

MEDIA RELEASE

CITIZENS AND THE NATION: NATIONAL ORIENTATIONS OF SINGAPOREANS SURVEY (NOS4)

INTRODUCTION

The National Orientations of Singaporeans (NOS) Survey studies the emotional bonds of Singaporeans to the nation. The Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) conducts this survey every five years to track longitudinal trends. Previous studies were completed in 1993 (NOS1), 1999 (NOS2) and 2005 (NOS3).

2 This media release presents the key findings of the fourth study in the series (NOS4), conducted between 28 Feb 09 and 11 May 09.

METHODOLOGY

3 The study was conducted by Associate Professor Tan Ern Ser, Faculty Associate¹ and Dr Gillian Koh, Senior Research Fellow, both of the Institute of Policy Studies, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore.

4 Face-to-face interviews were conducted with a disproportionate, stratified random sample of 2016 Singapore citizens residing in Singapore, aged 21 to 64 years. The fieldwork was carried out between 28 February 2009 and 11 May 2009. Results were weighted by ethnicity and housing type.

5 The NOS4 questionnaire contains the two sets of core items of the NOS series for trend analysis. The first set relates to National Loyalty which is measured using the Citizen-National Psychological Ties (CNP) Index that has two sub-components: (a) National Identity (NID) Index; and (b) Willingness to Sacrifice (for the nation) (WTS) Index.

6 The second set of core items relates to the National Pride (GNPRIDE) Index, a 5-item index developed by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC), based in Chicago, United States of America, to facilitate cross-national comparisons. NOS4 incorporates a new battery of 10 items also from the NORC focused on pride in specific aspects of a country, adapted for Singapore. It is

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called the Domain-Specific National Pride (SNPRIDE) Index. An overview of the key concepts and related indices used in NOS4 is at [Annex A](#).

7 Apart from those core items, the NOS4 questionnaire includes elective items relating to political participation, political alienation, views on social provisions and sense of community. The scores are compared with those collected on similar questions in previous NOS surveys and an IPS survey on Political Participation conducted in 1999². This media release focuses on relationships between variables that are of statistical significance at the 95% confidence level only.

NATIONAL LOYALTY STABLE

8 National Loyalty is measured using the Citizen-Nation Psychological Ties (CNP) Index, which comprises two sub-indices: the National Identity (NID) Index and the Willingness to Sacrifice (WTS) Index.

9 Examining the CNP, NID and WTS scores through the 15 year series, there was a slight downward trend to begin with, but these have held relatively steady between 2005 and 2009. Singapore's economy and population are more exposed to global trends and people movements than ever before, yet we recognise that the government has also taken steps to mitigate its complex effects on the sense of nationhood and identity among citizens through its programmes like National Education, the Community Engagement Programme, the Singapore Memory Project, the Overseas Singaporean Unit's Singapore Day, and events like the annual National Day Celebrations, the National Day Rally Speech, and Racial Harmony Day.

10 We examined how CNP scores were associated with different demographic profiles: The scores tended to weaken the higher the socioeconomic status of the respondents. The Chinese had marginally weaker scores, as did the younger respondents in our study. Those whose desire for political participation outweighed what they perceived were the opportunities to do so, that is 'alienated' on our measure of Political Alienation that is explained below and in Annex A, were more likely to have lower CNP, NID, WTS scores.

NATIONAL PRIDE RELATIVELY HIGH AND STABLE

11 The National Pride (GNPRIDE) Index measures the extent to which a citizen is proud of his nation, its achievements and what it stands for.

12 The mean GNPRIDE score for NOS4 was 17.2, close to 17.0 in NOS3. Given that, Singapore would rank 5th when compared with the sense of national

² A report of this study can be found in:

Ooi, G. L., Tan E. S., and Koh, G., 'Political Participation in Singapore: Findings from a National Survey', in Asian Journal of Political Science, Vol.7, No.2, December 1999, pp.126 to 141.

pride of people in 40 other countries from data collected from an international study completed in 2006. This is a higher placing than Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea, countries that admittedly would have faced some level of social, political and economic disruption compared to Singapore at that time in 2006. Unfortunately, there are no updated figures for comparisons across the countries for 2009. On the Domain-Specific National Pride (SNPRIDE) Index, Singapore's score of 2.8 is ranked 4th when compared to other 40 countries.

13 We examined how GNPRIDE scores were associated with different demographic profiles: GNPRIDE scores tended to weaken the higher the socioeconomic status of respondents. Those in the 'Others' category and Chinese, and with regard to age, the younger respondents tended to have lower scores on GNPRIDE. Respondents whom we identified as likely to be 'politically alienated' tended also to be associated with lower GNPRIDE scores.

14 As for SNPRIDE, the same general pattern of association with socioeconomic status and political alienation holds as it does for the other indices however in this case, the Adults tended on average to be associated with lower scores and not the younger respondents.

NORMS OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION STRONG

15 Respondents were surveyed on their desire and willingness to participate actively in the political and policy-making process, as well as views on subsidies and taxes which are the practical issues of citizenship, on their sense of community and unity. Results were compared with those of the IPS survey referred to earlier as well as other NOS surveys. What was different from the previous surveys however was that in NOS4, we did not read out the neutral answer category so as to eliminate 'fence-sitting' by respondents.

The Vote and Other Forms of Political Participation – Higher Propensity for Political Engagement

16 Findings suggested an increased demand for political participation and involvement. In 1998, 72% either agreed or strongly agreed that 'voting gave citizens the most meaningful way in which to tell the government how the country should be run' with 17.5% who chose the neutral option. Ten years later, in 2009, this increased to 85%. When asked if in spite of that sentiment, there should be 'other channels by which citizens can express their views on government policies', 79% agreed or strongly agreed with that statement, where 17.2% chose the neutral option in 1998. This increased to 95% in 2009.

17 While the expectation of 87% of the 1998 study was that every citizen *should* have equal freedom to express their views, with 11% falling in the neutral category, this increased to 97% of the sample in 2009. Even under circumstances where the Government needed to make quick decisions, 73% of the 1998 study

wanted the Government to take the time to listen to citizens, with 20% in the neutral category. The desire for consultation increased to 97% in the current 2009 study.

18 Respondents were asked if they liked to join and serve in government-related bodies, like Town Councils (TC), Community Development Councils (CDC) and grassroots organisations related to the People's Association. In 1998, 24% indicated they would consider doing so, with 37% in the neutral category. In 2009, this increased to 48%. When asked if they would consider joining non-government organisations, like professional bodies, or civic organisations, the proportion that would consider this increased from 39% in 1998 with 32% in the neutral category to 58% in 2009.

19 Results thus suggest that norms of active citizenship are fairly well-embedded in the broader body politic and that there exists a strong expectation regarding citizen engagement by the Government. Those in the younger age groups and higher socioeconomic levels were more likely to agree that there should be other channels for political expression other than the ballot box. Younger respondents and those with high CNP scores were also likely to feel that every citizen should have equal freedom to express their views.

Expressing Views To Government – No Change in Top Three Most Effective Channels

20 However, in practice, not many more actually proceeded to express their views on public policy issues to the Government – 8.6% of the 1998 sample and 8% of the 2009 sample. (Of course, this is not the only indicator of actual political participation.) Respondents indicated that this had more to do with not having 'strong views' than the perception of the lack of channels nor that the channels are viewed to be ineffective - 68% said it was because they had no strong views, 7% said they had no channels to do so, 13% said they thought there were no effective channels to do so. In 1998, 54% said they had no strong views, 15%, no channels, 16%, no effective channels. Among the small group of respondents who had actually taken steps to voice their opinions to the Government in 2009, 4% said they did it often, 64% they did it occasionally, and 31% said that they ever only did it once.

21 All respondents were asked to go through a list of 12 channels for political participation and indicate for each if they thought it was an effective channel for expressing views on public policy issues or issues of public interest. The top three channels remained the same as those cited in the earlier survey – the Meet-the-People sessions with Members of Parliament, direct communications with relevant government agencies, and letters to newspapers. There was change in the fourth and fifth ranked channels where specifically, the Community Development Councils (CDCs) replaced the Feedback Unit (now renamed 'Reach'). It is likely that this was because CDCs were only just introduced at the time of the earlier study in 1999 and the Government has chosen an increasing

number of social welfare schemes and job-related programmes through them. As such, CDCs have increased in visibility and relevance to citizens over the decade.

Perceived Participation Opportunity Improved

22 Respondents were surveyed on their perceptions of opportunities to be active participants in the political and governance system. Overall, the findings suggest that the belief that there were such opportunities has improved over time, yet so did the belief that such opportunities were limited. Overall, almost 2 in 3 respondents felt that citizens could influence government decision-making in NOS4.

23 Respondents were asked in another question whether it was possible for people like themselves to express their views and opinions before the government made its decisions. Whereas 20% of the respondents in NOS1 felt that it was possible for people like themselves to participate in decision-making, 47% agreed that it was possible to do so, bearing in mind that the neutral answer option was not read out in this latest survey.

Political Alienation Has Declined

24 We devised an indicator of the gap between a desire to influence national policy-making or discussions on national issues and the perception that opportunities exist to do so. We called it 'political alienation'. We used the difference in scores for responses to two questions in the NOS4 instrument: 'It does not matter to me whether I have any influence on government policy or not' (we reversed the scoring of this item so that it is a higher score is given to disagreeing to the statement), and 'It is possible for citizens to influence government decision-making'. Where 'desire' outweighed 'perceived opportunity' this was noted as indicator of 'alienation'. When it was the other way around, this was noted as an indicator of being 'not alienated'. This was done in the earlier study in 1998 with similar questions.

25 The results suggest that the percentage of those who probably felt a 'deficit' of opportunities for political participation had fallen – 43% in 1998 to 20% of the 2009 sample. More among the Adults, the higher socioeconomic levels, that is University graduates, Service occupation level, Upper Middle and High income, and 5-6 roomers level were in the alienated category and this was likely to be a function of their higher levels of desire for participation in the first place.

Social Provision – One Third Preferred Equal Subsidies

26 We asked respondents their views on sharing the costs of social provision. Up to 19% of respondents said that people from the whole range of low to high income should receive some government subsidies for medical care, public transport, housing and education. Between 29% to 31% of respondents surveyed

would prefer receiving government subsidies even if it meant paying more taxes. This group preferred relying on the government for distributive policies of providing certain public and social goods to a more liberal regime of minimal government and low taxes. A majority of respondents, 64% said that the quantum of subsidies should not be equal to all, which in turn would mean that as much as a one third of the respondents wished for subsidies to be the same across the board.

Sense of Community – Two in Three Concerned About Impact of Foreigners

27 On Singaporeans' sense of community, there was an increased ability to identify with citizens beyond the racial and ethnic differences - from 60% who disagreed that they had "nothing in common with Singaporeans of other races" in 1998 with 22% in the neutral category, increasing to 77% in 2009. More indicated they would be willing to help the disadvantaged outside of their ethnic group between the two surveys as well where 92% who agreed that they should do so in 1998 with 5% in the neutral category, and 98% of the same view in 2009.

28 With integration of new immigrants currently a widely discussed issue, we asked respondents for their reactions to the statement, "The policy to attract more foreign talent will weaken Singaporeans' feeling as one nation, one people". In the 1998 study, 38% agreed or strongly agreed that such a policy could be a threat to national unity, with 29% choosing the neutral category. In the NOS4 study, 63% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that national unity would be affected. Since 1998, a higher proportion of people living in Singapore are foreigners, from foreign labourers to professionals. This increased rate of representation of and correspondingly, exposure to foreigners as well as current public debate on the issue may have caused what would seem to be an increase in ambivalence, bearing in mind again that this might also have been partly the effect of eliminating of the neutral answer category. The bottomline however is that two in three people would be concerned about the impact of foreigners, whether immigrants or transients on national unity.

29 A new statement was included in the 2009 survey where respondents were asked if they agreed or disagreed with the statement "The Government is right to increase the number of foreigners working in Singapore if our economy needs it." 66% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement compared to the 37% who said they did not think that foreigners would affect unity in the previous question. The acceptance of the presence of foreigners was therefore higher when viewed with the lens of the 'economic imperative'.

HOLISTIC ASSESSMENT

30 A k-means (multi-dimensional means) cluster procedure generated by the statistical programme SPSS was used to organise respondents into three groups based on their scores for CNP, GNPRIDE and Political Alienation to give an

overall picture of citizen-nation ties to Singapore. 69% of the sample fell in the 'high' category, 19% in the 'medium' category and 12% in the 'low' category (ie, low CNP, low GNPRIDE and 'alienated'). People in the Chinese, Young and Adult categories were over-represented in this 'low' cluster vis-à-vis the distribution in the resident population. These are exploratory findings and it is important to remember that in absolute terms, the bases for all the indices were high and healthy, and the findings should be read from that perspective.

31 IPS wishes to express its gratitude to the members of public who very kindly participated in this study.

We are grateful to Tote Board and Singapore Pools for their support of this study.



Annex A

KEY CONCEPTS AND RELATED INDICES

National Loyalty

National Loyalty as a concept is measured using the Citizen-Nation Psychological Ties (CNP) Index. It is understood as sense of belonging to, pride in, and commitment to the nation. The CNP index itself comprises two components: a national identity (NID) component and a willingness to sacrifice (WTS) for the nation component.

CNP consists of 24 items in the Questionnaire, of which 12 items pertain to NID, and 12 items pertain to the WTS component.

National Pride

An index closely related to, but that is not the same as CNP, is the National Pride (GNPRIDE) Index. This index was developed by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC), University of Chicago, USA, in *National Pride. A Cross-relational Analysis* (June 1998) by Tom Smith and Lars Jarkko. As its name suggests, this Index measures the extent to which the citizen is proud of his or her nation, its achievements and what it stands for. The Index has five items, replicated exactly as it was in the NORC study to allow for direct comparison with its findings.

The Domain-Specific National Pride (SNPRIDE) Index is based on in-depth questions on pride for specific aspects of the country and adopted from National Pride in Cross-national and Temporal Perspective (International Journal of Public Opinion Research, No.18, Spring 2006, pp. 127-136) by Tom Smith and Kim Soekho.

Political Participation

Political Participation is understood in terms of actions taken by an individual to influence policies. We ask questions about whether activities like voting in elections are important, and whether there should be other channels by which citizens should make their views known on public policy, how important what happens in Parliament is to one's daily life, etc. There is also a question on whether one has ever made views known to the government on any public policy issue.

Political Alienation

Political Alienation is operationally defined as the gap between participation *propensity*, the extent to which one desires to have an influence on national policymaking, and perceived participation *opportunity*, the extent to which one perceives the political system as providing the opportunity to influence national policymaking.