

Forum 9: Global Trends, Social Movements and Democracy

This session, moderated by Mr Ho Kwon Ping, Executive Chairman of Banyan Tree Holdings, focused on the political dimensions of global trends on Singapore. The panel speakers included Dr Terence Chong, Deputy Director and Senior Fellow of the ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, and Dr Roberto Foa, Co-Director of the Cambridge Centre for the Future of Democracy.

The discussants on the panel were Mr Aaron Maniam, Deputy Secretary at the Ministry of Communications and Information, and Ms Zuraidah Ibrahim, Deputy Executive Editor of the South China Morning Post.

The world is faced with an antidemocratic impulse, a backlash against excessive globalisation. The response in Singapore to these sentiments has been sanguine, and even complacent. Based on poll and survey results, Dr Roberto Foa has found little evidence of politicisation exclusionary identity politics in Singapore. While there is evidence of anti-immigration sentiments, these arose from economic concerns rather than identity politics.

The second speaker Dr Terence Chong discussed the emerging faultlines of class and values in Singapore, correlating them to two different forms of populism: one arising from a competition for economic goods, and another from a backlash against socio-cultural change.

The two discussants Mr Aaron Maniam and Ms Zuraidah Ibrahim discussed the need to encourage greater inclusivity and participation in Singapore's political life, and raised questions over the interpretation of poll and survey data. The Q&A session covered a wide range of issues, including political trust, opposing socio-cultural values, meritocracy, the digital and generational divide, as well as the implications of a social media democracy.