



SURVEY ON PUBLIC ATTITUDES & PERCEPTIONS OF THE JUDICIARY IN SINGAPORE (1998)

SURVEY BACKGROUND

In the administration of justice, the Judiciary has focused on instituting a set of timeless values which include accessibility, expedition and timeliness, equality, fairness and integrity, independence and accountability, and public trust and confidence. These values serve as beacons for the administration of justice in Singapore.

In line with these core values, the Judiciary recognises the importance of obtaining feedback from the public to provide relevant performance benchmarks for the Courts' strategic planning and policy development initiatives. In 1998, Forbes Research Pte Ltd was accordingly commissioned by the Subordinate Courts to conduct a survey to ascertain the attitudes and perceptions of the community at large towards the Judiciary. Such independent feedback will enable the Judiciary to better understand and meet the needs of different court users as we strive to attain even higher levels of excellence in the administration of justice.

SURVEY OBJECTIVES

The survey aimed to elicit the overall level of confidence of the community at large in the

administration of justice in Singapore. Specifically, the public's feedback on the following areas were sought :

- Attitudes and perceptions towards the Judiciary
- Perception of overall crime levels and effectiveness of sentencing
- Awareness of court services and public education programmes
- Expectations of the Judiciary
- Sources of information about the Judiciary

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

The survey covered 1,519 respondents aged 15 years and above. The profile of the respondents is in the Appendix to the bulletin. All survey respondents were interviewed in-person, in their homes. A systematic stratified random sample of residential locations was adopted. In addition, the respondent for each household selected was also chosen on a systematic random basis. The fieldwork for the survey was conducted between May and July 1998.

SURVEY FINDINGS

Primary Findings

I Overall Confidence Level in the Judiciary

- The community at large has full confidence in the fair administration of justice in Singapore. 97% of survey respondents agreed/strongly agreed that the Courts administer justice fairly to all, regardless of language, religion, race or class (Table 1).
- 96% felt that the Courts in Singapore independently carry out justice according to the law.
- 95% of the survey respondents agreed/strongly agreed that the Judiciary is efficient in upholding law and order.
- 96% felt that court rulings in Singapore are obeyed and 76% opined that people are more likely to settle disputes in court rather than “take the law in their own hands”.
- 90% of the public opined that they can expect their disputes to be resolved efficiently and promptly by the Judiciary.
- 93% of survey respondents felt that the sentences imposed by the courts are very effective/effective as a deterrent to potential offenders.

TABLE 1
The Public’s Attitudes and Perceptions Towards the Judiciary

		N	Strongly Agree /Agree	Strongly Disagree/Disagree
1	The Courts administer justice fairly to all, regardless of language, religion, race or class	1,468	97.0%	3.0%
2	I have confidence in the fair administration of justice in society	1,423	93.3%	6.7%
3	The Courts independently carry out justice according to the law.	1,378	95.5%	4.5%
4	The Judicial System is efficient in upholding law and order	1,411	94.6%	5.4%
5	Court rulings in Singapore are obeyed	1,480	95.9%	4.1%
6	The public is more likely to settle disputes in court rather than “take the law in their own hands”	1,336	76.3%	23.7%
7	The public can expect their disputes to be resolved efficiently and promptly	1,389	89.9%	10.1%
8	Effectiveness of sentences given by the courts as a deterrent for other potential offenders	1,479	93.0% (Very Effective / Effective)	7.0% (Very Ineffective / Ineffective)

FIGURE 1
Singapore's Judicial System Compared to those in Other Countries

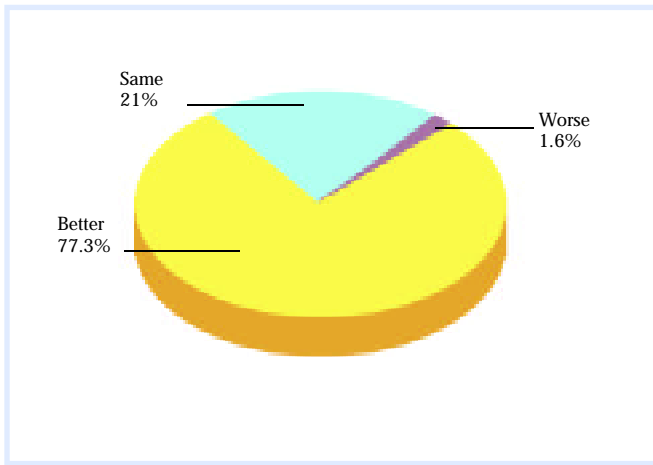
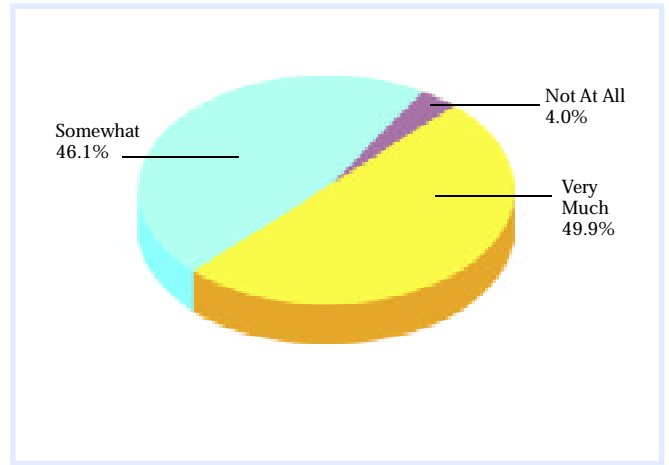


FIGURE 2
Extent to Which the Judiciary has Contributed to The Public's Sense of Security in Singapore



- 98% of the respondents felt that the Judiciary was better than (77%), if not equal to (21%) other Judiciaries (Figure 1).

II Perception of Overall Crime Levels and Effectiveness of Sentencing

- 99% of survey respondents felt safe in Singapore.
- For 96% of them, the Judiciary had contributed to their general sense of security (Figure 2).
- 86% of the public agreed/strongly agreed that the Courts administer justice according to the law, and similar cases receive similar sentences (Figure 3).
- As for sentences meted by the Courts, 74% felt that the sentences were just right, while 21% opined that they were harsh/too harsh (Figure 4).

FIGURE 3
Perception of the Courts Administering Justice According To The Law and Similar Cases Receiving Similar Sentences

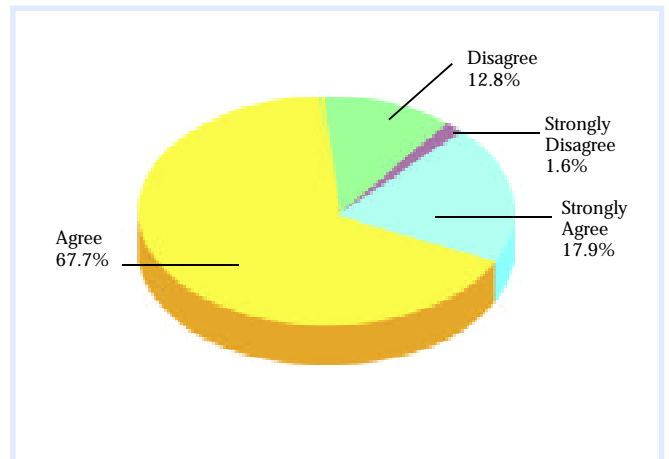


FIGURE 4
Perception of Sentences Imposed by the Courts

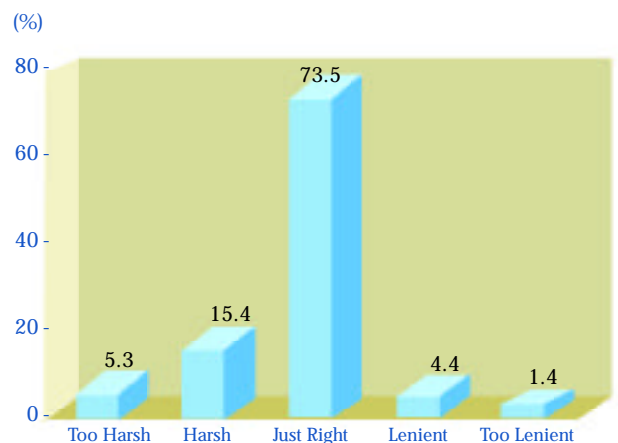
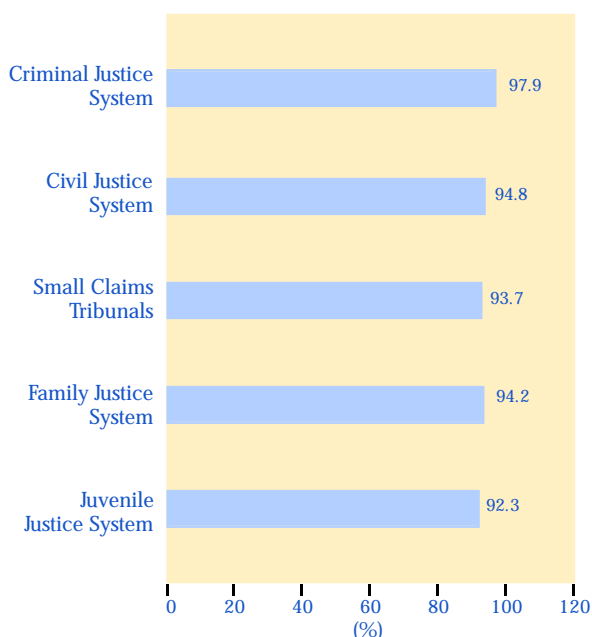


FIGURE 5
Public's Expectations of the Judiciary



III Public's Expectations of the Judiciary

- The Judiciary had met the expectations of the community at large.
- 98% felt that the Criminal Justice system had met their expectations in protecting the public.
- 95% agreed that the Civil Justice system had met their expectations in providing effective and fair dispute resolution.
- 94% replied that the Small Claims Tribunals had met their expectations in providing efficient dispute resolution.
- In the area of Family Justice, 94% opined that the system had met their expectations in protecting family obligations.
- The Juvenile system met the expectations of 92% of survey respondents in restoring/rehabilitating the juvenile (Figure 5).

- Survey respondents were asked to use three words to describe the Judiciary. 76% described the Judiciary as 'fair', 'impartial' or 'equal'. This was followed by 46% who described the Judiciary as 'efficient' and 26% as 'strict'.

IV Quality of Service

- The Courts obtained a high rating for the quality of services provided. 98% of survey respondents who had direct contact with the Courts opined that the quality of service provided by court personnel is excellent, good or satisfactory.
- Professionalism and confidence displayed by the court personnel scored highest with 97% each, followed by 96% accorded to the knowledge of court personnel in handling their matters (Table 2).

TABLE 2
Quality of Service Provided by the Courts

Rating of Quality of Service Provided by Court Personnel (N = 111)	% Excellent/ Good/Satisfied
1 Overall quality of service	97.6%
2 Professionalism	97.1%
3 Confidence	96.6%
4 Knowledge in handling matters	95.7%
5 Sense of responsibility	94.9%
6 Integrity of Officers	94.1%
7 Independence	93.9%
8 Initiative to take charge	92.4%
9 Courtesy & Friendliness	90.1%
10 Helpfulness	87.4%
11 Speed in handling matters	86.1%

[N = survey respondents who had direct contact with the Courts]

TABLE 3
Other Public Attitudes and Perceptions Towards the Judiciary

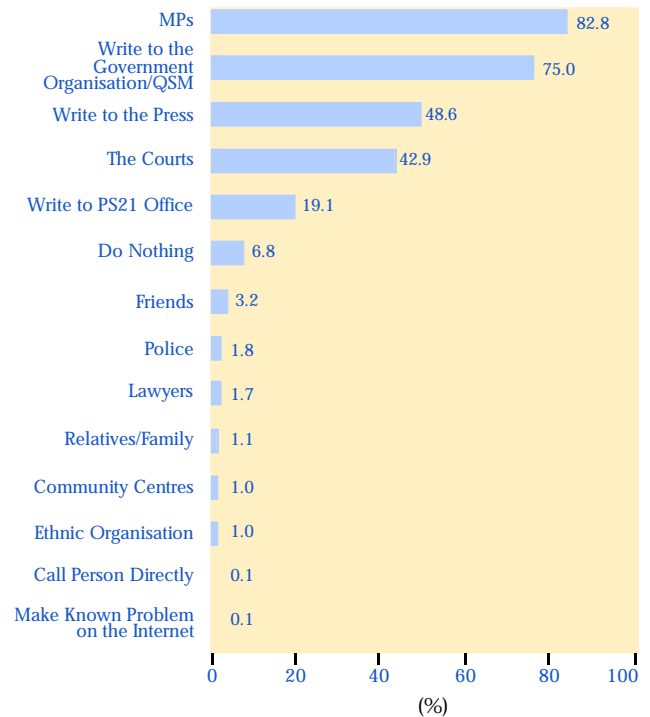
		N	Strongly Agree / Agree	Strongly Disagree/ Disagree
1	The Courts' proceedings are transparent and open	1,270	82.0%	18.0%
2	The Courts' facilities are easily accessible	1,157	72.7%	27.3%
3	The Courts inform the public of their cases	1,337	70.4%	29.6%
4	The Courts inform the public of their services and other educational programmes	1,264	65.1%	34.9%

Secondary Findings

I Transparency and Accessibility in the Judiciary

- In the area of access to justice, the general perception is that court proceedings are transparent and open (82%) and the Courts' facilities are easily accessible (73%) (Table 3).
- The proportion who agreed/strongly agreed on the accessibility of the Courts was higher among those who had direct contact with the Courts.
- On the question of the Courts keeping the public informed of their cases : 70% agreed/strongly agreed.
- 65% opined that the Courts informed the public of their services and other educational programmes.
- Survey respondents were also asked about their sources for obtaining help in the event that they have disputes with any Government Organisation. The large majority indicated that their first preference would be to seek help from their MPs (Figure 6).

FIGURE 6
Persons/Organisations whom the Public would seek help from if they have a dispute with any Government Organisation



- 75% would write to the Government Organisation or the Quality Service Manager, and 49% would write to the newspapers.
- It may be noted that 43% would seek help from the Courts if they have disputes with any Government Organisation, and this reflects positively on the public's confidence in the Courts to help them resolve such disputes.

II Awareness of Courts' Services and Public Education Programmes

- The awareness level of Courts' services provided and public education programmes organised by the Courts is low.
- In the area of published information, 48% indicated that they were aware of mass media coverage of Court cases. This was followed by 24% who were aware of published information through newsletters and 10% through the Courts' website (Table 4).

TABLE 4
Awareness of Courts' Services and Public Education Programmes

Awareness of published information	N = 1,519
• Coverage of Court Cases through mass media	47.5%
• Newsletters	24.3%
• Courts' Website	9.5%
• Information Brochures on Court's Services	8.3%
• Judiciary Annual Reports	5.1%
• Commemorative Book / CD ROM	3.7%
• Courts Charter	3.7%
• Corporate Videos	2.9%
• None of the above	33.3%
Awareness of Courts' Services	N = 1,519
• Small Claims Tribunals in Ang Mo Kio	39.3%
• Counselling Services	37.0%
• Night Courts	25.2%
• Mediation Services	16.5%
• Electronic Filing System (EFS)	13.4%
• ATOMS	12.3%
• Technology Court	7.7%
• None of the above	32.7%
Awareness of Outreach Programmes Organised by the Courts	N = 1,519
• Talks by Family Court	28.1%
• Talks by Juvenile Court	19.9%
• Open House	18.3%
• Peer Advisors Programme	5.7%
• Peer Mediation Programme	4.5%
• None of the above	54.0%

- As for services provided by the Courts, 39% were aware of the Regional Small Claims Tribunals' services provided at Ang Mo Kio.
- This was followed by 37% who were aware of counselling services provided by the Courts and 25% were aware that Night Courts are in operation in the Subordinate Courts.
- Regarding court outreach programmes, 28% of survey respondents were aware of talks organised by the Family Court and 20% were aware of talks organised by the Juvenile Court. The proportion of respondents who were aware of the recent open house organised by the Courts recorded at 18%.

II Sources of Information

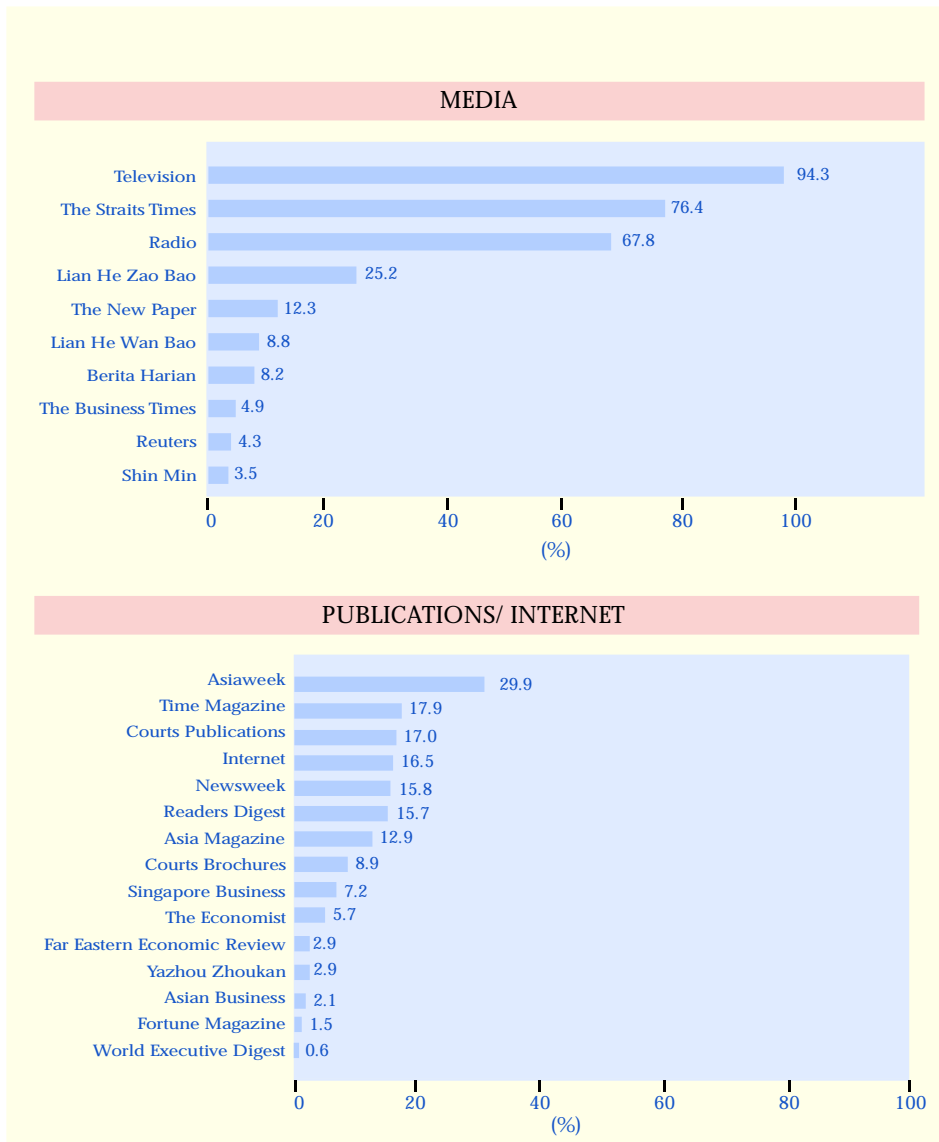
- Respondents were also asked to list the top three sources from which they usually gather information about the Courts. The top three sources were television (94%), The Straits Times (76%) and radio (68%) (Figure 7).
- The results showed that older respondents and those with below secondary education are more likely to obtain information about the Courts from the radio.

CONCLUSION

The survey findings conclusively show that the community at large has high confidence in the Judiciary. A large majority expressed that the Singapore Judiciary is better than the Judiciaries in other countries. Most of the respondents expressed satisfaction with the overall quality of the services provided by the Courts.

Besides registering impressive results in the area of public perception towards the Judiciary, the Courts

FIGURE 7
Sources of Information About the Courts



agreed that the Courts met their expectations in terms of protecting the public through the Criminal Justice System, providing effective and fair dispute resolution through the Civil Justice System, providing a quick and inexpensive way of settling claims at the Small Claims Tribunals, protecting family obligations through the Family Justice System and restoring/rehabilitating the juvenile through the Juvenile Justice System.

The survey demonstrated, however, that the public is insufficiently knowledgeable or informed about the various Court services and the public educational programmes of the Courts. The findings showed that more attention and resources will have to be devoted to enhancing public awareness about the Courts.

This survey on the public's perception of the Judiciary is significant as it has identified the areas where the Courts have performed well, and also the areas where the Courts should strive to perform better. The survey findings will enable the Judiciary to set appropriate performance benchmarks for the future, and this will undoubtedly propel the Courts further towards realising their vision of a world-class judicial system in all respects.

also fared well in another important area - the public's perception of the overall crime levels and the effectiveness of sentencing. A high 99% of respondents felt safe in Singapore and affirmed that the Judiciary had contributed much to their sense of security, while an equally high proportion of respondents (93%) felt that the sentences meted by the Courts were effective as a deterrent to potential offenders.

The survey also affirmed that the Judiciary has met the public's expectations on the effective administration of justice. The majority of respondents

*Prepared by
Research & Statistics Unit
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APPENDIX

PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender : 52% Males 48% Females 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Household Size : 10% 1-2 16% 3 35% 4 24% 5 15% 6 & above
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethnic Profile : 78% Chinese 13% Malays 8% Indian 1% Others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal Monthly Income : 34% No Income 7% Below \$1,000 25% \$1,000 - \$1,999 17% \$2,000 - \$2,999 8% \$3,000 - \$3,999 4% \$4,000 - \$4,999 4% \$5,000 & Above 1% Unknown
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age Distribution : 10% 15-19 27% 20-29 29% 30-39 18% 40-49 10% 50-59 6% 60 & Over 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Occupation : 6% Legislators/Senior Officials & Managers 13% Professionals 10% Technicians & Associate Professionals 9% Clerical Workers 13% Service Workers & Shop & Market Sale Workers 0.1% Agricultural & Fishery Workers 2% Production Craftsmen & Related Workers 2% Plant & Machine Operators & Assemblers 2% Cleaners, Labourers & Related Workers 17% Housewife/Retirees 14% Students 3% Unemployed 3% Self-employed 2% National Servicemen 2% Civil Servants 1% Unknown
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marital Status : 39% Single 59% Married 1% Divorced/Separated 1% Widowed 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highest Qualification Attained : 3% No formal education 11% Incomplete Primary/Primary 39% Incomplete Secondary/Secondary 16% Upper Secondary 16% Diploma 15% Degree/Post Graduate 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residential Status : 93% Singapore Citizens 7% Permanent Residents 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Type : 1% 1-2 room HDB 38% 3 room HDB 31% 4 room HDB 19% 5 room/Executive HDB 1% Private Condominium/Flat/HUDC 10% Landed Property 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact with the Courts over the past 2 years : 6% Yes 94% No