

## Trust in Singapore's key institutions rose last year: Survey

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SINGAPORE - Trust in Singapore's key institutions of Government, business, media and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) rose across the board amid a pandemic and economic recession, according to the latest Edelman Trust Barometer report released on Thursday (March 18).

The 1,150 Singaporeans surveyed gave the country a trust index score - the average across the four institutions - of 68 per cent, up by six points from the previous year and a decade high.

The Singapore report is part of a wide-ranging poll of over 33,000 people aged 18 and above across 28 countries, conducted by the global public relations firm Edelman. Fieldwork for this 21st annual edition was conducted from October to November last year.

Singapore's score is fifth behind India (77), China (72), Indonesia (72) and Saudi Arabia (69). Countries like Australia (59) were within Edelman's "neutral" range while the United States (48) and the United Kingdom (45) registered "distrust" among those surveyed.

Respondents in 24 countries also rated the four institutions based on how competent or ethical they were seen to be.

The Government was the institution most trusted by Singapore respondents, with 76 per cent saying they did so, up from 70 last year. This was followed by NGOs (70, up six points), businesses (65, up seven points) and media (62, up seven points).

On media - which covers the global landscape - 59 per cent trusted search engines as a source of news and information, above traditional media (56), brand-owned media (43) and social media (42). This was the first time since 2012 that trust in traditional media has fallen below 60 per cent.

This could be due to perceptions of traditional news as less timely and less updated compared with digital sources, Institute of Policy Studies' head of society and culture Carol Soon said in a panel discussion on the report's findings.

Fellow panellist and South China Morning Post's deputy executive editor Zuraidah Ibrahim said there was a fundamental, structural issue at hand, built on the rise of cynicism both in Singapore and globally. "Maybe the social compact needs to be re-addressed. We need to relook, post-pandemic, what are the inequities that we have to pay greater attention to."

Dr Soon added that building up trust overall would require an ecosystem approach. "You cannot just pin the responsibility on one specific institution - whether it's the media or the government - to increase the trust score."

### **Pandemic problems**

Amid the Covid-19 situation, 90 per cent of respondents said they were concerned about job loss.

Sixty-three per cent said some colleagues had their work hours reduced or jobs eliminated. The pandemic has also led to those with fewer resources being unfairly burdened with most of the suffering and risk of illness, around two in three said. More also saw improving the

healthcare system as a pressing societal issue to address, and prioritising family and their needs as more important.

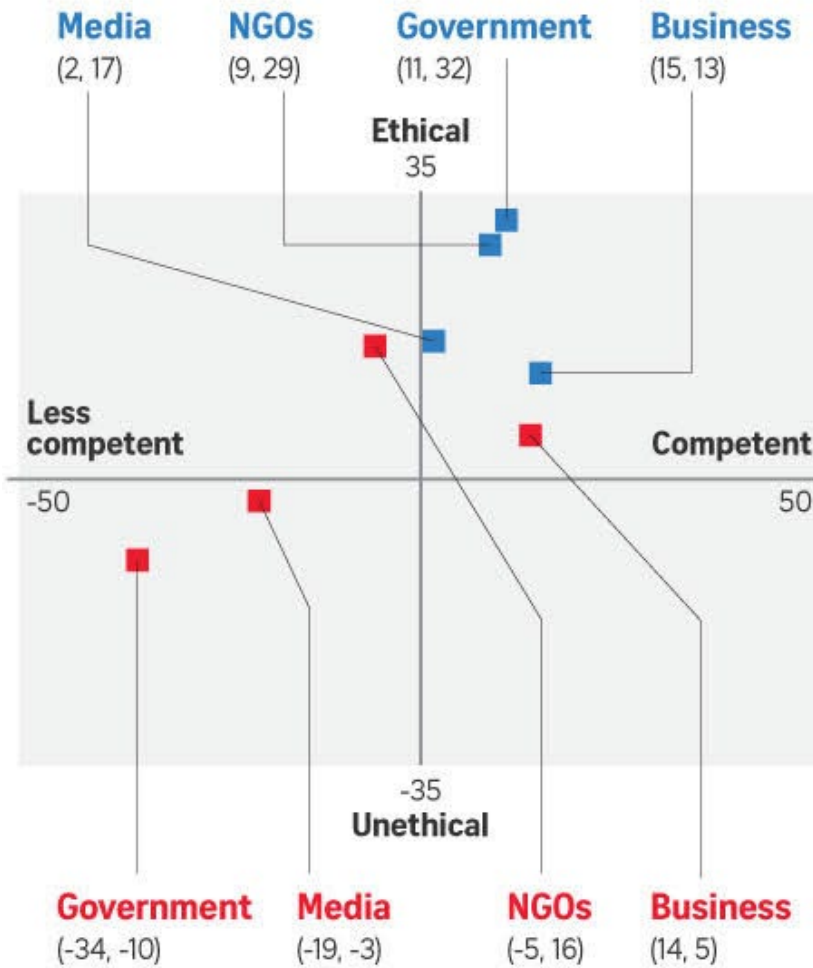
In the area of work, seven in 10 chose to work at home, of which more than half cited Covid-19 risks while commuting or in the office. Only 29 per cent would return to the office, of which the main reason given was they were more productive there.

Employee expectation has also shifted, and more emphasised an organisation's ability to keep workers and customers safe when considering a potential employer.

## Singapore institutions seen as competent and ethical

■ Singapore ■ Global (averages for 24 countries)

(Competence score, net ethical score)



NOTE: The competence score takes in responses to questions on whether an institution is good at what it does, while the net ethical score looks at perceptions of four factors: being purpose-driven, honest, fair and having a vision for the future that aligns with citizens.

Source: EDELMAN TRUST BAROMETER 2021  
STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

### **On other countries**

On their trust in foreign governments to do what is right, Singapore respondents rated Japan and Germany well, while China and the US were viewed more sceptically.

This was also the case for global firms headquartered in these countries, although the score for US-based firms has trended down in recent years to 54 per cent, while that of China's has risen steadily to 44 per cent.

Indian companies were the least trusted (39 per cent) this year, although there was an 11 point improvement from last year.