

Younger voters don't want to see 'political overkill', desire 'fair' politics: Ambassador-at-Large Chan Heng Chee
Heng said that PAP will have to understand this group of younger voters better to win back their votes.

Zhangxin Zheng
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Ambassador-at-Large Chan Heng Chee gave her take on the General Election 2020 in a virtual lecture on July 15.

The lecture, which lasted almost two hours, is part of her three-part series as an SR Nathan fellow with the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS), a think-tank from the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy at the National University of Singapore (NUS).

The lecture was moderated by Bilahari Kausikan, retired diplomat and Chairman of Middle East Institute, NUS, and it was live-streamed on Facebook.

As GE2020 just concluded last Friday, Chan started the lecture by sharing some of her observations and thoughts.

Chan's take on what cost PAP some votes

Chan said that GE2020 was a "historical watershed", with the Workers' Party (WP) winning two GRCs and one SMC, 10 seats in Parliament in all, and for the first time Singapore has an official Leader of the Opposition.

Chan added that Singaporeans chose "safety, security, and solution by returning the incumbent People's Action Party (PAP) but at the same time wanted to strengthen opposition voices, and checks and balances in the legislature".

Chan also said that Singaporeans cast their votes in view of what had happened in the past five years of governance, how the government has dealt with Covid-19 pandemic in the past five months, as well as the nine days of campaigning.

She highlighted factors that have cost PAP some votes, which include unpopular policies such as the amendment to the Elected Presidency and the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (POFMA).

The anxiety among businesses and people as well as the lack of clarity in communication arising from micromanaging during Covid-19 are also contributing factors that turned people away from the PAP during the GE2020.

Lastly, the nine days of campaigning is about messaging and online presence and savviness of the party.

PAP needs to engage younger voters better

In this case, Singapore is at her "youth peak", Chan said.

She suggested that the WP's younger candidates and the issues that they focused on have enabled them to resonate with the younger voters better.

The younger voters, Chan termed as the "Zoomer generation" are drawn to "personal narratives and 'I feel your pain' connectivity, approachability and authenticity."

"This online digital politics is now the new retail politics — up close and personal," Chan said.

Chan pointed out that most importantly, moving forward, she does not think that this demographic group of voters will become more conservative as they age as observed from overseas trends.

Desire for a kinder, gentler politics

She believes that the voters will "continue to support diversity in Parliament as a good thing" even though their personal concerns may change at different stages of life.

As such, PAP has to understand this group of younger voters better to "win back their votes", Chan concluded.

Younger voters want to see a "kinder, gentler" politics in Singapore and there is a strong desire to see the incumbents play politics more "fairly" when dealing with opposition parties.

Chan said: "Educated and younger Singaporeans do not want to see political overkill when the government deals with political opponents. This may be the result of the decades-long predominance of the ruling party in parliament and in government that as politics matures and evolves these are the values and norms that have come to be shared by the society and the community."