

CMIO racial categorisation system still important in Singapore: CNA-IPS survey

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SINGAPORE: The CMIO (Chinese, Malay, Indian, Others) racial categorisation system that Singapore uses, as well as race-based policies, still have a place in Singapore, going by a survey on what defines ethnic identity here.

The CMIO framework seems to be important, said senior research fellow Mathew Mathews from the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) in response to questions from the media during a briefing on Wednesday (Nov 8) on the findings of the survey done jointly with Channel NewsAsia.

“The fact that even among our millennials, they care about some of the core markers of their identity ... they still think it's important. That tells us that ethnicity and how we identify ourselves as ethnic individuals continue to be important for many Singaporeans,” said Dr Mathews, who was the survey's principal investigator.

He added that one of the benefits of the CMIO framework is it ensures that minorities will continue to be able to practise their culture in Singapore, and feel just as Singaporean as someone in the majority ethnicity.

According to the study's findings, the current CMIO classification system, due to its use in public policy, may have resulted in Singaporeans' perceptions of ethnic identity converging on certain key indicators such as language.

When asked about whether there is a need for race-based policies such as the Group Representation Constituency (GRC) and reserved presidential election, Dr Mathews said that Singapore needs policies to ensure that “every one of our races in Singapore will be able to feel that they do not have to give up their particular culture, their language, what they feel is valuable to them”.

The GRC system was put in place to ensure minority representation in Parliament, while a reserved presidential election is open only to candidates from a particular minority group to contest. The reserved election held in September this year caused unhappiness among a group of Singaporeans, who staged a so-called “silent protest” at Hong Lim Park.

More than 2,000 people, mostly Singaporeans, participated in the survey, which was conducted by questionnaires being given to them and collected later. The survey aimed to study what Singaporeans felt were core identity markers of the main ethnic groups in the country.