

Post-GE survey: Younger voters value character over credentials

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Research team member: When candidates talk too much about their credentials, that may not really help

Among the important findings from a post-election survey is that younger voters considered the character of candidates in this year's General Election to be more important than their academic or work credentials.

The survey was conducted by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) and was discussed in a forum online on Thursday (Oct 1).

Yahoo News Singapore quotes Associate Professor Tan Ern Ser of the National University of Singapore, one of the four members in the team that led the study, as saying: "What struck me is that it seems like credentials and contribution seems to matter much less now, as compared to character. So, when the candidates present themselves, if they talk too much about their credentials, that may not really help."

A/Prof Tan said this in the context of questions in the survey regarding the character traits of candidates, such as honesty and being a "fair person". Respondents were asked which quality was the most important to them.

The answer with the largest percentage increase in the "very important" rating was being a "fair person", which rose 9 percentage points particularly with respondents in the 21-29 age group and among diploma-holders.

And while Dr Lam Peng Er of the East Asian Institute believes that the People's Action Party (PAP) will stay as the "perennial party in power" for the foreseeable future, the PAP will likely face a smaller vote share and may even lose its two-thirds majority, due to younger, better educated, and more discerning voters who have material (job security, housing, transportation and more) and post-material concerns (values, citizens having a greater voice in Parliament, fairness and more).

Dr Lam, who said the opposition is here for the long haul, added: "It is not inconceivable that the Workers' Party (WP) wins another SMC (Single-Member Constituency) or GRC (Group Representation Constituency) in the next general election.

The survey had 4,027 Singaporean respondents from the ages of 21 and older, in the fourth time that the IPS has held such a post-GE study. The team comprised A/Prof Tan, Dr Gillian Koh, Dr Teo Kay Key and research associate Damien Huang.

For the respondents, the most important issues are "the need for good and efficient government" and "government's handling of the Covid situation", with three other key issues emerging as "very important" as well: The job situation, cost of living and the need for different views.

Dr Derek da Cunha, an independent scholar, said during the forum that "the majority of Singaporeans are, to varying degrees, socially and politically conservative by nature".

Therefore the WP, being a moderate and non-confrontational alternative to the ruling party, has been successful in winning seats in Parliament.

He said: "Workers' Party has no radical agenda, and quite right too." /TISG