

## Singapore Perspectives 2016

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Singapore Perspectives is the flagship conference of the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) that highlights current public policy challenges facing Singapore.

This year, Singapore celebrated 50 years of independence and we took stock of how the choices we made have gotten us to where we are. We also celebrated our achievements and started a conversation about the road ahead. With so much of our nation-building efforts premised upon the existence of this imagined community known as “Singapore”, it is an opportune moment to question and reimagine who “We” are. We know what our aspirations are, but *should* our aspirations and ideals remain constant?

The theme for the coming year’s conference is simply titled “We”. This is because we often focus on values or first principles and debate their applications, but never fully questioned the underlying collective that is the basis for such principles. To illustrate this point: “We” is the first word of the National Pledge of Singapore. It is an innocuous pronoun, unlikely to be noticed when compared to concepts like *democracy*, *justice* and *equality*, or aspirations such as *happiness*, *prosperity* and *progress*. Yet “We” is uttered first, summoning into existence a collective noun — Singaporeans who aspire to become a united people with a common destiny. Perhaps it is important to ask ourselves who “We” really are, or should become, before we can properly discuss what democracy, justice or equality means to us.

With the strong mandate given to the PAP government in the 2015 elections, what better way to contemplate these issues than to hear directly from our fourth-generation of political leadership?

IPS has pulled off a conference and logistics tour de force by successfully securing not one or two, but *four* distinguished members of our new generation leaders for this conference. Mr Heng Swee Keat, Mr Chan Chun Sing, Mr Ng Chee Meng and Mr Ong Ye Kung will all come as speakers to share their vision of who we are, and their vision of our future.

Audience participation is important to IPS conferences, and we have previously experimented with debates and audience voting in order to engage more people. For this conference, we have decided to try a new format of engagement. Instead of crowding up the session with multiple presenters, we have decided that only the Ministers will make a formal speech, as most Singaporeans want to hear from them. This gives our new leaders an opportunity to articulate their vision, values and ideas, but also more time for public engagement. For each session, we have assembled panellists made up of public servants, academics, community and corporate leaders who have been given the task of asking tough

questions to our Ministers — questions that Singaporeans would want to ask but may not have the opportunity to. We hope this will generate a lively discussion so that we can collectively clarify, challenge and refine the vision articulated. After the panellists have raised their key concerns and questions, a full half-hour will be set aside for an audience Q&A session, so that more may participate in a dialogue with the Ministers on issues that matter to them.

In the first panel, entitled “Collaborative Governance?”, Mr Chan Chun Sing will speak on how we could continue to have good governance amidst the increasing diversity and expansion of civic and cultural activism.

In the second panel, “Cohesive Diversity?”, Mr Ng Chee Meng will examine how Singapore could remain a tolerant and open society given the need for integrating new migrants and growing religiosity.

For the third panel, “Inclusive Growth?” Mr Ong Ye Kung will discuss how we could balance economic growth and the demands of productivity with equity and inclusivity.

In the final panel, Mr Heng Swee Keat will explore whether Singaporeans should reimagine who “We” are and how to move ahead as a people towards SG100 in a session titled “The Future of “We””.

We hope that this upcoming Singapore Perspectives 2016 will provoke greater consideration of fundamental public policy issues that matter to Singaporeans, and look forward to seeing you there!

*Dr Justin Lee and Dr Teng Siao See are Research Fellows in the Society and Identity research cluster at IPS. They are the lead programme coordinators for Singapore Perspectives 2016. More information about the conference can be found [here](#).*

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*If you have comments or feedback, please email [jps.eneews@nus.edu.sg](mailto:jps.eneews@nus.edu.sg)*



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