

*IPS Forum on
Singaporeans' Political Attitudes*

Comparing East Asian Democracies:
Singapore, Japan, South Korea & Taiwan

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27 September 2024

Outline

1. Systems of government (SJSKT)
2. State of democracy in East Asia
3. Meaning of democracy: substantive, procedural, good governance & politico-civil rights
4. Support for Democracy in East Asia
5. Support for Current System of Government

Japan & NIES: Systems of Government

- Japan & Singapore are “Uncommon Democracies”
- Perennial party-in-power: LDP since 1955 & PAP since 1959
- South Korea & Taiwan have split governments today: presidency & parliament are controlled by different political parties → danger of gridlock
- Japan, Singapore, South Korea & Taiwan are relatively affluent → underpins political stability

Public opinion in East Asia: **State of Democracy**

- All 4 rate their political systems quite positively as democratic.
- Singaporeans are the most positive: 74.3%
- Singaporeans' mean score is 7.1 (highest among the four)

Public opinion in East Asia: **Meaning of Democracy**

- All four have strong preference for the *substantive* dimension of democracy.
- This tendency (importance of “bread & butter” issues) is most conspicuous in Chart 5 which I will flash later.

Public opinion in East Asia: **Support for Democracy**

- Strong consensus in East Asia for democracy
- Support for democracy in East Asia is marginally highest in Singapore (mean score)
- Relative importance of democracy to economic development
 - a) South Korea & Taiwan rank economic development higher than democracy.
 - b) Exception is Japan which ranks democracy higher in importance.
 - c) 48.2% of Singaporeans rank economic development as more important/ somewhat more important but 28.3% ranks both economic development & democracy as equally important. This pattern is quite distinct from the other 3.

Public opinion in East Asia: **Support for current system of government**

- All 4 value their systems of government quite favorably.
- Singaporeans have most favorable outlook of their system of government.
- 79.1% of Singaporeans think that it works fine (no need to change) or needs only minor change.
- 84.5% of Singaporeans perceive that their system of government is capable of problem-solving over the long run.
- 78.8% prefer to live under their system of government.
- *I'll quickly flash the charts now.*

STATE OF DEMOCRACY IN EAST ASIA vs. SINGAPORE

Asian Barometer Survey (ABS)

Wave 6, 2023

ABS Singapore Team:

Dr Gillian KOH, Senior Research Fellow, Principal Investigator for ABS

Dr TAN Ern Ser, Adjunct Principal Research Fellow and Academic Adviser, IPS Social Lab

Dr TEO Kay Key, Research Fellow, IPS Social Lab

Mr CHEOW Jin Jie, Research Assistant

The other data have been collected by the ABS partners in the respective societies.

For further information about these partners, please see

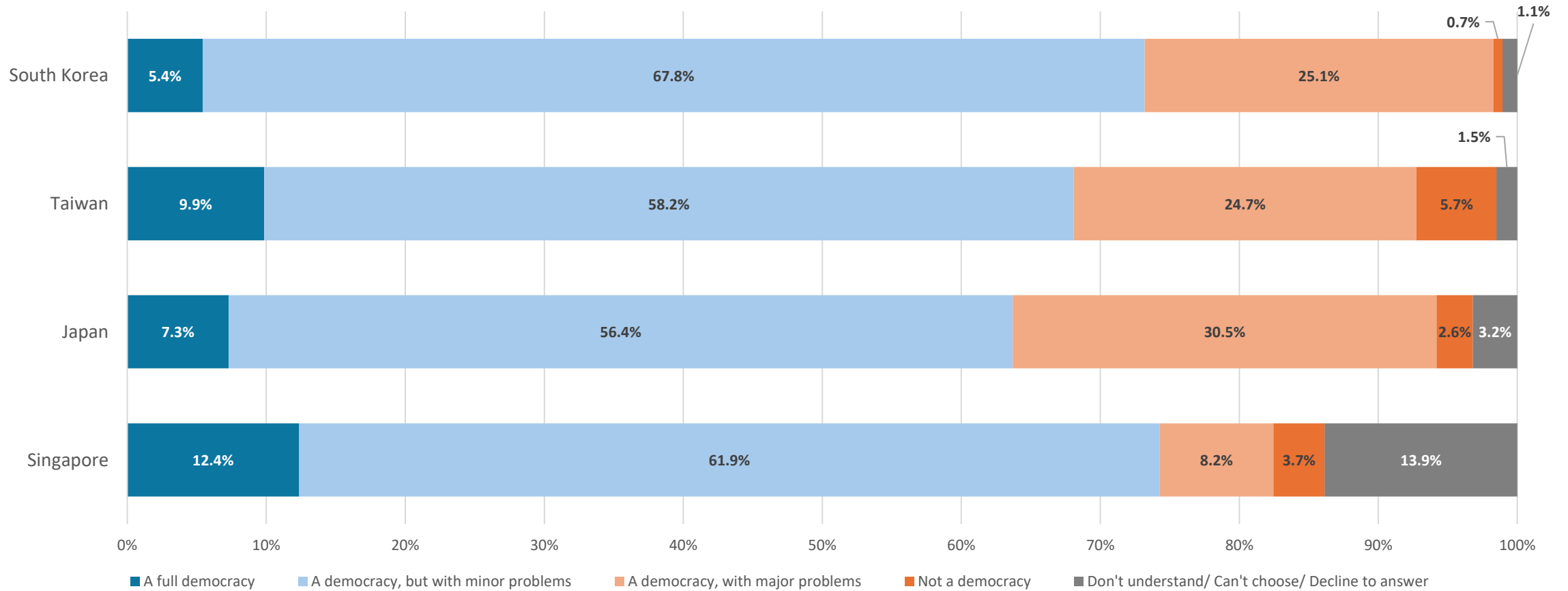
<https://www.asianbarometer.org/member.jsp?page=m20>.

Asian Barometer Survey, is a project of the Hu Fu Center for East Asia Democratic Studies,
National Taiwan University.

STATE OF DEMOCRACY

STATE OF DEMOCRACY

Chart 1: In your opinion, how much of a democracy is your country?



STATE OF DEMOCRACY

Chart 2: Where would you place our country 10 years ago?

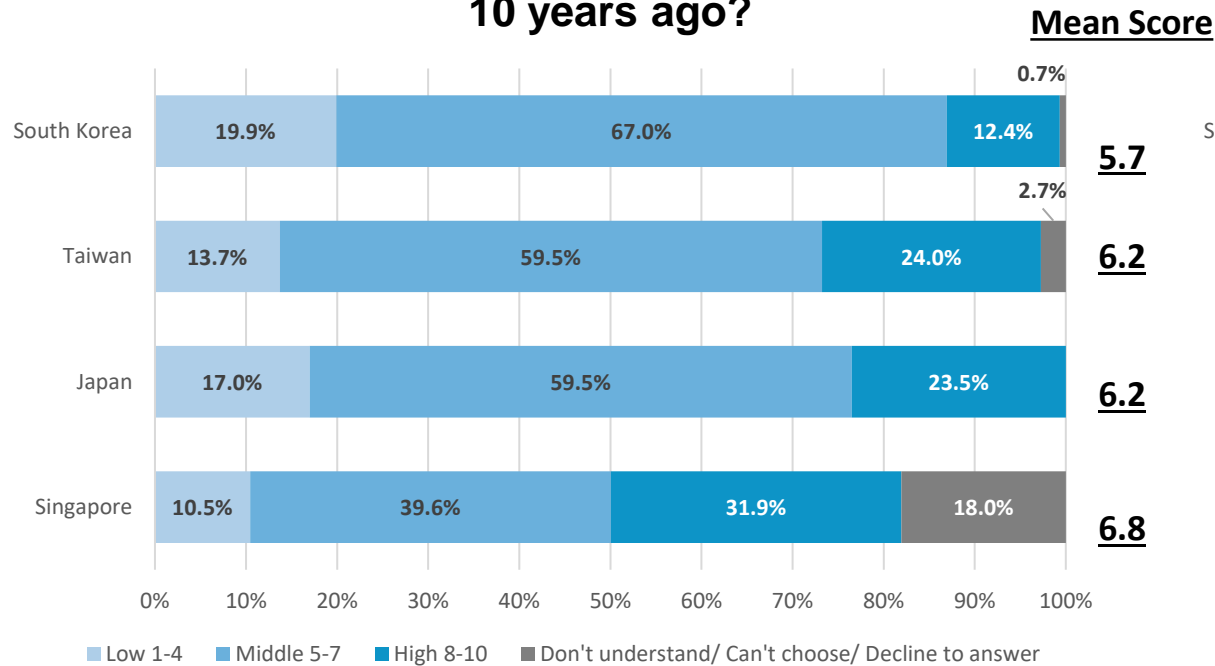
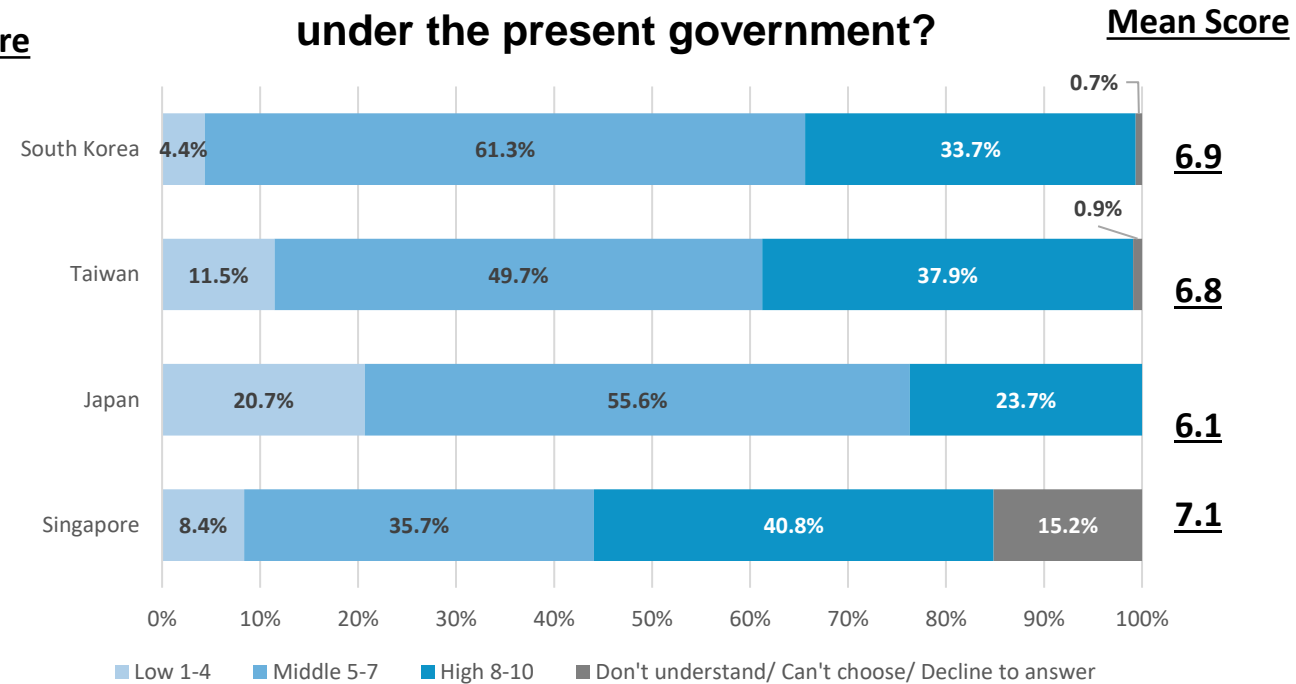


Chart 3: Where would you place our country under the present government?



*Scale: 1 denotes “completely undemocratic” and 10 denotes “completely democratic”.
Mean scores calculated without the DU/CC/DTA responses.*

MEANING OF DEMOCRACY

MEANING OF DEMOCRACY

What do people mean when they think of the concept of “democracy”?

One way in a survey setting is to break the concept of “democracy” into four dimensions and ask what matters in a forced choice manner. We accept its limitations.

Political-civic rights. For example, “People are free to express their political views openly”

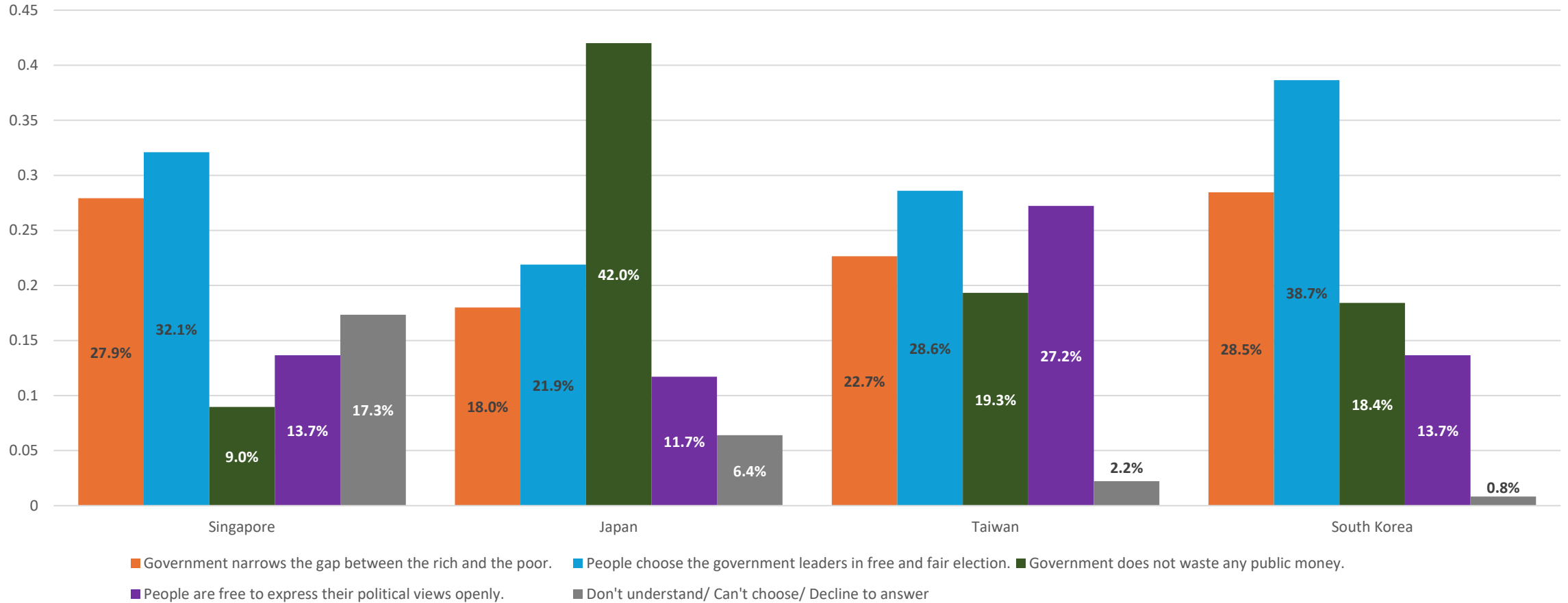
Substantive. For example, “Basic necessities, like food, clothes and shelter, are provided for all”

Procedural. For example, “People choose government leaders in free and fair elections”

Good Governance. For example, “Government ensures there is law and order”

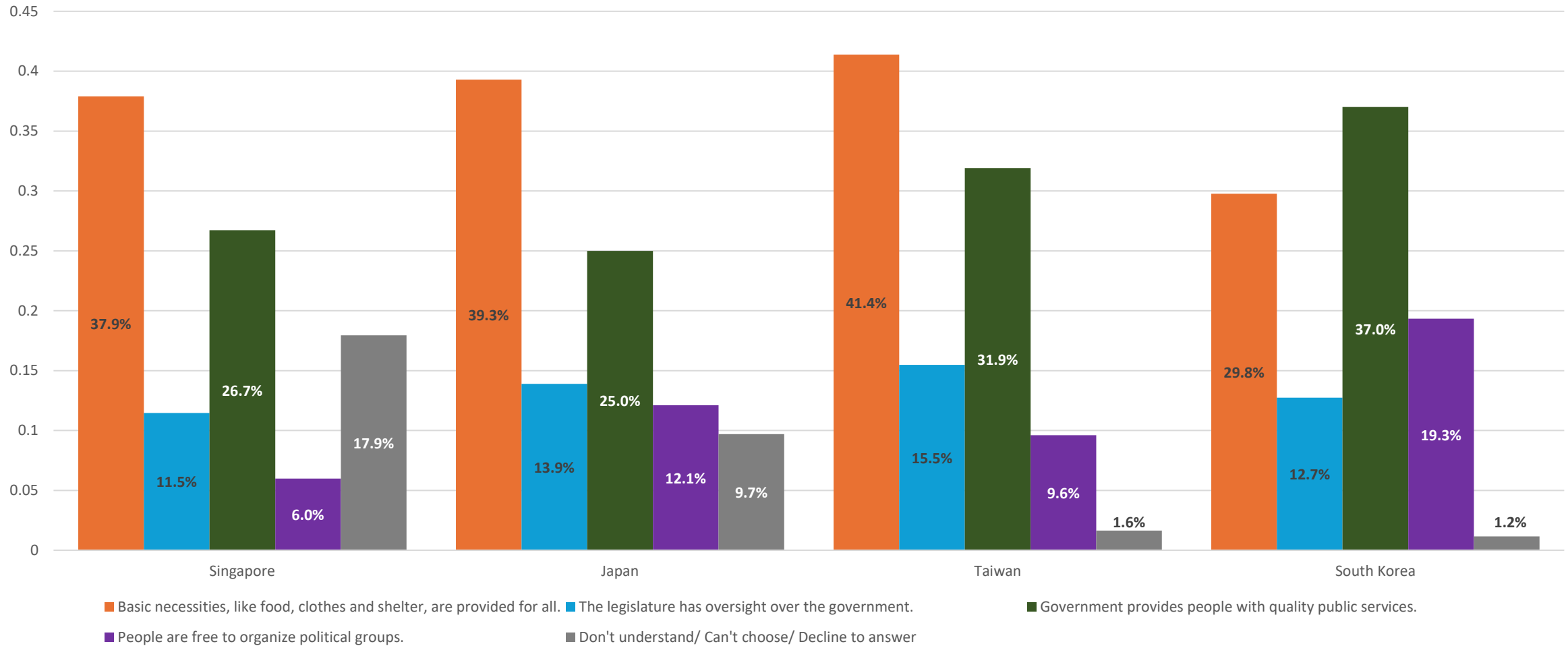
MEANING OF DEMOCRACY

Chart 4 : Which is the most essential characteristic of democracy? (1)



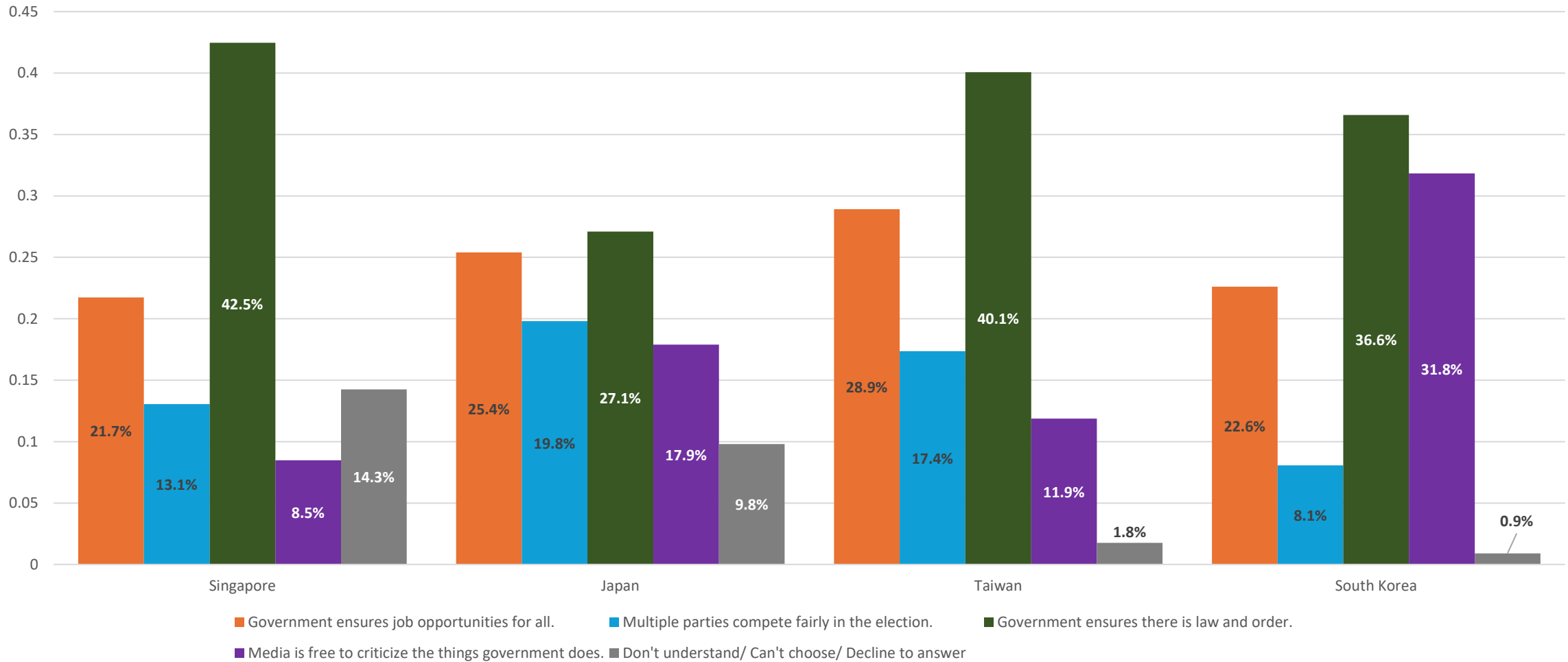
MEANING OF DEMOCRACY

Chart 5 : Which is the most essential characteristic of democracy? (2)



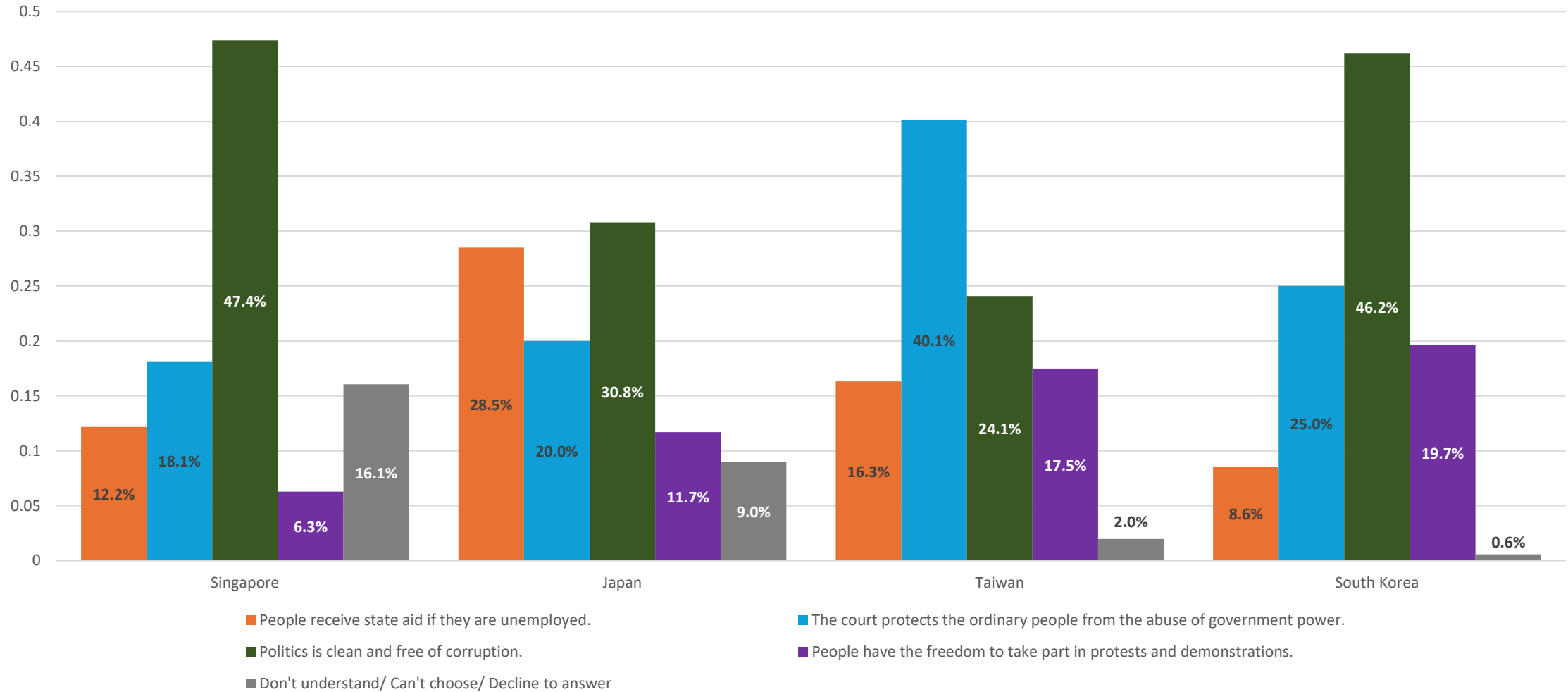
MEANING OF DEMOCRACY

Chart 6 : Which is the most essential characteristic of democracy? (3)



MEANING OF DEMOCRACY

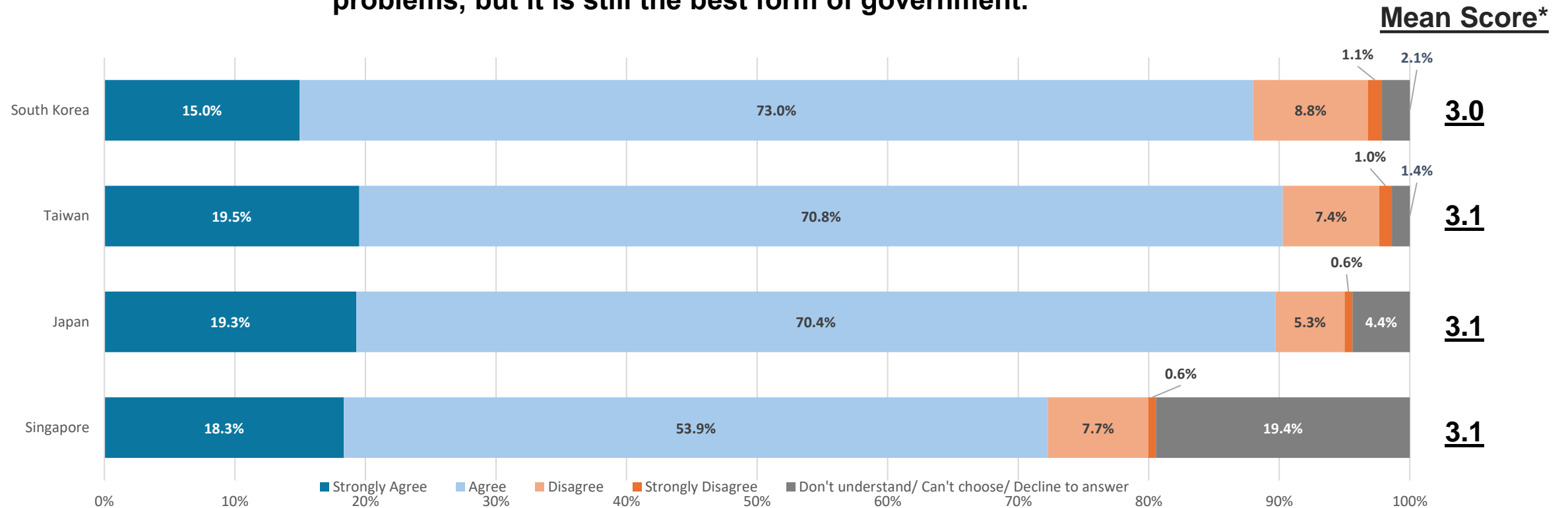
Chart 7 : Which is the most essential characteristic of democracy? (4)



SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRACY

SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRACY

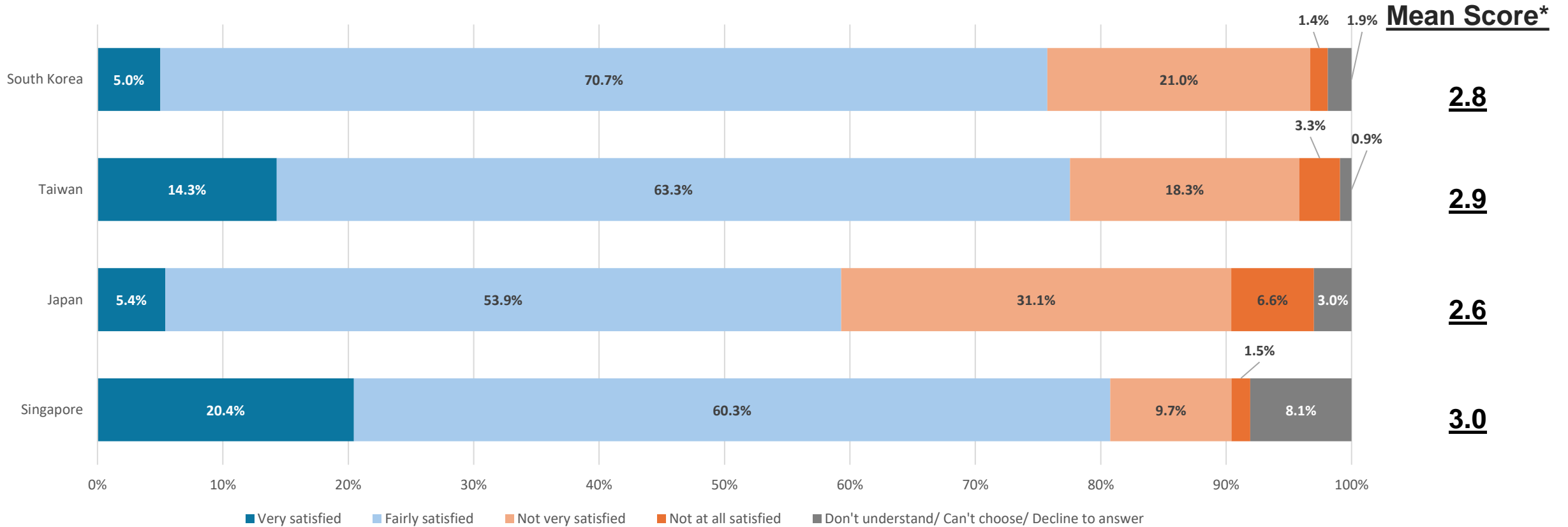
Chart 8: Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: “Democracy may have its problems, but it is still the best form of government.”



**The calculation of mean scores is based on reverse-coding of the variable.
Scale: 1 is “Strongly Disagree” and 4 is “Strongly Agree”
Mean score calculated without the DU/CC/DTA responses*

SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRACY

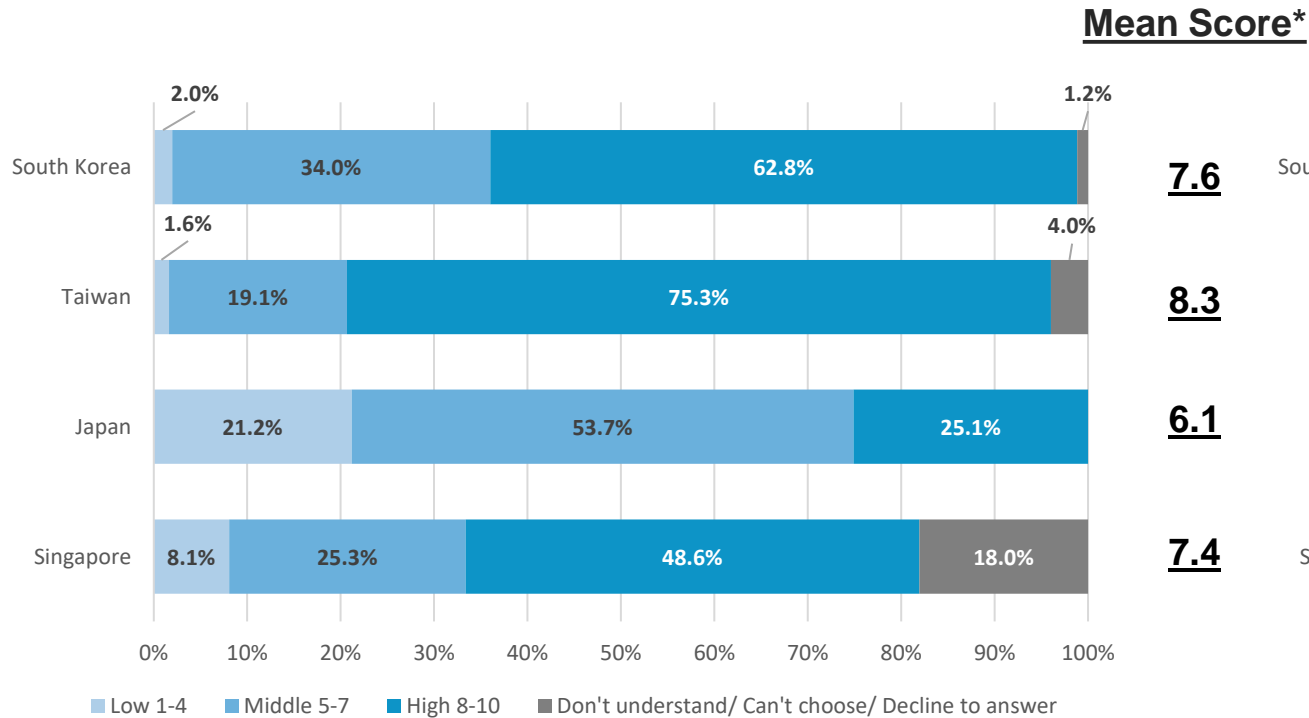
Chart 9: On the whole, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way democracy works in the country?



**The calculation of mean scores is based on reverse-coding of the variable.
Scale: 1 is "Not at all satisfied" and 4 is "Very satisfied"*

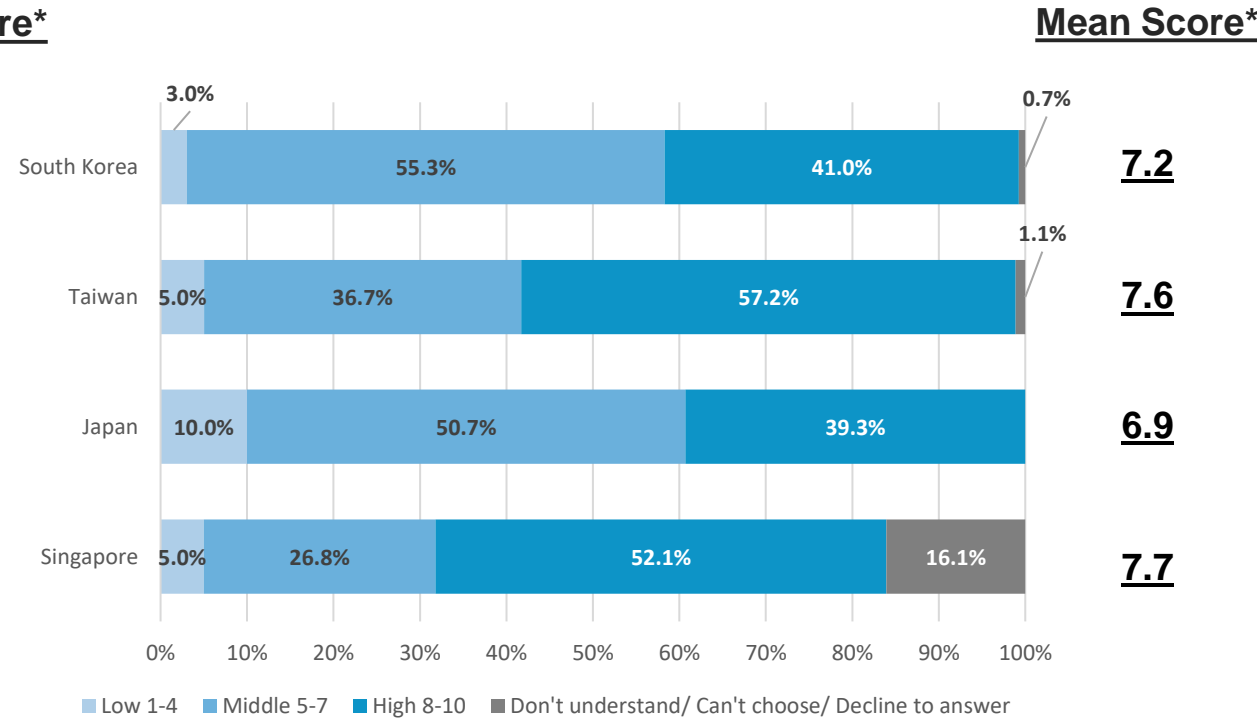
SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRACY

Chart 10: Expectation - Extent to which respondents think their country would be democratic 10 years from now



- *Scale: 1 is "Completely Undemocratic" and 10 is "Completely Democratic".*

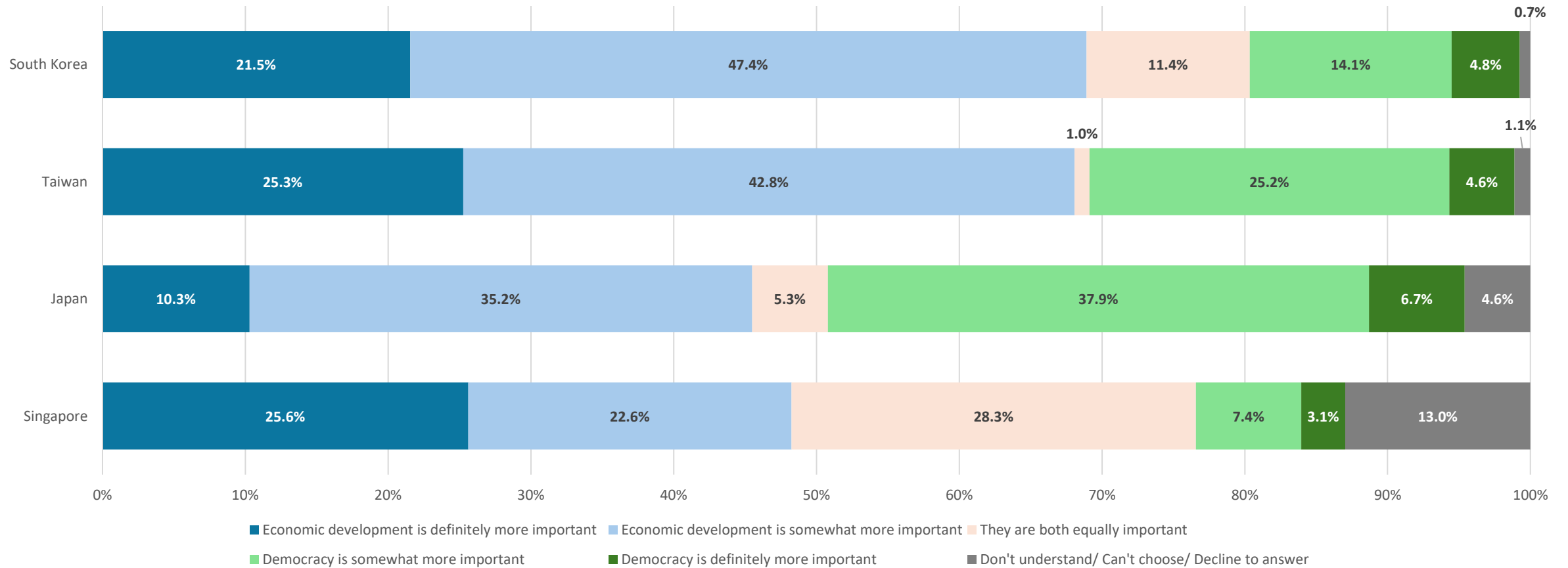
Chart 11: Suitability - Extent to which respondents think democracy is suitable for their country



- *Scale: 1 is "Completely Unsuitable" and 10 is "Completely Suitable".*

SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRACY

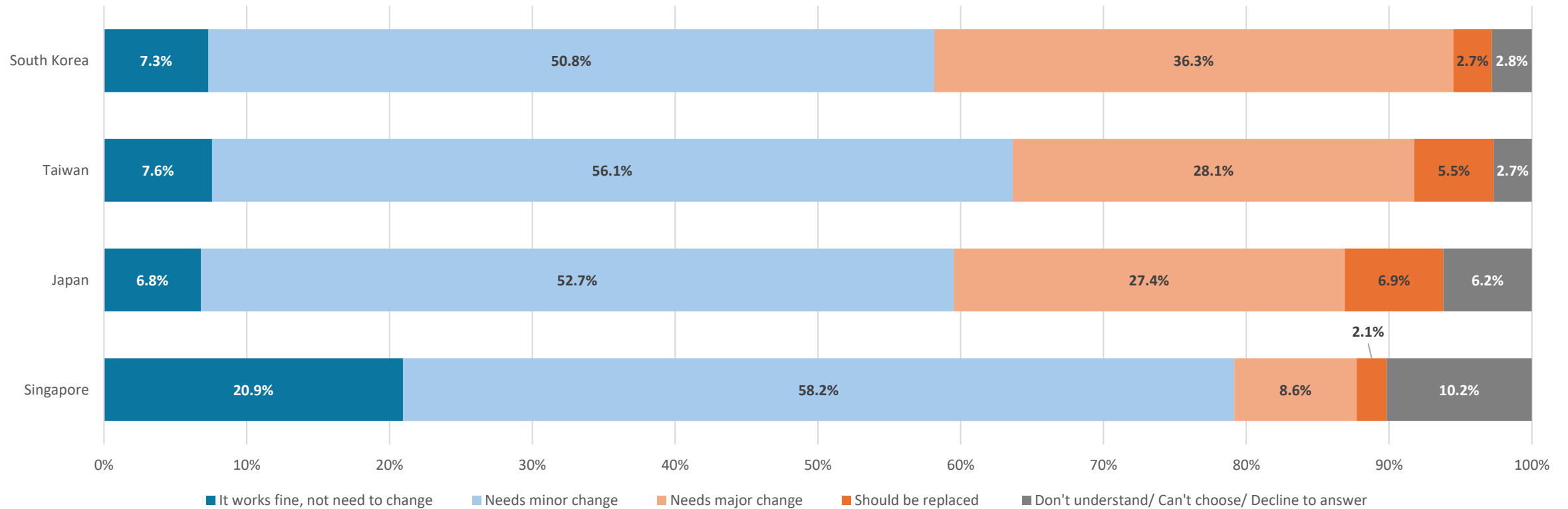
Chart 12: Priority – Relative importance of democracy to economic development



SUPPORT FOR CURRENT SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT

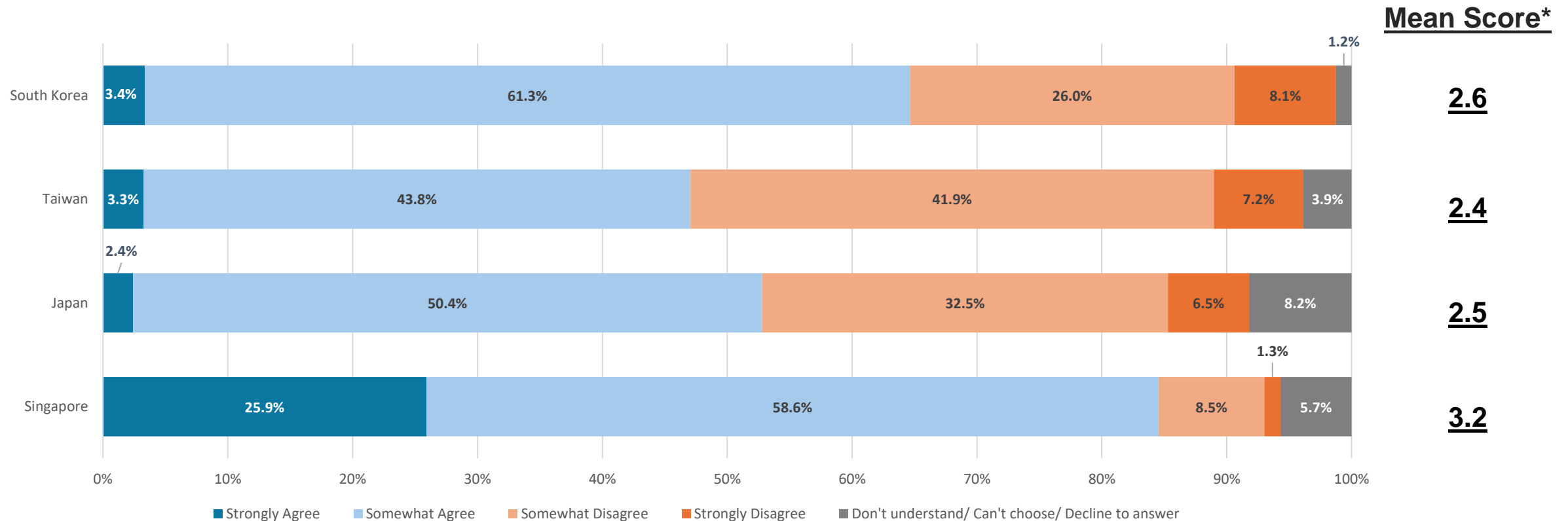
SUPPORT FOR THE CURRENT SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT

Chart 13: Would you say our system of government works fine as it is, needs minor change, needs major change, or should be replaced?



SUPPORT FOR THE CURRENT SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT

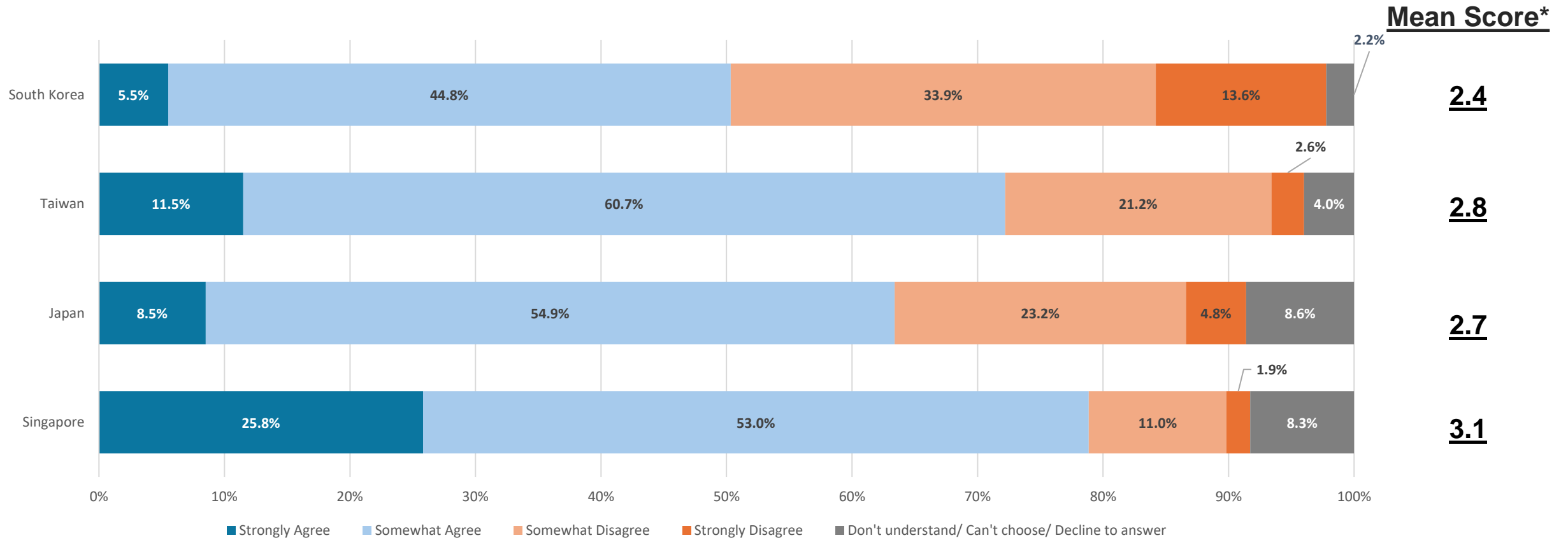
Chart 14: Over the long run, our system of government is capable of solving the problems our country faces.



**The calculation of mean scores is based on reverse-coding of the variable
Scale: 1 is "Strongly Disagree" and 4 is "Strongly Agree"
Mean scores calculated without the DU/CC/RTA responses*

SUPPORT FOR THE CURRENT SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT

Chart 15: I would rather live under our system of government than any other that I can think of.



*The calculation of mean scores is based on reverse-coding of the variable.

Scale: 1 is "Strongly Disagree" and 4 is "Strongly Agree"

Mean scores calculated without the DU/CC/RTA responses

END