

## **IPS post-GE2020 survey: Jobs, political diversity important to S'pore voters; decline in PAP's perceived credibility seen in all age groups**

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Jobs and the cost of living weighed heavily on Singaporeans' minds as they headed to the polls in July this year amid the Covid-19 pandemic, according to a survey of the general election results.

Political diversity, too, was a key consideration among the country's younger and better-educated voters.

And across all age groups, there was a slide in the proportion of people who thought the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) was credible, while the opposite was true for the opposition Workers' Party (WP).

These are among the key findings of the survey by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) that were presented on Thursday (Oct 1) at an online forum it had organised.

The think tank polled a sample of 4,027 voting-age Singaporeans by three methods - randomly through landlines, mobile phones and online survey, which were weighted to be representative of the national population in terms of age, gender and race.

It had done the same after the general elections in 2006, 2011 and 2015.

In GE2020, the PAP's vote share shrank by almost nine percentage points from the previous election in 2015, to 61.24 per cent.

The July 10 election also saw the WP make another breakthrough by beating the PAP to win Sengkang group representation constituency - its second GRC.

### **Issues that matter to voters**

As with previous surveys, respondents cited the "need for good and efficient government" as the top priority on a list of 15 issues.

A new item on this year's list that was among the top three issues was the Government's handling of the Covid-19 pandemic. Almost nine out of 10 voters surveyed said it was "important" or "very important".

But three major issues that saw the sharpest spike in "very important" ratings compared with 2015, were the jobs situation, cost of living and the need for different views in Parliament.

Jobs and cost of living were a focus of those aged 30 to 54 in low- to middle-income households; while having greater political diversity appealed more to younger voters aged 21 to 29 holding professional, manager, executive and technician (PMET) jobs.

"Both sets of considerations played out in GE2020 but among different groups of voters," said the IPS research team.

But the two are not mutually exclusive, said Dr Gillian Koh, a senior research fellow at IPS who led the survey's research team.

She explained: "Within the low- to middle-income band, respondents felt that the job situation arising from the pandemic was a challenge to their sense of security.

"Some will have responded that they support checks and balances and diverse voices in Parliament, and may have therefore accounted for the shift away from support for the PAP to the opposition - but the driver was the bread-and-butter issues rather than (political diversity) for its own sake."

### **Fall in PAP's perceived credibility**

Overall, the proportion of respondents who saw the PAP as credible fell from 93 per cent in 2015, to 86 per cent in 2020.

While the percentage who agreed strongly that the PAP is credible was similar to 2015, those who said they merely "agreed" with the statement dropped from 63 per cent in 2015, to 57 per cent in 2020. This is a return to pre-2015 levels.

The party's perceived credibility fell across all age groups, with the drop in positive ratings sharper among those with secondary and diploma education, the lower-income, those living in one- to three-room Housing Board flats, and men.

Conversely, the WP's credibility rose across all age groups, with upticks among PMETs, voters with post-secondary (ITE and junior college) qualifications, residents of one- to three-room HDB flats, and women.

IPS noted that both PMETs and those in the lowest housing category found the WP credible, which means it won supporters from both ends of the socio-economic spectrum.

"There were rises (in perceived credibility) especially for the WP, compared to the previous three surveys when they had the same mean score," said IPS Social Lab post-doctoral fellow Teo Kay Key, who is part of the survey team.

### **Fewer conservatives, more in pluralist and swing categories**

Compared with 2015, the proportion of those categorised as politically conservative shrank by more than half, from 44.3 per cent to 18.5 per cent.

They are defined in the survey as those who disagree with the need for change in the electoral system, checks and balances, or different voices in Parliament.

Those in the swing category - defined as being mixed in their views compared to the pluralists and conservatives - rose sharply by more than 20 percentage points to 59.2 per cent.

Pluralists, or those who desire more political diversity, rose slightly by around four percentage points to 22.4 per cent.

Dr Teo called the surge in the swing category "surprising", given that one would have expected stronger growth in the proportion of pluralists amid calls for more opposition presence in Parliament.

"Perhaps people want some kind of representation and some checks and balances, but not all the way to the pluralist end," she said.

"These demands may have been tempered by other governance issues such as the need for efficient government, which is one of the top three issues (shaping voting decisions) among all three categories."

While pluralists are typically younger and more well-off, what stood out this year was the increase in their proportion among the lowest-income households earning less than \$2,000 a month, and those with only post-secondary qualifications.

IPS said this points to two effects taking place.

First, the consistent trend of those in the higher socio-economic class supporting political pluralism; and second, the effects of bread-and-butter issues at the other end of the socio-economic spectrum, such that respondents felt there was a need for political opposition in Parliament.

National University of Singapore sociologist Tan Ern Ser, who was part of the survey team, said the findings indicate that socio-economic class and age are important factors in determining voters' perceptions and concerns.

"Those in their 40s are the sandwiched generation who have to look after both the young and elderly. During Covid-19, they are the ones in danger of losing their jobs.

"Their sense of income and job insecurity may have influenced the way they voted in this election."

The emergence of credible opposition parties over time could also impact the way Singaporeans vote, he added.

"All things being equal, if we see one or more of these parties gaining in credibility, it will eat into the vote share of the PAP."