

New study shows religious leaders tackling LGBT issues make a majority of Singaporeans uncomfortable

Anna Maria

The Independent, 31 October 2019

Singapore—A study released by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) on October 29, Tuesday, shows that the majority of Singaporeans are uncomfortable when religious leaders tackle issues pertinent to the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community.

The study, which centered around public opinion concerning fault lines in the country showed that six out of every 10 respondents are not comfortable with religious leaders, or even non-leaders, discussing LGBT issues.

The Straits Times (ST) reports that the respondents to the study pinpointed both LGBT issues as well as religion as what would most likely bring about polarization in society.

IPS senior research fellow Mathew Mathews, research associate Melvin Tay, and research assistant Shanthini Selvarajan are behind the study.

Messrs Mathews, Tay, and Selvarajan said that the study's results bear witness as to how important the policies of the Government are regarding separating politics and religion, as well as emphasizes the need for policy-making to be both inclusive and consultative in order to prevent social fragmentation due to divisive issues.

While opposition toward LGBT issues has decreased sharply in the last five years, since 2013, the divisions surrounding LGBT issues may possibly deepen further, according to the study. This is because religion, age and levels of education are factors that affect attitudes towards LGBT concerns.

The respondents to the study who identify as Christians were shown to be most in agreement to their leaders speaking out on LGBT concerns. A little over 50 percent of the respondents said they were comfortable with this.

In contrast, the bigger percentage of those from other religions, or between 55 and 71 percent, said that their faith leaders raising LGBT issues would make them uncomfortable.

Those surveyed who are older and have lesser education also tended to register discomfort with the concept, showing that better educated and younger respondents are more open to free speech.

When asked concerning the possible ramifications of situations when LGBT issues are poorly handled, the better educated and younger respondents also tended to believe that this could be the cause of polarization, decreased trust levels toward the Government, or anger directed toward specific communities.

Fifty percent of respondents who attained at least an undergraduate degree, as well as 50 percent of respondents in the 18 to 25 age range indicated they believed that anger and polarization would be likely consequences to mishandling LGBT issues.

In contrast, only a little more than a third of respondents with the ages of 65 and older expressed similar views.

Around 28 percent of respondents with Bachelor's degrees and 27 percent of the respondents from ages 18 to 25 said they believed a decrease of trust in the Government would be part of the likely fallout for mishandling LGBT concerns, while less than 18 percent had similar views among older and less educated respondents.

This seems to show that younger and better educated citizens believe that LGBT issues are significant, as well as accept the rights of the LGBT community.

Respondents who are professing Christians also showed the most conservative perspectives in the matter of sexuality and gender, when compared to those from other religions.

Regarding Government involvement in LGBT concerns, younger respondents, as well as those who indicated more liberal perspectives on sexuality, said they desired more involvement from the Government regarding LGBT issues.

According to Dr Mathews, "The potential reasons for them wanting more government involvement could be in the form of ensuring equal rights for LGBT people or repealing Section 377A," which criminalizes sexual activity among men.

Respondents who are older, as well as those professing neutral or conservative perspectives, expressed satisfaction with the current levels of government involvement in the matter.

One surprising result from the survey is that more professing Christians and Muslims are also in favour of more government involvement, for the sake of possibly keeping Section 377A in place or preventing pro-LGBT events.

"They may want government involvement to deal with what might be seen as intrusions on the status quo," Dr Mathews added.

However, over one-fifth of the Muslim respondents said they wanted less government involvement, as compared to 2.6 percent of Christians and 18.1 percent of overall respondents having the same view.

According to the study, this could mean that the within Muslim community there are substantive differences as to how LGBT issues are tackled by governmental polices. -/TISG