

4 in 10 never talk politics with friends; political activism unpopular

In keeping with notions of Singaporeans being a politically apathetic lot, a study by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) think-tank has found that close to four in 10 never discuss politics with friends and more than half engage in such conversations only occasionally.

Political activism is also unpopular here, although younger individuals and those of higher socioeconomic status were more likely to have participated in such actions, or indicated that they might do so in future in the survey of over 2,000 citizens and permanent residents.

Continuing a trend that surfaced in the second report – that Singaporeans are generally politically disinterested – the IPS found that only 7.1 per cent of respondents frequently discussed politics with

their friends. Still, this represents an improvement from the 3.8 per cent figure in 2002 – the last time a similar question was asked as part of the World Values Survey.

Across a range of political actions, respondents also mostly shied away from anything to do with physical demonstrations or the organising of events, the study noted.

These findings were especially stark when compared with selected societies overseas.

Singapore had the highest proportion of respondents who would never join a boycott (79.1 per cent), a peaceful demonstration (74.2 per cent) or an unofficial strike (88 per cent).

The next highest corresponding proportions could be found in

Japan (64.5 per cent), China (66.5 per cent) and Switzerland (72.5 per cent).

Over 90 per cent of respondents in Singapore also said they would never organise political activities. China came in second with 83.9 per cent.

Donations to a group or campaign appear to be a more palatable course of action for people here, with 26.8 per cent saying they had done so and 27.1 per cent indicating they might in future.

But Singapore still had the highest share of respondents (46.1 per cent) who would never do such a thing, with Thailand next at 41.5 per cent.

Singapore also had the lowest proportion of respondents (0.3 per cent) who were active political party members, with 97.1 per cent not belonging to any party.

In the United States, 18.9 per cent identified as active members and 50.6 per cent did not belong to any party.

The IPS study also found that compared with other societies, Singapore's political systems and elections were favourably perceived by respondents.

For instance, Singapore had the

highest proportion who felt that election officials are fair, that rich people do not buy elections and that journalists provide fair coverage of the polls.

Singapore also had the lowest proportion of respondents who believed that voters are bribed during elections.

"Given the absence of any recent criminal case or credible rumour about election bribes, those who reported that such bribery occurred may have been referring to the offers of estate upgrading made by the ruling party to voters," the study explained.

Elsewhere in the report, it was revealed that over 90 per cent of respondents were proud to be Singaporeans – a proportion that has risen over the years.

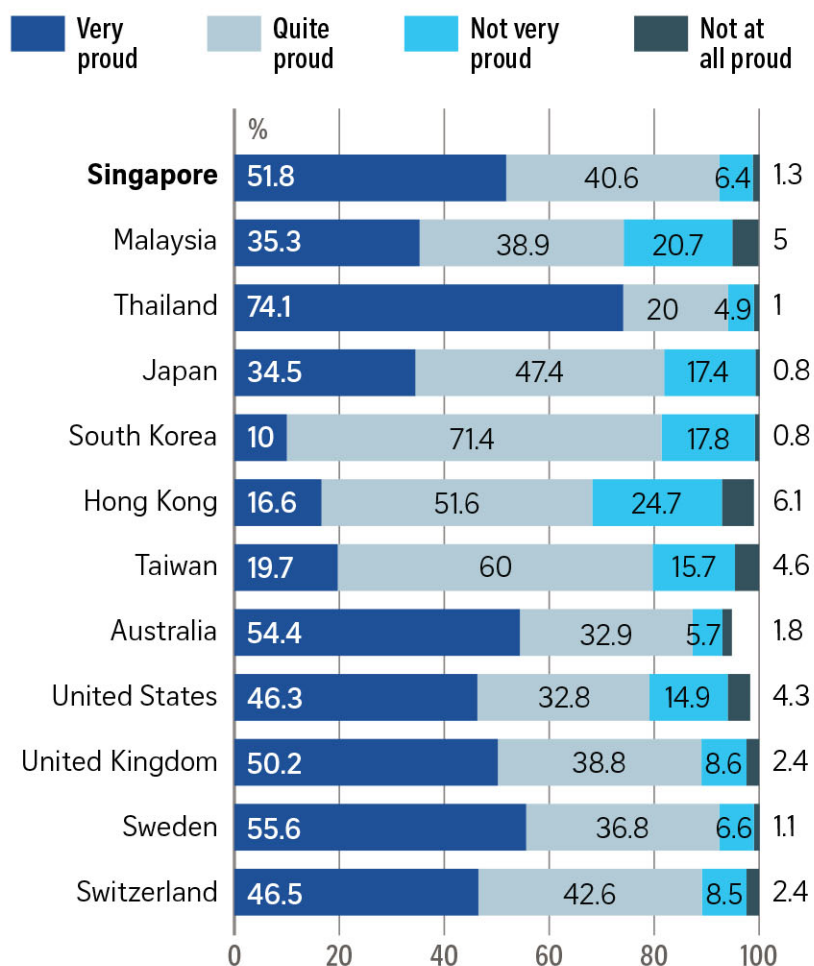
While 42 per cent in 2002 and 46.6 per cent in 2012 said that they were "very" proud of being Singaporeans, a majority of 51.8 per cent said the same in 2020.

Over 40 per cent said they were "quite" proud.

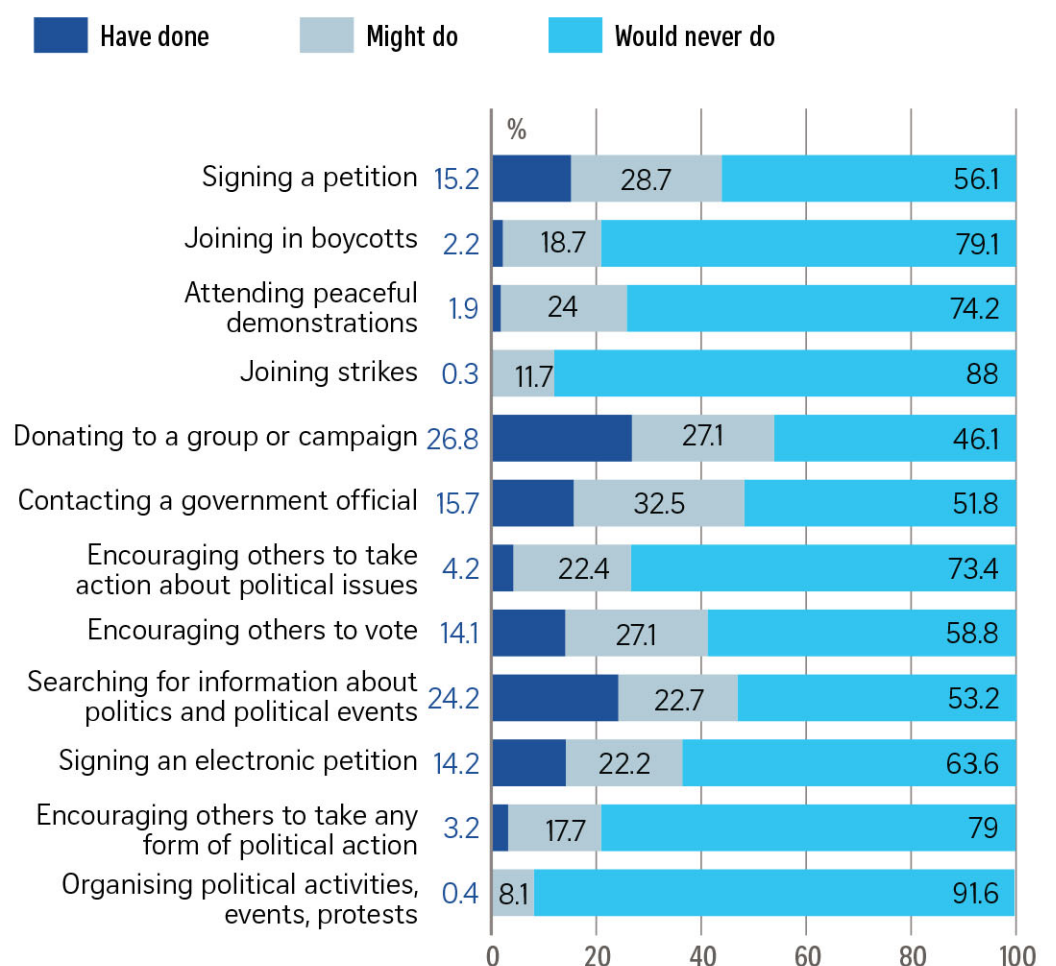
In Asia, only Thailand had a higher level of national pride, with 74.1 per cent saying they were very proud of their country.

Justin Ong

National pride



Types of political action



Source: INSTITUTE OF POLICY STUDIES STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS