

## **New study shows younger Singaporeans more open to letting religious extremists air their views online**

**More than 25 percent of Singaporeans said that religious extremists should be allowed to air their beliefs and perspectives online as long as there is no call to harm others**

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Singapore — A new study has been published by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) on March 28, Thursday, showing that more than 25 percent of Singaporeans said that religious extremists should be allowed to air their beliefs and perspectives online. For Singaporeans aged 18 to 25, the number nearly doubles.

The working paper, entitled *Religion in Singapore: The Private and Public Sphere*, is an analysis of Singapore data from a multi-country survey conducted in the latter part of 2018 for the International Social Survey Program Study of Religion.

The perspectives and opinions of a random sample of 1,800 Singaporean residents concerning religious beliefs, religiosity and the role of religion in the private and public spheres were taken, Channel NewsAsia reports.

Nearly all (97 percent) of the respondents say that it is “unacceptable” or “very unacceptable” for religious leaders to stir up hatred or violence against other belief systems.

According to the report, the fact that almost half of young respondents are open to allowing extremists more freedom, as long as there is no call to harm others, is an issue of concern.

“Given the rise of self-radicalization in terrorist incidents, hate speech and Islamophobia both globally and in Singapore, it is comforting that the majority of Singaporeans would not allow religious extremists to post their views online.

But the significant quarter of the population, as well as higher proportions among the young, who would permit such freedoms is worrying.

How the Government navigates the desire by this significant segment of the population for freedom of speech pertaining to extremist views in future will be of interest.”

In the area of confidence in religious organisations, around the same number of respondents (52.8 percent) say they have a complete or a great deal of confidence in these organizations as those who have confidence in Parliament.

A smaller number (47.6 percent), say they have this kind of confidence in business and industry. But the sector that scored the highest in the area of confidence level is the courts and legal system.

To the question of whether individuals from varying faith backgrounds can live together harmoniously, 72.7 percent answered positively.

For one part of the study, respondents were asked if they considered Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Jews, and atheists threatening or not threatening.

The results are as follows: Buddhists are seen as least threatening, with 97.1 percent of respondents saying they believed that they are not very threatening or not at all threatening. Next in line are Hindus, 95.8 percent, Christians, 93.5 percent, and then Muslims, 84.5 percent.

The study found that younger and better-educated Singaporeans had the most diverse views.

For example, for Muslims aged 18 to 35, 75 percent said that homosexual sex was always wrong. For those older than 55, the number jumps to 93.2 percent.

For Christians, in the same way, for those aged 18 to 35, 54.2 percent said that homosexual sex was always wrong. For those older than 55, the number is at 88.8 percent.

According to the report, "This shows that even if one's religion preaches strong views towards homosexuality, respondents' age has a significant influence on their attitudes towards homosexual sex, with younger cohorts demonstrating more liberal attitudes."

In terms of level of education, among the respondents, almost 80 percent of respondents with a secondary school level of education or less found homosexual sex always wrong. For the respondents with a bachelor's degree and more higher education, the number dipped to 55.2 percent.

The report states, "Perhaps this has been the result of the many engagements by the State directed at religious communities urging them to be more open to those of other faiths."