

The protests in Hong Kong have gone into their [15th consecutive week](#). No longer simply about the [soon-to-be shelved](#) extradition bill, protests encompass broader sociopolitical discontent and call for increased democracy. After months of indecision, the Hong Kong government [partially responded](#) to the protestors' five demands. While protestors staunchly call for "[five demands, not one fewer](#)," uncertainty on the future of the city reigns, with no clear resolution in light of the deaf government. What is certain, however, is that the status quo is untenable for protestors seeking long-term solutions for justice and democracy, with protest turnout slowly decreasing and time slipping by. Protestors have the initiative to rewrite this next phase of the engagement – it is crucial that they regroup and seize the momentum to unite the city and push for change.

Given the firm stubbornness of the government against concessions, repeating the old playbook will not produce new results. Instead of hoping for miracles that the administration will listen and reflect, protestors should examine different structural aspects of the protests that inhibit their ability to effectively realize change.

The protests, physically reactive and momentary, are not structured for alternative avenues of advocacy. To the establishment camp, the increasing violence of protestors and their dogmatic insistence on the five demands reflect [unwillingness to discuss](#), let alone compromise. In addition, the demands are not detailed on its loftier goals, leaving many to wonder where to even start discussions. Regardless of one's belief on compromise with the establishment, it is indisputable that dialogue with them is [required](#) as a [fact](#) of enacting any city-wide structural change. Protestors need to appear civil and relatively peaceful, and propose some plan to anchor opening dialogues.

It is also easily argued that the protests, loose confederations in nature, are not a single movement, as complications arise from protestors not being widely united on principle or tactics. Dogmatic insistence on the five demands loosely united individuals, but excludes others by essentially applying five litmus tests in a "for-us-or-against-us" environment. Some people support the broader pro-democracy message but do not agree with all five of the demands, such as the immediate pardoning of all protestors arrested. There is also no agreed upon ground beyond the demands, with the diversity of views held by protestors occasionally conflicting with those of others - principle-based rally cries apply broadly, whereas policy-based dogma constricts. In addition, tactics such as violence are not supported by all. Violence will clearly not coerce the [MTR](#) into cooperation, is not necessary to increase [awareness](#), and cedes protestors' moral highground against [police brutality](#) and [thug violence](#). It is important to note that the protests are [political in nature](#); just as the government response of security through police deployment is inappropriate, so too does protestor violence not address the underlying grievances of many pro-democracy protestors. In essence, protestors must agree on what pragmatic principles to fight for and how to fight for it to remain strong and adaptive.

It is important that the protests, [semi-democratic in operation](#), holds itself to the democratic principles it advocates for. While protestors discuss strategies and tactics in relatively egalitarian [online conversations](#) to considerable success in mobilizing people and paralyzing the city, this democracy is still nascent. In leaderless and semi-democratic situations, violence speaks disproportionately – a significant

proportion in the city does not support vandalism, but is unable to speak against it, especially in the moment. In addition, it is also important to note that the five demands central to the current protests were not themselves democratically agreed upon so much as thrust into prominence. The need for unity across protests complicates people's allegiance to the movement in relation to their principles.

Structural issues in protest method require structural revisions to their operations, and while addressing these issues is not a risk per se, the great reward would be the ability to recapture momentum in Hong Kong.

As this is a political problem wrapped up in identity issues, these suggestions target politics, and are not a prescription. Any popular grassroots action should be properly debated and democratically agreed upon and executed by movement participants.

First, protestors should rebrand to control the narratives spun about them. Violence and vandalism should be eliminated as much as possible to regain the moral highground and convey [maturity and rationality](#). Protestors would have a near-uncontested control of the battle of universal values, improve chances of getting the establishment to the table, and leave no ammunition for [dis-](#) and [mis-information](#) machines. Democratic, rational protest decision-making and operations will also help dispel the narrative that protestors are immature, fractured, and unguided. In this rebranding campaign, boundaries of the protests could be made clear, such as protestors stating that their pro-democracy advocacy would not be [pro-independence](#). As pro-independence protestors are a [minority](#), it is unlikely they could overturn a democratic decision to make this statement. While a public conversation of independence would be part of a healthy and well-informed city, caution must be exercised on policy that would have the People's Liberation Army on the streets.

Second, protestors should evolve into a democratic movement to unite and represent sympathizers. The faceless and strategic leaderless nature of the protests is a great springboard for egalitarian democracy, and the existing infrastructure of [online discussion and group platforms](#) are great resources to implement a hierarchical democratic conversation and organization that can engage and mobilize many. Caveating that those who vote must abide by the democratic agreement, next steps of actions and responses would reflect the views of the populace as well as mobilize voters to act. This democracy could extend in non-binding forms to establish protestor-run city-wide "[town halls](#)," either virtual or physical, that would solicit all protestors' opinions to systematically understand what people believe and identify important protest priorities. A democratic movement improves public buy-in, uniting the movement from being disparate confederation of individuals, and is consistent with its own pro-democracy advocacy.

Third, protestors should mobilize many for democracy and education. Widespread education about democracy should be carried out on the many forms of democracy, its impact on Hong Kong, and how it might be realized. Protest [media](#) includes [well-designed](#), articulate print pamphlets and online media, the means of production of which should be utilized to prepare the city for honest and factual discussions about democracy and how to fight for it in the Hong Kong context. With a well-informed public, the movement could increase voter turnout in upcoming elections to strengthen the belief of voting as a civil duty and vote pro-democracy politicians into as many levers of power as possible. More immediately, the movement could mobilize sympathizers to cooperate with the government in a pro-democracy way. As many people as possible should be mobilized to "[stress test](#)" Chief Executive Lam's "[public dialogue](#)" platform and expose it for being limited and controlled. This shows both some

willingness to engage with government steps towards democracy and also that genuine engagement with the public on city-wide issues is best done via universal suffrage.

Protestors have the chance to redefine how they push for change, and there are signs that the current method is reaching the end of its lifespan as the main means of effecting change. Protests have their moments for channeling emotion; the Hong Kong people have been heard around the world. Now is the time to direct this energy at bring about society-wide structural change. These suggestions push to evolve the protests into a unified and unifying big-tent pro-democracy movement operated by democratic principles using existing platforms to mobilize the populace for structural change.

The government lacks public trust and is unable to fulfill all the roles necessary to change society. Considering the 14-week government response rate on bill withdrawal, odds are that further demands will be slow-walked. Change lies solely with the people.