

## How have younger voters affected GE2020?

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Probably the biggest and most talked-about event to happen in 2020 in Singapore was the election – or GE2020. Social media has never seen such levels of activism, particularly from younger adults who are traditionally seen as apathetic to politics. With a record 10 opposition candidates winning seats in Parliament, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said young people have “very significantly different life aspirations and priorities”.

Younger voters and social media were crucial to the results this GE2020.

### Social media influence

A poll conducted by The Straits Times in February found little hint of young voters turning away from the ruling party, suggesting that this age group might have been influenced by events closer to Polling Day.

Social media played a big part in GE2020, and according to an interviewee: “The opposition had a much better social media game but I also think a lot of youth had their own echo chambers for opposition online.”

The paper interviewed new voters to get their views. Those who voted for the opposition did so for a number of reasons, including:

- to allow the chance for more voices in Parliament
- the issue surrounding Raeesah Khan
- freedom of speech and expression
- climate crisis

CNA’s commentary on how the WP won big during GE2020 was due to many factors, one of which is social media. According to Dr Gillian Koh, “the Workers’ Party’s slick use of social media and being relatable helped it attain the opposition’s best ever showing in Singapore.”

According to Dr Koh, the Hammer Show and Instagram stories were tailored to younger voters, who in past post-election surveys by the Institute of Policy Studies, was the segment more inclined to turn to the internet for election material and act as swing voters.

Today’s commentary from Ambassador-at-Large Chan Heng Chee iterated that those aged between 25 and 35 formed the biggest bulge in its population pyramid in this year during GE2020.

According to Prof Chan, “the Workers’ Party understood this and chose youthful candidates and issues for the Zoomer generation... This online digital politics is now the new retail politics — up close and personal.”

In her lecture, Prof Chan reiterated: “Clearly, this age group bought the opposition message of the need for diverse voices in Parliament and the need for checks and balances.”

## **What does this say about Singapore?**

The personality of politicians could be a key factor in determining the votes of the electorate during GE2020.

There was a large number of young (and first-time) voters this year, and people in this group are typically more influenced by social media than traditional media. So most opposition parties made good use of social media and networking sites to reach out to young voters.

80-year-old PSP chief Tan Cheng Bock became an internet sensation with his Gen Z lingo such as “hypebeast” and “woke” on his social media postings. WP candidate Nicole Seah was also active on social media. SDP’s Dr Chee Soon Juan engaged in light-hearted Instagram Questions, engaging Gen Zs to ask a variety of random youth-related questions.

There was, of course the “Jamus Effect”. The Harvard-educated WP candidate emerged as a rising star during a televised political debate, which saw him capturing the hearts and minds of Singaporeans. His continuous presence on social media cemented his popularity.

While this GE has laid a unique foundation for opposition parties to gain a foothold in their various wards, the years leading up to the next elections will be interesting to watch.