

## 3 in 10 S'poreans cynical about politicians: Survey

**Cai Haoxiang**

*The Straits Times*, 15 September 2011



Dr Zhang Weiyu (right) presenting her findings yesterday. She said her findings implied that policymakers should hold interpersonal discussions online to reach out to and 'convert' cynics. -- ST PHOTO: LIM SIN THAI

---

THREE out of 10 Singaporeans do not trust politicians to act in their best interests, and this 'cynicism' is linked to exposure to online political media, a survey has found.

'If a person is more cynical, he tends to use the online alternative media as well as foreign websites more than people who are not cynical,' said Assistant Professor Zhang Weiyu from the National University of Singapore's Department of Communications and New Media.

The survey, done around nine months ago and before the May General Election, also found that more Singaporean men are deemed to be cynical than women.

But in terms of education, age and income, the survey did not find any distinct difference among the groups, indicating the absence of trust is not a socio-economic issue but a political problem. The Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) survey, however, does not establish that exposure to online alternative media, such as The Online Citizen, Temasek Review and blog Yawning Bread, led to the cynicism, Dr Zhang told a seminar at IPS in Bukit Timah.

But, she added, it implies that policymakers should go on the Internet and hold interpersonal discussions to 'reach and convert' the cynics, she added.

About 1,100 Singaporeans aged 21 years and older were polled. They were asked whether politicians quickly forget their election promises after a campaign, whether having power is more important to politicians than catering to people's wishes, and whether people are often manipulated by them.

About 30 per cent of them 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that was the case.

But when compared with people from countries such as the Netherlands and the United States, Singaporeans tend to be less cynical.

The conclusion is derived from a statistical comparison based on the responses of Singaporeans that produced a mean score of 3.04. The higher the score, the greater the cynicism.

In the Netherlands, the score is 3.61, while the US survey, which is more comprehensive, found 47 per cent to 73 per cent of the people were 'cynical'.

One reason for the greater cynicism in the US could be its people's exposure to the mass media. Political observer Alex Au, who was present at the seminar, made the observation that Americans are more cynical because the US media runs highly critical commentaries on their congressmen or senators.

'You don't get the same amount of focus on the personal failures of politicians in Singapore,' he said.