

Ambassador-at-Large Chan: The youth bought the opposition's message of need for diversity

“The Workers' Party understood this and chose youthful candidates and issues for the Zoomer generation... This online digital politics is now the new retail politics — up close and personal,” said Professor Chan

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The Independent Singapore, 17 July 2020

In an online lecture, Ambassador-at-Large Chan Heng Chee pointed out that since individuals between the ages of 25 and 35 form a large part of the country's population, the country is at its “youth peak.”

Therefore, she added, the ruling People's Action Party (PAP), which could be said to have suffered somewhat of a setback with the opposition Workers' Party (WP) winning the most seats in Parliament ever, the PAP must strive to understand today's youth better in order to win back their vote.

This year, PAP won 61.22 of the popular vote, considerably lower than the nearly 70 percent it had won in 2015.

On Wednesday (July 15), Professor Chan was speaking at a forum entitled “Singapore in a Time of Flux: Optimism from the Jaws of Gloom.”

She said, “I expect our millennials will continue to support diverse voices and an opposition in Parliament as a good thing, even as they age. They will have specific personal concerns, too, in different phases of their lives. The incumbent party will have to understand this group better to win back their vote.”

According to the Ambassador-at-Large, the youth, whom she termed the “Zoomer generation” prefers “personal narratives and ‘I feel your pain’ connectivity, approachability and authenticity”.

This point was not lost on the WP, she said.

TODAY Online quotes her as saying, “The Workers' Party understood this and chose youthful candidates and issues for the Zoomer generation... This online digital politics is now the new retail politics — up close and personal.”

“Clearly, this age group bought the opposition message of the need for diverse voices in Parliament and the need for checks and balances,” she added.

And while “conventional wisdom” dictates that people grow more conservative as they age, Professor Chan does not believe that this is necessarily the case with Singapore's millennials, who, have shown a “distinct and increasingly liberal outlook”.

She pointed out the emergent political culture wherein Singaporeans are pressing for more democratic processes, but pointed out that many younger Singaporeans reject the mean-spirited politics of some Western countries and “do not want to see political overkill”.

“On the one hand is the culture of government that emphasises strong government, effectiveness, a legalistic culture, delivery of public goods and services, and a better life for the people. Critics have characterised the PAP political style as paternalistic.

On the other hand, many Singaporeans invoke democracy and want to see Singapore evolve into a full-fledged democracy.”

She added, “Even as we yearn for democratic competition, competitive politics, we are asking for a kinder and gentler politics. We seem to be repulsed by the competitive, mean politics of some Western democracies.”