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Title : Reasons for 12% of non-voters, spoilt votes should be analysed: NUSS Forum  
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SINGAPORE : There has been a change in voter attitudes at the 2006 General Election.

Not only did they pay more attention to the issues raised by the various political parties during the hustings, they also gave their vote to the ones most established and organised.

The political dialogue organised by the National University of Singapore Society brought together political commentators and candidates who had contested the election.

They shared their views on issues ranging from whether the 66.6 percent of votes garnered by the People's Action Party (PAP) was indeed a strong mandate and if there was a level playing field for political parties during the hustings.

For the PAP, an area of concern was the negative political views expressed in internet forums during the hustings.

Said Denise Phua, MP for Jalan Besar GRC: "PAP bashing became commonplace on cyberspace when more than 80 to 85 percent on what's on internet traffic becomes so negative to the ruling party of our country, I know something has gone wrong. And that to me is no longer a balanced perspective. Foreigners who chance upon these websites can probably see only one side of the story.

"The PAP is not perfect and I will be the first to admit it. But the easiest thing to do is to poke holes on what could have gone wrong and not to say anything that it has done right."

Defeated Workers' Party candidate Perry Tong noted that the 38 percent of votes for the opposition demonstrated the desire for an opposition in Singapore.

But the party is worried about the nearly 2 percent of spoilt votes and another 10 percent of voters who didn't cast their vote this election.

He is hoping the causes of this trend would be closely analysed.

Mr Tong also says he is satisfied that every vote is secret, a point maintained by Workers' Party Chief Low Thia Kiang.

"Who is not going to know if the High Court vault gets reopened and your votes get recounted. So in a sense yes, your vote is secret and I echo Mr Wong Kan Seng, although he is my opponent," said Workers' Party member Perry Tong.

As for the next General Election due in 2011, Ms Phua says voters would be watching if PAP Members of Parliament can play a check and balance role more effectively than an opposition party.

She also believes there will be a race for talent as each political party works to attract the best amongst Singaporeans to join its fold to stand for elections.

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