

3 in 5 here prioritise environment over jobs, economy

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A majority of Singapore residents feel that protecting the environment should be prioritised even if this results in slower economic growth and some loss of jobs, the results of a survey by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) showed yesterday.

Three in five of those surveyed from November 2019 to last March expressed this view, as opposed to the rest who said that economic growth and creating jobs should be the top priority, even if the environment suffers to some extent. This is up from 30.8 per cent in 2002 and 43.3 per cent in 2012 who supported protecting the environment.

The survey, *Our Singaporean Values*, presents findings from the World Values Survey (WVS) which has been conducted three times in Singapore since 2002.

The latest one involved a nationally representative sample of 2,012 Singapore residents.

The WVS research project monitors and investigates people's values and beliefs globally, how they change over time and what social and political impact they have. It is conducted in 80 societies. The previous two surveys in Singapore were done in 2002 and 2012.

The recent one found that those in Singapore who were younger, more educated and earned higher incomes were more likely to agree that protecting the environment should be given priority.

"It is likely that (the lower-income) were more concerned about their own livelihoods and, therefore, chose to protect jobs and the economy," said the research team, which comprised Dr Mathew Mathews, Dr Teo Kay Key, Mr Melvin Tay and Ms Alicia Wang of the IPS Social Lab.

More Singapore respondents also continued to agree that their individual efforts should be incentivised, as opposed to the statement that income should be distributed more equally, the survey found.

However, they are now more likely - compared with 2002 and 2012 - to say the Government should ensure that all are provided for, instead of taking the view that the onus should be on people to provide for themselves.

This shift could likely be due to the greater awareness of groups in the bottom 20 per cent of the income spectrum who are struggling financially, said Dr Mathews, head of the IPS Social Lab.

More than two-thirds of Singapore respondents agreed that work is a duty to society - among the highest globally. But they were much less likely than their counterparts in other Asian societies to feel that work comes first, even at the expense of free time.

Close to 40 per cent in Singapore agreed that work should come first, compared with between 47 and 82 per cent in South Korea, Malaysia, China and Thailand.

The importance of work, as compared with other priorities such as family, friends and leisure time, has also dropped for Singaporeans, the poll found. While work was ranked as the second most important priority in 2002, after family, it dropped to being the fifth priority last year, with family, friends, wealth and leisure time taking precedence.

On immigration, about four in five Singapore respondents said the Government should give priority to citizens over immigrants when jobs are scarce. In comparison, 69.5 per cent agreed with the statement in 2012. The figure was 87.4 per cent in 2002.

Groups that were most likely to strongly agree with the statement were the unemployed, followed by the self-employed. Those earning between \$1,500 and \$4,999 were also more likely to strongly agree with the statement compared with their peers who earned less, as well as those who earned more.

"One possible reason for this trend could be these 'sandwiched' groups are among the most likely to face competition for jobs from foreigners or immigrants in Singapore's labour context," said the researchers.