

Efficient government still top concern of voters: IPS survey

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A post-election survey by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) found that efficient government remained the top issue of concern to voters in the recent general election, even though the opposition made significant political inroads this year.

Cost of living, however, shot up four places in terms of importance compared with the 2006 election; where it ranked sixth in 2006, it tied for second place this year together with the need for checks and balances, the survey found.

The need for efficient government ranked first in 2006, while the need for checks and balances ranked second in 2006.

The personality of candidates, the work of the former MP in a constituency, and issues listed in a party's manifesto - these were of lesser importance to voters in both years.

Cost of living issues resounded the most among voters aged 30 to 54, and professionals and executives.

The finding that the need for efficient governance remained of highest importance may explain why the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) still scored 60.1 per cent of votes in the recent general election, said IPS senior research fellow Gillian Koh who led a team of researchers on the study.

Meanwhile, she attributed the opposition's better showing to its ability to capitalise on a prevailing need for checks and balances. 'There were opposition parties that campaigned on accountability issues and the need for checks and balances, and that made headway with voters,' she said.

The election saw the PAP suffering a 6.5 percentage point slide in overall vote share and six out of 87 seats lost to the Workers' Party (WP).

The WP campaigned heavily on the need for government accountability with their 'co-driver' analogy at the election.

The survey's results were released yesterday at an IPS forum, which featured several speakers discussing the impact of the May 7 polls.

Conducted in the two weeks immediately after Polling Day, the survey polled 2,084 respondents by telephone. The IPS then compared the results with a similar post-election survey done in 2006.

Another section of the poll asked voters about the impact of a candidate's characteristics on their voting decisions.

The top five traits cited by the voters were honesty, efficiency, fairness, ability to understand people, and ability to reflect people's views.

These traits were deemed more influential than a candidate's credentials, experience in grassroots and community work, and the political party the candidate belonged to.

The findings closely mirrored the 2006 survey results for that section, researchers noted.

This year's survey also found an increase in what the survey called 'swing voters', that is, those who were not 'conservatives' or 'pluralists', with the former referring to those supporting one-party dominance and the latter preferring more political plurality.

The proportion of 'swing voters' increased from 40 per cent to 45.4 per cent at the expense of the other two groups, the survey found, and was particularly high among the upper middle class.

The survey arrived at these findings from analysis of answers to various proxy questions.

Other findings from the survey included how voters perceived the credibility of various political parties contesting the election.

Except for the Singapore Democratic Party (SDP), all other parties including the PAP and the WP saw a dip in credibility compared with the 2006 polls, according to the survey.

Of those polled, 73 per cent agreed or strongly agreed that the PAP was a credible party, a drop from 87 per cent in 2006. The WP saw a dip from 65 per cent in 2006 to 56 per cent this year while the SDP's credibility rose from 19 per cent to 24 per cent.

The IPS survey also showed that the Internet played a bigger role in this election, with 66 per cent of respondents calling it important or very important in shaping their vote. In 2006, only 33 per cent said the same.

Newspapers continued to hold their own, with 75 per cent finding them important or very important, the same as in 2006.