



Welcome Remarks

IPS Post-Election Forum, 8 July 2011

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Cherian George, the NTU journalism professor and IPS Adjunct Fellow, said at a pre-GE forum that the significance of the election would turn on not only what happens on polling day, but also on the stories we tell of the elections after that. This of course is true of any historical event: They are the effect of present causes – meaning their significance is a function of the interpretations we impose on them retrospectively.

The stories that have been told of the 2011 GE resemble nothing so much as Alice Through the Looking Glass. Nothing on the post-GE mirror looks like what it used to look like on the pre-GE mirror.

The ruling People's Action Party won – with 60 per cent of the vote, a landslide by the standards of any democracy, first or third world. The party has since May 7 behaved as though it suffered a historic setback.

The PAP Secretary-General, Mr Lee Hsien Loong, said on election night that his party had received a strong mandate. The party has since the GE reversed or reviewed a whole slew of fundamental policies that the GE had presumably confirmed. I know of no instance in political history where a political party, after receiving 60 per cent of the votes, has concluded 'oh my lord, we had better change our policies'. I remember the first US presidential election I witnessed up close: Mr Ronald Reagan's landslide second-term victory in 1984. After the election, the Reagan Administration simply assured people it was 'morning again in America' and proceeded to cruise through the second term not changing any of its fundamental economic policies, even the obvious failures. And how much did Mr Reagan receive in 1984? The staggering, overwhelming majority of 58.8 per cent.

It is not only the PAP that assumes it suffered a reversal of historic proportions on May 7. Opposition parties assume the same. So too commentators of all variety, as well as the international media. I read in the Financial Times last month that the PAP had received 'only' 60 per cent of the votes on May 7. The Financial Times is a British newspaper. Over the last 100 years, only once has a British political party received 60 or more per cent of the votes – and that was in 1922, following the collapse of Lloyd George's World War I coalition and the destruction of the Liberals, allowing Bonar Law's Conservatives a landslide. Winston Churchill, Clement Atlee, Margaret Thatcher – none of the great British prime ministers of the last 100 years ever repeated the feat. Mrs Thatcher didn't even garner beyond 45 per

cent of the vote in any of her three GE triumphs. She got 44 per cent, 42 per cent and 42 per cent, respectively – famous victories all, we were assured.

So how did 60 per cent in Singapore become ‘only’? That actually is near the range of what the ruling party has received in GEs since 1984 – between 61 per cent in 1991 and 66 per cent in 2006, with the 75 per cent in 2001 an outlier, the result of the global crisis following Sept 11. Indeed, the 2011 result is only 0.9 percentage points lower than the previous ‘worse’ of 61 per cent in 1991, following which the ruling party received consecutively better results in subsequent GEs, reaching a high in 2001. So how did 60.1 per cent become ‘only’?

Well, it is all relative. Sixty per cent is ‘only’ because the PAP has been historically so dominant. In addition, there are number of other reasons why this elections was perceived to have been watershed.

First, most obviously, the ruling party lost a GRC, the first time it has since the GRC scheme was introduced.

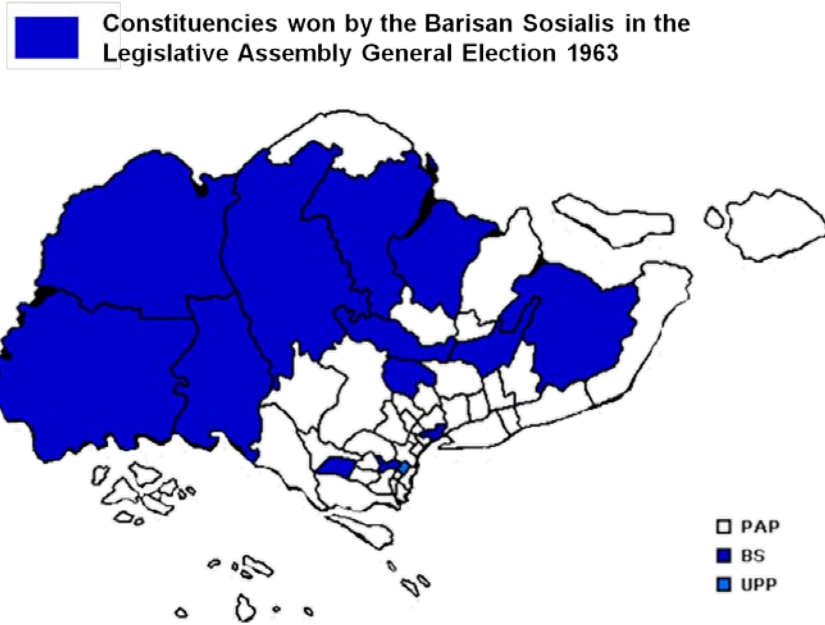
Second, the campaign did reveal an unprecedented ‘level of anger and resentment towards the Government and the PAP,’ as Mr George Yeo, the lead candidate in the PAP’s losing Aljunied GRC team, put it. The opposition ‘provided a loudspeaker for those who were frustrated, resentful and angry’, he felt, though the people also knew, ‘deep in their hearts... (that) they needed the PAP’.

Third, a more educated population feels it has to be able to participate in shaping the policies that affect it. There is a genuine desire for more debate, for more checks and balances, for more opposition, even among PAP supporters. For better or worse, we will have politics again – as we did between 1959 and 1966, the period it took the PAP to establish its dominance.

Fourth, never before have the opposition parties fielded as many credible candidates as they have this time round. It is no longer President’s Scholars on one side and bicycle thieves on the other. It is no longer even technocrats on one side and rabble-rousers on the other. Quite a few opposition candidates resembled their counterparts in the ruling party. There was similarity – which made for reassurance; but with significant differences – which made for choice. And when there is such choice, it stands to reason people will choose – and they may not necessarily always choose the PAP. That is the nature of democracy.

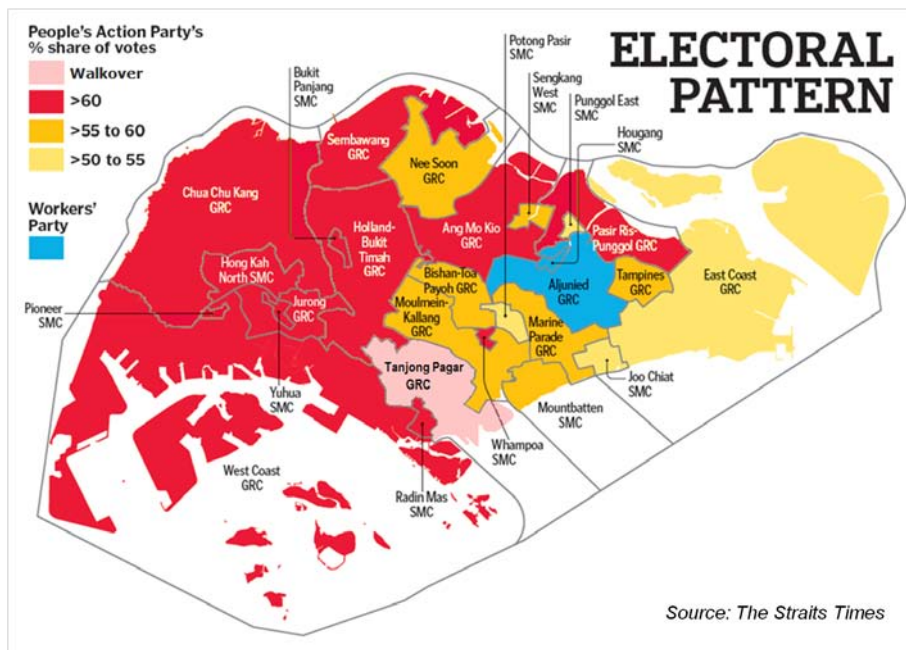
And finally, I think there was an economic reason. I can best indicate this graphically. Take a look at the first map, a representation of what happened in the 1963 General Election, almost 50 years ago. The area coloured blue were areas the Barisan Socialis won. It won 13 seats, to the PAP’s 37.

The second map shows what happened in the 2011 GE. The areas coloured red are areas where the PAP did exceptionally well, receiving more than 60 per cent of the vote, above its national average. You would notice they coincide almost exactly with the areas the Barisan Socialis won in 1963. How come?



Source: www.singapore-elections.com

Singapore General Election 2011



Well, it isn't because the PAP fielded two sons of former Barisan stalwarts, Mr Ong Ye Kung and Mr Janil Puthercary. After all, Mr Ong lost in Aljunied. The reason is simpler: Those Barisan areas were mostly rural in 1963. They have since been developed and are now almost wholly HDB, with little or no private housing, either condo or landed. Most of the areas where the PAP received less than 60 per cent of the votes had substantial private housing.

Potong Pasir is 40 per cent private, Joo Chiat is 99 per cent, Mountbatten is 60 per cent – all single-member constituencies where the PAP received well below its national average of 60 per cent. Among the GRCs, East Coast, where it got only 55 per cent, is more than one-third private, almost double the national average of 20 per cent. And in Aljunied, where it lost outright, it evidently performed worst in the GRC's Serangoon Gardens ward, which is almost wholly private.

This correlation did not always hold, of course. For example, Hougang is 80 per cent HDB, about the national average, three-quarters 3- or 4-room flats. The constituency went overwhelmingly to the Workers' Party, which retained it with a sharply increased majority. But on the whole, the results do suggest that the PAP lost 6 percentage points compared to 2006 largely because of the upper middle class.

Why should this be so? Hasn't this class benefited the most from PAP rule? We'll have to look at this more closely, but briefly I would say there is indeed a so-called 'sandwich class'. They have seen costs and expenses grow – healthcare, housing, looking after aging parents, education expenses – while their income have not grown as much. Indeed, as in the United States, an increasing portion of income growth in Singapore has been going to the very top – 98th percentile and above in the United States. This is one of the less fortunate aspects of globalization – a winner-take-all economic rubric. Moreover, unlike lower-income groups in 2- or 3-room HDB flats, the upper middle class doesn't get much from the state.

But this is just my view of what happened. Today, we will listen in on what the rest of Singapore thought.

The first time that IPS organised such a forum was after the 2006 General Election, when it released the findings of its first Post-Election Survey. Today, we are releasing our second Post-Election Survey. Gillian Koh will compare the findings of two surveys and detail what mattered most to voters.

We will then hear from Dr Lam Peng Er and Prof Chua Beng Huat. They will compare how the one-party dominant systems of Japan, Taiwan and South Korea with Singapore's experience. I said we will have politics again, but will that also entail a shift from a one-party dominant system to a two-party or multiparty-system? What might that change mean for political harmony, social cohesion and economic growth?

In the afternoon, after lunch, we will hear from Associate Professors Tan Ern Ser and Kenneth Paul Tan, as well as Dr Suzaina Kadir and Mr Arun Mahizhnan who will look at how social class, ethnicity, gender, and the media might explain the outcome of the election.

And finally, in the concluding session, we will hear from three practitioners – Mr Vikran Nair, MP for Sembawang GRC, from the PAP; Mr Pritam Singh, MP for Aljunied GRC, from the Workers' Party; and Ms Hazel Poa, Secretary-General of the National Solidarity Party. What are the issues they face? What do they think Singaporeans expect of their politicians? What sort of work will they have to do on the ground to build up their political capital?

There are close to 250 of you here today. I invite you to share your views. We have made provision to allow for as much discussion time as possible for you to speak from the ground. Tell us how you think we can achieve a healthy political system. This is the only country we

have in the only world we possess in the only universe we know. It is incumbent on each of us to fulfill the duties of citizenship faithfully.

The word 'politics' derives via Latin from the Greek *politikos*. And *politikos*, in turn, comes from the Greek *polites*, which means 'citizen'; *politeia*, 'citizenship'; and *polis*, 'city'. In other words, the Greek word for 'city' is the base at once for 'citizen', 'politics' and 'politician'. The word 'policy' – as in the Institute of Policy Studies -- also derives from the same source, *polis*.

City, a defined territory – Singapore -- produces a community, citizens. Citizens, regulating themselves, chose the politicians whom they wish to represent them. And politicians, devoting themselves to the welfare of the citizenry, produce policy for the city. It is almost a perfect Platonic circle.

Welcome to the oldest conversation in civilization – for politics is ultimately a conversation about our city, ourselves.

The full IPS Post-Election Forum 2011 report is available at:

http://www.spp.nus.edu.sg/ips/Post_Election_Forum_080711.aspx

If you have comments or feedback, please email ips.eneews@nus.edu.sg



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