

GE2025: Expect more scrutiny, pointed rebuttals in the last days of hustings, say experts

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Amid the flurry of rallies and ripostes, new faces and new arguments, expect things to heat up even more in the last third of the hustings.

As the Republic races towards the May 3 general election amid a nine-day campaign that kicked off on April 23, observers say voters will likely see more scrutiny of parties' proposed policies and their past shortcomings.

It will mean more robust debate, with parties expected to continue using public platforms like rallies and media doorstops to "strike back" and respond to claims from the other side, said independent political observer Felix Tan.

This includes issues like the handling of the scuppered Income-Allianz deal, which has resurfaced in recent days, Dr Tan said.

The proposed \$2.2 billion deal between NTUC's Income Insurance and German insurer Allianz fell through after a public outcry over Income's ability to continue its social mission after the sale. The Government eventually put a stop to the deal in October 2024.

On April 26, Workers' Party chief Pritam Singh said at a rally that no PAP labour MP had asked questions about the deal in Parliament when the issue surfaced.

At another rally the next day, Senior Minister Lee Hsien Loong pointed out that six PAP MPs and one WP MP had raised questions about it.

On April 28, Mr Singh countered by saying SM Lee had "sidestepped" the issue that no labour MP spoke up about the deal. He told reporters: "It puts into perspective the ratio of how many PAP MPs there are in Parliament, and how many Workers' Party MPs there are in Parliament. The ratio isn't one is to six, it's closer to one is to nine."

More questions may be asked on issues such as the Income-Allianz saga, observers said.

The last day of the campaign will be on May 1, when Prime Minister Lawrence Wong will hold his maiden May Day Rally. Unlike election rallies that are open to the public, PM Wong will address union leaders and tripartite partners of the National Trades Union Congress.

Dr Gillian Koh, a senior research fellow from the Institute of Policy Studies, said: "Then, we expect the PAP to lay out its responses to everything from labour relations, labour issues, helping and supporting workers through troubled times... and give some facts and figures on wages."

The experts agreed that May 1 will mark the climax of the hustings, as opposition parties will likely address points raised in the May Day Rally during their own rallies that night.

"(On May 1) I expect there will be robust debate on the PAP's policies to help workers, income and employment security," said Dr Koh.

Standouts in GE2025 so far

Taking stock of the last six days of campaigning, several observers agreed that GE 2025 has stood out for having the first walkover since 2011 in Marine Parade-Braddell Heights GRC, and also more multi-cornered fights compared with recent general elections.

“The PAP played their hand well on Nomination Day, managing to secure a walkover in the GRC despite moving out anchor minister Tan See Leng to Chua Chu Kang GRC, and fielding DPM Gan Kim Yong in Punggol GRC to fend off the WP challenge there,” said Professor Terence Ho, adjunct associate professor in practice at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy in the National University of Singapore.

Prof Ho noted that while there had been speculation on whether the WP would move its heavyweights out of Aljunied GRC to contest adjacent constituencies, only vice-chairman Faisal Manap ended up moving to contest Tampines GRC.

“It has also proved difficult for opposition parties to coordinate among themselves to avoid multi-cornered fights this time, given the number of parties contesting and changes to electoral boundaries,” he added.

In 2025, the usual behind-the-scenes horse-trading talks between opposition parties – to hash out who competes in which constituency and avoid multi-cornered fights – fell through. Instead, most negotiations took place bilaterally between the parties.

There are multi-cornered fights in Tampines, Sembawang and Ang Mo Kio GRCs, as well as the single seats of Radin Mas and Potong Pasir.

Tampines GRC will see a four-way fight with three opposition parties – the WP, National Solidarity Party and People’s Power Party – going head-to-head to challenge the incumbent PAP.

Dr Rebecca Grace Tan, a political science lecturer at NUS, said “the narrative of abandonment” is a new one that has surfaced this year, involving a back and forth on ascribing blame to who owes the duty to the voters, and who has walked the ground.

WP attributed its decision not to contest Marine Parade-Braddell Heights GRC to the redrawing of electoral boundaries and the lack of resources.

SDP candidates rebutted Health Minister and Sembawang GRC anchor minister Ong Ye Kung’s claim that SDP chief Chee Soon Juan had “abandoned Bukit Batok to come to Sembawang West”.

The Bukit Batok single seat that Dr Chee had walked the ground in for nine years has been absorbed into the new Jurong East-Bukit Batok GRC.

Party chairman Paul Tambyah said he could not believe Mr Ong “actually accused the candidate of abandoning his residents to go to a constituency for political agenda”.

He then took a jibe to say he was not sure if Mr Ong was referring to his own party mates, DPM Gan or Dr Tan See Leng, who moved on Nomination Day to head the PAP’s slates for Punggol and Chua Chu Kang GRCs, respectively.

The PAP and opposition parties have also trotted out familiar lines to make their respective cases for votes, said Prof Ho.

Opposition parties have emphasised the need for alternative voices in Parliament to hold the Government to account, citing recent lapses in governance, he noted.

Meanwhile, the PAP has argued that every seat counts to ensure PM Wong has the strongest possible team to take on key roles in government, particularly at a time of heightened risks and economic uncertainty.

He also noted that issues such as foreign interference in the election has emerged as a key concern, adding: "It is good that this issue has been squarely addressed by the PAP and WP leadership."

While these issues have dominated headlines, observers pointed out that pre-election chatter around scandals such as extramarital affairs among former members of the PAP and WP respectively; WP chief Singh's appeal on his conviction and sentence; and former minister S. Iswaran's conviction, have quietened down.

"Compared to previous GEs, broader questions on the integrity of candidates (have not been broached yet), and we've not seen that narrative on trustworthiness," said NUS' Dr Tan.

"Perhaps it is a sign of maturing."