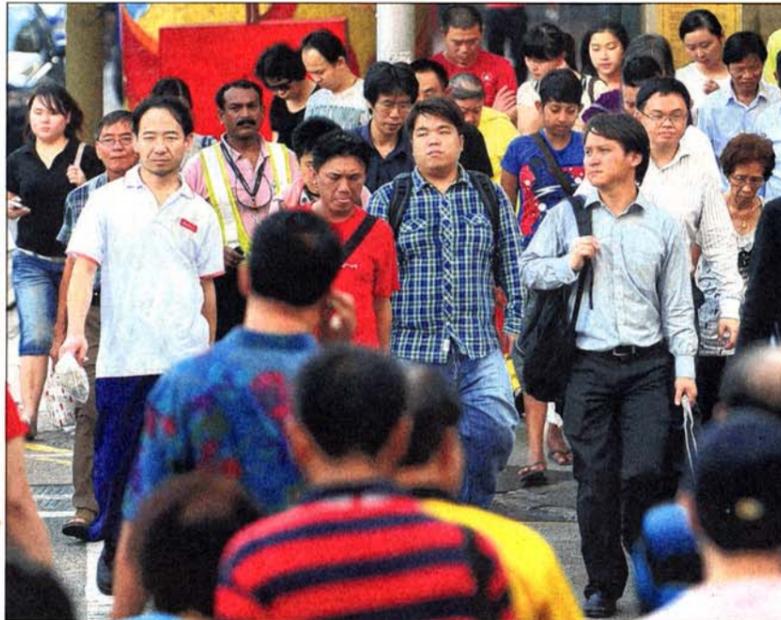


# Emotionless? Now poll says we are unhappiest



Singaporeans do not express their emotions, and are also unhappy, according to Gallup. Experts in Singapore are sceptical about the way that data from the survey is being interpreted. ST FILE PHOTO

Same Gallup study ranks S'pore less positive than even Iraq and Afghanistan

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FIRST, Singapore was described as the most emotionless country in the world.

Now, it has been singled out as the least positive nation, with even folks in violence-prone places like Iraq and Afghanistan apparently more upbeat.

The finding is derived from the same data for the ranking of most emotionless country by international polling firm Gallup, just cut in a different way.

Last month, it released a report claiming that "Singaporeans are the least likely in the world to report experiencing emotions of any kind on a daily basis". The new set of results from last year's poll of 150,000 people worldwide put the Republic right at the bottom of a ranking of 148 countries, based on positive emotions reported by respondents.

Latin American nations Panama and Paraguay topped the list. Respondents were asked whether they felt well-rested and respected and whether they laughed and smiled a lot, did or learnt something interesting and experienced a lot of enjoyment on the day before they were polled.

While 85 per cent of respondents in Paraguay and Panama said "yes", only 46 per cent of those in Singapore did. The figure was 50 per cent for Iraq, and 55 per cent for Afghanistan.

But experts here are sceptical of the new way of slicing the data. Sociologist Paulin Straughan said the new ranking raises "serious concerns" about the poll's validity. "So are we emotionless or the most unhappy? I'm so puzzled. How can the same study from the same people paint two different pictures about Singaporean society?" she added.

Prof Straughan is not convinced that the methodology of the poll is sound. "When I had the chance to raise the issue with Gallup about the response rate of the first set of results, they said 20 to 30 per cent of the 1,500 people surveyed had responded," she said. "If less than half the people they sampled responded, then the results are not even representative of the sample, let alone the whole nation."

Psychiatrist Adrian Wang also said the poll did not seem fair but thought that the two sets of results - that Singaporeans displayed the least emotion and the least positive emotion - were linked.

"The expression of emotions is very dependent on cultural norms. Singaporeans are more reticent in general about both positive and negative feelings," he said. "Just because we display both kinds of emotions less doesn't mean we don't feel them."

Singapore Management University law professor Eugene Tan said while both sets of results provide food for thought for Singaporeans, he took issue with them "painting a picture of Singaporeans as living in an unhappy society".

"That, to me, is rather an inaccurate description of the state of affairs. Sure, there's room to improve and we all have a part to play," he said. "But I don't think the level of optimism here in Singapore is so low that the future looks bleak."

Online reactions to the poll's results yesterday were mixed. Some netizens called the data "depressing" and agreed that "Singaporeans really are miserable", while others pooh-poohed the finding and dismissed it as "positively untrue".

Medical student Kong Yong Yao, 24, is among those who took issue with Gallup's verdict.

"Singapore is a culturally unique country with an appropriately unconventional sense of humour. Gallup's barometers are unlikely to be accurate," he said.

He is not losing sleep over the matter. "The good thing about Singaporeans is that I don't think we really care what Gallup thinks," he added.

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