

More contests could see record 2.2m turn up to vote Poll cards should reach registered voters by next Tuesday

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A record 2,211,102 Singaporeans will go to the polls on May 7 and some of them have already received their poll cards.

All registered voters should receive their cards by next Tuesday, the Elections Department said.

The voting hours are from 8am to 8pm, it added.

The new record number of voters tops the previous peak in 1988 when 1.37 million Singaporeans cast their votes.

At the last general election in 2006, 1.22 million people voted.

The bumper number this time is the result of the strong challenge from the opposition parties, which are contesting 82 out of the 87 elected seats in Parliament.

A record 14 Group Representation Constituencies (GRCs) will be contested, with Tanjong Pagar GRC being the only one facing no contest, giving the People's Action Party (PAP) a walkover.

In 2006, the PAP had walkovers in six GRCs.

The Single Member Constituencies, as in the 2006 polls, are all being contested and this time, there are 12 of them.

Political observers interviewed by The Straits Times also attribute the big leap in voter numbers to the increased interest in this election.

For example, the electoral rolls have expanded with 60,000 more names since the 2006 polls, as those who failed to vote got their names reinstated.

Voter interest among Singaporeans overseas is also high, with 3,452 set to vote.

However, Dr Gillian Koh, senior research fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies, feels what is more significant is the changes made to the political system two years ago.

She noted that the number of eligible voters has not increased much from 2006 although not all can vote if their names are not on the electoral rolls.

In 2006, there were 2,158,599 eligible voters against 2.35 million this time.

But in 2009, a major change was made to the political system.

Mooted by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, the changes - such as increasing the number of Non-Constituency MPs (NCMPs) and reducing the number of giant-sized teams - were aimed at giving the opposition more voice.

Said Dr Koh: 'We've moved from a situation where people were fearful to stand in the opposition to one where the PAP is more comfortable with diverse views.'

Voting will take place at 732 polling stations, which can be in HDB void decks, at pavilions, community centres/clubs (CCs) or in schools.

Singaporeans who are abroad can cast their vote at nine overseas polling stations.

The votes cast will be counted at 154 counting centres.

Voters who have queries can visit the Elections Department's website at <http://www.elections.gov.sg>, call the General Election hotline at 1800-8180-088 or go to the nearest CC for help.