

RESEARCH BRIEF: HONG KONG

OVERVIEW OF RESTRICTIONS TO CIVIC FREEDOMS



Photo credit: Peter Parks / AFP



INTRODUCTION

There has been alarming regression of civic space in the [Hong Kong](#) Special Administrative Region since June 2019, when mass protests erupted against a proposed extradition bill to allow the government to send people to mainland China to face trial in courts controlled by the Communist Party, going on to make broader [demands for democracy](#).

Hong Kong was a British colony until 1997, when sovereignty of the territory was returned to China. Under the deal struck between the UK and China, Hong Kong was guaranteed a separate legal and economic system for 50 years. The deal supposedly ensured the continued protection of a range of human rights in Hong Kong. The principle of ‘one country, two systems’ was enshrined in [Hong Kong’s Basic Law](#).

Seven years on from the mass protests, hundreds of activists remain behind bars, prosecuted and jailed under draconian national security laws for their peaceful activism and expression. Many civil society groups and political parties have disbanded, and activists have been forced to flee Hong Kong. Even in exile they remain at risk of [transnational repression](#). There is no space to hold protests. Once a bastion of press freedom, now Hong Kong has a pliant media that rarely criticises the authorities. Censorship is rampant.

The [CIVICUS Monitor](#), a civil society research partnership that tracks civic space conditions around the world, has continued to document numerous violations of civic freedoms in Hong Kong, including the persecution of activists, severe restrictions on protests, declining respect for freedom of association and transnational repression. Critical expression is criminalised and censored, independent media outlets have shut down and journalists have been imprisoned. Due to this, the CIVICUS Monitor rates Hong Kong as [closed](#), the worst category.

Hong Kong’s civic space violations contravene the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which is incorporated into Hong Kong’s legal framework via article 39 of the Basic Law and expressed in the [1991 Bill of Rights Ordinance](#). The ICCPR imposes international obligations on the state to respect and protect civic freedoms, including freedoms of association, expression and peaceful assembly.

Hong Kong’s actions are also inconsistent with the [Concluding Observations](#) issued by the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Committee during its July 2022 review of Hong Kong’s implementation of the ICCPR. The Human Rights Committee raised concerns about restrictive laws, the lack of a national human rights commission and restrictions on the rights of association, expression and peaceful assembly.

This brief assesses actions undertaken by the Hong Kong government over the last two years, highlights issues of concern and makes recommendations for improvements.

ABOUT THE CIVICUS MONITOR

The CIVICUS Monitor, an online platform that tracks threats to civil society in countries across the globe, rates civic space – the space for civil society – in Hong Kong as **Closed**.

The data provides the basis for civic space ratings, which are based on up-to-date information and indicators on the state of freedom of association, peaceful assembly and expression. Countries can be rated as:

CLOSED**REPRESSED****OBSTRUCTED****NARROWED****OPEN**

ARREST AND PROSECUTION OF ACTIVISTS

Hong Kong's China-controlled Legislative Council [passed a new security law](#) on 19 March 2024, further intensifying repression. The [Safeguarding National Security Ordinance](#) (SNSO) contains seven offences: prohibition of foreign political organisations or bodies from conducting political activities in the territory or establishing ties with foreign political organisations or bodies, secession, sedition, subversion against the Central People's Government, theft of state secrets and treason.



The Hong Kong pro-democracy activists who were detained and sentenced in November 2024 (Photo Credit: X/@hkdc_us)

According to [Human Rights Watch](#), the SNSO contains many overly broad definitions of crimes, increasing the risks of politically motivated prosecutions and convictions. The SNSO sets out harsh sentences for peaceful activities. It raises the maximum sentence for sedition, criminalised previously in the Crimes Ordinance, from two years to seven years, despite repeated calls from the Human Rights Committee to repeal the sedition law and refrain from using it. Police may extend the detention of a person arrested without charge from the current 48 hours to a further 14 days subject to court approval.

The UN Human Rights Chief has [deplored](#) the adoption of the SNSO, in spite of serious concerns raised by the UN Human Rights Office about the incompatibility of many of its provisions with international human rights law.

The SNSO and the draconian 2020 National Security Law (NSL) have been used to prosecute activists, critics and journalists.

[Human Rights Watch](#) reported in February 2026 that since 2020, authorities have arrested at least 365 people and convicted 174 for allegedly violating national security laws. [Amnesty International](#) reported that among cases prosecuted under national security-related legislation between July 2020 and June 2025, 85 per cent involved the legitimate right to freedom of expression that should not have been criminalised. Authorities denied bail in 89 per cent of cases and the average duration of pretrial detention was 11 months.

The first arrests under the SNSO took place in May 2024 and June 2024, when police arrested six people for alleged [seditious intent](#). Authorities detained them on 28 May 2024, accusing them of publishing messages with seditious intent on social media commemorating the anniversary of the 1989 Tiananmen Square Massacre.

On 30 May 2024, a court [convicted 14 activists](#) under the NSL. They were accused of 'subverting state power' under NSL article 22 for joining, organising and supporting an unofficial primary election in July 2020 to shortlist pro-democracy candidates for the legislative election. They were among 47 people [charged](#) with [conspiracy to commit subversion](#) under NSL article 22 for taking part in the unofficial primary election.

On 19 November 2024, the courts sentenced 45 activists involved in the same unofficial primary election to harsh [sentences](#) varying from four to 10 years' imprisonment. The group of activists – 37 men and eight women – included academics, former lawmakers, lawyers, opposition politicians and unionists.

The [UN said](#) it was 'gravely concerned by the use of the National Security Law to convict and impose harsh sentences on 45 people' and that it resulted 'in the criminalisation of conduct protected by human rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, and association'.

On 8 April 2025, a court [convicted](#) Chow Kim-ho, a former member of the pro-democracy party [League of Social Democrats](#), and sentenced him to a year in prison on sedition charges under the SNSO in punishment for his social media comments. He was arrested in November 2024. The charge stemmed from 145 posts on Facebook, Instagram and Threads.

Four Hong Kong activists from the [League of Social Democrats](#) were [convicted](#) on 12 June 2025 for unauthorised fundraising and displaying posters without permits. Party chairperson Chan Po-ying, vice-chairs Dickson Chau and Yu Wai-pan and activist Lee Ying-chi were found guilty of 12 charges related to setting up street booths in Causeway Bay and Wan Chai between April and May 2023. They were [fined](#) between HK\$1,000 and HK\$6,000 (approx. US\$130 to US\$770).



Hong Kong activist Joshua Wong in Germany in 2019 (Photo Credit: Michele Tantussi/AFP)

Authorities [charged](#) prominent activist Joshua Wong on 6 June 2025 with conspiring to collude with foreign forces under the NSL. Under the charge, Wong was accused of conspiring with self-exiled activist Nathan Law and 'other persons unknown' between July and November 2020 to request foreign countries or organisations to impose blockades or sanctions or engage in other hostile activities against Hong Kong or China.

On 10 July 2025, Hong Kong national security police arrested four people, aged 15 to 47, for allegedly [conspiring to subvert state power](#) through a Taiwan-based group that advocates for the territory's independence. The four male suspects were linked to the Hong Kong Democratic Independence Union, a pro-independence political party, which was established in Taiwan in November 2024.

Civil society is concerned about the [conditions](#) for political prisoners jailed due to their pro-democracy activism. According to the Committee for Freedom in Hong Kong Foundation, prison guards prepare daily intelligence reports on political prisoners, restrict their contacts and lock them alone for weeks or months under the pretext of national security. Former political prisoners describe being forced to eat alone under watch, attend political indoctrination courses and endure sessions with psychologists who assess their renunciation of political activism. In October 2025, authorities held human rights defender Chow Hang-tung [in solitary confinement](#) for 18 days after she made an online speech in prison on having been nominated for the 2025 Nobel Peace Prize.

INCREASING TRANSNATIONAL REPRESSION



Police reward notices for eight pro-democracy activists living in exile (Photo Credit: RFA)

There have been increasing cases of transnational repression, with the Hong Kong government seeking to target human rights defenders in exile and their families at home.

Under SNSO article 23, the Hong Kong Secretary for Security can [declare an individual](#) to be an absconder if they are subject to an arrest warrant for a minimum of six months without appearing before a magistrate, and if the Secretary for Security 'reasonably believes' they are not in Hong Kong.

On 12 June 2024, the government [cancelled the passports of six democracy activists](#) who are in exile under the SNSO. The six, accused of national security crimes in Hong Kong and wanted by police, are British Consulate worker Simon

Cheng, activist Fok Ka-chi, activist Finn Lau, former legislator Nathan Law, activist Choi Ming-da and labour rights activist Christopher Mung.

In December 2024, Hong Kong national security police issued a fresh round of [arrest warrants](#) for six human rights defenders self-exiled to Canada and the UK. A reward of HK\$1 million (approx. US\$129,000) was offered for information leading to their arrests. The six are accused of committing national security offences including colluding with foreign forces and inciting secession.



Human rights defenders in exile face arrest warrants
(Photo Credit: HKFP)

The six are Chloe Cheung, an activist with the Committee for Freedom in Hong Kong, Tony Chung, an activist and former convenor of the now-disbanded pro-independence group Studentlocalism, Victor Ho, a YouTuber based in Canada, Chung Kim-wah, a political commentator and former pollster at the Hong Kong Public Opinion Research Institute, Carmen Lau, a former district councillor and now activist with the US-based civil society organisation Hong Kong Democracy Council, and Joseph Tay, a former actor and co-founder of the Canada-based civil society organisation HongKonger Station.

On 25 July 2025, Hong Kong police [announced a bounty](#) for 19 activists based outside the territory for their roles in what it called a subversive organisation abroad, accusing them of violating the NSL.

Police have described The Hong Kong Parliament group as aiming to promote self-determination and establish a Hong Kong constitution. The group's members are located in several countries, including Australia, Canada, Taiwan, Thailand, the UK and the USA. The group said on 30 June 2025 that it had held an [online vote](#) on its Facebook page to form a legislature aimed at 'opposing one-party dictatorship and tyranny and pursuing Hong Kong people ruling Hong Kong'.

As a result, a Hong Kong court issued an arrest warrant for activists Tony Choi, Johnny Fok, Victor Ho, Keung Ka-wai, Elmer Yuen and 14 others. The authorities announced a reward of HK\$200,000 (approx. US\$25,500) for each of the 15 activists and HK\$1 million (approx. US\$127,000) for information leading to the arrest of Choi, Fok, Ho and Yuen, who were already wanted by the authorities.

On 11 February 2026, a Hong Kong court found the father of a wanted [activist guilty of a national security violation](#) after he tried to close her education insurance policy and withdraw the funds. Kwok Yin-sang was the first person to be charged under the SNSO for 'attempting to deal with, directly or indirectly, any funds or other financial assets or economic resources' belonging to an absconder. He was charged for withdrawing an education savings insurance policy he bought for her when she was around two years old. On 26 February 2026, he was [sentenced](#) to eight months in jail.



US-based Hong Kong activist, Anna Kwok
(Photo Credit: ISHR)

His daughter, Anna Kwok, is a board member and former director of the US-based advocacy group Hong Kong Democracy Council, and is one of 34 [overseas activists wanted](#) by Hong Kong national security police since 2023. She is accused of colluding with foreign forces. Police have offered a bounty of HK\$1 million (approx. US\$127,000) for her arrest.

RESTRICTIONS AND CRACKDOWN ON PROTESTS

Article 17 of the Bill of Rights Ordinance supposedly guarantees the right to peaceful assembly. However, the Public Order Ordinance requires organisers to get a ‘notice of no objection’ from the government before proceeding and notify police of demonstrations involving over 30 people at least seven days in advance. Protests have dwindled following the passage of the national security laws and the arrest and prosecution of activists and protesters.

Authorities also banned the annual Tiananmen Square Massacre vigil gathering at Victoria Park for the first time in 2020, citing COVID-19 restrictions, and have [imposed ongoing restrictions](#) since. Despite this restrictive environment, small protests acts have been reported, particularly around the anniversary. In most cases, reprisals have been swift.

On 4 June 2024, police reportedly arrested four people and detained five others as authorities sought to [stamp out commemorations](#) of the massacre. Police said they made four arrests, including of a 68-year-old woman who chanted slogans, stating that those arrested were suspected to have committed offences ‘in connection with seditious intention’. Police took five other people in for questioning on suspicion of disrupting public peace but released them. Officers also led away an older man who had held up two handwritten posters listing democracy movements in mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan alongside a poem commemorating the Tiananmen Square movement.

Ahead of the anniversary, police [detained](#) performance artist Sanmu Chen in Causeway Bay, the busy Hong Kong shopping district where Victoria Park is located. Before officers approached him, Chen wrote the Chinese characters ‘8964’, which refer to the date of the massacre, in the air with his finger. He also mimed the Chinese traditional tomb-sweeping ritual of pouring wine onto the ground to mourn the dead. He was released the same night.

Hong Kong police [arrested or took away](#) at least 12 people on the anniversary of the massacre in June 2025. Police said that in Wan Chai and Eastern District, five men and five women aged between 15 and 69 were taken to police stations for investigation on suspicion of breaching the peace. Among those police took away were performance artist Chan Mei-tung and activist Lui Yuk-lin in Causeway Bay, while in Victoria Park, they removed a man holding an electric candle, a man standing silently in the rain and two women, including a girl holding flowers and dressed in a school uniform. Members of the League of Social Democrats were intercepted on their way to Causeway Bay, according to the party’s social media posts.

The [trial of three activists](#) who organised annual vigils to commemorate the massacre began in January 2026. They were arrested in 2021 and are [facing charges](#) under the NSL. trade unionist Lee Cheuk-yan, lawyer Chow Hang-tung and former lawmaker Albert Ho are accused of ‘inciting subversion of state power’.



Three leaders of the now-disbanded Hong Kong Alliance (Photo Credit: UCA News)

Ho has entered a guilty plea while the other two pleaded not guilty. The trio are part of the now-disbanded Hong Kong Alliance, founded in May 1989 to support students holding pro-democracy rallies. The three face up to 10 years in jail if convicted. They have been [held in pretrial detention](#) since 2021, having been repeatedly denied bail.

[According to Human Rights Watch](#), 10,279 people have been arrested in connection with the 2019 pro-democracy protests, among whom 2,328 ‘faced legal consequences’ including conviction.

ORGANISATIONS DISBANDED OR SHUT DOWN UNDER PRESSURE

The introduction of the NSL and SNSO has undermined the right to freedom of association, supposedly guaranteed under article 18 of the Bill of Rights Ordinance. These laws have greatly impeded civil society's ability to carry out its work. The entire staff of some organisations quit on the eve of the NSL's introduction. Many civil society organisations, political parties, social movements and trade unions have disbanded or closed their offices. Since 2020, around [60 civil society groups](#) have disbanded or halted operations.



Civic Party members at a press conference
(Photo Credit: RFA)

In March 2024, four days after the enactment of the SNSO, the Civic Party of Hong Kong [voluntarily dissolved](#). The Civic Party was founded in 2006 to promote democracy. Following the imposition of the NSL in 2020, three of its members were jailed, its elected politicians were unseated and a former politician was listed as a wanted fugitive. By the end of 2021, all Civic Party members had been ousted under China's law that disqualifies anyone deemed politically disloyal from contesting elections or holding public office in Hong Kong.

In April 2025, Hong Kong's oldest and largest pro-democracy political party, the Democratic Party, [moved to disband](#). One of the leading voices of opposition for the past three decades, the party started the process of dissolution following warnings from Chinese government officials. Founded by academics and lawyers three years before the handover to China, the Democratic Party had campaigned for universal suffrage and on issues including environmental conservation and labour rights, at a time when such matters could be openly discussed in Hong Kong.

On 13 June 2025, China Labour Bulletin, a civil society group, announced its decision to dissolve. Founded by labour activist Han Dongfang in 1994, the group supported labour movements in China with an aim of making unions truly representative and providing accurate information about Chinese labour activism.

On 30 June 2025, the League of Social Democrats was [disbanded](#). Party chair Chan Po Ying said: 'The red lines are now everywhere. Our decision to disband was because we were facing a lot of pressure'.

In June 2025, the Legislative Council [passed](#) the Trade Unions (Amendment) Bill. The bill bans anyone convicted of national security offences from serving in trade unions, empowers the government to reject union registrations on national security grounds and requires unions to seek approval before receiving international funding.

On 5 February 2026, the Hong Kong Federation of Students, established in 1958, [announced its dissolution](#) after 68 years, citing 'increasingly severe pressure' on members and supporters. It played a key role in uniting students, engaging on social issues and advocating for reform, including supporting democratic movements in Hong Kong and mainland China.

CRIMINALISATION OF EXPRESSION

Article 16 of the Bill of Rights Ordinance supposedly guarantees freedoms of expression and opinion. However, the CIVICUS Monitor has documented an alarming deterioration of the authorities' respect for the right to freedom of expression, including the use of restrictive laws to silence dissent.

Police reported that three people were [arrested](#) at Hong Kong's World Cup qualifying match against Iran on 7 June 2024 because they 'turned their backs toward the pitch and did not stand for the playing of the national anthem'. Hong Kong's National Anthem Law, passed in 2020, criminalises perceived 'insults' to the Chinese national anthem, punishable by up to three years in prison.

In August 2024, busker Li Jiexin was [sentenced](#) to two weeks in jail over unlicensed public performances of the protest anthem ‘Glory to Hong Kong’. His conviction marked the second time he had been sentenced to jail, both involving the protest song popularised at the height of pro-democracy protests in 2019.

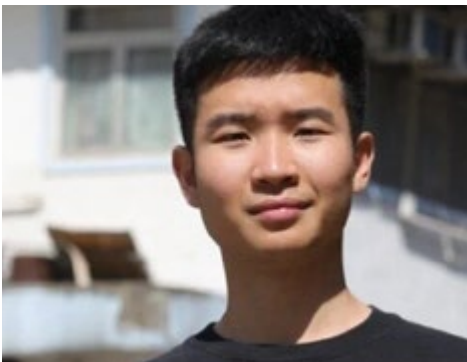


Chu Kai-pong, the first person convicted under the SNSO (Phot Credit: Next Shark)

In September 2024, Chu Kai-pong was [sentenced](#) to a year and two months in jail for sedition under SNSO section 24. He was arrested on 12 June 2024, the anniversary of the start of the 2019 protests, for wearing a T-shirt bearing the 2019 protest slogan, ‘Liberate Hong Kong, Revolution of Our Times’, and a yellow mask printed with the letters ‘FDNOL’, the abbreviation of another protest slogan, ‘Five Demands, Not One Less’.

The subversion charge alleges that Chan incited others to ‘organise, plan, commit or participate in... overthrowing the body of central power of the People’s Republic of China or the body of power of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region’. In the same month, police [arrested](#) an 18-year-old man in Kowloon, accusing him of leaving seditious messages on a toilet wall. A 19-year-old woman was [charged](#) with sedition on 26 August 2025 for allegedly promoting the Hong Kong Parliament group.

In October 2025, a 19-year-old woman pleaded guilty to [sedition](#) under the SNSO for producing and promoting videos for the Hong Kong Parliament and encouraging participation in its unofficial polls via social media between March and May 2025.



Student Miles Kwan Ching-fung (Photo Credit: Change.org)

In November 2025, authorities suppressed grassroots initiatives and peaceful criticism in response to [a fire that broke out](#) at Wang Fuk Court, a housing complex under maintenance at the time, which killed at least 151 people and injured 79. On 29 November 2025, police detained Miles Kwan Ching-fung, a university student who started an online petition calling for an independent investigation. The petition website drew over 10,000 signatures before it was shut down. Kwan was reportedly arrested on suspicion of ‘seditious intention’, and [released on bail](#) on 1 December 2025. In February 2026, [he was expelled](#) from the Chinese University of Hong Kong after a disciplinary review due to ‘multiple acts of misconduct’, according to a letter from the university.

In December 2025, Bruce Liu Sing-lee, chair of the Hong Kong Association for Democracy and People’s Livelihood, was [taken in](#) for questioning by the police force’s national security department. He was initially set to speak at a cancelled civil society-led press conference on the fire. Wong On-yin, a 71-year-old commentator, was the first person [charged](#) with national security-related offences in relation to commentary on the fire and [plans](#) to hold a press conference demanding accountability.

SILENCING OF JOURNALISTS AND MEDIA OWNERS

Press freedom has been under assault in Hong Kong since 2020. Since the introduction of the NSL, Hong Kong’s once-thriving independent media outlets have been targeted with raids and forced to closed and journalists have been criminalised.

Hong Kong was ranked 140th out of 180 countries and territories on the Reporters Without Borders [World Press Freedom Index](#) published in May 2026. The organisation noted that Hong Kong was once a bastion of press freedom but now takes orders directly from China and openly supports its attempts at censorship and

the dissemination of propaganda. Reporters Without Borders added that: ‘restrictive security laws apply to any journalist covering Hong Kong, whether they reside in the territory or not. Apple Daily and Stand News were forced to shut down in 2021, while more than five other independent media outlets closed down for fear of reprisals.’

On 26 September 2024, the Hong Kong District Court [sentenced](#) Stand News’ former chief editor Chung Pui-kuen to 21 months in jail, and former acting chief editor Patrick Lam to 11 months. The two were convicted in August 2024 of conspiring to publish seditious publications under the sedition law. Both journalists had already spent almost a year in pretrial detention. The [prosecution](#) of the journalists, along with Stand News’ parent company Best Pencil (Hong Kong) Limited, was based on 17 allegedly seditious articles, including interviews, news reporting, opinion pieces and profiles. Stand News, a non-profit digital news outlet, ceased operations and deleted its website in December 2021 after its newsroom was raided by over 200 national security police officers.

In a rare move on 6 December 2025, China’s national security arm in Hong Kong, the Office for Safeguarding National Security, [summoned](#) international journalists to warn them against spreading false information and ‘crossing red lines’ following critical coverage of the Wang Fuk Court fire.



Activists in the US outside Chinese Consulate for imprisoned Hong Kong media entrepreneur Jimmy Lai, February 2026 (Photo Credit: Apu Gomes/Getty Images)

On 9 February 2026, pro-democracy media owner Jimmy Lai, who has been in [detention](#) on multiple charges since 2019, was [sentenced](#) to 20 years in jail following his conviction on two counts under the NSL of ‘conspiracy to commit collusion with foreign forces’ and one count under the Crimes Ordinance of ‘conspiracy to commit sedition’.

Authorities said the [collusion charges](#) related to the publication of articles in Apple Daily, a former newspaper owned by Lai, that called on foreign countries to impose sanctions. Authorities also cited Lai’s meetings with US politicians and interviews with overseas media, his Twitter/X posts and his list of followers on the platform, which included prominent civil society organisations and foreign politicians supportive of the democracy movement. For the [sedition charge](#),

prosecutors claimed that 161 Apple Daily articles, including 33 by Lai, constituted seditious publications because they allegedly fuelled public distrust and hatred toward the authorities.

[According to human rights groups](#), Lai’s prosecution was marred by multiple serious violations of fair trial rights, with Lai tried by judges hand-picked by the Hong Kong government, denied a jury trial, subjected to prolonged pretrial detention and barred from having counsel of his choice.

Jimmy Lai founded the outspoken Apple Daily in 1995. Shortly after the NSL was introduced on 30 June 2020, around 200 police raided its headquarters. Apple Daily closed in June 2021 following another police raid and the freezing of its assets.

[UN experts](#) said Jimmy Lai’s conviction marked ‘another symbolic turn in the dramatic decline in fundamental freedoms and judicial independence in Hong Kong’ and ‘demonstrates the lengths the authorities are willing to go to silence dissent or criticism’.

Lai received his sentence alongside [eight others](#), including six former Apple Daily executives who had previously pleaded guilty to similar charges in the same case.

Publisher Cheung Kim-hung received a sentence of six years and nine months, associate publisher Chan Pui-man got seven years and editorial writer Yeung Ching-kee was sentenced to seven years and three months. Editor-in-chief Ryan Law, executive editor-in-chief Lam Man-chung and editorial writer Fung Wai-kong all received 10-year jail terms.



A Reporters Without Borders representative who intended to monitor Jimmy Lai's trial was deported from Hong Kong on arrival in April 2024. [According to Reporters Without Borders](#), their Taipei-based Advocacy Officer Aleksandra Bielakowska was detained for six hours, questioned and searched at Hong Kong's international airport before being deported.

CENSORSHIP OF THE ARTS



Video of "Glory to Hong Kong" - Anthem of The Hong Kong Protests (Photo Credit: YouTube/Ingen)

There have been multiple incidents of censorship of books, films, plays, songs and video games.

In May 2024, the [Hong Kong Court of Appeal overturned](#) a July 2023 lower court decision that had rejected the Hong Kong government's decision to ban the song 'Glory to Hong Kong' due to concerns it would have a 'chilling' effect on freedom of expression.

Hong Kong's Department of Justice has sought to ban the 'broadcasting, performing, printing, publishing, selling, offering for sale, distributing, disseminating, displaying or reproducing in any way' of the song, reflecting its

prominent role in the 2019 mass protests. The government has previously said people who engage with the song in any of the ways described could be prosecuted under the National Anthem Ordinance or charged with secession under the NSL, potentially leading to life imprisonment.

[YouTube said it would comply](#) with the court decision and block access inside Hong Kong to 32 videos deemed to be prohibited content. A YouTube spokesperson said the geo-blocking of videos would take effect immediately for Hong Kong viewers.

In June 2025, the government [barred](#) at least three publishers from participating in Hong Kong's largest book fair.

In the same month, police warned Hong Kong residents that [downloading or sharing a mobile game app](#) about defeating the communist regime would amount to sedition under the security laws. According to the website for Reversed Front: Bonfire, players can 'pledge allegiance' to Hong Kong, Mongolia, Taiwan, Tibet or Uyghur people, among other options, 'to overthrow the Communist regime'. The game, launched in April 2025, is no longer accessible on Apple's App Store or Google Play in Hong Kong.

In August 2025, the Taiwanese film Family Matters was [cut](#) from the Hong Kong International Film Festival due to [wording](#) that China rejected. In October 2025, [it was reported](#) that 50 films had been required to be edited, and 13 titles had not been approved for screening on national security grounds since Hong Kong amended its Film Censorship Ordinance in October 2021.

The [Film Censorship Ordinance was amended](#) in late October 2021 to include national security clauses. All films must now be approved by Office for Film, Newspaper and Article Administration before they are screened publicly in Hong Kong. Any that are deemed contrary to national security can be banned from being screened, or the authority can request changes such as the removal of scenes.

In March 2026, national security police [arrested](#) independent bookshop Book Punch founder Pong Yat-ming and three staff under the SNSO for allegedly 'knowingly selling a publication that has a seditious intention'. Officers raided the bookshop, seizing allegedly seditious publications, including 'The Troublemaker', a Jimmy Lai biography. Police released them on bail.



RECOMMENDATIONS

The government of Hong Kong should:

PROTECT CIVIL SOCIETY, HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS AND JOURNALISTS

- Repeal the NSL and SNSO, which are not compliant with the ICCPR and other international human rights laws and standards.
- Drop all criminal proceedings against activists, human rights defenders, journalists, political figures and others who have been targeted solely for the peaceful exercise of their rights to freedoms of expression and peaceful assembly and ensure that those already detained are immediately and unconditionally released.
- Ensure that all activists detained are treated in accordance with the Nelson Mandela Rules, formally called The UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, and thoroughly investigate all incidents of ill-treatment.
- End all form of transnational repression against Hong Kong activists in exile, including dropping charges against them, bounties for their capture, cancellation of their passports and targeting of their families in Hong Kong.
- Ensure the rights to freedom of association for civil society organisations and political parties and guarantee that no organisation is pressured to disband or shut down.

GUARANTEE THE RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

- Ensure that journalists can work freely and without fear of criminalisation or reprisals for expressing critical opinions or covering topics that the government may deem sensitive.
- Release all journalists detained and convicted for their expression and reporting, particularly former media owner Jimmy Lai and others from Apple Daily and Stand News.
- Halt the use of sedition provisions and other laws that criminalise expression, including criticism of the authorities.
- Take immediate steps to ensure that everyone can exercise the right to freedom of expression online and offline without interference.
- Remove any forms of censorship or bans of films, plays, songs and other artforms that are critical of the authorities.

RESPECT AND PROTECT THE RIGHT TO PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

- Abolish provisions in the Public Order Ordinance relating to the need for permission for protests and bring the ordinance into line with the ICCPR and other international laws and standards.
- Take all the measures necessary to respect and ensure the right of peaceful assembly and facilitate assemblies consistent with General Comment No. 37 of the UN Human Rights Committee.
- Lift the ban on all gatherings related to the anniversary of the Tiananmen Square Massacre.
- Drop all criminal proceedings against activists and protesters who have been targeted solely for the exercise of their right to peaceful assembly and ensure that those detained are immediately and unconditionally released and sentences are quashed.
- Provide recourse to judicial review and effective remedy, including compensation, in cases of unlawful denial of the right to freedom of peaceful assembly by state authorities.

**THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY SHOULD:**

- Consistently call for the immediate and unconditional release of all activists, human rights defenders, journalists, political figures and others detained for their activism or expression.
- Monitor the trials of arrested activists, human rights defenders, journalists, political figures and others and the conditions of those detained.
- Enact or amend legislation to effectively combat transnational repression in its physical and digital forms.
- Establish enforceable reporting mechanisms to receive and investigate transnational repression complaints, ensure timely follow-up and provide appropriate remedies for victims.
- Provide sustained financial, political and practical support to Hong Kong civil society organisations, including those operating on the ground, as well as activists, civic groups and human rights defenders in exile or in diaspora communities.
- Encourage relevant UN Special Rapporteurs to request country visits to Hong Kong and ensure sustained attention to the situation through periodic reports and thematic updates.