

## **30% of S'poreans are "cynics": study**

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SINGAPORE: A new study has shown that about a third of Singaporeans are "cynics" who do not trust politicians.

The survey, conducted by the Institute of Policy Studies, covered nearly 1,100 Singaporeans, aged 21 and above.

It was carried out in July and August last year, around nine months before the May general election.

Compared to other liberal democracies like the US, which sees a higher percentage of cynics (47%-73%), researchers say the 30 per cent figure for Singapore is not huge.

Still they say the ruling People's Action Party should be "worried".

The study's definition of cynics include people who think they are often manipulated by politicians; politicians forgetting their election promises; and politicians who think having power is more important than catering to the people's wishes.

In other words, cynics are unhappy with the person, rather than the system.

However, the study did not differentiate whether the politician is from the ruling or opposition parties.

Arun Mahizhnan, deputy director of the Institute of Policy Studies, said: "Certainly in the recent past, in Singapore, there is some disaffection with the delivery of public goods. You heard about the transportation problems, the housing problems, even things like the flood.

"So to what extent are these permanent features? To what extent are these immediate reactions? This is yet to be determined. But this survey suggests that there is a significant minority who are cynical and there are ways in which the cynicism could be addressed."

The study also found that there is no significant relation between a cynic, how much he earns, his education and age. It said the difference is not a socio-economic one but a political one. That means cynics in Singapore cut across the entire cross-section of the community.

Unlike other countries, cynics in Singapore are also not influenced by mainstream media. Rather, about 13 per cent get their news from alternative new media sites like The Online Citizen and Yawningbread.org.

They are mostly young and educated.

So experts say policy makers should exploit the Internet and new media in their engagement efforts, on top of deepening relations - both online and offline.

Dr Zhang Weiyu, National University of Singapore's assistant professor of communications & new media, said: "Since these people tend to use online channels and interpersonal channels to discuss politics, we should take advantage of these two channels to reach out to this group of people.

"They probably also go to mass media but they don't do that as often as people who are less cynical and we find that they have lower trust in these mass media compared to people who are less cynical.

"So the government or the policy makers should take advantage of the Internet and other interpersonal interactions to influence these people - interpersonal like Meet-The-People sessions and also I suggest that we can conduct more consultational panels with normal citizens.

"We need to encourage interpersonal discussions directly between politicians and citizens. So it's not just politicians trying to send their message through mass media to the citizens because we find that interpersonal talk has a big influence."

The study also showed that mainstream media complement alternative new media sites. For example, 72.2 per cent turn to television for news, while 71.6 per cent read the newspapers for their main source of information.

Another group that need to be engaged further are those who claim they do not consume any news, be it through traditional or alternative media sources. They constitute about 14 per cent of respondents.