

More younger S'poreans with pluralistic views: IPS Survey

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There has been an increase in the number of younger Singaporeans with pluralistic or diverse views on the country's political landscape.

This was revealed as one of the key findings in a post-election survey conducted by think-tank Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) — which was presented at a forum held on Friday.

The survey results showed that those who called for greater diversity in the political sphere fall within the age group of 21 to 29-years-old.

This group also saw an increase in numbers from 30.4 percent in the 2006 election to 44.4 percent.

"The pluralist box includes peoples' responses on the need for checks and balances and need for different views in Parliament," said Dr Gillian Koh, senior research fellow at the IPS.

"They just want to ensure that different views are reflected and it won't be the just one PAP view."

On the other hand, NUS political science lecturer Reuben Wong pointed out that this is a "normal situation" which every country faces, where those of the younger generation would tend to possess idealistic views and pushing for change.

"I think it's very normal in any country that the younger you are, the more anti-status quo you're likely to be. What's interesting is in Singapore is that we even asked this question. It should be the norm," he said.

The telephone survey which was carried from 8 to 20 May -- a day after the general election, polled around 2080 voters whose age ranges from 21-years-old and above. The data was weighted based on the gender, age and race of the respondents.

The survey also showed there is an increase in support for political pluralism as the level of one's education, socio-economic status or class grows.

"Education really means that you are actually open to more points of views, open to the experiences of many other places. And sometimes you may not even feel that Singapore is a bad place or badly run or you have a bad government," she said.

"But you've seen the experiences of other countries and you want to maintain that situation in what we have going forward and you see that you need checks and balances to ensure that."

Increase in number of swing voters

Among some of the interesting findings in the survey was the increase in the number of swing voters, from 40 to 45.4 percent.

In contrast, those with conservative views — voters who support the status quo — saw their numbers dropped across the age range, more so with those born after the country's independence.

It was also found that Malays formed the largest proportion in this group, with a percentage of around 56 percent, which was also the case in the 2006 election.

Commenting on the rise in the number of swing voters, Dr Koh said this was a result in the shift from those who were formerly conservatives into the swing vote's category, as a result of less settled political views.

This she added could also explained why there was an increase in the number of voters aged 65-years-old and above who had pluralistic views.

"The percentage of people in the conservative box among the 65-ers and above has dropped and increased in the swing category.

"So basically, even the older generation has become less settled in their views about what they want out of the electoral system," she said.

Meanwhile senior lecturer at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy Dr Suzaina said that one interpretation of the rising number in Malays swing voters could be the rethinking of one's position on the divide between the conservatives and pluralists.

"There are also socio-economic changes within the Malay community that you have to take into account, so there maybe issues of widening income gap of which affects Malays more.

"And also particularly in the last election, more Malays could be affected by the cost of living and job situation, so this could lead to rethinking, sort of stand in the middle," she said.

Voters concerned with cost of living

Apart from that, the IPS survey showed that the cost of living was one of the top five factors which influenced how Singaporeans cast their votes in the recent election. This was not the case in the 2006 contest.

Surprisingly, those who were most concerned of this issues are those from the service class, comprising those who are employed as senior executives, professionals and technicians.

They are within the age bracket of 30 to 39 as well as 40 to 54-years-old.

Dr Suzaina said this finding could be attributed to the fact that this group, also known as the "sandwiched class" was not the target of many of the government's self-help policies, which were more focused on assisting those from the bottom strata of the society.

"It's related to the issue that a lot of the policies in terms of providing assistance were targeting the really lower classes.

"There was a substantial portion which was sandwiched. They were falling through the cracks. They were affected by inflation and employment, and the policies were not targeted at them," she said.

Other "influential" factors also include the need for an efficient government; checks and balances in Parliament as well as different views in Parliament.

The recent general election also saw the internet as one of the most influential communication channels when it comes to shaping voting decision, although it is slightly behind the traditional media.

There was an increase in the number of those surveyed who viewed it as playing a significant role, from 43 percent in the last election to sixty-eight percent this year. This was largely supported by those within the age group of 21 to 29 years old and mostly among the service class.

However, the traditional media which include both the newspapers and local TV news coverage, are still leading the way but their percentages remained at around 70 percent.

Other key findings from the survey touched on the credibility of the political parties and influence of candidates' characteristics on voters in the recent election.