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PART 1

State Institutions

State Institutions in South Malaysia

Singapore's Entry and Exit, 1963–65

Elvin Ong

Editors' Introduction: This chapter focuses on how Singapore's underrepresentation in the Malaysian state institutions resulted in an extreme outcome. The Chinese-dominant People's Action Party (PAP) employed two strategies to protect regional interests—which were inclusive of Chinese ethnic interests. Frustrated with limited political representation at the national level, the PAP championed itself as the Chinese partner to be in the ruling coalition. When these overtures were rebuked, the PAP forged an alternative multiethnic coalition. The Alliance Party saw the PAP's ability to regroup in its demands as a threat. And while the PAP was successful in extracting greater autonomy over its regional affairs, it came at an expected price: separation from the federation.

Introduction

For more than five decades between 1965 and 2018, Singapore and Malaysia were among the two most robust electoral authoritarian regimes in the world (Levitsky and Way 2010; Slater 2012). In Singapore, the dominant multiethnic People's Action Party (PAP) has never lost more than 10 percent of parliamentary seats over 12 cycles of elections. In Malaysia, the dominant Alliance/Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition¹ comprising ethno-

1. Malaysia's dominant governing coalition was known as the Alliance from 1957 to 1973. Thereafter, it was known as the Barisan Nasional.

exclusive political parties—the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), and the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC)—has never lost executive power within the same period. Both regimes rely on their strong states to monitor citizens, distribute patronage, distort electoral rules and boundaries, selectively repress dissent and the opposition, and enact responsive, pro-growth economic policies (Crouch 1996; George 2012; Gomez 2016; Rahim and Barr 2019). Even more, they have emerged relatively unscathed through several economic crises, effectively plotted at least two leadership transitions, and successfully muffled multiple mass street protests (Pepinsky 2009; Weiss 2006).

The dominant parties and strong states in Singapore and Malaysia originated from their similar legacies of decolonization after World War II. As British colonies confronting communist and independence movements in the post–World War II decades, they encountered similarly unmanageable urban and communal conflict, leading to “elite protection pacts” forged between local elites and the governing bureaucracy (Slater 2010). In fact, political leaders across the two states found their fortunes so intertwined in the aftermath of the Japanese occupation that they initially worked toward merger into a single polity. On September 16, 1963, the Federation of Malaysia was formed through the merger of Malaya and Singapore together with the Eastern Bornean states of Sabah and Sarawak. For many ordinary people, the Federation of Malaysia was a natural union of four hitherto artificially separated states. Its emergence meant a clear break with British colonial rule and self-autonomy for its people.

But if political leaders and citizens so welcomed the merger and the creation of the federation in September 1963, why did Singapore find itself out on its own less than two years later in August 1965? The tremendous amount of literature devoted toward answering this question over the past few decades has revealed many interrelated answers. Many scholars point to the intense political competition between the Lee Kuan Yew-led PAP and the Tunku Abdul Rahman-led UMNO as the key factor in driving separation. They contend that this political rivalry was ultimately rooted in fundamental differences in ethnic demography between Singapore and Malaya, as well as in ideology between the two men and their respective political parties about the treatment of ethnicity in the new nation (Fletcher 1969; Sopiee 1974; Lau 1998; Abu Bakar 2009). In advancing this argument, they frequently refer to Lee and the PAP’s ideology of inter-ethnic equality undermining Tunku and UMNO’s brand of Malay-Muslim domi-

nant consociationalism. Violent inter-ethnic riots between Malays and the Chinese in the middle of 1964 were further illustrative of the idea that the overwhelmingly Chinese-dominant state of Singapore led by Lee was fundamentally incompatible with the Malay-Bumiputera-dominant Malaya led by Tunku. Expanding on these points, other scholars point to the failure of building a new, coherent national identity that would bring together a very diverse people (Andersen 1974). It has also been suggested that Lee Kuan Yew's "misreading" of UMNO and the Malays led to the two countries' inevitable separation (Barr 1997). Theoretically, these arguments corroborate Posner's (2004) claim that the relative size of ethnic groups conditions the political salience of inter-ethnic cleavages, thereby subsequently affecting the demands for political representation and separatism.

While not completely dismissing the validity of these arguments, this chapter argues that a more careful reading of the sequence of events suggests that Singapore's suppressed political representation in the federation's new institutions in 1963 was the key critical antecedent motivating political actors to engage in various maneuvers that ultimately led to Singapore's separation from Malaysia in 1965 (Slater and Simmons 2010). Specifically, the 1963 terms of merger institutionalized Singapore's political representation in the new federal legislature to only 15 seats, paling in comparison to Sabah and Sarawak's 40 seats and mainland Malaya's 104 seats. Even more, an institutional bifurcation in terms of franchise also emerged—Malaysian citizens who were also Singapore citizens were not allowed to stand as election candidates outside of Singapore or vote outside of Singapore. Because of such institutional restrictions, the PAP was confined to a geographical area with a limited number of seats and was unable to defend Singapore's interests, particularly with regards to economic policymaking. Not willing to accept its restricted political destiny, the PAP then pushed back by contesting in the April 1964 general elections in Malaya, upsetting and spooking Tunku, the new federation's prime minister. After its overall failure in these elections, the PAP rapidly cobbled together an alternative "Malaysian Malaysia" coalition with smaller parties in Sabah and Sarawak with an eye on displacing the Alliance in the following years. The visceral prospect of losing national power consequently hardened Tunku's resolve to cleave Singapore from Malaysia, effectively ensuring the Alliance's continued dominance at the expense of the loss of Singapore from the federation.

To be sure, some scholars have indeed noted Singapore's suppressed political representation at the beginning of the merger in 1963 (Leifer 1965; T. Y. Tan 2008). Yet, most scholars only mention this point in passing

and quickly pivot to narrating the intense political conflict between Lee's PAP and Tunku's UMNO, placing the blame of separatism squarely on their irreconcilable ideological approaches toward managing inter-ethnic relations between the Malays in Malaya and the Chinese in Singapore (see, e.g., Abu Bakar 2009, 69–70). In other words, they see Singapore's separation as an outcome primarily caused by the relative size of ethnic groups, buttressed by ideological differences between key leaders. In contrast, this chapter's arguments place the hitherto underappreciated role of political institutions at the center of the story. It argues that the political actors in Singapore were actively seeking ways to escape the "gilded cage" of institutional restrictions imposed on them, while political actors in Malaya were actively seeking to maintain it. From this perspective, non-inclusive political institutions were the primary driver of observed separatist political behavior (Birnie 2007). In a counterfactual world whereby the federation's institutions were more accommodating of Singapore's interests, the PAP might have been less eager in expanding its influence. Consequently, they would have posed less of a threat to the Alliance's and UMNO's political dominance, and Tunku would have been allowed more time to find new arrangements to accommodate Singapore and the PAP. Under this scenario, Singapore's separatism from the Federation of Malaysia might not have taken place or might have taken place much later.

The rest of this chapter traces the sequences of events leading up to Singapore's merger with Malaysia and its subsequent separation (Ricks and Liu 2018). First, I briefly describe the ethnic demography in the different regions in the aftermath of World War II, setting the contextual background for understanding the causal processes that follow. Second, I elaborate on the reasons and process for merger between Singapore and Malaya, specifying why the reasons for securing merger on the part of the PAP led it to accept less than favorable terms for Singapore's political representation in the newly created federation. Third, I then reveal how the PAP sought to rapidly expand its influence in the aftermath of merger as a means of overcoming Singapore's limited political representation, which subsequently led to the hardening of relations between the PAP leadership and Tunku. The manner in which the PAP drove to form an alternative anti-Alliance coalition was viewed as such a threat to UMNO domination that Tunku decided it was better to have Singapore out rather than risk losing political control. A short conclusion summarizes this chapter's most salient findings.

Contextual Background

Britain's colonial interests in peninsular Malaya and Singapore were defined by the region's strategic importance in trade and the provision of certain raw materials. In the island city-states of Penang and Singapore, the British governed the northern and southern entrances to the Straits of Malacca. The straits were the primary maritime trade route through which European–East Asian trade passed in the 19th and 20th centuries (Mills 1966, 189). This intercontinental trade, combined with mainland Malaya's demand for cheap labor to work in its tin mines and rubber plantations, drove inward immigration, creating an intensely plural society. Table 1.1 details the ethnic diversity of the various regions in the few years prior to merger as well as its uneven distribution. In 1957, more than three-quarters of Singapore's population was classified as Chinese, thereby suggesting its distinctly Chinese-dominated character. In mainland Malaya, however, just over a third of the population was classified as Chinese and almost half of it was Malay-Bumiputera, thereby indicating the demographic dominance of Malays on the mainland. From this perspective purely in terms of ethnic demographics, it is clear why Tunku Abdul Rahman, Alliance leader and prime minister of the already independent Malaya, sought to include Sabah and Sarawak when discussing merger between Singapore and Malaya (Cheah 2002, 93–94; Means 1963). By including the indigenous peoples of Sabah and Sarawak into the category of "Malay-Bumiputeras," Malay numerical dominance could be achieved and maintained. Without Sabah and Sarawak, the Chinese would outnumber the Malays.

The government authorities who conducted the census were, of course, cognizant of the crude categorizations of ethnicity and keenly aware of intra-ethnic differences. They first noted intra-ethnic differences by immigrant origins, such as the Malays from Aceh, Java, Menangkabau, or Palembang; the Chinese who were segregated into Hokkien, Cantonese, Hakka, Teochew, and Hainan; or the Indians who were Tamil, Telegu, Punjabi, Bengali, Hindustani, or Malayali (Vlieland 1931, 75–87; Del Tufo 1947, chapter 7). They also estimated certain intra-ethnic differences in birthplace (Del Tufo 1947, chapters 8 and 9). Out of the total population, 75 percent were estimated to be locally born in 1947. While 95 percent of Malays were estimated to be locally born, only some 63 percent of Chinese were locally born, while only half of the Indians were locally born.

At the eve of merger then, the Federation of Malaysia was a multi-

TABLE 1.1. Ethnic Demographics by Region (1957–60)

	Total Population	Malays and Bumiputeras	Chinese	Indians
Malaya (1957)	6,278,758	3,125,474 (49.8%)	2,333,756 (37.1%)	696,186 (11.1%)
Singapore (1957)	1,445,929	197,060 (13.6%)	1,090,595 (75.1%)	124,084 (8.6%)
Sarawak (1960)	744,529	507,252 (68.1%)	229,154 (30.7%)	2,355 (0.3%)
Sabah (1960)	454,421	310,054 (68.2%)	104,542 (23.0%)	3,180 (0.7%)
<i>Total</i>	8,923,637	4,139,840	3,758,047	825,805

Source: Reproduced from Means (1963, 140).

Note: Percentages in parentheses calculated as a proportion of the total population of each individual region. “Bumiputera” is a Malay term used to indicate the indigenous population of the region.

ethnic immigrant society with significant intra-ethnic divisions. In the post–World War II era, this rich soil of social diversity formed the raw material through which societal elites organized and formed mass political organizations. The ethnic Malay-based United Malays National Organization (UMNO) arose as the primary organizational vehicle through which to represent Malay interests in response to the British plans for a “Malayan Union” (Omar 2015; Slater 2010; Sopiee 1974; Stockwell 1979). The ethnic Chinese-based Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) grew from its origins as an organization devoted to the provision of social welfare to the Chinese “New Villages” into a full-fledged political party (Heng 1983; Loh 1988; Slater 2010; Soh 1960; M. I. Tan 2015; Tregonning 1979). In Singapore, leftist movements, such as effervescent workers’ unions, trade unions, and Chinese school student movements, first supported David Marshall’s Labor Front and then switched allegiances to support Lee Kuan Yew’s People’s Action Party (PAP). In the 1959 local elections in British-controlled Singapore, the Lee Kuan Yew-led PAP emerged the clear winner when it won 43 out of 51 local legislative seats.

Singapore’s Institutionalized Suppression in the 1963 Terms for Merger

On May 27, 1961, newly independent Malaya’s prime minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman, unexpectedly announced that he was open to the possibility of Malaya, Singapore, Sabah, and Sarawak being “brought closer together in political and economic cooperation” (Lee 1998, 365). According to the general consensus in most historical accounts, Tunku’s primary motivation for seeking merger can be summarized as the “security

thesis.” According to this standard narrative, Tunku was tremendously wary of Singapore reemerging as a “Second Cuba” due to the potential of a leftist-communist subversion of the city-state (Slater 2010, 233–36; Sopiee 1974, 142–44; Stockwell 2009, 19; T. Y. Tan 2008, chapter 2). In particular, the Lim Chin Siong–led leftist-communist mass labor movement was deemed to be extremely capable of capturing political power if Singapore was to gain independence on its own. A founding member of the PAP, Lim led the PAP’s Chinese-speaking mass activists against the PAP’s English-educated leaders led by Lee Kuan Yew. For Tunku, quashing the leftist-communist threat by taking control over Singapore’s internal security apparatus through merger was a far better choice than risking Singapore’s eventual independence and prospective communist takeover (Means 1963, 139; Tunku Abul Rahman Putra 1977, 119). Moreover, the political costs of incorporating more than one million Singaporean Chinese into Malaysia could be mitigated by incorporating the Borneo territories of Sabah and Sarawak into the federation so as to maintain overall Malay-Bumiputera numerical dominance (Sopiee 1974, 143; T. Y. Tan 2008, 68).

For Lee, merger with Malaya would not just provide political support and justification to eliminate Singapore’s leftist-communists and its leadership. It would also provide the impetus for an enlarged common market that would jump-start industrialization, reduce unemployment, and generate economic growth, thus arresting the PAP’s declining popularity since its coming to power in 1959 (Leifer 1965; Sopiee 1974, 116–20). In any case, the overall consensus was also that Singapore was far too small of a nation-state to secure independence from the British and survive on its own. Although it was a spectacular success as an *entrepôt* trade hub, its manufacturing industries relied on raw materials from Malaya. Socially and culturally, its peoples have extensive family network ties to the broader population in Malaya. In terms of defense and external relations, an independent, Chinese-majority, small island-nation would struggle among the far larger nation-states of Southeast Asia. Merger with Malaya was both politically advantageous for the PAP and economically, socially, and strategically sound for Singapore.

But if Tunku and Lee both saw the mutual benefits of merger, detailed compromises would still need to be forged in terms of the institutions of the newly created federation. Of key concern in this chapter is the inclusiveness of those institutions to Singapore’s interests. Given that the PAP would not be part of the Alliance’s federal cabinet, to what degree would

the new federation's other institutions, such as its legislature and voting rights, accommodate Singapore's interests and those of its citizens?

On this particular question, the overwhelming empirical evidence appears to be that Singapore's interests in the new legislature together with the voting rights of its citizens were artificially suppressed. To begin with, Singapore would only be entitled to elect 15 members to the new federal House of Representatives, which was much less than the 25 expected members if the numbers were proportionate to the size of its electorate. This was in stark contrast to Malaya's 104 representatives, Sabah's 16 seats, and Sarawak's 24 seats. It meant that Singapore's population, which would make up about 16 percent of the new federation, would only have less than 10 percent of the seats in the new legislature. In terms of average population per constituency, Malaya would have 60,372 per elected member, Singapore 96,395, Sabah 28,401, and Sarawak 31,022 (Means 1963, 148–49). This gross malapportionment meant that the weight of each vote from Sabah and Sarawak was more than three times that of the weight of a vote from Singapore.² Apparently, Lee accepted such arrangements and viewed them as not his “main difficulty” primarily because Tunku allowed Singapore to retain and exercise autonomy in matters regarding education and labor policies (Lee 1998, 406–7). These were important policy areas for the Chinese majority in Singapore because they wanted autonomy to establish and regulate Chinese schools and the freedom to establish workers' unions. Thus, such a quid pro quo deal was deemed to be acceptable and the best deal that Singapore could obtain from the Tunku.

But on the issue of citizenship and voting rights, another institutionalized demarcation and separation between Singapore and the new federation emerged. Even after the Tunku acceded to the request that Singapore citizens be automatically granted Malaysian citizenship (Lee 2000, 437–38; T. Y. Tan 2008, 106), there remained a clear distinction between the electoral rights of Malaysian citizens who were Singapore citizens and those who were not Singapore citizens. According to Article 31 of the Malaysia Agreement lodged with the United Nations, Malaysian citizens who were Singapore citizens could only be candidates for the 15 seats in the federal legislature allocated to Singapore or candidates for the Singapore state legislature and could only vote in Singapore.³ They were not allowed to be candidates for any other seats in the federal legislature outside of

2. My thanks to Kai Ostwald for clarifying this point.

3. See <https://treaties.un.org/doc/publication/unts/volume%20750/volume-750-i-10760-english.pdf>, accessed May 13, 2020.

Singapore or to be candidates for any other state legislature outside of Singapore or to vote outside of Singapore. Vice versa, Malaysian citizens who were not Singapore citizens could not become candidates for any of the 15 seats in the federal legislature allocated in Singapore or become candidates for the Singapore state legislature and could not vote in Singapore. They could only become candidates for any federal or state seat outside of Singapore and must vote outside of Singapore.

Whatever the Tunku's motivation for proposing this bifurcated citizenship and its voting rights and whatever Lee's motivation for accepting these proposals, the overall net effect is a clear institutionalized separation of electoral politics of the two regions, akin to a particular version of "One Country, Two Systems." (T. Y. Tan 2008, 107). To put it more starkly, it would be equal to citizens of Florida not being able to stand as candidates or vote in New York or citizens of Manchester not being able to stand as candidates or vote in London. This institutionalized suppression of Singapore's interests within the terms of merger thus set the stage and motivation for the PAP to launch expansionary plans across the causeway in a bid to overcome those very institutionalized limitations it accepted in the first place.

PAP's Expansionary Strategy and Its Pushback, 1963–65

Following Birnir's (2007) logic of the non-inclusion of political interests motivating political conflict, the subsequent empirical evidence leans toward Singapore's suppressed interests motivating the PAP to undertake expansionary strategies into mainland Malaya in order to overcome Singapore's institutional limitations contained in the terms of the merger. As Leifer (1965, 54–55) summarized,

The Singapore government, although accepting the limiting constitutional provisions of the Malaysia Agreement, *was determined, despite the known objections of the Malaysian government, to move from what it regarded as a parochial setting on the national scene.* And after the establishment of Malaysia, *the prospect of attracting support from the mainland prompted it to take certain steps* which were regarded in Kuala Lumpur not only as a challenge to the existing multi-racial alliance regime but as a Chinese challenge to the governing system whereby a Malay ruling group enjoyed an entrenched political dominance. (emphasis mine)

Two crucial expansionary “steps” that the PAP took were pivotal in stoking the fires of separatism. First, the PAP sought new supporters on peninsular Malaya by contesting the April 1964 general elections of the newly independent Malaysia, challenging the MCA directly by nominating candidates in nine predominantly urban Chinese electoral districts. In so doing, the PAP broke Lee Kuan Yew’s pre-merger promise to the Tunku of not contesting peninsular Malaya’s elections. Despite the PAP’s tireless campaigning, however, the MCA emerged victorious, winning 27 seats to contribute to the Alliance’s total tally of 89 seats out of a possible 104 parliamentary seats. The PAP’s plan to oust the MCA failed miserably after managing to win only one seat—a result that was met by the PAP leaders with “shock dismay” (Lau 1998, 118–24).

The PAP’s expansionary strategy confirmed the worst fear of Malay conservatives within UMNO—the inability to keep the PAP boxed in within Singapore. Beginning in May 1964, inter-ethnic tensions between the Chinese and Malay gradually rose such a point as to result in violent conflict on the streets and open conflict between the PAP and the Alliance (Fletcher 1969, 40–44; Lau 1998, chapter 5; Lee 1998, chapter 36; Slater 2010, 118–19; Sopiee 1974, 195–205). In a bid to try to hit back against the PAP for contesting in the Malaya elections, radical Malays within UMNO began to stoke the fires of Malay and Chinese inter-ethnic distrust and rivalry by accusing the PAP of neglecting the plight of Malays in Singapore. Despite Lee’s and the PAP’s best efforts to reassure Singaporean Malays that their welfare was well looked after, there was no letup in the attacks by UMNO radicals. Inter-ethnic rivalry soon boiled over into three days of inter-ethnic rioting in late July 1964, alongside more riots in early September 1964. Overall, the two riots led to 36 killed, more than 500 injured, and almost 6,000 detained (Lau 1998, chapter 6; Slater 2010, 119). A truce on all sides was finally agreed upon in late September 1964, which put further violent rhetoric and conflict on ice. The PAP and UMNO agreed to reduce their divisive rhetoric and, more importantly, to “both abstain from expanding their party branches and activities” in each other’s territorial strongholds (Lee 1998, 576–77).

To be clear, that the PAP contesting the April 1964 Malaya elections had the overall effect of provoking separatism sentiments is not in question. What is more empirically vague is the PAP’s decision to contest in the first place. Why did Lee Kuan Yew choose to do so if he knew the act would break his pre-merger promise with the Tunku not to interfere in Malayan politics? From Lee’s point of view, there were two interrelated

reasons. First, the PAP wanted to replace the MCA within the Alliance government to influence government policymaking (Fletcher 1969, 32–39; Lau 1998, chapter 4; Lee 1998, 540–41; Sopiee 1974, chapter 7). The PAP was unable to do so as an “equivocal” “cross-bencher” political party outside of the Alliance (Lee 1998, 518–19). The PAP’s apparent objective to attempt to build a national presence for future elections and to win enough seats to provide leverage for PAP to join the Alliance was reflected in the PAP’s party manifesto.⁴

Second, in Lee’s view, it was the Tunku who broke the pre-merger promise in the first place (Lee 1998, 540). In Singapore’s own elections in late September 1963 just half a year prior to Malaya’s April 1964 elections, the Tunku had come down into Singapore to campaign on behalf of the Alliance in Singapore. According to Lee (1998, 507),

The Tunku’s personal appearance to speak at Alliance rallies had been a most serious development. . . . All this meant that *UMNO did not intend to allow the state to look after itself as we had agreed, and that sooner rather than later we would have to enter Malayan politics to defend our interests. I had hoped to postpone that contest for at least one election term. Now this no longer seemed possible.* (emphasis mine)

This particular quote confirms the hypothesis that the PAP resolved to undertake an expansionary strategy in order to increase its influence and better defend Singapore’s interests. It even confirms that the hypothesized counterfactual existed—if the Tunku had kept to his agreement to leave Singapore to itself, then the PAP’s expansionary strategy might be delayed for at least one election cycle, thus potentially reducing antagonism between the Alliance and the PAP and the prospect of separation.

Even more, the PAP’s direct challenge against the MCA raised the ire of MCA leader and federal finance minister Tan Siew Sin, who actively sought to undermine Singapore’s economic prospects. Not only did he delay all plans for a common market, but he also rejected prospective investors in Singapore and damaged existing industries in the state. His office rejected 67 out of the 69 applications from the Singapore Economic Development Board for pioneer certificates, which were tax-free statuses for prospective

4. See the PAP manifesto in *State and Parliamentary Elections, 1964: Manifestos. Contesting Political Parties: The Alliance, People’s Action Party, Pan Malayan Islamic Party, People’s Progressive Party, Socialist Front, United Democratic Party, Negara* (Kuala Lumpur: Jabatan Penerangan Malaysia, 1964). Mimeograph.

investors (Lee 1998, 600). He also sought to take over Singapore's textile quota to develop a new textile industry in mainland Malaya at the expense of Singapore's existing industry (600–601). In addition, in late 1964, Tan Siew Sin tabled a budget that planned to increase taxes on gross earnings and payrolls, which would hit Singapore the hardest, and also intimated that he would look to force Singapore to increase the proportion of tax revenues it contributed to the federal government's coffers (579–80). Even Tunku Abdul Rahman (1977, 115) himself noted Tan's overall hostility to the PAP and Singapore, acknowledging that "what he [i.e., Tan] succeeded in getting went far beyond my idea."

Consequently, the PAP would go on to undertake a second expansionary "step" outside of the institutional limitations of Singapore to further challenge the political dominance of UMNO and the Alliance. In January 1965, Donald Stephens, federal minister for Sabah affairs and leader of the United Pasok Momogun Kadazan Organization (UPKO) approached Lee Kuan Yew with a proposal for the PAP to merge with UPKO and win a majority in the Sabah State Assembly (Lee 1998, 603).⁵ This inspired Lee Kuan Yew to counter-propose an anti-Alliance coalition between the PAP and all the minor opposition parties in mainland Malaya, Sabah, and Sarawak. The momentum for an anti-Alliance coalition quickly accelerated with meetings in early February and early March among the anti-Alliance parties. There were representatives from the PAP and UPKO, alongside those from the Sabah United People's Party (SUPP), the United Democratic Party (UDP) from Penang, and the People's Progressive Party (PPP) from mainland Malaya. Beginning in March 1965, Lee Kuan Yew began to promulgate the idea of a "Malaysian Malaysia," where meritocratic governance was based on one common national identity with equal rights for all ethnicities—a vision that openly challenged and opposed the Alliance's model of Malay-Muslim dominant consociationalism (Sopiee 1974, 199–205; Fletcher 1969, chapter 4). The institutional and organizational vehicle for the idea of a "Malaysian Malaysia" was the Malaysia Solidarity Convention (MSC), formed in May 1965.

The MSC saw the PAP ally with the four other smaller parties—the UDP, PPP, SUPP, and Sarawak's Machinda Party—under one single large organizational umbrella. Political leaders in UMNO and the Alliance saw

5. See also Oral History Interview of Lee Khoon Choy, political secretary to Lee Kuan Yew and of the Malaysian Solidarity Convention, July 21, 1981, National Archives of Singapore. Reel/Disc 67 of 72, accessed May 15, 2020, https://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/oral_history_interviews/record-details/def3d323-115d-11e3-83d5-0050568939ad

the MSC as the PAP's strategic attempt to form an anti-Alliance political bloc that threatened to displace the Alliance as the governing coalition of the country (Fletcher 1969, 49–51; Lau 1998, 227–52; Sopiee 1974, 201–2). Indeed, in his speech to the MSC convention in June 1965, Lee Kuan Yew made sure to refer to 40-40-20, the proportion of the population that were Malays, Chinese, and Others (Lee 1998, 618). If UMNO only appealed to the Malay population, he warned, its days were numbered. His speech had the effect of further deepening the chasm between the Tunku and the Alliance, on the one hand, and Lee Kuan Yew and the PAP, on the other (Lau 1998, 239–46; Sopiee 1974, 200–202). As Dr. Lim Hock Siew, a member of the Barisan Socialis, concluded, the MSC's objective

was also to *strike fear into the heart of UMNO that there was a possibility that the MSC could take over power from UMNO*. Because if you added the total number of MPs that came from all the parties in the MSC, that is the non-Alliance parties, then there were about twenty or so fewer than that of the Alliance MPs in the parliament. And therefore, *the possibility of the MSC winning the next general elections was distinctively present*. And that I think was a very decisive factor in forcing UMNO to make up its mind on what to do with the PAP. (emphasis mine)⁶

The situation was made worse in May 1965 when Lee Kuan Yew made another speech in the Federal Parliament that seemingly put down the Malay political leaders in UMNO and also questioned the efficacy of UMNO's pro-Malay-Bumiputera policies based on the principle of Malay special rights enshrined in the constitution (Lee 1998, 610–15). In the Tunku's (1977, 120) assessment, it was “the straw that broke the camel's back.” Even if Lee had no intentions of undermining Malay rights or overthrowing the Alliance leadership, the manner in which he and the PAP pushed the issue of race forced the Tunku and UMNO to see no other way out than to get rid of Singapore once and for all.⁷

6. Oral History Interview of Dr. Lim Hock Siew, member of Barisan Socialis, June 26, 1986, National Archives of Singapore, Reel/Disc 49 of 61, accessed May 15, 2020, https://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/oral_history_interviews/record-details/7b7e8331-1160-11e3-83d5-0050568939ad

7. Oral History Interview of Ya'acob Bin Mohamed (Haji), PAP member, January 7, 1987, National Archives of Singapore, Reel/Disc 17 of 18, accessed May 29, 2020, https://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/oral_history_interviews/record-details/77846bb6-115f-11e3-83d5-0050568939ad

By late June 1965, Tunku Abdul Rahman had made his mind up. While recovering in a London hospital from a bout of shingles, he instructed his deputy Tun Razak to begin negotiations for separation (Lau 1998, 257–65; Sopiee 1974, 203–7). By early August, all the legal negotiations for separation were complete, and by August 9, 1965, Singapore was out from Malaysia as an independent country on its own. In his own book published in 1977, Tunku Abdul Rahman further confirmed the hypothesis that Singapore's diminished political representation in the new federation was a key motivation for the PAP's expansionary strategy, which ultimately led to spiraling conflict and separatism. He (1977, 116) recalled,

I felt that once we were enmeshed in Singapore's day-to-day life and administration, and controlling the finance of the State, the inevitable consequence would be that the Singapore Government would want to take a full share in the Malaysian administration; and *if we were not prepared to give Singapore the right, then Mr Lee Kuan Yew's attack on Malaysia was justified.* (emphasis mine)

Conclusion

The foregoing analysis vividly illustrates how Singapore's suppressed political representation in the new Federation of Malaysia led to its separation less than two years after merger. According to the empirical evidence I have presented, separatism was less a clash of personalities, nationalist ideals, or ideological orientations toward ethnic identities and more about inequity in political representation. At the point of merger in September 1963, Singapore's political representation in the new Federal Parliament was circumscribed while its citizens had limited franchise in influencing politics in other regions of the new nation-state, even as the PAP was excluded from the Alliance cabinet. When Lee Kuan Yew and the PAP realized that they could not displace the MCA within the overall Alliance framework, they forged the MSC as an alternative route toward greater political representation. And when the Tunku and the Alliance recognized the threat of the MSC to their continued political dominance, they decided to allow Singapore to separate.

To be sure, one can speculate about the range of possible outcomes if counterfactual conditions are considered. If Singapore's political leader was not Lee Kuan Yew but some other less capable politician, they might have posed less of a threat to the Tunku and the Alliance's political domi-

nance. In the scenario, Singapore's separation from Malaysia might have been avoided. Yet, the festering sore of Singapore's suppressed political representation would still persist, implying that separation could be delayed but might not be ultimately avoided. Similarly, if the federation had begun its life as a fully autocratic regime rather than a democratic one, then the outcome may also be different. At various times, the Tunku and UMNO's top political leaders had considered arresting, or at least sidelining, Lee Kuan Yew in a bid to eliminate his biting rhetorical attacks and to appease UMNO's more radical supporters (Lee 2000, chapters 36 and 40; Tunku Abul Rahman Putra 1977, 127). An autocratic Malaysian regime with fewer qualms about the cost of repression might have chosen the "arrest" option. If Lee was arrested and any subsequent civil unrest put down forcefully, Singapore might not have separated from Malaysia at all. But the Tunku ultimately did not do so because he perceived the cost of repression to be quite high. Arresting Lee might stall separation but could also provoke more civil unrest from his supporters in Singapore. As Philip Moore, the British acting commissioner in Singapore, remarked on the aftermath of Lee's 1963 overwhelming victory in Singapore's local elections, "The Malaysian government would either have to do business with him or put him in jail. The latter is now unthinkable" (Lee 1998, 508).

Overall, this narrative does not totally discount the differences in political ideology between Lee's PAP and Tunku's UMNO. Nor does it totally discount the idea that Lee Kuan Yew misread the Tunku and UMNO's intentions in the run-up to merger and during Singapore's marriage within the federation (Barr 1997). Lee's PAP was insistent on a multiethnic meritocracy where all races would compete as equals, whereas the Tunku's Alliance was built on preserving multiethnic harmony via Malay-Bumiputera dominant consociationalism and Malay-Bumiputera special rights. Yet, this clash of ideologies could have been avoided if the new federation's institutions were more inclusive and Singapore's interests were more equitably represented. The fact that their representation was inequitable meant that the political clash between the two political parties was unavoidable and that Singapore's separation from the federation happened sooner rather than later, or not at all.