

## Let Hong Kongers Come to the United States

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The Chinese Communist Party sent invisible tanks rolling into Hong Kong when it promulgated a new national-security law Tuesday. City residents and international observers alike described the law, which violates the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration and Hong Kong's Basic Law, as draconian, authoritarian, and unjust, effectively eliminating the city's autonomy from the mainland.

But the battle is not lost yet. Joshua Wong and other pro-democracy leaders are still tweeting, despite reports that Hong Kong social-media users are deleting their accounts, fearing prosecution for political statements. And many are still marching. Despite moves by the city police force to arrest protesters and suppress certain expressions of political speech, pro-democracy demonstrators took to the streets Wednesday, the 23rd anniversary of the handover from the United Kingdom.

As it became clear that the new security law was on the way, the United States took steps to roll back the special status that it granted Hong Kong — a status according to which the U.S.'s treatment of Hong Kong differed from its treatment of the mainland. Just ahead of the security law's promulgation last week, the U.S. government announced an end to the export of U.S.-origin defense equipment to Hong Kong, suggesting that more is to come. And both houses of Congress passed legislation to sanction Chinese officials who degrade Hong Kong's autonomy and to also penalize any banks that do business with these officials. When it is signed by the president, the Hong Kong Autonomy Act will be the strongest response to Beijing's crackdown to date. That said, the U.S. response to Beijing's crackdown is still being shaped. It will need to balance support for the demonstrators' efforts to save the city with the attempt to punish Beijing severely. In addition to reevaluating the city's status under U.S. law and imposing sanctions, this calls for taking in the Hong Kong residents who choose to flee.

For weeks, commentators have called on the United States to do this, recalling that refugees fleeing totalitarian regimes have long been welcomed in the United States. Interestingly, these calls have not yet sparked opposition from proponents of stricter immigration policies. Perhaps this is because we see an emerging bipartisan consensus that the CCP is a grave threat to human freedom. U.S. action would follow steps taken by the United Kingdom, which Wednesday offered an eventual path to citizenship for up to 3 million Hong Kong residents, as well as measures taken by Taiwan, which last week opened a new office to process the influx of refugee applications caused by the national-security law. Meanwhile, Australia and Japan are considering their own approaches to admitting Hong Kongers.

So what should an American version of these policies look like? One option would be for the Trump administration to make it easier for Hong Kong residents to immigrate to the United States. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo indicated a few weeks ago that he was looking into this, but the president has yet to say anything about it. More likely, action will initially come from Congress, where two versions of Hong Kong immigration legislation were introduced Tuesday afternoon. Each of the bills targets a different part of the city's population to facilitate the immigration of its residents to the United States.

The Hong Kong Safe Harbor Act is the first of the two bipartisan proposals. It makes Hong Kong residents with a well-founded fear of political persecution eligible for Priority 2 refugee status, which would let them bypass the U.N. refugee system and non-governmental organizations responsible for vetting Priority 1 refugee claims. Although the original idea, which came from a [Heritage Foundation report last August](#), was to designate *all* Hong Kong residents as eligible for P-2 status, the bill as written would apply to the more than 3 million people who have participated in pro-democracy protests since last summer. And notably, the legislation would also make it easier for pro-democracy leaders, journalists, and first responders to seek asylum in the United States.

Meanwhile, the Hong Kong People's Freedom and Choice Act, the second bill, extends eligibility for temporary protected status to residents of Hong Kong and offers up to 50,000 special visas to highly skilled workers from the city. Crucially, it also speeds up the process for refugees from the city to apply for legal residency in the United States — a provision inspired by the legislation enacted to protect fleeing Chinese students after the Tiananmen Square massacre. These proposals were drafted to avoid overlap, and they would advance the dual goals of taking in Hong Kong residents who choose to flee Beijing's rule while also increasing the number of highly skilled immigrants in the American workforce. Taken together, these bills would be a solid first step, but the American response to Beijing's assault on Hong Kong can do more in this regard.

David Bier, an immigration analyst at the Cato Institute, calls the Hong Kong Safe Harbor Act "an important way to support the protests." However, he tells National Review that a better solution would be to simply waive visa requirements for Hong Kong residents — as the United States did for Cuban refugees before offering them permanent residency. Absent similar legislation waiving the visa requirement for fleeing Hong Kongers, the process might take too long.

And the people of Hong Kong don't have much time to spare. This week, Nathan Law, a prominent pro-democracy student leader, announced his departure from Hong Kong. He's going to continue his work in exile. Many of his peers will choose to stay and fight, but they should also be afforded the opportunity to leave when it becomes necessary. Already, city authorities are threatening to arrest residents who use certain slogans or banners. During the first protests in the wake of the national-security law Wednesday, the city's police force made more than 300 arrests, ten of them under the new law. In a sign of the law's far-reaching consequences under a government that will wield it with authoritarian abandon, a 19-year-old demonstrator was arrested for having a sticker on his phone that said "Free Hong Kong, Revolution Now." Beijing says that individuals arrested by the new outpost it established in Hong Kong will be tried on the mainland.

For years, Hong Kongers have lived under the threat of a CCP crackdown. With the enactment of the national-security law, it has finally arrived. Watching their cherished freedoms erode, they have learned to appreciate democracy's blessings perhaps more than many Westerners do. So what better way to support these highly-skilled democrats than to take them in? There's only one: offering an expeditious path to permanent residency, then citizenship.