

## **Changing attitudes to idea of non-Chinese prime minister or president, CNA-IPS study finds**

***Vanessa Lim***

***Channel NewsAsia***, 2 April 2022

SINGAPORE: Singaporeans have become more open to the idea of electing top leaders that are non-Chinese, based on a survey conducted by CNA and the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS).

In the second edition of the CNA-IPS survey on race relations, which was conducted last year, a bigger proportion of respondents said they could accept a Singaporean-Malay (69.6 per cent) or Singaporean-Indian (70.5 per cent) as the prime minister.

Researchers said the figures are a significant increase from the previous study in 2016, where 60.8 per cent said they were comfortable with a Malay as prime minister and 64.3 per cent with an Indian as prime minister.

Almost all respondents, or 96.8 per cent, could accept a Singaporean-Chinese as prime minister, slightly higher than the 95.6 per cent in 2016.

Researchers also found that respondents from the three major races showed the highest preference for someone of their own race as prime minister.

Among Chinese respondents, virtually all said they were comfortable with a Singaporean-Chinese as prime minister (98.9 per cent), while 63.9 per cent said they would accept a Malay prime minister and 65.8 per cent an Indian one.

Comparatively, 92.6 per cent of Malay respondents said they would accept a Singaporean-Malay prime minister, but 87.5 per cent would be comfortable with a Chinese one and 80.4 per cent with an Indian one.

Among Indian respondents, 91.9 per cent would accept a Singaporean-Indian as prime minister but 90.3 per cent would be comfortable with a Chinese one and 80.8 per cent with a Malay one.

## RACIAL PREFERENCES FOR THE PRIME MINISTER BY RESPONDENTS' RACE

Racial group	To be the Prime Minister of Singapore											
	Singaporean Chinese		Singaporean Malay		Singaporean Indian		New citizen from China		New citizen from India		New citizen of Western origin	
	2022	2016	2022	2016	2022	2016	2022	2016	2022	2016	2022	2016
Chinese	98.9%	98.5%	63.9%	53.3%	65.8%	59.5%	8.6%	7.0%	7.7%	5.8%	8.5%	6.9%
Malay	87.5%	86.2%	92.6%	93.1%	80.4%	74.9%	4.6%	2.4%	4.8%	2.2%	6.9%	2.6%
Indian	90.3%	87.6%	80.8%	70.1%	91.9%	89.1%	12.3%	9.7%	14.4%	10.5%	15.0%	9.2%
Others	100.0%	86.7%	85.2%	80.7%	88.9%	68.1%	29.6%	8.7%	29.6%	6.0%	29.6%	24.4%

Infographic: Rafa Estrada Source: CNA-IPS Survey on Race Relations



A larger proportion of respondents said they could accept a Singaporean-Malay or Singaporean-Indian prime minister, compared to a previous study conducted in 2016. (Graphic: Rafa Estrada)

For the role of president, the percentage of respondents who said they could accept a non-Chinese also rose.

About 82.2 per cent said they were comfortable with a Singaporean-Malay as president – a jump from 65.5 per cent in the previous study – and 82 per cent could accept a Singaporean-Indian – up from 70.6 per cent in 2016.

## RESPONDENTS' RACIAL PREFERENCES IN POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

	Singaporean Chinese		Singaporean Malay		Singaporean Indian		New citizen from China		New citizen from India		New citizen of Western origin	
	2022	2016	2022	2016	2022	2016	2022	2016	2022	2016	2022	2016
To be the Prime Minister of Singapore	96.8%	95.6%	69.6%	60.8%	70.5%	64.3%	9.1%	6.7%	8.6%	5.8%	9.4%	7.1%
To be the President of Singapore	96.1%	93.2%	82.2%	65.5%	82.0%	70.6%	8.9%	5.9%	8.6%	4.8%	9.6%	6.5%

Infographic: Rafa Estrada Source: CNA-IPS Survey on Race Relations



Singaporeans have become more open to the idea of electing top leaders who are not Chinese, according to the survey. (Graphic: Rafa Estrada)

In the 255-page report, researchers suggested that the larger rise could be a result of President Halimah Yacob, who is a Malay, dispelling “perhaps earlier prejudices that a Malay was not suitable for the highest office of the land”.

However, most respondents were “very uncomfortable” with the idea of a new citizen from any country taking on these roles. Less than 10 per cent said that they would be comfortable with a new citizen as president or prime minister.

The survey gathered responses from more than 2,000 citizens and permanent residents aged 21 and above, with a sample that was reflective of the Singapore population in terms of their age, race, gender and housing type. However, an additional 350 or so Malay and Indian respondents were polled so that their views were properly represented.