

Hong Kongers defy Beijing, cast votes in ‘illegal’ referendum

Written by Taipei Times

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Hong Kongers cast ballots in an unofficial referendum on democratic reform yesterday, as booths opened across the territory in a poll that has enraged Beijing and drawn nearly 650,000 votes since it opened online.

Tensions are growing in the former British colony over the future of its electoral system, with residents making increasingly vocal calls to be able to choose who can run for the post of chief executive.

Hong Kong's leader is currently selected by a 1,200-strong pro-Beijing committee. China has promised direct elections to select the next chief executive in 2017, but has ruled out allowing voters to choose which candidates can stand.

Beijing and Hong Kong officials have dismissed the poll as illegal, but participation since voting began online on Friday has beaten all expectations — despite a major cyberattack that the organizers have blamed on Beijing.

Yesterday, thousands of voters, some toting umbrellas in the pouring rain, turned out to physically cast their ballots at the 15 polling booths set up around the territory.

“I am just acting in accordance with my conscience and this is for our next generation too. As I am not familiar with computers, I came to the voting booth,” a 68-year-old retired teacher told reporters at a station set up at a teachers’ union.

Another voter, 18-year-old Lau I-lung, said: “I am happy I can use a vote to determine the future system of elections. I think it can make a difference.”

“People were lining up to vote. It shows that Hong Kong people have a strong desire for genuine democracy,” said Benny Tai (戴耀廷), one of the founders of the Occupy Central movement, which organized the ballot.

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The roughly 647,400 people who had voted online and at the polling booths as of yesterday afternoon represent a sizeable chunk of the 3.47 million Hong Kongers who registered to vote at elections in 2012.

Voters have until Sunday to cast their ballot.

Source: [Taipei Times - 2014/06/23](#)