

Values poll: S'pore more liberal but still largely conservative

IPS notes that divorce, euthanasia deemed more acceptable but sexuality issues less so

Justin Ong
Political Correspondent

Singaporeans remain largely conservative on issues such as homosexuality, abortion, casual sex and prostitution, but deem the likes of divorce, euthanasia and the death penalty as more acceptable, according to the findings of a study released yesterday.

Overall, the Republic has become more liberal since 2002, the first time it participated in the World Values Survey (WVS) – a global research project monitoring changing public beliefs and their socio-political impact over time across 80 societies.

Compared with the others, though, Singapore's respondents weighed in at the middle of the spectrum for issues around sexuality and family, with the likes of Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States registering more liberal mean scores of six to seven, while China emerged as the most conservative with scores of one to three.

Survey respondents were asked to rate a list of issues on a scale of one to 10, with one as never or seldom justifiable and 10 being mostly or always justifiable.

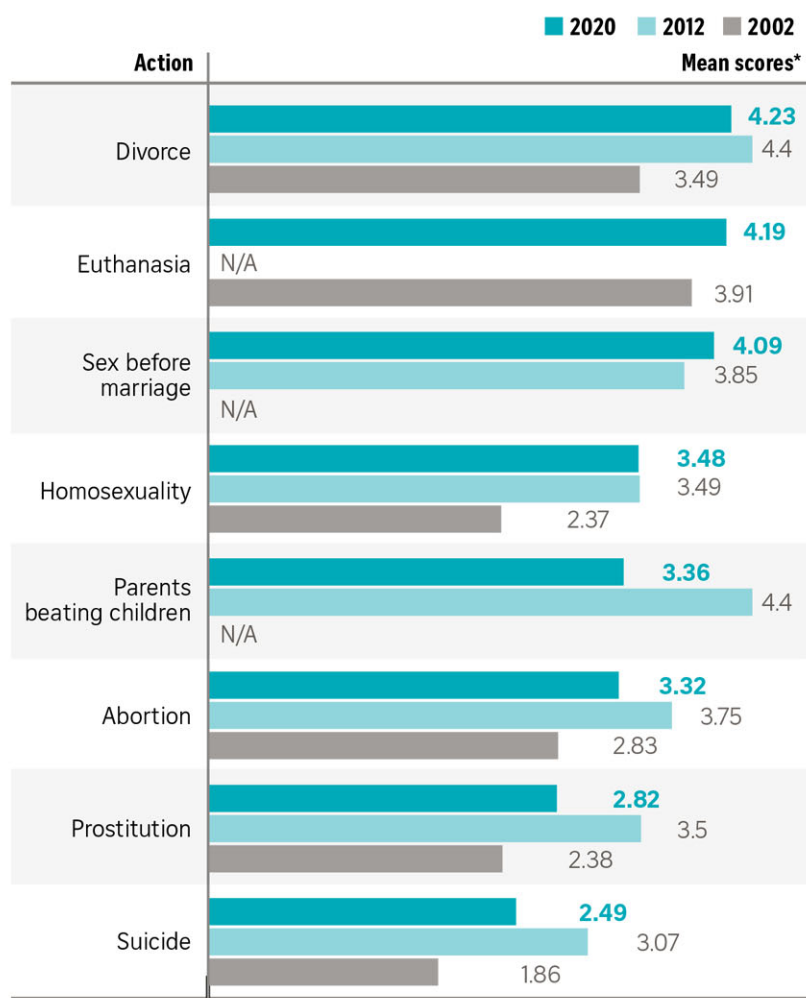
For Singapore's respondents, there were no mean scores larger than five, indicating low levels of acceptance for all the issues surveyed overall.

The third and latest edition of the survey, conducted by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) from November 2019 to last March, also found that religiosity in Singapore has been on the wane – although familial values like filial piety continue to hold firm.

Over 2,000 Singapore citizens and permanent residents aged above 21 were interviewed face to face by IPS in a survey sample size representative of the general population.

Asked for their views, 68.3 per cent of respondents said prostitution was never or seldom justifiable, with 67.3 per cent saying the same for casual sex, 60.3 per cent for abortion, 59.3 per cent for homosexuality and 57.2 per cent for parents beating children.

To what extent do S'poreans view these actions as justifiable?



NOTE: *On a scale from 1 to 10, with lower scores indicating never or seldom justifiable and higher indicating mostly or always justifiable.

Source: INSTITUTE OF POLICY STUDIES STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

Over a quarter also agreed that homosexual parents were just as good as other couples – a low proportion compared with Japan (56.9 per cent) and Hong Kong (51.5 per cent) but higher than Malaysia (20.9 per cent) and South Korea (22.7 per cent).

On other matters, a majority felt it was sometimes, mostly or always justifiable to carry out the death penalty (63.5 per cent), euthanasia (50.6 per cent), premarital sex (54.1 per cent) and divorce (57.1 per cent).

In its report, IPS noted that most of the respondents' mean scores were higher than those in 2002, suggesting they were marginally more liberal compared with the first cohort. But there were exceptions, such as bribery and tax evasion, where mean scores were

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The IPS team, led by head of its Social Lab, Dr Mathew Mathews, noted that male, younger, higher-educated and more affluent respondents were more likely to hold liberal views.

But those who professed support for liberal norms of sexuality were still in the minority within their respective demographic groups, said the researchers, who concluded that the findings broadly suggested that Singapore's societal values remain predominantly conservative.

The study also found that aside from respondents who professed no religion, Catholics formed the largest proportion (18.3 per cent) who saw homosexuality as mostly or always justifiable.

Those who identified as Muslim formed the highest proportion (75.2 per cent) of respondents who felt the opposite – that homosexuality was never or seldom justifiable.

The report also noted that overall, religiosity in Singapore has waned over the past two decades, with the proportion viewing religion as important dropping from approximately 76 per cent in 2002 and 2012 – when the second WVS survey was held – to 65.3 per cent in 2020.

More respondents in 2020 (18.2 per cent) also said God was not important, compared with 13 per cent in 2012, and 9.4 per cent in 2002.

But Singapore's proportion of 80.1 per cent believing in God was higher than other Asian societies like Japan (54.8 per cent) and Hong Kong (53 per cent), although there were also 95.2 per cent of Malaysians and 82.5 per cent of Taiwanese who said "yes" to belief in a higher power.

In Singapore, more Muslims (26.6 per cent) and Protestant Christians (22.3 per cent) strongly agreed that whenever science and religion come into conflict, religion would always be right.

Those two groups were also more likely to support exclusivism – that one particular belief system is true – with 21.9 per cent of Protestants and 17.7 per cent of Muslims strongly agreeing that theirs was the only acceptable religion.

justino@sph.com.sg

3 in 5 here prioritise environment over jobs, economy

Yuen Sin

A majority of Singapore residents feel that protecting the environment should be prioritised even if this results in slower economic growth and some loss of jobs, the results of a survey by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) showed yesterday.

Three in five of those surveyed from November 2019 to last March expressed this view, as opposed to the rest who said that economic growth and creating jobs should be the top priority, even if the environment suffers to some extent. This is up from 30.8 per cent in 2002 and 43.3 per cent in 2012 who supported protecting the environment.

The survey, *Our Singaporean Values*, presents findings from the World Values Survey (WVS) which has been conducted three times in Singapore since 2002.

The latest one involved a nationally representative sample of 2,012 Singapore residents.

The WVS research project monitors and investigates people's values and beliefs globally, how they change over time and what social and political impact they have. It is conducted in 80 societies. The previous two surveys in Singapore were done in 2002 and 2012.

The recent one found that those in Singapore who were younger, more educated and earned higher incomes were more likely to agree that protecting the environment should be given priority.

"It is likely that (the lower-income) were more concerned about their own livelihoods and, therefore, chose to protect jobs and the economy," said the research team, which comprised Dr Mathew Mathews, Dr Teo Kay Key, Mr Melvin Tay and Ms Alicia Wang

of the IPS Social Lab.

More Singapore respondents also continued to agree that their individual efforts should be incentivised, as opposed to the statement that income should be distributed more equally, the survey found.

However, they are now more likely – compared with 2002 and 2012 – to say the Government should ensure that all are provided for, instead of taking the view that the onus should be on people to provide for themselves.

This shift could likely be due to the greater awareness of groups in the bottom 20 per cent of the income spectrum who are struggling financially, said Dr Mathews, head of the IPS Social Lab.

More than two-thirds of Singapore respondents agreed that work is a duty to society – among the highest globally. But they were much less likely than their counterparts in other Asian societies to feel that work comes first, even at the expense of free time.

Close to 40 per cent in Singapore agreed that work should come first, compared with between 47 and 82 per cent in South Korea, Malaysia, China and Thailand.

The importance of work, as compared with other priorities such as family, friends and leisure time, has also dropped for Singaporeans, the poll found. While work was ranked as the second most important priority in 2002, after family, it dropped to being the fifth priority last year, with family, friends, wealth and leisure time taking precedence.

On immigration, about four in five Singapore respondents said the Government should give priority to citizens over immigrants when jobs are scarce. In comparison, 69.5 per cent agreed with the statement in 2012. The figure was 87.4 per cent in 2002.

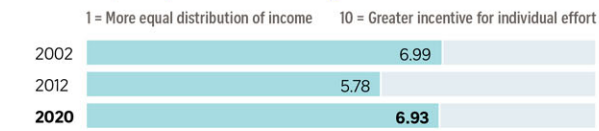
Groups that were most likely to strongly agree with the statement were the unemployed, followed by the self-employed. Those earning between \$1,500 and \$4,999 were also more likely to strongly agree with the statement compared with their peers who earned less, as well as those who earned more. "One possible reason for this trend could be these 'sandwiched' groups are among the most likely to face competition for jobs from foreigners or immigrants in Singapore's labour context," said the researchers.

yuensin@sph.com.sg

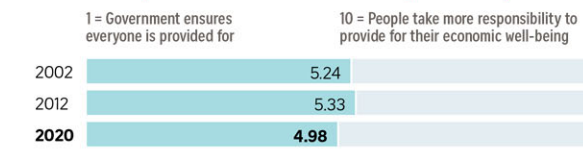
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Views on economic obligations

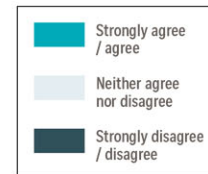
Income equality vs incentivising individual effort



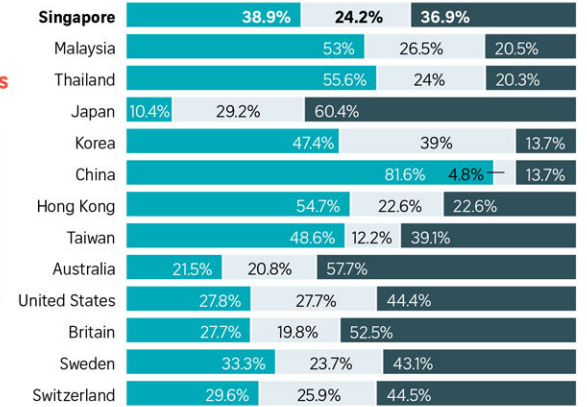
Government provision vs individual responsibility



Views on the statement: "Work should always come first, even if it means less free time"



Note: Total figures may not add up to 100 per cent due to rounding.



Source: Institute of Policy Studies STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS