

**Resisting Regime Change in Singapore:
Governmentality and the Impact of the Internet**

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Thesis Summary

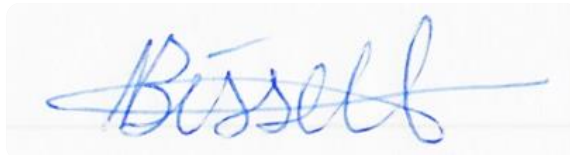
The purpose of this thesis is to analyse the nuances of the Singapore Government that have kept the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) in government continuously since 1959. I argue continued sophisticated governance perpetuates into the conceivable future. Whereas other scholars have focused on singular specific elements of Singaporean society, I analyse the Government's control of the media, civil activism, and elections, and the impact of the internet within each sector. Furthermore, I argue that these three sectors are intertwined in their involvement with each other and the Government.

Within this thesis, I apply to Singapore's governance the theory of governmentality, developed by Michel Foucault. Governmentality is the manner in which authority influences the conduct of others, by methods including heavy-handed punishment, discipline in specifically created and managed microcosms, and the encouragement of self-regulation by actors. The ultimate goal of governmentality is for the population to fulfill the desired ends of the sovereign authority. Governmentality also contains a significant degree of flexibility to modify the methods of government as appropriate. In Singapore, this realignment of governmentality has seen decrease in heavy-handedness in favour of greater use of discipline and self-government. This is a unique use of Foucault's theories within the body of scholarship on Singapore's politics and society.

Within Singaporean society there is a growing impetus to make use of the limited spaces for civil activism, alternative media and pluralism; and a brazenness to stand in opposition to the Government which did not exist even a decade ago. This is the result of a generational shift in part brought forth by the ubiquitous use of the internet by younger people. Therefore, the ability for the PAP to adapt to the uses of the internet by the citizenry and the increasing boldness of the Singaporean youth will be a test of its perpetual governmentality revision.

Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.



Natasha Bissett

September 3, 2013

Date

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This thesis is the product of just over four years of research (2010-2014) and living in four countries: Australia, Singapore, Japan, and the United Kingdom. Understandably, it would not have been possible without a significant support network.

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List of Important Acronyms

AHPETC	Aljunied-Hougang-Punggol East Town Council
EBRC	Electoral Boundaries Review Committee
GIC	Government of Singapore Investment Corporation
GLC	Government-Linked Corporation/Company
GRC	Group Representation Constituency
HDB	Housing Development Board
IPI	International Press Institute
ISA	Internal Security Act
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender
MCI	Ministry of Communication and Information
MDA	Media Development Authority
NCMP	Non-Constituency Member of Parliament
NMP	Nominated Member of Parliament
NPPA	Newspaper and Printing Presses Act
NS	National Service
NSP	National Solidarity Party
NTUC	National Trade Union Congress
PA	People's Association
PAP	People's Action Party
PMO	Prime Minister's Office
RP	Reform Party
SAF	Singapore Armed Forces
SDA	Singapore Democratic Alliance
SDP	Singapore Democratic Party
SMC	Single Member Constituency
SPH	Singapore Press Holdings

SPP	Singapore People's Party
TOC	The Online Citizen
TWC2	Transient Workers Count Too
WP	Workers' Party of Singapore (Workers' Party)

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Chapter One:

Resisting Regime Change in Singapore by Authoritarian Governmentality

Politics in Singapore has intrigued political science scholars since the 1960s. Initially, this interest focused on the political merger of the tiny island city-state with the Federation of Malaysia in the midst of so-called communist plots and Asian decolonisation.¹ When Singapore became an independent state in 1965 it began a process of economic development that influenced its political structure.² The marriage of authoritarianism with free but unfair elections and state-sponsored capitalism seems counter-intuitive,³ but has endured for nearly fifty years. The May 2011 Parliamentary General Election demonstrated that keeping this marriage stable is not as easily achieved as it seemed in the past.

The leaders of the governing People's Action Party (PAP) see elections as a requisite for a democratic state, but believe that government should be a professional political institution.⁴ The PAP has compromised the public perception of parliamentary representation so that it is not about majoritarian decision-making, but instead about

¹ For example: N.J. Ryan, *The Making of Modern Malaysia and Singapore: A History from Earliest Times to 1966*, 4th, Oxford University Press, Kuala Lumpur & Singapore, 1969; and G.P. Means, 'Malaysia - A New Federation in Southeast Asia', *Pacific Affairs*, v. 36 (2), 1963; and R. Emerson, *Malaysia: A Study in Direct and Indirect Rule*, 2nd, University of Malaya Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1964; and R. Clutterbuck, *Riot and Revolution in Singapore and Malaya 1945-1963*, Faber and Faber Ltd., London, 1973.

² For example: C. Lingle, *Singapore's Authoritarian Capitalism: Asian Values, Free Market Illusions, and Political Dependency*, Edicions Sirocco, S.L & The Locke Institute, Barcelona & Virginia, 1996, p. 39; and C.A. Trocki, *Singapore: Wealth, Power and the Culture of Control*, Routledge, London & New York, 2006, p. 129; and C.M. Turnbull, *A History of Singapore: 1819-1988*, 2nd, Oxford University Press, Oxford & New York, 1989; and T.J. Bellows, 'Meritocracy and the Singapore Political System', *Asian Journal of Political Science*, v. 17 (1), 2009, p. 25; and K. Jayasuriya, 'The Exception Becomes the Norm: Law and Regimes of Exception in East Asia', *Asian-Pacific Law & Policy Journal*, v. 2 (1), 2001, pp. 117-119; and J.S.T. Quah, 'Public Administration in Singapore: Managing Success in a Multi-Racial City-State', *Public Administration in the NICs: Challenges and Accomplishments*, A.S. Huque, J.T.M. Lam and J.C.Y. Lee (eds.), Macmillan Press, London & New York, 1996, pp. 59-60; and J. Drysdale, *Singapore: Struggle for Success*, Times Books International, Singapore, 1984, pp. 405-406, 411-412; and J.H.-Y. Chang, 'Culture, State and Economic Development in Singapore', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, v. 33 (1), 2003, pp. 85-86, 101-102.

³ For example: W. Case, 'Manipulative Skills: How Do Rulers Control the Electoral Arena?', *Electoral Authoritarianism: Dynamics of Unfree Competition*, A. Schedler (ed.) Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, CO & London, 2006, p. 106; and J.S.T. Quah, 'Public Administration in Singapore: Managing Success in a Multi-Racial City-State', pp. 61-62; and T.J. Bellows, 'Meritocracy and the Singapore Political System', pp. 28-31; and D.K. Mauzy, 'The Challenge to Democracy: Singapore's and Malaysia's Resilient Hybrid Regimes', *Taiwan Journal of Democracy*, v. 2 (2), 2006, pp. 54-59; and G.P. Means, 'Soft Authoritarianism in Malaysia and Singapore', *Journal of Democracy*, v. 7 (4), 1996, pp. 103-105.

⁴ M.D. Barr, 'The bonsai under the banyan tree: democracy and democratisation in Singapore', *Democratization*, 2012, p. 5.

parliamentary representatives guaranteeing the maintenance of housing estates and amenities within their constituency. Because parliamentary representation is not about democratic principles, Barr described Singapore's democracy as a "bonsai" version: a deliberately stunted miniature.⁵ The bonsai model is a safeguard against the inherent risks of free democratic competition,⁶ and has been deliberately pruned and shaped to look like the full-grown version but lacks the same functionality.

Functionally, the electoral system has been modified to increase the difficulty for opposition parties to contest. Electoral manipulation included the introduction of Group Representation Constituencies (GRCs) in 1988, which combined neighbouring Single Member Constituencies (SMCs) into larger multiple-seat electorates.⁷ Group Representation Constituencies challenge the opposition because they require larger election deposits and significantly more campaigning time and resources than SMCs.

The 2011 parliamentary election was a significant turning point in Singapore's political story. Six opposition parties contested 26 of 27 constituencies, which made 2011 the most competitive election in nearly forty years.⁸ By contesting most constituencies in 2011, the opposition validated elections as the principal method to change the political landscape.

The 2011 election was also significant because the PAP's total vote share declined to 60.1%,⁹ which showed that the population also appreciated the value of elections to change the Government. Despite the strength of constituency-level benefits to coerce voters, 40% of voters were willing to experiment with parliamentary pluralism despite the risk that their local constituencies would be neglected for maintenance by the Government.¹⁰ The decline in the PAP's vote share from 66% to 60.1% demonstrated that the population were willing to challenge the PAP's parliamentary dominance, but

⁵ M.D. Barr, 'The bonsai under the banyan tree', p. 4.

⁶ M.D. Barr, 'The bonsai under the banyan tree', p. 4.

⁷ D.K. Mauzy and R.S. Milne, *Singapore Politics under the People's Action Party*, Routledge, London & New York, 2002, p. 145.

⁸ L. Lim, 'GE 2011; PAP faces biggest polls battle since '72', *Straits Times*, April 27, 2011.

⁹ I. Zuraidah, '81-6', *Straits Times*, May 8, 2011.

¹⁰ G. Chua, '1 Dilemma, 2 Different Votes; Why this PAP backer opted for the opposition', *Straits Times Forum*, May 10, 2011; and L. Lim, 'Are GRCs no longer PAP-safe?', *Straits Times*, May 8, 2011.

still wanted to enjoy the national prosperity it had developed over 54 years of government.¹¹

The election was also significant due to the exclusive success of the Workers' Party (WP). The Party contested eight constituencies and retained its incumbent seat of Hougang SMC and won the five-seat Aljunied GRC. It was the first time an opposition party won a GRC.¹² The win in Aljunied demonstrated it was possible to win a GRC with long-term campaigning there, and by presenting a non-confrontational party image using the leadership of incumbent party MPs. Essentially, the WP replicated the PAP's formula for electoral success: clean party image, good parliamentary track record, credible candidates and high public visibility. Crucially, the WP campaigned not to overthrow the Government but to moderate the conduct of the PAP in Parliament.¹³

The popularity and resonance of the Workers' Party brand was replicated in the February 2012 Hougang by-election and January 2013 Punggol East by-election, both of which the Workers' Party won. These victories expanded their parliamentary presence to seven elected MPs and two unelected MPs.¹⁴ Ultimately, the 2011 election result demonstrated that a change of government by democratic means is an achievable possibility, although the transfer of government from the PAP is a long-term prospect.

Ortmann concluded that after 2011 Singapore could be considered a competitive authoritarian regime because opposition parties overcame authoritarianism to contest.¹⁵ The Singapore Government has become more tolerant of electoral competition, but a specific analytical focus on elections obscures the other sectors of society that influence elections. Elections are of course important in Singapore, but electoral manipulation is only the continuation of existing methods to resist external forces for regime change.

¹¹ A. Low, 'Vote Swing; PAP's share of vote declines again', *Straits Times*, May 8, 2011; and L.H. Chua, 'Commentary; Towards a two-party system?', *Straits Times*, May 8, 2011.

¹² K.B. Kor, 'Aljunied Win 20 years in the making', *Straits Times*, May 8, 2011.

¹³ X. Li, 'Reasons behind Aljunied swing', *Straits Times*, May 8, 2011.

¹⁴ '2012 Parliamentary By-Election Results', *Elections Department, Singapore*, May 30, 2012, http://www.eld.gov.sg/elections_by2012.html, accessed on: July 13, 2013; and '2013 Parliamentary By-Election Results', *Elections Department, Singapore*, January 30, 2013, http://www.eld.gov.sg/elections_by2013.html, accessed on: July 13, 2013.

¹⁵ S. Ortmann, 'Singapore: Authoritarian but Newly Competitive', *Journal of Democracy*, v. 22 (4), 2011, pp. 153-154.

The governance of Singapore is in a state of perpetual revisionism to respond to internal and external challenges.¹⁶ The Government has tolerated so-called responsible civil activism and alternative media in order to undermine claims it is authoritarian. To maintain the political status quo, it has selectively responded to issues of public resonance that could be capitalised upon by the opposition parties. Civil activists, the online alternative media (bloggers) and the opposition parties are also revisionist and react to government revisions to modify their operations and work within regulatory frameworks. There is a growing sentiment within Singaporean society for the liberalisation of civil society, the media and elections, which the Government is trying to control by revisionism.

The Singapore Government's methods of societal control often meet the definition of authoritarianism: showing little regard for the opinion or objections of citizens and institutional actors.¹⁷ Authoritarianism is antithetical to liberalism and pluralism: to hold authority to account, majoritarian decision-making, and competition for power.¹⁸ The bonsai of democracy surely meets this definition.

This thesis seeks to analyse the use of authoritarianism by the PAP to mitigate challenges from extra-parliamentary sectors such as the media and civil society, and to prevent parliamentary pluralism by making elections only minimally democratic. Perpetual revisionism by the PAP may be an "open secret" within Singapore,¹⁹ but the aim of the thesis is to chart how power-relations (action and rebellion) between Government and opposing forces affect revisionism for both parties. The following research questions are therefore proposed:

1. In what ways, and how effectively, is the political status quo being challenged?
2. How has the Singapore Government revised its methods of societal control in response to pressures for greater freedoms?

¹⁶ M.D. Barr, 'Perpetual Revisionism in Singapore: The Limits of Change', *The Pacific Review*, v. 16 (1), 2003, p. 94.

¹⁷ D. Robertson, *A Dictionary of Modern Politics*, 3rd Edition, Routledge, London & New York, 2002, p. 33.

¹⁸ D. Robertson, *A Dictionary of Modern Politics*, pp. 33-34.

¹⁹ F.K. Han, *et al.*, *Lee Kuan Yew: Hard Truths To Keep Singapore Going*, Straits Times Press, Singapore, 2011, p. 99.

3. What is the long-term political implication of the push for change against the Government, and the Government's perpetual revision?

Michel Foucault argued an authority's use of power and resistance to that authority were coextensive: each fed off and reacted to the other.²⁰ To analyse perpetual revision in Singapore, we can borrow from Foucault the theory of governmentality, or the method of governing the conduct of others. Governmentality is a useful theoretical tool because it implies the governing authority uses a multiplicity of techniques to achieve goals and outcomes from the population, rather than a strict reliance on one method such as heavy-handed authoritarianism or manipulation.

In the chapters of this thesis I scrutinise the Singapore Government's governmentality: the authoritarian controls on media, civil activism and elections to perpetuate the PAP as Government. I also considers the responses (resistance) to methods of government. The following literature review is divided into several sections: Singapore politics, Singapore internet utilisation, and use of Foucault and explanation of governmentality.

Literature Review: Bonsai Democracy and Perpetual Revision

This thesis contributes to the existing literature on government and society in Singapore by providing an analysis of government control of the media, civil society, political and social activism, and electoral contestation. All of which impact the potential for political change. Much of the literature on Singapore has a narrow analytical focus, and provides a history of authoritarian control in Singapore within that specific focus.

Often scholars concluded that the PAP's control over Singapore is dependent on the ability of the Government to revise its policies and tweak societal mentalities.²¹ In the 2011 volume *Hard Truths to Keep Singapore Going*, Lee Kuan Yew described the role

²⁰ A.I. Davidson, 'Introduction', *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977-1978*, M. Senellart (ed.) Palgrave Macmillan, New York & Basingstoke, 2009, p. xx.

²¹ J. Rajah, *Authoritarian Rule of Law: Legislation, Discourse and Legitimacy in Singapore*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2012, p. 297; and M.D. Barr, 'Perpetual Revisionism', p. 94; and M.D. Barr, 'The bonsai under the banyan tree', p. 3; and G. Rodan, 'Singapore 'Exceptionalism'? Authoritarian Rule and State Transformation', *Asia Research Centre Working Papers*, 2006, p. 3.

of the Government: “to allow the change in such a way that it does not demolish the system, which will bring down the country.”²²

Important to perpetual revision is the role of the law in dealing with change. Jothie Rajah described Singapore as a system of “rule by law”, whereby the Government is able to shape the law to its needs. This is counter to a system of rule of law, where the exercise of state discretionary power is curbed by law and legal process.²³ Jayasuriya similarly argued that Singapore has a duality where rule of law is applied to the commercial sector for the benefit of the economy, and rule by law is applied to the political spheres to control political challengers.²⁴

Rule by law is one element of the PAP’s broader manipulation of liberal principles to undermine democracy. Rule by law is reminiscent of Foucault’s concept of discipline and exclusionary authoritarianism. Discipline, Foucault argued, is reductive; the authority designates the permitted behaviour and implies that everything that is not permitted is forbidden.²⁵ Hand-in-hand with such limiting thought is that those who cannot be disciplined, or more precisely choose not to be disciplined, are excluded and considered a pariah to be punished²⁶ Throughout the thesis are examples of this exclusionary authoritarianism and punishment by exclusion, particularly those carried out by the domestic media.

One example of political revisionism and democratic manipulation was the introduction of the Nominated Member of Parliament (NMP) and Non-Constituency Member of Parliament (NCMP) seats. The Nominated and Non-Constituency MPs challenge the traditional understanding of elected representation and parliamentary partisanship. The Nominated MP system facilitates civil society actors, academics and business people to contribute to the political development of Singapore from within Parliament.²⁷ In the PAP’s notion of representation, NMPs replace the need for elected opposition because they are able to introduce alternative ideas without the influence of political partisanship.

²² F.K. Han, *et al.*, *Hard Truths to Keep Singapore Going*, p. 49.

²³ J. Rajah, *Authoritarian Rule of Law*, p. 1.

²⁴ K. Jayasuriya, 'The Exception Becomes the Norm', p. 121.

²⁵ M. Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977-1978*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York & Basingstoke, 2009, p. 46.

²⁶ M. Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, pp. 43-44.

²⁷ G. Rodan, 'New Modes of Political Participation and Singapore's Nominated Members of Parliament', *Government and Opposition*, v. 44 (4), 2009, p. 461.

Lee Kuan Yew described the NMPs as “the only talent [in Parliament] outside PAP MPs”²⁸ and that they “talk more sense than the opposition politicians.”²⁹

If the Nominated MP seats are supplemental MPs, the Non-Constituency MP seats are lip-service to an elected opposition, a position openly acknowledged by the PAP and by Lee Kuan Yew. PAP MPs justified that it is not the place of the PAP to elevate the opposition parties in Parliament,³⁰ but having NCMPs serve to expose PAP MPs to parliamentary debate.³¹

Each election, several NCMP seats are offered to the best-performing, but unelected, opposition candidates and guarantee a minimum of nine opposition members in Parliament.³² From the nine potential NCMP positions, the Elections Department subtracts the number of elected opposition candidates in order to allocate the remaining seats as NCMPs. In 2011, six opposition candidates were elected, so three NCMP positions were offered.³³

Unelected MPs guarantee voters there will be some form of opposition in Parliament. Within this rationale, during elections, voters do not need to risk voting out the Government or the MP management team for their local constituency. Not surprisingly, opposition parties have consistently rejected the principle of NCMPs because it maintains the status quo of PAP dominance in Parliament under the guise of pluralism.³⁴ Unelected MPs are analysed in Chapter Six, where I argue that their importance has increased with a more politically sensitive citizenry.

²⁸ F.K. Han, *et al.*, *Hard Truths to Keep Singapore Going*, p. 111.

²⁹ F.K. Han, *et al.*, *Hard Truths to Keep Singapore Going*, p. 71.

³⁰ F.K. Han, *et al.*, *Hard Truths to Keep Singapore Going*, p. 62.

³¹ F.K. Han, *et al.*, *Hard Truths to Keep Singapore Going*, p. 92.

³² 'Parliamentary Elections Act: Key changes', *Straits Times*, April 28, 2010.

³³ W. Chan and H. Musfirah, 'NCMP seats offered to best-losing opposition candidates', *Channel NewsAsia*, May 10, 2011.

³⁴ Interview with Goh Meng Seng, then-Secretary General of the National Solidarity Party, Singapore, October 9, 2010; and Yaw Shin Leong, then-Treasurer of the Workers' Party, Singapore, October 15, 2010; and Dr. Chee Soon Juan, Secretary-General of the Singapore Democratic Party, Singapore, October 19, 2010; and Chia Ti Lik, then-Secretary General of the Socialist Front, Singapore, October 22, 2010; and Gerald Giam, then-Workers' Party Deputy Webmaster (later NCMP), Singapore, October 28, 2010; and Y.N. How, 'GE: WP's Sylvia Lim comments on NCMP system', *Channel News Asia*, April 13, 2011; and X. Teo, 'Low Thia Khiang: No NCMP seat for me', *Today*, March 24, 2011; and Z. Hussain, 'NCMP seats: Opposition candidates divided on issue', *Straits Times*, April 12, 2011; and A. Ong, 'GE 2011: NSP's 'star couple' to buck NCMP trend', *Straits Times*, April 26, 2011; and K.B. Kor and L.J. Huang, 'Opposition candidates cool towards NCMP post', *Straits Times*, May 5, 2011.

The link between Foucauldian governmentality and the Singapore Government's perpetual revisionism is the modification of government methods to respond to popular demands of the people. By its nature, revision may see vibrant change in some sectors and stagnation in others.³⁵ Terence Lee argued that PAP revisions are usually “gestural” because they appear significant but have limited actual impact on the Government's powers (rule of law).³⁶

In the aftermath of the 2011 election, the Government engaged in some gestural policy-making to address election “hot issues”.³⁷ These included a review and decrease of high Ministerial salaries³⁸ and the launch of the mass-consultation exercise Our Singapore Conversation.³⁹ Political commentator Catherine Lim complained in the months after the election that anticipated political changes had not been forthcoming.⁴⁰ Of course, while considering how to respond to so-called hot issues, any larger revisions to the structure of power and government will be more gestural than actual. One element unlikely to change, regardless of popular pressure, is the channels of power through networks of elites,⁴¹ who are ultimately in control regardless of elections.⁴²

³⁵ C. George, *Freedom From The Press: Journalism and State Power in Singapore*, National University of Singapore Press, Singapore, 2012, p. 225.

³⁶ T. Lee, 'Gestural Politics: Mediating the 'new' Singapore', *Political Regimes and the Media in Asia*, K. Sen and T. Lee (eds.), Routledge, London & New York, 2008, p. 184.

³⁷ D. Da Cunha, *Breakthrough: Roadmap for Singapore's Political Future*, Straits Times Press, Singapore, 2012, pp. 237-239.

³⁸ L. Lim, 'Ministerial pay to be reviewed', *Straits Times*, May 22, 2011; and 'Ministerial Salaries Review Committee's proposal', *AsiaOne*, January 4, 2012, <http://www.asiaone.com/News/Latest+News/Singapore/Story/A1Story20120104-319812.html>, accessed on: January 20, 2012; and S. Hong, 'PM Lee: Govt will accept salary review proposals', *My Paper*, January 5, 2012.

³⁹ 'Thousands take part in S'pore's national conversation', *AsiaOne*, September 8, 2012, <http://www.asiaone.com/News/Latest+News/Singapore/Story/A1Story20120908-370385.html>, accessed on: November 20, 2012; and J. Au, 'A brief history of national conversations', *Straits Times*, April 17, 2013; and A. Foo, 'Government to address issues raised during national conversation: Shanmugam', *Straits Times*, July 5, 2013; and 'Key themes in national conversation identified', *The New Paper*, November 21, 2012; and R. Chan, 'Government focused on Our Singapore Conversation: PM Lee', *Straits Times: Singapolitics*, April 5, 2013, <http://www.asiaone.com/News/Latest%2BNews/Singapore/Story/A1Story20130405-413834.html>, accessed on: April 6, 2013.

⁴⁰ C. Lim, 'Six months after a Watershed Election: How is the dust settling?', *Catherinelim.sg*, December 4, 2011, <http://catherinelim.sg/2011/12/04/six-months-after-a-watershed-election-how-is-the-dust-settling/>, accessed on: May 8, 2014; and C. Lim, 'One year after a Watershed Election: Reading the signs', *Catherinelim.sg*, May 11, 2012, <http://catherinelim.sg/2012/05/11/one-year-after-a-watershed-election-reading-the-signs/>, accessed on: May 8, 2014.

⁴¹ R. Worthington, *Governance in Singapore*, RoutledgeCurzon, London & New York, 2003, pp. 5, 9.

⁴² M.D. Barr, 'The bonsai under the banyan tree', p. 3; and M.D. Barr, *The Ruling Elite of Singapore: Networks of Power and Influence*, I.B Tauris, London, 2014, p. 140.

In addition to perpetual revisionism proposed by Barr, Cherian George considered that the PAP could continue to govern in the face of challenges if it created controlled spaces for dissent but shrewdly limited competition.⁴³ Melissa Aratani-Kwee earlier proposed the lack of trust between the Government and civil society be resolved by the Government increasing participatory spaces. She also argued that an increased synergy between media civil society and opposition parties would make self-regulation increasingly important for the Government.⁴⁴ Her argument echoed the Government's position that civil society must build reciprocal trust with the Government, and institute bottom-up policies of regulation to minimise the need for top-down governance.⁴⁵ This advice particularly resonates within the sectors of civil activism and online alternative media as the Government attempts to tighten its control of these spheres, as discussed in chapters four to six.

Literature Review: Media and Singapore's Slowly Developing Internet Challenge

Of particular interest to this thesis is the major literature on the media and internet in Singapore. In his analysis of civil society and the media, Rodan concluded that the Government has constrained domestic and international media, but paradoxically this has not discouraged investment within Singapore.⁴⁶ For example, when regulations were introduced to curb the involvement of international broadcasters in domestic politics, it did not deter the BBC from transferring its regional headquarters to Singapore.⁴⁷ This is significant because it validated economically the actions of the PAP Government.

In addition to tacit international (corporate) support, the domestic media has been co-opted to support the Government and educate the population since 1971.⁴⁸ Thus, there is

⁴³ C. George, *Freedom From the Press*, p. 202.

⁴⁴ M. Aratani-Kwee, 'Civil Society and the Crafting of Self-Responsibility', *State-Society Relations in Singapore*, G. Koh and G.L. Ooi (eds.), Institute of Policy Studies, Oxford University Press, Singapore, 2000, pp. 219-220.

⁴⁵ G. Koh and G.L. Ooi, 'Epilogue: Reflections on Civil Society', *State-Society Relations in Singapore*, G. Koh and G.L. Ooi (eds.), Institute of Policy Studies, Oxford University Press, Singapore, 2000, pp. 228-229, 233.

⁴⁶ G. Rodan, 'Embracing electronic media but suppressing civil society: authoritarian consolidation in Singapore', *The Pacific Review*, v. 16 (4), 2003, p. 520.

⁴⁷ G. Rodan, 'Embracing Electronic Media', p. 508.

⁴⁸ C. George, *Freedom From the Press*, p. 36.

not a significant lobby movement for media freedom.⁴⁹ Cherian George and Xiaoming Hao's 2011 survey of Singaporean journalists found that generally there is satisfaction about the role of the media to support Government policies and to educate the population.⁵⁰ Their conclusion implied that the situation of media control will not diminish as long as journalists and editors are satisfied and have internalised the media's role.

Furthermore, Singaporean media scholars have often concluded that the mainstream media is more adept than non-traditional media. Cherian George and Eddie Kuo both argued the mainstream media was more capable than the online alternative media due to journalist's training, factual reporting, and ethical code.⁵¹

In his post-2011 election analyses, George lamented that the internet had not been used to enhance deliberative democracy but was instead a space inhabited by anti-government views and opposition supporters. Limited in their ability to attack the media and Government with more than words, bloggers and netizens could only use impassioned criticism and share damaging materials online. Bloggers can "out-shout" the Government,⁵² but are less able than the mainstream media to bring together PAP and opposition supporters in dialogue on important issues.

⁴⁹ C. George, *Freedom From the Press*, pp. 137-139.

⁵⁰ X. Hao and C. George, 'Singapore Journalism: Buying into a Winning Formula', *The Global Journalist in the 21st Century*, D.H. Weaver and L. Willnat (eds.), Routledge, London & New York, 2012, pp. 101-102.

⁵¹ C. George, 'Internet Politics: Shouting Down the PAP', *Voting in Change: Politics of Singapore's 2011 General Election*, K.Y.L. Tan and T. Lee (eds.), Ethos Books, Singapore, 2011, pp. 155-156; and C. George, *Freedom From the Press*, pp. 179-180. E.C.Y. Kuo, *et al.*, *Internet in Singapore: A Study on Usage and Impact*, Times Academic Press, Singapore, 2002, p. 109.

⁵² C. George, 'Internet Politics', pp. 158-159.

Like George, the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) scholars also understated the significance of the internet during the election.⁵³ The Institute set broad targets to measure the actual impact of the internet on voters. The lack of results led the scholars to conclude that 2011 was not an “internet election” based on quantitative results.⁵⁴ However, their assessments obfuscate the importance of the internet use to brazenly challenge the status quo of power relations: top down government, and a dominant mainstream media.

Within this thesis, the place of the internet in civil society, the media and elections is treated pragmatically as a tool. The internet can and is used by the mainstream media, political parties and civil society organisations for their ends. It can and is also used to create alternative media and to connect citizens with each other, the mainstream media, parties and organisations. The internet is a vital tool that impacts on multiple sectors of society, specifically the media, civil society, and elections.

The internet is a rapidly changing technology, both in the sites that are popular and the seemingly short attention span of users online. Terence Lee and C. Kan concluded that because the internet is constantly changing and challenging the Government, the only way to tell what action the Government will take is to wait and see what it does.⁵⁵ This is disappointingly ambivalent and does not consider the role of bloggers and internet use

⁵³ T.H. Tan, *et al.*, 'Media Myths and Realities: Findings of National Survey of Media Use in the General Election', *Impact of New Media on General Election 2011*, Singapore, October 4, 2011; and T.H. Tan, *et al.*, 'Survey on Political Traits and Media Use: Report May 2011', *Institute of Policy Studies*, Singapore, June; and E.S. Tan, *et al.*, 'POPS (4) IPS Post-Election Survey 2011', *Institute of Policy Studies*, Singapore, June; and X. Xu, 'Political Parties Contesting on Twitter: Who Won the Battle?', *Impact of New Media on General Election 2011*, Singapore, October 4, October 4, 2011; and M. Skoric, 'Facebook, Mobile Phones, and Political Participation during the 2011 Singapore General Election', *Impact of New Media on General Election 2011*, Singapore, October 4, October 4, 2011; and D. Goh, 'Party Websites and Blogs: The Good, The Bad, and the Toxic. Part One: Websites and Facebook', *Impact of New Media on General Election 2011*, Singapore, October 4, October 4, 2011; and N. Pang, 'Party Websites and Blogs: The Good, The Bad, and The Toxic. Part Two: The Blogosphere', *Impact of New Media on General Elections 2011*, Singapore, October 4, October 4, 2011; and C. George, *Freedom From the Press*, p. 155; and C. George, 'Internet Politics', p. 159.

⁵⁴ T.H. Tan, *et al.*, 'Media Myths and Realities'; and R. Chang, 'Internet 'did not have decisive effect on GE'', *Straits Times*, October 5, 2011; and W. Tan, 'General Election was not an internet election, says IPS survey', *Today*, October 5, 2011; and S. Chang, 'GE not an “Internet Election”', *My Paper*, October 5, 2011; and Y.N. Hoe, 'GE not an “Internet Election”', *Channel NewsAsia*, October 4, 2011; and W. Tan, 'Was GE201 an “Internet elections”?’ No really, a survey finds', *Today*, October 4, 2011; and S. Mahtani, 'Poll Questions Social Media's influence in Singapore Politics', *The Wall Street Journal*, October 6, 2011.

⁵⁵ T. Lee and C. Kan, 'Blogospheric Pressures in Singapore: Internet discourse and the 2006 general election', *Continuum*, v. 23 (6), 2009, pp. 882-883.

to significantly shape the Government's reactions. It is the reaction of bloggers to the Government's regulatory decisions which informs how heavy-handed the Government will be towards the internet. In Chapter Four, I analyse the regulation of the alternative media shaped by Government actions, blogger reactions, and Government counter-reaction.

As a rapidly changing tool for communication, the case studies of internet use easily become out-dated within weeks, months and years. Any analysis of the internet needs to consider that case studies are transitory and so must draw broader theoretical significance. For example, the political satire site *Talking Cock* was popular in the early 2000s and even discussed in Parliament,⁵⁶ but has become inactive since 2005 as the site's creators moved away from Singapore to New York.⁵⁷ Similarly, the satirical blogger Mr Brown (Lee Kin Mun) has also been discussed in the literature for his often cheeky political blogging. In 2006, Lee was rebuked by the Ministry of Information, Communication and the Arts for his critical column in the *Today* newspaper.⁵⁸ Lee has continued to blog, but his focus has shifted from political satire to his daily life and commercial blogging.

Case studies must also consider that in Singapore, the perpetual revisionism by the Government may relegate their significance to mere historical examples. Former cautionary tales include the closure of the socio-political website *Singapore Internet*

⁵⁶ T. Lee, 'Going Online: journalism and civil society in Singapore', *Journalism and Democracy in Asia*, A. Romano and M. Bromley (eds.), Routledge, London & New York, 2005, pp. 25-26; and Y.Y.J. Woo and C. Goh, 'Caging the bird: TalkingCock.com and the pigeonholing of Singaporean Citizenship', *Renaissance Singapore? Economy, Culture, and Politics*, K.P. Tan (ed.) National University of Singapore Press, Singapore, 2007, pp. 103-104.

⁵⁷ C. Goh and Y.Y.J. Woo, 'About Us', *Colin&YenYen.com*, http://colinandyenyen.com/?page_id=2, accessed on: July 13, 2013.

⁵⁸ T. Lee and C. Kan, 'Blogospheric Pressures', pp. 878-880; and T. Lee, *The Media, Cultural Control and Government in Singapore*, Routledge, London & New York, 2010, pp. 138-139; and J. Gomez, "'Citizen Journalism": Bridging the Discrepancy in Singapore's General Elections News', *Südostasien Aktuell – Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, v. 6 2006, pp. 25-26; and T.H. Tan, 'On the Management of Dissent', *Tan Tarn How: Arts & Culture and Media in Singapore*, July 7, 2006, <http://tantarnhow.blogspot.com/2006/07/on-management-of-dissent.html>, accessed on: April 12, 2010; and T.H. Tan, 'Subverting Seriousness and Other Misdemeanours: Modes of Resistance Against OB Markers in the 2006 Singapore General Election', *17th Annual Conference of the Asian Media Information and Communication Centre (AMIC) on 'Changing Media, Changing Societies: Media and the Millennium Development Goals'*, Manila, July 14-16, 2008, p. 5; and H.W. Tang, 'The Networked Electorate: The Internet and the Quiet Democratic Revolution in Malaysia and Singapore', *Journal of Information, Law & Technology*, v. 2009 (2) 2009, p. 16.

Community (Sintercom) in 2001.⁵⁹ *Sintercom* was required to register with the Singapore Broadcasting Authority (SBA) as a political website in 2001, which made the site owner (Dr Tan Chong Kee) legally responsible for any content on the site.⁶⁰ In response, Tan shut down *Sintercom* when the SBA refused to vet his content prior to publication. Tan felt the uncertainty of content attracting punishment was a “Sword of Damocles” over site operations, and put too much pressure on him to censor the site.⁶¹ The *Sintercom* episode was significant in Singapore’s history because it was the first time that direct action was taken against a political website.

In 2006, the Government took action against blogger Chen Jiahow (‘AcidFlask’), and threatened him with a defamation lawsuit for comments made on his blog about the Agency for Science, Technology and Research (A*STAR) and its chairman Philip Yeo. Chen was warned that his allegations would be challenged in court. Accordingly, Chen restricted public access to his blog and unreservedly apologised.⁶² Such state action was characteristic of a government unsure of how to manage the internet and online criticism. Chen’s experience emulated the *Sintercom* example, where a blogger was unsure of their ability to continue under government scrutiny and so closed down their site.

Ten years later, the Government required another political website, *The Online Citizen* (TOC) to register, this time as a political association under the Societies Act and as a political website.⁶³ The operators of TOC attempted to resist the demands by the Prime

⁵⁹ C.K. Tan, 'The Canary and the Crow: Sintercom and the state tolerability index', *Renaissance Singapore? Economy, Culture, and Politics*, K.P. Tan (ed.) National University of Singapore Press, Singapore, 2007, pp. 164-171; and T. Lee, 'Going Online', p. 21; and C. George, *Contentious Journalism and the Internet: Towards Democratic Discourse in Malaysia and Singapore*, Singapore University Press, Singapore, 2006, pp. 99-119; and C. George, *Freedom From the Press*, p. 153; and T. Lee, 'Internet Control and Auto-regulation in Singapore', *Surveillance & Society*, v. 3 (1), 2005, p. 82; and T. Lee, 'Online Media and Civil Society in the 'New' Singapore', *Asia Research Centre Working Papers*, 2005, pp. 8-10; and G. Rodan, *Transparency and Authoritarian Rule in Southeast Asia: Singapore and Malaysia*, Routledge, London & New York, 2005, p. 104; and G. Rodan, 'Embracing Electronic Media', pp. 514-515; and S. Kalathil and T.C. Boas, *Open Networks Closed Regimes*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, D.C., 2003, p. 79.

⁶⁰ C.K. Tan, 'The Canary and the Crow', pp. 168-169.

⁶¹ C.K. Tan, 'The Canary and the Crow', p. 169.

⁶² T. Lee and C. Kan, 'Blogospheric Pressures', p. 876.

⁶³ T. Fong, 'The Online Citizen portal to be gazetted as political association', *Channel News Asia*, January 11, 2011.

Minister's Office (PMO), but their objections were rebuffed.⁶⁴ Unlike Tan, the TOC operators consented to the registration so they could continue to offer a space for Singaporean free speech and alternative journalism.⁶⁵ The registration of TOC as a political association was a significant turning point in the Government's management of the internet and the decision by bloggers to accept registration. If political association registration remains a once-off occurrence, TOC's registration could also be a historical example of past governmentality, as explored in Chapter Four.

In 2012, the threat of defamation lawsuits against bloggers returned, but their reaction was to heed the Letters of Demand, apologise and delete the specified offensive content.⁶⁶ The reaction to threats of defamation lawsuits and registration by bloggers demonstrates they have become increasingly shrewd about their operation and interaction with the state. This poses the challenge for the Government to regulate the socio-political blogosphere with sophistication. Such sophisticated government has involved shifting from punishment and intimidation to encouraging self-regulation by bloggers.

Using Foucault: Governmentality, Punishment and Discipline

The specific use of Michel Foucault's theories to analyse Singapore is not widespread, and the most consistent use has been by Terence Lee. Lee focused on the self-regulation of the citizenry in response to Government discipline and punishment. He concluded that Singaporeans are not coerced by their fear of the Government, but are instead auto-regulatory: acting unconsciously in a manner desired by the Government. Thus, Lee dismissed conscious self-regulation by citizens in favour of auto-regulation.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ J. Chan, 'Govt rejects blog's request not to be gazetted: Registry explains the *The Online Citizen* is 'not a passive website'', *Today*, January 19, 2011.

⁶⁵ X.Y. Cheow, 'Blog willing to operate as political association', *Today*, January 15, 2011.

⁶⁶ 'TR Emeritus publishes apology to PM Lee', *Channel News Asia*, February 22, 2012; and 'TRE, Lee Hsien Yang reach amicable agreement', *Channel News Asia*, February 24, 2012; and A.J. Wong, 'Now that I am out, I have to face the music', *Today*, February 25, 2012; and 'Letter of Demand by Davinder Singh, Drew Napier LLC', *The Online Citizen*, December 8, 2012, <http://www.theonlinecitizen.com/2012/12/letter-of-demand-by-davinder-singh-drew-naiper-llc/>, accessed on: December 10, 2012.

⁶⁷ T. Lee, *The Media, Cultural Control and Government*, p. 149.

To illustrate the theoretical principle of discipline, Lee specifically applied the concept of the Panopticon to internet regulation in Singapore.⁶⁸ The idea of the Panopticon prison was initially developed by British legal reformer Jeremy Bentham in 1787, and discussed as a tool of discipline by Foucault in his 1975 volume *Discipline and Punish*. In the Panopticon, cells are arranged around a central tower which prisoners can see but not see into. The inside of their cells are visible to those in the tower.⁶⁹ It was hypothesised by Foucault that the perception of perpetual surveillance, and a guilty conscience, would cause inmates to act appropriately to avoid punishment.⁷⁰ Foucault himself rejected the Panopticon in his 1977-78 lectures on governmentality, when he described it as archaic and implied it was unsuitable for a modern, post 16th Century government.⁷¹

Lee argued the automatic licensing of Singapore websites, which caused them to be legally liable broadcasters, was like the Panopticon because it made these internet content providers (bloggers) conscious of the risks of Government punishment.⁷² Taking into account Foucault's own objections to the Panopticon in favour of governmentality, the validity of applying the Panopticon model to the Singapore internet is further diminished as bloggers have become increasingly willing to act as they please and react directly to punishment when it arises. The adoption of limited self-regulation, such as comment moderation, is for bloggers' own benefit to create amenable spaces, rather than due to fear of the Government. Therefore, I use the theoretical model of governmentality rather than the Panopticon.

Foucault's governmentality provides greater analytical scope than adopting only a view of government by discipline or sovereign action. It is also consistent with the observations of Singapore scholars of perpetual revisionism by the Singapore Government. Furthermore, Foucault argued that any study of governmentality in a

⁶⁸ T. Lee, *The Media, Cultural Control and Government*, p. 118.

⁶⁹ M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Second, Random House, New York, 1991, p. 200.

⁷⁰ M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 201.

⁷¹ M. Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, p. 66.

⁷² T. Lee, *The Media, Cultural Control and Government*, pp. 118-119, 148-149.

particular state must consider counter-conducts, the resistance to governmentality.⁷³ Governmentality and counter-conduct serves the purpose of this thesis to analyse the authoritarianism of the Singapore Government and how it is being challenged in the media, civil society, and by political competition.

The concept of governmentality was first discussed by Foucault in his 1977-78 lectures *Security, Territory, Population*. Governmentality continued from his earlier works on power relations (bio power) between institutions and individuals, and most directly from *Discipline and Punish*, published two years earlier. Whereas in *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault described the shift in government of people from overt punishment by a sovereign to inculcating desired behaviour by separation and institution; *Security, Territory, Population* traced the development of modes of government (governmentality) in Western Europe since the 16th Century. Governmentality refers not to a singular style of government, but the appropriation of elements of sovereign reign and discipline.⁷⁴

Governmentality, Foucault concluded in the 1978 lectures, always takes into account the freedom of the population to comply with or counter the methods of government by the state authority (the sovereign).⁷⁵ Government, as a verb, describes the “conduct of conduct,”⁷⁶ or the way of conducting things and people to achieve a specific end.⁷⁷ The role of the sovereign power in modern governmentality is not to rule on a whim, but to intimately know the state, what its strengths and weaknesses are, and how to effectively govern to maintain and benefit the state.⁷⁸ Foucault argued that such knowledge of the state would come from political economy: “the knowledge of processes that link together variations of wealth and variations of population on three axes: production, circulation, consumption.”⁷⁹ Colebatch included advice from experts in this so-called problematisation phase.⁸⁰

⁷³ M. Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, p. 389.

⁷⁴ M. Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, p. 102.

⁷⁵ M. Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, p. 353.

⁷⁶ M. Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, p. 389.

⁷⁷ M. Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, p. 99; and A.I. Davidson, 'Introduction', p. xxii.

⁷⁸ M. Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, p. 274.

⁷⁹ M. Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, p. 350.

⁸⁰ H.K. Colebatch, 'Government and Governmentality: Using Multiple Approaches to the Analysis of Government', *Australian Journal of Political Science*, v. 27 (3), 2002, p. 426.

A contemporary sovereign employing governmentality, as opposed to dictatorship, uses:

The ensemble formed by institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, calculations, and tactics [...] that has the population as its target, political economy as its major form of knowledge, and apparatuses of security as its essential technical instrument.⁸¹

Security encompasses discipline, direct action (juridical security) against the population or the state, law or any means necessary to achieve the desired end. The freedom of the population to choose their behaviour vis-à-vis the sovereign's freedoms is always considered, and so the tactics of governmentality encourage the population to behave as desired by the sovereign. A fuller account of security is presented in later in this chapter.

Foucault applied the concept of *raison d'état* (the national interest) as the rationale that guided the development of governmentality from sovereign reign, characterised by whimsical use of power or the preservation of sovereignty, to government for the perpetuation of the state as a whole.⁸² As the political state matured, the *raison d'état* incorporated production of wealth within society, guaranteeing sufficient means of subsistence, increasing the population size while maintaining law and order and relations with neighbouring territories.⁸³ As the sphere of *raison d'état* increased, it caused a political challenge for the sovereign to also consider and incorporate the desires and the population, especially if they were counter to the *raison d'état*.

Foucault argued that after the 18th Century, *raison d'état* became not just the concern of the sovereign, but of the whole population. Opening up attainment of the national interest to the wider society encouraged civil society and other forces to respond to sovereign action in the name of defending the state.⁸⁴ Governmentality is therefore a method by which the Government can accommodate the dichotomy between *raison d'état* and the will of the population, including in pursuit of the national interest

⁸¹ M. Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, p. 108.

⁸² M. Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, pp. 236-237, 262.

⁸³ M. Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, p. 354.

⁸⁴ M. Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, p. 257.

themselves. This requires constant revision of governmentality methods.⁸⁵ We can thus see where governmentality theory and the “open secret” of PAP perpetual revision converge.

Analysts of governmentality after Foucault’s death have argued that in addition to the need to achieve the *raison d’état*, governmentality uses other rationalities and mentalities (emotive ways of thinking).⁸⁶ Rose went as far as to argue that a sovereign could use whatever rationality or mentality was appropriate, both to problematise and to formulate an appropriate governmental strategy.⁸⁷ Within the literature, the People’s Action Party’s guiding mentality has been classified as survivalism.

Problematism in Singapore: Hegemonic Survivalism

Survivalism has underpinned all of the PAP’s problematisation and governmentality, and prioritises economic⁸⁸ and political stability.⁸⁹ Stability validates regulation of all sectors of society to create an efficient and prosperous state in order to attract international investment, tourism, trade, and competitive advantage within the Asia-Pacific region.⁹⁰ The Singapore Government has described itself as ‘pragmatic’ to obfuscate to varying degrees the utilisation of multiple ideological elements.⁹¹ This led Kenneth Paul Tan to argue that pragmatism has become an ideology unto itself.⁹²

⁸⁵ M. Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, p. 259.

⁸⁶ M. Dean, *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society, 2nd Edition*, 2nd Edition, Sage Publications, London, 2010, pp. 24-25.

⁸⁷ N. Rose, *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 2004, p. 27.

⁸⁸ G. Huff, 'The Developmental State, Government, and Singapore’s Economic Development Since 1960', *World Development*, v. 23 (8), 1995, p. 1431; and D.K. Mauzy and R.S. Milne, *Singapore Politics*, p. 4.

⁸⁹ K.P. Tan, 'The Ideology of Pragmatism: Globalisation and Authoritarianism in Singapore', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, v. 42 (1), 2012, p. 69; and K.P. Tan, 'Singapore's National Day Rally Speech: A Site of Ideological Negotiation', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, v. 37 (3), 2007, p. 293.

⁹⁰ Y.S. Cheong, *OB Markers: My Straits Times Story*, Straits Times Press, Singapore, 2013, p. 253.

⁹¹ B.-H. Chua, *Communitarian Ideology and Democracy in Singapore*, 2nd Edition, Routledge, London & New York, 2006, p. 5; and M.D. Barr and Z. Skrbiš, *Constructing Singapore: Elitism, Ethnicity and the Nation-Building Project*, Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (NIAS), Copenhagen, 2008, p. 67.

⁹² K.P. Tan, 'Ideology of Pragmatism', p. 68.

The ultimate goal is state and regime survival, so adoption of other elements of ideologies is part of the Government's method to find potential solutions. For example, the Government has touted multiracialism as a core policy for maintaining stability within multi-ethnic Singapore. The citizen population has been categorically segregated as Chinese, Malay, Indian or "Other",⁹³ while the Government simultaneously espouses the need for a united Singapore.⁹⁴

Racial policy has divided Singapore into identity microcosms that are then disciplined. For example, racial classification has influenced policies on public housing quotas,⁹⁵ employment discrimination,⁹⁶ education streaming based on a "mother tongue" language,⁹⁷ and also the placement within the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) or Civil Defence Force (CDF) during compulsory military service for men (National Service).⁹⁸

The Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act is mandated to prevent inter-racial conflict,⁹⁹ and has been used to stifle the discussion of racial segregation and the Government's language policies.¹⁰⁰ Problematisation identified that a multi-ethnic population could be a threat to stability; or more so that the Government could viably control the population using racial segregation. The Government then instituted policy that effectively stifled debate and discussion of the racial policies that affect the population.

⁹³ M.D. Barr and Z. Skrbiš, *Constructing Singapore*, p. 51.

⁹⁴ 'Speech by Secretary-General Lee Hsien Loong at People's Action Party Convention, 27 November 2011 "A New PAP for a New Era"', *People's Action Party, Singapore*, November 27, 2011, http://www.pap.org.sg/uploads/ap/1293/documents/pm_lee_speech_party_convention_2011_english.pdf, accessed on: May 4, 2011.

⁹⁵ M.D. Barr and Z. Skrbiš, *Constructing Singapore*, p. 101; and C. Tremewan, *The Political Economy of Social Control in Singapore*, 2nd, St. Martin's Press, London & New York, 1996, pp. 65-66; and L.Z. Rahim, 'A New Dawn in PAP-Malay Relations?', *Impressions of the Goh Chok Tong Years in Singapore*, B. Welsh, J. Chin, A. Mahizhnan and T.H. Tan (eds.), National University of Singapore Press, Singapore, 2009, p. 351.

⁹⁶ M.D. Barr and Z. Skrbiš, *Constructing Singapore*, pp. 103-106.

⁹⁷ M.D. Barr and Z. Skrbiš, *Constructing Singapore*, pp. 93-95, 101-102; and C. Tremewan, *Political Economy of Social Control*, pp. 119, 125, 139-142.

⁹⁸ M.D. Barr and Z. Skrbiš, *Constructing Singapore*, pp. 218-129; and D.K. Mauzy and R.S. Milne, *Singapore Politics*, p. 109; and L.Z. Rahim, 'A New Dawn', pp. 351-352.

⁹⁹ *Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act (Chapter 167A)*, Singapore Attorney General's Chambers.

¹⁰⁰ Z. Hussain, 'Red card on race issues at Speakers' Corner', *Straits Times*, September 19, 2008.

One of the strongest mentalities worked into the pragmatism ideology is elitism. Elitism dictates that so-called elite are the fittest to govern Singapore. The elite have been defined as “a core group of people who occupy key positions of power and influence, and set the direction for the whole society and country.”¹⁰¹ As elites are selected to join Cabinet, elections are needed to introduce these recruits into Parliament, which validates the manipulation of elections, discussed in Chapter Seven.

The need to replenish elites has justified the creation of a fiercely competitive so-called meritocratic system, in which children are pushed from a young age to be the best.¹⁰² The process of honing elites continues in the military, at university and in the workplace, especially in the civil service and Government-Linked Companies (GLCs).¹⁰³ The traditional recruitment pools for Cabinet Ministers have been the military and administrative service and from the upper echelons of the private sector.¹⁰⁴

The contradiction of elitism and meritocracy has combined with technocracy. The education system has increasingly streamed children towards technical education.¹⁰⁵ Students are streamed into the physical and natural sciences in university such as engineering, medicine, science, and economics. Focus on technical scholarship and quantitative methodology however, reduces the influence of the social sciences in government. The current Cabinet demonstrates the so-called technocratic government that has been cultivated in Singapore for forty years. Of the 18 people in the current Cabinet, only K. Shanmugam (Minister for Law and Foreign Affairs) has a degree in law.¹⁰⁶

Table 1.1 illustrates the academic qualifications of the members of Cabinet. A conscious decision has obviously been made to bolster the qualifications of Cabinet technocrats with a Masters of Public Administration (MPA). This is an example of a sovereign acting upon itself for the benefit of the state. If a Masters of Public Administration is

¹⁰¹ M.D. Barr and Z. Skrbiš, *Constructing Singapore*, p. 58.

¹⁰² M.D. Barr and Z. Skrbiš, *Constructing Singapore*, pp. 127-128. Chapters seven to ten of Barr and Skrbiš comprehensively discuss the process to stream children to the new elite and pressures that this has placed upon children and their parents.

¹⁰³ M.D. Barr and Z. Skrbiš, *Constructing Singapore*, p. 61.

¹⁰⁴ M.D. Barr and Z. Skrbiš, *Constructing Singapore*, pp. 66-67.

¹⁰⁵ M.D. Barr and Z. Skrbiš, *Constructing Singapore*, pp. 157-158, 182.

¹⁰⁶ 'Cabinet Appointments: K. Shanmugam', *Singapore Cabinet Office*, June 2011, http://www.cabinet.gov.sg/content/cabinet/appointments/mr_k_shanmugam.html, accessed on: July 20, 2013.

what separates the Cabinet leaders from otherwise elite technocratic MPs, it could be a long-term norm to achieve for future leaders. Eight members of Cabinet have this degree in addition to their qualifications in otherwise dissimilar fields. It may also indicate the core members of Cabinet and perhaps those being primed for the most senior Ministries as the next generation leaders.

The Masters of Public Administration also corresponds with the five core Cabinet Ministries as identified by Barr: Defence, Home Affairs, Education, Finance, and Trade.¹⁰⁷ The eight Master's holders include Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and both Deputy Prime Ministers Teo Chee Hean (Minister for Home Affairs) and Tharman Shanmugaratnam (Finance Minister). Other Master's holders are Minister for Trade and Industry Lim Hng Kiang and his Second Minister S. Iswaran, and Education Minister Heng Swee Keat.

Holding the Master's degree may also identify rising stars in Cabinet, such as the two appointed Acting Ministers: Tan Chuan-Jin (Manpower) and Lawrence Wong (Culture). In addition, several other Cabinet Ministers have similar management degrees, including a Masters of Management (Lim Swee Say) and a Sloan Fellowship (Chan Chun Sing).

¹⁰⁷ M.D. Barr, *The Ruling Elite of Singapore*, p. 116.

Table 1.1 Qualifications of Cabinet Members (Source: Singapore Cabinet Office)¹⁰⁸

Name	Role	Qualification	Institute	State Award
Lee Hsien Loong	Prime Minister	Hons (1st) Math M. Public Admin	Cambridge Harvard	President, PSC SAF O/S
Teo Chee Hean	Deputy PM Home Affairs	M. Science M. Public Admin	Imperial (London) Harvard	President SAF O/S
Tharman Shanmugaratnam	Deputy PM Finance	M. Economics M. Public Admin	LSE Harvard	
Lim Hng Kiang	Trade & Industry	Hons (1st) Eng. M. Public Admin	Cambridge Harvard	President SAF O/S
Lim Swee Say	Minister PMO Sec Gen. NTUC	Hons (1st) Electr. M. Management	Loughborough Stamford	SAF O/S
Yaacob Ibrahim	Communication & Info.	PhD Structural Eng.	Stamford	
Khaw Boon Wan	National Development	Hons Engineering Bach. Commerce	Newcastle	
Ng Eng Hen	Defence	M. Medicine	NUS	
Vivian Balakrishnan	Environment & Water	Bach. Medicine	NUS	President
K. Shanmugam	Law Foreign Affairs	Hons (1st) Law	NUS	
Gan Kim Yong	Health	M. Engineering	Cambridge	O/S Merit
Lui Tuck Yew	Transport	Bach. Sci. (Chemistry)	Cambridge	SAF O/S
S. Iswaran	Minister PMO 2nd Home, Trade	Hons (1st) Econ. M. Public Admin	Adelaide Harvard	
Heng Swee Keat	Education	M. Economics M. Public Admin	Cambridge Harvard	
Grace Fu	Minister in PMO 2nd Env., Foreign	Hons Account. M. Bus. Admin	NUS	
Chan Chun Sing	Family Development 2nd Defence	Bach. Economics Sloan Fellowship	Cambridge MIT	President & SAF O/S LKY Scholar
Tan Chuan-Jin	Acting Manpower	Bach. Economics M. Arts Defence Studies M. Public Admin	LSE KCL NUS	SAF O/S
Lawrence Wong	Acting Culture. 2nd Comm.	M. Economics M. Public Admin	Michigan Harvard	

¹⁰⁸ Data retrieved from 'Cabinet Appointments' profiles, *Singapore Cabinet Office*, <http://www.cabinet.gov.sg/content/cabinet/appointments.html>, accessed on: April 11, 2014.
 Acronyms: SAF O/S (SAF Overseas Scholar), President (Presidential Scholar), O/S Merit (Overseas Merit Scholar), LKY Scholar (Lee Kuan Yew Scholar), PSC (Public Service Commission Scholar), NUS (National University of Singapore), KCL (Kings College London), LSE (London School of Economics), MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), Imperial (Imperial College London).

The Nexus of Security: Spectacular Punishment, Discipline and Government

Security is the application of the Government's power onto citizens to alter their behaviour.¹⁰⁹ In Machiavellian regimes where the ends goals of the sovereign is to secure personal authority, the use of security mechanisms are juridical. Laws are established by the sovereign and the population is simply expected to obey to that end.¹¹⁰ As the sovereign form of government develops, the juridical actions of the sovereign take on an element of discipline, to influence the behaviour of the wider population. This was the subject of *Discipline and Punish*.

Sovereign punitive acts became spectacles of punishment or 'spectacular punishment', such as public humiliation, torture and public execution.¹¹¹ In Singapore, spectacular punishment has included pre-emptive detention under the Internal Security Act (ISA), and financially crippling lawsuits by the Government and elites against political challengers. Spectacular punishment serves two purposes: firstly, to punish, and secondly, to demonstrate the power of the sovereign, which influences the behaviour of a much wider audience to not emulate punishable behaviour.¹¹² Various sources of authority can be mobilised to punish,¹¹³ including extra-government entities such as political elites and the media. I argue in Chapter Two that the media in Singapore has been co-opted to punish political challengers to the PAP using negative reports, especially when a heavy-handed response would be detrimental to the Government.

Punishment influences wider behaviours in the whole population,¹¹⁴ but discipline applies to distinctive social spaces. By dividing society into microcosms, specific regulations can be imposed upon the population within the microcosm by local authorities, and causes desired behaviours to manifest almost unconsciously.¹¹⁵ Discipline classifies which actions will be best to achieve the desired result to the exclusion of others. Thus, it specifies only the permitted behaviour and all other behaviours can be assumed to be forbidden.¹¹⁶ Within a disciplinary microcosm, an

¹⁰⁹ M. Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, p. 47.

¹¹⁰ M. Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, p. 95.

¹¹¹ M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, pp. 8-10.

¹¹² M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, pp. 34, 48, 58.

¹¹³ H.K. Colebatch, 'Government and Governmentality', p. 418.

¹¹⁴ M. Dean, *Governmentality*, p. 29.

¹¹⁵ M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, pp. 141-166.

¹¹⁶ M. Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, pp. 46, 57.

optimal model is presented to be emulated and thus normalise the behaviour of all in the cohort.¹¹⁷ For example, in a school microcosm, optimal students are studious and well behaved. The other children are encouraged to emulate the optimal student to receive praise, and serious deviation from the optimal model is punished.¹¹⁸ Ultimately, self-regulation by citizens and the regulation of peers reduces the need for direct government intervention,¹¹⁹ and places the onus of responsibility on citizens.

Within microcosms, a local authority also transmits ideas that become hegemonic. Antonio Gramsci theorised that hegemony was the result of coercion and consensus within a sphere to make a worldview or ideology dominant and therefore to, “inform norms, values, and taste, political practices, and social relations.”¹²⁰ The state co-opts organisations and institutions to coerce citizens to adopt the hegemonic mentality.¹²¹

In Singapore, survivalism has become hegemonic through education, National Service and the media. When hegemony is created by co-option of institutions, counter-hegemony is created by the rejection or absence of that co-option.¹²² Counter-hegemony implicitly goes hand-in-hand with counter-conduct: the rejection of the processes by a sovereign to influence the behaviour of others.¹²³ Counter-conduct influences revisionism by the sovereign.¹²⁴

The reaction of the Government to threats is important for regime perpetuation. Political theorists have observed that skilled manipulation by a government in the face of political threats will result in regime perpetuation, but “clumsy” manipulation will result in regime change.¹²⁵ Lee Kuan Yew’s response to threats was notoriously heavy-handed, and his tenure has been recalled as the “knuckledusters era”.¹²⁶ Lee’s heavy-handed

¹¹⁷ M. Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, p. 57.

¹¹⁸ M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 80.

¹¹⁹ N. Rose, *Powers of Freedom*, p. 3.

¹²⁰ H. Katz, 'Gramsci, Hegemony, and Global Civil Society Networks', *Voluntas*, v. 17 (4), 2006, p. 335; and T.R. Bates, 'Gramsci and the Theory of Hegemony', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, v. 36 (2), 1975, pp. 352-353.

¹²¹ H. Katz, 'Gramsci, Hegemony, and Global Civil Society Networks', p. 335.

¹²² H. Katz, 'Gramsci, Hegemony, and Global Civil Society Networks', p. 336.

¹²³ A.I. Davidson, 'Introduction', p. xxii.

¹²⁴ A.I. Davidson, 'Introduction', p. xx.

¹²⁵ W. Case, 'Manipulative Skills', p. 97.

¹²⁶ Y.S. Cheong, *OB Markers*, p. 127.

response and unequivocal position against threats was seen (by him) as appropriate for the successful development of the nascent Singaporean state in the 1960s and 1970s.¹²⁷ The government under his successors, Goh Chok Tong (1990-2004) and Lee Hsien Loong (2004-present) has been characterised by comparatively softer reactions, such as reduced use of government punitive action or spectacular punishment in response to political threats.

As the Government has softened punishment, it has also tightened regulations and co-opted the media to undermine support for the opposition parties, and bolster the PAP's positive reputation. The People's Action Party could perpetuate its regime for decades by employing this strategic revisionism¹²⁸ where it loosens some regulations and tightens others, and by gestural politics. Subsequently, the traits that make Singapore authoritarian, such as electoral manipulation,¹²⁹ denied protection of civil liberties,¹³⁰ and circumscription of political challenge sources,¹³¹ would continue to be a core part of Singapore society.

The survival of Lee Hsien Loong's Government, and future administrations, is less about instituting new authoritarian policies, and more about governmentality that allows some of the desires of the population, such as liberalism. The Government must balance incorporating these desires and not undermining the national interest (*raison d'état*) of maintaining the state and populations, particularly law and order, wealth and subsistence, and population growth.

¹²⁷ S. Yap, *et al.*, *Men in White: The Untold Story of Singapore's Ruling Political Party*, Singapore Press Holdings Ltd., Singapore, 2009, pp. x-xi; and S. Ramesh, 'GE: MM Lee says Singapore is not Disney world', *Channel NewsAsia*, April 25, 2011; and W.K. Leong, 'A generation that does not remember: MM', *Today*, May 9, 2011.

¹²⁸ G. Rodan, 'Singapore 'Exceptionalism'?', p. 3.

¹²⁹ S. Levitsky and L.A. Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK & New York, 2010, pp. 8-12; and W. Case, 'Manipulative Skills', p. 96; and A. Schedler, 'The Logic of Electoral Authoritarianism', *Electoral Authoritarianism: The Dynamics of Unfree Competition*, A. Schedler (ed.) Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, COL & London, 2006, p. 5.

¹³⁰ S. Levitsky and L.A. Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism*, pp. 8-9.

¹³¹ J.J. Linz, *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, COL & London, 2000, pp. 161, 170.

Thesis Methodology

Except for fieldwork in Singapore in October-November 2010, the majority of research for this project was conducted from Australia and in Japan. Most of the research materials were obtained online. The Singapore mainstream media and alternative media (socio-political blogosphere) and affiliated social networking sites were monitored daily throughout the course of the research (four years) for trending news and political updates.

At the beginning of this project (from January to March 2010), and whilst undertaking fundamental research on Singapore's political system, I conducted a three-month survey of the *Straits Times Forum* and its comments section. I selected January as the starting month to have the benefit of a new year. The survey ran for three months to allow sufficient time for specific issues and incidents to play out. I tested the hypothesis that the Government would favour the print edition for its official replies, based on the assumption of the Government's preference for traditional media and the wider circulation of the print edition. This hypothesis was proven to be inaccurate as bureaucrats' replies were published in both print and online versions, sometimes with no link to where the original letters were published. This showed that the Government regarded the online *Straits Times* letters, referred to in brief in the print edition, as just as valid as the letters printed in full.

A longer survey was not required because I did not intend to conduct an ethnographic survey of how citizens and the Government use the *Straits Times Forum*. I was able to trace when the moderators deleted inappropriate content. This included a mass deletion of several hundred posts without explanation because the topic had shifted to discussing religious tolerances in Singapore, although the comments to *Forum* letters were only accessible online and to registered users. This was clearly the reaction of the *Straits Times Forum* editor to the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act.

Six months before the May 2011 election, I spent six weeks in Singapore, conducting research interviews. This was after several months of attempting to organise interviews

with journalists, political party representatives, People's Action Party MPs, government department representatives, and bloggers.

Despite a wide net cast to solicit interviews, I was limited by the number of individuals who agreed to meet me. Interview data was obtained from 25 people: seven political opposition leaders or CEC members, seven bloggers, six journalists and editors from the mainstream media, and five regular opposition party members. Thus, six weeks was sufficient to interview all of the contacts who had agreed to meet with me and to follow-up with additional contacts when I arrived in Singapore. Data collected from journalists appears in chapters two and three, and interview data from opposition politicians appears in multiple chapters, particularly in chapters six and seven.

Potential interviewees were identified in a purposive manner. I found the email addresses of journalists on the websites of the mainstream media publications and emailed my request for an online or face-to-face interview in Singapore. My email was accompanied by a Letter of Introduction by my supervisor Dr Michael Barr. Of the 20 journalists emailed, I had less than 50% success obtaining an actual interview. Nine were willing to be interviewed, of which six came to fruition and one sent a reply to questions. The other two did not return my emails or calls after their initial agreement to be interviewed. The remaining 11 did not reply or stated that they did not want to be interviewed.

I also contacted several government ministries that were involved with youth or using the internet, including the Ministry of Communication and Information (then-Ministry of Information, Communication and the Arts). I emailed the specific Minister where the address was available and also a general enquiry address, but was unsuccessful in obtaining an interview with any representatives. I was asked to submit questions to three ministries, but a common reply was that the Ministry did not entertain interviews with doctoral students. Of the three that received questions, only one replied with a general history but no specific answers.

I also emailed the leadership of all active political parties and their youth wings, and was granted interviews by eight members of political opposition parties, but none from the People's Action Party. I was more successful with bloggers, although was unable to

secure an interview with representatives of three sites: *New Asia Republic*, *sgpolitics.net* and *Temasek Review*.

When I emailed the socio-political website *Temasek Review* (now named *TR Emeritus*) with a request for an interview about the operation of the site, my request was made public. Several commenters raised concerns that it was probably a hoax, and cautioned the site operators against a meeting with me because I might be a government agent, or interfering in the domestic politics of Singapore.¹³² Not unexpectedly, they also located and shared my public Facebook page (used for my research), my Flinders University profile, and visiting scholar profile with the Singapore Internet Research Centre at Nanyang Technological University. One commenter published my email address, before it was removed. The incident demonstrated to me the suspicion that has permeated segments of Singaporean society, particularly when the source of suspicion is foreign and could be affiliated with the Government.

In October 2011 I quantitatively surveyed all contesting parties' Facebook use during the lead-up to and aftermath of the 2011 election (March 21-May 28). I used the list of all candidates in the election and tried to find a public account on Facebook. Public accounts do not require a user to 'friend' that candidate but they can subscribe to content with a 'like'. There are no restrictions on 'likes' but private accounts have a maximum limit of 5,000 "friends".

I surveyed 80% of public accounts of all the candidates available (87 of 108), and also the official party Facebook pages, which were all public access except the SDA which used Desmond Lim's private page. Candidates with no content within the date range were excluded. Posts were categorised as

- 'Personal', relating to friends, family or non-political content;
- 'General political content' which was not specifically related to the election;
- 'Election 2011' which was content specific to the election;

¹³² 'Interview Request from a PhD Researcher from Flinders University in Australia', *Temasek Review*, October 18, 2010, <http://www.temasekreview.com/2010/10/18/interview-request-from-a-phd-researcher-from-flinders-university-in-australia/>, accessed on: October 20, 2010.

- ‘Party content’ which included posts about incumbents official capacity as a MP, grassroots or Cabinet Minister (where applicable);
- And ‘after election’ which was election related content after May 7.

The results of the survey are presented in Chapter Eight.

As the Government counter-reaction will not be seen until the subsequent election in 2016, and as the use of the internet will continue to develop in the interim, the results of this survey are an important indication of the areas where Facebook or similar platforms can be used. However, due to the changes that will undoubtedly take place between 2011 and 2016, the results cannot be expected to remain static.

The parliamentary survey presented in Chapter Six utilised the Parliamentary Hansard search function. I searched the Hansard from October 10, 2011, which was the first Parliament sitting of the current Government; to August 8, 2013 when Parliament was adjourned for a short break. I used a keyword search for the names of the elected Workers’ Party MPs and Non-Constituency MPs which revealed when they were mentioned or spoke in Parliament.

The case studies analysed within the thesis chapters are illustrative of the broader arguments of media acting as a platform for the Government, and the mismatch of expectations between government and civil activists. These illustrations of theory update the case studies often presented in the literature which are quickly outdated. They are not presented to be specifically unique incidents in Singapore's history, but representative of broader governmentality.

Thesis Chapter Outline

To answer the research questions posed at the beginning of this chapter, each chapter of the thesis will analyse how survivalist rationale implicitly directed Government policy and regulation, how the governance of each sector (media, civil society, and elections) is challenged by counter-conduct, and what revision has taken place to meet these challenges. The overriding question of the thesis is how effective has the push for

change been thus far, and what is the potential implication of further perpetual revisionism in Singapore?

Chapter Two's starting point is the unequivocal statement in 1971 by then-Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew (1959-1990) that the role of the media in Singapore is to support the Government.¹³³ Having conveyed this goal, the Government has sought to keep the media controlled using punishment and microcosm discipline. Media that cannot be controlled has been marginalised and subordinated to the primacy of the domestic media corporations: Singapore Press Holdings (SPH) and MediaCorp. Both corporations are linked to the elite power Establishment. MediaCorp is owned by the sovereign wealth fund Temasek Holdings.¹³⁴ Singapore Press Holdings is indirectly controlled by a disproportionately minority of management shareholders, who are powerful on decisions of company appointments.

Management Shares are issued directly by the Minister of Communication and Information to important nation-building and financial institutions.¹³⁵ These shares coerce SPH economically to keep the corporation aligned to nation-building goals. In addition, a former Cabinet Minister or trusted elite has been appointed to oversee the SPH Board since 1982, and importantly monitor editors as the Executive Chairman.¹³⁶

Two of the four men who have been Executive Chairmen have been subsequently appointed as President of Singapore, which indicates their significance to the Government and the importance of Singapore Press Holdings as one of several elite holding zones. In Chapter Three, I discuss the influence of the first Executive Chairman

¹³³ J. Rajah, *Authoritarian Rule of Law*, p. 131.

¹³⁴ P.H. Ang, 'Singapore Media', *Journalism.sg*, September, 2007, <http://journalism.sg/wp-content/uploads/2007/09/ang-peng-hwa-2007-singapore-media.pdf>, accessed on: June 6, 2010; and Temasek Holdings, 'Our Portfolio Highlights and Major Investments', *Temasek Holdings*, March 31, 2009, <http://review.temasek.com.sg/portfolio/major-portfolio-companies?page=2>, accessed on: March 20, 2010.

¹³⁵ G. Rodan, *Transparency and Authoritarian Rule*, p. 21; and *Staying Ahead: Singapore Press Holdings Annual Report 2012*, Singapore Press Holdings, 2012, http://www.sph.com.sg/pdf/annualreport/2012/SPH_AR2012.pdfpp.205-206.

¹³⁶ C. George, *Freedom From the Press*, p. 33.

S.R. Nathan through his close work with the editors of the *Straits Times* to make hegemonic the Government's mentalities and the nation-building role of the media.¹³⁷

Having established in chapters two and three that the media has been co-opted by the Government to support policies and to punish political threats; Chapter Four examines the Government's attempts to control the alternative media online. The alternative media is a bridge between control of the mainstream media and of civil activism, because socio-political bloggers have involved themselves in civil and political activism. Therefore, the chapters on media (two, three and four) and civil society (chapters five and six) are closely linked.

The space for legal civil activism is circumscribed by regulations on public speech and assembly. The only legal spaces for unlicensed public speech and assembly in Singapore after 2009 are Speakers' Corner in Hong Lim Park and private venues, with the permission of the venue owner. The Government simultaneously permitted the use of these spaces for any legal civil activism, while it tightened the regulation on external activism by the Public Order Act. Under the Act, one person on their own can be arrested for taking part in a public demonstration.¹³⁸ Civil activists have taken advantage of the opened spaces for civil activism to hold more daring events. A positive outcome of successfully held civil activism is that it increases the efficacy of positive civil activism in the future. In other words, positive civil activism begets future positive civil activism.

I argue that in alternative media and civil society that success is characterised by lack of punishment, and is achieved by working within the regulatory frameworks of their spheres. This however, ultimately perpetuates the authoritarian state by not actively challenging the PAP for dominance.

Chapter Six focuses on the Nominated Member of Parliament and Non-Constituency Member of Parliament positions. Because the Government has circumscribed where

¹³⁷ C. George, 'History Spiked: Hegemony and the Denial of Media Diversity', *Paths Not Taken: Political Pluralism in Post-War Singapore*, M.D. Barr and C.A. Trocki (eds.), National University of Singapore Press, Singapore, 2008, p. 27; and C. George, *Freedom From the Press*, p. 110; and Y.S. Cheong, *OB Markers*, pp. 23-25.

¹³⁸ *Singapore Parliament Record (Hansard)*, Eleventh Parliament, April 13, 2009; and *Public Order Act 2009*, Singapore Attorney General's Chambers.

civil activism can take place, NMP seats in Parliament are even more important. The government has made it clear that Speakers' Corner and private venues allow citizens to "let off steam"¹³⁹ but Parliament is the only permitted space for dispute of policies.¹⁴⁰ Consequently, civil activists should either join political parties, or aspire to be selected for the Nominated MP seat in Parliament.

Nominated and Non-Constituency MPs have limited ability to vote in Parliament, but are able to table motions to be discussed.¹⁴¹ Extra-Parliamentary protest to government decisions can be ignored without Nominated MP or opposition MP support in Parliament, where decisions are made almost unilaterally thanks to the PAP's Party Whip. Chapter Six uses the example of the historic Bukit Brown Cemetery, which the Government decided should be partly demolished to build a new highway and multi-storey public housing.¹⁴² The proposal roused public interest and protest against the Government's plans. The proposal was discussed in Parliament, but ultimately passed, which caused disillusion with the Government's engagement process.¹⁴³

The increased importance of Parliament as a space for policy debate and direct challenge to the Government in turn affects the manipulation of elections to prevent parliamentary pluralism, which the PAP leadership has claimed would impinge its ability to govern efficiently.¹⁴⁴

In Chapter Seven I analyse the authoritarian manipulation of elections in Singapore. During elections, the PAP conflates government and the party, and claims that it should be judged on its accomplishments as government.¹⁴⁵ The opposition parties are held to

¹³⁹ 'Transcript of Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's National Day Rally 2008 Speech at NUS-UCC on 17 August 2008', *Prime Minister's Office, Singapore*, December 23, 2010, http://www.pmo.gov.sg/content/pmosite/mediacentre/speechesninterviews/primeminister/2008/August/transcript_of_primeministerleehsienloongsnationaldayrally2008spe.html, accessed on: June 22, 2011.

¹⁴⁰ *Singapore Parliament Reports (Hansard)*, Ninth Parliament, April 25, 2000.

¹⁴¹ D.K. Mauzy and R.S. Milne, *Singapore Politics*, p. 145.

¹⁴² 'Singapore Graveyard Stirs Lively Debate', *Wall Street Journal*, November 9, 2011.

¹⁴³ X. Li, 'Navigating a New Terrain of Engagement', *Straits Times*, March 30, 2012; and G. Chua, 'Timeline of a Grave Saga', *Straits Times*, March 30, 2012.

¹⁴⁴ 'PM Lee says countries worldwide respect and admire Singapore's proven system', *Channel NewsAsia*, May 3, 2006.

¹⁴⁵ 'Singapore cannot run on autopilot', *Straits Times*, April 26, 2011.

the same expectation,¹⁴⁶ which is difficult because only a few candidates can claim a long and successful track record in Parliament.

I argue that electoral authoritarianism disciplines the population to focus on the economic ramifications of their vote. For example, the Group Representation Constituencies are led by a Cabinet Minister and team of MPs, influencing voters to be conscious that they can vote out Cabinet Ministers which would destabilise the state.¹⁴⁷ The Government has used the GRCs to shape the belief that parliamentary representation is not about a voice for the people, but the provision of good management in constituencies.¹⁴⁸ As such, the PAP has used its position as Government to promise multi-million dollar upgrades to constituencies that support it, in preference of opposition constituencies. This has been blatantly justified by the PAP as “fair” to its supporters in exchange for their loyalty.¹⁴⁹

In Chapter Eight I discuss the internet’s use during the May 2011 parliamentary election, an important demonstration of the utilisation of the internet by political parties, media, and citizens. During the election, all political parties used Facebook to varying degrees to campaign, outreach to citizens and constituents, and to advertise and report on the election events (“hustings”).¹⁵⁰ The results of internet utilisation show that electoral outreach had been altered because of the communicative potential of the internet, although the fullest extent of the internet’s impact remains to be seen. The mainstream media and government will undoubtedly work to marginalise the power of the internet in elections in the future.

Chapter Nine concludes the thesis, and by using the evidence cited in the preceding chapters, directly addresses the research questions of how the political status quo has been challenged and how effective perpetual revisionism has been in responding to pressure.

¹⁴⁶ F.K. Han, *et al.*, *Hard Truths to Keep Singapore Going*, p. 26.

¹⁴⁷ D.K. Mauzy and R.S. Milne, *Singapore Politics*, p. 145.

¹⁴⁸ 'Full Q & A Segment of the Kent Ridge Ministerial Forum', *Razor TV*, April 5, 2011, http://www.razor.tv/site/servlet/segment/main/specials/General_Election/61896.html, accessed on: April 17, 2011.

¹⁴⁹ 'Full Q & A Segment of the Kent Ridge Ministerial Forum'.

¹⁵⁰ D. Loh, 'New online portal to aid election candidates during hustings', *Channel NewsAsia*, April 26, 2011.

Chapter Two:

Over Forty Years of Media Governmentality

On June 9 1971, Singapore's first Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew addressed journalists from around the world at the International Press Institute (IPI) in Helsinki. There, he laid the foundations for Singapore's press controls and media responsibility¹ that have continued for over forty years. Singapore's media governmentality has utilised direct action to punish media actors, and also the creation of microcosms (sub-spheres) within the media upon which to enact discipline. In this chapter, I analyse the media controls in Singapore which were derived from that 1971 speech, including punishment and creating disciplinary microcosms. The subsequent chapter discusses the discipline within those microcosms. The media controls in Singapore have affected the mainstream domestic press and the international press that would operate within Singapore.

Within a microcosm, a local authority can shape the behaviour of the population,² and a desired viewpoint can be made dominant (hegemonic) by coercion and consensus.³ Consensus would result when the local authority's viewpoint was freely accepted by the microcosm population, and coercion used to re-establish control when that acceptance faded.⁴ Coercion in Singapore's media came from heavy-handed state action in 1971, the 1974 amendments to the Newspaper and Printing Presses Act (NPPA) to create Ordinary and Management Shares, and the appointment of a trusted member of the elite to be Executive Chairman within Singapore Press Holdings. He would be the local authority to influence the microcosm population. The specific role of the Executive Chairman to bring about consensus is the subject of the next chapter, which details the modification to journalistic behaviour, started in the *Straits Times* and normalised throughout the domestic media sector.

As a result of the controls outlined in these two chapters, the domestic media has been co-opted as a partner of the Government. The media plays a vital role in the

¹ F.K. Han, *et al.*, *Lee Kuan Yew: Hard Truths To Keep Singapore Going*, Straits Times Press, Singapore, 2011, p. 83.

² M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Second, Random House, New York, 1991, pp. 141,149-151.

³ H. Katz, 'Gramsci, Hegemony, and Global Civil Society Networks', *Voluntas*, v. 17 (4), 2006, p. 335.

⁴ T.R. Bates, 'Gramsci and the Theory of Hegemony', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, v. 36 (2), 1975, p. 353.

reinforcement of hegemony, management of civil activists, and the electoral fortunes of the opposition parties and the People's Action Party.

In his Helsinki speech, Lee spoke about the influence of the media on citizens around the world, and specifically the influence of media in Singapore.⁵ Lee warned that the media could influence consumer decisions, political choices in elections, and cause copy-cat hijacking and terrorism. He lamented that strongly worded news articles and photographs caused emotional reactions, such as communal tension and riots. Lee made special mention of the 1950 Maria Hertogh riots as an illustration of the influence the media could wield.⁶ The riots were in part sparked by the publication of provocative images and emotive reporting about the repatriation of Maria Hertogh, a Dutch teenager, and the denial by the Singapore courts to keep her in Singapore.

Maria was raised as a Muslim in Malaya by a friend of her mother's during and after the Japanese occupation of Singapore. After the War, her Catholic parents in the Netherlands engaged the services of the Dutch and British Governments to locate and return her to them.⁷ Maria's case was brought before the Singapore High Court, which eventually decided to repatriate the girl and dissolve her marriage to a Malay man.⁸ The court favoured her natural parents and she was placed in a convent under the guise of her own protection.

On December 11 1950, Maria's application to stay in Singapore, lodged by her foster mother and ex-husband was denied. In response, Malays rioted outside of the High Court in Singapore. The riots soon turned to generalised violence against Eurasians and Europeans, and any Malays or Muslims who had been part of the colonial state. Over two days, 18 people were killed, and 173 were injured. There was significant property damage including two burned-out buildings and 119 damaged vehicles.⁹ The rapidity and scale of the violence during the riots would have been unforgettable for the first

⁵ 'The Mass Media and New Countries', *journalism.sg*, <http://journalism.sg/lee-kuan-yews-1971-speech-on-the-press/>, accessed on: July 20, 2013.

⁶ 'The Mass Media and New Countries'.

⁷ Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied, *Colonialism, Violence and Muslims in Southeast Asia*, Routledge, London, 2009, p. 16.

⁸ Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied, *Colonialism, Violence and Muslims*, pp. 17-19.

⁹ Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied, *Colonialism, Violence and Muslims*, pp. 20-22.

generation of Singaporean leaders and indicative of how quickly segments of the population could be mobilised to inter-ethnic violence and violence against the state.

The media was a core part of the riot's development, as they were given free access to Maria in the convent and produced biased coverage to sensationalise the situation. On December 5 1950, *The Singapore Standard* published a provocative photograph of Maria in the Convent of the Good Shepherd before the statue of the Virgin Mary.¹⁰ By contrast, the Malay press published reports and photographs of her unhappiness in the convent.¹¹ The memory of the Maria Hertogh riots was clearly a powerful example for Lee; since 1971 several unofficial rules and behavioural norms were developed for the media.

The media is required to be politically non-partisan and circumspect when reporting race or religion, and take care with emotive reporting and photographs. In separate interviews in 2010, a *Channel NewsAsia* producer and a *Straits Times* political editor discussed the media's discretion when using photographs, particularly when reporting suicides, or accidents within the military. They warned the latter could undermine public confidence in the military.¹² During elections, the *Straits Times* and *Channel NewsAsia* avoid photographs and video of opposition election rallies that show the size of the crowd because these visual mediums would allegedly misrepresent the support for the opposition parties holding the rally.¹³

Lee's Helsinki speech was a turning point in Singapore's media system because it was the clear articulation of his rationality of media control. Lee spoke of the choice that "new countries" and developing economies such as Singapore must make for their future: either emulate established media systems in Britain or the United States, or

¹⁰ Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied, *Colonialism, Violence and Muslims*, p. 20.

¹¹ T.E. Hughes, *Tangled Worlds: The Story of Maria Hertogh*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 1980, pp. 50-51.

¹² Interview with *Straits Times* Political Editor (*Straits Times2*), de-identified upon request, Singapore, October 29, 2010; and interview with *Channel NewsAsia* producer (*Channel NewsAsia1*), de-identified upon request, Singapore, October 23, 2010.

¹³ Interview with *Straits Times* political journalist (*Straits Times1*), de-identified upon request, Singapore, October 22, 2010; and interview with *Channel NewsAsia1*; and interview with *Straits Times2*.

develop their own systems of control. Lee stated that in Singapore, the press was expected to act as an intermediary between government and citizen. It would publish popular concerns to be addressed by the Government, and the Government's reply with the solutions that should be popularly supported. The media would support the nation-building effort taking place in Singaporean schools and universities, and reinforce values encouraged by the Government.

Most importantly, Lee unequivocally stated that "freedom of the press, freedom of the news media, must be subordinated to the overriding needs of the integrity of Singapore, and to the primacy of purpose of an elected government."¹⁴ The media in Singapore are required to support the Government, and editors and journalists have accepted the ideal that the media should not perform the Fourth Estate role¹⁵ –to scrutinise and criticise the Government.¹⁶ Lee's statement was after-the-fact to detentions and action taken against three newspapers in Singapore because they had breached this principle and performed a Fourth Estate role.¹⁷

Governmentality: Punishment in 1971

Historically, Lee's speech at Helsinki was not an isolated declaration of authoritarian intent, but laid the foundations for control and post-facto justified government action in the preceding weeks. On April 28th 1971, Lee made a speech at the Seminar on Communism and Democracy which stated that Chinese newspapers in Singapore were favouring Chinese issues; Malay newspapers in Singapore were reporting favourably

¹⁴ 'The Mass Media and New Countries'.

¹⁵ T. Lee, *The Media, Cultural Control and Government in Singapore*, Routledge, London & New York, 2010, p. 14; and W. Bokhorst-Heng, 'Newspapers in Singapore: A mass ceremony in the imagining of the nation', *Media, Culture and Society*, v. 24 2002, p. 560; and T.H. Tey, 'Confining the Freedom of the Press in Singapore: A 'Pragmatic' Press for 'Nation-Building'?', *Human Rights Quarterly*, v. 30 2008; and J. Rajah, *Authoritarian Rule of Law: Legislation, Discourse and Legitimacy in Singapore*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2012, p. 155; and A.W. Au, 'The Ardour of Tokens: Opposition Parties' Struggle to make a Difference', *Management of Success: Singapore Revisited*, T. Chong (ed.) Institute of South East Asian Studies, Singapore, 2010, p. 107; and C. George, 'Control-Shift: The Internet and Political Change in Singapore', *Management of Success: Singapore Revisited*, T. Chong (ed.) Institute of South East Asian Studies, Singapore, 2010, p. 262; and Y.S. Cheong, *OB Markers: My Straits Times Story*, Straits Times Press, Singapore, 2013, pp. 235-236.

¹⁶ J. Schultz, *Reviving the Fourth Estate: Democracy, Accountability and the Media*, Cambridge University Press, London & New York, 1998, p. 3.

¹⁷ F.K. Han, *et al.*, *Hard Truths to Keep Singapore Going*, p. 83.

about Malaysia and its Malay-centric *bumiputera* policies; and one of the English-language newspapers frequently criticised the Government.¹⁸ Lee did not name any newspapers directly, but the reaction from several newspapers sparked government action against the *Nanyang Siang Pau*, the *Eastern Sun* and the *Singapore Herald* newspapers.

The Government's actions demonstrated the multiplicity of security measures it could deploy against challengers, including direct action and forcing the newspapers to bring about their own end. Such heavy-handedness against newspapers has not been repeated since, arguably because of the success of the discipline process, but journalists, civil activists and political figures still cite the 1971 detentions as proof that the Government can act heavy-handedly if needed.¹⁹

The Chinese-language daily newspaper *Nanyang Siang Pau* reacted to Lee's indirect allegations of Chinese favouritism, and provocatively challenged Lee to prove his allegations.²⁰ On May 2nd 1971, the Internal Security Act was used to detain four staff members of the newspaper,²¹ including General Manager Lee Mau Seng, Editor Shamsuddin Tung, Senior Editorial Writer Ly Singko, and Public Relations staffer Kerk Loong Seng.²²

Lee Kuan Yew alleged that the newspaper had tried to undermine the PAP by engaging with the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) party and wrote favourably about Malaysia instead of Singapore.²³ The Government stated that the newspaper had

¹⁸ F.T. Seow, *The Media Enthralled: Singapore Revisited*, Lynn Rienner Publishers, Boulder, Colorado & London, 1998, pp. 39-40.

¹⁹ Interview with *Straits Times*; and interview with then-Singapore Youth Wing members (*SDP Youth*), de-identified upon request, Singapore, October 9, 2010; and interview with Former Nominated Member Parliament (*Former NMP*), de-identified by request, Singapore, October 6, 2010; and informal conversations with bloggers and civil activists and opposition party supporters, Singapore 2010.

²⁰ F.T. Seow, *The Media Enthralled*, p. 40.

²¹ F.T. Seow, *The Media Enthralled*, p. 42.

²² D. Davies, 'The Press', *The Singapore Puzzle*, M. Haas (ed.) Praeger, Westport, CONN., 1999, p. 82.

²³ F.T. Seow, *The Media Enthralled*, p. 41.

published “pro-communist and [Chinese] chauvinist” sentiments,²⁴ notwithstanding that Shamsuddin Tung and Ly Singko were strongly anti-communist.²⁵

The *Straits Times* cited the intervention of Cabinet Ministers S. Rajaratnam, Dr Wong Lim Ken and Jek Yuen Thong as evidence that *Nanyang Siang Pau* had become a “security problem”. The *Straits Times* undermined the protests by *Nanyang*’s publisher Lee Eu Seng about the arrest of his brother (Lee Mau Seng).²⁶

Nanyang Siang Pau had been the premier space for Chinese-Singaporeans to air their grievances about the Government. Lee Eu Seng protested that in lieu of elected opposition in Parliament, it was the role of the media “to bring to the attention of the government [...] the wishes, criticisms and legitimate grievances of the general public.”²⁷ He vociferously challenged allegations about the newspaper, including ordering blank editorials run in protest.²⁸

Eventually, Lee Eu Seng was arrested in January 1973 and detained for five years under the Internal Security Act. He was alleged to have used the *Nanyang Siang Pau* to “incite the people against the government over issues of [Chinese] culture.”²⁹ During his detention, Lee’s name was stripped from the printing licence, which removed his ownership of the paper.³⁰ This was the first stage of government control that would continue to be refined over the next four decades.

Unlike the *Straits Times* which reported positively the Government’s action against the *Nanyang Siang Pau*, the *Singapore Herald* challenged the validity of the detentions. The *Singapore Herald* was a “politically feisty”³¹ newspaper and Lee claimed it was “taking

²⁴ G. Rodan, *Transparency and Authoritarian Rule in Southeast Asia: Singapore and Malaysia*, Routledge, London & New York, 2005, p. 20; and C. George, *Freedom From The Press: Journalism and State Power in Singapore*, National University of Singapore Press, Singapore, 2012, pp. 28-29.

²⁵ F.T. Seow, *The Media Enthralled*, p. 42.

²⁶ F.T. Seow, *The Media Enthralled*, p. 43.

²⁷ C. George, 'History Spiked: Hegemony and the Denial of Media Diversity', *Paths Not Taken: Political Pluralism in Post-War Singapore*, M.D. Barr and C.A. Trocki (eds.), National University of Singapore Press, Singapore, 2008, p. 274; and F.T. Seow, *The Media Enthralled*, p. 44.

²⁸ F.T. Seow, *The Media Enthralled*, pp. 46-47.

²⁹ F.T. Seow, *The Media Enthralled*, p. 51.

³⁰ F.T. Seow, *The Media Enthralled*, p. 51; and D. Davies, 'The Press', p. 83.

³¹ C. George, 'History Spiked', pp. 269-270.

on” the Government with its critical commentary. In response, the Government denied the *Singapore Herald* reporters press access and withdrew government advertisements.³² The Government also alleged that because the newspaper had foreign investors, it was a front for foreign involvement in Singaporean affairs.³³ Before the newspaper was launched however, its founding editor Francis Wong had confirmed with Rajaratnam that the newspaper would have foreign investors and that this was not a problem because the *Straits Times* had investors in Britain.³⁴

Another English-language newspaper, *The Eastern Sun* also published a reaction to Lee’s allegations about English-language papers’ involvement in so-called “black operations”. The newspaper was accused of receiving capital from communist sources in Hong Kong.³⁵ The editorial staff denied the allegations and on May 16 1971, six staff members resigned. They conceded that their departure would force the closure of the newspaper, but they could not continue under such a “pall of distrust”.³⁶ Rather than following the drawn out drama of the *Nanyang Siang Pau*, the *Eastern Sun* shut down.³⁷

The closure of the *Eastern Sun* added to the importance of the *Singapore Herald*’s continuation. Without two English-language newspapers, the *Straits Times* would have a monopoly on the English-language press in Singapore. Several regional entrepreneurs offered their support to keep the *Singapore Herald* in operation.³⁸ In response to the regional challenge, Lee systematically arranged to end all funding to the *Singapore Herald*.³⁹ He disparaged the investors’ reputations in public and claimed that the paper owed \$4.5 million to multiple creditors.⁴⁰ On May 18, the *Singapore Herald* was issued a formal demand to repay \$1.03 million to Chase Manhattan Bank or foreclose.

³² F.T. Seow, *The Media Enthralled*, pp. 58-59; and D. Davies, 'The Press', p. 87.

³³ D. Davies, 'The Press', p. 84; and G. Rodan, *Transparency and Authoritarian Rule*, p. 20; and F.T. Seow, *The Media Enthralled*, pp. 58-59.

³⁴ F.T. Seow, *The Media Enthralled*, pp. 58-59.

³⁵ F.T. Seow, *The Media Enthralled*, p. 53; and G. Rodan, *Transparency and Authoritarian Rule*, p. 21.

³⁶ F.T. Seow, *The Media Enthralled*, p. 53.

³⁷ F.T. Seow, *The Media Enthralled*, p. 53.

³⁸ D. Davies, 'The Press', p. 86; and F.T. Seow, *The Media Enthralled*, pp. 74,77.

³⁹ D. Davies, 'The Press', p. 85.

⁴⁰ D. Davies, 'The Press', p. 86; and F.T. Seow, *The Media Enthralled*, pp. 62-67.

The staff of the *Singapore Herald* offered to work without pay to facilitate the newspaper paying off its debts. Once more, regional support rallied around the newspaper, including the International Press Institute which urged its members to protest against Lee's actions.⁴¹ Seow argued that the Government created a long and elaborate charade of a Singapore-based investment into the newspaper,⁴² but eventually revoked the *Singapore Herald's* printing press licence and the paper was shut down.⁴³

Lee's Helsinki speech made specific reference to the need to protect the Singapore press from manipulative and subversive foreign interests, including the Institute itself, and this was achieved by the actions against the three papers. The result was the monopoly of the *Straits Times* as the English-language newspaper in Singapore, and that the *Nanyang Siang Pau* had a new editor. In subsequent years, governmentality shifted to micro-manage the media. The 1974 amendments proposed for the Newspaper and Printing Presses Act in 1974, were the initial steps to tighter and longer-lasting media control.

Creating Discipline: Shares and Executive Chairs

The 1974 amendments to the Newspaper and Printing Presses Act passed through several Parliamentary Select Committees, which asked for public submissions. This granted the opportunity for the Government to validate its action with media consent. Initially, none of the Chinese-language newspapers contributed a submission, either because they did not agree to serve as a pseudo opposition, or because they had decided to boycott the submission process.⁴⁴ In the absence of submissions from the Chinese press, the Select Committee extended the submission date and specifically asked the *Shin Min Daily News* to make a submission. *Shin Min's* submission replicated Lee Kuan Yew's exact sentiments from the Helsinki speech, that it would "support fully the policies of the Government of our Republic and maintain social order and good traditions."⁴⁵ *Shin Min* also avowed that it would not be influenced by foreign sources or

⁴¹ F.T. Seow, *The Media Enthralled*, pp. 73-77.

⁴² F.T. Seow, *The Media Enthralled*, pp. 80-85.

⁴³ D. Davies, 'The Press', p. 87.

⁴⁴ J. Rajah, *Authoritarian Rule of Law*, p. 140.

⁴⁵ J. Rajah, *Authoritarian Rule of Law*, p. 141.

serve as a platform for political parties, organisations or individuals.⁴⁶ Clearly, the threat from the 1971 detentions had achieved its goal of forcing the Chinese media to show respect to the Government.

The 1974 amendments to the NPPA required all newspapers to become publicly listed companies and have two types of shareholders: Ordinary and Management.⁴⁷ By requiring newspapers to become public companies, the Government could prevent direct foreign investment as had occurred with the *Singapore Herald*.

Ordinary Shares represent 99% of the total shares in a newspaper company and are available to foreign investors. Since 1977, except with the approval of the Ministry of Communication, the ownership of Ordinary Shares for each investor is capped at 3%.⁴⁸ Management Shares comprise the remaining 1% of the total share pool and are only issued to Singaporean individuals and corporations selected by the Ministry of Communication. This level of control is due to the disproportionate power of these shares, which are worth 200 votes each on “any resolution relating to the appointment or dismissal of a director or any member of the staff of a newspaper company.”⁴⁹

Rajah described the Ministry’s offer of Management Shares as “a gift [...] bestowed from the state.”⁵⁰ More accurately, management shareholding is a form of economic self-regulation based on mutual benefit for the investor and the Government. As the only newspaper corporation in Singapore, Management Shareholders obtain exclusive investment in the profitable media entity Singapore Press Holdings. In return, the Government is guaranteed that no unwanted staff decisions will be made that would significantly alter SPH’s operation.

Implicit in the arrangement is the responsibility to keep the newspaper to the same national agenda as core economic institutions and the Government. If the Minister does

⁴⁶ J. Rajah, *Authoritarian Rule of Law*, p. 141.

⁴⁷ G. Rodan, *Transparency and Authoritarian Rule*, p. 21.

⁴⁸ J. Rajah, *Authoritarian Rule of Law*, p. 144; and G. Rodan, 'Singapore: Information Lockdown, Business as Usual', *Losing Control: Freedom of the Press in Asia*, L. Williams and R. Rich (eds.), Asia-Pacific Press, Canberra, ACT, 2000, p. 173.

⁴⁹ *Newspaper and Printing Presses Act 1974 (Chapter 206)*, Singapore Attorney General's Chambers.

⁵⁰ J. Rajah, *Authoritarian Rule of Law*, p. 143.

not have confidence in a Management Shareholder, or feels that their influence would be detrimental to the newspaper, that privilege can be revoked.⁵¹

Singapore Press Holdings was formed in 1984 through the amalgamation of the Straits Times Press and Singapore News and Publications Limited,⁵² to bring all newspaper ownership under one corporation.⁵³ Singapore Press Holdings has 19 Management Shareholders: nine corporations and ten directors. Seven of the nine corporate Management Shareholders hold more than 5% of the total Management Shares with special dispensation from the Ministry of Communication. Figure 2.1 and 2.2 show the top 20 Ordinary Shareholders and Management Shareholders, respectively.

Singapore Press Holdings' Management Shareholders reflect a high degree of government trust in Singaporean banks and government-linked institutions and their subsidiaries. These shareholders include the Development Bank of Singapore (DBS), United Overseas Bank (UOB), and Overseas Chinese Banking Corporation (OCBC). They also include the National University of Singapore, the multi-industry corporation Fraser & Neave, Fullerton Financial Holdings, and SingTel. Fullerton and SingTel are significant investments for sovereign wealth fund Temasek Holdings,⁵⁴ which also owns the broadcasting corporation MediaCorp.

⁵¹ *Newspaper and Printing Presses Act 1974 (Chapter 206)*.

⁵² In 1982, *Nanyang Siang Pau* was merged with another well-established Chinese paper *Sin Chew Jit Poh* to form the new media company Singapore News and Publications Ltd. (SNPL). In 1983, SNPL launched the products of their amalgamation: Chinese dailies *Lianhe Zaobao* and *Lianhe Wanbao* (G. Rodan, *Transparency and Authoritarian Rule*, p. 21; and T.H. Tan, 'Singapore's Print Media Policy: A National Success?', *Management of Success: Singapore Revisited*, T. Chong (ed.) Institute of South East Asian Studies, Singapore, 2010, p. 248).

⁵³ G. Rodan, *Transparency and Authoritarian Rule*, p. 21.

⁵⁴ Temasek Holdings has a 100% stake in Fullerton Financial Holdings ('About Us', *Fullerton Financial Holdings*, Singapore, <http://www.fullertonfinancial.com/en/profile-about-us.html>, accessed on: March 12, 2013), a 30% stake in DBS and 54% stake in SingTel (*Extending Pathways: Temasek Review 2012*, Temasek Holdings, 2012, http://www.temasekreview.com.sg/documents/TR2012_Eng.pdf, pp. 88, 90).

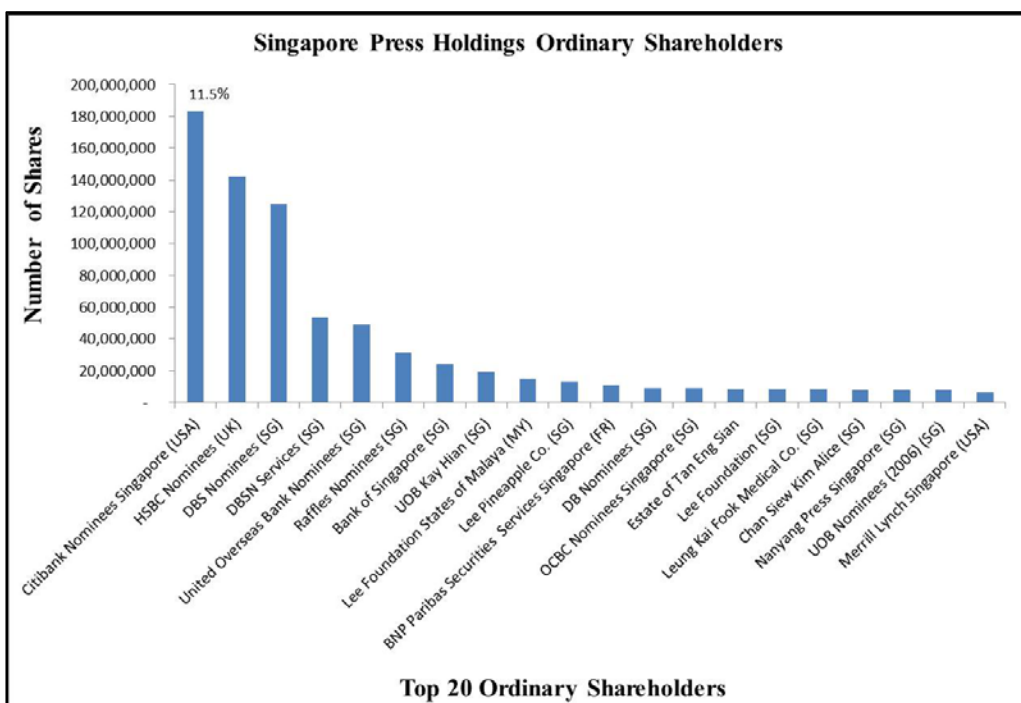


Figure 2.1 Singapore Press Holdings Ordinary Shareholders (Source: Singapore Press Holdings)⁵⁵



Figure 2.2 Singapore Press Holdings Management Shareholders (Source: Singapore Press Holdings)⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Data compiled from: 'Distribution of Shareholders by size of shareholdings', *Staying Ahead: Singapore Press Holdings Annual Report 2012*, Singapore Press Holdings, 2012, http://www.sph.com.sg/pdf/annualreport/2012/SPH_AR2012.pdf, p. 205.

⁵⁶ Data compiled from: 'Distribution of Management Shareholder by size of shareholdings', *Staying Ahead: Singapore Press Holdings Annual Report 2012*, p. 206.

Shareholding by national institutions, statutory boards and Government-Linked Companies forces the Singapore Press Holdings' Board of Directors to consider the economic ramifications of newspaper content. These ramifications include lawsuits and effects on the Singaporean economy, such as investment and political turmoil. Newspaper editors are therefore responsible to both the Government, which can punish using the law, and Management Shareholders who can make drastic decisions about editorial staff.

The broadcasting corporation MediaCorp is similarly kept responsible by economic consideration, and held to account by the Government and its majority investor, Temasek Holdings. A *Channel NewsAsia* producer interviewed described the control that Temasek Holdings has over MediaCorp as "economic blackmail"⁵⁷ because funding can be denied to sections of the corporation if content jeopardises nation-building. The producer could not confirm that such funding cuts had actually occurred, but highlighted it as a possible punishment tactic by the Government if needed. MediaCorp's control has been significantly different than Singapore Press Holdings because as a Government-Linked Company it has always been part of the Government.

In addition to Management Shareholding and Government ownership, political elites are an important feature of Singapore Press Holdings' management. The directors of Singapore Press Holdings are all members of the economic or political elite. Current directors include Professor Cham Tao Soon who is the Chancellor of SIM University, a director of UOB (amongst others), and a member of the Council of Presidential Advisors.

Other directors include Willie Cheng, who sits on the board of UOB and NTUC Fairprice, which is operated by the National Trade Union Congress; and Ng Ser Miang who is Singapore's non-resident Ambassador to Hungary and Norway, Vice President of the International Olympic Committee and is also the Chairman of NTUC Fairprice and NTUC Choice Homes. Singapore Press Holding's CEO Alan Chan is the link with MediaCorp, as he sits on the boards of both corporations. Chan was a high-ranking civil

⁵⁷ Interview with *Channel NewsAsia*.

servant for 25 years before joining SPH, and he served as Permanent Secretary in several ministries, including as Principal Private Secretary for Lee Kuan Yew.⁵⁸

The Executive Chairman and Directorships are one of many elite holding zones where indispensable individuals can be positioned until they are needed to return to the Executive branch of Government such as the Cabinet or the Presidency. The successful transition of two former Executive Chairmen to the role of the President demonstrates that both of these institutions are centrally important for the political executive (Cabinet). The Executive Chairman is therefore a vital political position for the Government to keep political elites nearby.

The first Executive Chairman was S.R. Nathan, who was appointed in 1982. In 1981, Nathan was Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.⁵⁹ He had also been the Director of the Security and Intelligence Division (SID), which provided external security analyses to the Cabinet and civil service.⁶⁰ After his retirement from SPH, Nathan became the Ambassador to Malaysia, and then was elected unopposed as President of Singapore.

Nathan was succeeded at SPH in 1988 by Lim Kim San. Lim was an 'Old Guard' Cabinet Minister, who had been Interior Minister (1967-1970), Minister for National Development (1975-1989), and Minister for the Environment (1972-1975 and 1979-1981).⁶¹ Lim was Lee Kuan Yew's confidante: Lee wrote in Lim's biography, "Whenever I needed someone with integrity and judgement to carry out a mission, I called upon Kim San."⁶² Presumably, Lim's role at SPH was to ensure that the *Straits Times* maintained the journalistic norms established by Nathan and fulfilled the role of

⁵⁸ 'Board of Directors', *Singapore Press Holdings*, http://www.sph.com.sg/aboutsph_bod.shtml, accessed on: July 28, 2013.

⁵⁹ G. Rodan, *Transparency and Authoritarian Rule*, p. 21; and C. George, *Freedom From the Press*, p. 33; and Y.S. Cheong, *OB Markers*, pp. 23-25; and S.R. Nathan, *An Unexpected Journey: Path to the Presidency*, Editions Didier Millet, Singapore, 2011, pp. 449-450.

⁶⁰ S.R. Nathan, *An Unexpected Journey*, p. 321; and G. Rodan, *Transparency and Authoritarian Rule*, p. 21.

⁶¹ A.I. Latif, *Lim Kim San: A Builder of Singapore*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 2009, p. 194; and C. George, *Freedom From the Press*, p. 33.

⁶² A.I. Latif, *Lim Kim San*, p. viii.

the media as laid down in 1971. Lim resigned in 2005, but died the following year from pneumonia, aged 89.⁶³

After his retirement from SPH, Lim was replaced by Dr Tony Tan Keng Yam, a core member of the second generation of political leaders in Singapore. Tan's importance to Lee Kuan Yew was emphasised in 1988 when Lee stated that he preferred Tan to become Prime Minister instead of Goh Chok Tong.⁶⁴ Tan left Cabinet as Minister of Education in December 1991 to become the Chairman and CEO of OCBC Bank.⁶⁵

In 1995, Tan was persuaded to return to Cabinet after first Deputy Prime Minister Ong Teng Cheong resigned to contest the Presidency, and second Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong was diagnosed with lymphoma and relinquished his portfolios.⁶⁶ Goh Chok Tong, then Prime Minister, explained that Tan's return was imperative to the Government because it needed an experienced Cabinet Minister in the role of Deputy Prime Minister.⁶⁷ Tan was selected to return rather than promote a younger and junior Cabinet Minister to Deputy Prime Minister, and he may have been a fall-back to succeed Goh Chok Tong as Prime Minister if Lee Hsien Loong was not able to.

In 2004, Lee Hsien Loong became Prime Minister and Tan resigned from Cabinet once more. He was appointed to several boards, including as Executive Chairman of SPH and the Government of Singapore Investment Corporation (GIC), the other sovereign wealth fund.⁶⁸ Tan's simultaneous appointment as Executive Chairman of SPH and GIC indicated that although he was out of government, he would still play a crucial political role. The election of Tony Tan to the Presidency in August 2011 was the second time a SPH Executive Chairman became President.

⁶³ A.I. Latif, *Lim Kim San*, p. 224.

⁶⁴ D.K. Mauzy and R.S. Milne, *Singapore Politics under the People's Action Party*, Routledge, London & New York, 2002, p. 114.

⁶⁵ 'Biography of the President', *The Istana, Singapore*, January 25, 2013,

<http://www.istana.gov.sg/content/istana/thepresident/biography.html>, accessed on: February 4, 2013.

⁶⁶ M.D. Barr, *The Ruling Elite of Singapore: Networks of Power and Influence*, I.B Tauris, London, 2014, p. 60.

⁶⁷ 'Dr Tan Rejoining Govt Not Linked to BG Lee's Health', *Straits Times*, June 30, 1995.

⁶⁸ 'Biography of the President'.

In June 2011, Nathan decided he would not seek the Presidency for a third six-year term because of his age (87 years).⁶⁹ Two weeks later, Tan announced that he would stand in the Presidential election,⁷⁰ competing against former PAP backbencher Tan Cheng Bock, former NTUC Income chief Tan Kin Lian,⁷¹ and former Principal Private Secretary to Goh Chok Tong Tan Jee Say.⁷² Tony Tan was elected President with 35.2% of total votes, a narrow margin over Tan Cheng Bock (34.8%) and Tan Jee Say (25%), and a landslide over Tan Kin Lian (4.9%).⁷³

Tan's resignation in 2011 left a void in SPH's upper management. He was replaced by Dr Lee Boon Yang, who had been Minister for Information, Communication and the Arts until 2009 when he retired from Cabinet.⁷⁴ Lee had not been in Cabinet as long as Lim or Tan, but was praised by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong for his 24 years of political service.⁷⁵ Lee Boon Yang's concurrent appointment to SPH and as Non-Executive Director of Keppel Corporation (offshore and marine infrastructure)⁷⁶ demonstrated his continued political importance.

Within the literature on Singapore media control and the Executive Chairman, there is almost no mention of the style of management under Tony Tan, who was at SPH from 2005 to 2011. Cherian George mentioned the succession of Executive Chairmen,⁷⁷ but did not address the methods of control used by this position. It could be assumed it was a continuation of the status quo under Nathan and Lim.

Based on the limited information available from the literature and interviews conducted with Singaporean journalists, I believe Nathan's greatest impact was to act as a local authority and realign media behaviours. These behaviours could be easily followed by

⁶⁹ E. Toh, 'Presidential Election; "I won't seek a 3rd term"', *Straits Times*, July 2, 2011.

⁷⁰ 'GIC's Tan to Run for President of Singapore', *The Wall Street Journal*, June 23, 2011; and M.D. Barr, *The Ruling Elite of Singapore*, pp. 123-124.

⁷¹ X. Li, 'Presidential Election; Nathan: I've Not Decided Whether to Run Again', *Straits Times*, June 8, 2011.

⁷² I. Saad, 'PE: Tan Jee Say "Looks Forward to a Dignified Contest"', *Channel NewsAsia*, August 11, 2011.

⁷³ X. Li, 'Tony Tan is President', *Straits Times*, August 28, 2011.

⁷⁴ 'Former Minister Lee Boon Yang Set to be Next SPH chairman', *Straits Times*, September 23, 2011.

⁷⁵ 'PM's Tribute to Lee Boon Yang', *Straits Times*, March 27, 2009.

⁷⁶ M.D. Barr, *The Ruling Elite of Singapore*, p. 124.

⁷⁷ C. George, *Freedom From the Press*, p. 33.

the editors and journalists, and successive Executive Chairmen could reinforce them when needed. Editors, particularly Cheong Yip Seng, continued the process of discipline in their subordinates. This is corroborated by Cherian George and Xiaoming Hao's findings that journalists in the mainstream press believe that the greatest source of influence on their work is senior journalists and editors.⁷⁸

The next chapter covers the impact of the Executive Chairman, specifically Nathan, to create consensus between the media and government. The remainder of this chapter will address the research question of how the status quo was challenged and what response was made by the Government. The specific focus is how the actors in the international media manifested themselves as a threat, and what security apparatus was used to deal with that threat to secure the *raison d'état* (national interest).

The mainstream media corporations Singapore Press Holdings and MediaCorp have been central figures in the governmentality of media, so it is appropriate to first discuss how MediaCorp was developed. The first incarnation of broadcasting in Singapore was Radio Television Singapore (RTS) owned by the Department of Broadcasting within the Ministry of Culture. In 1980, RTS became the statutory board Singapore Broadcasting Corporation (SBC),⁷⁹ responsible for supporting government policies, and "to act internationally as the national authority or representative of Singapore."⁸⁰

Singapore Broadcasting Corporation was a crucial tool for the widespread adoption of government policies, such as the replacement of Chinese dialects with Mandarin in the late 1970s.⁸¹ To achieve this, Singapore Broadcasting Corp phased-out the broadcast of

⁷⁸ X. Hao and C. George, 'Singapore Journalism: Buying into a Winning Formula', *The Global Journalist in the 21st Century*, D.H. Weaver and L. Willnat (eds.), Routledge, London & New York, 2012, p. 99.

⁷⁹ T. Lee and L. Willnat, 'Media Research and Political Communication in Singapore', *Asia Research Centre Working Papers*, 2006, p. 8; and P.H. Ang, 'Singapore Media', *Journalism.sg*, September, 2007, <http://journalism.sg/wp-content/uploads/2007/09/ang-peng-hwa-2007-singapore-media.pdf>, accessed on: June 6, 2010; and J.S.T. Quah, *Public Administration Singapore-Style*, Emerald Group, Bingley, UK, 2010, p. 148.

⁸⁰ D.O. McDaniel, *Broadcasting in the Malay World: Radio, Television and Video in Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore*, Abex Publishing, New Jersey, 1994, p. 167.

⁸¹ The government had decided that Singaporean Chinese citizens needed to use Mandarin to connect them by a common language, and to facilitate greater trade with Mandarin speaking economic communities in the region (D.K. Mauzy and R.S. Milne, *Singapore Politics*, p. 107).

non-Mandarin television programs, and placed dialect subtitles over Mandarin programs to aid the widespread adoption of language.⁸²

In 1991, George Yeo, then-Minister for Information and the Arts, announced that the Government would consider selling SBC to a private firm.⁸³ Because of the importance of the national broadcaster, and government wariness of the power of the broadcasting medium, the Government needed to ensure that a private firm would meet their expectations. In 1994, the solution was found and SBC was split into three companies: Television Corporation of Singapore (TCS), Radio Corporation of Singapore, and TV12, which were all bought by Temasek Holdings.⁸⁴ In 1999, internal restructuring across the three broadcasting corporations led to the replacement of TCS with the Media Corporation of Singapore, better known as MediaCorp.⁸⁵

Shortly after its creation, MediaCorp launched *Channel NewsAsia* to provide a local “Asian perspective” on news.⁸⁶ In Parliament, George Yeo explained the political influence of international broadcasting in Malaysia and Indonesia, and his concern this would be replicated in Singapore. The international media had taken interest in opposition politician Chee Soon Juan’s civil disobedience, which threatened to affect Singaporeans’ perception of legal political activism. In response to the international media’s coverage of Chee, Yeo warned the international media that by the 2001 election, coverage of critics of the Government would not be tolerated.⁸⁷ In April 2001, the Broadcasting Act was amended to prevent international media from “interfering in the domestic politics of Singapore,” such as featuring Chee’s criticisms.⁸⁸ In addition, *Channel NewsAsia* was established to direct Singaporeans to locally-produced

⁸² D.O. McDaniel, *Broadcasting in the Malay World*, p. 180.

⁸³ D.O. McDaniel, *Broadcasting in the Malay World*, p. 186.

⁸⁴ P.H. Ang, 'Singapore Media'.

⁸⁵ 'MediaCorp Interactive History: TCS to MediaCorp', *MediaCorp*, Singapore, www7.mediacorp.sg/interactivehistory/, accessed on: February 2, 2013.

⁸⁶ 'MediaCorp Interactive History: Channel NewsAsia Launched', *MediaCorp*, Singapore, www7.mediacorp.sg/interactivehistory/, accessed on: February 2, 2013; and G. Rodan, 'Singapore: Information Lockdown', p. 182.

⁸⁷ G. Rodan, 'Embracing electronic media but suppressing civil society: authoritarian consolidation in Singapore', *The Pacific Review*, v. 16 (4), 2003, p. 508.

⁸⁸ G. Rodan, 'Embracing Electronic Media', p. 508.

international news and away from international publications and broadcasters. Yeo stated at the time: “If the news is not on, people will search for it elsewhere.”⁸⁹

In September 2000, *Channel NewsAsia* was expanded to provide regional coverage and secure Singapore as a regional broadcasting hub.⁹⁰ To allay concerns outside of Singapore that *Channel NewsAsia* was affiliated with the Government and would be a political mouthpiece, then-Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong stated that MediaCorp would be made a private company.⁹¹ However, this did not occur and MediaCorp’s sole shareholder has remained Temasek Holdings.⁹²

The importance of the Singapore domestic media stepping up to produce international news was the result of continuous skirmishes between the Government and the international media since the 1980s. The global influence of television since the 1960s meant that MediaCorp was uniquely suited to this role vis-à-vis the *Straits Times*. The Government’s attempts to control and marginalise the international media in Singapore during the 1980s to mid-2000s saw a return of punishment, which forced economic consideration and self-regulation by the international media.

Governmentality: Punishment and Marginalisation of the International Media

During the 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s, the international media was a perpetual thorn in the side of the Government, particularly for Lee Kuan Yew and Goh Chok Tong. In this period, Lee and Goh perceived that several publications brazenly undermined the reputation of the Government and the Singapore state. In 1986, the NPPA was once more amended so that circulation restrictions could be used to punish international publications for interference in the domestic politics of Singapore.⁹³ The Singapore Court of Appeal defined ‘domestic politics’ as Singapore’s political system and public institutions, political and economic policies and issues, and even the ideology used by

⁸⁹ G. Rodan, *Transparency and Authoritarian Rule*, p. 93.

⁹⁰ ‘Channel NewsAsia Makes History with International Launch’, *Channel NewsAsia*, September 29, 2000.

⁹¹ ‘Channel NewsAsia Makes History with International Launch’.

⁹² ‘MediaCorp Earnings More Than Double to S\$84.2m’, *Channel NewsAsia*, August 25, 2010.

⁹³ M. Haas, ‘The Politics of Singapore in the 1980s’, *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, v. 19 (1), 1989, p. 52.

the Government.⁹⁴ Consequently, virtually no comment could be made about political matters in Singapore without infringing on domestic politics.

The Government has three standard responses to perceived threats against its integrity by the international media: letters to the editor, lawsuits, and circulation restrictions. Failure by publications to print government replies and letters in full was cause for punishment, as it indicated bias by the international media against the Singapore Government.

To maximise the economic impact of these punishments, they were carried out to the extreme. Lawsuits concluded with settlements or damages of hundreds of thousands of Singapore Dollars. For example, in December 1989 the Singapore Supreme Court awarded Lee Kuan Yew damages of S\$230,000 in his case against the *Far Eastern Economic Review* (FEER).⁹⁵ In 1994, Lee Kuan Yew, Lee Hsien Loong and Goh Chok Tong threatened legal action against the *International Herald Tribune* (IHT), and the paper issued an apology and paid damages of S\$950,000.⁹⁶

In February 2010, the IHT and op-ed columnist Philip Bowring agreed to pay S\$160,000 plus unspecified legal costs to Lee Kuan Yew, Lee Hsien Loong and Goh Chok Tong to avoid legal action.⁹⁷ News organisation Bloomberg was threatened in 2002 with a lawsuit for allegations of nepotism that appeared on its website. In the article, allegations were made about the appointment of Lee Hsien Loong's wife Ho Ching to Temasek Holdings. Bloomberg settled out of court and paid S\$595,000, and issued an apology to Lee Kuan Yew, Lee Hsien Loong, Goh Chok Tong and Ho Ching.⁹⁸

Circulation restrictions were similarly severe. In 1987, the magazine *Asiaweek* had its circulation cut when its editor refused to publish an unedited government reply. Circulation was decreased from 10,000 to 500 copies per week. When the magazine published the unedited letter in full, its circulation was restored to 5,000 copies per

⁹⁴ T.H. Tey, 'Confining the Freedom for the Press', p. 894.

⁹⁵ G. Rodan, *Transparency and Authoritarian Rule*, p. 31.

⁹⁶ P. Bowring, 'Cost of Reputation: Court Finds for Lee in Libel Case', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, December 14, 1989.

⁹⁷ R. Pérez-Peña, 'Times Co. Settles Claim in Singapore', *New York Times*, March 24, 2010.

⁹⁸ G. Rodan, *Transparency and Authoritarian Rule*, p. 88.

week.⁹⁹ In February 1987, the *Asian Wall Street Journal* (AWSJ) had its circulation cut from 5,000 to 400 copies per day.¹⁰⁰ Of the 400 permitted copies, 142 were allocated for libraries and institutions, although only 52 of these institutions actually held subscriptions. This created a black market effect where vendors sold the remaining copies for double and triple the newsstand price.¹⁰¹

In January 1988, the Government once more amended the NPPA to allow photocopies of restricted publications to be sold if the advertisements were removed. Ambassador Tommy Koh justified the amendment: “in the age of photocopiers, reducing AWSJ’s circulation from 5,000 to 400 does not deprive 4,600 readers of information. It does deprive the AWSJ of 4,600 copies worth of sales and advertising, as it is intended to do.”¹⁰² The international media was therefore made to consider the economic ramifications of its coverage of Singapore, and to be circumspect with criticism of the Singapore Government. The amendment to permit the sale of photocopies of restricted publications also indicated that the Government was not going to deprive itself or Singaporeans of the benefit of the publications’ material while it carried out punishment.

In addition to punishment and economic coercion, the Government attempted to shrink the available market for the international press. The establishment of *Channel NewsAsia* was the first step in using the domestic media to marginalise the space for the international media within Singapore and the region. In 2000, the year that *Channel NewsAsia* went international, the Government allowed direct competition between Singapore Press Holdings and MediaCorp as an experiment to test how the corporations would fare in direct competition with international rivals.¹⁰³ The experiment lasted for four years and resulted in severe financial losses for both corporations.

⁹⁹ G. Rodan, *Transparency and Authoritarian Rule*, pp. 29-30.

¹⁰⁰ 'Asian Wall Street Journal Is Banned By Singapore for Refusal to Print Letter', *The Wall Street Journal*, February 10, 1987.

¹⁰¹ B. Wain, 'Asia: Better Read than Dead in Singapore', *The Wall Street Journal*, March 8, 1987.

¹⁰² T. Koh, 'Letters to the Editor: Singapore’s Dispute with the Journal', *The Wall Street Journal*, February 24, 1987.

¹⁰³ G. Rodan, 'Embracing Electronic Media', p. 508.

The Government favoured MediaCorp to expand its operation first, in June 2000.¹⁰⁴ MediaCorp was issued a newspaper printing licence to coincide with *Channel NewsAsia* broadcasting internationally.¹⁰⁵ Singapore Press Holdings did not receive its reciprocal broadcasting licence until April 2001: ten months later.¹⁰⁶ Singapore Press Holdings launched the free English-language daily *Streets*,¹⁰⁷ two Chinese-language noon edition papers, a Chinese-language children's publication called *Thumbs Up*,¹⁰⁸ and the tabloid *Project Eyeball* which had a complimentary online presence.¹⁰⁹ It also launched two broadcast channels, *Channel U* (Chinese-language) and *TV Works* (later *Channel I*) in English.¹¹⁰

MediaCorp launched the free daily paper *Today* and another Chinese entertainment channel.¹¹¹ The two corporations often blacked-out the other's events, and SPH banned MediaCorp reporters from attending its press conferences.¹¹² The competition actually created a niche for the international media rather than shut it down. This prompted Lee Hsien Loong in 2001 to suggest increasing the clout of the Competition Act to stem the competition because it would be "undesirable" if one corporation gained monopoly of the print and broadcast mediums.¹¹³ Lee's concerns were also prompted by the massive financial losses sustained by both corporations. In 2002, SPH announced its profits had dropped 20% because of lost advertising revenue, and MediaCorp announced it had suffered a net loss of S\$119 million. In 2003, the companies announced their deficits of S\$30 million and S\$45 million respectively.¹¹⁴

The experiment was brought to an end in September 2004 when the corporations established the joint venture companies MediaCorp TV Holdings and MediaCorp Press

¹⁰⁴ A. Tan, 'Update-1 – MediaCorp to Launch Newspaper in S'pore', *Reuters*, June 5, 2000.

¹⁰⁵ 'Channel NewsAsia Makes History with International Launch'.

¹⁰⁶ 'Singapore Newspaper Publisher Licensed to Operate TV Channels', *Xinhua News Agency*, April 26, 2001.

¹⁰⁷ J. Lien, 'SPH to launch 2 New English Papers Next Year', *Business Times*, October 7, 1999.

¹⁰⁸ 'Singapore Press Holdings to Launch Children's Publication', *Dow Jones International News*, January 7, 2000.

¹⁰⁹ H. Jafri, 'SPH to Launch Paper and Expand Existing Ones – Move Aimed at Countering Move by Media Corp', *Asian Wall Street Journal*, June 8, 2000.

¹¹⁰ 'Singapore Newspaper Publisher Licensed to Operate TV Channels'.

¹¹¹ 'Competition Intensified Between Singapore's Two Largest Media Groups', *Xinhua News Agency*, May 3, 2001.

¹¹² 'SPH MediaWorks Gets TV Licence', *Channel NewsAsia*, April 27, 2001.

¹¹³ 'Singapore Considers Competition Law to Temper Media Feud', *Agence France-Presse*, May 22, 2001.

¹¹⁴ 'Makings of a Merger', *Straits Times*, September 19, 2004.

Ltd. The latter would continue to publish *Today*, and the former to take over Singapore Press Holdings' broadcasting. Rather than a failed experiment, the merger strengthened the connection between the two media corporations. Singapore Press Holdings took a \$10 million (20%) stake in MediaCorp TV Holdings and a 40% stake in MediaCorp Press Ltd.¹¹⁵ The media sector in Singapore was renewed, the domestic corporations were “standing together”.¹¹⁶

Most significantly, Lee's 1971 promise that the Government would neutralise foreign influence within the domestic media had come to fruition by squeezing out the international media.¹¹⁷ The international media had challenged that freedom of the press must be subordinate to the survival of the state, testing the authority of the sovereign Government. It had directly impugned the integrity of the Government with allegations of nepotism. The response in Singapore was two-fold: Machiavellian preservation of sovereignty by marginalising a threat and economic coercion to adapt their continued involvement with the city-state.

Governmentality: Discipline Online

From 2006, the usefulness of the internet for international media and alternative media websites began to be realised within Singapore. This once more challenged the Government's stance on press freedom, and led it to revisit the economic controls implemented from the 1980s.

The power of the internet to circumvent the restrictions on the international media was first realised in 2006, simultaneous to the rise of alternative media blogging in Singapore, which is discussed in Chapter Four. In August 2006, the Government mandated for international publications an S\$200,000 “security deposit” and details of a

¹¹⁵ 'Makings of a Merger'.

¹¹⁶ 'MediaCorp Interactive History: Standing Together', *MediaCorp*, Singapore, www7.mediacorp.sg/interactivehistory/, accessed on: February 2, 2013.

¹¹⁷ 'The Mass Media and New Countries'.

local representative. If the publication was involved in legal action, the bond would be paid to the Government and the representative summoned to court.¹¹⁸

The requirements were introduced four days after the *Far Eastern Economic Review* was contacted by Lee Hsien Loong and Lee Kuan Yew's attorneys and threatened with legal action for an article in the July 2006 issue. The Lees claimed that in the article, Dr Chee had alleged corruption within government and that Lee Kuan Yew oppressed those who dissented against him and the Government. *The Wall Street Journal* noted that it was the Lees who made the assumption of corruption in the reply, not the original article.¹¹⁹ The *Far Eastern Economic Review's* editors refused to comply with the new regulations and so the magazine was banned. The magazine was however, able to circumvent the ban by using the internet, because the NPPA did not apply online. Copies of the articles were uploaded to its website, along with correspondence with the Lees' lawyers, and the October issue of the magazine.¹²⁰ Soon after, FEER's owners Dow Jones decided to shut down the magazine, citing losses from diminished advertising and dwindling readership after migrating online.¹²¹

Despite using the internet to circumvent censorship, the Singapore Government still uses legal action against allegedly defamatory content online. This was demonstrated in the 2002 settlement with Bloomberg. As addressed in Chapter Four, the threat of lawsuits has been revived against alternative media bloggers online.

As the media around the world has increasingly adopted the internet for distribution, circulation restrictions are less effective methods of punishment and self-regulation. In November 2011, Singapore Press Holdings took the first step to dealing with the new international media presence in Singapore. That month, SPH threatened to sue Yahoo! Inc., which produces online local Singaporean news, for copyright infringement. Singapore Press Holdings alleged that Yahoo! published 23 articles on its Singapore website *Yahoo! News Singapore Scene* from the *Straits Times*, *The New Paper* and *My*

¹¹⁸ 'Sued in Singapore', *The Wall Street Journal*, October 6, 2006.

¹¹⁹ 'Sued in Singapore'.

¹²⁰ 'Sued in Singapore'.

¹²¹ 'Far Eastern Economic Review to shut after 63 years', *Reuters*, September 22, 2009.

Paper.¹²² The representatives from Singapore Press Holdings claimed that in 2009, Yahoo! had approached the corporation for permission to reproduce content on its website, but the negotiations had broken down in 2010.¹²³

In December 2011, Yahoo! launched a counter-claim that its copyright had been infringed by SPH when copies of its articles were reposted on the SPH citizen journalism site *STOMP*.¹²⁴ In August 2012, Yahoo! withdrew its counterclaim¹²⁵ but SPH increased the number of copyright infringements to 254.¹²⁶ The case remained pre-trial and it appeared that the two corporations had reached a stalemate. Yahoo! continued to post news about Singapore, drawn from its own journalists and with guest bloggers from the Singaporean socio-political blogosphere.

The Government's tolerance of online international media, as long as it was not defamatory, can be seen in the long gap between attempts to bolster regulations on online international media. The lack of resolution to the SPH and Yahoo! stalemate was addressed in 2013, when the Government introduced a new individual media licence applicable to online news sites. Ten websites were informed of their requirement to register with the Media Development Authority (MDA), including Yahoo! The licence introduced an S\$50,000 bond and a 24 hour take down notice requirement for inappropriate content.¹²⁷ The criteria for regulation applies to sites that have over 50,000 unique Singaporean IP addresses visit each week, and feature one news article about Singapore per week over two months.¹²⁸

The licence criteria caused some socio-political bloggers to raise concerns that they would also be subject to the new licence because of their popularity and scope of

¹²² A. Kennedy, 'Singapore Publisher Sues Yahoo over Copyright', *Sydney Morning Herald*, November 24, 2011; and 'Singapore Press Holdings Sues Yahoo over Copyright', *Reuters*, November 22, 2011.

¹²³ H.W. Chun, 'Singapore Press Holdings Sues Yahoo', *The Wall Street Journal*, November 23, 2011.

¹²⁴ 'SPH Refutes Yahoo!'s Defence and Counterclaim', *AsiaOne*, December 28, 2011, <http://news.asiaone.com/News/Latest+News/Singapore/Story/A1Story20111228-318737.html>, accessed on: July 23, 2013.

¹²⁵ 'Yahoo Amends Counterclaim to Copyright Infringement against SPH', *Straits Times*, August 8, 2012.

¹²⁶ M. Singh, 'Copyright Case: SPH Amends Claim against Yahoo', *Business Times*, August 11, 2012; and 'SPH Amends Claim to Cite 254 Articles it Says Yahoo Infringed', *Straits Times*, August 11, 2012.

¹²⁷ T. Wong, 'Licence Scheme: MDA Starts with 10 Sites', *Straits Times*, May 29, 2013.

¹²⁸ T. Wong, 'Licence Scheme: MDA Starts with 10 Sites'; and 'New Licensing Framework Not Intended to Clamp Down on Internet Freedom, Says MDA', *Channel NewsAsia*, May 30, 2013.

articles.¹²⁹ The Government replied that the licence was not applicable to the alternative media at this juncture.¹³⁰ In Chapter Four I argue the licence could be held in reserve to deal with particularly troublesome online sites if other measures are ineffective or inappropriate.

The take-down notice was specifically justified by Minister of Communication and Information Yaacob Ibrahim for content that “threaten[s] the social fabric and national interests of our country” and that “misleads and causes mass panic”.¹³¹ The licence would cause online news sites to be accountable and responsible for their content, which is important as he said: “because you’re reporting for the benefit of Singaporeans.”¹³² It was hoped the 24 hour time frame would ensure rapid compliance and minimise the spread of harmful content.¹³³ In the past the Government had asked site operators to remove content before issuing a take-down order, and the other party had always complied. This implies the 24 hour clause may not have a significant impact on the operational relationship between the Government and media providers.¹³⁴

Former Nominated Member of Parliament and lawyer Siew Kum Hong warned it was impossible for the public to know what other caveats were included in the licence agreement, and the licence could be far more restrictive than ostensibly appeared.¹³⁵ After the new licence was debated in Parliament, Yaacob revealed the Government had consulted with media corporations affected, and confirmed the licence was not a dramatic shift in media policy.¹³⁶

¹²⁹ 'Online Writers Voice Concerns over New Individual Licensing Framework', *Channel NewsAsia*, May 30, 2013.

¹³⁰ L. Lim and T. Wong, 'MDA: Bloggers Not Affected by New Rules', *Straits Times*, June 1, 2013.

¹³¹ L. Lim and T. Wong, 'MDA: Bloggers Not Affected by New Rules'; and Media Development Authority Singapore, 'Much has been discussed about recent changes to the licensing framework for news sites and we thank you for your comments. We thought it would be useful to clear the air by highlighting some key facts of our current media regulations [...]', *Facebook*, May 31, 2013, <http://www.facebook.com/MDASingapore/posts/477728388976557>, accessed on: June 25, 2013.

¹³² T. Wong and R. Chang, 'New Rules Do Not Target Individual Bloggers', *Straits Times*, July 9, 2013.

¹³³ T. Wong, 'Internet Big Boys Concerned over Rules for News Sites', *Straits Times*, July 4, 2013.

¹³⁴ T. Wong, 'No Major Changes Likely for Online Licensing Rules', *Straits Times*, July 5, 2013.

¹³⁵ K.H. Siew, 'Why the new MDA Online Licensing Framework is Censorship', *Siew Kum Hong*, June 5, 2013, <http://siewkumhong.blogspot.jp/2013/06/why-new-mda-online-licensing-framework.html>, accessed on: July 23, 2013.

¹³⁶ T. Wong, 'Yaacob: Rules for Online News Sites a Refinement and Not a Major Shift', *Straits Times*, July 9, 2013.

On June 6, Yahoo! Country Manager for Singapore, Alan Soon, announced Yahoo! Singapore was willing to comply with the licence because it strengthened their place in Singapore as a legitimate news source, and because the licence was no more onerous than current regulations.¹³⁷ The next month however, a group of international internet corporations including Yahoo!, Facebook, eBay, and Google sent a letter to the Ministry of Communication and Information to criticise the implementation of the new licence, and warn that its vague wording would cause industry uncertainty about investment and operation in Singapore.¹³⁸

The new licence was justified by the Government to ensure parity between the offline and online versions of influential media.¹³⁹ The other nine sites affected were a token gesture of widespread regulation, but are part of MediaCorp or Singapore Press Holdings, including the *Straits Times*, *Business Times*, *Lianhe Zaobao*, *Today*, and also *Channel NewsAsia* and *AsiaOne*, which is a repository of SPH articles. Youth portals *Omy.sg* (bilingual Chinese and English) and *STOMP* were also required to register.¹⁴⁰ In 2010, interviewed Singapore Press Holdings and MediaCorp journalists explained that the news websites often carry more stories than print or broadcast editions because of the limited space offline, but all are subject to the same rigorous editorial process.¹⁴¹

The new media licence has realigned internet media control to existing regulations on international media, introduced in 2006. The passivity of the new licence, as indicated by Alan Soon, reflects a shift in governmentality: attempting to incorporate a popular element without letting it threaten government. In the forty plus years since 1971, governmentality has adapted to achieve the goals that Lee Kuan Yew set down in his

¹³⁷ W. Tan, 'Yahoo! Singapore Will Abide by MDA's Licensing Framework', *Today*, June 6, 2013.

¹³⁸ J. Tan, 'Coalition of Internet Giants "Very Concerned" over New MDA Regulations', *Yahoo! News, Singapore*, July 3, 2013, <http://sg.news.yahoo.com/coalition-of-internet-giants-very-concerned-over-new-mda-regulations-082941943.html>, accessed on: July 23, 2013.

¹³⁹ L. Lim and T. Wong, 'MDA: Bloggers Not Affected by New Rules'.

¹⁴⁰ 'List of Online News Sites which Require Individual Licence', *Media Development Authority*, Singapore, <http://mda.gov.sg/NewsandEvents/PressRelease/2013/Documents/Annex.pdf>, accessed on: July 20, 2013.

¹⁴¹ Interview with *Today* reporter (*Today1*), de-identified upon request, Singapore, October 15, 2010; and Interview with *Straits Times1*; and Interview with *Channel NewsAsia1*; and Interview with *Straits Times2*; and Interview with *Lianhe Zaobao* political journalist (*Lianhe Zaobao1*), de-identified upon request, Singapore, November 1, 2010; and Interview with Ng Tze Yong, then-Special Assistant to the Editor-in-Chief of Singapore Press Holdings, Singapore, November 3, 2010.

Helsinki speech have shifted from punishment to economic control, new licensing for online news sites. The 1971 principles have however, remained the foundation for control of the media. Chapter Three details the long-lasting form of control: the use of the Executive Chairman position to align journalistic norms with government expectations of the role of the media. I also argue that the media role to serve the interests of the Government has been internalised by editors, who influence subordinate journalists, in turn who influence their readers.

Pro-government bias of the media has seen it punish opposition parties, civil activists and alternative media that challenge the Government or produce counter-hegemony. The media's co-option has electoral implications when it bolsters the reputation of the People's Action Party and undermines the credibility of opposition political parties. The media also has the power to marginalise the political impact of civil activism and so increase the importance of parliament to bring about political change. Beyond the authoritarianism discussed in this chapter, the control of the media has had a broader impact on other sectors of society, including civil activism, alternative media and elections.

Chapter Three:

Controlling the Gatekeepers: The Role of the Executive Chairman

Chapter Two introduced the concept of media microcosms, subsections of the broader media sector: the print and broadcast media corporations. Foucault argued that within a microcosm, the population could be disciplined to unconsciously fulfil desired ends of the sovereign.¹ Discipline also invokes the idea of hegemony, as described by Gramsci. As discussed in chapters one and two, hegemony is the dominant idea in a space by a process of coercion and consensus.

Lee Kuan Yew's attitudes about the media, represented in the 1971 Helsinki speech, have been applied within the print microcosm by the localised authority of Executive Chairman. The turning point in journalist and editorial attitudes to accept consensus with the Government was due to interventions made by first Executive Chairman S.R. Nathan. Nathan was able to influence senior editors, particularly within the *Straits Times*, who then influenced subordinate journalists.

This chapter focuses on the role of the Executive Chairman to secure the media's role in nation-building and supporting the Government, and the effect this has had on journalists' attitudes and media reporting. Mainstream reporting has subsequently impacted civil activists and political opposition by undermining their credibility and marginalising their influence on society, which is discussed further in subsequent chapters.

In 1982, Lee Kuan Yew installed S.R. Nathan as the first Executive Chairman of Straits Times Press (later Singapore Press Holdings) to oversee editorial control. Lee had been unimpressed with how the *Straits Times* performed its nation-building role as he presented in Helsinki ten years earlier. In particular, Lee believed that the newspaper had inadvertently influenced voters to elect opposition candidate Joshua Benjamin

¹ M. Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977-1978*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York & Basingstoke, 2009, p. 57.

Jeyaretnam (J.B. Jeyaretnam or JBJ) in the 1981 Anson by-election.² Days before the by-election the *Straits Times* ran on the front page that the Singapore Bus Service, the backbone of the public transport section, was planning to increase bus fares.³ To reinforce for the *Straits Times* its national role, Lee contemplated installing a team of civil servants to oversee and manage its editors. Instead, only one civil servant was appointed: S.R. Nathan who was at that time Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.⁴

There is a disparity between narratives of Nathan's appointment in the literature. Garry Rodan, Derek Davies, Cherian George, and Gerald Sussman respectively argued that the appointment of Nathan, and also of Singapore Press Holding's President Tjiong Yik Min, were top-down government actions, and drew particular attention to their security credentials.⁵ Tjiong was the head of the Internal Security Department (ISD) from 1986 to 1993, before he joined SPH in 1995. Tjiong's time at ISD meant that he was involved in the 1987 detentions of 22 civil activists and also the 1992 raid on the *Business Times* offices for a breach of the Official Secrets Act (OSA). Rodan strongly implied that Tjiong served as a secondary control mechanism alongside Nathan to keep the *Straits Times* and its affiliates in line.⁶

Nathan and Cheong Yip Seng's memoirs both describe the process leading to Nathan's appointment as far more nuanced. Neither denied Lee's sovereign action installing Nathan into the Straits Times Press, but instead drew attention to Nathan's existing friendship with Chief Editor Peter Lim,⁷ and pointed to an existing idea of Nathan

² Y.S. Cheong, *OB Markers: My Straits Times Story*, Straits Times Press, Singapore, 2013, p. 177.

³ Y.S. Cheong, *OB Markers*, pp. 177-178; and D.K. Mauzy and R.S. Milne, *Singapore Politics under the People's Action Party*, Routledge, London & New York, 2002, p. 138; and D. Davies, 'The Press', *The Singapore Puzzle*, M. Haas (ed.) Praeger, Westport, CONN., 1999, p. 90.

⁴ G. Rodan, *Transparency and Authoritarian Rule in Southeast Asia: Singapore and Malaysia*, Routledge, London & New York, 2005, p. 21; and C. George, *Freedom From The Press: Journalism and State Power in Singapore*, National University of Singapore Press, Singapore, 2012, p. 33; and Y.S. Cheong, *OB Markers*, pp. 23-25; and S.R. Nathan, *An Unexpected Journey: Path to the Presidency*, Editions Didier Millet, Singapore, 2011, pp. 449-450.

⁵ G. Rodan, *Transparency and Authoritarian Rule*, p. 21; and C. George, *Freedom From the Press*, p. 33; and D. Davies, 'The Press', p. 90; and G. Sussman, 'Internet Politics the Singapore Way', *Urban Communication: Production, Text and Content*, T.A. Gibson and M.D. Lowes (eds.), Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., Plymouth, UK, 2007, p. 53.

⁶ G. Rodan, *Transparency and Authoritarian Rule*, p. 21.

⁷ S.R. Nathan, *An Unexpected Journey*, pp. 449-450; and Y.S. Cheong, *OB Markers*, p. 24.

joining the *Straits Times* as a consultant after retirement. As a consultant in the *Straits Times*, Nathan would mentor journalists and offer his knowledge about regional affairs to the paper through op-ed columns.⁸

Lyn Holloway (Managing Director), Peter Lim and Cheong (then-Deputy Editor in Chief) felt Nathan had been more open to working with the press than other Permanent Secretaries, and would be less heavy-handed as an overseer.⁹ Lee took their idea one step further and insisted Nathan be appointed to the Board as Executive Chairman.¹⁰

Nathan recalled in his memoir that throughout his first year, Lee often stated that if needed, he would be willing to send in a team of civil servants to oversee the *Straits Times* and “cut out the rot” within the editorial team.¹¹ Nathan insisted that it was not necessary to arbitrarily fire journalists and editors. He identified the root of the problem as a lack of discipline within the newsroom, as editors were openly challenged by their subordinate journalists.¹² The solution, as he perceived it, was to address this culture within the newsroom and reform it to one more amicable to the Government’s expectations.¹³

As control is easier by unconscious discipline, so too is editorial control made easier when subordinate journalists have internalised the principles of the media. Strict gatekeeping by editors could cause high turnover of journalists, especially where their principles differ. A *Straits Times* Deputy Editor I interviewed shared her impression that journalism graduates were usually split 50-50 along pro- and anti-Establishment lines. Those with liberal or anti-Establishment leanings often hoped to change the media system from within, but became disillusioned with the editorial process and left.¹⁴ This had occurred several years earlier, when a group of liberal journalists were asked to

⁸ S.R. Nathan, *An Unexpected Journey*, p. 450.

⁹ S.R. Nathan, *An Unexpected Journey*, p. 451; and Y.S. Cheong, *OB Markers*, p. 25.

¹⁰ S.R. Nathan, *An Unexpected Journey*, p. 451.

¹¹ S.R. Nathan, *An Unexpected Journey*, p. 453.

¹² S.R. Nathan, *An Unexpected Journey*, pp. 463-464.

¹³ S.R. Nathan, *An Unexpected Journey*, p. 473.

¹⁴ Interview with *Straits Times* Political Editor (*Straits Times2*), de-identified upon request, Singapore, October 29, 2010.

leave the *Straits Times* if they could not accept the media's role in Singapore¹⁵ and the extension of that is their ability to work within the media cultures within the corporations.

P.N. Balji expressed there was partisanship at work for journalists who changed between the corporations in the media experiment phase of 2000-2004, and said he was regarded as a "traitor" for leaving Singapore Press Holdings for MediaCorp.¹⁶ When Balji left *Today*, he felt he could not return to the SPH fold, so started working in public relations before accepting a position back at *Today* a few years later.¹⁷ Due to the limited space for professional journalists to work in domestic media – SPH, MediaCorp or Yahoo! – it may be that journalists who leave these corporations find it difficult to return, or are shunned from an exclusive media culture.

Cheong lamented in his memoirs that 60% to 80% of journalism graduates left before their fourth or fifth year in newspapers. He chalked the figure to most "not [having] printer's ink in the veins,"¹⁸ but clearly there is a challenge within the media to retain journalists, especially those with liberal aspirations, and to fulfil the Government's expectation of the media.

The governmentality of the media may have softened from the hard-line and exclusionary style of discipline whereby anything that is not expressly permitted specified is implicitly forbidden, and given way to a more *laissez-aller* (letting go) approach as described by Foucault. *Laissez-aller* is letting events take their course with the confidence the situation will resolve itself and normalise.¹⁹ Such confidence surely stems from a strong hegemonic influence, in line with the balance of *raison d'état* (national interest) and accommodating the population's desires. It is another aspect of long-term governmentality that editors will manage the conservatism of the media appropriately. Criticism of the Government may become more common within the

¹⁵ Interview with *Straits Times* political journalist (*Straits Times1*), de-identified upon request, Singapore, October 22, 2010.

¹⁶ "The Veteran", *Behind The Times*, <http://sheereng.wordpress.com/final-feature/the-veteran/>, accessed on: May 28, 2014.

¹⁷ "The Veteran".

¹⁸ Y.S. Cheong, *OB Markers*, p. 69.

¹⁹ M. Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, pp. 41,44.

media, though it will not be in the same bellicose form of the alternative media. If discipline has succeeded, the criticism will be normalised so it does not stand out, and ultimately the Government will remain dominant.

Taming Journalists

In 1986, the *Straits Times* was rebuked by Lee for insufficiently covering the fierce Malaysian reaction to Israeli President Chaim Herzog's visit to Singapore. Lee claimed it was a missed opportunity to reinforce Singapore's vulnerability in a politically unfriendly region.²⁰ After this incident, Nathan and Peter Lim discussed the Lee's interest in changing the Editor-in-Chief of the *Straits Times*. Nathan nominated then-Deputy Editor Cheong Yip Seng to the position.²¹ He felt it would be better for a Singaporean to take over rather than an expatriate editor with "Western-style preoccupation with 'freedom of the press'" which would cause future conflicts with the Government.²²

There was no commercial need to change the Editor-in-Chief at the *Straits Times*, but there was an opportunity to match the transition of editorial leadership to a change in national leadership. Lee Kuan Yew agreed to Cheong's appointment, and before the transfer was formalised, discussed with Cheong the change in prime ministership to Goh Chok Tong. Lee described Goh's government would "rearrange the furniture" but there would be no major breaks from the substance of his time as Prime Minister. To nicely round out the dual transition, Lee instructed Goh to deliver the news to Cheong that he had been selected to be the new Editor-in-Chief.²³ In 1987, Cheong became the Editor-in-Chief of Singapore Press Holdings English and Malay Division, which included the *Straits Times*,²⁴ and in 1990 Goh became Prime Minister.

Political crossover with SPH was also executed by second Executive Chairman Lim Kim San. Lim secured Singapore Press Holdings as the publishing house for nation-

²⁰ Y.S. Cheong, *OB Markers*, p. 29.

²¹ S.R. Nathan, *An Unexpected Journey*, pp. 488-490.

²² S.R. Nathan, *An Unexpected Journey*, p. 490.

²³ Y.S. Cheong, *OB Markers*, p. 26.

²⁴ Y.S. Cheong, *OB Markers*, p. 67; and S.R. Nathan, *An Unexpected Journey*, pp. 472-473.

building texts, likely a demonstration of Lim's personal political clout as an Old Guard Cabinet Minister and Lee's confidante. Since 1999, Straits Times Press has been responsible for the publication of all of Lee Kuan Yew's memoirs, and research and publication of several volumes valuable for the Singapore Story national myth. These volumes included the history of the People's Action Party and the independence struggles of Singapore titled *Men in White*, commissioned to celebrate the half-century anniversary of the party's founding.²⁵

Most recently, in 2008 and 2009, *Straits Times* reporters were given unprecedented access to Lee Kuan Yew to produce his memoirs *Hard Truths to Keep Singapore Going*. Han Fook Kwang, Editor of the *Straits Times*, described the project as important to reiterate Singapore's past struggles and the "hard truths" that must be considered for Singapore's future.²⁶ The production and distribution of such collections is mutually beneficial for the Government and Singapore Press Holdings because such a volume attracts considerable political interest and sales, and the Government has the opportunity to reinforce the hegemony of survivalism.

In the Helsinki 1971 speech, the role of the media was characterised as explaining problems facing Singapore and how citizens' support of the Government would resolve these problems. The media would also reinforce the social values and attitudes being indoctrinated in other parts of society.²⁷ Ideologically, the main role of the Executive Chairman is to ensure the Government's expectations of the media become hegemonic. Many of the younger journalists were impressed with Western-style journalism, principles of the Fourth Estate, and were influenced by the partisan media in neighbouring countries. Many would openly challenge the decisions of the editors and agitated for "democracy in the newsroom".²⁸ Such attitudes were clearly in conflict with the Government's desired role of the media.

²⁵ Y.S. Cheong, *OB Markers*, p. 237.

²⁶ SPHRazorTV, 'The Making of: Hard Truths to Keep Singapore Going', *YouTube*, July 25, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rMULP5aymGQ>, accessed on: July 28, 2013.

²⁷ 'The Mass Media and New Countries', *journalism.sg*, <http://journalism.sg/lee-kuan-yews-1971-speech-on-the-press/>, accessed on: July 20, 2013.

²⁸ S.R. Nathan, *An Unexpected Journey*, pp. 464,467.

As recounted in Chapter Two, the first response to challenges to the Government's sovereign authority by journalists was a heavy-handed response, such as imprisonment or revocation of licence. The second was to move authority closer to the source of dissent, with the offer to use more direct proven techniques to "cut out the rot". The first steps to discipline by specified behaviour came from Nathan, who initiated regular meetings with the editors, including expatriate editors, of the English and Malay papers in Singapore Press Holdings: *The Straits Times*, *Business Times*, *The New Paper*, and *Berita Harian*. Cheong called this group the "coffee break editors".²⁹ During the meetings, the editors could discuss stories, staffing issues, and encounters with the Government. Nathan would input his experience and opinions.³⁰

In addition to meeting regularly with editors, Nathan worked with Peter Lim to introduce training sessions for journalists. In the first seminar, Nathan explained his role as Executive Chairman, and reiterated that the Singaporean media must serve the best interests of the state. Lim led sessions about the way the news should be presented, what constituted an appropriate headline, and how to balance the expectations of the Government and journalistic principles.³¹ Journalists and editors who had worked overseas were invited to recount their experiences with other publications' expectations for responsible journalism, to impress upon their colleagues that the Singapore Government was not unique in its expectations. Recalcitrant journalists were sent on sabbatical to work in other newsrooms, where they could experience such expectations first hand.³²

In 1986, just before Peter Lim stepped aside as Editor-in-Chief, Nathan circulated a document to all editors and journalists with his interpretation of the Government's expectations. These included that the media must support the Government and its policies, and be sensitive to and explain the issues at stake such as Singapore's political and economic stability.³³ Included in the document was the reminder that the

²⁹ S.R. Nathan, *An Unexpected Journey*, pp. 472-473; and Y.S. Cheong, *OB Markers*, p. 102.

³⁰ Y.S. Cheong, *OB Markers*, p. 417.

³¹ S.R. Nathan, *An Unexpected Journey*, pp. 473-474.

³² S.R. Nathan, *An Unexpected Journey*, pp. 474-475.

³³ Y.S. Cheong, *OB Markers*, p. 234; and S.R. Nathan, *An Unexpected Journey*, p. 489.

Government would not tolerate the media to take on any semblance of the Fourth Estate.³⁴

The circulated document did not impose unfamiliar requirements that would alienate editors and journalists, but instead utilised journalistic norms such as objective reporting, to convince that the expectations of the Government were not so foreign. The following dot points (reproduced verbatim) were produced by Nathan and illustrate the tolerated disciplinary behaviour to be interpreted by journalists to meet the objective of the Government.

- Report accurately and factually correct information.
- It must be sensitive to national issues and support government policies and put across ideas (for) their implementation.
- It must help develop public understanding of the issues and the constraints to be faced.
- It must explain and educate the reader to understand the issues and that the political and economic stability of Singapore is in everyone's interest.
- In comment and analysis, it must be intelligent and credible. Any expressed or implied criticism must be based on fact, logical and sound in argument – but bearing in mind the largest interest.
- It must discard the “lure of the scope” – but its story must be well written in terms of accuracy and perspective.
- In doing the above, it should win credibility, through preserving its institutional independence, but within the limits set by the press laws in Singapore.
- It must not be a loaded purveyor of views nor be seen as an obsequious press. It must present the scene as it exists – but in a balanced manner.³⁵

The principle of journalistic objectivity is generally considered to be reporting that is non-biased, fair, factual and unimpeded by fear or favour.³⁶ Nathan recalled that one of

³⁴ Y.S. Cheong, *OB Markers*, p. 234; and S.R. Nathan, *An Unexpected Journey*, p. 489.

³⁵ Y.S. Cheong, *OB Markers*, p. 234.

³⁶ T.P. Vos, 'New media, old criticism: Bloggers' press criticism and the journalistic field', *Journalism*, 2011, p. 441; and S.J. Ward, *The Invention of Journalism Ethics*, McGill-Queen's University Press,

the biggest challenges he had to overcome was the perception of young Singaporean and expatriate journalists that writing positively about the Government or its policies meant the media was subordinate and a government mouthpiece.³⁷ He worked to inculcate the idea that the Government's news is important to all Singaporeans and so deserves maximal coverage,³⁸ and this is not political bias but the public interest. This sentiment was reflected by one interviewed journalist in 2010: "At first I felt awkward when my friends asked why I always reported government news, but now I realised that the launch of a big policy will affect many people so it is important to write about it."³⁹

This policy has been validated by the socio-political blogosphere. Although bloggers have created counter-hegemonic alternative news, their limited resources have not completely freed bloggers from dependence on the mainstream media, which they rely on for most of their content. By using the mainstream media as their basis, the blogosphere replicates the pro-government bias in story selection, and perpetuates the market dominance of the mainstream press.

Several interviewed Singaporean journalists declared that the primary principle within the Singapore media is "objectivity".⁴⁰ Cunningham made the criticism that in general, the principle of objectivity "excuses lazy reporting. If you're on a deadline and all you have is 'both sides of the story', that's often good enough."⁴¹ In addition, experts and their opinions are regarded with disproportionate credibility. Therefore, by quoting experts, journalists are not obliged to report a counterview.⁴² Singaporean journalists have adopted this practice of minimalist "he said/she said" style of reporting,⁴³ which

Quebec, 2004, p. 19; and M. Schudson, 'The objectivity norm in American journalism', *Journalism*, v. 2 (2), 2001, p. 150.

³⁷ S.R. Nathan, *An Unexpected Journey*, p. 465.

³⁸ A. Choi, 'Press coverage of a social problem in Singapore: an analysis of content, modes and styles of communication', *Asian Journal of Communication*, v. 9 (1), 1999, p. 131.

³⁹ Interview with *Today* reporter (*Today1*), de-identified upon request, Singapore, October 15, 2010.

⁴⁰ Interview with *Today1*; and interview with *Straits Times1*; and interview with Ng Tze Yong, then-Special Assistant to the Editor-in-Chief of Singapore Press Holdings, Singapore, November 3, 2010.

⁴¹ B. Cunningham, 'Rethinking Objective Journalism', *Columbia Journalism Review*, July 9, 2003.

⁴² S.J. Ward, *The Invention of Journalism Ethics*, pp. 19-20.

⁴³ T.P. Vos, 'New media, old criticism: Bloggers' press criticism and the journalistic field', p. 440.

Lim Cheng Tju criticised as being the reason for “middle level stagnation” within the Singapore media.⁴⁴

Ngiam Tong Dow, who was a *Straits Times* journalist and Permanent Secretary in several ministries,⁴⁵ argued instead for the importance of “straight reporting” in Singapore.⁴⁶ Straight reporting journalists must not “crusade” for a particular party or personal agenda.⁴⁷ The interviewed *Today* journalist echoed this sentiment: “I’ll just report as is. [...] You should not pursue the activist role; just say what he says, what she says.”⁴⁸ To investigate a story and raise contradictory conclusions from the Government’s official line is discouraged because it would be so-called crusading journalism.

Based on research interviews with Singapore Press Holdings and MediaCorp journalists, these ideas of Singaporean objectivity are not limited to one corporation. It is likely that when journalists and editors moved between the corporations these values were transferred. For example, P.N. Balji transferred from the *Straits Times* under Cheong Yip Seng, to become Editor of *The New Paper*, before being recruited to establish *Today* for MediaCorp.⁴⁹

In Singapore, the requirement to present both sides of the story has been further diluted to sound bites from affected parties. This can be attributed to Nathan’s influence as he criticised the *Straits Times* would publish one side of a story and influence readers, and then publish the other side the next day. Although paying lip-service to objectivity, readers were more influenced by the first article than the second.⁵⁰ Multiple perspectives

⁴⁴ C.T. Lim, 'Political Cartoons in Singapore: misnomer or redefinition necessary?', *Journal of Popular Culture*, v. 34 (1), 2000, p. 80.

⁴⁵ Ngiam served in the Prime Minister’s Office, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Trade and Industry, Ministry of Communications and Information, Ministry of National Development ('Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy: Ngiam Tong Dow', *National University of Singapore*, http://www.spp.nus.edu.sg/Faculty_NgiamTongDow.aspx, accessed on: March 13, 2013).

⁴⁶ T.D. Ngiam, *Dynamics of the Singapore success story: insights by Ngiam Tong Dow*, Cengage Learning Asia, Singapore, 2011, p. 115.

⁴⁷ T.D. Ngiam, *Dynamics of the Singapore success story*, p. 115.

⁴⁸ Interview with *Today1*.

⁴⁹ P.N. Balji, 'Confessions of an editor', *The Independent*, August 9, 2013, <http://theindependent.sg/confessions-of-an-editor/>, accessed on: August 21, 2013.

⁵⁰ S.R. Nathan, *An Unexpected Journey*, p. 467.

in one story alleviate the problem of multiple articles, but reduced the space available for each perspective. Due to the pro-government bias of the media, Singapore media articles tend to heavily quote or paraphrase the Government, and thus any differing opinion presented is given a few sentences at the end, to leave the reader to make their own inferences.

Sound-bite reporting also reduces the analytical quality of the media, and used to excess is counter to another principle of the media: to not be a mouthpiece. As is seen in the case study at the end of the chapter, the media can easily become a platform for the Government position because of sound-bite reporting. The media is challenged to balance so-called objective reporting and serving as a platform. Even the Government says that it does not want the press to be sycophantic in its coverage, for fear it would delegitimize its role, but wants it to operate with the best interests of Singaporeans in mind.

In the late 1980s, Lee Kuan Yew clarified Singaporean reporters were not prohibited from criticising the Government, as long as the article benefitted the Government and did not to undermine its legitimacy. Similarly, the media is allowed to report the criticisms of the Government by political opposition as long as it does not become anti-government propaganda.⁵¹ In 1994, the Government's tolerance for criticism by third parties in the domestic media was tested. That year, the Government coined another term for media control: the Out-of-Bound Markers (OB Markers).

In 1994, novelist Catherine Lim was publicly rebuked by Goh Chok Tong and Lee Kuan Yew for her articles, published in the *Straits Times* in September and November that year. In her September article, Lim criticised the Government for losing touch with the people⁵² and that Goh had not done enough to differentiate himself from Lee, despite promises for a “kinder, gentler” government upon taking office.⁵³ The *Straits Times* published the official replies, which included the assertion by Goh's Press Secretary

⁵¹ T.H. Tey, 'Confining the Freedom of the Press in Singapore: A 'Pragmatic' Press for 'Nation-Building'?', *Human Rights Quarterly*, v. 30 2008, p. 881.

⁵² C. Lim, 'The PAP and the people - A Great Affective Divide', *Straits Times*, September 3, 1994.

⁵³ K.P. Tan, 'Who's Afraid of Catherine Lim? The State in Patriarchal Singapore', *Asian Studies Review*, v. 33 (1), 2009, p. 52.

Chan Heng Wing that if Lim felt strongly enough about politics, she should join a political party.⁵⁴ This was perceived by many as a “sign up or shut-up ultimatum”.⁵⁵ Goh also stated that “armchair critics” outside of the political arena should not make such comments without anticipating an official response.⁵⁶

Cheong Yip Seng only briefly described the Catherine Lim Affair in his memoir, stating that both he and Leslie Fong (then-Editor of the *Straits Times*) knew it would “tread on sensitive toes”, but were surprised the Government did not criticise the *Straits Times* for running the pieces.⁵⁷ In hindsight, the *Straits Times* performed as expected by not only publishing Government replies, but also spurning Lim’s views with several editorials.⁵⁸ The Government’s reaction to Lim’s articles served several purposes. It punished the perpetrator (Lim) for having the gall to make such statements in the national newspaper. The punishment (rebuking) also influenced the audience not to repeat her transgressions, and disciplined the media not to wantonly publish similar articles in the future.

Goh explained the necessity for Out-of-Bounds Markers to demonstrate that the denigration of the Prime Minister or the Government through the media would not be tolerated.⁵⁹ However, the boundaries of tolerance and what exactly constituted ‘denigration’ were vague. In 1998, then-backbencher Tan Cheng Bock questioned Lee Kuan Yew on how Singaporeans could hope to raise political concerns with the OB Markers in place. Lee responded: “If your interest is to improve Singapore, then you do not need to worry about OB Markers. It is as simple as that. It is when your intention is to twist your Minister’s tail, to show that you are smart, that is risking it.”⁶⁰

In 2000, Lee Hsien Loong clarified that political commentary would be permitted as long as it did not undermine or question the legitimacy of the Government.⁶¹ By remaining deliberately vague, the OB Markers can be used by editors to censor and by

⁵⁴ K.P. Tan, 'Who's Afraid of Catherine Lim?', p. 54.

⁵⁵ H. Mutalib, 'Constructing a 'Constructive' Opposition', *Impressions of the Goh Chok Tong Years in Singapore*, B. Welsh, J. Chin, A. Mahizhnan and T.H. Tan (eds.), National University of Singapore Press, Singapore, 2009, p. 87.

⁵⁶ M.H. Chua, 'PM: No erosion of my authority allowed', *Straits Times*, December 5, 1994.

⁵⁷ Y.S. Cheong, *OB Markers*, pp. 306-307.

⁵⁸ K.P. Tan, 'Who's Afraid of Catherine Lim?', pp. 52-53.

⁵⁹ 'PM tells Dr Lim why he responded to commentary', *Straits Times*, December 17, 1994.

⁶⁰ D.K. Mauzy and R.S. Milne, *Singapore Politics*, p. 166.

⁶¹ D.K. Mauzy and R.S. Milne, *Singapore Politics*, p. 167.

political commentators to self-censor.⁶² Unequivocally, the OB Markers is a reminder to the media that their role is to bolster support for the Government and not serve as a platform for counter-hegemony.

Consequently, journalists and editors are required to balance several contradictory positions when producing news. The first is to support the Government and be subordinate to its primacy. The second is to allow criticism, but not to serve as a Fourth Estate, or as a platform for anti-government propaganda. The balance seems to have been struck that the media focuses on the first principle, which facilitates the media being denigrated as a government mouthpiece.

Combined with the he said/she said role of objectivity and media bias towards the Government, reporting is often one-sided because journalists can defer to the Government as the ultimate expert on policy. An interviewed *Straits Times* political journalist commented: “Sometimes the incumbent gets a lot more airing, not because it’s safest, but because he’s the incumbent.”⁶³ A People’s Action Party incumbent would also have the greatest insight in Singapore’s governance. By quoting experts and elites, the media can support the Government under the guise of objectivity and thus build consensus around government actions.⁶⁴ However, such a pro-government principle has also resulted in the media serving as a proxy for the Government to punish counter-hegemony, which has ramifications for civil activism, alternative media and opposition parties.

Governmentality Outsourced: Framing Reports to Punish

Ngiam argued that straight reporting must not “create misleading impressions” that would be disadvantageous to the Government.⁶⁵ Lee Kuan Yew also warned of the

⁶² T. Lee, *The Media, Cultural Control and Government in Singapore*, Routledge, London & New York, 2010, p. 97.

⁶³ Interview with *Straits Times*.

⁶⁴ A. Choi, 'Press coverage of a social problem in Singapore', p. 138; and K.E. Kuah, 'Maintaining Ethno-religious harmony in Singapore', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, v. 28 (1), 1998, p. 374.

⁶⁵ T.D. Ngiam, *Dynamics of the Singapore success story*, p. 115.

emotional influence that photographs and television could have on the audience in 1971. Combining these two concepts, the media has been most circumspect when reporting the opposition parties' election rallies, and specifically when publishing photographs from the events. Journalists interviewed explained that the policy of not publishing photographs of the rallies is an unofficial policy that has become a behavioural norm because it might mislead readers about the popularity of the opposition parties.⁶⁶

The circumspection of the media with photographs has created a niche for bloggers to fill, particularly during elections. During the 2006 election, blogger Alex Au posted on his blog a photograph of the Workers' Party Hougang SMC rally, which was quickly circulated around the blogosphere because it showed tens of thousands of people in attendance.⁶⁷ Caught off-guard, the *Straits Times* published the photograph several days later. In 2011, bloggers enthusiastically published photographs and estimates of rally crowd sizes to show up the mainstream media and fill this niche.⁶⁸

Whereas the Government is shielded from misrepresentation by the mainstream media, opposition parties, civil activists and alternative media online are not as protected from misleading images and reporting. This facilitates the mainstream media producing content that undermines the public credibility of these actors. In the absence of an actual scandal, the media has used unflattering photographs and headlines to misrepresent the opposition parties.

During the 2011 election, *The New Paper* published allegations that Dr Chee Soon Juan had attempted to start a protest at the end of a Singapore Democratic Party (SDP) rally.⁶⁹ The Party and attendees refuted the allegation and insisted Chee had simply signed

⁶⁶ Interview with *Straits Times1*; and interview with *Channel NewsAsia* producer (*Channel NewsAsia1*), de-identified upon request, Singapore, October 23, 2010; and interview with *Straits Times2*.

⁶⁷ T. Lee and C. Kan, 'Blogospheric Pressures in Singapore: Internet discourse and the 2006 general election', *Continuum*, v. 23 (6), 2009, p. 877.

⁶⁸ For example: 'Exclusive TOC Pictures from the Rallies – 30 April', *The Online Citizen*, May 1, 2011, <http://theonlinecitizen.com/2011/05/exclusive-toc-pictures-from-the-rallies-30-april>, accessed on: May 2, 2011; and theonlinecitizen, 'WP easily attracted the biggest crowd tonight at the rallies. Estimates put the crowd size in Hougang at 40,000 to 50,000 people. The crowd at the PAP rally was 500 to 1,000 people, according to TOC reporter on the ground', *Facebook*, April 29, 2011, <http://www.facebook.com/theonlinecitizen/posts/10150230444856383>, accessed on: April 29, 2011.

⁶⁹ B. Sim and M. Singh, 'Is he SDP's loose cannon?', *The New Paper*, May 3, 2011.

autographs.⁷⁰ These rebuttals were however, only reported online and so the allegations by *The New Paper* stood unchallenged in print. Thus, perception of Chee and the SDP may have been tarnished.

During the 2012 Hougang by-election, the Workers' Party alleged the *Straits Times* attempted to discredit its candidate Png Eng Huat by publishing unflattering photographs of him at an election rally.⁷¹ The Party also criticised the *Straits Times*' reports that misrepresented Png's handling of several companies and implied that his history of financial management would negatively affect the WP management of Aljunied-Hougang Town Council.⁷²

The *Straits Times* published alleged insider information by a source called "Secret Squirrel" who claimed that Png had only received one vote in the internal party selection for a 2011 Non-Constituency MP seat. This allegations cast doubt on why the Party would select Png to be their Parliamentary candidate if the Executive Committee members did not want him to take on a Non-Constituency Parliamentary role.⁷³

The principle of public interest (affecting the public) implicitly holds the opposition to a higher standard in order to be reported. Journalists commented in research interviews that the opposition parties, especially unelected opposition parties, must say something impressive to warrant publication in the media.⁷⁴ The public interest or more so of interest to the public, also includes reporting scandal, which is unique to Singapore. In

⁷⁰ K. Han, 'Wah lau, TNP, buay pai seh ah?', *The Online Citizen*, May 2, 2011, <http://theonlinecitizen.com/2011/05/wah-lau-tnp-buay-pai-seh-ah>, accessed on: May 3, 2011; and 'TNP accused Dr Chee participating in a 'protest march' when he was merely signing autographs', *Temasek Review*, May 1, 2011, <http://www.tremeritus.com/2011/05/01/tnp-accused-of-dr-chee-participating-in-a-protest-march-when-he-was-merely-signing-autographs/>, accessed on: May 2, 2011.

⁷¹ 'WP's Low: Mainstream Media Bias a Step Backwards for Democracy', *AsiaOne*, May 27, 2012, <http://www.asiaone.com/print/News/Elections/Story/A1Story20120527-348648.html>, accessed on: February 20, 2013.

⁷² "'The Media Got Their Facts Wrong"; Png Eng Huat', *AsiaOne*, June 5, 2012, <http://www.asiaone.com/News/Latest%2BNews/Singapore/Story/A1Story20120605-350640.html>, accessed on: February 20, 2013.

⁷³ M. Chew, 'Who's Secret Squirrel?', *Straits Times*, May 26, 2012; and R. Chan, 'WP Chief Lashes Out at PAP and Media', *Straits Times*, May 27, 2012; and A. Ong and C. Ong, 'Png defends himself; "I Meant Voting Process, Not Voting Slip"', *Straits Times*, May 23, 2012; and L. Lim, 'WP Faces Allegations of Dishonesty', *Straits Times*, May 23, 2012.

⁷⁴ Interview with *Straits Times2*; and interview with *Today1*; and interview with *Lianhe Zaobao* political journalist (*Lianhe Zaobao1*), de-identified upon request, Singapore, November 1, 2010.

Singapore however, it means it is probably easier for the opposition to be reported negatively than positively in usual circumstances due to aggressive political strategy, and inter/intra- party conflict.

The way a story is framed and told shapes the interpretation of events by the reader.⁷⁵ Journalists around the world frame stories as counter-hegemonic or 'bad' to reinforce what behaviours and attitudes are undesirable in society.⁷⁶ By drawing attention to their undesirable bad behaviour, the subject of the story is punished. In his 1971 speech, Lee warned the media about the influence that its coverage of emotive events could have on the audience, including causing some to copy illegal actions.⁷⁷ The media is therefore careful that its coverage does not encourage similar actions by others. Objectivity has been used to justify shallow reporting and pro-government bias, and so too could reporting in the public interest be used as punishment: governmentality outsourced to the media.

The Singapore Democratic Party has experienced near-blackout of its operations⁷⁸ for many years, except where involved in illegal action. The Party's Secretary-General, Dr Chee Soon Juan, and other members of the party have been arrested and charged multiple times for illegal activism since the 1990s. The media reported factually the purpose of the event and any government action that took place,⁷⁹ but has also inserted into reports on non-controversial events the outcome of past actions by Chee, such as his bankruptcy or being barred from contesting elections.⁸⁰ Therefore, the media has in the

⁷⁵ W.R. Neuman, *et al.*, *Common Knowledge: News and the Construction of Political Meaning*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1992, p. 60.

⁷⁶ H.J. Gans, *Deciding what's news: a study of CBS evening news, NBC nightly news, Newsweek, and Time*, Northwestern University Press, Evanstone, Ill., 2004, p. 40.

⁷⁷ 'The Mass Media and New Countries'.

⁷⁸ Interview with Dr Chee Soon Juan, Secretary-General of the Singapore Democratic Party, Singapore, October 19, 2010.

⁷⁹ 'Eighteen people, comprising members of the opposition Singapore Democratic Party charged', *Today*, July 12, 2008; and 'SDP's Chee Soon Juan declared bankrupt, cannot stand for elections till 2011', *Channel NewsAsia*, February 10, 2006; and 'SDP pair again contest charges of speaking in public without a permit', *Channel NewsAsia*, November 28, 2007; and K.B. Kor, 'SDP holds illegal protest against rising consumer prices; 12 held', *Straits Times*, March 16, 2008; and 'SDP's Chee Soon Juan stopped from handing out pamphlets urging outdoor rally and march', *Channel NewsAsia*, September 10, 2006; and C. Oon, 'SDP chief fined \$5k and supporter \$2k', *Straits Times*, May 31, 2008; and T. Wong, 'Former ISA detainees address SDP forum', *Straits Times*, October 9, 2011; and 'Police investigating SDP forum', *Straits Times*, October 10, 2011.

⁸⁰ 'Rebranding the SDP', *Straits Times*, November 20, 2010; and K.B. Kor, 'SDP Marks its 30th Year', *Straits Times*, February 28, 2010.

past misreported the SDP in ways to reinforce what behaviours will not be tolerated in society.

Former Internal Security Act detainees have similarly been branded as “former detainees” associated with plots to subvert the government, including a so-called “Marxist conspiracy” in 1987. As many of these former detainees are involved in protesting the ISA, it is an opportunity for the media to frame the events within the context of their alleged subversion.⁸¹ Their reputations are perpetually tarnished as troublemakers, regardless of their innocence in 1987 or activities since. One example is Teo Soh Lung, who stood for election in 2011 with the SDP. When her candidacy was announced, the media focused on her detention in 1987 rather than her credibility as a local leader, or her legal career before detention and civil activism after her release.⁸² While this trend of drawing on famous incidents is often replicated in the alternative media online, it is used to elicit sympathy.⁸³

Minimalist or negative coverage also affects civil activism, which marginalises the importance of civil and political activism perse. For example, the *Straits Times* and *Channel NewsAsia* only produced one article covering the socio-political blog *The Online Citizen*'s *Face-to-Face* political forum in December 2010, despite its significance as a political forum in the midst of pre-election hype. The forum lasted for

⁸¹ J. Tan, 'Police probe SDP forum involving exiled ISA detainees', *Yahoo! News, Singapore*, October 9, 2011, <http://sg.news.yahoo.com/police-probe-sdp-forum-involving-exiled-isa-detainees.html>, accessed on: October 10, 2011; and T. Wong, 'Former ISA detainees address SDP forum'; and 'Police investigating SDP forum'; and S.-A. Chia, 'Ex-ISA detainees remember 1987 arrests', *Straits Times*, May 22, 2009; and J. Heng, 'Remembering the Marxist Conspiracy', *Straits Times*, June 3, 2012; and R. Chang, 'Former Detainees Call for ISA's Abolition', *Straits Times*, September 20, 2011.

⁸² T. Wong, 'GE 2011; Former ISA detainee may stand as SDP candidate', *Straits Times*, April 19, 2011.

⁸³ 'Breaking news: Former ISA detainee Teo Soh Lung quits RP', *The Online Citizen*, February 27, 2011, <http://theonlinecitizen.com/2011/02/breaking-news-former-isa-detainee-teo-soh-lung-quits-rp/>, accessed on: February 28, 2011; and theonlinecitizen, 'Yuhua SMC, it's PAP's Grace Fu vs SDP's Teo Soh Lung, Former ISA Detainee', *Facebook*, <http://www.facebook.com/theonlinecitizen/posts/10150229131341383>, accessed on: April 27, 2011; and S. Palay, 'Two Ex-ISA Detainees join SDP', *Seelan Palay's Blog*, February 20, 2011, <http://seelanpalay.blogspot.com/2011/02/two-ex-isa-detainees-join-sdp.html>, accessed on: February 21, 2011.

several hours and gathered representatives from six opposition parties to directly answer questions from members of the 350-strong audience.⁸⁴

The media selected only sound-bites of the comments made by the representatives rather than contributing significantly to pre-election analysis of each party's stance. Overall, the coverage was favourable but did highlight that the majority of the audience were opposition supporters or bloggers, and that TOC was unable to gain the PAP's participation.⁸⁵ This was in contrast to the coverage of forum organised by the National University of Singapore the previous month which the PAP attended.⁸⁶ Journalist Kor Kian Beng's editorial about the TOC event noted the rise in dissatisfaction with the Government, but concluded that it was the opposition who would need to capitalise on this dissent to win in the next election, not that the PAP should address dissatisfaction to retain power.⁸⁷

The Online Citizen's Presidential *Face-to-Face* forum in August 2011 was also minimally reported in the mainstream media, despite being a two-day panel in the midst of the Presidential election campaign.⁸⁸ The second *Face-to-Face* event was more professionally organised and featured former Nominated MP Viswa Sadasivan as the moderator. Even though TOC was registered as a political association in January 2011 and its media and political credibility was thus improved,⁸⁹ this did not earn its forum more media coverage from the *Straits Times*. Similarly, MediaCorp's televised Presidential forum was given minimal coverage by the newspaper.⁹⁰ *The Straits Times'* reluctance to cover these two forums is understandable because it would acknowledge

⁸⁴ Khairulanwar Zaini, 'Face-to-Face: An awkward family reunion', *The Online Citizen*, December 17, 2010, <http://theonlinecitizen.com/2010/12/face-to-face-report-an-awkward-family-reunion/>, accessed on: December 17, 2010.

⁸⁵ 'Oppositions' Views Aired at Forum', *Channel NewsAsia*, December 17, 2010; and K.B. Kor, 'Opposition Has No Excuse Not To Do Better at GE', *Straits Times*, December 27, 2010.

⁸⁶ J. Au and K.B. Kor, 'Opposition Figures Air Key Issues at Dialogue', *Straits Times*, December 17, 2010.

⁸⁷ K.B. Kor, 'Opposition Has No Excuse Not To Do Better at GE'.

⁸⁸ T. Wong, 'Participants Grill Candidates on Role of President', *Straits Times*, August 20, 2011; and 'Tan vs. Tan on ISA', *The New Paper*, August 20, 2011; and 'PE: Candidates Air Views on Forum', *Channel NewsAsia*, August 19, 2011; and X. Li, 'Presidential Election; Candidates Make Their Pitch on TV', *Straits Times*, August 19, 2011; and T. Wong, 'Heated Words Over ISA at Presidential Forum', *Straits Times*, August 20, 2011.

⁸⁹ O. Ho, 'Is *The Online Citizen* Riding into a Cowboy Town?', *The New Paper*, August 16, 2011.

⁹⁰ B. Sim, 'Sizing Up the Four Tans/ "He Shows Sincerity"', *The New Paper*, August 24, 2011; and E. Toh, 'Candidates Split on Protecting Reserves', *Straits Times*, August 24, 2011.

the capabilities of their competitors. Instead, it heavily promoted its own roundtable forum, and analysed the results of that discussion.⁹¹

The marginal coverage of a competitor is understandable in line with the media's self-government. However, the minimal coverage of the annual *Pink Dot* event held in Speakers' Corner in Hong Lim Park has demonstrated the media's attempt to marginalise an independent and implicitly controversial activist event.

Pink Dot celebrates the universal right to love regardless of sexual orientation, specifically for LGBT peoples.⁹² This makes it somewhat controversial because Penal Code Section 377a criminalises homosexual acts between men.⁹³ Although the Government's official position is that it does not actively enforce the Section,⁹⁴ it recognises that there are some conservative elements of society that would be uncomfortable if the law was repealed,⁹⁵ and this could affect the PAP electorally. To report in depth the popularity of *Pink Dot* would therefore undermine the moral decision by the Government to retain the legislation for the sake of the conservatives in society.

Considering *Pink Dot* as being newsworthy only within the scope of public interest is a basis for justifying the minimalist coverage it is given, but its steadily increasing attendance over the years makes the minimalist level of coverage seem out of sync with the interests of the public. Clearly, there is disparity between the social significance of the *Pink Dot* event and its media coverage, especially vis-à-vis government constructed events to unite Singaporeans such as National Day. As one attendee commented, "I feel more Singaporean now than on National Day!"⁹⁶ This statement demonstrates the

⁹¹ 'Dr Tan vs. Dr Tan on Leadership and the Economy', *Straits Times*, August 17, 2011; and R. Chang, 'All Four Tans set to Contest Election', *Straits Times*, August 17, 2011; and 'If I Become President...', *Straits Times*, August 18, 2011; and E. Toh, 'Spirited Exchange Between Tan Cheng Bock and Tony Tan', *Straits Times*, August 17, 2011; and M.H. Chua, 'Commentary; Why the President is Not a Super-MP', *Straits Times*, August 17, 2011; and 'Candidates Answer Question from Reader', *Straits Times*, August 17, 2011; and 'On the Roles of the President and the Parliament', *Straits Times*, August 17, 2011.

⁹² 'About *Pink Dot* SG', *Pink Dot*, Singapore, <http://pinkdot.sg/about-pink-dot/>, accessed on: July 29, 2013.

⁹³ *Penal Code (Chapter 224)*, Singapore Attorney General's Chambers.

⁹⁴ Y.C.L. Lee, "'Don't Ever Take A Fence Down Until You Know The Reason It Was Put Up' – Singaporean Communitarianism And The Case For Conserving 377a", *Singapore Journal of Legal Studies*, 2008, p. 348.

⁹⁵ Y.C.L. Lee, "'Dont Ever Take Down a Fence [...]", p. 392.

⁹⁶ 'A Big Thank You To Our Supporters!', *Pink Dot*, Singapore, July 2, 2012, <http://pinkdot.sg/a-big-thank-you-to-our-supporters/>, accessed on: July 10, 2012.

emotional power of an organically developed movement rather than a highly orchestrated and somewhat artificial show of nationalism.

Pink Dot has been phenomenally successful each year it has operated since 2009. The main event is the gathering of participants to form a human “dot” as seen from nearby high rise buildings and aerial mounted cameras. In 2009, 2,500 people attended the first *Pink Dot*,⁹⁷ although the *Straits Times* reported only 1,000 attendees.⁹⁸ In 2010, 4,000 people joined the event,⁹⁹ and in 2011 over 10,000 people attended.¹⁰⁰ In 2012, 15,000 people attended the first evening *Pink Dot*, where participants used pink torches to make the first-ever night-time *Pink Dot*.¹⁰¹ In 2013, *Pink Dot* exceeded 21,000 attendees.¹⁰²

Each year, *Pink Dot* has only attracted minimal media attention, usually a few lines of text to report the number of attendees. It was only in 2013 when *Pink Dot* attracted greater attention from the *Straits Times*, which published two articles that questioned if *Pink Dot* was representative of a uniquely Singaporean way of protesting social issues important to the young.¹⁰³ The influence of participation in a positive and increasingly attended grassroots event spurs greater participation in the future. Chapter six considers the future of *Pink Dot* vis-à-vis Parliamentary civil activists.

The strength of the media’s pro-government bias means that it has become the responsibility of civil activists, opposition parties and individuals to avoid behaviour that would generate negative media coverage. Any hint of a scandal is seized upon by the mainstream media and undermines the credibility of extra-government sources. For

⁹⁷ 'Singapore's gay community holds first-ever rally', *Associate Press*, May 16, 2009; and S. Leyl, 'Singapore Gays in First Public Rally', *BBC News*, May 17, 2009.

⁹⁸ Nur Dianah Suhaimi, '1,000 Turn Up in Pink at Event', *Straits Times*, May 17, 2009.

⁹⁹ 'Second *Pink Dot* event is in the pink', *Straits Times*, May 16, 2010.

¹⁰⁰ '*Pink Dot* event draws 10,000', *Straits Times*, June 19, 2011; and 'In the Pink', *Straits Times*, June 19, 2011; and C. Toh, 'To love and be loved Alan Seah, *Pink Dot* ; 'Freedom to love' and 'free love' are not the same things', *Today*, August 9, 2011.

¹⁰¹ 'A Big Thank You To Our Supporters!'; and 'More than 15,000 Singaporeans at *Pink Dot* 2012!', *Pink Dot, Singapore*, June 30, 2012, <http://pinkdot.sg/more-than-15000-singaporeans-at-pink-dot-2012/>, accessed on: July 10, 2012; and 'Singapore Shines at *Pink Dot* 2012', *Pink Dot, Singapore*, July 1, 2012, <http://pinkdot.sg/singapore-shines-at-pink-dot-2012/>, accessed on: July 10, 2012.

¹⁰² 'More than 20,000 Turn Up at Speakers' Corner in Support of Gay Rights', *Straits Times*, June 29, 2013; and 'Growing Support for the Freedom to Love', *Pink Dot, Singapore*, May 23, 2013, <http://pinkdot.sg/growing-support-for-the-freedom-to-love/>, accessed on: July 29, 2013.

¹⁰³ T. Wong, 'Politics 360; A S'pore way of fighting for gay rights?', *Straits Times*, July 20, 2013; and E. Toh, 'Politics 360; The rise and rise of social issues', *Straits Times*, April 6, 2013.

opposition parties that do not have the advantage of an incumbent elected MP, the media is a crucial factor for their electoral success. The Singapore Democratic Party was particularly vulnerable because it chose to use its own channels online rather than engage with the mainstream media. This was the response to past negative reporting by the mainstream media,¹⁰⁴ but meant that the media coverage of the party was disproportionately negative and went un rebutted in the same medium. Chapter Eight considers the ramifications of the use of the internet by the opposition parties, including the SDP's overreliance on the internet in lieu of offline outreach.

The mainstream media also reports trending scandals that may have emerged online. This ultimately has the effect of stigmatising or undermining the subject's credibility. In February 2012, the alternative media and mainstream media harassed Workers' Party Parliamentarian Yaw Shin Leong after allegations of extra-marital affairs. Online revelations were circulated that he had several affairs and online harassment included posting on his Facebook page and blog, sending emails, and speculating about his indiscretion on forums.¹⁰⁵ Mainstream media journalists took the harassment to the next level and waited outside of his home and at constituency Meet the People Sessions.¹⁰⁶

The Workers' Party expelled Yaw from the Party when he refused to attend a party meeting on the incident. Since parliamentary membership requires than an MP maintain membership with the party that endorsed the candidature, he was expelled from Parliament.¹⁰⁷ The People's Action Party took the opportunity to denigrate the WP in Parliament, which was also reported by the media.¹⁰⁸ So-called objective reporting reduced the *Straits Times* to partisan tabloidism.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Dr Chee Soon Juan.

¹⁰⁵ 'Core Member of Opposition Party Alleged to be Having an Extramarital Affair', *TR Emeritus*, January 20, 2012, <http://www.tremeritus.com/2012/01/20/exclusive-core-member-of-reputable-opposition-party-alleged-to-be-having-an-extramarital-affair/>, accessed on: February 18, 2012; and Ng E-Jay, 'Mainstream and Alternative Media: Stop the Yaw Shin Leong Witch Hunt', *sgpolitics.net*, January 29, 2012, <http://www.sgpolitics.net/?p=7301>, accessed on: March 12, 2012; and M. Singh, 'Netizens ask Hougang MP: Did you have affair with married woman?', *The New Paper*, January 28, 2012.

¹⁰⁶ 'Women Linked to Yaw', *The New Paper*, February 16, 2012; and M. Singh, 'Mr Yaw Shin Leong: "No Comment"', *The New Paper*, January 26, 2012.

¹⁰⁷ A. Ong, 'Workers' Party expels Yaw', *Straits Times*, February 16, 2012.

¹⁰⁸ K.B. Kor, 'Can Workers' Party Ride Out the Yaw scandal?', *Straits Times*, February 19, 2012.

The PAP took note from the messy expulsion of Yaw from the Workers' Party and managed better the resignation of their MP Michael Palmer for a similar indiscretion. The media reports about the resignation of PAP MP and Speaker of the House Michael Palmer occurred only after he had resigned his seat in December 2012. Palmer held a press conference to announce his resignation from Parliament and the PAP, only days after his affair was revealed to Party leadership. The media focused on the ramifications of Palmer's shock departure and praised the swift action of the PAP, rather than on his actual indiscretion with a member of the People's Association.¹⁰⁹ Unlike Yaw Shin Leong and the Workers' Party's silence on the matter, which caused a media frenzy to find information, Palmer's statements meant that the issue was dealt with quickly. It was only online that netizens attempted to find more scandalous material.¹¹⁰ In this incident, the PAP proved more adept at handling the media in a scandal, and the situation as a whole.

Case Study of an Official Platform: The Media and the Population White Paper

The February 2013 Population White Paper debate in Parliament provided a prime example of the role of the media at work, including prioritising coverage of the Government's position. In January 2013, the National Population and Talent Division (NPTD) of the Prime Minister's Office released the White Paper *A Sustainable Population for a Dynamic Singapore*, which addressed the future problem of an aging population from the year 2020.¹¹¹ The report stated that the Total Fertility Rate (TFR), which measures the number of children born in Singapore, was insufficient to replace

¹⁰⁹ 'Speaker of Parliament Michael Palmer Resigns Over "Grave Mistake"', *Channel NewsAsia*, December 12, 2012; and 'MPs Surprised by Michael Palmer's Resignation', *Channel NewsAsia*, December 13, 2012; and 'Grassroots Leaders "Shocked", "Saddened" by Michael Palmer's Resignation', *Channel NewsAsia*, December 13, 2012; and 'Michael Palmer; Fall of a Rising Political Star', *Straits Times*, December 15, 2012.

¹¹⁰ 'The Year of Sex Scandals: Michael Palmer; Rising Political Star's Ascent Cut Short', *Straits Times*, December 24, 2012.

¹¹¹ *A Sustainable Population for a Dynamic Singapore: Population White Paper*, National Population and Talent Division, 2013, <http://202.157.171.46/whitepaper/downloads/population-white-paper.pdf>. 1.

the shrinking and aging population. Thus, the Government would need to increase immigration levels to introduce 15,000 to 25,000 new citizens each year.¹¹²

The Executive Summary stated that by 2030, the total population of Singapore would be between 6.5 and 6.9 million people, of which between 3.6 and 3.9 million (55%) would be citizens.¹¹³ On January 30, the *Straits Times* released the initial details from the White Paper, including the projected 6.9 million population figure and the projected annual increase of 15,000 new citizens.¹¹⁴ Half of the 87 members of Parliament registered their interest to speak on the White Paper in the Parliament debate from February 4th to 8th.¹¹⁵

Because the media prioritised the incumbents' views, PAP MPs and the Prime Minister were able to leverage media coverage to influence the national discussion about Singapore's future population. The issue was never really debated in society because the final decision was made in Parliament. The White Paper was voted upon (as a motion), and although the opposition MPs, Non-Constituency MPs and several Nominated MPs voted against it, the White Paper was accepted in the Government's favour.¹¹⁶ This was due to the dominant number of PAP MPs and the Party Whip, which requires all MPs to vote along the party line to support the proposal.¹¹⁷

The media's role in the debate was not only to report the decision-making process in Parliament, but also to serve as a social pressure valve to provide a platform for citizens, politicians and businesses to register their opinions and dissent. The *Straits Times Forum* pages served as a platform for citizens and business people to register their opinions

¹¹² *A Sustainable Population for a Dynamic Singapore: Population White Paper, National Population and Talent Division*, p. 4.

¹¹³ *A Sustainable Population for a Dynamic Singapore: Population White Paper, National Population and Talent Division*, p. 7.

¹¹⁴ C.L. Goh, 'Goal: 15,000-25,000 New Citizens a Year', *Straits Times*, January 30, 2013; and R. Chang, 'Population Could Hit 6.9m by 2030', *Straits Times*, January 30, 2013.

¹¹⁵ C.L. Goh and A. Ong, 'At Least 42 MPs to Speak on Population', *Straits Times*, February 2, 2013; and 'Halimah Yacob Looks Forward to Parliamentary Debate on White Paper', *Channel NewsAsia*, February 2, 2013.

¹¹⁶ 'Parliament Endorses Population White Paper', *Channel NewsAsia*, February 8, 2013.

¹¹⁷ 'Party Whip', *Parliament of Singapore*, July 13, 2013, <http://www.parliament.gov.sg/leader-house>, accessed on: July 23, 2013.

about the White Paper's proposals. Thirty four letters were published in the *Straits Times Forum* about the White Paper between January 29th and February 13th.

In these letters, citizens and businesses reacted to the initial projections of the increased population, and argued that it would dilute Singaporean culture.¹¹⁸ Others raised concerns that curbs on foreign labour would adversely affect business profitability.¹¹⁹ Some questioned the social values that have developed to result in Singaporeans shunning low-skilled labour and thus requiring foreign labour,¹²⁰ and others called upon the Government to directly address the concerns of citizens.¹²¹ When the Workers' Party proposed to freeze immigration levels in favour of bolstering the domestic workforce,¹²² this drew a strong response in Parliament and in the *Forum* pages.¹²³

The journalistic norm of he said/she said reporting was a standard during the coverage of the White Paper debate, as was favouring expert sources over others. One example was an article that discussed the non-elected opposition parties' response to the White Paper. As mentioned, journalists believe that non-elected opposition must produce profound statements to be reported in the media, and the party's credibility influences that bias.

In this particular article, journalist Andrea Ong favoured the National Solidarity Party (NSP), which had rivalled the Workers' Party in the 2011 election. Over half of the article was dedicated to the NSP position on the White Paper, such as its suggestion of a referendum and proposal that the Government work harder to improve the TFR. In the remainder of the article, Ong quoted statements made by the Singapore Democratic Party, Reform Party (RP) and newly revived Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). Each

¹¹⁸ P.P.H. Chan, 'What About Our Singaporean Identity?', *Straits Times Forum*, February 9, 2013; and H.C. Tan, 'Hollowing Out of S'pore a Serious Concern', *Straits Times Forum*, February 9, 2013.

¹¹⁹ Hariharan Gangadharan, 'Adopt Nuanced Approach to Foreign Labour', *Straits Times Forum*, February 8, 2013; and G.T. Goh, 'The Four Groups of Foreigners', *Straits Times Forum*, February 8, 2013; and B.S.M. Chong, 'Revise Foreign Labour Policy to Help S'poreans', *Straits Times Forum*, February 8, 2013.

¹²⁰ P.L. Low, 'Look Beyond Population Increase to Sustain Economic Growth', *Straits Times Forum*, February 9, 2013.

¹²¹ C.T. Yeo, 'Vital to Ease Singaporean's Concerns', *Straits Times Forum*, February 8, 2013; and B.H. Melwani, 'Don't Rock the Boat', *Straits Times Forum*, February 8, 2013.

¹²² R. Chang, 'WP Rejects Road Map, Offers its Own', *Straits Times*, February 5, 2013.

¹²³ I. Mahtani, 'We Cannot do Without Foreign Labour', *Straits Times Forum*, February 9, 2013.

of the three parties' positions were summarised in two or three sentences, by contrast to 12 sentences about the NSP.¹²⁴

The media presented without rebuttal the views of institutions or organisations such as the Restaurants Association of Singapore, Singapore Business Federation, and Singapore International Chamber of Commerce.¹²⁵ In articles that presented counter-arguments to the Government or the White Paper, the Government's position was given in the final lines of the article. This left the reader with the final impression that the Government had an adequate response to its critics, reinforcing confidence.

One article reported the five major concerns of union leaders to the White Paper's proposals, and concluded the article with assurances from National Trade Union Congress Secretary General Lim Swee Say that the Government would engage with the labour movement on the issues raised, and urged unionists to consider the long-term implications of government inaction.¹²⁶

The *Straits Times Forum* serves as an important pressure valve for public opinion and discontent, but decision-making process is confined to Parliament and so the media coverage of Parliament is primary. The reporting of Parliamentary sessions in great detail can see the media become the platform for the Government to shape extra-Parliamentary debate. For example, Deputy Prime Minister Teo Chee Hean stated that the White Paper's proposals were necessary to guarantee sustainable growth in the Singapore population and economy in the future, and thus reinforced the importance of delicately managing the influx of foreign workers in Singapore.¹²⁷ National Development Minister Khaw Boon Wan also stressed the White Paper would be used as

¹²⁴ A. Ong, 'Opposition Parties Take Aim at White Paper', *Straits Times*, February 2, 2013.

¹²⁵ H. Musfirah, 'RAS Urges Government to Review Curbs on Foreign Workers', *Channel NewsAsia*, February 12, 2013; and F. Chan and R. Chan, 'SICC Against Curbing Flows of Workers', *Straits Times*, February 7, 2013; and C.Y. Min, 'Any Further Manpower Curbs "Will Hit Businesses Badly"', *Straits Times*, February 1, 2013.

¹²⁶ Y.C. Toh, 'Unions Weigh in on White Paper', *Straits Times*, February 3, 2013.

¹²⁷ C.L. Goh, 'Gov't "Not Pursuing Growth at all Cost"', *Straits Times*, February 5, 2013; and 'Keeping S'pore the Best Home for Singaporeans', *Straits Times*, February 5, 2013; and L. Lim, 'Most Foreigners will be Supporting Citizens, says DPM', *Straits Times*, February 5, 2013; and R. Chan, 'White Paper "is for S'poreans Benefit"', *Straits Times*, February 5, 2013.

a framework for future development of housing and infrastructure, and cautioned against under-preparedness if the population did reach the projected 6.9 million.¹²⁸

Goh Chok Tong spoke on the survival of Singapore and the need to think pragmatically about Singapore's future. Goh's speech was directed to the public rather than the Parliament, and reminded citizens of Singapore's economic vulnerability compared to regional neighbours. He endorsed the White Paper and concluded that Singapore needed to remain a vibrant city-state to attract international investment and Multi-National Corporations (MNCs) to create jobs for Singaporeans, and to influence the region economically.¹²⁹

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong spoke on the last day of the Parliamentary debate which brought it to an end in Parliament and the media public sphere. Lee's statements reassured the public the Government works in the best interest of Singapore and Singaporeans, and implied the PAP Government will continue several decades into the future, so the White Paper could take a long-term view.¹³⁰ In his speech, Lee echoed other PAP MP's criticism of the Workers' Party and the implication that the only elected opposition party was anti-immigration.¹³¹ On this point, the media had framed articles to undermine the credibility of the Workers' Party, while superficially remaining objective by using quotes and elite perspectives rather than editorials.¹³² In one article, Opinion Editor Chua Mui Hoong also reminded readers that in the past, Workers' Party proposals had been struck down by the Government because the party could not substantiate its claims.¹³³

¹²⁸ R. Chang, 'Major Shift in Planning Strategy: Khaw', *Straits Times*, February 7, 2013; and D. Chin and R. Chang, 'S'pore of the Future Won't be a Concrete Jungle: Khaw', *Straits Times*, February 7, 2013; and R. Chang, '6.9m Figure an Aggressive Projection: Khaw', *Straits Times*, February 1, 2013.

¹²⁹ 'The Future of the Singapore Story', *Straits Times*, February 7, 2013; and H. Musfirah, 'White Paper is Govt's Plan to Forestall Impending Crisis: ESM Goh', *Channel NewsAsia*, February 6, 2013.

¹³⁰ Saiful Bahri Ismail, 'Govt to Examine its Experience in Population White Paper', *Channel NewsAsia*, February 10, 2013.

¹³¹ 'MPs Take Issue with WP's proposal', *Channel NewsAsia*, February 7, 2013; and L. Lim, 'Iswaran: WP Plan Could Send Economy into Tailspin', *Straits Times*, February 8, 2013; and R. Chang, 'Lively Debate on Benefits and Dangers of WP plan', *Straits Times*, February 6, 2013; and R. Chang, 'At Odds over Local Workforce Expansion', *Straits Times*, February 8, 2013; and *Singapore Parliamentary Reports (Hansard)*, Twelfth Parliament, February 5, 2013.

¹³² 'Amy Khor says WP's Proposals Will Affect Singaporeans', *Channel NewsAsia*, February 5, 2013; and I. Saad, 'Population White Paper for Benefit of All Singaporeans: DPM Teo', *Channel NewsAsia*, February 4, 2013.

¹³³ M.H. Chua, 'Expect This Debate to be Different', *Straits Times*, February 8, 2013.

The newspaper also ran several editorials in favour of the White Paper proposals and support for the Government. Editorials allow journalists and editors to express partisan views, sometimes anonymously.¹³⁴ The *Straits Times* editorials particularly reminded readers of the historical bond between the PAP Government and the people, and urged that citizens “must put their trust in the Government, that it understands the issues and that its solutions are in the best interest of Singapore.”¹³⁵ In the PAP’s terms then, the media coverage of the Parliamentary debate on the White Paper fulfilled the requirements of the media’s role as a nation-building partner. The media served as a platform for the Government by extensively quoting the PAP MPs and Cabinet Ministers, and undermining the credibility of the elected opposition’s counter-proposal. Any credible counter-proposal by the Workers’ Party would naturally be debated in the Parliament vociferously, but the media framed its coverage of the counter-proposal within the criticism of the PAP, so the Workers’ Party was denigrated as anti-immigration or dangerous for the economy.

Conclusion

In summary, the expectation that the media support the Government has been adopted by journalists and editors with the result that the media’s reporting punishes or undermines the credibility of opposition parties or civil activists, and thus marginalises their political impact. Within the media microcosm, the local authority that initiated this process was the Executive Chairman S.R. Nathan and his objectives to reconcile journalistic norms to government expectations were carried on by *Straits Times* Editor-in-Chief Cheong Yip Seng.

The main implication of selective reporting is the impact that it has on civil activism and political parties. Prioritisation of incumbent and expert views places responsibility upon

¹³⁴ F.K. Han, 'Govt Needs to Regain People’s Trust', *Straits Times*, February 10, 2013; and J. Cheam, 'Give Planners a Chance to Deliver', *Straits Times*, February 2, 2013; and T.K. Lui, 'Our home; Think Big, Plan Long-Term', *Straits Times*, February 13, 2013; and 'Why Population Matters', *Straits Times*, January 31, 2013; and J. Heng, 'MPs Praise Bold Move to Hold Open Debate on Issue', *Straits Times*, February 7, 2013.

¹³⁵ F.K. Han, 'Govt Needs to Regain People’s Trust'.

civil activists and political opposition to shape their behaviour to be perceived as credible by the media if they wish to be reported favourably.

The subsequent chapters of the thesis reiterate the importance of the media to shape public perceptions about civil activists and opposition parties, which affect their ability to bring about political change. For the opposition parties especially, the media's reporting before and during elections can seriously affect their electoral success, which ultimately affects the composition of Parliament. Therefore, the media's norms for reporting non-government sources in Singapore is just as important consideration as the legislation on civil activism, election campaigning or government sovereign punishment. The next chapter discusses the socio-political blogosphere, which is a platform between the mainstream domestic and international mediums. The control of the online media imitates the sovereign action used against the domestic and international press, and also has seen attempts at discipline such as was discussed in this chapter.

Chapter Four:

Disciplining the Online Socio-Political Blogosphere

The previous chapters discussed the governmentality of media using punishment, indoctrinating hegemony and specific disciplinary rules in the mainstream media. Citizens who take to the internet to create an alternative media almost necessarily mount a counter-hegemonic challenge to the dominance of the Government and thus test the political status quo. The rapid pace of change online has put added pressure on the Government's perpetual revision of governmentality: to incorporate what online freedoms the people want and maintain control.

The governmentality of the internet has gone through many versions. This chapter focuses specifically on recent measures to conduct the influence of the socio-political blogosphere. Unlike the domestic mainstream media however, the Government may not be able to use a *laissez-aller* approach as the processes of self-regulation are not strongly established.

In January 2011, the Singapore Government initiated a new stage in internet control when Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong directed the socio-political blog *The Online Citizen* to register as a political association and a political website.¹ It was the first time a blog was required to register under the Societies Act as a political association, and the second time since 2001, a site was required to register as a political website.² Under the Broadcasting (Class Licence) Notification of 1996, websites that specifically deal with

¹ 'BREAKING NEWS: PM wants TOC gazetted as Political Association', *The Online Citizen*, <http://theonlinecitizen.com/2011/01/breaking-news-pm-wants-toc-gazetted-as-political-association/>, accessed on: January 11, 2011; and T. Fong, 'The Online Citizen portal to be gazetted as political association', *Channel News Asia*, January 11, 2011.

² T. Lee, 'Internet Control and Auto-regulation in Singapore', *Surveillance & Society*, v. 3 (1), 2005, pp. 79-82; and T. Lee, 'Going Online: journalism and civil society in Singapore', *Journalism and Democracy in Asia*, A. Romano and M. Bromley (eds.), Routledge, London & New York, 2005, p. 21; and 'The Online Citizen to be listed as political association', *Straits Times*, January 11, 2011.

politics or religion are required to register their sites with the broadcasting authority within 14 days of operation.³

The Government has realised that the next-generation of bloggers, who established themselves after 2006 (and more recently, former journalists) are actively testing the boundaries of government tolerance. The Government has sought to adapt successful methods of control from civil society, the domestic and international media. The governmentality of the internet has used sovereign action, attempts to induce discipline, and economic self-regulation.

The long-term ramification of *The Online Citizen's* registration is not found in the actions of the Government, but in the reaction of the bloggers. The decision by TOC's operators to accept registration demonstrated that a paradigm shift had taken place in response to government sovereign action. Unlike *Sintercom* or *AcidFlask*, discussed in Chapter One, TOC did not shut down its operations after it was required to register, even though the Societies Act is far stricter than the Broadcasting Class Licence.

The Online Citizen challenged the Government's punitive authoritarianism by heeding the punishment. The trade-off for the Government's ability to hold TOC to the letter of the law is that TOC has recourse if the Government acts against it beyond the regulations of the Political Donations Act or the Class Licence. The paradigm shift towards working within the framework of government regulation has also taken place in civil activism, which is discussed in the next chapter. The reaction to government action by the TOC bloggers and others is a factor to consider in future modifications of governmentality.

³ I. Banerjee and B. Yeo, 'Internet and Democracy in Singapore: A Critical Appraisal', *Rhetoric and Reality: The Internet Challenge for Democracy in Asia*, I. Banerjee (ed.) Eastern Universities Press, Singapore, 2003, pp. 269-270; and J. Gomez, *Internet Politics: Surveillance & Intimidation in Singapore*, Think Centre, Singapore, 2002, p. 35; and G. Rodan, 'Embracing electronic media but suppressing civil society: authoritarian consolidation in Singapore', *The Pacific Review*, v. 16 (4), 2003, p. 511; and J. Gomez, 'Online Opposition in Singapore: Communications Outreach Without Electoral Gain', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, v. 38 (4), 2008, p. 596; and G. Rodan, 'The Internet and Political Control in Singapore', *Political Science Quarterly*, v. 113 (1), 1998, p. 81; and *Broadcasting (Class Licence) Notification*, Singapore Attorney General's Chambers, 1996.

Recent registrations as political websites include *The Independent*, established by former TOC contributor Kumaran Pillai, former journalist and Editor P.N. Balji, lawyer Alfred Dodwell, research company CEO Leon Perera, and former *Straits Times* journalist and designer Edmund Wee.⁴ The site was launched on August 9 2013, in time for the National Day Rally and Prime Minister's speech.⁵ *The Independent* aimed to be the middle ground between the mainstream media and socio-political bloggers with no formal journalistic experience.⁶

The Media Development Authority required registration because *The Independent* indicated it sought to gain revenue from advertising and subscriptions. Registration under the recently revised Class Licence prohibits foreign funding and the purported risk of foreign influence on a political website.⁷ Former Nominated MP Siew Kum Hong questioned why *The Independent* was denied foreign investment, but *Yahoo! News* was permitted to operate in Singapore.⁸

Accepting the conditions of registration to continue operations, *The Independent* was registered in December 2013. In November 2013, the MDA contacted *The Breakfast Network*, an independent site established by former *Straits Times* Associate Editor Bertha Henson. Henson established the company Breakfast Network Private Limited (BNPL) to fund *The Breakfast Network* website.⁹ The Media Development Authority advised Henson that registration of *The Breakfast Network* would be required to prevent foreign interests influencing the site through the backer company BNPL.¹⁰

⁴ 'About Us: Editorial Team', *The Independent*, <http://theindependent.sg/about-us/>, accessed on: August 5, 2013.

⁵ T. Wong, 'MDA tells website to register, not accept foreign funding', *Straits Times*, July 29, 2013.

⁶ 'Our Philosophy', *The Independent*, <http://theindependent.sg/our-philosophy/>, accessed on: August 5, 2013.

⁷ 'Registration of new website to guard against foreign influence on Singapore politics', *Media Development Authority, Singapore*, July 29, 2013,

<http://www.mda.gov.sg/NewsAndEvents/PressRelease/2013/Pages/29072013.aspx>, accessed on: August 5, 2013; and 'MCI's response to PQ on registration of websites', *Ministry of Communications and Information, Singapore*, January 20, 2014, http://www.mci.gov.sg/content/mci_corp/web/mci/pressroom/categories/parliament_qanda/mci-s-response-to-pq-on-registration-of-websites.html, accessed on: April 14, 2014.

⁸ T. Wong, 'MDA rules: What's the big picture?', *Straits Times*, August 1, 2013.

⁹ Breakfast Network, 'Back for Breakfast', *Facebook*, December 16, 2013, <http://www.facebook.com/notes/breakfast-network/back-for-breakfast/439172016184194>, accessed on: April 11, 2014.

¹⁰ Y.C. Tham, 'Second website told by MDA to register', *Straits Times*, November 30, 2013.

In response, Henson initiated a wind-up of BNPL, hoping it would alter the MDA's decision and allow the site to continue on Facebook and Twitter alone. The Authority replied that the issues was not the BNPL backed *The Breakfast Network*, but that registration, including the particulars of the site owners and operators, was needed to guarantee against foreign ownership.¹¹ The Authority issued a warning that if registration was refused and BNPL continued, *The Breakfast Network* could not publish content on any platform, including social media.¹²

In response to “onerous” conditions for registration and unclear direction or reply from the MDA, Henson shut down the company and *The Breakfast Network* website.¹³ *The Breakfast Network* continued unregistered on Facebook in a tentative stalemate with the MDA. The Authority differentiated between “volunteering contributors” and “pro bono editorial team members,” which was Henson's terminology, and required the details of only staff classed as “editors”.¹⁴ By classifying all contributors as voluntary, the Facebook and Twitter pages were allowed to continue.¹⁵ Additionally, the Facebook account reposts contents from Henson's personal blog, which means it is not generating unique content, but serving as an aggregator.

On April 4 2014, the news site *MotherShip.sg* agreed to register with the MDA. Like *The Breakfast Network* and *The Independent*, registration was justified to prevent foreign funding and influence over site content.¹⁶ *MotherShip.sg* is backed by Project Fisher-

¹¹ C. Yong, ‘MDA seeks clarification from Breakfast Network founder’, *Straits Times*, December 19, 2013.

¹² P. Mong, ‘Facing New Licensing Rules, Leading Political News Site Closes in Singapore’, *Global Voices Online*, December 23, 2013, <http://advocacy.globalvoicesonline.org/2013/12/23/facing-new-licensing-rules-leading-political-website-closes-in-singapore/>, accessed on: April 14, 2104.

¹³ B. Henson, ‘Wishfully Thinking Wishb’, *Bertha Harian*, April 5, 2014, <http://berthahenson.wordpress.com/2014/04/05/wishfully-thinking-wishb>, accessed on: April 14, 2014.

¹⁴ ‘Online Licensing Framework: Was the Breakfast Network banned by the MDA?’, *Gov.sg*, December 16, 2013,

http://www.gov.sg/government/web/content/govsg/classic/factually/factually_20131216_wasthebreakfastnetworkbannedbymda, accessed on: April 14, 2014; and Breakfast Network, ‘Back for Breakfast’.

¹⁵ Breakfast Network, ‘Can The Community Continue To Serve Breakfast?’, *Facebook*, December 17, 2013, <http://www.facebook.com/breakfast-network/can-the-community-continue-to-serve-breakfast/439488136152582>, accessed on: April 14, 2014.

¹⁶ Narul Azliah Aripin, ‘Singapore News Website Mothership.sg agrees to register under Broadcasting Act’, *Yahoo! Newsroom*, April 4, 2014, <https://sg.news.yahoo.com/mda-asks-singapore-news-website-mothership-sg-to-register-for-a-licence-104026615.html>, accessed on: April 14, 2014.

Man Pte Ltd, chaired by former high ranking civil servant Philip Yeo.¹⁷ Yeo is listed as part of *Mothership.sg*'s core team.¹⁸

The decision to comply with the registration was based on comparison with reactions from *The Independent* and *The Breakfast Network* to registration: "If we comply and register, we will go the way of The Independent Singapore, who are still around, writing and publishing. If we don't comply, we will go the way of Breakfast Network, which is now defunct."¹⁹ Thus, the reaction by peers can influence the decision to comply or resist Government action.

Governmentality to Control the Blogosphere: From Then till Now

The socio-political blogosphere has the potential to serve as a substitute Fourth Estate because websites are autonomous media entities. These sites fill a media niche denied to the domestic and international mainstream media. Their smaller audience allow bloggers to be far more critical and openly denigrate the Government more than would be tolerated in the mainstream media (domestic or international). However, action has recently been taken against larger and more influential socio-political bloggers that could influence Singaporeans about the state of politics in the city-state.

The Government has shown intolerance for criticism and denigration in the domestic media, which has made the internet the only space for significant dissent. Non-journalist commentators using the domestic press are expected to take responsibility for their opinions and any criticism is expected to be constructive.²⁰ The 1994 Catherine Lim Affair demonstrated the mainstream media should not publish unfounded criticism or denigration of the Government, even by Singaporeans.²¹ In 2007, Lim began exclusively publishing her commentaries online²² and has only recently been published again in the

¹⁷ 'Mothership.sg asked to register under Broadcasting Act', *My Paper*, April 4, 2014.

¹⁸ 'About Us', *Mothership.sg*, <http://mothership.sg/about-us>, accessed on: April 14, 2014.

¹⁹ Narul Azliah Aripin, 'Singapore News Website Mothership.sg agrees to register under Broadcasting Act'.

²⁰ K. Bhavani, 'Distorting the truth, mr brown?', *Today*, June 30, 2006; and M.H. Chua, 'PM: No erosion of my authority allowed', *Straits Times*, December 5, 1994.

²¹ M.H. Chua, 'PM: No erosion of my authority allowed'; and 'PM tells Dr Lim why he responded to commentary', *Straits Times*, December 17, 1994.

²² Email communication with novelist and social commentator Catherine Lim, April 29, 2010.

Straits Times,²³ including revisions to her idea of the “great affective divide” between the Government and the people.²⁴

Blogger Mr Brown was similarly rebuked in 2006 for his satirically titled commentary (‘Singaporeans are fed, up with progress!’) in the *Today* newspaper. In the article, he criticised the rising cost of living in Singapore, which caused the Ministry of Information, Communication and the Arts to reply that it was not appropriate for such criticisms to be made using a moniker and without a constructive suggestion of how the situation could be resolved.²⁵ Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong remarked that he found Mr Brown’s podcasts entertaining, but that his column was not the appropriate platform for such accusations without rebuttal.²⁶ The column was suspended but no further action was taken, and similar criticisms and satire continued to be posted on the Mr Brown blog.

James Gomez argued in 2002 that the internet increased the surveillance capacity of the Singapore Government,²⁷ and that this perpetual surveillance created a state of apprehension in civil activists, opposition politicians and netizens.²⁸ Rajah similarly concluded that surveillance and intimidation had “emasculated” the internet’s effect on political change and creation of “potent players in public discourse”.²⁹ After 2011, the socio-political blogosphere has wielded significant influence on public discourse, which has seen the Government modify its governmentality of the internet.

²³C. Lim, 'Utopia or Dystopia?', *Straits Times*, May 10, 2005; and C. Lim, 'Time to do some crystal-ball gazing', *Straits Times*, January 13, 2004; and C. Lim, 'Conviction versus Consensus Politicians', *Straits Times*, February 12, 2011; and C. Lim, 'Politics taking a step in the right direction', *Straits Times Forum*, August 30, 2011; and C. Lim, 'Surprised by “cooling off” idea', *Straits Times Forum*, January 13, 2010.

²⁴ C. Lim, 'Be mindful of the affective gap', *Straits Times*, April 5, 2007.

²⁵ K. Bhavani, 'Distorting the truth, mr brown?'

²⁶ 'Transcript of PM’s rally speech in English', *Singapore Angle*, August 21, 2006, <http://www.singaporeangle.com/2006/08/transcript-of-pms-rally-speech-in.html>, accessed on: July 23, 2013.

²⁷ J. Gomez, *Internet Politics*, p. 41; and C. George, 'Control-Shift: The Internet and Political Change in Singapore', *Management of Success: Singapore Revisited*, T. Chong (ed.) Institute of South East Asian Studies, Singapore, 2010, p. 267.

²⁸ J. Gomez, *Internet Politics*, pp. 22, 41, 44, 126; and J. Gomez, *Self Censorship: Singapore's Shame*, Think Centre, Singapore, 2000.

²⁹ J. Rajah, *Authoritarian Rule of Law: Legislation, Discourse and Legitimacy in Singapore*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2012, p. 160.

As discussed in Chapter One, Terence Lee argued that the Government has used intimidation to influence internet behaviour. He applied the Panopticon concept to surveillance, and argued this created fear and self-censorship online. Lee used the Panopticon to explain that the automatic licencing of websites as broadcasters would “steer” citizens to exhibit correct behaviour because of their perception of perpetual surveillance.³⁰ Because the internal workings of the Panopticon tower, the Government, are opaque, government action seems unprovoked and so intimidates netizens.³¹ However, the Panopticon has become less useful as an analytical tool because of the paradigm shift in bloggers’ reactions to government punishment.

There are three forms of governmentality that have been applied to the internet: registration as a political website, registration as a political association, and the threat of lawsuits by political elites. Registration is disciplinary to encourage self-regulation by the affected site and its peers. In contrast, lawsuits are punitive uses of sovereignty. Prior to 2010, the Government did not actively enforce control over the internet’s political use by citizens, with the exception of charging some bloggers under the Sedition Act for racist posts.³² The first action in the most recent regime of internet control was the application of the Broadcasting Class Licence on *The Online Citizen*, which was a revival of a past sovereign action against *Sintercom* in 2001.

The Class Licence is disciplinary in the Foucauldian model by listing action that must be adhered or prohibited, and implies all action unspecified may be in breach of the Licence. The Licence holds websites to abide by the *Internet Code of Practice 1997*, which prohibits objectionable content “on the grounds of public interest, public morality, public order, public security, national harmony, or is otherwise prohibited by applicable Singapore laws.”³³ These laws include the Sedition Act, Penal Code, Maintenance of

³⁰ T. Lee, *The Media, Cultural Control and Government in Singapore*, Routledge, London & New York, 2010, p. 113; and T. Lee, 'Internet Control', p. 86; and T. Lee and C. Kan, 'Blogospheric Pressures in Singapore: Internet discourse and the 2006 general election', *Continuum*, v. 23 (6), 2009, p. 881.

³¹ T. Lee, 'Internet Control', pp. 83-84.

³² M. Kane, 'Singapore Bloggers Charged with Sedition', *CNET News*, September 13, 2005, http://news.cnet.com/8301-10784_3-5862538-7.html, accessed on: February 20, 2009; and T. Lee and C. Kan, 'Blogospheric Pressures', p. 877.

³³ *Internet Code of Practice*, Media Development Authority, 1997, http://www.mda.gov.sg/Documents/PDF/licences/mobj.981.Internet_Code_of_Practice.pdf.

Religious Harmony Act, and the Defamation Act.³⁴ Generally, it refers to sexually explicit content, and racial, religious or ethnic intolerance and incitement to violence.³⁵ The registration makes site operators legally liable for any content on the site, including by third parties.³⁶ The Media Development Authority stated the necessity of the registration to “emphasise to Internet Content Providers to be responsible and accountable for what they say online... which is important given that Singapore is a multi-racial, multi-religious society.”³⁷

The lack of government enforcement of this policy between 2001 and 2011 was consistent with the Government’s promises of a “light touch” on the internet,³⁸ which facilitated self-regulation by bloggers and freed up government resources to punish actual legal transgressions. In response to the Class Licence, websites instituted their own moderation policies to reduce the likelihood of punishment for objectionable material.³⁹ This was not only a response to government intimidation but also a common practice online to create amendable spaces to encourage a regular audience.⁴⁰

The increase in application of the Class Licence after 2011, use of lawsuits, and the closure of *The Breakfast Network*, which was described by Mr Brown as licensed to death,⁴¹ led commentators including Cherian George to assert the period of light tough

³⁴ G. Rodan, 'The Internet and Political Control', p. 81.

³⁵ *Internet Code of Practice*; and G. Rodan, 'Embracing Electronic Media', p. 511; and J. Gomez, 'Dumbing down democracy: Trends in internet regulation, surveillance and control in Asia', *Pacific Journalism Review*, v. 10 (2), 2004, pp. 135-136.

³⁶ J. Gomez, 'Online Opposition in Singapore: Communications Outreach Without Electoral Gain', pp. 596-597; and *Broadcasting (Class Licence) Notification*.

³⁷ T. Fong, 'The Online Citizen portal to be gazetted as political association'.

³⁸ T. Lee, 'Internet Control', p. 78; and T. Lee and C. Kan, 'Blogospheric Pressures', p. 876.

³⁹ Interview with Alex Waipeng Au founder of Yawning Bread (blog), Singapore, October 20, 2010; and interview with Remy Zheng Xi Choo, co-founder of *The Online Citizen* (blog), Singapore, October 24, 2010; and interview with Andrew Loh, co-founder of *The Online Citizen* (blog), Singapore, October 25, 2010. See also: 'Terms of Service', *TR Emeritus*, April 24, 2012, <http://www.tremeritus.com/terms-of-service/>, accessed on: July 23, 2013; and 'Moderation', *The Online Citizen*, 2010, <http://theonlinecitizen.com/moderation>, accessed on: January 28, 2010; and W. Au, 'Re comments', *Yawning Bread*, <http://yawningbread.wordpress.com/re-comments/>, accessed on: July 23, 2013.

⁴⁰ J. Preece, 'Sociability and usability in online communities: determining and measuring success', *Behaviour and Information Technology*, v. 20 (5), 2001, p. 351; and K. Wise, *et al.*, 'Moderation, Response Rate, and Message Interactivity: Features of Online Communities and Their Effects on Intent to Participate', *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, v. 12 (1), 2006, pp. 26,32.

⁴¹ 'Gahmen licenses Breakfast Network website to death', *mrbrown*, December 10, 2013, <http://www.mrbrown.com/blog/2013/12/gahmen-licenses-breakfast-network-to-death.html>, accessed on: April 14, 2014.

regulation had come to an end. The Media Development Authority, not surprisingly, rebutted George that “our internet regulations have not changed.”⁴² Rather than consider the automatic licensing as a light touch, it may be better to consider it as ‘hands free’. Then, the actual ‘touch’ of the Government can be better classified by strength or onerousness. The remainder of the chapter discusses the two methods of governmentality on alternative media: discipline and punishment.

Reining in the Political Alternative Media: Political Website Registrations

Sintercom is the most famous instance of the Government attempting to register an online site. Established in 1994 by Singaporean expatriate scholars including Tan Chong Kee, *Sintercom* was a platform for overseas Singaporeans to keep abreast of and discuss Singaporean news, and to form an expatriate community online.⁴³ The site ran a section where unedited *Straits Times Forum* letters could be published titled “Not the Straits Times Forum,” which was designed to pressure the *Straits Times* to relax its editorial policy on letters.⁴⁴

In 1997, *Sintercom* was invited to host its servers in Singapore, which the site operators agreed would demonstrate that Singaporeans could speak on issues that concerned them.⁴⁵ Tan recalled the decision to host the site in Singapore was a “gilded cage” because in 2001, *Sintercom* was required to register as a political website.⁴⁶ Tan appealed to the Singapore Broadcasting Authority for it to vet content prior to publication, but the Authority was unwilling to do so because of the logistical burden

⁴² C. George, ‘Online freedom: time to revise the Singapore report card’, *Freedom From The Press*, December 10, 2013, <http://blog.freedomfromthepress.info/2013/12/10/online-freedom-time-to-revise-the-singapore-report-card/>, accessed on: April 14, 2014.

⁴³ C.K. Tan, ‘The Canary and the Crow: Sintercom and the state tolerability index’, *Renaissance Singapore? Economy, Culture, and Politics*, K.P. Tan (ed.) National University of Singapore Press, Singapore, 2007, p. 164.

⁴⁴ T. Lee, ‘Going Online’, pp. 20-21; and D.K. Mauzy and R.S. Milne, *Singapore Politics under the People's Action Party*, Routledge, London & New York, 2002, p. 163; and C.K. Tan, ‘The Canary and the Crow’, p. 168.

⁴⁵ C.K. Tan, ‘The Canary and the Crow’, p. 166.

⁴⁶ G. Rodan, ‘Embracing Electronic Media’, p. 514; and C.K. Tan, ‘The Canary and the Crow’, pp. 166, 168-169; and A.T. Kenyon and T. Marjoribanks, ‘Transforming Media Markets: The Cases of Malaysia and Singapore’, *Australian Journal of Emerging Technologies and Society*, v. 5 (2), 2007, pp. 112-113.

this would involve. Instead, the SBA urged Tan to use his own discretion regarding site moderation.

Tan felt that self-regulation ran a significantly high risk that he would still be punished by the SBA and so a “Sword of Damocles” hung over his head. In response, he shut down the site.⁴⁷ For the Government to close down a popular site that was operating legally would have been a significant blow to the liberalising reputation of the Singapore Government under Goh Chok Tong. However, the decision by the site owner to close down due to perceived government coercion had the same result: the control or elimination of an autonomous political challenger.

Ten years later, the registration of TOC was prompted by its experimentation with political activism. In December 2010, TOC held a political forum (*Face-to-Face*) that featured representatives of the opposition political parties. The People’s Action Party was invited but refused to send a representative.⁴⁸ During the event, members of the 350 person audience asked questions of the representatives about issues of importance such as housing, defence, and the Internal Security Act.⁴⁹ It was the first time that a blog had organised a political event of this seriousness. Chinese-language daily newspaper *Lianhe Zaobao* referred to TOC as “the kingmaker of the Opposition” and implied it sought to be the main platform for all opposition parties to reach out to citizens.⁵⁰

The implication of such desire if true was that TOC would be a partisan site for the opposition and had “become involved in politics in Singapore,” as the Government said later.⁵¹ The Government justified its decision to register TOC based on its obvious political influence. It was important to ensure TOC would not be subject to foreign

⁴⁷ C.K. Tan, 'The Canary and the Crow', p. 169.

⁴⁸ 'Oppositions' Views Aired at Forum', *Channel NewsAsia*, December 17, 2010; and D. Tan, 'Face-to-Face forum: That elephant in the room', *The Online Citizen*, December 22, 2010, <http://theonlinecitizen.com/2010/12/face-to-face-forum-that-elephant-in-the-room-2/>, accessed on: December 25, 2010.

⁴⁹ 'TOC Face-to-Face Forum LIVE UPDATE (with pictures)', *The Online Citizen*, December 17, 2010, <http://theonlinecitizen.com/2010/12/toc-face-to-face-forum-live-update/>, accessed on: January 4, 2011; and 'Oppositions' Views Aired at Forum'; and J. Au and K.B. Kor, 'Opposition Figures Air Key Issues at Dialogue', *Straits Times*, December 17, 2010.

⁵⁰ J. Chiang, 'TOC rebuts 'Kingmaker' misquote in Zaobao', *The Online Citizen*, January 11, 2011, <http://theonlinecitizen.com/2011/01/toc-rebutts-kingmaker-misquote-in-zaobao/>, accessed on: January 12, 2011; and D. Tan, 'Kingmaker' TOC to be Gazetted', *New Asia Republic*, January 11, 2011, <http://newasiarepublic.com/?p=23110>, accessed on: January 12, 2011.

⁵¹ X.Y. Cheow, 'Blog willing to operate as political association', *Today*, January 15, 2011.

influence by donations and would act responsibly.⁵² By registering TOC as a political association, the site would be bound to the Political Donations Act, which prohibits foreign funding and limits anonymous donations.⁵³ *The Online Citizen* representatives objected to the registration but the Prime Minister's Office and Media Development Authority emphasised that registration would not constrain the legal activities of TOC, or prevent it from producing political content and holding political events indoors or at Speaker's Corner.⁵⁴

Concerns spread through the blogosphere that TOC would be a precedent for the registration of other socio-political sites. *Temasek Review*, TOC's opinionated anti-government rival, released several statements about the registration, including that it considered buying TOC, and would continue to operate overseas as needed.⁵⁵ Reform Party Secretary-General Kenneth Jeyaretnam opined that the action against TOC revealed that the only away alternative media in Singapore could be permitted was to be overseas and anonymous like *Temasek Review*.⁵⁶ Comparisons to *Sintercom* were widespread and caused TOC to post on Facebook: "For the last time, 'we are not Sintercom' and 'we WILL [*sic*] continue to stray into the controversial areas, even if we are gazetted'".⁵⁷

⁵² J. Chan, 'Govt rejects blog's request not to be gazetted: Registry explains the *The Online Citizen* is 'not a passive website'', *Today*, January 19, 2011.

⁵³ *Political Donations Act 2000 Handbook*, Registry of Political Donations, 2000, <http://www.elections.gov.sg/registry.html>.

⁵⁴ 'The Online Citizen to be listed as political association'; and T. Fong, 'The Online Citizen portal to be gazetted as political association'; and T. Fong and L.W. Keat, 'Boundaries drawn for political blog', *Today*, January 12, 2011.

⁵⁵ 'Temasek Review should not acquire *The Online Citizen*', *Temasek Review*, January 17, 2010, <http://www.temasekreview.com/2011/01/17/ttr-should-not-buy-toc/>, accessed on: January 17, 2010; and 'Temasek Review: We would be happy to go if we are no longer needed', *Temasek Review*, January 15, 2011, <http://www.temasekreview.com/2011/01/15/temasek-review-we-would-be-happy-to-go-if-we-are-no-longer-needed/>, accessed on: January 17, 2011; and 'The future of Temasek Review is in the hands of our readers', *Temasek Review*, January 16, 2011, <http://www.temasekreview.com/2011/01/16/temasek-reviews-open-appeal-for-donations/>, accessed on: January 17, 2011; and 'The End: MDA to put the final nail into TOC's coffin', *Temasek Review*, January 11, 2011, <http://www.temasekreview.com/2011/01/11/newsflash-mda-demands-registration-of-toc/>, accessed on: January 12, 2011; and 'TOC's inadequate response to PMO and MDA', *Temasek Review*, January 15, 2011, <http://www.temasekreview.com/2011/01/15/toc%e2%80%99s-inadequate-response-to-pmo-and-mda/>, accessed on: January 17, 2011.

⁵⁶ K. Jeyaretnam, 'Why the Gazetting of TOC Should Be a Wake-Up Call', *Reform Party*, January 13, 2011, <http://votingrp.wordpress.com/2011/01/13/why-the-gazetting-of-toc-should-be-a-wake-up-call/>, accessed on: January 17, 2011.

⁵⁷ *The Online Citizen*, 'For the last time, "we are not sintercom" and "we WILL continue to stray into the controversial areas, even if we are gazetted"', *Facebook*, January 19, 2011, <http://www.facebook.com/theonlinecitizen/posts/181948235171485>, accessed on: January 20, 2011.

As part of the registration, TOC was required to supply the names of its core executive team to be legal representatives for the site.⁵⁸ The site operators initially objected to its classification as a political website, and protested they did not have a strict editorial hierarchy.⁵⁹ The Government replied that TOC was not a “passive website” but had produced political commentary and analysis and organised the political forum in December 2010.⁶⁰ The requirement to supply names gave the opportunity to formalise the leadership of TOC. Co-founders Remy Zheng Xi Choo and Andrew Loh were not listed as the core team, although Loh was still the unofficial editor until he left in late 2011. Instead, the site nominated Joshua Chiang as the replacement Chief Editor, Ravi Philemon (social activist and blogger), Siew Kum Hong (lawyer and former NMP), and Leong Sze Hian, a financial analyst and blogger.⁶¹

The Online Citizen demonstrated that a site willing to acquiesce to government regulations could continue. Furthermore, the registration of TOC bolstered their credibility. Shortly after their registration, TOC was invited to a Young PAP (the PAP youth wing) event to report on the proceedings.⁶² Considering that the PAP had refused to send a representative to the *Face-to-Face* forum a month earlier, the invitation carried the recognition of TOC’s influence.

In August 2011, TOC repeated its *Face-to-Face* forum in a smaller and more intimate setting to attract the participation of the four presidential candidates: Dr Tony Tan Keng Yam, Tan Cheng Bock, Tan Jee Say and Tan Kin Lian. The event was much smaller, and the audience was selected from registrations to present a cross-section of

⁵⁸ T. Fong and L.W. Keat, 'Boundaries drawn for political blog'; and 'BREAKING NEWS: PMO Reaffirms Position on TOC', *The Online Citizen*, January 18, 2010, <http://theonlinecitizen.com/2011/01/breaking-news-pmo-reaffirms-position-on-toc/>, accessed on: January 19, 2010.

⁵⁹ J. Chan, 'Govt rejects blog's request not to be gazetted: Registry explains the *The Online Citizen* is 'not a passive website"; and 'TOC's reply to PMO', *The Online Citizen*, January 24, 2011, <http://theonlinecitizen.com/2011/01/tocs-reply-to-pmo/>, accessed on: January 24, 2011.

⁶⁰ J. Chan, 'Govt rejects blog's request not to be gazetted: Registry explains the *The Online Citizen* is 'not a passive website'.

⁶¹ 'Team in charge of *The Online Citizen* revealed', *Yahoo! News: Fit-to-Post*, January 24, 2011, <http://sg.yfittopostblog.com/2011/01/24/team-in-charge-of-the-online-citizen-revealed/>, accessed on: January 27, 2011.

⁶² theonlinecitizen, 'TOC goes to PAP's *Face-to-Face* tomorrow! Tay Ping Hui and two MPs talk about Personal Politics!', *Facebook*, January 21, 2011, <https://www.facebook.com/theonlinecitizen/posts/147441475313499>, accessed on: January 25, 2011; and theonlinecitizen, 'Have you registered? TOC is sending a team down!', *Facebook*, February 22, 2011, <https://www.facebook.com/theonlinecitizen/posts/104600156286540>, accessed on: February 26, 2011.

Singaporean society. The event was held indoors and the recordings from the panel were uploaded to the TOC site. In addition to the cooperation over two days by the four candidates in the midst of campaigning, the event was moderated by former Nominated MP and journalist Viswa Sadasivan.⁶³ The agreement of all four candidates to participate, if only to bolster their election campaign, demonstrated the legitimacy of the TOC as a political and media force.

The need to register socio-political blogs as political associations was diminished with the amendments to the Broadcasting Act in July 2013, which created the individual licence on news sites and the clause to prevent foreign funding within the Class Licence. This is represented in forms that accompany the registration process and removes the need to gazette sites as political associations to prohibit foreign funding.⁶⁴ The likelihood of the Government going on a registration spree of bloggers as political associations is low unless they host civil activism events. *The Online Citizen* may alone hold the status of political association and socio-political news blog for the foreseeable future as a relic of past governmentality.

Additionally, registration as a political association would not be a feasible punishment for individual bloggers. Moreover, it could actually validate their politics. For example, *Yawning Bread* blogger Alex Au is an activist for homosexual equality and was involved with the activist group People Like Us, which was rejected for society registration twice.⁶⁵ Registration of *Yawning Bread* as a political association (if possible) would make the denial of registration of People Like Us hypocritical.

The Government must also be aware that attempts to register socio-political site as a political association may drive them to operate offshore and anonymously where they would be less accountable to the Government. In October 2010, *The New Paper*

⁶³ theonlinecitizen toc, 'TOC *Face-to-Face* 2 18th August 2011 Part 1', *YouTube*, August 19, 2011, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hp_kO7XcSZI, accessed on: July 20, 2012; and theonlinecitizen toc, 'TOC *Face-to-Face* 2 18th August 2011 Part 2', *YouTube*, August 21, 2011, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I9hh_Wzy6lo, accessed on: July 20, 2012.

⁶⁴ 'Online Licensing Framework: Was the Breakfast Network banned by the MDA?'

⁶⁵ 'About Us', *People Like Us*, http://www.plu.sg/society/?page_id=2, accessed on: April 22, 2011; and K.P. Tan, 'New politics for a renaissance city?', *Renaissance Singapore? Economy, Culture, and Politics*, K.P. Tan (ed.) National University of Singapore Press, Singapore, 2007, p. 32.

attempted to identify a responsible party for *Temasek Review* as Dr Joseph Ong.⁶⁶ The allegation of Dr Ong's ownership was consistently denied by the anonymous site editors.⁶⁷ After the election, *Temasek Review* was reinvented as *TR Emeritus* and eventually, one of the moderators (Richard Wan) did reveal his identity to the tabloid.⁶⁸ Wan's revelation in *The New Paper* opened *TR Emeritus* up to legal action by the Government.⁶⁹ Wan recognised that his public revelation had changed the way that *TR Emeritus* would be treated by the media and Government; and sought to change the way that *TR Emeritus* conducted itself.⁷⁰

Governmentality: Defamation Lawsuits as Punishment

The main advantage that Singaporean bloggers have over the international media is that as local sites with smaller readership, the Government is generally more tolerant of their criticisms, no matter how fierce. However, bloggers are also a lot more vulnerable than the international or domestic media when faced with punishment. If bloggers are located in Singapore, they are within the Government's jurisdiction to be sued or investigated by the police. Unlike international publications, usually owned by large media corporations, many bloggers would not be able to defend against defamation or libel suits by the Government or political elites.⁷¹ Based on the precedent of suits against international media and political opposition, cases would undoubtedly end with damages of hundreds of thousands of Singapore Dollars plus legal costs.

Many bloggers are conscious of the economic ramifications of lawsuits initiated by the Government and political elites, and have reacted accordingly to prevent the threat of

⁶⁶ W.C. Ng, 'Is he the man behind Temasek Review?', *The New Paper*, October 11, 2010.

⁶⁷ 'Temasek Review's response to TNP's misleading article', *Temasek Review*, October 9, 2010, <http://www.temasekreview.com/2010/10/09/temasek-reviews-response-to-tnps-misleading-article/>, accessed on: October 9, 2010; and 'Moderator comes clean on TR's harrasment tactics', *The New Paper*, August 28, 2011.

⁶⁸ 'Moderator comes clean on TR's harrasment tactics'; and 'Socio-political website reveals one of its editors', *AsiaOne*, February 16, 2012, <http://news.asiaone.com/News/Latest+News/Singapore/Story/A1Story20120216-328308.html>, accessed on: July 23, 2013; and A.J. Wong, 'Now that I am out, I have to face the music', *Today*, February 25, 2012.

⁶⁹ A.J. Wong, 'Now that I am out, I have to face the music'.

⁷⁰ A.J. Wong, 'Now that I am out, I have to face the music'.

⁷¹ N. Cowan, 'Singapore Online: Hopes and Limits for an Independent Online Media', *Asian Studies Association of Australia 18th Biennial Conference*, Adelaide, Australia, July 5-8, 2010, p. 10.

lawsuit coming to fruition. This further diminishes the continued usefulness of the Panopticon as a tool of control on the Singapore blogosphere, because bloggers are willing to push the boundaries of tolerated conduct and deal with whatever consequences may arise rather than cower at surveillance.

As *The Online Citizen's* registration signalled to the rest of the blogosphere that registration as a political website and political association would not significantly hamper normal operations, so too has the reaction to lawsuits influenced others. After Richard Wan became the public face of *TR Emeritus*, the site became savvier about responding to government demands. In February 2012, *TR Emeritus* was issued with two Letters of Demand for apologies and the removal of offending content (comments on an article) that were interpreted to allege nepotism in the appointment of Lee Hsien Loong's family members to Government-Linked Corporations. These family members included Ho Ching (Lee Hsien Loong's wife and Chief Executive Officer of Temasek Holdings, and his brother Lee Hsien Yang, then-Chairman of Fraser & Neave.⁷²

In the past, the *Temasek Review* posted similar damning claims but had not been publicly threatened with a defamation lawsuit. The attitude of the then-anonymous editors gave the impression they would sooner shut the site down or retreat further overseas, than face any legal challenge head on. In the 2012 incident, Wan consulted with legal counsel M. Ravi to dispute the Letters of Demand, but eventually removed the offensive content and posted apologies on the website.⁷³

The defamation threats against *TR Emeritus* were the beginning of a series of threats of lawsuits against socio-political bloggers, but there was now greater awareness amongst other bloggers of how to deal with threats of defamation and what content might

⁷² 'TRE editor "sorry for causing unnecessary duress" to PM Lee', *AsiaOne*, February 20, 2012, <http://news.asiaone.com/News/Latest+News/Singapore/Story/A1Story20120220-328995.html>, accessed on: July 23, 2013; and 'Letter of Apology to Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong', *TR Emeritus*, February 19, 2012, <http://www.tremeritus.com/2012/02/22/letter-of-apology-to-pm-lee-hsien-loong/>, accessed on: February 25, 2012; and C. George, 'Hard landing: TR Emeritus welcomed into the open with defamation threat', *Yahoo! News Singapore*, February 20, 2012, <http://sg.news.yahoo.com/blogs/singaporescene/hard-landing-tremeritus-welcomed-open-defamation-threat-135524157.html>, accessed; and 'TRE, Lee Hsien Yang reach amicable agreement', *Channel News Asia*, February 24, 2012.

⁷³ 'TR Emeritus publishes apology to PM Lee', *Channel News Asia*, February 22, 2012; and 'TRE, Lee Hsien Yang reach amicable agreement'.

provoke a lawsuit. In July 2012, the Attorney-General's Chambers (AGC) sent a Letter of Demand to blogger Alex Au ordering the removal of a post alleged to have "scandalised the courts".⁷⁴

The Attorney-General's Chambers alleged Au's article claimed the judiciary passes reduced sentences to those with political connections.⁷⁵ These unsubstantiated allegations amounted to contempt of court, and Au was ordered to remove the post and upload a signed apology on the site.⁷⁶ He complied and the case was dropped, and no additional action was taken when he blogged about the incident afterwards.⁷⁷

In December 2012, *The Online Citizen* and *TR Emeritus* both received a Letter of Demand to remove defamatory allegations about former PAP MP S. Vasoo. The allegations were made by opposition politician Vincent Wijesingha on a Facebook note that was reproduced on the blogs.⁷⁸ In his note, Wijesingha alleged that the PAP maliciously fabricates evidence when it needs to punish political challengers.⁷⁹

Wijesingha's note was about the Government response to strikes by foreign bus drivers in Singapore, and specifically used Vasoo's role in legal proceedings against Dr Chee Soon Juan in 1993 as evidence of PAP's lies. In 1993, Chee was dismissed from the National University of Singapore for misuse of university funds and accused Vasoo of being politically motivated.⁸⁰ Vasoo and two other university staff members sued Chee

⁷⁴ 'Blogger removes post on Woffles Wu case', *Today*, July 12, 2012.

⁷⁵ W. Au, 'Woffles Wu case hits a nerve', *Yawning Bread*, July 18, 2012, <http://yawningbread.wordpress.com/2012/06/18/woffles-wu-case-hits-a-nerve/>, accessed on: July 20, 2012.

⁷⁶ W. Au, 'Woffles Wu case hits a nerve'.

⁷⁷ W. Au, 'Using power to give immunity to the powerful', *Yawning Bread*, July 15, 2012, <http://yawningbread.wordpress.com/2012/07/15/using-power-to-give-immunity-to-the-powerful/>, accessed on: July 20, 2012.

⁷⁸ 'TRE receives Letter of Demand from Dr Vasoo's Lawyer', *TR Emeritus*, December 7, 2012, <http://www.tremeritus.com/2012/12/07/tre-receives-letter-of-demand-from-dr-vasoos-lawyer>, accessed on: December 12, 2012; and 'Letter of Demand by Davinder Singh, Drew Napier LLC', *The Online Citizen*, December 8, 2012, <http://www.theonlinecitizen.com/2012/12/letter-of-demand-by-davinder-singh-drew-napier-llc/>, accessed on: December 10, 2012.

⁷⁹ 'You can resign and go to SBS', the drivers were told', *TR Emeritus*, December 2, 2012, <http://www.tremeritus.com/2012/12/02/smart-you-can-resign-and-go-to-sbs/>, accessed on: December 12, 2012; and 'Letter of Demand by Davinder Singh, Drew Napier LLC'.

⁸⁰ 'Dr Chee fired for 'dishonest conduct'', *Straits Times*, April 1, 1993; and I. Zuraidah, 'Vasoo seeks damages and a public apology from Dr Chee', *Straits Times*, April 24, 1993.

for the funds misuse and were awarded US\$300,000 in costs and damages, which was the beginning of his path to bankruptcy.⁸¹

Vasoo did not take issue with the rest of Wijeyasingha's article, but only the references to the 1993 incident. The Letter of Demand ordered the sites to remove the allegations and post an apology on the site or legal action would ensue.⁸² *TR Emeritus* removed only the highlighted references to Chee and Vasoo but retained the rest of the article.⁸³ *The Online Citizen* and Vincent Wijeyasingha removed the article and original note in full. Therefore, they carried out the censorship to a higher degree than stipulated in the Letter of Demand.

The use of lawsuit threats has the immediate effect of censoring unwanted allegations online because bloggers are required to consider the financial ramifications of defending a defamation lawsuit. Rather than engage in a lengthy and expensive legal battle that they would not win, it is easier for them apologise and delete the offending content stipulated in the Letter of Demand. As website operators can be held legally liable for third party content on the site such as comments on a post or article, they have also installed moderation policies to filter or flag for review content that might be defamatory or seditious.⁸⁴ The need for elites and institutions to use legal threats revealed how ineffective the regulatory framework of automatic class licensing and registration as a political association has been to influence a minority of bloggers to not politically threaten the Government's legitimacy.

Governmentality: Attempting to Discipline Bloggers

Another method of governmentality of the internet was the mooted blogger code of conduct in 2012. Theoretically, the population within a microcosm can be disciplined by imposed rules to guide behaviours better than sovereign punishment. The creation of

⁸¹ S.J. Chee, 'Pressing for Openness in Singapore', *Journal of Democracy*, v. 12 (2), 2001, p. 165.

⁸² 'Letter of Demand by Davinder Singh, Drew Napier LLC'.

⁸³ A. Wong and T. Wong, '2 websites apologise to ex-MP Vasoo over offending article', *Straits Times*, December 7, 2012.

⁸⁴ Interview with Remy Zheng Xi Choo.

behavioural rules in a microcosm has already been discussed in the media chapters, including in the requirements for political associations and political websites.

In 2006, the idea of a blogger code was raised by members of the Singapore internet community.⁸⁵ The argument for the code was that it would ease the transition of blogs to be recognised by the Government as credible alternative media, and to ensure that bloggers would not be subjected to heavy-handed regulation.⁸⁶ The proposal divided the blogosphere. Some believed the internet needed to be regulated to keep a level of civility and responsibility, and the code would raise bloggers' credibility as responsible citizens.⁸⁷ Others felt any formalised set of rules would stifle the organic development of the blogosphere, and argued that a code was not necessary because bloggers were already subject to Singapore's offline laws.⁸⁸ The idea was abandoned when bloggers instead sought to protect themselves from government action with disclaimers of indemnity on their site.⁸⁹

In 2008, bloggers wrote to Communication Minister Lee Boon Yang, and proposed significant amendment to the regulations on online speech, and advocated for legislation with specific focus rather than broad regulations. These reforms included a call to repeal the Broadcasting Class Licence, the establishment of a regulatory consultation body, and removal or greater elaboration of regulations on hate speech, political speech and sexual and violent content.⁹⁰

⁸⁵ T. Lee and C. Kan, 'Blogospheric Pressures', p. 880.

⁸⁶ Dharmendra Yadav, 'Blogs Should Self-Regulate', *Today*, December 5, 2006.

⁸⁷ For example: G. Giam, 'In support of a blogger Code of Ethics – Part 2', *GeraldGiam.sg*, December 18, 2006, <http://geraldgiam.sg/2006/12/in-support-of-a-bloggers-code-of-ethics-part-2/>, accessed on: August 5, 2013; and A. Ng, 'Why get so uptight over something called “self-regulation”?', *Aaron-Ng.info*, December 20, 2006, <http://aaron-ng.info/blog/why-get-so-uptight-over-something-called-self-regulation.html>, accessed on: August 5, 2013; and A. Ng, 'Self-regulation by the blogging community: why not?', *Aaron-Ng.info*, December 6, 2006, <http://aaron-ng.info/blog/self-regulation-by-the-blogging-community-why-not.html>, accessed on: August 5, 2013.

⁸⁸ For example: E. Diodati, 'Blogs Already Self-Regulate', *Singapore Angle*, December 6, 2006, <http://www.singaporeangle.com/2006/12/blogs-already-self-regulate.html>, accessed on: August 5, 2013; and S.C. Huang, 'Self-regulation of Singapore Blogosphere – Whatever for??', *The Online Citizen*, December 18, 2006, <http://www.theonlinecitizen.com/2006/12/self-regulation-of-singapore-blogosphere-whatever-for/>, accessed on: August 5, 2013.

⁸⁹ T. Lee and C. Kan, 'Blogospheric Pressures', p. 881.

⁹⁰ N. E-Jay, 'Proposals for Internet Freedom: Bloggers for Internet Deregulation', *sgpolitics.net*, April 18, 2008, <http://www.sgpolitics.net/?p=1166>, accessed on: August 5, 2013; and N. E-Jay, 'Bloggers submit

The Minister's reply, directed to Alex Au bordered on patronising. The Ministry thanked him and his "blogger friends for the effort in putting up the proposals for Internet deregulation which you had emailed" to the Minister. In the letter, the bloggers were assured that the Ministry took a light touch approach to internet regulation, but would consider the proposals in addition to the findings of the Advisory Council on the Impact of New Media (AIMS) study. The proposals were received but not acted upon,⁹¹ and with no agreement from either side, the grey zone of internet regulation continued as the status quo until 2012.

In November 2011, Minister for Communication Yaacob Ibrahim made another proposal that bloggers should develop a code of conduct.⁹² After six months of non-action, the issue was raised once more in April 2012 and was promptly rejected by bloggers.⁹³ People's Action Party MP Teo Ser Luck called for a code of conduct to be developed by the bloggers themselves, to encourage flexible and reactive self-regulation, rather than inflexible regulations imposed upon them that may not meet the needs of the community.⁹⁴

After bloggers made it clear that they would not participate in the creation of, nor accept, a code of conduct, the Government instead established the Media Literacy Council (MLC). The Council was designed to lead public education about tolerated behavioural norms online, and advise the Government how to react to the changing use of the

Proposals for Internet freedom in Singapore to Minister for Information, Communication & the Arts', *sgpolitics.net*, April 21, 2008, <http://www.sgpoltics.net/?p=172>, accessed on: August 5, 2013; and 'Bloggers' group proposes sweeping changes in Internet regulation', *The Online Citizen*, <http://www.theonlinecitizen.com/2008/04/bloggers-group-proposes-sweeping-changes-in-internet-regulation/>, accessed on: August 5, 2013.

⁹¹ N. E-Jay, 'Ministry for Information, Communication & the Arts reply to bloggers' Proposals for Internet freedom in Singapore', *sgpolitics.net*, May 7, 2008, <http://www.sgpoltics.net/?p=192>, accessed on: August 5, 2013.

⁹² T. Wong, 'Online social norms need time to evolve', *Straits Times*, May 9, 2012.

⁹³ T. Wong, 'Online social norms need time to evolve'; and T. Wong, 'Online code of conduct? "No thanks"', *Straits Times*, April 28, 2012; and H. Lee, 'Revisiting the internet code of conduct', *The Online Citizen*, December 14, 2011, <http://www.theonlinecitizen.com/2011/12/revisiting-the-internet-code-of-conduct/>, accessed on: December 14, 2011; and E. Ee, 'Forget code of ethics, free up mainstream media', *publichouse.sg*, April 26, 2012, <http://publichouse.sg/categories/topstory/item/575-forget-code-of-ethics-free-up-mainstream-media>, accessed on: August 5, 2012.

⁹⁴ 'Bottom-up approach preferred for Internet code of conduct: Teo Ser Luck', *Channel NewsAsia*, May 21, 2012.

internet by citizens.⁹⁵ Bloggers dismissed the MLC as a wasted effort by a Government slow to react to the changing norms of the internet and self-correction by bloggers.⁹⁶

If bloggers developed their own code of conduct it would have greater resonance and not be seen as an imposition on the alternative media. It would also serve to show that bloggers were willing to self-regulate as the mainstream media had done, which could allow the Government to practice a greater hands-off approach. The overwhelming rejection of bloggers to even consider developing a code of conduct was a serious challenge to the authority of the Government.

Rather than forcing the issue further, Yaacob Ibrahim accepted the bloggers did not want a code, thus incorporating their desire for freedom into governmentality strategies. Instead, greater emphasis was placed on the strategic use of lawsuits and on licensing the online media. The amendment to the Broadcasting Act included the introduction of individual licences for news sites, which have been discussed above. Although the licence has not yet affected bloggers directly, it has put them on notice that they are also vulnerable.

Shadow of the Fist: The Individual Media Licence

The Government once more reviewed its methods to control the alternative media using a technique it had applied to the international media: security bonds. By requiring a security bond from media services, the Government could threaten alternative media economically. So far, the licence has only been applied to mainstream media organisations. The requirements for registration are 50,000 unique visitors within

⁹⁵ 'New Council to oversee cyber wellness, media literacy initiatives', *Media Development Authority, Singapore*, July 30, 2012, <http://www.mda.gov.sg/NewsAndEvents/PressRelease/2012/Pages/31072012.aspx>, accessed on: August 5, 2013; and D. Ho, 'No Internet code of conduct for now; panel to focus on education', *Straits Times*, February 7, 2013.

⁹⁶ A. Loh, 'Bloggers question aim of Media Literacy Council', *Yahoo! News, Singapore*, July 31, 2012, <http://sg.news.yahoo.com/blogs/singaporescene/media-literary-council-formed-bloggers-frown-move-111025765.html>, accessed on: August 5, 2013.

Singapore per week, one news article about Singapore politics and society per week over two months. Licensees must furnish an S\$50,000 bond to the MDA.⁹⁷

The new licence also granted the MDA the power to issue "take down orders", which it could use to require the removal of unsuitable content from sites within 24 hours. Yaacob Ibrahim clarified this referred to religiously insensitive, vice, or gruesome content,⁹⁸ and Baey Keng Yam emphasised that the licence was "only going after content that is not in good taste or racially and religiously offensive."⁹⁹

The Media Development Authority, Yaacob Ibrahim and other Cabinet Ministers, attempted to reach out to netizens on this issue using Facebook, a significant step towards normalised relations.¹⁰⁰ In the past, the Government would have used the mainstream media to publish its replies. Considering that the Government claims that the registration will not affect bloggers, the use of Facebook is a significant gesture. Facebook outreach however, carries the risk of mismatched expectations if there is not sufficient government reply using Facebook, which could cause increased cynicism about the Government's action. The reactions of the Government in traditional arenas, such as Parliament and the mainstream media, are more telling because they are comfortable there and have monopoly of authority.

As discussed in Chapter Two, the reaction by the affected parties was negotiation with the Government, but the reaction from bloggers was far more dramatic. The generational difference of the younger netizen population was seen in civil activism such as the TOC *Face-to-Face* forums, and the Bukit Brown cemetery debate, discussed in Chapter Six, but also in the reaction to recommendations for a blogger code of conduct. Almost immediately after the new regulations took effect, bloggers organised into the Free My

⁹⁷ T. Wong, 'Licence Scheme: MDA Starts with 10 Sites', *Straits Times*, May 29, 2013; and 'New Licensing Framework Not Intended to Clamp Down on Internet Freedom, Says MDA', *Channel NewsAsia*, May 30, 2013.

⁹⁸ L. Lim and T. Wong, 'MDA rolls out licence scheme from news websites', *Straits Times*, May 29, 2013.

⁹⁹ T. Wong, 'Clampdown? Yes: Netizens. No: MDA', *Straits Times*, May 20, 2013.

¹⁰⁰ Media Development Authority Singapore, 'Much has been discussed about recent changes to the licensing framework for news sites and we thank you for your comments. We thought it would be useful to clear the air by highlighting some key facts of our current media regulations [...]', *Facebook*, May 31, 2013, <http://www.facebook.com/MDASingapore/posts/477728388976557>, accessed on: June 25, 2013; and L. Lim and T. Wong, 'MDA: Bloggers Not Affected by New Rules', *Straits Times*, June 1, 2013; and A. Ong, 'Over 150 online sites hold 24-hour blackout protest', *Straits Times*, June 7, 2013.

Internet movement, blacked out their homepages, released a policy discussion paper, and held a rally at Speakers' Corner. This dramatic reaction was before any socio-political site has been required to register. Over 160 blogs and websites held the 24 hour "black out" protest.¹⁰¹

On June 8, approximately 2,500 people protested in Speakers' Corner. The protest speeches included a promise to lobby the Government to repeal the registration and that bloggers would encourage a dialogue with the MDA.¹⁰² Participants interviewed by *Yahoo! News* complained that the regulations had been introduced unilaterally by the MDA without any debate in Parliament.¹⁰³ Based on the backlash to the proposed code of conduct, the MDA and Ministry of Communication and Information may have felt it wiser to introduce the basic regulatory framework first, and then modify it as needed based on the public reaction.

The Online Citizen raised concerns that it met the MDA's requirements, but that it would not be able to pay the S\$50,000 bond.¹⁰⁴ The MDA replied that TOC was not on the list of registered sites, so it should not be concerned. If in the future TOC was required to register for the licence, the MDA would allow it to appeal the bond.¹⁰⁵ Although the bloggers' fears about the bond are valid because of the financial ramification, their reaction may be a miscalculation of the application of the licence. Because of the significant views required to qualify, the political website and political association registration has more immediate effect and the new licence may be held in reserve to punish websites not sufficiently regulated.

In July 2013, Yaacob used Parliament to criticise bloggers for their failure to self-regulate after they rejected the proposal for a blogging code of conduct. He criticised the habit of forwarding information by Facebook without verification, and that blogging

¹⁰¹ W. Tan, "'Free My Internet' blackout draws diverse range of participants', *Today*, June 6, 2013.

¹⁰² E. Soh, 'Over 1,500 Singaporeans Protest at Rally Against New Online Rules', *Yahoo! News, Singapore*, June 8, 2013, <http://sg.news.yahoo.com/over-1-500-singaporeans-protest-at-rally-against-new-online-rules-144315176.html>, accessed on: July 17, 2013.

¹⁰³ E. Soh, 'Over 1,500 Singaporeans Protest at Rally Against New Online Rules'; and W. Tan, 'Bloggers stage protest, call on new MDA rules to be withdrawn', *Today*, July 9, 2013.

¹⁰⁴ L. Lim and T. Wong, 'MDA: Bloggers Not Affected by New Rules'.

¹⁰⁵ T. Wong, 'Licence Scheme: MDA Starts with 10 Sites'; and 'Online Writers Voice Concerns over New Individual Licensing Framework', *Channel NewsAsia*, May 30, 2013.

community leaders were insufficiently monitoring, censoring and correcting the information being forwarded.

Where were these prominent members of the online community who believed that the internet should be left alone? Were they helping to clarify and reject online rumours, or were they helping to spread them or even create them?¹⁰⁶

Yaacob's criticism more explicitly revealed that the Government would like blogosphere to be like the mainstream media, to act responsibly to combat misrepresentations. This may imply a potential timeline for the implementation of the new licence onto the blogosphere. First, bloggers are expected to be self-governing because they explicitly rejected a code of conduct. Secondly, blogs that insufficiently self-govern could be asked to register as a political websites which has no performance bond but does place legal liability on the site operators. Belligerent sites that meet the criteria could be registered as news sites under the individual licence, subject to the S\$50,000 bond and take-down orders. They are then faced with the economic decision to either submit S\$50,000 to the Government, or to close down. Either way, the result is the same: the control or marginalisation of a belligerent site. This three step process would allow for legal action to take place at any time.

Conclusion

The increasing brazenness of bloggers in Singapore challenges the authority of the PAP Government and forces it to respond to their implicit demands for greater freedom of speech with modified governmentality. The registration of *The Online Citizen* as a political association and political website in January 2011 was significant for two reasons. Firstly, it indicated that the Government had partially revised its approach to internet control. Secondly, the reaction by TOC to registration was the beginning of greater compliance with government regulations.

¹⁰⁶ L. Lim, 'Parliament: From the Gallery; Trust needed for govt role as info provider and regulator', *Straits Times*, July 9, 2013; and C.L. Goh, 'Parliament; Some cause anxiety by spreading rumours', *Straits Times*, July 9, 2013.

Unlike *Sintercom* which closed down because of lack of direct oversight, TOC continued its operations in spite of government oversight under the Societies Act. The bloggers' reaction to governmentality caused a counter-reaction by the Government. The need for counter-reaction of this scale has not been seen in other media sectors, so it is a unique demonstration that governmentality is influenced by reaction of state and counter-conduct sources.

The Government also revived the tactic of defamation and lawsuit threats. To this, bloggers accepted the terms of Letters of Demand and deleted offensive content and apologised. In the case of Yawning Bread, Alex Au even blogged about the incident afterwards. Bloggers in this decade are more emboldened than in the previous decade of the early 2000s.

The rejection of the code of conduct highlighted the difference in opinion about the responsibility of the internet between the Government and bloggers. Bloggers feel that they do not need regulation but service interests of a Fourth Estate. The Government seeks to bring the internet into alignment with the mainstream media to respect it and be responsible force in the public sphere. Therefore, it will take a combination of methods to control the alternative media, as was required to subdue the traditional media (domestic and international).

The bloggers' reaction that the individual licence would be their death knell was met with a reminder from the Government that it was they who had rejected the proposed code of conduct. The Government will not cede its authority to make sovereign decisions, so to achieve *laissez-aller* governmentality, it is the responsibility of bloggers to adopt a supportive role, or at least act responsibly to avoid punishment. Until sufficient trust for *laissez-aller* is earned, the Government will continue to review governmentality on socio-political alternative media.

Chapter Five:

Singapore's Civil Activism Generation Shift

A paradigm shift has taken place in civil society, as in media and electoral politics and it affects the Government by challenging established rationale and governmentality. The methods of civil activism in Singapore are becoming bolder, but more sporadic. The mildness of past activism has been attributed to *kiasu*-ism, a generalised characteristic of Singaporeans that means 'afraid to fail',¹ but has also encompassed *kiasi*-ism, the fear of punishment.² *Kiasu* and *kiasi* can be explained by lack of confidence leading to activists being easily cowed by the Government.³

The digital native activists, who grew up using the internet, are arguably less *kiasu-kiasi* because they are emboldened by the internet's ease of accessibility, anonymity and as a frontier communication platform. Digital native civil activists are also influenced by successful past events. Their boldness has also influenced the activism of others from previous generations. The Government has been able to curtail civil activism by regulations that prohibit activism outside of specified areas and by intimidating activists, but the next generation is using these spaces and defying intimidation when carrying out their events.

Due to fear of the Government's potential for heavy-handedness, lobbying in Singapore has generally been carefully orchestrated to minimise political threat to the Government, such as letters to the *Straits Times Forum*, closed-door forums and submissions of policy proposals, impact reports and petitions.⁴

¹ M.D. Barr and Z. Skrbiš, *Constructing Singapore: Elitism, Ethnicity and the Nation-Building Project*, Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (NIAS), Copenhagen, 2008, p. 95.

² Satirical site Talking Cock created a dictionary to document the unique terms used in Singlish, the colloquial language of Singapore. See: 'The Coxford Singlish Dictionary', *Talking Cock*, <http://www.talkingcock.com/html/lexec.php>, accessed on: August 5, 2013.

³ D.M. Jones and D. Brown, 'Singapore and the Myth of the Liberalizing Middle Class', *Singapore*, G. Rodan (ed.) Ashgate Publishing Ltd, Aldershot, UK & Burlington, USA, 2001, p. 234.

⁴ G. Rodan, 'Singapore: Emerging Tensions in the 'Dictatorship of the Middle Class'', *Singapore*, G. Rodan (ed.) Ashgate Publishing Ltd, Aldershot, UK & Burlington, USA, 2001, pp. 224-225.

By comparison to the boldness of digital natives in the late 2000s and early 2010s, the early 2000s were a time of scepticism by activists about government action and intent. The use of Speakers' Corner was limited by anxiety about the required licencing, and because speakers were not immune from the laws of Singapore.⁵ In 2001, the Government caused *Sintercom* to shut down by requiring it to register as a political website.⁶ The same year, civil society organisation Think Centre was registered as a political association under the Societies Act and the Political Donations Act.⁷

Think Centre's aim was to educate Singaporeans on political, human rights, and civil society issues, and to encourage their participation in politics and civil society.⁸ Think Centre brazenly challenged the Government's surveillance techniques, using its website to publicise when strange people attended their offline events. Identifiable photographs of so-called 'spies' were even posted on their website to crowd-source the spies' identity.⁹ Many people believed that the Government was spying on civil activists and opposition politicians.¹⁰

Around the world, it has been recognised that activism by youth occurs at different junctures in time. These junctures are based on social attitudes, incidents occurring domestically and internationally, and the proximity of important national events such as elections or national day celebrations.¹¹ Interests, causes and priorities are far more transitory amongst youth activists than they were in previous generations.¹² This implies that there will be fewer dedicated activists to a specific cause as youth priorities change.

⁵ D.K. Mauzy and R.S. Milne, *Singapore Politics under the People's Action Party*, Routledge, London & New York, 2002, p. 164; and *Singapore Parliament Reports (Hansard)*, Ninth Parliament, March 5, 2001.

⁶ C.K. Tan, 'The Canary and the Crow: Sintercom and the state tolerability index', *Renaissance Singapore? Economy, Culture, and Politics*, K.P. Tan (ed.) National University of Singapore Press, Singapore, 2007, p. 170.

⁷ J. Gomez, 'Think Centre: The Internet and Politics in the New Economy', *Asian Journal of Social Science*, v. 30 (2), 2002, p. 304.

⁸ 'About Think Centre', *Think Centre*, Singapore, <http://www.thinkcentre.org/aboutus/index.cfm>, accessed on: August 5, 2013.

⁹ J. Gomez, 'Think Centre', p. 313.

¹⁰ J. Gomez, *Internet Politics: Surveillance & Intimidation in Singapore*, Think Centre, Singapore, 2002, pp. 76-83; and S.J. Chee, 'Pressing for Openness in Singapore', *Journal of Democracy*, v. 12 (2), 2001, p. 161.

¹¹ F.M. Rossi, 'Youth Political Participation: Is This the End of Generational Cleavage?', *International Sociology*, v. 24 (4), 2009, p. 473.

¹² C. Zukin, et al., *A New Engagement? Political Participation, Civic Life, and the Changing American Citizen*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK & New York, 2006, pp. 11,122.

Aging ‘battle axe’ activists around the world are being replaced by cohorts who participate only online with virtual organisations on Facebook, and membership that is often many times the number of the offline members or activists.¹³ This is a result of the ease of joining a cause on Facebook, and changed perceptions of what participation means to young people.¹⁴

Civil activism events in Singapore can be divided into three categories: demonstration for a cause of grievance, boundary-pushing of government tolerance, and public service events, such as *The Online Citizen’s Face-to-Face* events, discussed in Chapter Four. There is often a distinct lack of follow-up lobbying such as letter-writing, policy submission or parliamentary involvement. There have been exceptions, such as the response to the individual licence for online news sites by bloggers, but this was after the new licence was introduced.

Most importantly, civil activists in Singapore are utilising government-designated spaces for legal offline activism. This has ramifications for the tolerance of the Government to challenges, but the lack of sustained activism and lobbying does not bring about political change. The Government has sought to marginalise the effect of wider civil activism by containing it to Speakers’ Corner in Hong Lim Park or indoor venues. As the use of these sites is liberalised, external locations for civil activism are restricted. Thus the Government has adjusted governmentality to incorporate popular desires but retain security.

Speakers’ Corner was established in 2000 as a space for free speech. This was in response to public and civil society demands.¹⁵ Initially, only individuals could use Speakers’ Corner without police licence, but in 2004, political parties and organisations

¹³ J. Bartlett, 'Keyboard warriors who have yet to go on a march', *The Guardian*, October 31, 2011.

¹⁴ F.M. Rossi, 'Youth Political Participation', p. 479; and A.-M. Oostveen, 'Citizens and Activists', *Information, Communication & Society*, v. 13 (6), 2010, pp. 795-796.

¹⁵ *Singapore Parliament Reports (Hansard)*, Ninth Parliament, April 25, 2000.

were also exempt.¹⁶ Also in 2004, the Government exempted indoor sites from police licence.¹⁷

Until 2008, all intended speakers at Speakers' Corner were required to register with the nearby Kreta Ayer Police Station. This was changed to require registration, which could be done online, with the National Parks Board.¹⁸ Police licence is still required for an event that deals with race or religion in Singapore, or features foreigners, even in Speakers' Corner or indoors. Prohibition of racial and religious speech or the participation of foreigners is justified to maintain societal stability.¹⁹

In 2009, the Public Order Act was introduced to curb activism outside of Speakers' Corner or indoor venues. The Act extended the police powers within the Penal Code to classify an individual involved in a public event as a demonstration.²⁰ The Government reassured activists they need not worry about the Act because they could use Speakers' Corner or indoor venues without a police licence.²¹

The marginalisation of activism in Singapore is compounded by the transitory style of activism by digital natives. In general, digital native small-scale and ephemeral activism is often perceived to have less value than traditional methods of activism practiced by previous generations.²² The ramification of the marginalisation of activism reinforces the centrality of the Singapore Parliament for political change. This places additional emphasis on the importance of Members of Parliament, elected and unelected (Nominated and Non-Constituency MPs), which is discussed in the next chapter.

¹⁶ *Singapore Parliamentary Reports (Hansard)*, Eleventh Parliament, April 13, 2009.

¹⁷ *Singapore Parliamentary Reports (Hansard)*, Eleventh Parliament, September 16, 2008.

¹⁸ 'Transcript of Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's National Day Rally 2008 Speech at NUS-UCC on 17 August 2008', *Prime Minister's Office, Singapore*, December 23, 2010, http://www.pmo.gov.sg/content/pmosite/mediacentre/speechesninterviews/primeminister/2008/August/transcript_of_primeministerleehsienloongsnationaldayrally2008spe.html, accessed on: June 22, 2011.

¹⁹ *Hansard*, April 25, 2000; and *Singapore Parliament Reports (Hansard)*, Eleventh Parliament, February 28, 2008.

²⁰ *Public Order Act 2009*, Singapore Attorney General's Chambers.

²¹ *Hansard*, April 13, 2009.

²² M. Bakardjieva, 'Subactivism: Lifeworld and Politics in the Age of the Internet', *The Information Society*, v. 25 2009, p. 92; and S. Banaji and D. Buckingham, 'The Civic Sell', *Information, Communication & Society*, v. 12 (8), 2009, pp. 1198-1201; and F.M. Rossi, 'Youth Political Participation', p. 479; and K.D. Sweetster and R. Weaver Lariscy, 'Candidates Make Good Friends: An Analysis of Candidates' Use of Facebook', *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, v. 2 2008, p. 189; and W.L. Bennett, 'Digital Natives as Self-Actualizing Citizens', *Rebooting America: Ideas for Redesigning American Democracy in the Internet Age*, A. Fine, M.L. Sifry and J.L.A. Rasiej (eds.), Creative Commons, San Francisco, CA, 2009, p. 226.

Generational Differences to Activism:

The difference between digital natives and earlier generations has been noted around the world. The civil and political participation undertaken by digital natives is notably different because it is less involved in formal organisation and parties,²³ and youth participation in elections and civil society is declining.²⁴ Members of previous generations have been described as “dutiful citizens” who felt high levels of civic duty including voting, political party participation, and staying informed about politics.²⁵

Digital natives are mobilised by issues that have auto-biographical resonance, caused by a political “awakening”,²⁶ specific issue interest,²⁷ philanthropic desires, and professional or tertiary exposure to issues and values.²⁸ For example, research in the United States found that digital natives were less motivated by principles of civic duty than any preceding generation, since the turn of the Twentieth Century. They pay the least regular attention to politics, partly because they are the least targeted demographic for political campaigns.²⁹ Polls in Singapore similarly found that Singaporean youth were less engaged with the political system, including wanting to vote.³⁰ The use of the internet for political means has also been disappointing for those hoping for resurgence in levels of political participation.³¹

²³ F.M. Rossi, 'Youth Political Participation', pp. 468,473.

²⁴ F.M. Rossi, 'Youth Political Participation', p. 468; and C. Zukin, *et al.*, *A New Engagement?*, p. 123; and R.D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: the Collapse and Revival of American Community*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 2000,

²⁵ W.L. Bennett, 'Digital Natives as Self-Actualizing Citizens', pp. 226-227; and C. Zukin, *et al.*, *A New Engagement?*, p. 123.

²⁶ F.M. Rossi, 'Youth Political Participation', p. 481.

²⁷ C. di Gennaro and W. Dutton, 'The Internet and the Public: Online and Offline Political Participation in the United Kingdom', *Parliamentary Affairs*, v. 59 (2), 2006, p. 309; and M.M. Skoric and G. Kwan, 'Do Facebook and videogames promote political participation among youth? Evidence from Singapore', *Proceedings of EDEM 2010 - Conference on Electronic Democracy*, Danube-University, Krems, May 6-7, 2010, p. 5.

²⁸ F.M. Rossi, 'Youth Political Participation', pp. 473,468; and J. Sloam, 'Rebooting Democracy: Youth Participation in Politics in the UK', *Parliamentary Affairs*, v. 60 (4), 2007, p. 549; and W.L. Bennett, 'Digital Natives as Self-Actualizing Citizens', pp. 226-227; and S. Ward, *et al.*, 'Online Participation and Mobilisation in Britain: Hype, Hope and Reality', *Parliamentary Affairs*, v. 56 2003, p. 654; and S. Coleman, *et al.*, 'New Media and Political Efficacy', *International Journal of Communication*, v. 2 2008, p. 785; and A.-M. Oostveen, 'Citizens and Activists', p. 794; and C. Shirky, *Here Comes Everybody*, Allan Lane, London & Toronto, 2008, pp. 17-18.

²⁹ C. Zukin, *et al.*, *A New Engagement?*, p. 126.

³⁰ E. Wee, 'They're just not that into POLITICS', *The New Paper*, April 7, 2011.

³¹ C. di Gennaro and W. Dutton, 'The Internet and the Public', p. 300; and W.-Y. Lin, *et al.*, 'Becoming Citizens: Youths' Civic Uses of New Media in Five Digital Cities in East Asia', *Journal of Adolescent Research*, v. 25 (6), 2010, p. 849.

Digital natives are quite attuned to efficacy and they judge the worth of organisations on their ability to deliver results, and as tools and channels for participation.³² They want proactive organisations to produce measurable results towards causes.³³ Credible leadership is also an important factor for youth support, discussed further in Chapter Eight.³⁴ Disappointment with the Government causes less faith in, and thus utilisation of official channels including voting.³⁵ As one Singaporean blogger commented, Singaporean youth are apathetic “because we never get proper answers to our questions and soon, most realise that participation was merely a futile process and a waste of time.”³⁶

Not surprisingly, such sentiments were reflected in the 1999 *Singapore21* report that many youth felt that their correspondence to the Government went into “black holes” and they received unsatisfactory replies, or no reply at all.³⁷ This also explained the limited use of the Government online platform REACH, which has continuously sought ways to attract youth to participate, such as increasing its internet presence with Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.³⁸

Digital natives prefer direct access to the source of their grievance and its solution, but are easily deterred by lack of efficacy. In 2004, the Government promised to improve its “No Wrong Door” policy so citizen correspondence would be directed to the relevant Ministry or department regardless of where it was originally received.³⁹ There must be consideration that digital mediums such as Facebook and blogs will have a mismatch of

³² F.M. Rossi, 'Youth Political Participation', p. 468.

³³ F.M. Rossi, 'Youth Political Participation', pp. 475-476.

³⁴ W. Zhang, 'Redefining youth activism through digital technology in Singapore', *International Communication Gazette*, v. 75 (3), 2013, pp. 262-263.

³⁵ C. Zukin, *et al.*, *A New Engagement?*, p. 4; and J. Sloam, 'Rebooting Democracy', pp. 553,556-557; and C. di Gennaro and W. Dutton, 'The Internet and the Public', p. 310.

³⁶ Visakan Veerasamy, 'Do youths care about politics? Should they?', *New Nation*, April 19, 2011, <http://newnation.sg/2011/04/do-youths-care-about-politics-should-they/>, accessed on: August 5, 2013.

³⁷ *Singapore 21: Together we make the Difference*, 1999, http://www.singapore21.org.sg/s21_reports.html pp. 49-50.

³⁸ 'Brand new website, bold new features', *REACH, Singapore*, August 27, 2010,

<http://www.reach.gov.sg/brandnewwebsiteboldnewfeatures.aspx>, accessed on: July 20, 2012.

³⁹ J. Durai and J. Tai, 'No Wrong Door “needs enforcing”', *Straits Times*, October 24, 2011.

expectations between digital natives and politicians.⁴⁰ In the subsequent chapter, this mismatch of expectations is revisited in the Bukit Brown debate.

Youths with Causes: Demonstration Activism

The most popular demonstration activism in Singapore is *Pink Dot*, a LGBT event held annually in Speakers' Corner. *Pink Dot* has attracted increasingly large crowds of thousands of participants since 2009. The highest figure achieved was 21,000 attendees in 2013.⁴¹ Its popularity is an outlier in attendance at civil activist events; so far no other civil society event has come close to the number of attendees at the previous three *Pink Dots*. The closest events to scale are the Workers' Party rallies during elections, which attract tens of thousands.⁴² These are however, held only during an election which is usually once in five years.

Pink Dot is typical of the digital native type of participation, which is characterised by weak ties between participants and to the organising core of a cause. Rossi argued that participation can be represented in concentric circles for the four types of membership and participation: hard-core, militant, linked, and sympathisers (see Figure 5.1).⁴³ The hard-core are at the centre of the circles and are the smallest group. They organise the event, and are the most dedicated to the cause. In the second circle, which is larger than the hard-core, are militant participants. They are not organisers but guaranteed supporters (such as subscribing members) and participants at events.

The next circle outwards contains linked participants, who will participate in the short-term but are not necessarily members of the organisation. The largest circle outwards contain the sympathisers, who support the aims of the cause but do not actively

⁴⁰ K.D. Sweetster and R. Weaver Lariscy, 'Candidates Make Good Friends', p. 189; and C. Shirky, *Here Comes Everybody*, p. 287; and A. Wong and X. Teo, 'A Year of Greater Engagement', *Malaysia Insider*, May 7, 2012.

⁴¹ 'More than 20,000 Turn Up at Speakers' Corner in Support of Gay Rights', *Straits Times*, June 29, 2013.

⁴² theonlinecitizen, 'WP easily attracted the biggest crowd tonight at the rallies. Estimates put the crowd size in Hougang at 40,000 to 50,000 people. The crowd at the PAP rally was 500 to 1,000 people, according to TOC reporter on the ground', *Facebook*, April 29, 2011,

<http://www.facebook.com/theonlinecitizen/posts/10150230444856383>, accessed on: April 29, 2011.

⁴³ F.M. Rossi, 'Youth Political Participation', p. 479.

participate in action more than once-off suggestions or donations.⁴⁴ Thus the scale of attendees may be an unreliable demonstration of serious commitment to the cause. In the case of *Pink Dot*, 21,000 participants and followers on Facebook, does not automatically translate into 20,000 homosexual equality activists in Singapore.

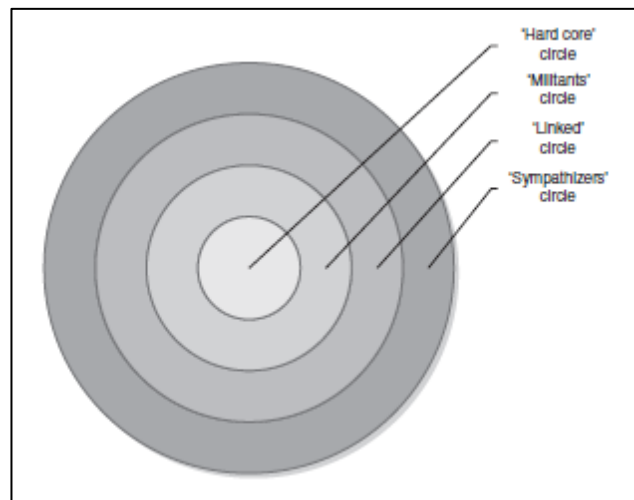


Figure 5.1 Rossi's Concentric Circles of Participation in Social Movement Organisations⁴⁵

Many of the events in Singapore have a niche audience, which affects their turnout. For example in 2005, Transient Workers Count Too (TWC2) held a carnival at Queenstown Stadium for International Migrants Day. The event had the support of the Government (the Ministry of Manpower), several Southeast Asian embassies, and corporations such as SingPost and Western Union. Over 2,000 people attended the event, including foreign maids, who are part of TWC2's focus.⁴⁶ The groups also often hold smaller events, as well as providing ongoing support and advocacy for foreign workers in Singapore.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ F.M. Rossi, 'Youth Political Participation', p. 479.

⁴⁵ F.M. Rossi, 'Youth Political Participation', p. 479.

⁴⁶ 'Foreign workers hold migrants' day', *Straits Times*, December 17, 2005.

⁴⁷ 'What We Do', *Transient Workers Count Too*, Singapore, <http://twc2.org.sg/what-we-do/>, accessed on: August 5, 2013.

In December 2011, a few young Singaporean women were influenced by the *SlutWalk* movement taking places overseas,⁴⁸ and organised the first *SlutWalk* Singapore event. The event was held in Speakers' Corner. Unlike other *SlutWalk* events participants did not march through the streets.⁴⁹ The organisers were assisted by women's rights group AWARE to hold the main *SlutWalk* event and several side events in the same week.⁵⁰

Around the world, the aims of the various *SlutWalk* events differed. This caused much confusion about what was the central aim of the movement. In Singapore, the *SlutWalk* organisers attempted to make clear that their aim was not to reclaim the word "slut" for feminists, but to protest the social attitudes and legal ramifications of blaming victims of rape for the crime.⁵¹ The adoption of Speakers' Corner for a stationary *SlutWalk* event, rather than a protest march, was also a manifestation of the changed mindset of digital natives: to use whatever means at their disposal to carry out an event.

In addition to global divide over the various aims and methods of *SlutWalks*, *SlutWalk* Singapore received misleading publicity in the mainstream media tabloid *The New Paper*⁵² and online in the lead-up to the event. On the day, approximately 650 people attended.⁵³ In 2012, the organisers attempted the same event, but the international hype had diminished, and less than 400 people joined in.⁵⁴

Despite the noble intent of the Singaporean *SlutWalk* organisers, they complained that the event was subjected to severe criticism online, which misrepresented the cause and

⁴⁸ "'SlutWalk' marches sparked by Toronto officers' remarks', *BBC News*, May 8, 2011; and L. Barton, 'The view from a broad: do the SlutWalk', *The Guardian*, May 10, 2011; and M. Griffin, "'Sluts" take to the streets', *Sydney Morning Herald*, May 10, 2011; and 'SlutWalk Campaigners urge David Cameron to do more for rape victims', *Huffington Post*, September 19, 2012, http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2012/09/19/slutwalk-campaigners-outside-number-10-david-cameron-rape-victim_n_1896503.html, accessed on: May 20, 2013; and 'SlutWalk comes to DC', *Washington Post*, August 13, 2011.

⁴⁹ T. Wong, 'Police waive permit for SlutWalk event', *Straits Times*, December 2, 2011.

⁵⁰ 'SlutWalk Singapore: Fringe Events', AWARE, Singapore, October 19, 2011, <http://www.aware.org.sg/2011/10/slutwalk-singapore-fringe-events>, accessed on: August 1, 2012.

⁵¹ J. Gwynne, 'SlutWalk, feminist activism and the Foreign Body in Singapore', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, v. 43 (1), 2013, p. 176.

⁵² J. Lim, 'Slutty, we're just sexy', *The New Paper*, November 1, 2011.

⁵³ SlutWalk Singapore, 'SlutWalk Singapore 2012 @ Hong Lim Park', *Facebook*, <https://www.facebook.com/events/312635092178878/permalink/323992314376489/>, accessed on: April 20, 2013.

⁵⁴ SlutWalk Singapore, 'SlutWalk Singapore 2012 @ Hong Lim Park'.

those who participated.⁵⁵ An unfortunate side effect of the internet's openness and ease of access is it is easy to type whatever thoughts enter one's head, without consideration of the consequences. In short, there is often no filter between what is thought and what is typed. Such "keyboard warriors" are a common phenomenon and characterised by people who contribute unproductively to an online conversation because they can.

The limited societal resonance of *SlutWalk* by digital natives perhaps does not engender much faith in the women's rights movement in Singapore. By comparison, over 2,500 bloggers attended the *Free My Internet* protest in June 2013, and demonstrated what issues will get digital natives to mobilise. *Free My Internet* was the dramatic overreaction to the introduction of individual licences for online news sites, which does not even affect blogs (at the moment).

After staging a 24 hour blackout of their websites, which saw over 160 sites participate,⁵⁶ the bloggers took to Speakers' Corner to protest the so-called silencing of citizen journalism.⁵⁷ One element of their criticism was the introduction of the licence without consultation or parliamentary oversight,⁵⁸ which they saw as representative of the next stage in the Government's attempts to regulate the internet.

The resonance of the *Free My Internet* event amongst bloggers also perhaps points to generational solidarity. Studies have found that digital natives have the highest level of generational self-identification but a lower level of trust in each other and others

⁵⁵ S. Ng, 'The Big SlutWalk Singapore Trolling Wankfest of Doom 2011', *SlutWalk Singapore*, November 22, 2011, <http://slutwalksg.com/2011/11/22/the-big-slutwalk-singapore-trolling-wankfest-of-doom-2011/>, accessed on: January 5, 2012; and 'The New Paper "twisted our mission into something people could make fun of" – SlutWalk Singapore', *The Online Citizen*, November 28, 2011, <http://theonlinecitizen.com/2011/11/the-new-paper-twisted-our-mission-into-something-people-could-make-fun-of-slutwalk-singapore>, accessed on: December 15, 2011.

⁵⁶ T. Wong, "'Free My Internet' netizens to protest against MDA rule', *Straits Times*, June 2, 2013; and I. Saad, 'Bloggers to stage "internet blackout" to protest new licensing regime', *Channel NewsAsia*, June 5, 2013; and A. Ong, 'Lights back on in Singapore blogosphere after blackout protests', *Straits Times*, June 7, 2013.

⁵⁷ S. Chen and Sanat Vallikappen, 'Singapore Bloggers Protest Licensing Rules of News Websites', *Bloomberg*, June 8, 2013, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2013-06-09/singapore-bloggers-protest-licensing-rules-for-news-websites.html>, accessed on: August 5, 2013; and Y.S. Ng, 'Free My Internet protest by bloggers draws a crowd at Hong Lim Park', *The Online Citizen*, June 10, 2013, <http://www.theonlinecitizen.com/2013/06/free-my-internet-protest-by-bloggers-draw-a-crowd-at-hong-lim-park/>, accessed on: August 5, 2013; and H.W. Chun, 'Singaporeans Protest New Internet Rules', *The Wall Street Journal*, June 9, 2013.

⁵⁸ 'Protesters rally in Singapore against new online rules', *Agence France-Press*, June 8, 2013.

compared to previous generations.⁵⁹ The organisers of *Free My Internet* used Facebook and their blogs to advertise the event and invited nearly 30,000 people to attend,⁶⁰ but only 2,500 attended. This implied that Facebook and blogs are not always optimal mobilisation tools and that the thousands of blog readers in Singapore either did not feel the same sense of impending doom as the bloggers did, or believed the protest would have no effect.

The difference in attendance between *Free My Internet* and *SlutWalk* can be explained by the biographical resonance of the cause. Most people have had no exposure to rape, which diminishes biographical resonance of the issue to introspective digital natives. By contrast, opposing licencing of blogs (although this has not actually occurred) is not as taboo as protesting social attitudes towards rape. If we compare the aims of *SlutWalk* and *Pink Dot*, there is actually less difference between these two events (protesting inequality and social attitudes) than between them and *Free My Internet*.

One plausible explanation for the difference in attendance between the first *Pink Dot* and *SlutWalk* was the marketing of the events. In its first event, *Pink Dot* attracted between 1,000 and 2,500 participants (depending on the source)⁶¹ compared to *SlutWalk*'s 650. The higher attendance may be because '*Pink Dot*' is a less provocative name for an event than *SlutWalk*. *Pink Dot* also did not have the association with a global movement that was divisive in intent and practice.

The first *Pink Dot* demonstrated that a successful event with strong resonance can influence future events. *Pink Dot* has been recognised as the significant LGBT event in Singapore, and secured the support of international corporations such as Barclays Bank, J.P. Morgan, Google, Nando's fast food chain, and local businesses such as the Park

⁵⁹ C. Zukin, *et al.*, *A New Engagement?*, p. 126.

⁶⁰ 'Join the "Free My Internet" movement to protest against MDA's new online regulations', *TR Emeritus*, June 1, 2013, <http://www.tremeritus.com/2013/06/01/join-the-free-my-internet-movement-to-protest-against-mdas-new-online-regulations/>, accessed on: August 5, 2013; and 'Free My Internet, #FreeMyInternet – Movement against new licensing requirements for online media', *Facebook*, <https://www.facebook.com/events/185882738236629/>, accessed on: August 5, 2013.

⁶¹ 'Singapore's gay community holds first-ever rally', *Associate Press*, May 16, 2009.

royal on Pickering, a hotel nearby Hong Lim Park.⁶² Furthermore, *Pink Dot* deliberately promotes a non-discriminatory audience with a supportive and fun family atmosphere. Thus, *Pink Dot* indirectly protests the serious issue of homosexual inequality. By keeping the politics out of *Pink Dot*, the audience grows, but the lobbying power may be decreased. The generalised principle of *Pink Dot* to respect others has allowed the movement to grow beyond advocacy for homosexual equality to building a society that upholds freedoms and respect without discrimination.⁶³

In 2013, *Pink Dot* directly appealed to Singaporean nationalism to emphasise that LGBT Singaporeans are still part of the nation. The organisers were supported by Dick Lee, who composed the iconic *National Day Parade* song 'Home'. Lee donated to *Pink Dot* a 2010 recording of the song. The *Pink Dot* organisers used the song in a video produced by acclaimed local filmmaker Boo Junfeng to show the issues of acceptance that LGBT people face in Singapore.⁶⁴ The video also showed everyday images from across Singapore, such as apartments, transport and eating out, that would be familiar and have direct biographical resonance. The *Pink Dot* 2013 video was hosted on YouTube and had over 134,000 views as of August 2013.⁶⁵ The use of YouTube is vital because of its massive global audience and ubiquitousness as a video platform.

By contrast, *SlutWalk* also produced a video for its 2012 event, which seriously addressed five myths about rape and urged people to support their cause, because rape is "everyone's problem". The *SlutWalk* video was creatively produced and featured hand-drawn caricatures and important messages, but it was not widely shared on Facebook (only 57 times)⁶⁶ and was not uploaded onto YouTube. Although to compare directly *SlutWalk*'s second attempt with *Pink Dot*'s fifth is unfair, the *SlutWalk* 2012 team clearly missed the opportunity to make their event more significant to digital natives.

⁶² 'Growing Support for the Freedom to Love', *Pink Dot, Singapore*, May 23, 2013,

<http://pinkdot.sg/growing-support-for-the-freedom-to-love/>, accessed on: July 29, 2013.

⁶³ 'More than 15,000 Singaporeans at *Pink Dot* 2012!', *Pink Dot, Singapore*, June 30, 2012,

<http://pinkdot.sg/more-than-15000-singaporeans-at-pink-dot-2012/>, accessed on: July 10, 2012.

⁶⁴ '*Pink Dot* 2013 drives the message Home, with new Campaign Video', *Pink Dot, Singapore*, May 23, 2013, <http://pinkdot.sg/pink-dot-2013-drives-the-message-home-with-new-campaign-video/>, accessed on: August 5, 2013.

⁶⁵ Pinkdotsg, 'Home 2013', *YouTube*, May 22, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S1dQCsfEJ5o>, accessed on: August 5, 2013.

⁶⁶ SlutWalk Singapore, 'Top 5 Myths', *Facebook*, December 15, 2012,

https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?v=10151405040588319&set=vb.350443491656160&type=3&video_source=pages_video_set, accessed on: August 5, 2013.

Another brazen mobilisation of Singaporeans was to protest the Population White Paper in February 2013. The White Paper, discussed in Chapter Three, proposed significant increases in the number of foreigners welcomed to Singapore as new citizens to combat the aging population and insufficient Total Fertility Rate.⁶⁷ The turnouts to the two protests in Speakers' Corner were significantly large, and were a clear representation that for many, the *Straits Times Forum* and online outrage are not sufficient to influence the Government.

Over 5,000 people attended the first protest which was organised by civil society organisation Transitioning.org. On May Day (May 1), a second protest was organised in Speakers' Corner, attracting nearly 6,000 participants, who protested the preference of hiring foreign workers over Singaporeans.⁶⁸ The organisers hoped that the size of the crowd would illustrate how angry Singaporeans were about the proposal⁶⁹ but the events took place after the White Paper was endorsed by Parliament.

The second type of event in Singapore, which typically attracts much smaller audiences, is the boundary pusher event. These are usually organised by groups and individuals who have previously undertaken controversial or illegal activism. Although their messages are serious and important, the event style tends to overshadow the message and is usually negatively reported by the media. These boundary-pusher events do not directly lobby, but that does not appear to be their primary purpose. These events are not exclusively carried-out by digital natives, but the boldness of the younger generation in their activism and online attitudes, has clearly influenced activism wholesale.

⁶⁷ C.L. Goh, 'Goal: 15,000-25,000 New Citizens a Year', *Straits Times*, January 30, 2013.

⁶⁸ T. Xu, 'May Day Protest at Hong Lim Park', *The Online Citizen*, May 2, 2013, <http://www.theonlinecitizen.com/2013/05/mayday-protest-at-hong-lim-park/>, accessed on: August 5, 2013; and 'May Day protest at Speakers' Corner draws thousands', *Yahoo! News, Singapore*, May 1, 2013, <http://sg.news.yahoo.com/around-2-000-turn-up-at-may-day-protest-at-hong-lim-park-085513158.html>, accessed on: August 5, 2013.

⁶⁹ S. Adam, 'Singapore Protest Exposes Voter Worries About Immigration', *Bloomberg*, February 18, 2013, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2013-02-16/singaporeans-protest-plan-to-increase-population-by-immigration.html>, accessed on: August 5, 2013; and '4,000 turn up at Speakers' Corner for population White Paper protest', *Yahoo! News, Singapore*, February 16, 2013, <http://sg.news.yahoo.com/huge-turnout-at-speakers-corner-for-population-white-paper-protest-101051153.html>, accessed on: August 5, 2013.

Poking the Lion: Pushing the Boundaries of Government Tolerance with Civil Activism

Foucault described the role of resistance, or his preferred term ‘counter-conduct,’ as altering the power relations between sovereign and population.⁷⁰ Counter-conduct in Singapore has attracted negative media coverage to reinforce that it is ‘bad’ behaviour. In the previous chapter, bloggers’ resistance to suggestions of a code of conduct influenced the Government response. Boundary-pushing activism similarly has influenced governmentality, which in turn has influenced future activism.”

The actor who most consistently practiced boundary-pushing resistance was Dr Chee Soon Juan, and he influenced the actions of others. Chee’s boundary-pushing events used both illegal and legal methods.

In 2000, Chee organised a 26-mile run on Human Rights Day to commemorate the imprisonment of Chia Thye Poh under the Internal Security Act. He was warned that such an event with more than five people would constitute a procession, which would require a police licence. He was thus given the option of how to proceed. The event was modified so that Chee ran with his sister Chee Siok Chin from Whitley Detention Centre where Internal Security Act detainees are held to Speakers’ Corner.⁷¹ Chee chose to counter-react by operating legally while maintaining the original means of protest.

As part of the protest, Speaker’s Corner speakers, including Chee, called for the abolition of the ISA. Some of the activists in the audience raised clenched fists and chanted: “Abolish ISA!” This was reported in the domestic media and the activists were warned that Speakers’ Corner was not for demonstrations or such “gesticulations”.⁷² The Government reacted to the activism by increasing the disciplinary rules for using Speakers’ Corner.

⁷⁰ A.I. Davidson, 'Introduction', *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977-1978*, M. Senellart (ed.) Palgrave Macmillan, New York & Basingstoke, 2009, p. xxii.

⁷¹ J. Lloyd-Smith, 'Running into Trouble', *South China Morning Post*, December 9, 2000; and 'SDP leaders to Walk for Workers on May Day', *Singapore Democratic Party, Singapore*, April 26, 2007, http://yoursdp.org/news/sdp_leaders_to_walk_for_workers_on_may_day/2007-04-25-4796, accessed on: August 5, 2013.

⁷² S.J. Chee, 'Pressing for Openness in Singapore', p. 163.

When the Singapore Democratic Party held the *Silenced No Longer* anti-ISA event in October 2011, the police investigated the organisers for featuring via Skype Singaporean exiles Tang Fong Har and Francis Seow.⁷³ It was a bold move to organise an event that featured exiled former detainees and to test the Government's response. For the Party, Skype allowed the event to operate in a legal grey-area. The exiles spoke on a Singaporean issue to Singaporeans, but they were not in Singapore, so they could not be charged for breaching the regulations on public speech. Although the police investigated the SPD organisers for the event, and called them to be questioned several times,⁷⁴ which is a common intimidation technique, no charges were made.

Many of Chee's civil activism was illegal, which caused the SDP to be tarnished as troublesome. For example, in 2002, Chee was charged with holding an unlicensed speech in Speakers' Corner that contravened restrictions against racial or religious speech. He criticised the hypocrisy of Muslim schoolgirls being told they could not wear the *tudung* headdress in school because it breached school uniform. He pointed to the example of Sikh boys being allowed to wear turbans regardless of uniform requirements, and espoused that children exposed to others of different faiths and cultures dispelled prejudice.⁷⁵ For breaching the rules of Speakers' Corner, even to highlight the breach of the girls' religious freedoms, he was fined S\$3,000.⁷⁶

In March 2008, Chee and supporters, including members of the SDP, held the *Tak Boleh Tahan!* (Can't Take it Anymore!) protest against the rising cost of living.⁷⁷ Chee and 18 others were arrested for unlawful assembly and an illegal procession.⁷⁸ The protestors claimed that the arrest was hypocritical because in 2007 the Consumers' Association of Singapore (CASE) had held a similar event (*Walk with Case*), and none of those

⁷³ 'Police investigating SDP forum', *Straits Times*, October 10, 2011.

⁷⁴ Email communication with the Singapore Democratic Party, January 10, 2012.

⁷⁵ 'Tudung issue: Are We Missing the Point?', *Singapore Democratic Party, Singapore*, February 15, 2002, http://yoursdp.org/news/tudung_issue_are_we_missing_the_point/2002-02-15-3986, accessed on: August 5, 2013.

⁷⁶ J. Gomez, 'Restricting Free Speech: The Impact on Opposition Parties', *The Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies*, v. 23 2006, p. 115.

⁷⁷ K.B. Kor, 'SDP holds illegal protest against rising consumer prices; 12 held', *Straits Times*, March 16, 2008.

⁷⁸ 'Eighteen people, comprising members of the opposition Singapore Democratic Party charged', *Today*, July 12, 2008.

participants were arrested.⁷⁹ They alleged that CASE had been allowed to operate without a police licence because it was “organised by PAP MPs.”⁸⁰ The Government replied that the *Tak Boleh Tahan!* members were arrested because they carried out their demonstration despite rejection for a police licence and outside of Speakers’ Corner.⁸¹ If *Tak Boleh Tahan!* was a stationary protest in Speakers’ Corner, the police would have had no reason to arrest them.

There have been events that started out legally, but then proceeded to illegality in resistance to governmentality, such as the first major political event using Speakers’ Corner in September 2006. Chee and other SDP members held a 72 hour protest in Speakers’ Corner during the World Trade Organisation Summit.⁸² The protest deliberately capitalised on the presence of the international media, which was focused on Singapore for the summit. The police warned Chee that any attempt to move the protest from Speakers’ Corner would result in his arrest.⁸³ Chee tested the police’s threat, fully aware that the international media would be watching, and he and fellow demonstrators attempted to march to Parliament House. They were barricaded by police and arrested.⁸⁴

In October 2011, members of the political association Singaporeans for Democracy (SFD) were investigated by the police because they had invited a Malaysian and Cambodian to speak about government intimidation in the region.⁸⁵ Singaporeans for Democracy organisers had intended to hold this anti-ISA event in a private venue

⁷⁹ 'Poetry', *Straits Times*, March 15, 2007; and 'High Court to hear if Govt discriminates against opponents', *Singapore Democratic Party*, October 1, 2010, <http://yoursdp.org/index.php/news/singapore/4197-high-court-to-hear-if-govt-discriminates-against-opponents>, accessed on: July 15, 2011.

⁸⁰ 'High Court to hear if Govt discriminates against opponents'.

⁸¹ C.L. Goh, 'Illegal assembly; Chees among 18 charged', *Straits Times*, July 12, 2008.

⁸² 'Chee ends protest after three days', *Today*, September 20, 2006.

⁸³ 'SDP's Chee Soon Juan stopped from handing out pamphlets urging outdoor rally and march', *Channel NewsAsia*, September 10, 2006.

⁸⁴ 'Chee ends protest after three days'.

⁸⁵ Teo Soh Lung, 'Police harassment of Martyn See?', *Facebook*, January 24, 2012, https://m.facebook.com/note.php?note_id=241136545961226&p=0&_rdr, accessed on: July 10, 2012.

without a police licence, but were denied access by the venue owner on the day.⁸⁶ The event was moved to a nearby-bar and the discussion was a semi-private forum.⁸⁷

A complaint was made to the police that “foreign speakers were in attendance to speak on and discuss domestic political issues which they have no stake in”.⁸⁸ The police investigated the organisers for breach of the Public Order Act for holding the event in a public location and involving foreigners without police licence.⁸⁹ The threat of punishment under the Public Order Act was replaced with investigation under the Employment of Foreign Manpower Act.⁹⁰ No charges appeared to be forthcoming from the event, although organiser Martyn See was questioned by police.⁹¹

Sometimes it is not the activists themselves, but unaffiliated parties, who cause an event to be reported negatively or punished by the Government. The *That We May Dream Again* event in Speakers’ Corner was not investigated by the police, but it was part of a scandal almost four months after the event. The scandal was not about what was actually said at the event, but what was not said. At *That We May Dream Again*, former detainees of the 1987 Operation Spectrum detention commemorated the 25th anniversary of their detention.⁹² Participants were invited to “lim kopi” (Malay for drink coffee, i.e. to chat) with the former detainees after the event. *That We May Dream Again* was advertised by

⁸⁶ 'Breaking news: Forum cancelled, participants locked out', *Singapore Democratic Party*, September 24, 2011, <http://yoursdp.org/index.php/news/singapore/4972-breaking-news-forum-cancelled-participants-locked-out>, accessed on: September 26, 2011.

⁸⁷ T. Wong, 'Police question political forum's organiser', *Straits Times*, October 13, 2011.

⁸⁸ T. Wong, 'Police question political forum's organiser'.

⁸⁹ T. Wong, 'Police question political forum's organiser'; and J. Gomez, 'Police: foreign speakers at private forums require clearance', *Singaporeans For Democracy, Singapore*, January 20, 2012, <http://sfd.sg/content/police-foreign-speakers-private-forums-require-clearance>, accessed on: July 10, 2012.

⁹⁰ J. Gomez, 'Police: foreign speakers at private forums require clearance'.

⁹¹ T. Wong, 'Police question political forum's organiser'; and J. Gomez, 'Police: foreign speakers at private forums require clearance'.

⁹² 'Ex-detainees to mark 25th anniversary of arrests', *Singapore Rebel*, May 30, 2012, <http://singaporerebel.blogspot.com/2012/05/ex-detainees-to-mark-25th-anniversary.html>, accessed on: July 10, 2012.

The Online Citizen on its Facebook page⁹³ and attracted approximately 400 people, including those who knew about and sympathised with former detainees, and those who were curious about the 1987-88 detentions.⁹⁴

The 1987-88 detentions had been mostly struck from public consciousness until 2011.⁹⁵ The detention of 22 activists for their political challenge to the Government, either as part of the Catholic Church or the Law Society, was omitted in large part from Singapore's official history. The justification for the detention was flimsy because of contradictory and unclear information about the role of the Church, the initial assessment of the detainees as Marxists (which was soon dropped), and seemingly far-fetched allegations of an international plot to overthrow the Government.⁹⁶ The detentions however, clearly served to demonstrate to activists that the Government could use the heavy-hand of the state if needed.

That We May Dream Again was co-organised by human rights group MARUAH, which circulated a petition for an official enquiry into the detentions, and hoped to get 35,000 signatures to submit to the Government. At the event, the former detainees were also able to promote their books and memoirs about the detentions.⁹⁷ Then-Singapore Democratic Party Treasurer Vincent Wijesingha spoke in his own capacity and was particularly impassioned about the detentions. That he was not punished by the Government is testament to the tolerance for Speakers' Corner events and even online

⁹³ theonlinecitizen, 'MARUAH and FUNCTION 8 will join other organisations in commemorating the 25th Anniversary of the arrest of 24 persons during Operation Spectrum with events to be held at Speakers Corner, Hong Lim Park (Singapore) on 2 June 2012 (Sat)', *Facebook*, June 1, 2012, <https://www.facebook.com/theonlinecitizen/posts/156821761109451>, accessed on: July 10, 2012; and theonlinecitizen, 'That We May Dream Again: Remembering the 1987 'Marxist Conspiracy'', 2nd June 2012 at Hong Lim Park, Singapore Time : 3-7pm', *Facebook*, June 1, 2012, <https://www.facebook.com/theonlinecitizen/posts/392294390807700>, accessed on: July 10, 2012; and theonlinecitizen, 'Interview with Tan Tee Seng, an ISA detainee in 1987. There will also be a session themed "That We May Dream Again – Remembering the 1987 "Marxist Conspiracy" will be held on 3pm to 7pm | Saturday 2 June 2012 | Speakers' Corner, Hong Lim Park.', *Facebook*, June 1, 2012, <https://www.facebook.com/theonlinecitizen/posts/10151007613061383>, accessed on: July 10, 2012.

⁹⁴ W. Au, 'Hundreds turn up at rally against arbitrary detention', *Yawning Bread*, June 2, 2012, <http://yawningbread.wordpress.com/2012/06/02/hundreds-turn-up-at-rally-against-arbitrary-detention/>, accessed on: July 10, 2012.

⁹⁵ Barr commented on the difficulty in attaining information about the detentions from official sources such as the Singapore National Museum. M.D. Barr, 'Marxists in Singapore? Lee Kuan Yew's Campaign against Catholic Social Justice Activists in the 1980s', *Critical Asian Studies*, v. 42 (3), 2010, pp. 335-336.

⁹⁶ Barr has produced several comprehensive analyses of the detentions and the Government's motivations in M.D. Barr, 'Marxists in Singapore?'; and M.D. Barr, 'Singapore's Catholic Social Activists: Alleged Marxist Conspirators', *Paths Not Taken: Political Pluralism in Post War Singapore*, M.D. Barr and C.A. Trocki (eds.), National University of Singapore Press, Singapore, 2008, pp. 228-247.

⁹⁷ J. Heng, 'Remembering the Marxist Conspiracy', *Straits Times*, June 3, 2012.

content. It is not difficult to believe that not so long ago Wijesingha would have been investigated by police for his speech detailing how Operation Spectrum was a political charade orchestrated by Lee Kuan Yew.⁹⁸

Wijesingha cited incidents, such as the resignation of Cabinet Minister S. Dhanabalan soon after the detentions, as evidence that the justification for the detention was fabricated. He also cited Cabinet Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam's admission in 2011 that "he did not believe that the 22 detained were engaged in a Marxist conspiracy," and Lee Kuan Yew's discussion – on public record with then-Archbishop Gregory Yong – that his objective was to undermine the influence of the Catholic Church.⁹⁹ Wijesingha's boldest statement was that:

There was no Marxist conspiracy, it was a lie. And the Prime Minister at the time [Lee Kuan Yew], the two Deputy Ministers, every Cabinet Minister except Dhanabalan, every Minister of State, every Parliamentary Secretary and every member of the Parliament except Mr Chiam See Tong were complicit in that lie. And, every person who has joined the PAP since that day have become co-conspirators in that lie!¹⁰⁰

It is not surprising that the text of Wijesingha's speech was not reported in the media. The Government was probably quite aware that if they initiated any action against Wijesingha, which legally they could, it would result in his speech being published in the media. A media report would force the Government to make a public statement about the 1987 detentions. In contrast, Wijesingha's coerced apology to Tan Chuan-Jin (then-Acting Minister of Manpower) and former to PAP MP S. Vasoo for allegedly defamatory comments made on Facebook¹⁰¹ was much less politically sensitive. So the *That We May Dream Again* incident was left alone by Singapore's media until

⁹⁸ That We May Dream Again, 'Speech by Vincent Wijesingha', *Facebook*, June 4, 2012, <https://www.facebook.com/video/video.php?v=10150930745672453>, accessed on: July 10, 2012.

⁹⁹ That We May Dream Again, 'Speech by Vincent Wijesingha'.

¹⁰⁰ That We May Dream Again, 'Speech by Vincent Wijesingha'.

¹⁰¹ F. Sim, 'Vincent Wijesingha apologises to acting manpower minister', *Yahoo! News, Singapore*, January 6, 2013, <http://sg.news.yahoo.com/vincent-wijesingha-apologises-to-acting-manpower-minister-034410149.html>, accessed on: February 2, 2013; and T. Wong, 'Wijesingha apologises to former MP Vasoo', *Straits Times*, December 7, 2012.

September 2012; only minimally reported in the *Straits Times* as a commemoration of a Marxist Conspiracy.¹⁰²

Two weeks after the event, the *New York Times* published an article stating Singaporeans were becoming bolder to challenge the Government, and cited the *That We May Dream Again* event, the measures to protect Bukit Brown cemetery, and *Pink Dot*.¹⁰³ The article prompted Singapore's American Ambassador Chan Heng Chee to reply that the Government engages with civil activist groups. She also clarified that the ISA "was used in the past to deal with a violent insurgency and active subversion by the Communists. It remains relevant as a pre-emptive tool to safeguard security, especially against the threat of terrorism."¹⁰⁴ Neither of the *New York Times* articles was reported in the Singapore media.

That We May Dream Again was scandal free until September 2012, when blogger Alex Au posted on his blog that Archbishop Nicholas Chia had written a letter of support to co-organiser Function 8, but then asked that the letter not be mentioned in public.¹⁰⁵ Au claimed that prior to Chia's request for the letter be kept private, Deputy Prime Minister Teo Chee Hean had requested Archbishop Chia meet with him.¹⁰⁶ Au implied that Teo had strong-armed Chia into withdrawing his letter.

Chia responded to Au's allegation via a press release that he had contacted Function 8 and requested the withdrawal of the original letter because it could misrepresent the official position of the Church on the 1987 detentions. He felt "the group would use my letter in a manner that I did not agree with, and make use of the Office of the Archbishop and the Catholic Church for their own ends."¹⁰⁷ *That We May Dream Again* co-organisers MARUAH and Function 8 issued a press statement on the issue and called for

¹⁰² J. Heng, 'Remembering the Marxist Conspiracy'.

¹⁰³ A. Jacobs, 'As Singapore Loosens Its Grip, Residents Lose Fear to Challenge Authority', *New York Times*, June 16, 2012.

¹⁰⁴ H.C. Chan, 'Singapore is "Evolving"', *New York Times*, June 22, 2012.

¹⁰⁵ W. Au, 'Lunch menu a 4-point letter', *Yawning Bread*, September 18, 2012, <http://yawningbread.wordpress.com/2012/09/18/lunch-menu-a-4-point-letter/>, accessed on: February 4, 2013.

¹⁰⁶ W. Au, 'Lunch menu a 4-point letter'.

¹⁰⁷ T. Wong, 'Archbishop Nicholas Chia: I withdrew letter for social harmony's sake', *Straits Times*, September 19, 2012.

the Government and Archbishop to be transparent and disclose how the Archbishop's actions were in the interest of social harmony.¹⁰⁸

The Ministry of Home Affairs issued a statement that Function 8 was “disrespectful” to Chia for making public the claim about the letters, and the incident was an attempt to embroil the Church in a political scandal.¹⁰⁹ The following month, Teo made a statement in Parliament that the decision by Chia to withdraw the letters was consistent with the rights of his office and the position of the Church not to get involved in Singapore's domestic politics.¹¹⁰ After Teo's statement in Parliament, there was no further action taken publicly against Function 8 or Alex Au on the *That We May Dream Again* event. Teo's Parliamentary statement had brought the issue to a close.

Conclusion

The difference in attitudes to participation between digital natives and previous generations is significant because it has made younger Singaporeans bolder in their civil activism. They are less *kiasu-kiasi* and afraid to actively challenge the Government. They have realised the value of using legal spaces for their activism. Each successful event inspires hope that future activism will not be punished. Digital natives are still distrustful of the Government so have sought to supplement legal spaces with their own spheres of protest and activism, including socio-political blogs, discussed in the previous chapter.

Events that have used legal spaces include demonstrations with biographical resonance, such as SlutWalk, PinkDot, and Free My Internet, and boundary-pushing events. These events actively test how far these designated spaces can be used by activists before attracting a government reaction.

¹⁰⁸ W. Au, 'Three statements from the government, Function 8 and Maruah on the archbishop affair', *Yawning Bread*, September 21, 2012, <http://yawningbread.wordpress.com/2012/09/21/three-statements-from-the-government-function-8-and-maruah-on-the-archbishop-affair/>, accessed on: February 4, 2012.

¹⁰⁹ T. Wong, 'MHA: Function 8 disrespectful to the Archbishop', *Straits Times*, September 20, 2012.

¹¹⁰ T. Wong, 'Archbishop Chia's withdrawal of letter to group “consistent”', *Straits Times*, October 15, 2012.

The mobilising influence for digital natives needs to be considered when reflecting on civil activism in Singapore in the Twenty-First Century. Digital natives are far more transitory in their interests and political causes, and are less rigidly organised by political parties and bound memberships. Accessibility to civil society and causes is made considerably easier because of the internet. This increases the size of the sympathetic actors.

Auto-biographical resonance also means that an issue must strike the appropriate chord with a digital native to encourage their participation. As was seen in the *SlutWalk* Singapore event of December 2011, the resonance of an event is also vulnerable to media reporting and public misperception, including by uninformed “keyboard warriors”.

The use of Speakers’ Corner for sporadic protest is certainly contributing to the liberalisation of Singaporean culture, but it does not have a significant impact on actual policy. There is a lack of cooperation between protestors and channels to lobby the Government, including using elected and unelected MPs and official channels such as REACH. Additionally, the protest against the Population White Paper and individual news licence were held after-the-fact, when the White Paper was endorsed and the licence introduced. Interested Parliamentarians could not use the popularity of the protests to challenge the Government in Parliament on the basis of their representation.

The subsequent chapter explores the possibility of synergy between unelected MPs and protest movements to affect political change. This is significant as Chapter Seven analyses the electoral manipulation methods that attempt to mitigate the opposition parties gaining a critical mass in Parliament, which would enable them to bring about lasting change.

Chapter Six:

The Increased Significance of Unelected Members of Parliament

As the Government tightened the regulations on public activism outside of Speakers' Corner and indoor venues, it expanded and entrenched Parliamentary channels for activism and expression of partisan political views. This concurrent tightening and realigning of policy is characteristic of incorporating the desires of the population, seen in the growth of civil activism, whilst reinforcing the measures to protect the national interest (*raison d'état*). This chapter explores the creation of unelected Member of Parliament seats by sovereign action to limit the influence of elected opposition MPs, while assuaging the popular desire for more opposition in Parliament. Consider Non-Constituency and Nominated MPs as disciplinary microcosms where behaviour is shaped and limited by the implication that the ideal MP is the elected PAP MP, and that unelected MPs should model their behaviour on that standard of conduct.

In this chapter I demonstrate how the PAP has successfully manoeuvred opposition parties into accepting the limitations and compromises involved in accepting the offer of NCMP seats, thus implicitly accepting the hegemonic role of the PAP in Parliament. In the section on Nominated MPs, I explore the extent to which incumbents have been able to act as representatives for specific public interests, and as forces of change. In the case study that concludes this chapter, I analyse the possibilities of synergy between unelected MPs and civil society to bring about significant political change.

The Government has made it clear on many occasions that Parliament is the only tolerated space for political debate,¹ which makes elections and the selection of Nominated MPs important to counteract the marginalization of civil activism. Nine Nominated Members of Parliament can sit in Parliament alongside a guaranteed nine opposition Members of Parliament. These nine opposition MPs will be a mixture of elected and Non-Constituency MPs.

¹ M.H. Chua, 'PM: No erosion of my authority allowed', *Straits Times*, December 5, 1994., *Singapore Parliament Reports (Hansard)*, Ninth Parliament, April 25, 2000; and X. Li, 'Navigating a New Terrain of Engagement', *Straits Times*, March 30, 2012; and X. Li and G. Chua, 'No regrets' over Bukit Brown effort', *Straits Times*, March 30, 2012.

Unelected MPs have restricted voting rights, because they do not represent constituents. They can raise bills and motions, and participate freely in debates and ask questions, but they are prohibited from voting on amendments to the Constitution, money and supply bills, and votes of no-confidence in the Government or the President.² On Parliamentary Motions however, unelected MPs have greater power to influence the House as their dissent is not discounted by lack of seat representation. Participation in Parliamentary debates can force government clarification or conciliation. As the non-People's Action Party presence in Parliament is still a minimum, 10 of 99 total MPs (elected and unelected), the PAP is not particularly threatened by pluralism. It must be remembered however, that as the Government perpetually revises its governmentality to shore up control, should the opposition increase in strength in the future, the NMP and NCMP scheme may be revised.

The creation of unelected MP seats was authoritarian sovereign action. The creation of unelected MPs undermined the ideal of representative democracy in Singapore by showing citizens that they did not need to elect the opposition parties to have plurality in Parliament. Nominated and Non-Constituency MPs do not represent electoral constituencies, and Nominated Members are instructed to be non-partisan. This gives Nominated MPs an advantage over other MPs affiliated with a political party, because their reputations do not have electoral ramifications in subsequent elections.

Their performance may however, have repercussions for their careers outside of Parliament. For example, Professor Thio Li-ann withdrew from teaching at New York University due to student backlash against her anti-homosexual comments made as an NMP. In 2007, Thio spoke vociferously in defence of retaining Section 377a of the Penal Code, which criminalises male homosexual acts.³ By contrast, her peer Siew Kum Hong argued in favour of the law's repeal and has been lauded for his contribution to

² *Singapore Parliamentary Reports (Hansard)*, Eleventh Parliament, April 26, 2010; and K.Y.L. Tan, 'Parliament and the Making of Law in Singapore', *The Singapore Legal System*, K.Y.L. Tan (ed.) National University of Singapore Press, Singapore, 1999, p. 130.

³ 'Anti-gay Singapore prof cancels NYU stint after uproar', *Sydney Morning Herald*, July 4, 2009.

Parliament.⁴ Nominated MPs therefore have a different set of considerations than their party-affiliated peers.

Sovereign Action against Representative Democracy: The Non-Constituency MP

The Non-Constituency MP position was introduced to Parliament in 1984, after the PAP vote share declined to 63% and the opposition won two seats in Parliament.⁵ The PAP perceived that middle-class voters were turning away from the PAP because of the lack of elected opposition since the late 1960s, and could potentially continue to vote for more opposition candidates in subsequent elections. The Government introduced NCMPs to show that the PAP was open to opposition in Parliament.⁶ In the period of 1984 to 1991, the Government simultaneously opened Parliament to the potential of appointed opposition (NMPs) while closing off the avenues for elected opposition with Group Representation Constituencies.⁷ Lee Kuan Yew endorsed the introduction of NCMPs to benefit junior PAP MPs by exposing them to the “cut and thrust of debate” that they were denied with no opposition MPs in Parliament.⁸ The NCMPs would also demonstrate the limited usefulness of opposition MPs in Parliament,⁹ and as a tool by which allegations of corruption or authoritarianism could be adequately rebutted in Parliament under the guise of democracy.¹⁰

⁴ K.H. Siew, 'An unexpected email 6 years later', *Siew Kum Hong*, August 4, 2013, <http://siewkumhong.blogspot.jp/2013/08/an-unexpected-email-6-years-later.html>, accessed on: August 5, 2013.

⁵ G. Rodan, 'Singapore: Emerging Tensions in the 'Dictatorship of the Middle Class'', *Singapore*, G. Rodan (ed.) Ashgate Publishing Ltd, Aldershot, UK & Burlington, USA, 2001, p. 221.

⁶ G. Rodan, 'Singapore: Emerging Tensions', p. 221; and K.Y.L. Tan, 'A Short Legal and Constitutional History of Singapore', *The Singapore Legal System*, K.Y.L. Tan (ed.) Singapore University Press, Singapore, 1999, p. 53.

⁷ D.K. Mauzy and R.S. Milne, *Singapore Politics under the People's Action Party*, Routledge, London & New York, 2002, p. 144; and G. Rodan, 'Singapore 'Exceptionalism'? Authoritarian Rule and State Transformation', *Asia Research Centre Working Papers*, 2006, p. 4.

⁸ K.Y.L. Tan, 'Parliament and the Making of Law', p. 130.

⁹ J.S.T. Quah, 'Singapore: Meritocratic City-State', *Government and Politics in Southeast Asia*, N.J. Funston (ed.) Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 2001, p. 298.

¹⁰ J.S.T. Quah, 'Singapore: Meritocratic City-State', p. 298; and G. Rodan, 'Singapore: Emerging Tensions', p. 221; and *Hansard*, April 26, 2010.

The NCMP position is offered to the highest polling losing candidate, as long as they polled over 15% in that constituency.¹¹ Within a Group Representation Constituency, the choice of which candidate from the team of candidates will become the NCMP is made by the party.¹² The maximum number of NCMPs was raised from six to nine in 2009, although the number of NCMPs actually admitted into Parliament depends on the number of elected opposition MPs. The minimum number of NCMPs is nine, but if more than nine opposition candidates are elected, there will be no NCMPs.¹³ Six opposition candidates were elected in 2011, which left three spaces for NCMPs.

Importantly, the number of NCMPs is not affected by by-elections. At the time of writing, there were three NCMPs from the 2011 election, and seven elected opposition MPs from the 2011 Parliamentary general election and the Hougang and Punggol East SMC by-elections in 2012 and 2013.

The Workers' Party has been the most critical opponent of the NCMP institution, but has benefitted the most from it. The basis of the WP's objection is that NCMPs are a shadow of elected MPs because they are restricted in their voting and lack of constituency representation. The Government can easily ignore any NCMP's attempts to assist citizens because they are not elected representatives.¹⁴ The objection to the NCMP is part of the WP's broader goal to introduce a two-party system and genuine political pluralism. This is facilitated by removal of electoral manipulations, such as GRCs, which would make Singapore's elections more competitive and reduce the need for supplementary unelected MPs.¹⁵ Political pluralism of course goes against the very objective of electoral manipulations in Singapore, to reduce the number of opposition candidates elected into Parliament.

The Workers' Party is in principle opposed, but has taken up offered NCMP positions several times: in 1989, 1997, 2006, and 2011. In 1989, Dr Lee Siew Choh took up a

¹¹ L.-a. Thio, 'Rule of Law within a Non-Liberal "Communitarian" Democracy', *Asian Discourses of Rule of Law*, R. Peerenboom (ed.) Routledge Curzon, London & New York, 2004, p. 198.

¹² *Hansard*, April 26, 2010.

¹³ E. Toh, 'NCMPs add to voices in Parliament, says PM', *Straits Times*, April 13, 2011.

¹⁴ *Hansard*, April 26, 2010.

¹⁵ Email communication with Gerald Giam, Workers' Party NCMP, August 8, 2013.

NCMP post despite party objections, as did Joshua Benjamin Jeyaretnam in 1997. These two men were headstrong political forces within the WP who seized the opportunity for a seat in Parliament.¹⁶ In 2006, Sylvia Lim took up an offered NCMP seat and it benefitted her political career for the 2011 election when she was elected in Aljunied GRC. Although the National Solidarity Party NCMP Steve Chia had warned her that being an NCMP would not bring any electoral benefit,¹⁷ Lim used her time in Parliament to showcase her professionalism as an MP.¹⁸

In 2010, Sylvia Lim, Low Thia Khiang and Wong Kan Seng vociferously debated the Workers' Party's policy on NCMPs. Wong criticised the WP for hypocrisy by voting against amendments to the NCMP position and yet benefiting from it after elections. Reversing a common PAP refrain that it is not the place to build up the success of the opposition, Lim refuted that the WP's position was not to entrench the NCMP institution in Singapore's political system. It would however, respect the voters' desire for the Workers' Party to sit in Parliament.¹⁹ Workers' Party Secretary-General Low Thia Khiang has taken a consistently principled stance against NCMPs, and emphatically stated he will not accept a NCMP position, and would resign if the party forced the issue. Low regards the system as "a reflection of the guilty conscience of the PAP."²⁰ Sylvia Lim too, frequently complained that the NCMP position is a poor comparison to an elected MP.²¹ In interviews six months before the 2011 election, Workers' Party candidates Yaw Shin Leong and Gerald Giam voiced similar sentiments about NCMPs. They conceded that they would accept the NCMP position if required by the Party, but obviously preferred to be elected in their own right.²²

After the 2011 election, Giam, who contested in East Coast GRC, and fellow candidates Yee Jenn Jong, who narrowly lost Joo Chiat SMC, were selected by the Workers' Party

¹⁶ 'Why I took NCMP seat despite party objection', *Straits Times*, December 1, 1989; and 'Jeyaretnam says 'yes' to offer of NCMP seat', *Straits Times*, January 11, 1997.

¹⁷ 'Steve Chia to Sylvia Lim: Higher Profile no guarantee of GE success', *Straits Times*, June 23, 2006.

¹⁸ Y.N. How, 'GE: WP's Sylvia Lim comments on NCMP system', *Channel News Asia*, April 13, 2011.

¹⁹ *Hansard*, April 26, 2010.

²⁰ X. Teo, 'Low Thia Khiang: No NCMP seat for me', *Today*, March 24, 2011.

²¹ S. Lim, 'Having NCMPs not the same has having elected opposition MPs', *Straits Times Forum*, April 18, 2011; and Z. Hussain and J.L. Teh, 'WP slate "must work harder than PAP team if elected"', *Straits Times*, May 6, 2011; and Y.N. How, 'GE: WP's Sylvia Lim comments on NCMP system'.

²² Interview with Yaw Shin Leong, then-Workers' Party Treasurer, Singapore, October 15, 2010; and Interview with Gerald Giam, then-Workers' Party Deputy Webmaster, Singapore, October 28, 2010.

CEC as NCMPs.²³ Yee confirmed he took up the position because “it is more effective to be able to have a voice through the NCMP than not.”²⁴ Notwithstanding Giam’s successes as an NCMP in raising issues of public importance and debating on behalf of the Workers’ Party positions, he reiterated that the NCMP position was limited in influence. When asked, he recommended that candidates should focus on getting elected rather than rely on the NCMP position as a safety net.²⁵

As NCMPs, Yee and Giam have frequently used the position to ask questions and address issues debated in Parliament. In a survey of the *Parliamentary Hansard* from October 10, 2011 to August 8, 2013 (when Parliament adjourned), Giam spoke 113 times, Yee 121 times and Lina Chiam who is NCMP for the Singapore People’s Party (SPP) 119 times. By contrast, the elected Workers’ Party MPs spoke less in the same period: Chen Show Mao 59 times, Muhamad Faisal 69 times, Sylvia Lim 102 times, Low Thia Khiang 47 times, and Pritam Singh 90 times. By-election MPs Png Eng Huat spoke 49 times (since May 26 2012), and Lee Li Lian spoke 28 times (since January 26 2013).²⁶ Therefore, the NCMPs from the Workers’ Party are so far making the most of their opportunity to speak in Parliament on a variety of issues. Gerald Giam also posts his Parliamentary contributions on his Facebook page and his blog so that they are easily accessible to the public.²⁷

The contributions of unelected MPs are important to Parliament despite their limited influence on changing legislation. Rodan investigated the constituents that unelected MPs sought to unofficially represent, specifically focusing on the Nominated MPs. He found that although many did not have an official method of soliciting issues to be raised in Parliament or positions to be represented, they relied upon their extensive experience

²³ ‘Opposition trio named as NCMPs’, *Straits Times*, May 17, 2011.

²⁴ T. Fong, ‘Workers’ Party’s Yee Jenn Jong set to accept NCMP seat’, *Today*, May 13, 2011.

²⁵ Email communication with Gerald Giam.

²⁶ Data retrieved from the search form ‘Publications – Singapore Parliamentary Results’, *Parliament of Singapore*, <http://www.parliament.gov.sg/publications-singapore-parliament-reports>, accessed on: August 5, 2013.

²⁷ For example: Gerald Giam, ‘I asked the Minister for Trade and Industry for more information regarding median wages in different industrial sectors in Singapore and their wage shares vis-a-vis those in developed economies. This was my question and the written answer I received.’, *Facebook*, July 24, 2013, <https://www.facebook.com/geraldgiam.sg/posts/641141582570938>, accessed on: August 5, 2013; and G. Giam, ‘Sectoral median wages and wage shares’, *GeraldGiam.sg*, July 24, 2013, <http://geraldgiam.sg/2013/07/sectoral-median-wages-and-wage-shares/>, accessed on: August 5, 2013.

as ‘experts’ within their field. Rodan also found that unsolicited feedback often came from members of the official associations that NMPs are affiliated with.²⁸

Likewise, Non-Constituency MPs have the advantage of their parties’ contact networks. Gerald Giam confirmed that he has a small team of volunteer policy assistants but also follows current issues in the media. He felt it was most important to speak on issues that have a wide effect on Singaporeans; the typical “bread and butter” issues of health, housing, and labour policies.²⁹ Although he did not confirm, it is likely that Facebook and socio-political blogs are also a potential site of gauging citizen reaction to important issues, although MPs must be cautious about using blogger sentiments as their own in Parliament.³⁰

During interviews in October 2010, most opposition leaders voiced their personal and party disagreement with the NCMP institution, because it allowed the electorate to vote the PAP into government but still have a nominal opposition in Parliament. The common sentiment was the NCMP system allows constituents to “have their cake and eat it too”.³¹ Many criticised the NCMP scheme for undermining democracy in Singapore by deliberately confusing voters about Parliamentary representation, because

²⁸ G. Rodan, 'New Modes of Political Participation and Singapore's Nominated Members of Parliament', *Government and Opposition*, v. 44 (4), 2009, pp. 455-457.

²⁹ Email communication with Gerald Giam.

³⁰ L. Lim, 'WP's refusal to conduct probe “troubling”', *Straits Times*, July 13, 2013. In 2012, one socio-political blog criticised Workers’ Party MPs Pritam Singh and Chen Show Mao for allegedly plagiarising netizens in their Parliamentary speeches ('Another WP MP Pritam Singh accused of “copying” the works of others in his parliamentary speech', *Temasek Times*, March 7, 2012, <http://temasektimes.wordpress.com/2012/03/07/another-wp-mp-pritam-singh-accused-of-copying-the-works-of-others-in-his-parliamentary-speech/>, accessed on: August 5, 2013; and 'Chen Show Mao accused of “plagiarism” by netizens', *Temasek Times*, March 6, 2012, <http://temasektimes.wordpress.com/2012/03/06/chen-show-mao-accused-of-plagiarism-by-netizens/>, accessed on: August 5, 2013) Both allegations were rebutted by the MPs and the bloggers they cited as a misunderstanding, as attribution was not required by the original bloggers (Chen Show Mao, 'I have been thinking about our social norms, most recently the norms for sharing things online.', *Facebook*, March 7, 2012, <https://www.facebook.com/ChenShowMao/posts/296347487097185>, accessed on: August 5, 2013; and 'Pritam Singh and Ombudsman', *groundnotes*, March 7, 2012, <http://groundnotes.wordpress.com/2012/03/07/i-note-that-the/>, accessed on: August 5, 2013; and email communication with Gerald Giam).

³¹ Interview with Goh Meng Seng, then-Secretary-General of the National Solidarity Party, Singapore, October 9, 2010; and interview with Yaw Shin Leong; and interview with Gerald Giam; and interview with Dr Chee Soon Juan, Secretary-General of the Singapore Democratic Party, Singapore, October 19, 2010; and interview with Chia Ti Lik, then –Secretary-General of the Socialist Front party, Singapore, October 22, 2010; and *Hansard*, April 26, 2010; and Y.N. How, 'GE: WP's Sylvia Lim comments on NCMP system'; and Y.N. Hoe, 'NCMP scheme remains bone of contention', *Today*, April 14, 2011.

their electoral choice will always have the consolation safety net of some kind of opposition in Parliament.³²

Goh Meng Seng, then-Secretary-General of the National Solidarity Party affirmed he would not take a NCMP position if offered because constituents obviously did not want his representation: “if you don’t want my service than I won’t offer it.” Instead, he would have offered the opportunity to a Malay candidate from the Party.³³ Christopher Neo, the Vice-President of the NSP however, stated that he would take a NCMP position to represent the minority who had voted for him.³⁴

The People’s Action Party has defended the NCMP position on the basis of the opportunity it offers to the opposition parties, citizens, and to PAP backbenchers. In 2010, Wong Kan Seng framed the expansion of the number of NCMP seats in terms of the benefit for the opposition to ‘try’ Parliamentary responsibility and grow their public recognition with the electorate, while simultaneously representing the scheme as a sort of altruistic gesture by the PAP.

The NCMP scheme is unique to Singapore as no ruling party in any other country has created a scheme to allow the losing Opposition candidates into Parliament. We have done so because as a Government, we think it is a good thing that is in Singapore’s interests. But let me also say that as a party the PAP treats Parliamentary elections very seriously and we will therefore field our best candidates and continue to contest each and every Parliamentary seat robustly to win.³⁵

The Non-Constituency MP position allows citizens to judge the effectiveness of opposition MPs without putting the governance of Singapore at risk through an ineffective Parliament.³⁶ People’s Action Party backbenchers weakly offered the consolation that the NCMP position could help the opposition to grow its brand, to show

³² Interview with Chia Ti Lik; interview with Kenneth Jeyaretnam, Secretary-General of the Reform Party, Singapore, November 1, 2010.

³³ Interview with Goh Meng Seng.

³⁴ Z. Hussain, ‘NCMP seats: Opposition candidates divided on issue’, *Straits Times*, April 12, 2011.

³⁵ *Hansard*, April 26, 2010.

³⁶ *Hansard*, April 26, 2010.

their credibility, but they need to take advantage of the opportunity.³⁷ Goh Meng Seng conceded that the NCMP position would be a good opportunity to grow “political capital” with the electorate in the lead-up to subsequent elections.³⁸

After an election, opposition parties which are offered NCMP seats are faced with two options. On the one hand, NCMPs are the opportunity for a limited place in Parliament to make some difference and with the additional media coverage that Parliamentary presence offers. On the other hand, parties can accept their electoral loss and be shunned from the media spotlight for five years. Not surprisingly, many opposition candidates have begrudgingly accepted that being an NCMP “is better than nothing,”³⁹ thus solidifying the PAP Government’s dilution of representative democracy in Singapore.

Diluting the House: Nominated Members of Parliament

The Nominated MP scheme was introduced in 1991 as a response to the continued decline in PAP vote share after the 1988 election.⁴⁰ Goh Chok Tong said that Nominated MPs would “systematically create more opportunities for Singaporeans to participate actively in shaping their future.”⁴¹ It would benefit professionals who did not want to join a political party but could contribute to Singapore’s political development.⁴² Not surprisingly, the NMP position has been criticised as furtherance of the PAP’s technocratic elitism by introducing ‘experts’ from the business, tertiary, and professional sectors into Parliament to advise on government policy.⁴³

The introduction of Nominated MPs was perceived by opposition parties as an attempt to replace them with “pro-PAP stooges”.⁴⁴ Goh Chok Tong somewhat confirmed this perception when he complained that the opposition parties were not adequately

³⁷ *Hansard*, April 26, 2010.

³⁸ Interview with Goh Meng Seng.

³⁹ K.B. Kor and L.J. Huang, 'Opposition candidates cool towards NCMP post', *Straits Times*, May 5, 2011.

⁴⁰ G. Rodan, 'Singapore: Emerging Tensions', p. 221.

⁴¹ K.Y.L. Tan, 'Parliament and the Making of Law', p. 131.

⁴² K.Y.L. Tan, 'Parliament and the Making of Law'.

⁴³ G. Rodan, 'New Modes of Political Participation', pp. 442,446.

⁴⁴ G. Rodan, 'New Modes of Political Participation', p. 445; and D.K. Mauzy and R.S. Milne, *Singapore Politics*, p. 145.

challenging the PAP and representing external alternative views in Parliament.⁴⁵ After the removal of the fiery J.B. Jeyaretnam from Parliament, the House would have seemed muted in its opposition: the side effect of opposition MPs seeing their peer targeted by PAP scrutiny and hefty lawsuits.

The criticism of the four opposition MPs in 1991 to the introduction of Nominated MPs was echoed by the vociferous objections of many PAP backbenchers, who felt that the NMP positions also undermined their roles as a ‘balance’ on the Government. The PAP backbencher had been cast as a pseudo-opposition since the late 1960s, thought ultimately it was little more than Parliamentary “shadow boxing”. The backbenchers could seek clarifications and make comments, but eventually had to pull their punches and vote along party lines.⁴⁶ The perception that the role of the PAP backbencher is to challenge the Government as a mild pseudo-opposition has however, continued. In 2010, PAP backbencher Irene Ng vociferously argued in Parliament that NMPs undermined the dissenting role of backbenchers within the PAP.⁴⁷

Nominees for the NMP positions are drawn from six sectors of Singaporean society: business and industry, professionals, labour movement, social and community organisations, the media, arts and sports sector, and tertiary education.⁴⁸ Nominated MPs affiliated with civil society have included Kanwaljit Soin from AWARE in 1995, Braema Mathi from The Working Committee Two in 2003, Geh Min from the Nature Society of Singapore in 2005, and Imran bin Mohamed from the Association of Muslim Professionals in 1994.⁴⁹

Nominated MPs have also included blogger and lawyer Siew Kum Hong (2007),⁵⁰ actress Janice Koh (2011), law professor Eugene Tan (2011), fashion model management director Calvin Cheng (2009), and former journalist Viswa Sadasivan

⁴⁵ K.Y.L. Tan, 'Parliament and the Making of Law', p. 131.

⁴⁶ K.Y.L. Tan, 'Parliament and the Making of Law', p. 132.

⁴⁷ *Hansard*, April 26, 2010.

⁴⁸ *Hansard*, April 26, 2010; and G. Rodan, 'New Modes of Political Participation', p. 453.

⁴⁹ G. Rodan, 'Competing Ideologies of Political Representation in Southeast Asia', *Third World Quarterly*, v. 33 (2), 2012, p. 323; and G. Rodan, 'New Modes of Political Participation', p. 451.

⁵⁰ G. Rodan, 'New Modes of Political Participation', p. 452.

(2009).⁵¹ Nominated MPs are selected by a committee approved by the President from public nominations, and occasionally have been directly selected by the Government, such as Siew Kum Hong.⁵²

Parliamentary motions are the strongest tool for change that an unelected MP possesses without the privilege of voting rights on Constitutional amendments. As the media will cover Parliamentary debates and decisions, the tabling of a motion is an opportunity for debate within the public sphere, and the possibility of extra-Parliamentary lobbying. If the motion is made in the year of a Parliamentary election, it could have electoral effects for the opposition parties and the PAP. Thus the Nominated MPs can champion causes in civil society, to counteract the marginalisation of civil activism by circumscribed public speaking and limited or unfavourable media reporting. The NCMP and elected opposition MPs of course have this same option, but thus far the Nominated MPs have been the biggest champion of civil society causes within Parliament.

In 1995, the Maintenance of Parents Act was tabled by NMP Walter Woon Cheong Ming. It was legislated, the only Private Members Bill tabled by a NMP to have done so.⁵³ The Family Violence Bill introduced by Kanwaljit Soin was vociferously debated. Although it did not pass into law, the Government did modify The Women's Charter instead.⁵⁴

By contrast, Braema Mathi did not table The Working Committee Two's Bill to standardise the contracts for foreign domestic workers when in Parliament. She reasoned: "it would be had no chance of success unless it received the support of the PAP", which would have been unlikely due to the Government's stance that such

⁵¹ 'List of former MPs', *Parliament of Singapore*, <http://www.parliament.gov.sg/list-former-mps>, accessed on: August 5, 2013.

⁵² D.K. Mauzy and R.S. Milne, *Singapore Politics*, p. 144; and G. Rodan, 'Competing Ideologies', p. 322; and G. Rodan, 'New Modes of Political Participation', p. 443.

⁵³ 'Parents Maintenance Bill passed', *Straits Times*, November 3, 1995; and G. Rodan, 'New Modes of Political Participation', p. 459.

⁵⁴ S. Kadir, 'Singapore: Engagement and Autonomy within the Political Status Quo', *Civil Society and Political Change in Asia: Expanding and Contracting Democratic Space*, M. Alagappa (ed.) Stamford University Press, Stamford, CA, 2004, p. 336; and L. Lyons, *A State of Ambivalence: The Feminist Movement in Singapore*, Koninklijke Brill, Leiden, 2004, p. 164; and G. Rodan, 'New Modes of Political Participation', p. 449.

contracts were private arrangements between employer and employee.⁵⁵ Therefore, the Bill was never debated and the potential to bring about change was underutilised.

Nominated Members have also tried to make significant amendment to the Constitution using their limited powers. In 2008, Thio Li-ann and Loo Choon Yong filed a motion for a by-election to be called within three months of a Parliamentary seat being vacated, especially if by the minority race MP in a Group Representation Constituency.⁵⁶ The motion was rejected by the PAP because the Prime Minister's discretion to call an election was sufficient. In 2012, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong reiterated this decision when he refused to be hurried into calling a by-election in the Workers' Party constituency of Hougang SMC.⁵⁷

Another example of the usefulness of an NMP's contribution to the public debate was in 2007, when Parliament debated the repeal of Section 377a. The debate included the introduction of a signed petition by Siew Kum Hong. The petition was signed by 2,341 people.⁵⁸ Although the Government did not repeal the section of legislation, it clarified it would not actively enforce the law unless illegal behaviour was brought to the attention of the police.⁵⁹ Therefore, the debate revealed that the Government's attitudes had softened and that it was only for a conservative minority (including NMP Thio) that the legislation remained.

In 2009, Prime Minister Lee enshrined the Nominated MP position in Parliament by removing the clause that Parliamentarians could vote to have NMP seats excluded from

⁵⁵ L. Lyons, 'Transient Workers Count Too? The intersection of citizenship and gender in Singapore's civil society', *Sojourn*, v. 20 (2), 2005, pp. 220-221.

⁵⁶ 'MPs debate by-election laws in Parliament', *Channel NewsAsia*, August 27, 2008.

⁵⁷ 'Transcript of Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's reply in Parliament on calling a by-election in Hougang SMC', *Prime Minister's Office, Singapore*, March 2012, http://www.pmo.gov.sg/content/pmosite/mediacentre/speechesninterviews/primeminister/2012/March/transcript_of_primeministerleehsienloongsoralanswerinparliament.m.html, accessed on: August 5, 2013.

⁵⁸ S. Tan, 'Singapore parliamentarians debate retention or repeal of section 377a', *Fridae*, October 23, 2007, <http://www.fridae.asia/newsfeatures/2007/10/23/1974.singapore-parliamentarians-debate-retention-or-repeal-of-section-377a>, accessed on: July 20, 2012.

⁵⁹ S. Tan, 'Singapore parliamentarians debate retention or repeal of section 377a'.

that Parliament.⁶⁰ The amendment was debated in Parliament and gave Members the opportunity to reflect on the usefulness of the NMP scheme over the past two decades.

Nominated MPs Calvin Cheng and Paulin Tay Straughn defended the position for the value it added to Parliamentary debate. Cheng argued that NMPs should not be a de-facto opposition and campaign on partisan issues, but instead be considered as advisors from specialised areas of Singaporean society and raise issues of public interest.⁶¹ Straughn felt she had an obligation to add as much value to Parliamentary debates as possible because of the efforts of those who nominated her.⁶² Similarly, Edwin Khew unapologetically stated that he represented the views of the business and manufacturing sector of Singapore as President of the Singapore Manufacturers' Federation.⁶³

More so than the Non-Constituency MPs, which are bound by party affiliation, the Nominated MPs have the opportunity to serve as a sort of Fourth Estate, which is prohibited in the media, and still nascent in the socio-political blogosphere. Nominated MPs are supposed to be non-partisan but as they are in Parliament, the main chamber of public debate, they have an advantage over the extra-parliamentary media and civil activists. Their non-partisanship means that their suggestions will not automatically be discounted by PAP MPs just because they are from the opposition.

Protected by Parliamentary Privilege, which grants freedom of speech and immunity to Members of Parliament,⁶⁴ Nominated MPs are in a more secure position than civil activists or the media to make moderated criticisms of the Government and not be legally punished. Parliamentarians can be fined S\$50,000 for extreme behaviour in the House, including violence towards other members, propagating falsehoods and defamation, and failure to comply with the rules of Parliament.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ 'Transcript of Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's Speech at Singapore Perspectives 2010 at Raffles Convention Centre on 25 January 2010', *Prime Minister's Office*, December 21, 2010, http://www.pmo.gov.sg/content/pmosite/mediacentre/speechesninterviews/primeminister/2010/January/transcript_of_primeministerleehsienloongsspeechatsingaporeperspe.html, accessed on: June 22, 2011.

⁶¹ *Hansard*, April 26, 2010.

⁶² *Hansard*, April 26, 2010.

⁶³ G. Rodan, 'New Modes of Political Participation', pp. 454-455.

⁶⁴ *Parliament (Privileges, Immunities and Powers) Act (Chapter 217)*, Singapore Attorney General's Chambers.

⁶⁵ K.Y.L. Tan, 'Parliament and the Making of Law', p. 133.

By respectfully and responsibly criticising proposals and policies, the Nominated MPs could serve as the check on both the opposition and PAP MPs within the House. Cheng argued the role of the NMP was not to champion causes, but to represent interests from their areas of expertise. This suits the soft role of the NMP within the Government's form of parliamentary representation,⁶⁶ but does not advance the cause of political change in Singapore as much as if NMPs took a more activist role.

Case Study: Potential Synergy for Bukit Brown Cemetery

The public reaction to the development of a section of the historic Bukit Brown cemetery for a new highway revealed the potential for synergy between Members of Parliament and civil activists outside of Parliament. Faizah Jamal was nominated by the Nature Society Singapore (NSS) and was initiated to Parliament in February 2012. In her maiden speech, she argued about the importance of preserving Singapore's natural environment, including Bukit Brown.⁶⁷ She was one of three MPs (including two PAP backbenchers) who advocated for the Government to balance development with conservation of historical sites and the environment. The public reaction to the plans to develop the Bukit Brown site also energised netizens and activists to mobilise against the development, and to engage directly with Minister of State for National Development Tan Chuan-Jin.

In mid-2011, the Urban Redevelopment Authority announced that the Bukit Brown cemetery site was a suitable site for future public housing to meet the demand for Housing Development Board (HDB) flats.⁶⁸ In September 2011, the Land Transport Authority (LTA) announced that it would attempt to ease traffic congestion by construction of a new highway, but it would encroach on part of the historic Bukit Brown cemetery.⁶⁹ It was estimated that 5% (5,000) of the 100,000 graves there would

⁶⁶ G. Rodan, 'Singapore 'Exceptionalism'?', p. 16.

⁶⁷ *Singapore Parliamentary Reports (Hansard)*, Twelfth Parliament, February 29, 2012.

⁶⁸ T. Chong and A.L. Chua, 'Saving Bukit Brown', *Straits Times*, November 17, 2011.

⁶⁹ 'New road in Bukit Brown to ease congested Lornie Road', *AsiaOne*, Septemebr 12, 2011, <http://www.asiaone.com/Motoring/News/Story/A1Story20110912-299069.html>, accessed on: November 20, 2011.

be affected.⁷⁰ Bukit Brown cemetery is significant to many Chinese-Singaporeans as their forebears are buried there, but the site is also popular because it is a sprawling rainforest with an abundance of bird and animal life.⁷¹

There were two overlapping concerns about the plans to build a highway and future development of the whole area. Firstly, development would destroy the large ecosystem and green space enjoyed by many Singaporeans. Secondly, development would eradicate a historic site from Singapore's earliest days as a free port.⁷² The group All Things Bukit Brown referred to the site as a "living heritage site" because of the overlap of these two factors.⁷³

In November 2011, the Singapore Heritage Society wrote to the *Straits Times* about their dismay with the Government's decision to ignore its recommendations for alternative proposals, and called on the URA to be flexible with its plans.⁷⁴ In April 2012, the Nature Society also wrote to the *Straits Times Forum* that the Government should reconsider the demolition of a significant section of Bukit Brown in line with the URA's own report that it would create 20 new parks throughout Singapore to attract tourists. The Nature Society argued that if the URA was serious about this intention, it should not squander the opportunity to use an existing park and ecosystem in Bukit Brown.⁷⁵

The Government responded to the Nature Society and Singapore Heritage Society's letters, and stated that it had reviewed the options to manage the current traffic problem,

⁷⁰ T. Chong and A.L. Chua, 'Saving Bukit Brown'.

⁷¹ 'Singapore Graveyard Stirs Lively Debate', *Wall Street Journal*, November 9, 2011.

⁷² *Nature Society (Singapore)'s Response to the Bukit Brown Expressway Plan*, Nature Society (Singapore), 2012, http://www.nss.org.sg/documents/BB_Response_HHC_AS_CL_v3-9.260312.pdf; and 'SOS Bukit Brown – Save Our Singapore!', *SOS Bukit Brown*, December 5, 2011, <http://sosbukitbrown.wordpress.com/2011/12/05/welcome-to-sos-bukit-brown-save-our-singapore/>, accessed on: August 5, 2011; and *Position Paper on Bukit Brown*, Singapore Heritage Society, 2012, http://www.singaporeheritage.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/SHS_BB_Position_Paper.pdf; and T. Chong and A.L. Chua, 'Saving Bukit Brown'; and R. Tan, 'Bukit Brown steeped in spirit, stories of pioneering generation', *Straits Times Forum*, November 13, 2011; and I.-J. Chew, 'Keep Bukit Brown graves: Descendants', *Straits Times Forum*, October 18, 2011; and E. Pang, 'Save selected parts of Bukit Brown Cemetery', *Straits Times Forum*, June 27, 2011; and *Singapore Parliamentary Records (Hansard)*, Twelfth Parliament, March 5, 2012.

⁷³ 'Welcome!', *All Things Bukit Brown*, http://bukitbrown.com/main/?page_id=638, accessed on: August 5, 2013.

⁷⁴ A.L. Chua and T. Chong, 'Nothing concrete in earlier plans for Bukit Brown', *Straits Times*, November 27, 2011.

⁷⁵ H.C. Ho, 'Bukit Brown should be a destination park', *Straits Times Forum*, April 6, 2012.

including building a tunnel, a viaduct or altering the currently affected highway, but had found no other option that would not also cause significant environmental damage or make the traffic situation worse. Thus the Government argued that to build a new highway through Bukit Brown was the least destructive option for the local environment.⁷⁶

Arguments for the future development of the site included that Bukit Brown was no longer a functional cemetery and that in tiny Singapore; the needs of the many outweighed the needs of the few. Special mention was made of the family tomb of businessman Ong Sam Leong (1857-1918), which is 600m² and large enough to build a 40-storey HDB block to house 400 families.⁷⁷ Tan Chuan-Jin stated that the Bukit Brown space could hold 15,000 homes for over 50,000 residents when the development was complete.⁷⁸ Efforts were already underway to record as much information from the tombs within the cemetery, but some suggested that once the digitisation process was complete, the development could proceed without impact.⁷⁹

In March 2012, Tan Chuan-Jin reassured the public that the development of Bukit Brown for housing would not take place for another 20 years, and the priority was the construction of the 2 km long, 8-lane highway, which would be started in 2013.⁸⁰ The Nature Society published an addendum to their original memoranda on the development of the site, and expressed an opinion of concern that the highway would cause great harm to the nearby rainforest.⁸¹

The main political contention about the development of Bukit Brown was the feeling that the Government had not sufficiently consulted Singaporeans about its plans. These

⁷⁶ 'Singapore Graveyard Stirs Lively Debate'; and Y. Feng, 'Special Report: Bukit Brown 2.0', *Straits Times*, October 30, 2011; and *Hansard*, March 5, 2012; and *Singapore Parliamentary Reports (Hansard)*, Twelfth Parliament, November 22, 2011.

⁷⁷ A. Ho, 'Bukit Brown deserves bustle of life', *Straits Times*, November 3, 2011; and 'Ong Sam Leong, A Grand Repose', *All Things Bukit Brown*, April 2013, <http://bukitbrown.com/main/?p=1185>, accessed on: August 5, 2013.

⁷⁸ G. Chua, 'Heritage society "disappointed" with Govt's Bukit Brown decision', *Straits Times*, February 6, 2012.

⁷⁹ As suggested in: Y. Feng, 'Special Report: Bukit Brown 2.0'; and S.K. San, 'Build a virtual Bukit Brown if preservation is not an option', *Straits Times Forum*, November 1, 2011.

⁸⁰ *Hansard*, March 5, 2012.

⁸¹ *Nature Society (Singapore)'s Response to the Bukit Brown Expressway Plan*, p. 2.

criticisms were also made by Parliamentarians: PAP MPs Charles Chong and Irene Ng, and NMPs Faizah Jamal and Janice Koh.⁸² Critics of the Bukit Brown development plans felt incensed that the Government had not consulted the people on such an important decision that would affect Singapore's heritage.⁸³ The *Straits Times* reported Tan Chuan-Jin warned that although the Government was aware of the importance of consultation for the public,⁸⁴ he would not allow it to disrupt the Government's decision: "The Government 'is elected to do what is right for Singaporeans and for Singapore', taking into account immediate and long-term needs. 'When the time for decision comes, we will decide'".⁸⁵

As a gesture to younger activists, Tan communicated with them on Facebook.⁸⁶ On March 19, 2012, Tan chaired a closed-door meeting with some of the conservation activists and the LTA and URA. There he detailed how the Government had come to its decisions about Bukit Brown's developments.⁸⁷ After the meeting, the conservationist groups issued a statement online which called for the moratorium of all works being conducted in Bukit Brown because the Government had not adequately addressed their concerns or sufficiently discounted all alternative plans. The statement was signed by the Nature Society (Singapore), Singapore Heritage Society, Asia Paranormal Investigators, All Things Bukit Brown, SOS Bukit Brown, Green Corridor and Green Drinks.⁸⁸

The Singapore Heritage Society and Nature Society particularly complained that they were not afforded the opportunity to make their own presentation of alternative plans in

⁸² *Hansard*, March 5, 2012.

⁸³ Y. Feng, 'Special Report: Bukit Brown 2.0'; and D.G. Tan, 'Were local groups even consulted on Bukit Brown plan?', *Today*, November 2, 2011.

⁸⁴ Y. Feng, 'Bukit Brown: Room for some flexibility', *Straits Times*, November 6, 2011.

⁸⁵ X. Li and G. Chua, 'No regrets' over Bukit Brown effort'.

⁸⁶ Tan Chuan-Jin, 'We just had a briefing and discussion on Bukit Brown. This was an opportunity to share our considerations behind the issue of the road, which I had announced in Parliament on 5th March, and to also listen to the views held by many who are passionate on the heritage and history of the place.', *Facebook*, March 19, 2012, <http://www.facebook.com/TanChuanJin1/posts/348347548541360>, accessed on: July 1, 2012; and Tan Chuan-Jin, 'It is illuminating to read the statement issued by the various groups. Yesterday's session on Bukit Brown was never intended to be the type of dialogue desired and claimed by these groups. Nor was it a response to their earlier request.', *Facebook*, March 20, 2012, <http://www.facebook.com/TanChuanJin1/posts/348576695185112>, accessed on: July 1, 2012; and Tan Chuan-Jin, 'Bukit Brown... work in progress', *Facebook*, February 3, 2012, <http://www.facebook.com/notes/tan-chuan-jin/bukit-brown-work-in-progress/319519974757451>, accessed on: July 20, 2012; and 'Documentation of Bukit Brown graves progressing well: Tan Chuan-Jin', *Channel NewsAsia*, February 4, 2012.

⁸⁷ C.L. Goh and R. Sim, 'Bukit Brown Plans: Naysayers want all works halted', *Straits Times*, March 20, 2012.

⁸⁸ C.L. Goh and R. Sim, 'Bukit Brown Plans: Naysayers want all works halted'.

the closed-door meeting.⁸⁹ Tan replied that the decision to continue the development project had disappointed some of the activists, and represented a “mismatch of expectations” between the Government and activists about the purpose of the consultation. Some of the new civil activist groups, which operated mainly online, had thought they could overturn the Government’s decision.⁹⁰ Online activists complained that the consultation exercise had been a charade if the final decision had already been made.⁹¹ Tan rebutted that he had not been conducting a debate but a consultation with interested parties to give background information.⁹² Furthermore, he accused the activists of having a zero-sum attitude to dialogue with the Government.

Because we failed to conduct a session that was in line with what they wanted, for example to have their own briefs, to invite others on their invite list, it was deemed to be an inadequate effort at genuine engagement. Yesterday’s session at Bukit Brown was never intended to be the type of dialogue desired and claimed by these groups.⁹³

Despite the clear mismatch of expectations, the result of dialogue between conservationists and the Government did yield a slight compromise. The Land Transport Authority agreed it would modify the proposed road in order to preserve the unique ecology of the cemetery, and reduce the number of graves that needed to be exhumed from 5,000 to just over 3,700.⁹⁴ The alterations to the project delayed the exhumation of graves, which delayed the entire project.⁹⁵ In August 2013, the Government announced that the construction would begin in the fourth quarter of 2013, to be completed by 2017.⁹⁶

⁸⁹ C.L. Goh and R. Sim, 'Bukit Brown meeting “not a consultation”', *Straits Times*, March 21, 2012.

⁹⁰ X. Li and G. Chua, 'No regrets' over Bukit Brown effort'.

⁹¹ X. Li, 'Navigating a New Terrain of Engagement'.

⁹² S. Sreedharan, 'Time to move forward on Bukit Brown: Tan Chuan-Jin', *Today*, March 21, 2012.

⁹³ S. Sreedharan, 'Time to move forward on Bukit Brown: Tan Chuan-Jin'; and C.L. Goh and R. Sim, 'Bukit Brown meeting “not a consultation”'.

⁹⁴ L. Neisloss, 'Cemetery as battleground for “soul of Singapore”', *CNN*, December 30, 2012.

⁹⁵ X. Li, 'Navigating a New Terrain of Engagement'; and G. Chua, 'Timeline of a Grave Saga', *Straits Times*, March 30, 2012.

⁹⁶ J. Chow, 'Tender awarded for four-lane road cutting across Bukit Brown cemetery', *Straits Times*, August 5, 2013.

After Tan's statements in March 2012, the issue of Bukit Brown was subsumed by other issues within the national consciousness. Nominated MPs Faizah Jamal and Janice Koh continued to raise the issue of Bukit Brown's development in Parliament wherever possible. When Parliament debated the Population White Paper, Faizah and Koh both spoke about the importance of balancing development with preservation of Singapore's historical sites, including Bukit Brown.⁹⁷ During these Parliamentary debates, Tan Chuan-Jin seemed to agree with their sentiments, although he reiterated the need to focus on future development for the benefit of Singaporeans.⁹⁸

The civil society representation by the NMPs was clearly displayed as neither the opposition Workers' Party or Singapore People's Party were involved in the debate. This was not the first time that the opposition MPs had refrained from engaging in a debate launched by the NMPs. In 2007, Low Thia Khiang and Chiam See Tong did not comment on the Section 377a debate, and so represented the division of civil society and political opposition parties in Parliament.⁹⁹ The limit of the Workers' Party's attention to the Bukit Brown development was a few very brief mentions of the importance to maintain forests and animal habitats including Bukit Brown.¹⁰⁰ Thus the NMPs have played a much stronger role in civil society representation than the elected opposition.

Conclusion

The Bukit Brown saga was demonstrative of a mismatch of expectations between civil activists and the Government about a government decision. This mismatch is the result of the marginalisation of civil activism from having any significant political effect. Activists believed that their engagement with Tan and the Government would reap rewards and were disappointed when this did not happen. The involvement of

⁹⁷ *Singapore Parliamentary Reports (Hansard)*, Twelfth Parliament, February 6, 2013; and *Singapore Parliamentary Reports (Hansard)*, Twelfth Parliament, February 8, 2013; and *Singapore Parliamentary Reports (Hansard)*, Twelfth Parliament, July 9, 2013; and Shah Salimat, 'White paper encourages society with no heart: NMP Faizah Jamal', *Yahoo! News, Singapore*, February 8, 2013, <http://sg.news.yahoo.com/white-paper-encourages-society-with-no-heart-nmp-faizah-jamal-040923504.html>, accessed on: August 5, 2013.

⁹⁸ *Singapore Parliamentary Reports (Hansard)*, Twelfth Parliament, March 11, 2013; and *Hansard*, March 5, 2012.

⁹⁹ G. Rodan, 'New Modes of Political Participation', pp. 460-461.

¹⁰⁰ *Hansard*, February 6, 2013; and *Hansard*, March 11, 2013.

Nominated MPs and elected PAP MPs was important because it raised the issue in Parliament, and sought a concession on the decision. Unfortunately, as the decision on Bukit Brown was not a motion or a bill, and was not voted upon by Members of Parliament, the actual impact of the civil activism and the NMPs and MPs was limited to altering a pre-made decision by the Government.

The scope of the Bukit Brown debate was limited to a small number of MPs, none from the opposition Workers' Party or Singapore People's Party. For even greater lobbying effect, civil activists should try to involve the opposition parties and NCMPs to lodge their support for the cause, to create a critical mass in Parliament against a Government decision. The previous chapter discussed the paradigm shift needed for civil activism to be bolder about challenging the Government. This was reflected in the Bukit Brown mobilisation inside and outside of Parliament. Within the Bukit Brown case, the potential for NMPs and civil activists to work in cooperation to lobby the Government existed, but it was insufficient to significantly alter the Government's decision. The Bukit Brown debate reinforced that to effect government decisions, presenting Parliamentary Bills and elected parliamentary pluralism is needed. The subsequent chapters discuss the manipulations of elections to prevent the situation of a critical mass of elected opposition MPs challenging the Government.

Chapter Seven:

Protecting the Parliament from Pluralism: The Manipulation of Elections

Suppose you had 10, 15, 20 opposition members in Parliament. Instead of spending my time thinking what is the right policy for Singapore, I'm going to spend all of my time thinking what's the right way to fix them [punish them], to buy my supporters' votes, how can I solve this week's problem and forget about next year's challenges? ¹

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, 2006

The increase in the number of unelected MPs was a response to the public demand for a stronger opposition in Parliament, set in the context of the PAP leaders' determination to avoid allowing the creation of a divided parliament. The trade-off for increasing the number of unelected MPs was the increased manipulation of the rules of elections to minimise the slight impact of this gesture towards parliamentary pluralism. Manipulation has seen the creation of disciplinary spheres, the Group Representation Constituencies, and pork-barrelling tactics to influence the whole voting population. These manipulations have been the reaction by the Government to the political mobilisation and electoral success of the opposition parties.

The latter section of the chapter provides a brief overview of the electoral challenge by the opposition parties in the 2011 election, and their success in terms of votes. The challenges have manifested, but the Government's reaction, in the form of revision to electoral governmentality, will not be seen until closer to the next election in 2016.

At the heart of Singaporean society lies Parliament and Cabinet, the institutions for all political decisions and shaping the future of the tiny island city-state. Because of the centrality of these two institutions for the stability of the state, the People's Action Party Government has determined challenges to the credibility and legitimacy of Parliament, and to the smooth operation of the Parliament and Cabinet. It has already been established that PAP leaders are not heavily invested in liberal conceptions of

¹ 'PM Lee says countries worldwide respect and admire Singapore's proven system', *Channel NewsAsia*, May 3, 2006.

democracy,² so parliamentary pluralism is seen as a threat to the operation of the Government. This was explained by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong in the quote at the beginning of this chapter. Furthermore, Parliament is the vehicle for elites to be manoeuvred into Cabinet, so manipulation must consider how to keep that channel working optimally.

The 2011 election in Singapore was an important milestone in city-state's political development. During the election, punishment and discipline came into play. Despite this, the People's Action Party lost six seats (two constituencies) out of a total of 87 (27 constituencies). The election was significant because it was the first time that an opposition party won a Group Representation Constituency. It was also significant because it was a continuation of decline in satisfaction with the PAP Government, its total vote share dropping to its lowest level since independence (60.1%).

Straightforward Manipulation: Shifting Boundaries

The Group Representation Constituency is the most effective piece of electoral manipulation that the PAP Government has introduced. Although its official *raison d'etre* is to guarantee minority ethnicity (Malay, Indian and Other) representation in Parliament,³ the GRC has also been a convenient vehicle to channel desired elite-calibre candidates into Parliament and then Cabinet. Group Representation Constituencies are an electoral microcosm to challenge the opposition parties' ability to contest elections, and directly manipulate constituents' perception of the role of parliamentary representation in Singapore society. This has been achieved by linking MPs to a Town Council that oversees the public housing in a constituency. Before discussing the nuanced aspects of the justification for GRCs, I will first look at the straightforward aspects of GRCs as part of electoral manipulation, focusing firstly on racial issues and then electoral logistics.

² M.D. Barr, 'The bonsai under the banyan tree: democracy and democratisation in Singapore', *Democratization*, 2012, p. 5.

³ G.P. Means, 'Soft Authoritarianism in Malaysia and Singapore', *Journal of Democracy*, v. 7 (4), 1996, p. 107; and 'Why My Vote Matters', *Channel News Asia*, August 29, 2010, retrieved from: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6dPStn9TEWg>, accessed on: August 5, 2013; and D.K. Mauzy and R.S. Milne, *Singapore Politics under the People's Action Party*, Routledge, London & New York, 2002, p. 145; and *Singapore Parliamentary Reports (Hansard)*, Sixth Parliament, January 12, 1988.

Group Representation Constituencies were introduced in the 1988 election, and were initially limited to teams of three candidates in 13 of the 55 total constituencies. These constituencies were formed by amalgamating neighbouring constituencies, and left Singapore's electoral map a mixture of Single Member Constituencies and the GRCs. The Government justified GRCs to ensure minority-ethnicity candidates, especially Malays would be elected to Parliament. The requirement for a GRC team to field at least one specified minority race candidate would also require that parties were not practicing "communal" politics by favouring one ethnicity over another.⁴

Goh Chok Tong explained to Parliament the urgency for this guarantee of minority representation came after the 1984 election, when the minority PAP candidates' vote share declined.⁵ A comparison of the 1980 and 1984 elections revealed however, that the PAP vote share declined across the board, not just in constituencies that fielded Malay or Indian candidates.⁶ In 1984, 12 minority-ethnicity candidates contested the election for the PAP and were all elected.⁷

In the debates on the introduction of Group Representation Constituencies, Goh Chok Tong clung firmly to the rationale that minority candidates needed to be guaranteed a place in Parliament.⁸ This was despite his admission that in 1982 minority MPs had been opposed to the similar idea to "twin" them with a Chinese PAP candidate to contest, because they would not be winning based on merit but on the strength of their Chinese counterpart. At that time, the Government rejected the idea that a Nominated MP position (which was later introduced in 1991) could be the vehicle to guarantee minority representation in Parliament, because they would not be accountable to constituents.⁹

⁴ *Singapore Parliamentary Reports (Hansard)*, Sixth Parliament, January 11, 1988.

⁵ Hansard, January 11, 1988.

⁶ '1980 Parliamentary Election Results', *Elections Department, Singapore*, June 7, 2012, http://www.eld.gov.sg/elections_past_parliamentary1980.html, accessed on: August 5, 2013; and '1984 Parliamentary Election Results', *Elections Department, Singapore*, June 7, 2012, http://www.eld.gov.sg/elections_past_parliamentary1984.html, accessed on: August 5, 2013.

⁷ '1984 Parliamentary Election Results'.

⁸ Hansard, January 11, 1988; Hansard, January 12, 1988; and *Singapore Parliamentary Reports (Hansard)*, Seventh Parliament, January 14, 1991.

⁹ *Hansard*, January 11, 1988.

During the 1988 debate, Dr Lee Siew-Choh and Chiam See Tong opposed the idea of the GRC as a barrier for the opposition parties to gain seats in Parliament. Chiam pointed out that J.B. Jeyaretnam or First Minister David Marshall had not required GRCs when they were elected, and both were minority candidates. He accused the Government of actually ingraining “racialism” and “communal politics” through the GRC requirement and that Singaporeans would be forced to see candidates within the framework of their ethnicity, not their credibility.¹⁰ Lee raised the concern that in close elections, the PAP would increase the size of GRCs in the future to five or six members,¹¹ foreshadowing on the increase in GRCs that would occur in the 1991 election.

In 2006, Lee Kuan Yew addressed the necessity of the GRC scheme on a televised pre-election program *Why My Vote Matters*. He went beyond the official rationality for GRCs to ensure minority MPs, to include the need for GRCs to elect female candidates.¹²

Why do we have GRCs? Because we could not get single minority candidates or women elected. In the early elections, just being a PAP candidate got you elected. But after a while, the electorate got wise and says “oh we’ll have a PAP Government, I don’t like this. Why an Indian, he can’t speak Teochew or Hokkien, I choose a Chinese.”¹³

Lee Kuan Yew explained the PAP does not field minority candidates or female candidates in Single Member Constituencies, and neither does the opposition, because against a Chinese man “they know that, on the ground, they cannot win.”¹⁴ Lee’s statement was directly counter to Goh’s response to female Nominated MP Kanwajit

¹⁰ *Hansard*, January 11, 1988.

¹¹ *Hansard*, January 14, 1991.

¹² ‘Why My Vote Matters’.

¹³ ‘Why My Vote Matters’.

¹⁴ ‘Why My Vote Matters’.

Soin in 1996, when she asked if the GRC system would be expanded to guarantee female representation in Parliament:

The difficulty with getting enough women MPs is not so much getting them elected, as it is finding suitable female candidates in the first place. [...] The Nominated MP scheme has helped us get more women into Parliament [...] But setting a quota on the number of women MPs, through the GRC or similar scheme, will neither encourage nor help qualified women to enter politics.¹⁵

The argument against the ethnic and gender rationale for GRCs soon became irrelevant because the PAP refused to field either in Single Member Constituencies after 1991. From 1970 to 1984, the PAP had not fielded any female candidates. In 1984, they fielded three women (Aline Wong, Yu Foo Shoon and Dixie Tan), all of whom won their seats against Chinese men from the opposition in Single Member Constituencies.¹⁶ In 1988, Dr Seet Ai Mee was also elected, once more against a Chinese man.¹⁷ In 1991, Seet and Yu were fielded in SMCs but only Yu was elected.¹⁸ One rationale for the election of these women could be their PAP affiliation vis-à-vis opposition candidates without credibility. Part of the rationale for the GRCs for minority candidates was that only first-time candidates had difficulty being elected.¹⁹ Yet, when these four women were elected, each was a political newcomer. Even by 1991, the female candidate rationale for the GRCs was tenuous.

In 2011, the PAP fielded both female and minority ethnicity candidates in SMCs, although they were established MPs from GRCs. This demonstrated that a shift had occurred from Lee Kuan Yew's comments in 2006, and yet perpetuated part of the rationale for the GRC as a vehicle to ensure minority representation in Parliament. GRCs were necessary for untested candidates to be elected. The full extent of the success of a minority candidate or a woman in an SMC was not explored in the 2011

¹⁵ *Singapore Parliamentary Reports (Hansard)*, Eighth Parliament, October 28, 1996.

¹⁶ A.K. Wong and K.L. Wai, *Singapore Women: Three Decades of Change*, Times Academic Press, Singapore, 1993, p. 291.

¹⁷ '1988 Parliamentary Elections Results', *Elections Department, Singapore*, June 7, 2012, http://www.eld.gov.sg/elections_past_parliamentary1988.html, accessed on: August 5, 2013.

¹⁸ '1991 Parliamentary Election Results', *Elections Department, Singapore*, June 7, 2012, http://www.eld.gov.sg/elections_past_parliamentary1991.html, accessed on: August 5, 2013.

¹⁹ *Hansard*, January 11, 1988.

election as both female candidates (Amy Khor and Grace Fu) were Chinese, and the minority candidate was Eurasian Michael Palmer.²⁰

The female candidates fielded by the opposition in SMCs were also Chinese: Teo Soh Lung, Lina Chiam, Jeannette Chong-Aruldoss, and Lee Li Lian. All were fielded against fellow Chinese-Singaporeans but their lack of success was not due to their gender, but factors such as their election campaign, inexperience with politics, and party affiliation. Teo Soh Lung was fielded by the oft-controversial Singapore Democratic Party and was a former Internal Security Act detainee,²¹ Lina Chiam insufficiently demonstrated her ability to stand as a politician in her own right rather than with her husband Chiam See Tong.²² Jeannette Chong-Aruldoss was the most successful National Solidarity Party candidate in a SMC and resonated with the electorate,²³ but was unable to rely on party cohesiveness like her PAP rival. Lee Li Lian was similarly an inexperienced candidate who was bolstered by the Workers' Party brand, but faced the established and popular Michael Palmer.

Logistically, the GRCs have been used to eliminate the possibility that the opposition can gain government by Single Member Constituency seats alone. This has been justified to ensure minority representation in Parliament,²⁴ which a SMC Government would not do, but more so it increases the difficulty for opposition candidates to contest.

Table 7.1 illustrates the increase in the size of GRCs from three candidates to six candidates in some constituencies, and their increase at the expense of the Single Member Constituencies which soon became a minority of seats. In 1991, Goh Chok Tong weakly justified to Parliament that the increase in GRC size would allow more MPs to serve constituents in an existing constituency framework, rather than breaking GRCs and effective Town Councils into several SMCs.²⁵ In 2011, the Electoral

²⁰ '2011 Parliamentary General Election Results', *Singapore Elections Department*, May 12, 2011, http://www.elections.gov.sg/elections_results2011.html, accessed on: May 13, 2011.

²¹ J. Ng, 'GE: SDP's Yuhua candidate hits out at ministerial salaries', *Channel News Asia*, April 28, 2011.

²² J. Au, 'On the ground with... Lina Chiam in Potong Pasir', *Straits Times*, April 14, 2011.

²³ D. Da Cunha, *Breakthrough: Roadmap for Singapore's Political Future*, Straits Times Press, Singapore, 2012, p. 133.

²⁴ *Hansard*, January 11, 1988.

²⁵ *Hansard*, January 14, 1991.

Boundaries Review Committee (EBRC), which oversees constituency changes, stated the number of voters per MP should be between 20,000 and 36,000 voters.²⁶

The number and size of GRCs has been linked to electoral competition. In 1988, the opposition parties contested 86% of the constituencies, including 10 of the 13 GRCs. The 23% increase in contestation of constituencies from the 1984 election only resulted in the PAP's vote share marginally declining to 63.2% from 64.8%.²⁷ Yet, Lee Kuan Yew warned voters in 1989 that by voting for the opposition in GRCs, they could cause a “freak” result where the PAP would lose government.²⁸

Chiam See Tong, the de-facto leader of the opposition as the only elected opposition MP,²⁹ seemingly remained convinced that voters would backlash against the PAP for introducing the GRC scheme.³⁰ Nevertheless he decided that the opposition parties would only contest half of the constituencies in the 1991 election.³¹ This allowed constituents to “risk free” vote for the opposition,³² which would increase the number of elected opposition in Parliament, but not threaten the PAP's dominance. Lee Kuan Yew claimed that the opposition's decision not to contest in all constituencies was a sign of confidence in the PAP Government.³³ That election, four opposition candidates were elected in Single Member Constituencies: Chiam See Tong, Low Thia Kiang, Ling How Doong, and Cheo Chai Chen.³⁴ In response, for the 1997 election the Government introduced four six-candidate GRCs and severely decreased the number of SMCs.

²⁶ S. Ramesh, 'GE: How many voters does each GRC get?', *Channel NewsAsia*, February 24, 2011.

²⁷ 'Parliamentary General Election 1984 Votes', *Singapore-elections.com*, <http://singapore-elections.com/parl-1984-ge/votes.html>, accessed on: August 5, 2013; and 'Parliamentary General Election 1988 Votes', *Singapore-elections.com*, <http://singapore-elections.com/parl-1988-ge/votes.html>, accessed on: August 5, 2013.

²⁸ B.-H. Chua, *Communitarian Ideology and Democracy in Singapore*, 2nd Edition, Routledge, London & New York, 2006, p. 22.

²⁹ D. Da Cunha, *The Price of Victory: The 1997 Singapore general election and beyond*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 1997, p. 75.

³⁰ *Hansard*, January 11, 1988.

³¹ W. Case, 'Manipulative Skills: How Do Rulers Control the Electoral Arena?', *Electoral Authoritarianism: Dynamics of Unfree Competition*, A. Schedler (ed.) Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, CO & London, 2006, p. 106.

³² D.K. Mauzy and R.S. Milne, *Singapore Politics*, p. 150.

³³ S. McCarthy, *The Political Theory of Tyranny in Singapore and Burma: Aristotle and the Rhetoric of Benevolent Despotism*, Routledge, Oxon, UK & New York, 2006, p. 114.

³⁴ '1991 Parliamentary Election Results'.

Table 7.1 Parliamentary seat distribution and contest, 1968-2011

(Source: Elections Department, Singapore).³⁵

Year	Total Seats	SMCs	GRCs (seats)	3 GRC (seats)	4 GRC (seats)	5 GRC (seats)	6 GRC (seats)
1968	58	58					
Contest	7 (12%)	7					
1972	65	65					
Contest	57 (88%)	57					
1976	69	69					
Contest	53 (77%)	53					
1980	75	75					
Contest	38 (51%)	38					
1984	79	79					
Contest	50 (63%)	50					
1988	81	42	13 (39)	13 (39)			
Contest	70 (86%)	40	10 (30)	10 (30)			
1991	81	21	15 (60)		15 (60)		
Contest	36 (44%)	20	4 (16)		4 (16)		
1997	82	8	15 (74)		5 (20)	6 (30)	4 (24)
Contest	35 (43%)	8	6 (27)		3 (12)	3 (15)	0
2001	84	9	14 (75)			9 (45)	5 (30)
Contest	29 (34%)	9	4 (20)			4 (20)	0
2006	84	9	14 (75)			9 (45)	5 (30)
Contest	47 (56%)	9	7 (38)			4 (20)	3 (18)
2011	87	12	15 (75)		2 (8)	11 (55)	2 (12)
Contest	82 (94%)	12	14 (70)		2 (8)	10 (50)	2 (12)

³⁵ Compiled from data on the Parliamentary Election Results pages, hosted on the *Elections Department*, Singapore, created June 1, 2012.

The Electoral Boundaries Review Committee operates under the jurisdiction of the Prime Minister's Office.³⁶ The Committee is not transparent in its decisions to change boundaries and is only accountable to the Prime Minister's Office.³⁷ It is also subject to the electoral designs by the Prime Minister, although he would likely say that they are only 'suggestions' for the Committee. In 2009, Lee Hsien Loong explained public demand for more political competition caused him to reconsider his statement about the threat of an opposition critical mass. He 'encouraged' the EBRC to expand the number of SMCs and reintroduce four-member GRCs for the 2011 election.³⁸

Electoral boundaries are manipulated before each election under the justification of population shifts, but they have also undermined opposition support in previously hotly contested areas.³⁹ For example, after the 1981 and 1984 elections when Workers' Party Secretary-General J.B. Jeyaretnam won Anson constituency, the constituency was absorbed into its much smaller neighbour Tanjong Pagar. In 1988, Lee Kuan Yew led the new Tanjong Pagar GRC.⁴⁰

Similarly in 1997, Eunos GRC, which was hotly contested in 1988 and 1991, was absorbed into neighbouring Aljunied GRC.⁴¹ In 2001, Cheng San GRC, which was contested by Jeyaretnam and Tang Liang Hong in 1997, was divided amongst three constituencies led by senior Cabinet Ministers: Ang Mo Kio GRC led by then-Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, Pasir Ris-Punggol GRC led by then-Minister for

³⁶ M.D. Barr, 'The bonsai under the banyan tree', p. 15; and K.Y.L. Tan, 'Legal and Constitutional Issues', *Voting in Change: Politics of Singapore's 2011 General Election*, K.Y.L. Tan and T. Lee (eds.), Ethos Books, Singapore, 2011, p. 57.

³⁷ *Singapore Parliamentary Reports (Hansard)*, Eleventh Parliament, April 26, 2010.

³⁸ '学者：政府响应政治多元化诉求 [Scholars: The Government response to demands of political pluralism]', *Lianhe Zaobao*, February 25, 2011; and '选区划分报告出炉9单选区增至12个14集选区增至15个四议席集选区重现 近235万选民选区划定,共87议席 [Geographical boundaries report released]', *Lianhe Zaobao*, February 25, 2011; and L.H. Chua, 'Commentary; Few surprises despite the many changes', *Straits Times*, February 25, 2011.

³⁹ M.D. Barr, 'The bonsai under the banyan tree', p. 8.

⁴⁰ 'Parliamentary General Election 1984', *Singapore-elections.com*, <http://singapore-elections.com/parl-1984-ge/>, accessed on: August 5, 2013; and 'Parliamentary General Election 1988', *Singapore-elections.com*, <http://singapore-elections.com/parl-1988-ge/>, accessed on: August 5, 2013.

⁴¹ 'Parliamentary General Election 1988'; and 'Parliamentary General Election 1991', *Singapore-elections.com*, <http://singapore-elections.com/parl-1991-ge/>, accessed on: August 5, 2013; and 'Parliamentary General Election 1997', *Singapore-elections.com*, <http://singapore-elections.com/parl-1997-ge/>, accessed on: August 5, 2013.

Education Teo Chee Hean, and Aljunied GRC led by then-Minister of Trade and Industry George Yeo.⁴²

The oft-short notice between the release of the electoral boundaries and Nomination Day leaves little time for the opposition parties to prepare themselves for the contest. In 2011, the boundaries were released on February 24 and Nomination Day was set for April 27. This gave the opposition parties little over two months to prepare for the contest. The six contesting opposition parties managed to field candidates in all but one GRC. It was the strongest opposition showing since 1972.⁴³ Yet, despite rhetoric of opposition solidarity against the PAP, division of contest was not always amicable.⁴⁴

The lead-up to the 2011 election was particularly characterised by intra- and inter-party conflict while the PAP prepared as a united and organised force, although their solidarity faltered at the end of the election.⁴⁵ The only three-cornered fight in the election took place in Punggol East SMC, and was the result of the Workers' Party overriding the wishes of the smaller and weaker Singapore Democratic Alliance (SDA) to contest there. During one of his political rallies, SDA candidate and Secretary General Desmond Lim apologised he had not been able to stop the Workers' Party from contesting in Punggol East.⁴⁶ He revealed he had attempted to negotiate with Workers' Party Chairman Sylvia Lim but she would not give ground to the SDA.⁴⁷ In a subsequent rally, Desmond Lim's wife berated the WP for their lack of respect that her husband had "worked the ground" in the constituency since 2006, and claimed it had "parachuted" in Lee to steal his win.⁴⁸

⁴² 'Parliamentary General Election 1997'; and 'Parliamentary General Election 2001', *Singapore-elections.com*, <http://singapore-elections.com/parl-2001-ge/>, accessed on: August 5, 2013.

⁴³ L. Lim, 'GE 2011; PAP faces biggest polls battle since '72', *Straits Times*, April 27, 2011.

⁴⁴ D. Da Cunha, *Breakthrough*, p. 111.

⁴⁵ A.W. Au, 'Parties and Personalities; Staying Together (or Not) under Fire', *Voting in Change: Politics of Singapore's 2011 General Election*, K.Y.L. Tan and T. Lee (eds.), Ethos Books, Singapore, 2011, pp. 85-86.

⁴⁶ M. Toh, 'I didn't want to cause a 3-way fight says SDA chief', *Straits Times*, May 3, 2011.

⁴⁷ M. Toh, 'I didn't want to cause a 3-way fight says SDA chief'; and E. Toh, 'Who's afraid of the 3-cornered fight?', *Straits Times*, April 23, 2011.

⁴⁸ K. Spykerman and M. Pang, 'Wife of SDA man rips WP candidate', *Straits Times*, May 5, 2011; and E. Toh, 'SDA leader the only one to lose deposit', *Straits Times*, May 8, 2011.

The National Solidarity Party lost its desired constituencies in the boundary changes and so compensated by stating their intent to contest Radin Mas and Pioneer SMCs.⁴⁹ The Reform Party had however, intended to contest there and had done some outreach since 2009.⁵⁰ Reform Party Secretary General Kenneth Jeyaretnam felt it was only natural that the RP contest there, because they incorporated areas that had been part of his father's support base in Anson and Telok Blangah.⁵¹

National Solidarity Party candidate and former NMP Steve Chia explained he had begun to visit residents in Pioneer when the boundary report was released. He urged Jeyaretnam to reconsider his desire to contest there, because fielding two "heavyweights" there would only advantage the PAP in a three-way fight.⁵² Chia also justified that he had spent \$800 on campaigning for residents in Pioneer, so he would not back down.⁵³

Jeyaretnam made his dissatisfaction about the situation with the NSP well known in the media and on the internet.⁵⁴ Ardent supporters of the RP vociferously criticised the NSP for belligerently taking RP preferred constituencies. In addition, Jeyaretnam protested that Sin Kek Tong from the Singapore People's Party had told him not to pursue Chua Chu Kang SMC, because that was where he would contest.⁵⁵

After the election, Jeyaretnam lamented the Reform Party had conceded most of its desired constituencies "in the interest of Opposition unity",⁵⁶ and the intransigence of other parties had forced the Party to contest in West Coast GRC and Ang Mo Kio with inexperienced teams.⁵⁷ The lack of established rapport between RP candidates and the

⁴⁹ D. Da Cunha, *Breakthrough*, p. 111.

⁵⁰ I. Saad, 'NSP unveils Jurong and Radin Mas candidates', *Today*, April 6, 2011.

⁵¹ I. Saad, 'NSP unveils Jurong and Radin Mas candidates'

⁵² A. Ong and J.L. Teh, 'Chia and Jeyaretnam fight over Pioneer', *Straits Times*, April 16, 2011; and D. Da Cunha, *Breakthrough*, p. 114.

⁵³ K. Jeyaretnam, 'A Thank You Letter and Apology to the Residents of Pioneer and Radin Mas', *Reform Party, Singapore*, May 11, 2011, <http://thereformparty.net/blog/2011/05/12/a-thank-you-letter-and-apology-to-the-residents-of-pioneer-and-radin-mas>, accessed on: May 13, 2011.

⁵⁴ K. Jeyaretnam, 'We explain that it is the NSP, not the RP that has deliberately sought 3-cornered fights', *Reform Party*, April 6, 2011, <http://www.thereformparty.net/2011/04/06/we-explain-that-it-is-the-nsp-not-the-rp-that-has-deliberately-sought-3-cornered-fights/>, accessed on: April 22, 2011; and D. Da Cunha, *Breakthrough*, p. 111.

⁵⁵ K. Jeyaretnam, 'We explain that it is the NSP, not the RP that has deliberately sought 3-cornered fights'

⁵⁶ D. Da Cunha, *Breakthrough*, p. 114.

⁵⁷ K. Jeyaretnam, 'A Thank You Letter and Apology to the Residents of Pioneer and Radin Mas'.

constituents in these GRCs, and the limited time for outreach before the election resulted in its poor results, an average of 32% of votes in two constituencies.⁵⁸

The Reform Party's poor showing in the election and its vulnerability to the other opposition parties was due to a mass exodus of over 20 regular members and potential candidates in the weeks before the election.⁵⁹ In February 2011, the first group of candidates and CEC members resigned from the party, citing differences with Jeyaretnam's leadership.⁶⁰ The incident was triggered by allegations of bribery against Hazel Poa and her husband Tony Tan Lay Thiam, and involved CEC member Mohammed Affendy. Poa, Tan and Affendy refuted the allegations that the S\$400 *hong bao* (red packet) Chinese New Year gift to Affendy's children was a bribe.⁶¹ Jeyaretnam claimed that they had been involved in a "tussle" for the Secretary-General position.⁶²

From the first exodus, potential candidates included Jeannette Chong-Aruldoss, Tony Tan Lay Thiam, Hazel Poa, and Nicole Seah, who joined the National Solidarity Party.⁶³ Others soon followed the exodus, including Teo Soh Lung and Alec Tok, who contested with the Singapore Democratic Party. Tok also leaked the conditions imposed upon CEC members by Jeyaretnam following the first resignations, including a three-month gag order on former CEC members from speaking to the media.⁶⁴

⁵⁸ '2011 Parliamentary General Election Results'.

⁵⁹ 'Breaking News: At least 20 left RP, including newest member Gilbert Goh', *The Online Citizen*, February 23, 2011, <http://theonlinecitizen.com/2011/02/breaking-news-at-least-20-left-rp-including-newest-member-gilbert-goh/>, accessed on: February 24, 2011.

⁶⁰ K.B. Kor, 'Nine members leave Reform Party', *Straits Times*, February 23, 2011; and F. Mohktar, 'Key members of Reform Party resign', *Yahoo! Fit to Post*, February 23, 2011, <http://sg.yfittopostblog.com/2011/02/23/key-members-of-reform-party-resign>, accessed on: February 24, 2011.

⁶¹ 'Update on RP exodus: Mohd Affendy's response to the Ang Pao incident', *The Online Citizen*, February 24, 2011, <http://theonlinecitizen.com/2011/02/mohd-affendys-response-to-the-ang-pao-incident>, accessed on: June 29, 2011; and 'Reform Party's Mohd Affendy clarifies "Ang Bao" incident', *Temasek Review*, February 27, 2011, <http://www.temasekreview.com/2011/02/27/reform-partys-mohd-affendy-clarifies-ang-bao-incident/>, accessed on: June 29, 2011.

⁶² X. Teo, 'Reform Party resignations due to power tussle', *Today*, February 24, 2011.

⁶³ A.W. Au, 'Parties and Personalities; Staying Together (or Not) under Fire', p. 71.

⁶⁴ T. Wong, 'RP man for Radin Mas Alec Tok quits Party', *Straits Times*, April 9, 2011; and X. Teo, 'Former RP vice-chair "unlikely to return" but will still contest', *Today*, April 21, 2011.

Boundaries, By-Elections and the Prime Minister's Exclusive Discretion

The Prime Minister decides when elections are held.⁶⁵ The significance of this was demonstrated soon after the 2011 election, when the seat for Hougang SMC was vacated. Hougang is the support-base for the Workers' Party, as the long-term seat of Party Secretary-General Low Thia Kiang (from 1991 to 2011). In 2011, Low left Hougang to lead the contest in Aljunied GRC, which the Workers' Party also won.⁶⁶ His successor was Yaw Shin Leong, who increased the WP vote margin by 2%.⁶⁷

In February 2012, Yaw was expelled from the party⁶⁸ after he refused to address online allegations that he had several extramarital affairs.⁶⁹ The expulsion vacated the Hougang seat and left constituents without representation. Prime Minister Lee was not hurried to set a by-election date,⁷⁰ regardless of public opinion that the constituency should have a by-election, and a High Court application for Lee to call a by-election.⁷¹ The Workers' Party complained in Parliament that the delay left Hougang without an elected representative, to which the PAP replied it was the WP and not Parliament that had expelled their representative.⁷²

⁶⁵ S. Ramesh, 'PM Lee hints of Singapore election date', *Channel NewsAsia*, November 28, 2010; and X.Y. Cheow, 'No decision on GE date yet, says PM Lee', *Today*, January 24, 2011.

⁶⁶ I. Low, 'Aljunied GRC: The Winners: From political gamble to election history', *Straits Times*, May 8, 2011; and K.B. Kor, 'Aljunied Win 20 years in the making', *Straits Times*, May 8, 2011.

⁶⁷ '2006 Parliamentary General Election Results', *Singapore Elections Department*, January 3, 2011, http://www.elections.gov.sg/elections_past_parliamentary2006.html, accessed on: May 1, 2011; and '2011 Parliamentary General Election Results'.

⁶⁸ A. Ong, 'Workers' Party expels Yaw', *Straits Times*, February 16, 2012.

⁶⁹ 'Core Member of Opposition Party Alleged to be Having an Extramarital Affair', *TR Emeritus*, January 20, 2012, <http://www.tremeritus.com/2012/01/20/exclusive-core-member-of-reputable-opposition-party-alleged-to-be-having-an-extramarital-affair/>, accessed on: February 18, 2012; and 'Yaw's personal life under scrutiny as ex-wife opens up', *AsiaOne*, February 9, 2012, <http://news.asiaone.com/News/Latest%2BNews/Singapore/Story/A1Story20120209-326776.html>, accessed on: February 20, 2012; and 'Another woman linked to Yaw Shin Leong', *The New Paper*, February 11, 2012.

⁷⁰ J. Tan, 'Constitution demands a by-election in Hougang: experts', *Yahoo! News, Singapore*, February 28, 2012, <http://sg.news.yahoo.com/blogs/singaporescene/constitution-demands-election-hougang-experts-103527358.html>, accessed on: May 1, 2012; and J. Tan, 'No requirement to call immediate by-election in Hougang: Hri Kumar Nair', *Yahoo! News, Singapore*, February 24, 2012, <http://sg.news.yahoo.com/blogs/singaporescene/no-requirement-call-immediate-election-hougang-hri-kumar-152246090.html>, accessed on: May 1, 2012.

⁷¹ D. Choo, 'Hougang resident files court application for PM Lee to call by-election', *Yahoo! News, Singapore*, March 3, 2012, <http://sg.news.yahoo.com/blogs/singaporescene/hougang-resident-files-court-application-pm-lee-call-035237571.html>, accessed on: March 25, 2012.

⁷² C.S. Toh, 'Why Hougang by-election isn't urgent', *Straits Times Forum*, February 21, 2012; and 'No fixed time within which by-election must be called: PM Lee', *Channel NewsAsia*, February 15, 2012.

Bridget Welsh warned that a lengthy delay implied that the Prime Minister “does not respect voters in Singapore, particularly in Hougang,” and also that the PAP was not confident it could win the small SMC from the Workers’ Party.⁷³ Seven days after the application to the court was made, Lee announced he was considering when to hold the election.⁷⁴

The court case continued long after the by election was actually called in May 2012. In August 2012, the High Court ruled that the Constitution does not require Prime Ministers to fill vacated seats with by-elections and the discretion ultimately lies with the Prime Minister.⁷⁵ Plaintiff Vellama Marie Muthu appealed the decision of the High Court in September 2012,⁷⁶ and the Court of Appeal overturned the High Court’s decision in July 2013, and declared that the Prime Minister must call for a by-election “within a reasonable time” after a seat is vacated.⁷⁷

The most significant outcome of this case was the Judiciary imposing a limitation, albeit mild, upon the highest position in the Executive branch of government. This implies that if prompted by non-partisan citizens such as Vellama, the Judiciary could be used to act as a mild democratic check on the power of the Executive branch. If the political opposition parties or civil society organisations undertook similar legal pursuits however, it is likely that their claims would be portrayed as political challenges to the Government, or attempts to undermine the integrity of the Singapore political system by playing off the Judiciary against the Executive.

The Hougang by-election was called three months after the seat was vacated, and won by the Workers’ Party candidate Png Eng Huat with 62% of the vote. Public attention to the by-election issue, and perhaps the PAP’s pride meant that the Punggol East by-election was held much quicker, less than a month after the seat was vacated in

⁷³ D. Choo, 'Hougang resident files court application for PM Lee to call by-election'.

⁷⁴ ‘PM will call by-election in Hougang, but have not decided on timing yet’, *The Online Citizen*, March 9, 2012, <http://www.theonlinecitizen.com/2012/03/pm-will-call-by-election-in-hougang-but-have-not-decided-on-timing-yet/>, accessed on: March 10, 2012; and A. Loh, 'Court reserves judgment on Hougang by-election', *Yahoo! News, Singapore*, March 30, 2012, <http://sg.news.yahoo.com/hougang-by-election-%E2%80%93-court-reserves-judgement-on-hougang-by-election.html>, accessed on: April 20, 2012.

⁷⁵ ‘High Court judge throws out Hougang by-election suit’, *Channel NewsAsia*, August 1, 2012.

⁷⁶ R. Chan, 'Hougang by-election verdict: Resident files appeal', *Straits Times*, September 3, 2012.

⁷⁷ A. Ong, 'PM must call polls to fill a vacant MP seat', *Straits Times*, July 6, 2013.

December 2012.⁷⁸ The PAP fielded new candidate Dr Koh Poh Koon, and the Workers' Party fielded their candidate from the 2011 election: Lee Li Lian. The Singapore Democratic Alliance and Reform Party also joined the contest and fielded candidates Desmond Lim and Kenneth Jeyaretnam respectively.⁷⁹

The PAP probably anticipated that Koh would win easily because of his credibility as a local surgeon,⁸⁰ and because he faced a four-way contest against the opposition parties. Multi-party contests in constituencies generally favour the PAP because the partisanship within the opposition camps splits the opposition vote. In the 2011 election, PAP candidate Michael Palmer benefited from the three-way contest against the Workers' Party and Singapore Democratic Alliance which split the opposition vote.⁸¹

In 2012, Lee Li Lian won the by-election with 54.5% of the total vote, over Koh's 43.7% and the combined 1.8% for Lim and Jeyaretnam.⁸² Lee won by the same vote share as Palmer had. Like the Aljunied GRC election of the Workers' Party in 2011, Punggol East could be regarded as an experiment with Workers' Party representation and rejection of an unknown PAP candidate (and perhaps the PAP itself) and alternative minor opposition parties.

The discretion of the Prime Minister to call an election also has a significant financial impact on the opposition parties: election deposits.⁸³ Each candidate is required to provide an election deposit before the election, calculated to 8% of the annual salary of an elected MP.⁸⁴ In 2011, this equated to S\$16,000 per candidate.⁸⁵ To contest a Group Representation Constituency, a party was required to furnish between \$64,000 and \$96,000 per team. Across multiple constituencies, both GRC and SMC, parties would spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on election deposits alone. In 2011, the Workers' Party contested four GRCs (1x four-candidates and 3x five-candidate) and four SMCs, making their total election deposit requirement for the election approximately \$368,000

⁷⁸ J. Tan, 'SMSes expose Michael Palmer's affair', *The New Paper*, December 15, 2012.

⁷⁹ '2013 Parliamentary By-Election Results', *Elections Department, Singapore*, January 30, 2013, http://www.eld.gov.sg/elections_by2013.html, accessed on: July 13, 2013.

⁸⁰ J. Cheam, 'Dr Koh Poh Koon is confirmed as PAP candidate', *Straits Times*, January 10, 2013.

⁸¹ '2011 Parliamentary General Election Results'.

⁸² '2013 Parliamentary By-Election Results'.

⁸³ N. Tan, 'Manipulating Electoral Laws in Singapore', *Electoral Studies*, v. 32 2013, p. 636.

⁸⁴ *Handbook for Parliamentary Election Candidates 2011*, Elections Department of Singapore, 2011, http://www.elections.gov.sg/pdf/PEC_handbook.pdf#zoom=100 p. 6.

⁸⁵ T.H. Yee, 'Election deposit raised to \$16,000', *Straits Times*, April 20, 2011.

across 23 candidates. The PAP election deposit of course was much higher: approximately \$1,392,000 for 87 candidates.

Electoral deposits place significant pressure on parties without MPs who could donate some of their Parliamentary salaries (approximately S\$16,000 per month)⁸⁶ to the party coffers. Instead, unelected parties make personal sacrifices to support their election bids. Goh Meng Seng sold his four-room flat for over S\$400,000 to fund the NSP's electoral bid,⁸⁷ and Kenneth Jeyaretnam invested the equivalent of two years' salary as a hedge fund manager (approximately S\$100,000) into the Reform Party election bid.⁸⁸

The Reform Party's Ang Mo Kio GRC bid was partially financed by the online resourcefulness of the young candidate Alex Tan. Tan posted on Facebook the day before Nomination Day that he needed the S\$32,000 to fund the candidacy of himself and Jay Ting, both on loan from the Singapore People's Party to Reform Party.⁸⁹ Forty-three donors contributed to the loaned S\$32,000.⁹⁰

The election deposit is returned to the candidate even if they withdraw their nomination for candidacy, except if the candidate contests but receives less than one-eighth (12.5%) of total constituency votes.⁹¹ In the 2011 election, the only candidate to lose the election deposit was Desmond Lim in Punggol East SMC.⁹² In the Punggol East by-election, two of the four candidates lost their deposits: Kenneth Jeyaretnam (1.27% of votes) and Desmond Lim (0.57% of votes).⁹³ Although Jeyaretnam and Lim lost their elections deposits, they dismissed it as a necessary risk and cost in the attempt to bring pluralism to Singapore.⁹⁴ This unequivocally stated that election deposits are not a significant

⁸⁶ 'Committee recommends 3% pay cut for MPs', *AsiaOne*, January 4, 2013, <http://news.asiaone.com/News/Latest+News/Singapore/Story/A1Story20120104-319840.html>, accessed on: August 5, 2013.

⁸⁷ F. Mohktar, 'Going all out in the name of politics', *Yahoo! Fit to Post Newsroom*, December 3, 2010, <http://sg.yfittopostblog.com/2010/12/03/going-all-out-in-the-name-of-politics>, accessed on: December 6, 2010.

⁸⁸ Interview with Kenneth Jeyaretnam, Secretary-General of the Reform Party, Singapore, November 1, 2010.

⁸⁹ M. Toh, 'RP raises funds online for Ang Mo Kio fight', *Straits Times*, April 27, 2011.

⁹⁰ M. Toh, 'RP raises funds online for Ang Mo Kio fight'

⁹¹ *Handbook for Parliamentary Election Candidates 2011*, p. 6.

⁹² H. Musfirah, 'We'll be back, says SDA's Desmond Lim', *Channel NewsAsia*, May 8, 2011.

⁹³ '2013 Parliamentary By-Election Results'.

⁹⁴ 'RP, SDA not disheartened by defeat in Punggol East by-election', *Channel NewsAsia*, January 27, 2013; and Y.C. Toh, 'Punggol East by-election; SDA scores worst result in post-independence history', *Straits Times*, January 27, 2013.

hurdle for candidates with financial resources, and especially to those willing to invest their lives to the Singapore political process.

Once a party is able to contest the election logistically, it must consider the competing against the PAP's national public exposure. Unlike a Single Member Constituency that may have up to 40,000 constituents, GRCs can have up to 180,000 constituents across four to six wards (districts). In 2011, the smallest SMC was Potong Pasir (17,327 constituents) and the largest SMC was Punggol East (33,281 constituents). The smallest GRC was Moulmein-Kallang (87,595 constituents and 4-candidate team) and the largest GRC was Ang Mo Kio (179,071 constituents and six-candidate team).⁹⁵ For parties considering contesting multiple GRCs and SMCs in the election, the amount of time involved in making constituency rounds is considerable. Sylvia Lim revealed that she had been making constituency rounds in Aljunied for eight years prior her election in 2011,⁹⁶ even though the first contest there by the Workers' Party was in 2006.

Discipline and Pork in Group Representation Constituencies

In addition to countering the challenge of opposition parties by logistical barriers, the PAP Government engages in disciplinary pork-barrelling with its constituents. The Group Representation Constituency has been a vehicle to distort parliamentary representation for constituents by linking representation to the state of public housing within constituencies. After 1991, the Government directly linked MPs to the maintenance and upgrading of the Housing Development Board public housing estates within their constituencies.⁹⁷ To achieve this, MPs are appointed as Town Councillors of the HDB estates in their constituencies.⁹⁸ Town Councils liaise between residents and the HDB to oversee the supply of residential services, and are also a limited form of local government with the power to issue fines within estates.⁹⁹ This forces voter to consider which party will be able to best upgrade and maintain their constituency facilities.

⁹⁵ '2011 Parliamentary General Election Results'.

⁹⁶ Z. Hussain, 'Workers' Party "A" team takes shape in Aljunied', *Straits Times*, April 15, 2011.

⁹⁷ D.K. Mauzy and R.S. Milne, *Singapore Politics*, p. 151.

⁹⁸ D.K. Mauzy and R.S. Milne, *Singapore Politics*, p. 146.

⁹⁹ A. Low, 'Missing link between town councils and residents', *Straits Times*, June 27, 2009.

The linkage of representation to Town Councils has also been justified by the PAP as a test for opposition parties. By adding Town Councils as a factor for voter consideration, candidates must prove themselves to constituents as capable of running the local government.¹⁰⁰ The significance of Town Councils is increased by the use of preferential government upgrading and funding for PAP constituencies. Voters are thus disciplined by the PAP to realise they cannot have their cake and eat it too for voting for the opposition, and still receive upgrades to their constituencies from the PAP Government.¹⁰¹

The harshness of the preferential upgrading scheme is somewhat tempered as the opposition constituencies will not be denied completely. Lee Kuan Yew warranted the PAP would prioritise its own constituencies; “You show favour to your supporters because you want to retain them as your supporters”¹⁰² but opposition constituencies would simply be pushed to the back of the queue. This point was also elaborated upon by Lee Hsien Loong in 2010:

There has to be a distinction because the PAP wards supported the Government and the policies which delivered these good things. All the basics apply to everybody: your roads, your trains, your houses, your schools, your hospitals, your security and defence. But the extras, which comes down to the upgrading program, it’s a national program but between the people who voted and supported the program and the Government and the people who didn’t, I think if we went and put yours [the opposition wards] before the PAP constituencies it would be an injustice [*sic*].¹⁰³

In the lead-up and during the elections, voters are tempted to vote for the PAP with upgrade packages worth tens of millions of dollars for wards (in GRCs) and hundreds of

¹⁰⁰ C.L. Goh, 'Tidying up town council politics', *Straits Times*, May 18, 2013; and D.K. Mauzy and R.S. Milne, *Singapore Politics*, p. 96; and 'Why My Vote Matters'.

¹⁰¹ C.L. Goh, 'Tidying up town council politics'; and D.K. Mauzy and R.S. Milne, *Singapore Politics*, p. 96.

¹⁰² 'Why My Vote Matters'.

¹⁰³ 'Full Q & A Segment of the Kent Ridge Ministerial Forum', *Razor TV*, April 5, 2011, http://www.razor.tv/site/servlet/segment/main/specials/General_Election/61896.html, accessed on: April 17, 2011.

millions for constituencies. For example, in March 2011, Whampoa ward was promised S\$90 million in upgrades over five years as part of S\$460 million upgrade package for Jalan Besar GRC.¹⁰⁴ In April, Chua Chu Kang GRC was promised two new MRT (light rail) stations, estate upgrades worth over S\$450 million and new schools. Since 2006, Chua Chu Kang GRC had received S\$638 million in upgrades including lifts and new recreational facilities.¹⁰⁵

In 2011, the voters of Aljunied GRC elected the Workers' Party team with a 9% margin, but were cognizant that if their new representatives did not meet the PAP's benchmark of constituency management, they could vote for the PAP in the next election.¹⁰⁶ Before the election, the Government had upgraded the constituency, so constituents were less intimidated by the threat of withholding upgrades.¹⁰⁷ This did not stop Lee Kuan Yew threatening Aljunied voters that they would "live and repent" their decision if they elected the Workers' Party.¹⁰⁸

With the exception of opposition strongholds Potong Pasir and Hougang SMCs, the PAP's appeal to voter economic pragmatism has been largely successful. These two constituencies had consistently resisted PAP upgrade "carrots" because of loyalty to their long-term MPs Chiam See Tong and Low Thia Khiang.¹⁰⁹

In November 2010, PAP candidate and grassroots advisor Sitoh Yih Pin questioned if the Potong Pasir Town Council could afford the lift upgrading that was offered to some parts of the constituency. Sitoh raised concerns that there was not enough money in the Town Council's lift upgrade account based on past financial reports. Chiam replied there was sufficient time to raise the needed funds from residents before the lifts would be

¹⁰⁴ Amresh Gunasingham, 'Whampoa to get \$90m makeover', *Straits Times*, March 14, 2011.

¹⁰⁵ H. Cai, 'GE 2011; Hong Kah to get \$452m upgrading', *Straits Times*, April 17, 2011.

¹⁰⁶ G. Chua, 'GE 2011; WP connected better, says Aljunied residents', *Straits Times*, May 10, 2011; and S. Tan, 'Why Aljunied residents voted Workers' Party', *Straits Times*, May 11, 2011.

¹⁰⁷ G. Chua, 'GE 2011; WP connected better, says Aljunied residents'; and S. Tan, 'Why Aljunied residents voted Workers' Party'.

¹⁰⁸ C. Lim, 'After a watershed election: paradoxes, perils, promises', *Catherinelim.sg*, August 27, 2012, <http://catherinelim.sg/2012/08/27/after-a-watershed-election-paradoxes-perils-promises/>, accessed on: May 8, 2014.

¹⁰⁹ D. Lam, *Days of Being Wild: GE2006 Walking the Line with the Opposition*, Ethos Books, Singapore, 2006, pp. 48-49, 52-53.

upgraded and payment required.¹¹⁰ In 2011, voters in Potong Pasir narrowly elected Sitoh and were divided by their loyalty to Chiam (to vote for his wife Lina Chiam), or to upgrade their small constituency with the PAP Government's assistance.¹¹¹

Upgrades disadvantage the opposition parties because they cannot offer the same levels of financial support, and voters are well aware that they will be put to the so-called back of the queue if they elect the opposition. Instead, opposition candidates have tried to realign parliamentary representation to its core principle of the people's voice in Parliament. Popular National Solidarity Party candidate Nicole Seah declared at a rally "We cannot promise upgrading, but we can promise to keep your estate clean, MPS [Meet The People Session] 4 times a week, and most importantly, NSP will fight for you and be Your [*sic*] voice."¹¹² The Workers' Party campaigned almost exclusively on promoting a "First World Parliament" with a two-party political system to hold the PAP Government to account, by creating a critical mass of opposition MPs to prevent the PAP unilaterally passing legislation with its parliamentary majority.¹¹³

Institutional Partisanship and Tarnishing the Elected Opposition

Should an opposition party be elected to a constituency, government agencies can still hamper their effectiveness as a Town Council. Should the government succeed in discrediting opposition constituency management, it may undermine that party's credibility and re-election. The Housing Development Board in particular has shown itself to be a potent partisan force against opposition MPs. Prior to 1991; all MPs (including opposition MPs) were offered an office space in their constituency by the

¹¹⁰ W.G. Teo, 'Can Potong Pasir afford lift upgrade? – PAP grassroots advise says no but opposition MP says yes', *Straits Times*, November 13, 2010.

¹¹¹ S. Long, 'Potong Pasir; Sitoh wins opposition bastion on third try', *Straits Times*, May 8, 2011.

¹¹² National Solidarity Party, 'CCK Rally: Nicole Seah (in English) - Opposition has been criticised for populist policies. My qn to the PAP is where were you in past 5 years? Can you blame us for raising this now? Fellow Singaporeans, it is time for change. We cannot promise upgrading, but we can promise to keep your estate clean, MPS sessions 4 times a week, and most importantly, NSP will fight for you and be Your voice.', *Facebook*, May 4, 2011, <http://www.facebook.com/nspsg/posts/145791745490587>, accessed on: October 27, 2011.

¹¹³ Z. Hussain, 'WP's goal: A First World Parliament', *Straits Times*, April 10, 2011.

HDB.¹¹⁴ After 1991, this offer was withdrawn and the cost to build a permanent structure office was increased.

Chiam See Tong and Low Thia Khiang responded and held their Meet the People Sessions in the void decks (vacant spaces) below HDB blocks.¹¹⁵ Chiam's makeshift cubicle became a landmark of Potong Pasir SMC, and after the 2011 election was used as a makeshift shrine for supporters to remember Chiam's 27 years as MP there.¹¹⁶

After the 2011 election, Low clarified that the Workers' Party would prefer to rent space for the Aljunied-Hougang Town Council (AHTC), rather than build a permanent office.¹¹⁷ When the Party won Punggol East SMC, it moved into the former PAP Town Council office to maintain a local presence in the constituency.¹¹⁸ In July 2011, the HDB adjusted the price to rent void decks and in Aljunied GRC offered 27 public spaces to the People's Association (a proxy of the PAP) rather than to the Aljunied-Hougang Town Council.¹¹⁹

Sylvia Lim criticised the People's Association's presence as grassroots advisors. She argued that it allowed former PAP candidates to remain present and visible in the constituency between elections.¹²⁰ The Government has defended that the various grassroots organisations, under the umbrella of the People's Association, cannot work with the opposition MPs because they explain Government policy to the people.¹²¹ In July 2013, the People's Association expanded its services to private estate residents, who are not under the jurisdiction of the Town Councils. The People's Association

¹¹⁴ A. Ong, 'WP says "no" to offices in void decks', *Straits Times*, July 22, 2011.

¹¹⁵ A. Ong, 'WP says "no" to offices in void decks'

¹¹⁶ 'Chiam bids farewell to his long-time MPS spot', *Straits Times*, October 2, 2012; and 'The Famous Void Deck', *Our Champion*, May 5, 2011, <http://ourchampion.wordpress.com/2011/05/05/the-famous-void-deck/>, accessed on: October 2, 2011.

¹¹⁷ C. Toh and Y. Lin, 'WP seen as "rationale, responsible: WP's Low', *Today*, May 9, 2011; and 'WP holds victory parade for contest win', *Channel NewsAsia*, May 8, 2011.

¹¹⁸ 'Media Release – 31 January 2013', *Aljunied-Hougang-Punggol East Town Council, Singapore*, January 31, 2013, <http://www.ahpetc.sg/media-release-31-january-2013/>, accessed on: August 5, 2013.

¹¹⁹ S. Lim, 'HDB abuses its power as land owner, says WP', *New Asia Republic*, August 22, 2011, <http://newasiarepublic.com/?p=32109>, accessed on: August 1, 2012.

¹²⁰ S. Lim, 'HDB abuses its power as land owner, says WP'

¹²¹ M.H. Chua, 'It's good politics to engage all MPs', *Sunday Times*, March 24, 2013.

established a hotline for these residents to complain directly to the grassroots advisor, rather than the elected MP.¹²²

Many programs required the grassroots advisor's assent. In Hougang SMC, elected MP Png Eng Huat and PAP grassroots advisor Desmond Choo came to an agreement on program support for the benefit of the residents of the constituency. Choo even supported the WP's application for several upgrading plans.¹²³

Since the 2011 election, there has been a constant drama about the Workers' Party's management of Aljunied GRC and its Town Councils. In December 2012, Aljunied-Hougang Town Council was graded poorly for its services to constituents.¹²⁴ Aljunied-Hougang Town Council Chairman Sylvia Lim claimed that the poor grade was due to the cancellation of a Town Council management software contract by PAP-subsiary Action Information Management (AIM).¹²⁵

In May 2013, the Workers' Party drew criticism over its award of contract (without tender) to the company FM Solutions and Services (FMSS) as the management agent for Town Council functions. Criticism included that the owners of the company were ardent WP supporters, and about the rate that the WP was paying to the company for its services by contrast to those in PAP Town Councils.¹²⁶

The investigation and criticism came as a result of a disagreement between the Aljunied-Hougang-Punggol East Town Council (AHPETC) and local hawkers (stall owners). The Town Council was accused of insufficiently maintaining hawker centres in Bedok ward of Aljunied GRC. Comparisons were made to the management under the PAP Town

¹²² R. Chan, 'Aljunied, Hougang private estate residents get hotline', *Straits Times*, July 15, 2013.

¹²³ A. Ong, 'Hougang getting 3 upgrading schemes', *Straits Times*, November 27, 2012.

¹²⁴ Y. Lin, 'Aljunied-Hougang receives red rating in S&CC arrears', *Today*, December 15, 2012; and 'Town Councils graded on corporate governance in new report card', *Channel NewsAsia*, December 14, 2012.

¹²⁵ C.L. Goh, 'Town Council review soon with consultation', *Straits Times*, May 24, 2013; and C.L. Goh, 'Tidying up town council politics'; and 'AIM saga: what happened', *Straits Times*, May 4, 2013; and T. Wong, 'Sale of Town Council software revisited', *Straits Times*, January 24, 2013; and A. Ong and T. Wong, 'Town Councils "used to trip up opposition"', *Straits Times*, January 23, 2013.

¹²⁶ 'Teo Ho Pin and Sylvia Lim face off on agent rates', *Straits Times*, May 17, 2013; and C.L. Goh, 'Tidying up town council politics'; and 'Aljunied-Hougang Town Council; "still no answers on dealing with agent"', *Straits Times*, May 17, 2013.

Council and hawkers alleged that the WP had required them to pay additional fees to clean the ceilings of their hawker centres.¹²⁷ The hawkers were supported by the National Environmental Agency (NEA) which reminded the AHPETC that they should not need to collect additional funds from residents and stallholders.¹²⁸

Minister of Environment and Water Resources Dr Vivian Balakrishnan stated he would be overseeing the clean-up, and hold the WP to account.¹²⁹ In Parliament, Balakrishnan accused AHPETC Chairman Sylvia Lim and Aljunied MP Pritam Singh of lying about the incident and offered to suspend his parliamentary privilege to bait them to sue him for his accusation.¹³⁰ This was obviously an attack on the Workers' Party political integrity, played out in Parliament and in the media.¹³¹ The Workers' Party alleged that the NEA was politically motivated to tarnish its image by making letters from the hawkers to the Town Council publicly available in the media.¹³²

The Parliamentary scrutiny of the Workers' Party estate management arguably will have greater impact than any scandal about its MPs or party members. When the next election comes, the PAP will be sure to draw on the Workers' Party's management of its Town Council to show the opposition parties are unsuitable to manage GRC Town Councils, and as a secondary result, to form a critical mass in Parliament.

GRCs: The Elite Candidate's Vehicle to Cabinet

Although the rationality for GRCs to ensure minority-representation in Parliament may be flimsy, the GRCs are an important vehicle to bring desired individuals into Parliament, and ultimately into Cabinet. The GRCs have more recently been acknowledged by the PAP as a political recruitment tool and training ground for new

¹²⁷ J. Lim, 'Stallholders in row with WP town council', *Straits Times*, May 26, 2013.

¹²⁸ J. Lim, 'Stallholders in row with WP town council'

¹²⁹ A. Ong, 'Vivian to WP: clean up centres and apologise to hawkers', *Straits Times*, June 12, 2013.

¹³⁰ C.L. Goh, 'Parliament showdown a clear sign that PAP won't hang back', *Straits Times*, July 14, 2013.

¹³¹ C.C. Neo, 'Grave doubts about Workers' Party MP's integrity must be resolved: PM', *Today*, July 13, 2013; and 'Integrity is key issue in hawker centre cleaning saga: Balakrishnan', *Channel NewsAsia*, July 9, 2013; and E. Toh, 'Low urged to set things right in council', *Straits Times*, July 10, 2013; and L. Lim, 'Party political battle or question of integrity?', *Straits Times*, July 10, 2013.

¹³² T. Wong, 'NEA politically motivated: Sylvia Lim', *Straits Times*, June 8, 2013.

Cabinet Ministers.¹³³ Goh Chok Tong stated this in 2006, “Without some assurance of a good chance of winning, at least, their first election, many able and successful young Singaporeans many not risk their careers to join politics.”¹³⁴

The People’s Action Party’s confidence of their election within GRCs rests on two pillars of coercion: the promise of upgrades, and Cabinet Ministers leading GRCs. To vote out the PAP in a GRC would remove its leader from Cabinet, and cost the country a valuable member of the Government.¹³⁵ In 2011, the power of this coercive element was clear as Goh Chok Tong campaigned for voters in Aljunied to consider that they could lose George Yeo (Foreign Minister), which would cost the Government a valued member with decades of experience.¹³⁶ In the lead-up to the 2011 election, constituents however, complained about GRCs being used to allow inexperienced PAP candidates to enter Parliament by “riding the coattails” of a Cabinet Minister leading a GRC.¹³⁷

The movement of incumbent MPs between constituencies allows new faces to be inducted into Parliament through GRCs. In 2011, this was facilitated by the creation of eight new SMCs and three new GRCs, and demonstrated the importance of the EBRC to the PAP. Of 23 new PAP candidates fielded in 2011, 22 were divided amongst 12 GRCs, and one contested directly against the opposition in a SMC. The eight new SMCs were contested by existing MPs, all drawn from GRCs led by senior Cabinet Ministers. The only new PAP candidate fielded in a SMC was Desmond Choo in Hougang SMC. Choo was appointed to the Hougang Grassroots Organisation in February before the election, and was anticipated to contest against Low Thia Khiang directly.¹³⁸

¹³³ *Singapore Parliamentary Reports (Hansard)*, Eleventh Parliament, April 24, 2010; and K.B. Kor, 'Next PM in new line-up?', *Straits Times*, November 27, 2011; and X. Li, 'GRC “a good start for potential PM”', *Straits Times*, April 6, 2011; and 'Why My Vote Matters'; and E.K.B. Tan, 'Election Issues', *Voting in Change: Politics of Singapore's 2011 General Election*, K.Y.L. Tan and T. Lee (eds.), Ethos Books, Singapore, 2011, p. 35.

¹³⁴ *Hansard*, April 24, 2010.

¹³⁵ 'If PAP loses GRCs, it will weaken Government', *Today*, May 4, 2011; and X. Li, 'GE 2011; DPM Wong questions opposition’s GRC motives', *Straits Times*, March 24, 2011.

¹³⁶ A.W. Au, 'Parties and Personalities; Staying Together (or Not) under Fire', p. 85.

¹³⁷ T.A. Hwang, 'Stick to the original GRC framework', *Straits Times Forum*, April 20, 2011; and P.N. Young, 'Revert to 3-member GRCs for credibility', *Straits Times Forum*, April 9, 2011; and K.Y.L. Tan, 'Legal and Constitutional Issues', p. 61.

¹³⁸ S. Ramesh, 'PAP introduces first batch of new election candidates', *Channel NewsAsia*, March 21, 2011; and 'GE 2011; On the ground in...', *Straits Times*, April 14, 2011.

On Nomination Day, it was revealed that Low Thia Kiang would be leading the Workers' Party team for Aljunied GRC and Hougang would be contested by Yaw Shin Leong, originally speculated as slated for Aljunied GRC.¹³⁹ The change of candidacy at the last minute was probably seen by the PAP as a small boon, as the media had reminded voters in the lead-up to the election that in 2006 Yaw had voted for the PAP candidate in his constituency rather than the opposition candidate.¹⁴⁰ The *Straits Times* reported that voters in Hougang were conscious of their party loyalty to the Workers' Party but were torn between the two new candidates, and many new Hougang residents had positive experiences with the PAP in other constituencies which would sway their vote.¹⁴¹

The placement of established MPs in SMCs was arguably a strategy designed to maximise the possibility that the PAP would retain as many SMCs as possible, and also reward rising political stars.¹⁴² Incumbents fielded in SMCs included Mayors, a Parliamentary Secretary, and Ministers of State. Teo Ho Pin (Bukit Panjang), Dr Amy Khor (Hong Kah North) and Heng Chow Hing (Whampoa) were mayors of North-West, South-West and Central Singapore Districts respectively.¹⁴³ Khaw had been Minister of State for Environment and Water Resources; Heng in Trade and Industry, National Development, Health, and the Prime Minister's Office; and Cedric Foo (Pioneer) was Minister of State in Defence and National Development.¹⁴⁴ Grace Fu (Yuhua) was Minister of State for National Development and Education.¹⁴⁵ Sam Tan Chin Sion

¹³⁹ J.L. Teh, 'Workers' Party Candidates; Yaw won't vote for PAP again', *Straits Times*, April 22, 2011.

¹⁴⁰ J.L. Teh, 'Workers' Party Candidates; Yaw won't vote for PAP again'; and C. Toh, 'Second batch of WP candidates talk about their passion', *Today*, April 22, 2011.

¹⁴¹ J.L. Teh and J. Ee, 'Hougang; Without Low, Hougang residents eye first-timers', *Straits Times*, April 29, 2011.

¹⁴² M.D. Barr, 'The bonsai under the banyan tree', p. 8.

¹⁴³ 'Member's CV: Dr Teo Ho Pin', *Parliament of Singapore*, May 22, 2013,

<http://www.parliament.gov.sg/mp/teo-ho-pin?viewcv=Teo%20Ho%20Pin>, accessed on: May 22, 2013;

and 'Member's CV: Dr Amy Khor Lean Suan', *Parliament of Singapore*, May 22, 2013,

<http://www.parliament.gov.sg/mp/amy-khor-lean-suan?viewcv=Amy%20Khor%20Lean%20Suan>,

accessed on: May 22, 2013; and 'Member's CV: Mr Heng Chee How', *Parliament of Singapore*, May 22, 2013, <http://www.parliament.gov.sg/mp/heng-chee-how?viewcv=Heng%20Chee%20How>, accessed on: May 22, 2013.

¹⁴⁴ 'Member's CV: Dr Amy Khor Lean Suan'; and 'Member's CV: Mr Heng Chee How'; and 'Member's CV: Mr Cedric Foo Chee Keng', *Parliament of Singapore*, May 22, 2013,

<http://www.parliament.gov.sg/mp/cedric-foo-chee-keng?viewcv=Cedric%20Foo%20Chee%20Keng>, accessed on: May 22, 2013.

¹⁴⁵ 'Cabinet Appointments: Ms Grace FU Hai Yien', *Singapore Cabinet Office*, November 1, 2012,

http://www.cabinet.gov.sg/content/cabinet/appointments/ms_grace_fu_hai_yien.html, accessed on: July 20, 2013.

(Radin Mas) was Parliamentary Secretary in Trade and Industry and for Information, Communication and the Arts.¹⁴⁶

When the Workers' Party won Aljunied GRC, the expelled PAP incumbents included Cabinet Ministers George Yeo, Lim Hwee Hua (Prime Minister's Office), and also Zainul Abidin Rasheed. Zainul was Senior Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and slated to be next Speaker of the House and Yaacob Ibrahim's replacement as Minister for Muslim Affairs.¹⁴⁷ After the election, Lee Kuan Yew and Goh Chok Tong announced their resignation from Cabinet,¹⁴⁸ followed by Ministers Mah Bow Tan (National Development), Raymond Lim (Transport) and Wong Kan Seng (Home Affairs).¹⁴⁹ The departure of seven Ministers facilitated the appointment of new members to Cabinet.

Catherine Lim concluded that the departure of Lee and Goh from Cabinet represented the end of the PAP's need for their presence there because of their de-stabilising effect in the election campaign.¹⁵⁰ It is difficult to know without confirmation from within the PAP if the departure from Cabinet was merely damage control, or the opportunity to induct new and more popular candidates into Cabinet. Likely, it was both.

Four new Parliamentarians became Ministers after the election, and two existing MPs joined Parliament. They were all inducted via the GRC system under the wing of senior Cabinet Ministers Mah Bow Tan, Goh Chok Tong, Lee Kuan Yew and Lim Hng Khiang. This strongly implied their selection for Cabinet was planned when they were fielded. Heng Swee Keat (Tampines) was directly appointed as Minister for

¹⁴⁶ 'Member's CV: Mr Sam Tan Chin Siong', *Parliament of Singapore*, May 22, 2013, <http://www.parliament.gov.sg/mp/sam-tan-chin-siong?viewcvc=Sam%20Tan%20Chin%20Siong>, accessed on: May 22, 2013.

¹⁴⁷ W.G. Teo, 'Zainul to be Speaker if re-elected', *Straits Times*, April 24, 2011.

¹⁴⁸ I. Zuraidah, 'Lee Kuan Yew steps down', *Straits Times*, May 15, 2011; and L. Huang and Jalelah Abu Bakar, 'They're still our MPs and will continue to take care of us, say residents', *Straits Times*, May 16, 2011.

¹⁴⁹ H. Musfirah, 'Three retiring ministers reiterated wish not to be re-appointed: PM Lee', *Channel NewsAsia*, May 18, 2011; and J. Chan, 'GE results a factor to Mr Mah's stepping down?', *Channel NewsAsia*, May 19, 2011; and T. Wong, 'Raymond Lim ready to take a back seat', *Straits Times*, May 19, 2011.

¹⁵⁰ C. Lim, 'After a watershed election: paradoxes, perils, promises'.

Education.¹⁵¹ Tan Chuan-Jin (Marine Parade), Chan Chun Sing (Tanjong Pagar), and Lawrence Wong (West Coast), were made Acting Ministers in the second Cabinet shuffle of August 2012. Tan became Acting Minister of Manpower,¹⁵² Chan became Acting Minister of Social and Family Development,¹⁵³ and Wong became Acting Minister of Culture, Community and Youth.¹⁵⁴ S. Iswaran (West Coast) and Grace Fu (Yuhua – previous Jurong GRC) were promoted from Minister of State to full Ministers in the Prime Minister’s Office.¹⁵⁵ Chan Chun Sing was later promoted to full Minister of Social and Family Development.¹⁵⁶

The GRCs are vital channels for the PAP to induct desired candidates into Parliament and then into Cabinet. Implicit in the use of GRCs for this goal is the mentality of elitism. The candidates selected to become Cabinet Ministers are technocratic elites, discussed in Chapter One. Elitism was also exploited by the opposition parties in the 2011 campaign, reflecting another instance of the opposition adjusting to the electoral manipulation placed before them to bring a significant challenge to the PAP.

Emulating PAP Elitism: The Best of the Duds

In 2011, Lee Kuan Yew disparaged many of the opposition’s candidates as useless “duds”. He stated unequivocally that the PAP did not prevent political competition per

¹⁵¹ 'Cabinet Appointments: Mr HENG Swee Keat', *Singapore Cabinet Office*, August 2012, http://www.cabinet.gov.sg/content/cabinet/appointments/mr_heng_swee_keat.html, accessed on: May 22, 2013.

¹⁵² 'Cabinet Appointments: Mr TAN Chuan-Jin', *Singapore Cabinet Office*, August 2012, http://www.cabinet.gov.sg/content/cabinet/appointments/mr_tan_chuan-jin.html, accessed on: May 22, 2013.

¹⁵³ 'Cabinet Appointments: Mr CHAN Chun Sing', *Singapore Cabinet Office*, November 2012, http://www.cabinet.gov.sg/content/cabinet/appointments/mgns_chan_chun_sing.html, accessed on: May 22, 2013.

¹⁵⁴ 'Cabinet Appointments: Mr Lawrence WONG', *Singapore Cabinet Office*, November 1, 2012, http://www.cabinet.gov.sg/content/cabinet/appointments/mr_lawrence_wong.html, accessed on: July 20, 2013.

¹⁵⁵ 'Cabinet Appointments: Mr S Iswaran', *Singapore Cabinet Office*, September 2011, http://www.cabinet.gov.sg/content/cabinet/appointments/mr_s_iswaran.html, accessed on: May 22, 2013; and 'Cabinet Appointments: Ms Grace FU Hai Yien'.

¹⁵⁶ 'Cabinet Appointments: Mr CHAN Chun Sing', *Singapore Cabinet Office*, September 9, 2013, http://www.cabinet.gov.sg/content/cabinet/appointments/mgns_chan_chun_sing.html, accessed on: April 14, 2014.

se, but just made sure that these so-called “duds” were not elected.¹⁵⁷ The ultimate “duds” for Lee Kuan Yew were the late-J.B. Jeyaretnam and Dr Chee Soon Juan of the Singapore Democratic Party.¹⁵⁸ Jeyaretnam, elected in 1981 in the Anson by-election, was fiery in Parliament and clashed frequently with Lee Kuan Yew, so much that Barr referred to him as Lee’s “bete noir.”¹⁵⁹ Both Chee and Jeyaretnam were sued to bankruptcy by Lee and other PAP leaders for defamation, which overshadowed their contribution to Singapore’s democracy. Duds are politicians who do not contribute to politics in a beneficial manner, such as agreeing with the Government in Parliament or offering alternative options for policies that can be debated in Parliament.

In 2011, the opposition parties demonstrated that they could field more than ‘duds’, and that the PAP’s traditional recruitment pools were no longer exclusive.¹⁶⁰ The opposition’s elite candidates directly challenged Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong’s statement in April 2011 that advocated continued single party parliamentary dominance: “We do not have enough talent in Singapore to form two A-teams, to form two really first class teams to govern Singapore really well.”¹⁶¹

Eighteen opposition candidates fielded were former Singapore Armed Forces scholars and officers, or from the civil service: the two traditional PAP hunting grounds. This group were not just low-level bureaucrats but included Tan Jee Say, former-Principal Private Secretary to Goh Chok Tong, and Dr Ang Yong Guan who had been the head of the Singapore Armed Forces Psychiatry Care Centre.¹⁶² Candidates’ backgrounds included statutory boards, the HDB (WP’s Muhamed Faisal),¹⁶³ the Monetary Authority of Singapore (SDP’s Michelle),¹⁶⁴ the Singapore Police Force (WP’s Sylvia Lim and

¹⁵⁷ M.D. Barr, 'The bonsai under the banyan tree', p. 4.

¹⁵⁸ 'Lee says Singapore needs strong defence to exist', *Sunday Times*, January 15, 2011.

¹⁵⁹ M.D. Barr, 'J.B. Jeyaretnam: Three Decades as Lee Kuan Yew's bête noir', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, v. 33 (3), 2003, p. 299.

¹⁶⁰ E.K.B. Tan, 'Election Issues', p. 31.

¹⁶¹ E.K.B. Tan, 'Election Issues', p. 35.

¹⁶² J. Philemon, 'SDP Puts On A Fiery Show', *The Online Citizen*, April 29, 2011, <http://ge2011theonlinecitizen.wordpress.com/2011/04/29/sdp-puts-on-a-fiery-show/>, accessed on: April 29, 2011.

¹⁶³ 'Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap', *Workers' Party*, Singapore, <http://wp.sg/wpge/candidates/muhamad-faisal-bin-abdul-manap/>, accessed on: May 4, 2011.

¹⁶⁴ J. Philemon, 'SDP Puts On A Fiery Show'.

John Yam, and SPP's Sin Kek Tong),¹⁶⁵ and various Ministries (NSP's Spencer Ng, Ivan Yeo and Hazel Poa, SPP's Jimmy Lee, and WP's Gerald Giam).¹⁶⁶ Singapore Armed Forces scholars and officers included SDP's Ang Yong Guan (SAF Colonel), WP's Pritam Singh (SAF Captain) and Eric Tan (Navy Captain), RP's Lim Zi Rui (SAF Officer), NSP's Tony Tan Lay Thiam (SAF Army Scholar) and Fong Chin Leong (SAF Captain).¹⁶⁷ In addition, the opposition featured 27 candidates that hold post-graduate qualifications, including six PhDs (or equivalent) including SDP members Vincent Wijesingha, Ang Yong Guan, and James Gomez, and WP members Chen Show Mao (*Juris* doctor), John Poh Nam, and *juris* doctoral candidate (Pritam Singh).¹⁶⁸

These candidates would have undoubtedly been touted as important members of any PAP team, especially once they had one or two election wins under their belt. For the opposition parties however, only the Singapore Democratic Party and Workers' Party made significant use of their elite-calibre candidates.

The Singapore Democratic Party benefited from this strategy because it proved that they could attract credible (in the PAP standard) candidates despite the Party's poor reputation, and because it indicated a change to become a more responsible and credible party. Michelle Lee, Tan Jee Say and Ang Yong Guan stated they would not stand for

¹⁶⁵ 'Sylvia Lim Swee Lian', *Workers' Party, Singapore*, <http://wp.sg/wpge/candidates/sylvia-lim/>, accessed on: May 4, 2011; and 'Dr Yam Poh Nam, John', *Workers' Party, Singapore*, <http://wp.sg/wpge/candidates/dr-yam-poh-nam-john/>, accessed on: May 4, 2011; and 'Sin Kek Tong', *Singapore People's Party, Singapore*, April 20, 2011, <http://www.spp.org.sg/?p=88>, accessed on: May 4, 2011.

¹⁶⁶ 'About Team NSP: Marine Parade', *Team NSP for Marine Parade*, <http://marineparade.nsp.sg/about/>, accessed on: May 4, 2011; and 'About Team NSP: Chua Chu Kang', *Team NSP for Chua Chu Kang*, <http://chuachukang.nsp.sg/about-teamck/> accessed on: May 3, 2011; and 'Jimmy Lee', *Singapore People's Party, Singapore*, April 20, 2011, <http://www.spp.org.sg/?p=66>, accessed on: May 4, 2011; and 'Gerald Giam Yean Song', *Workers' Party, Singapore*, <http://wp.sg/wpge/candidates/gerald-giam-yeansong/>, accessed on: May 4, 2011.

¹⁶⁷ J. Philemon, 'SDP Puts On A Fiery Show'; and 'Pritam Singh', *Workers' Party, Singapore*, <http://wp.sg/wpge/candidates/pritam-singh-2/>, accessed on: May 4, 2011; and 'Eric Tan Heng Chong', *Workers' Party, Singapore*, <http://wp.sg/wpge/candidates/eric-tan-heng-chong/>, accessed on: May 4, 2011; and 'Parliamentary candidates for Ang Mo Kio GRC', *Reform Party, Singapore*, <http://thereformparty.net/candidates-ang-mo-kio/>, accessed on: May 3, 2011; and 'About Team NSP: Chua Chu Kang'; and 'Tampines', *National Solidarity Party, Singapore*, <http://nsp.sg/portfolio-items/tampines/>, accessed on: May 3, 2011.

¹⁶⁸ 'Democrats unveil first six candidates', *Singapore Democratic Party, Singapore*, April 21, 2011, http://yoursdp.org/news/democrats_unveil_first-six_candidates/2011-04-22-2413, accessed on: April 30, 2011; and 'SDP unveils remaining five candidates', *Singapore Democratic Party, Singapore*, April 22, 2011, http://yoursdp.org/news/sdp_unveils_remaining_5_candidates/2011-04022-2413, accessed on: April 30, 2011; and 'James Gomez joins SDP', *Straits Times*, November 14, 2010; and 'Chen Show Mao', *Workers' Party, Singapore*, <http://wp.sg/wpge/candidates/chen-show-mao/>, accessed on: May 4, 2011; and 'Dr Yam Poh Nam, John'; and 'Pritam Singh'.

civil disobedience by the Party,¹⁶⁹ giving the SDP an ultimatum to continue to develop its renewed responsible image.

The Workers' Party used the credentials of Chen Show Mao to showcase they could compete with the PAP,¹⁷⁰ but the Party already had a good head-start over other opposition because of the incumbency of Low Thia Kiang and Sylvia Lim.

The National Solidarity Party gained their elite candidates (Hazel Poa and Tony Tan Lay Thiam) as a result of their defection from the Reform Party.¹⁷¹ However, they were under-utilised in the campaign and were overshadowed by the phenomenally popular Nicole Seah, who resonated with digital natives.¹⁷² Similarly, the Singapore People's Party's elite-calibre candidates Benjamin Pwee and Jimmy Lee¹⁷³ were overshadowed by the legacy of Chiam See Tong in Potong Pasir, and were under-utilised for party growth. This was why Pwee led others to leave the Party in January 2012.¹⁷⁴

As the opposition parties increased their elite credentials, the PAP changed its election strategy to reduce its elitist reputation and field more grassroots candidates with alternative experience.¹⁷⁵ This put the PAP candidates against the standard of opposition candidates, the majority of whom were not elite-calibre candidates. Alternative sources of credibility are important for the opposition parties, just as much as using elite-calibre candidates. For example, Goh Meng Seng was known for his political commentaries and involvement in discussion forums online.¹⁷⁶ Jeannette Chong-Aruldoss was fielded in

¹⁶⁹ S.H. Peh, 'Other opposition parties must aim to match WP', *Straits Times*, May 9, 2011; and A.W. Au, 'Parties and Personalities; Staying Together (or Not) under Fire', p. 79.

¹⁷⁰ Z. Hussain and J.L. Teh, 'WP slate "must work harder than PAP team if elected"', *Straits Times*, May 6, 2011.

¹⁷¹ F. Mohktar, 'Key members of Reform Party resign'.

¹⁷² A.W. Au, 'Parties and Personalities; Staying Together (or Not) under Fire', pp. 71,75.

¹⁷³ A.W. Au, 'Parties and Personalities; Staying Together (or Not) under Fire', p. 76.

¹⁷⁴ J. Tan, 'SPP's Lina Chiam stays mum over new CEC, internal conflict', *Yahoo! News, Singapore*, January 30, 2012, <http://sg.news.yahoo.com/six-singapore-people%E2%80%99s-party-members-resign.html>, accessed on: February 4, 2012.

¹⁷⁵ 'PAP "proud" of new slate of candidates: PM', *Straits Times*, April 6, 2011; and E. Toh, 'Tin Pei Ling a "good grassroots leader"', *Straits Times*, April 6, 2011; and Y. Feng, 'Unionist with 25 years of volunteer work', *Straits Times*, April 5, 2011.

¹⁷⁶ Interview with Goh Meng Seng, then-Secretary-General of the National Solidarity Party, Singapore, October 9, 2010; and M.D. Barr, 'The bonsai under the banyan tree', p. 11.

her home constituency of Mountbatten SMC and used her British legal training to offer legal services to low-income Singaporeans.¹⁷⁷

Candidates were also involved in civil society, which bolstered their credibility as politicians with links to specific communities. Vincent Wijeyesingha was the Executive Director of Transient Workers Count Two. Michelle Lee delivered food to poor residents and taught underprivileged children. Ang was involved in the Kampong Kembangan Citizen's Consultative Committee (CCC) which worked with the People's Association, and John Tan is involved in Mensa, the Singapore Psychology Society and Optimist International.¹⁷⁸ Hazel Poa and Tony Tan Lay Thiam were respected philanthropists in the local community and at a national level.¹⁷⁹

One particular form of opposition credibility comes from being 'duds' and appealing to anti-PAP sentiment within the electorate. Three of the 2011 candidates particularly could tap into the 'dud' sentiment: Kenneth Jeyaretnam, Teo Soh Lung, and James Gomez. Although Jeyaretnam could stand on his academic credentials (Master's in Economics) and experience as a hedge fund manager in London, which would put him alongside the calibre of many PAP candidates based on on-paper experience, he has sometimes struggled to reconcile what most Singaporeans recognise him for: as the son of J.B. Jeyaretnam. Lacking the fiery charisma of his father, Kenneth Jeyaretnam has attempted to co-opt his late father's memory for his own credibility.¹⁸⁰ He referred at rallies to his "political pedigree".¹⁸¹ In 2011, Jeyaretnam appeared to embrace his father's legacy by referring to himself as "son of a dud", including using it as the web address for his blog.¹⁸²

Teo Soh Lung's appeal to the anti-Establishment voter was based on her detention in 1987-88 under the Internal Security Act. In the media Teo was described as a "former

¹⁷⁷ "NSP to field lawyer in Mountbatten SMC", *Channel NewsAsia*, March 20, 2011.

¹⁷⁸ 'Democrats unveil first six candidates'; and 'SDP unveils remaining five candidates'.

¹⁷⁹ 'About Team NSP: Chua Chu Kang'.

¹⁸⁰ D. Da Cunha, *Breakthrough*, p. 116.

¹⁸¹ K.B. Kor and J. Au, 'JBJ's son Kenneth joins Reform Party', *Straits Times*, April 10, 2009.

¹⁸² K. Jeyaretnam, 'I wear the son of a dud badge with pride', *Facebook*, April 4, 2011,

<http://www.facebook.com/kenneth.jeyaretnam/posts/200151080017558>, accessed on: October 28, 2011; and <http://sonofadud.com>.

Internal Security Act detainee”¹⁸³ and readers were reminded of her detention as part of a Marxist conspiracy. The alternative media also referred to Teo as a former detainee.¹⁸⁴ The difference in intention between the mainstream and alternative media’s reference to Teo was to respectively imply she would be a dangerous force for political instability, and to elicit sympathy as a former ISA detained civil activist.

James Gomez’s anti-Establishment reputation focused predominantly on his political stunt in the 2006 election.¹⁸⁵ In the 2006 election, Gomez was embroiled in scandal for allegations he made against the Elections Department for misfiling his application for a Minority race certificate. CCTV footage revealed he had put the form back in his briefcase, rather than give it to the Elections Department clerk. The incident was made a significant issue during the election campaign by the PAP, who claimed the Workers’ Party was not credible if it fielded candidates who attempted political stunts.¹⁸⁶

The three elite-calibre candidates that the PAP and the media tried to undermine in the 2011 election were the SDP’s Vincent Wijesingha, Tan Jee Say, and the Workers’ Party’s Chen Show Mao. The attempted smear campaigns were unsuccessful in gaining enough media traction to dominate the election, as the Gomez scandal had in 2006. Without a scandal, or allegations made at election rallies which caused J.B. Jeyaretnam to be sued for defamation,¹⁸⁷ the PAP’s 2011 offensive seemed to be overreaching. Without a valid reason to criticise the oppositions’ best candidates, it was the PAP’s credibility that was affected.

To tarnish Wijesingha’s credibility, Dr Vivian Balakrishnan made vague references to a YouTube video that “raises some very awkward questions about the agenda and

¹⁸³ T. Wong, 'GE 2011; Former ISA detainee may stand as SDP candidate', *Straits Times*, April 19, 2011.

¹⁸⁴ theonlinecitizen, 'Yuhua SMC, it's PAP's Grace Fu vs SDP's Teo Soh Lung, Former ISA Detainee', *Facebook*, <http://www.facebook.com/theonlinecitizen/posts/10150229131341383>, accessed on: April 27, 2011; and 'Breaking news: Former ISA detainee Teo Soh Lung quits RP', *The Online Citizen*, February 27, 2011, <http://theonlinecitizen.com/2011/02/breaking-news-former-isa-detainee-teo-soh-lung-quits-rp/>, accessed on: February 28, 2011.

¹⁸⁵ J.Y. Ng, 'James Gomez more careful, spends one hour at Elections Department', *Today*, April 21, 2011; and L.H. Chee, 'Gomez goof-up, or Gomez-gate?', *Straits Times*, May 1, 2006.

¹⁸⁶ J.Y. Ng, 'James Gomez more careful, spends one hour at Elections Department'; and L.H. Chee, 'Gomez goof-up, or Gomez-gate?'.

¹⁸⁷ J. Gomez, 'Restricting Free Speech: The Impact on Opposition Parties', *The Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies*, v. 23 2006, pp. 119-121.

motivation of the SDP and its candidates.”¹⁸⁸ Netizens soon discovered a video which showed Wijesingha attending an anti-Section 377a forum, where he was identified as the “first gay MP in Singapore”.¹⁸⁹ The PAP Holland-Bukit Timah GRC team – led by Balakrishnan and contesting against Wijesingha’s team – hastily claimed this to be the video Balakrishnan had referred to.¹⁹⁰ Wijesingha made no attempt to clarify or deny the contents of the video or the implication of his homosexuality.

Balakrishnan clarified that his concern was not so much Wijesingha’s sexual orientation, but “whether Wijesingha will now pursue this cause in the political arena and what is the SDP’s position on the issue.”¹⁹¹ A straw-poll by tabloid *The New Paper* indicated that most Singaporeans did not care about the sexual orientation of their MP if he/she was a good representative and managed their estate well.¹⁹² As quickly as the issue was raised, Balakrishnan stated he was satisfied with the SDP’s promise that it would not pursue a “gay agenda” during the election and that the incident was over.¹⁹³ As Alex Au concluded, it is difficult to know the exact impact of Balakrishnan’s accusations against the SDP without exit and opinion polling.¹⁹⁴

Simultaneous to the Wijesingha incident, the PAP also levelled criticism against his team-mate Tan Jee Say. Tan was part of the Administrative Service for 11 years and had decades of experience in finance and economics.¹⁹⁵ In the first days of the election, he released a 46 page economic paper that recommended that the Government end subsidies and support for non-viable manufacturing firms, to free up limited land and manpower resources.¹⁹⁶ The Government attempted to discredit Tan’s economic

¹⁸⁸ X. Teo, 'Netizens attempt to identify video SDP accused of “suppressing”', *Today*, April 25, 2011; and A.W. Au, 'Parties and Personalities; Staying Together (or Not) under Fire', p. 77.

¹⁸⁹ X. Teo, 'Netizens attempt to identify video SDP accused of “suppressing”'; and 'What the video is about', *Straits Times*, April 26, 2011; and A.W. Au, 'Parties and Personalities; Staying Together (or Not) under Fire', p. 77.

¹⁹⁰ A. Loh, 'Balakrishnan issues statement on Vincent Wijesingha', *The Online Citizen*, April 25, 2011, <http://theonlinecitizen.com/2011/04/balakrishnan-issues-statement-on-vincent-wijesingha-video/>, accessed on: November 23, 2011.

¹⁹¹ A. Loh, 'Balakrishnan issues statement on Vincent Wijesingha'

¹⁹² B. Sim and M. Singh, 'Is S'pore ready for a gay MP?', *The New Paper*, April 26, 2011; and A.W. Au, 'Parties and Personalities; Staying Together (or Not) under Fire', p. 78.

¹⁹³ X.Y. Cheow, 'YouTube video issue put to rest', *Today*, April 28, 2011.

¹⁹⁴ A.W. Au, 'Parties and Personalities; Staying Together (or Not) under Fire', p. 78.

¹⁹⁵ 'About', *Tan Jee Say*, 2011, <http://www.tanjeesay.com/about/>, accessed on: August 5, 2013.

¹⁹⁶ A. Low, 'Does Jee Say want manufacturing or not?', *Straits Times*, April 30, 2011.

proposal, and he proposed to shut down the manufacturing sector in favour of a purely service-based economy.¹⁹⁷

When the election campaign stepped up, the PAP went one step further to undermine Tan's economic and political credibility. Tan had been Goh Chok Tong's Principal Private Secretary for five years, and Goh alleged that Tan had been unsuitable to become a Permanent Secretary.¹⁹⁸ Obviously, this was an attempt to discredit Tan's capability in a government position. Lee Kuan Yew overstepped when he joined Goh's attack and disparaged that Tan had "no qualifications" to support his production of a comprehensive economic plan. Tan replied to Lee that he had studied economics at Oxford University, and had worked in the Ministry of Trade and Industry. To Goh specifically, he reminded that he had stayed as Principal Private Secretary even after his government bond had expired, and he had not wanted to be a Permanent Secretary.¹⁹⁹ Tan did not allow the PAP to gain any traction in their campaign against him.

The third candidate subjected to intensive scrutiny was Chen Show Mao, who was questioned as to why after 30 years away from Singapore he had chosen to return and contest for Parliament.²⁰⁰ Sylvia Lim and Low Thia Kiang defended their star candidate, including that the Party had questioned Chen on his long-term absence working abroad, and were satisfied with his answer.²⁰¹ Lim argued that Chen was totally committed to Singapore and he had voiced his desire to move his wife and children to Singapore from Hong Kong if he was elected to Parliament.²⁰² Chen was part of the winning team for the Workers' Party in Aljunied GRC, which indicated that any impact

¹⁹⁷ A. Low, 'Does Jee Say want manufacturing or not?'

¹⁹⁸ A.-L. Chang and M. Toh, 'Tan Jee Say not Permanent Secretary calibre: SM Goh', *Straits Times*, May 1, 2011; and A.W. Au, 'Parties and Personalities; Staying Together (or Not) under Fire', p. 77.

¹⁹⁹ T. Wong, 'Tan Jee Say: I never wanted to be Perm Sec', *Straits Times*, May 2, 2011; and F. Mokhtar, 'SDP's Tan vs SM Goh: War of words heats up', *Yahoo! News, Singapore*, May 2, 2011, <http://sg.news.yahoo.com/blogs/singaporescene/sdp-tan-jee-surprised-sm-goh-comments-174025954.html>, accessed on: May 3, 2011; and Y.N. Hoe, 'SM Goh should have avoided personal attacks: SDP's Tan Jee Say', *Today*, May 1, 2011.

²⁰⁰ C.W. Teo and R. Chan, 'PAP salvo targets Workers' Party "star" Chen', *Straits Times*, April 19, 2011; and C.G. Tan, 'Commitment and WP man's NS remark', *Straits Times Forum*, May 6, 2011.

²⁰¹ I. Saad, 'WP introduces four election candidates', *Channel NewsAsia*, April 20, 2011.

²⁰² S. Lim, 'Letter to ST Forum from Ms Sylvia Lim', *Workers' Party, Singapore*, April 20, 2011, <http://wp.sg/2011/04/letter-to-st-forum-from-ms-sylvia-lim-4>, accessed on: April 21, 2011.

of the questions on his credibility was overshadowed by his contest alongside WP leaders Low Thia Kiang and Sylvia Lim.

All three smear tactics against the opposition candidates were unsuccessful in derailing the campaigns of the respective parties. If the allegations of Wijesingha and Tan had been severely damaging, it would be expected that the vote share of the SDP would decline from its 2006 results. Instead, the Singapore Democratic Party's achieved an average vote percentage of 35%, which was 10% higher than in 2006.²⁰³ The highest polling SDP constituency was Holland-Bukit Timah GRC, where Tan and Wijesingha contested.²⁰⁴ Any effect of the smear campaign did not negate the overall improvement of the Party vote share, undoubtedly spurred by the credibility and popularity of Wijesingha and Tan.²⁰⁵ The perception of Tan's credibility was demonstrated in the Presidential election of August 2011 when he gained 25% of the vote in a four-way contest against former Deputy Prime Minister Tony Tan Keng Yam, PAP backbencher Tan Cheng Bock, and former NTUC Income chief Tan Kin Lian.²⁰⁶

A Quick Look at the Election Results

Table 7.2 details the vote share percentages of each party per constituency compiled from the official election results. The election results indicate the strength of the PAP Government's governmentality to prevent parliamentary pluralism, as only one party was able to win a GRC and SMC despite all but one constituency was contested. The PAP's vote share declined by 6% but the opposition did contest nearly 40% more of constituencies than in the 2006 election. The decline could be considered opportunistic protest against the PAP facilitated by increased opposition contest, but perhaps not symptomatic of a significant shift away from a PAP Government.

²⁰³ '2006 Parliamentary General Election Results'.

²⁰⁴ '2011 Parliamentary General Election Results'.

²⁰⁵ T. Chong, 'Election Rallies: Performances in Dissent, Identity, Personalities and Power', *Voting in Change: Politics of Singapore's 2011 General Election*, K.Y.L. Tan and T. Lee (eds.), Ethos Books, Singapore, 2011, p. 124; and A.W. Au, 'Parties and Personalities; Staying Together (or Not) under Fire', p. 78.

²⁰⁶ 'Presidential Elections Results', *Elections Department, Singapore*, December 28, 2012, http://www.eld.gov.sg/elections_past_results.html, accessed on: August 5, 2013.

Catherine Lim concluded that the most contentious issues for the Singaporean polity were those that Lee Kuan Yew defended the most strongly: ministerial salaries and importation of foreign workers. She concluded: “The rejection of these policies was by extension a rejection of Mr Lee.”²⁰⁷ Based on this rationale, if the discontent with the PAP had been higher, it would be expected that more SMCs and GRCs would have been won by the opposition parties.

The highest vote percentages achieved by opposition parties correlate to constituencies where they fielded popular candidates and party leaders, or had a strong link to the party leader. Netina Tan concluded that Singaporeans resonate with credible candidates with competent leadership, and clear (and appealing) policy platforms.²⁰⁸ The popular candidate appeal was seen in Aljunied, Potong Pasir, Hougang, Marine Parade, and Holland-Bukit Timah. The lingering strength of incumbent seats was demonstrated in Potong Pasir and Hougang, where the Singapore People’s Party and Workers’ Party respectively had their best results. This was despite both incumbent MPs moving to different constituencies.

Yee Jenn Jong (WP) and Jeannette Chong-Aruldoss were able to use their biographical ties to Joo Chiat SMC and Mountbatten SMC respectively to increase their vote shares as both had lived in those constituencies for most of their lives.²⁰⁹ The Marine Parade GRC result was perhaps an outlier, bolstered by the popularity of young candidate Nicole Seah and a backlash against the perceived incompetence of the PAP candidate Tin Pei Ling.²¹⁰ It may have also been a response to the constituency being uncontested since the early 1990s.

The Reform Party team in Ang Mo Kio GRC would always have had a difficult contest because they were contesting against Lee Hsien Loong. The amateurishness of the Reform Party team,²¹¹ however, probably worsened their result because constituents did not want to vote out the Prime Minister.

²⁰⁷ C. Lim, 'After a watershed election: paradoxes, perils, promises'.

²⁰⁸ N. Tan, 'Manipulating Electoral Laws in Singapore', p. 641.

²⁰⁹ T. Voon, 'Joo Chiat boy counts on old ties', *Straits Times*, May 2, 2011; and E. Ng, 'A feel for the ground in Mountbatten', *Today*, March 21, 2011.

²¹⁰ E.K.B. Tan, 'Election Issues', p. 32.

²¹¹ D. Da Cunha, *Breakthrough*, pp. 112,118.

The results for the Singapore Democratic Alliance are slightly harder to interpret because Punggol East SMC was a three-way contest. It is impossible to know how the SDA would have fared in a straight contest against the PAP. What can be implied from the results in Pasir Ris-Punggol is that it was, like most of the opposition contests, an opportunity to protest vote against the PAP rather than specifically vote for the opposition.

Table 7.2 2011 Parliamentary Election Results (Source: Elections Department, Singapore)

Workers' Party				Singapore Democratic Party				People's Action Party			
Constituency	WP Votes	Total Votes	%	Constituency	SDP Votes	Total Votes	%	Constituency	PAP Votes	Total Votes	%
Aljunied	72289	132118	54.72	Bukit Panjang	10372	30747	33.73	Aljunied	59829	132118	45.28
East Coast	49429	109421	45.17	Holland-Bukit Timah	32406	81179	39.92	Ang Mo Kio	112677	162528	69.33
Hougang	14850	22915	64.80	Sembawang	47605	131857	36.10	Bishan-Toa Payoh	62385	109590	56.93
Joo Chiat	9278	18944	48.98	Yuhua	6986	21079	33.14	Bukit Panjang	20375	30747	66.27
Moulmein-Kallang	31773	76659	41.45	TOTAL	97369	264862	36.76	Chua Chu Kang	89710	146595	61.20
Nee Soon	57523	138263	41.60				Average % 35.72	East Coast	59992	109421	54.83
Punggol East	12777	31158	41.01					Holland-Bukit Timah	48773	81179	60.08
Sengkang West	10591	25280	41.89					Hong Kah North	18156	25712	70.61
TOTAL	258510	554758	46.60					Hougang	8065	22915	35.20
			Average % 47.45					Joo Chiat	9666	18944	51.02
								Jurong	76595	114381	66.96
								Marine Parade	78286	138212	56.64
National Solidarity Party				Singapore People's Party							
Constituency	NSP Votes	Total Votes	%	Constituency	SPP Votes	Total Votes	%				
Chua Chu Kang	56885	146595	38.80	Bishan-Toa Payoh	47205	109590	43.07	Moulmein-Kallang	44886	76659	58.55
Jurong	37786	114381	33.04	Hong Kah North	7556	25712	29.39	Mountbatten	11985	20446	58.62
Marine Parade	59926	138212	43.36	Potong Pasir	7878	15870	49.64	Nee Soon	80740	138263	58.40
Mountbatten	8461	20446	41.38	TOTAL	62639	151172	41.44	Pasir Ris-Punggol	100493	155094	64.79
Pioneer	9437	24030	39.27				Average % 40.70	Pioneer	14593	24030	60.73
Radin Mas	9123	27732	32.90					Potong Pasir	7992	15870	50.36
Tampines	54381	127109	42.78					Punggol East	16994	31158	54.54
Whampoa	6683	19711	33.90					Radin Mas	18609	27732	67.10
TOTAL	242682	618216	39.26					Sembawang	84252	131857	63.90
			Average % 38.18					Sengkang West	14689	25280	58.11
								Tampines	72728	127109	57.22
								West Coast	72563	109006	66.57
								Whampoa	13028	19711	66.10
Reform Party				Singapore Democratic Alliance							
Constituency	RP Votes	Total Votes	%	Constituency	SDA Votes	Total Votes	%				
Ang Mo Kio	49851	162528	30.67	Pasir Ris-Punggol	54601	155094	35.21	Yuhua	14093	21079	66.86
West Coast	36443	109006	33.43	Punggol East	1387	31158	4.45	TOTAL	1212154	2015636	60.14
TOTAL	86294	271534	31.78	TOTAL	55988	186252	30.06				Average % 59.47
			Average % 32.05				Average % 19.83				

Conclusion

Electoral manipulation in Singapore is in many respects a Machiavellian attempt to hold onto the power of the sovereign (the PAP). The creation of Group Representation Constituencies served to insulate the PAP from significant electoral competition since 1988, and induct desired candidates into Parliament and into Cabinet. The goal of electoral manipulation is to prevent elected parliamentary pluralism that would interfere with the smooth operation of Parliament for the PAP. Within the GRCs, populations are disciplined to accept the GRC's necessity to guarantee political stability, and consider the economic ramifications of their vote by linking parliamentary representation to local constituency housing management.

The long-standing *raison d'etre* for GRCs is to ensure minority ethnicity representation in Parliament, expanded in 2006 to include female representation. The 2011 election demonstrated that this justification for GRCs was no longer necessary, it was not completely disregarded as no Malay or Indian candidates (male or female) were fielded outside of GRCs. This represented a realignment of the role of GRCS to better facilitate political channelling into Cabinet and block opposition entry to Parliament.

The Electoral Boundaries Review Committee can coordinate with the Prime Minister, who has the executive discretion to call elections, to disadvantage opposition parties with a short period of time to finalise their campaign strategies. For some of the underprepared parties, this can cause friction which ultimately hurts their electoral outcome. The Workers' Party campaigned for eight years before it won Aljunied GRC by 9%, but its operation of the Aljunied-Hougang-Punggol East Town Council has been under intense scrutiny since it took office. Undoubtedly, the PAP will draw attention to all of the Workers' Party's deficiencies running the Town Council in the next election to not just undermine the credibility of the Workers' Party, but the other opposition parties too.

Elections are usually a prime opportunity for the media to report the PAP's denigration of opposition parties. The opposition's counter-conduct – whereby it fielded elite-calibre candidates itself – and generally avoided providing an opportunity for the PAP to attack meant that in this instance the PAP was unable to make its smear campaigns stick. This

may not be replicated in future elections: it depends on the personalities within the parties. The number of elite-calibre candidates within the opposition's 2011 slate also showed that the PAP's traditional recruiting grounds of the civil service and the Armed Forces are no longer exclusive, although the onus is on the opposition parties to make the best use of those candidates.

For future elections, there are several factors to consider: the preparation of the opposition parties to contest in constituencies, their credibility based on the PAP's benchmark, and also the resonance of party messages with the electorate. For the opposition parties, the internet is a crucial platform for their interim reputation because they are offered limited mainstream media coverage. Should the opposition challenge to the PAP Government continue in future elections, it will revise the governmentality currently in place. In response to growing popular demand for competitive elections,¹ the opposition seized the opportunity in the 2011 election. It remains to be seen if and how the PAP Government reacts in the lead-up to the next general election.

²¹²¹ E.K.B. Tan, 'Election Issues', p. 44.

Chapter Eight:

Rallying the Restless: Singapore's 2011 Internet Election

Amongst digital natives, the sense of opportunity to make the 2011 election an important stand for the opposition was palpable. These Singaporean youth were particularly spurred by the people power demonstrations taking place in the Middle East and North Africa, where authoritarian regimes were overthrown. They felt that they too could bring about change in the PAP Government using the media and opposition parties as vehicles, and the tool of their generation: the internet.¹ In previous chapters, the mobilisation of digital natives for civil activism and alternative media was discussed. The 2011 election demonstrated the mobilising force of the internet for political participation. Digital natives may have been a vocal minority of the total electorate but they had a significant impact on the election campaign and media reporting.

The internet can be a force to rally party support but it seems that internet's users (netizens) mobilise better in tandem with opposition. Maggiotto and Piereson argued that it is easier to mobilise people against a party they dislike than to mobilise in support.² Ryan similarly concluded that users are more likely to share disinformation about something they dislike than positive information about something they like.³ Important to this concept is the coverage of parties and causes in the media. Krupkinov argued that exposure to negative media campaigns during constituents' decision-making stage, when they decide who to vote for, is more effective than sustained positive media campaigns. After a constituent has decided, they often state their dislike for alternative

¹ E. Torrijos, "'Orchid Evolution' sweeping through S'pore?", *Yahoo! News, Singapore*, April 15, 2011, <http://sg.news.yahoo.com/blogs/singaporescene/orchid-evolution-sweeping-pore-veteran-editor-20110415-035611-590.html>, accessed on: October 28, 2011; and J. Gomez, 'We are on the verge of an electoral revolution', *Singapore Democratic Party, Singapore*, March 8, 2011, <http://yoursdp.org/index.php/news/singapore/4656-we-are-on-the-verge-of-an-electoral-revolution>, accessed on: March 9, 2011.

² M.A. Maggiotto and J.E. Piereson, 'Partisan Identification and Electoral Choice: The Hostility Hypothesis', *American Journal of Political Science*, v. 21 (4), 1977, pp. 749,765.

³ J.B. Ryan, 'Social Networks as a Shortcut to Correct Voting', *American Journal of Political Science*, v. 55 (4), 2009, p. 754.

candidates, and thereby solidify their choice by framing their decision as one of personal preferences rather than rationality.⁴

Within the echo-chambers of the internet, the polarisation of choice between parties is more extreme because cohorts of like-minded citizens deepen their shared attitudes. Online encounters between members of different support cohorts can be fiery because anonymity fuels aggression.⁵ In these encounters, counter-arguments are rejected because of partisanship, which limits bridging social capital to bring the partisan groups together, and deliberation because alternative ideas are rejected.⁶

Considering these behaviours, Schmitt-Beck cautioned against banking on the wisdom of constituents and the voting mass: “Voters are social animals. During campaign periods, they not only develop their own personal party preferences, but also clear notions of the preferences of their fellow voters. [...]”⁷ If the messages come from within the echo-chamber, it skews the perception of the whole group to deepen their own bonding (heterogeneous group) social capital. If social echo-chambers are divided by support for parties and individual candidates (as in the case of Nicole Seah and George Yeo subsequently), and combined with the theoretical negative and positive information sharing within those echo-chambers with regards to that party and others, then theoretically, party support and thus electoral success is linked to electoral cohorts.

If the election result does not match the predicted outcome, voters can lose efficacy.⁸ As efficacy is a crucial mobilisation tool for digital natives, this could have severe consequences for future elections. In this chapter I analyse the mobilisation by digital natives within the framework of their conception of political participation, but I argue this has limited effect on election outcomes.

⁴ YY. Krupkinov, 'When does negativity demobilize? Tracing the Conditional Effect of Negative Campaigning on Voter Turnout', *American Journal of Political Science*, v. 55 (4), 2011, p. 799.

⁵ C. Shirky, *Here Comes Everybody*, Allan Lane, London & Toronto, 2008, p. 12; and S. Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More From Technology and Less From Each Other*, Basic Books, New York, 2010, pp. 299,368.

⁶ C. Shirky, *Here Comes Everybody*, p. 231.

⁷ R. Schmitt-Beck, 'Mass media, the electorate, and the bandwagon. A Study of Communication Effects on vote choice in Germany', *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, v. 8 (3), 1996, pp. 266-267.

⁸ F.M. Rossi, 'Youth Political Participation: Is This the End of Generational Cleavage?', *International Sociology*, v. 24 (4), 2009, p. 468.

I also surveyed the use of Facebook by political parties in Singapore during the 2011 election. The use of popular and easily accessible online platforms, such as Facebook, is one method to tap into online youth enthusiasm in the heat of electoral hype, but does not guarantee their mobilisation. The use of the internet can increase the outreach potential for political parties, but a balance must be achieved with the use of the internet, media and offline outreach.

The Use of the Internet in the 2011 election

Shortly after the election, the Institute of Policy Studies declared that the 2011 election had not been an “Internet election” because the mainstream media was still a staple news source.⁹ This assessment overlooked the significant contribution of blogs and Facebook to create the news that was then reported in the mainstream media. It also did not address that there is an asymmetry in resources between mainstream media corporations and independent socio-political bloggers.

Discussed in the previous chapter, netizens were at the centre of producing allegations that Workers’ Party MP Yaw Shin Leong had an extra-marital affair with a married member of his party.¹⁰ Yaw was questioned online by netizens, and followed offline by mainstream media journalists.¹¹ In 2004, Travers-Scott warned that political blogs may become the “new and significant force in tabloidism.”¹² The media attention on Tin Pei Ling and Nicole Seah in the 2011 election and the post-election Yaw affair demonstrated that online “muckrakers” can be a force that spurs the mainstream media to tabloid reporting, which has considerably greater effect because of their wider exposure.

⁹ Y.N. Hoe, 'GE not 'Internet election', says survey', *Channel News Asia*, October 4, 2011.

¹⁰ 'Core Member of Opposition Party Alleged to be Having an Extramarital Affair', *TR Emeritus*, January 20, 2012, <http://www.tremeritus.com/2012/01/20/exclusive-core-member-of-reputable-opposition-party-alleged-to-be-having-an-extramarital-affair/>, accessed on: February 18, 2012.

¹¹ 'Hougang MP Yaw disappears amid affair rumours', *AsiaOne*, January 28, 2012, <http://news.asiaone.com/News/Latest+News/Singapore/Story/A1Story20120128-324415.html>, accessed on: March 16, 2012; and M. Singh, 'Netizens ask Hougang MP: Did you have affair with married woman?', *The New Paper*, January 28, 2012; and M. Singh, 'Mr Yaw Shin Leong: “No Comment”', *The New Paper*, January 26, 2012; and 'Women Linked to Yaw', *The New Paper*, February 16, 2012; and A. Ong, 'Workers' Party expels Yaw', *Straits Times*, February 16, 2012.

¹² D. Travers Scott, 'Pundits in Muckrakers' Clothing: Political Blogs and the 2004 U.S. Presidential Election', *Blogging, Citizenship, and the Future of Media*, M. Tremayne (ed.) Routledge, New York & London, 2007, p. 54.

During the 2011 election, the mainstream media did not miss the opportunity to saturate the media market online and offline. *Channel NewsAsia* established a dedicated online portal to the election, and simulcast the live polling results on its website and television.¹³ The broadcaster reported it had over 42 million page views in the campaign period (April 27 - May 7), and its mobile site received four times the daily average page views, due to the proliferation of smartphones and smart-devices (e.g. iPads).¹⁴ The *Straits Times* also hosted a dedicated site for the elections, and the majority of news in the paper each day was related to the election. Significantly, the election represented an opportunity for the socio-political blogosphere to demonstrate its competitiveness with the paid professional media.

The Online Citizen was the most organised site and launched a specific election sister-site where it hosted parties' manifestos and breaking election news.¹⁵ It recruited volunteers to attend the various rallies and make reports, including the key points made by speakers,¹⁶ and the approximate number of attendees. Twitter was integrated with Facebook and the roving bloggers could directly upload their observations to Facebook via Twitter. After the rallies, the bloggers could make more detailed analyses.¹⁷ It was estimated by *The Online Citizen's* roving bloggers that the Workers' Party rally at

¹³ 'Biggest general election winner, the new media', *Channel NewsAsia*, May 11, 2011.

¹⁴ 'Biggest general election winner, the new media'

¹⁵ <http://ge2011.theonlinecitizen.com/>.

¹⁶ For example: theonlinecitizen, 'TOC comes to live from the PAP rally in Fullerton Square. Intan Mokhtar speaking now', *Facebook*, May 3, 2011,

<http://www.facebook.com/theonlinecitizen/posts/10150234738116383>, accessed on: May 3, 2011; and

theonlinecitizen, 'Heng:dont allow the opposition to destroy the economy with ill conceived policies. Dont get mired in divisive policies', *Facebook*, May 3, 2011,

<https://www.facebook.com/theonlinecitizen/posts/10150234745731383>, accessed on: October 27, 2011.

¹⁷ For example: B. Cheah, "'Change is coming to Singapore!": Reform Party', *The Online Citizen*, May 3, 2011, <http://theonlinecitizen.com/2011/05/change-is-coming-to-singapore-reform-party>, accessed on: May 3, 2011; and A. Ong, "'We're humans, we make mistakes": Grace Fu at PAP rally', *The Online Citizen*,

May 3, 2011, <http://ge2011theonlinecitizen.wordpress.com/2011/05/03/%E2%80%9Cwe%E2%80%99re-humans-we-make-mistakes%E2%80%9D-grace-fu-at-pap-rally/>, accessed on: May 3, 2011; and A. Loh, 'PAP has abused power to secure political advantage: WP', *The Online Citizen*, May 3, 2011,

<http://theonlinecitizen.com/2011/05/pap-has-abused-power-to-secure-political-advantage-wp>, accessed on: May 3, 2011.

Hougang attracted 40,000 to 50,000 people, and the PAP rallies less than 2,000 people.¹⁸ The SDP rallies approximately attracted 10,000 people.¹⁹

The activities of the media (mainstream and alternative) during the election showed that an organised alternative media could compete with mainstream media corporations to bring live reports from rallies and obtain information from parties and candidates. The saturation of the mainstream media online also indicated that the alternative media needs a niche to remain relevant in the media environment.

Digital Natives Go on the Offensive:

In the election, netizens mobilised themselves against two PAP candidates: Dr Janil Puthuchery and Tin Pei Ling. The disquiet against Puthuchery was more limited than against Tin, but was due to his recent citizenship as a Singaporean (he was Malaysian) and dismissive attitude towards the compulsory military National Service, the rite of passage for Singaporean men.²⁰ Puthuchery became a Singaporean citizen only two years before the election, so did not need to complete National Service. He was nonchalant about NS and stated that he did not need to volunteer to serve, because he had served a higher national service by “saving kids’ lives”.²¹ This was compared to WP candidate Chen Show Mao, who had volunteered for NS before becoming a Singaporean citizen.²² When Puthuchery was asked if he would ever volunteer for NS he replied: “If DPM Teo Chee Hean [GRC leader] tells me to bring a rifle and run up a hill, I’m fully

¹⁸ theonlinecitizen, 'WP easily attracted the biggest crowd tonight at the rallies. Estimates put the crowd size in Hougang at 40,000 to 50,000 people. The crowd at the PAP rally was 500 to 1,000 people, according to TOC reporter on the ground', *Facebook*, April 29, 2011, <http://www.facebook.com/theonlinecitizen/posts/10150230444856383>, accessed on: April 29, 2011.

¹⁹ theonlinecitizen, 'SDP rally has ended but Chee Soon Juan and the 11 SDP candidates proceed to meet supporters, estimated to be 10,000 strong', *Facebook*, May 1, 2011, <http://www.facebook.com/theonlinecitizen/posts/10150233039316383>, accessed on May 1, 2011; and Singapore Democratic Party (SDP), 'We thank the 10 000 strong crowd turnout tonight! It would not have been possible without all of you. Hope you enjoyed the night, because It's About You!', *Facebook*, April 29, 2011, <http://www.facebook.com/yoursdp/posts/10150232164608455>, accessed on: April 29, 2011; and New Asia Republic, 'WAH... SDP attracted 20,000 spectators tonight at its rally', *Facebook*, May 1, 2011, <http://www.facebook.com/newasiarepublic/posts/217298054950129>, accessed on: May 2, 2011.

²⁰ A.W. Au, 'Parties and Personalities; Staying Together (or Not) under Fire', *Voting in Change: Politics of Singapore's 2011 General Election*, K.Y.L. Tan and T. Lee (eds.), Ethos Books, Singapore, 2011, p. 74.

²¹ Tin Pei Ling and Dr Janil to “contest” in Marine Parade and Pasir Ris-Punggol GRCs', *SingaporeGE2011*, April 19, 2011, <http://singaporege2011.wordpress.com/2011/04/19/tin-pei-ling-and-dr-janil-to-contest-in-marine-parade-and-pasir-ris-punggol-grcs>, accessed on: April 20, 2011.

²² Nur Dainah Suhaimi, 'Chen Show Mao', *Straits Times*, May 8, 2011.

prepared and happy to do so.”²³ The dismissal of the NS obligation and the very significant impact that it has on young men’s lives in Singapore²⁴ demonstrated that Puthuchery lacked a significant political characteristic – being relatable to Singaporean citizens beyond his qualifications as a doctor.

By far the most impressive mobilisation online was the sustained campaign against young PAP candidate Tin Pei Ling. Tin was presented to the media and the public in March 2011. As a grassroots candidate, she was part of the PAP’s alternative candidate strategy to win voters alienated by elite credentials. As an attractive young woman, she was also clearly intended to win some of the youth vote for the PAP. Almost immediately, netizens mined her Facebook page for any compromising material, which many felt was morally justified because the information had been put online.²⁵ Critics drew conclusions about her integrity because her husband, who was 13 years her senior, was Principle Private Secretary to Prime Minister Lee. Netizens alleged she had married him to gain entry into politics.²⁶

Her privately posted content was virally circulated around the Singapore blogosphere. For example, a photograph of her posing with a designer handbag box (Kate Spade brand) was used to show her immaturity and materialism.²⁷ Netizens also uncovered a YouTube video clip from a Young PAP grassroots event where a Tin nervously stomped her feet and exclaimed “I don’t know what to say!” to the cameraman.²⁸ The widespread forwarding of such content and the vehemence against her immaturity pervaded the

²³ *Lianhe Zaobao* journalist Yew Lun Tian interviewed Puthuchery and posted a translated version of the article and notes from her interview on Facebook for the internet pundit community to discuss (Yew Lun Tian AtWork, 'Dr Janil Puthuchery talks to Zaobao about whether he would volunteer for NS, and more', *Facebook*, April 1, 2011, <http://www.facebook.com/notes/yew-lun-tian-atwork/dr-janil-puthuchery-talks-to-zaobao-about-whether-he-would-volunteer-for-ns-and/11033296904925>, accessed on: April 1, 2011).

²⁴ Yew Lun Tian AtWork, 'Dr Janil Puthuchery talks to Zaobao about whether he would volunteer for NS, and more'.

²⁵ A.W. Au, 'Parties and Personalities; Staying Together (or Not) under Fire', p. 73.

²⁶ R. Chang, 'MPs who had a tough start; Tin Pei Ling tells her side of the story', *Straits Times*, October 14, 2011.

²⁷ N. E-Jay, 'Online smearing of PAP candidate Tin Pei Ling is hypocritical and cowardly', *sgpolitics.net*, March 30, 2011, <http://www.sgpolitics.net/?p=6488>, accessed on: March 30, 2011; and A.W. Au, 'Parties and Personalities; Staying Together (or Not) under Fire', p. 73.

²⁸ Icyha0, 'PAP Tin Pei Ling I don't know what to say', *YouTube*, April 4, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2b4vQINMhmY>, accessed on: April 20, 2011; and A.W. Au, 'Parties and Personalities; Staying Together (or Not) under Fire', p. 73.

blogosphere.²⁹ It raised the attention of the mainstream media, which is often reactive to trending information online, increased by the ease of proliferate sharing.³⁰ In Tin's case, the media coverage fuelled the fire of online vitriol in a perpetuating cycle: the media repeated the online backlash against Tin³¹ and netizens were spurred by the media reports, and the media reported their aggression.

The *Straits Times* reported that Tin often overcompensated for her youth when speaking to the media, which made her seem more immature, especially when she did not properly explain her answers.³² This was exemplified by a widely circulated video in which Tin was asked by journalists about her greatest regret in life. She replied that her greatest regret was she hadn't taken her still-living parents to Universal Studios Singapore.³³ Her answer was used by netizens as undeniable proof of her immaturity.³⁴

When the same question was posed to the National Solidarity Party's 24-year old Nicole Seah, she was prepared and replied that she felt she had no "life-threatening" regrets and every mistake had shaped her personality for the better.³⁵ Netizens hailed Seah as the

²⁹ For example: 'Crowd chanted "Kate Spade!" as Tin Pei Ling made her speech', *SingaporeGE2011*, April 27, 2011, <http://singaporege2011.wordpress.com/2011/04/27/crowd-chanted-kate-spade-as-tin-pei-ling-made-her-speech/>, accessed on: April 28, 2011; and N. E-Jay, 'Why Tin Pei Ling saga just won't die down', *sgpolitics.net*, April 6, 2011, <http://www.sgpoltics.net/?p=6525>, accessed on: April 6, 2011; and C. Ong, 'Why many have chosen Nicole Seah over Tin Pei Ling', *The Kent Ridge Common*, April 21, 2011, <http://kentridgecommon.com/?p=11206>, accessed on: April 22, 2011; and R. Zeng, 'Tin Pei Ling's entry into Parliament: An insult to Singaporean politics', *Rachel Zeng's Blog*, May 8, 2011, <http://rachelzeng.wordpress.com/2011/05/08/1205/>, accessed on: May 8, 2011; and 'Cringing at Tin Pei Ling's Video', *My Journey - My Life*, April 15, 2011, <http://fuzzielemon.blogspot.jp/2011/04/cringing-at-tin-pei-lings-video.html>, accessed on: August 5, 2013; and K. Han, 'Live blogging as I watch Tin Pei Ling's rally speech', *#Spuddings*, May 1, 2011, <http://spuddings.net/2011/05/01/live-blogging-as-i-watch-tin-pei-lings-rally-speech>, accessed on: May 1, 2011.

³⁰ C. Shirky, *Here Comes Everybody*, p. 45.

³¹ For example: 'Tin Pei Ling: He's just a friend, not my boyfriend', *The New Paper*, April 13, 2011; and A. Wong, 'My conscience is clear: Tin Pei Ling', *Yahoo! News, Singapore*, April 14, 2011, <http://sg.news.yahoo.com/blogs/singaporescene/conscience-clear-tin-pei-ling-20110414-001731-974.html>, accessed on: April 15, 2011; and A. Wong, 'Is Tin Pei Ling a victim of "gutter journalism"?', *Yahoo! News, Singapore*, March 30, 2011, <http://sg.news.yahoo.com/blogs/singaporescene/tin-pei-ling-victim-gutter-journalism-20110330-014441-579.html>, accessed on: April 15, 2011; and E. Toh, 'I take valid criticism seriously: Tin Pei Ling', *Straits Times*, April 18, 2011; and J. Chow, 'Give Tin Pei Ling time to correct her image: SM', *Straits Times*, May 4, 2011.

³² Y. Feng, 'Tin Pei Ling's the one to watch', *Straits Times*, March 31, 2011.

³³ 'Video: Tin Pei Ling's greatest regret', *AsiaOne*, March 31, 2011, <http://www.asiaone.com/News/AsiaOne+News/Singapore/Story/A1Story20110331-271047.html>, accessed on: April 5, 2011.

³⁴ R. Chang, 'MPs who had a tough start; Tin Pei Ling tells her side of the story'.

³⁵ S.A. Tay, 'NSP's Nicole Seah on her biggest regret', *The New Paper*, April 21, 2011.

more mature of the candidate,³⁶ but her answer was guarded, unlike Tin who was brutally honest to her own detriment. Much later, Tin explained that she had meant that she regretted she had not been able to fulfil a promise to her parents to take them to Universal Studios before she became a PAP candidate, and lamented that she would not have time once elected to take them on vacation.³⁷ Even if Tin had said clearly what she meant at the time, undoubtedly netizens would have lambasted her for her presumptuousness that she would be elected.

The narrative of Tin's immaturity fed into a wider discontent with the PAP and its practice to field inexperienced candidates in GRCs under the wing of an established Cabinet Minister.³⁸ Some netizens called for Tin to be fielded in a SMC to test her capability in a straight contest with the opposition.³⁹ Goh Chok Tong defended the decision to field Tin in Marine Parade GRC because she had gone through rigorous selection criteria to be a candidate.⁴⁰ He assured voters that "if under all this, she had melted, if she had shown herself to be weak, I would have gone to the PM and said 'This person is not one that I would want on my team'."⁴¹ Zaqy Mohamad, who had been one of the PAP's youngest candidates in the 2006 elections, also defended Tin and encouraged voters to look past her youth to her experiences in the grassroots sector. He argued she could be a capable MP based on those experiences.⁴²

³⁶ For example: 'Nicole Seah versus Tin Pei Ling in Marine Parade GRC', *Temasek Review*, April 20, 2011, <http://temasekreview.com/2011/04/20/nicole-seah-versus-tin-pei-ling-in-marine-parade-grc/>, accessed on: April 21, 2011; and 'Nicole Seah makes politics kewl again', *Temasek Review*, May 2, 2011, <http://www.temasekreview.com/2011/05/02/nicole-seah-makes-politics-kewl-again>, accessed on: May 13, 2011; and 'Nicole Seah vs Tin Pei Ling: Round 1', *Hun Boon's Blog*, April 25, 2011, <http://hunboon.wordpress.com/2011/04/25/nicole-seah-vs-tin-pei-ling-round-1>, accessed on: August 5, 2013; and R. Zeng, 'Tin Pei Ling's entry into Parliament: An insult to Singaporean politics'; and 'I prefer Nicole Seah over Tin Pei Ling', *Just2Me*, April 22, 2011, <http://www.just2me.com/2011/04/i-prefer-nicole-seah-over-tin-pei-ling.html>, accessed on: August 5, 2013.

³⁷ R. Chang, 'MPs who had a tough start; Tin Pei Ling tells her side of the story'.

³⁸ A.W. Au, 'Parties and Personalities; Staying Together (or Not) under Fire', p. 73.

³⁹ 'Tin Pei Ling and Dr Janil to "contest" in Marine Parade and Pasir Ris-Punggol GRCs'; and N. E-Jay, 'It's not just about Tin Pei Ling herself, but about the flaws in our political system', *sgpolitics.net*, April 15, 2011, <http://www.sgpolitics.net/?p=6561>, accessed on: April 19, 2011; and N. E-Jay, 'Why Tin Pei Ling saga just won't die down'; and C. Ong, 'Why we ought to be disappointed with Lim Hwee Hua's comments: An Anthology of Criticism against Tin Pei Ling', *The Kent Ridge Common*, April 11, 2011, <http://kentridgecommon.com/?p=10806>, accessed on: April 18, 2011.

⁴⁰ G. Ng, "I have no reason whatsoever to worry about Tin Pei Ling", *Straits Times*, April 19, 2011.

⁴¹ G. Ng, "I have no reason whatsoever to worry about Tin Pei Ling".

⁴² W.K. Leong, 'Mixed views on youngest PAP candidate in three decades', *Today*, March 30, 2011.

The disapproval of Tin was hypocritical. Little to no attention was paid by netizens to Nicole Seah's inexperience, which was less than Tin's. The disparity of popularity between Tin and Seah was a partisan issue more than the political competence of either candidate. Ng Tze Yong speculated that if Tin had been fielded by the opposition, her comments would be treated as cute and a counter-point to a "straight-laced PAP MP".⁴³

Nicole Seah's popularity demonstrated Magiotto and Piereson's argument about partisan mobilisation, as she was the lightning rod for opposition support, and Tin was the lightning rod for anti-PAP sentiments.⁴⁴ Seah's lightning rod support was probably also against the older-generations' attitudes and perceptions of digital natives as apathetic and uninvolved in the political process.⁴⁵

Lightning-rod popularity is transient, and between elections, the political skill of a candidate can be more fully honed. After Tin was elected, it soon became evident that her niche was not the youth she had been fielded to represent but the older generation. In Parliament, she proposed to increase support for the elderly.⁴⁶ One year into her term as a MP, the *Straits Times* reported on her good rapport with the much older constituents of her MacPherson ward.⁴⁷

By the next election, Tin will have been part of the Marine Parade constituency for five years, with the associated recognition from residents, and recognition as a junior backbencher in Parliament. If she is savvy, Nicole Seah will continue to be popular among those who remember the hype of the 2011 election. After the election, it is the elites within the National Solidarity Party, such as Hazel Poa, who have spearheaded alternative policy.⁴⁸ Rather, Seah has focused on local grassroots efforts.⁴⁹ In the next election, the mainstream media will no-doubt revisit Seah's so-called rivalry with Tin if

⁴³ T.Y. Ng, 'What if Tin Pei Ling and Chen Show Mao swapped places?', *Straits Times*, April 13, 2011.

⁴⁴ A.W. Au, 'Parties and Personalities; Staying Together (or Not) under Fire', pp. 74-75.

⁴⁵ E. Wee, 'They're just not that into POLITICS', *The New Paper*, April 7, 2011.

⁴⁶ Tin Pei Ling, 'Speech for the Opening of Parliament – delivered on 21 October 2011', *Facebook*, October 22, 2011, <http://www.facebook.com/notes/tin-pei-ling/speech-for-the-opening-of-parliament-delivered-on-21-october-2011/264424013599500>, accessed on: October 27, 2011.

⁴⁷ R. Chang, 'MPs who had a tough start; Tin Pei Ling tells her side of the story'.

⁴⁸ 'The fear fighter', *Straits Times*, May 17, 2013.

⁴⁹ 'Life after GE: Nicole Seah', *The New Paper*, May 10, 2012.

both contest the elections. Seah will be on the back-foot to show what she had done in Marine Parade GRC in the election interim.

During the 2011 election, the lightning-rod popularity of Nicole Seah was focused on her Facebook presence. The ‘liking’ of Nicole Seah’s Facebook page was a symbol of dissent against the PAP, and over 100,000 people ‘liked’ her Facebook page.⁵⁰ This prompted blogger Xiauxue (Wendy Cheng) to complain that it was an insult to the legacy of the PAP for more people to ‘like’ Seah than the unofficial page for Lee Kuan Yew. Her comment was transmitted widely, and resonated with many to drive the number of ‘likes’ for Lee’s page up to match Seah’s.⁵¹ Xiauxue later complained about the positive bias for Nicole Seah compared to Tin Pei Ling and directly compared the experience of the PAP and NSP Marine Parade GRC team-members. She pointedly reminded her readers that the inexperienced NSP were facing down former-Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong.⁵²

Facebook ‘likes’ are the weakest form of participation but have a strangely strong resonance for digital natives because it quantifies popularity. These ‘likes’ are not representative of actual support because Facebook cannot differentiate between constituencies or limit users to those eligible to vote. The liking of Seah and dislike of Tin represented the opportunity for digital natives to be part of a critical mass of support for a cause without necessarily believing in it whole-heartedly. The level of vehemence against Tin was also exemplary of how the digital natives are less *kiasu-kiasi* (afraid) to stand in opposition to the PAP, as discussed in Chapter Five.

⁵⁰ National Solidarity Party, 'Nicole Seah overtakes Lee Kuan Yew on number of “likes” on Facebook', *Facebook*, May 3, 2011, <http://www.facebook.com/nspsg/posts/164058483655372>, accessed on: June 29, 2011.

⁵¹ W. Cheng, 'What the fuck, Singaporeans?', *XiaXue*, May 3, 2011, <http://xiauxue.blogspot.com/2011/05/what-the-fuck-singaporeans.html>, accessed on: June 29, 2011; and W. Wee, 'Influential blogger promotes MM Lee’s Facebook page, beats Nicole Seah’s', *TechinAsia*, May 4, 2011, <http://www.techinasia.com/xiauxue-lee-kuan-yew-nicole-seah/>, accessed on: June 29, 2011.

⁵² W. Cheng, 'Vote Wisely', *XiaXue*, May 4, 2011, <http://xiauxue.blogspot.jp/2011/05/vote-wisely.html>, accessed on: June 29, 2011.

Another example of misleading mass participation with implied solidarity is the political rally.⁵³ Nicole Seah was able to draw crowds of thousands at the National Solidarity Party rallies.⁵⁴ Although rally attendance requires more effort than ‘liking’ someone on Facebook, the support for Seah at rallies and on Facebook can be considered as the same phenomenon, with the same deceptive result. Being part of the multitudes allowed Singaporeans to feel like part of a community of dissent against the PAP. Da Cunha warned that Singapore rally crowds are particularly misleading because the audience takes on a social form that is not as present when they poll alone.⁵⁵ Singaporeans travel across the island and outside of their constituencies to hear parties’ candidates speak. Masses attend specific rallies because they are guaranteed to be “more interesting”.⁵⁶ Just as *Pink Dot* is guaranteed to be a spectacle, so too are the Workers’ Party rallies. The media has justified its reticence to photograph the crowd’s mass at rallies because of this misleading impression.⁵⁷

Party Facebook and Internet Use

In theory, Facebook could be used by parties to counter negative press and to bolster their ability to reach out to constituents. The theoretical implications of using Facebook should not be seen as significantly different from blogs, because there is no great difference to the dialogic potential between a blog and Facebook. On a blog, information is posted by the user and comments are made on those posts, which is the same on Facebook. On Facebook, users can also post comments to the ‘wall’ of others which can then be commented upon. The basic principle of this form of interaction is that it requires the operator of the site to be cognisant of their audience and to actually interact with them.

⁵³ T. Chong, 'Election Rallies: Performances in Dissent, Identity, Personalities and Power', *Voting in Change: Politics of Singapore's 2011 General Election*, K.Y.L. Tan and T. Lee (eds.), Ethos Books, Singapore, 2011, p. 119.

⁵⁴ T. Chong, 'Election Rallies: Performances in Dissent, Identity, Personalities and Power', p. 122.

⁵⁵ D. Da Cunha, *The Price of Victory: The 1997 Singapore general election and beyond*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 1997, p. 50.

⁵⁶ D. Da Cunha, *Breakthrough: Roadmap for Singapore's Political Future*, Straits Times Press, Singapore, 2012, pp. 184,193.

⁵⁷ Interview with Straits Times political journalist (*Straits Times*1), de-identified upon request, Singapore, October 22, 2010.

In pre-Facebook 2006, Scoble and Israel argued that it was important for businesses to be involved in the blogosphere because it would allow them to see what was being said about their company and products, to reply to those comments, and to be seen “as a sincere human who cares about your business and its reputation.”⁵⁸ In their analysis of Microsoft, Scoble and Israel found that when employees began blogging about the company, its public image improved and the “evil empire” reputation was softened.⁵⁹ The same principle can be applied to politicians, and seems to be something the PAP is exploring.

Prior studies of politicians’ uses of blogs, websites and Facebook have found that their interactivity is often quite deficient.⁶⁰ This is most likely because of the busyness of elected politicians prevents them from regularly updating their sites. Mobile internet technology can make this a lot easier because smartphones can access Facebook anywhere there is wireless internet. However, there needs to be intent and a feeling of efficacy from the politicians about using such communicative tools. Rational constituents and fans know that their comments will probably never be replied to. It seems that when a politician apologises for their lack of response and acknowledges the deficiency of two-way communication, it is positively received by fans.⁶¹

Before and after the election, Singaporean citizens rallied around the Facebook persona of George Yeo, who had nearly 90,000 fans on his public page and had filled the 5,000 friend limit on his private page.⁶² Within hours of posting his thank you letter to Singaporeans for their Facebook well-wishes, the post had nearly 10,000 ‘likes’.⁶³ Yeo’s

⁵⁸ R. Scoble and S. Israel, *Naked Conversations: How Blogs Are Changing the Way Businesses Talk with Customers*, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Hoboken, NJ, 2006, p. 2.

⁵⁹ R. Scoble and S. Israel, *Naked Conversations*, p. 13.

⁶⁰ K.D. Sweetster and R. Weaver Lariscy, 'Candidates Make Good Friends: An Analysis of Candidates' Use of Facebook', *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, v. 2 2008, p. 193; and R. Ferguson and B. Griffiths, 'Thin Democracy? Parliamentarians, Citizens and the Influence of Blogging on Political Engagement', *Parliamentary Affairs*, v. 59 (2), 2006, pp. 371-372; and S. Ward, *et al.*, 'Australian MPs and the Internet: Avoiding the Digital Age?', *The Australian Journal of Public Administration*, v. 66 (2), 2007, pp. 215,218.

⁶¹ George Yeo, 'I would like to apologize to many friends for not being able to respond to your comments and messages. Aljunied is a tough battle and we are taking nothing, taking no voter for granted. Thanks for your good wishes and words of encouragement. 加油! Got to sleep now', *Facebook*, April 30, 2011, <https://www.facebook.com/georgeyeopage/posts/10150170692583043>, accessed on: April 30, 2011; and George Yeo, 'A Letter to FB Friends', *Facebook*, May 13, 2011, <http://www.facebook.com/notes/georgeyeo/a-letter-to-fb-friends/10150177399263616>, accessed on: May 13, 2011.

⁶² <https://www.facebook.com/georgeyeopage>.

⁶³ George Yeo, 'A Letter to FB Friends'.

approachability in real-life was perceived to extend to his Facebook persona. In the late stage of the election, several politically unaffiliated youths created the “In George We Trust” movement, raising money to distribute thousands of badges, stickers and fliers at rallies.⁶⁴ Yeo said Facebook and other social media had been crucial to his engagement with the people and to provide more coverage of his activities beyond being an MP and the Foreign Minister.⁶⁵ Therefore, savvy use of Facebook by PAP candidates could soften the party’s image and benefit them electorally amongst digital natives.

The use of Facebook or other online platforms should not be relied upon exclusively, but can be very useful tools to engage constituents, especially digital natives. The 2011 campaign and the SDA’s Punggol East by-election campaign in 2013, demonstrated that using the internet in lieu of traditional offline outreach would have limited results. During the by-election, the SDA heavily used the internet to campaign, including a YouTube political rally. Residents were encouraged to view them by using a Quick Response (QR) barcode printed on the fliers,⁶⁶ which can be scanned by smart-phones and the webpage loaded directly.

The Singapore Democratic Alliance’s YouTube outreach competed against the traditional campaigning methods used by the PAP and other opposition parties contesting the by-election. Lim decided not to hold an offline political rally to save the party money,⁶⁷ but the videos were not popular.

The videos only received limited coverage in the media and received substantially more ‘dislikes’ than ‘likes’ on the YouTube page. Some of the YouTube comments also encouraged users to turn-on Google’s automatic closed-captions, which mistranslated Harminder Pal Singh and Desmond Lim’s thick accents into humorous gibberish.⁶⁸ Thus, the seriousness and innovation of using YouTube to carry out an online rally was

⁶⁴ J. Lui, 'In George they trust', *Straits Times*, May 5, 2011.

⁶⁵ 'George Yeo on his team mates', *Straits Times*, April 24, 2011.

⁶⁶ Y.C. Toh, 'Punggol East By-Election: Singapore Democratic Alliance; Party chief attacks PAP and WP', *Straits Times*, January 22, 2013.

⁶⁷ "'No Crime" to pay youth volunteers to help party: SDA', *Yahoo! News, Singapore*, January 19, 2013, <http://sg.news.yahoo.com/no-crime-paying-volunteers-sda-155444833.html>, accessed on: August 5, 2013.

⁶⁸ SDA Punggol East, 'Introduction: SDA Punggol East By-Elections Online Rally', *YouTube*, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NmNvgSO-I2A>, accessed on: August 5, 2013.

undermined as a joke. Combined with the controversy that Lim had hired young people to do his campaigning for him, and advertised for participants as “company ambassadors” who were paid for their time,⁶⁹ it is perhaps not surprising that Lim received even less votes in the 2013 by-election than he had in the 2011 election.

During the 2011 election, the Reform Party also relied heavily on Facebook. Kenneth Jeyaretnam conceded the Party had not done any outreach in Ang Mo Kio GRC before the election, but still hoped to achieve a better result than the Workers’ Party had there in 2006.⁷⁰ They did not, achieving only 30.6% compared to the Workers’ Party 33.8%.⁷¹ Similarly, the Singapore Democratic Party for a long time used the internet as an alternative source of public outreach due to poor media coverage.⁷² The Party’s electoral results however, revealed that it had overestimated its internet strategy’s ability to bypass the mainstream media as a primary communication form.⁷³

The Workers’ Party has had a cautious approach to using the internet because of its potential to be exploited to tarnish the Party’s reputation. It was not much before the election that the WP’s internet presence significantly increased. Candidates justified that this was because internet utilisation was less important for deep connections with constituents than face-to-face contact.⁷⁴ Journalists commented in interviews that Low Thia Khiang is cautious about the media’s exposure of the Party,⁷⁵ and this has seemingly applied to the internet. When he left the Workers’ Party, Goh Meng Seng criticised Low’s policy to suppress candidates’ internet use, and said it stymied the

⁶⁹ 'Desmond Lim paid teenagers to support him?', *TR Emeritus*, January 19, 2013, <http://www.tremertus.com/2013/01/19/desmond-lim-paid-teenagers-to-support-him/>, accessed on: August 5, 2013; and "'No Crime" to pay youth volunteers to help party: SDA'.

⁷⁰ A. Ng, 'RP to introduced candidates for Ang Mo Kio GRC today', *Today*, April 27, 2011; and M. Toh, 'Reform Party likely to contest in Ang Mo Kio', *Straits Times*, April 22, 2011.

⁷¹ '2006 Parliamentary General Election Results', *Singapore Elections Department*, January 3, 2011, http://www.elections.gov.sg/elections_past_parliamentary2006.html, accessed on: May 1, 2011.

⁷² Interview with Dr Chee Soon Juan, Secretary-General of the Singapore Democratic Party, Singapore, October 19, 2010; and interview with then-Singapore Youth Wing members (*SDP Youth*), de-identified upon request, Singapore, October 9, 2010.

⁷³ D. Da Cunha, *Breakthrough*, p. 158.

⁷⁴ Interview with Yaw Shin Leong, then-Workers’ Party Treasurer, Singapore, October 15, 2010; and interview with Gerald Giam, then-Workers’ Party Deputy Webmaster, Singapore, October 28, 2010.

⁷⁵ Interview with *Straits Times*1.

political development of the Party. He claimed it was hypocritical because the internet had been a vehicle to bring in many new members to the Party.⁷⁶

Not surprisingly, Goh Meng Seng led the National Solidarity Party's internet usage with his blog and posting on Facebook. The National Solidarity Party established several satellite websites for their constituency contests, but the main NSP website and sections of the satellite sites were underdeveloped or missing altogether. This made the NSP's internet strategy at times seem ill-conceived. Star candidates such as Nicole Seah or Goh Meng Seng used Facebook, but quite often preferred their private Facebook pages to their publicly accessible ones. Goh Meng Seng's public Facebook page reflected only a fraction of the content he posted on his private page during the campaign.⁷⁷

The Singapore's People Party and Singapore Democratic Alliance had limited internet utilisation during the election. The Singapore People's Party use of the internet was bolstered by addition of several young supporters, which redeveloped the website and allowed the party candidates to use private Facebook pages to some extent. During the 2011 election, the Singapore Democratic Alliance was deficient in its internet presence. After the Singapore People's Party left the SDA, it took quite some time for the latter to amend its website to reflect the change. Even before the election campaign, the majority of SDA's content was hosted on the private Facebook page of Secretary General Desmond Lim, which required users to 'friend' him to see. Even then, Lim was not a prolific poster.

The utilisation of Facebook by parties, especially publicly accessible profiles, is important for the way their content will be shared by constituents throughout Singapore. Compared to newspaper and television news consumption, where stories are selected for the audience, the selection of news online is often by word-of-mouth and sharing amongst networks. Active pursuit of news has been found to be infrequent online,

⁷⁶ Interview with Goh Meng Seng, then-Secretary-General of the National Solidarity Party, Singapore, October 9, 2010.

⁷⁷ Based on observations of the two accounts throughout 2011.

because it is based on users' time and inclination to check for news stories.⁷⁸ The spread of news by parties is limited by social networks. If someone does not support a particular party, they are unlikely to share that party's information online. Instead, based on Magiotto and Peterson's argument about negative mobilisation, it could be assumed that the non-supporters will more likely spread negative news about the party they dislike. Involvement in political scraps with other opposition parties reduces the potential for bridging capital with supporters of other opposition parties, and undecided swing voters. In addition to building up bonding social capital which binds party supporters together, the parties should also pursue bridging social capital to attract support or at least sympathy from other opposition party supporters.

A Quick Look at Facebook Utilisation: Survey October 2011

I surveyed official party Facebook accounts and publicly accessible accounts of candidates in October 2011 for the period of March 21 to May 28, 2011, allowing a month on either side of the election campaign (April 27-May 8). Posts by the official party pages were categorised into photographs, videos, advertisements and discussions. Discussions were categorised by status updates, posted questions, or news. As Figure 8.1 illustrates, the majority of posts by all seven contesting parties were discussions. The date range from this figure is the election period from Nomination Day (April 27) to the day after Polling Day (May 8).

The Singapore Democratic Party and Reform Party public accounts were by far the most prolific during the campaign. This reflected the substitution of significant offline outreach with online outreach, obviously hampered by their niche audiences (as with all parties).

⁷⁸ *Understanding the Participatory News Consumer*, PEW Research Centre, 2010, www.pewinternet.org/~Media/Files/Reports/2010/PIP_Understanding_the_Participatory_News_Consumer.pdf. 4; and B. Stelter, 'Finding Political News Online, The Young Pass It On', *New York Times*, March 27, 2008.

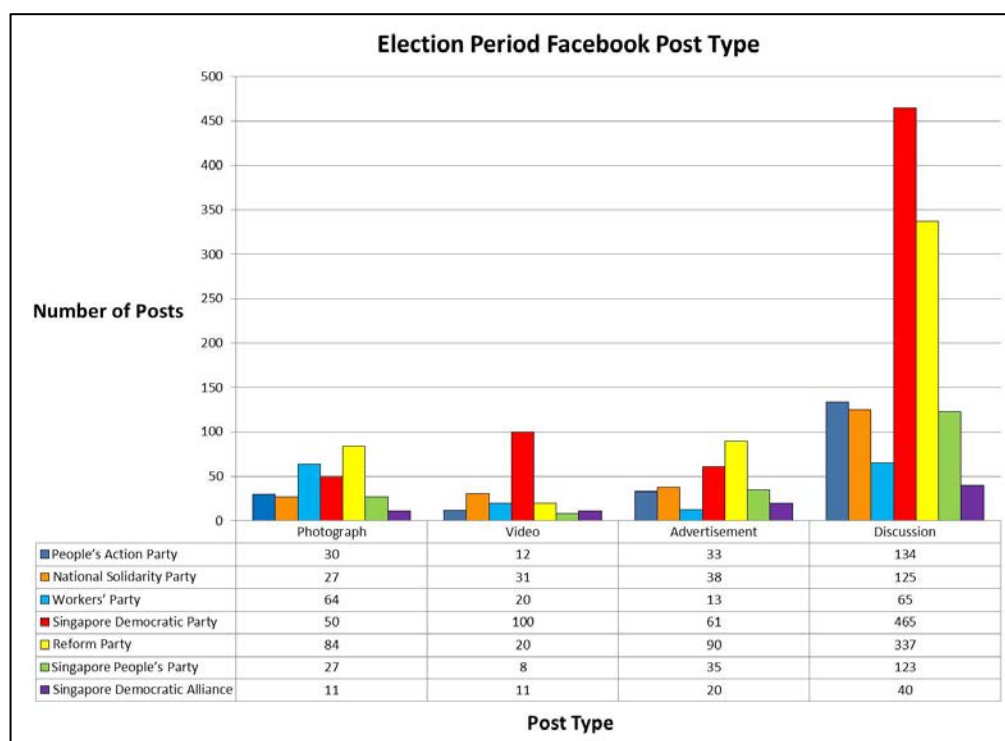


Figure 8.1 Election Period (April 27-May 8) Official Party Facebook pages Post Types (Source: Author's survey)⁷⁹

Most parties used their Facebook pages to advertise events, rallies and candidates, which is important to mobilise support. The Singapore Democratic Party preferred to use video because they could convey important party messages using a professionalised style crafted in the preceding years. Videos have been a method for Dr Chee to address the audience, which he was prohibited from doing because of his bankruptcy and prohibition from contesting the election. During the survey period, the videos posted were speeches by the candidates from the election rallies, the political party broadcasts, and the campaign video *SDP ♥ Singapore*.⁸⁰ The Reform Party also posted rally videos and its

⁷⁹ Compiled from author's survey of party Facebook pages: <https://www.facebook.com/workersparty>; and <https://www.facebook.com/nspsg>; and <https://www.facebook.com/pap.sg>; and <https://www.facebook.com/thereformparty>; and <https://www.facebook.com/SingaporePeoplesParty>; and <https://www.facebook.com/limbakchuanandesmond>; and <https://www.facebook.com/yoursdp>.

⁸⁰ Singapore Democratic Party (SDP), 'SDP's James Gomez: "We are going to send him to Johor Bahru!"', *Facebook*, April 29, 2011, <https://www.facebook.com/yoursdp/posts/111709748913907>, accessed on: April 30, 2011; and Singapore Democratic Party (SDP), 'Dr Ang Yong Guan at SDP's rally in Holland-Bukit Timah GRC', *Facebook*, April 29, 2011, <https://www.facebook.com/yoursdp/posts/199307530106851>, accessed on: April 30, 2011; and Singapore Democratic Party (SDP), 'It's About You - The SDP's first of two party political broadcasts.', *Facebook*, April 29, 2011, <https://www.facebook.com/yoursdp/posts/198975373471738>, accessed on: April 30, 2011; and Singapore Democratic Party (SDP), 'SDP Loves Singapore', *Facebook*, April 27, 2011, <https://www.facebook.com/yoursdp/posts/212325992130643>, accessed on: April 30, 2011.

political broadcast.⁸¹ It also reposted the MARUAH video explaining votes are secret,⁸² and used a video of a lecture given by scholar Derek DaCunha about election logistics as an appeal to volunteers to assist in the campaign.⁸³

Like videos, photographs were used to show the outreach by the parties, including constituency walkabouts and political rallies. The Reform Party's focus on its election rallies as its chief form of outreach was reflected in its photographs, and it posted more photograph albums (six) on Facebook of its rallies than other forms of outreach or party events such as press conferences during the election period.⁸⁴ The Workers' Party also preferred the use of photographs to showcase its campaigning and rallies across Singapore. It uploaded 16 albums of campaigning across the constituencies contested and seven albums from its political rallies. Also hosted were three albums which depicted Nomination Day, Polling Day and campaign materials.⁸⁵

The National Solidarity Party only uploaded two albums (both election rallies) within the election period, although they uploaded photos to existing albums after the campaign period.⁸⁶ The breakdown of all four post types into sub-categorised uses reveals specifically what parties used photographs, videos, advertisements, and discussion posts for; illustrated in Figure 8.2.

⁸¹ The Reform Party, 'Watch this video and it will win you over and vote for the Reform Party! - Irene', *Facebook*, May 6, 2011, <https://www.facebook.com/thereformparty/posts/160782633985188>, accessed on: May 8, 2011; and The Reform Party, 'Watch and share! ', *Facebook*, May 4, 2011, <https://www.facebook.com/thereformparty/posts/161423400588629>, accessed on: May 8, 2011; and The Reform Party, 'Why KJ went into politics', *Facebook*, May 3, 2011, <https://www.facebook.com/thereformparty/posts/121448277935161>, accessed on: May 8, 2011; and The Reform Party, 'Today we will be submitting our second election broadcast.', *Facebook*, May 2, 2011, <https://www.facebook.com/thereformparty/posts/160738267322733>, accessed on: May 8, 2011.

⁸² The Reform Party, 'Let us assure you once again, Your vote is secret. 投票是秘密的 undi saya adalah rahsia. யொஊர் வொடெ இஸ் ஸெக்ரெட்', *Facebook*, May 5, 2011, <https://www.facebook.com/thereformparty/posts/221233701220518>, accessed on: May 8, 2011.

⁸³ The Reform Party, 'Please see this video. We need 200 committed volunteers. Please help us! You can register your interest to help through the link below! Thanks! – Irene', *Facebook*, April 30, 2011, <https://www.facebook.com/thereformparty/posts/204704846236719>, accessed on: May 8, 2011.

⁸⁴ The Reform Party, 'The Reform Party: Photo Albums', *Facebook*, https://www.facebook.com/thereformparty/photos_albums, accessed on: October 27, 2011.

⁸⁵ The Workers' Party, 'The Workers' Party: Photo Albums', *Facebook*, https://www.facebook.com/workersparty/photos_albums, accessed on: October 27, 2011.

⁸⁶ National Solidarity Party, '02 May 2011 - Mountbatten SMC Rally', *Facebook*, May 3, 2011, <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.145736438829451.32026.127539053982523&type=3>, accessed on: October 27, 2011; and National Solidarity Party, '28 April 2011 Marine Parade GRC Rally', *Facebook*, May 3, 2011, <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.145737045496057.32027.127539053982523&type=3>, accessed on: October 27, 2011.

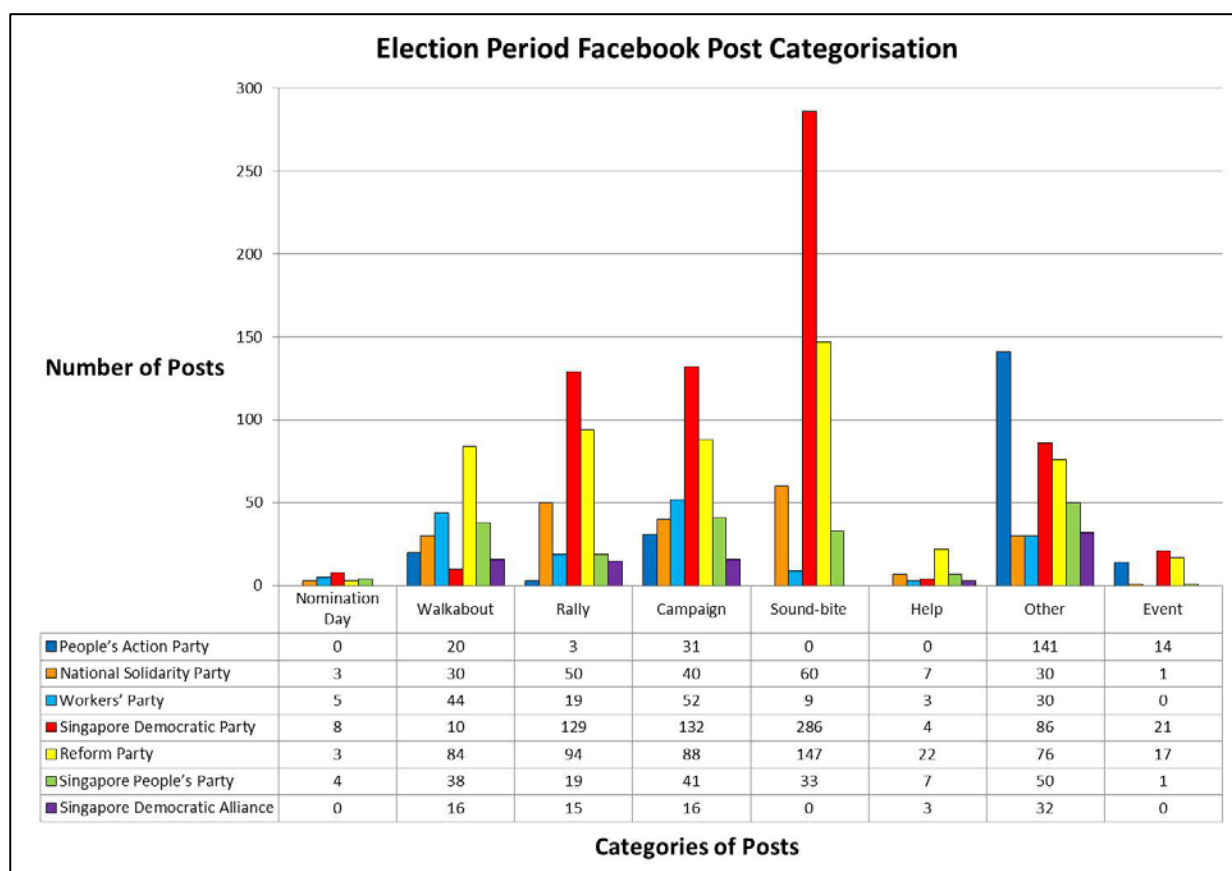


Figure 8.2 Election Period (April 27-May 8) Official Party Facebook pages Post Categorisation (Source: Author's survey).⁸⁷

Several interesting Facebook trends can be drawn from Figure 8.2. The first is the use of Facebook with Twitter integration for sound-bites and rolling coverage of election rallies. The National Solidarity Party, Singapore Democratic Party and Reform Party used Facebook for this function, to a much greater extent than the Singapore People's Party and the Workers' Party. The People's Action Party and Singapore Democratic Alliance did not use Facebook for this function. The People's Action Party probably did not use Facebook like this because the mainstream media would report its rally speeches. The Singapore Democratic Alliance may not have used Facebook like this because it would require third party access to Desmond Lim's private Facebook page.

The People's Action Party had the highest proportion of 'Other' content due to posts about government policies and incumbent MPs, but not specifically related to the election campaign. The PAP blurred its role as government and Party significantly on

⁸⁷ Compiled from author's survey of party Facebook pages.

Facebook, as shown in the use of Facebook by PAP candidates in the lead-up and aftermath of the election. The Singapore People's Party also posted a significant amount of 'other' content, which included status updates about team movements on Polling Day. The Reform Party requested the most help than any other party, probably because of the exodus that had removed much of its support base. These calls for 'Help' included solicitation of polling agents and volunteers.

Probably due to its otherwise low profile, the Reform Party most prolifically advertised its constituency walkabouts to raise awareness of the party's activities. Walkabouts are seen as crucial to the campaigning process because they raise awareness of the party in the constituency, and parties can speak with residents to gain a better appreciation of issues that bother them. The party that advertised its walkabouts least on Facebook was the Singapore Democratic Party, which could give the impression erroneously or not that the party did minimal walkabout outreach. By contrast, the Party heavily promoted its rallies, more so than any other party, even the Reform Party. Rallies allow the parties to present an emotive and well-orchestrated event to potential voters and are the opportunity for non-elected candidates to showcase themselves and the party.

Considering the proportion of accounts available, and the actual amount of content generated, Facebook utilisation needs to be better coordinated to central party pages. Most parties preferred private Facebook accounts, the account type first available on the social networking site.⁸⁸ Table 8.1 shows the actual number of candidates and their Facebook accounts vis-à-vis the surveyed accounts.

⁸⁸ During the course of this thesis, I 'friended' many of these private accounts to keep track of campaigns.

Table 8.1 Actual Candidate and Profiles vis-à-vis Surveyed Profiles (Source: Author's survey)⁸⁹

Party	Candidates	Public FB Surveyed	Public FB Actual	Private FB Actual
PAP	87	57 (65%)	66 (75%)	61 (70%)
NSP	24	4 (16%)	6 (25%)	18 (75%)
WP	23	8 (34%)	13 (56%)	17 (73%)
SDP	11	7 (63%)	8 (72%)	8 (72%)
RP	11	9 (81%)	10 (90%)	7 (63%)
SPP	7	1 (14%)	3 (42%)	7 (100%)
SDA	7	1 (14%)	2 (28%)	5 (71%)

As can be seen in Table 8.2 overleaf, the opposition parties' candidates surveyed predominately used Facebook for election posts and only a small percentage was for party news. The Singapore People's Party and Singapore Democratic Alliance were not included in the graph because there were only 5 posts made during the surveyed period on the two profiles. As only the People's Action Party candidates had significant numbers of incumbent MPs (64 of 87 candidates), it should not be surprising that nearly 50% of their content was about the Party or their official political positions. The People's Action Party can use their participation in constituency events to unofficially campaign between elections, which are permitted without police licence for MPs.⁹⁰ Facebook was used to post photographs, videos and status updates about such events, which showed that MPs are active in their constituency. If the Workers' Party had made an official and public profile for Low Thia Khiang or Sylvia Lim, it could be presumed that the percentage of WP content for Party or incumbent news would increase. Other Worker's Party candidates did post party news, but it was only a small percentage more than the other opposition parties with no elected MP.

⁸⁹ Author's survey of Facebook to locate public and private profiles, October 20, 2012.

⁹⁰ *Public Entertainment and Meetings (Exemption) Order, Public Entertainment and Meetings Act (Chapter 257)*, Singapore Attorney General's Chambers.

Table 8.2 Public Candidates' Facebook Use, March 21-May 28, 2011⁹¹

Party	Number of Candidates	Personal	General Political	Official/ Party	Election 2011	After Election	Total Posts
	% of Total	%	%	%	%	%	
PAP	56	382	162	5241	5104	328	11217
%	64%	3.4%	1.4%	46.7%	45.5%	2.9%	
WP	8	28	16	100	594	86	824
%	35%	3.4%	1.9%	12.1%	72%	10.4%	
NSP	4	14	0	50	512	38	614
%	17%	2.2%	0%	8.1%	83.4%	6.2%	
RP	9	10	20	26	320	40	416
%	82%	2.4%	4.8%	6.25%	76.9%	9.6%	
SDP	7	0	44	60	434	52	590
%	63%	0%	7.4%	10.2%	73.5%	8.8%	

The use of Facebook by parties indicates acknowledgement by their leadership of how important the internet platforms are for digital native youth. However, with the exception of Marine Parade GRC, where the National Solidarity Party achieved its best result, it is difficult to quantify the actual impact of the internet on the electoral result vis-à-vis media coverage, offline outreach and the reputation of the party. Even in Marine Parade, the media and blogosphere circus around Tin Pei Ling and Nicole Seah was undoubtedly a factor in the result, but there is no way to know with certainty whether it was crucial to the outcome. Ultimately, the true impact of the internet on

⁹¹ Author's survey of party candidate Facebook pages. See appendix for complete list of surveyed public profiles.

elections, by contrast the perception of voters, required detailed exit polling, which does not happen in Singapore.

There are dialogic differences of expectation between politicians and voters, but this should not detract from the utilisation of the sphere. Instead, it should be kept as a consideration when engaging online. One of the People's Action Party's innovative uses of Facebook demonstrated the lack of dialogue on these spheres but also how the Party could use the internet as an extension of traditional media forms. On May 4, only three days before Polling Day, the PAP Facebook featured a live web-chat with Prime Minister Lee. Lee posted eight status updates that became comment threads run simultaneously during the one-hour session. Figure 8.4 is a screenshot of the web-chat format. Over 7,000 'likes' and 7,000 comments were made on the eight threads, and the *Straits Times* reported that the total posts to the PAP Facebook page that day were over 50,000.⁹²

Before the event, a video was posted on the PAP Facebook advertising the web-chat and featured Lee inviting Singaporeans to join in: "The young cyber-enthusiasts in the YP have persuaded me to do a web-chat on Wednesday night. It will be from 8 to 9pm. Come and join us to participate, to discuss the hot issues in this general election."⁹³ The web-chat was only advertised on the PAP Facebook, which may have limited the audience who were aware of the event to established PAP Facebook fans.

⁹² I. Tham and C.W. Teo, 'Deluge of responses for PM's first webchat', *Straits Times*, May 5, 2011.

⁹³ People's Action Party, 'Invitation from PM Lee', *Facebook*, May 3, 2011, <http://www.facebook.com/photo.php?v=2035376361182>, accessed on: July 21, 2012.

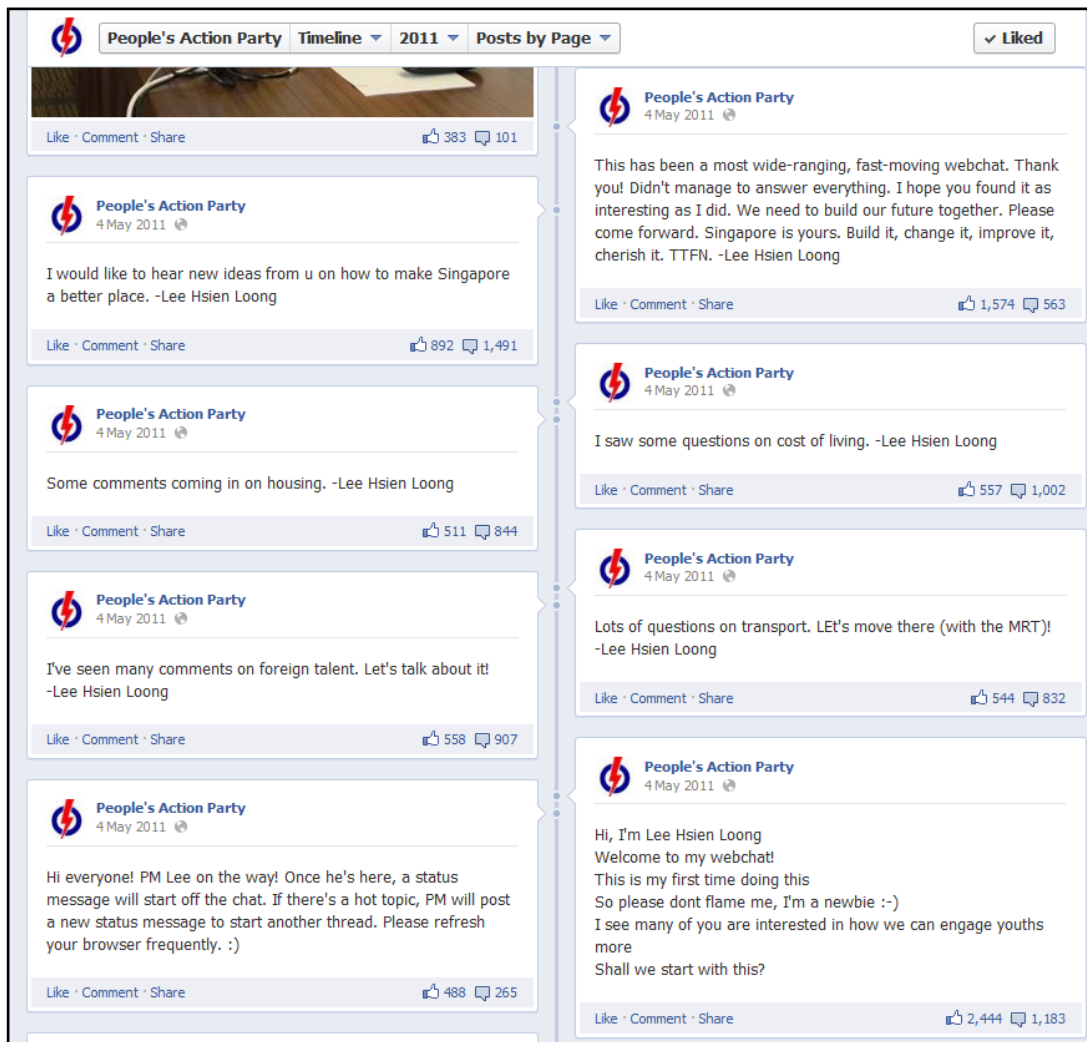


Figure 8.4 Screenshot Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong’s web-chat (Source: People’s Action Party Facebook page).⁹⁴

The Prime Minister’s web-chat was the first of its kind in Singapore, and a significant gesture towards the digital native voters. The actual dialogic potential was limited because of the speed that replies were made to the threads. Of the thousands of comments that were posted, it was estimated that PM Lee could only directly reply to 40 or 50.⁹⁵ The first question asked by Lee was how the PAP could engage youth more actively. After the a few replies, he suggested, “Can we invite you to join the YP (Young PAP)? There’s lots you can do, including arguing with us.”⁹⁶ Clearly, Lee would not miss the opportunity to use the web-chat as a recruitment tool for the Party, and to take

⁹⁴ People’s Action Party, *Facebook*, <https://www.facebook.com/pap.sg>, accessed October 27, 2011.

⁹⁵ I. Tham and C.W. Teo, 'Deluge of responses for PM's first webchat'.

⁹⁶ I. Tham and C.W. Teo, 'Deluge of responses for PM's first webchat'.

some of the wind out of the opposition parties' sails by appealing to young voters that the PAP listens to them, only days before Polling Day.

Conclusion

The internet clearly did not revolutionise elections in Singapore, but the 2011 General Election did demonstrate its significance as a media platform. The mainstream media's and blogger's enthusiastic adoption of online platforms to host election coverage was unprecedented. In addition, the passionate hostility online towards Tin Pei by digital natives indicated a new willingness amongst this section of the electorate to actively challenge the PAP. Although some of this hostility spilled over to physical sites, most was contained to the internet.

Realisation of the potential for this vitriolic reaction to PAP actions and candidates may make the PAP more circumspect about the candidates it presents to the electorate. Certainly it will make PAP and opposition candidates more aware of the privacy settings on the platforms they use and how the content can be accessed and manipulated by netizens. It is not clear however, the degree of electoral influence that internet hustings have by comparison to media coverage or offline outreach.

It is highly likely that in future elections, the internet's role will have been normalised, and so its influence diminished. The mainstream media will dominate the production of information online and off, while the alternative media will be most engaged during the elections, filling the niches of the mainstream media such as posting election rally figures, or providing alternative perspectives on issues and events. Constituents will use Facebook to connect and research the parties contesting in their area, and parties will attempt to mobilise online supporters to become real-world supporters. If online support measured in 'likes' continues to significantly outpace actual support, then normalisation of the internet as a media sphere could actually see the marginalisation of the internet's impact in Singapore politics.

Chapter Nine:

Future Challenges and the Perpetual Revision of Singapore's Governmentality

Over more than 50 years as Government, the People's Action Party has continuously revised its governmentality: the way it influences the conduct of societal actors. Shifts in the techniques of governing have allowed it to remain supremely dominant in politics, at worst holding 93% of all seats in Parliament since 1968, despite momentous societal and technological shifts within the city-state.

At times, the PAP Government has taken what could be described as a Machiavellian approach to governing. Threats to be dealt with were seen through the narrow lens of how they affected the PAP's political sovereignty, particularly parliamentary pluralism. The response to threats to sovereignty was in line with an authoritarian response: brutal and public. Domestic media, seen to be critical of the PAP, was punished with detention of editorial staff,¹ and closure by revocation of printing press licence.² International media publications that alleged nepotism and heavy-handed authoritarianism by the Government were stripped of circulation³ and sued for hundreds of thousands of Singapore Dollars.⁴

Opposition politicians who directly challenged the PAP's methods of government in and out of Parliament were harassed with law suits and their reputations tarnished.⁵ The Group Representation Constituency was introduced in 1988 to counter the possibility of elected opposition and parliamentary pluralism.

The PAP Government has modified its governmentality as Singapore developed socially, politically, and technologically. The Government began to adapt to the popular

¹ F.T. Seow, *The Media Enthralled: Singapore Revisited*, Lynn Rienner Publishers, Boulder, Colorado & London, 1998, p. 42.

² D. Davies, 'The Press', *The Singapore Puzzle*, M. Haas (ed.) Praeger, Westport, CONN., 1999, p. 87.

³ G. Rodan, *Transparency and Authoritarian Rule in Southeast Asia: Singapore and Malaysia*, Routledge, London & New York, 2005, pp. 29-30; and 'Asian Wall Street Journal Is Banned By Singapore for Refusal to Print Letter', *The Wall Street Journal*, February 10, 1987; and B. Wain, 'Asia: Better Read than Dead in Singapore', *The Wall Street Journal*, March 8, 1987.

⁴ G. Rodan, *Transparency and Authoritarian Rule*, pp. 31,88; and P. Bowring, 'Cost of Reputation: Court Finds for Lee in Libel Case', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, December 14, 1989.

⁵ M.D. Barr, 'J.B. Jeyaretnam: Three Decades as Lee Kuan Yew's bête noir', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, v. 33 (3), 2003, p. 308; and J. Gomez, 'Restricting Free Speech: The Impact on Opposition Parties', *The Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies*, v. 23 2006, pp. 111-112,121-122.

desires of the population, to incorporate them piecemeal. Foucault would likely have argued that this was evidence of the PAP-driven state modernising its approach to government. Foucault said in his 1977-78 lectures: “The modern state is born, I think, when governmentality becomes a calculated and reflected practice”⁶ rather than a process of reaction and counter-reaction.

As its approach to sustainable, long-term government has evolved, one thing has remained constant: the mentality underpinning governmentality, the reason for action. The PAP’s reason for action is survivalism: of itself in Machiavellian sovereign responses, and of the state and population as a whole: the national interest (the *raison d’état*). The approach to consider the survival of the state as a whole has seen a more nuanced governmentality strategy. Survivalism has been made a hegemonic idea in Singaporean society, which makes the so-called pragmatic⁷ responses by the Government more acceptable to the population. Threats to Singapore’s survival have allegedly included hostile neighbouring countries (Malaysia and Indonesia),⁸ internal racial and religious strife,⁹ economic vulnerability from a lack of resources,¹⁰ and most recently the effect of rampant political partisanship.¹¹

Survivalism in Singapore justifies the utilisation of whatever methods and other rationales are necessary to sustain government. Therefore, elitism and technocracy have

⁶ M. Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977-1978*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York & Basingstoke, 2009, p. 165.

⁷ K.P. Tan, 'The Ideology of Pragmatism: Globalisation and Authoritarianism in Singapore', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, v. 42 (1), 2012, p. 68; and B.-H. Chua, *Communitarian Ideology and Democracy in Singapore*, 2nd Edition, Routledge, London & New York, 2006, p. 5; and M.D. Barr and Z. Skrbiš, *Constructing Singapore: Elitism, Ethnicity and the Nation-Building Project*, Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (NIAS), Copenhagen, 2008, p. 67.

⁸ K.P. Tan, 'Ideology of Pragmatism', p. 70.

⁹ K.P. Tan, 'Ideology of Pragmatism', p. 72; and *Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act (Chapter 167A)*, Singapore Attorney General's Chambers.

¹⁰ K.P. Tan, 'Ideology of Pragmatism', pp. 70,72; and 'Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's National Day Rally 2011 (Speech in English), Sunday, 14 August 2011, at University Cultural Centre, National University of Singapore', *Prime Minister's Office*, November 17, 2011, http://www.pmo.gov.sg/content/pmosite/mediacentre/speechesninterviews/primeminister/2011/August/Prime_Minister_Lee_Hsien_Loongs_National_Day_Rally_2011_Speech_in_English.html, accessed on: March 12, 2012.

¹¹ 'PM Lee says countries worldwide respect and admire Singapore's proven system', *Channel NewsAsia*, May 3, 2006; and 'Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's National Day Rally 2011 (Speech in English), Sunday, 14 August 2011, at University Cultural Centre, National University of Singapore'; and 'PM Lee pledges a just and fair society', *The Online Citizen*, May 21, 2011, <http://theonlinecitizen.com/2011/05/pm-lee-pledges-a-just-and-fair-society/>, accessed on: May 27, 2011; and 'Punggol East by-election: Statement of PM Lee Hsien Loong', *Straits Times*, January 26, 2013.

been given a central position in the PAP's political makeup under the justification that those most suited to lead must be steered in that direction.¹²

Elitism has been enshrined in electoral politics in Singapore: the Group Representation Constituencies are the vehicle to induct desired elites into Parliament and Cabinet,¹³ and the population is encouraged to continue to support the PAP because it claims to be the only party with sufficiently qualified and suitable members to run the country.¹⁴ It was only in the 2011 election that the PAP seriously tried to accommodate the population's desire for greater representation of their non-elite status by supplementing elite PAP candidates with those of alternative backgrounds.¹⁵

Within the chapters of this thesis, the shifts in PAP governmentality have been discussed, including how the Government has used punishment and tried to discipline the whole population, or segments of it. Research questions were proposed in the introduction:

- How is the political status quo being challenged?
- How has the Government revised its methods of governmentality in response;
- How effective has the push for change been, and
- What are the political implications of continued revisionism by the PAP and challengers?

To answer the second question, I have used Foucault's discussions of governmentality, taken from his 1977-78 lectures at the College de France, and his previous works on discipline and punishment. The aim of the thesis was to convey the adaptability and nuance of the governance in Singapore using this governmentality framework. Governmentality has been defined as:

¹² M.D. Barr and Z. Skrbiš, *Constructing Singapore*, pp. 127-128.

¹³ Singapore Parliamentary Reports (Hansard), Eleventh Parliament, April 24, 2010; and K.B. Kor, 'Next PM in new line-up?', *Straits Times*, November 27, 2011; and X. Li, 'GRC "a good start for potential PM"', *Straits Times*, April 6, 2011.

¹⁴ E.K.B. Tan, 'Election Issues', *Voting in Change: Politics of Singapore's 2011 General Election*, K.Y.L. Tan and T. Lee (eds.), Ethos Books, Singapore, 2011, p. 35.

¹⁵ 'PAP "proud" of new slate of candidates: PM', *Straits Times*, April 6, 2011; and E. Toh, 'Tin Pei Ling a "good grassroots leader"', *Straits Times*, April 6, 2011; and Y. Feng, 'Unionist with 25 years of volunteer work', *Straits Times*, April 5, 2011.

The ensemble formed by institutions, procedures, analyses, calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific, albeit very complex, power that has the population as its target [...] and apparatuses of security as its essential technical instrument.¹⁶

Within these chapters, the employment of extra-government actors to enact punishment or discipline has been incorporated, particularly the role of the media to punish negative behaviour by reporting on civil activists and opposition politicians.

The mainstream media has been subject to punishment and discipline within its corporate microcosms – Singapore Press Holdings and MediaCorp. This discipline has been by making hegemonic survivalist and pro-government mentalities. For the international media, economic coercion was used to promote self-censorship. The domestic media's role is to support the Government and defend against Singapore's vulnerability.

To solidify the supportive role of the media, the Government has linked itself with the media corporations. In Singapore Press Holdings, this link is personified by former Cabinet Ministers or trusted political elite members as the Executive Chairman, who has in the past directly influenced editors. The Executive Chairman has been accompanied by the disproportionately powerful Management Shares, which are offered to powerful economic institutions.¹⁷ Management Shares are worth 200 votes each on decisions of staff changes within the newspaper corporation, including editors. In MediaCorp, the link to the Government is more direct as MediaCorp is owned by sovereign wealth fund Temasek Holdings.¹⁸ The Executive Chairman, the Management Shareholders, and Temasek Holdings will not jeopardise the profitability of the media corporations by allowing journalists to attract government punishment.

¹⁶ M. Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, p. 108.

¹⁷ Data compiled from: 'Distribution of Shareholders by size of shareholdings', *Staying Ahead: Singapore Press Holdings Annual Report 2012*, Singapore Press Holdings, 2012, http://www.sph.com.sg/pdf/annualreport/2012/SPH_AR2012.pdf. 205.

¹⁸ P.H. Ang, 'Singapore Media', *Journalism.sg*, September, 2007, <http://journalism.sg/wp-content/uploads/2007/09/ang-peng-hwa-2007-singapore-media.pdf>, accessed on: June 6, 2010.

Not Ready to Let Go: No *Laissez-Aller* for Online Media

Sophisticated and planned governmentality can allow the Government to take a regulatory step back from perpetual revisionism, what Foucault described as a *laissez-aller* (letting go) approach. A *Laissez-aller* approach allows actions to take their course with the confidence they will not have a negative outcome.¹⁹ In other words, the result will be normalised and not detrimental to the population, such as conflict, or disadvantageous to the state's national interest. When discussing the discipline of the mainstream media to perform the role desired by the Government, it was posited that the Government is increasingly taking a *laissez-aller* approach with the mainstream media because sufficient trust had been built to have confidence in normalised results.

By contrast to the mainstream press, the socio-political blogosphere is continually challenging governmentality with its counter-conduct. Foucault argued that authoritative power and resistance to that authority relate and influence each other.²⁰ In Singapore, bloggers have reacted to Government policies and actions, which in turn caused the Government to counter-react using registrations and the threat of lawsuits. The Government clearly does not trust the socio-political bloggers to restrain their challenge to the Government sufficiently to risk a *laissez-aller* approach.

Using disciplinary tactics applied to the domestic media, the Government attempted to convince bloggers to introduce their own code of conduct: to discipline themselves.²¹ The bloggers promptly rejected the proposal. This rejection instigated increased registration of political websites²² and threat of lawsuits against aggressive socio-political bloggers.²³ Additionally, the terms of political website registration were

¹⁹ M. Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, pp. 41,44.

²⁰ A.I. Davidson, 'Introduction', *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977-1978*, M. Senellart (ed.) Palgrave Macmillan, New York & Basingstoke, 2009, pp. xx-xxi.

²¹ T. Wong, 'Online social norms need time to evolve', *Straits Times*, May 9, 2012.

²² Y.C. Tham, 'Second website told by MDA to register', *Straits Times*, November 30, 2013; and Narul Azliah Aripin, 'Singapore News Website Mothership.sg agrees to register under Broadcasting Act', *Yahoo! Newsroom*, April 4, 2014, <https://sg.news.yahoo.com/mda-asks-singapore-news-website-mothership-sg-to-register-for-a-licence-104026615.html>, accessed on: April 14, 2014.

²³ 'TR Emeritus publishes apology to PM Lee', *Channel News Asia*, February 22, 2012; and 'TRE, Lee Hsien Yang reach amicable agreement', *Channel News Asia*, February 24, 2012. 'Blogger removes post on Woffles Wu case', *Today*, July 12, 2012. 'TRE receives Letter of Demand from Dr Vasoo's Lawyer', *TR Emeritus*, December 7, 2012, <http://www.tremeritus.com/2012/12/07/tre-receives-letter-of-demand-from-dr-vasoos-lawyer>, accessed on: December 12, 2012; and 'Letter of Demand by Davinder Singh, Drew Napier LLC', *The Online Citizen*, December 8, 2012, <http://www.theonlinecitizen.com/2012/12/letter-of-demand-by-davinder-singh-drew-naiper-llc/>, accessed on: December 10, 2012.

tightened.²⁴ Although the Government has been insistent that it will not allow blogs that reject its call to register to continue operation,²⁵ bloggers are still free to choose their response.

As a counter-response to the changes in governmentality, bloggers began to selectively respond to punishment directly. *The Online Citizen* accepted registration as a political website and political association, and chose to accept punishment rather than close down.²⁶ This had a positive influence on other sites. Other sites required to register as a political website included *The Independent* and *Mothership.sg*, and *The Breakfast Network*. In these instances, *The Independent* and *Mothership.sg* operators chose to accept government registration and continue their operations. By contrast *The Breakfast Network* chose to shut down rather than register as a political website, operating only on Facebook.

Digital natives have different attitudes to political mobilisation, creating a significant generational shift from older civil activists. Chapter Five discussed this generational shift in terms of digital natives being less *kiasu-kiasi* – afraid to fail and afraid of punishment.²⁷ The challenge of digital natives has also been felt in elections, particularly in political mobilisation online. There was phenomenal online hostility towards the young PAP candidate Tin Pei Ling and a passionate support for the National Solidarity Party candidate Nicole Seah.

In the Marine Parade Group Representation Constituency, where these two women contested, the opposition National Solidarity Party performed the best of any of its constituency contests. The online aggression against the PAP spilled over to the Nomination Day venue where members of the crowd heckled Tin and booed former

²⁴ 'Online Licensing Framework: Was the Breakfast Network banned by the MDA?', *Gov.sg*, December 16, 2013, http://www.gov.sg/government/web/content/govsg/classic/factually/factually_20131216_wasthebreakfastnetworkbannedbymda, accessed on: April 14, 2014.

²⁵ J. Chan, 'Govt rejects blog's request not to be gazetted: Registry explains the *The Online Citizen* is 'not a passive website'', *Today*, January 19, 2011.

²⁶ X.Y. Cheow, 'Blog willing to operate as political association', *Today*, January 15, 2011.

²⁷ M.D. Barr and Z. Skrbiš, *Constructing Singapore*, p. 95. 'The Oxford Singlish Dictionary', *Talking Cock*, <http://www.talkingcock.com/html/lexec.php>, accessed on: August 5, 2013.

Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong, who was the GRC leader.²⁸ These events showed the diminished *kiasi* fear of digital natives towards the Government, but the only discernible electoral outcome was that they were able to “out shout” the PAP.²⁹

Yet there is lack of clarity on the question of how much online (and limited offline) support by digital natives translates into deeper support for a cause. *Pink Dot* had 20,000 participants in 2013, but this does not automatically equate to a critical mass of 20,000 homosexual-equality activists. Similarly unclear is the extent of correlation between digital youth support for the opposition online and their vote.

The internet was used to great effect in the 2011 election. Yet without exit polling it is unclear the actual impact of the internet on electoral results vis-à-vis the reputation of the political parties and candidates as mediated by the mainstream media, the dissatisfaction with the PAP and the government, and the situation in each constituency.

Civil Society

In addition to using the internet as a native communication platform, digital natives have engaged in civil activism using the prescribed spaces by the Government as part of its governmentality. The result of using legal spheres for civil activism is a diversity of activities and airing of issues, including controversial topics such as homosexual equality,³⁰ protesting the Internal Security Act,³¹ and protesting the Government’s plans

²⁸ theonlinecitizen, 'Tin Pei Ling's speech is drowned out by jeers and shouts in the crowd "I don't know what to say" and "Kate Spade"', *Facebook*, April 27, 2011, <https://www.facebook.com/theonlinecitizen/posts/10150229191131383>, accessed on: April 27, 2011; and 'Crowd chanted “Kate Spade!” as Tin Pei Ling made her speech', *SingaporeGE2011*, April 27, 2011, <http://singaporege2011.wordpress.com/2011/04/27/crowd-chanted-kate-spade-as-tin-pei-ling-made-her-speech/>, accessed on: April 28, 2011.

²⁹ C. George, 'Internet Politics: Shouting Down the PAP', *Voting in Change: Politics of Singapore's 2011 General Election*, K.Y.L. Tan and T. Lee (eds.), Ethos Books, Singapore, 2011, pp. 154-155, 159.

³⁰ 'Pink Dot event draws 10,000', *Straits Times*, June 19, 2011; and 'Singapore's gay community holds first-ever rally', *Associate Press*, May 16, 2009; and 'Second Pink Dot event is in the pink', *Straits Times*, May 16, 2010; and 'Inclusiveness in Singapore in the pink', *Straits Times*, July 1, 2012; and 'More than 20,000 Turn Up at Speakers' Corner in Support of Gay Rights', *Straits Times*, June 29, 2013.

³¹ T. Wong, 'Former ISA detainees address SDP forum', *Straits Times*, October 9, 2011; and 'Police investigating SDP forum', *Straits Times*, October 10, 2011; and 'Event @ Hong Lim Park', *That We May Dream Again*, <http://remembering1987.wordpress.com/event-hong-lim/>, accessed on: August 5, 2013; and J. Tan, 'More than 400 mark anniversary of political arrests', *Yahoo! News*, Singapore, February 2, 2013, <http://sg.news.yahoo.com/more-than-400-mark-anniversary-of-political-arrests-141449951.html>, accessed on: August 5, 2013.

for population growth.³² Another example was the protest by bloggers against a newly introduced licence that further regulated online news sites, which the bloggers perceived could be used to dampen the socio-political blogosphere.³³

The turnout to such events has ranged from several hundred to over 20,000 people in indoor events or in Speakers' Corner. The use of Speakers' Corner has been the visual demonstration of this mindset change, which has evolved into the opposite of the deep suspicion of the Government that pervaded civil society around the time the site was established in 2000.

In the early 2000s, civil activist groups such as Think Centre were under surveillance,³⁴ the website Sintercom was required to register as a political website shortly before it shut down,³⁵ and opposition politician Dr Chee Soon Juan was charged for several instances of illegal activism. He was also charged for using Speakers' Corner to speak on religious issues which contravened the prohibition of racial or religious speech at the site.³⁶ Acting legally within Speakers' Corner or indoor venues makes the activists harder to punish, and thus harder to denigrate by the media. Thus, the answer to the first research question was found in chapters four, six and seven.

Although civil activism has taken significant steps forward in confidence to raise issues in public and carry out protests, Parliament remains the site for decision-making in Singapore. Thus, there remains the greatest challenge to enact political change: to make

³² '4,000 turn up at Speakers' Corner for population White Paper protest', *Yahoo! News, Singapore*, February 16, 2013, <http://sg.news.yahoo.com/huge-turnout-at-speakers-corner-for-population-white-paper-protest-101051153.html>, accessed on: August 5, 2013; and 'May Day protest at Speakers' Corner draws thousands', *Yahoo! News, Singapore*, May 1, 2013, <http://sg.news.yahoo.com/around-2-000-turn-up-at-may-day-protest-at-hong-lim-park-085513158.html>, accessed on: August 5, 2013.

³³ Y.S. Ng, 'Free My Internet protest by bloggers draws a crowd at Hong Lim Park', *The Online Citizen*, June 10, 2013, <http://www.theonlinecitizen.com/2013/06/free-my-internet-protest-by-bloggers-draw-a-crowd-at-hong-lim-park/>, accessed on: August 5, 2013; and S. Chen and Sanat Vallikappen, 'Singapore Bloggers Protest Licensing Rules of News Websites', *Bloomberg*, June 8, 2013, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2013-06-09/singapore-bloggers-protest-licensing-rules-for-news-websites.html>, accessed on: August 5, 2013.

³⁴ J. Gomez, 'Think Centre: The Internet and Politics in the New Economy', *Asian Journal of Social Science*, v. 30 (2), 2002, p. 313; and J. Gomez, *Internet Politics: Surveillance & Intimidation in Singapore*, Think Centre, Singapore, 2002, pp. 76-83; and S.J. Chee, 'Pressing for Openness in Singapore', *Journal of Democracy*, v. 12 (2), 2001, p. 161.

³⁵ C.K. Tan, 'The Canary and the Crow: Sintercom and the state tolerability index', *Renaissance Singapore? Economy, Culture, and Politics*, K.P. Tan (ed.) National University of Singapore Press, Singapore, 2007, p. 170.

³⁶ J. Gomez, 'Restricting Free Speech: The Impact on Opposition Parties', p. 115; and 'Chee unable to pay defamation damages', *Today*, January 8, 2005; and 'SDP's Chee Soon Juan declared bankrupt, cannot stand for elections till 2011', *Channel NewsAsia*, February 10, 2006.

change from Parliament. The analyses of the unelected MPs in Parliament, and the governmentality of elections to prevent political pluralism, detailing how challenging this task is, implicitly answer the third research question.

Nominated MPs have demonstrated their importance in affecting political decisions in the past. Incidents included the parliamentary debate to repeal Penal Code Section 377a, which criminalized homosexual acts, which was launched by Nominated MP Siew Kum Hong.³⁷ Unelected and elected MPs if they choose to could bolster extra-Parliamentary activists' causes, working within the framework set by the Government that Parliament is the only legitimate space for policy debate and to make national decisions.³⁸

To actually influence government decisions, the Non-Constituency and Nominated MPs alone are insufficient, as they cannot vote to amend the Constitution.³⁹ To undermine the People's Action Party's dominance in Parliament, the opposition parties need a critical mass to reduce the PAP numbers to less than two-thirds of the total seats.⁴⁰ Therefore, the opposition needs at least 30 elected members as 29 is one-third. It thus becomes even clearer how the manipulation of elections is of utmost importance to maintain the status quo of PAP control, and why perpetual revision is necessary to undermine the population (and electability) of the opposition parties.

Elections

The 2011 General Election saw the greatest challenge for seat by the opposition parties since 1972.⁴¹ The opening up of elections to greater competition was initiated by the Government response to increased demand for more opposition representation in

³⁷ S. Tan, 'Singapore parliamentarians debate retention or repeal of section 377a', *Fridae*, October 23, 2007, <http://www.fridae.asia/newsfeatures/2007/10/23/1974.singapore-parliamentarians-debate-retention-or-repeal-of-section-377a>, accessed on: July 20, 2012.

³⁸ *Singapore Parliament Reports (Hansard)*, Ninth Parliament, April 25, 2000.

³⁹ *Singapore Parliamentary Reports (Hansard)*, April 26, 2010; and D.K. Mauzy and R.S. Milne, *Singapore Politics under the People's Action Party*, Routledge, London & New York, 2002, p. 145.

⁴⁰ K.Y.L. Tan, 'State and institution building through the Singapore Constitution 1965-2005', *Evolution of A Revolution: Forty Years of the Singapore Constitution*, L.-a. Thio and K.Y.L. Tan (eds.), Routledge-Cavendish, Oxon & New York, 2009, p. 58.

⁴¹ L. Lim, 'GE 2011; PAP faces biggest polls battle since '72', *Straits Times*, April 27, 2011.

Parliament and competitive elections.⁴² How the Government adjusts its electoral governmentality to counter-react to the 2011 election will not be seen until the next election, but communicative modifications have already been made to respond to the digital native's preference for online mobilisation. Several important public issues have seen Ministers and other elites take to Facebook to communicate and engage with constituents, including Tan Chuan Jun's management of the Bukit Brown development,⁴³ and Yaacob Ibrahim's explanation of the individual licensing for media organisations.⁴⁴

Whether the opposition can mobilise their resources to the same extent as 2011 remains to be seen, but the 2011 election provided the opportunity for nearly all Singaporean voters to cast their vote in support or dissent of the PAP. The opposition party most successful was the Workers' Party, which retained its incumbent seat of Hougang SMC, and won the five seats of Aljunied Group Representation Constituency. The Party also nearly won Joo Chia SMC and the five-seat East Coast GRC.⁴⁵

⁴² '学者：政府响应政治多元化诉求 [Scholars: The Government response to demands of political pluralism]', *Lianhe Zaobao*, February 25, 2011; and '选区划分报告出炉9单选区增至12个14集选区增至15个四议席集选区重现 近235万选民选区划定,共87议席 [Geographical boundaries report released]', *Lianhe Zaobao*, February 25, 2011; and L.H. Chua, 'Commentary; Few surprises despite the many changes', *Straits Times*, February 25, 2011.

⁴³ Tan Chuan-Jin, 'We just had a briefing and discussion on Bukit Brown. This was an opportunity to share our considerations behind the issue of the road, which I had announced in Parliament on 5th March, and to also listen to the views held by many who are passionate on the heritage and history of the place.', *Facebook*, March 19, 2012, <http://www.facebook.com/TanChuanJin1/posts/348347548541360>, accessed on: July 1, 2012; and Tan Chuan-Jin, 'It is illuminating to read the statement issued by the various groups. Yesterday's session on Bukit Brown was never intended to be the type of dialogue desired and claimed by these groups. Nor was it a response to their earlier request.', *Facebook*, March 20, 2012, <http://www.facebook.com/TanChuanJin1/posts/348576695185112>, accessed on: July 1, 2012; and Tan Chuan-Jin, 'Bukit Brown... work in progress', *Facebook*, February 3, 2012, <http://www.facebook.com/notes/tan-chuan-jin/bukit-brown-work-in-progress/319519974757451>, accessed on: July 20, 2012; and 'Documentation of Bukit Brown graves progressing well: Tan Chuan-Jin', *Channel NewsAsia*, February 4, 2012.

⁴⁴ Media Development Authority Singapore, 'Much has been discussed about recent changes to the licensing framework for news sites and we thank you for your comments. We thought it would be useful to clear the air by highlighting some key facts of our current media regulations [...]', *Facebook*, May 31, 2013, <http://www.facebook.com/MDASingapore/posts/477728388976557>, accessed on: June 25, 2013; and L. Lim and T. Wong, 'MDA: Bloggers Not Affected by New Rules', *Straits Times*, June 1, 2013; and A. Ong, 'Over 150 online sites hold 24-hour blackout protest', *Straits Times*, June 7, 2013.

⁴⁵ '2011 Parliamentary General Election Results', *Singapore Elections Department*, May 12, 2011, http://www.elections.gov.sg/elections_results2011.html, accessed on: May 13, 2011.

The election resulted in six elected opposition MPs and three Non-Constituency MPs.⁴⁶ Across the board, the PAP won 60.1% of the total vote, the opposition parties gained 39.9%, the best since independence.⁴⁷ The election revealed that the Government's electoral manipulations were less effective in 2011 than in past elections.

The contest in Aljunied GRC showed that a well-prepared party could invest significant time into building a rapport with constituents to win.⁴⁸ Even helming GRCs with Cabinet Ministers was not sufficiently effective to deter votes for the opposition, although many voters agonized that victory of the Workers' Party meant the removal of popular and effective Cabinet Minister George Yeo.⁴⁹

The mentality that elected representation is second to the maintenance of local estates has continued, but Aljunied voters were willing to set that aside knowing that if the Workers' Party did not meet the benchmark of the PAP's performance as local representatives, they could re-elect the PAP in the next election.⁵⁰ Therefore, the interim punishment of the Workers' Party by the Government has not been lawsuits or any such crude methods, but to draw attention to the inability of the Party to sufficiently govern Aljunied GRC.

The next election may see the Government manipulate the electoral boundaries to eliminate Hougang and Punggol East SMC, but it probably will depend on the strength of the opposition in other constituencies. Response to the circumstances of the time will see the Government determine how much it needs to draw upon electoral boundary manipulation.

⁴⁶ 'Opposition trio named as NCMPs', *Straits Times*, May 17, 2011.

⁴⁷ K. Fong, 'PM Lee: We have our work cut out for us', *Yahoo! News, Singapore*, May 9, 2011, <http://sg.news.yahoo.com/blogs/singaporescene/gov-t-aims-raise-income-across-board-pm-123356074.html>, accessed on: May 13, 2011.

⁴⁸ Z. Hussain, 'Workers' Party "A" team takes shape in Aljunied', *Straits Times*, April 15, 2011.

⁴⁹ A.W. Au, 'Parties and Personalities; Staying Together (or Not) under Fire', *Voting in Change: Politics of Singapore's 2011 General Election*, K.Y.L. Tan and T. Lee (eds.), Ethos Books, Singapore, 2011, p. 84; and X. Li and W.G. Teo, "'Emotional dilemma" of Aljunied voters', *Straits Times*, April 29, 2011; and G.T. Goh, 'Aljunied's dilemma', *Straits Times Forum*, May 3, 2011; and W.K. Leong, 'GE: WP playing with Aljunied residents' lives, says George Yeo', *Today*, May 1, 2011.

⁵⁰ G. Chua, 'GE 2011; WP connected better, says Aljunied residents', *Straits Times*, May 10, 2011; and S. Tan, 'Why Aljunied residents voted Workers' Party', *Straits Times*, May 11, 2011.

A View to the Future?

The argument conveyed throughout this thesis was that the perpetual revision of governmentality by the PAP Government has been, and will continue to be, reactive to changes in society. Popular demands are incorporated as necessary into elements of governmentality, without undermining the security of the state or the sovereignty of the PAP Government. Operating alongside the PAP's shifts in governmentality is the alteration to counter-conduct by civil activists, digital natives, mainstream media, and opposition political parties. It has been shown in several chapters how aspects of PAP governmentality have been accepted by these counter-conduct actors, such as the pro-Government bias of the mainstream media and the incorporation of elitism and non-confrontation by the Workers' Party and others. The alignment of counter-conduct to governmentality influences future modifications of both.

It would be presumptuous to guess how long the PAP will retain government, and even the shape that government may take. Based on the precedent of revision to governmentality, it is highly likely the PAP will continue to revise governmentality strategies to best absorb the popular desires of the population, resonate with conciliatory counter-conduct and limit the influence of negative resistance. The implication of such a likely situation is the continuation of the PAP as the dominant force in Singapore politics, regardless of any liberalisation of the media, civil society, or electoral politics.

Appendix

List of public Facebook profiles surveyed for Chapter Eight.

PAP	Fatimah Bt Abdul Lateef	Janil Puthucheary	Lim Wee Kiak	Raymond Lim	Vikram Nair
Alex Yam	Gan Thiam Poh	Jessica Tan	Low Yen Ling	Seah Kian Peng	Vivian Balakrishnan
Ang Hin Kee	George Yeo	Josephine Teo	Lui Tuck Yew	Seng Han Thong	Wong Kan Seng
Arthur Fong	Mparader (Goh Chok Tong)	Lam Pin Min	Mah Bow Tan	Sim Ann	Zainal Sapari
Baey Keng Yam	Grace Fu	Lawrence Wong	Masagos Zulkifli	Sitoh Yih Pin	Zainudin Nordin
Cedric Foo	Heng Chee How	Lee Bee Wah	Michael Palmer	Tan Chuan-Jin	Zainul Abidin Rasheed
Chia Shi-Lu	Heng Swee Keat	Lee Hsien Loong	Muhd Faishal Ibrahim	Teo Chee Hean	Zaqy Mohamed
Christopher De Souza	Hri Kumar Sangaran	Liang Eng Hwa	Ng Phek Hoong Irene	Teo Ho Pin	
David Ong	Inderjit Singh	Lim Biow Chuan	Patrick Tay	Teo Ser Luck	
Edwin Tong	Indranee Thurai Rajah	Lim Swee Say	Penny Low	Tin Pei Ling	

WP	NSP	RP	SDP
Angela Faye Oon	Goh Meng Seng	Andy Zhu	Alec Tok
Chen Show Mao	Jeanette for Mountbatten	Arthero Lim	Ang Yong Guan
Gerald Giam	NSP Support Ken Sun At Whampoa SMC	Frankie Low	Jarroed Luo
Glenda Han	Nicole Seah	Ho Soak Harn	Michelle Lee Juen
Koh Choong Yong		Kenneth Jeyaretnam	Tan Jee Say
Pritam Singh		Kumar Apavoo	Teo Soh Lung
Yaw Shin Leong		Lim Zi Rui	Vincent Wijesingha
Yee Jenn Jong		Osman Sulaiman	
		Vigneswari Ramachandran	

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Chia Ti Lik, then –Secretary-General of the Socialist Front party, Singapore, October 22, 2010.

Remy Zheng Xi Choo, co-founder of The Online Citizen (blog), Singapore, October 24, 2010.

Gerald Giam, then-Workers' Party Deputy Webmaster, Singapore, October 28, 2010.

Goh Meng Seng, then-Secretary-General of the National Solidarity Party, Singapore, October 9, 2010.

Kenneth Jeyaretnam, Secretary-General of the Reform Party, Singapore, November 1, 2010.

Andrew Loh, co-founder of The Online Citizen (blog), Singapore, October 25, 2010.

Ng Tze Yong, then-Special Assistant to the Editor-in-Chief of Singapore Press Holdings, Singapore, November 3, 2010.

Yaw Shin Leong, then-Workers' Party Treasurer, Singapore, October 15, 2010.