

Public increasingly backing radical Hong Kong protesters despite unease over violence, say academics, as Carrie Lam's government faces even greater resistance against extradition bill

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Moderate demonstrators out in force in Kowloon as movement remains united in spite of legislature storming by hard core of protesters

Sympathy for direct action stems from failure of government to respond to protester demands, say political commentators

Hong Kong's pro-democracy movement against the extradition bill received a shot in the arm on Sunday to keep the pressure on the government to completely withdraw the unpopular legislation, political commentators said after the mass rally in Kowloon. [1]

The fact the older generation had turned out in force to support youngsters spearheading the movement meant that the recent protest violence, widely condemned across the city, had not turned public opinion in favour of the administration, they said.

Speaking after Sunday's protest in Kowloon that organisers said was attended by more than 230,000 people, Dr Cheung Chor-yung, a senior teaching fellow at the City University's department of public policy, said: "By whatever measure, the turnout was huge.

"Some people are getting more sympathetic to the protesters because they see that the government is too stubborn and has not responded to the demands by the protesters despite rounds of protests, be they peaceful or violent.

"The general public may not support the mob that stormed the legislature, but that does not mean they would support the Carrie Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor government's handling of the issue."

Political analyst Dr Ma Ngok, of Chinese University, also said: "Members of the public have not distanced themselves from the young protesters. It is clear that people have more sympathy and understanding towards their actions."

Ma added upcoming protests in other districts would further weaken the government's credibility and legitimacy if it refused to respond to the protesters' demands.

Sunday's (Jul 7) march was the latest major protest sparked by anger over the government's handling of the unpopular extradition bill.

It was also the first major protest organised on the Kowloon side. The organisers claimed 230,000 people took part, while the police put the estimate at 56,000.

The most popular tourist area in Hong Kong, Tsim Sha Tsui, was on the verge of lockdown on Sunday, with landmarks swamped by protesters, shops shut, and the cross-border high-speed rail terminus turned into a no-go zone.

Police were braced for further violent clashes for the march, however the event passed off peacefully.

The police made their presence known along the march route, from Salisbury Garden at the waterfront of Tsim Sha Tsui to the express rail terminus in West Kowloon, to avoid a repeat of the ugly scenes of last Monday (Jul 1), when a mob broke into the legislature and went on a rampage during protests against the bill.

While the violence was widely condemned, it appeared the July 1 storming had not dispelled public sympathy for the protests against the now- suspended bill, which would have allowed for the transfer of fugitives from Hong Kong to jurisdictions with which the city has no such arrangement, notably mainland China.

The demonstrators, many dressed in black and wearing masks, carried banners calling for the full withdrawal of the bill, as well as the release of protesters arrested during previous clashes.

Some protesters chanted slogans in Mandarin, in the hope mainland visitors would sympathise with their cause. Some tourists said they appreciated the protesters were only exercising their rights, while some shop owners believed the impact on their businesses would be acceptable.

A 73-year-old protester, surnamed Hung, said he could understand the youngsters' anger.

"The ideal case was that we wouldn't need to storm [the Legco]," Hung said. "But the students and the citizens could bear no more. They felt that the government would not respond to their demands. "The government won't take you seriously If you are too peaceful. Sometimes force is needed. We can understand If the protesters go further."

Some protesters also launched a charm offensive to win over tourists.

University student Aaron Yuen, 19, went to distribute anti-extradition bill booklets he had compiled to mainland tourists.

"I want to engage mainland tourists directly to tell them of the evil in the bill, because they have little access to proper information from the outside world in China," said Yuen.

"Many of them don't even know the existence of these protests, let alone what they are about."

The booklets were written in simplified Chinese, a script used on the mainland, with a candy attached as a gift, so tourists from across the border could feel the "sincerity and decency" of Hongkongers, Yuen added.

Along Kowloon Park Drive, a tourist from Shanghai said he was vaguely aware of the anti-bill protests in Hong Kong.

"My friends and peers haven't talked about these protests," he said. "I think on the mainland many of us simply don't have access to such information.

"I personally won't mind the protests, which are a free expression of opinions, I would just go about my own business as planned."

Meanwhile, some 200 protesters gathered outside the China Hong Kong City Centre, where the ferry terminal is located, to reach out to mainlanders.

They held up their arms, waved and chanted Mandarin slogans, calling on the shoppers to join them.

Others attempted to trick the tourists, pointing to the West Kowloon high- speed rail terminus saying: "Shopping this way. Traitors that way [towards the shopping malls on Canton Road]."

Localist Ventus Lau Wing-hong, one of the march organisers, appealed to participants to "remain peaceful and graceful".

Links

[1] <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/3017589/passengers-hong-kong-high-speed-rail-link-face-serious>

- [2] <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/3017620/mass-rally-draws-tens-thousands-streets-kowloon-protest>
- [3] <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/law-and-crime/article/3017627/protesters-and-police-fight-pitched-battles-late-night>
- [4] <https://www.scmp.com/comment/opinion/article/3017595/protest-crisis-shows-governments-hong-kong-centric-approach-not>
- [5] <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/3017607/carrie-lams-top-ministers-venture-online-charm-offensive>

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<https://www.scmp.com/print/news/hong-kong/politics/article/3017622/public-increasingly-backing-radical-hong-kong-protesters>