

IPS study: Public confidence in Singapore state institutions rises, but falls for media, political parties, unions

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Public confidence in state, financial and civil institutions has increased over the past eight years, while confidence in the media, political parties and labour unions has declined, a study has found.

The police recorded the largest boost in confidence from the public, the study's researchers from the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) said in a study released yesterday.

Around 87 per cent of people polled said they were confident or very confident with the Singapore Police Force (SPF), up from 79.1 per cent from 2012, when the previous study was conducted. This was the highest level of confidence in police globally, noted the researchers.

The 2020 study was carried out by Mathew Mathews, Teo Kay Key, Melvin Tay and Alicia Wang. They surveyed 2,012 Singapore citizens and permanent residents aged 21 and above.

The study is part of the global World Values Survey, a cross-national study of public attitudes and values that involves around 80 countries and 130,000 respondents in total. Singapore participated in the 2002, 2012 and 2020 iterations of the global poll.

Of public confidence in state institutions, Mathews said: "That's partly because they do see that the state has performed well in terms of the provision of public services, and if they have performed well, then you know they can be relied on."

Corruption is perceived to be very low, especially in comparison with other countries, he added.

"When they see that the state is not corrupt, not acting for self-interests, then people are a lot more likely to feel that they can be confident the institution will be able to provide public good and ensure the interests of the whole is being cared for, and not just specific groups," he added.

What the study found

Researchers found that the people were more confident in state institutions in general, especially the police, the Government and the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF).

These institutions polled highly in comparison with the rest of the world. For example, confidence in the Singapore Government was 81.5 per cent, higher than Switzerland (66.9 per cent), Hong Kong (55.2 per cent), Taiwan (53.1 per cent) and South Korea (51.3 per cent), ranking behind only China (94.9 per cent).

Singapore residents were also highly confident in the lack of corruption here. Around 36 per cent of those polled said they were confident that there were zero people in state institutions who are involved in corruption, the highest in the world.

More than four-fifths of respondents were confident in the courts as well as the SPF and the SAF.

However, the report noted that Singapore's legislature — Parliament — saw a decline in public confidence, falling slightly from 75.4 per cent in 2012 to 72.7 per cent in 2020. This was the only state institution that had the confidence of less than three quarters of the people.

The media, political parties and labour unions in Singapore also saw a notable slide in public confidence, too, compared with 2012.

Around 54.7 per cent said they were confident in the political parties here in 2020, which was an election year. This is a decrease from 58.8 per cent who felt the same in 2012, a year after the 2011 General Election.

For labour unions, the report noted that full-time employees had the highest level of confidence in these organisations, while the self-employed had the lowest levels.

Fewer people were also confident in the media in general (56.1 per cent) and in television (57.4 per cent), compared with 2012 figures.

Teo said that the findings for the media concern all media outlets, including non-mainstream ones.

“There has been caution recently about consuming (news) information blindly So I think that is a part of why people are now a little less confident. We can see it as people being more critical, thinking a bit more about the things that they see,” said Teo.

Here is a detailed look at the study's findings:

State institutions

Government: In 2020, 81.5 per cent were confident, up from 79.3 per cent in 2012

Parliament: In 2020, 72.7 per cent were confident, down from 75.4 per cent in 2012

Courts: In 2020, 82.3 per cent were confident, little changed from 82.7 per cent in 2012

Police: In 2020, 87 per cent were confident, markedly higher than 79.1 per cent in 2012

SAF: In 2020, 83.3 per cent were confident, well up from 76.6 per cent in 2012

Civil Service: In 2020, 79.9 per cent were confident, up from 75.7 per cent in 2012

Politics and society

Political parties: In 2020, 54.7 per cent were confident, a hefty slide from 68.5 per cent in 2012

Religious organisations: In 2020, 60 per cent were confident, well down from 70.3 per cent in 2012

Labour unions: In 2020, 54 per cent were confident, a fall from 58.8 per cent in 2012

Environmental organisations: In 2020, 72.1 per cent were confident, a rise from 69.2 per cent in 2012

Women's organisations: In 2020, 67.1 per cent were confident, up from 65.9 per cent in 2012

Charitable organisations: In 2020, 59.4 per cent were confident, a slight fall from 60.3 per cent in 2012

Other institutions

Banks: In 2020, 79.4 per cent were confident, up from 74.8 per cent in 2012

Universities: In 2020, 83.7 per cent were confident, a slight rise from 82.9 per cent in 2012

Media: In 2020, 56.1 per cent were confident, down from 57.8 per cent in 2012

Television: In 2020, 57.4 per cent were confident, a fall from 58.5 per cent in 2012

Multilateral organisations

Asean: In 2020, 56.4 per cent were confident of the 10-member grouping of Southeast Asian nations, down from 62 per cent in 2012

United Nations: In 2020, 53.7 per cent were confident, a fall from 61.5 per cent in 2012 —
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