

Which are the strong opposition parties this GE?

By Alicia Wong | SingaporeScene – Wed, Apr 20, 2011 9:42 AM SGT



Analysts Derek da Cunha and Eugene Tan (left to right) share their views on GE 2011. (Yahoo! photo/Alicia Wong ...

Of the six opposition parties that could be contesting the General Election, no more than half are deemed as strong contenders, according to two analysts.

Dr Derek da Cunha, who has followed Singapore politics as an analyst for 20 years, named the three "real contenders" as the Workers' Party (WP), National Solidarity Party (NSP) and Singapore People's Party (SPP).

The independent scholar said, "These three largely centrist parties are essentially courting the most crucial block of voters -- the wavering middle ground."

"The other opposition parties tend to be viewed as outliers in the process," he added.

Dr da Cunha was giving a pre-election analysis at the Singapore Management University, together with law lecturer and political watcher Eugene Tan as the discussant on Tuesday afternoon.

Comparing residents' reactions during walkabouts, the quality of candidates and GE preparations, Dr da Cunha predicted that the WP would get 8 to 10 percent more votes compared to another opposition party, with "perhaps the only exception being Mr Chiam See Tong's SPP."

Tan said the WP is in a "class of its own" with the NSP and SPP coming in second.

The People's Action Party's letter to *The Straits Times* forum page questioning why the WP's star catch Chen Show Mao is contesting suggests the ruling party is concerned with the opposition's "A team", he said.

But both analysts, however, felt the PAP is unlikely to go overboard with "negative campaigning" as this may cause voters to recoil.

Tan said the SPP's "only draw" is veteran opposition politician Chiam, who might be able to "put up a stiff fight in Bishan-Toa Payoh", while the NSP is still "a bit rough around the edges" despite having matured somewhat.

Hot spots to look out for in the GE

Dr da Cunha expects East Coast, Aljunied and Moulmein-Kallang GRCs to be contested by the WP, Tampines GRC to see an NSP team and Bishan-Toa Payoh to be contested by SPP's Chiam.

"The significance of these five GRCs is their relative proximity to each other," he noted, predicting that the "energy" from the opposition campaigns would spillover across the electoral boundaries and be "mutually reinforcing".

Tan, however, felt Aljunied GRC "will not be not anything like 2006" and the "battleground" seems to be shifting to either East Coast or Moulmein-Kallang GRC.

PAP has attempted to preempt the WP from sending a strong team to East Coast GRC by fielding labour chief Lim Swee Say, who is known to work the ground well. There are also no new candidates in this GRC, explained Tan.

At Moulmein-Kallang, it would also be easier for the WP to field a high quality slate since it is a four-member GRC, he added.

Tan pointed to Marine Parade GRC as another constituency to look out for. Seen as "rock solid PAP ground", constituents may have been overlooked.

In 2006, four of the six candidates were new, while the fifth, Dr Ong Seh Hong, had only completed his first term. This time, the PAP is more "measured", fielding two new candidates Brigadier-General Tan Chuan-Jin and Tin Pei Ling, the analyst noted.

Among the 12 SMCs where three-cornered fights could "artificially inflate" the PAP vote, Potong Pasir, Punggol East, Mountbatten, Sengkang West, Whampoa and Pioneer are the areas that would see an "interesting contest", said Dr da Cunha.

Using the PAP's national vote of 66.6 percent in the 2006 GE as a benchmark, Dr da Cunha predicted there would be a swing against the PAP of 3 to 5 percent in wards where the opposition party is not seen as a strong contender.

If the main contender is the WP, he said the swing against the PAP could be up to 7 percent, and if the opposition party is in the five GRC hot spots, the PAP could lose up to 10 percent more votes.

The swing against the PAP is supported by several factors, including the high cost of living, unhappiness over the influx of foreigners and the high cost of HDB flats, said Dr da Cunha.

But these factors are mitigated by others such as the booming economy, political apathy and upgrading programmes, he added.

Winning the vote

While Dr da Cunha believed the opposition would need to field at least 2 "A teams" to put pressure on the PAP and encourage voters in multiple constituencies to vote for them, Tan disagreed.

The opposition needs to field one "dream team" to show voters that they are serious in winning a GRC, he urged.

Both analysts also touched on the important role of volunteers in leaving voters with a good impression of a political party.

Dr da Cunha, however, had a sober word of caution should the opposition party fail to win more than its current two seats in Parliament, or lose a seat.

"I have never seen the ground so polarised as it is today. Those who are against the government and its policies are vehemently so," he stated. "It will get worse if these people are not represented in Parliament".

This might result in anti-PAP voters turning to civil disobedience in hopes of bringing about change, he noted.