

Workers' Party supporters celebrate the results of the General Election along Hougang Avenue 5 on Jul 11, 2020. (Photo: Marcus Ramos)

What PAP needs to do from here #GE2020

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GE2020 showed that the PAP no longer has a monopoly on talents. PAP desperately needs to rebrand their image, otherwise, they risk losing their ruling majority one day.

Over the past 2 weeks, what struck me most was the vast difference in how the PAP and the Workersâ?? Party campaigned, how they countered their political opponents, and how they responded in moments of crisis. If anything at all, one thing I can see clearly is that:

The PAP needs a new image, and they need it badly.

The Workersâ?? Party won big by clinching their second GRC this year, and even PSP and SDP performed better than most people expected at the polls. If the PAP does not reinvent their brand image, they may very well continue to lose more seats to the Opposition â?? what will Singapore be like then?
Here are some things that I feel the PAP needs to work on, or risk being voted out one day.

1. The PAP brand is no longer working.

If party branding was a competition, the Workersâ?? Party would win that hands down. It started from their â??slickâ?• introductory video (one which was full of authenticity and heart), which they continued to play up for the remainder of the campaigning period. WP candidates cleverly used their own social media platforms to communicate their own individual (political) views, elaborate on the policies they had proposed in their manifesto, and built a relatable image that made voters feel one could really connect with them.
In other words, they did a beautiful job of making sure voters felt they were being heard.
The PAP used to be a great brand when the late LKY was still around, but over the years, that brand is fast losing its appeal among the public. Elitist. Out of touch with reality. Overbearing. Add gutter politics and mudslinging into the equation, and the party could continue to lose the support of the younger, increasingly informed electorate.Which brings me to my next point,

2. Singapore now knows the PAP no longer has a monopoly on talent.

In an alternate world, someone like Jamus Lim could have very well been a PAP candidate. But he chose to join the Workersâ?? Party instead. Why?

This is the question that the PAP needs to answer.
If bright, new faces continue to favour joining the opposition rather than the PAP, then one day, theyâ??ll be in trouble. Succession is key in any business or party, but how do you hope to retain your power if you fail to recruit the best talents?

A strong brand is also crucial in order to attract fans and new talents to join you.**2. The PAP needs a better PR team.**
The accusations against Ivan Lim.
Issuing POFMA on Dr. Paul Tamyah of the SDP and other news organisations.
Calling for Raeesah to open up all of her past posts for review.
Questioning Dr. Chee Soon Juanâ??s character and integrity, and then not responding to AWARE calling them out for it.

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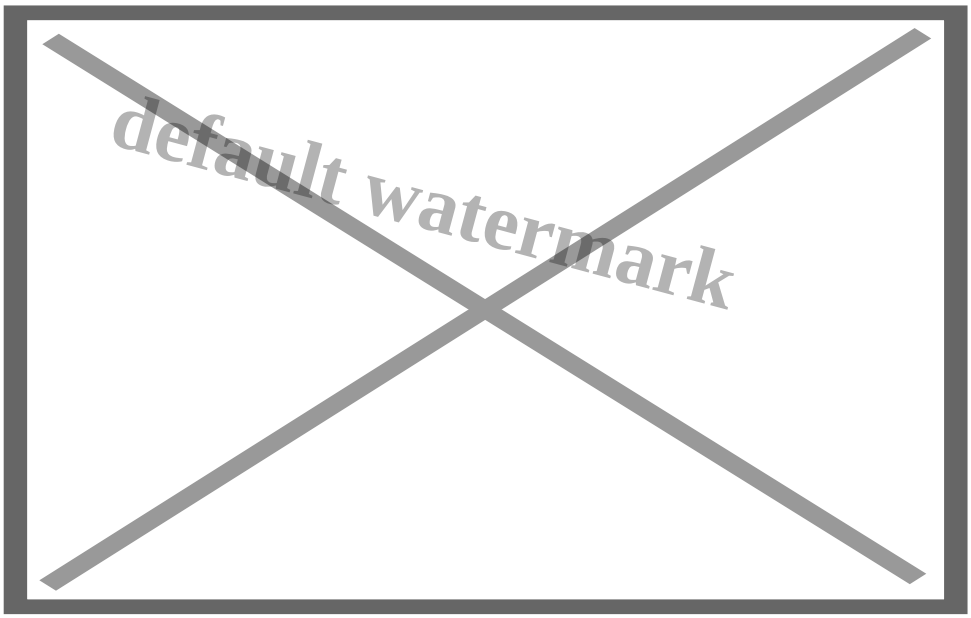
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Was all of that really necessary?

I would recommend that the PAP think seriously about engaging PR folks to help them navigate future general elections, so as to avoid similar fiascos. Otherwise, they risk alienating their voters further with such actions.

Any Public Relations practitioner worth their salt will tell you that a crisis represents an invaluable opportunity to turn things around. To do this successfully, you need to be able to identify what the core of the issue is and what the public *really* wants. In some cases, an apology may not even be necessary.

At various turns, the PAP had opportunities to turn events to their favour, but they failed to make use of it. Hereâ??s two examples:



- **The Ivan Lim scandal** â?? why was the public so angry? The way I see it, it was largely because (i) no Singaporean wants any politician with a questionable character in our government and (ii) the accusations against Ivan Lim undermined the rigour of the PAPâ??s candidate vetting process. I donâ??t think any one of us can say to have had pleased everyone throughout our lifetime, and we most certainly donâ??t expect the same holy standards applied to every single one of our politicians.
  What could have been done instead â?? Ivan, what was so hard about acknowledging that not everyone in your past saw you in the same light but add that youâ??ve changed over the years as folks highlighted your (blind) faults to you + you hope the public will continue highlighting your weaknesses in the future so that you know where to improve? And for the PAP, why did they pass up the opportunity to shed light on the yardsticks they use to select their candidates? Unlike the WP, who has been very open about how and why they select their people, the PAP has largely remained silent on this part.

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Contrast this to the way WP Chief Pritam Singh turned the Raeesah Khanâ??s crisis into a win for the party and won praises for his leadership, while taking the opportunity to clarify on how the WP selects (and stands by) their candidates

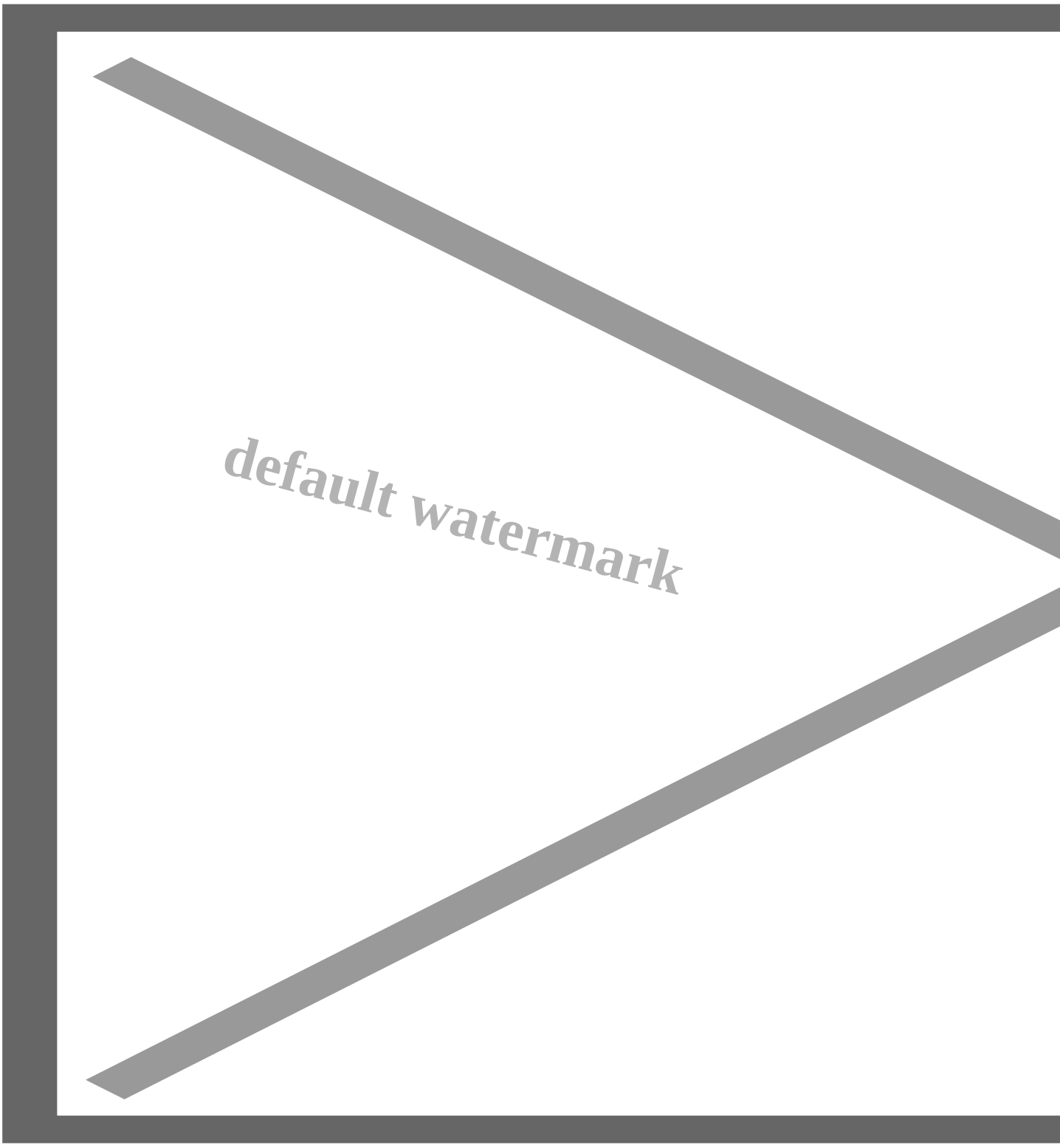
- **â??PAP-liteâ?• vs. Wonderboy Jamus** â?? I donâ??t know about you, but I found the â??PAP-liteâ?• comment incredibly insulting. A better strategy would have been to acknowledge the WP as a worthy opponent (come on, theyâ??ve seriously gotten stronger over the years) while pointing out that the PAP had already considered many of the policies that the WP proposed in their manifesto, but yet decided on a different course of action because [insert reasons here].

  What could have been done instead â?? during GE2015, Tharman Shanmugaratnam did a point-by-point rebuttal to the Oppositionâ??s policy alternatives. He did it again this time round in addressing WPâ??s calls for a Minimum Wage. And I, for one, was looking forward to more PAP candidates pointing out the flaws in the oppositionâ??s proposals, but was disappointed that we hardly got that level of discussion at all. After all, I donâ??t believe the PAP hasnâ??t already thought about many of the proposals that the opposition raised, but didnâ??t enact it for other reasons unknown to us.

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TLDR: Whatâ??s next?

In short, the PAP has some great policies and candidates but terrible PR if you asked me. In contrast, the Workersâ?? Party has proven themselves to have a solid manifesto, relatable candidates *and* great PR.
Read my previous commentary here on the different partiesâ?? manifestos during GE2020, and why I still think the PAP is the only one to have gotten their focus right.



Now that all that election drama is over, Iâ??m actually glad that the PAP has lost yet another GRC, and hope that they will learn from this and do better the next round. **Singaporeâ??s brand of politics has worked beautifully since our founding, and if the PAP does not do better, then we risk**

losing that advantage â?? one key characteristic being that of long-term planning and policy-making because weâ??ve always had the same party in power.

We should take heed from America, where their frequent change in political leadership has caused a growing shift towards populist policies and overhauling what the previous government has done *(remember how Trump tossed aside ObamaCare and the Trans Pacific Partnership so quickly after he got elected into power?)*. I wouldnâ??t want to see that happen to Singapore.

In the meantime, I look forward to seeing how this new government will see us through the crisis, because it isnâ??t going to be easy. Our hopes are on the newly-elected MPs now.

Did you agree with my take on how the PAP could and should have done better? Iâ??d love to hear your views in the comments below!

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