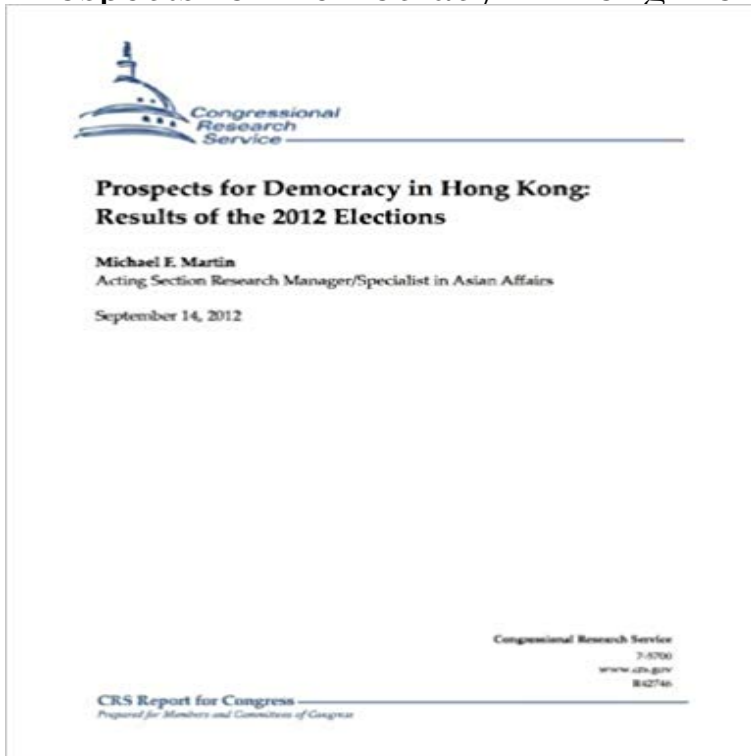


Prospects for Democracy in Hong Kong: The 2012 Election Reforms



Hong Kong selected a new Chief Executive and Legislative Council (Legco) in March and September of 2012, respectively. Both elections delivered surprising results for different reasons. The eventual selection of Leung Chu-ying (CY Leung) as Chief Executive came after presumed front-runner Henry Tang Ying-yen ran into a series of personal scandals. The Legco election results surprised many as several of the traditional parties fared poorly while several new parties emerged victorious. The 2012 elections in Hong Kong are important for the city's future prospect for democratic reforms because, under the territory's Basic Law, any changes in the election process for Chief Executive and Legco must be approved by two-thirds of the Legco members and receive the consent of the Chief Executive. Under the provision of a decision by China's Standing Committee of the National People's Congress issued in December 2007, the soonest that the Chief Executive and all the Legco members can be elected by universal suffrage are the elections of 2017 and 2020, respectively. As such, the newly elected Legco and CY Leung will have the opportunity to propose and adopt election reforms that fulfill the ultimate aim of the election of Hong Kong's leaders by universal suffrage. The outcome of Hong Kong's 2012 elections matters to Congress for three key reasons. First, the Hong Kong Policy Act of 1992 states that it is U.S. policy to support democracy in Hong Kong. Second, the conduct of the 2012 elections and the possibility of additional political reforms may be indicators of the Chinese government's commitment to the Basic Law and its support for the democratic reforms in areas where it exercises sovereignty. Third, some scholars speculate that Hong Kong may serve as a testing ground for possible democratic reforms in Mainland China. Congress has appropriated funds in the past to foster the development of civil

society and democratic practices in Hong Kong. The 2012 election results and the upcoming discussion of future election reforms including the involvement of the Chinese government are factors that Congress may consider when deciding whether to allocate more assistance for the democratic practices in Hong Kong. In addition, Congress may conduct hearings or organize other events to examine and bring attention to the prospects for democracy in Hong Kong.

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