

Larger percentage of ‘swing voters’ cast ballot for opposition in GE2020 in reversal of 2015 findings: IPS survey

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Among Singaporeans who voted in 2020 for a party different from their choice in the 2015 General Election, a larger percentage swung from the People’s Action Party (PAP) to the opposition compared to the other way round, according to a post-election survey by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS).

This was a reversal from 2015’s survey results, which found that more swing voters swung from the opposition to the PAP.

Swing voters were defined in the survey as those who voted for one party in 2015 and another party in 2020.

Eight per cent of respondents in this year’s survey were voters who swung from the PAP to the opposition.

Three per cent of respondents reported a swing from the opposition to the PAP.

The results were, however, from a small sample size, said Assoc Prof Zhang Weiyu, who presented the findings at a forum via Facebook Live on Thursday (Oct 8).

Among the more than 2,000 people surveyed, 56 per cent did not answer the questions on who they voted for either in 2015 or 2020.

“Some of the numbers are quite low, especially for the category on the opposition to the PAP. So we had lots of missing data due to refusals,” she said at a media briefing on Wednesday.

This was part of a larger survey which IPS commissioned from YouGov. The company gathered the views of 2,018 citizens aged 21 years and above, from Jul 13 to 21, with the data weighted for the proportion of gender, race and age groups of Singaporeans.

DEMOGRAPHICS AND TRAITS OF SWING VOTERS

Respondents who swung from the PAP to the opposition in 2020 were more likely to be men, comprising 64 per cent of those surveyed.

In 2015, women were more likely to have swung from the PAP to the opposition, with 70 per cent of them reported having done so.

There were no significant differences in ethnicity, housing types, age and education in swing voting patterns this year, compared to the proportion of these groups in the Singaporean population, according to the survey.

This was unlike in 2015, when a lower proportion of Chinese voters and a higher proportion of Indian voters swung from the PAP to the opposition. A higher proportion of voters living in one- or two-room flats also swung from the PAP to the opposition in 2015.

In addition, respondents who swung to the opposition were most likely to have signed a petition in the past six months.

They also joined online rallies the most and were most likely to have attended opposition rallies. This was in contrast to 2015, where respondents who reported swinging from the PAP to the opposition attended opposition rallies the least.

These respondents were also least concerned about the quality of candidates, a party's track record and the management of the COVID-19 pandemic, but were most concerned about having different voices in Parliament. This is consistent with 2015's findings.

"I would say 2020 PAP to opposition swing voters were pretty much typical," said Assoc Prof Zhang.

"They tended to be males, they were also more active in politics, they trusted newspapers and radio less and they liked to have alternative views in Parliament. That was often in line with our expectations of swing voters in this country."

As for respondents who swung from the opposition to the PAP, they attended e-rallies the least.

Only 20 per cent from this group reported joining a rally, compared to 31 per cent among non-swing voters and 46 per cent of those who swung from the PAP to the opposition.

Those who did attend rallies went to almost the same number of PAP and opposition rallies, similar to non-swing voters.

This group of respondents were also most concerned about the quality of candidates, according to the findings.

Given that this was billed as an Internet election, with no physical rallies because of COVID-19 restrictions, all voters relied on social media at an equal level, said Assoc Prof Zhang.

This was compared to the 2015 General Election when voters who swung from the PAP to the opposition used online party sources more.

Mass media usage was also at an equal level among all kinds of voters, Assoc Prof Zhang noted.

Based on the data, she added: "What really influenced a swing seemed to be the voting reason, caring about alternative voices in the Parliament, rather than specific social media usage."