

15 January 2026

## **Singapore Perspectives 2026 “Fraternity” spotlights diverse friendship networks and new tools to combat polarisation**

- *IPS survey finds that more diverse friendship networks are associated with better social outcomes, such as higher trust in fellow Singaporeans and stronger social cohesion*
- *Novel citizen engagement modalities explored to bridge growing differences*

The Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) today announced the launch of Singapore Perspectives 2026 (SP2026). Anchored by the theme “Fraternity”, the conference explores how Singapore can strengthen social bonds through new forms of collective deliberation and co-creation.

There will be two online panels held on 20 January 2026, followed by an in-person conference at Sands Expo and Convention Centre on 26 January 2026. The conference will close with a dialogue session with Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade and Industry Mr Gan Kim Yong.

Key findings from two new studies — a survey on social capital, as well as a research series on citizen engagement modalities — will be discussed during the online panels on 20 January 2026.

### **Diverse Friendship Networks Linked to Better Social Outcomes**

Leading up to the conference, IPS conducted a survey titled “Measuring Social Capital in the Digital Age” to examine how Singaporeans navigate relationships in an era of emerging technologies.

The survey highlights that diverse friendship networks are a significant driver of social health:

- **Social Trust:** Respondents with more diverse friends report higher trust in neighbours and fellow Singaporeans
- **Cohesion:** Diverse networks are associated with a stronger sense of belonging, civic participation and social cohesion.
- **Persistence of In-person Ties:** Despite digital advancements, 93.0% of respondents met all their close friends in person. Schools and

workplaces remain the primary starting points for these vital connections. Most close friends still interact in person, with 71.0% of close friendships using a mix of in-person and online communication.

- **AI Scepticism:** Younger people, as well as those who demonstrate higher use of AI, are more trusting of AI chatbots. However, the majority of respondents remain cautious, citing concerns about misinformation and harmful advice.

### **Novel Deliberation Method Surfaces Common Ground on Local-Foreigner Integration in Singapore**

*IPS-REACH pilot shows structured deliberation and quality facilitation can surface common ground on contested integration issues*

Under the right conditions, Singapore residents of different residency statuses (both locals and foreigners) can reason through contested integration issues and reach common ground. This was the central finding from Singapore's first "**Consensus Conference on Local-Foreign Integration**" in Changi Simei and East Coast GRC. The pilot, conducted by the Institute of Policy Studies in partnership with REACH, brought together 24 residents of different residency statuses to discuss contested issues, exchange perspectives, and work toward common positions over four full-day sessions.

Provided with balanced briefing materials and hearing from a subject matter expert to ground shared understanding, participants went through facilitated small and large group deliberations centred on four thematic pillars: community, employment, education and multiculturalism. Participants then drafted and amended statements, each assessing if they "can live with" the statement. Statements achieving unanimous support (100%) were categorised as common ground. Those falling short were categorised as no-go zones. Participants then worked together on a 48-page Residents' Report documenting the outcomes of the deliberation and came up with a collaborative ground-up project, which was being considered for funding and implementation support.

The project report by IPS details the processes behind designing and running the pilot as well as observations and findings from the pilot proceedings. It also presents an analysis and an assessment of the pilot, gleaned from pre-post surveys of participants. The pilot provides a proof of concept for using deliberative approaches to strengthen bridging social capital in Singapore.

### Key findings from the pilot included:

- **Common ground emerged across domains.** Participants generated 67 statements and reached unanimous consensus (100%) on 23, an overall rate of 34.3%.
- **Community life achieved the highest consensus.** At 77.8% consensus, participants agreed on norms of mutual respect and reciprocal effort in everyday interactions.
- **Jobs and education reached consensus when conditions were specified.** Despite being perceived as zero-sum, these domains achieved consensus rates of 22.2% and 25.0% respectively when participants articulated conditions of acceptability.
- **Multiculturalism surfaced deeper latent tensions.** At 6.7% consensus, this domain revealed tensions over national identity that conditional compromise could not resolve.
- **Deliberation translated into action.** Participants co-authored a 48-page Residents' Report, negotiating more than 80 revisions across residency lines. A voluntary working group of seven Singapore citizens and three foreigners formed to develop Triad Trails, a community integration initiative that has continued beyond the formal sessions.
- **Participants found the process meaningful.** 95.8% reported a positive experience, 91.6% found it meaningful, and 87.5% described it as empowering.

### Recommendations

The study proposes the following.

1. **Dedicate institutional attention to local-foreign integration as a distinct pillar of Singapore's multiculturalism.** Singapore has built infrastructure over decades to foster cohesion among its founding communities (Chinese, Malay, Indian, Eurasian and Others). The local-foreign dimension warrants similar attention, whether by expanding the mandate of existing bodies (e.g. OnePeople.SG, National Integration Council (NIC)) or establishing new civic infrastructure to address identity and belonging questions that policy adjustment alone cannot resolve.

- 2. Strengthen public communications with attention to narratives of omission, framings of dependency, and limited data discoverability.** Participants felt that narratives about foreign contributions often omitted citizens' contributions. Policy language portrayed citizens as beneficiaries of government support rather than stakeholders. Limited data discoverability further fuelled speculation and misinformation. Communications could therefore better balance recognition of contributions, strengthen affirmation of citizens as stakeholders, and make relevant information easily discoverable on official channels.
- 3. Expand the pilot to other constituencies and contested issues.** The pilot demonstrated that structured deliberation can build bridging social capital, surface common ground, and generate collaborative action. Expansion would test replicability and clarify where deliberative approaches can add most value.

### **Upcoming Pilot: The effects of AI on culture and the creative industry**

Building on these successes, IPS will lead an upcoming pilot of “**Citizens Reassembled**”. This engagement modality combines small-group citizens’ panels with mass public polling to see if divided interest groups can find common ground regarding the effects of AI on culture and the creative industry.

#### **For Media Queries:**

Ms Ruan Xinpei  
Executive (Public Affairs)  
Tel: +65 9171 5193  
Email: [rxinpei@nus.edu.sg](mailto:rxinpei@nus.edu.sg)

Ms Liang Kaixin  
Senior Associate Director (Communications & Public Affairs)  
Tel: +65 9452 4479  
Email: [kaixin@nus.edu.sg](mailto:kaixin@nus.edu.sg)

## About Singapore Perspectives 2026

IPS will hold its annual flagship Singapore Perspectives (SP) conference on **20 and 26 January 2026**.

The theme for SP2026 will be “Fraternity”. As a compact urban city, Singapore’s social fabric has long been woven from dense everyday interactions in homes, schools, workplaces and shared public spaces. These social connections form the basis of the trust, norms and networks that bind our society together. In recent years, however, significant changes and disruptions — such as rapid digitalisation, demographic changes, social stratification and an unsettled global environment, among others — have heightened the complexity of our society and transformed how we connect with one another.

Against this backdrop, this year’s conference asks: How do we renew the ties that bind? How do we bridge diverse interests and backgrounds, to strengthen our shared belief and distinctive identity as Singaporeans?

Prime Minister and Minister for Finance Lawrence Wong and President Tharman Shanmugaratnam have both spoken about the critical need to nurture a “We First” society that emphasises the value of individuals taking initiative for collective ends. This conference will discuss how we can navigate challenges to social cohesion and help Singaporeans embrace a “We First” mindset.

There will be two online panels held on 20 January 2026, followed by an in-person conference at Sands Expo and Convention Centre on 26 January 2026. The conference will close with a dialogue session with Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade and Industry Mr Gan Kim Yong.

Please click [here](#) to view the programme.

## About the Institute of Policy Studies

The Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) was established in 1988 as an independent think-tank to study and generate public policy ideas in Singapore. IPS became an autonomous research centre of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy at the National University of Singapore in 2008. Today, IPS continues to analyse public policy, build bridges between thought leaders, and communicate its findings to a wide audience. The Institute examines issues of critical national interest across a variety of fields, and studies the attitudes and aspirations of Singaporeans through surveys of public perception. It adopts a multi-disciplinary approach in its analyses and takes the long-term view in its strategic deliberation and research. For more information about IPS, visit <https://www.lkyspp.nus.edu.sg/ips>