

Two New Publications: Social Stratification in Singapore; Insights and Hopes for Singapore in 2065

CLASS AND SOCIAL ORIENTATIONS: KEY FINDINGS FROM THE SOCIAL STRATIFICATION SURVEY 2011

The Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) published a [report](#) on class and social orientations as part of the IPS Exchange Series, which comprises final reports on primary research conducted by IPS researchers and the Institute's associates, as well as reports of study groups, conferences and seminars organised by the Institute.

Authored by Dr Tan Ern Ser, Head of IPS Social Lab, the report is based on a 2011 survey on social stratification in Singapore. The views of 2,700 Singapore citizens aged 15 through 74 were sought to find out about the social and political orientations of Singaporeans such as social mobility, political participation, and satisfaction and happiness, among other variables. The report also made some comparisons with an earlier survey done in 2001.

A Stratified Society

Asking respondents to describe their social class is useful in understanding how they perceive their future prospects, said Dr Tan. He concluded that Singapore is a stratified society where life outcomes are shaped by income, education and occupation, as well as subjective indicators, such as one's perception of class structure. He pointed to data which showed that university-educated fathers are far more likely to have similarly qualified children (63%) than their counterparts with secondary-level qualifications (37%) or primary or lower education (12%). Similarly, the survey found a positive correlation between income level and financial outlook, demonstrating that "while absolute mobility occurs across all classes, relative mobility has remained unequal".

In line with a growing body of work on non-economic measurements of a country's success, the report looked at how satisfied and happy Singaporeans are. The survey found 81% of respondents agreed with the statement "I am satisfied with my life". While this represented a 5% drop compared to 2001 findings, Dr Tan stated that the introduction of a "neutral" option in 2011 (which was selected by 8% of the sample) could have accounted for the drop as well. The survey also found a positive correlation between household income and both life satisfaction and happiness, but Dr Tan pointed out that money was not a sufficient condition for happiness.

Political participation was also discussed in the report. Political alienation, defined as the difference between an individual's tendency to participate in the political process and his perception of the opportunity to participate was measured in the survey. Dr Tan said that there is some political alienation present, with 48% in the "alienated" category; 48% with "zero" alienation; and 4% "not alienated". This is a similar pattern to that found in the 2001 findings, although political alienation overall increased. This was attributed to a desire for more political participation not being matched by the opportunity to participate, he said.

Recommendations

In his recommendations to policymakers, Dr Tan said there should be greater equalisation of opportunities for middle-class Singaporeans, who make up the bulk of society. This is because social and cultural capital matter as much as economic capital. For instance, the survey showed that middle-class and younger Singaporeans desire greater political participation. He also touched on local-migrant interaction and integration, reminding policymakers of the need to strengthen the Singaporeans' sense of security by managing the inflow of foreign workers and professionals and constantly upgrading workforce skill levels. While Singaporeans are not inherently against migrants, they are understandably negative towards economic migrants whom they perceive to be a threat towards their economic and familial wellbeing, he said.

Dr Tan urged policymakers to consider class, alongside race and religion, as an important dimension in the policy domain. He said: "I hope that we'll aim to achieve a middle class society based on meritocracy and equality of opportunity, and that we'll stop thinking that meritocracy is a problem, when it is inequality of opportunity which hinders social mobility. Finally, I hope people will stop referring to the middle class as the sandwiched class. There is no sandwiched class, just sandwiched generation and middle class."

SINGAPORE 2065: LEADING INSIGHTS ON ECONOMY AND ENVIRONMENT FROM 50 SINGAPORE ICONS AND BEYOND

More than fifty well-known individuals from Singapore academia, civil society, the private sector and the public sector have penned a series of insights for a new book edited by Professor Euston Quah, head of economics at Nanyang Technological University and Adjunct Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies. These include the respected economist Professor Lim Chong Yah, opposition politician Chen Show Mao and business editor Vikram Khanna.

In his foreword for the book, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance Tharman Shanmugaratnam said that geopolitical developments, demography shifts, climate change and slower global growth pose uncertainties for Singapore's next phase of development. But Singapore is starting from a position of strength, coming out of the transformations it achieved in its first 50 years of independence. This book he said, is a valuable contribution to the healthy debate on the choices Singaporeans must make as they go forward, to become an even better Singapore that is both more innovative and inclusive. Singapore's future will depend on its ability to develop new skills and technologies, original business solutions and a spirit of experimentation in society.

Prof. Quah said he could categorise the essays as such: careful and rational arguments; projections, calculations and simulations; and visionary thinking. They offer the reader a stimulating read of convergent and divergent visions of Singapore's future, and provide suggestions of what must be done to place the country in a favourable position.

For example, Senior Minister of State for Finance and Transport, Mrs Josephine Teo ended her heartfelt letter to young Singaporeans urging them to "Take good care of our country, because it really is a most unusual and precious little red dot. Leave it an even brighter red dot than the one we will be leaving you."

The Straits Times Opinion Editor Chua Mui Hoong wrote about her fervent wish for the Singapore of 2065 to have "pockets of nature" where Singaporeans can encounter the country's tremendous biodiversity. This would be no easy endeavour, she acknowledged, due to Singapore's land constraints and the challenges of managing development alongside conservation.

"The Next Fifty", a poem by the eminent poet Edwin Thumboo is included at the start of the book. An evocative musing on Singapore's journey forward, one of the verses reads:

What more?

As we update, renew and rearrange tiring skylines,

Tunnel and reclaim, let's pledge our Island, its little ones

To tidy, living green, the firm corners of our compass.

Let then shimmer in light, set mood and spirit, unfold

Shadows, chlorophyll our air, distil flower and shade

All this and more careful adventuring for posterity.

Singapore 2065: Leading Insights on Economy and Environment from 50 Singapore Icons and Beyond is available at leading bookstores and on World Scientific's [website](#).

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