

Hong Kong votes in election seen as referendum on protests

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Long lines formed outside Hong Kong polling stations Sunday in elections that have become a barometer of public support for anti-government protests now in their sixth month. (AP Photo/Vincent Yu)

Hong Kong: Voting was underway Sunday in Hong Kong elections that have become a barometer of public support for anti-government protests now in their sixth month.

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A strong showing by the opposition would show that the public still supports the pro-democracy movement, even as the protests have become increasingly violent.

The ruling camp in Hong Kong and the national government in Beijing hope that the unrest and disruption to daily life will turn voters against the movement.

There has been a rare break in the violence in recent days as protesters, anxious to validate their cause through the ballot box, hit the pause button to ensure the polls won't be postponed.

"We need to show the world that our cause is legitimate. I don't believe that Beijing will not respond to the Hong Kong people's voice," a black-clad and masked student Alex Wong said during a peaceful march Saturday.

Hong Kong Chief Secretary Matthew Cheung said that the vote is a "real democratic exercise" and that a strong police presence at polling stations will ensure that it proceeds smoothly.

Online messages from protest support groups have advised people not to wear black or face masks during voting in case they are targeted by police.

- AP