



**110學年度下學期 「行政與政策論壇」
系列演講(一)**

**Strong government responses? Reflections on
the management of COVID-19 in Hong Kong
and Taiwan**

2022年3月8日

Natalie 慧敏老師

Strong government responses? Reflections on the management of COVID-19 in Hong Kong and Taiwan

Natalie W.M. Wong

Department of Public Administration, National Chengchi University, Taipei, Taiwan

Ka Ki Lawrence Ho

Department of Social Sciences, The Education University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong,
Hong Kong

Mao Wang

Department of Political Science, Chinese Culture University, Taipei, Taiwan, and

Chih-Wei Hsieh

Department of Public Policy, City University of Hong Kong, Kowloon Tong,
Hong Kong

Abstract

Purpose – A debate emerged among members of public administration academia soon after COVID-19 appeared on the roles and measures that governments ought to deploy to prevent infection. One prevalent discourse is the strength of “strong government” in the fight against the virus—the administrative capacity to launch prompt, appropriate and effective actions that entail collaboration with citizens. A notable development in governance is that new public management (NPM) principles, such as the value of money and the pluralisation of service delivery, are gradually put aside when governments urgently need to curb the spread of infection. The roles of bureaucracy and centralised action are re-emphasised in the policymaking and implementation of anti-epidemic measures. Such a trend allows us to examine if the COVID-19 public health crisis has fundamentally reversed the trend of government retreat in public service within neoliberal regimes since the 1980s.

Design/methodology/approach – For this research, the authors selected two “strong governments” in Asia—Hong Kong and Taiwan—by showing how administrators outline their anti-pandemic strategies, examining the role of government in coordinating responses and how bureaucracy interacts with the other two key domains of the governance mechanism: civil society and the market. These two offshore Chinese capitalist economies and pluralistic societies are perceived to have “strong government capacity” in the fight against COVID-19, presumably as a key attribute to their success confining the spread of infection during the early stages of the first outbreak. Both societies reported low infection rates and low mortality rates until September 2020. The authors browsed databases developed by scholars (Cheng *et al.*, 2020; Hale *et al.*, 2020) and referred to two “rubrics” to assess and compare government actions in both places according to the rubrics, noticed that the policy footprint appeared in over two-thirds of indicators of proactive government interventions and identified double-digit counts in nearly half of the categories.

Findings – The authors found that both governments attempted to establish strong stewardship and quick measures to contain the infection. The pattern of “strong government” is, however, not the same as that superficially exhibited. Taiwan took limited steps to regulate business activities but proactively intervened and coordinated the supply of hygienic utilities. Hong Kong launched aggressive attempts to reduce human mobility but remained non-active despite the “face mask run” in society. The “strong government” aspect also received divergent reactions from society. There was extensive cross-sectoral collaboration under the centralised “National Team” advocacy in Taiwan, and there has been no record of local infection for over 10 months. The Hong Kong government was repeatedly doubted for its undesirable stewardship in anti-epidemic measures, the effectiveness of policy interventions and the impartiality of law enforcement.

The author thanks the anonymous reviewers for their comments.

Reflections
on the
management of
COVID-19

Received 28 June 2021
Revised 14 December 2021
Accepted 17 January 2022



International Journal of Public
Sector Management
© Emerald Publishing Limited
0951-3558
DOI: 10.1108/IJPSM-06-2021-0158



Viewpoint, Policy Forum or Opinion

Fighting COVID-19 in Hong Kong: The effects of community and social mobilization

Kin-Man Wan ^{a,*}, Lawrence Ka-ki Ho ^b, Natalie W.M. Wong ^c, Andy Chiu ^d

^a Department of Government and Public Administration, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong

^b Department of Social Sciences, The Education University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong

^c Department of Public Policy, City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong

^d Department of Sociology, University of Warwick, United Kingdom

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Accepted 21 June 2020
Available online 25 June 2020

Keywords:
COVID-19
civil society
social mobilization
Asia
Hong Kong

ABSTRACT

The globalized world economy has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic since early February 2020. In the midst of this global public health crisis, a prompt review of the counterinsurgencies that have occurred in different jurisdictions is helpful. This article examines the experience of Hong Kong (HKSAR), which successfully limited its number of confirmed cases to approximately 1100 until early June 2020. Considering the limited actions that the government has taken against the pandemic, we emphasize the prominent role of Hong Kong's civil society through highlighting the strong and spontaneous mobilization of its local communities originating from their experiences during the SARS outbreak in 2003 and the social unrest in 2019, as well as their doubts regarding the pandemic assessments and recommendations of the HKSAR and WHO authorities. This article suggests that the influence of civil society should not be overlooked in the context of pandemic management.

© 2020 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.



Special Issue: The Political Ramifications of COVID 19

A whole-of-nation approach to COVID-19: Taiwan's National Epidemic Prevention Team

International Political Science Review
2021, Vol. 42(3) 300–315
© The Author(s) 2021
Article reuse guidelines:
sagepub.com/journals-permissions
DOI: 10.1177/01925121211012291
journals.sagepub.com/home/ipsr



Chih-Wei Hsieh

Department of Public Policy, City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong

Mao Wang

Graduate Institute of Public Affairs, National Taiwan University

Natalie WM Wong

Department of Public Policy, City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong

Lawrence Ka-ki Ho

Department of Social Sciences, Education University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong

Abstract

This article analyzes Taiwan's National Epidemic Prevention Team, a collective synergy between government and society in fighting COVID-19. We draw on a model of collaborative governance to dissect the collaboration between National Epidemic Prevention Team members; that is, central government, local governments, private enterprises and citizens. We argue that the 2003 severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) outbreak, democratic deepening and continual diplomatic isolation despite the global health crisis contributed to Taiwan's National Epidemic Prevention Team capacity and cohesiveness. Our analysis contributes to the heated discourse on democratic resilience in these turbulent times, suggesting that outbreak control can succeed only if there is an integrated system of interdepartmental, central–local, intersectoral and citizen–state collaboration. Overall, this article shows how liberal democracies can control and counteract COVID-19 without resorting to authoritarian methods of containment.

Upcoming: Digital divide in Hong
Kong during COVID-19 pandemic

Research puzzles

- Has the pandemic pushed leaders in democratic regimes to review their pluralisation strategies (such as PPP), which have been developing for 30 years (particularly under conditions of austerity due to the financial crises of 1997 and 2008 and the increasing outcry for managerial accountability in public service delivery)?
- Have governments become increasingly involved in public service delivery, whether in a traditional or “new and innovative” form, given the “market failure” during the public health crisis?
- Does this mean the declining trend of decentralisation, out-sourcing (but re-emphasising) the centralised coordination of public service delivery?

Background

- Debates over the roles and measures that governments ought to deploy to contain infection in the COVID-19 pandemic.
- One prevalent discourse is the strength of a “strong government” in the fight against the virus: the administrative capacity to launch prompt, appropriate, effective actions that entail collaboration with citizens.
- A notable development in governance is that new public management (NPM) principles, such as the value of money and the pluralisation of service delivery, are gradually put aside when governments rush to curb the spread of infection.
- The roles of bureaucracy and centralised actions are re-emphasised in the policymaking and implementation of anti-epidemic measures.
- However, the experiences of managing the pandemic have been fragile and may erode public trust in governments.

Background (Con't)

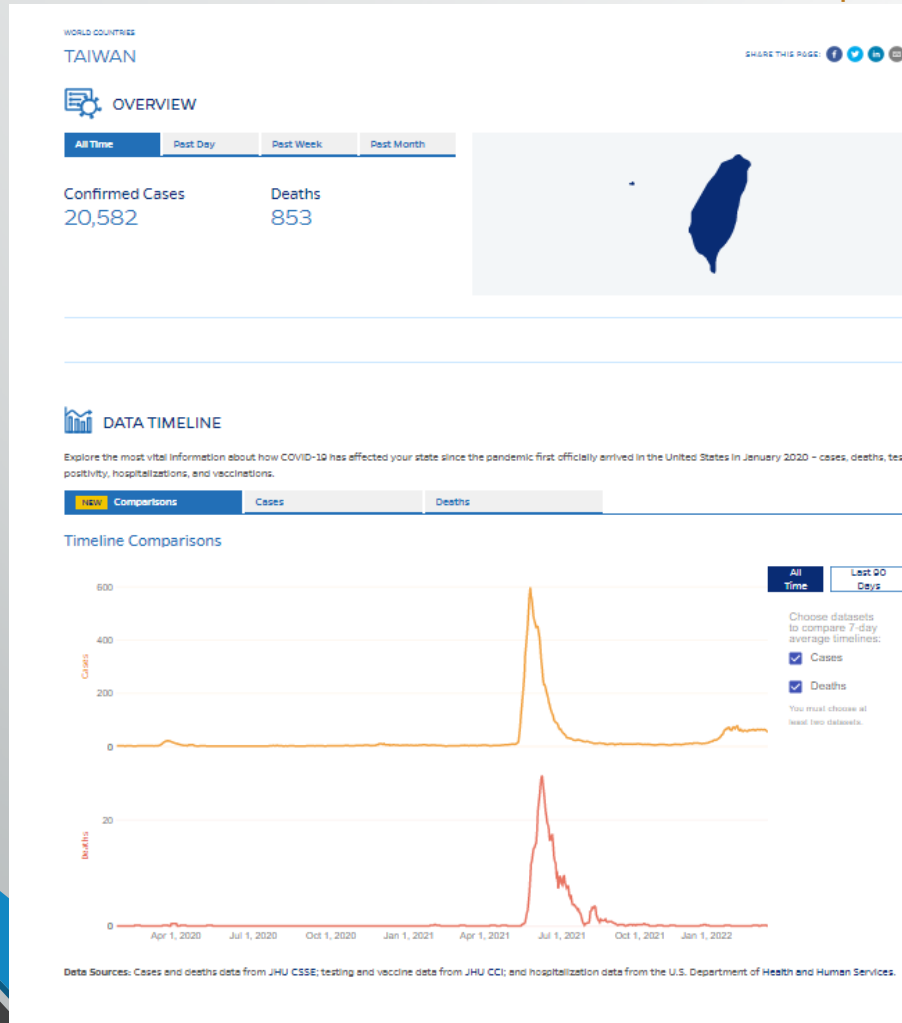
- Experiences in Asia have drawn special attention from both scholars and political leaders, highlighting the relative effectiveness in the fight against the pandemic, as shown by the limited number of deaths, collaborative attitudes from the public regarding lockdown and quarantine policies and rare outcries of human rights infringement.
- This pandemic seems to have been controlled generally better in Asia.

Research Design & Rationales

- In the paper, Taiwan and Hong Kong were selected to study how administrators outline their anti-pandemic strategies, examining the role of government in coordinating responses, and how bureaucracy interacts with the other two key domains of the governance mechanism: civil society and the market.
- Rubrics developed by Cheng et al. (2020)

Number of cases and death in Taiwan and Hong Kong

(Source: Johns Hopkins University & Medicine; Our World in Data)

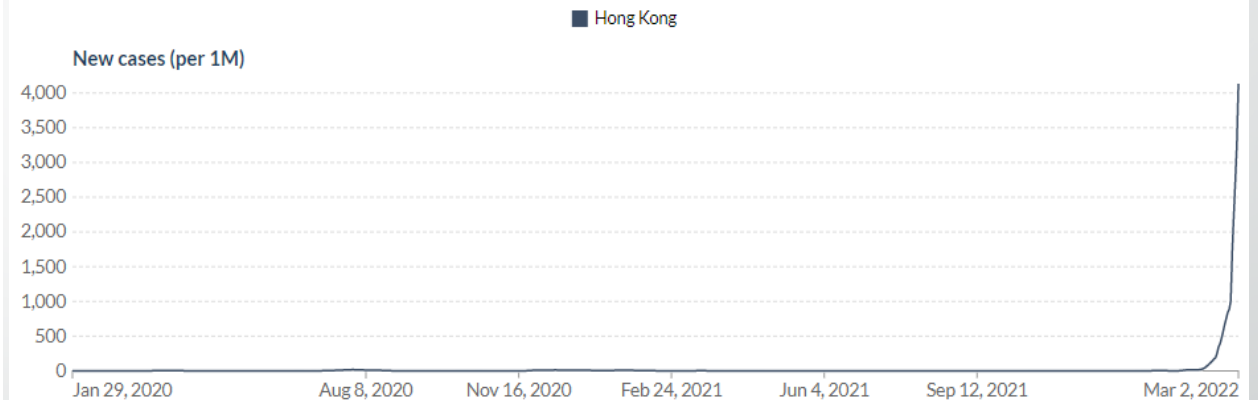


Daily new confirmed COVID-19 cases & deaths per million people

7-day rolling average. Limited testing and challenges in the attribution of cause of death means the cases and deaths counts may not be accurate.

Our World in Data

LINEAR LOG Uniform y-axis



Source: Johns Hopkins University CSSE COVID-19 Data

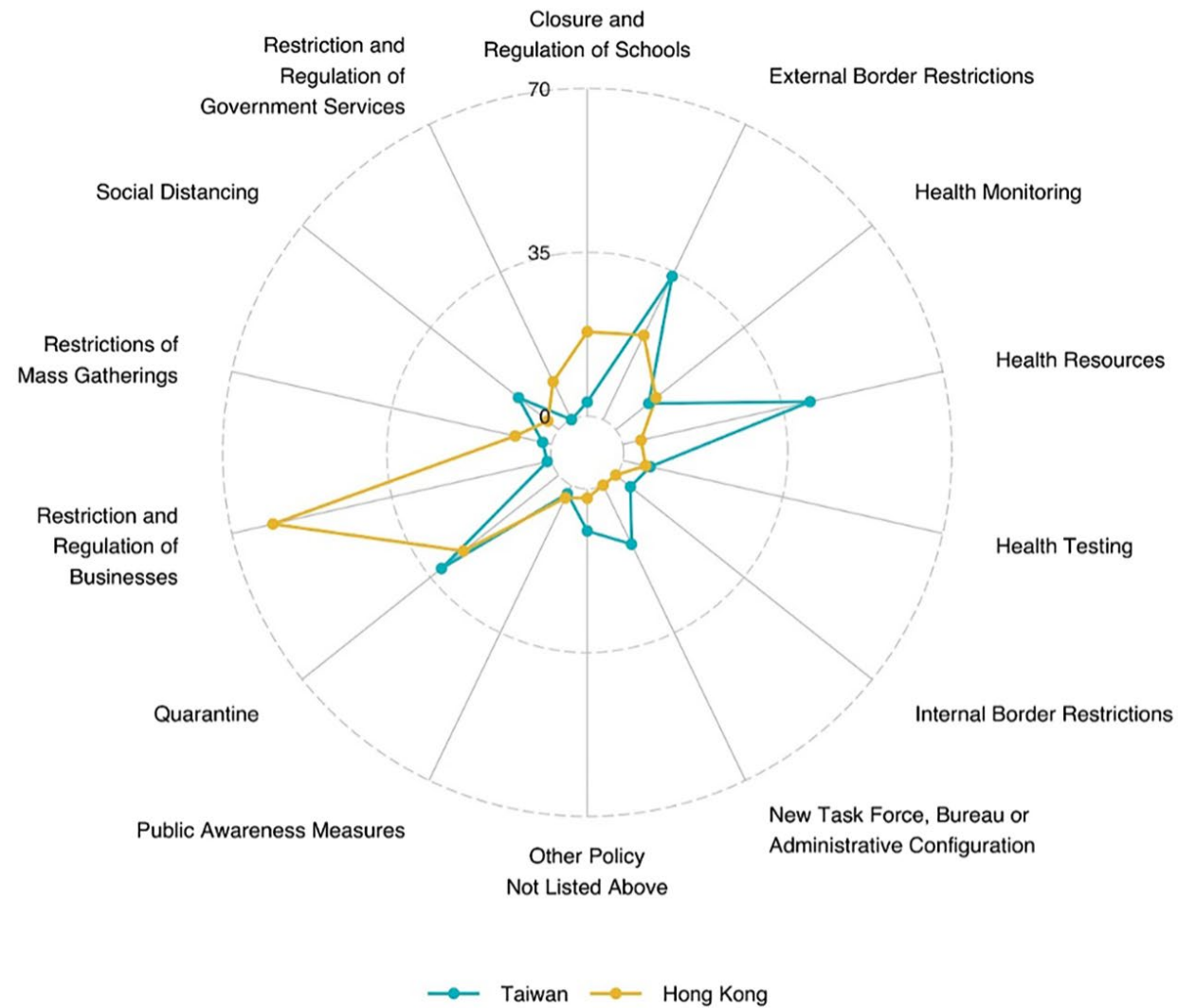
CC BY

▶ Jan 29, 2020 ◯ Mar 2, 2022

How have Taiwan and Hong Kong governments encountered with COVID-19 in 2020?

- The experiences of SARS in 2003
- What have both governments done in the COVID-19 pandemics?

Reflections on the management of COVID-19



Source(s): Cheng *et al.* (2020)

Figure 2.
Government actions in response to the COVID-19

State capacity in recentralising public service delivery

- **Strong stewardship of the governments**
 - Using the framework developed by Christensen and Lægreid(2020), we compared three aspects of governance capacity—**analytical capacity, coordination capacity and the delivery of regulatory capacity**—between Taiwan and Hong Kong.

1) Analytical capacity: were authorities well-prepared?

Taiwan	Hong Kong
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• "Whole government approach" (Hsieh et al 2021)• CECC to supervise and coordinate horizontal and vertical communications across government organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A steering committee• The government defined a three-tiered response system in which each level represents a graded risk of novel infectious disease affecting Hong Kong and its health impact on the community.• Government departments/agencies were involved at each level. The plan includes three response levels: alert, serious and emergency, which is based on risk assessment of the disease that may affect the community.• In general, the response measures include surveillance, investigation and control actions, laboratory support, medical services provision, port health measures and communication

2) Coordination capacity: decision-making and collaboration among units

- Decision-making process has been manipulated by governments under the condition of urgency, and the leading role of government can be seen in collaboration with non-government sectors in public service deliveries.

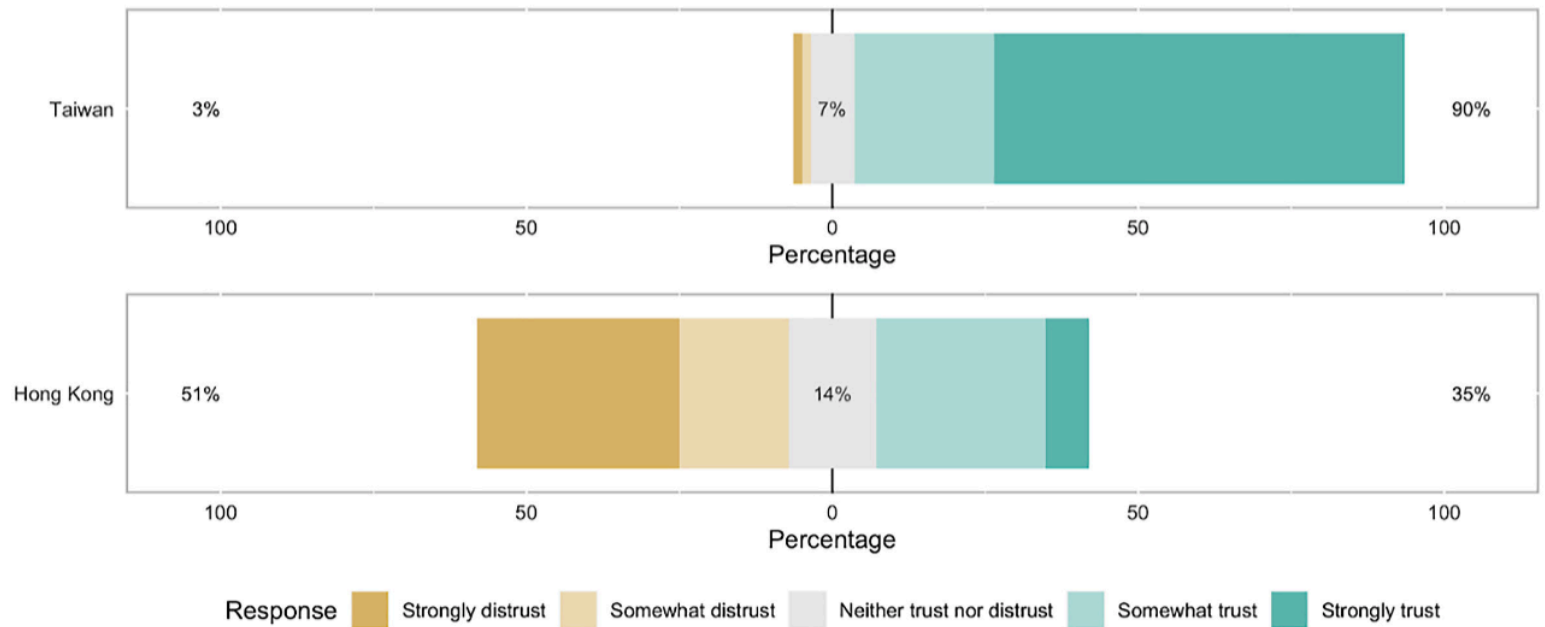
Taiwan	Hong Kong
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Disposal Surgical Masks▪ Masks inventory▪ Ethanol production▪ Designated taxi/ rental cars▪ Developing test kits and treatment drugs▪ Requisitioned hotels for quarantine▪ Telecom companies for "QR code"	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reusable masks• Requisitioned hotels and AsiaWorld Expo for quarantine• Private Lab for testing service• Technology Company for "Leave Home Safe" App

(3) Delivery and regulatory capacity

- Both TW and HK governments imposed penalties for non-compliance with the law, such as violating social distancing measures, wearing disposable surgical masks and breaking quarantine.

Legitimacy to the governments

- Democratic value may be overridden by authorities' manipulation of (and even disregard for) public value assessment, which puts public trust in the government at risk (Bekker et al., 2020).
- “rallying around the flag” effect (Bækgaard et al., 2020; Flinders, 2021; Mueller, 1973)



Source(s): Fetzer *et al.* (2020)

Figure 1.
The levels of citizens' trust in governments during COVID-19

Conclusion – Recall to the research puzzles

- We studied whether COVID-19 has challenged the apparently irreversible trend of pluralisation of public service delivery:
- Has the pandemic pushed leaders in democratic regimes to review their pluralisation strategies (such as PPP), which have been developing for 30 years (particularly under conditions of austerity due to the financial crises of 1997 and 2008 and the increasing outcry for managerial accountability in public service delivery)?
- Have governments become increasingly involved in public service delivery, whether in a traditional or “new and innovative” form, given the “market failure” during the public health crisis?
- Does this mean the declining trend of decentralisation, out-sourcing (but re-emphasising) the centralised coordination of public service delivery?

Conclusion (Con't)

- Taiwan and Hong Kong have exhibited a “re-expansion” of their public sectors during the COVID-19 public health crisis. Their governments have reassumed command in a top-down manner in the fight against this unprecedented pandemic.
 - The pandemic is not the turning point, but is instead a **catalyst**, a trigger pushing both regimes back to their original track of public administration.
- **Path dependency**

Conclusion (Con't) - Path dependency

- HK: we can observe the increasing “pluralisation” of public sector management during the pandemic crisis; that is, the expansion of government authority and jurisdiction, but not confined to the extension of bureaucracy.
- TW: COVID-19 has exhibited the characteristics of Taiwan’s public administration system; it is highly centralised, top-down and hierarchical.
 - Emphasising top-down government command, with collaboration and voluntary assistance from the community. There is notable, spontaneous mobilisation from front-line local units to villages, cities and district governments.
 - Intensified collaboration among citizens, civil society and bureaucrats can be seen, which effectively curbed the waves of the pandemic outbreak, as well as successfully maintaining a zero-infection record between early 2020 and April 2021.



End

Q&A