



[Hong Kong Charges 47 Pro-Democracy Advocates Under the Region's Controversial National Security Law](#)

Earlier this week, authorities in Hong Kong detained 47 democracy advocates on charges of 'conspiracy to commit subversion' in the largest crackdown to date against the region's opposition movement since the implementation of last summer's controversial national security law. The legislation is part of the Chinese regime's clear efforts to suppress pro-democracy forces in Hong Kong and tighten its grip over the city, and has been criticized by rights groups, international governments, and lawyers as a violation of Beijing's promise to respect freedoms and the high degree of autonomy in the special administrative region. Many of those detained during this most recent wave of arrests are being prosecuted for helping organize last July's primaries, which saw over half a million citizens vote to choose pro-democracy candidates for the city's Legislative Council elections. Over the past year, mass resignations and disqualifications of lawmakers from the opposition camp have left the legislature a largely pro-Beijing body. Government officials from around the world have condemned the latest activist detentions, with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken saying that political participation and freedom of expression should not be criminalized.

The Chinese government in Beijing imposed the Hong Kong National Security Law back in June of last year to quell dissent following months of anti-government protests. The legislation punishes perceived acts of subversion and secession, among others, with possible life imprisonment. Since its implementation last summer, a significant number of activists have either been arrested or fled overseas. In addition to activists, the law also targets opposition lawmakers and as such, many elected legislators have been disqualified or forced to resign. In the case of the most recent detentions, authorities have attempted to argue that the advocates' participation and role in organizing last July's primaries was part of a plan to paralyze Hong Kong's legislature and subvert power from the state. The group had been previously arrested during a police operation a couple of months ago back in January, but were then released before being detained again this week. The latest crackdown on dissenting voices in Hong Kong comes as Chinese officials prepare to unveil electoral reforms aimed at further diminishing the influence of opposition forces there in public office.

In a show of solidarity with the detained activists, hundreds of protesters gathered outside the courthouse during the hearing proceedings. Many of the demonstrators were dressed in black – the color associated with the 2019 anti-government protests – and raised the three-finger salute that has become the symbol of resistance against authoritarian rule in nearby Myanmar. Police displayed warning flags, notifying some in the crowd of people that they could be deemed as being in violation of the national security law or COVID-19 social distancing protocols. Inside the court, prosecutors opposed bail and requested a three-month adjournment to further investigate. Meanwhile, the defense teams argued against the proposed delay and questioned why the charges had been put forward if time was still needed for the prosecutors to prepare their case.

Observers lament that with this newest round of activist detentions, almost every major dissenting figure in Hong Kong is now in jail, in exile, or on trial. As such, this week's charges have drawn widespread international outrage and condemnation. The United States, the United Kingdom, and the European Union, among others, have all criticized the move as a blatant and unacceptable attack on political pluralism and participation in Hong Kong.