

SINGAPORE: REGIME CHANGE IN 2016?

by Yap Pheng Hui

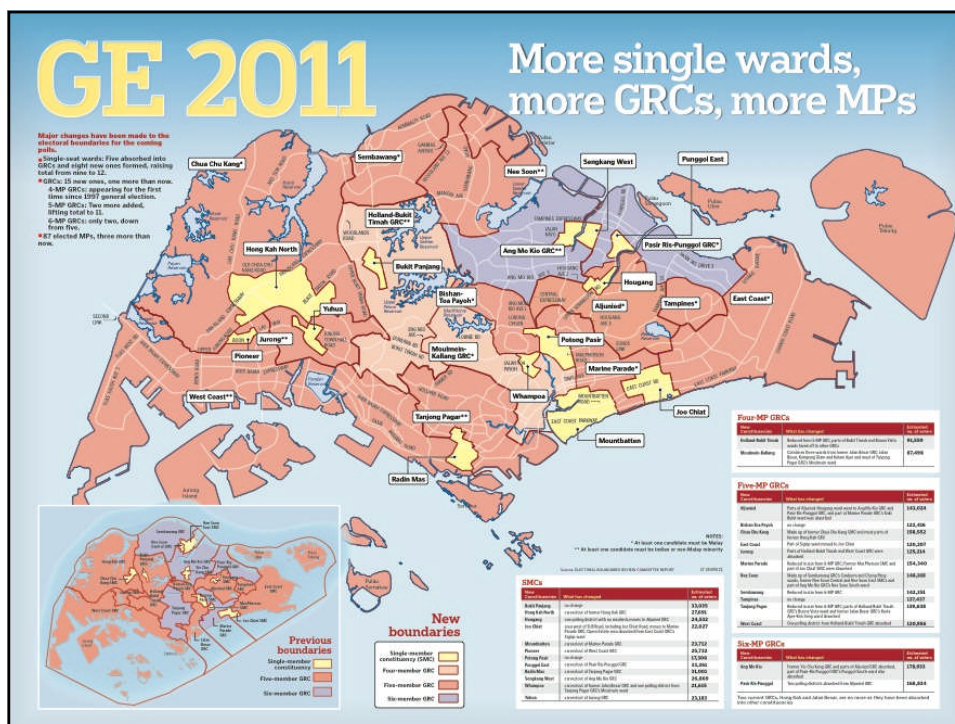
at Chiba University

March 2013



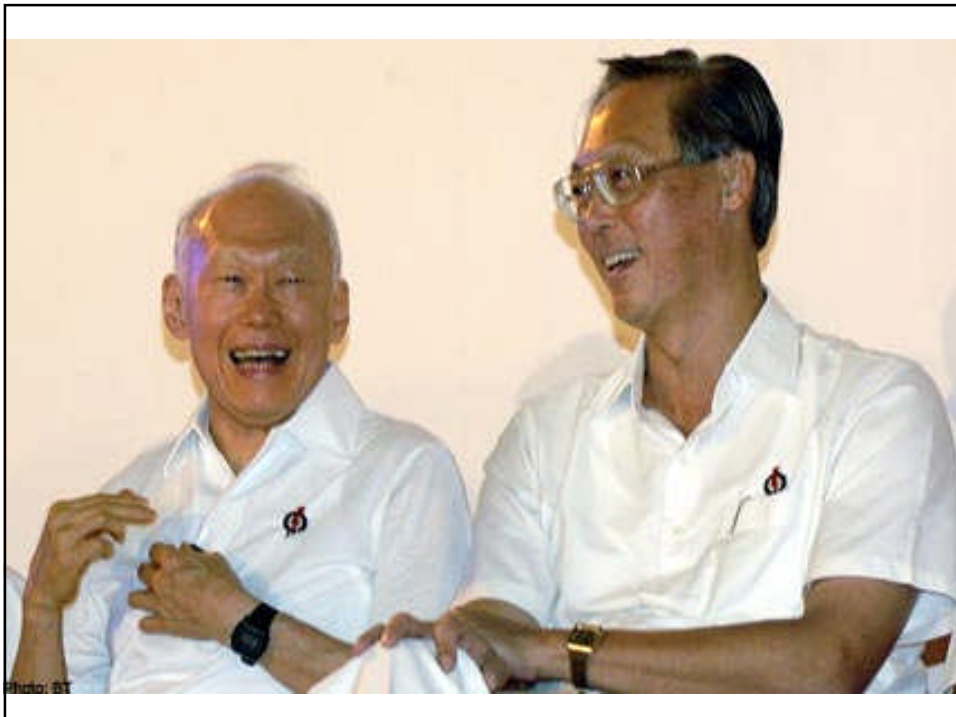
THE WATERSHED ELECTIONS

- 7 May 2011 election was described by PM Lee Hsien Loong as a watershed election
- Except for five seats, all wards were contested, a true test of People's Action Party's popularity
- People's Action Party won by 60.1%, down by 5 percentage points
- Lost a major Group Representative Constituency (GRC) with five seats.
- Foreign Minister George Yeo defeated by Workers' Party in the GRC contest
- This was the worst election results for the PAP since independence.



AFTERMATH I

- Two presiding former Prime Ministers in the Cabinet: Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew, together with Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong, announced their resignation from office but retain their MP seats



AFTERMATH II

- Unpopular Ministers replaced: Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Home Affairs Wong Kan Seng, Minister in charge of public housing Mah Bow Tan, Transport Minister Raymond Lim
- Lee Hsien Loong promised to review all existing policies. No “sacred cow” will be spared and no stone unturned.

THREE MORE DEFEATS I

- 27 August 2011 Presidential election
- Four candidates contested
- Dr Tony Tan Keng Yam, former Deputy Prime Minister, was backed by PAP
- Dr Tan Cheng Bock, former PAP MP but critical of government policies
- Tan Jee Say, former senior civil servant (Principal Private Secretary of Goh Chok Tong)
- Tan Kin Lian, former CEO of a government related insurance group

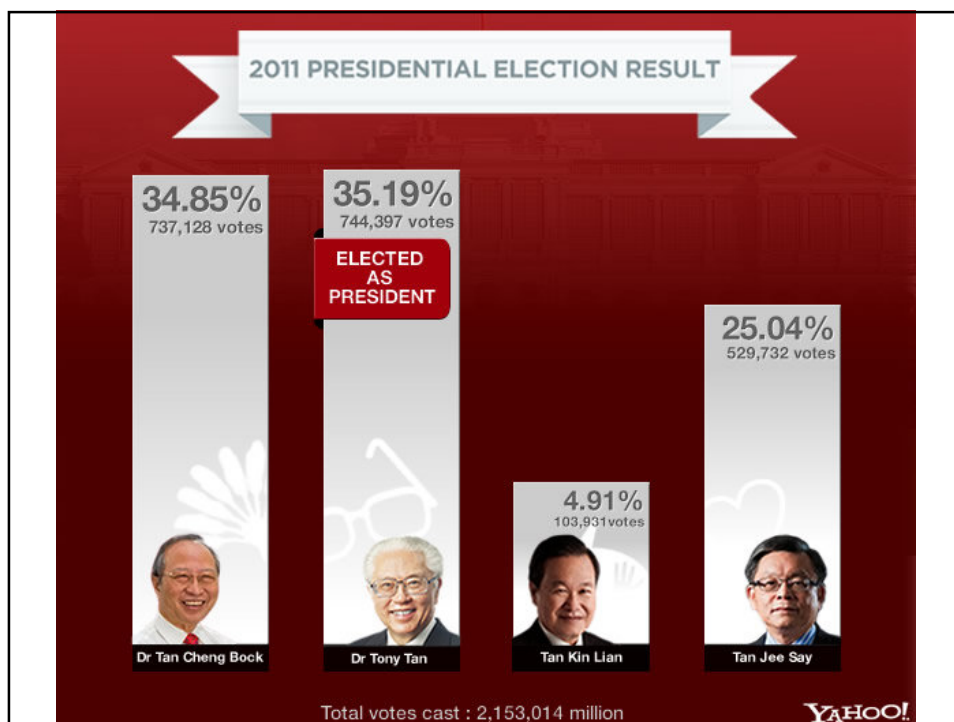
IMPLICATIONS

- Signs of fracturing of the ruling elite class?



THREE MORE DEFEATS I

- Shocking results
- PAP-backed candidate won the elections but only with 35.19% of votes
- Dr Tan Cheng Bock lost by less than 8000 votes, less than one percentage point



THREE MORE DEFEATS II

- 26 May 2012 Hougang by-election
- Workers' Party MP Yaw Shin Leong was sacked from his party for not answering charges of his extra-marital affairs
- It was a political crisis for the Workers' Party and a by-election was called



THREE MORE DEFEATS II

- Despite the political scandal and crisis, Workers' Party managed to retake Hougang constituency with a comfortable margin
- Because Hougang was a Workers' Party stronghold, the results were not surprising
- What was surprising was the winning margin. PAP candidate contested a second time but only managed to gain one more percentage point than 2011 General Elections

SAME SPOT, ANOTHER CRASH: THREE YEARS ON

HOUANG BY-ELECTION

WP wins 62.1%

Party chief Low quick to challenge PM to show sincerity by approving upgrading

Lydia Lim
Deputy Political Editor

The Workers' Party won its sixth straight election in Hougang yesterday with 62.1 per cent of valid votes cast.

It was a strong showing by its candidate Eng Eng Huat, whose winning margin was just three percentage points lower than the party's best of 64.8 per cent in last May's general election.

WP chief Low Tia Kheng went on the offensive after the results were announced at 10.30pm, challenging Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong to show the sincerity in holding an inclusive society by approving extra upgrading for Hougang.

The Alhambra-Hougang Town Council had put up Hougang town for the Neighbourhood Renewal Programme and Home Improvement Programme, he said, and the most Development Ministry National Development Ministry had yet to give its decision. An opposition word for 21 years, the incumbent constituency had been the number one constituency at the end of the upgrading queue.

In a statement last night, the former Minister said the People's Action Party had been "too slow" in upgrading Hougang.

WP supporters surrounding Mr Eng Eng Huat and Mr Low Tia Kheng at the Block 122 Hougang Ave 5 collection last night.

The results

	2012	2011
WP	13,447 (62.1%)	14,833 (64.8%)
PAP	8,210 (37.9%)	8,053 (35.2%)
Spill votes	294	261
Total votes	21,951	23,147

PM Lee respects choice

I congratulate the WP and Mr Eng Eng Huat for winning this by-election. I look forward to Mr Eng's contributions in Parliament.

I respect the choice of Hougang voters. The PAP will continue to be present in Hougang, and I am confident that we will win back the constituency in a future election.

At the national level, we set a new direction last year. Since the general election in May 2011, the PAP Government has done its best to address important national issues like housing, transportation, immigration and economic upgrading and incomes. We have made progress, but there is much more to be done.

Now that the Hougang by-election is over, we should focus on these longer-term issues, and work together as one

by-election.

Deputy Prime Minister Lee Chuan responded to Mr Low's comments, which were relayed from the WP headquarters in Seng Guan Road. He said he was surprised that Mr Low spoke about character assassination.

"If there was any of that, I think it came from considerations within his own party. And if there is anything that Mr Low wants to take through legal action over, if he feels that it's necessary," Mr Lee said.

During the campaign, Mr Lee asked questions about Mr Eng's integrity after the latter gave conflicting accounts of whether his name was on the ballot when the WP selected a Non-constituency MP.

Mr Lee also responded to Mr Low's charge that the Government had denied upgrading programmes to areas like Hougang that supported the opposition.

"The upgrading project is going ahead, and we have always said that Hougang residents will get their upgrading, and I think that they will," said Mr Lee.

Political observers yesterday had mixed reactions to the WP's winning margin in its stronghold.

Assistant Professor Reshen Wong of the National University of Singapore said he had expected the gap to be narrower. He said that Mr Desmond Choo started out as an underdog but intervention by PAP leaders led to the WP taking back the "underdog mantle".

Dr Derek de Souza said the result showed that "it is extremely difficult to shift the vote significantly in one direction, especially when it comes to the Hougang by-election".

More reports and pictures >>Pages 2-4
Hougang speaks, but for itself >>Page 4

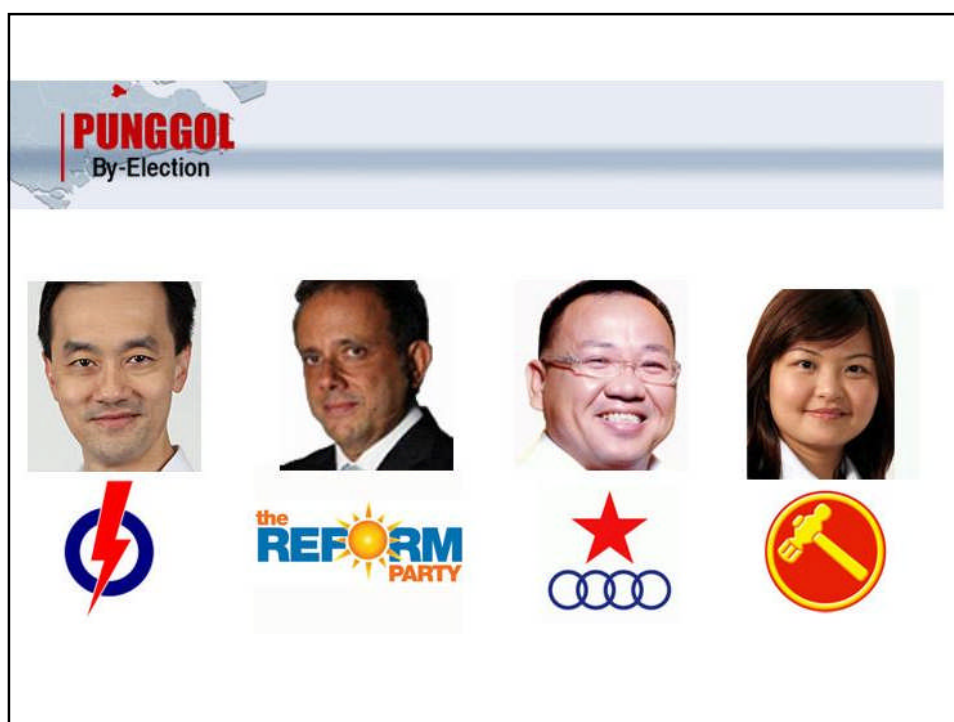
THREE MORE DEFEATS III

- 12 December 2012, Speaker of Parliament and PAP Punggol East MP resigned because of an extra-marital affair




THREE MORE DEFEATS III









- Under huge public pressure, Lee Hsien Loong eventually agreed to call a by-election, held on 26 January 2013
- Punggol East constituency was contested in 2011 General Elections by the Workers' Party and the Singapore Democratic Alliance (SDA)
- Four parties contested this time, PAP, WP, SDA and the Reform Party



THREE MORE DEFEATS III

- Workers' Party won with a huge margin despite the four corner fight

 **PUNGGOL EAST BY-ELECTION RESULTS**

				
	KOH POH KOON	LEE LI LIAN	DESMOND LIM BAK CHUAN	KENNETH JEYARETNAM
				
AGE	40	34	45	53
Total Votes received in BE	12,856	16,038	168	353
Percentage of Votes in GE2013	43.09%	53.76%	0.56%	1.18%

ANOTHER POLITICAL SHOCK WAVE

- After the Punggol East by election, PAP published the Population White Paper which mentioned the “planning perimeter” of 6.9 million people by year 2030

ANTOHER POLITICAL SHOCK WAVE II

- It immediately ignite fierce resistance
- Thousands gather openly to protest
- This seems like an issue that unite different social classes



THE SOCIAL CONTEXT

- Widening income gap. Singapore has the highest Gini coefficient in Asia
- Bottom 20% of population suffer stagnant wages for one decade
- Government's pro business and lax immigration policy blamed
- Popular use of social media to create political awareness

LISTENING TO THE PEOPLE?

- The Population White Paper was passed in Parliament because the party whip was enforced
- But changes were made: the Government promised that 6.9 million was not a target
- A review will be carried out in 2020

REGIME CHANGE IN 2016?

- Since 2011, it is apparent that public mood has turned against PAP
- People openly support opposition parties
- PAP has been slow to react to this new reality



A NEW DEAL?

- 2013 budget focused on income redistribution
- Tightening of immigration policy
- Greater social spending
- More progressive tax

A Second Chance?

- Budget debate is still underway
- There seems to be a changing in course
- If this persists, PAP may be able to hold on to power for much longer because
- The Workers' Party openly claimed that it is not ready to form the government yet