

# PERSPECTIVES

A DIALOGUE BY THE IPSOS PUBLIC  
AFFAIRS SINGAPORE TEAM

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What is this  
pandemic revealing  
about the resilience  
of the Singapore  
people and their  
systems?



## What is this pandemic revealing about the resilience of our people and systems?

DPM Heng Swee Keat, in his announcement of the Resilience Budget, spoke of the need to “build resilience in our economy and society, as we battle this downturn, and build capabilities for when the eventual recovery comes”. This recognises and suggests that (1) resilience is multifaceted in that there needs to be both economic and social resilience, and (2) resilience is about capability-building which enables the economy and society as a whole to become more prepared in the future. Underlying this is the principle that resilience is ultimately about having access to both tangible resources (such as food, shelter and money) and non-tangible resources (such as social networks).

Given the factors above as well as the circumstances we are faced with, we reflect on what has COVID-19 revealed about the resilience of our people and systems in Singapore.

# RESILIENCE IS MULTIFACETED - BOTH ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL

This crisis has illuminated successes within our people and systems that we have built and nurtured over decades. It also casts a light upon the pillars that may not have similar solid foundations.

Despite huge uncertainties, we have seen a growing camp calling for unity and solidarity where the individuals and communities rise up to help (i.e. the pledging of Solidarity Payout to families in need and helping migrant worker community). This demonstrates the feasibility of public partnerships, giving rise to a wave of civic responsibility never seen before. However, I am concerned about those who belong to the camp that translates their uncertainty to fear and, in a bid to gain control, chooses to act out of anger, further stressing our systems and the aftermath that follows.

SERAPHINA, B.SOCSCI PSYCHOLOGY  
"THE CULTURAL EXPLORER"



I feel the vision that was cast years ago has made so much impact in how the current crisis is being handled - Singapore envisioned as a resolute nation, worthy of independence. Much as the impact of this global pandemic is unprecedented, Singapore has prepared for such a time as this. Systems were put in place years ago that have allowed community structure and financial safety nets to safeguard the people. Learning from the previous SARS pandemic, experience has taught the health systems to create solutions that are now protecting both patients and medical workers. Recent weeks, it has been inspiring to hear that Singaporeans have now gone the extra mile to help out those that still need a leg-up during this time. Much as the task of building resilience for Singapore rests on the government as an institution, now every Singaporean gets to participate in it.

JONI, B.SC MGMT & COMMS TECH  
"THE SOCIAL ADVOCATE"



With the recent announcement of the fourth Budget by DPM, and the extent of measures put in place to ensure that the safety net is cast wide enough to ensure Singapore residents are safeguarded in these times of unprecedented crisis, I feel assured that at a national level we have displayed a certain level of resilience. While gaps in the society have been revealed in the media, with more support needed for migrant workers, I am hopeful that more measures have been introduced to help them.

Yet, even after the crisis is over, it is still important that society progresses alongside those who have not been granted as much financial resources or opportunities to rise up the social ladder. As we see different countries struggle between balancing the health of the economy as well as the health of their citizens, I am also concerned that it takes cooperation from the citizens to ensure that we come out stronger at a national level.

Seeing how anti-lockdown protests have happened in Brazil, and joined by their own president (see [BBC article](#)), the conflict between the national leader with state governors also highlights the internal conflict within the government, thereby diluting the level of confidence among citizens. Contrasting to Singapore, the word solidarity comes to mind and I sincerely hope that with the cooperation and sensibilities of the citizens, the allocation of resources goes to those who truly needs them.



**ZHI XIN, B.SOCSCI (HONS) PSYCHOLOGY**  
"THE IDEATOR"

The city-state of Singapore has come a long way in transforming itself to a resilient nation. The nation's proclivity to evolve with changing global environment, ability to learn from experience, and to have a forward-focussed mentality has been pivotal in its growth. In the face of the ongoing global pandemic that has stunned the world and brought economic and social life to a standstill, Singapore has been internationally praised for its decisive action plan in combating the situation and its response has been termed as a "model response".

So, what sets this small island nation with limited resources apart from the rest of the world? Proactiveness in being prepared with sufficient resources for challenging times! Financial safeguards in place to save jobs and protect its people's lives! Transparency with accurate communication to build trust and reduce panic among the public!

But above all, what truly made this nation set an example for all out there was its people and the exhibition of their "Kampong" spirit. From collectively appreciating frontline workers, to starting initiatives to promote local business, to building apps that bring communities together—these are the few examples that showcase the importance of social cohesion in building strength and support that can be counted on during times of need. Although only time can tell how the pandemic situation evolves, the ultimate test of Singapore's resilience will hinge not just on the efforts undertaken by the government but also by its people.



**SHASHANK, M.MKTG MGMT**  
"THE ANALYST"



For our plans to succeed, for our hopes and dreams to come true, we need one final ingredient: the unity and resilience of our people. Once in a while, nations and peoples are severely tested, as we are now. Some buckle under pressure and emerge from crisis diminished. Others grow more determined as they face fearful odds, discover reserves of strength in themselves, and emerge from crisis transfigured, renewed. And that has been our Singapore story: in crises, we have never failed to wrest opportunity from danger.

LEE HSIEN LOONG, 7 JUNE 2020

In considering resilience, there is a need to explore both social capital and political capital. Social capital is strongly related to social resilience where there must first be the existence of some form of social capital (social networks, communities etc.) and trust in fellow citizens before we can be socially resilient. According to Putnam's concept of social capital, when people are able to get together, their trust in each other and ability to work collectively to solve social problems (i.e. social resilience) is increased. With the myriad of ground-up initiatives started by members of the public who banded together to work towards the common goal of lending a helping hand, it is evident that Singaporeans are socially resilient.

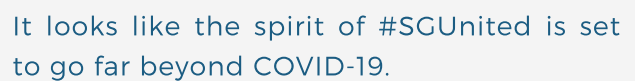
Political capital's influence on systemic resilience is a little trickier as political capital is first reliant on the people's trust in government. According to an Ipsos study, while trust is dependent on a multitude of factors, the organisation's reliability emerged as the main driver of trust. Looking at what's happening in Singapore, members of the public are confident that the Government will be able to handle the situation well. With the frequency of communications, accuracy of information and support for ground-up initiatives, the Government has exhibited not only its reliability, it has also proven to be flexible and responsive, thereby contributing further to Government having political capital, and in turn strengthening systemic resilience.

Taken together, COVID19 has perhaps shed light on how both the systems and people of Singapore are resilient – the systems in place have worked and continue to work, and people are banding together to overcome social challenges.



ELLYSYA, B.SOCSCI  
(POLITICS, LAW, ECONS)  
"THE INNOVATIVE THINKER"

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