

**MEDIA RELEASE (28 SEPTEMBER 2018)**

**IPS SURVEY ON**

**EMIGRATION ATTITUDES OF YOUNG SINGAPOREANS (2016)**

By the Institute of Policy Studies, National University of Singapore

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**In a nutshell:**

- a. The level of intention to emigrate in the 2016 survey was similar to what was found in the first survey that was conducted in 2010.
  - b. In both the 2010 and 2016 surveys, respondents who tended to agree that the social norms amongst their friends and family and in Singapore were predisposed towards emigration, those who thought emigration would improve one's social status and socio-economic security, those who thought they had the ability to emigrate and those who valued drive and ambition, were more likely to have thought about emigrating permanently and would take active steps to examine that possibility in the next five years.
  - c. On the other hand, those who believed they could improve their lot in Singapore, those with a higher sense of national pride and life satisfaction levels tended to be less likely to think of emigrating or take active steps to examine that possibility "in the next five years" across both surveys.
  - d. In the 2016 survey, those with higher education attainment as well as those who spoke English at home, the older respondents and males were more likely to think of emigrating. These factors did not matter in the 2010 survey.
  - e. Having family and friends, public health and safety were key factors of rootedness in the 2016 survey as they were in the 2010 survey, while medical care, educational opportunities and political stability rose in importance in the second study.
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1. The Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) conducted a survey on the emigration attitudes of young Singaporeans in 2016 as a follow up to a previous study conducted in 2010. Like in 2010, the investigators were Dr Gillian Koh, Ms Debbie Soon, and Dr Leong Chan-Hoong, Senior Research Fellow at the Institute.

2. This survey series provides a glimpse into the attitudes of young Singaporeans between the ages of 19-30 years old, living in Singapore, towards working and living abroad. Hence, the study takes a prospective approach to the issue of emigration. It seeks to identify the

predictors of emigration attitudes, factors for rootedness to Singapore and track preferred destinations for emigration. The 2016 sample of 2013 respondents was randomly selected and face-to-face interviews were conducted in English from 16 June 2016 to 27 November 2016. It was harder to achieve responses from residents of private housing. The data has a margin of error of +/- 2%.

### **Emigration attitudes**

3. The positive predictors of both the intention to emigrate and intention to actively examine the possibility of emigrating in the next five years that were common in both surveys were: social norms among friends and family that favoured emigration; the view that emigration improved one's social status and socio-economic security; the self-rated ability to emigrate; certain personal values (like hard work, attitudes and values a person's parents taught them as well as drive and ambition) were critical to succeeding in Singapore.

4. The negative predictors of both the intention to emigrate and the intention to actively examine the possibility of emigrating in five years in both 2010 and 2017 were the belief in the ability to improve one's lot in Singapore, the sense of national pride and life satisfaction levels, which meant that the higher the levels of the three factors, the lower the intent to emigrate and actively examine the possibility of doing so.

5. Education levels, language spoken at home, age and gender mattered in 2016 in terms of the intention to emigrate, whilst these did not in 2010. Specifically, in 2016, those with higher education levels and those who spoke English at home, the older respondents and males were more likely to emigrate.

6. The study found that the level of the desire to emigrate in the 2016 survey was similar to that of the 2010 survey where nearly 1 in 5 (18.3%) thought about emigrating to another country to live there permanently very frequently or all the time, nearly a third (29.2%) said they would actively examine the possibility of emigrating to another country within the next five years.

7. It was found that 27.4% agreed and strongly agreed that those who successfully emigrated overseas enjoyed a higher social status compared to those who remained in Singapore in the 2016 survey. Also 42.6% agreed and strongly agreed that emigration overseas could provide a "backup plan" in case Singapore failed in 2016, up from 32.8% in 2010. In 2016, a larger proportion, that is, 58.3% agreed and strongly agreed that the increase in emigration was inevitable as Singapore became more stressful and competitive compared to 43.3% in 2010.

8. On the other hand, increased numbers of respondents preferred to improve their lot in Singapore, where 53.5% of the respondents said they preferred to improve their socio-economic well-being in Singapore rather than emigrate for a better life, up from 48.2% in 2010. Only 19.9% agreed and strongly agreed that Singapore's future had become too unpredictable

and emigration was their best option in 2016, down from 27.5% in 2010. 59.3% said they could achieve the things they wanted without leaving Singapore, up from 45.6% in 2010.

9. On the pull of national identity, 53.1% said they would not renounce Singapore citizenship even if they were to become permanent residents (PR) in another country, up from 40.6% in 2010. 42.2% agreed and strongly agreed that being a PR opened up more opportunities for them, which was a rise from 36.8% in 2010.

10. Australia strengthened its position as the preferred emigration destination for Singaporeans, and New Zealand became a new contender, emerging in second place in terms of the percentage of respondents who selected it. There was a slight decline in interest in the United States, United Kingdom and Canada as destinations, coming in third, fourth and fifth respectively.

### **National pride and life satisfaction**

11. There were improvements in levels of national pride and life satisfaction but less certainty about whether there would be “sufficient jobs and opportunities for every Singaporean in the next 10 years”. 79.7% of the respondents said they preferred being a citizen of Singapore than any other country in the world in 2016, up from 57.2% in 2010. 77% felt that Singapore was a better country than most other countries in 2016, up from 52.2% in 2010. 58% said they were confident about the country’s economic prospects in the 2016 survey, up from 50.5% in the 2010 one.

### **Foreign talent**

12. More respondents thought that the country benefited from the presence of “foreign talent” with 62.5% of respondents who thought that foreign talent contributed to Singapore’s development as much as Singaporeans did in 2016, up from 45.4% in 2010. 55.3% in 2016 thought that foreign talent were keen to stay in Singapore permanently, up from 42.7% in 2010. 44% thought that foreign talent were keen to integrate, up from 37.4% in 2010.

13. However, increased numbers of respondents thought there were downsides to immigration in terms of social cohesion and were more skeptical about long-term commitment of immigrants to the country. 48% thought that that having too much foreign talent diluted the cohesiveness of society in 2016, up from 38.9% in 2010. 55.9% thought foreign talent used Singapore as a stepping stone to other countries, up from 45.5% in 2010. And, 44.9% said they wished to emigrate because there was “too much foreign talent in Singapore” up from 37% in 2010.

### **Cluster analysis**

14. Cluster analysis was conducted to develop archetypes of young Singaporeans based on their emigration attitudes and their responses to other parts of the survey.

15. Four clusters were generated, and were given labels: Disconnected Stayers (n=637, 31.6%), Flourishing Stayers (n=585, 29.1%), the Disconnected (n=234, 11.6%) and the Explorers (n=557, 27.7%) emerged.

16. The profile of the Disconnected Stayers and Flourishing Stayers is that they had a low levels of intention to emigrate, little ability to emigrate, and minimal sense of relative deprivation brought about by immigration. How did they differ? Disconnected Stayers had a moderate view of the benefits of emigration and its impact on social and socio-economic status while Flourishing Stayers had a dim view of these. Disconnected stayers had a weaker sense of national pride, subjective well-being, optimism about Singapore's economic future, and moderately strong family ties while Flourishing Stayers had the highest scores on these measures when compared to not just the Disconnected Stayers but across all the clusters.

17. The profile of Explorers and the Disconnected is that they had a high level of intention to emigrate and felt that emigration had a positive impact on one's social and socio-economic status. How did they differ? Explorers had a high self-rated ability to emigrate while the Disconnected scored themselves lower on that. Explorers had the greatest sense of relative deprivation between locals and foreigners amongst all the clusters. Explorers had a moderately high level of national pride, sense of subjective well-being, were moderately confident about Singapore's economic future and enjoyed strong family ties, while the Disconnected scored the lowest on these four factors of all the clusters.

18. Looking at demographic profiles of these clusters, there was no distinction among them on the basis of socio-economic status (household income, housing type) and education level, while in the case of the 2010 survey, respondents with a higher socio-economic status were overrepresented in the cluster with the highest intention to emigrate. In 2016, the Explorers cluster consisted of a larger proportion of non-Chinese (38.4%) compared with the other three clusters (27.7%, 29.6% and 26.5%). Also, in 2016, there was a higher proportion of English speakers in the Explorers and Disconnected clusters (79.1% and 79.9%) compared to the other two clusters (69.2% and 73.3%).

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