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**IPS Forum on Singaporeans' Political Attitudes: Asian Barometer Survey
(Wave 6, 2023)**

The Asian Barometer Survey (ABS) is a comparative public opinion survey on political attitudes in Asia-Pacific. It examines the level that democratic norms and political systems have been entrenched in citizens in the countries and societies in the region. A common survey instrument developed by scholars is used.

Overall, the responses provide a sense of what “democracy” means to them; the legitimacy they confer onto their governing system; and the factors shape those political attitudes.

IPS has been the Singapore partner since 2010 (Wave 3-6). Each time, the survey gathers the responses of about 1,000 Singapore citizens aged 21 and above in face-to face interviews, the findings are weighted if necessary to improve on their representation. This makes the data generalisable to citizens here.

The 2023 survey is conducted by IPS' Dr Gilian Koh, senior research fellow, Dr Tan Ern Ser, IPS Social Lab adjunct principal research fellow and academic advisor, Dr Teo Kay Key, IPS Social Lab research fellow and Cheow Jin Jie, research assistant.

Key findings:

Democracy – a political system valued by Singaporeans in the age of democratic backsliding globally

- **Democracy**, as a political system, is **increasingly being viewed as suitable** for Singapore.
 - Since 2006, there is persistently strong support among Singaporeans for the statement “Singapore is a democracy, but with minor problems.”
 - More say it is a full democracy in 2023 (12.4%) compared to 2020 (9.2%).
 - From 2010 to 2023, respondents in each wave rated Singapore as being more democratic in the present compared to 10 years before, based on mean score.
 - Based on multinomial logistic regression results, respondents with technical or secondary education are more likely to think that Singapore is less democratic now.
 - Those aged 35 and above are more likely to think there has been no change in democracy.

- Respondents who believe there is “equal distribution of power and resources” in Singapore’s political system are more likely to think that there is no change in the nature of Singapore’s democracy between the past and now.
- Meaning of democracy:
 - Singaporeans value the procedural, substantive and good governance attributes, but place less emphasis on the area of political-civic rights.
 - One of the characteristics deemed to be the essential about democracy among Singaporeans is that “basic necessities, like food, clothes and shelter, are provided for all.”
 - This sentiment is echoed in the multinomial logistic regression, where respondents who believe that there is an equal distribution of power and resources are more likely to perceive that there is no change in the nature of Singapore’s democracy between the past and now.
- Singaporeans’ commitment to democracy remains constant and strong.
 - Over the different waves of survey, there is persistently strong support among Singaporeans for the statement “Democracy may have its problems, but it is still the best form of government.
 - In 2023, **72.2% strongly agree or agree** that “Democracy may have its problems, but it is still the best form of government.”
 - Over **80% of Singaporeans** are **satisfied or very satisfied** with the way democracy works in Singapore over the past five waves of ABS surveys.
 - There is strong belief democracy is suitable for Singapore, and strong expectation it will continue to “be democratic” in 10 years’ time.
 - When compared to economic development, generally, democracy takes a back seat but more said they are equally important in the 2023 survey.
- Singaporeans demonstrate strong detachment from authoritarian scenarios.
 - In 2023, only 4.2% strongly approve that “We should get rid of parliament and elections and have a strong leader decide things.”
 - 3.4% strongly approve that “Only one political party should be allowed to stand for election and hold office.”
- Support for current system of government
 - In 2023, 20.9% thinks that our system of government works fine and has no need to change, 58.2% thinks that it needs minor change.

Three archetypes of Singapore citizens based on political attitudes

- The archetypes are built on respondents’ sentiments about the suitability of democracy for Singapore, their support for democracy as a system, and the performance of Singapore’s system of government.
- In terms of the archetypes’ characteristics, the assessment of whether the system of government has allowed for a fair and equal distribution of power and resources also distinguishes one group from the other, among other characteristics.

- The **Contented Democrats** are likely to be male, have more minorities among them, be traditionalists and have a positive assessment about the distribution of power and resources through the system of government.
- The **Contingent Democrats** are more likely to be female, in the higher income bracket, not inclined towards democratic deconsolidation compared to the Ambivalent Democrats and have a positive assessment about the distribution of power and resources.
- The **Ambivalent Democrats** are likely to be male, likely to be in the lower income brackets, are relatively more inclined towards democratic deconsolidation compared to the Contingent Democrats and have a more negative assessment about the distribution of power and resources than the other two.

International relations: Singaporean respondents likely to view influence of China in Asia and Singapore slightly more positively compared to the US.

- In general, Singaporean respondents are slightly more likely to perceive China to be good for Asia and Singapore when compared to the United States. In more rigorous testing however, they are neutral between the two powers, whereas respondents in Taiwan, Vietnam and the Philippines favour the US more.
- Thinking about the future, Singaporean respondents believe China will have the most influence in Asia in 10 years' time, with a 52.2 percentage point difference to a similar question on United States' influence in the future.
- Examining if there are any particular variables that explain Singaporean respondents' attitudes towards quality of influence of the US and China on Singapore, only the income variable explains the difference in responses. Even then, it is that Singaporeans with higher income background are more likely to hold the same view regarding the quality of influence of both countries.
- In contrast, for respondents in Taiwan, Vietnam and the Philippines, age, gender, education, political interest and their attachment to authoritarianism help explain how they view the quality of influence of the US and China.
- This analysis helps us check if there is any relationship between political attitudes and type of regime domestically, and the sense of affinity to these major powers.

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The Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) was established in 1988 as an independent think-tank to study and generate public policy ideas in Singapore. IPS became an autonomous research centre of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy at the National University of Singapore in 2008. Today, IPS continues to analyse public policy, build bridges between thought leaders, and communicate its findings to a wide audience. The Institute examines issues of critical national interest across a variety of fields, and studies the attitudes and aspirations of Singaporeans through surveys of public perception. It adopts a multi-disciplinary approach in its analyses and takes the long-term view in its strategic deliberation and research. For more information about IPS, visit <https://www.lkyspp.nus.edu.sg/ips>