

## The Burning questions of GE2015 – more or less answered

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THE Institute of Policy Studies produced its analysis of the GE2015 results today, based on surveys done with voters. This is its third GE report, which comprised five papers. We comb through the data and looked at the researchers' views to bring you these answers.

### **1. Why such a big swing of 9.8 per cent towards the People's Action Party this time?**

**Answer:** The researchers don't really have an answer to this. Or rather they have too many answers. The conclusion is that more people voted for the status quo. But why? They asked respondents about issues that they were most satisfied with and least satisfied with where the G is concerned. As usual, there were plenty of issues but top of the dissatisfaction list was cost of living. This was also the issue that most influenced the vote but guess what, most people still voted the PAP anyway.

This seems to suggest that while the PAP made them most unhappy about cost of living, voters also think it was also in the best position to solve it.

So we've become more conservative, not wanting to rock the boat. Former NMP and law academic Eugene Tan described it as a "flight to safety" going back into the arms of "the devil you know than the devil you don't".

As for why they were fleeing to safety, this is simply too complex an issue. It could be because voters became more obsessed with efficiency and performance, got scared by a possible Opposition landslide, went back to bread-and-butter issues – take your pick.

In any case, who are these people who shifted their position from GE 2011 when the mantra to vote in more opposition into Parliament held some sway? The younger voters, suggested Dr Gillian Koh, could have been won over by the emphasis on "continuous meritocracy", that is, you're not set for life because of your academic records. A broad cross-section of lower-middle, upper-middle and high income groups also shifted their position. The question, therefore, is: Was it the middle income group which stuck to its guns?

## **2. Does this mean the Opposition is dead?**

**Answer:** It doesn't. In fact, the survey showed that the Opposition has a foothold in Singapore politics, said Dr Gillian Koh. While the issues that the Opposition campaigned on, such as the need for checks and balances and diversity in Parliament aren't so high on the voters' agenda this time, the difference is that more of the voters think that it is an important issue. For example, 89 per cent of those surveyed said the need for checks and balances in Parliament was important or very important compared to 84 per cent in 2011. The better off the voter is, the more likely is he an advocate of political pluralism. So in the future, who knows?

In other words, people still want more political pluralism, but this time, there might be other factors that swung them to vote for the PAP. Even those who were avowedly pro-PAP seem to think there was a need for more diverse voices. The opposition parties were still deemed credible to voters. The WP might have lost some cred with the above 55 group and the "working class" but gained favour among the young voters and Malays. It was the Singapore Democratic Party which had the biggest surge in credibility, especially among those below 40, and among the non-Chinese.

## **3. So what were the key issues influencing voters this time?**

**Answer:** Help for the needy became a key issue. It didn't feature at all in GE2011. In fact, Dr Tan Ern Ser maintains that it's back to bread-and-butter issues, like cost of living and housing and medical care affordability.

Political ideals were further down in people's minds and Dr Tan has an interesting way to describe the voting climate – Survival Ideology Version 2.0. Unlike the early days when it was about sustaining and raising economic growth, voters now have to live with a "risk" culture and insecurity, bolstered by SG50 celebrations which reflected Singapore's history. When it comes to living in dangerous times, the tendency is to stick to the status quo. By the way, Singaporeans couldn't care less about the birth rate or even relations between the races. For the race-relations, could it be that we've taken the peace for granted?

Dr Tan also did something interesting – he got half of the respondents to say whether they voted the PAP or the opposition and then looked at the issues which divided them. You can expect that the non-PAP voter would be more unhappy about issues, but what is intriguing is the satisfaction scores are still pretty high. For example, the scores on whether they agreed that the G has done a good job on law and order was 6.21 for non-PAP and 7.52 for PAP voter.

#### **4. Did the election campaign itself have an impact on voters?**

**Answer:** Actually, just like in 2011, at least half the voters had already made up their minds who to vote for before Nomination Day. So what about the other half? It's not clear how they decided before they went into the poll booth but these late decision makers are likely to be lower-income and Malays. Also it appeared that more social media users than non-social media users didn't make up their minds. So what was it that affected their vote in the nine days of campaigning? Dunno.

This is a bit odd because most of those surveyed were pretty clear about their stand on issues. There were far fewer "neutrals" when questions were asked about say, the need for checks and balances in Parliament and the need for diverse views. You would have thought that with firm positions, more people would have made their voting decision earlier.

Does this mean that all spending during campaign period by political parties had no impact? What is clear is that the rally is still the key attraction for voters. One in four attended rallies although not many people bought campaign paraphernalia – at least those that were on sale.

#### **5. Who are these undecided voters anyway?**

**Answer:** Going by a paper Ms Zhang Weiyu presented, Malays, those below the age of 29 and above the age of 80 living in smaller HDB flats stand out. Given that they form close to half of voters, it would appear that they would be susceptible to campaigning strategy. In fact, these people are the "swing voters" who go to rallies, particularly SDP rallies, more often than those who had already decided on their vote. Compared to early decision voters, they spent more time reading election information and watching videos related to the election. They are "silent observers".

#### **6. How much did the Lee Kuan Yew factor play a part in this GE? What about AHPETC?**

**Answer:** The impact wasn't quite across-the-board but it had an impact on certain groups of people. The older set of voters with secondary education and below from humbler backgrounds think that both were important issues.

#### **7. Did social media play a big role?**

**Answer:** No, it wasn't an Internet election. More people might be consuming more of social media, but it didn't mean that they trusted them more. MSM, especially television, is still No. 1. But the political parties, especially the PAP really cranked up its online

engagement, especially from National Day. Looking at the spike in online activity, **Mr Tan Tarn How said the PAP began its campaign from Aug 9.** The PAP was the greatest with its website and social media engagement, especially with its embedded videos. But it wasn't consistent with its messaging compared to the WP which hammered home its mantra of empowerment in its online campaign.