

**SATISFACTION WITH GOVERNMENT'S HANDLING
OF COVID-19 IN SINGAPORE**

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SINGAPORE¹**

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SATISFACTION WITH GOVERNMENT'S HANDLING OF COVID-19 IN SINGAPORE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper reviews Singaporeans' satisfaction with the government's COVID-19 pandemic management. It also examines perceptions of Singapore's pandemic response in comparison with other countries or regions, and the importance of government satisfaction in predicting perceptions of Singapore's pandemic response.

Around 71 per cent felt that the restrictions in Singapore were adequate to deal with the pandemic, while 19 per cent felt that there could have been more restrictions implemented and 10 per cent felt that there could have been fewer restrictions implemented.

When averaged over 56 waves, the proportion of respondents who reported satisfaction with the government's overall handling of COVID-19 was 75.3 per cent.

Among the five items which were polled throughout the pandemic, respondents were most satisfied with the government's efforts in keeping the healthcare system running (86.4 per cent). An average of 81.3 per cent were satisfied with government's role in keeping the economy running while 72.4 per cent were satisfied with the government providing financial aid packages to citizens. The average proportion of respondents satisfied with the government's role in protecting jobs was 71.6 per cent.

Among the items which were polled at some points during the course of the pandemic:

The proportion of respondents who were satisfied with the way the government penalized individuals or retail businesses who were not observing safety measures remained stable at 77 per cent.

The proportion of respondents who were satisfied with the way the government ensured that Safe Management Measures (SMM), like quotas and safe distancing, were adhered at public places hovered at around 72 per cent.

There was comparably less satisfaction with how respondents reacted to the way the government opened Vaccinated Travel Lanes with more countries, so that Singaporeans and foreign nationals could travel without quarantine. It was constant at 46 per cent for a considerable period. However, as the government opened borders under the Vaccination Travel Framework (VTF), the proportion of respondents who were satisfied with these border measures rose from 65 per cent in W49 (1 April 2022 – 11 April 2022) to 70 per cent in W55 (29 September 2022 – 3 October 2022).

Satisfaction with government communications on re-opening plans and measures increased to over 70 per cent in W49 to nearly 80 per cent in more recent waves, as plans became clearer that life was going to go back to a greater sense of normality.

To achieve a more complete understanding of how Singaporeans felt about the government's response to COVID-19, we asked respondents to indicate whether Singapore fared better, the same as, or worse when compared with a list of other countries and regions, including the United States and China. Notably, 53 to 69 per cent of the respondents between W52 (24 June 2022 – 4 July 2022) and W55 (29

September 2022 – 3 October 2022) reported that Singapore fared better than all other countries or regions. Only 12 to 22 per cent of respondents reported that Singapore fared worse than most of the countries or regions that were presented to them and about 16 to 32 per cent thought Singapore's handling was comparable to how other countries dealt with the pandemic.

China and the US were singled out for further analyses as they best represent the extreme ends ('tough' and 'loose' respectively) of the spectrum of pandemic management. For both China and the US, respondents who are more highly educated, and more satisfied with how the government has handled the pandemic were more likely to perceive Singapore as having fared better in its pandemic response. There do not appear to be significant differences in attitudes based on respondents' race.

Education is a consistent and significant predictor of perceptions of pandemic management by both China and the US. Specifically, respondents who are more highly educated were more likely to believe that Singapore fared better than China and the US in managing the pandemic. This is heartening insofar as it implies that Singaporeans, particularly those who may be more informed about the COVID-19 situation globally and are presumably more discerning, did not express a penchant for either polarity. As opposed to the tough and loose strategies often adopted by China and the US respectively, strategies implemented by Singapore can be said to be more calibrated and relatively balanced. Based on our data, we surmise that respondents generally recognise the merits of this calibrated approach, are satisfied that the

government has taken it, and are therefore more likely to affirm our pandemic response as superior to either extreme alternative.

We also examined how respondents' values predict government satisfaction and perceptions about Singapore's pandemic performance. Results demonstrate that important shared values such as harmony and care positively predict increased satisfaction with the government's pandemic management, which in turn leads to a stronger conviction in Singapore's superior performance compared with other countries or regions. On the other hand, values that reflect a desire for freedom based on self-interest are conversely related to government satisfaction and perceptions of performance.

SATISFACTION WITH GOVERNMENT'S HANDLING OF COVID-19 IN SINGAPORE

INTRODUCTION

Since 2020, there has been a constant need to review and adjust our pandemic management strategies to deal with the constantly evolving COVID-19 situation. For instance, as new variants (e.g., Omicron, XBB) have emerged, decisions have had to be made on whether to impose stricter restrictions and measures immediately, or continue with existing measures while learning more about the variant.

Singapore has largely adopted the strategy of continuing with existing measures and riding out the waves without having to impose further restrictions (Chong, 2022; Abdullah & Teo, 2022). This is in line with the country's overall pandemic management strategy of moving towards living with the virus in a new normal, as opposed to adhering to a zero-COVID strategy (Zhang et al., 2022). This strategy has been supported, in part, by Singapore's high vaccination rates, which serve as a protective barrier against the resurgence of COVID-19 cases. Late-onset measures and an emphasis on more self-responsibility may afford more flexibility, but can also strain resources should the public health situation deteriorate rapidly; the success of such measures also depends on public adherence to the restrictions (Kamerlin & Kasson, 2020). Ultimately, balancing the trade-offs between restriction and relaxation, economic sustainability and public health, and lives and livelihoods has been a critical point of contention when formulating strategies to manage the pandemic.

In general, it may be argued that the perceived effectiveness of pandemic management strategies depends on public attitudes. That is, pandemic management may be effective to the extent that it resonates with the priorities and values of a society and its people. For example, in an economy where a large proportion of people are struggling to make a living, imposing strict public health measures may exacerbate their circumstances; some may even prefer to brave the virus than to be prohibited from making a living (St-Denis, 2020). In more affluent segments of society, on the other hand, there may be more scope to impose social and movement restrictions in the name of public health. Remote working is a viable option, and people can more effectively negotiate between the demands of public health and sustaining a viable livelihood (de Lucas Ancillo et al., 2020; Savić, 2020).

Different societies value different styles of handling a disease outbreak. For instance, according to Hofstede (2001), societies differ in the extent to which they are individualistic (i.e., valuing personal goals, freedom, and independence) or collectivistic (i.e., valuing collective goals, harmony, and interdependence). In line with the emphasis on personal freedom, individualistic societies have been found to be less compliant with COVID-19 restrictions (Huang et al., 2022; Maaravi et al., 2021). Governments of individualistic societies appear aware of the potential resistance to their measures, and are thus less eager to impose strategies to manage COVID-19 (Chen et al., 2021). These governments may therefore adopt looser strategies that afford more flexibility. Unlike tough strategies, loose strategies prioritise individual freedom and privacy, often dismissing the need for large-scale testing, harsh lockdowns and contact tracing (Lo & Shi, 2021).

The perceived effectiveness of a country's pandemic management may also depend on comparative perceptions of how others are doing. After all, good, better, or worse are subjective evaluations made in relation to an arbitrary reference point — which in turn may be determined by one's socioeconomic environment, attitudes, and values about the pandemic.

Pandemic management — and indeed, understanding perceptions about a country's pandemic management effectiveness — is therefore no straightforward affair. In fact, the White Paper on Singapore's response to COVID-19 highlighted that Singapore had been relatively successful in areas such as vaccinating the population, assisting businesses, maintaining trade, and supporting vulnerable populations, but could have better managed other areas including the implementation of mask wearing, safe management measures, and border restrictions (Prime Minister's Office, 2023). As illustrated in the White Paper, the change in mask-wearing policy was perceived as contradictory, thus undermining public trust and confidence in the government's ability to handle the pandemic. Public attitudes, values, and comparative assessments are interwoven in individuals' subjective appraisals. More importantly, these appraisals affect government satisfaction with regards to the pandemic, a key determinant of positive social outcomes (Mathew et al., 2021). Against this complex backdrop, this paper seeks to shed light on Singaporeans' evaluation of Singapore's pandemic response and how it compares with other countries or regions. This paper also discusses the role and nature of government satisfaction in linking individuals' values with their perceptions of Singapore's pandemic response.

Current Study

The data used in this report was drawn from an online survey panel of the marketing research firm Toluna, which IPS has used since April 2020 (i.e., Wave 1). Polling efforts are still ongoing to keep track of sentiments among Singaporeans.² The data covered in this report was taken from the period of April 2020 (Wave 1) to November 2022 (Wave 56).

The survey drew on over 2,000 respondents, about 500 of whom were polled in every wave. The sample is representative of the national population's gender and race breakdown. The same group of respondents in a wave would be asked to do the survey again after four waves, creating a block of around 2,000 unique respondents in every four consecutive waves. While many of those who had previously participated continued to do so, there was some expected attrition. Therefore, additional recruitment of respondents from the panel was conducted -Table 1 below shows the dates of execution for each wave.

Table 1: List of wave start and end dates

² This paper is the sixth paper in a series of reports covering the population sentiments on the pandemic in Singapore.

The first paper was released in May 2020: Mathew, M., Tan, A. & Syafiq, M. (2020). Attitudes Towards the Use of Surveillance Technologies in the Fight Against COVID-19.

The second paper was released in April 2021: Mathew, M., Syafiq, M., Hou, M. & Tan, A. (2021). The COVID-19 Pandemic in Singapore, One Year On: Population Attitudes and Sentiments. IPS Working Paper No. 40.

The third paper was released in December 2021: Mathew, M., Syafiq, M., Hou, M. and Phoa, F. (2021). Living with COVID-19 in Singapore: Attitudes, Challenges and the Way Ahead. IPS Working Paper No. 43.

The fourth paper was released in April 2022: Mathew, M., Phoa, F., Hou, M., Lim, E. (2022). Attitudes towards Work and Workplace Arrangements amidst COVID-19 in Singapore. IPS Working Paper No. 45.

The fifth paper was released in July 2022: Mathew, M., Hou, M., & Phoa, F. (2022). Moving Forward Through COVID-19 in Singapore: Well-being, Lessons Learnt and Future Directions. IPS Working Paper No. 46.

Wave	Start date	End date	Remarks
1	21 April 2020	23 April 2020	21 Apr: Announcement of Extended CB
2	1 May 2020	4 May 2020	
3	14 May 2020	19 May 2020	
4	28 May 2020	31 May 2020	
5	12 June 2020	16 June 2020	15 Jun: Announcement of Phase 2
6	30 June 2020	3 July 2020	18 Jun: Start of Phase 2 10 Jul: GE2020
7	30 July 2020	4 August 2020	
8	4 September 2020	10 September 2020	
9	21 September 2020	28 September 2020	
10	9 October 2020	17 October 2020	
11	22 October 2020	2 November 2020	
12	3 November 2020	9 November 2020	
13	10 November 2020	18 November 2020	
14	26 November 2020	5 December 2020	
15	9 December 2020	18 December 2020	14 Dec: Announcement of Phase 3
16	6 January 2021	13 January 2021	28 Dec: Start of Phase 3
17	15 January 2021	22 January 2021	
18	26 January 2021	2 February 2021	
19	4 February 2021	15 February 2021	
20	17 February 2021	24 February 2021	
21	25 February 2021	4 March 2021	
22	8 March 2021	15 March 2021	
23	5 April 2021	13 April 2021	
24	14 April 2021	21 April 2021	
25	22 April 2021	28 April 2021	
26	29 April 2021	13 May 2021	4 May: Announcement of stricter safe management measures
27	17 May 2021	27 May 2021	16 May: Start of Phase 2 Heightened Alert (P2HA)
28	29 May 2021	7 June 2021	31 May: PM Lee addressed nation on the new normal
29	7 June 2021	14 June 2021	15 Jun: End of P2HA
30	21 June 2021	2 July 2021	

31	14 July 2021	25 July 2021	20 Jul: Announcement of return to P2HA 22 Jul: Start of second P2HA
32	26 July 2021	7 August 2021	6 Aug: Relaxation of P2HA rules announced
33	7 August 2021	19 August 2021	
34	20 August 2021	30 August 2021	22 Aug: Lowest number of community cases reported since mid-July
35	2 September 2021	10 September 2021	10 Sept: Sharp spike in cases to be expected in the community
36	15 September 2021	21 September 2021	15 Sept: Singapore reported more than 800 daily cases 20 Sept: More than 1,000 cases reported, higher than the daily count in April 2020
37	22 September 2021	29 September 2021	24 Sept: Stabilisation Phase announced 27 Sept: Start of Stabilisation Phase
38	1 October 2021	11 October 2021	8 Oct: PM Lee's address to the nation on living with COVID-19
39	15 October 2021	27 October 2021	20 Oct: Extension of Stabilisation Phase announced 25 Oct: Start of extended Stabilisation Phase
40	28 October 2021	1 November 2021	
41	10 November 2021	17 November 2021	10 Nov: Calibrated adjustments to Stabilisation Phase
42	19 November 2021	23 November 2021	20 Nov: Transition Phase announced
43	30 November 2021	9 December 2021	2 Dec: Imported Omicron cases reported in Singapore
44	28 December 2021	8 January 2022	1 Jan: Working from home no longer default working arrangement 4 Jan: Weekly infection rate above 1, warnings of impending Omicron wave

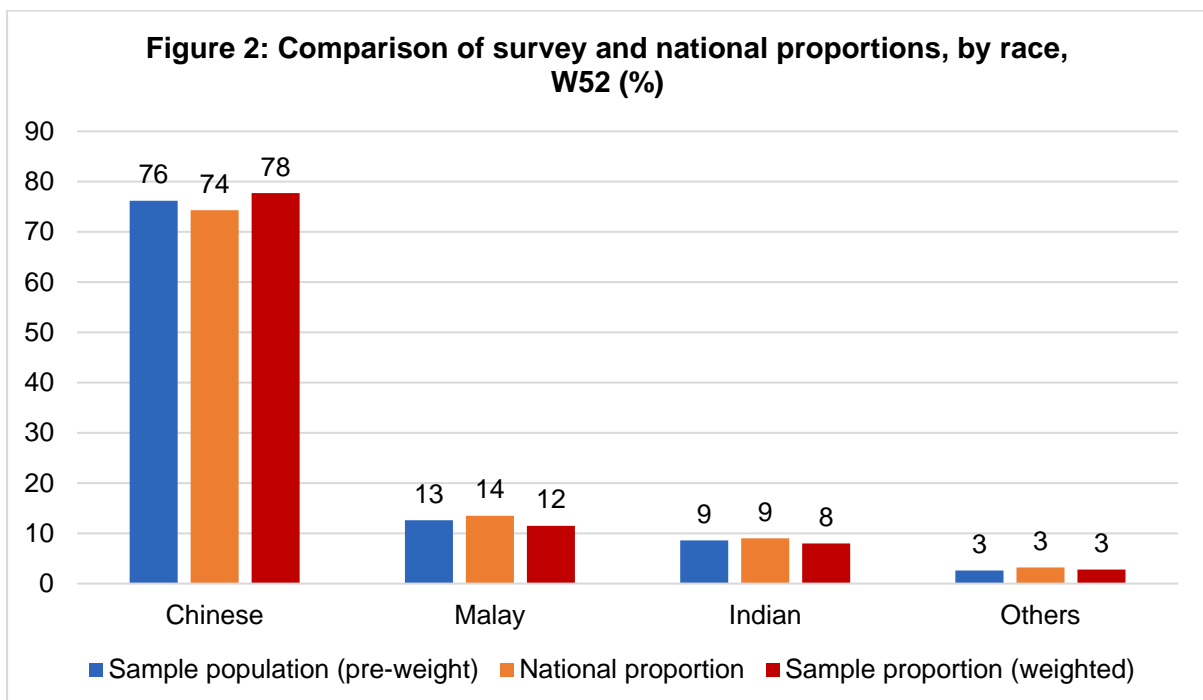
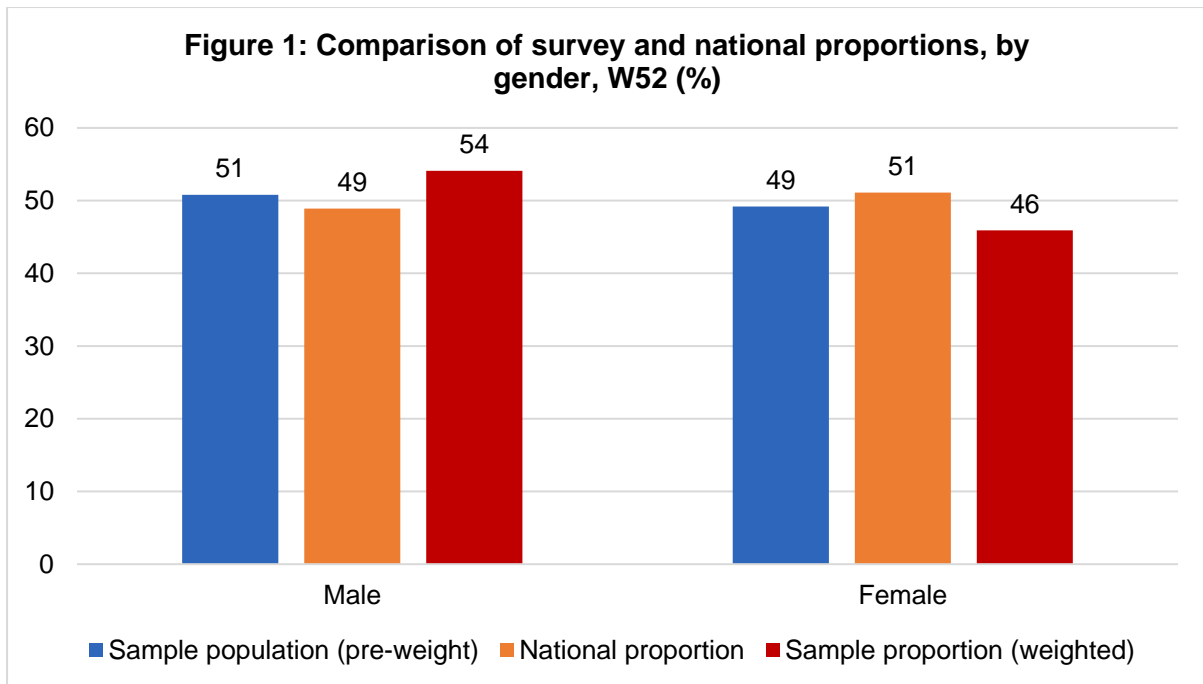
			5 Jan: Announcement of changes in vaccination status policy
45	12 January 2022	25 January 2022	21 Jan: Maximum isolation period for fully vaccinated individuals shortened. 21 Jan: VTL travellers to take ART only if they leave home, no need to report results.
46	31 January 2022	8 February 2022	4 Feb: Number of cases cross 10,000 after Chinese New Year backlog
47	14 February 2022	22 February 2022	16 Feb: Announcement of simplified rules for gatherings and travel on 25 Feb (subsequently postponed) 18 Feb: Budget 2022 announced
48	18 March 2022	25 March 2022	24 Mar: Announcement of easing of community safe management measures and border measures on 29 Mar
49	1 April 2022	11 April 2022	27 Mar: Announcement of lockdown in Shanghai, China due to surging cases 29 Mar: Easing of community safe management measures and border measures and allowing removal of masks outdoors
50	22 April 2022	4 May 2022	22 Apr: Announcement of further easing of safe management measures from 26 Apr
51	31 May 2022	13 June 2022	2 Jun: Announcement of anticipation of impending wave driven by new Omicron strains
52	24 June 2022	4 July 2022	
53	12 July 2022	20 July 2022	
54	12 August 2022	25 August 2022	21 Aug: National Day Rally — Announcement of further relaxation of measures, including removal of mask

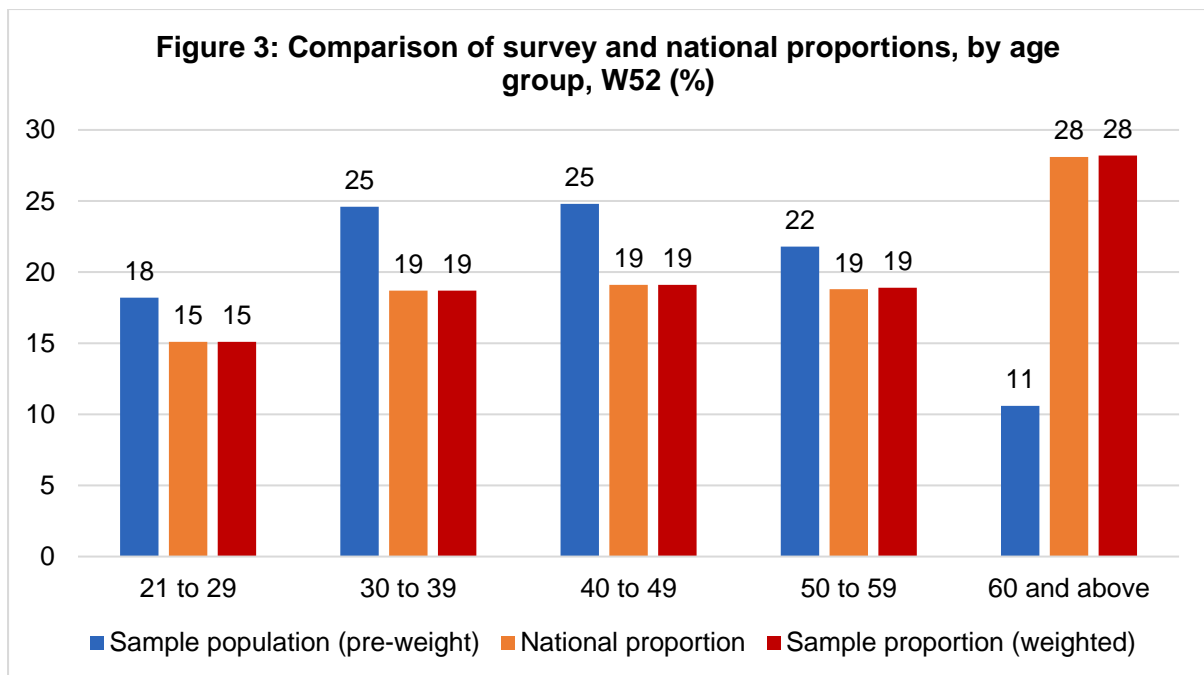
			mandate indoors (except in medical facilities and on public transport)
55	29 September 2022	3 October 2022	7 Oct: Announcement of all COVID-19 vaccination-differentiated measures to be lifted from 10 Oct
56	4 November 2022	13 November 2022	
57	3 February 2023	15 February 2023	27 Dec: Announcement of further relaxation of COVID-19 controls in China and the reopening of borders from 8 Jan 2023 9 Feb: Announcement of masks no longer required on public transport from 13 Feb as Singapore moves to Dorscon Green

Cells shaded reflect the data used for analysis in this working paper.

As the study was conducted using an online consumer panel, the sample consists of lower proportions of older persons and those from lower income households, thereby limiting the generalisability of the results. To address this limitation, age was weighted in each wave according to national proportions.³ Attempts to correct other variables, like education or housing, resulted in over-magnification of these populations and were thus not used. Graphical comparisons of the representativeness of the gender, race, and age profile of the sample in Wave 52 with Singapore's resident population are shown in Figures 1 to 3.

³ Weights were applied only when reporting topline figures and were not used in further statistical analyses.





Overall, the data captures useful insights on attitudes towards COVID-19 pandemic management in Singapore.⁴

When statistical analysis was carried out, data from W52 (24 June 2022 – 4 July 2022) to W55 (29 September 2022 – 3 October 2022) was aggregated into a single block to represent the views of Singaporeans during this three-month period.⁵ Regression analysis was also carried out to determine the effect of various predictor variables over key dependent variables. The regression results are illustrated in this paper as cross-tabulations where appropriate.⁶

⁴ Percentages in the figures and tables in this report may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

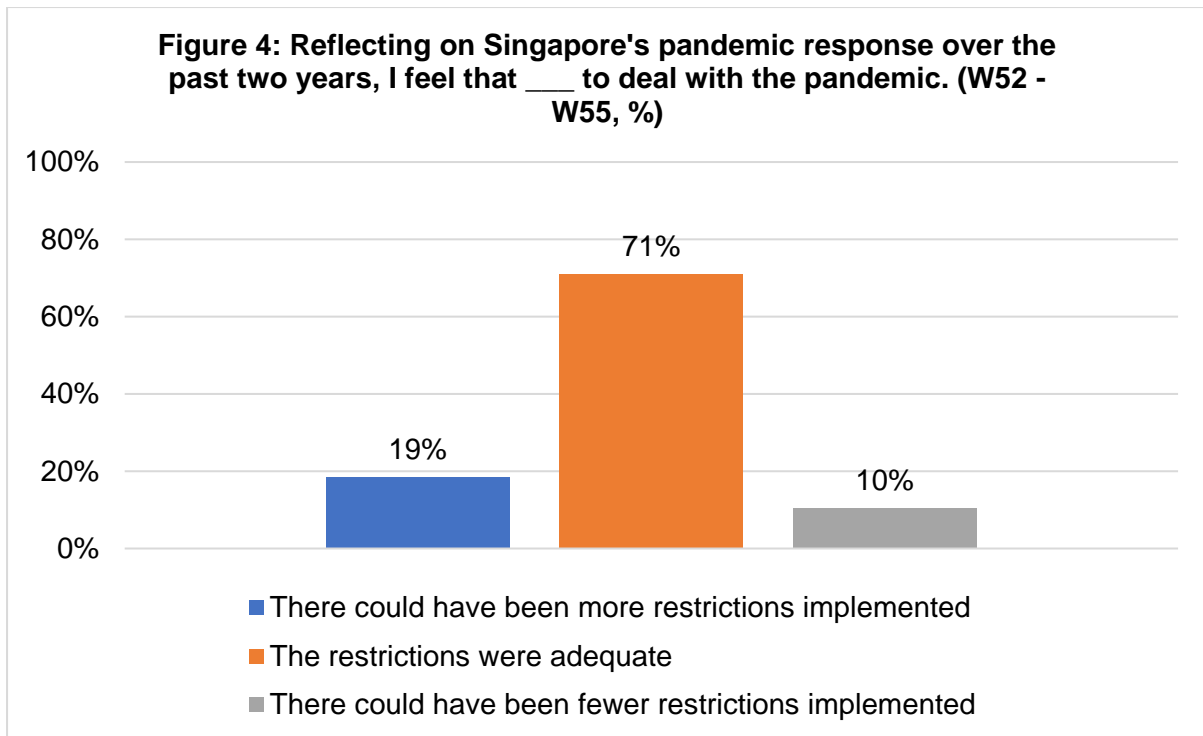
⁵ Data from W52 to W55 were aggregated as those are the latest 4 consecutive waves of data. If data is only available for specific waves (e.g., W51 to W54 or W50 to W53), then those are used for analysis instead. Later datasets are prioritised as they are more likely to represent current sentiments.

⁶ The regression model and relationships presented in this paper are statistically significant ($p < .05$).

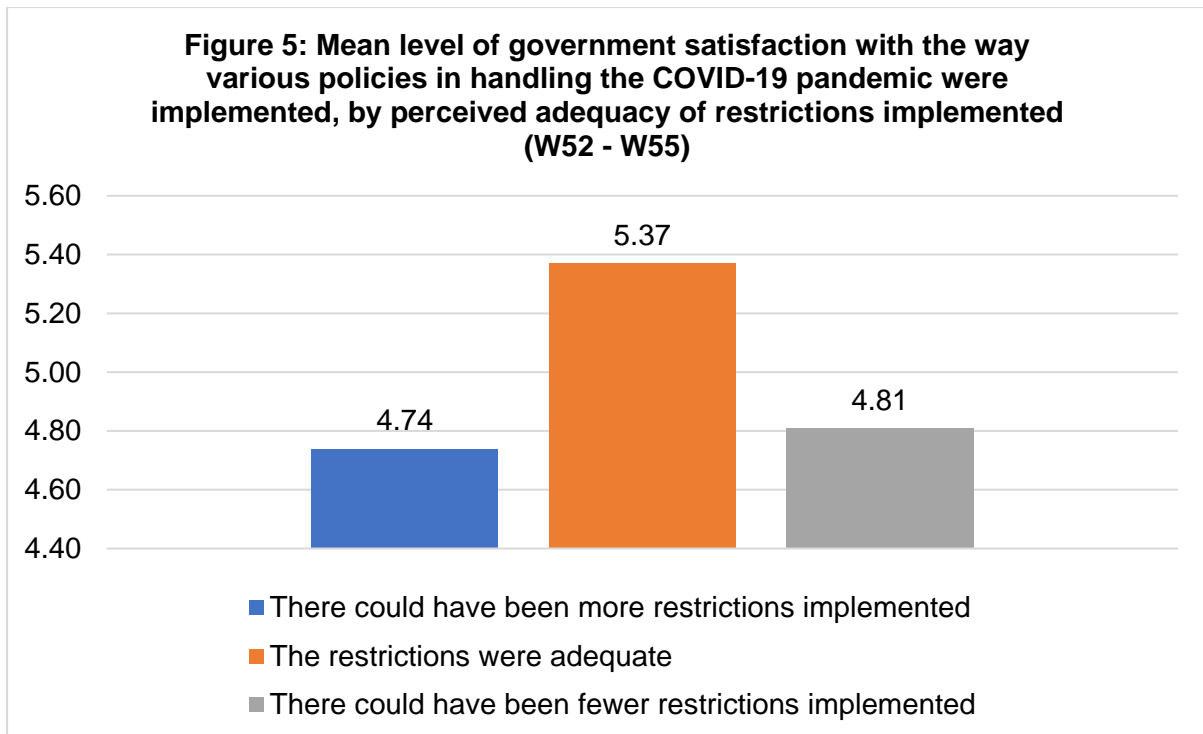
1. EVALUATING SINGAPORE'S PANDEMIC RESPONSE

1.1 Perceived Adequacy of Measures and Government Satisfaction

With most safe management measures eased since October 2022, Singapore has gradually moved into a post-pandemic era. Respondents were asked about their perceptions of the adequacy of restrictions implemented in Singapore, and how satisfied they were with how the government implemented certain policies relating to the COVID-19 pandemic. The level of government satisfaction was measured using a composite scale of items from 1 (“strongly dissatisfied”) to 7 (“strongly satisfied”). Respondents were asked about their perceptions of the way the government handled the pandemic in various aspects, including communicating its plans and measures for re-opening, keeping the economy running and protecting jobs (see Annex A for the full list). Most of the respondents between Waves 52 and 55 felt that the restrictions implemented were adequate. Around 71 per cent felt that the restrictions in Singapore were adequate to deal with the pandemic, while 19 per cent felt that there could have been more restrictions implemented and 10 per cent felt that there could have been fewer restrictions implemented.



A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed that these groups of respondents significantly differed in how satisfied they were with the government regarding how the pandemic was handled ($F(2,1997) = 71.11, p < .001$).



Respondents who felt the restrictions were adequate were most satisfied with the government ($M = 5.37$, $SD = .86$, $p < .001$) compared to respondents who felt that there could have been more restrictions implemented ($M = 4.74$, $SD = 1.35$, $p < .001$) and those who felt fewer restrictions could have been implemented ($M = 4.81$, $SD = 1.41$, $p < .001$). These results demonstrate a clear linkage between government satisfaction and perceived adequacy of restrictions imposed.

Satisfaction with Government performance through the pandemic

We report on a number of indicators we used to track the public's satisfaction with government policies related to the management of the pandemic. Many indicators had greater relevance at different points of the pandemic and thus were not tracked

through the period from when the circuit breaker was in progress to when practically all restrictions were removed.

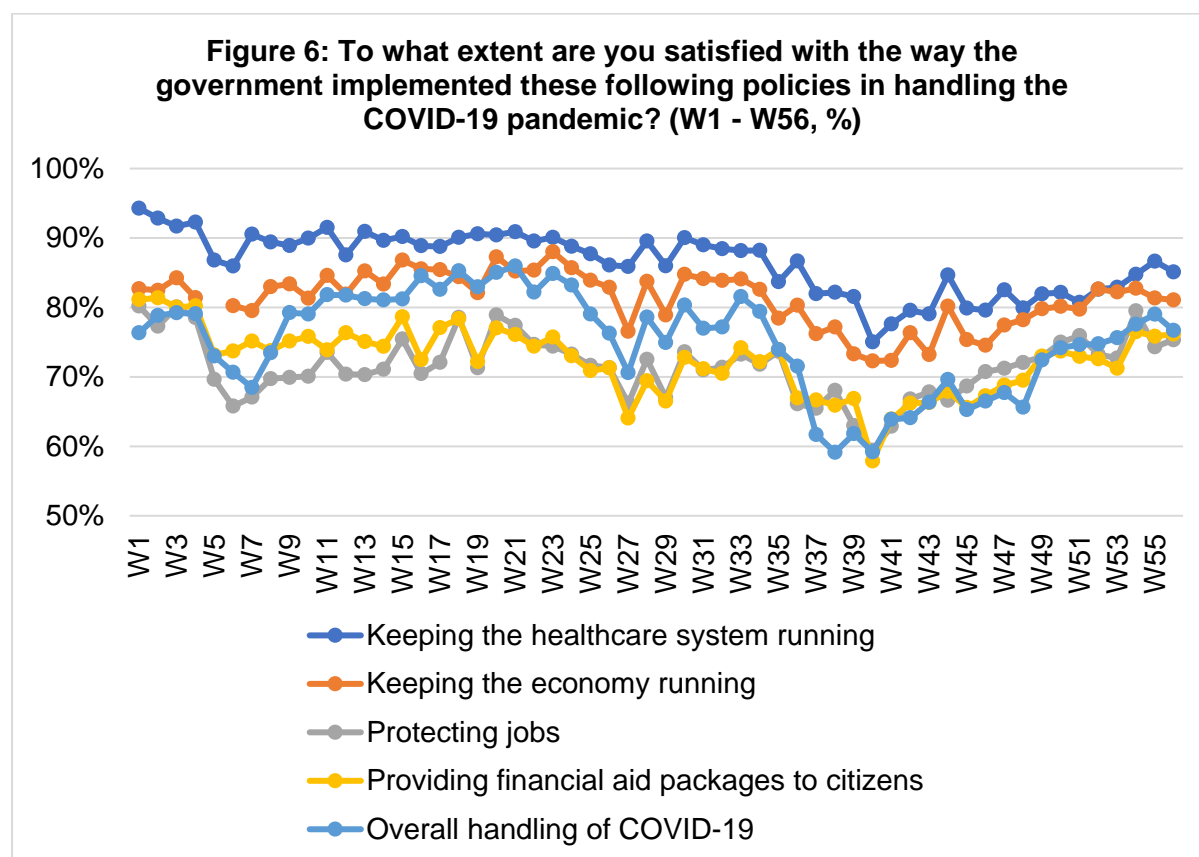
Figure 6 contains five items which were polled throughout the pandemic.

An item asked respondents about their satisfaction with the government's overall handling of COVID-19. Overall satisfaction ranged from over 80 per cent during W16-23, the period between January 2021 till early April 2021 where Phase 3 re-opening measures were implemented which included relaxation on dining and an allowance of eight people visiting households. This item fell to its lowest at 59 per cent and hovered around 60 per cent during the stabilization phase of W36-42 when Singapore reported new highs of people being infected, which crossed the 1000 mark in the start of this period. When averaged over 56 waves, the proportion of respondents who reported satisfaction with the government's overall handling of COVID-19 was 75.3 per cent.

The trends for the other items which were constantly measured throughout the pandemic – keeping healthcare system running, keeping the economy running, protecting jobs, providing financial aid packages to citizens showed similar trends with satisfaction levels dropping during the stabilization phase but recovering after this.

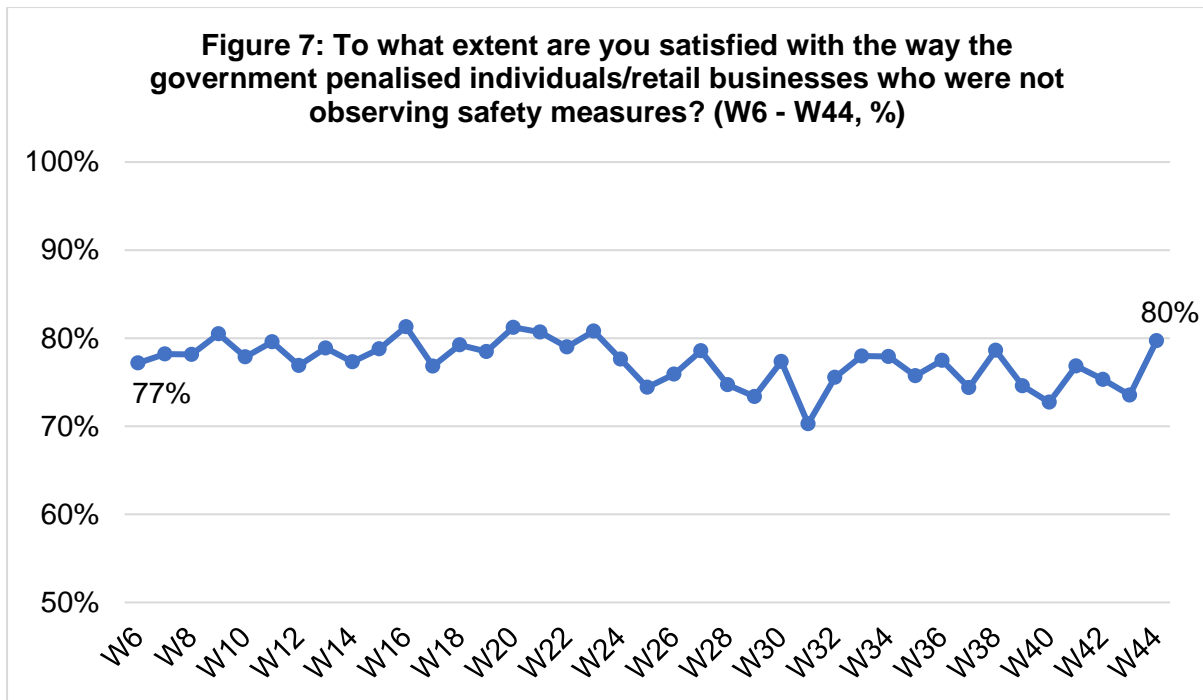
Among the five items which were polled throughout the pandemic, respondents were most satisfied with the government's efforts in keeping the healthcare system running (86.4 per cent). Satisfaction level was often at around 90 percent, with a drop to 75 percent when the number of reported infections was particularly high. An average of

81.3 per cent were satisfied with government's role in keeping the economy running⁷ while 72.4 per cent were satisfied with the government providing financial aid packages to citizens. The average proportion of respondents satisfied with the government's role in protecting jobs was 71.6 per cent.



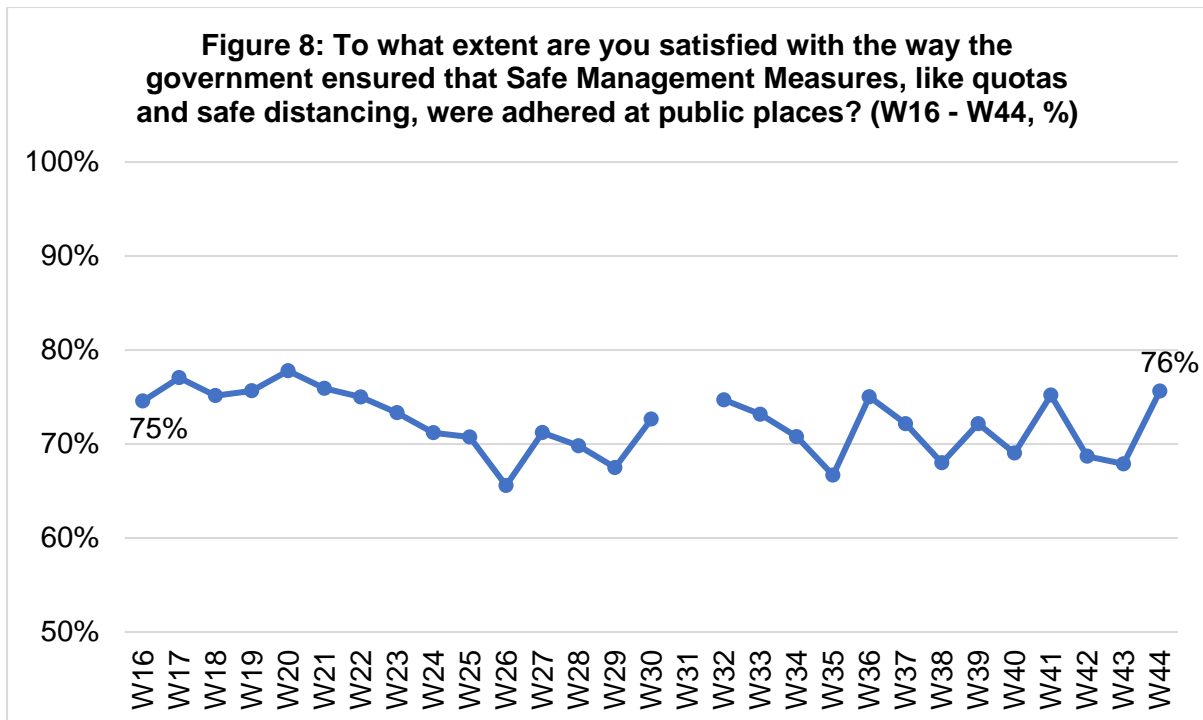
Among the items which were polled at some points during the course of the pandemic: The proportion of respondents who were satisfied with the way the government penalized individuals or retail businesses who were not observing safety measures remained stable at 77 per cent from W6 (30 June 2020 – 3 July 2020) to W44 (28 December 2021 – 8 January 2022).

⁷ W5 data is unavailable for the keeping the running item as some questions were not asked in certain waves.



The proportion of respondents who were satisfied with the way the government ensured that Safe Management Measures (SMM), like quotas and safe distancing, were adhered at public places hovered at around 72 per cent from W16 (6 January 2021 – 13 January 2021) to W44 (28 December 2021 – 8 January 2022)⁸.

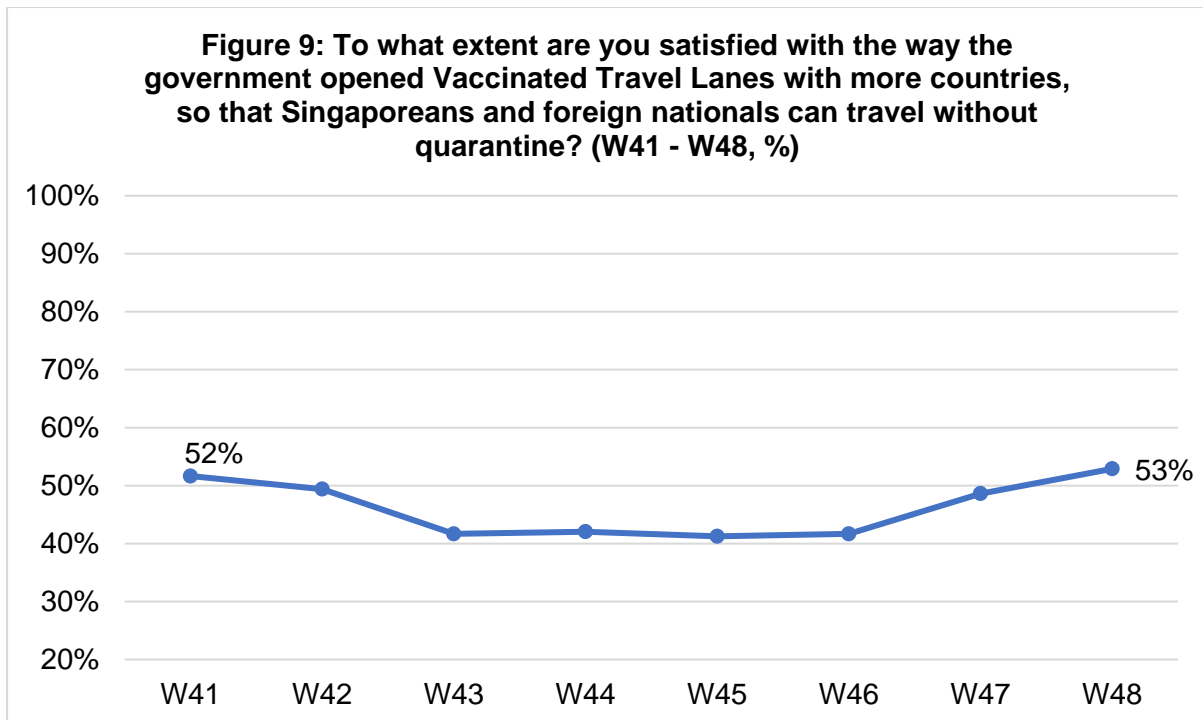
⁸ W31 data for is unavailable for the Safe Management Measures item as some questions were not asked in certain waves.



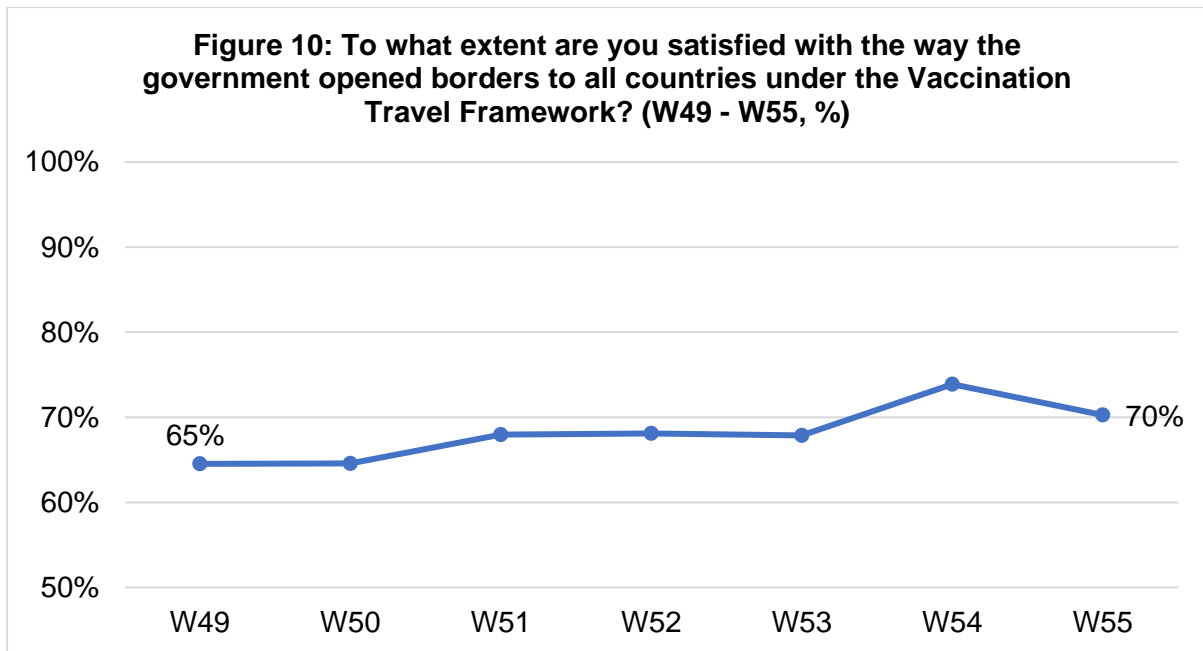
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The proportion of respondents who were satisfied with the way the government opened Vaccinated Travel Lanes with more countries, so that Singaporeans and foreign nationals can travel without quarantine, was relatively low compared to other areas. It was constant at 46 per cent from W41 (10 November 2021 – 17 November 2021) to W48 (18 March 2022 – 25 March 2022).

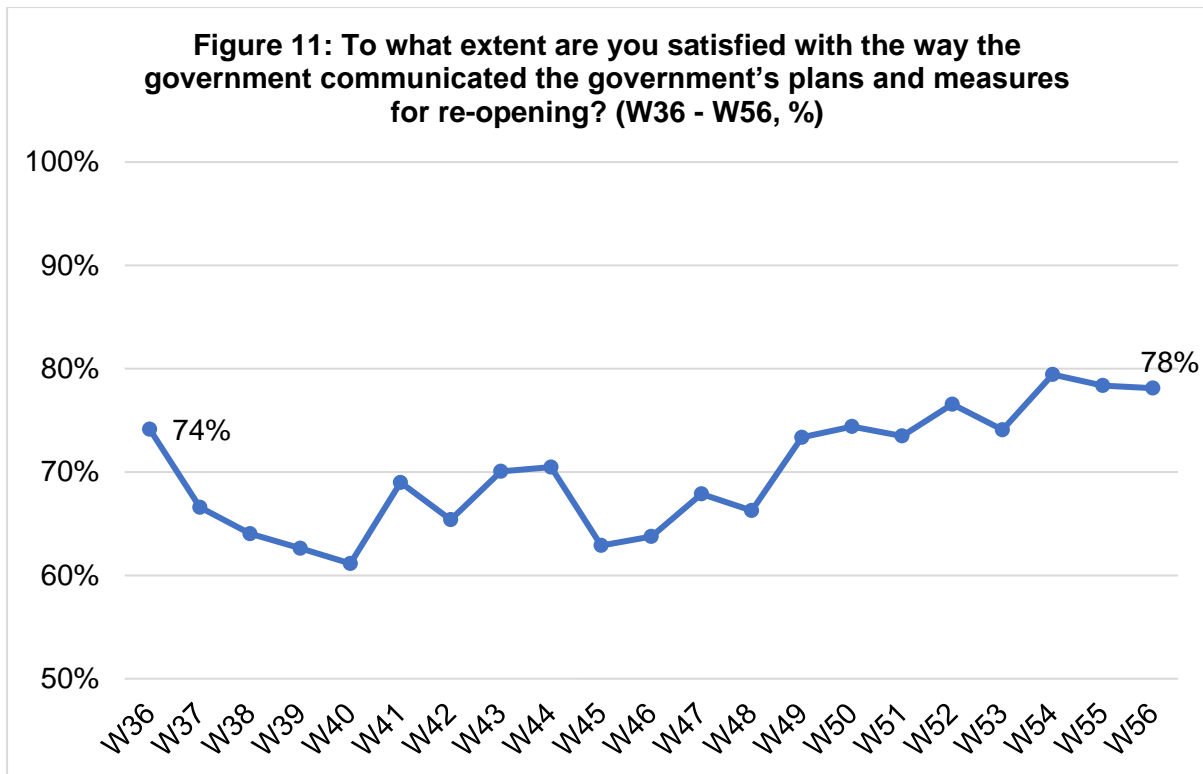
⁹ W31 data for is unavailable for the Safe Management Measures item as some questions were not asked in certain waves.



However, as the government opened borders under the Vaccination Travel Framework (VTF), the proportion of respondents who were satisfied with these border measures rose from 65 per cent in W49 (1 April 2022 – 11 April 2022) to 70 per cent in W55 (29 September 2022 – 3 October 2022).

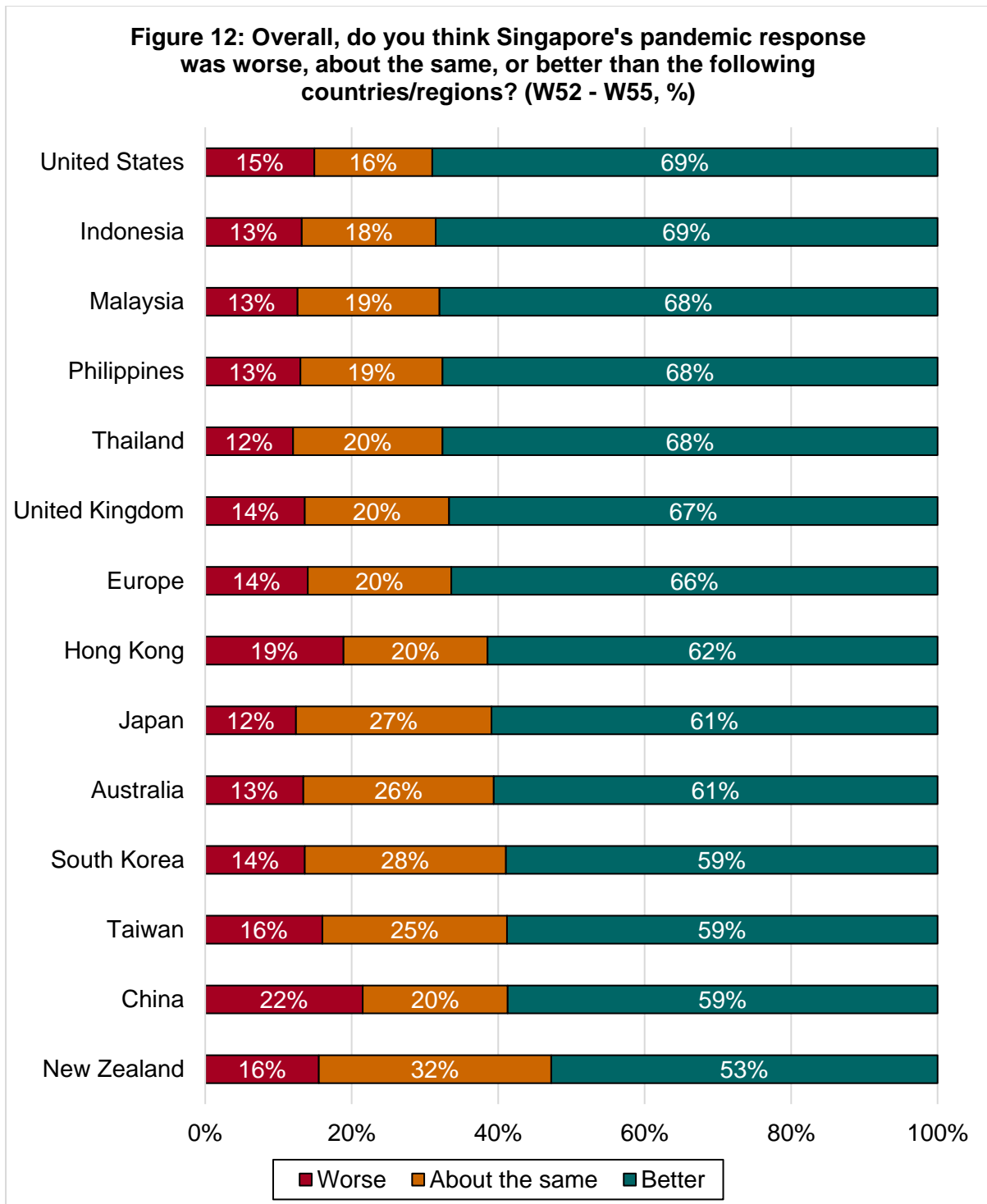


Satisfaction with government communications on re-opening plans and measures increased to over 70 per cent in W49 (1 April 2022 – 11 April 2022) to nearly 80 per cent in more recent waves, as plans became clearer that life was going to go back to a greater sense of normality.



1.2 Singapore's Pandemic Response Compared to Other Countries

Respondents were also asked to compare Singapore's pandemic response with that of other countries or regions. Notably, 53 to 69 per cent of the respondents between Waves 52 and 55 perceived that Singapore fared better than various other countries or regions. Only 12 to 22 per cent of respondents reported that Singapore performed worse than most of the countries or regions that were presented to them. There were noticeably more respondents who indicated this for the case of China (22 per cent) and Hong Kong (19 per cent).



We examined whether the perception of how Singapore fared against other countries might have differed across different demographic groups.

A series of linear regressions was conducted to examine the variables that could significantly predict which respondents were more likely to perceive that Singapore fared worse, about the same, or better than some other countries or regions. The outcome variables and the list of predictor variables used for the analyses are listed in Table 2. The regression analyses against each country or region are listed in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 2: List of predictor variables for perception that Singapore has fared better than other countries or regions in its pandemic response

Outcome variable: Perception of Singapore's pandemic response relative to other countries or regions (Measured based on how Singapore's pandemic response fared against various countries or regions respectively, where a higher score signifies that the respondent perceived that Singapore fared better)	
Demographic predictor variables	Description
Gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Male ● Female
Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 21 to 29 ● 30 to 39 ● 40 to 49 ● 50 to 59 ● 60 and above
Race	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Chinese ● Non-Chinese
Education level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Secondary and below ● Post-secondary ● Degree and above
Government satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Composite scale of a series of variables measuring respondents' level of satisfaction with how the government has managed the COVID-19 pandemic ● A higher score would mean that the respondent has greater satisfaction ● See Annex A for full list of variables

Age, education, and government satisfaction were significant predictors of perceptions of how Singapore fared against China (see Table 3). Older respondents, more highly educated respondents, and those who were more satisfied with how the government has handled the pandemic were more likely to indicate that they perceived that Singapore fared better than China in its pandemic response.

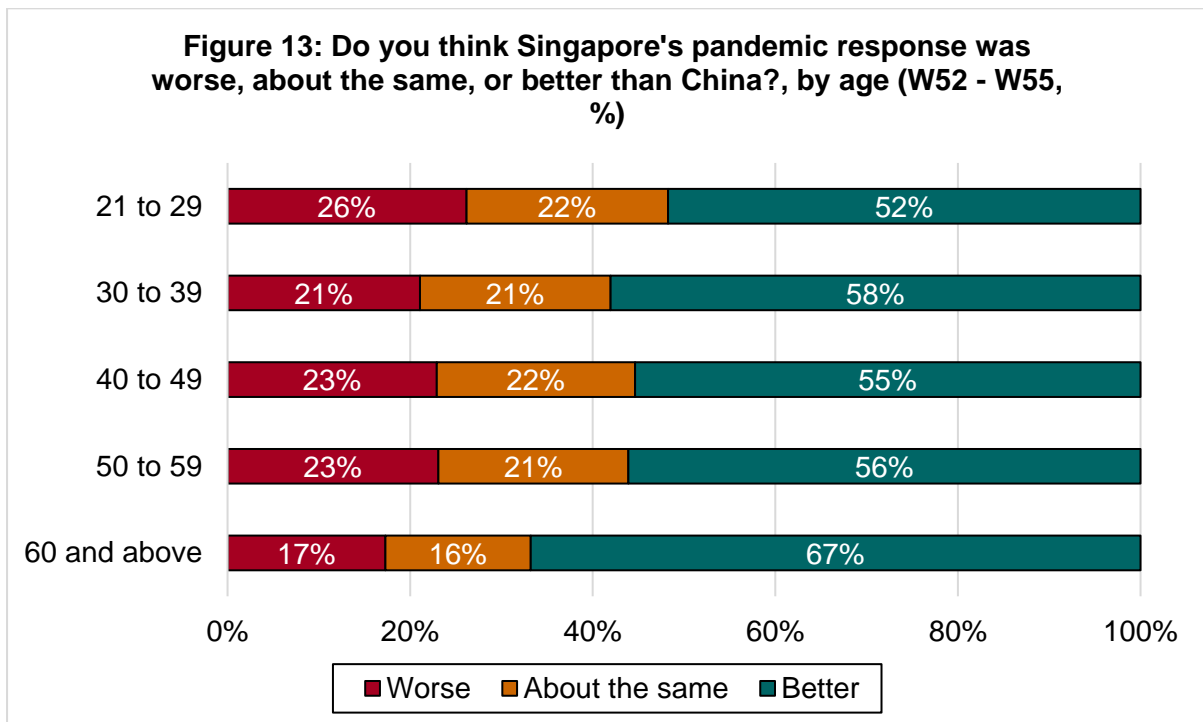
Table 3: Regression analysis of perceptions of how Singapore fared against China

Predictor variables	Coefficient	Standard error	p-value
Gender	-.018	.036	.622
Age	.049	.015	<.001
Race	.021	.042	.618
Education level	.055	.026	.036
Government satisfaction	.217	.016	<.001
Constant	.943	.138	<.001

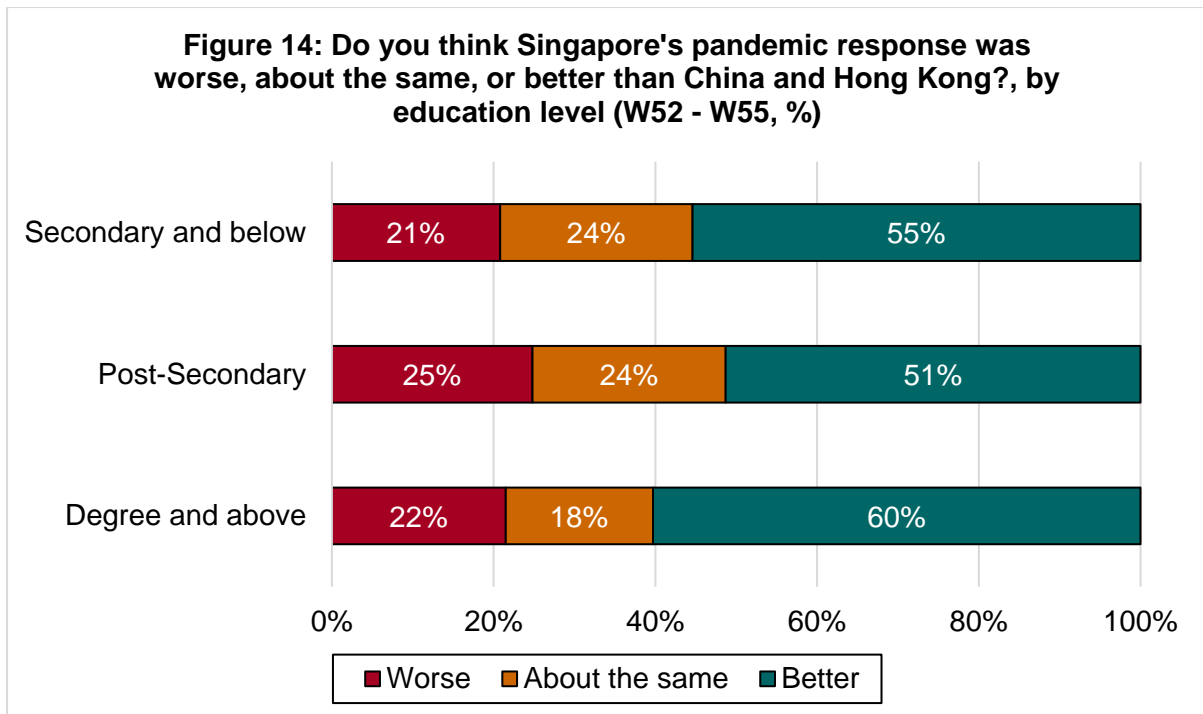
To illustrate the results from the regression, we conducted the following cross tabulations:

Around 52 per cent of the respondents aged 21 to 29 indicated that Singapore performed better than China in its pandemic response, compared to 67 per cent of those aged 60 and above. These findings may appear counterintuitive at first glance. Many may assume that older adults would be more risk averse and would therefore be more inclined to a conservative approach towards managing the pandemic, similar to China's zero-COVID policy. Yet, competing needs such as maintaining important social connections and keeping healthy through engaging in physical activity — goals

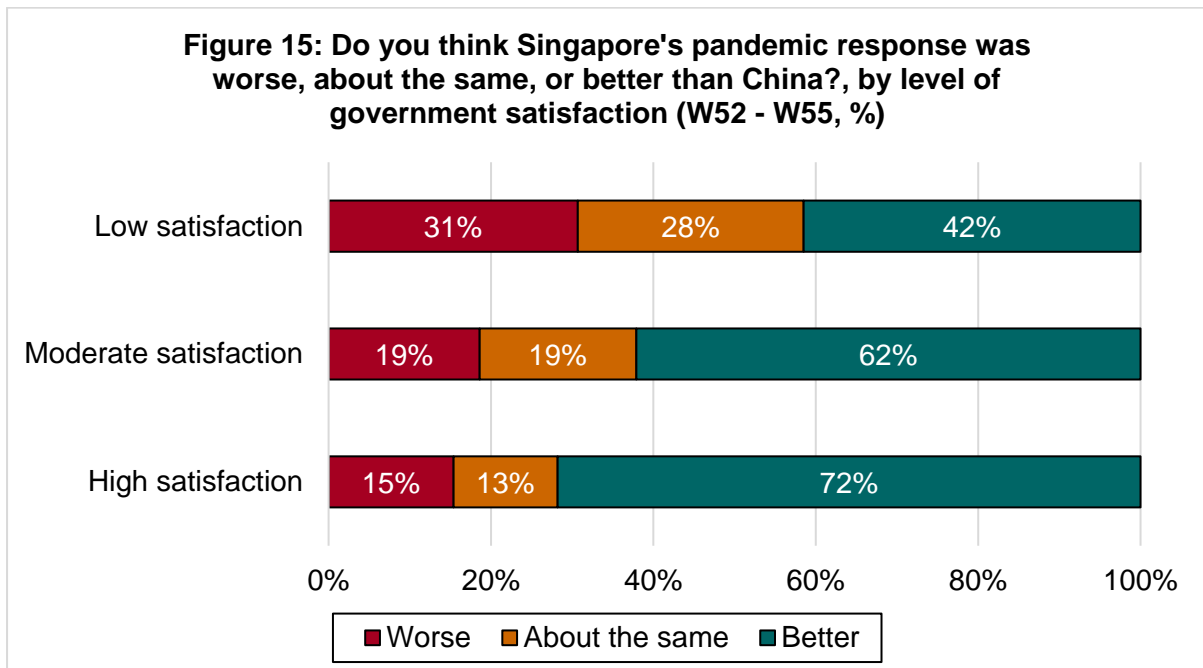
which are difficult to attain under harsh COVID-19 restrictions — may have proven to be more highly valued by older respondents, leading to the observed results.



Around 55 per cent of respondents with secondary-level qualifications and below indicated that Singapore performed better than China in its pandemic response, compared to 60 per cent with a bachelor's degree and above.



Around 72 per cent of those who had high satisfaction in how the government has handled the pandemic indicated that Singapore performed better than China in its pandemic response, compared to 42 per cent of respondents who had low satisfaction.



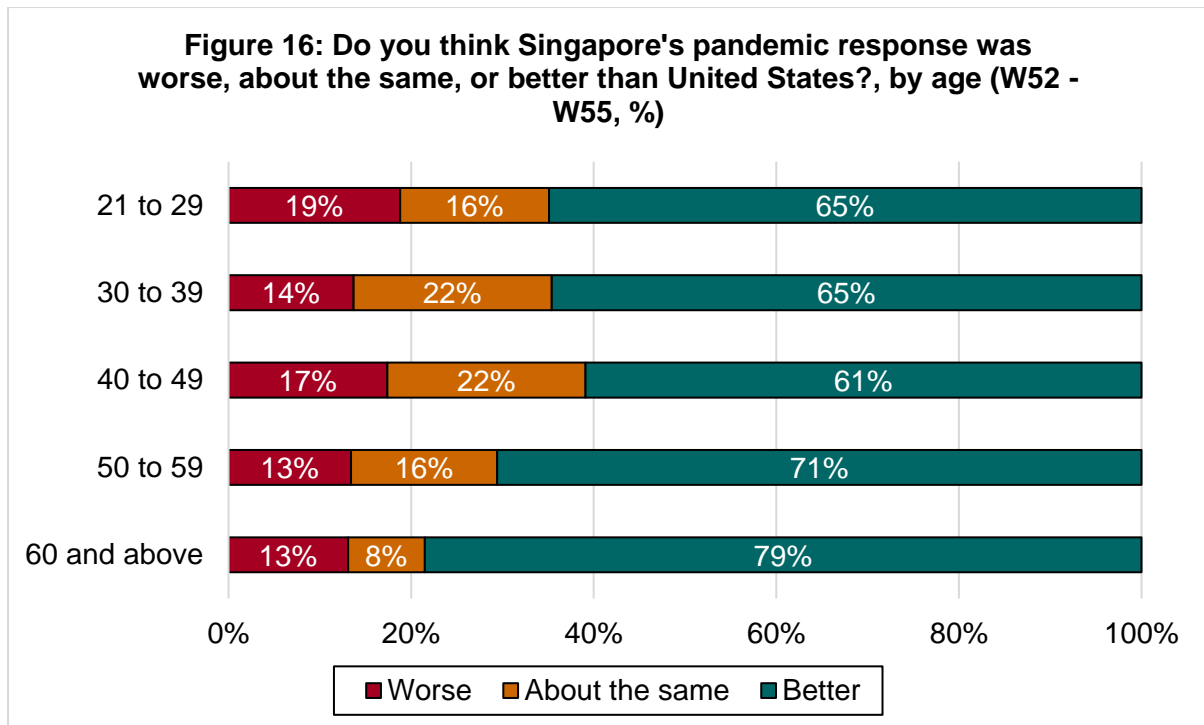
Interestingly, age, education and government satisfaction were similarly significant predictors of perceptions of Singapore’s pandemic response compared to that of the US (see Table 4). Older respondents, higher-educated respondents, and those who were more satisfied with how the government has handled the pandemic were more likely to indicate that they perceived that Singapore fared better than the US in its pandemic response.

Table 4: Regression analysis of perceptions of how Singapore fared against the US

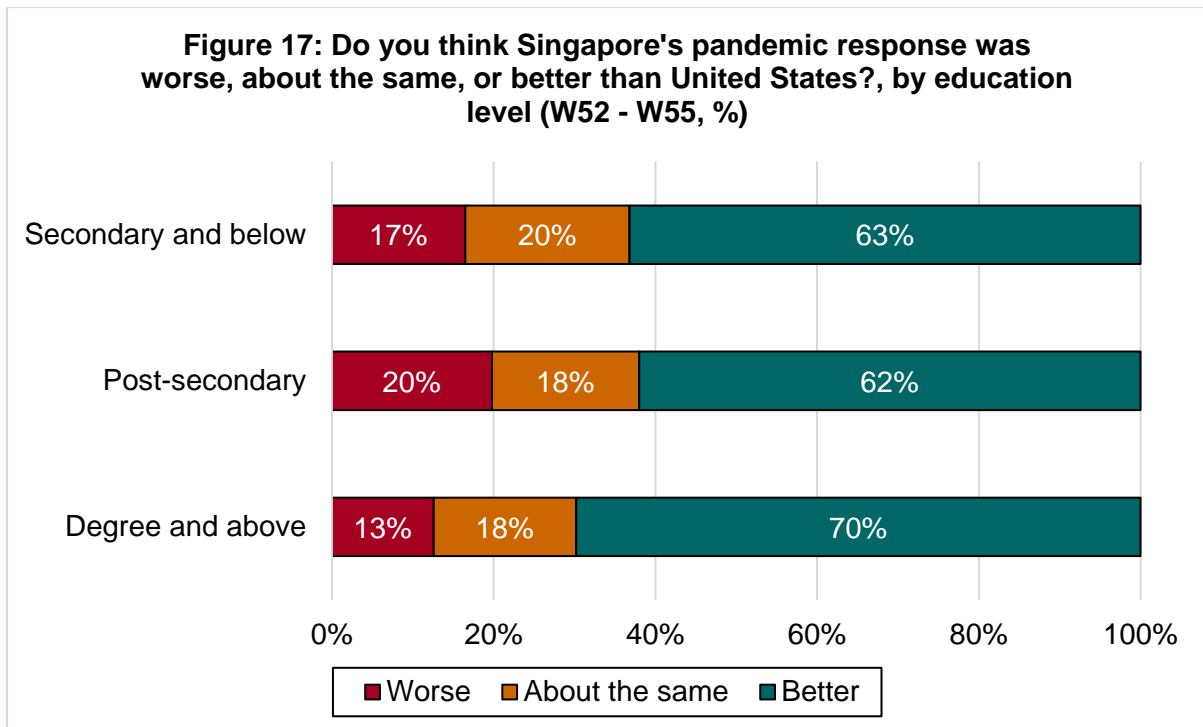
Predictor variables	Coefficient	Standard error	p-value
Gender	.010	.032	.752
Age	.053	.013	<.001
Race	-.019	.038	.619
Education level	.083	.024	<.001
Government satisfaction	.202	.015	<.001
Constant	1.118	.125	<.001

To illustrate the results from the regression, we conducted the following cross tabulations:

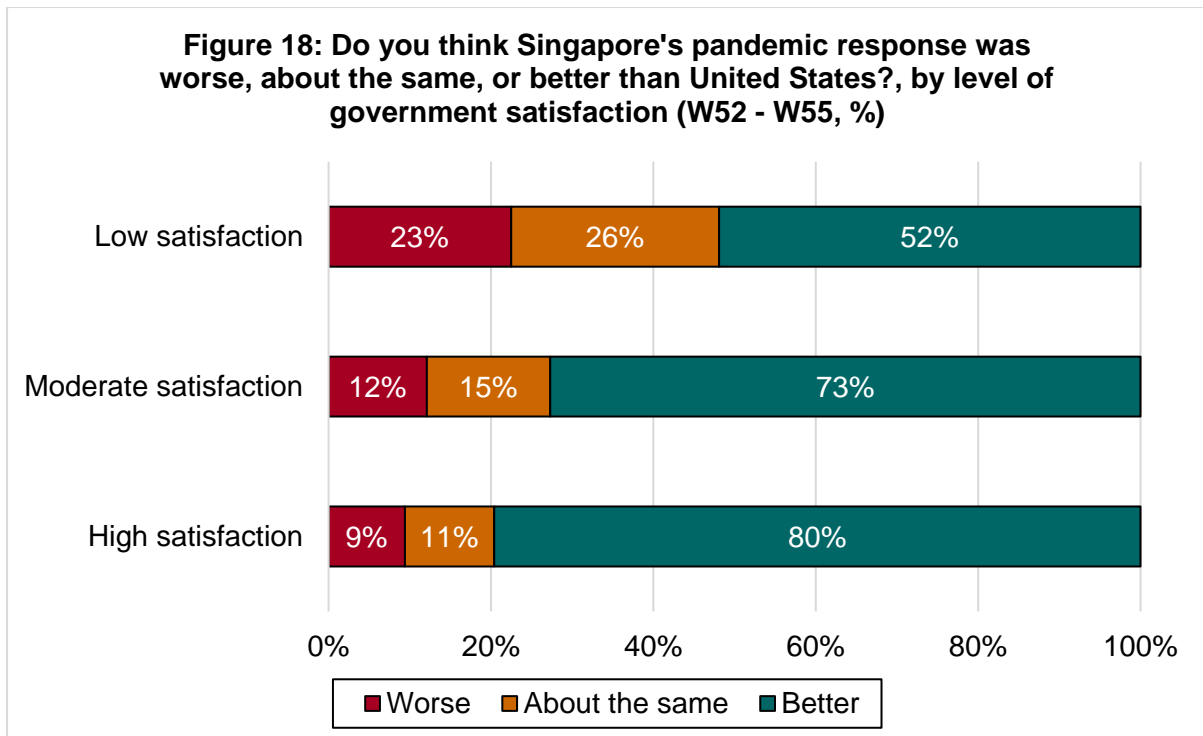
Around 65 per cent of the respondents aged 21 to 29 indicated that Singapore performed better than the US in its pandemic response, compared to 79 per cent of those aged 60 and above.



Around 63 per cent of respondents with secondary-level qualifications and below indicated that Singapore performed better than the US, compared to 70 per cent of respondents with a bachelor's degree and above.



Around 80 per cent of those who had high satisfaction with how the government handled the pandemic indicated that Singapore performed better than the US in its pandemic response, compared to 52 per cent of respondents who had low satisfaction.



Overall, the results demonstrate that attitudes towards China and the US follow similar patterns — those who were older, more highly educated, and had higher government satisfaction expressed stronger beliefs that Singapore performed better than these two countries in the pandemic.

Although counterintuitive at the first instance, we believe that perhaps these results could reflect a more fundamental acknowledgment of the effectiveness of the Singapore model in managing the pandemic. In contrast to the tough strategies typically adopted by China and the loose strategies typically adopted by the US (Lo & Shi, 2021), strategies implemented by Singapore tend to fall in the middle of the tough-loose spectrum, demonstrating a relatively balanced and moderate approach. Based on our data, it appears that respondents generally recognised the merits of this

calibrated approach, were satisfied with the government's pandemic response and were more likely to affirm that Singapore's pandemic response is superior to extreme alternatives.

Education was a consistent and significant predictor of perceptions of both China and the US. This is encouraging, as it affirms that Singaporeans who are presumably more discerning and knowledgeable about the COVID-19 situation globally did not express any clear ideological slants. Instead, there appears to be consistent evidence that insofar as our respondents were satisfied with the Singapore government's way of managing the pandemic, they also demonstrated unbiased support for Singapore's superior management that is free from ideological polarities.

1.3 The Nature of Government Satisfaction

1.3.1 Overview

In this section, we conduct a more holistic investigation into how values can influence government satisfaction, and how that in turn affects perceptions of Singapore's pandemic response.

One of the key findings observed earlier was that perceived adequacy of restrictions influenced government satisfaction. Notably, government satisfaction peaked when respondents' expected level of restrictions matched what was actually implemented by the government, and diminished when respondents felt that there could have been more or less restrictions. This means that respondents' expectations are crucial in predicting how satisfied they are with the government's pandemic response.

Arguably, expectations are guided by the values we live by and feel are important to our lives. As such, it is likely that individuals' values would also predict government satisfaction. Another key finding presented in the previous section was that government satisfaction determines perceptions of how Singapore fared in comparison with other countries in terms of pandemic response.

Taken together, we therefore hypothesised that values would predict how satisfied individuals are with the government, and that this would subsequently predict perceptions of Singapore's pandemic performance vis-à-vis other countries or regions. In other words, government satisfaction is likely to depend on the values that individuals endorse, such that satisfaction increases when government measures are congruent with individuals' values. The level of government satisfaction experienced would then lead to individuals' perceptions of whether Singapore fared better or worse than other countries such as the US and China.

1.3.2 Methodology

We performed structural equation modelling to examine how these predictors (i.e., values) relate to the mediator (i.e., government satisfaction) and our outcome of interest (i.e., perceptions of how Singapore fared in comparison with other countries) in an integrative fashion. Pooled cross-sectional data from W52 to W54 (June to August 2022) was used in the present analysis, with a sample size of 1,500. First, we provide a description of the key variables in our model.

The key predictor variables examined are:

- Freedom
 - This item measures the extent to which respondents value being free to choose what they do and say, even if some people may be offended by them, on a five-point scale (1 being “not important at all” and 5 being “very important”).
- Harmony
 - This item measures the extent to which respondents value living in harmony and order with others, even if this may limit freedoms of speech and expression, on a five-point scale (1 being “not important at all” and 5 being “very important”).
- Justice
 - This item measures the extent to which respondents value being treated fairly by the law, regardless of one’s personal background, on a five-point scale (1 being “not important at all” and 5 being “very important”).
- Power
 - This item measures the extent to which respondents value achieving greater wealth, status, and authority in life on a five-point scale (1 being “not important at all” and 5 being “very important”).
- Care
 - This item measures the extent to which respondents value caring for the well-being of others, even if this is at the expense of one’s personal interests, on a five-point scale (1 being “not important at all” and 5 being “very important”).

- Safety
 - This item measures the extent to which respondents value living without fear of danger or harm in a safe and secure environment, on a five-point scale (1 being “not important at all” and 5 being “very important”).
- Stimulation
 - This item measures the extent to which respondents value having an exciting life with new experiences, on a five-point scale (1 being “not important at all” and 5 being “very important”).
- Government satisfaction
 - This nine-item scale measures the extent to which respondents are satisfied with various government responses to COVID-19. These include responses relating to the economy (e.g., keeping the economy running and protecting jobs), information management (e.g., policy communication) and the government’s overall handling of the pandemic. The specific item breakdown can be found in Annex A.

Finally, the key outcome variables are:

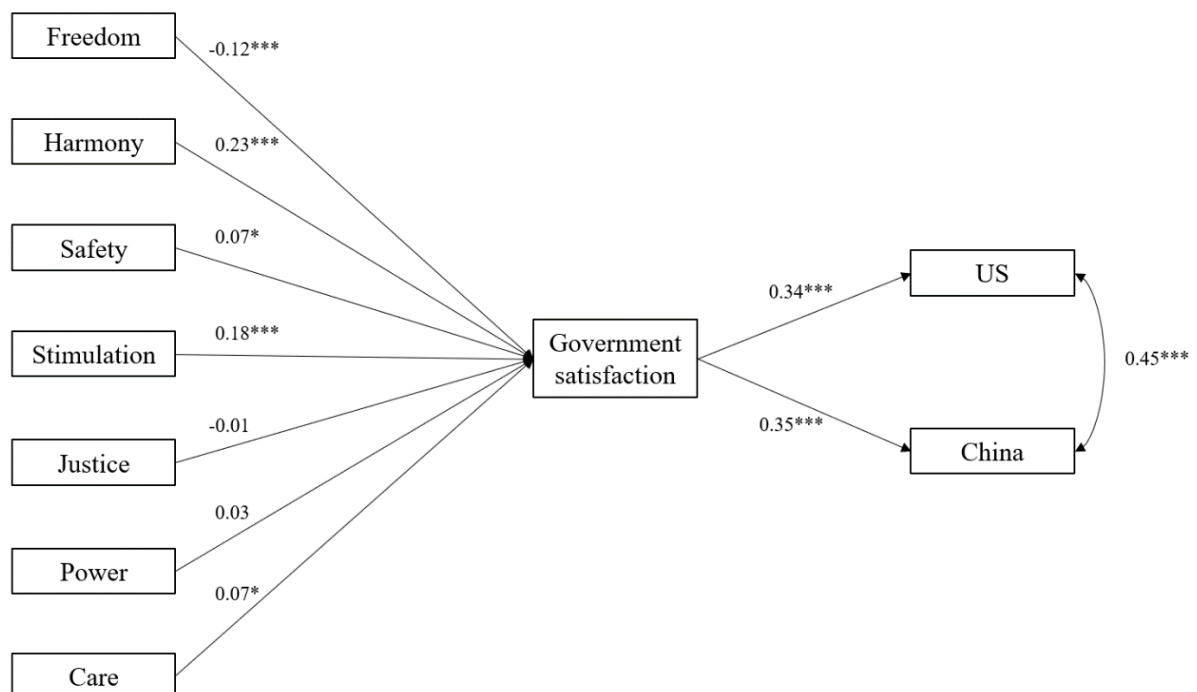
- United States
 - This item measures the extent to which respondents perceived Singapore as having fared worse, about the same, or better than the US in terms of pandemic response, on a seven-point scale (1 being “much worse” and 7 being “much better”).
- China
 - This item measures the extent to which respondents perceived

Singapore as having fared worse, about the same, or better than China in terms of pandemic response, on a seven-point scale (1 being “much worse” and 7 being “much better”).

1.3.3 Results

Overall, the model showed a good fit with the data: $\chi^2 (22) = 106.05$, $p < .001$, GFI = 0.96, CFI = 0.92, RMSEA = 0.05, SRMR = 0.03 (see Figure 19).

Figure 19: Structural equation modelling illustrating the relationships between values, government satisfaction and perceptions of how Singapore fared against the US and China



Note: Standardised path coefficients are displayed.

* = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$, *** = $p < .001$.

Results show that government satisfaction played a crucial intermediary role in linking values with perceptions of how Singapore fared, compared with the US and China.

Several values also significantly predicted greater satisfaction with how the Singapore government managed the COVID-19 pandemic.

Specifically, the more an individual values harmony ($\beta = .23$, $p < .001$), safety ($\beta = .07$, $p < .05$), stimulation ($\beta = .18$, $p < .001$), and care ($\beta = .07$, $p < .05$), but not freedom ($\beta = -.12$, $p < .001$), the higher the level of government satisfaction. This demonstrates that government satisfaction is indeed dependent on the values that resonate with individuals. In turn, greater satisfaction with the government led people to perceive that Singapore did better than the US ($\beta = .34$, $p < .001$) as well as China ($\beta = .35$, $p < .001$).

Taken together, these findings elucidate the nature of government satisfaction in Singapore. First, government satisfaction is related to preserving harmony and order. This is hardly surprising as harmony provides stability, promotes unity, and prevents conflicts among diverse groups of people in Singapore. These are paramount conditions for the government to successfully overcome a crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Second, government satisfaction relates to caring about the well-being of others. After all, caring about others helps to strengthen community bonds, engender a sense of belonging and create a cohesive society that would allow the nation to thrive, even under difficult circumstances.

Third, government satisfaction depends on its ability to provide a safe and secure environment for people to live in, as such environments allow individuals to have peace of mind and better quality of life. This is especially important during the COVID-19 pandemic, when people feel threatened by the risk of infection and turn to the government for solutions that help them mitigate such risks (e.g., circuit breaker).

Fourth, government satisfaction is enhanced when people's need for new experiences, such as growth, is fulfilled. At this juncture of the pandemic, many are in the midst of charting new paths in their lives. Past research has also shown that a large proportion of Singaporeans have re-evaluated their life priorities in the midst of the pandemic (Mathew et al., 2022). Providing conditions for Singaporeans to engage in such re-negotiation, and enabling Singaporeans to seek opportunities for growth, are therefore important antecedents of government satisfaction.

Lastly, it is crucial to note that at least within the Singapore context, government satisfaction does not appear to be based on allowing people to freely choose how to behave at the expense of others. Enabling such norms to prevail is likely to disrupt social stability, peace, and cohesion — hallmarks of Singaporean society that have long been emphasised.

CONCLUSION

At long last, we are now at the tail-end of the pandemic. In the past three years, Singapore and the world have experienced multiple twists and turns in the trajectory of the COVID-19 outbreak. As we venture into a post-COVID world, we took this opportunity to review Singaporeans' attitudes towards how the pandemic was managed, including perceptions of our nation's performance in relation to other countries and regions, as well as Singaporeans' satisfaction with the government across various areas.

Overall, several important themes emerged through our investigation. Chief amongst these is that we saw a glimpse of a uniquely Singaporean model of responding to a crisis, characterised by an agile pragmatism and a sense of calibration, and perhaps more importantly, a model that seemed well-received by Singaporeans. Indeed, our analysis of Singaporeans' perceptions of our performance in the pandemic relative to others in the world revealed that Singaporeans held a fairly strong conviction in the superiority of our response — a clear majority of the respondents believed that we did better than all of the countries and regions provided to them for their evaluation.

Notably, we observed that these attitudes were largely independent of political ideologies and extremities. Singaporeans — especially those with higher education levels who might be more sceptical or discerning — were ready to affirm the effectiveness of the Singapore response when evaluating it against other countries and regions. Perhaps, then, what drives our collective acknowledgment of the Singapore model is not simply political or ideological preferences, but our shared,

steadfast commitment to a pragmatic response to an enemy that does not discriminate.

One might then ask what constitutes pragmatism in Singapore. In the context of the pandemic in Singapore, what works? It appears that the answer to this question may be elucidated by a close examination of the values held closely by Singaporeans. Our investigation reveals that Singaporeans cherish a sense of social order and harmony, above all. These are aspects which have long characterised the Singapore story, and which have provided the necessary conditions for our society to flourish economically and socially. Importantly, the kind of order and harmony that we embrace is not equivalent to silencing or merely keeping up a semblance of peace. Instead, we cherish a harmony that is driven by genuine care for others, constituting the epitome of a truly collectivist society. Indeed, during the pandemic, we have amply seen Singaporeans being ready to step up to lead ground-up initiatives to help those in need. The physical and psychological wellbeing of our people took centre-stage, and efforts to mitigate the ill effects of temporary restrictions on livelihoods have been relentless.

At the same time, it is evident that Singaporeans have come to terms with learning to live with the virus, and have begun to forge new paths ahead. Accordingly, Singaporeans clearly value a sense of growth, and are ready for an exciting, post-pandemic life. Of course, our collective ability to finally live life more normally — and with renewed vigour — must be intricately balanced with fundamental safeguards to protect our safety and security. At times, this has meant the occasional tightening of

safety measures and limitations to social interactions, overseas travel, and other activities; policies to enable appropriate life transitions (e.g., career switches, job placements) were also in order. To the extent that the government is able to negotiate these demands and ensure that the policies enacted resonate with these priorities, we observed that satisfaction with the government remains strong.

Our review of the various elements of government satisfaction also revealed interesting findings. Core institutional resilience appeared strong, with perceptions of government satisfaction in critical areas such as the healthcare system and the economy remaining high across these years, albeit with some occasional dips when case numbers were higher. Satisfaction with public health enforcement (e.g., safe management measures) also remained consistently high. In addition, one observation seemed to be that satisfaction towards border measures tended to be moderate, and levels of satisfaction in this area tended to fluctuate depending on the 'season' of COVID-19 (e.g., whenever there are new variants that emerged and caused larger numbers of infections). Nevertheless, satisfaction with the relaxation of border measures improved considerably as our nation transitioned towards living with COVID-19. Indeed, it is unsurprising to expect a greater sense of heterogeneity in attitudes towards more complex issues such as border controls during a novel disease outbreak, given individuals' wide-ranging and subjective differences in risk tolerance and public health threat perception.

On our collective ability to remain agile in a fast-changing external environment, we were encouraged that a majority of Singaporeans are not susceptible to knee-jerk

reactions. Indeed, at this stage of the pandemic, we note that a majority of our respondents expressed a preference for existing measures to be kept in place until more is known about potential new variants, as opposed to shutting down immediately. A majority also readily endorsed the importance of exercising self-responsibility at this stage of the pandemic. These are clear indicators of our nation's ability to collectively adapt to evolving strategies — from tight, circuit breaker-type restrictions in the early stages to putting endemic living into practice. Such adaptability and willingness to be self-responsible citizens should not be understated. From a public communications perspective at the very least, should similar calamities recur, we need only to know, and be reminded, that we have done it before and we can do it again.

ANNEX A: COMPOSITE SCALES

Government satisfaction ($\alpha = .94$):

This composite scale captures respondents' level of satisfaction with the government's management of the pandemic, with higher scores representing higher levels of government satisfaction.

Respondents were asked to rate the extent to which they were satisfied with how the government had handled the pandemic based on a seven-point scale (1 being "strongly dissatisfied" and 7 being "strongly satisfied") on the following items: "For each of the following measures, to what extent are you currently satisfied or dissatisfied with the way the government implemented these following policies in handling the COVID-19 pandemic?"

- Communicating COVID-19 related policies and measures (e.g., precautions to take, Circuit Breaker, loosening of restrictions) to the public
- Communicating the government's plans and measures for re-opening
- Opening borders to all countries under the Vaccination Travel Framework
- Keeping the healthcare system running
- Keeping the economy running
- Protecting jobs
- Providing financial aid packages to citizens
- Reducing the number of daily infections in the community
- Overall handling of COVID-19

Confidence in engaging in social activities in the new normal ($\alpha = .93$):

This composite scale captures the level of confidence a respondent had in engaging in social activities in the new normal while the virus is still in our midst, with a higher score representing higher confidence.

Respondents were asked to rate their level of confidence based on a five-point scale (1 being “not at all confident” and 5 being “very confident”) on the following items: “In the new normal, with COVID-19 circulating in our midst, how confident are you in carrying out the following activities?”

- Dining out at public places like hawker centres, restaurants or bars
- Attending a live event with a large number of spectators e.g., National Day, sports events
- Going out shopping at crowded places like shopping malls, wet markets, supermarkets
- Travelling to other countries with relatively low cases of COVID-19 for leisure
- Taking public transport
- Having close personal contact e.g., handshaking, hugs, standing together in a group
- Visiting friends and relatives more regularly
- Meeting people who test negative on the antigen rapid test (ART), but are close contacts of those infected with COVID-19 or whose workplace has infections
- Meeting someone who has recently recovered from COVID-19
- Participation in nightlife activities (e.g., nightclubs, discotheques)

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