

1 in 3 S'poreans are 'cynics'

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SINGAPORE - A new study has found that about a third of Singaporeans are "cynics" - deemed as those who do not trust politicians. The survey, conducted by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS), covered 1,092 Singaporeans, aged 21 and above, and was conducted about nine months before May's General Election.

The study's definition of cynics include people thinking they are often manipulated by politicians. However, the study did not differentiate whether the politician is from the ruling or opposition parties.

Compared to other liberal democracies like the United States - which sees a higher percentage of cynics of between 47 and 73 per cent - researchers say the 30 per cent figure for Singapore is not huge.

Still, they say the data gives politicians food for thought. IPS deputy director Arun Mahizhan, who noted "some disaffection with the delivery of public goods" such as transport and housing, wondered whether these are "permanent features". He added: "To what extent are these immediate reactions? This is yet to be determined. But this survey suggests that there is a significant minority who are cynical and there are ways in which the cynicism could be addressed."

Liberals are seen to be more cynical, but the study also found that there is no significant relation between a cynic and his income or education levels. It says the difference is not a socio-economic one but a political one, which means cynics in Singapore cut across the entire section of the community.

Cynics in Singapore are also not influenced by mainstream media. Rather, 12.8 per cent get their news from alternative new media sites. So experts say policymakers should exploit the Internet and new media in their engagement efforts, on top of deepening relations both online and offline.

"We need to encourage inter-personal discussions directly between politicians and citizens," said Dr Zhang Weiyu, an Assistant Professor at the Department of Communications and New Media at the National University of Singapore. "So it's not just politicians trying to send their message through mass media to the citizens because we find that inter-personal talk has a big influence on your political psychology."

The study though, also showed that mainstream media, including those online and offline, complement alternative new media sites. For example, 72 per cent turn to television for news, while 71.6 per cent read the newspapers for their main source of information.

Another group that needs to be engaged further are those who claim they do not consume any news, be it through traditional or alternative media sources.

They constitute about 14 per cent of respondents.