

## **Can we engage in more than ballot box dialogue?**

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In “A society in transformation ...” (Aug 31) P N Balji wrote that Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong governs a more complex society today and he cited an Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) survey to suggest that “... a demanding public ... will show their unhappiness at the ballot box and not so much at dialogue sessions with the Government.”

IPS research, most recently the findings from our National Orientations of Singaporeans survey, suggests a different picture.

In that survey, 85 per cent of some 2000 respondents said that voting was the most meaningful way to tell the Government how the country should be run.

However, an even greater proportion of 95 per cent of respondents said that, apart from the vote, there should be other ways by which citizens could express their views on government policies.

Taken together, this suggests that that “demanding public”, if anything, would also value and use channels apart from just the ballot box to express their views on public policy to the Government.

As governance challenges grow more complex, processes of government-citizen engagement will have to be strengthened so that political consensus can be negotiated and re-negotiated day-to-day around what Singaporeans feel are important to them.

Both Mr Balji and I have not, however, even begun to scratch the surface of discussing that more difficult task of facilitating horizontal citizen-to-citizen engagement on the trade-offs that every policy represents.

Do we have the wherewithal as a polity to develop processes that allow us to engage one another directly, rationally, with a sense of Singaporean realism to negotiate workable consensus on difficult issues confronting our society?

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