



From the Ballot Box to Policy Blueprints: What Singapore's Election Outcome Means for the Region

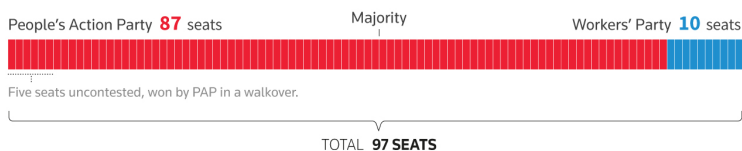
Chhun Phalanady and Pheng Thean

What the Vote Revealed

Singapore's 3 May 2025 general election delivered a decisive verdict: voters reaffirmed their preference for institutional steadiness in a time of heightened external turbulence. The People's Action Party (PAP), led by Prime Minister Lawrence Wong, secured 87 out of 97 parliamentary seats and 65.6% of the vote share—its strongest performance since 2011 and a rare result for a first-time premier.¹

Exhibit 1: Singapore General Election Results

The People's Action Party, which has ruled since before Singapore's 1965 independence, won 87 of the 97 parliamentary seats up for grabs, with victories by huge margins in many of the 33 constituencies



Historical



Note: Results updated as at May 4, 2025 at 9:00am SGT.

Source of Graph: <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/singapore-votes-test-ruling-party-monopoly-2025-05-03/>

¹ Tessa Wong, "Fears of Global Instability Drive Singapore Voters Into Ruling People's Action Party's Arms," BBC, May 3, 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cly505gqwwpo>.

For Wong, who was sworn in on 15 May 2024, the outcome marked more than political continuity.² It was a clear public endorsement of policy competence in an era of global economic fragmentation.

Just weeks before polling day, the United States imposed a sweeping 10% tariff on all imports from Singapore, triggering concerns about the erosion of rules-based trade. Wong responded forcefully in Parliament, warning that if multilateral principles collapse, small states risk being sidelined in a world dominated by bilateral power plays. He reframed the election not as business-as-usual, but as a trust test: could Singapore's governance model still hold under pressure from shocks beyond its control?³

The electorate answered with clarity. While the Workers' Party retained its ten seats, it failed to expand further amid a fragmented opposition. Wong's calm, strategic posture during the pandemic and his recent articulation of Singapore's external economic strategy, delivered in the S. Rajaratnam Lecture (16 April) and May Day Rally (1 May) – likely helped consolidate perceptions of credible leadership.⁴ The result reflects not just a preference for stability but also a readiness to entrust the PAP with navigating what lies ahead.⁵

Translating Mandate into Economic Governance

What comes next, however, is not just about preserving stability but activating it. The mandate gives Wong's government the latitude to move and raises expectations for delivery. With inflationary aftershocks persisting and a trade slowdown looming, the challenge now is how to shield long-term competitiveness without dulling the momentum voters just handed it.

² Lawrence Wong, "PM Lawrence Wong at the Swearing-In Ceremony (May 2024)," Prime Minister's Office Singapore, May 15, 2024, <https://www.pmo.gov.sg/Newsroom/PM-Lawrence-Wong-at-the-Swearing-In-Ceremony-May-2024>.

³ Reuters, "U.S. Tariffs Will Cause Demand Shock to Singapore Economy: MAS," *Reuters*, April 28, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/us-tariffs-will-cause-demand-shock-singapore-economy-mas-2025-04-28/>.

⁴ Matthew Mohan, "Lawrence Wong's Leadership Amid COVID-19 Pandemic Helped Elevate Him to Top Post," *CNA*, April 14, 2025, <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/lawrence-wong-4g-leader-analysts-2626466>.

⁵ Xinghui Kok and Jun Yuan Yong, "Singapore's Ruling Party Extends Monopoly With Decisive Election Win," *Reuters*, May 4, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/singapore-votes-test-ruling-partys-monopoly-2025-05-03/>.

At the May Day Rally, Wong acknowledged the risks: slowing external demand, weaker wage growth, and potential job losses, especially in trade-linked sectors. In response, his administration moved quickly to establish a national task force, co-chaired by MTI and NTUC, to monitor disruptions and coordinate support for businesses and workers. Rather than defaulting to reactive stimulus, the government is leaning into pre-emptive coordination, sharpening Singapore's ability to adjust early and systematically.⁶

This next phase of governance will test the operational strength of Singapore's tripartite model. Often overlooked in external analysis, the state-business-labour alignment enables targeted interventions to move quickly without political gridlock. Wong's team is now positioned to deploy calibrated responses, from wage support and upskilling pathways to liquidity support for SMEs, without compromising fiscal discipline. These are not new tools, but they are backed by a political mandate to act confidently and coherently.⁷

Tariff Negotiations and Strategic Leverage in ASEAN

Sometimes, the most powerful idea comes without fanfare. Just weeks before the election, in his S. Rajaratnam Lecture on April 16th, PM Wong reaffirmed that ASEAN remains central to Singapore's foreign policy, especially in a world becoming more divided through the tariff tug-of-war.⁸

The US's blanked 10% tariff, imposed on all imports of Singapore despite its open trade regime, reinforced a growing reality: interdependence is now seen as vulnerability. Rather than retaliate, Wong argued for strengthening ASEAN from within through credible coordination and timely delivery.⁹

⁶Lawrence Wong, "PM Lawrence Wong at May Day Rally 2025," Prime Minister's Office Singapore, May 1, 2025, <https://www.pmo.gov.sg/Newsroom/PM-Lawrence-Wong-at-May-Day-Rally-2025>.

⁷Bapat Sara Manish, "Singapore's Tripartite Partners Must Make 'Short-term Trade-offs and Long-term Investments' in Transformation: SNEF," *The Business Times*, April 29, 2025, <https://www.businesstimes.com.sg/singapore/economy-policy/singapores-tripartite-partners-must-make-short-term-trade-offs-and-long-term-investments>.

⁸Lawrence Wong, "PM Lawrence Wong at the S Rajaratnam Lecture 2025," Prime Minister's Office Singapore, April 16, 2025, <https://www.pmo.gov.sg/Newsroom/PM-Lawrence-Wong-at-the-S-Rajaratnam-Lecture-2025>.

⁹*Ibid.*

As such, his lecture advanced three practical targets:

- Complete 100% intra-ASEAN tariff elimination
- Tackle non-tariff barriers (NTBs), which still account for over 60% of trade costs
- Accelerate the ASEAN Digital Economy Framework Agreement (DEFA)¹⁰

These measures are not new, but the timing matters. With a fresh electoral mandate, the PAP has the legitimacy and confidence to play this two-level game.¹¹ It now holds the political space to lead ASEAN not just in vision but also in execution, particularly as infrastructure, energy, and digital integration become urgent.

Singapore's leverage lies in technical credibility, not political weight. It has long shaped regional cooperation through process, not posture. In this fragmented moment, Wong's approach signals a return to pragmatic regionalism, where influence stems not from size but from reliability and readiness to deliver.¹²

Narrowing the Execution Gap

ASEAN has never lacked ambition, but execution remains its chronic challenge. With Malaysia chairing ASEAN in 2025 and Singapore preparing to take the helm in 2027, there is a timely window to shift from designing frameworks to delivering outcomes. Rather than introduce new initiatives, Wong's administration has signaled its intent to operationalize existing regional commitments, particularly the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), through clear priorities and pragmatic sequencing.¹³

Infrastructure connectivity is a strategic entry point. The Asian Development Bank estimates that ASEAN will require USD 2.8 trillion in infrastructure investment by 2030 to sustain inclusive

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Wong, "Fears of Global Instability Drive Singapore Voters Into Ruling People's Action Party's Arms."

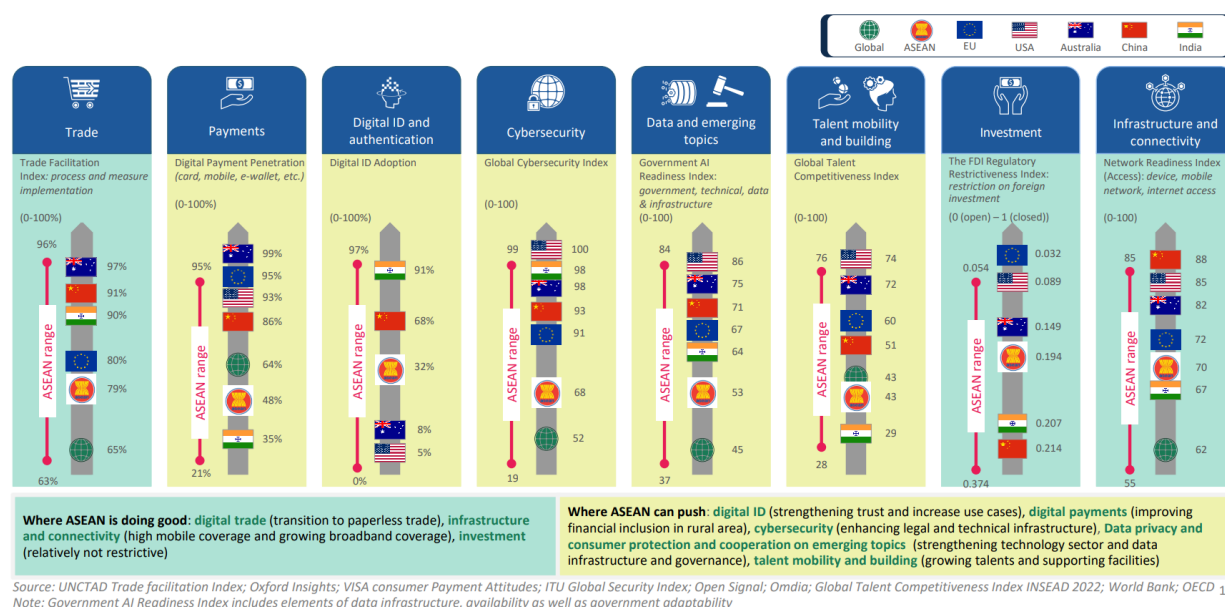
¹²BERNAMA, "ASEAN Should Accelerate Economic Integration Efforts - Lawrence Wong," ASEAN Malaysia 2025, April 14, 2025, <https://asean.bernama.com/news.php?id=2413533>.

¹³Wong, "PM Lawrence Wong at the S Rajaratnam Lecture 2025."

growth. With its strengths in green finance and digital logistics, Singapore is well-positioned to support project financing and align national initiatives with regional objectives.¹⁴

Parallel to this is the push for digital integration. ASEAN's digital economy, valued at approximately USD 300 to 400 billion in 2023, is projected to grow to USD 1 trillion by 2030, and potentially double to USD 2 trillion with the effective implementation of the ASEAN Digital Economy Framework Agreement (DEFA). Singapore's credibility in regulatory coordination and tech diplomacy makes it a natural driver in this space, from rule-setting to capacity building.¹⁵

Exhibit 2: Benchmarking ASEAN's Progress on Trade, Tech & Talent (2024)



Source: https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/DEFA-Report-public-summary-expanded_Final_25112024.pdf

Yet this agenda cannot ignore ASEAN's historical delivery gap. *Exhibit 2* illustrates ASEAN's mixed progress across digital pillars, revealing the depth of the execution gap and where leadership

¹⁴Asian Development Bank, "Innovative Financing Key to Private Sector Participation in ASEAN+3 Infrastructure Development", May 02, 2023, <https://www.adb.org/news/innovative-financing-key-private-sector-participation-asean3-infrastructure-development>

¹⁵Noudhy Valdryno, "The ASEAN DEFA: The Right Opportunity to Leapfrog ASEAN's Digital Economy - Tech for Good Institute," Tech for Good Institute, n.d., <https://techforgoodinstitute.org/blog/expert-opinion/the-asean-defa-the-right-opportunity-to-leapfrog-aseans-digital-economy/>

must now focus.¹⁶ Furthermore, as of 2015, only 79.5% of ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) measures had been implemented. Gaps persist in enforcement, harmonisation, and follow-through.¹⁷ For Singapore, the opportunity is not to reinvent ASEAN's vision, but to close this gap through trust-based execution by sequencing implementation realistically, building technical consensus, and ensuring delivery matches ambition.

Conclusion: A Vote to Lead Quietly, But Decisively

Singapore's 2025 election was not just a referendum on domestic competence but a signal to the region. With renewed political capital, PM Lawrence Wong stands at the helm of a small state with outsized influence, navigating a world fractured by tariffs, fragmentation, and trust deficits. *In this moment, ASEAN does not need louder voices, and it needs deliverers.* And Singapore, armed with mandate and method, is poised to turn quiet credibility into strategic weight. The question now is not whether it will lead, but how far others are willing to follow.

¹⁶ Boston Consulting Group, "Study on the ASEAN Digital Economy Framework Agreement (DEFA)," Slide show, ASEAN, (November 8, 2024) (November 8, 2024), https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/DEFA-Report-public-summary-expanded_Final_25112024.pdf.

¹⁷ Sanchita Basu Das, "Mind the Gap: Explaining Implementation Shortfalls in the ASEAN Economic Community", ISEAS Yusof Ishak, September 2017, <https://www.iseas.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/pdfs/ISEAS%20EWP%202017-07%20Sanchita.pdf>

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