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GE book offers 'instant analysis' on polls

New book comes just a month
after election and outlines how
Singapore politics 'came of age'

■ BY ELGIN TOH

JUST a month after the May 7 General Election, 10 scholars have produced an "instant analysis" on the watershed polls – a first among scholarly political literature here.

Titled *Voting In Change: Politics Of Singapore's 2011 General Election*, the book is the earliest academic attempt to examine the election that resulted in the opposition registering its best showing since independence.

Editor Kevin Tan said the authors opted for a hastier schedule because the traditional approach of taking longer to study and reflect on developments often meant that the event or issues would have lost immediacy by the time of publication.

"We thought that having something out quickly rather than slowly would be a good thing. It would engage the public and help to clarify the discourse," he said yesterday.

The result is a 240-page book that outlines how Singapore politics "came of age" on May 7.

The election ushered in "a new zeitgeist" that caused many to "trump doubts" and "forget fears", wrote the editors, Dr Tan and Associate Professor Terence Lee. The political changes that took place were "unimaginable in the fortnight before Polling Day", they added.

The election results also spawned doubts about the Group Representation Constituency (GRC) system, Dr Tan wrote.

Forced to accept a "package deal", voters ironically voted out popular foreign minister George Yeo in Aljunied GRC and elected Ms Tin Pei Ling, an unpopular newcomer in her 20s, in Marine Parade GRC, he noted. Both were People's Action Party (PAP) candidates.

The book also explains why parties succeeded or failed, and makes observations about how the electorate is evolving.

The Workers' Party's (WP) relative success can be explained by its strict discipline, wrote Mr Alex Au, in a chapter on the parties and their personalities. Indeed, on this measure, the WP may have outperformed even the PAP, whose leaders openly contradicted one another more than once during the campaign, he argued.

Associate Professor Bridget Welsh of the Singapore Management University noted that for all the attention young voters were receiving, surveys showed their political priorities and concerns "did not differ greatly from older voters".

And in a chapter on the role of new media, Associate Professor Cherian George of Nanyang Technological University said new media "enabled Singaporeans to experience and engage with GE2011 in ways like never before". He noted that the election results were informally revealed online before the Elections Department's official announcement.

The book's other contributors are Dr Terence Chong, Dr Lam Peng Er, Dr Ooi Can Seng, Mr Eugene Tan and Ms Krystal Tan.

The book will be launched at 10am on Saturday at the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce & Industry auditorium. During the event, at least five first-time candidates from different parties will speak about their experiences on the campaign trail.

Admission to the event is free, but prospective attendees have to register at votinginchange.eventbrite.com

Published by Ethos Books, the paperback full-colour volume will be sold for \$40.66. During the launch event, it will be available for \$30.

✉ elgintoh@sph.com.sg

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