

Singaporeans most proud of healthcare system, cleanliness; low scores for press freedom, treatment of migrant workers: Study

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SINGAPORE: The country's healthcare system, level of cleanliness and armed forces were the strongest sources of pride for Singaporeans, according to a study by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) that examined national pride and identity.

On the other hand, Singapore's arts, treatment of low-wage migrant workers and level of press freedom were among the weakest sources of pride.

The findings, released on Thursday (Sep 23), were based on responses from about 2,000 citizens and permanent residents from a representative sample of households. They were surveyed between September and November 2020.

HIGHEST SCORES FOR HEALTHCARE SYSTEM

Twenty-four sources of pride were listed in the survey, including government autonomy, the social welfare system and economic performance.

The healthcare system scored the highest marks, with 83.8 per cent of respondents saying they were proud or very proud of it. Cleanliness scored 76.4 per cent for these categories.

The Singapore Armed Forces (78.7 per cent) and the education system (73.3 per cent) also ranked among the top five.

People were "largely proud" of how the country handled the COVID-19 pandemic – more than two-thirds of respondents were proud or very proud of it.

Social and political institutions, such as racial equality and the way democracy is practised here, drew a "modest" level of pride, said IPS.

LEAST PROUD OF PRESS FREEDOM, TREATMENT OF MIGRANT WORKERS

Singapore's level of press freedom and treatment of low-wage migrant workers were ranked bottom of the list, with only about one-third of respondents saying they were proud or very proud of these.

Scores for pride in Singapore's sporting achievements and arts were also among the lowest.

Overall, researchers noted that areas respondents were most proud of were those that have seen a "considerable amount of state management and global recognition".

Conversely, weaker sources of pride were ones that have been "well-publicised" as falling short of international benchmarks.

While external validation has given Singapore confidence in its institutions, as well as an international reputation, it also means Singaporeans may not derive pride from local institutions that do not hold such acclaim, said the report.

"Perhaps it is time for serious deliberation to redefine what we can be proud of as a nation – it may not always be what reflects international standing, and its underlying values, but possibly what has local appeal and benefit."

At the same time, areas that Singapore residents are less proud of should deserve "sustained attention", it said.

The study's principal research fellow, Dr Mathew Mathews, said: "For example, the treatment of migrant workers is an important area that has become a lot more salient to more Singaporeans. And I think our collective understanding ... should motivate us to try to see what we can do in our own way, and as a collective, to better the treatment of migrant workers."

Researchers also noted "clear demographic differences" in the survey results – such as how highly educated respondents were more likely to be less proud of Singapore's treatment of migrant workers, "who pose no threat to their employment security".

"In general, distinctions in pride levels of various domains were mainly observed across education and SES (socio-economic status), rather than age and race," added the report.

IMMIGRATION, JOBS AND GLOBALISATION

The study also assessed people's perceptions of a range of social issues, all of which "have substantial bearing on national identity" – such as immigration and equality.

More than eight in 10 viewed globalisation positively as it helped the economy and Singapore residents.

In addition, more than 75 per cent of respondents felt immigration was generally good for the economy.

But the report noted: "Just over 50 per cent of respondents agreed to a moderate or great extent that immigrants took jobs away from people in Singapore, and that the Government spent too much money assisting immigrants."

It added that less-educated respondents and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds were more likely to perceive a higher economic threat from immigrants.