

# **GE2020: 3-Cornered Fights are Stupid. Here's Why.**

***Aretha Chinnaphongse***

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*To have a 3-cornered fight only dilutes the already “weaker” David and strengthens the chances of the “stronger” Goliath that is PAP to win*

As of Nomination Day (30 June), there are two three-cornered fights this General Elections. Pasir Ris-Punggol Group Representation Constituency (GRC) will see a three-cornered fight in this General Election, after candidates from the People's Action Party (PAP), the Singapore Democratic Alliance (SDA) and the Peoples Voice were confirmed. Similarly, a three-cornered fight is also set for Pioneer SMC, as the Progress Singapore Party (PSP) and an independent candidate will challenge the ruling PAP for the seat.

Analysts and experts have come forward to note three-cornered fights are inevitable. For example, Associate Professor Bilveer Singh from the National University of Singapore's (NUS) political science department noted that the entrance of new parties such as PB and Red Dot United (RDU) has “made the ground crowded and they all need to find a ‘chair’ somewhere to sit.”

Here are some reasons why a 3-cornered fight is shortsighted and will only serve to be counter-productive for the opposition parties.

## **The 2 Binaries: PAP vs Opposition**

As quoted from The Economist, “PAP is a slick political machine” which has held power since before independence in 1965. PAP's popular vote has never dipped below 60%, and even at their “worst” in 2011, the party still had a majority of 93% elected seats in Parliament. In the last General Elections in 2015, PAP won with a landslide victory of 70% of the popular vote, perhaps due to the convergence of happenings in that year such as the SG50 celebrations and the passing of former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew.

From this, we can see that PAP over the year has managed to solidify and consolidate their power in the minds of Singaporeans. With grand developments of economic progress and making this “little red dot” more visible in the global arena, it is hard to deny that PAP has done nothing for the country. However, with more opposition parties than ever before, the question of the lack of diversity in parliament and fairness in the legislature is being contested. As stated by People's Power Party Goh Meng Seng on 3-cornered fights, “Any party which thinks that they alone could take down such gigantic machinery must have their heads checked.”

Three-cornered fights will only end up with the opposition parties on the losing end. In Singapore, where the “main” party has been ruling for over 50 years, any party that wants to go against them is automatically considered the “Opposition”, regardless of any differences between the opposition parties themselves. The two binaries that have been entrenched in Singapore's political arena only serves to dilute and dampen any power or voice of the opposition. A 3-cornered fight, with what the audience sees as “PAP vs 2 Opposition parties”, will not only decrease the influence of both opposition parties but also muffle their ideas as they have to not only compete with the all mighty PAP but also another opponent. In the perspective of voters where PAP is in one camp, and Opposition another, having two

opposition parties go against one another will also serve to bring about the question of voters' interest.

### **Losing Election Deposit**

Opposition parties are also disadvantaged as they also hold the risk of losing their election deposit. If any candidate fails to garner at least 12.5% of the votes cast in any constituency, he might risk losing his election deposit of S\$13,500.

This happened in Bukit Batok, MacPherson and Radin Mas SMC contests in 2015 wherein Bukit Batok SMC, opponent to PAP candidate David Ong and Singapore Democratic Party (SDP) Sadasivam Veriyah independent Samir Salim Neji received only 0.6% of the vote and thus forfeited his S\$14,500 election deposit. Despite Institute of Policy Studies senior research fellow Gillian Koh noting that a 3-cornered fight signifies the maturing process of Singapore's democratic society, the "onus really lies on voters" where the question of will they "feel too overwhelmed to understand the full range and find it safer to swing back to the incumbent?"

For these reasons, the opposition parties have worked together in this regard to avoid 3-cornered fights. For example, after some miscommunication, the Reform Party (RP) announced that it will not be contesting West Coast GRC to make way for Progressive Singapore Party (PSP), whereas the People's Power Party (PPP) will withdraw from standing in Radin Mas SMC to allow the RP to field a candidate there. Similarly, the National Solidarity Party said that it will also make way for PSP and not contest in Pioneer SMC.

### **Singapore's General Elections: A David and Goliath contest?**

In summary, 3-cornered fights aren't a good idea because the PAP has a much higher and stronger reputation amongst Singaporeans and they have the ability to garner more votes and popularity. It does not help that they are relentlessly and continuously distinguished for "building" Singapore to what it is today. Especially in a time of Covid-19 and quite possibly the worst recession that Singapore might experience, there are two ways that citizens may react to the elections: to fall back on PAP who is regarded as "safe" and "trusted" or to notice that PAP has had its shortcomings in dealing with the pandemic, and vote for "newer" and "different" ideas from the opposition parties. To have a 3-cornered fight only dilutes the already "weaker" David and strengthens the chances of the "stronger" Goliath that is PAP to win.