

Over 80% of S'poreans satisfied with how democracy works in S'pore: IPS survey

Respondents indicated a strong belief that democracy is suitable for Singapore, as well as a strong expectation that it will continue to be democratic in ten years' time.

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The majority of Singaporeans are strongly committed to democracy, with over 80 per cent satisfied or strongly satisfied with the way democracy works in Singapore. Singaporeans also expressed strong disapproval of authoritarian systems of government.

These are some of the key findings of the 2023 [Asian Barometer Survey \(ABS\)](#) conducted by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS).

The survey has been conducted from 2006 to 2023 in Singapore, and examined the political attitudes of 1,000 Singapore citizens, aged 21 and above.

Respondents were asked what democracy means to them, what their views of authoritarianism were, how much they support the current system of government in Singapore, and more.

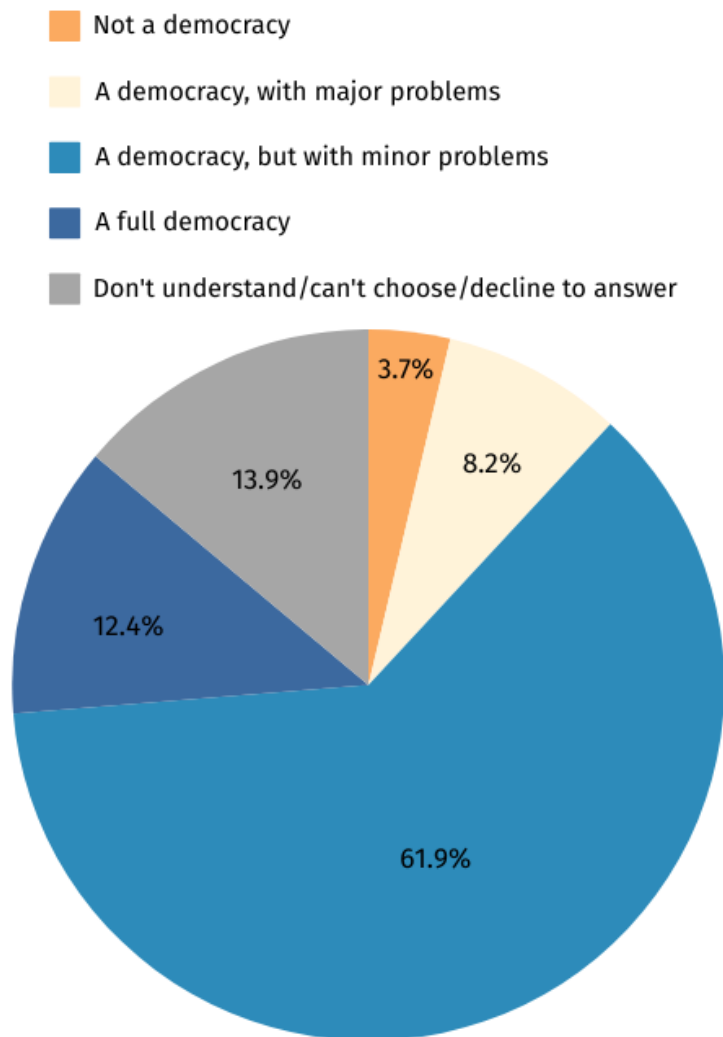
The survey also touched on respondents' views on the influence of China and the U.S. on Singapore.

State of democracy in Singapore

Respondents were queried on how much of a democracy they thought Singapore was. Since 2006, the majority of respondents have indicated in each iteration of the survey that Singapore was a "democracy, but with minor problems".

Here is the percentage breakdown for 2023:

In your opinion, how much of a democracy is Singapore?



Infographic by Tharun Suresh. Data from IPS.

Notably, the percentage of respondents who said that Singapore is a "full democracy" increased from 9.2 per cent in 2020 to 12.4 per cent in 2023.

Respondents were also asked to separately rate how democratic Singapore was 10 years ago, as well as under the present government, on a scale of one to ten.

Across all iterations of the survey from 2010 to 2023, the mean scores were higher for the present government compared to 10 years before.

Factors behind political attitudes

The survey also found that respondents with technical or secondary education were more likely to think that Singapore is less democratic now, as opposed to respondents with high school or university education backgrounds.

Those aged 36 to 55, along with those 56 and above, were also more likely to think that there has been no change in democracy.

Meaning of democracy

Respondents were also queried on what they thought of the concept of democracy.

The survey broke the concept of democracy into four dimensions:

- **Political-civic rights**; the ability to freely express political views, criticise the state, participate in protests, etc.
- **Substantive**; provision of basic necessities, job opportunities, or state aid
- **Procedural**; free and fair elections, legislative oversight, etc.
- **Good governance**; ensuring law and order, corruption-free governance, and quality public services

The survey then examined which of the four dimensions was most salient or essential to respondents in a series of four questions with forced choices.

Across three waves of the survey in 2010, 2014 and 2023, the following four characteristics of democracy were highlighted as most essential.

- People choose government leaders in free and fair elections (a characteristic of the procedural dimension);
- Basic necessities, like food, clothes and shelter, are provided for all (a characteristic of the substantive dimension);
- Government ensures there is law and order (a characteristic of the good governance dimension);
- Politics is clean and free of corruption (a characteristic of the good governance dimension).

The survey thus concluded that Singaporeans generally value the procedural, substantive and good governance dimensions of the concept of democracy more than political-civic rights.

Support for democracy

The survey also looked at Singaporeans' commitment to democracy.

Since the 2010 wave of the survey, the majority of respondents have agreed with the statement: "Democracy may have its problems, but it is still the best form of government".

In 2023, 18.3 per cent of respondents strongly agreed with the statement, while 53.9 per cent of respondents agreed.

Over 80 per cent satisfied with the way democracy works

Moreover, over the past five waves of the survey, over 80 per cent of Singaporeans have indicated that they are satisfied with the way democracy works in Singapore.

In 2023, 20.4 per cent of respondents indicated that they were "very satisfied", while 60.3 per cent indicated that they were "fairly satisfied".

Suitability & importance of democracy

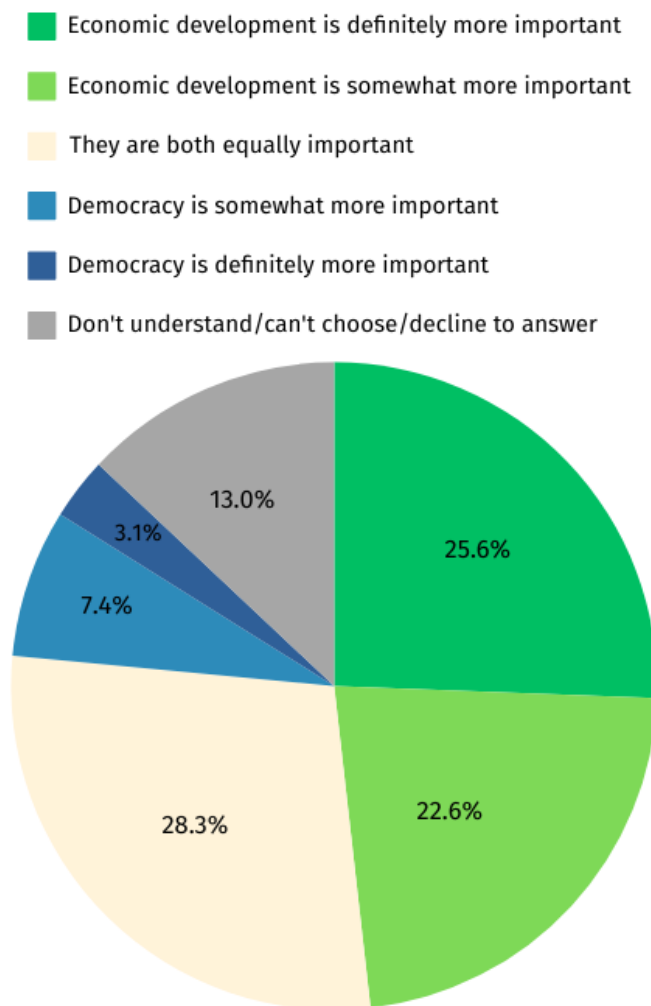
Across three waves of the survey in 2014, 2020, and 2023, respondents indicated a strong belief that democracy is suitable for Singapore, as well as a strong expectation that Singapore will continue to be democratic in ten years' time.

Respondents were also asked to weigh the relative importance of democracy to economic development.

In 2023, the most common answer by respondents was that democracy and economic development are equally important, with 28.3 per cent of them choosing this option.

In second place, 25.6 per cent of respondents said that economic development is definitely more important:

Priority - Relative importance of democracy to economic development



Infographic by Tharun Suresh. Data from IPS.

Strong disapproval of authoritarianism

Respondents from 2006 to 2023 also indicated a strong disapproval of authoritarian systems of government.

Respondents were given a series of statements and asked whether they approved or disapproved of them:

- "We should get rid of parliament and elections and have a strong leader decide things."
- "Only one political party should be allowed to stand for election and hold office."
- "We should get rid of elections and parliament and have experts make decisions on behalf of the people."

A majority of respondents (between 72.2 and 73.9 per cent for each statement) in 2023 disapproved or strongly disapproved of the presented authoritarian statements.

Current system of government

Respondents generally indicated support for the current system of government in Singapore across the 2010, 2014, 2020 and 2023 iterations of the survey.

In 2023, 58.2 per cent of respondents said that the current system needs minor change, while 20.9 per cent said that it works fine and does not need to change.

8.6 per cent of respondents felt that the system needs major change, while 2.1 per cent felt that it should be replaced.

Respondents were also asked whether, over the long run, the system is capable of solving the problems Singapore faces.

58.6 per cent of respondents somewhat agreed, while 25.9 per cent of respondents strongly agreed.

8.5 per cent of respondents somewhat disagreed, and 1.3 per cent strongly disagreed.

International relations

Respondents were also surveyed on how they view the influence of the United States and China on Singapore.

The majority of respondents believed that China would have the most influence in Asia in ten years.

In 2023, 59.1 per cent of respondents said that China will have the most influence in Asia in ten years, whereas only 6.9 per cent of respondents indicated the United States instead. On the other hand, 49.6 per cent of 2023 said that China currently has the most influence on Asia, whereas 21.4 per cent indicated the United States.

Slightly more positive about China

Respondents were also slightly more positive about China's influence on Singapore, compared to the United States.

Mean scores were aggregated from respondents' ratings of China and the United States' influence on a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 being "very negative" and 6 being "very positive".

In 2023, the mean score for the nature of the United States' influence was 3.9, lower than China's influence which was scored 4.1.

MDDI poll

The Ministry of Digital Development and Information (MDDI) also conducted a poll on foreign policy in June 2024.

The poll was demographically representative and consisted of more than 2,000 Singapore citizens aged 15 years and older.

According to MDDI, 6 in 10 Singaporeans rated the relationship with both the United States and China as good or very good.

6 in 10 also felt that Singapore should maintain the current level of Singapore's closeness to the United States and China.

8 in 10 were of the view that Singapore should act in its best interests and not take sides.

7 in 10 said that they trust the government's handling of foreign policy and that the government would act in the country's best interests.

Methodology

IPS noted that, in contrast to previous waves of the ABS survey, there was a higher proportion of respondents choosing the "Don't understand/Don't know/Can't choose/Decline to answer" option.

These responses were not taken into account when calculating mean scores or comparing responses across the various waves of data.

The 2023 wave also changed the survey to be largely self-administered.

While the survey was previously administered by interviewers posing the questions to respondents and keying in the responses on the respondents' behalf on a tablet, respondents keyed in the responses themselves in the 2023 edition.