

## Racial ties in S'pore generally healthy, survey shows

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**TODAY**, 18 Aug 2016

SINGAPORE — A nationwide survey of 2,000 citizens and permanent residents aged 21 and above has found race relations and attitudes towards racial issues to be generally healthy, with people striving to uphold multiculturalism and lauding policies in place to promote it.

However, it found that their perceptions of the different races are coloured, so much so that race matters when it comes to familial or inter-personal relationships. People also have a preference on the choice of Prime Minister and the President, based on race.

While the survey painted a rosy picture in general, Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) senior research fellow Dr Mathew Mathews — who led the study — said there is “still some way to go” in terms of deepening interracial ties.

“People do believe in the merits of multiculturalism. The fact that few including minorities have faced insults, name calling and harassment in the last two years is a good sign,” he said.

However, he noted the fact that respondents still believe that people from some races are “more predisposed to some negative behaviour”.

“We want to come to a stage when many of these stereotypes are questioned and people really believe that just because they have seen some people from a particular race behaving in a negative way it does not mean that is reflective of the whole group,” he said.

Conducted between June and July, the door-to-door survey, commissioned by Channel NewsAsia (CNA) and the IPS, found that Singaporeans seek to uphold the values and ideals of multiracialism, and there is a high level of interaction between the different races.

There is strong endorsement among the respondents of the meritocratic system and policies to safeguard race relations.

Respondents also said they aim to socialise their children to understand and be sensitive of cultural differences.

About 75 per cent of the respondents were Chinese, followed by Malays (13 per cent), Indians (nine per cent), and others (2.8 per cent).

In general, most respondents are accepting of social interaction across racial lines. About 7 in 10 Chinese Singaporeans said they were amenable to inviting Indians and Malays to their homes for a meal, or to them playing with their children or grandchildren.

Most respondents said they interact with people of other races in a variety of settings, such as attending an ethnic celebration, making inter-racial friends, and taking an interest in understanding the culture of those around them.

Nevertheless, it is “impossible to judge the depth of these interactions”, the survey noted.

More than 70 per cent of the respondents indicated that the various policies meant to safeguard racial or religious harmony, such as the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act and the Chinese-Malay-Indian-Others racial categorisation, were helpful in building trust between the races and safeguarding minority rights.

However, when it came to familial and inter-personal relationships or the choice of the country’s President and Prime Minister, there is a clear racial preference towards people of the same race.

A vast majority of Chinese, Malay and Indian respondents also find those of their own race more acceptable partners to marry into the family, to help with business issues, or to share personal problems with.

In general, a greater proportion of respondents from the minority races were accepting of the Chinese, as compared with the Chinese being accepting of the minority races.

The least preference among many respondents were for new citizens, the survey showed.

Overall, the respondents acknowledged that racism persists in society here, with reservations among some about broaching sensitive issues with people of other races.

Six in 10 respondents across all races said they have heard racist comments, of which under half said that such comments were made by colleagues and friends.

The primary way of dealing with such information was to ignore these comments, which 63 per cent did, and 29 per cent responded by arguing with the person who had made the statement.

Nevertheless, 73 per cent of all respondents disagreed with the statement that “race is very important in determining who is successful and who is not”, with the survey noting that Malay respondents were “slightly less likely to disagree”.

Almost 90 per cent agreed that everyone who works hard, regardless of race, has an equal opportunity to become rich.

Even so, about half of the respondents (53 per cent) felt that being of the majority race was “advantageous”, with this perception being more acute among the minority races.

The fieldwork for the survey was carried out by market research company Blackbox.

A “drop-off pick up” method was used where the surveyor approached a pre-determined prospective household, identified the eligible person using a set criteria, and invited him or her to independently complete a survey questionnaire, which was worded in all four official languages.

Participants were given an envelope to seal in their completed questionnaire, before it was collected by the surveyor.