

GE2020: Issues to watch

As Singapore prepares to go to the polls amid an ongoing pandemic, Covid-19 looms large among the national issues that are likely to capture voters' attention. **BY JANICE HENG**

Covid-19

The virus outbreak has dominated most areas of life in 2020, and politics is likely to be no exception. Campaigning may address how the government has tackled the pandemic so far -- with presumably differing views from ruling People's Action Party (PAP) candidates and those from opposition parties. The opposition may continue to question the very decision to hold an election during the pandemic. PAP candidates, meanwhile, may stress the need for a strong mandate to keep guiding Singapore through the crisis.



Economy and jobs

A weighty issue in any election, the economic angle has gained greater urgency from the historic recession expected to be wrought by Covid-19.

Possible sources of discontent include the economic pain



from the circuit breaker and Covid-19 measures; perceived inadequacy of support; and unhappiness about foreign manpower. In turn, PAP candidates may point to the record Budget packages, and stress the need to maintain Singapore's reputation for stability and good governance, not least in these tumultuous times.

Leadership transition

The pandemic has been dubbed the crisis of a generation – and has been a proving ground for the fourth generation or 4G leadership, with Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat delivering bumper Budgets, and Health Minister Gan Kim Yong and National Development Minister Lawrence Wong co-chairing the multi-ministry taskforce on Covid-19. With Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong having said before that he intends to hand over by the time he turns 70 in 2022, the next general election was already being seen as



something of a referendum on the 4G, even before Covid-19.

Cost of living

Recessionary pressures and rising unemployment may heighten anxieties about the cost of living, even though inflation this year is expected to come in between -1 and 0 per cent. The upcoming Goods and Services Tax hike, though telegraphed well in advance of its 2025 deadline, may prove a pain point.



Central Provident Fund policy

Pandemic notwithstanding, perennial issues such as CPF policy may still crop up again. With contribution rates for older workers set to rise in stages from 2022, the long-contentious issue may be given new fuel.



Pofma

With this being the first general election since the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (Pofma) came into force, any use of this law during the campaigning period will be closely scrutinised.



Former hot topics?

Previous hot-button issues such as housing, public transport, and healthcare affordability may take a backseat in this election's campaign. Unhappiness on these fronts has seemingly cooled after policy improvements, including ramped-up supply of Built-to-Order flats, and generous healthcare packages for the Pioneer and Merdeka generations.

