POPS(10) — IPS POST-ELECTION SURVEY 2020

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) conducted the fourth wave of the IPS Post-Election Survey beginning the day after the 10 July 2020 General Election (GE2020) in Singapore, from 11 July to 21 August. Known as POPS(10), it is the 10th edition of its broader series of surveys called 'Perceptions of Policies in Singapore Surveys' (POPS).

METHODOLOGY AND INTERPRETATION OF THE DATA

2.   IPS commissioned Degree Census Consultancy Pte Ltd to gather the views of Singaporeans aged 21 years and above to understand voter attitudes and behaviour. The table below provides information on the sample size of the 2020 study in comparison to past surveys.

Table 1: Samples of the IPS Post-Election Surveys, 2006, 2011, 2015, 2020

2006	Interlocking quota sample (average monthly household income and age) of **985 citizens** using landline
2011	Random sample of **2,084 citizens** using landline
2015	Random sample of **2,015 citizens** using landline
2020	Random sample of **2,001 citizens using landline** **1,002 citizens on mobile phone** via Degree Census panel **1,024 citizens on internet survey** via Degree Census panel

3.   This year, responses were also collected from mobile phone and internet users on Degree Census's panel, to examine if there were any differences in responses when the same questions were posed because this was done through different modes.

4.   The data was reweighted to make up for the shortfall or oversampling of Singapore citizens on the basis of age, gender and ethnicity. Characteristic of the challenges of conducting surveys by remote means in Singapore, before weights were applied on the final sample, there was a smaller proportion of those with below secondary-level educational qualifications, those in the working class and also those in the upper-middle-and-above income group in it, but a higher proportion of those with diploma or higher educational qualifications.

5.   Given those limitations, the findings are generalisable to the citizen population as is the data from the 2011 and 2015 surveys. The margin of error at 95% confidence interval in this 2020 survey for the landline sample is +/- 2.2% and for the total mixed mode sample (landline, mobile and internet), +/- 1.5%. Only findings and differences in mean scores that are at the level of statistical significance are reported here.

FINDINGS ON KEY TOPICS

Issues
Burning question on issues: How important was the handling of COVID-19?

6.   As has been the case throughout the post-election survey series, the most important issue in shaping voting decisions for respondents in 2020 was 'the need for good and efficient government'.

7.   A new item in this year's survey, 'Government's handling of the COVID situation' was among the top three issues — 89% of all respondents said it was 'important' or 'very important'.

8.   When compared with the findings in 2015, there were three issues where the proportion of respondents choosing the 'very important' rating increased markedly - 9 percentage points, which was the highest among the full set of issues. They were:

    8.1.   'Job situation', which was particularly salient for respondents in the 30–54 age bands, those whose household monthly income ranged from $2,000 to $6,999 or what we call the low-middle to middle-middle segment, Malays and Indians, and men.

    8.2.   'Cost of living', which was particularly salient for respondents of the same age and income bands as for 'job situation', but also for those in the working and intermediate occupational classes and for diploma holders.

    8.3   'Need for different views in Parliament' was particularly salient for respondents in the 21–29 age band, those in the household monthly income band of $5,000 to $6,999, or what is called the middle-middle income band, those in the service (PMET) occupational class, and diploma and university degree holders.

9.   The first two issues suggest that the question of sustainable livelihoods especially in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic affected the vote for respondents of working age and in the low to middle income households. They are the most vulnerable to threats to job and income security. Bread and butter issues were critical to them.

10.   On the other hand, the third issue suggests that political ideals were important too but particularly to the young and better-educated.

11.   Therefore, both sets of considerations played out in GE2020 but among different groups of voters.

Credibility of Parties

Burning question on credibility of parties: Which segments might have affected the overall change in support for the People's Action Party (PAP) and the Workers' Party (WP)?

12.   In the survey, respondents were asked to indicate, from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree', whether each of the six top political parties[1] in GE2020, was 'credible'. The ranking derived from the survey matched that achieved in the general election.

13.   Compared to 2015, the largest change for the PAP was in the 'agree' category — from 63% in 2015 to 57% in 2020. There was a 13 percentage point drop in the combined 'strongly agree/agree' responses among those aged 40–49. More generally, there were drops in positive credibility rating among those whose monthly household income ranged from $0 to $4,999, also known as the low to low-middle income bands, among HDB 1-3 room flats dwellers, and men.

14.   The largest change for the WP was in the 'strongly agree' category — from 8% in 2015 to 20% in 2020. Examining the results across age, there were rises in the 'strongly agree/agree' responses in the 30–34 age band and among seniors. More generally, there were rises in positive credibility rating among those in the service (PMET) occupational class, as well as those who have only post-secondary educational qualifications, HDB 1-3 room flats dwellers, and women.

15.   These findings reinforce the sense that the issue of livelihoods, especially for the low to middle income households, influenced support for the PAP and WP. Respondents in the highest occupation class of service (PMET) found the WP credible, yet so did those in the lowest housing category which means there were proportions of respondents on both ends of the socio-economic spectrum that found the WP credible.

Cluster Analysis on Political Pluralism

Burning question on pluralism: Did support for political pluralism revert to its upward trend after the dip in 2015? Was it still related to social class?

16.   The staple of the IPS Post-Election Survey series is a cluster analysis around five items. Responses to these five questions indicate if a respondent believed that political pluralism is important and can be achieved through the current electoral system.

17.   The analysis placed in the 'Conservative' category in this schema of analysis, respondents who disagreed that there is value in political pluralism and need for any change in the electoral system. It placed in the 'Pluralist' category respondents who agreed there is value in political pluralism and need for change in the electoral system to enable that to happen. Those who had an eclectic mix of views were placed in what is called the 'Swing' category.

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[1] All contesting political parties were ranked based on the numerical amount of votes they received.

18.   When compared to the 2015 survey, the proportion of those in the Conservative category shrunk from 44.3% to 18.5%, the proportion in the Swing category rose from 37.8% to 59.2% and proportion in the Pluralist category rose from 18% to 22.4%.

19.   The highest proportions of Pluralists were found among respondents in the youngest age band and the highest socio-economic groups as indicated by their status in educational attainment, housing type, occupational class and quantum of monthly household income.

20.   What was different in 2020, however, was that there were rises in the proportion of those who were Pluralists in a different socio-economic spectrum too —respondents in the low household income band ($0 to $1,999) at 7.2%, and those with post-secondary qualifications only (JC/ITE, etc.), at 8.2%.

21.   Hence, there were two effects taking place in terms of support for political pluralism — first, the consistent trend of those in the higher socio-economic class supporting political pluralism and the second, the effects of bread and butter issues at the other end of the socio-economic spectrum so that such respondents felt there was need for political opposition in Parliament. If indeed so, this second factor will be specific to the difficult economic conditions surrounding GE2020.

Communication Channels
Burning question on communication channels: How important was online campaigning compared to other forms of communication?

22.   Given the constraints of campaigning in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was only to be expected that the internet would be more important as a communications channel in GE2020 then before — but by how much and for whom, and in particular, which online platforms were most salient and were online rallies popular at all?

23.   First, comparing against data of past surveys, 2020 is the year in which the internet ranked the highest in importance for respondents, out of the 11 modes. Television, newspapers and then rallies that were presented online because mass gatherings were disallowed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, followed in that order.

24.   In 2020, the internet was especially important to post-Independence voters, and those in the service (PMET) class, much like in 2015. The younger the respondent and the higher the occupational class, the more likely the internet was important to him or her. It was also the youngest respondents, those in the higher occupational segments, the middle-middle income, and those with post-secondary education and above who tuned into online rallies.

25.   Among the list of specific internet platforms that were mentioned by respondents who said the internet was 'important' or 'very important' in providing material that shaped their vote, Facebook came up tops, as it had in 2015, but what was surprising was that mainstream media, Channel NewsAsia (CNA) which is available online, followed with the second highest number of mentions. YouTube had the third highest number of mentions. Twitter as the fourth most cited channel in 2015 was replaced by Instagram in 2020.

Modality Effects
Burning question: Is there difference in views among those who responded to survey on landline, mobile or online?

26.   There is always a question among researchers about whether those who respond to surveys on political attitudes online are different from those who do so on other platforms. This may be because they seemed to seek or want to contribute to alternative views, or because, it is argued, the medium provides a greater sense of anonymity that allows those on it to be more authentic in their expressions.

27.   Examining the responses across the modalities, it was found that respondents to the survey via the internet had different mean scores at the level of statistical significance from the other respondents on landlines and mobile phones, for several items. The ones where there was at least a +/- 0.1 difference in mean scores were:
- Fairness of government policy (more important).
- Whether Singapore has been well-governed since GE2015 (lower level of agreement).
- 'Hardworking' as a trait of candidates (more important).
- Television, online rallies in addition to the internet being the most important source of material on the election (more important).
- Being a Conservative in the IPS schema of analysis (weaker).
- Being a Pluralist in the IPS schema of analysis (stronger).

To explain, even the Conservatives among those who were surveyed online were more oriented towards views that support political pluralism than the Conservative respondents engaged via landlines and mobile phones.

29.   Further research will be conducted to ascertain if there are deeper underlying biases associated with responding to surveys on political matters through different modes.

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About the Research Team

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The Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) is a research centre of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy at the National University of Singapore (NUS).

Degree Census Consultancy Pte Ltd was commissioned to collect views for POPS(10). The samples of mobile phone users and those completing the survey online were drawn from its panel.