

THE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES BROWN BAG SERIES PRESENTS:

THE 5Cs OF PRIMARY SUPPORTER GROUPS IN LOCAL URBAN POLITICS

A SMALL-GROUP ETHNOGRAPHY OF "CORE GROUPS" IN SINGAPORE'S GRASSROOTS POLITICS

ABSTRACT

What are the factors that establish and maintain primary supporters among politicians in local urban politics? Despite widespread agreement on the presence of "primary" or "personal" political supporters and its significance to local politics, the debate is divided as to how these groups are formed, reproduced and reconfigured. Elite-centered explanations illustrate how capital concentration, distribution and dominance over key positions set the stage and tempo of local politics where a small few matters. The pluralist scholarship on the other hand highlights how supporter groups from divergent domains negotiate to perform representational roles. Hybridized models such as urban regime analysis and neoliberal approaches emphasize on political exigencies and translocal forces. However each of these approaches accounts for part of the urban politics story, and attempts at reconciliation has prove intellectually promising, yet theoretically frustrating.

In this presentation, I posit that small group ethnography may provide some clues. Drawing from fieldwork data from observations of "core groups" supporting local politicians in Singapore, I argue that the experiences of core group supporters can be themed through 5Cs: Competency, Capitalization, Culture, Controversy, and Concomitance. Together, they reveal the central encounters by which primary supporter groups establish and reproduce through. Here, I illustrate how both elements of elite and pluralist centered experiences are crucial to understanding the dynamics of primary supporter groups. At the same time, social groups should not be solely regarded as conceptual placeholders for elite based politics or a subset of larger interest groups dynamics. Instead they are a crucial social formation in their own rights in illuminating the lived experiences of political actors in local urban politics.

PRESENTER BIO:



George Wong is a PhD candidate at the Sociology Department, Nanyang Technological University. His research focuses on political sociology and urban politics, with an emphasis on contemporary political experiences and dynamics of political legitimacy within local urban politics. His current dissertation project is a political ethnography of grassroots leaders in Singapore, and their roles as mediators of local political experiences and political cultures. Beyond academia, George serves as a Town Councilor and political organizer.

CONTACT INFO: BOONKENG001@E.NTU.EDU.SG

**17TH OCTOBER (THU) - 12:30PM - 1:30PM
HSS-03-94 (LEVEL 3, HSS BUILDING)**