

RESEARCH NOTE

Does the age of legislators matter to their representational behavior? Evidence from Hong Kong

Waikeung Tam 

Department of Political Science, Lingnan University, Tuen Mun, Hong Kong
Corresponding author. E-mail: wktam@ln.edu.hk

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Abstract

In this research note we examine the impacts of legislators' age on their representational behavior in Hong Kong by conducting content analyses of the questions raised by members of the Hong Kong legislature (LegCo) at the plenary meetings from 1998 to 2016. We explore whether young legislators were more likely than older legislators to represent youth interests. Our results show that legislators' age did not significantly affect their representational behavior. We propose three factors of this null finding. The first concerns the relatively low voter turnout among young people in Hong Kong. The second is related to the career incentives of legislators in authoritarian legislature. The last factor is the political affiliation of young legislators in Hong Kong.

Key words: Age representation; identity politics; political representation; representational behavior; substantive representation

1. Introduction

Does age affect elite behavior? Does the underrepresentation of young people in the legislature undermine their interests? Research on political representation has long focused on the role of identities, life experiences, and personal background of legislators in affecting their representational behavior (Burden, 2007). A substantial body of studies has examined how gender, race, and socio-economic class of legislators affect their representational behavior. Recently, nascent scholarship on age representation in legislatures has been produced, investigating the age composition of legislatures and the impacts of legislators' age on representational behavior.

This research note examines whether age affects elite behavior and whether the underrepresentation of young people in the legislature undermines their interests under an authoritarian setting – Hong Kong. It addresses a core question: whether legislators' age affects their representational behavior in the Hong Kong legislature (LegCo). Specifically, are young legislators more likely than older legislators to represent youth interests? We assess the representational behavior of the Hong Kong legislators by conducting content analyses of the questions they raised at LegCo's plenary meetings from 1998 to 2016.

Introducing the concept of age representation into the analysis of legislative politics in Hong Kong is significant for two reasons. First, Hong Kong has been striving for democracy since the 1980s. After several decades of gradual and partial democratization, has LegCo become a socially representative body, in terms of providing an adequate representation of youth, who are traditionally underrepresented in legislatures? (Norris and Franklin, 1997). As highlighted by Aarts and Thomassen's (2008: 14) survey, whether people feel they are represented by their members of parliament is an important factor affecting their satisfaction with democracy. Second, Hong Kong has seen very

relevant age-related political conflicts in the past decade. Unhappiness and political discontent of Hong Kong's youth have increased significantly in recent years (Chiu and Wong, 2018). They were the major participants in the 2009–10 Anti-Express Rail Campaign, the 2014 Umbrella Movement, the 2016 Mongkok Riot, and the 2019 Anti-Extradition Bill Movement (Lee *et al.*, 2019).

This research note proceeds as follows. The first section is a review of the literature on the role of age in affecting elite behavior especially representational behavior, age representation in legislatures, representation in authoritarian legislatures, and the major features of the Hong Kong legislature. The second section outlines the hypothesis of this study. The third part discusses the data and methodology. In the subsequent part, we highlight the results of this study. The final section is the conclusion, where we discuss the implications of our findings on the effect of age on elite behavior and the representation functions of LegCo under the hybrid regime.

2. Literature review

There is vast scholarship on the effect of social identities on elite behavior, particularly how legislators' social identities influence substantive representation. Burden (2007) argues that the personal traits and backgrounds of legislators importantly influence their behavior. Our literature review focuses on the effect of legislators' age. A growing amount of literature on age and political representation has explored two issues: (1) explanation for the age composition of legislatures and (2) the effect of legislators' age on legislative behavior.

2.1 Age composition of legislatures

Regarding the first issue, existing work explains the descriptive underrepresentation of younger deputies in legislatures. Based on an analysis of a dataset that includes 107 countries (excluding Hong Kong), Stockemer and Sundstrom (2018) find that as of 2017, young adults (aged 35 years and below) were underrepresented in legislatures, with only 10 percent representation in legislatures around the world. More importantly, the design of political institutions – electoral systems and age candidacy requirements – crucially influences the share of young adults in legislatures. Specifically, the proportional representation system and granting candidates the right to stand in elections at the age of 18 can enhance the presence of youth in legislatures. The proportional representation system and mixed systems will increase the presence of young legislators by 5–7%, and for every year that candidate age requirements are reduced, the share of young legislators will increase by 1% or more. Stockemer and Sundstrom's (2019) research on the European Parliament (EP) from 1979 to 2014 also demonstrates that young adults were descriptively underrepresented, and lowering the legal age to run for office can effectively increase the descriptive representation of young people in the EP. Krook and Nugent's (2018) analysis of parliaments in 144 countries made similar findings. Lower age eligibility requirements for running for political office signal greater openness to youth political participation, which can encourage youth to run for office at an earlier age. Finally, Joshi's (2013) analysis of 14 Asian countries (excluding Hong Kong) finds that young adults (aged 35 years and below) were severely underrepresented in legislatures, when compared to their proportion in the total population. By contrast, middle-aged adults were significantly over-represented. Joshi finds that the proportional representation system can facilitate the descriptive representation of youth in legislatures.

Summing up, the foregoing studies highlight the descriptive underrepresentation of young people in legislatures worldwide and explain the underlying factors. This underrepresentation merits scholarly attention for two important reasons. First, descriptive underrepresentation of youth can undermine the legitimacy of legislature and more broadly the political system, rendering them socially unrepresentative (Norris and Franklin, 1997). Political theorists such as Mansbridge (1999) and Young (2000) have argued that political inclusion of diverse social groups establishes trust and a more egalitarian society. Inclusion of youth, a traditional marginalized group in decision-making

bodies, is one example. Second, the underrepresentation of young people in legislatures may harm their interests. Youth may have different policy preferences than middle-aged and elderly people. Youth generally favor more public spending on education and childcare, whereas the elderly prefer pensions and health care subsidies (McClellan, 2019). Youth are also more supportive of environmental protection, gender equality, and same-sex marriage than the older generations (Joshi, 2013: 4; Stockemer and Sundstrom, 2018: 467–468). Given this variance of policy preferences, the descriptive underrepresentation of youth in legislatures may undermine their substantive representation. Middle-aged or elderly legislators may be less likely to bring the concerns of youth to the policy-making process.

2.2 Legislators' age and legislative behavior

Political representation scholarship examines how legislators' age influences their legislative behavior, including performance in office, party loyalty, and representation of youth/elderly. This section reviews these three aspects.

2.3 Legislators' age and performance in office

Hajek (2019) shows that older MPs sponsor more legislative proposals than younger MPs in the Czech Republic. This is because older MPs have more parliamentary and political experiences and reputation, which enhance their ability to draft legislative proposals.

2.4 Legislators' age and party loyalty

Meserve *et al.* (2009) investigate how age influences the career opportunities of members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and their voting behavior in the EP. It was found that young MEPs are more likely than their older colleagues to contravene the dictates of EP group leaders when voting in the EP. Young MEPs are significantly more likely to defect on integration-related bills than both middle-aged and elderly MEPs, especially as national elections draw nearer. This is because young MEPs have the largest potential to return to domestic politics, and they have to avoid upsetting national constituents and party leaders. By contrast, the opportunities of older MEPs to return to domestic-level office diminish, because working in Brussels creates a perception of being out of touch with domestic affairs. In their research on Japan, Nemoto *et al.* (2008) likewise find that legislators' age shapes their incentives to maximize their electoral fortunes and political careers and consequently their propensity to engage in dissidence against the party leadership. In the case of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, young and elderly legislators were more likely to rebel against the party leadership. This is because they had greater incentives for career advancement and were less reliant on access to party posts than their middle-aged colleagues.

The foregoing studies examine how legislators' age affects the types of legislative activities that they participate in and their propensity to follow or defect from the group or party leadership when voting. However, they have not investigated whether legislators' age will affect their likelihood of representing different age groups. Specifically, are young legislators more likely to promote the interests of youth whereas elderly legislators are more likely to represent elderly interests? McClellan (2019) and Curry and Haydon (2018) are the pioneers in this area of research.

2.5 Legislators' age and youth/elderly representation

In his research on the impact of mayors' age on their likelihood to represent different age groups in Japan, McClellan (2019) demonstrates that young mayors are more likely than elderly mayors to represent youth by increasing expenditure on child welfare relative to elderly welfare. McClellan hypothesizes and tests four potential reasons for this phenomenon. First, young mayors possess a

longer time horizon, both as younger citizens and as politicians with a longer future political career. This may motivate them to emphasize long-term policies like investment in young people. The role played by time horizon is unique to age but not to other demographic characteristics of politicians such as gender, race, and class. Second, young mayors may be affected by their personal experiences as youth themselves. Third, young mayors may have more electoral incentives to prioritize youth concerns because they depend on the votes of young people more than elderly mayors. Lastly, there may be generational patterns in pathways to the mayor's office that shape mayors' representational behavior. McClean's analysis of over 10,000 Japanese mayoral candidates highlights that longer time horizons and electoral incentives drive young mayors to prioritize youth concerns relative to those of the elderly.

Based on the study of bills introduced by members of the US Congress, Curry and Haydon (2018) examine the impact of legislators' age on their likelihood to represent senior interests. Curry and Haydon suggest that older legislators may share the values and ideologies of senior citizens because of their similar ages and life experiences. Indeed, they find that older legislators were more likely to introduce bills addressing lower salience senior issues than their younger colleagues, regardless of the number of elderly voters in their districts.¹ However, in districts with a sizeable proportion of senior constituents, lawmakers were more likely to initiate bills related to higher salience senior issues, regardless of a lawmaker's age.² Curry and Haydon conclude that lawmakers' age matters to their attentiveness to elderly interests, but the age effect is conditioned by the relative salience of each senior issue. Curry and Haydon suggest that as older Americans are likely to mobilize when a senior issue becomes politically salient, lawmakers regardless of their age must act upon their constituents' (elderly) concerns.

Taken together, McClean and Curry and Haydon demonstrate that age affects elite behavior (legislator behavior) in two established democracies – Japan and the USA. Their finding, however, may not be generalized to non-democratic regimes like Hong Kong. Recent research on representation in authoritarian regimes demonstrates that distortions of issue representation often happen in authoritarian legislatures.

2.6 Representation in authoritarian legislatures

Manion (2014) highlights that delivering local public goods, not debate on government policy, is the focus of local congressional representation in China today. Truex (2016) argues that legislators in China have actively represented the interests of their constituents on the regime's weak or no preference issues but carefully navigated away from sensitive issues core to the authoritarian state. Truex describes this representation as 'representation within bounds.' Schuler (2020) also argues that legislators in Vietnam have avoided debating sensitive issues such as information policy and public security. Instead, they focused on issues that the autocratic leaders have delegated to the government. The aforementioned studies show that distortions of issue representations are common in authoritarian legislatures. Given that certain youth-centric issues such as political participation and engagement may be politically sensitive in Hong Kong (particularly in view of the youth-led social movements in Hong Kong in the last two decades), will distortions of issue representation commonly found in authoritarian legislatures affect youth representation and the link between legislator age and youth representation in LegCo? We will return to this important issue in the discussion section.

2.7 Major features of LegCo

During the period of this study, Hong Kong had a hybrid political system. The Chief Executive, head of the executive branch, was handpicked by a pro-Beijing, 1,200-member Election Committee. LegCo was a semi-democratic legislature. It had 70 members, of which 35 were elected from geographical constituencies (universal suffrage) and five from the District Council (Second) functional constituency.

¹Lower salience senior issues referred to those senior issues that got less coverage in the *New York Times*. Examples included elderly abuse, late-life housing, continuing education, and nursing home regulation (Curry and Haydon, 2018).

²Higher salience senior issues were those issues that received an above-the-median amount of coverage in the *New York Times*, such as health policy issues.

Table 1. Paths through which young, middle-aged, and elderly legislators gained their seats in LegCo

	Young legislators		Middle-aged legislators		Elderly legislators	
	GC	FC	GC	FC	GC	FC
1998–2000	1 (50%)	1 (50%)	17 (35%)	31 (65%)	2 (22%)	7 (78%)
2000–2004	0 (0%)	1 (100%)	22 (43%)	29 (57%)	2 (29%)	5 (71%)
2004–2008	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	27 (54%)	23 (46%)	2 (22%)	7 (78%)
2008–2012	2 (100%)	0 (0%)	27 (60%)	18 (40%)	0 (0%)	12 (100%)
2012–2016	0 (0%)	4 (100%)	27 (66%)	14 (34%)	11 (48%)	12 (52%)
Average	3 (33%)	6 (67%)	120 (51%)	115 (49%)	17 (28%)	43 (72%)

GC, geographical constituency elections; FC, functional constituency elections.
Young legislators: legislators aged 35 or below.

The latter were also elected by popular elections. The remaining 30 members were returned from functional constituencies. Functional constituency elections are undemocratic, because they violate the principle of equal voting rights. The voters of some functional constituencies are members of a profession, such as lawyers and teachers. Nevertheless, the majority of functional constituencies use a corporate voting method under which the voters are companies or unions.

Members of LegCo could be broadly divided into pro-democracy and pro-establishment camps. The pro-democracy camp takes a progressive stance toward democratic development, human rights, and the rule of law. It is also more critical toward the Hong Kong government and Beijing. By contrast, the pro-establishment camp adopts a conservative approach toward democratization, the rule of law, and human rights. Additionally, it is more supportive of the regimes in Hong Kong and Beijing. The pro-establishment camp held more than half of the legislative seats.

Table 1 shows the paths through which legislators of different age groups gained their seats in LegCo during the period of our study. Due to the small number of young legislators (less than 10), we cannot make any inferences from the existing statistics. Close to half of the middle-aged legislators obtained their seats through geographical constituency elections and another half through functional constituency elections. Concerning elderly legislators, most of them (72%) gained their seats through functional constituency elections.

In response to the Anti-Extradition Bill Movement and the landslide victory of the pro-democracy camp in the 2019 District Council election, Beijing imposed severe measures to repress the opposition in Hong Kong. The National Security Law was implemented in the city in 2020. In 2021, Beijing turned back the clock on democratization in Hong Kong. For example, a Beijing-led vetting committee is established to decide who can stand in the elections. Legislative seats elected by universal suffrage are cut to 22% of the total (the smallest since universal suffrage was introduced in 1991). These measures turn LegCo into an authoritarian legislature and may distort representation of sensitive youth-related issues in future.

3. Hypothesis

Based on the insights derived from the literature review, this study makes the following hypothesis. As youth themselves, young legislators may share the values, ideologies, and concerns faced by youth (Curry and Haydon, 2018; McClean, 2019). Moreover, as McClean (2019) argues, young politicians may have longer time horizons and more dependent on the votes of young people. In view of these potential mechanisms, the hypothesis of this study is:

Hypothesis 1: Young legislators are more likely than older legislators to promote youth interests by raising more youth-centric questions in LegCo's plenary meetings.³

³While all legislators age and move from being young to middle-aged and old and therefore middle-aged and old legislators may also share and support youth concerns, there is relatively more evidence showing that the *current* (emphasis

Although research like that of Curry and Haydon (2018) shows that the age composition of voters in the electoral district significantly affects legislators' representational behavior, the variable 'age composition of constituents' is not applicable to functional constituency legislators in Hong Kong. This is because the majority of functional constituencies adopt a corporate voting method under which only companies and unions are eligible to vote. For functional constituencies which adopt individual voting method, information about their age composition is unavailable. Regarding geographical constituency elections, information about the age composition of constituents is not available for the legislative sessions of 1998–2000 and 2000–2004. Thus, our analysis only includes data since 2004.

4. Data and methodology

This study covers the legislative sessions of 1998–2000, 2000–2004, 2004–2008, 2008–2012, and 2012–2016. The dependent variable is legislator policy preferences, that is whether and the extent to which a legislator has represented youth interests. This is measured by analyzing the questions (both oral and written) raised by legislators during the query session at LegCo plenary meetings.⁴ During the query session, members of LegCo question government secretaries about matters for which they are responsible. No more than 22 questions may be raised at any query session and each member can at most raise three questions. Among these 22 questions, six are oral questions and the remaining are written questions.

For this study, we have created a database that contains all the questions raised by members of LegCo during the query sessions at LegCo plenary meetings. In total, 11,373 questions were raised between 1998 and 2016. Our data analysis excluded the President of LegCo because the President presides over the plenary meeting and does not raise any questions.

This study uses the parliamentary questions, rather than the bills initiated by members of LegCo, to measure their policy preferences, for two reasons. First, Article 74 of the Basic Law forbids legislators from introducing bills that will incur public expenses or affect the operation of the government. Accordingly, a vast majority of the bills were introduced by the executive branch rather than by LegCo members. Second, the government has relatively weak control over the questions and concerns that individual legislators can address during the query sessions. In other words, it is relatively difficult for the government to control the agenda of the query sessions.⁵

We argue that content analyses of questions can allow us to accurately assess legislator policy preferences. Martin (2011: 260) highlights that content analyses of parliamentary questions enable researchers to understand the policy preferences of individual legislators. Scholarship on legislative politics in authoritarian and democratic countries has illustrated the usefulness of this research method. In their study of the policy preferences of the delegates to the Vietnamese National Assembly, Malesky and Schuler (2010) conduct content analyses of the questions asked by the delegates during the plenary meetings. Drawing on parliamentary questions asked during Question Time, Jacob (2014) explores the impact of legislator gender on their legislative activities in the Indian parliament. Finally, Mugge *et al.* (2019) rely on content analyses of parliamentary questions to investigate the policy preferences of ethnic minority female legislators in the Dutch Parliament.

Our study defines youth as people aged from 18 to 35 years. Stockemer and Sundstrom (2018: 478) highlight that this is the most common operationalization found in political representation literature.

added) rather than the previously shared interests have affected representational behavior in the USA and Japan (see Curry and Haydon, 2018; McClean, 2019).

⁴There is an important difference between oral and written questions. Legislators pose an oral question to the government secretary during the query session. After the secretary provides an oral answer, the original questioner has the privilege to ask the first supplementary question. After that, other legislators can raise their own supplementary questions. Supplementary questions allow legislators to directly grill the secretaries about government policies and therefore provide more opportunities to hold the government accountable. By contrast, written questions only request government secretaries to provide written replies.

⁵Pro-establishment parties can control the question contents of their members and prevent them from asking politically sensitive questions. But the query sessions can provide pro-democracy legislators with much room to challenge the regime.

Norris and Franklin (1997: 189) and Erikson and Josefsson (2021: 87) also define the younger generation as people aged 35 years and below. The Hong Kong government likewise adopts this definition.⁶ Regarding middle-aged and elderly people, we define them as people aged 36–59 and 60 or above, respectively. In this study, the definition of young, middle-aged, and elderly legislators follows the aforesaid criteria.

We took the following steps to identify parliamentary questions that primarily addressed youth concerns in Hong Kong. First, we reviewed the literature on youth representation and Hong Kong politics to locate major issues faced by youth. The literature we studied included, but was not limited to: *Journal of Youth Studies*, *Intergenerational Justice Review*, Busemeyer *et al.* (2009), Tremmel (2010), Joshi (2013), Stockemer and Sundstrom (2018, 2019), Krook and Nugent (2018), Yip and Loh (2008), Ma (2011), Ng (2019), Xie (2011), Chiu and Wong (2018), and McClean (2019). We also consulted surveys on young people in Hong Kong conducted by local universities such as the University of Hong Kong and the Chinese University of Hong Kong, to understand the major concerns of young people.⁷ The literature and survey results show that the following issues are most relevant for youth in Hong Kong: environment and heritage protection, tertiary education, student loans, youth (un)employment, youth housing needs, health concerns of youth, and youth political participation and engagement. In order to be considered as a youth-centric question, a question must satisfy one of the following two conditions. First, the question is closely related to one of the aforementioned issues. Second, the question includes the word ‘youth,’ because a youth-centric question can be related to issues other than those mentioned above.

Here are two examples to illustrate how the questions were coded. In the LegCo meeting on 30 January 2013, legislator Chan Hak-kan inquired on the progress of the government-proposed youth hostel scheme and whether the government would relax the stringent eligibility criteria. Under the scheme, the government sponsors non-governmental organizations to build youth hostels. The objective is to provide working youth with their own living space. The age limit of applicants for these youth hostels is 35 and all tenants can at most reside in hostel units for five years. Moreover, Chan asked how the government can ensure that it will adequately consider youth housing needs when formulating housing policies and whether it will expand the youth hostel scheme.⁸ Since this question concerns youth housing needs, it was coded as a youth-centric question. The second example concerns a question raised by legislator Ip Wai-ming on 2 December 2009. Ip asked how the government would help youth from Hong Kong who encountered accidents during their stay overseas under the Working Holiday Scheme.⁹ Since this question explicitly mentioned the word ‘youth’ and focused on the assistance offered to Hong Kong’s youth overseas, we coded it as a youth-centric question.

One coder read all the questions and hand coded each question as youth-centric or not. A second coder randomly chose half of the questions (out of the total 11,373) for coding. Cohen’s κ was run to determine if there was agreement between two coders’ judgment on the categorization of questions. There was strong agreement between the two coders’ judgment ($\kappa = 0.947$, 95% CI 0.9235–0.9705; $P < 0.001$).¹⁰

The demographic variables of legislators, including their gender, tenure (the number of years that had served as a legislator at the beginning of each legislative session), and their education level were

⁶Matthew Cheung said that government advisory bodies have increased 20 young people’, *Hong Kong Economic Journal*, 15 January 2019, p. A14.

⁷For example, we consulted the surveys ‘Social Attitudes of the Youth Population in Hong Kong’ conducted by the Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies at the Chinese University of Hong Kong in May–June 2010 and ‘Political Participation, Intentions, Values and Psychological Distress among Youth in Hong Kong’ conducted by the Department of Social Work at the University of Hong Kong in early 2020.

⁸The *Hong Kong Hansard*, 30 January 2013, written question 19, p. 77.

⁹The *Hong Kong Hansard*, 2 December 2009, written question 11, p. 59.

¹⁰The two coders were the author’s research assistants. They hold a bachelor’s degree in social sciences and received extensive training by the author. If the coding of the two coders was different, the author read and coded the question again.

controlled for in the data analysis. The data set was organized with one observation per legislator for each legislative session.

The data for this research were primarily based on the LegCo website, which contains detailed information about the operation of LegCo, including the proceedings of its plenary meetings. The *Hong Kong Hansard* records verbatim the proceedings of every LegCo plenary meeting. Information about the questions raised by legislators at the plenary meetings came from the *Hong Kong Hansard*.¹¹ The demographic background of each legislator, including their age, gender, education level, and tenure came from the 'Database on Legislative Council Members' on the LegCo website.¹² Finally, major Hong Kong newspapers provided additional sources of information.

To assess whether young legislators are more likely to represent youth interests in Hong Kong, we first quantified their presence in LegCo. Tables 2 and 3 report the breakdown of LegCo members and the Hong Kong adult population by their age and two salient points are noted. First, LegCo was dominated by middle-aged and elderly members, whereas youth were a minority (see Table 2). Second, compared to the age composition of the adult population (Table 3), young people were descriptively underrepresented in LegCo. During 1998–2012, 26–33% of the adult population was aged 20–34. However, the proportion of young LegCo members was only 6% or below.¹³ A question arises: had descriptive underrepresentation of youth in LegCo affected substantive representation of youth?

Before discussing the empirical tests and findings, we report the descriptive data on youth-centric questions raised by members of LegCo. Table 4 shows that in total, 989 youth-centric questions were asked.

We also classified all the youth-centric questions into different topics and Table 4 reports the result. 'Environmental protection' and 'conservation of heritage and monuments' accounted for the vast majority of youth-centric questions. Ten percent of youth-centric questions focused on tertiary education (including 'college student loans/tuition fees,' 'improving access to tertiary education,' 'quality of tertiary education,' and 'shortage of university student hostels'). 'Youth political participation and engagement' – a central concern among Hong Kong's youth since the late 2000s – only accounted for about 1% (Table 4).¹⁴ This low figure stands in sharp contrast to youth political activism in various social movements since the late 2000s (e.g., the 2009–10 Anti-Express Rail Campaign, the 2014 Umbrella Movement, the 2016 Mongkok Riot, and the 2019 Anti-Extradition Bill Movement).

5. Empirical tests and findings

The dependent variable of this study is the extent to which a legislator represented youth interests. This is measured by the percentage of youth-centric questions asked by a legislator in each legislative session, which is calculated as the number of youth-centric questions divided by the total number of questions asked by a legislator. Bayesian multilevel zero-inflated β regression models using the logit transformation were conducted.¹⁵ The *brms* package (Bürkner, 2017) in the R software was used. Legislator's age and the age composition of voters in geographical constituencies were entered as independent variables. Legislator's gender, tenure, and education level were entered as control variables.

¹¹<https://www.legco.gov.hk/archive/english/archive.htm>. Accessed 16 May 2019.

¹²See https://app.legco.gov.hk/member_front/english/library/index.aspx. Accessed 16 May 2019.

¹³As mentioned in our literature review, young people are descriptively underrepresented in parliaments around the globe. Stockemer and Sundstrom (2018: 469) highlight that as of 2017, young people on average had only 10% representation in parliaments around the world. Thus, young generation is not particularly underrepresented in Hong Kong when compared with other countries.

¹⁴An example of questions on youth political participation was raised by pro-democracy legislator Kam Nai-wai on 3 February 2010. In view of the refusal of the Chief Executive of the HKSAR to meet the young protestors during the Anti-Express Rail Campaign, Kam asked when the government leaders would meet the young protestors and the plan by the government to seriously consult the opinions of young people on its policies. Additionally, Kam asked the age composition of the members of the Commission on Youth and the Commission's effectiveness to understand the concerns of young people. *Hong Kong Hansard*, 3 February 2010, oral question 4, p. 4753.

¹⁵Online Appendix 1 explains why our study used the Bayesian multilevel zero-inflated regression model.

Table 2. Age distribution of LegCo members (1998–2012) (%)

	1998	2000	2004	2008	2012
20–34	2	0	0	3	6
35–39	5	3	2	2	4
40–59	78	85	83	73	55
60–64	13	10	5	13	26
65 and above	2	2	10	8	9
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Compiled by the author based on the Database on Legislative Council Members.

Table 3. Distribution of Hong Kong's adult population by age group (1998–2012) (%)

	1998	2000	2004	2008	2012
20–34	32.7	31.2	28.1	27.2	26.2
35–39	14.2	13.6	11.7	10.3	9.6
40–59	34.1	35.8	40.7	41.5	40.5
60–64	5.2	5.1	4.3	5.4	7.2
65 and above	13.8	14.4	15.2	15.6	16.6
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Sources: Compiled by the author based on various government statistical reports.

Legislator, legislative session, and party affiliation were entered as random effects. Results and credible intervals (CrI) of the estimates are shown in Table 5.

Our results reject Hypothesis 1. Legislators' age was not significant in predicting the percentage of youth-centric questions a legislator would ask (95% CrI -0.05 to 0.03). Young legislators were not more likely than older legislators to represent youth interests.¹⁶

Our results show that the percentage of young voters and young electors in geographical constituencies was not significant in predicting the percentage of total, oral, and written youth-centric questions asked by legislators returned from geographical constituencies.¹⁷

Moreover, gender, tenure, and the education level of a legislator did not significantly predict the percentage of youth-centric questions a legislator would ask (see Table 5).

We also differentiated between oral and written questions within the robustness analyses in order to examine whether there were substantial distinctions between the two types of questions. Our results did not find any substantial differences. Legislators' age did not significantly predict the percentage of oral or written youth-centric questions asked by legislators (see Table 6 in online Appendix 3).

Since the category of environmental protection makes up 77% of youth-centric questions, we conducted additional analysis to investigate the results without this category included. Table 7 (in online Appendix 4) reports the results after excluding the category of environmental protection and we did not find any substantial differences.

6. Discussion and conclusion

This study investigates whether age affects elite behavior and whether the underrepresentation of young people in the legislature undermines their interests, using Hong Kong as a case study. Our results show that legislators' age did not significantly affect their representational behavior. Young members of LegCo were *not* more likely to represent youth concerns by asking more youth-centric questions during the query sessions of LegCo's plenary meetings. Our study results are contrary to

¹⁶It should be noted that the null relation between legislators' age and their question behavior does not necessarily mean that young people's interests are underrepresented.

¹⁷Results are available in online Appendix 2.

Table 4. Categorization of youth-centric questions (1998–2016)

	Number of questions
Environmental protection	765 (77%)
Conservation of heritage and monuments	50 (5%)
College student loans/college tuition fees	36 (4%)
Improving access to tertiary education	26 (3%)
Career development	24 (2%)
Quality of tertiary education	23 (2%)
Youth unemployment	9 (1%)
Housing needs of youth	8 (1%)
Youth political participation/engagement	7 (1%)
Shortage of university student hostels	6 (1%)
Quality and availability of vocational training programs for youth	4 (0.4%)
Health concerns of youth	3 (0.3%)
Youth suicide	3 (0.3%)
Others	25 (3%)
Total	989 (100%)

Source: Compiled by the author.

Table 5. Results of zero-inflated β regression for the percentage of the overall youth-centric questions asked by legislators

	Estimate (95% CrI)	Exp ^a
Intercept	-0.98 (-4.60 to 2.65)	0.38
Age	-0.01 (-0.05 to 0.03)	0.99
Tenure	0.02 (-0.02 to 0.06)	1.02
Gender: male	-0.33 (-0.89 to 0.23)	0.72
College: yes	0.25 (-0.49 to 0.98)	1.28

^aExponentiated estimate.

those of McClean (2019) and Curry and Haydon (2018), who highlight that politicians' age matters to their representational behavior.

The null finding of this study indicates that members of LegCo, especially young members, have not actively represented the young generation. This may be one of the reasons why Hong Kong had seen large-scale protests in recent decades that were predominantly led by young people. This issue also explains why it is important to study legislator behavior in Hong Kong.

6.1 Low voter turnout among young people

Why were younger LegCo members not more likely than older legislators to represent youth concerns? We propose three possible factors of this null finding. The first concerns the relatively low voter turnout among young people in Hong Kong. Table 8 (in online Appendix 5) reports the voter turnout in the Legislative Council elections among three age groups. Young people had the lowest voter turnout in three (out of six) Legislative Council elections. Middle-aged people had the highest voter turnout in every legislative election. Moreover, young people had the lowest voter registration rate for the Legislative Council elections between 2000 and 2016 (see Table 9 in online Appendix 5). Young people's low voter turnout was seen in District Council elections as well. Table 10 (in online Appendix 5) demonstrates that young people had the lowest voter turnout in all the post-1997 District Council elections. Given that getting re-elected is a major goal of politicians, the relatively low voter turnout among young people in Hong Kong provides little electoral incentive for the politicians to actively represent their interests. Instead, members of LegCo are likely to have more incentive to represent the middle-aged people in view of their higher voter registration and turnout in the Legislative Council elections (and District Council elections). Since young people's relatively low voter turnout may have contributed to the null finding of this study, one may argue that besides age, electoral

incentive is equally if not more important in affecting elite behavior (legislator behavior). The significance of voter turnout also implies that the descriptive underrepresentation of young people in legislature may not necessarily harm their interests. This is because if young people have a high voter turnout (at least comparable to other age groups), this electoral incentive will motivate legislators to actively represent their interests.

6.2 Career incentives and representation in authoritarian legislatures

The second reason for the null finding of this study is related to the career incentives of legislators in authoritarian legislatures. Truex (2016) argues that deputies to China's National People's Congress (NPC) must perform their representation role within bounds. The Chinese Communist Party will punish all unbounded representational behavior. Truex's argument sheds light on the career incentives and representational behavior of Hong Kong's legislators especially the pro-establishment camp. Like their NPC counterparts, the legislative careers of the pro-establishment legislators in Hong Kong are controlled by Beijing. Beijing will also punish any unbounded behavior of the pro-establishment politicians and effectively end their political career. One example is the dismissal of the pro-establishment legislator James Tien from the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (China's top advisory body) during the 2014 Umbrella Movement. Beijing called the pro-establishment politicians to support the Hong Kong government during the Movement. Tien was sacked for his failure to follow Beijing's policy by calling Hong Kong's Chief Executive C.Y. Leung for resignation during LegCo's query session. Since youth have actively participated in social movements in Hong Kong since the 2000s, the pro-establishment legislators might have less incentive to focus on youth-related topics especially the sensitive issues like greater participation in the policy-making process.

Compared to their pro-establishment colleagues, Beijing has less influence over the political careers of the pro-democracy legislators. That said, the pro-democracy legislators also have concern about raising sensitive youth-related issues. Such concern has become more acute since the rise of the radical localists in the early 2000s. Hong Kong's younger generation tends to support the pro-democracy camp. However, since the early 2000s, disillusionment with the traditional moderate democrats has spread and more young people have turned to support the radical localists. As shown by Lam and Cooper (2018), the radical localists and their young supporters have advocated highly sensitive demands and issues, such as a separate Hong Kong identity and an independent state, which directly threaten the core interests of the authoritarian Chinese state.

The career incentives under authoritarian legislature may also help explain the content of youth-centric questions. Table 4 shows that youth-centric questions focused on environmental protection and college education. In a post-materialist society like Hong Kong, young people have greater aspiration for political participation and engagement (Ma 2011). However, only 1% of youth-centric questions were about this issue. Truex (2016) and Schuler (2020) argue that legislators under authoritarianism avoid politically sensitive issues in their legislative work. It is likely that Hong Kong's legislators (especially the pro-establishment legislators) tend to avoid asking questions on youth political participation, so as to minimize youth political activism and the subsequent challenge to the regime in Hong Kong and Beijing.

Summing up, given the career incentives under authoritarian legislature and the politically sensitive nature of certain youth issues (especially since the 2000s), members of LegCo (regardless of their age) have strong incentives not to actively represent the voice of young people.

6.3 Political affiliation of young legislators in Hong Kong

Indeed, the career incentives of the pro-establishment legislators are intricately linked to another factor of the null finding of this study, namely the political affiliation of young legislators. During the period of this study, there were nine young legislators (aged 35 or below) in LegCo. Most of them (seven out of nine) belonged to the pro-establishment camp. These young pro-establishment legislators

were Bernard Chan (1998–2000, 2000–2004), Starry Lee (2008–2012), Chan Hak-kan (2008–2012), Steven Ho (2012–2016), Kwok Wai-keung (2012–2016), and Tang Ka-piu (2012–2016). Given that Beijing dominates the legislative careers of the pro-establishment legislators and youth have been the major actors of social movements in Hong Kong since the 2000s, these young pro-establishment legislators do not want to emphasize youth issues, especially the sensitive ones.

This study of Hong Kong's legislature finds that age does not affect elite behavior. Younger legislators in Hong Kong are not more likely than older legislators to represent youth interests. We suggest that this null finding is caused by three factors. The first is the relatively low voter turnout of young people in Hong Kong. The second concerns the political affiliation of young legislators in Hong Kong (most of them belonged to the pro-establishment camp). The third, which we believe is more important, is the career incentives of legislators under authoritarianism.

The important role of the career incentives under authoritarian legislature has an important implication. Unlike Curry and Haydon (2018) and McClean (2019) who find that age affects elite behavior in democracies (the USA and Japan), punishment and rewards from the authoritarian leaders may be a more crucial determinant of elite behavior in authoritarian legislatures. In other words, punishment and rewards imposed by the authoritarian party replace social identities (including age) in determining legislators' representational behavior. Does similar situation of youth representation also happen in legislatures under other authoritarian regimes? This important issue should be addressed by political representation research in future.

Supplementary material. The supplementary material for this article can be found at <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1468109922000159> and <https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=doi:10.7910/DVN/H7RTYT>

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Waikeung Tam is Research Assistant Professor in Political Science at Lingnan University, Hong Kong. His research interests focus on legislative politics and judicial politics in authoritarian regimes.