

## **A more active citizenry now**

***Leong Wee Keat***

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While the desire for political participation is strong, only eight out of 100 citizens here went on to express their views on public policy issues to the Government.

This is less than the number in 1998, when 8.6 per cent of citizens went on to express their opinions.

Respondents to the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) survey indicated this had more to do with not having “strong views” — rather than the perception of the lack of channels or that the channels are viewed to be ineffective.

But, this goes against an informed and critical population, political observer Eugene K B Tan argued.

The Singapore Management University (SMU) law lecturer said: “No strong views gets me worried. After all, we want an informed and critical population who don’t follow blindly.”

Sociologist Tan Ern Ser, who conducted the study with Dr Gillian Koh, preferred to look at “the positive development” that more are demanding political participation.

For example, 85 per cent of respondents agreed that voting gave citizens the most meaningful way to tell the Government how the country should be run, compared to 72 per cent in 1998.

However, SMU’s Mr Tan argued that voting at the ballot box is perhaps “a narrow understanding” of political participation.

“Citizens should also take an active interest in local matters and contribute to the discussion,” he added.

It seems more citizens want their voices heard.

Those who want to join and serve in Government-related bodies like town councils and grassroots organisations doubled to 48 per cent of respondents last year. But this is still less than the 58 per cent who would want to serve in a non-government related organisation.

Almost all 2,016 citizens surveyed would like the Government to take more time to listen to their views, even when a quick decision is necessary. In 1998, only 73 per cent would like to be consulted.

Noting that the authorities are promoting active citizenship and for people to be more engaged, Associate Professor Tan Ern Ser said: “I think it is happening. Maybe it is not happening in a big way, but it is happening.”