

Hong Kong

# HK47: dozens of pro-democracy activists jailed in Hong Kong's largest national security trial

Thursday 21 November 2024, by [DAVIDSON Helen](#) (Date first published: 19 November 2024).

**Members of 'Hong Kong 47' - charged in 2021 over involvement in pre-election primary - sentenced to between four and 10 years**

*He is a good person': anger and distress as Hong Kong activists sentenced to prison - video*

Dozens of Hong Kong's most prominent pro-democracy figures have been jailed – one for 10 years – in the territory's [largest national security trial](#), after a prosecution that has been widely criticised as politically motivated.

Those jailed are among 47 people, known as the “Hong Kong 47”, who were charged in 2021 under [the punitive national security law \(NSL\)](#) with conspiracy to commit subversion over their involvement in [pre-election primaries held in 2020](#) before the Hong Kong general election. Most have already spent more than three years in jail, but none were released on Tuesday.

The group are some of the most public faces of the resistance to a Beijing-led crackdown on dissent and political freedom in [Hong Kong](#), which has left the city with almost no active opposition. The 47 were activists, legislators, campaigners and councillors from the pro-democracy camp of Hong Kong's previously vibrant political scene.

[Their sentences were quickly condemned](#) by democratic governments, including the US, and human rights groups, but the Chinese and Hong Kong governments defended the prosecutions.

Hong Kong's security secretary, Chris Tang, said the sentences “reflected the severity of the crime”, but did not rule out the government appealing against individual sentences after further examination. Beijing accused critics of “desecrating” the spirit of the rule of law.

[Benny Tai](#), a legal academic and activist, who pleaded guilty, received the longest sentence – 10 years in jail, reduced from 15 for pleading guilty – for his role as an organiser of the primaries. Tai's sentence is the longest to be handed out since the NSL was passed in mid-2020.

He was accused of masterminding a plan for the city's pro-democracy camp to win a majority in the city's general election, and then block bills and eventually force the dissolution of the legislature and resignation of the chief executive.

*Police watch closely as people arrive at West Kowloon magistrates court in Hong Kong for the sentencing. Photograph: Chan Long Hei/AP*

The three government-picked judges overseeing the case ruled this plan was a violation of Hong Kong's mini-constitution, the basic law, and an act of conspiracy to commit subversion under the NSL.

[Joshua Wong](#), one of the most public faces of the 2019 protest movement, was sentenced to four years and eight months, reduced by a third for pleading guilty. The court said he was an "active participant" in the primaries plan and "not of good character" because of his previous convictions. Wong is already in jail serving sentences for other protest-related charges, but the judges said the additional sentence "would not have a crushing effect on him".

*The pro-democracy activist Joshua Wong outside the legislative council building in Hong Kong in 2019. He was sentenced to more than four years. Photograph: Kin Cheung/AP*

The second longest sentence, seven years and nine months, was given to a young Hong Kong activist, Owen Chow. The former politicians Au Nok-hin, Andrew Chiu and Ben Chung were identified as key organisers alongside Tai, but their sentences were reduced by at least 50% after they acted as witnesses for the prosecution.

Claudia Mo, 67, a popular former legislator who pleaded guilty, received one of the shortest sentences: four years and two months. The judges took into account her public service but said she was still an "active participant".

Of the 47, 31 pleaded guilty, and two were acquitted at trial. The 14 who were convicted after pleading not guilty were given harsher sentences.

Gordon Ng, an Australian-Hong Kong dual national, was sentenced to seven years and three months.

After the sentencing, Australia's foreign minister, Penny Wong, said Australia was "gravely concerned" about Ng's sentence, and had expressed its "strong objections to the Chinese and Hong Kong authorities on the continuing broad application of national security legislation".

*Armed police stand guard as a prison van arrives at the West Kowloon magistrates courts building. Photograph: Tyrone Siu/Reuters*

The former Stand News journalist Gwyneth Ho was sentenced to seven years in jail. Ho, who had intended to run in the elections as a candidate, had pleaded not guilty.

Just hours after the sentencing, Ho published a lengthy [statement](#) to social media, saying she had been prosecuted for participating in "the last free and fair election in Hong Kong". She said: "Behind the rhetoric of secession, collusion with foreign forces etc, our true crime for Beijing is that we were not content with playing along in manipulated elections."

She said the case marked a "turning point" when Hong Kong was seen as a lost cause, but she urged supporters to push back against authoritarianism, saying: "Prove to the world at every possible moment, no matter how small, that democracy is worth fighting for."

The case is the largest, by number of defendants, since the NSL was passed. [The 47 were arrested in early 2021](#) in a series of dawn raids on homes and offices that shocked the city, followed by [a lengthy judge-only trial](#) that drew accusations of denial of procedural fairness.

There has been intense public interest in the trial in Hong Kong. The queue for the public to get inside the West Kowloon magistrates court started over the weekend and numbered several hundred people by Tuesday, mostly local supporters and friends but also western diplomats. Some local

people who had been in line for a day or more were accused by bystanders of being paid to queue and take a seat ticket but not go into court, a practice that has come under increasing [scrutiny](#) for political cases.

On Tuesday morning, busloads of police patrolled and ushered the crowd into a line that stretched down the block and folded back on itself. Officers were seen searching several people and took at least two away.

Dennis, a former district councillor, lined up at 4am to support the convicted activists, many of them his friends. He had been able to visit some of them in jail over the years. "I think quite a number of them are quite depressed about their future. So I think I have to come and give a little support," he said.

Towards the front of the queue, Jerome Lau, 74, said he had visited many of his jailed friends in Stanley prison. "Just for me to wake up early on a rainy day, compared to what they're suffering inside the prison, it's nothing at all."

*Diplomats queue outside the West Kowloon magistrates court in Hong Kong Photograph: Peter Parks/AFP/Getty Images*

China and Hong Kong say the security law restored order after the 2019 protests and have warned other countries against "interference". Hundreds of pro-democracy activists have been arrested under the NSL, and more than 150 have been charged.

On Wednesday, the jailed media tycoon and pro-democracy activist [Jimmy Lai](#) will also testify in his national security trial, breaking the silence he has kept over five previous trials and almost four years in jail.

The collusion charges against Lai – the founder of the now-closed popular Chinese-language tabloid Apple Daily – revolve around articles by the newspaper supporting the pro-democracy protests and criticising Beijing's leadership. Lai has pleaded not guilty.

**Helen Davidson**

*With Agence France-Presse*

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**P.S.**

- The Guardian. Tue 19 Nov 2024 13.29 CET:  
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/nov/19/hong-kong-47-hk47-sentencing-national-security-trial>
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