

S'poreans confused about President's roles: IPS survey

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SINGAPORE - A survey on the Elected Presidency conducted between September and last month - just after the Presidential Election (PE) in August - has found that two of the top three roles that shaped a voter's choice were outside the President's official job scope.

Conducted by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS), the telephone survey asked 2,025 respondents to pick which of 11 statements described the roles of the President.

The top two roles of the President cited by the respondents were "to ensure that the Government manages the economy wisely" and "to ensure that the Government does what it promised in the General Election". The third most important role was the President's veto powers over the reserves.

Of the 11 statements, only five were aligned with the Government's interpretation of the office, according to IPS, which released the findings yesterday.

Only 1 per cent was able to identify all the "correct" and "incorrect" statements.

The survey aimed to "understand the factors that shaped voters' decision-making" in the PE.

IPS senior research fellow Gillian Koh said Singaporeans' understanding of the roles of the Elected President is "limited".

Said Dr Koh: "The institution of the Elected Presidency is very young, is extremely complex. And ... it is put to the vote, so people feel that with a mandate that is from the ground, it should actually allow the President to do much more than what is actually stipulated."

Concurring, constitutional law expert Kevin Tan noted: "Sometimes when you ask a question, people may tell you this is what the President should be doing as opposed to what the Constitution says he should be doing."

Singapore Management University law professor Eugene Tan also pointed out that during the campaigning, candidates presented "conflicting" ideas of the presidency.

He added: "The Constitution was ignored by the candidates, especially those who took a fairly radical view of the presidency. And the Government's attempt to educate the population ... I don't think went very well. So what we saw was really, overpromising as an electoral strategy by some candidates."

On who should educate the public on the roles of the President, Mr Tan reiterated that "first and foremost, Singaporeans have the duty to educate themselves". He also suggested that the President can issue an annual report about his work.

As with the May General Election, the Internet played a significant role as a medium of communication, particularly among younger respondents earning higher incomes.

However, newspapers and television remained the top two sources of information for the respondents and also had a bigger influence over voting decisions, according to the survey. Among websites cited, Facebook was the most commonly-read, while the Channel NewsAsia website was rated highest among respondents aged between 21 and 29, those who were most highly educated and most knowledgeable about the Elected Presidency.