

## **Beneath the hood of GE2015**

**Are PAP supporters of a different breed than non-PAP supporters? Does social media have any value in politics? The IPS surveys looked to answer these and other questions.**

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WHILE the SG2015 election may seem like a distant memory for the lay person, it has obviously provided much fodder for the think tanks. The Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) has just released its findings on the election. Among the topics covered were the perception of governance by Singaporeans of different political inclinations, the performance of the parties online and the behaviour of voters online.

SIX-SIX.COM picks out the key points from the findings. There were some obvious outcomes, such as the fact that this was not a social media election. But that was already evident once the polling results started coming in.

The findings were inconclusive in part, and begged further questions. We pose the questions at the end of the respective sections, and hope to have answers after the big powwow at the end of the IPS debate that took place earlier this evening.

### **Singaporeans want diversity and credibility**

In the IPS study on perception of governance, non-PAP voters were compared with PAP voters.

There seemed to be a perceptible difference in their ratings of items like life satisfaction. Based on a poll of 557 participants, it would seem the non-PAP voters are slowly becoming dissatisfied, while the opposite is true of the PAP supporters.

There was also a difference in how they rated items on the election campaign. Interestingly, though they differed in how they fared on the scale for reputation of the party and confidence in the party, both camps placed high value on these issues. Regardless of party affiliations, they also valued opposition presence.

Questions to ponder:

- Given that Singaporeans generally seem to value multi-party politics (before voting for PAP), how should the opposition reach out to those unconvinced of their credibility?

- Have the smaller opposition parties like The Singaporeans First Party (SingFirst), People's Power Party (PPP) and the National Solidarity Party (NSP) diluted support for the domineering Workers' Party (WP)?

### **Blunted hammer?**

When it came to their social media game, the Reform Party (RP) garnered the highest percentage increase in Facebook followers, increasing its tally ten-fold from a low base of 5,600 followers. The People's Action Party (PAP) was the next highest performer, increasing its followers four times to 164,000 followers.

The WP and the PAP have a large social media base. Unlike the PAP, however, the WP wasn't able to substantially increase its share of Facebook followers. Though the WP trumps the other opposition parties in absolute number of followers, its increase seems to be marginal, considering its status as the main opposition party.

Social media questions we pose:

- Was there a lapse in the messaging of the WP?
- Did the WP miss out on any opportunities to expand its social media profile?
- Given the marginal increase, is the WP in danger of losing its political clout?

### **Before the word go**

The study on the parties' media profile also showed that the PAP had consistently engaged with the public on Facebook, even before election season. It started doing so from 2013. The SDP had been aggressive in 2011, but their efforts petered out in 2015.

The WP was active during budget debates, which they are involved in since it has Members of Parliament (MP) within its fold. The NSP had very little to show for when it came to its Facebook engagement.

The findings beg the following questions:

- Does the PAP's performance simply reflect its larger amount of resources, since it was reported recently that it spent \$5.3 million while the eight opposition parties spent a total of \$1.8 million?
- Could the opposition have done more prior to the elections being announced?
- Since the outcome didn't match the social media sentiment, would the PAP invest as much in this platform the next time around?

## **The echo chamber**

The landslide victory of the PAP in the 2015 General Election seemed to have put a damper on the reliability of social media as a means of gauging the mood of the public, since many people expected the opposition to gain a bigger foothold based on the support they received online.

The IPS study on Internet and Media Use During General Election 2015 seems to further confirm this.

In response to the statement, “Singapore should have a powerful leader who can run the government as he thinks fit,” social media users responded with more certainty. Only 18.3% of them responded with “Neither agree nor disagree”. On the other hand 31.2% of non-social media users took up a neutral position.

## **Profile of Social Media Users**

The study also indicated that social media users consumed more mainstream media than non-social media users and participated more in offline activities.

The findings posed more questions:

- Is online participation merely a reflection of political capital offline? If so, does social media have any capacity to influence people?
- Is social media merely preaching to the converted?
- Given the large amount of spending on social media, by the PAP and the WP, would that money have been better spent on offline outreach activities?