

More nationality-based prejudice than before, IPS survey finds

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There is a growing discomfort across nationalities, even as comfort levels across race and religion appear to have largely remained the same, a survey has found.

Some 32.1 per cent of Singapore residents surveyed felt that prejudice based on nationality has become more widespread now compared to five years ago, and this is more so than the increase in other types of prejudices such as race, age or religion.

When it came to racial prejudice, 16 per cent felt that it has grown over the past five years, while 46.8 per cent of those surveyed found that it has not changed.

These were the findings of the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) which surveyed over 4,000 Singapore residents in a large-scale study of race, language and religion here.

The results, presented at the IPS Singapore Perspectives 2014 conference on Tuesday, shed some light on the differences between various groups in Singapore and how they have changed over the years.

IPS director Janadas Devan, in opening remarks, spoke about riots that had occurred in Singapore between Teochews and Hokkiens, the different Chinese dialect groups, as far back as 1854.

"There was a time when they considered themselves different countrymen," he said.

But now, while differences between race, religion and language have generally smoothed over, there appears to be a growing divide between those who are born here, and those who are foreign-born.

While 94 per cent of respondents said they were comfortable working for a local-born Chinese, for example, that number fell to 74 per cent for a boss who is a new citizen from China.

Those born here were also less comfortable with new citizens in personal and social settings, even if they were of the same race, the survey found.

A local-born Chinese had a greater affinity with local-born Malays and Indians, for example, compared to Chinese from China, said Mr Janadas.

IPS research fellow Mathew Mathews, who headed the survey, said younger and more educated respondents felt these differences more acutely as they were "more sensitive" and exposed to these differences through the online sphere, for example.

Mr Janadas said there was a need to better integrate foreigners into society while retaining the country's Singaporean identity.

The survey also found some other gaps. For example, there were minorities who felt they had been discriminated against in everyday situations. Among Malay respondents, 26.4 per

cent said they had been discriminated against at work or for job promotions, because of their race. Among the Indians, 24.2 per cent felt this way.

There was also 5.7 per cent of Chinese who said they had been discriminated against in the same situations.

Some felt that the Government could do more to address these issues of discrimination. Among the Malay and the Indian respondents, about 40.8 per cent and 33.6 per cent respectively, think the Government should give preferential treatment to minority races. They made up a larger number than those who disagreed with this.

But more than half of the Chinese respondents said they disagreed with preferential treatment for minorities.

The more educated were also more likely to disagree with preferential treatment. Across university-educated respondents of each race, there were more who did not want preferential treatment given to minorities, than those who did.

On the whole, Singapore residents feel there is little racial and religious prejudice here. More than 85 per cent of the 4,000 respondents did not think they were treated differently in public services, for example.

The common space is "remarkably free of racial and religious prejudice," said Mr Janadas. "This not happen overnight...we can't take it for granted."