement into a categorical variable (0=No participation, 1–5=Some participation, and 6–10=High participation) and model the responses with multinomial logistic regressions. To take account of the endogeneity of migration intention and participation in social movements, we run instrumental variable probit models to predict migration intention, and the political event variable is used as an instrument. We also include the average number of COVID-19 cases in the last 7 days in the logistic regression models of migration intention. As it is an exogenous factor to the models, it does not affect the associations between the dependent and independent variables. The main conclusions remain the same with these robustness checks.

### **Conclusion**

We have applied and extended Hirschman’s theoretical framework to investigate the relationships between the Hong Konger identity, participation in social movements and migration intention of HK. Our findings, based on large-scale survey data collected amid the migration tide in HK, reveal that the Hong Konger identity is associated with both a higher level of participation in social movements and a stronger migration intention. There are few variations in these associations across the generations. The generational effects are mainly concerned with the oldest group. The Hong Konger identity is associated less strongly with participation in social movements, and more strongly with migration intention for people born before 1965. Furthermore, participation in social movements is also a strong push factor to migration, and no generational difference in the association is found.

We have used HK as a case study to show how Hirschman’s framework can be applied to societies with heightened political control. The findings suggest that when

civil rights and political freedom are dwindling and public dissatisfaction is high, as in the case of HK, a local identity is associated with voicing for reforms. In the case of failed social movements (i.e., when voices are not answered or even penalized), a local identity and previous experiences in voicing out are associated with a higher chance of exit to another country.

These results have implications for societies with shrinking political opportunity structures but greater ease of transnational migration. In the case of HK, a continuous population outflow can be expected. The continual decline in political freedom means that HK people with a strong sentiment of belonging may choose to emigrate rather than participate in social movements. The Hong Konger identity is conducive to political mobilization. Following Hirschman's (1970) framework, voice is an indication of loyalty to an organization. Members who have strong sentiments to the organization will seek for changes. In the case of public policy, loyalty makes people voice for the sake of collective interests, rather than their own. When voices are failed, people's loyalty will decline and those who would choose to voice have to exit. State–society interactions, particularly state responses to collective movements and voicing, would be key to shaping the speed and size of outward migration.

### *Limitations of this Study*

We have observed that the Hong Konger identity has weaker associations with participation in social movements and migration intention in the third round of the survey. This is likely to reflect the challenges in collecting data about migration when many people have been migrating continuously given the tightening of political control in civil society. Our surveys collected data as soon as the new BN(O) visa scheme took effect, which should have reduced the sample selection bias. We also conducted some robustness checks of our findings.

We included respondents who were born in or after 1997 only in the last round of the survey, as the UK government had extended the BN(O) visa scheme to children of BN(O)s then. Our data do not include people who are not eligible for the BN(O) visa scheme and thus are not representative of the entire HK population. Future research should collect data on both the pre- and post-1997 cohorts from the whole HK population. It should continue to monitor the migration trend and investigate further the generational differences in the push and pull factors for migration.

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**Notes**

1. We used the 2016 HK census data to calculate the weights because it is the latest available population data. The Census data do not have information about BN(O) status. We therefore calculate the weight based on the HK population.
2. We recoded migration intention into a binary variable in order to increase the cell sizes of each category of the dependent variable. In robustness checking, we recode migration intention into a 3-category response (i.e., “no/don’t know,” “considering,” and “yes”). The main conclusions remain largely the same.
3. In the survey, respondents were asked “How would you rate your general health status in the last 12 months.” Their answers include “Very poor,” “Poor,” “Neither Poor nor Good,” “Good,” and “Very Good.” We define “Whether having a poor health” = 1 if respondents replied “Very Poor” or “Poor”; = 0 Otherwise.

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