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<http://www.rsf.org/hongkong-white-terror-forces-pro-democracy-30-07-2014,46722.html>

Asia - Hongkong

Oppressive atmosphere

“White Terror” forces pro-democracy website House News to shut down

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The popular pro-democracy news website House News abruptly shut down without warning on 26 July. One of its founders, Tony Tsoi, said the decision was taken because of the political pressure and intimidation that has paralyzed the Hong Kong media in recent months.

Tsoi compared the atmosphere to the “white terror” in Taiwan between 1949 and 1987, during which political dissidents were rounded up. The Chinese authorities have been cracking down on campaigners as demands for greater democracy have grown in Hong Kong.

House News was launched on 28 July 2012 and quickly gained popularity, attracting 300,000 views daily.

The site, which promoted democracy and criticized Chinese policies, struggled to find advertisers. However, it was not financial difficulties that led to its closure. In a [statement posted on the site in place of its news content](#), Tsoi, a businessman and writer, said he was afraid of being arrested whenever he crossed the border into China.

“Hong Kong has changed,” he wrote. “To act as a normal citizen, a normal media outlet and to do something right for society is becoming difficult, or even terrifying — not that you feel alienated, but fearful. The ongoing political struggle makes people very anxious — many democrats are tracked and smeared. Their past records have been dug up. A sense of White Terror lingers in society and I feel the pressure as well.”

Benjamin Ismaïl, the head of the Reporters Without Borders Asia-Pacific desk, said: “*We ask the Hong Kong authorities to carry out an investigation to establish who is behind the threats and pressure on Tony Tsoi. Any failure to respond will mean the authorities are complicit in the climate of fear that is spreading throughout the archipelago, and the self-censorship that this causes.*”

In recent months, the Chinese authorities have tightened their grip on Hong Kong civil society. The Information Office of the State Council published a [white paper](#) last month reminding the people of Hong Kong that love of the motherland was the main qualification for jobs in the government.

A few days later the website [Popvote](#), which hosted a simulated referendum allowing voters to choose between three options for how the chief executive should be elected, suffered large-scale cyber attacks, making it partly unavailable.

The Apple Daily site, which supported this popular initiative, [was blocked on 18 and 20 June](#), after a similar series of hacking attempts.

Of Hong Kong’s population of about 6 million, 800,000 took part in the referendum, described as illegal by the official media. About 500,000 people took part in the 1 July pro-democracy rally, held annually since the 1997 handover to Chinese rule.

On a recent visit, Reporters Without Borders noted the oppressive atmosphere in which news organizations have to operate. A growing number of news providers are resorting to self-censorship or succumbing to pressure from editorial management.

Hong Kong ranks 61st of 180 countries in the 2014 [Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index](#).
