

83% of S'poreans say globalisation is good for the economy, but 50% think immigrants take away jobs: IPS study

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SINGAPORE - Despite the worldwide backlash against the openness of economies and the mass movement of people around the globe, Singaporeans generally have a positive view of globalisation, with 83 per cent of the people polled recognising its benefits, an Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) study on national pride and identity found.

But more than half of the respondents also believed that immigrants may take their jobs, with people of lower socio-economic status more likely to express such worries.

The findings of the study, which polled 2,001 Singaporeans and permanent residents from a representative national sample of households, were released on Thursday (Sept 23) in the report *Making Identity Count In Singapore: Understanding Singaporeans' National Pride And Identity*.

IPS principal research fellow and head of Social Lab Mathew Mathews, the study's lead author, said globalisation has a substantial bearing on national identity and, in Singapore, it has sparked debates on foreign manpower and free trade.

Recently, for instance, Parliament debated the [impact of foreign professionals, managers, engineers and technicians](#) and the [India-Singapore Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement](#) on jobs for Singaporeans.

The study, which surveyed people between September and November last year (2020), asked respondents about their perceptions on globalisation and immigration.

Overwhelmingly, people - 83 per cent - believed that globalisation benefits the economy and Singaporeans in general.

A smaller proportion, 17 per cent, said it benefits only foreigners and the rich.

On immigration, 75 per cent of those polled agreed to a large or moderate extent that immigrants provide a boost to the economy, and 62 per cent agreed that the newcomers improve society by bringing in new ideas and culture.

Even then, 50 per cent of the respondents felt that immigrants take jobs away from Singaporeans, and 53 per cent believed that the Government spends too much on helping them.

Those who are of a lower socio-economic class and received less education were more likely to feel the competition. Lower socio-economic class is defined in the study as people who live in three-room or smaller Housing Board flats, while those with an education level of secondary school or below are considered less educated.

For instance, 58 per cent of those with less education agreed that immigrants take jobs away from Singaporeans, while 43 per cent of those with higher education, who have at least a degree, felt the same way.

Dr Mathews said this shows issues like foreign competition for jobs affect some groups more keenly than others as they are more likely to suffer economic displacement and jobs losses as a result of globalisation.

"The proper response should be to carefully understand why particular groups are more concerned," he added.

National University of Singapore Associate Professor of Sociology Tan Ern Ser, who is a co-author of the report, said the results show that Singaporeans are not anti-globalisation or anti-immigration, but that they want policies on immigration to be improved.

The study also found that education and socio-economic status, rather than age or race, accounted for differences in how proud people feel about a range of institutions here that were deemed as sources of national pride.

The 24 sources of pride, ranging from the healthcare system to racial equality and level of meritocracy, were derived from international studies and focus group discussions here.

In general, the research indicated that national pride and identity in Singapore were healthy, said Prof Tan.

The healthcare system, cleanliness, Singapore Armed Forces, religious diversity and freedom, education system and Covid-19 pandemic management were among the aspects of Singapore that people were most proud of.

Meanwhile, having the same ruling party for a long time, government autonomy, sporting achievements, the arts, treatment of migrant workers and press freedom were aspects that people were least proud of.

The results also showed that respondents of higher socio-economic status were less proud than those of lower socio-economic status on things such as meritocracy.