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Minimal Factionalism in Singapore's People's Action Party

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Abstract

Singapore's People's Action Party (PAP) is one of the longest ruling parties in the world. The PAP's ability to avoid overt factionalism over the years is exceptional, especially compared to the region's personalistic or cadre parties. In recent years, the defection of former PAP cadre Dr. Tan Cheng Bock and the formation of the Progress Singapore Party (PSP) and PM Lee Hsien Loong's family rivalry, which involved PAP elites, have challenged the cohesion of the PAP. This study examines a set of incentives and constraints institutionalised at the party and national levels to foster elite cohesion. It is argued that the critical junctures in the PAP's early years led to the adoption of a cadre party model and a centralised candidate selection process that co-opts like-minded elites into a core that promotes elite unity. Nationally, party switching and factional alignments based on ethnicity or ideology have been systematically banned. Given the lack of credible alternatives that seriously challenge the incumbent PAP, ambitious party cadres would do better toeing the party line and staying loyal.

Keywords

factionalism, Singapore, party politics, People's Action Party, party system

1. Introduction

Studies have found that the early critical junctures that led to Singapore's ruling People's Action Party's (PAP) organisational changes have helped to foster elite cohesion (Chan, 1971; 78, Tan, 2014a). Since the 1950s, the adoption of a cadre party model under the guise

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of a mass party organisation has helped to maintain elite cohesion and nurture an exclusive sense of belonging amongst the party members (Lee, 1998; Shee, 1971). But will these institutional mechanisms deter the PAP from factionalism in the near future? Singapore is expected to hold a general election (GE) by April 2021. Rumours of a PAP split has swirled since former PAP backbencher Dr. Tan Cheng Bock formed a new Progress Singapore Party (PSP) that was publicly backed by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's estranged brother (Bowie, 2019; Koh, 2020). Will more PAP members defect to challenge the PAP's new fourth-generation (4G) leadership in the post-Lee Kuan Yew era?

This study argues that a set of incentives and constraints institutionalised at both the party and national levels will continue to deter factionalism and maintain PAP unity, especially given the lack of a credible alternative in Singapore's upcoming election. Unlike the weak opposition parties, which are often fraught with leadership strife, the PAP's centralised and elitist cadre recruitment and candidate selection process regularly co-opted like-minded elites into the inner circle which ensures self-renewal and loyalty. In contrast, most opposition parties are small, are under-resourced, and do not have similar institutionalised and systematic leadership renewal process (Mutalib, 2004; Tan, 2014b: 261–284). Nationally, the PAP-dominated Parliament has also introduced legislation that prohibits party switching or party alignments based on ethnic or religious consciousness. Singapore's unique majoritarian electoral system based on simple plurality of single- and multi-group constituencies also discourages overt, self-seeking party careerists. Together these institutional mechanisms and the lack of a credible opposition alternative discourage defection and the rise of a voting faction that challenges the PAP's ruling elite.

This article will be organised as follows. The first section defines key concepts and adopts a historical institutionalist approach to trace the PAP's critical junctures that led to the party's organisational reforms that maintain party unity. The second section examines how the party's centralised and secretive elite recruitment and candidate selection methods operate to shape elite behaviour. The third section then turns to Singapore's Westminster parliamentary system and legislations to ban party switching and deter religious- and ethnic-based political alignments. The conclusion examines the implications of the recent elite leadership rivalries and Dr. Tan's new party on the PAP's cohesion.

1.1. Why PAP?

This study focuses on the PAP as it has been Singapore's long-standing ruling party since 1965. While elections were competitive in the 1960s, the PAP won every seat in every election from 1968 to 1981 and has enjoyed more than 97 per cent of legislative seat shares since then. While there are thirty-six registered political parties, only about five or six are active between elections. On average, about 6.5 parties have competed in elections from 1968 to 2015. Together, the opposition parties typically earn around 30 per cent of the vote share in each election. Yet the opposition votes do not translate proportionately to seat shares, largely because of the electoral system's strong majoritarian effect, which returns eighty-nine members of parliament (MPs) from single and group

constituencies based on a plurality bloc vote rule. Currently, only the Worker's Party¹ (WP) has six elected seats, five from a group representative constituency (GRC), which it won in the 2011 GE, the first time since the scheme was introduced in 1988. Despite being the oldest, most well-known opposition party, the WP also faced a tough fight in the 2015 GE, holding on narrowly to its six elected seats (6.7 per cent) while the other opposition parties were soundly defeated. The national mourning over former PM Lee Kuan Yew's death had led to an unprecedented surge of nostalgic support for the PAP (Singh, 2016; Tan, 2016; Weiss et al., 2016).

Singapore is a classic electoral authoritarian regime (Schedler, 2006: 3). Apart from the WP and the PAP, most parties may be considered irrelevant based on Sartori's definition of relevant party, as they lack electoral strength and coalition or "blackmail potential."² Indeed, based on Laakso and Taagepera's formula, the effective number of parliamentary parties calculated by the author (based on seat shares) for Singapore's GEs from 1968 to 2015 is only 1.05. Following Laakso and Taagepera (1979), the effective number of parties in Singapore is calculated based on the following formula: $N = \frac{1}{\sum_{i=1}^n p_i^2}$, where n is the number of all parties and p_i^2 is the square of each party's proportion of all votes (or seats). The lower the effective number of parties, the lower the degree of party system fragmentation. Singapore's low effective number of parties means it has a low level of party system fragmentation compared to its neighbouring states in Southeast Asia (Croissant et al., 2002: 334).

The PAP's ability to deter intra-factionalist politics is exceptional compared to other known hegemonic parties. For example, Mexico's Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), Taiwan's Kuomintang (KMT), and Malaysia's United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) have all suffered from factionalism, splits, and party alternation. The PAP's ability to prevent the rise of factionalism is also notable compared to other Leninist parties' cadre systems. For example, the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) has been marked by clientelism, traditionally divided between reformist and conservative factions (Abuza, 1998: 34). Factionalism in the Communist Party of China (CPC) is more ambiguous, with more clientelist politics and ideological tensions, such as between the elitist and populist coalition (Zhu and Zhang, 2017: 1192). While the VPC and CPC have routinised, exclusive cadre selection, Singapore's smaller elite size and party structure make it easier for the PAP to be more tightly knitted (Rahim and Barr, 2019: 159).

More importantly, since the PAP's left-wing faction defected in 1961, the party has successfully institutionalised a set of incentives and constraints to foster elite cohesion and deter factionalism. While the PAP has a youth wing and a women's wing, these sub-groups do not actively promote their agenda as a bloc or lobby through their MPs. Unlike other Westminster parties, there is also no evidence of tendencies³ or factions based on ideological, ethnic, or social affiliation. As Panebianco reminds us, for a party to survive it must distribute "selective incentives" (career opportunities) to its ambitious members and "collective incentives" (sense of belonging) to its supporters to develop organisational interests.⁴ The PAP's rules governing elite recruitment and candidate selection have become part of its internal incentive distribution system that deters factionalism. The highly centralised, systematic, and regularised cadre recruitment and candidate

selection processes have become a source of credible commitment to reward loyalists and sanction defectors. The PAP is able to institutionalise the incentive structure to promote party loyalty and a sense of belonging, after many rounds of leadership succession and elections over time. Unlike parties with decentralised candidate selection methods that encourage self-interested elite behaviour or intra-party competition (Rahat and Hazan, 2001) or cadre parties such as the CPV and CPC that exhibit ideological divisions (Abuza, 1998: 34; Li, 2012; Zhu and Zhang, 2017: 1192), the PAP's centralised, elitist candidate selection model has operated well with Singapore's electoral system which fosters party discipline and sanctions overt, self-seeking party careerists. The increased electoral competition and recent defection of former PAP backbencher Dr. Tan Cheng Bock to form a new party to compete in the upcoming GE would thus be a good test of the PAP's cohesion (Reuters, 2019; Wong, 2019).

2. Party Factionalism and Cohesion

Presently, there is no consensus in the literature on the sources of factionalism. Following Rose, a faction may be defined as “a group of individuals based on representatives in Parliament who seek to further a broad range of policies through consciously organized political activity” (1964: 37). A faction is distinct from other influence or pressure groups as their membership is based in Parliament. A faction is an intra-party group that is relatively organised and competes with rivals for power advantages within the larger group of which it is a part of (Belloni and Beller, 1978: 419). Although factions can vary in terms of permanence, organisation, and influence (Hine, 1982; Sartori, 2005), they are typically formed based on common agendas or aims related to ideology, policy, party and government posts, and/or material resources.⁵

The causes of factions can also vary. As Chambers and Ufen (2020) highlight in the Introduction of this special issue, many factors can lead to factionalism at the systemic and intra-party levels. Factions can emerge because of the electoral system, party system, party structure, or social structure (Belloni and Beller, 1978; Cox and Rosenbluth, 1993; Morgenstern, 2001). Factionalism also arises due to “clientelist ties to engage in politics” (Nathan, 1973: 40), including factors such as shared generation, class, geography, school ties, and ideology.⁶ Within the party, leadership selection and candidate selection method or party organisation structure can also affect the rise of factions (Carey and Shugart, 1995; Gallagher and Marsh, 1988; Rahat and Hazan, 2001). For example, Cox and Rosenbluth (1993) find that “institutionalized factions” rules for selecting party leaders and Single Non-Transferable Vote electoral systems based on factional affiliation rather than merit can lead to internal conflicts, splits, and defections, as seen in Taiwan's KMT in the 1990s (Cheng and Chou, 2000; Hood, 1996).

This study builds on these insights to demonstrate how the PAP's secretive cadre party model encourages like-minded elites to cohere together and deter factionalism. While factions can serve integrative functions within parties (Köllner, 2004), they are more often than not detrimental to party cohesion and integrity.⁷ Further, factionalism can breed voter cynicism and damage the moral authority and legitimacy of parties and party systems, as seen in

Japan and Taiwan. On the other hand, a cohesive party is defined as “the extent to which, in a given situation, group members can be observed to work together for the group’s goals in one and the same way” (Ozbudun, 1970: 305). The concept of party cohesion is distinct from discipline, as the latter refers to the use of enforcement or sanctions, such as the party whip or expulsion, to achieve cohesion (Hazan, 2003; Owens, 2003b; Ozbudun, 1970).⁸ It includes the degree to which party elites co-operate (unity) and the compliance of members with party goals or the leader’s preferences (loyalty). Practically, when we see the MPs voting as a bloc or acting in unison, we can say that members are in agreement with each other or made to act in accord with each other despite their personal preferences (Bowler et al., 1999: 5). Based on these concepts, the following section will examine the PAP’s cadre party structure which shapes the preferences and behaviour of party careerists and the constraints of Singapore’s parliamentary and electoral system against candidate-centred, factionalist politics.

3. The PAP’s Early Formative Years and Critical Junctures

The PAP was formed on 21 November 1954 as an anti-colonial, anti-imperialist mass party dedicated to bringing the country to independence through a merger with the Federation of Malaysia. Then, the PAP was described as a “consciously radical and anti-colonial coalition of moderate socialists and left-wing communist forces” (Chan, 1989: 71). To broaden the party’s mass appeal, Lee Kuan Yew and the party founders – largely English-speaking, middle-class men – invited left-wing, Chinese-speaking, communist leaders from the powerful trade unions to join the PAP (Lee, 1998). They co-opted the left-wing activists as a strategic move to capture the Chinese and dialect-speaking voters in the 1955 Legislative Elections.⁹ While the strategy helped the PAP win seats in the legislative assembly elections, it also caused leadership struggles and factional conflicts that resulted in two disastrous party splits.

The PAP’s Central Executive Committee (CEC) is the pinnacle of the PAP’s decision-making body. The fight for the control of the CEC since 1956 was a critical juncture that led to the PAP’s leadership selection method. Before 1957, all party cadres and members were to elect the CEC in an annual conference. Then, the left-wing members were expected not to take more than three or four seats in the CEC and not to be office-bearers (Chan, 1985: 149). Yet both factions manoeuvred to control the CEC. The left-wing leaders wanted the party branches to have more nomination powers and managed to win four out of twelve of the CEC seats by the second party conference on 8 July 1956. By the third party conference in 1957, the left-wing faction admitted non-members to boost its party members at the annual conference and won six out of twelve seats (Chan, 1985: 150). Fortuitously for the conservative leaders, five left-wing CEC members were detained along with thirty-five others for subversive communist activities (Ramakrishna, 2015: 49–50). Taking this opportunity, the “moderate” faction under Lee Kuan Yew promptly amended the party constitution to introduce a system of election to the CEC by cadre members only. The near takeover by the left-wing faction in 1957 was a historical

event as it removed all democratic and inclusive leadership selection methods in the PAP.¹⁰

As the PAP geared itself for its first GE in 1959, leadership conflicts and ideological differences led to two party splits. While the first split resulted from a personality clash between the PAP leaders Ong Eng Guan and Lee Kuan Yew in 1960,¹¹ the second split was driven by ideological struggle between the left and “moderate” factions as they disagreed over the terms for independence and the abolishment of the Internal Security Council. The ideological differences led to the defection of thirteen PAP Assembly men in July 1961 and the formation of a powerful Barisan Sosialis (BS) party, fronted by Dr. Lim Siew Choh (Fong, 1979). The defection resulted in a mass exodus of PAP members and its grassroots organisations such as the People’s Association and Works Brigade going on strike (Bloodworth, 1986: 243). Party archival records show that around 565 members later resigned or were expelled from the party (Pang, 1971: 388–389). After the mass defections, the PAP was left with only twenty-six members in a fifty-one-member Legislative Assembly, and it lost the by-election in Anson constituency to David Marshall, Singapore’s first chief minister from the Worker’s Party (Lee, 1998: 385). The PAP founding leaders’ near loss of the CEC control and the experience of two party splits were critical junctures as they prompted the leaders to undertake major party reorganisations. The PAP leaders realised that an open recruitment policy left them vulnerable to external infiltration.¹² In order to consolidate their power, the PAP leaders restructured the mass party organisation and concentrated power in the hands of a small elite group like a cadre party.

3.1. Organisational Change: “A Cadre Party in a Mass Party Guise”

One of the PAP’s first organisational changes was to move away from the mass recruitment of members and focus on improving the quality of party members. As Chan notes, the PAP is “a cadre party in a mass party guise” (1985: 159). While the PAP projected itself as a mass party to welcome youths, workers, trade union officials, and students as members, after the second split, it implemented stringent recruitment policies. For example, the PAP introduced regular re-registering of party membership to prevent outsiders from takeover (Pang, 1971: 35). Statistics show that before the second split, the total number of unionists declined from 677 (29%) to 570 (23.5%; Pang, 1971: 67). The PAP’s recruitment activities also declined. For example, in 2000, the PAP’s membership was estimated at around 15,000 – only about 0.5 per cent of total Singapore citizens then (around 3.38 million; Mauzy and Milne, 2002: 41; Singapore Department of Statistics, 2015). Instead it has focused on recruiting horizontally from the civil service, the military, and the legal profession (Tan, 2014a).

3.2. Secretive Cadre Recruitment and CEC Selection

The near loss of the CEC in 1957 made the founding leaders learn that inclusiveness and intra-party democracy can weaken internal control. As former PM Lee Kuan Yew said: “[...] the folly of adopting a democratic constitution that had left it open to capture

through the penetration of its own party branches. We discussed several possible changes to ensure that it could never happen again” (Lee, 1998: 271).

To prevent takeovers from outsiders, four categories of membership (probationary, ordinary, probationary cadre, and cadre) and regular re-registering of party membership were introduced after 1975 (Pang, 1971: 35). To ensure only party members with substantial contribution can become cadres, measures such as selection committee and cadre-training classes were introduced (Lee, 1998: 280). All cadres have to be approved by the CEC and only cadres are allowed to stand for election, hold office, and cast their votes in party elections.¹³ The exact number of the cadres is never disclosed. However, it is estimated to be around 1,500 – the number reported to have attended the party’s annual convention in 2015 (Ong, 2015). To be considered as a cadre, the member must undergo three rounds of interviews by a panel of around four or five ministers and MPs. Annually, around 100 candidates are selected for interviews. Typically, a cadre is a loyal, trusted party activist, nominated by another cadre from amongst the branch activists or an outstanding professional co-opted from the private or civil sectors (Tan, 2014a). The sense of exclusivity in being one of the select few serves as a “collective incentive,” fostering a sense of belonging (Panebianco, 1988: 54). As Wong Kan Seng, the former PAP Assistant Secretary General, once said: “You know you are among the elite, the trusted few. People are quite happy when told they have become cadres” (Koh, 1998). My interviews with PAP cadres such as former Foreign Minister Lee Koon Choy and Former Speaker of the House Michael Palmer also confirm that the prestige and honour of being a PAP “insider” rather than material incentives were effective in generating strong sense of party loyalty (Lee, 2008; Palmer, 2007).

The PAP CEC selects the cadre, who in turn endorses the CEC at a biannual party conference in a closed system (Pang, 1971: 36). This closed party leadership selection has persisted to date, as seen in the transition to the fourth-generation (4G) leaders in 2018 (Sim, 2018). Together, the exclusive cadre recruitment and CEC selection process foster elite cohesion as they funnel like-minded members into the inner circle and exclude those with extreme views. Being part of the PAP’s ruling elite also means that the cadres have vested interests in ensuring the PAP’s long-term survival, or risk losing their privilege or status.

4. Centralised Candidate Selection, Turnover, and Cohesion

Parties serve the important function of selecting and nominating candidates to stand in the GE every four to five years. As a hegemonic party, the PAP’s elite recruitment and candidate selection processes are what Rahat calls “the choice before the choice” (Rahat, 2007: 157) as they essentially decide who becomes an MP. There is no primary or internal election for the PAP’s selection of candidates for GE. The CEC controls the selection and nomination of the candidates. After the CEC’s screening, the Secretary General retains the final authority to re-nominate or replace the MP before the polling day. The centralised and regularised candidate selection control by a small group of PAP leaders

thus asserts centripetal forces that bring everyone towards the CEC, the body that selects the candidates (Panebianco, 1988: 60).

The CEC's control of the candidate selection signals to the party members where to direct their loyalty, as it controls who gets to be office holders.¹⁴ Like its cadre recruitment, the search for a PAP candidate is conducted through an elaborate and centralised controlled selection process.¹⁵ Since 1976, candidate selection has become systematic, regularised, and formalised. Unlike other parties which select their candidates from their rank and file, the PAP "talent spots" its candidates widely from the civil service, the corporate sector, and professions such as law, banking, and medicine (Tan, 2014a). Even those without party or grassroots experience can be invited to stand as candidates if they demonstrate the relevant expertise, educational credentials, and political values (Yap et al., 2010: 581–588)- after which the shortlisted candidates are invited to tea sessions with the ministers before undergoing two to three formal interviews and a series of psychological tests.¹⁶

The PAP has regular turnovers. The GEs conducted every four to five years allow the PAP to regularly renew its pool of cadres and MPs.¹⁷ This regular turnover empowers the CEC and allows it to remove lacklustre or dissenting MPs, similar to the CPC which also recruits horizontally and experiences frequent turnover (Xie and Zhang, 2017). However, unlike the CPC's turnover that is triggered by its formal retirement age of sixty-five (Wang and Vangeli, 2016), the PAP's turnover is legitimised by its regular elections every four to five years and rhetoric for leadership renewal (Singh, 2017: 78). The PAP's turnover promotes party loyalty because it (1) reminds MPs of the party hierarchy and more specifically that the party selectorate retains the right to nominate and select its candidates; (2) emphasises the continued need for loyalty and performance in order to ensure re-election; and (3) ties MP positions to the party and not local constituency support. Additionally, PAP candidates are typically in their thirties and forties, younger than the typical CPC's Central Committee members. In contrast, the CPC is large with a bottom layer of around 1,800 low-middle ranking party members from across different class and regional backgrounds (Yu, 2017). By contrast, the PAP is far smaller and tight-knit.

The PAP's case supports the prevailing finding that the centralised control of candidate selection by a small group of elites is a key element in disciplining MP behaviour and in ensuring party cohesion (Gallagher and Marsh, 1988; Hazan and Rahat, 2006). The PAP's exclusive cadre recruitment and highly centralised candidate selection enhance elite cohesion as they ensure like-minded elites into the inner circle of power. The PAP's regular turnover is also significant as it (1) reminds the MPs of the party hierarchy and the authority of the CEC; (2) emphasises the need for loyalty, compliance, and performance; and (3) ties the MP's career prospects to the CEC and not to local constituency support. Typically, the PAP is able to sanction dissenters without creating a public schism in the party. My interview with the former PAP Minister Lee Koon Choy indicates that there were cadres who were unhappy with speed of the PAP's leadership renewal. However, most would air their dissatisfaction privately (Lee, 2008). Past infamous cases of disgruntled senior PAP leaders who complained about exclusion from the

party's higher echelon included the former deputy PM Toh Chin Chye and two former presidents, Devan Nair and Ong Teng Cheong. All these high-level PAP leaders were critical of the PAP leaders after being sidelined. In fact, former presidents Devan Nair and Ong Teng Cheong had a public falling out with former PMs Lee Kuan Yew and Goh Chok Tong in the 1990s (Asiaweek, 2000; Devan, 1988). These high-profile PAP feuds never led to any party splits or factionalism as seen in the 1960s. The PAP, especially under Lee Kuan Yew's rule, was able to ostracise the dissenting cadres and ensure the party closed ranks¹⁸ (Infopedia, 2016; New York Times, 2005).

5. Parliamentary Incentives and Constraints

Apart from the PAP's centralised and regularised candidate selection, Singapore's Westminster parliamentary system also asserts strong centripetal forces that encourage the PAP's unity. Studies have shown how parliamentary leaders can employ a variety of institutional tools to impose discipline (Carey, 2009; Depauw and Martin, 2008). Like most parliamentary parties, the PAP is cohesive and less factionalised than those from presidential systems.¹⁹ As Kam (2009) found, parliamentary parties are more cohesive as the Westminster parliamentary system is built around a double-monopoly of power that (1) concentrates office perks and policy influence in a single body, the cabinet, and (2) provides one set of party leaders with exclusive control of the cabinet and the recruitment channels that lead to the cabinet. And it is this "double-monopoly of power" that fuses professional advancement and policy influence into a single indivisible good that is controlled by the party leadership (Kam, 2009: 563). For the PAP MPs, their political careers depended on their relations and the support of their party leaders rather than their constituents. Departing from the party line would thus mean loss of favour, re-election, or promotion.

5.1. Party Whip and Voting Unity²⁰

In Singapore's Parliament, the use of the party whip ensures that elected MPs vote according to the party line.²¹ Unless the party whip is lifted, very few PAP MPs would vote against the party line. There have been occasions on which the whip has been lifted when the bill concerns religious, moral, or ethical issues. For example, in 1969, the whip was lifted for the passing of the Termination of Pregnancy Act to legalise abortion. Then, ten PAP MPs abstained from voting for the abortion bill, signalling their opposition to the bill.²² My random selection of the bills passed from 2007 to 2009 shows that PAP MPs often vote in unison. As Table 1 shows, out of the seven bills that were voted on, only once was the party whip lifted, namely on the Human Organ Transplant Bill introduced on 24 March 2009. Then, one PAP MP voted against the party's position while another two abstained.

The elected opposition WP also has a party whip. However, the presence of fewer than ten opposition MPs poses little threat to the PAP's large party bloc. With a legislative supermajority, the PAP controls the parliamentary agenda and can steam-roll unpopular policies without much opposition or challenge them in Parliament. As Tan (1989) notes, "...the institution of the party whip and the culture of obedience to one's party

Table 1. Voting Behaviour in Singapore Parliament, 2007–2009.

Date	Bills introduced	Votes breakdown		
		Against	For	Abstain
16 July 2007	(Amendment) Bill on Legal Service Commission (Judicial independence)	2 (Opp. MPs)	75 (PAP MPs)	0
23 October 2007	Penal Code (Amendment) Bill	1 (NMP)	76 (PAP MPs)	0
27 August 2008	Parliamentary Election: Motion to debate on by-election	62 (PAP MPs)	5 (NMPs)	0
21 October 2008	(Amendment) Bill on Article 5(2) of the Constitution	0	75 (PAP MPs)	0
13 April 2009	Public Order Bill	2 (Opp. MP) 1 (NMP)	74 (PAP MPs)	0
24 March 2009	(Amendment) Human Organ Transplant Bill	1 (PAP MP)	72 (PAP MPs)	1 (pp MP) 1 (Opp NCMP) 1 (PAP MP) 1 (PAP MP)
16 July 2009	(Amendment) Bill on Article 5(2) of the Constitution	2 (Opp MPs)	75 (PAP MPs)	0

Source: Extracted from Parliament of Singapore website, available at <https://www.parliament.gov.sg/publications/votes-and-proceedings>

Note: MP = member of parliament, NMP = nominated member of parliament, NCMP = non-constituency member of parliament, Opp MP = opposition member of parliament.

leaders that constrains parliamentarians means that the cabinet controls parliament rather than vice versa”.

5.2. Party Discipline and Party Switching

Hirschman’s work on “exit, voice and loyalty” (1970) shows that disillusioned or dissenting MPs can exercise the option of “exit,” switching to another party or standing as an independent. In Singapore, “exit” in the form of party switching was rampant in the 1950s. Following the British tradition, elected MPs were allowed to switch parties during their term in office. Then, dissenting PAP legislators would cross the floor to form parties such as the United People’s Party and BS to challenge the PAP. After being elected into government, however, former PM Lee Kuan Yew eradicated the practice of party switching by amending the constitution to enforce party discipline and deter defection in 1963. Consequently, the MP’s tenure was governed by Part VI, 46(2b) of the Constitution, which states: “The seat of a Member of Parliament shall become vacant if he ceases to be a member of, or is expelled or resigns from, the political party for which he stood in the election” (AGC Singapore, n.d.). This means that if any MP resigns or is expelled from his party, he has to re-contest his seat.

Since the 1950s, very few PAP MPs have defected or switched parties. The PAP also has not publicly resorted to expulsion to enforce discipline.²³ Thus far, Dr. Tan Cheng Bock may be considered the most high-profile PAP MP (1980–2006) who resigned from

the party to stand as an independent to challenge the PAP-favoured candidate, Dr. Tony Tan, in the 2011 presidential election.²⁴ More recently, Dr. Tan Cheng Bock also legally challenged the government's decision to reserve the presidential election for Malay candidates (Paige, 2017). Aside from this anomaly, PAP MPs would typically voluntarily resign for their personal indiscretions or misconduct. For example, two PAP MPs, namely Michael Palmer, the former Speaker of the House, and David Ong, elected MP in the 2015 GE, both voluntarily resigned and vacated their seats due to their extramarital affairs with fellow party members. These two resignations triggered two by-elections in 2013 and 2016 in Punggol East and Bukit Batok, respectively. While the PAP lost the Punggol East by-election to WP's female candidate Lee Li Lian (Au Yong, 2013), it maintained its seat by a large margin in Bukit Batok (Kwang, 2016).

5.3. PAP Cohesion and the Progress Singapore Party

Thus far, this chapter has argued that a set of institutionalised incentives and constraints at both the national and party levels, including the party's cadre selection and rejuvenation system and party-switching ban, have prevented the rise of factionalism. Yet the defection of Dr. Tan Cheng Bock has raised questions of a potential split within the PAP elites, especially since Dr. Tan has the backing of PM Lee's brother, Lee Hsien Yang, as a result of a family dispute over former PM Lee Kuan Yew's residential home. Dr. Tan's Progress Singapore Party (PSP) has gathered some momentum in drawing supporters and candidates to stand for the upcoming GE. Dr. Tan served for twenty-six years as a well-respected PAP MP, boasting more credibility compared to smaller and lesser known opposition party members. The PSP may thus challenge the cohesion of the 4G PAP leadership for two reasons. First, the PSP arose from the most high-profile family feud in Singapore's history. In 2017, two of PM Lee's siblings publicly accused the current PM Lee Hsien Loong of using state organs to oppose the late Lee Kuan Yew's wish to have his Oxley Road home demolished after his passing. Posting on Facebook, Lee's siblings, both high-profile professionals in Singapore's elite circle, accused the PM of abuse of power, nepotism, and exploiting their father's legacy for political gains. The family spat, which began in 2017, was played out publicly over Facebook posts, widening to involve the PM's wife, the PM's sister-in-law, the attorney general, other senior ministers, and the PM's nephew. The PSP, now publicly backed by PM Lee's brother, Lee Hsien Yang, thus signifies the growing tension in the ruling family arising from the scandal, which may force some PAP leaders to take sides. Second, the PAP's vote shares have been steadily eroding since 1960s (Tan, 2013), and Singaporeans' trust in the PAP appeared to be on the decline, especially given the rising costs of living, social inequalities, and disaffection with the ruling party (Tang, 2019). The recent Covid-19 pandemic has also exacerbated economic insecurity and the spread of the virus amongst foreign workers may also further tarnish people's trust in the PAP's technocratic governance. As PM Lee reminds us, "The next election is about the future of Singapore" (Sim, 2019). In the light of the pandemic, Dr. Tan has asked Singaporeans "to dig deep and ask themselves: What have I got to lose? If not now, then when [...] I believe the processes of good governance have gone astray. I worry because I see the foundations of good governance eroding" (Low, 2020).

However, given Dr. Tan's age and refusal to form a coalition with the other opposition parties, the likelihood of his party replacing the WP as the next largest opposition party remains slim. Thus far, the party has been weakened by internal strife, expelling a member accusing the party members of "being infiltrated by foreign proxies," and a series of resignations, which raises questions on the party's long-term viability (Today Online, 2020). So it is unlikely that the PSP will undermine the cohesion and party loyalty ensured through the PAP's institutionalised cadre system and parliamentary incentives and constraints. Some scholars have suggested that an abuse of power or corruption scandal might arise and undermine intra-party cohesion (Mutalib, 2000). In 2013, former PAP MP Michael Palmer resigned following his admission of an extramarital affair with a constituency director of the People's Association (PA) (Wong, 2012). "Palmergate" sparked debates over PAP's governance and the relationship between the PAP and the PA (Palatino, 2013). Three years later, former MP David Ong also had to resign because of an extramarital affair (Heng et al., 2016). These incidents suggest that scandals may undermine the voters' confidence in the public clean image of the "men in white" (Yap et al., 2010), but they do not undermine party cohesion.

6. Conclusion

This article posits that minimal factionalism in the PAP over five decades has been carefully maintained by a set of incentives and constraints that deter elite defections and rogue behaviour at the party and systematic levels. At the party level, the organisational adaptation from a mass party to a cadre party and the centralised, regularised candidate selection processes have helped to foster elite cohesion and party loyalty. At the national systemic level, Singapore's Westminster parliamentary system has deterred party switching and the emergence of factions or tendencies based on local, ethnic, or religious consciousness.

Presently, the PAP remains one of the most stable and institutionalised party systems in Southeast Asia. In fact, Singapore has one of the lowest levels of electoral volatility in the region, with about 12.7 per cent for the last eleven elections (1968–2011).²⁵ Opposition parties are also personality driven and under-institutionalised, lacking stable roots and autonomy.²⁶ With low electoral volatility in the region, Singapore's hegemonic party system is still perceived as stable and institutionalised. Since assuming power in 1959, the PAP has facilitated two national leadership successions and several party leadership changes in the last five decades (Mauzy, 1993; Tan, 2014c). Unlike most parties, leadership renewal is often highlighted as a key priority and most MPs typically retire without protest – not an easy feat, considering how coups and violence are key mechanisms for leadership change in Asia.

In the past, critics such as Chan have predicted that the PAP's "party discipline that is the very strength of the party will become its major weakness in future" Chan (1975: 301). Singapore's PAP politicians are largely plain-speaking technocrats who lack oratory or manipulation skills to build their support bases. Thus far, the PAP has managed to unite the party and rally support across constituencies of different socio-ethnic backgrounds. Internal rivalry or factionalism in the PAP is not evident to outsiders. The new

4G leaders such as Heng Swee Keat, Chan Chun Sing, Ong Ye Kung, Gan Kim Yong, and Ng Chee Meng recruited from the military and the civil service share a similar mind-set and are groomed to take over from Lee Hsien Loong's older cabinet members. Looking ahead, the PAP is unlikely to replicate the high electoral support of 69.9 per cent in the last 2015 GE, an achievement largely a result of patriotic fervour in response to Lee Kuan Yew's death and the country's golden jubilee celebrations. However, given the lack of credible alternatives from the weak opposition parties, the PAP will remain cohesive, as it is still the best and safest route for ambitious politicians to gain access to power in the foreseeable future.

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Notes

1. The WP is Singapore's second longest surviving party, first led by David Marshall and later J. B. Jeyaretnam.
2. Sartori considers a party relevant if it has (1) electoral strength or "strength in seats," (2) coalition potential, and (3) "blackmail" potential (Sartori, 2005: 107–108).
3. For example, the political "tendencies" in British parties are more ephemeral than other party factions in Italy, Japan, or Uruguay, which are more organised and permanent as they pursue policy objectives or office over different electoral cycles (Morgenstern, 2001: 236).
4. As Panebianco contends, without this incentive structure, party institutionalisation cannot occur and its organisation survival is at stake (1988: 54).
5. See typology that identifies factionalism as either cooperative, competitive, or degenerative (Boucek, 2009).
6. Others have attributed cultural and psychological factors, particularly in China, where "the fundamental dynamic of Chinese politics is a continuous tension between the imperative of consensus and conformity on the one hand, and the belief, on the other hand, that one can find security only in special particularistic relations which, by their very nature, tend to threaten the principles of consensus" (Pye, 1981: 4).

7. Rose contends that the recognised lines of conflict can become causes of policy disagreements as factional opponents transfer old enmities to new issues (1964: 37).
8. Ozubun distinguishes cohesion from party discipline as the latter means that followers regularly accept and act upon the commands of the leader and the leader “has ways and means of inducing recalcitrant members to accept and act upon[...] commands” (1970: 305).
9. Lee Kuan Yew, Toh Chin Chye, and Goh Keng Swee were considered leaders of the moderate faction, while Lim Chin Siong, Fong Swee Suan, and Devan Nair were of the left-wing faction (Pang, 1971: 3).
10. In the third party conference in July 1956, the pro-Communist faction nearly wrestled control from the moderates, winning five out of twelve seats during the CEC election (Pang, 1971: 4).
11. Ong Eng Guan was a flamboyant Minister for National Development who challenged Lee’s leadership and was expelled for “attempts to disrupt party unity and destroy collective party leadership” Pang (1971: 8). For an account of events leading to Ong’s expulsion, see Fong (1979): 83–88).
12. Then, the unions and organisations infiltrated by operators were later de-registered. See Fong (1979): 108–109); Lee (1998): 388).
13. For the selection and composition of the PAP cadres in the 1960s and 1970s, see Shee (1971).
14. In highly institutionalised parties, the pattern of elite recruitment tends to have centripetal movement, as a strong centre in the party monopolises the incentive distribution (Panebianco, 1988: 60).
15. Critics view the PAP’s candidate selection as a ruthless winnowing process that promotes “politics of envy” (Barr, 2006) because it promotes elitism and leaders who are unsympathetic and unrepresentative of their constituents (Chua, 2008; Tan, 2008).
16. The psychological assessments included IQ tests, pen-and-paper personality quizzes totally with around 1,000 questions in total and two face-to-face clinical interviews. Candidates were probed about their family histories, childhood, educational history, national service experiences, health and marriage, and so on. Also see Yap et al. (2010) for the PAP’s candidate selection and interviews with MPs.
17. On average, the PAP’s turnover rate is about twenty-four MPs or a third of each cohort. In the 2006 GE, twenty-five MPs relinquished their positions. Four out of the twenty-five MPs had only served one term and no reason was given for their removal. Similarly, in the 2015 GE, twenty-four MPs were asked to step down or retire.
18. See, for example, the negative portrayal of Ong Teng Cheong and Devan Nair in Singapore’s mainstream media (Infopedia, 2016; New York Times, 2005).
19. This is because the separate electoral constituencies of executive and legislative power under presidential systems fail to provide incentives for cohesive legislative party discipline. Conversely, parliamentary systems, in which the executive power emanates from and is contingent upon majority confidence, require disciplined parties in order to keep the executive in check (Moser, 2001: 98).
20. Typically, the study of party cohesion in pluralistic regimes is based on party vote or roll call analysis of the legislature. Quantitative methods of measuring party cohesion include “party

- vote,” “index of cohesion,” or “index of party loyalty” (Carey, 2009; Kam, 2009; Owens, 2003a).
21. The government whip is regarded as the disciplinarian who controls MPs in their respective parties. The whips ensure that there are sufficient party members in the Chamber to support the party’s position and that MPs vote according to the party’s line. Occasionally, the whip may be lifted and the MPs are allowed to vote according to their conscience. See “Party whip” from the Parliament of Singapore at <https://www.parliament.gov.sg/leader-house>
 22. In 2002, there was also heated debate on the Nominated Member of Parliament (NMP) scheme. Then, a total fifty-eight PAP MPs voted for the bill while five voted against, which included three PAP MPs (Dr. Tan Cheng Bock, Leong Hong Kee, and Dr. Lily Neo) and three opposition MPs. See Singapore Parliamentary Debates on “Nominated Members of Parliament”, 5 April 2002, available at: <http://sprs.parl.gov.sg/search/topic.jsp?currentTopicID=00068270-ZZ#>
 23. In 1959, three other PAP members, Tan Gak Eng, S. V. Lingam, and Ng Teng Kian, were expelled for anti-party activities and support of Ong (Pang, 1971: 8).
 24. Dr. Tan Cheng Bock lost very narrowly by 0.34 per cent to the winner, Dr. Tony Tan, in the 2011 PE.
 25. Electoral volatility refers to changes over successive elections in the balance of party support. It is used to measure the stability of inter-party competition to show parties’ acceptance of elections and their ability to maintain their bases. Here, the Pedersen Index is used to calculate the volatility by taking the sum of the net change in the percentage of votes gained or lost by each party from one election to the next, divided by two ($(\sum |vit - vit+1|)/2$). The higher the volatility score, the less institutionalised the party system.
 26. A score of 100 signifies that the set of parties winning votes is completely different from one election to the next. A score of 0 means the same parties receive exactly the same percentage of votes in two elections.

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