

A STUDY ON SOCIAL CAPITAL IN SINGAPORE

By the Institute of Policy Studies, National University of Singapore

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In a nutshell:

- a. We found at the end of “A Study on Social Capital” (2017) that diversity in social networks among Singaporeans strengthens social capital, trust, national identity and national pride.
 - b. We believe that more can be done to facilitate improved mixing, especially between people with different school backgrounds, and between those living in private and public housing.
 - c. Raising diversity in social ties is a collective effort. We wish to encourage Singaporeans to take up opportunities to interact and make friends with people outside of their usual circles centred on a common race, language, religion, educational and housing background. We also wish to encourage government agencies and community leaders to do more to create the structures and programmes that encourage such mixing.
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1. The Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) of the National University of Singapore (NUS) conducted a survey of Singapore citizens and permanent residents called “A Study of Social Capital in Singapore” from January 2016 to October 2017. The research team comprised Dr Gillian Koh, Senior Research Fellow at IPS, and Associate Professor Tan Ern Ser as well as Associate Professor Vincent Chua, both of the Department of Sociology, National University of Singapore. An overview of the model for the study can be found in Figure 1.

2. The study offers unique contributions to understanding social capital in Singapore.

2.1. It measures “community” in terms of individuals’ personal, social networks, which puts detail into what would otherwise be an amorphous concept.

2.2. It measures social support behaviours in addition to attitudes towards community and nation.

2.3. It measures the extent to which people are forming ties across a variety of social categories like age, gender, race, nationality, religion, dwellers of different housing types and people with different educational backgrounds – what is called “network diversity”.

2.4. It examines the drivers of network diversity, for instance, how domains like school, workplace, and voluntary association (including participation in sport and culture) shape social ties.

2.5. It examines the consequences of having socially diverse ties on a range of collective outcomes such as national identity, national pride, and trust of other groups.

3. The face-to-face survey was conducted between January and July 2016 among 3,000 respondents comprising 82.2% Singapore citizens and 17.8% permanent residents, using a residential dwelling sampling frame purchased from the Department of Statistics. Despite the usual fieldwork challenges faced, especially of accessing residents of gated private residences, the fieldwork achieved a reasonable response rate of 64%. Applying the appropriate weights for the profile of the population of Singapore residents on the key dimensions of ethnicity, resident status, and class, the data is generalisable to the resident population.¹ See Table 1.

Name Generator and Position Generator Approaches

4. The study measures social capital using the name generator approach where individuals are asked a list of questions about the nature of their social support networks including (a) who they discussed important matters with; (b) borrowed money from; (c) confided in when feeling down; (d) gotten job information and assistance; (e) helped with watching over the home (e.g., collecting mail, house-sitting, babysitting, giving elderly care etc.); (f) who they played sports with; (g) spent most time doing social activities with; as well as (h) who they had difficulty relating to. Respondents were then asked to provide detailed profiles of each of the persons they named using a standard list of questions.

Findings

5. The study elicited a total 17,413 ties. This means that, statistically speaking, the average network size of the respondents is 5.8 ties to unique individuals. Nearly all

¹ The weights used in our analysis are encapsulated in a single variable called “overall weight”. Their values range from 0.17 to 6.52. They are essentially products of three sets of weights based on the sampling population’s resident status, ethnicity, and house-type profiles respectively. The overall weight may be represented in an equation as follows: Overall weight = weight for resident status X weight for ethnicity X weight for house-type.

respondents, 99%, have someone to discuss important matters with and 87% named someone they confide in when they are feeling down - the name generators with the highest response to. Only 14% said that they found a job with the help of someone they know - the name generator with the lowest level of response to. See Table 2.

6. Generally, people seek close kin for advice on important matters, for financial support, or as confidants. Other relatives help with house matters, e.g. picking mail, caring for children, or for the elderly. Neighbours help each other with house matters too. Workplace ties are important sources of social companionship as well as inter-ethnic and inter-nationality ties, but these ties can sometimes be marked by conflict.

General network diversity

7. In terms of network diversity (i.e., inter-group mixing), respondents can easily name people of different gender groups and age groups.² They are fairly able to name network members from different racial, religious and nationality groups (in this case, Singaporeans and non-Singaporeans). See Table 3.

8. Respondents were not likely to have named a diverse networks across two particular types of social backgrounds – educational status and the type of housing that people live in. If the researchers were to collapse the categories of school backgrounds and dwelling type of respondents' social contacts into just two broad categories - one comprising people from what the respondents believe to be from “elite” and “non-elite” school backgrounds and another, public and private housing, the in-group solidarity within each is much stronger than across the categories.³

9. This set of data was adjusted for unequal group sizes, where the rule of thumb for housing is that 20% of Singaporeans live in private housing and the proportion for people from elite school backgrounds, based on the answers we received from respondents, is 18%. See Table 4 for the results on housing and Table 5 for the results on school backgrounds of their respondents' key contacts. Why is diversity in relation to status groups low? After taking away the effect of the opportunity to interact because of uneven group sizes, this social closure may be the result of cultural factors – like the members of the one status group feeling a gulf with the other status group because of differences in the facility in the use of language (how they speak English for instance), types of social norms, areas of interests and hobbies. The members of one group then has less interaction with the other group because it is not sure if that group is interested in socialising with members of the group one belongs to

² This is measured by the Index of Qualitative Variation (or IQV).

³ The “elite” and “non-elite” school background is based on respondents' perception of the schools that the people they named had ever attended or are currently attending.

– a self-reinforcing loop that requires active social programmes and social development policies to break.

Drivers of network diversity

10. Multivariate analyses show strong evidence that social domains such as education, work, voluntary association, sports and cultural participation are positively correlated with many kinds of network diversity. That is, they promote the social interaction and integration across groups. Programmes in these domains can facilitate network diversity and therefore, we encourage more of these. But ultimately, why do we want this network diversity?

Outcomes of network diversity

11. Our study found that network diversity is positively correlated with a range of collective sentiments such as national identity, national pride, social trust, and trust toward other racial, religious, and nationality groups. See Table 6 for the summary statistics of six measures that were used in the study and Table 7 for association of network diversity with those collective sentiments. We would like to think that having a diverse network (whether on race, religion or status) increases the variety and richness of one's experiences and knowledge beyond one's own group, and this facilitates thinking in national terms, rather than only narrowly in terms of only one's own group and its interests.

12. The study underscores the important role of social relationships in engendering national identity. Who one associates with, whether one forges ties to a variety of social groups, has a significant role in how one feels about Singapore and the broader community. It is an invitation for all to play a part to raise that level of diversity in Singaporeans' social ties because that will strengthen our sense of being Singaporean over time. The government and community leaders should do more to create the structures that will encourage social mixing but this is also a call to individual citizens to respond positively and take the opportunity to form friendships and networks of mutual self-help across different social groups. We now have the evidence to prove that this translates to strengthening the Singapore nation.

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FIGURE 1: MODEL OF THE STUDY OF SOCIAL CAPITAL IN SINGAPORE

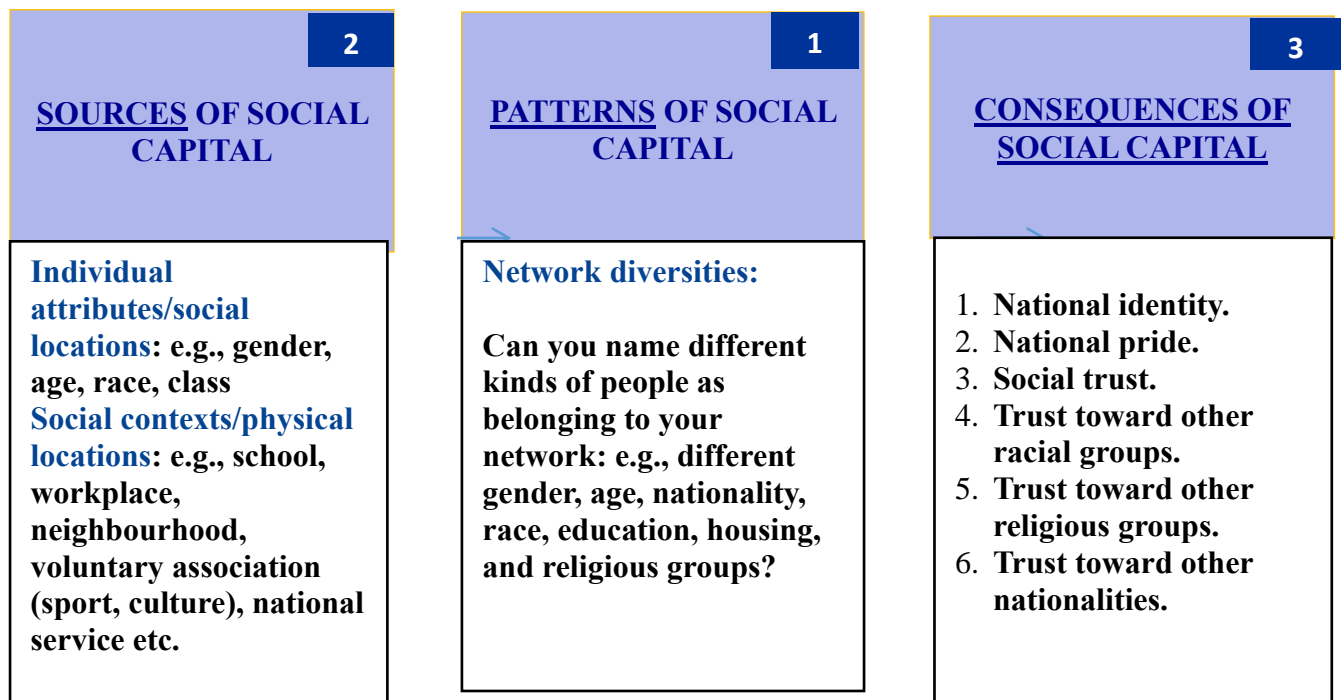


TABLE 1: SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS – BEFORE AND AFTER WEIGHTING
(N = 3,000)

Attributes	Original sample Percentages	Weighted sample Percentages
Citizenship		
Singapore citizen by birth	75	78.2
Singapore citizen by conversion	7.2	7.4
Singapore permanent resident (SPR)	17.8	14.4
Age		
21-39 years	38	36
40-59 years	43.3	43.6
60 and more years	18.7	20.4
Gender		
Male	47.5	47.9
Female	52.5	52.1
Marital status		
Single	21.6	23.5
Married	72.8	71.3
Separated or divorced	3.6	3.4
Widowed	2	1.8
Children		
Yes	71.3	69.4
No	28.7	30.6
Race		
Chinese	54.4	76
Malay	18.3	12.3
Indian	24.4	8.6
Others	2.9	3.1
Housing type		
1-3 room HDB	30.7	20.7
4 room HDB	36.5	34
5 room and plus HDB	21.8	26.6
Private apartment, landed and others	11	18.7
Current work status		
Employed	67.9	68.1
Unemployed	2	1.7
Homemaker and others	30.1	30.2
Current occupation		
Professional, executive and technician (PMET)	66	68.3
Clerical and service	23	21
Production, plant, cleaner	8.1	7.7
Others	2.9	3
Last occupation		
Professional, executive and technician (PMET)	24.2	24.9
Clerical and service	35	34.3
Production, plant, cleaner	22.7	21.3
Others	18.1	19.5
Highest level of education attained		
Lower – Primary, secondary, ITE, JC	57.9	54.9
Middle – Polytechnic and professional qualification	17.7	18.9
High – university graduate	24.3	26.2

TABLE 2: NOMINATION OF NAMES FOR EACH NAME GENERATOR (PERCENTAGE WHO MENTIONED AT LEAST ONE NAME)

S/N	Item	% mentioned at least one name
1	Discussed important matters with	99
2	When feeling down, someone to confide in	87
3	Apart from your family, spent most time doing social activities	77
4	You had helped with discussing important matters	63
5	Knew someone of a different race you feel close enough to casually chat with	57
6	Knew someone of a different nationality you feel close enough to casually chat with	49
7	Helped with keeping watch over the house (e.g., collect mail, house-sitting, babysitting, elderly care)	45
8	You had helped with keeping watch over the house	39
9	Are there significant others you have not yet named	36
10	Participation in voluntary organisation	25
11	Played sport with (For those played sport only)	21
12	Had difficulty relating with	20
13	Borrowed money from	17
14	Gotten a job with the help of someone you know	14

TABLE 3: NETWORK DIVERSITY SCORES

DIVERSITY MEASURED BY IQV	MEAN	MEDIAN	RATING
Gender IQV (male vs. female)	.66	.75	High
Age IQV (6 age categories) ⁴	.58	.67	High
Singapore IQV (Singaporean vs. non-Singaporean)	.37	.36	Medium
Race IQV (Chinese, Malay, Indian, Others)	.32	.37	Medium
Race IQV (Majority – ‘C’ vs. Minority – ‘MIO’)	.41	.44	Medium
Educational IQV (graduate vs. non-graduate)	.41	.40	Medium
Educational IQV (low, middle, high) ⁵	.46	.56	Medium
Elite IQV (attended an elite school vs. not)	.24	0	Low
Housing IQV (public vs. private)	.37	0	Low
Housing IQV (4 housing categories) ⁶	.54	.64	Medium
Tie strength IQV (strong tie vs. weak tie)	.48	.60	Medium
Spatial IQV (nearby vs. further)	.63	.75	High
Religion IQV (8 categories) ⁷	.41	.47	Medium

RATING: LOW = 0 to .33, MEDIUM = .34 to .66, HIGH = .67 to 1

The diversity of a network indicates the extent to which respondents were able to name different kinds of people who make up their network - those who belong to racial groups, ages, nationalities, religions, social-economic classes that are different from themselves. A score of zero on the IQV indicates “no diversity” on a particular attribute, e.g., having a network comprising all men or all women only. By contrast, a perfectly-balanced network where the score is 1 on the IQV, is when the network comprises equal proportions of each attribute, e.g., half of the network comprises men and the other half comprises women. Diversity scores, or the IQV, run the continuum from 0 to 1, where the higher the score, the higher the network diversity on that particular attribute.

⁴ **Age diversity:** Below 30 / 30 to 39 / 40 to 49 / 50 to 59 / 60 to 69 / 70 and above.

⁵ **Educational diversity using 3 categories:** Low = Primary and below, Secondary, ITE, Pre-U / Middle = Polytechnic, Professional qualification / High = University degree and above

⁶ **Housing diversity:** HDB 1- to 3-room / HDB 4-room / HDB 5-room, HDB maisonnette / Private or condominium apartment or landed property or shophouse.

⁷ **Religious diversity:** Buddhism / Christianity / Hinduism / Islam / Taoism / Sikhism / Others / No religion.

TABLE 4: TIE SALIENCE BEFORE AND AFTER CONTROLLING FOR UNEQUAL GROUP SIZES (HOUSING BACKGROUND)

COMBINATION	NUMBER OF TIES (WEIGHTED)	ORIGINAL RANK	OPPORTUNITY	SALIENCE AFTER CONTROLLING FOR OPPORTUNITY
PRIVATE-PRIVATE	3.051	2	0.2	15.255
PUBLIC-PUBLIC	4.325	1	0.8	5.40625
PUBLIC-PRIVATE	0.812	4	0.2	4.06
PRIVATE-PUBLIC	2.59	3	0.8	3.2375

TABLE 5: TIE SALIENCE BEFORE AND AFTER CONTROLLING FOR UNEQUAL GROUP SIZES (EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND)

COMBINATION	NUMBER OF TIES (WEIGHTED)	ORIGINAL RANK	OPPORTUNITY	SALIENCE AFTER CONTROLLING FOR OPPORTUNITY
ELITE-ELITE	2.739806	2	0.18	15.22114444
NONELITE-NONELITE	3.913078	1	0.82	4.772046341
ELITE-NONELITE	2.145631	3	0.82	2.616623171
NONELITE-ELITE	0.4120724	4	0.18	2.289291111

TABLE 6: DISTRIBUTION OF THE MEASURES OF COLLECTIVE SENTIMENT (SUMMARY STATISTICS)

	Mean	Min possible	Max possible
National identity (scale)	45.7	12	60
National pride (scale)	31.8	10	40
Social trust (binary)	.24	0	1
Trust toward other racial groups (binary)	.80	0	1
Trust toward other religious groups (binary)	.81	0	1
Trust toward other nationality groups (binary)	.74	0	1

National identity (extent of agreement or disagreement with the statements, 5-point Likert)

1. I think of myself as a citizen of the world, and not of any country in particular (Reverse coded)
2. I feel annoyed whenever people criticise Singapore
3. It does not matter to me whether I am a Singapore citizen (or Singapore PR) or not (Reverse coded)
4. It does not matter to me which country I am a citizen of, as long as I can attain a high standard of living (Reverse coded)
5. I am proud to be a Singaporean (or Singapore PR)
6. Singapore is the only place I feel completely at home
7. I would feel upset if I see anyone burning the National (Singapore) flag
8. My Singapore citizenship/PR means a lot to me
9. I do not feel a sense of belonging to Singapore (Reverse coded)
10. I remain a Singapore citizen (or Singapore PR) because I have nowhere else to go to right now (Reverse coded)
11. All things considered, I can say that I love Singapore
12. I feel offended when I hear negative remarks about Singapore

How proud are you of Singapore in each of the following?

1. The way democracy works
2. Its political influence in the world
3. Singapore's economic achievement
4. Its social security system
5. Its scientific and technological achievements
6. Its achievements in sports
7. Its achievements in the arts and literature
8. Singapore's armed forces
9. Its history
10. Its fair and equal treatment of all groups in society

Social trust

Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you need to be very careful in dealing with people?

1. Most people can be trusted

2. Need to be very careful

Trust toward other racial groups

Could you tell me for each group which I am about to show you – whether you trust this group 1) completely, 2) somewhat, 3) not very much or 4) not at all?

People of another race

We coded 3 and 4 as '1' (trusting) and 1 and 2 as '0' (less trusting).

Trust toward other religious groups

Could you tell me for each group which I am about to show you – whether you trust this group 1) completely, 2) somewhat, 3) not very much or 4) not at all?

People of another religion

We coded 3 and 4 as '1' (trusting) and 1 and 2 as '0' (less trusting).

Trust toward other nationality group

Could you tell me for each group which I am about to show you – whether you trust this group 1) completely, 2) somewhat, 3) not very much or 4) not at all?

People of another nationality

We coded 3 and 4 as '1' (trusting) and 1 and 2 as '0' (less trusting)

TABLE 7: MULTIVARIATE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN VARIETIES OF NETWORK DIVERSITY AND THE NINE MEASURES OF COLLECTIVE SENTIMENT

	National identity (1) (OLS)	National pride (2) (OR)	Social trust (3) (OR)
sex IQV	1.022**	1.218	.881
Singapore IQV	1.003**	1.510**	1.147
race IQV (4 groups)	1.610***	1.342	1.427
race IQV (2 groups)	1.133**	1.310*	1.319
age IQV	2.022***	1.855***	.849
education IQV (2 levels)	.903**	1.208	1.297
education IQV (3 levels)	.656	1.109	1.150
eliteIQV	.818*	1.210	1.099
housingIQV (2 categories)	1.138***	1.042	1.276
housingIQV (4 categories)	2.807***	1.593**	.793
tie strength IQV	.585	1.320*	1.143
spatial IQV	1.414***	1.273*	.966
religion IQV	1.720***	1.291	1.770**
network size	.218***	1.043*	1.061**
number of occupational positions	.062*	1.016	.981
range of occupational positions	.025***	1.005*	.998

*P<.05, **P<.01, ***P<.001

	Trust toward other racial groups (4) (OR)	Trust toward other religious groups (5) (OR)	Trust toward other nationality groups (6) (OR)
sex IQV	1.034	1.089	1.099
Singapore IQV	1.136	1.118	1.348
race IQV (4 groups)	2.640***	1.959**	1.936***
race IQV (2 groups)	2.209***	1.667**	1.710***
age IQV	.861	.849	.874
education IQV (2 levels)	1.042	1.141	.958
education IQV (3 levels)	1.060	1.180	.952
eliteIQV	1.225	1.086	1.031
housingIQV (2 categories)	.873	.986	1.132
housingIQV (4 categories)	1.035	1.196	.885
tie strength IQV	.897	.933	.949
spatial IQV	.794	.931	.775
religion IQV	1.614*	1.611*	1.648**
network size	.986	1.003	.991
number of occupational positions	1.042**	1.048**	1.036**
range of occupational positions	1.006**	1.008***	1.005*

*P<.05, **P<.01, ***P<.001

The models are either OLS or binary logistic models (OR) depending on whether the dependent variable is continuous or categorical.

The scores highlighted in green indicate that they are statistically significant.