

## **High awareness of race and religion sensitivities but fault lines on class, immigration and LGBTQ issues: IPS study**

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SINGAPORE - A large majority of Singaporeans are aware of the seriousness of race and religious issues, and feel the Government has done enough to manage these divisions.

But fault lines have emerged on class, immigration and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) rights, where more Singaporeans, especially younger ones, want to see greater state intervention and public discourse.

These emerging issues, if mismanaged, are also seen to impact Singaporeans' trust in government the most, compared to race and religion.

The findings from a study of public opinion on fault lines in Singapore, carried out by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS), were released on Tuesday (Oct 29).

Based on a survey of about 4,000 citizens and permanent residents last year, the study noted that about a third of the respondents identified race and religion as having the potential to result in violence in Singapore if not managed properly - significantly more so than class, immigration and LGBT issues.

Yet only about a quarter tied race and religion to trust in the state and politicians, compared to almost 40 per cent who said trust levels in the Government would likely fall if class and immigration issues are mismanaged.

These results could mean that citizens now accord the Government more responsibility to do more to manage class differences and immigration issues, said the researchers. This is unlike in the early years after independence, when the focus was on surviving racial tensions and communal politics.

The study's authors were IPS senior research fellow Mathew Mathews, research associate Melvin Tay and research assistant Shanthini Selvarajan.

### **YOUTH WANT LESS GOVERNMENT INTERVENTION ON RACE AND RELIGION; HIGHLY-EDUCATED ETHNIC MINORITIES WANT MORE**

Just over a fifth of young people aged between 18 and 25 surveyed wanted more state involvement in race issues, compared to one-third of those aged above 65. Similar results were observed for religion.

This could be due to the lived experiences of the older generation, who experienced the Maria Hertogh and 1964 race riots, said researchers. The former took place in 1950, after a court decided that a child who had been raised by Muslims should be returned to her Catholic biological parents. In 1964, clashes took place between the Malays and Chinese when Singapore was part of the Federation of Malaysia.

For older Singaporeans, these events drove home the need for a robust state apparatus to intervene and keep the peace, said the study.

Significantly more Malays and Indians (about 40 per cent) wanted greater state involvement on race issues compared to 24 per cent of Chinese - a sign that ethnic minorities are more likely to perceive or experience discrimination than the majority. A similar trend was noticed for religion.

More minorities (61 per cent of Malay and 55 per cent of Indians) also wanted stronger legislation in these areas, compared to 46 per cent of Chinese.

In addition, highly educated minorities with a university degree and above desired more state intervention than their less educated counterparts, showing that increased education results in greater awareness of, and desire to, resolve racial and religious issues, added the study.

### **MINORITIES, YOUTH MORE LIKELY TO INVESTIGATE POTENTIAL DISCRIMINATION**

After receiving an e-mail or phone message that a business was refusing to serve people from a certain race or religion, nearly half of Malays and Indians said they were likely to investigate the issue, compared to 37 per cent of Chinese.

About 30 per cent of Malays and Indians were also more likely to take the allegation seriously by reporting it to the authorities, compared to 13 per cent of Chinese.

Younger Singaporeans would also be more pro-active in tracing the source of such a message, with two-thirds saying they would check with their friend who sent it, compared to only half of respondents aged 65 and above.

### **MORE COMMUNITY-DRIVEN APPROACH IN FUTURE?**

Overall, the study shows that an overwhelming 92 per cent of respondents believe the Government had done well to improve racial and religious harmony.

An example of vigorous state intervention to combat social divides, it says, can be seen in the area of religion - where a range of hard and soft legislation like the Internal Security Act, Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act, and the Inter-Racial and Religious Confidence Circles have prevented potential discord and wider conflict.

But while seven in 10 aged above 65 agreed that the Government is responsible for racial and religious harmony in Singapore, only half of respondents aged 18 to 25 felt this way, it adds.

The researchers say this shows that older Singaporeans may attribute greater responsibility to the state, or believe that these fault lines are most effectively managed by strong government intervention.

But going forward, younger generations could prefer a more community-driven approach to handling race and religion issues.

This could be because younger people aged 18 to 25 are more sensitive and concerned about discrimination, and being digital natives, are likely to investigate matters further, said the study.