

Kevin YL Tan and Terence Lee, eds. *Voting in Change: Politics of Singapore's 2011 General Election*. Singapore: Ethos Books, 2011. 240 pp. ISBN 978-981-08-9096-4.

In *Voting in Change: Politics of Singapore's 2011 General Election* (2011), the editors present a collection of essays that offers the reader “an opportunity to savour the excitement, the promises and potential of what GE2011 meant to the Singaporean public at the time of the election” (11). While the People’s Action Party (PAP) were returned to power in a landslide victory, *Voting in Change* explores the manner in which this particular GE embodied a dramatic ideological shift in which “Singaporean politics came of age” (10). Indeed, while the PAP secured 81 of the 87 seats in parliament, the comprehensive nature of their victory belied the strength of the resistance from both opposition parties and the citizenry. In eleven provocative and timely chapters, *Voting in Change* reaches beyond the surface of election statistics and demonstrates that the PAP’s ostensibly resounding victory did not come easy. Highlights include Eugene Tan’s presentation of “Election Issues,” where the five key issues of GE2011 are framed as leadership renewal, party systems and dominance, the economy, housing affordability, and immigration. Cherian George explores the role that new media – most notably Facebook and smartphones – played in articulating the anger and dissatisfaction felt among Singaporeans, employing cyberspace as a means of demanding integrity, collaboration and freedom between the government and its people. Kevin Tan discusses the legal and constitutional changes made prior to GE2011 and their impact on Singapore’s electoral landscape, drawing attention to how the electoral system innovations – notably the Non-Constituency MPs (NCMP) scheme, the Group Representation Constituencies (GRCs), and the Nominated MPs (NMPs) scheme – are unique to Singapore. Popular blogger Alex Au turns our attention to the political parties and their personalities and on how “opposition parties managed to steal most, if not the whole show” (20). Among the most interesting of all the chapters is Terence Chong’s which analyses the performative aspects of political rallies, where the stage becomes a site of performances in dissent, identity, personalities and power.

While the entire book is informative and provides a much needed documentation of GE2011 as a watershed event, what is most successful is the way it brings to the fore the rising stars of Singaporean politics. The book documents the changing face of opposition parties, noting that while the Worker’s Party is commonly associated with a strong ethnic Chinese following and rooted in working and lower-middle class support, this demographic was, in GE2011, increasingly complemented by better educated and racially diverse

supporters. Terence Chong demonstrates that even though the Singapore Democratic Party's more progressive stance on issues like minimum wage, distribution of wealth, and sexuality attracted "a more liberal, well educated, cosmopolitan and younger English-speaking crowd" (121), Vincent Wijeyesingha's comments regarding a need to challenge the government's politics of fear "struck a chord with many" (124). Cherian George illustrates how the SDP lived up to its reputation as the more risk-taking party whose freewheeling online presence was a reflection of "offline gumption" (157). Most significantly, *Voting in Change* crystallises the manner in which the PAP appear to have lost the battle for hearts and minds among the younger generations of Singaporeans and, for whom, stories of third-world to first-world progress bear little resonance. The book suggests that if the PAP's comparatively quiet online presence is partly a reflection of its distant and patriarchal offline character, then they will, in future, surely need to find new ways of embracing the politically engaged and technologically astute electorate.

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