

# Forum on the Reforms to the Elected Presidency System

Friday, 21 October 2016  
Padang Room, Level 4  
Raffles City Convention Centre

SESSION ONE  
The Proposed Reforms

PRESENTATION BY

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Blackbox Research Pte Ltd

BLACK  
BOX

# Elected Presidency: Public Polling Insights

David Black, Blackbox Research

21 October 2016



Following the conclusion of the Constitutional Commission public hearings in May 2016, Blackbox began tracking public sentiment on the topic in our monthly omnibus of Singaporeans, **YouKnowAnot** \*.

From June-September 2016, we ran several questions looking at whether Singaporeans were following the topic and what they thought might be needed to improve on the current system.

Following the release of the Constitutional Commission report on 7 September and the release of the Government's White Paper response on 15 September, we updated our survey questions to reflect the recommendations and news coverage of some of the main changes proposed.

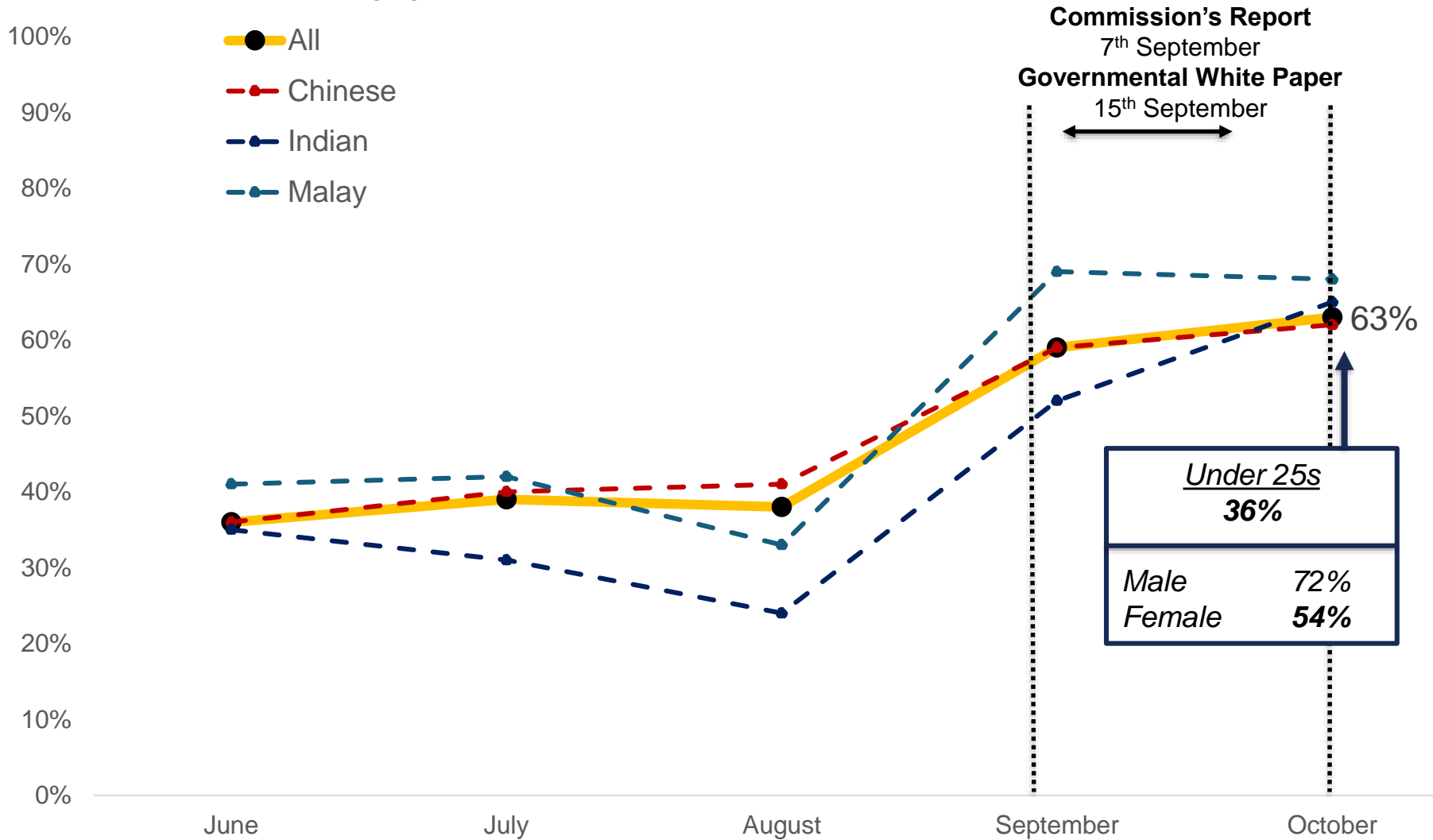
Our updated questions were included in Blackbox's October omnibus, which ran from 6-13 October.

June	July	August	September	October
13 <sup>th</sup> – 23 <sup>rd</sup>	14 <sup>th</sup> – 22 <sup>nd</sup>	12 <sup>th</sup> – 22 <sup>nd</sup>	8 <sup>th</sup> – 20 <sup>th</sup>	6 <sup>th</sup> – 13 <sup>th</sup>
N=887	N=884	N=897	N=897	N=897

\* Every month Blackbox polls n=1000 Singaporean citizens/PRs aged 15+ on a range of topics via an online survey. We use quota sampling to ensure accurate demographic representation across age, gender, race and socio-economic profiles (as reported publicly in SingStat data).

# Have Singaporeans Followed the Proposed Changes?

## Public Engagement (June-Oct)



Public uncertain about many aspects of EP reforms  
(Data from Oct'16 survey)

37%

Still not following the  
issue

1 in 5

'Unsure' on most  
agree/disagree  
questions

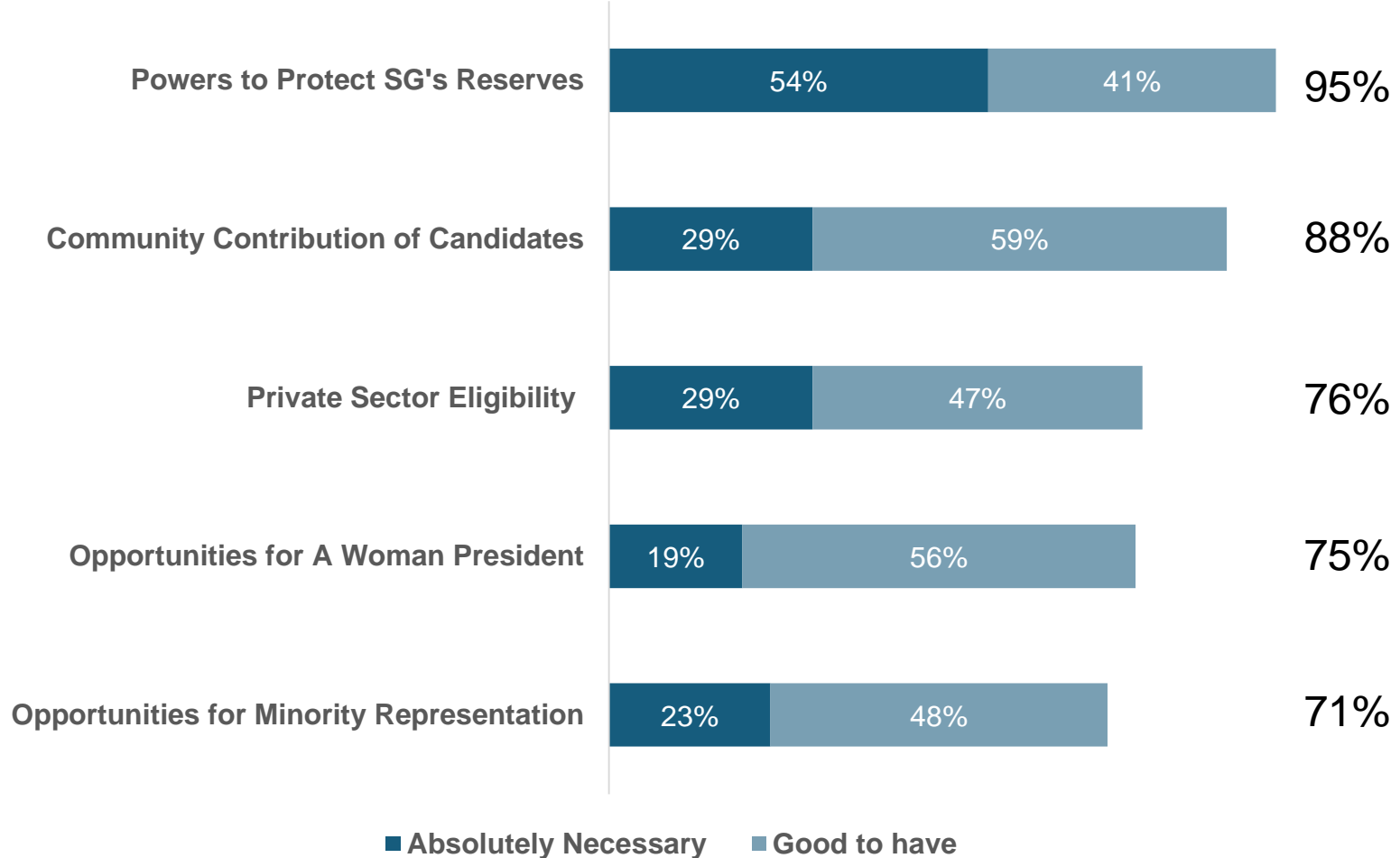
(Normally 5% range)

1 in 3

Say *Reserve  
Election* idea will  
both help social  
cohesion and  
undermine  
meritocracy

## Improvement Areas Highlighted by The Public *(Ranked By Perceived Necessity)*

*(June-Sept) Q: Thinking about what the eligibility criteria for Singapore's elected President should be, do you think the following are necessary to improve the current system?*



Singaporeans Overwhelmingly Support an Elected President with Clear Powers

82%  
support

President elected by Singaporeans should exercise the power to block the Government's **proposed spending of the country's national reserves.**

80%  
support

President elected by Singaporeans should exercise the power to block the **Government's nominees for top positions within the public and legal sector**



Research has consistently shown that the public is more interested in the President's role of safeguarding Singapore's reserves than anything else

## Pre-Report

1. **95%** supported stronger or tougher checks and balances that restrict the Government's ability to spend Singapore's reserves.

## Post-Report

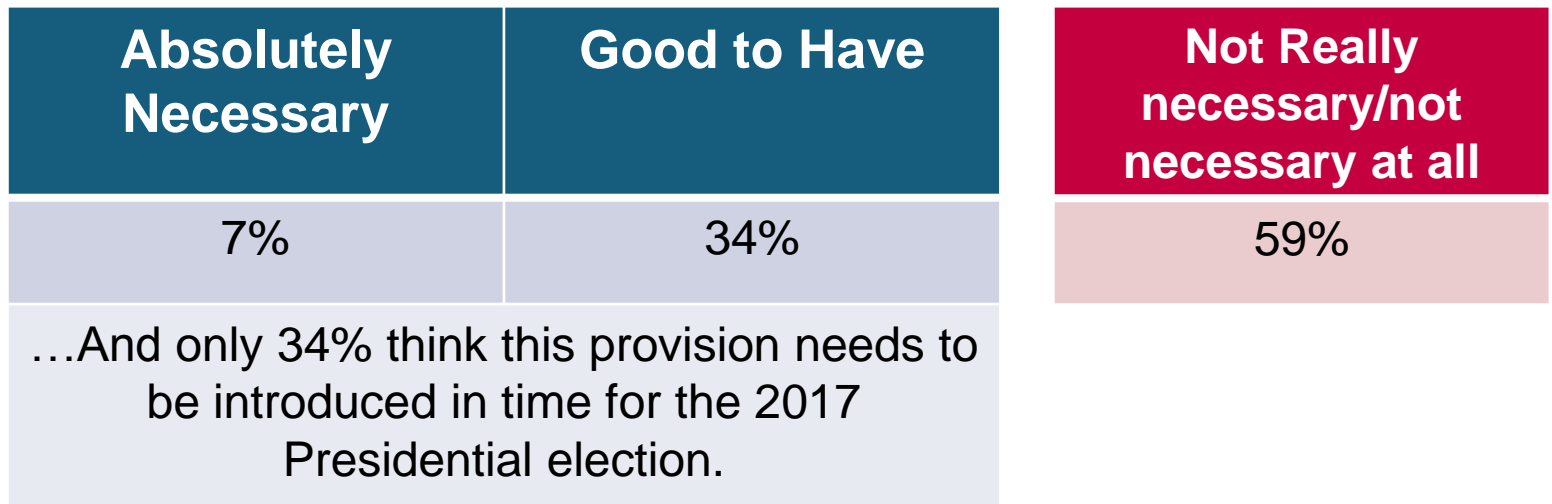
1. **82%** support President being able to block Governmental spending of National Reserves.
2. **74%** want elected President to consult the Council of Presidential Advisors over all fiscal and appointment matters that he has veto power over, rather than over just some of them as is present.

# Reserved Election Provision

About four in ten Singaporeans (41%) are responsive to the proposed reserved elections provision.

**(Oct. Only) Q:** Thinking about the changes the Government is proposing to the Elected Presidency system, do you think the following is necessary to improve it:

*Introducing a system where an election is restricted to candidates of a racial group if no member of that group has been the President after five terms, or 30 years.*

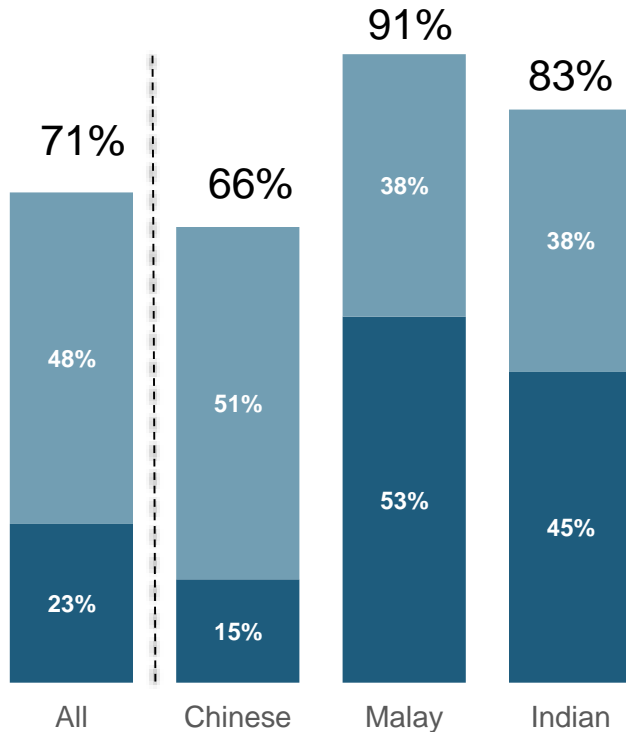


# Minorities: Principle More Compelling Than Provision

Lower support for proposed 'reserved election' provision than for the general principle of minority opportunity

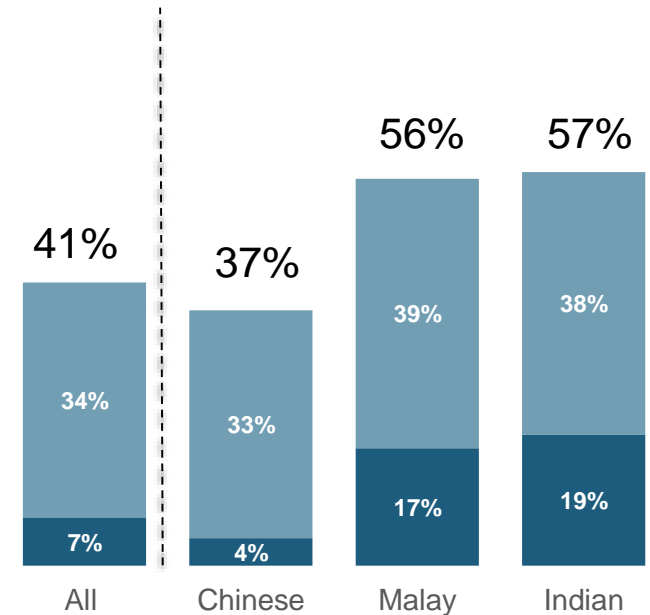
## Pre-Report

Q: Ensuring that minorities (e.g. Malays, Indians) are given a greater opportunity to become President



## Post-Report

Q: Introducing a system where an election is restricted to candidates of a racial group if no member of that group has been the president after 5 terms (30 years)



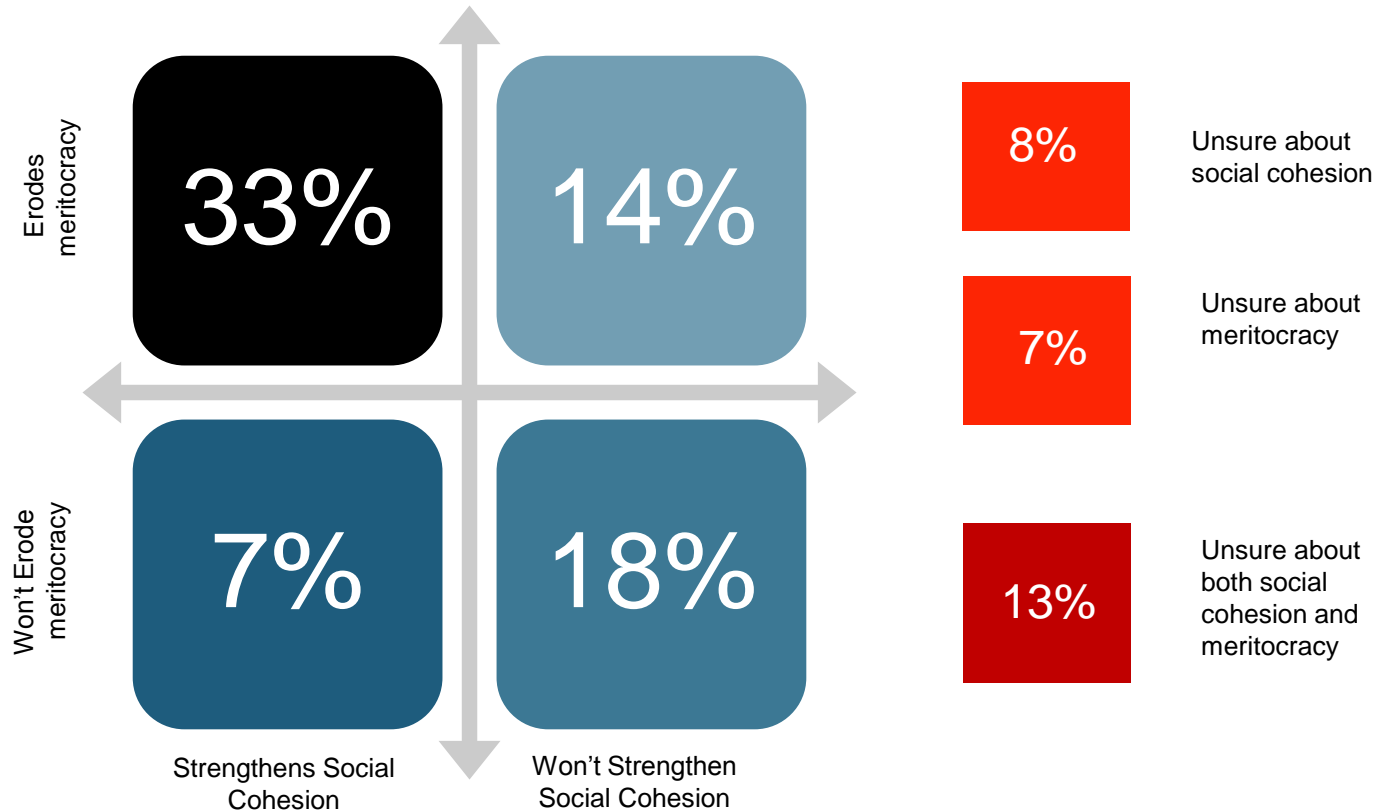
■ Absolutely Necessary ■ Good to have

While supportive of the Reserved Election concept, some uncertainty as to whether the idea clashes with Singapore's meritocratic principles.

(Oct. only) Q: Thinking about the effects of the proposed changes to the Elected Presidency, please state if you "Agree" or "Disagree" with the following statements.

**Meritocracy**

The safeguard of having a system of reserved elections when a racial group has not had one of its members become President over five terms or 30 years **erodes Singapore's system of meritocracy** even if the candidates still have to meet the basic eligibility



**Social Cohesion**

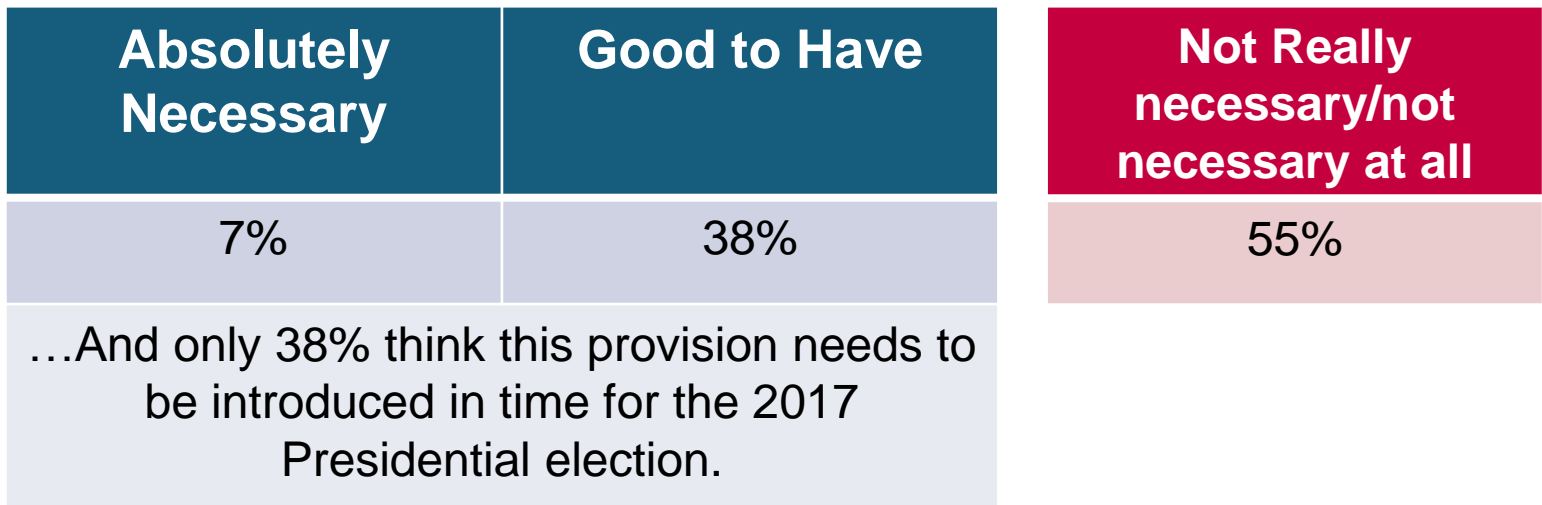
The safeguard of having a system of reserved elections when a racial group has not had one of its members become President over five terms or 30 years **will strengthen** social cohesion in multiracial Singapore.

# Private Sector Eligibility Criteria

Less than half of Singaporeans (45%) think the new private sector criteria are necessary to improve the elected Presidency

**Q:** Thinking about the changes the Government is proposing to the Elected Presidency system, do you think the following is necessary to improve it:

*Changing the eligibility criteria for private sector candidates from executive or chairman of a company of paid-up capital of \$100 million to being the most senior executive of a company with shareholder equity of \$500 million.*



1. Compared to other community issues and topics we monitor such as public transport, population, cost of living and employment, the elected presidency is not a high heat topic for most Singaporeans.
2. A clear research finding over the last six months is that Singaporeans are supportive of a popularly elected President but often find the nuances of the changes to the President's powers hard to grasp.
3. But Singaporeans appear more interested in President's financial safeguarding powers than in the proposed changes with respect to minorities and private sector eligibility.
4. With respect to the reserved election idea, it is evident that Malay and Indian citizens see merit in the idea, yet, at the same time, also question whether this undermines meritocracy. This is a topic that seems likely to be revisited in the future.



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*Since 2001, we have carried out work in more than 25 countries for international companies, government agencies, regulatory authorities and NGOs.*

*Our insights are regularly reported in both the Singapore and international media and we publish Singapore's only regular measurement of community sentiment '**YouKnowAnot**' which is circulated to more than 500 local opinion leaders and influencers every month.*





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