

China

'Hong Kong 47' trial: 14 democrats found guilty in landmark subversion case

By **Jessie Pang** and **James Pomfret**


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[1/7] Police stand guard outside the West Kowloon Magistrates' Courts building during the verdict of the 47 pro-democracy activists charged under the national security law, in Hong Kong, China, May 30,... [Purchase Licensing Rights](#)  [Read more](#)



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Summary

- Fourteen of 16 convicted of subversion conspiracy
- Amnesty calls verdicts "near-total purge" of HK opposition
- Sentencing at a later date, life in prison possible
- Australia minister: 'deep concern' at verdict and jailed citizen

HONG KONG, May 30 (Reuters) - Fourteen Hong Kong pro-democracy activists were found guilty and two were acquitted on Thursday in a landmark subversion trial that critics say could deal another blow to the city's rule of law and its reputation as a global financial hub.

The verdicts in Hong Kong's biggest trial against the democratic opposition come more than three years after police arrested 47 democrats in dawn raids at homes across the city. They were charged with conspiracy to commit subversion under a national security law imposed by China.

Sentencing will come at a later date for those found guilty, with prison terms ranging from three years to life for this offence. Thirty-one defendants pleaded guilty, and four of them have become prosecution witnesses.

The U.S. and some other countries have criticised the trial as politically motivated, calling for the accused to be immediately released. Diplomats from several countries including the U.S. and the European Union attended the hearing.

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"Australia has expressed our strong objections to the Hong Kong authorities on the continuing broad application of national security legislation to arrest and pressure pro-democracy figures," Foreign Minister Penny Wong said in a statement.

She said her government was "deeply concerned" with the verdicts and would continue to seek consular access to Gordon Ng, an Australian citizen and one of those convicted.

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'VICIOUS PLOT'

Security was tight around the High Court, with scores of police officers, some with dogs, and vehicles patrolling the area. Some supporters queued overnight to secure a spot.

"I came because it's a critical stage and a historic moment" for Hong Kong, said a man who gave only his surname, Chiu, 35, who began waiting at midnight. The defendants "all stood up for themselves and for Hong Kong people hoping to make a change".

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The defendants are accused of a "vicious plot" to paralyse government in the former British colony and force the city's leader to resign through a pre-selection ballot in a July 2020 citywide election. The democrats maintain it was an unofficial attempt to select the strongest candidates in a bid to win a historic majority in Hong Kong's legislature.

Summarising their verdict, Judges Andrew Chan, Alex Lee and Johnny Chan wrote that if the defendants had succeeded, it would have created "a constitutional crisis for Hong Kong" and led to "serious interfering in, disrupting or undermining the performance of duties and functions in accordance with the law by the (Hong Kong) government."

Several defendants, including activists [Owen Chow](#), 27, and Gwyneth Ho, 33, appeared stony-faced in the dock as the verdicts were delivered to a packed courtroom.

Those convicted also include former democratic lawmakers Leung Kwok-hung, Lam Cheuk-ting and Helena Wong. It was not yet clear whether any would appeal, with court adjourned until an afternoon session.

Leung, 68, is the oldest defendant.

"Although he might not be well emotionally and still not yet adapted to prison life... he always told me that he's innocent," Leung's wife, Chan Po-ying, told Reuters.

'RUTHLESS ILLUSTRATION'

Acquitted were barrister Lawrence Lau and social worker Lee Yue-shun.

"There are still other defendants in this case warranting our concern and even love," Lau said outside the court. He told reporters he could not say much as the prosecution might appeal against his acquittal.

The prosecution in the afternoon applied to appeal the two acquittals.

Mass pro-democracy protests erupted in Hong Kong in 2019 against Beijing's plans for legislation that democrats argued infringed on freedoms guaranteed when Hong Kong returned to China's control in 1997.

Beijing in 2020 imposed the sweeping national security law that led to a spate of arrests of democratic campaigners as well as the closures of liberal media outlets and NGOs. Hong Kong's democratic opposition had sought for decades to pressure Beijing to allow full democracy in the city.

Once-lively street marches, demonstrations and vigils have essentially ceased amid intense policing.

"This unprecedented mass conviction is the most ruthless illustration yet of how Hong Kong's national security law is weaponized to silence dissent," Amnesty International's China director, Sarah Brooks, said in a statement. "It represents a near-total purge of the political opposition."

Beijing says the national security laws have brought stability to Hong Kong and that human rights are respected.

Most of the accused have been detained since Feb. 28, 2021 and went through [marathon bail hearings](#).


Those who have pleaded guilty include former law scholar Benny Tai, whom the prosecution called a "mastermind" of the "conspiracy", and activist Joshua Wong.

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Reporting by James Pomfret and Jessie Pang; additional reporting from Kirsty Needham in Sydney; Editing by Michael Perry and William Mallard




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Jessie Pang
Thomson Reuters

Jessie Pang joined Reuters in 2019 after an internship. She covers Hong Kong with a focus on politics and general news.





James Pomfret
Thomson Reuters

James Pomfret is a Special Correspondent for Reuters covering politics and policy in Asia, with a specialization on China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. A two-time Pulitzer finalist, his multimedia career has spanned print, radio, TV and photography. His reporting includes "The Revolt of Hong Kong" - an investigative series he helped lead that was a Pulitzer finalist for International Reporting in 2020, and a series on China's weaponization of the rule of law against its critics that won a 2023 SOPA award.



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