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:

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