

Jobs, political diversity top election issues: Survey

Employment and cost of living a focus of those aged 30 to 54 in low- to middle-income households, while the need for different views in Parliament appealed more to younger voters

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Amid the Covid-19 pandemic, jobs and the cost of living weighed heavily on Singaporeans' minds as they headed to the polls in July this year, according to a post-election survey.

Political diversity, too, was a key consideration among the country's younger and better-educated voters.

And across all age groups, there was a slide in the proportion of people who thought the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) was credible, while the opposite was true for the opposition Workers' Party (WP).

These are among the key findings of a post-GE2020 survey conducted by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS), and which were presented yesterday at an online forum it had organised.

The think-tank polled a sample of 4,027 voting-age Singaporeans by three methods – randomly through landlines, mobile phones and an online survey, which were weighted to be representative of the national population in terms of age, gender and race.

It had done the same after the general elections in 2006, 2011 and 2015.

In GE2020, the PAP's vote share shrank by almost nine percentage points from the previous election in 2015, to 61.24 per cent.

The July 10 election also saw the WP make another breakthrough by wresting Sengkang group representation constituency – its second – from the PAP.

As with previous surveys, voters cited the "need for good and efficient government" as the top priority on a list of 15 issues.



Voters filling in their ballots at a polling station while observing social distancing in July. A new item on this year's list that was among the top three issues was the Government's handling of the Covid-19 pandemic.

PHOTO: REUTERS

A new item on this year's list that was among the top three issues was the Government's handling of the Covid-19 pandemic. Almost nine out of 10 voters surveyed said it was "important" or "very important".

But three major issues that saw the sharpest spike in being "very important" to voters, compared with 2015, were the jobs situation, cost of living, and the need for different views in Parliament.

Jobs and cost of living were a focus of those aged 30 to 54 in low- to middle-income households, while having greater political diversity appealed more to younger voters aged 21 to 29 holding professional, manager, executive and technician jobs.

"Both sets of considerations played out in GE2020 but among different groups of voters," said the IPS research team.

Compared with 2015, pluralists, or those who desire more political diversity, rose slightly by around four percentage points to 22.4 per cent.

While they are typically younger and more well-off, what stood out this year was the increased proportion among the

lowest-income households earning less than \$2,000 a month, and those with non-tertiary post-secondary qualifications.

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National University of Singapore sociologist Tan Ern Ser, a member of the survey team, said the findings indicate socioeconomic class and age are important in determining voters' perceptions and concerns.

"Those in their 40s are the sandwiched generation who have to look after both the young and elderly. During Covid-19, they are the ones in danger of losing their jobs.

"Their sense of income and job insecurity may have influenced the way they voted in this election."

The emergence of credible opposition parties over time could also impact the way people vote, he added.

"All things being equal, if we see one or more of these parties gaining in credibility, it will eat into the vote share of the PAP."

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