

Most Singaporeans do not think there will be a backlash in a terror attack: IPS report

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SINGAPORE - Picture the scenario: a foreign extremist organisation, made up of members of one religious group, has launched an attack in Singapore.

Chaos ensues and there is a heightened level of suspicion.

Would Singaporeans, whose religion is implicated in the attack, worry about a backlash against them by people of other religions?

According to a report by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS), four in five Muslims and non-Muslims feel there would be either no abuse, or very few and isolated incidents of verbal abuse.

"This shows that most Singaporeans, even if they can be suspicious of others after an attack, expect that our race relations are strong enough so that they will not encounter substantial verbal or physical abuse," said Mr Leonard Lim, a research associate at the IPS, and co-author of the report.

One-third of Singaporeans would even be pro-active in expressing solidarity with those whose religion was implicated.

Released on Tuesday (Sept 25), the report said that after an attack, younger respondents were less likely to be suspicious of strangers of the same religion as the overseas extremist organisation that carried out the attack.

The IPS report follows a survey of just over 2,000 Singaporeans conducted last year.

The study aims to understand how Singaporeans would react following a terror attack in the country perpetrated by organisations that use religious labels, namely Christian, Muslim, Buddhist or Hindu groups.

Respondents were told to imagine that news reports had emerged of a bomb explosion at an MRT station platform, with four hypothetical scenarios: That it was carried out by either an extremist Christian; Hindu; Buddhist; or Muslim overseas organisation.

The study found that Singaporeans would display stronger negative reactions if it had been carried out by a foreign Muslim group than if a Buddhist, Christian or Hindu group had been behind it.

Even so, less than half believe members of their own racial community would be suspicious or angry at people of a particular religion associated with an overseas extremist organisation of the same religion in the aftermath of a terror attack.

"This is indicative of some level of inter-religious solidarity in Singapore," said the team of researchers led by Dr Mathew Mathews, senior research fellow at the IPS.

The study found most Singaporeans feel it would take two to three years for the country to recover from an attack.

And this, in part, could be due to concerns that there may be lingering doubt.

Asked how long it would take for most Singaporeans to feel united as one people, Muslim respondents indicated 3.62 years on average, the longest of the four religions.

"The findings suggest that Muslims may be more conscious of the potential backlash and suspicions that would inevitably arise within Singapore, as a result of a terror attack," the researchers said.

However, they added it was noteworthy that a third of non-Muslims would be pro-active in expressing solidarity in such circumstances, and they would even let others know they do not associate Muslims with such terror attacks.

But few would join a campaign or event that recognises that people of a particular religion are not the cause of the terror attack.

About a quarter of non-Muslims surveyed would do so, in the case of an attack by overseas Muslims.

"Still, it is encouraging that a quarter of non-Muslims would go out of their way to join such activities, to show their support for Muslim Singaporeans," the researchers said.