

Marked resistance to fully accepting immigrants here: Study

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There is a marked resistance to fully embracing immigrants here, with levels of acceptability decreasing as proximity increases, a study by the Institute of Policy Studies found.

Examining public opinion on five major faultlines here - race, religion, socio-economic status, immigration and LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) matters - a paper published yesterday found that Singapore residents were open to migrants in calibrated proportions.

This means policymakers need to consider the threshold for immigrants in different spaces, said researchers Mathew Mathews, Melvin Tay and Shanthini Selvarajan.

For instance, while about four in 10 said the ideal proportion of immigrants in Singapore overall was more than 20 per cent, less than a quarter said the same when asked about the ideal proportion in their housing block.

The paper said issues arising from immigration are likely driven by intra-class differences, and survey results pointed to concerns over competition and citizen privilege as being the most significant issues for local-born citizens.

"(Many locals) perceive themselves to be in competition with migrant skilled labour, professionals, and students - at times unfairly," the paper said.

"Perceptions of differential treatment and unequal allocation of resources based on the origins of individuals persist too."

On LGBT issues, the study found that more than four in 10 respondents expect a polarised, angry society if they are not properly managed.

"Both religion and LGBT were polled as the faultlines most likely to engender polarisation... If mismanaged or left unmanaged, (it) can easily morph into more insidious outcomes," the researchers said.

While 39 per cent of respondents wanted more state involvement in LGBT issues, this was likely for differing reasons.

More liberal respondents likely wanted equal rights for LGBT individuals while more conservative ones likely wanted government action to check LGBT activities.

The same percentage of respondents also wanted more public discussions on LGBT issues, while 25 per cent wanted less. Of the five topics, this was also the one that the most respondents felt should have less discourse.

The study also found that about six in 10 Singaporeans would be uncomfortable with religious people or leaders speaking up strongly in public about LGBT issues.

This illustrates the potential social divide that may arise as a result of religious groups becoming involved in public conversations on such matters, said the researchers.

They added: "(The findings) attest to the importance of current policy direction on disaggregating religion and politics, as well as the need to spotlight consultative and inclusive policy-making to mitigate polarisation."