IPS POST-ELECTION FORUM

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FULL REPORT

Welcome Remarks by IPS Director, Mr Janadas Devan

The Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) held its second Post-Election Forum on 8 July 2011, the first having been after the 2006 election. Its new Director, Mr Janadas Devan welcomed 270 participants to the event.

On the 2011 general election (GE), the subject of the Forum, he said it reminded him of Alice in Wonderland peering through the looking glass - nothing in the post-GE mirror resembled the pre-GE image.

He said that despite the People's Action Party's (PAP) 60.1% victory, a landslide for any ruling party in a democracy First or Third World, the PAP behaved like it had suffered a historic setback. A string of policy and cabinet changes followed, the magnitude of which seemed unprecedented in Singapore's history. Even the international media responded in the same fashion as the Financial Times, for instance, referring to the outcome as being 'only 60% of the votes'. This was ironic for a newspaper published in the United Kingdom where the last time any ruling party there received more than 60% of the electoral votes was in 1922. Clearly, one had to view the results in relative terms.

Mr Devan said there were a number of reasons for this year's watershed election. This included a more educated population with a genuine desire for debate, participation in policy development as well as for a situation where there would be stronger checks and balances to PAP power. It was such an ethos that brought about political change between 1959 and 1964 when the PAP first came to power. Also, the opposition parties had never fielded such credible candidates before, presenting voters with a genuine choice of quality to match the PAP.

He believed there was an economic reason behind the results too. Comparing two maps depicting the results of the elections in 1963 and 2011, the areas where the PAP achieved more than 60% of the votes in 2011 coincided with where the Barisan Socialis had won seats in 1963. They were mostly rural at the time and were now developed with relatively little private housing. The constituencies where the PAP received less than the national average were areas with relatively more people living in private housing. This correlation did not hold always, most notably in the single member constituency of Hougang, which was dominated by constituents living on public housing. Despite this, the overall evidence would suggest that the PAP lost at least six percentage points largely due to the swing of upper middle class voters. They were those in the sandwiched class that were too well-off to benefit from state subsidies but too poor to feel they lived comfortably, who had seen their cost of living rise without a similar growth in income because of globalisation and wage stagnation. Mr Devan concluded by inviting all Forum attendees to participate actively in the day's discussions.

Session I: The IPS Post-Election Survey 2011

In the first session, Dr Gillian Koh from the IPS Politics and Governance cluster shared the findings of the IPS Post-Election Survey on behalf of the research team, comprising Dr Leong Chan Hoong, Ms Debbie Soon and IPS Faculty Associate Professor Tan Ern Ser.

The survey collected the views using a telephone poll conducted by a third party survey firm, of a random sample of about 2000 Singapore citizens of voting age (21 years old and above). This was different from the IPS Post-Election Survey in 2006 that was based on a quota sample of almost 1000 Singaporeans. The 2011 survey polled respondents on the same questions as in 2006 to understand the factors that might have shaped voters' decision-making in the 7 May 2011 general election and how these might have changed since the last election in 2006.

Dr Koh described the methodology, talked about the driving questions behind the survey and shared the highlights of the findings. The first section of the survey asked respondents to rate a list of eleven issues on how they might have influenced their vote. In contrast to the findings of the 2006 survey, the issue of 'cost of living' was now among the top five concerns, with 86% of respondents saying that it influenced them. It ranked sixth based on the average mean score given to it, in 2006. This year, this issue was especially relevant at the level of statistical significance for those in the '30-39' and '40-54' age brackets, and surprisingly, for people in the broad group of professionals, managers, technicians and supervisors or what the survey terms the 'service class'. Political ideals like the 'need for efficient Government', 'need for checks and balances in Parliament', 'need for different views in Parliament' and 'fairness of Government policy' were still important as in 2006.

The next section of the survey discussed the characteristics voters looked for in political candidates when they voted. Like 2006, it was found that credentials, grassroots experience and party affiliation were not as important as honesty, efficiency, fairness and empathy in influencing voters. Yet, credentials, grassroots experience and party affiliation did increase in relative importance compared to 2006, especially among the older pre-Independence voters.

On the impact of communication channels in shaping voter decisions, the Internet was ranked just behind newspapers and television as influential media, a contrast to 2006 where it was in ninth place. According to Dr Koh, this was largely attributed to the change in electoral rules that liberalised the use of the internet, allowing parties, candidates and citizens to carry out advertising and discussions online. The Internet has become especially influential with the post-Independence voters and service class. It was also found that the higher the income and occupational class, the higher the influence of the Internet. Election rallies and contact with grassroots workers grew in importance overall too.

Respondents were asked how credible all seven political parties that contested GE 2011 were. In comparison with GE 2006 in which only four parties contested, mean scores for credibility took a dip for the PAP and Singapore Democratic Alliance (SDA), remained static for the Workers' Party (WP) and improved for the Singapore Democratic Party (SDP). The PAP was found to be especially credible with older respondents aged 40 years and above as well as the working class whereas the WP was especially credible with the highly educated and those in the service class. The other opposition parties were more credible for post-independence respondents.

Lastly, voters were asked their opinions on various aspects of the electoral system. Recognising the importance of the 'climate of fear', Dr Koh explained that her team at IPS decided to include a new question asking respondents if they felt free to vote the way they wanted. 91% of the respondents replied that they were able to. She described the detailed findings on each of the questions in this section.

A cluster analysis was carried out to find out which respondents supported the political *status quo* of a one-party dominant system, and which desired change or greater political pluralism. This was based on answers to six questions in the survey: 1) Need for checks and balances in Parliament; 2) Need for different views in Parliament; 3) The whole election system is fair to all political parties; 4) The votes for upgrading policy is fair; 5) There is no need to change the election system because it has served me well; and 6) It is always important to have elected opposition members in Parliament. The statistical analysis allowed respondents to be classified into three categories based on their answers, namely 'Conservative' (maintaining status quo), 'Pluralist' (seeking change) and 'Swing' (those who did not answer those questions in one particular direction to suggest they definitely wanted the *status quo* or change across the board).

It was found that the largest dip in the proportion of respondents by age in the Conservative category was among those 65 years and older. The largest increases in proportion of respondents in the Pluralist category were found among those in the '21-29' age bracket and those 65 years and older. The largest proportion of increase in the Swing category was found among those in the '40-54' age bracket. More among the youngest and the oldest were now in the Pluralist category and more in the '40-54' age bracket than in 2006 were now in the Swing category as opposed to the Pluralist category. Like the 2006 study, it was clear that the proportions of respondents in the Pluralist category increased among those with higher socio-economic status as indicated by their housing type, occupational class, education level and monthly household income.

Looking at the proportions that were in the Pluralist and Conservative categories, there was a clearer distinction between the attitudes of post- and pre-Independence voters in the 2011 survey when compared to the 2006 one.

Discussion

At the open dialogue session, one participant asked how the thesis on the correlation between higher socioeconomic class and pluralist attitudes among voters squared with the fact that the PAP was elected by a comfortable margin in the ostensibly middle-class area of Holland-Bukit Timah Group Representation Constituency (GRC)?

Dr Koh said that the situation with Holland-Bukit Timah GRC would be better understood if there was a breakdown of the voting and housing data for each of the four constituencies comprising the GRC. Mr Devan added that the areas associated with bungalows in the Holland area were part of another GRC, and that up to 70% of residents in the whole Holland-Bukit Timah GRC lived in public housing, to the extent that it was a reflection of the socio-economic class of residents there.

Another participant said that while the data was stunning, he felt that IPS analysts should try to 'see the wood for the trees' in that there was generally an increased political awareness among Singaporean voters when compared to data in 2006. All issues mattered

more this time around even if the bread and butter issues and credibility of political parties might have changed in relative importance.

Dr Koh concurred, saying that the economic and therefore social conditions of Singaporeans would have changed dramatically in the period between the two elections. This would have led citizens to become aware of the role that public policy played in their lives. In addition, because of the much higher level of contestation in 2011 with 89% of total electors voting as opposed to the close to 50% that did in 2006, the situation might have been influenced by that. It would be important to continue to conduct the survey over many more elections as more 'data points' were needed to arrive at a definitive picture and to put aside the specificities of each election.

A participant asked about what language the survey was conducted in and Dr Koh clarified that it was conducted in English, Mandarin and Malay as is standard practice in the Singapore context. She also asked if the working class might have found it against their interests to vote for the opposition. Dr Koh said that it would be good for researchers to conduct qualitative studies to establish that.

The next participant took issue with relating higher incomes to pluralism and the squeezed middle-income groups. While the higher income voters were more financially secure, a factor that supposedly allowed them to be more idealistic and vote for political pluralism, it could be said that they would also be the most affected by voting for the more liberal opposition. She thought they were more likely to be conservative especially in their social outlook if nothing else.

Mr Devan agreed that some people would have voted for altruistic reasons. However it was important to look at more fine-grained income data about the top 20% of income earners in Singapore. If indeed the situation was anything like the United States where it was really only the top 5% or 1% of income earners that saw their incomes rise exponentially and pulled up the average, then it was possible that even the middle and upper-middle class in Singapore did not see their livelihoods improve. This sort of data would be important in properly establishing the impact of such issues on voting patterns.

Comparing the relationship between the 2006 and 2011 survey results, Dr Koh said it was clear that the higher socioeconomic classes were more likely to be pluralist voters as a result of heightened ideals and experiences. She also stated that this was sometimes not necessarily a vote against the PAP, but rather a vote to create an outcome that would ensure that good governance would prevail in Singapore in the long term.

One participant asked if there was more detail on what was meant by the 'cost of living' in the survey questionnaire. She also asked if immigration and foreign workers were amongst the issues that respondents were asked for their views.

Explaining that the survey was 15 minutes long in delivery, Dr Koh stated that it was important to be economical. The questions were asked in the same form as they were posed in 2006. It was important to keep the same set of eleven issues in that first section of the survey as in the previous instrument for comparison. For that reason, there was no follow-up on what people meant when they checked off 'cost of living' as an important issue for them. This was also the reason why the issue of 'immigration and foreign workers' was placed in the final section of the survey. Dr Koh said that 52% of the respondents felt that the issue was important to them, with a preponderance of them from the service class.

In a final comment by a participant, he referred to Mr Devan's maps comparing the electoral victories in 1963 and 2011. He said that the Singapore electorate was akin to a savvy investor. When voters felt that the PAP had gone overboard, they treated it as 'oversold stock' by issuing a warning, as seen in the case of Anson and Nee Soon in the past, and now Aljunied. He believed that no one would want the PAP out of government, but those who voted against it were voting for a check on them. He suggested that more research be done on this.

He also cited how opposition parties that seemed to have been working the ground day-to-day were rewarded but not those who only emerged to contest in constituencies close to election day. This was also quite different from other countries where the opposition parties were always visible, for instance, because they had a shadow cabinet.

Dr Koh agreed, recognised the impact of Worker's Party's efforts at working the ground day-to-day from Hougang to Aljunied in-between the elections. It was evident that they believed that like social capital, political capital had to be built ground-up, from door-to-door. Voters were savvy too in the sense that the majority in Aljunied voted for WP's best team. So tactics mattered.

Session II: A 'New Normal' for Politics in Singapore?

Panel moderator, Dr Gillian Koh, opened the session by reminding the forum of the two key outcomes of the GE: first, the PAP saw a decline in support compared to the 2006 election; and second, there was a psychological breakthrough when WP scored a win in a GRC. Were there lessons for the political parties, and political development in Singapore more generally, from the history of Japan, Korea and Taiwan, countries that had been, for various reasons, one-party dominant states too? Was Singapore heading towards a 'new normal' for politics?

The first speaker of the session, Dr Lam Peng Er, Senior Research Fellow at the East Asian Institute, focussed on a comparison between the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in Japan and the PAP in Singapore. Like Singapore, Japan had historically been a one-party dominant state with the LDP at the helm until the party lost power to the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) in the country's recent election. Could one-party dominant systems in Asia such as the ones in Malaysia and Singapore stay in power indefinitely? Would French sociologist Maurice Duverger's observation that dominant parties tended to wear themselves out in office, hold true?

As in the case of Singapore, the LDP's management of a high-growth economy had underpinned its political dominance. However, Japan's bubble economy burst in 1991, with rapid industrialisation, urbanisation, and the rise of a new middle class in post-war Japan leading to a more pluralistic electorate. Similarly, the PAP was the political steward of Singapore's economic miracle. The party, however faced new challenges of widening social inequality, 'value change' brought about by demographic shifts and a new middle class. It faced the challenge of connecting with younger voters to preserve its political market share.

Weaknesses in party support and organisation led to LDP's decline. Its membership fell from 5.47 million in 1991 to only 1.06 million in 2010 with urbanisation. There had been too much 'in-breeding' at the higher echelons of the party so it failed to renew itself. By 2009, more than a third of LDP MPs were second or third generation politicians, with aspiring politicians having no other choice but to join the opposition DPJ instead. The PAP would be

well-advised to renew its ranks but also to build up its own party structure and mass base going forward.

It was also important to realise that there were particular historical differences between the LDP and PAP. For instance, the LDP never controlled more than two-thirds of parliamentary seats unlike the PAP. The rarity of one-party dominant systems had led to the use of the label 'uncommon democracies'. With few checks and balances and opposition parliamentarians, Singapore was uncommon even among uncommon democracies. It was not unthinkable that the PAP was 'the last hegemonic party in the world'.

Dr Lam noted that Singapore had witnessed some change towards a 'normal democracy'. It was too early to tell if the PAP would lose more GRCs in the next election but the 'new normal' would include more demanding and critical younger voters and the emergence of a critical online media. Socio-political polarisation occurred with a mainstream media that remained sympathetic towards the ruling party and a more critical online media that 'shouted' at the PAP.

In Singapore, the emergence of more credible opposition parties could also lead to changes in the *status quo*. In the Japanese case, the LDP's main opponent during the Cold War was the Japan Socialist Party, contented to remain as an opposition party and supporter of narrow labour union interests. A more power hungry DPJ emerged in 1996 with policies that were more acceptable to Japanese mainstream, and won the Upper House (2007) and the Lower House (2009) and become the new ruling party. Similarly, in the 2011 GE, the PAP was challenged by more confident, credible and competitive parties than before. Was this the harbinger of greater political competition for PAP which would usher in that 'new normal' for Singapore politics?

In the short run, would Singapore's political economy model, consisting of an 'iron triangle' of the PAP, the mandarin-dominated policy structure and the government-linked corporations change? In this respect, this was an 'old normal' still present and unaffected by the entry of six new opposition members of parliament (MPs).

The PAP stated that would renew its efforts at reaching out to the people to inform their policy-making process, but would it be able to move from what in people's minds was a paternalistic orientation that 'the PAP(a) knows best'. If indeed the PAP was flexible enough to make the adjustments, it would not be impossible for the ruling party to reform and enjoy a new lease of life.

The second speaker, Dr Chua Beng Huat, Professor of Sociology at NUS argued that since Singapore had always been a democracy, it was not approaching a 'new normal'. Rather, it was normalising its political atmosphere.

He began with the position that single-party dominant states were not abnormal in nature, with India and Japan as two examples where political parties had maintained power for decades. In both cases, the dominant parties -- the Congress Party (CP) and the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) -- had lost to the Opposition once but regained power fairly quickly.

To Prof Chua, Singapore was more accurately 'a democratic polity with an authoritarian atmosphere'. He noted that although the ruling party was authoritarian in its administrative means, it had never seriously broken the limits of democracy with the possible exception of its use of the Internal Security Act. He pointed out that the Barisan Socialis could have chosen to contest another election after Operation Coldstore, for it had won 53%

of seats in the 1963 elections, but it chose not to. Subsequently, it ceded space to the PAP, where the credibility of a political candidate was increasingly defined by the PAP model, such that a typical candidate was presented as highly educated, financially successful and non-corrupt. This definition of credibility was then continuously repeated and established as the definitive model, which in turn helped to keep the ruling party in power. Therefore, it was not productive to compare Singapore to other Asian countries since each differed in the specific histories of their formation. Instead, it was time to rethink the democratic conditions that Singapore had inherited.

The speaker predicted that PAP's dominance would be 'undoubted' in the near future given its track record of maintaining national prosperity. However, the form of PAP's economic success had begun to draw criticism. As the IPS survey data showed, those in the higher income groups were more concerned about the government's liberal migration policy - to a greater degree than low-income workers who faced competition from foreign workers, this group feared that the influx of foreign talent would threaten their future.

In time, a more educated polity could demand greater political pluralism. The crucial question to explore was if the political structure would an expression of this liberalisation of culture and of minds. Painting a possible picture of the nation's political future, Prof Chua suggested that Singapore could evolve to resemble India, where a dominant party like the CP in power could function within an increasingly democratic political culture. The retirement of former Minister Mentor Mr Lee Kuan Yew would be important in nurturing such an open political culture. Prof Chua said that much of the 'authoritarian atmosphere' in Singapore had been the result of the presence of one man. His retirement was hence, symbolically, a huge relief to the collective political consciousness of Singaporeans.

While the Singapore polity was so 'starved for change' that every change was thought to be the beginning of the 'next big thing', there was a long path ahead before Singapore could be a 'fully normal democracy', or achieve institutional norms befitting of that democracy.

Discussion

One participant asked the speakers to comment on what was behind the 'three As of the 2011 election': Anger, Apology and Anxiety.

Prof Chua said the anger expressed by the electorate was hardly surprising. What was most impressive was that the issue of high ministerial pay, which first surfaced two decades earlier had not been forgotten by the electorate. Singaporeans felt as powerless and disenfranchised as WP politician Low Thia Khiang had pointed out in his election rallies. The electorate was growing increasingly frustrated of getting boilerplate explanations from the government whenever issues were raised. Prime Minister (PM) Lee's public apology during the election period would be considered as less than extraordinary in a democratic atmosphere. However, apologies were seen as abnormal in Singapore as Mr Lee Kuan Yew had never done so previously in his capacity as party leader. However, with the PM having set precedent, Prof Chua expected more of such apologies in a 'normalising' polity.

On the issue of anxiety, Singaporeans had realised that general economic growth did not necessarily translate to improvement in their lives. Rising inequality meant that people were no longer assured that PAP could 'deliver the goods' across the board. However, one big anxiety the PAP faced was the loss of support from the middle ground, a class which

'ought to be grateful for government policies' but then subsequently 'misbehaved' with its votes.

Dr Lam concurred with Prof Chua and noted that the intensity of anger was indeed different at this year's rallies. By their own admission, it was only during the hustings that Mrs Lim Hwee Hwa and Mr George Yeo contesting in Aljunied GRC realised the deep resentment on the ground, suggesting that they or the party had been out of touch. The anxiety could have been exacerbated by growing social inequality, despite the growing economy. With regard to PM's apology, Dr Lam felt that it was the most effective thing that the PAP had done in GE2011. If the next election saw a swing of another five to six percent, the PAP would have reason to be anxious. He hoped they would do some soul-searching with this election.

The next participant asked if the political situation in Singapore had a close analogy to a family with a strong father figure. Singaporeans were relating to the PAP like a rebellious teenager with his father. Just like the adolescent child, the electorate was now ready to take greater charge of their lives. However, he said that while apologies and adolescence were part and parcel of 'family life', Singaporeans realised that they were all in the same car and had no desire for an a negative or even catastrophic outcome.

Dr Lam agreed with this analogy and pointed to IPS' survey results, which had showed that the young and more educated were more open to choices and preferred greater political pluralism. Drawing on this, Dr Lam asked Mr Ng if he felt that the PAP had reconnected with young voters like him. Mr Ng said that if the ruling party kept giving the impression that it thought it was always right, people would not feel involved in nation-building. Perhaps the PAP was a victim of its own success. Dr Lam replied that the PAP had nurtured a literate and successful middle-class, who like Mr Ng, were raising questions about the party, thus proving the point that the party would be in that sense, a victim of its own success.

Another participant asked if the speakers thought that the ruling party develop its links with civil society in Singapore in the future. In his reply, Dr Lam said that he did not see the PAP doing this. He also said that while the PAP had promised a more consultative government, citizens were still asking for this and therefore it was unclear if it had delivered on this promise or could do this successfully.

On civil society activism, Prof Chua noted that some of his Filipino colleagues also referred to the country's '7000-strong civil society' as an index of democracy, but to him, that was really the sign of a failed state. Civil society was also hard to start and sustain in Singapore, and that was not because of repression, but because of the efficiency of the state.

One participant wanted to know how those in the low-income group voted given inflation and the rise in cost of living. She mentioned two possible scenarios: one where the low-income had become so anxious for means-tested welfare that they voted for the incumbent, and the other where they were possibly angry, thus voting for the Opposition. Dr Koh said that more data was needed to discern any distinctive trend.

Another participant commented that Singaporeans demonstrated a strong sense of fair play when they reacted negatively to the way that it was revealed that one of the opposition candidates in the election was gay. Those who reacted negatively felt that what was in candidates' private life is out of bounds in such a contest. He said that 'this may have political consequences in the future'. His second comment was that the PAP government's

track record of good economic performance could work two ways – if the appeal was to a safe pair of hands for the economy, that might have a positive effect, but if the appeal was that people should show gratitude by voting the party, that would have a negative effect. Voters want to know what the party is going to deliver going forward. This too would impact the political landscape in the future. Finally, he said that in larger countries, the political attitudes in one region may not affect another. In small Singapore where constituencies resemble one another, political issues that are played out at the national level are played out at the local level too. A swing in political sentiment and votes can therefore have a large effect. In larger countries, there could be a swing at some local level but its effect is isolated from the national outcome. There could be a radical change in the political landscape if the swing from the PAP in 2011 were to happen again.

A participant suggested that there could be scope for comparing the IPS survey results with National Volunteer Philanthropy Centre data, as it concerned the interests that respondents with higher socio-economic status had in social justice issues.

With regard to Dr Lam's assessment of Japan, the next participant noted that the DPJ had multiple defections from parties. He asked how important the question of defections was to changing the *status quo*. Dr Lam said that defections were important but not sufficient for transition in Japan's political system. However, a confluence of factors, rather than just defections had led to a change in power.

Closing with a quick recapitulation of the panel presentations, Dr Koh said that the challenge for the PAP, from Dr Lam's perspective was whether it could connect better, especially with the young, as well as address issues that had caused anger on the ground. From Prof Chua's viewpoint, Singapore was currently 'normalising' towards being a democratic polity, and recent developments reflected the response of a political regime to a situation that is to be expected in a 'normal' democracy.

Session III: A Transformed Electorate?

The third session on 'A Transformed Electorate' was chaired by Associate Professor Kwok Kian Woon, Associate Provost (Student Life) and Head of the Division of Sociology at the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Nanyang Technological University (NTU).

The first speaker, IPS Faculty Associate and Associate Professor Tan Ern Ser from the Department of Sociology at the NUS focused on the question of whether social class affected voting behaviour. Dr Tan, a member of the 2011 IPS Post-Election Survey team, said that the equality of economic opportunities afforded by the meritocratic system had created some impression of a classless society. The reality was, however that different groups possessed varying degrees of social and cultural capital and produced unequal results within the structure of meritocracy. Singapore's class structure consisted of a proportionately small low income group that was the focus of government welfare policies, and a large middle income majority for whom the government had emphasised upward social mobility. Having experienced the benefits of Singapore's economic development over previous decades, Dr Tan described the middle class as generally supportive of the political *status quo*. However, since the 1990s, it had found itself no longer financially comfortable. GE 2011 significantly revealed the frustrations from the 'middle-class squeeze' – they needed financial assistance too, but means-testing had disqualified them from social assistance schemes.

The IPS survey used household income and occupation as indicators of class: middle and upper-middle class respondents were in the service class category. They posted the highest scores on issues of concern such as the need for a good and efficient government, need for checks and balances in Parliament and even cost of living. This was surprising as bread and butter issues were expected to be of greater concern to the working class. The service class agreed most strongly with the statement that it is important to have elected opposition members in Parliament but least on the fairness of the election system to all parties. They also had the highest proportion of 'pluralists' among the occupational classes, though this had declined from 2006. Pluralists were more likely to agree or strongly agree that the WP is credible (58%) compared to 52% for the PAP. Overall, the survey had found voters concerned with bread and butter issues, but these were not mutually exclusive with their support of checks and balances in the government. However, Dr Tan said that 'demand-side pressures' of growing pluralist political orientations must be matched by an increasing 'supply-side' presence of credible opposition parties to produce an electoral trajectory towards to a multi-party system if at all.

The second speaker was Dr Suzaina Kadir, Senior Lecturer at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy (LKYSPP). Dr Kadir analysed the transition of Singapore's electorate through the three lenses of education, race and ethnicity, as well as gender.

Results of the IPS survey showed that the education level of respondents was positively related with the likelihood they would take a pluralist perspective on politics. Voters with a diploma or university education saw greater importance in having elected members of the opposition, were less likely to see the electoral system as fair to all parties, and found opposition parties more credible as compared to those with secondary level education or lower. The higher-educated also saw the Internet as more important in shaping their views, and were more cognisant of immigration and foreigners.

On the other hand, gender did not factor into GE 2011; in other countries, gender could affect political differences, but this did not apply in Singapore.

Dr Kadir also outlined the manner in which different races prioritised political considerations, candidate characteristics, communication channels and credibility of the political parties in GE 2011. The IPS survey suggested that the Malays showed the biggest move into the Swing category, put a premium on grassroots and community leadership when evaluating candidates and viewed the Internet as an important communication channel. They also seemed inclined to consider opposition parties somewhat credible, especially the National Solidarity Party (NSP) and SDP, but there were questions as to who would champion Malay issues in WP. Dr Kadir noted that the Malay electorate had generally been assumed to be supportive of the PAP due to the protection and socio-economic help from the government, but GE 2011 raised the strong possibility that the Malay electorate was changing its attitudes towards politics and leadership.

The third speaker was Mr Arun Mahizhnan, Deputy Director of IPS, who spoke on the role of the Internet in GE 2011. He noted that in Singapore, the traditional mainstream media of newspapers, radio and television were widely considered to be pro-establishment. Hardly any alternative media in the traditional platforms existed apart from a few opposition party newspapers in print. In contrast, almost all the alternative media in Singapore were online, as were traditional media such as the Straits Times. As such, it could not be said that all online media were anti-establishment, but almost all anti-establishment media were online media.

Mr Mahizhnan explained why online media could be 'toxic' for many reasons. First, the outpouring of the pent-up demand for political expression, accumulated over decades of restricted and censored speech, had no other outlet. Second, cyberspace was akin to an 'electronic coffee shop' where everyone was free to comment. Third, unlike the real life coffee shop, the online coffee shop enabled every person to reach any number of other people anywhere, any time and at very low or even no cost. Finally, online media provided a level of anonymity unavailable offline, and allowed one to operate beyond the reach of local jurisdiction.

The IPS survey showed that newspapers and the television were still top channels of communication in shaping voter decisions on whom to vote for, and fewer than 45% said the material found on the Internet was the most important in shaping their views in this election. However, online media was more influential with some segments of people, especially with those younger in age, and higher in income and occupational class. Mr Mahizhnan noted that these findings were not surprising, as they largely reflected the regular Nielsen Media Index indicators.

While the current survey findings made it hard to characterise GE 2011 as the 'Internet Election', the online alternative media's growing impact on Singapore was clear. The role of the online media on local elections had previously been restricted by rules and regulations as well as the fact that Singaporeans did not take advantage of the new medium available to them. In 2010, the government opened the digital doors even wider than in 2006 and allowed for greater exchange of political communications.

There was no doubt that the volume and range of information and views in GE 2011 was far greater than in 2006, partly because there were far more political parties and constituencies in this GE. However, the use of new media varied from party to party - WP and SDP did much better than all others, including the gargantuan PAP. Also, a lot of non-party members went into this new media sphere and used it to support or condemn the parties and candidates. Thus, the new media playing field was levelled by political actors as well as ordinary people.

In conclusion, GE 2011 was at least an Internet-aided election if not *the* Internet Election. The alternative media reflected what was on the ground much more than what the mainstream media had ever done in the last 35 years or so. The ground also learnt a lot of new things from the new media and it reacted, which was very normal in most liberal democracies. The election results as well as the alternative media and mainstream media have shown the beginning of the normalisation of a unique nation, or at least it had arrived at new normal.

Associate Professor Kenneth Paul Tan at LKYSPP was the fourth speaker. Dr Tan noted that although the IPS survey found that political pluralists had fallen in proportion since 2006, this group set the tone of GE 2011 by being the most expressive. He cited the high volume of online media activity, where people shared what they liked on Facebook and Youtube, but also contributed vitriolic attacks on issues and candidates they disliked. This had resulted in a 'tribalisation of cyberspace' with polarised views and often obvious political affiliations. There were also inspirational or 'confessional' expressions by thoughtful Singaporeans, who reflected on their new-found political consciousness due to a specific incident or personality, and many resolved to be part of 'change'. The intellectual leadership of such change was provided by public intellectuals, citizen journalists and artists who helped to re-shape the political discourse with an 'alternative vocabulary' for ordinary Singaporeans. This stood in contrast with received ideological dogmas such as the primacy

of economic success and the indispensability of the PAP. The highly emotive approaches of several opposition party candidates in campaign rallying also contrasted favourably with the clinical style of many PAP candidates.

Dr Tan suggested two analogies by which people could choose to view the GE and its implications - 'carnival' and 'adolescence'. This would help in deliberating on whether the expressiveness would amount to durable change and greater political competition in future.

First on 'carnival', he said the political exuberance of the Singaporean electorate could be viewed as an effort for by Singaporeans as carnival participants to forget their mundane lives and through colourful public masquerades of parody and satire, mock those in positions of authority. While the build-up of political confidence in the confined space of the GE could spill over into regular life and motivate a citizenry into sustainable activity and democratisation, political energy could also be quickly dissipated by tedium and disillusionment. If change promised to the electorate by either the ruling or opposition parties did not materialise, a disheartened electorate might instead withdraw from what was perceived as a re-politicised public space, changing nothing.

Dr Tan's other analogy of adolescence would help to highlight the youthful character of the Singaporean electorate during GE 2011: many were younger and/or first time voters. The electorate seemed to be experiencing growing pains of political maturation, particularly after being governed by a colonial and strongly paternalistic government under the PAP. On one hand there were 'risky' behaviours and unpolished voices from an 'adolescent' electorate rebelling against a controlling 'father figure', but there were also perspectives released in reaction to the blind spots of establishment thinking. These experiences would nevertheless be valuable for moving the electorate out of its comfort zones and signalling emerging or latent social issues, resulting in more enduring political change.

Dr Tan also warned that the American experience of counterculture in the 1960s, in which a younger generation rejected their parents' social and political norms and conventions had eventually led to an ideologically polarised society facing a deadlock on important policy issues. The IPS survey had found that the proportion of Singaporeans who consistently wanted change had risen most significantly among the youngest voters, the proportions of those who wanted change and those who did not have both declined. This increased pool of voters with more eclectic preferences suggested that the electorate might be closer to 'carnival' than to 'adolescent' counterculture.

Discussion

A participant pointed out that the IPS survey showed both a swing in Malay voters towards the SDP and NSP and the Internet's greater influence on Malays as compared with other races. He asked if Dr Kadir agreed with these results based on her interactions with the ground. Dr Kadir responded that it was not so much a swing between parties, but that the credibility of SDP and NSP had improved among the Malays compared to the Chinese and the rest. One possible reason was the characteristics of candidates that were important to Malay voters, and how the respective parties addressed them. At the same time, she was surprised by the importance of the Internet to the Malays, as she thought they would depend on newspapers and TV for information.

Another participant asked if Singapore was being re-politicised, and if Singaporeans were going back to the old normal of the 1960s, when people were more interested in social and political issues. Dr Tan replied that he did not think politics was ever absent in

Singapore but that the most sophisticated kind of politics made itself invisible, and in Singapore this was disguised as pure administration. Mr Mahizhnan added that people spoke about political pluralism as if it never existed in Singapore - politics was serious and competitive in the 1960s but a mythology seems to have developed over the last few decades had caused some Singaporeans to imagine otherwise and forget what the political scene was truly like.

On the methodology of the IPS survey, the next participant questioned the breakdown of classifications and why asked why occupation was used to define class. Many proxy indicators for class existed, and occupation was among quite a few that had been selected to understand the impact of class on political attitudes.

Lastly, a participant wondered if an even greater swing away from the PAP would have been expected given the 'noise level' of GE 2011. She wondered if this chatter was just casual discussion, or a function of the amplification of the younger generation of voices taking to the Internet. If the latter were true, then would be the question of how the situation would play out in the future with the increase in percentage of the population using the Internet and the growing size of the younger demographic group. Mr Mahizhnan disputed the assertion that only young people were involved on the Internet, as many older people were also users of the medium. Although the young were turning to the Internet as far as the volume of messages would suggest, the erudite and rational voices on the Internet left quite an impression and impact on the older and adult population. Mr Mahizhnan was certain that the Internet would be the medium of communication for all ages going forward.

Session IV: A Renewal of the Parties?

In the final session, representatives of three parties were invited to share how their parties had renewed themselves in the run-up to the recent election and how if at all, that renewal process would continue given their interpretation of what mattered to voters. Ambassador Ong Keng Yong, immediate past Director of the Institute moderated the session.

The first speaker, PAP MP Mr Vikram Nair addressed renewal from the perspective of a new candidate. Most obviously, renewal involved new party faces. Typically, the PAP brought in more than a quarter of new candidates each election (24 this time), even though this came with the political cost of losing what support there might have been for the retiring PAP Members of Parliament (MPs). This process of forced renewal created a rapid pace of change, which might have been too fast for some. Renewal also concerned party and political processes – something the PAP would take some time to arrive at. Nonetheless, Mr Nair said that he had been unrestrained in his engagement of ministers with his views and there had been no objection to that. Others were encouraged to do likewise. Contrary to general perception, office holders were receptive to feedback and engagement.

Next was the issue of checks and balances in Parliament, and how PAP MPs met needs on the ground. MPs were keenly aware of their dependence on votes for re-election, and it made no sense for them to close their ears to ground sentiment. The PAP was not an elite party that ignored the needs of the low income, as the strong connection between individual MPs and residents at Meet-the-People Sessions would suggest. The PAP tackled poverty by maintaining a minimum standard of living for the poor and providing social assistance that reinforced responsibility and self-reliance. The aspiration of upward mobility for the middle class would be harder to fulfill, and may not be something that the PAP could promise everyone.

Mr Nair cautioned too that there was a darker side of democracy which could lead to populism rather than government that was fiscally responsible, where ruling parties pander the people to boost re-election prospects, and he would not wish for this in Singapore. Coming out of the Great Depression, governments had courageously spent beyond their budgets to revive flagging economies, as the thinking of John Maynard Keynes advocated at that time. The difficulty was in resisting popular pressure to continue with budget deficits in the longer term once recovery had occurred. In Singapore, fiscal responsibility was influenced by legislation as the elected government was not permitted to exceed the budget every five years. The PAP was open to engagement, but not to the extent of conceding to popular pressure. Going forward, Mr Nair said that his friends advised him to bring about change that takes heed, not of the 40% that did not vote for the PAP but of the 60% that did.

The second speaker, Opposition MP and Vice-Chair of the WP Media Team, Mr Pritam Singh began his presentation by defining the parameters of 'renewal' for his party. Was WP conducting its renewal with the intention of continuing with the same style of politics, to bring in people of similar ilk to the party, or create a more varied membership base?

The WP carried out its party renewal process rather differently from the incumbent party. WP did not have the luxury of hosting official tea sessions for hundreds of prospective candidates, certainly because of the high risk that was perceived from joining the political opposition in Singapore. It did not proactively seek out accomplished individuals to join its cause. Rather, those who joined WP did so of their own volition, and saw the party as a vehicle to bring about a more progressive society in Singapore. Anyone thinking about joining the opposition would also face several challenges, one of which was the prospect of being placed under close scrutiny. Renewal within the WP was driven by the individuals that joined the party, rather than the party itself. In that regard, the WP reflected the average Singaporean. The WP believed that every Singaporean could make a difference and contribute to public discourse, regardless of his or her background or skills.

WP conducted its renewal with the mentality that all prospective members had to remember that the people were the masters, and that grassroots, community activists and politicians were the servants. This master-servant analogy stemmed from a genuine desire to serve the public, rather than socialist political ideology.

As a litmus test, new members were expected to engage residents in a variety of public settings early on. Those that fared well were generally inclined to follow up with residents on difficult questions they did not have the answers to. They also tended to be able to simplify, synthesise and communicate messages in a manner that residents could easily understand. At the end of the day, party renewal stood for naught if good new members could not be recruited. Ultimately, the party was as only as strong as its weakest link.

The third speaker, Ms Hazel Poa, NSP Secretary-General said that political parties could renew themselves on the basis of evolution or cloning. The PAP appeared to adopt the latter, as the new candidates in 2011 did not look too different from their predecessors, and typically comprised of unionists, former public servants, and high income professionals. They were also unable to find any existing PAP policy that they disagreed with when queried by the press in the recent general election period. PAP utilised the rather ineffective method of high ministerial salaries to draw talent. Candidates in the past were of higher calibre, even though ministerial salaries were lower. In addition, PAP candidates from the private sector previously commanded greater respect for their personal sacrifice of plum pay and benefits. This rapid increase had eroded respect and trust built up over the years.

Opposition parties were evolving with the influx of promising young candidates, and the entry of the highly qualified individuals of the ilk of Mr Chen Show Mao, Mr Tan Jee Say and Dr Ang Yong Guan. The online media had provided direct outreach for political parties. In the recent GE, the online media also forced the mainstream media to give greater coverage to opposition parties with the possibility of driving traffic online.

The NSP had a history of leadership transition with Central Executive Committees (CEC) often comprising of current and former presidents and secretary-generals working together. This contrasted with the practice of some other opposition parties (WP, Singapore People's Party, SDP). The model of leadership change facilitated renewal while continuous leadership lent itself more readily to a consistent party message. The NSP intended to step up its engagement with the media, especially online as well as strengthen ties with the community to attract new members. There was also the need to foster a greater sense of cooperation with other opposition parties, in light of the increased possibility of three-cornered fights with the growth of the opposition. The NSP also planned to conduct training for its younger members and put in place the documentation processes required for the preservation of institutional memory and transfer of knowledge.

In closing, Ms Poa said that the electorate had evolved and was now more Internet savvy and less fearful of engaging in political commentary or activity. She personally felt a greater sense of identity and national pride among Singaporeans after the GE.

Discussion

The first participantraised the question of when the political opposition would become a viable alternative government.   Would such a situation see a natural process of consolidation between opposition parties?   Mr Singh first said that 44 candidates were required to form the government in today's Parliament. There could be a scenario one day when the PAP would need to form a coalition government if it could manage to win only 30 or so seats. It was a question of which party it would turn to.   The 2011 campaign represented a crucible of opportunity, and the WP emerged with six MPs and one Non-Constituency Member of Parliament (NCMP). Much could happen in the next few years. Coalition governments could be united in approach, and were not necessarily characterised by legislative and policy impasse.

Ms Poa agreed that the opposition was not ready to form government and ventured that another way to view it was that the opposition camp would require a critical number of 15 ministerial calibre candidates for this to happen. She saw the genesis of a shadow cabinet at present, which she hoped would fully emerge in the next five years.

Mr Nair said that coalition politics might appear empowering to the people, but came with the reality of limited say on policies that were dependent on political deal-brokerage.

Referring to Ms Poa's earlier point on the greater likelihood of three-cornered fights, Dr Gillian Koh asked the speaker to comment on the state of relations between NSP and other opposition parties, as well as the areas of resonance on policy points. Ms Poa said she believed that the parties would consolidate in the future, but hinted at issues of historical baggage in the current climate.

Mr Singh added that the PAP had enclosed the WP's stronghold in a geographical cordon in the eastern part of Singapore through gerrymandering (with Tampines, Pasir Ris-Punggol, Marine Parade, Tanjong Pagar and Bishan-Toa Payoh Group Representation

Constituencies). The lack of current partnerships stemmed from the need to politically strategise, rather than an unwillingness to collaborate.

Another participant pointed to what he viewed as the deep politicisation of the state and civil service, and the support provided to the PAP by members of these institutions by taking personal leave during the election season. Was there a need to equalise the playing field? Mr Nair said that such a view was not credible as he had no such control of the civil service or media. Mr Singh said that in his experience as an MP to date, he had seen the civil service (like the Housing Development Board) attempt to address issues raised in an apolitical and fair manner.

The next participant threw up a seemingly counterintuitive suggestion of asking MPs to conduct fewer Meet-The-People Sessions. Apart from bringing in new blood, renewal was also about ideas, which required time spent in reflection rather than the frenetic need to address constituents every problem. PAP MPs need time to digest feedback and develop more holistic responses to social and policy issues. Moderator, Ambassador Ong said that the participant could blog to sensitise Singaporeans to a culture of referring municipal problems to the town councils instead of MPs, or even provide their own solutions. Disagreeing with the participant, Mr Singh ventured that it might be wiser for opposition politicians to continue with this platform, as the grassroots option was not open to them. To that end, the People's Association (PA) grassroots movement should always be an apolitical and neutral entity, and be perceived as such. In addition, MPs needed to help Singaporeans without the means of crafting letters of appeal to do so at these sessions.

Mr Nair agreed on the importance of thinking time, but maintained that it was vital to continue to meet with residents as it was the job of the MP to help deal with these issues or at least send them in the right direction. He added that he did not make use of the PA engine to campaign, and most of his election helpers were branch volunteers.

The fourth participant pointed to the slide in percentage of respondents that agreed with the statement that 'PAP is a credible party' from 87% (2006) to 73% (2011) in the IPS Post-Election Survey. She asked why this had happened and what the PAP would do. Mr Nair said that the decline in credibility was the probable result of the activism of anti-PAP individuals, some policies that were not quite right, and mistakes that were highlighted and even sensationalised. On the account of voter turnout, Singapore did better than the United States or United Kingdom (typically 50% of the electorate), where a large number was disillusioned with both parties. Looking ahead, the PAP was prepared for greater public scrutiny and would do its best to fix the fundamentals and get things right.

Another participant NTU Journalism Student Mr Bhavan Jaipagras raised the question of how committed political parties were to the notion of civil rights. Acting Minster for Community Development and Sports Major General Chan Chun Sing had begun to 'parrot' old rhetoric barely two months into the job. For the opposition, civil rights featured in the WP manifesto but was not strongly present in the party's election rhetoric; NSP did not address civil rights in its manifesto. Mr Singh said that at the launch of the WP manifesto, six WP members each referred to a chapter. The party did not conduct its election campaigning in a manner that some would have expected in the hustings, but the public could expect to see greater discussion on civil rights in Parliament. Ms Poa said that she hoped to change things on civil rights, but this decision had to collectively be taken by the NSP's CEC.

The next participant said that Mr Nair seemed to be open to ideas, and asked if this line of logic extended to the spending of the reserves in the recent economic crisis. Why was the discussion prematurely taken off the table? Mr Nair said that deficit spending was

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useful and necessary on occasion, as John Maynard Keynes did in his time. Of greater concern, was deficit spending that became systemic.

Further, the participant raised the question of what the opposition could do to encourage more mature debate in cyberspace. Mr Singh suggested that these seemingly 'critical' views may in reality be a small part of cyberspace. Comments of such a nature would not disappear, and it was important to still listen as there may be useful comments within. The government could release more information, so people could identify the statistics, which would make the government more transparent. Ms Poa said that there were sites where discussion was more meaningful, and those that were less so. It was difficult for discussion on political sites to be very rational all the time, and this might be better managed by apolitical organisations. Mr Nair said that he was happy to receive dissenting comments as long as they were made within the bounds of the law.

Another participant pointed out that the panellists had said little on young voters in their speeches. How did the parties intend to cater to younger voters in their renewal process? Mr Nair said that there would always be competing interests and trade-offs in decision-making. The PAP did recruit a number of youths, although there were probably many others with different views who were not inclined to join the party. He was personally open to visits from youths or any others who were interested in making a difference to see how activities were conducted on the ground, having benefitted from doing so himself. Mr Singh said that the WP's youth wing was its best kept secret since it met regularly and conducted outreach to young voters. Ms Poa said that the NSP would primarily conduct its youth engagement through online media, and the organisation of activities. The NSP also had the unique advantage of Nicole Seah's Facebook space.

The next participant commented on the lack of Malay-Muslim MPs who openly disagreed with MM Lee's statement following the publication of *Hard Truths*, which he hoped would change with party renewal. To the opposition, Mr Haikal said he heard anecdotally that the public voted for the PAP for its stronger Malay-Muslim candidates vis-a-vis the opposition. Ms Poa related that the NSP has always had difficulty convincing Malay-Muslim individuals to stand for election, possibly due to personal religious convictions. Mr Singh disagreed that the quality of WP Malay-Muslim candidates was poor. WP Malay-Muslim politicians faced a different dynamic from their PAP counterparts and sought to serve the needs of all Singaporeans and not just their racial community. Mr Nair said that Minister for Muslim Affairs Yaacob Ibrahim did speak up for the community shortly after former Minister Mentor Mr Lee made his comments and this was taking into account the fact that there was strong feedback within the party from Malay-Muslim MPs. While it made sense to debate legislative issues openly in Parliament, it would be more effective to hold some discussions in more private settings.

In closing, Ms Poa said that the NSP would continue to work harder to recruit better candidates. Mr Singh emphasised the importance of bringing in candidates that would inject a certain spark of idealism for a better Singapore. Because of the difficult nature of getting individuals to join the opposition cause, it was fair for the party to set the standards high, and to make its position absolutely clear. What was important to the fundamentals of party renewal was for new candidates to present genuine keenness and joy toward public service rather than being solely focused on electoral victory.

Closing Remarks

In bringing the forum to a close, IPS Director Mr Janadas Devan recounted that the term 'new normal' was discussed with great frequency at the conference. The articulate and committed manner in which incumbent and opposition politicians discussed issues in the final panel inspired confidence in the future of Singapore, if this was indeed a picture of the 'new normal' in local politics. The ability of Singaporeans to disagree without being disagreeable certainly did bode well for the country.

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IPS POST-ELECTION FORUM 2011

PROGRAMME
8 July 2011
Orchard Hotel

8.30 am – 9.00 am	**Registration**
9.00 am – 9.15 am	**WELCOME REMARKS** Mr Janadas Devan Director Institute of Policy Studies
9.15 am – 10.00 am	<u>**SESSION I**</u> **IPS POST-ELECTION SURVEY** *Chairperson:* Mr Janadas Devan *Speaker:* Dr Gillian Koh Senior Research Fellow Institute of Policy Studies Open Dialogue
10.00 am – 10.30 am	**Tea Break**
10.30 am – 12.00 pm	<u>**SESSION II**</u> **A 'NEW NORMAL' FOR POLITICS IN SINGAPORE?** *Chairperson:* Dr Gillian Koh *Speakers:* Dr Lam Peng Er Senior Research Fellow East Asian Institute Professor Chua Beng Huat Asia Research Institute Open Dialogue
12.00 pm – 1.15 pm	**Lunch**

1.15 pm – 2.45 pm	**SESSION III** **A TRANSFORMED ELECTORATE?** *Chairperson:* Associate Professor Kwok Kian Woon Member Academic Panel Institute of Policy Studies and Associate Provost (Student Life) & Head Division of Sociology School of Humanities and Social Sciences Nanyang Technological University *Speakers:* Associate Professor Tan Ern Ser Faculty Associate Institute of Policy Studies and Department of Sociology Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences National University of Singapore Dr Suzaina Kadir Senior Lecturer Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy Mr Arun Mahizhnan Deputy Director Institute of Policy Studies Associate Professor Kenneth Paul Tan Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy Open Dialogue
2.45 pm – 3.15 pm	**Tea Break**

3.15 pm – 4.45 pm	**SESSION IV** **A RENEWAL OF THE PARTIES?**
	Chairperson: Ambassador Ong Keng Yong Immediate Past Director Institute of Policy Studies
	Speakers: Mr Vikram Nair Member of Parliament Sembawang GRC and Party Member People's Action Party
	Mr Pritam Singh Member of Parliament Aljunied GRC and Vice-Chair, Media Team The Workers' Party
	Ms Hazel Poa Secretary-General National Solidarity Party
	Open Dialogue
4.45 pm – 5.00 pm	**CLOSING REMARKS** Mr Janadas Devan
5.00 pm	**END**

IPS POST-ELECTION FORUM 2011
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