

## **Support in Hong Kong for Same-sex Couples' Rights Grew Over Ten Years (2013-2023): 60 Percent Now Support Same-Sex Marriage**

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### **1. Executive Summary**

Over the past ten years, the share of Hong Kong people who favour protecting gay and lesbian rights has grown markedly. In 2013, only a minority of Hong Kong people surveyed said that same-sex couples should be permitted to marry (38%). Just over half of people expressed agreement with same-sex marriage (50.4%) in 2017. By 2023, 60% agreed with same-sex marriage; only 17% said they did not support same-sex marriage, and 23% were neutral.

These findings are based on telephone surveys we conducted in 2013, 2017, and 2023. During these three waves of data collection, interviewers asked respondents the same questions.<sup>1</sup> This report examines changes in public opinion by comparing data from the three survey waves. Our study is the longest running research project to track public opinion concerning same-sex marriage using representative samples of Hong Kong residents.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to asking questions about same-sex marriage, our surveys asked about same-sex couples' rights related to specific issues, including hospital visitation, housing discrimination, fatal accidents, and property inheritance. In 2013, a majority of Hong Kong people already favoured same-sex couples' rights in each of these areas, and those numbers grew by 2017. In 2023, we found that only a small minority of Hong Kong people (about 8-12%) disagreed that same-sex couples should have rights in these areas of life. From 2013 to 2023, there was a statistically significant increase in the percentage of people who agreed that same-sex couples should have rights in each of these areas.

In 2023, 85% of Hong Kong people said that same-sex couples should have at least some of the rights enjoyed by different-sex couples, compared with 78% in 2017 and 73% in 2013. In addition, 71% of people in 2023 said that Hong Kong should have a law to protect against sexual orientation discrimination,

compared with 69% in 2017 and 58% in 2013. A strikingly small percentage of people in 2023—only 6%—disagreed with having such legislation.

We also found, when asking a general question about social acceptance, that the share of Hong Kong people who said they were unaccepting of gay men and lesbians dropped nearly 20 percentage points between 2013 and 2023 (from 32% to 13%).

## **2. Methods**

We commissioned the Centre for Communication and Public Opinion Survey (CCPOS) at the Chinese University of Hong Kong to conduct a telephone survey of Hong Kong residents.<sup>3</sup> Between 5 January and 9 February 2023, CCPOS called mobile and fixed line phones to obtain a representative sample of Hong Kong residents aged 18 and over. A total of 1,551 people completed the survey (777 from mobile phones and 774 from fixed line phones) in either Cantonese or English.

The cooperation rate (the number of people who completed the survey divided by the number of people who answered the phone) was 80%. The response rate (the number of people who completed the survey divided by the number of all phone numbers dialed) was 11%.<sup>4</sup> We used standard statistical weighting techniques to adjust for the nonresponse, which is common in phone surveys. We weighted the data for age, gender, education, and place of birth using the 2021 Population By-census, the timeliest population data available. We also created statistical weights to combine data from the mobile and fixed line samples.<sup>5</sup>

We compared the results from our 2023 survey with the results from our earlier surveys, both of which were also based on representative samples of Hong Kong residents aged 18 and over.<sup>6</sup> We conducted our first survey in June 2013 and our second survey in May-June 2017.<sup>7</sup> Results from those two earlier surveys have been reported in earlier reports.<sup>8</sup> This report presents statistics from all three surveys—2013, 2017, and 2023—and reports p values from Chi-square tests for statistically significant differences between 2013 and 2023.

## **3. Results and Discussion**

### *3.1 Attitudes Towards Specific Rights*

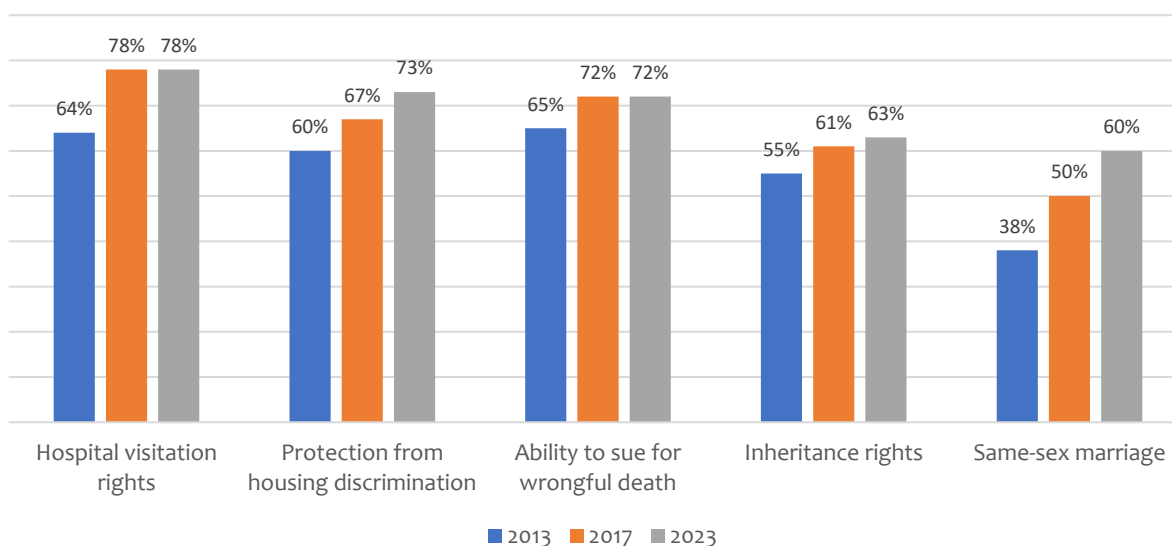
Our surveys asked respondents about their attitudes towards specific rights for same-sex couples. In 2023, we found that 78% of the public favoured allowing same-sex couples to visit each other in the

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hospital during hours restricted to family members; 73% agreed that same-sex couples should be protected from housing discrimination; 72% favoured permitting gay men and lesbians to sue for the wrongful death of their same-sex partners in cases of fatal accidents; 63% agreed that same-sex partners should inherit property from each other; and 60% agreed that same-sex couples should be permitted to marry.

As illustrated in Figure 1, between 2013 and 2023, there was a statistically significant increase in the percentage of people who favoured extending rights to same-sex couples in each of these issue areas. The largest increase we observed was in relation to marriage (from 38% in 2013 to 60% in 2023).

**Figure 1**  
**Percentage of Hong Kong residents who favoured same-sex couple rights, by type of right (2013, 2017, 2023)**



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\* Respondents who said they “completely agree” or “somewhat agree” with a particular right were counted in this chart as favouring that right. Please see Appendix 1 for exact question wording. For every right, differences between 2013 and 2023 were statistically significant at  $p < .001$ .

In 2017, we added a survey question about permitting a person from Hong Kong in a long-term same-sex relationship with someone from a foreign country to apply for a visa for their partner to live in Hong Kong. We found that year that 53% of people supported granting such permission while 29% disagreed. In 2018, the Hong Kong Court of Final Appeal ruled that a same-sex couple who registered their domestic partnership abroad must be extended permission to apply for a dependent visa in Hong

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Kong.<sup>9</sup> In 2023, when we repeated our question concerning immigration visas, 63% of people agreed with granting eligibility to same-sex couples, and only 16% disagreed.

### 3.2 General Attitudes Towards Same-sex Couples and Towards Gay Men and Lesbians

In addition to asking about specific rights, we asked respondents about their general attitudes towards same-sex couples' rights and towards gay men and lesbians. In 2023, 85% of Hong Kong people said that same-sex couples should have some or all the rights enjoyed by different-sex couples, compared with 78% in 2017 and 73% in 2013. In 2023, 69% of Hong Kong people said that they were either moderately or very accepting of gay men and lesbians, compared with 61% in 2017 and 50% in 2013. Conversely, the share of people who said they were unaccepting of gay men and lesbians dropped from 32% in 2013, to 22% in 2017, and to 13% in 2023.

**Table 1**  
**General Attitudes Towards Same-Sex Couples and Gays and Lesbians**

<i>Do you think same-sex couples should have ...</i>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2023</b>
All the rights that male-female couples have	35.5%	38.2%	44.7%
Some rights that male-female couples have	37.2%	39.3%	39.9%
None of the rights that male-female couples	27.4%	22.5%	15.4%
<i>How accepting are you of gays and lesbians?</i>			
	<b>2013</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2023</b>
Very Accepting	16.5%	21.0%	28.4%
Moderately Accepting	33.0%	39.7%	40.8%
A Little Accepting	18.9%	17.4%	17.6%
Not at all Accepting	31.6%	21.9%	13.3%

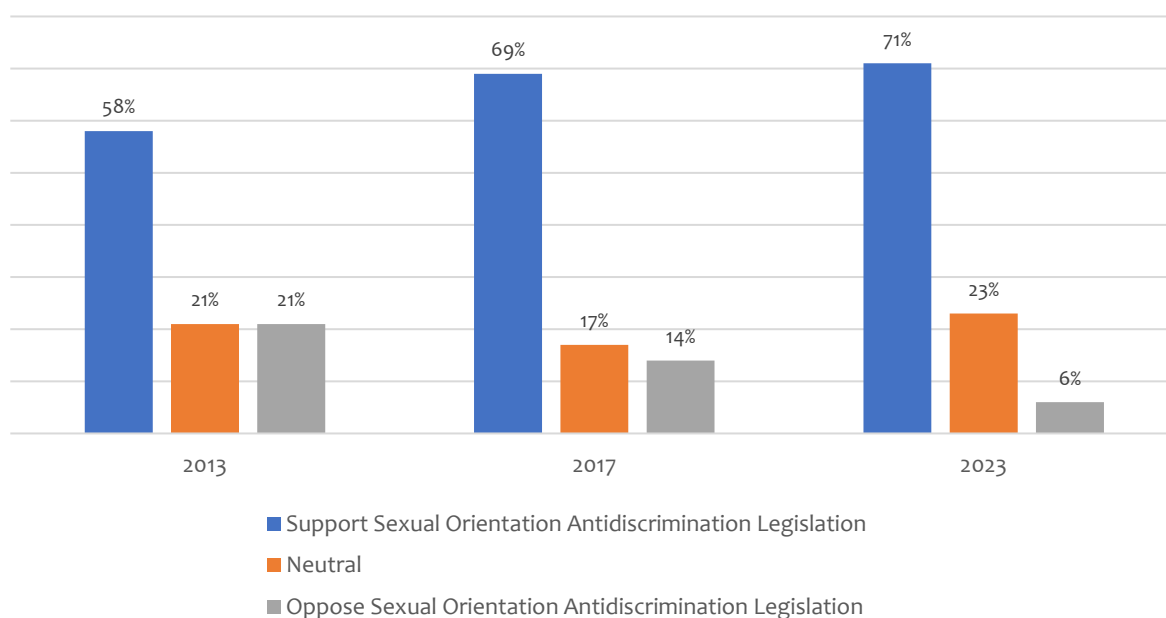
\* Note: Percentages do not sum to 100 due to rounding

### 3.3 Attitudes Towards Sexual Orientation Antidiscrimination Legislation

Finally, our surveys asked respondents about their views on whether Hong Kong should have a law that protects people from being discriminated against based on sexual orientation. In 2023, 71% of

people said that Hong Kong should have a law to protect against sexual orientation discrimination, compared with 69% in 2017 and 58% in 2013. Only 6% of respondents in 2023 disagreed with such legislation.

**Figure 2**  
**Sexual Orientation Antidiscrimination Legislation:**  
**Support and Opposition (2013, 2017, 2023)**



\* Respondents who said they “completely agree” or “somewhat agree” with sexual orientation antidiscrimination legislation were counted in this chart as supporting such legislation. Respondents who said they “completely disagree” or “somewhat disagree” with sexual orientation antidiscrimination legislation were counted in this chart as opposing such legislation. Please see Appendix 2 for exact question wording. The difference in support between 2013 and 2023 was statistically significant at  $p < .001$ .

#### 4. Closing Remarks

Previous research suggests that acceptance of gay people and gay rights has been increasing in most parts of the world; however, the world is also becoming polarised, with acceptance decreasing in certain places<sup>10</sup> Our research suggests that Hong Kong’s pattern of change comports with the majoritarian global pattern of growing acceptance.

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Future research could explore the reasons for this growth in acceptance in Hong Kong. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss in depth any potential explanations for the shifts in public opinion that we found, we will highlight a few potential explanatory factors for consideration.

First, over the past decade there has been increased representation of gay men and lesbians in both global media and Hong Kong's local media, including in television and film.<sup>11</sup> Such representation may have helped to humanise gay and lesbian issues and foster greater acceptance.<sup>12</sup>

Second, legal developments in Hong Kong may have also helped to shape public opinion. Gay men and lesbians in Hong Kong have prevailed in numerous court cases that received attention in the news. Indeed, Hong Kong courts have ruled in favour of same-sex couples in cases concerning some of the issues that we address in our survey. As noted above, the Hong Kong Court of Final Appeal (CFA) ruled in 2018 that a same-sex couple who registered their domestic partnership abroad must be extended permission to apply for a dependent visa in Hong Kong.<sup>13</sup> In a separate case, in 2019, the CFA ruled that a same-sex couple's foreign marriage must be recognised for civil-servant spousal benefits and joint tax-filing status in Hong Kong.<sup>14</sup> Since 2020, lower courts (the Court of First Instance and the Court of Appeal) in Hong Kong have also issued rulings in favour of same-sex couples' claims on matters concerning housing, inheritance, and custody of children.<sup>15</sup> These legal developments in favour of same-sex couples' rights may have played a role in shaping Hong Kong people's views on same-sex couples.

Lower courts in Hong Kong have ruled that constitutional law does not require extending marriage rights to same-sex couples, but litigation on the issue is ongoing and is presently pending before the Court of Final Appeal.<sup>16</sup> While the issue of same-sex marriage was winding its way up Hong Kong's court system, legal developments abroad may have played a role in shaping public opinion on same-sex marriage. Hence, the global legal landscape is the third factor that we highlight as a potential contributor to shifts in public opinion. Over the past decade there has been a marked growth in the number of jurisdictions around the world that have legalised same-sex marriage.<sup>17</sup> It is worth noting that, after our initial survey wave, the highest courts of the United States and Taiwan both ruled that it is unconstitutional to exclude same-sex couples from marriage.<sup>18</sup> Major developments such as these made news headlines in Hong Kong and may have contributed to the shift in Hong Kong public opinion.

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In identifying these three potential factors for explaining shifts in public opinion, we are not suggesting they form an exhaustive list. Instead, we offer them as a springboard for discussion and further research.<sup>19</sup>

Another area for potential future research is the relationship between one's views about sexual orientation and one's views about rights. It is interesting that, in 2023, the percentage of people who are moderately or very accepting of gay men and lesbians (69%) is smaller than the percentage of people who said that same-sex couples should have at least some of the rights enjoyed by different-sex couples (85%). This discrepancy might suggest that individuals in Hong Kong do not necessarily form their opinions about legal rights based on their private moral beliefs. For example, individuals may oppose homosexuality based on their religious conviction; at the same time, the same individuals may believe that Hong Kong's laws should be premised on secular notions of equality and are therefore accepting of rights for same-sex couples.<sup>20</sup> Future research could further explore this potential dynamic.

Through additional survey waves in future years, our study will continue to track changes in Hong Kong public opinion concerning gay men and lesbians. In the second wave of our survey, we began asking questions about transgender issues. We will report our 2023 findings on transgender issues in a separate report and we will also continue to study transgender issues in subsequent survey waves.

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<sup>1</sup> In our 2017 survey, we added a question about granting immigration eligibility to same-sex couples, and we repeated this question in 2023.

<sup>2</sup> Another study collected survey data to compare Hong Kong public opinion on same-sex marriage in 2016 and 2019. See Yiu Tung Suen et al., *Public Attitudes towards LGBT+ Legal Rights in Hong Kong 2019/2020* (Sexualities Research Programme, Chinese University of Hong Kong 2020), pp. 2, 5.

<sup>3</sup> Our two previous survey waves (2013 and 2017) were conducted by the Social Sciences Research Centre (SSRC) at the University of Hong Kong. Because SSRC closed in 2021, we commissioned CCPOS to conduct the third wave of our survey. To maintain consistency, CCPOS used the same data collection protocols that were used by SSRC. We designed the 2013, 2017, and 2023 surveys to produce statistics that lend themselves to comparisons over time. We replicated question wording and questionnaire structure to maintain consistency.

<sup>4</sup> We calculated this response rate using the “Response Rate 4” formula from the American Association for Public Opinion Research, which is a relatively conservative standard. See American Association for Public Opinion Research, *Standard Definitions: Final Dispositions of Case Codes and Outcome Rates for Surveys* (10th ed. 2023). Applying the formula that CCPOS usually uses would yield a response rate of 44%. For more information about how alternative calculation methods can produce differences in reported response rates, see, e.g., Stephen Wing-kai Chiu & Niantao Jiang, “The Future of Telephone Surveys in Hong Kong: A Comparison of Fixed Line Surveys with Cellular Phone Surveys,” 13(1) *Social Transformations in Chinese* 2, 5 (2017).

<sup>5</sup> There is limited information on the impact of nonresponse on data quality in Hong Kong. For a related discussion on nonresponse rates in the United States, see Paul J. Lavrakas et al., *The Future of U.S. General Population Telephone Survey Research* (American Association of Public Opinion Research 2017) (reporting average response rates in 2015 of 9.3% for fixed lines and 7.0% for mobile lines). Analysis from the Pew Research Center shows that most statistics from telephone surveys about social and political attitudes are similar to statistics obtained from high-quality face-to-face surveys, which generally have higher response rates. Pew Research Center, *What Low Response Rates Mean for Telephone Surveys* (2017).

<sup>6</sup> The 2013 survey sample consisted solely of fixed line telephone numbers; however, in 2017, we enhanced the survey by including both fixed line and mobile numbers. We performed a supplementary analysis and found that adding mobile phones to the survey was not the reason our 2017 data showed increases in support for gay people and gay rights. In this supplementary analysis, we limited the sample to fixed line numbers (i.e., we excluded the mobile numbers from the 2017 survey), and we still found increases over time in support for same-sex couples’ rights, favorable attitudes towards gays and lesbians, and support for sexual orientation antidiscrimination legislation.

<sup>7</sup> We had initially planned to conduct our survey every four years. Due to work disruptions stemming from the Covid-19 pandemic, we postponed the third wave of our survey from 2021 to 2023.

<sup>8</sup> E.g., Holning Lau et al., “Support in Hong Kong for Same-sex Couples’ Rights Grew Over Four Years (2013-2017), Over Half of People in Hong Kong Now Support Same-Sex Marriage,” Centre for Comparative and Public Law, Faculty of Law, University of Hong Kong (2018), available at [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=3207048](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3207048); Kelley Loper et al., “Public Attitudes Towards Transgender People and Antidiscrimination Legislation,” Centre for Comparative and Public Law, Faculty of Law, University of Hong Kong (2013), available at [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=3387194](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3387194).

<sup>9</sup> *QT v Director of Immigration* [2018] 21 HKCFAR 324.

<sup>10</sup> See Andrew R. Flores & Andrew Park, *Polarized Progress: Social Acceptance of LGBT People in 141 Countries, 1981 to 2014* (Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law 2018).

<sup>11</sup> For example, television history was made in recent years, with *Ossan’s Love* (2021) being the first mainstream television drama in Hong Kong centred on a gay romantic storyline, and with *Boyscation* (2022) being the first mainstream reality dating show centred on gay men. With respect to film, over the past decade, gay and lesbian themed movies have garnered nominations and awards at the Hong Kong Film Awards—for example, *Sisterhood* (2017) and *Suk Suk* (2020).

<sup>12</sup> Studies have shown that positive television and film depictions of gay men foster more favorable views of gay men. See, e.g., Ellen D.B. Riggie et al., “The Impact of ‘Media Contact’ on Attitudes Toward Gay Men,” 31 *Journal of Homosexuality* 55 (1996); Edward Schiappa et al., “The Parasocial Contact Hypothesis,” 72 *Communication Monographs* 92 (2005).

<sup>13</sup> *QT v Director of Immigration* (n 9).

<sup>14</sup> *Leung Chun Kwong v Secretary for the Civil Service* [2019] 22 HKCFAR 127.

<sup>15</sup> See *Nick Infinger v Hong Kong Housing Authority* [2020] HKCFI 329 (recognising foreign same-sex marriages for the purposes of public housing rental) (appeal pending); *Ng Hon Lam Edgar v Secretary for Justice* [2020] HKCFI 2412 (recognising foreign same-sex marriages for the purposes of inheritance and intestacy); *Ng Hon Lam Edgar v Hong Kong Housing Authority* [2021]



HKCFI 1812 (recognising foreign same-sex marriages for the purposes of the government's Home Ownership Scheme) (appeal pending); *AA v BB*, [2021] HKCFI 1401 (granting joint custody and guardianship of children in a case concerning lesbian partners who became parents through donor insemination).

<sup>16</sup> See *MK v Government of HKSAR* [2019] HKCFI 2518; *Sham Tsz Kit v Secretary for Justice* [2022] HKCA 1247.

<sup>17</sup> See Holning Lau, "Barring Married Same-Sex Couples from Joint Adoption: Comparative Perspectives and the Case of Taiwan," 15 *National Taiwan University Law Review* 177, 201-03 (2020); Human Rights Watch, "During Pride Month, a Look at LGBT Rights: New Map Shows Same-sex Marriage, Civil Unions and Registered Partnerships Worldwide,"

[https://features.hrw.org/features/features/marriage\\_equality/index.html](https://features.hrw.org/features/features/marriage_equality/index.html) [<https://perma.cc/SEM9-47R3>] (last visited 4 February 2023).

<sup>18</sup> The United States Supreme Court decided the same-sex marriage case of *Obergefell v. Hodges* in 2015. See *Obergefell v. Hodges*, 576 U.S. 644 (2015). The Taiwan Constitutional Court (TCC) decided its same-sex marriage case on 24 May 2017, which was during the period of time in which we were conducting our second survey. See *Judicial Yuan (JY) Interpretation No. 748* (2017). Taiwan's legislature implemented the TCC ruling in 2019. See *Act for Implementation of Judicial Yuan Interpretation No. 748* (2019) (Taiwan).

<sup>19</sup> To be clear, our survey did not ask respondents any questions about media representation; nor did it ask about any specific court cases or foreign legal developments. Future research can investigate media representation and legal changes as factors that potentially shape public opinion.

<sup>20</sup> For further discussion of this point based on our 2013 survey data, see Holning Lau, Charles Q. Lau, and Kelley Loper, "Public Opinion in Hong Kong about Gays and Lesbians: The Impact of Interpersonal and Imagined Contact," 26(3) *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 301, 318-319 (2014). See also Flores & Park (n 10), pp. 5-6 ("in liberal democracies . . . questions of private morality may be distinct from policy discussions.").

### **Appendix 1** **Comparison of Attitudes Towards Specific Rights**

*If someone in a same-sex relationship is hospitalised, would you agree or disagree that his or her same-sex partner should be permitted to visit during hospital visitation hours that are for family members?*

	2013	2017	2023
Completely Agree	49.2%	58.4%	63.4%
Somewhat Agree	15.2%	19.2%	14.6%
Neutral	19.6%	14.1%	14.0%
Somewhat Disagree	5.2%	2.2%	2.5%
Completely Disagree	10.7%	6.1%	5.5%

*If a same-sex couple wants to rent a flat together, but the landlord wants to reject them because they are a same-sex couple, would you agree or disagree that the same-sex couple should be permitted to rent the flat together?*

	2013	2017	2023
Completely Agree	45.6%	50.7%	57.0%
Somewhat Agree	14.3%	16.4%	16.2%
Neutral	18.4%	12.8%	18.1%
Somewhat Disagree	4.1%	5.2%	2.7%
Completely Disagree	17.7%	14.9%	6.1%

*If someone in a long-term same-sex relationship is struck and killed by a reckless car driver, would you agree or disagree that his or her partner should be permitted to sue and receive compensation from the reckless driver?*

	2013	2017	2023
Completely Agree	46.8%	51.2%	54.8%
Somewhat Agree	18.4%	20.7%	17.4%
Neutral	18.7%	13.9%	17.4%
Somewhat Disagree	4.4%	3.9%	3.7%
Completely Disagree	11.7%	10.4%	6.8%

\* Note: Percentages do not sum to 100 due to rounding

**Appendix 1**  
**Comparison of Attitudes Towards Specific Rights**

(Continued from previous page)

*If someone in a long-term same-sex relationship passes away, would you agree or disagree that his or her partner should inherit some of the property that the deceased partner leaves behind?*

	2013	2017	2023
Completely Agree	35.4%	37.2%	39.1%
Somewhat Agree	19.1%	24.1%	24.2%
Neutral	22.8%	18.2%	24.7%
Somewhat Disagree	6.9%	5.1%	3.4%
Completely Disagree	15.8%	15.5%	8.6%

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*Do you agree or disagree that same-sex couples should be permitted to marry?*

	2013	2017	2023
Completely Agree	26.3%	34.4%	44.0%
Somewhat Agree	11.4%	16.0%	16.1%
Neutral	19.6%	17.0%	22.9%
Somewhat Disagree	5.8%	5.2%	5.2%
Completely Disagree	37.0%	27.4%	11.8%

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*If a person from Hong Kong is in a long-term same-sex relationship with someone from a foreign country, would you agree or disagree that the person from Hong Kong should be permitted to apply for a visa for his or her same-sex partner to live in Hong Kong?*

	2013	2017	2023
Completely Agree	n/a	32.4%	40.1%
Somewhat Agree	n/a	20.2%	22.8%
Neutral	n/a	18.4%	21.5%
Somewhat Disagree	n/a	7.8%	4.9%
Completely Disagree	n/a	21.1%	10.7%

\* Note: Percentages do not sum to 100 due to rounding

**Appendix 2**  
**Attitudes Towards Sexual Orientation Antidiscrimination Law**

*Do you agree or disagree that Hong Kong should have a law that protects people from being discriminated against because of their sexual orientation?*

	2013	2017	2023
Completely Agree	42.3%	48.8%	50.6%
Somewhat Agree	15.5%	20.0%	19.9%
Neutral	21.0%	17.0%	23.1%
Somewhat Disagree	3.7%	3.6%	2.0%
Completely Disagree	17.6%	10.6%	4.4%

\* Note: Percentages do not sum to 100 due to rounding