

Singapore's Constitutional Development: Autochthony amid Change and Continuity

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Libraries – Mere Repositories?

- The legislative quest for “better laws”
- Unique role of library and research services, especially parliamentary libraries
- Societies face similar challenges and issues even if solutions have to be contextualised
- Value of comparative studies

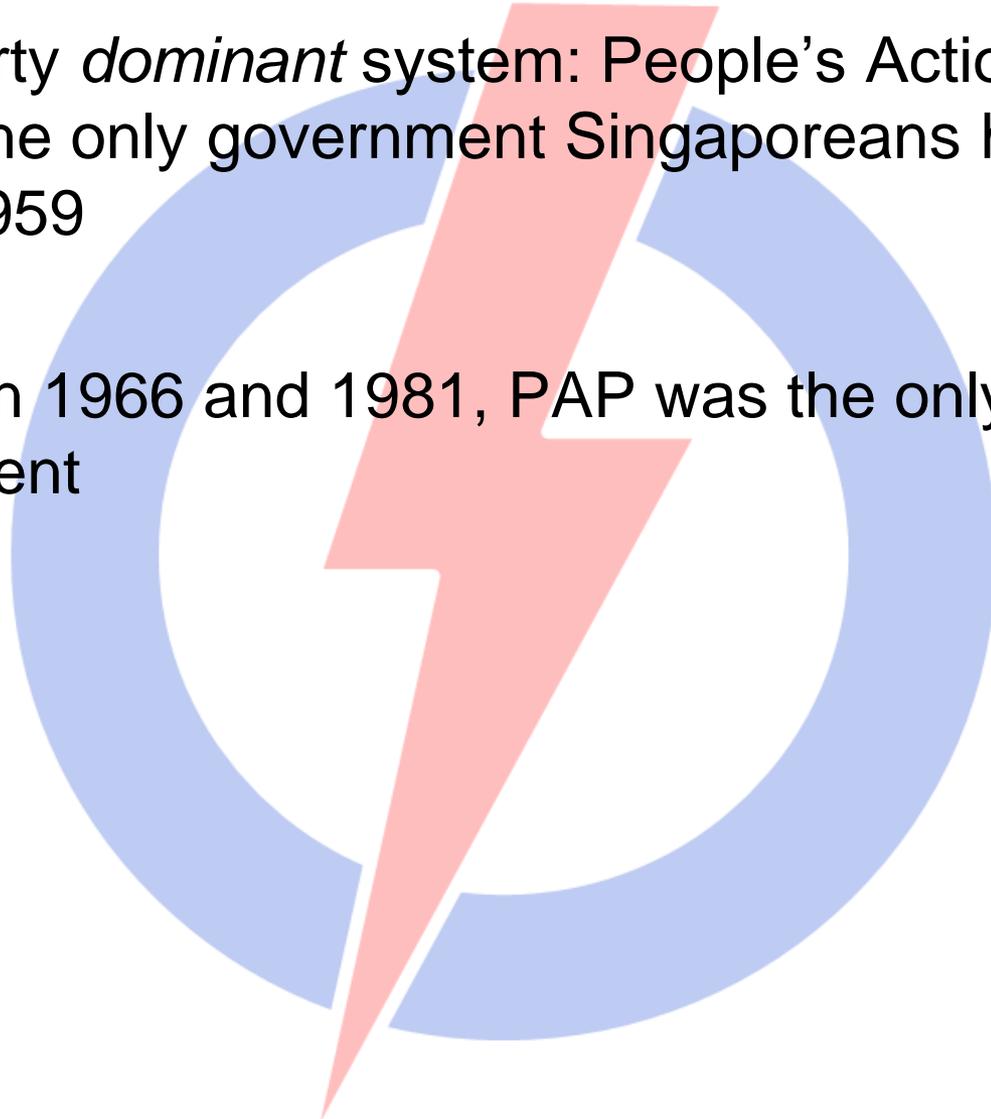
Politics & Post-Colonial Nation-Building

- Independence from Malaysia on 9 August 1965: granted self-government by British (1959-63), merger with Malaya in 1963 to form Malaysia



Politics & Post-Colonial Nation-Building

- One-party *dominant* system: People's Action Party (PAP) the only government Singaporeans have known since 1959
- Between 1966 and 1981, PAP was the only party in Parliament



Post-Colonial Constitutional Engineering

- To design a political system that can reduce “political accidents” through pre-emptive, pragmatic institutional design to keep Singapore thriving
- Westminster-inspired but autochthonous development to forge a politico-legal system to suit Singapore’s context



Context & Text

- Laws (as text) operate in a context
- Simple plurality system → One-party dominant state
- Deep constitutional engineering: 1984-1991 amidst declining electoral support for the People's Action Party (PAP)
- Growing desire for more open and vibrant political system

PAP's Electoral Performance, 1968-2011

Date of General Election	Total no. of parliamentary seats	Total no. of parliamentary seats contested by PAP only	PAP's % share of total valid votes cast	PAP's share of parliamentary seats (%)
13 Apr 1968	58	51 (87.9%)	86.7	58 (100%)
2 Sep 1972	65	8 (12.3)	70.4	65 (100)
23 Dec 1976	69	16 (23.2)	74.1	69 (100)
23 Dec 1980	75	37 (49.3)	77.7	75 (100)
22 Dec 1984	79	30 (39.8)	64.8	77 (97.5)
3 Sep 1988	81	11 (13.6)	63.2	80 (98.8)
31 Aug 1991	81	41 (50.6)	61.0	77 (95.1)
2 Jan 1997	83	47 (56.6)	65.0	81 (97.6)
3 Nov 2001	84	55 (64.7)	75.3	82 (97.6)
6 May 2006	84	37 (44.05)	66.6	82 (97.6)
7 May 2011	87	5 (5.75)	60.1	81 (93.1)

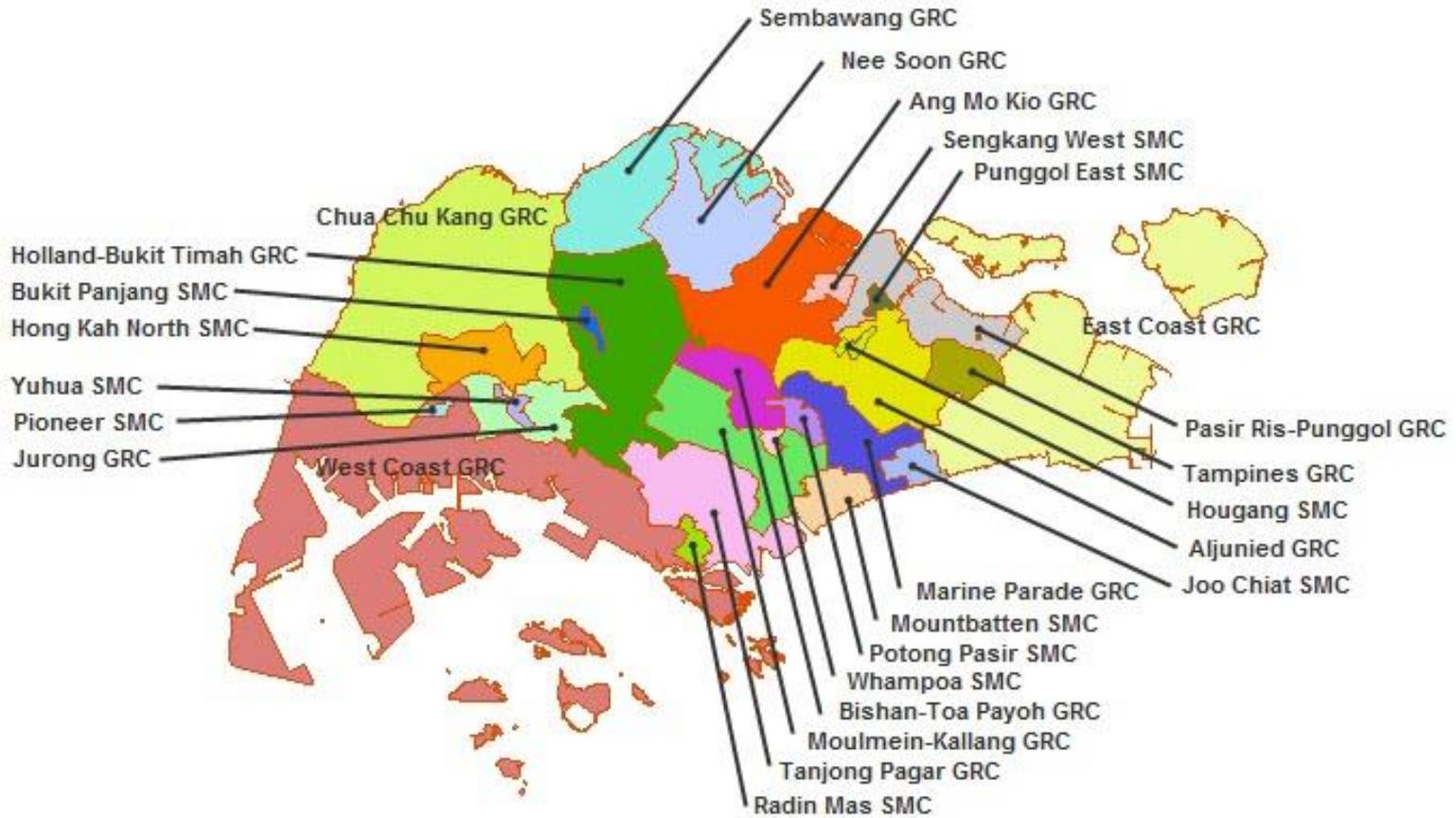
Themes in Constitutional Engineering

- Retain Parliament as the focal point of political system
=> elections as primary mode of political contestation
- Elite belief that constitutional design must produce a government with a clear mandate to govern i.e., strong parliamentary majority
- Representation not the dominant outcome of electoral process
 - proportional representation portrayed as damaging and divisive
 - Parliament as a platform for alternative and diverse voices (notion of harmonious difference)

“Preemptive” Constitutional Design (1984-91)

- 1984: Non-Constituency Member of Parliament (NCMP)
- 1988: Group Representation Constituency (GRC)
- 1990: Nominated Member of Parliament (NMP)
- 1991: Elected President

Map of Electoral Divisions



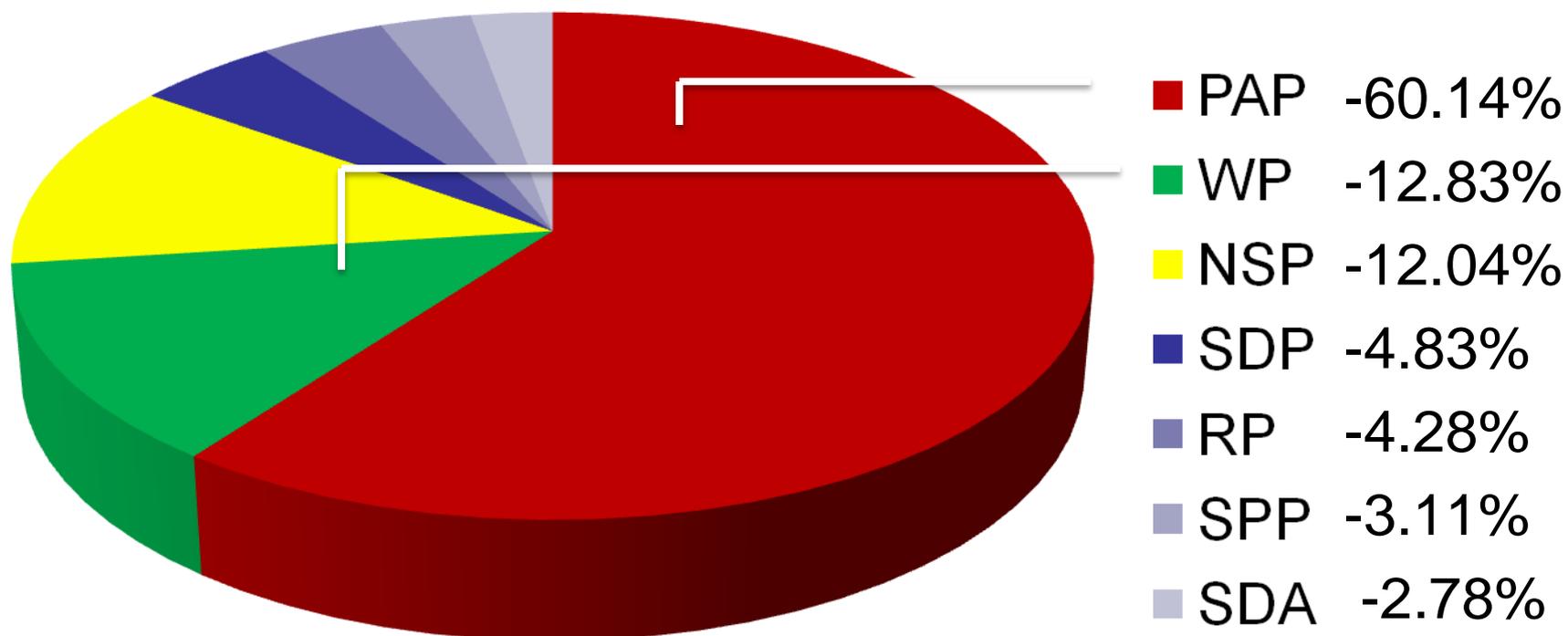
Constitutional Changes – 2010 (Highlights)

- NMP scheme institutionalised
- NCMP scheme – up to 9 (from 6)
- GRCs - smaller (target average size of 5 MPs)

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12th GE: Share of valid votes



Entrenching Multiracialism in Statutes

- Fault-lines of race, language, and religion
- Limitations of laws in developing societal resilience and harmony but laws still necessary
- Multiracialism not sustainable without a coherent set of shared national values. Shared values needed to discipline shared purpose of a multiracial nation-state

Masjid-al-Burhani



Kwan Im Thong Hood Cho Temple



Sri Krishnan Temple



Maghain Aboth Synagogue



Cathedral of the Good Shepherd



Orchard Road Presbyterian Church



St Andrew's Cathedral



Armenian Apostolic Church of St. Gregory



Politics in the 'New Normal'

- Performance legitimacy (“3rd World to 1st World in one generation”), clean government, and shared economic growth as basis of PAP’s political longevity
- Political landscape has evolved to become relatively more diverse, competitive
- ‘Selective amnesia’ of post-independence voters (P80, P90)
- Abnormality of one-party dominance? Internalisation of good governance (=> need for multi-party democracy?)

Adaptive Changes Needed?

- (1) More competitive political landscape in Singapore
- (2) Gradual withering of one-party dominance
- (3) Need to manage political change within a framework where party, government and state are conflated
- (4) Governance in a changing political landscape

In Lieu of a Conclusion

- Singapore in political transition; at political, economic and social crossroads
- Politically-sheltered electorate in politically uncharted waters
- Reconciling constitutional niceties, political aspirations and expectations, political realities, and PAP government's preference for incremental political change

Thank You!