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To cite this article: Lee Morgenbesser (2016): The autocratic mandate: elections, legitimacy and regime stability in Singapore, The Pacific Review, DOI: [10.1080/09512748.2016.1201134](https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2016.1201134)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2016.1201134>



Published online: 29 Jun 2016.



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The autocratic mandate: elections, legitimacy and regime stability in Singapore

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ABSTRACT

This paper explains how authoritarian regimes employ flawed elections to obtain both short-term legitimacy and long-term stability. In conjunction with the use of co-optation and repression, it argues that ruling parties hold *de jure* competitive elections to claim what is termed autonomous legitimation. This denotes the feigning of conformity to the established rules of the constitution and the shared beliefs of citizens. Regardless of overall turnout and support, ruling parties exploit the normative and symbolic value of elections in order to establish moral grounds for compliance within a dominant-subordinate relationship. In support of this argument, the case of Singapore's People's Action Party (PAP) is analysed in historical and contemporary terms. Since 1959, the PAP has used precisely timed elections to extract one or more mandate types from citizens and, by extension, claim legitimacy. In particular, it has sort a mandate based on its response to an event, execution of a policy and/or collection of a reward. In the long run, autocratic stability has been achieved through a process of reciprocal reinforcement, which has combined autonomous legitimation with targeted co-optation and low intensity coercion. The paper concludes by addressing the generalisability of this finding for other authoritarian regimes in Southeast Asia.

KEYWORDS Authoritarianism; elections; legitimacy; stability; Singapore; Southeast Asia

Introduction

The existence of 'hybrid regimes' occupying a grey zone between liberal democracy and closed authoritarianism is firmly established. This conceptual category is designed to capture those political regimes utilising democratic institutions, such as elections, albeit in a substandard way. Such a label has been frequently applied to Southeast Asia; a region presently comprised of three 'competitive authoritarian' regimes (Cambodia, Malaysia and Singapore) and two 'hegemonic authoritarian' regimes (Laos, Vietnam). Despite being conceptualised for their hybridity, which implies democracy exists in some way, these regimes are still 'recalcitrant' to democratisation (Emmerson 1995). This is indicative of how contestation and participation do exist, but in varying degrees of deficiency. In Cambodia, Malaysia and Singapore, for example, the incumbent regimes deliberately dilute the capacity of opposition parties to win office, intentionally

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infringe upon civil liberties and regularly abuse state resources to create an uneven playing field. This helps explain why the 2015 election victory of Myanmar's National League for Democracy was nothing short of an anomaly for opposition parties in the region. In Laos and Vietnam, by comparison, the incumbent regimes legally bar opposition parties from existing, violate basic civil liberties through the use of overt repression and monopolise access to resources, media and the law. So what exactly is democratic about South-east Asia's pool of authoritarian regimes? Given the present state of contestation and participation, it is clear that a more critical examination is required into how the very institution that gives rise to the use of hybrid labels – in this case, elections – actually sustains authoritarian rule.

This means studying the utility of elections from the functional perspective of authoritarian regimes, rather than democratic regimes. The question then becomes how ruling parties use elections to prolong their stay in power and, by extension, resist democratisation. An important contribution in this regard is Gerschewski's (2013) theory of autocratic stability. In seeking to explain why some regimes survive and others perish, he assigned casual importance to co-optation, legitimation and repression. These pillars do not exist from the outset, but must be developed and reinforced in order to achieve inter-complimentary. A key problem, however, is that legitimation remains neglected by comparison to the other pillars. For a variety of normative and substantive reasons, Gerschewski (2013: 19) lamented how 'only anecdotal evidence is available as to why legitimation matters'. Set against the backdrop of flawed elections, this article addresses this deficit.

It uses the case of Singapore to explain how elections can be employed to gain legitimacy and, thus, maintain authoritarian rule. Since 1959, the People's Action Party (PAP) has sanctioned more defective elections than its counterparts in Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia and Vietnam.¹ Despite such manipulation and misconduct, a majority of citizens have conferred legitimacy on the PAP because of its performance, governance as well as its values and ideology. A lack of fair electoral contestation, by contrast, has very few consequences for its legitimacy. This is indicative of Singapore's status as a 'pathway case' containing both the cause and outcome of interest – a legitimation mechanism employed in perpetual support of autocratic stability.² The value of Singapore – in case study terms – is further denoted by its status as a model for other authoritarian regimes, many of which seek to replicate the PAP's success by fusing flawed elections to a market-orientated economic system and a communitarian ethos (Ortmann and Thompson 2014). So by understanding how one of the most enduring authoritarian regimes has achieved legitimacy, democracy promotion may be more effectively targeted in those regimes following it. This is an especially prevalent issue given the 'democratic recession' now underway (Diamond 2015).

The central argument of this article is that PAP has employed flawed elections to acquire autonomous legitimacy. This term captures how authoritarian regimes utilise the space provided by elections to feign conformity to established rules and/or shared beliefs about the maintenance of political power. Since 1963, the PAP has successfully secured a normative commitment from citizens to obey its authority and acquiesce to the political status-quo. This is manifested in the procurement of a 'mandate' from citizens, be it event response, policy execution and/or reward collection. The gradual institutionalisation of this function has subsequently been integral to a regime stabilisation process predicated on reciprocal reinforcement, which combines autonomous legitimation with targeted co-optation and low intensity repression. Far from being mere

window dressing or a precursor to democratisation, the inconvenient truth is that elections are far more open to the way political power is distributed and organised in a given context. Indeed, this article shows that they are neither institutionally predisposed to democracy or anathema to the legitimisation of authoritarian regimes.

To substantiate this argument, the first section describes how authoritarian regimes pursue stability. The aim here is elevate legitimisation alongside the existing use of co-optation and repression. The second section contextualises how those same tools have been used by the PAP, but in a way that provides the necessary space for legitimisation. This comes in the form of a faux version of democracy, whereby elections – irrespective of quality – are considered to be the key difference between regime types. To support this argument empirically, the section shows how elections have been explicitly timed to gain one or more mandate types. The final section conveys the complementarity of the PAP's stability strategy by demonstrating the extent of mutual reinforcement between co-optation, repression and, of course, legitimisation. The conclusion addresses the generalisability of this survival strategy for other authoritarian regimes in Southeast Asia.

Autocratic stability: a toolbox

The general goal of authoritarian regimes is to achieve longevity. This requires the adept management of citizens (who can overthrow the political order); opponents (who can push for democracy); and political elites (who can upturn the existing power-sharing arrangement). Since these actors constitute the main sources of either opposition or support, the strategic interaction that occurs between them has a substantial effect on the trajectory of authoritarian regimes. The two tools most widely wielded to manage such relationships are co-optation and repression. The first involves inducing people to behave in ways that they might otherwise not, while the second involves preventing, countering and eliminating threats. This section draws out how each tool influences the fate of authoritarian regimes, before examining the underrepresentation of legitimisation in this equation.

The strategy of maintaining power through co-optation is intrinsic to authoritarian regimes. This entails 'encapsulating sectors of the populace into the regime apparatus through the distribution of perks' (O'Donnell 1979: 51). A common form of co-optation is patronage. In exchange for demonstrating their loyalty to the ruling party, citizens are provided with goods and services. The aim is to manufacture a normative commitment from them to obey authority, thereby reducing the risk that small-scale protests over particularistic issues will manifest into a full-blown crisis (Kuran 1991). A common feature of this exchange process is the obligation to reciprocate, which lowers the power asymmetry between these actors by breeding reliability. Besides patronage, another form of co-optation is the use of formal institutions, such as legislatures and parties (Gandhi 2008; Magaloni 2008). In exchange for remaining loyal to the leader, political elites are provided with the opportunity to advance their career, gain parliamentary immunity, influence policy, receive monetary payments, secure business contracts or assume a party post. In the long run, the credibility of this exchange process reduces incentives for political elites to rebel. This is symptomatic of how the use of co-optation nurtures a stake in the survival of authoritarian regimes.

A more obvious strategy used by authoritarian regimes is repression. This is defined as the 'actual or threatened use of physical sanctions against an individual or

organisation, within the territorial jurisdiction of the state, for the purpose of imposing a cost on the target as well as deterring specific activities' (Davenport 2007: 2). Depending on the nature, scope and timing of the perceived threat, repression is wielded in two ways (Levitsky and Way 2010: 56–61). Low intensity coercion is a less visible and more subtle form typically aimed at individuals or groups of minor importance (i.e. physical and non-physical harassment, restrictions on assembly). High intensity coercion is a more visible form usually targeted at well-known individuals, large groups of people or major organisations (i.e. imprisonment, crushing of protests). The overarching goal of repression, which is the sum of both approaches, is to make disloyalty a less attractive option for political elites and collective action more difficult for citizens. The employment of this strategy, however, is fraught with risks. Besides fomenting societal discontent and muzzling the expression of preferences, repression encourages the paranoia of leaders (Wintrobe 1998). While it decreases the willingness of citizens and opponents to challenge them, it simultaneously increases the capacity of political elites overseeing the security apparatus to oust them. This is illustrative of how the costs and benefits of repression must be shrewdly balanced.

The collective contribution co-optation and repression make to the stability of authoritarian regimes is a product of the complementarity between them. They exist in a state of reciprocal reinforcement, which encourages not only functional interdependence, but mutual strengthening (Gerschewski 2013: 27–30). Using patronage to co-opt citizens, which is often expressed in electoral support for the ruling party, reduces the need for wholesale repression. This is because the distribution of perks is less politically costly for leaders than the use of *ex ante* harassment or *ex post* suppression. A similar effect is evident in the use of formal institutions to co-opt political elites and opposition members. Since legislatures and parties provide information about the identity of their most serious challengers, leaders are better able to optimise repression. This leads them to increase the use of high intensity coercion against notable opponents, but decrease its use against citizens (Frantz and Kendall-Taylor 2014). The value of this more targeted approach is that it trumps the need for indiscriminate tactics that run the risk of spurring a mass-led overthrow or an elite-driven coup.

What is less established is how legitimisation works alongside co-optation and repression. In addressing this question, this article disputes prior dismissal of its importance on normative and substantive grounds. Such an understanding not only neglects how citizens confer legitimacy on ruling parties, but belies the sophisticated approaches authoritarian regimes adopt to stay in power.

Legitimation

Holding power compels authoritarian regimes to eventually have it validated by the citizens over whom it is exercised. The goal is to establish moral grounds for their authority, which is in keeping with the idea that a legitimate political order is one that is normatively approved by citizens. The most important factor determining the failure or success of such an undertaking is the basis of the claim. While a broad range of potential stimuli exist (see Geddes and Zaller 1989), very few of them actually fulfil the essential preconditions of legitimacy. In the view of Beetham (1991: 15–25), political power can be said to be legitimate to the extent that it conforms to established rules; those rules can be justified by reference to shared dominant-subordinate relationship; and there is evidence of consent by the subordinate to the particular power relation. This definition

captures how legitimacy must not only be derived from the beliefs of citizens, but from actions expressive of those beliefs (see also Lipset 1963; Alagappa 1995). The enduring difficulty for authoritarian regimes is to produce a congruence of values between political institutions and the citizens they are designed to govern.

All but a few authoritarian regimes use elections to gain a moral windfall that is otherwise unavailable to them. The most common iteration of this strategy, which is termed autonomous legitimation, involves feigning conformity to established rules and/or shared beliefs about the maintenance of political power. This means ruling parties 'submit' to the legal requirement of competitive elections and the principle that citizens should decide the winner of that competition. This explains why 'democracy' and the 'will of the people' are so frequently invoked following flawed elections, even in the most extreme of circumstances. In the wake of Syria's 2012 parliamentary election, for instance, Bashar al-Assad pronounced that

Of course this is a very popular step, this is part of the reforms we began to implement about a year ago. Election results reflect the opinion of the people. This is a serious message for everyone, inside the country as well as outside. The Syrian people are not scared by the terrorists, who tried to get us to cancel the elections. The results show that the Syrian people still support the reforms that we announced a year ago and most support the system. This is why this parliamentary election was very important (in BBC News 2012).

While the quality of authoritarian elections can certainly be dismissed, the function they perform cannot. So what is the relationship between such flawed elections and the legitimacy claimed by those sanctioning them? In authoritarian regimes, they are the end product of an established sequential logic. This means those in power have provided a substantive reason or set of reasons for employing elections as a legitimation mechanism; a selectivity that is the sum of past and/or present inputs to the claim. This also explains why coup-makers are often so quick to express a commitment to hold elections. Upon institutionalisation, the value of this institution is its capacity to privately 'bind in' participating citizens at a requisite level of mass loyalty. In this way, the act of voting is considered to be an expression of consent by a subordinate group to a dominant group, regardless of the motives behind it (see Barker 1990, 2001). Since this occurs irrespective of overall turnout and support, the end goal is to establish moral grounds for compliance.

The Singapore case: opening the PAP toolbox

Since 1959, Singapore has been transformed from a crisis-ridden entrepôt outpost into a model of peace and prosperity. Today it enjoys a stable political environment, an enviable standard of living and an economy often judged to be the most competitive, innovative and open in the world. The evident cost of this success has been the emasculation of the Westminster parliamentary democracy inherited from Britain. In order to understand how this has occurred, this section details the PAP's deployment of co-optation and repression. The discussion is by no means fully representative of the tactics and strategies employed, but it does account for the most obvious inputs. The aim is to contextualise the contribution of legitimacy to autocratic stability.

The PAP has maintained a diverse range of co-optation measures designed to elicit greater compliance amongst citizens, opposition members and political elites. While it has shunned the distribution of patronage (in the classical sense), it has developed a

corporatist exchange process revolving around the delivery of perks to citizens. This includes a social welfare program that subsidises education and basic medical care, but also comprehensive public housing. On several occasions, in fact, the PAP has threatened to withdraw support for the latter initiative as a way of deterring citizens from voting for the opposition (Jeyaretnam 2003). The capacity to do so is a product of Singapore's record of development, which has not only blunted political activism for the sake of careerism and conformity, but produced genuine support for the PAP. At the elite level, the delivery of perks – be it bureaucratic appointments, commercial contracts, executive positions or military promotions – is also dependent upon loyalty to the ruling party (Barr 2014). This is based on the common knowledge that associating with the opposition can jeopardise one's professional status.

Besides patronage, political institutions have been central to co-optation under the PAP. For citizens, this is manifested in the regular use of meet the people sessions, people's associations and the Reaching Everyone for Active Citizenry @ Home initiative (formally the Feedback Unit). These initiatives are symptomatic of the PAP's belief about the utility of fostering petitionary politics, albeit within a tightly controlled environment (Jayasuriya and Rodan 2007; Ong 2015). Such grassroots dominance helps mobilise voters for elections, whilst de-mobilising them for other forms of political contention, especially those related to communal and labour issues. For opposition members and political elites, co-optation occurs via the party and legislature. The political appeal of the PAP allows it to include the most competent, experienced and vibrant individuals possible (for a critique, see Barr 2016). In conjunction with its electoral hegemony, this encourages prospective elites to join it (and presumably benefit) or continue to vainly resist it. A more explicit articulation of co-optation occurs within the legislature via the Non-constituency Member of Parliament and Nominated Member of Parliament schemes.³ These initiatives are designed to steer formal political participation away from party politics and political competition (Rodan 2009). They send the signal that supporting the PAP is the only game in town, which builds elite (and mass) commitment to the political status quo.

A more well-known tool used by the PAP has been repression. In contrast to many other authoritarian regimes, however, low intensity coercion has tended to be the institutionalised norm and high intensity coercion the ad hoc exception (George 2007). To maintain political stability, which is considered to be synonymous with its survival, the PAP has exercised tight control over citizens. This is seen in the lack of judicial independence; media censorship (or self-censorship); restrictions on assembly, association, religion and speech; strict labour laws; as well as the stifling of civil society (Lydgate 2003; Gomez 2006; Rajah 2012). The recent spate of lawsuits against internet bloggers, such as Roy Ngerng (defamation), Alex Au (scandalising the court) and Amos Yee (obscenity and wounding religious feelings), underscores the contemporary nature of low intensity coercion. The cumulative effect has been to limit social activism and channel political engagement in more favourable ways to the PAP. An accompanying feature has been the use of high intensity coercion, which is made permissible by the Criminal Law Act (1955) and Internal Security Act (1960). The latter was most notably used as part of 'Operation Cold Store', which obliterated the leadership of the Barisan Socialis ahead of the 1963 election on the grounds its members were communist sympathisers. This was later followed by 'Operation Spectrum', which saw a group of Catholic social activists arrested and detained for being involved in a Marxist coup conspiracy (Barr 2010). Beyond the targeting of such groups, the PAP has been adept at punishing international

news organisations and opposition leaders through libel suits.⁴ Rather than imprisoning Worker's Party leader J. B. Jeyaretnam or Singapore Democratic Party leader Chee Soon Juan, the ruling party has used the rule of law and its control of the judiciary to remove them from the political arena. This is indicative of an approach to repression that seeks maximum effectiveness at minimum cost.

How does legitimisation fit within this toolbox? A well-established view is that the PAP derives legitimacy from its handling of Singapore's economy – citizens recognise its right to rule based on its ability to 'deliver the goods' in the form of improved standards of living (Chua 1995: 156; Khong 1995: 123; Wong and Huang 2010: 528). The problem with this view is not its accuracy, but its narrowness. Aside from downplaying how elections translate said performance into legitimacy, it precludes many non-material performance benchmarks. This includes the PAP's ability to facilitate leadership successions, manage important events and/or implement public policy. Another view is that, despite their substandard quality, elections allow citizens to confer legitimacy on the ruling party. 'They have afforded the PAP government a political legitimacy not enjoyed by other authoritarian regimes', Rodan (1996: 61) claims, 'Ironically, elections have thus enabled the PAP to claim a mandate in operating outside democratic processes between ballots'. A similar explanation is advanced by Nam (1969: 466), Tremewan (1994: 181) and Barr (2012: 31). The problem here is that there has been no investigation into how this actually works in practice. In line with Singapore's designation as a pathway case, then, this article demonstrates how the PAP has employed well-timed elections to be the demonstrable expression of consent on the part of citizens to its rule. The goal is to isolate elections from other potential legitimacy stimuli so that its contribution to autocratic stability can be known.

Electoral legitimisation under the PAP

The PAP has altered Singapore's political system so that elections represent just one part of a wider pattern of domination. The justification for doing so has been both consistent and ubiquitous: maintaining economic prosperity, political stability and social harmony depends on a level of participation and contestation befitting national circumstances. Despite the flawed nature of elections, however, the PAP has gained autonomous legitimacy in the form of a mandate to govern from citizens. This section traces the sequential logic behind the institutionalisation of this function.

The period initially following Singapore's independence is often dramatized as a 'matter of life or death'. By most accounts, it had a highly specialised economy that was failing; had no natural resources; was politically divided following an opposition boycott; lacked geostrategic importance, especially to Britain; and was surrounded and outnumbered by hostile ethnic majorities in Indonesia and Malaysia (see Bellows 1970; George 1973). Such a dire situation apparently changed how much importance the PAP attached to maintaining parliamentary democracy. During its time in opposition, it had repeatedly championed liberal democratic ideals. In a 1955 parliamentary speech, for instance, Lee Kuan Yew strongly criticised the Labour Front government's Emergency Regulations law:

We either believe in democracy, or we do not. If we do, then we must say categorically, without qualification, that no restraint from any democratic process, other than by the ordinary law of the land, should be allowed. If you believe in democracy you must believe in it unconditionally (in Josey 1980: 121).

Such sentiments were basically not expressed again once the PAP gained power. The turn towards authoritarianism instead advanced according to the pragmatic claim that stability was a prerequisite to progress, making debate over how to achieve it irrelevant. This was made abundantly clear as early as 1962, when Lee Kuan Yew stated that, 'If I were in Singapore indefinitely, without having to ask those who are governed whether they like what is being done, then I have not the slightest doubt that I could govern much more effectively in their own interests' (Kwang et al. 1998: 367). The gradual institutionalisation of such beliefs indicated that the PAP was open to undermining any democratic ideals or institutions considered harmful to socio-political stability, which itself was tied to its longevity.

The institutionalisation of authoritarian rule during the early 1960s heralded many lasting changes to the political system. In the context of elections, the most debilitating included the detention and then bankrupting of opposition leaders; denial of permits to hold campaign rallies; shutting down of hostile printing facilities; increasing of the candidate registration fee; limiting the campaign period to nine days; and placing the Elections Department within the Prime Minister's Office (on the electoral system, see Tey 2008; Tan 2013). Despite these infractions, the PAP nevertheless preserved elections as an avenue for political contestation and upheld the right of citizens to vote their conscience. In other words, it maintained the institution and principle considered to be most expressive of established rules and shared beliefs. Why? For the PAP, elections erroneously represented the key difference between democratic and authoritarian regimes. Such a view is evident in Lee Kuan Yew's claim that, 'If I had been autocratic and authoritarian, I would not have won eight consecutive general elections over a period of thirty years' (*The Straits Times* 1989: 24). Similarly, 'Authoritarian means one has not got the consent of the people to your policies. My policies have been endorsed by the electorate every four to five years by a clear majority, never below 60 per cent. I do not consider myself authoritarian' (Plate 2010: 182). These statements are indicative of the faux democracy long practiced by the PAP. In the understanding of Lee Kuan Yew, Goh Chok Tong and Lee Hsien Loong, Singapore is a democracy insofar as it holds elections. This explains the peculiar nature of the electoral system among authoritarian regimes, whereby voting and vote-counting systems are free from manipulation and misconduct, but opposition parties are inhibited by unfair rules and regulations. In the end, the electoral system is free enough for citizens to confer legitimacy, but unfair enough to ensure the PAP's dominance.

The more specific claim the PAP makes is that winning elections provides them with a mandate. This is a dividend that makes a government authorised by the public to enact its program and empowers it to do so through a majority of seats in a legislature (Keeler 1993). The first component is what makes elections so appealing to authoritarian regimes – the capacity to establish a normative commitment amongst subordinate citizens to obey. The second component subsequently makes that right to rule meaningful in a procedural sense. Such an understanding is implicit in Lee Kuan Yew's definition of democracy: 'The principle that the people should at periodic elections elect their representatives who have then the mandate to govern for a fixed number of years in accordance with their programme and policy' (Nam 1969: 465). A similar understanding was conveyed nearly three decades later by Goh Chok Tong, when he stated that, 'Parliamentary democracy means representative democracy. It means the voters generally consent to the policies of the government and are prepared to delegate to the political leaders sufficient mandate to act on their behalf'

(Chong 1991: 142–3). Such ideas were also evident in Lee Hsien Loong’s definition of representative democracy:

In this scheme, if voters in the general election support the party and vote its candidates in, and they form a majority in Parliament, then that party with a majority in Parliament forms the government. And that party has a mandate, not only because it so happens that this specific group of MPs, at this moment, supports it, but because it stood in a general election and the voters gave it the mandate (Lee Hsien Loong 2008: 3398).

These accounts of faux democracy reveal the function of elections as a legitimization mechanism. Following the essential criteria of political legitimacy, they demonstrate an inclination to feign conformity to the established rules (i.e. the constitution) and the shared beliefs of citizens (i.e. popular sovereignty). This is confirmed by the following analysis on the timing of elections, which adds empirical support for this argument.

Timing is everything?

In most parliamentary systems, the decision of when elections occur is at the discretion of the government. Given the advantage this provides over opposition parties, Newton (1993: 136) has noted elsewhere how ‘The choice of election date may well be the most important single decision taken by a British prime minister’. A similar argument can be made for Singapore. In what follows, it will be shown how the timing of elections is indicative of the PAP’s claim they provide a mandate. This means they have the moral authority to collect a reward, institute a policy and/or respond to an event. Such action is considered tantamount to legitimacy. The section concludes by analysing whether such elections actually confer legitimacy.

A lack of analysis on election timing in authoritarian regimes means a few inferences must be carefully drawn from democratic regimes. All else being equal, democratic leaders announce elections when they anticipate a decline in future performance (Balke 1990). This is based on the information advantage they maintain in comparison to citizens, whereby they are better positioned to assess their abilities and problems they are likely to face (Smith 2004). The problem with applying this argument to Singapore is that the PAP can always be confident of re-election, which means being removed from office is not an outcome worthy of consideration. On average, in fact, elections have typically been called 362 days before the statutory end of a standing term (see Table 1).

Table 1. Election timing in Singapore.

Election	Dissolution of parliament	Statutory end of term	Days of term remaining
1963	3 September 1963	29 June 1964	299
1968	8 February 1968	20 October 1968	254
1972	16 August 1972	5 May 1973	292
1976	6 December 1976	11 October 1977	308
1980	5 December 1980	6 February 1982	427
1984	4 December 1984	2 February 1986	424
1988	17 August 1988	24 February 1990	555
1991	14 August 1991	8 January 1994	877
1997	16 December 1996	4 January 1997	18
2001	18 October 2001	25 May 2002	218
2006	20 April 2006	24 March 2007	337
2011	19 April 2011	1 November 2011	195
2015	25 August 2015	10 January 2017	504

Table 2. PAP mandate claims.

Election	Seats contested by opposition	Event response	Policy execution	Reward collection
Claimant: Lee Kuan Yew				
1963	51/51	+		
1968	7/58	+		
1972	57/65			+
1976	53/69	+		
1980	38/75		+	
1984	49/79	+		
1988	70/81		+	
Claimant: Goh Chok Tong				
1991	40/81	+	+	
1997	36/83		+	
2001	29/84	+		+
Claimant: Lee Hsien Loong				
2006	47/84	+	+	
2011	82/87			+
2015	89/89	+		

Note: See appendix for coding rules, statements and sources.

One intermittent factor on the timing of elections is the state of the opposition. In conjunction with Singapore's nine day campaign period, snap elections have tended to compound the problems faced by them (Mutalib 2004). Some notable examples include the imprisonment of Barisan Socialis members during the 1963 election or the disqualification of Workers' Party leader, J. B. Jeyaretnam, for the 1991 election. However, the state of the opposition has not been a constant influence on election timing because the PAP was on several occasions returned to power unopposed on nomination day, including from 1968 to 1980. This reveals not only the weakness of the opposition, but mitigates the need for well-timed elections to exploit that weakness. Instead, the need for a mandate – and, thus, autonomous legitimation – has been a constant influence on the timing of elections. This is evident in the three complimentary mandate types the PAP has claimed (see Table 2).

The PAP has mostly used elections to gain a mandate for its response to a non-policy related event. This first occurred in relation to the 1963 election, which Lee Kuan Yew called immediately after Singapore's merger with the Malaysian Federation. He cited how an election would clarify outstanding questions concerning the constitutionality of incorporation; encourage investment by establishing the governing party; and break the parliamentary deadlock between the PAP and the Barisan Socialis. By comparison, the 1976 election was called out of concern for four problems: a global oil price increase; a slowdown in the economic recovery of Europe and the United States; conflict in the Middle East; and uncertain political conditions in Japan. When asked why the election was being called based on such a dire assumption, Lee Kuan Yew (1972: 5) stated that he 'always believed in clearing the decks before I run into rough weather'. Another iteration of this claim was made ahead of the 1991 election. Here, Goh Chok Tong (1991: 14–5) offered the following justification for the timing of the poll:

I had originally thought of having the next general elections in 1993, but my colleagues have told me that grassroots leaders have told them that people are supportive of my new open, consultative style and they think we can improve the chances of success for the next lap if we go for [an] early general election to get a strong mandate.

This mandate type found further expression ahead of the 2001 election, which was called in the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks in the United States. On this

occasion, Goh Chok Tong (2001: 1) stated how 'The revelation of the extensive network of terrorist set-ups dramatically changed the global environment, Singapore has to adapt itself to this different and more unpredictable world. We called for an early general election to get the mandate to do this'. Despite the PAP's recurring propensity to rationalise such election-stimulating events in the worst possible terms, this case demonstrated how tangential they can actually be to Singaporean politics. The final iteration of this mandate claim occurred via the 2015 election, which was tied to the imperative of putting a next generation leadership team in place. 'We have just completed 50 successful years. Now we are starting out on our next 50 years of nationhood. Soon, I will be calling elections to ask for your mandate to take Singapore into this next phase of our nation-building' (Lee Hsien Loong 2015). This statement is revealing for how it links Singapore's future to the PAP's electoral success.

Another mandate type is policy execution. This denotes an election timed to occur immediately prior to the intended tabling of major legislation in parliament or immediately following its passage through it. Here, the PAP aims to receive an *ex ante* or *ex post* commitment from citizens for its stipulated policy. Following the 1980 election, for example, Lee Kuan Yew interpreted the landslide to be a solid endorsement of the PAP's declared policies on school streaming, compulsory national service and the detention of alleged communists. Ahead the 1988 election, by contrast, the PAP sought a mandate to make two major changes to Singapore's political system. The first was the establishment of Town Councils, which were designed to empower locally elected representatives and residents to run the Housing Development Board estates. The second was to allow for the popular election of the President, who would be endowed with new reserve powers over government expenditure and appointments of key public offices. Unsurprisingly, the PAP interpreted its victory to be a clear sign that citizens endorsed its proposed agenda. The same held true for the 1991 election. Besides being a verdict on his new leadership (i.e. 'event response'), the election was timed by Goh Chok Tong to gain a mandate for his Next Lap agenda. This included major initiatives, such as Edusave, Medifund and Open University. Finally, Lee Hsien Loong used the 2006 election to secure a mandate on the Progress Package introduced in the national budget two months beforehand. The most notable policies included the ComCare scheme for low-income families, Workfare Bonus for less-skilled workers and Opportunity Funds for every school. In a broader sense, the 2006 election represented one of more explicit examples of the PAP tying its mandate claim to redistributive policies in the national budget.

The final and least claimed mandate type is reward collection. This is an election timed to capitalise on the PAP's positive performance – subjectively understood – in a given policy area. In 1972, for example, Lee Kuan Yew called an election once the government had resolved the problems caused by the departure of British forces; which was also the stimulating 'event' for the 1968 election. Since it was initially feared that an accelerated withdrawal would destabilise the economy, increase unemployment, create an infrastructure shortage and leave Singapore defenceless, managing this crisis was considered to be a notable achievement (Chee 1984). A similar approach was adopted by Goh Chok Tong for the 1997 election. In addition to claiming a 'policy execution' mandate on the basis of the Our Best Home in the twenty-first century initiative, he declared that the support of citizens was due to the previous five years.

My colleagues and I have kept Singapore thriving and moving forward in an ever changing and challenging environment. Working together, the people and the Government have created more

wealth, built new homes, schools, hospitals, and infrastructure, and upgraded old ones. We have shared a large portion of the wealth, fairly and widely (Goh Chok Tong 1997: 1).

This strategy continued at the 2011 election, which coincided with Singapore's emergence from the Global Financial Crisis. The aim was to capitalise on the PAP's successful response to the recession by translating it into another mandate. 'Over the last five years, we ran into the worst storm we have ever encountered since independence', Lee Hsien Loong (2011: 1) declared, 'But we took bold and decisive measures ... If you look and compare today with five years ago, I think we can honestly say incomes have gone up some, people have jobs and homes, our city has been upgraded and Singapore is better'. This statement is revealing. Despite the flawed nature of elections, it shows how they are clearly used as a mechanism to translate performance across many areas into political longevity. Such a strategy is predicated on the idea that having a mandate is synonymous with having legitimacy.

Does it work?

The pertinent question at this point is whether flawed elections actually provide the PAP with legitimacy. In as much as this question can be answered, the World Values Surveys (2004, 2014) offer clear validation. The results reveal that the PAP's strategy of institutionalising voting and vote-counting systems free from manipulation and misconduct have brought about a positive return from citizens. According to the most recent survey, 76.7 per cent of respondents believed voters are offered a genuine choice in elections and 92.6 per cent of them thought their votes were counted accurately by overwhelmingly fair administrative officials. This no doubt helps explain why 79.8 per cent of respondents subsequently expressed 'a great deal' or 'quite a lot' of confidence in the PAP government. The series of Asian Barometer Survey's (2012) has also shown that Singaporean citizens have extremely high levels of trust in elections and the government, especially compared to other authoritarian regimes. It led Chang et al. (2013) to conclude that the PAP's legitimacy was based on values and ideology, good governance and government performance. This wholesale approach to legitimisation, which fits closely the three mandate claims previously identified, prescribes to flawed elections a critical function: translating support into obedience amongst citizens. Absent this institution, the PAP would lack the moral authority to govern. This interdependency explains why even flawed elections are so important to it (and other authoritarian regimes).

Legitimation and autocratic stability

The task now is to evaluate the contribution electoral legitimisation has made to autocratic stability in Singapore. The focus is Gerschewski's (2013) theory that stabilisation occurs via three mechanisms: endogenous self-reinforcement, exogenous reinforcement or reciprocal reinforcement. Under the PAP, stability has been a product of targeted co-optation, low intensity repression and, it has been argued, autonomous legitimisation. All have been deployed as complementary components of a holistic approach to stability – meaning each tool is capable of co-functioning and mutually compensating for deficiencies in the overall stabilisation process. Since the focus of this article is on the input of electoral legitimacy to this formula, this section examines its reciprocal relationship to the other tools and what this means for democratisation in Singapore.

The PAP's survival is due to its administration of a sophisticated institutional ensemble. Depending on the actor and tools in question, this is manifested in informally subtle and formally obvious ways. A clear starting point is its sustained record of performance across many areas, which the previous section showed elections translate into autonomous legitimacy, fosters a certain habituation to routine amongst citizens. A majority of them have thus far been willing to support the PAP at the polls as a tried and tested 'choice' to lead Singapore. This is indicative of the socialising effect of elections – an institution capable of transmitting definitions of power relations between the dominant and the subordinate. By 'binding in' citizens to the idea of the developmental state, the PAP has been able to reduce the overall persuasion costs of co-optation and, by extension, make legitimacy more attainable via elections. The same process of reciprocal reinforcement also occurs in relation to political elites. From its earliest years in power, the PAP tied professional success to party loyalty. This has made individuals seeking a prominent career susceptible to co-optation, especially those wanting a position within the corporate world, legislature, military, public service or trade unions. It not only precludes the formation of a more effective opposition movement, but lends credibility to the PAP's slate of electoral candidates as the best available. The combined outcome of the relationship between legitimation and co-optation, then, has been a cohesive ruling party that enjoys normative compliance amongst citizens.

An accompanying source of stability has been the reciprocal relationship forged between legitimation and repression. The inherent problem faced by authoritarian regimes is the potential for conflict between these pillars, whereby the use of high intensity coercion weakens any coexisting legitimacy claim. The PAP's strategy has been to avoid any measures that negatively affect the opportunity to gain autonomous legitimation in the form of an event, policy and/or reward mandate. This explains the more subtle and targeted approach to repression vis-à-vis citizens. Broadly understood, it encourages laws to be bent, not broken; media outlets to be regulated, not censored; public gatherings to be controlled, not outlawed; civil society organisations to be circumscribed, not eliminated; and elections to be managed, not blatantly stolen. This inclination towards sophisticated – rather than clumsy – repression has also been the case in relation to political elites. Through its self-renewal process, which sees members of parliament 'retired' each election in favour of new individuals, who enters and exits the party is formalised according to known rules. This power-sharing arrangement has not only minimised the need for Lee Kuan Yew, Goh Chok Tong and Lee Hsien Loong to repress the political elites surrounding them, but reduced the danger of those same elites working together to advance an alternative legitimacy claim. Such complementarity has proved to be enduring and, thus, antithetical to democratisation.

A premise of this article was to provide an account of elections from the functional perspective of authoritarian regimes. This was necessitated by the frequent employment of elections as an indicator of categorical hybridity, which implies the applicable regimes are democratic in some way. Along these lines, a recurring claim is that Singapore's elections aid democratisation in incremental or involuntary ways (Ortmann 2011; Slater 2012). This is because they provide a contest over not only the outcome of the polls, but the overarching rules of the political system. The preceding analysis, however, offers a more pessimistic assessment. The most significant obstacle to democratisation is the stability configuration forged through co-optation, repression and legitimation – a calibrated approach that compensates for endogenous deficiencies and exogenous challenges. Using the 2015 election, for example, the PAP reversed a slide in its popular vote

by combining clever electoral boundary manipulation (low intensity repression) and greater redistributive social welfare (targeted co-optation) with a mandate claim capitalising on Lee Kuan Yew's death, Singapore's golden jubilee independence celebrations and the need to nurture a new leadership team (autonomous legitimation). Such a sophisticated approach to flawed elections raises doubts about how those same elections promote democratisation. The PAP evidently uses this institution in way that promotes autocratic stability above all else.

Conclusion

This article explained how authoritarian regimes use flawed elections as a legitimation mechanism in the service of stability. It argued ruling parties pursue autonomous legitimacy, which demands the feigning of conformity to the established rules of the constitution and/or the shared beliefs of citizens. Using the pathway case of Singapore, the article demonstrated how the PAP understood elections to be an action expressive of popular sovereignty, whereby citizens are allowed to vote freely in an otherwise unfair system for opposition parties. This faux democracy was expressed in the PAP's use of well-timed elections to win an event response, policy execution or reward collection mandate. When combined with targeted co-optation and low intensity repression, the article showed how regime stability was achieved through a process of mutual reinforcement. The remainder of the conclusion discusses the generalisability of this finding. In Southeast Asia, the question of representativeness is particularly relevant for this region given the assortment of both 'competitive' (e.g. Cambodia, Malaysia) and 'hegemonic' (e.g. Laos, Vietnam) regimes. The capacity of elections to confer legitimacy on the respective ruling parties of these hybrid categories warrants some contingent generalisations.

The scope conditions evident in Singapore are retained in Cambodia. Since 1979, there have been five national elections. Besides the 1993 election, which was administered by the United Nations, all have been marred by manipulation and misconduct. This has included the sustained intimidation of opposition parties, regular infringement of civil liberties and systematic abuse of state resources. Using such elections, the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) has nevertheless sort autonomous legitimation in accordance with the established rules of the constitution. Specifically, it has exploited the traditional notion of a meritorious benefactor (*saboraschon*) by distributing development projects, material goods and specialised services to citizens in exchange for their support. This has endowed the ruling party with 'customary legitimacy' (Hughes 2003, 2006). The sequential logic of this legitimacy claim is the notion that only the CPP can deliver socio-economic development and political stability after decades of turmoil. In this way, elections represent a modern reconstitution of a distribution mechanism for an existing foundation of authority. A key difference to Singapore, however, is the undersupply of formal co-optation and an oversupply of high intensity repression. When coupled with the fact elections occur at precisely known intervals, this represents a less sophisticated approach to autocratic stability.

The case of Malaysia offers further evidence of competitive authoritarian regimes using flawed elections for legitimation. The sequential logic of the claim advanced by the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) revolves around the need to maintain Malay ethnic ascendancy, promote non-Malay power-sharing and preserve Malaysian identity (Case 1995, 2010). In accordance with established rules, the elections serve to validate a divisive form of authoritarian rule institutionalised over successive decades.

This strategy periodically pits a rural Malay majority co-opted by party-state patronage against an urban (mostly) Chinese–Indian minority disenchanted with the National Front alliance. Despite a long history of ‘competitive’ elections, Jomo (1996: 93) concludes that they have been ‘reduced to what may well be a ritualistic and orchestrated exercise legitimating the surrender of many other democratic rights’. The same view is shared by Liow (1999) and Mauzy (2006). An important difference to the case of Singapore, however, is that UMNO has been more willing to use high intensity coercion against protest movements (such as the Bersih rallies) and opposition leaders (such as Anwar Ibrahim) following the emergence of the *Reformasi* movement in 1998. This has contributed to the erosion of UMNO’s legitimacy (Ufen 2009). The capacity of flawed elections to compensate for this deficiency in overall regime stability remains doubtful.

The way hegemonic authoritarian regimes use flawed elections for legitimation varies compared to competitive authoritarian regimes. In conjunction with the use of blunt repression and diversified co-optation, the applicable ruling parties still feign conformity to established rules and/or shared beliefs. A crucial difference, however, is that the constitution legalises untenured single-party hegemony. This is denoted by a ruling party that has institutionalised a monopolistic belief system capable of defining the collective goal of society and acting as a source of authority. In this way, voting in elections represents a publically symbolic act – a civic ritual intended to gain an express acknowledgement on the part of all subordinate citizens to the superior position of the party. Another difference is the extraordinary emphasis placed on fostering unanimous participation. The social and organisational surrounding elections is designed to socialize citizens to a point where voting becomes a willing expression of civic duty. In contrast to autonomous legitimation, which occurs irrespective of overall turnout and support, hegemonic authoritarian regimes claim ‘mass’ legitimation, which is expressed as more than 90 per cent turnout and 90 per cent support (see Morgenbesser 2016). This is periodically the case in Laos and Vietnam. Since 1975, the Lao People’s Revolutionary Party has instituted an avowedly socialist-orientated state with itself designated by the constitution to be the ‘leading nucleus’ of social and political life (Stuart-Fox 1997). Despite a dilution of Marxist-Leninism in recent decades, the ruling party was able to muster 99.6 per cent turnout and claim 96.9 per cent support during the 2011 election (IFES 2015). This process of acclamation bore striking resemblances to the five previous national elections. Similarly, the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) has ideologically and legally cast itself as ‘the force’ leading the state and society toward the fulfilment of communism and Ho Chi Minh thought (London 2014). In 2011, the CPV (as part of the Vietnamese Fatherland Front coalition) won elections on the basis of 99.5 per cent turnout and 99.2 per cent support, respectively (IFES 2015). Despite the outlandishness of this victory, such results have been the norm for decades now.

The residual cases of Cambodia, Malaysia, Laos and Vietnam show that the employment of flawed elections for legitimation is not limited to the PAP. Ultimately, the more exceptional feature of the Singapore case is instead the high degree of stability forged via co-optation, repression and, of course, legitimation.

Notes

1. Brunei and Thailand are excluded because they are ‘closed authoritarian’ regimes devoid of national elections. Myanmar has also been excluded because the opposition’s victory in the 2015 election obfuscates the regime type in existence. The role elections have historically played in providing legitimacy and stability, however, is detailed by Morgenbesser (2015).

2. According to Gerring and Seawright (2007: 122), 'The logic of the pathway case is clearest in situations of causal sufficiency - where a causal factor of interest, X1 [electoral legitimacy], is sufficient by itself (though perhaps not necessary) to cause a particular outcome, Y [autocratic stability], understood as a unidirectional or asymmetric causal relationship'. Furthermore, 'The pathway case exists only in circumstances where cross-case covariational patterns are well studied but where the mechanism linking X1 and Y remains dim'. To satisfy this requirement, Kailitz's (2013) data-set on the legitimacy exhibited by political regimes is employed. Accordingly, Singapore is classified as an electoral autocracy; meaning it legitimates itself by the procedures of legislative multiparty elections and executive multiparty elections.
3. A Non-Constituency Member of Parliament (1984) is an individual from the opposition who is elected despite having lost in a general election. Up to nine members can be appointed by virtue of being the best performing losers in an election. In contrast, a Nominated Member of Parliament (1990) is an individual who is appointed by the President to ensure a wide representation of community views. Up to nine members can be appointed for a term of two and a half years on the recommendation of a Special Select Committee of Parliament.
4. *Asia Week*, *Asian Wall Street Journal*, *Bloomberg*, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, *Financial Times*, *International Herald Tribune*, *The Economist* and *Time* have all lost or settled defamation suits (see George 2012).

Acknowledgments

The author wishes to thank Pippa Norris (and colleagues), Jason Sharman and the anonymous reviewers for their helpful feedback on this article. Small portions of this article are adapted from a forthcoming book entitled *Behind the Façade: Elections under Authoritarianism in Southeast Asia* (Albany, New York: SUNY Press).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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Appendix

This appendix begins by providing information on the rules used to code the various mandate claims made by the PAP each election. Afterwards, it makes available the statement made by the particular claimant and the relevant supporting sources.

Coding of mandate claims

General precondition: To avoid obfuscating the mandate claim being operationalised by the claimant, it is exclusively derived from these *ex ante* and *ex post* sources:

- (1) Speech in the month immediately prior to the scheduling of the election. Historically, the mandate claim has been advanced during the National Day Rally or Election Nomination Day speech.
- (2) Speech in the immediate aftermath of the election, usually on the day of the poll or the next day.
- (3) Speech at the swearing-in of the new cabinet following the election.

Event response: This is operationalised when the claimant times an election in response to a non-policy related event. The selection of the event, which can have already occurred or be predicted to take place, is at the discretion of the claimant. Furthermore, it can be confined to the domestic or international realm. Some examples include the merger with the Malaysian Federation (1963) or leadership succession (1991).

Policy execution: This is operationalised when the claimant times an election to occur immediately prior to the intended tabling of major legislation in parliament or immediately following its passage through parliament. The importance of this policy is signalled by its mentioning in the above sources. Some examples include the Elected Presidency (1988) or Our Best Home in the 21st Century (1997).

Reward collection: This is operationalised when the claimant times an election in order to capitalise on its positive performance – subjectively understood – in a given policy area. The source of the reward is at the discretion of the claimant; meaning it can occur in the domestic or international realm and be economic or political in nature. Some examples include the management of the British withdrawal from Singapore (1972) or recovery for the Global Financial Crisis (2011).

Coding of general elections

1963 (event response) – claimant:

Lee Kuan Yew (1963) 'Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew's Speech on the Eve of Nomination Day (11 September)'. National Archives of Singapore (doc. 19630911). Singapore: Ministry of Culture.

Tomorrow is Nomination Day. The general elections will decide the next government of Singapore. There were three reasons why we called for elections now. Firstly, three important points which had been agreed in London on 8th July had not been properly incorporated into the Malaysian Constitutional documents. One: It was agreed that Singapore will go into the Common Market gradually over a period of 12 years. At the end of 5 years there will be a Review Board to decide, and even then we can choose to pay the Central Government compensation instead of imposing taxes. In spite of this the Tariff Board Ordinance passed recently in Kuala Lumpur made equalisation of taxes immediate after the 5th year. Two: It was agreed that any restriction in migration between the States because of Singapore's autonomy on education and labour should be reciprocal. This amendment was not incorporated into Article 9 of the Constitution. Three: Although the Tunku had agreed to delegate to the Singapore Government powers of detention over secret society gangsters, the Federation Government proposed to do this by purely administrative action which could be revoked at any time by the Central Government. Two weeks ago in my discussion with Mr. Duncan Sandys, Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations and the Colonies, I told him that these and several other points outstanding with the British Government, like the \$10 million which they had to pay us for land occupied by the Armed Services, had to be resolved by Monday, 2nd September. If they were not settled it was the intention of my Government to call for a general election in which these points would become issues. Now I am happy to report that these matters have all been amicably and satisfactorily resolved. But there are two other reasons why it is best for Singapore to have general elections now.

On 16th September, we shall enter a new phase, an era which can lead, together with the rest of our partners in Malaysia, to peace, stability and prosperity, or to chaos. One of the most important factors that leads to stability which in turn leads to prosperity, is for everybody to know where Singapore stands. The Common Market terms have been settled. The Jurong industrial site is ready for expansion. The only question of doubt in any investor's mind is which party will be the government for the next five years; and who will be the Ministers, because on that they will decide to invest and open factories or pull out. The sooner this is settled and finality established, the better for Singapore and for Malaysia.

The next reason is that the opposition parties had blocked our Bill for the election of 15 members in Singapore to the Federal Parliament. We must have the 15 members to represent Singapore in the Federal Parliament in Kuala Lumpur as soon as possible. It is our intention that these elections for the 51 seats will also decide the 15 members of Parliament in Kuala Lumpur. For we shall pass a Bill for the election of 15 members from 51 members you are now electing in proportion to the party representation as shown by the results of these elections.

Every general elections costs the government about three-quarters of a million dollars, money of the tax-payer that could be more usefully spent on constructive projects. Now it is up to you to elect the next government of Singapore, and at the same time decide who will represent Singapore in the Federal Parliament in Kuala Lumpur, who will stand up and speak up for Singapore. There is one difference about the general elections this time. With the agreement of the Federation and British governments and the Singapore Legislative Assembly, the

Constitution has been changed so that any Assemblyman who resigns or is expelled from his party automatically vacates his seat. No Assemblyman after election can change sides. In other words, you will no longer be choosing an Assemblyman but the government. The party leadership constitutes the Cabinet. In this way there will be finality and stability for the next 5 years. It is for you to decide which party you can trust to lead Singapore to stability and prosperity and to defend her interests in Malaysia.

1968 (event response) – claimant:

Lee Kuan Yew (1968) 'Statement by the Prime Minister at a Press Conference at City Hall on Nomination Day, 17th February, 1968'. National Archives of Singapore (doc. lky19680217). Singapore: Ministry of Culture.

Neither in 1959, nor in 1963, had a new government been elected to face the kind of problems of the dimensions that we are now going to face. Our continued defence and security is a precondition to continuing confidence for continuing investment and expanding industries. A robust economy will in turn provide the revenues that will enable Singapore to carry more and more of its own defence and enable it to make its common defence with Malaysia even more secure. It is like the chicken and the egg. At the moment, we have got both the egg and the chicken. If we do our duty and do not flinch from unpleasant decisions, we will have bigger and better chickens laying more and better eggs in 1973. It is the business of this Government to see that we have the problems of redundancy, following the withdrawal of British bases and the reduction in the spending of British families here, in manageable proportions. This means new and imaginative policies. Some of them will require new legislation. Some will require stiffer administrative implementation of the renewal of old work permits or the issue of new ones, in the unskilled and semiskilled categories.

1972 (reward collection) – claimant:

Lee Kuan Yew (1972) 'Singapore Government Statement (16 August)'. National Archives of Singapore (doc. 19720816). Singapore: Ministry of Culture.

The principal mandate on which the PAP was elected to office on 13th April, 1968, was to see Singapore through the problems brought about as a result of the rundown of the British military bases. This task has been successfully completed. The present government has therefore decided to seek a new mandate. For the next five years the government's main aim is to raise standards of skills and technical competence, and to improve professional, management and technological expertise. Only higher standards can enable Singapore achieve more sophistication in her industrial, commercial and servicing sectors, and enlarge her role as an international banking and financial centre, providing a home for the Asian Dollar. These new objectives require a change in policy emphasis, with the accent on quality.

Lee Kuan Yew (1972) 'The Prime Minister's Eve of Poll Broadcast (1 September)'. National Archives of Singapore (doc. lky19720901). Singapore: Ministry of Culture.

We, the PAP, have seen you through two major crises in 7 years - separation in 1965, accelerated British withdrawal in 1968. Hard work and realistic policies brought us through. Now we are on top of our problems. The prospects look good for the immediate future.

1976 (event response) – claimant:

Lee Kuan Yew (1976) 'Excerpts of a Press Conference Held by the Prime Minister, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, at the Singapore Polytechnic, Following Nominations for the 1976 General Elections (13 December)'. National Archives of Singapore (doc. 19761213b). Singapore: Ministry of Culture.



Interview question: Prime Minister, why are you calling the election now, instead of nearer the end of your party mandate?

Prime Minister: I have always believed in clearing the decks before I run into rough weather. The OPEC Ministers are meeting on the 15 of December and if we are lucky, we may have an increase that the world can live with. I hope it will be so, in which case all will be well. It may be that they will have the increase in two bites as has been reported from Qatar – a small one for January and another one for June-July. The second one is that the economic recovery of the industrial economies both in America and in Europe, with the exception of Germany and probably Holland, has not been as predicted. There is a great deal of talk about tax cuts in America when the new Carter Administration takes over, with a budget deficit of something between US\$15 billion up to US\$30 billion. Maybe this can get the U.S. economy going, and at the same time, control inflation. I don't know. But I believe before running into rough weather, any sensible captain bats down his hatches.

I need hardly mention what may happen between the Arabs and the Israelis if there is no move towards a settlement in the Middle East. Things will happen in 1977 and not all of them may be favourable. So we have decided that we will forego the nine months that we are entitled to. I might also add that the Japanese election results mean that one of our major trading partners and investors is in a state of flux for some time. Their economic recovery is also not likely to be as sustained as we have hoped it will be. All this is not helpful.

1980 (policy execution) – claimant:

Lee Kuan Yew (1980) 'Press Conference Held by the Prime Minister, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, After the Results of the 1980 General Elections (24 December)'. National Archives of Singapore (doc. 19801224). Singapore: Ministry of Culture.

My Cabinet colleagues and I and all our PAP MPs are deeply moved by this massive vote of confidence you have given us. This will enhance our stability. Now you have given solid endorsement to our policies on national service and detention of pro-communist detainees, both vital to our security. We shall do our best to justify your faith in us and support for our policies. I am particularly happy that in the poorer and rural and urban areas, where people were troubled by low incomes or disturbed by resettlement, you have increased your support for us. We will continue our policies and do more in these poorer areas. We shall lessen the disruption and disturbance in your lives as we rebuild Singapore. We shall also find ways to lessen the problems for those who, as a result of changes in Singapore, have to change their occupation and find a new way of making a living. We face uncertain times ahead. But with your solid backing and co-operation, we shall resolve these difficult problems ahead, as we have done in the past.

1984 (event response) – claimant:

Lee Kuan Yew (1984) 'Speech by Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew at the Fullerton Square Rally on 19 December 1984'. National Archives of Singapore (doc. 19841219). Singapore: Ministry of Culture.

In December last year I announced that the elections would be held earlier than 1985 so that there was no need for a bye-election in Havelock. Had the US economy taken a downturn, we would have gone into the elections earlier to get a mandate to brace ourselves for the difficulties which will follow. Fortunately, the recession did not come. Because the economy kept on going till Mr Reagan's re-election, we announced elections for December. You may be curious to know why.

My first reason for giving long notice is to draw out the younger, rational, educated men who may be in the wings, wanting to form a party. In July, I moved an

amendment to the Constitution to allow the three highest opposition candidates, in percentage votes, to be returned as non-constituency candidates if no opposition candidate wins any seat. I invited them to come out and participate. I think it is good for them and for the country that they should come out early, if not to win this time, then to prepare for 1988-89. None did. Maybe they will turn up after I have stepped down.

My second reason is to have a long period for electioneering, arguments, sniping, twisting, barracking by the opposition. As I expected they ran out of steam, they ran out of issues, arguments and ideas. They repeated themselves. They exhausted themselves.

A third reason is that we can name our candidate early, from February, and place them in their constituencies. We are proud of them. An incompetent opposition kept their candidates secret up to the last moment, nomination day itself. We assumed they were not proud of them. When they were disclosed on nomination day, we knew why. Most were yesterday's men, pre-occupied with yesterday's agenda - old, out-of-date, tired and threadbare. The rest are ambiguous, shadowy figures, improbable representatives of freedom and democracy, feeble champions of stability, security and prosperity. This election is political initiation for the post-Malaysia generation, the under-30's, the generation that has not personally experienced strife and deprivation. They need to hear about the future policies, ideas, views and vision that the parties have. Those who hold out themselves as leaders must have the wherewithal to tell this young generation whither they want to take them. The younger PAP team has set out to do this. The opposition has baulked at it.

This is the last reason for having electioneering stretched over a whole year - the education of a whole generation of young voters. They have heard the attacks, smears, arguments against the government. They have seen the people who have made these extremist charges of bad intentions or crass stupidities. They have also seen and heard the PAP leaders rebutted these falsehoods and restated the facts. They must judge who are reliable, who are to be believed. It is not difficult. I have never been sued for slander or libel, and never paid anyone any damages for uttering lies. Dr Lee Siew Choh had to pay to me \$50,000 in damages and costs in 1973 for falsely alleging "unlawful or wrongful activities and all sorts of bad things." My Jeyaretnam had to pay \$120,000 and costs in 1982 for falsely alleging corruption on issuing a banking licence to Tat Lee Bank because of my brother's interests.

1988 (policy execution) – claimant:

Lee Kuan Yew (1988) 'Prime Minister's Eve of National Day Broadcast (8 August)'. National Archives of Singapore (doc. 19880808). Singapore: Ministry of Culture.

I have discharged my responsibility to provide for continuity. Now let me talk about your responsibility. This is my 30th year as Prime Minister. I think I know Singapore well. Let me share with you my concern. Many younger Singaporeans believe that there will always be an honest, fair and capable government. They are wrong. Older Singaporeans, who have experienced the Lim Yew Hock Government before 1959, know better. Look at other countries. See how much money is needed for elections elsewhere. Honest and competent government is rare in new countries because it is difficult to achieve. It is only because the PAP old guards have insisted upon and enforced high standards, and chosen men and women of integrity that Ministers and MPs have remained honest and competent. Those who have not, have had to pay the price. This is special to Singapore. It is precious asset of immense value for economic growth and political stability. And because the government has never sought to deceive people into believing that they will get something for nothing, everybody is self-reliant and the country's finances are sound.



Now the government proposes that you protect your collective savings by requiring an elected President to agree to it before it is spent. This will prevent any quiet spending of your savings. The fact that this government has not raided the reserves whenever revenue was short, is no guarantee that it may not happen in the future. We should put your CPF savings, which are a big part of the reserves, out of temptation's way.

Another proposal is that an elected President must consent to appointments of Members of the Public Service Commission and other more important statutory boards. This will be a check on any government who wants to replace the current incumbents with more pliable men. The most important appointments are those to the Public Service Commission (PSC), for the PSC appoints the members of the Civil Service and promote them. Such a provision will ensure that sound and able men are appointed.

Now let me talk of the recently passed Town Councils Act, 1988. This Act will put the MP in charge of his constituency town council. The honesty and competence of your MP will then directly affect you because he will be in charge of the maintenance and administration of your housing estate, instead of the HDB. He will control a budget of \$9 million yearly for a single member constituency or \$9 million for a Group Representation Constituency (GRC). This sum will increase as more functions like car parks, hawker centres and markets are handed over to town councils. If your MP is not honest, or not competent, you will know it soon enough. And if your estate is poorly run, repairs slow, and lift maintenance poor, you will be inconvenienced and worse, the re-sale value of your flat will be affected. So you had better take a careful look at the persons or the three persons, in a GRC, who seek to represent you. Your personal wellbeing will be at stake when you choose your MP. This change will make for careful and better selection of MPs by you and by political parties, and will be good for Singapore.

In new countries, democracy has worked and produced results only when there is an honest and effective government, which means a people smart enough to elect such a government. Remember, elected governments are only as good as people who choose them.

1991 (event response, policy execution) – claimant:

Goh Chok Tong (1991) 'Transcript of Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong's National Day Rally Speech (11 August)'. National Archives of Singapore (doc: 19910811). Singapore: Ministry of Information and the Arts.

We have published our programme in the next lap. We can succeed in implementing the next lap only if we have your support. It is our programme, but without your support, we cannot implement it. And for the programme to succeed, the able must care for the average and slow learners. Only then can a bond be built between the able and the others. Only then can we reinforce in Singaporeans this sense of family. Only then can we achieve our goal of having an extended family of Singaporeans.

I have originally thought of having the next general elections only in 1993, but my colleagues have told me that grassroots leaders have told them that people are supportive of my new open, consultive style and they think I can improve the chances and they think we can improve the chances of success for the next lap if we go for early general election to get a strong mandate. They feel that the mood is right. I feel that the mood is right. I was chosen by my colleagues in Cabinet and in Parliament to be the Prime Minister. I want your endorsement as Prime Minister. When I call for a general election soon, I hope you will give me that clear mandate. I hope you will endorse my style of government, my way of doing things and my programme.

1997 (event response, policy execution) – claimant:

Goh Chok Tong (1997) 'Speech by Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong at the Swearing-In Ceremony Held at the City Hall Chamber (25 January)'. National Archives of Singapore (doc. 1997012502). Singapore: Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts.

On 2 January 1997, Singaporeans gave their support for our policies to build Our Best Home in the 21st Century. Their confidence was based on what we have achieved in the last five years. My colleagues and I have kept Singapore thriving and moving forward in an ever changing and challenging environment. Working together, the people and the Government have created more wealth, built new homes, schools, hospitals, and infrastructure, and upgraded old ones. We have shared a large portion of the wealth, fairly and widely. We also continue to invest in our young through better schools and Edusave grants, scholarships and bursaries. And we will continue to enhance your assets, especially your properties, as we make progress year by year. We are building a nation of character, grace and compassion.

2001 (event response) – claimant:

Goh Chok Tong (2001) 'Speech by Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong at the Swearing-In Ceremony Held in the State Room, Istana, on Friday, 23 November 2001, at 5pm'. National Archives of Singapore (doc. 2001112307). Singapore: Ministry of Information and the Arts.

The recent General Election was held in unusual circumstances. Singapore was in the grip of a recession, caused by a sharp drop in external demand. The terrorist attacks of September 11 had shocked the world, and aggravated the global economic slowdown which had begun earlier this year. The war against terrorist targets in Afghanistan had started, and the world was braced for more terrorist attacks. There was much uncertainty and pessimism about the future. I called the election against this gloomy background. I sought the people's mandate:

- To take all practical measures to help Singaporeans get through the recession;
- To restructure our economy to meet new competitive challenges and a changing global environment; and
- To renew the political leadership, and have in place a new team to lead Singapore beyond 2007.

I said that I was fighting the General Election as Prime Minister for the last time. The people gave my Party and me their resounding support. More than 75 per cent of those who voted backed the PAP. They voted for leaders who were trustworthy, reliable and competent. They understood Singapore's vulnerabilities, and voted for a predictable and orderly political succession.

2006 (event response, policy execution) – claimant:

Lee Hsien Loong (2006) 'Post-Polling Press Conference (7 May)'. National Archives of Singapore (doc. 2006050705). Singapore: Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts.

1. Voters have decided:

- Happy that the PAP has been returned to government;
- Overall % for PAP 66.6% (exactly two-thirds) – this is slightly higher than the % in 1997
- I want to thank Singaporeans for giving me and my team this strong mandate;
- Support has come from all communities, and across the board;

- Will do our best to serve you and work with you so that we can achieve our vision together.
2. Singaporeans have strongly supported what my government has been doing, and our plans for the future:
- We will now implement the programmes in our manifesto, to create opportunities for all, provide outstanding education for our young, get every Singaporean to play a role, improve our healthcare system, and attend to elderly and poorer citizens;
 - We have a lot to do.
3. We now have a new leadership team in place, which will see Singapore through the next 15 to 20 years:
- We need a first class team to cope with the rapid changes and unpredictable surprises that will come;
 - Key is keeping in touch with changing demographics and the younger generation, and the new globalised world order;
 - So we will also start immediately to search for more good people to reinforce our team at the next election.

2011 (reward collection) – claimant:

Lee Hsien Loong (2011) 'Transcript of Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's National Day Rally English Speech on 14 August 2011 at the NUS University Cultural Centre'. National Archives of Singapore (doc. 20110824003). Singapore: Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts.

This is my first National Day Rally after the general elections. My team has a fresh mandate to implement our programmes to grow the economy, to improve our education system, to expand our healthcare system, housing, transport and so on. I have a new team that is settling in. It is gelling together to tackle both long range issues as well as immediate challenges which Singaporeans face.

From a national perspective, Singapore has done very well. Over the last five years, we ran into the worst storm we have ever encountered since independence. But we took bold and decisive measures, especially the Resilience Package and the Jobs Credit. The measures worked and sheltered us from the worst of the storm. If you look and compare today with five years ago, I think we can honestly say incomes have gone up some, people have jobs and homes, our city has been upgraded and Singapore is better. But unfortunately, it was such a powerful storm that even with a big and strong umbrella, we could not avoid getting a little bit wet. So Singaporeans felt the discomfort, the anxiety - compounded because of the rapid changes which we could not predict and which left us worrying what tomorrow would bring.

After the crisis passed, our economy bounced back faster than we had expected, which should be good news but it also brought its own problems. Our infrastructure programmes could not quite catch up, there was a shortage in our housing programme, and people became very anxious over their HDB flats. Our public transport became a bit more crowded than it should be and people noticed. From a personal perspective, many citizens felt pressure in their daily lives even though you see the growth figures. Last year 14.5 per cent; this year so far, nearly five per cent, and they ask themselves, why has my cost of living gone up? Can I or my children afford to buy homes for ourselves? What about my healthcare costs as I grow old? In short, Singapore may be progressing, the country may be moving forward, but am I part of this progress, am I part of this story?

I can fully understand and empathise with these concerns because it has been a difficult ride - bumpy, stormy and causing anxiety from time to time. But we are tackling these problems, building more flats, improving our public transport, managing the inflow of foreign workers and immigrants. It will take a while to solve these problems because they are big and complicated issues, but we are heading in the right direction and things will gradually get better. So, please be patient and at the same time, please try and look beyond these problems which we can see as immediate concerns and look to longer-term, wider world issues which affect us and are of strategic importance to us.

2015 (event response) – claimant:

Lee Hsien Loong (2015) 'Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's National Day Rally 2015 Speech', <http://www.pmo.gov.sg/mediacentre/prime-minister-lee-hsien-loong-national-day-rally-2015-speech-english>, accessed 26 August 2015.

In the last ten years, we built on what we inherited. We put brick on brick, we climbed step by step, we kept Singapore special, delivered results for Singaporeans. How did we do that? Mr Lee and his team planned beyond their terms, beyond their lifetimes. They nurtured the next generation of leaders and the next generation of Singaporeans. They taught their successors to do the same and this is what my team and I have sought to do for the last ten years. We have served you to the best of our ability, you have got to know us well, we have walked this SG50 journey together with you. My team and I take very seriously our responsibility to make sure that Singapore lasts beyond us. My core team are already in our late 50s and 60s. We will not be around forever and we must have the next team ready in the wings. The nucleus is there – brought in at the last elections and earlier. They have taken charge of important programmes like Our Singapore Conversation, like SG50 as well as different ministries, including difficult ones. They have connected with Singaporeans young and old and participated fully in the major decisions which we have made. But we need to reinforce them, to round out the team to give Singapore the best possible chance of succeeding into the future. And that is what I need to do in the next election.

Singapore is at a turning point. We have just completed 50 successful years. Now we are starting out on our next 50 years of nationhood. Soon, I will be calling elections to ask for your mandate to take Singapore into this next phase of our nation-building. And this election will be critical. You will be deciding who is governing Singapore for the next five years; but more than that. You will be choosing the team who will be working with you for the next 15-20 years. You will be setting the direction for Singapore for the next 50 years. You will be determining the future for Singapore.

What will this future be? Will Singapore become an ordinary country, with intractable problems, slow or even negative growth; overspending; heavy burdens for our children; gridlocked government; unable to act? There are so many examples around the world. Or will Singapore always stay special for our children? A multi-racial society strengthened by diversity, not splintered by divisions. A rugged society where everyone strives to do his best, but looks out for his fellow men, a people who live up to our song "One People, One Nation, One Singapore.

If you are proud of what we have achieved together, if you support what we want to do ahead, the future that we are building, then please support me, please support my team because my team and I cannot do anything just by ourselves. We have to do it with you in order to do it for you. In fact, we have to do it together in order to do it for all of us to do a good job for Singapore so that we can keep Singapore special for many years to come. Another 50 years.