

## **Fewer in S'pore say they have close friends of another race in 2024: Study**

**An increase since 2013, but a decrease since 2018.**

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Fewer people in Singapore said they had a close friend of another race in 2024 as compared to six years ago, a recent study found.

The results of the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS)-OnePeople.sg study on "Indicators of Racial and Religious Harmony" were published on Feb. 3.

OnePeople.sg, an organisation that champions racial harmony initiatives in Singapore, was launched in 2007 by then-Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong.

This is the third iteration of the study, after it was conducted in 2013 and 2018.

### **How it was done**

4,000 randomly selected Singapore citizens and permanent residents aged 18 and above participated in face-to-face surveys conducted between April and August 2024.

The survey covered topics such as racial and religious harmony, inter-racial trust, social acceptance, and experiences of discrimination in public and professional spaces.

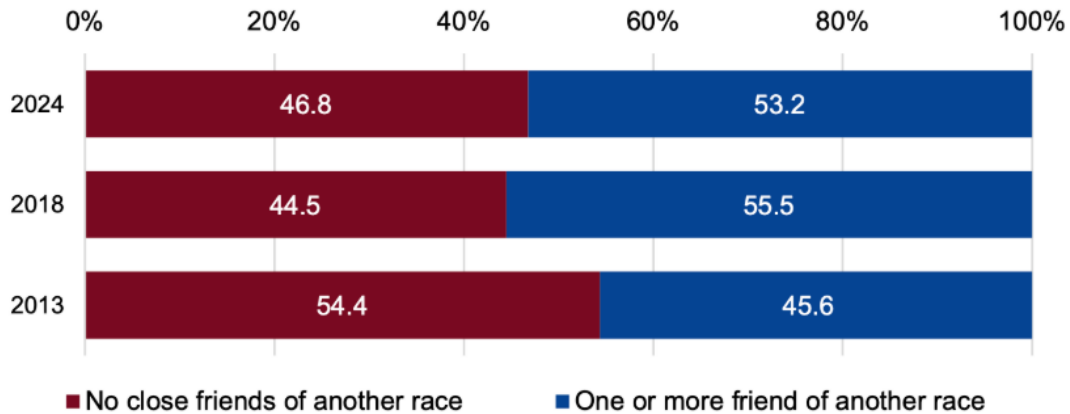
A booster sample of respondents from minority races was included to ensure their perspectives were well-captured, before the results were weighted to mirror Singapore's racial demographics.

### **Fewer in S'pore had close friend of another race**

The study found that just over half of respondents (53.2 per cent) in 2024 had a close friend of another race.

This was a decrease from 2018, where 55.5 per cent said they had a close friend of another race.

**Figure 5.1.1: Proportions of respondents with at least one close friend of another race, responses by wave\***



\*Respondents were asked to report the number of close friends they had (people who were not their relatives, but who they felt at ease with, could talk to about what was on their minds, or call on for help). This number was then broken down into five categories: Singaporean Chinese, Singaporean Malay, Singaporean Indian, Singaporean Eurasian, and Others. Proportions reported above are derived from these responses.

Image from IPS.

The IPS report attributed the marginal decline to an overall decline in the number of close friends, regardless of race.

Respondents had an average of 6.49 close friends in 2024, down from 10.67 in 2018, and 8.33 in 2013.

**Table 5.1.1a: Average number of close friends (Overall)**

	2013	2018	2024
<b>Average number of close friends<sup>8</sup></b>	8.33	10.67	6.49

Image from IPS.

Nevertheless, the study noted that Singaporeans' acceptance of people from different racial groups as close friends remained high in 2024.

Over nine in 10 respondents said they would accept a local-born Chinese as a close friend, and more than eight in 10 indicated they would accept local-born Malays, Indians, and Eurasians as close friends.

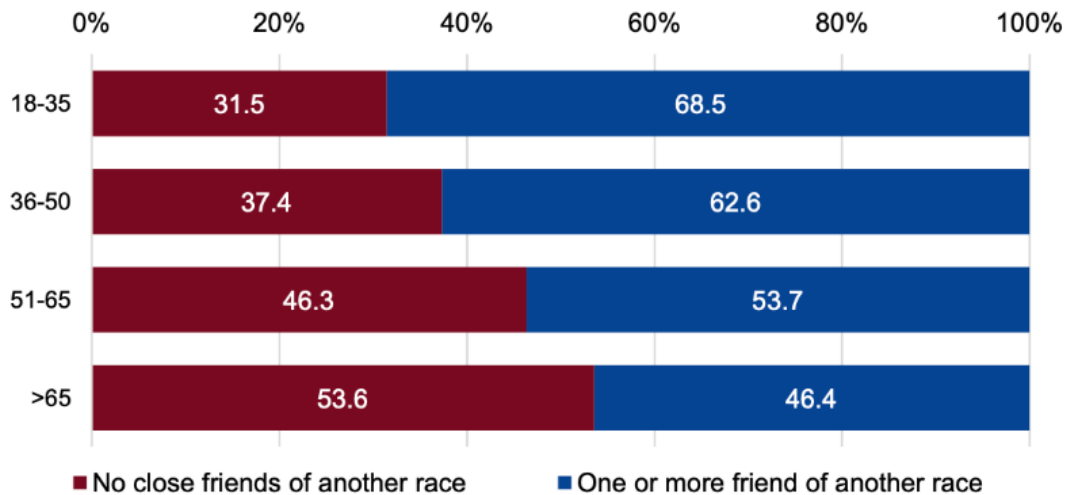
The study also found that about six in 10 HDB-dwellers indicated they had at least one close friend of another race, as compared to under half of private property dwellers (49.1 per cent).

### **More younger respondents had cross-racial friends**

Younger respondents were more likely to report having at least one close friend of another race.

68.5 per cent of respondents aged 18 to 35 years old said they had at least one close friend of another race, as compared to 46.4 per cent of those over 65 years old.

**Figure 5.1.3a: Proportions of respondents with at least one close friend of another race, 2024 responses by age\***



*\*Respondents were asked to report the number of close friends they had (people who were not their relatives, but who they felt at ease with, could talk to about what was on their minds, or call on for help). This number was then broken down into five categories: Singaporean Chinese, Singaporean Malay, Singaporean Indian, Singaporean Eurasian, and Others. Proportions reported above are derived from these responses.*

This was despite younger respondents reporting fewer close friends on average than their older counterparts.

The report said this suggests that younger respondents have smaller but relatively more diverse social circles, likely due to exposure to diverse social environments, such as schools, workplaces, and social media.

### **Part of global trend of shrinking social circles**

Commenting on the study, Janil Puthuchery, chairman of OnePeople.sg, offered an explanation as to why the study showed a decline in cross-racial friendships among respondents from 2018.

"Our hypothesis is that while more people are open to cross-racial friendships, shrinking social circles means fewer opportunities to form and strengthen such friendships. This is not just a Singapore issue. Many countries face similar trends."

Janil told the media that the decrease in cross-racial friendships is something authorities "should pay close attention to", especially given the backdrop of shrinking social circles across the world.

"This is a social issue that many cities in the world are facing. But for OnePeople.sg, it will impact how we then deal with the issue of how to form cross-racial friendships, when the opportunity to form friendships in general may reduce over time," he told the media on Feb. 3.

### **Other findings**

The report found that the perception of racial and religious harmony in Singapore among respondents improved in 2024.

Nine in 10 respondents in 2024 indicated that they perceived at least a moderate level of racial and religious harmony in Singapore.

Fewer reported experiencing racial discrimination in everyday life as compared to 2018.

That said, the report noted that a sizeable portion still indicated that they faced workplace discrimination.

On the general upward trend of Singaporeans' perceptions of racial and religious harmony, Janil said it was "heartening" to see these positive signals at various levels.

He said the goal of OnePeople.sg, as it partners with other organisations like IPS, was "not just to maintain the status quo". Instead, it was "to protect the precious harmony that we have and to continually seek ways to improve."

"Each generation should experience a better, more cohesive Singapore than the one before."