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The 2015 Singapore Swing: Depoliticised Polity and the *Kiasi/Kiasu* Voter

James Chin

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Abstract

The results of the 2015 Singapore general election (GE) saw the People's Action Party (PAP) reverse the decline in support of the past few GEs. Many writers cited as some of the key reasons for PAP's strong showing: a flight to safety, the superior PAP campaign, the personal popularity of Lee Hsien Loong, the 50 years of Singapore's Independence (SG50) feel-good factor, changes in government policies since 2011, direct government subsidies to the pioneer generation, the passing of Lee Kuan Yew, and the mainstream media's attack on the credibility of the opposition. In this paper, the author offers an additional explanation, that is, the underlying causes of the PAP's electoral success were the policies laid down after Singapore's independence and some key cultural traits of this island nation. The policy of depoliticisation led to the creation of a social contract under which political liberties were voluntarily sacrificed in return for economic growth and prosperity. The author further argues that the cultural traits of kiasi and kiasu

tipped the balance in favour of the PAP when voters decided that the outlook for the Southeast Asian region was negative and Singapore needed the PAP to steer the country during this period of uncertainty.

Key Words:

- depoliticisation
- cultural traits
- voting pattern
- social contract
- Singapore elections

Notes

1. His supporters tried to nominate him for the Noble Peace Prize: ‘Nobel gesture: Singapore’s longest-held political prisoner Chia Thye Poh nominated for Peace Prize’, South China Morning Post, 3 October 2015.
2. ‘PM Lee demands blogger remove post or face legal action’, Today, 20 May 2014. What was interesting about this case was Roy was able to raise more than S\$100,000 from ordinary Singaporeans over the internet for his legal defence fund. In December 2015, the courts awarded \$150,000 in damages to Lee. See ‘Roy Ngerng to pay S\$150,000 in damages to PM Lee’, Today, 17 December 2015.
3. ‘S’pore minister: Luckily, we’re not M’sians’, Malaysiakini, 4 September 2015.
4. Chee defends SDP’s ‘sound policy proposals’, Today, 2 September 2015.
5. ‘External threats aplenty, but a united nation will overcome them: PM Lee’ (p. 3), Today, 9 September 2015.

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