

## More people distrust Muslims after hypothetical terror attack: Poll

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*The New Paper*, 26 September 2018

In the event of a terror attack here, Singaporeans would display stronger negative reactions if it had been carried out by a foreign extremist Muslim organisation than if Buddhists, Christians or Hindus had been behind it, a survey has found.

In analysing a 2017 survey of more than 2,000 Singaporeans, researchers from the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) also found that older and less well-off people were less likely to retain trust and openness in Muslims in such circumstances.

However, non-Muslims who had more interracial interaction were more likely to express solidarity with Muslims after an attack, pointing to the "importance of providing ample avenues for interracial mingling", the researchers said.

The report, released by the IPS yesterday, is believed to be the first public study of its kind to examine perceptions of different religious groups after a hypothetical terror attack.

The report - titled *Community Relations Amidst The Threat Of Terror* - is authored by Dr Mathew Mathews, senior research fellow at the IPS, with Mr Leonard Lim, research associate at IPS, and Ms Shanthini Selvarajan, research assistant at IPS, as co-authors.

Singaporeans were asked to respond to news of a bomb exploding on an MRT station platform, which killed 15 people and wounded 40.

They were told the authorities had confirmed the identity of the perpetrators and given four scenarios: that it involved either a foreign extremist Buddhist; Muslim; Christian; or Hindu organisation.

If the attack was by a Muslim group, 48 per cent of respondents were quite or very likely to be suspicious of a Muslim stranger walking in their neighbourhood, compared to 40 per cent for Buddhists and Hindus, and 35 per cent for Christians.

Less-educated respondents, or those less well-off as measured by housing types, were more likely to show less trust and openness after an attack.

Across most of the survey findings, those living in one- and two-room Housing Board flats fared differently from the rest.

"This is indicative of the exclusion those at the extreme end of the socio-economic status may be experiencing, which fuels their prejudices and biases," said the authors.

The study also found "substantial levels of mistrust" between races in Singapore, especially by the majority Chinese community of the minority Malays and Indians.

This was measured by asking respondents what proportion of people of each race they thought would return their wallet if they had dropped it in a shopping mall.

Most Chinese respondents said they could not trust Indian and Malay people to hand it back; they were more likely to trust a Chinese person to return it.

Non-Muslims who had more interracial interaction in the previous two years - such as friendships or shared cultural experiences with Malays - were less likely to display Islamophobic tendencies after an attack by a foreign Muslim group.

The survey of Singapore citizens, conducted by consumer research firm Media Research Consultants and funded by Mediacorp, questioned 1,016 Chinese people, 504 Malays, and 511 whose ethnicity was classified as Indian or others.

Useful to reach out to lower-income, lower-educated non-Muslims  
Helping lower-income, less-educated non-Muslims get a better understanding of other races and religions would pay dividends for the whole of society, according to a new report.

It also suggested that national education programmes or regular sports events in housing estates could be tailored for this group, which tend to have fewer interactions with people from other races and religions.

The Institute of Policy Studies made the recommendations in a report yesterday, after its research noted that Singaporeans would display stronger negative reactions if a terror attack here were to be carried out by foreign Muslims than if the foreign attackers were Buddhists, Christians or Hindus.

The report, which analysed a 2017 survey of around 2,000 respondents, looked at how Singaporeans would react following a terror attack perpetrated by groups that used religious labels.

It found that lower-income and lower-educated non-Muslims were more likely to exhibit Islamophobia if overseas Muslim extremists carried out an attack here.

This group has more racially homogeneous social networks which, in turn, drastically reduce opportunities for inter-racial dealings.

"This also limits the potential for avenues to encourage a sense of empathy for people of other races and/or religions," it added.

The report suggested that aspects of school courses that teach multicultural values could be applied to programmes tailored for this group.

The findings suggested that even casual cross-racial ties, such as attending a wedding or celebration of someone of a different race in the previous two years, are enough to enhance trust among different groups.

Forum theatre, where members of the audience participate in the performance, could also be introduced in primary and secondary schools to encourage open dialogue about the sensitive issues of race and ethnicity.