

## **Singaporeans want more state involvement and discourse on class issues**

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Over 40 per cent of Singaporeans want more state involvement and public discourse on issues relating to class and immigration - two faultlines that have come to the fore - a study by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) has found.

For example, amid the recent online furore over a condominium resident caught on video verbally abusing a security guard, there were some expectations from Singaporeans that the Government ought to step in more to mitigate such issues.

"Netizens often referenced CECA (a bilateral comprehensive trade agreement between India and Singapore enabling freer flows of labour) as an adverse state-of-affairs that should be addressed by the state," three IPS researchers wrote in a working paper published yesterday.

"In the same vein, security associations, unions and politicians expressed desire for more legislation to protect the rights of lower-paid workers and robustly penalise abuse or harassment of the latter."

IPS senior research fellow Dr Mathew Mathews, who led the study, told reporters that the viral video of the condo resident's foul-mouthed tirade showed how much Singaporeans cared about class and immigration issues.

"These faultlines are real and attract public concern," he said.

The incident also showed how immigration and class issues, and to some extent, race, can intersect and become conflated, he added.

The New Paper understands that the resident, who identified himself as Ramesh in the video, is employed by financial services firm JP Morgan and is a Singapore citizen.

In an internal note seen by TNP, JP Morgan's senior country officer for Singapore, Mr Edmund Lee, reminded over 3,000 staff based here of the firm's business principles and culture of respect.

Without referencing the viral video or explaining why he sent the memo, Mr Lee wrote: "All of us... are expected to demonstrate the highest standards... in our behaviour and actions inside and outside of the workplace."

The latest IPS study found that race and religion continue to be perennial faultlines, but a majority of Singaporeans feel the Government has managed these divides adequately.

Instead, younger, better-educated and wealthier Singaporeans want more public discussion and state intervention on class and immigration issues.

Drawing data from a survey that polled 4,015 Singaporeans and permanent residents between August last year and January this year, it found that about two-thirds of respondents felt there was sufficient government involvement in matters of race and religion.

Only about a quarter tied the management of these issues to trust in the state and politicians.

In comparison, close to half wanted to see more government involvement in class and immigration, with nearly four in 10 indicating that trust in the state would erode should the two issues be mishandled.

Compared with older Singaporeans, younger respondents, especially those aged 18 to 25, were more sensitive to the perils of mishandling class and immigration issues and wanted more government intervention and public discussions, the study found.

One reason for this could be the increased competition in the job market, the researchers said.

"This is also reflective of widening divides associated with the pursuit of economic development and progress across the years - leading to greater concern among younger cohorts," they wrote.

Dr Mathews said one way of mitigating class-based faultlines was social mixing, and the study found that six in 10 did not find it hard to mix with people from different classes.

Almost all respondents also agreed it was good for their children to play with others from varied backgrounds.

But there was still a sizeable proportion who had difficulties with inter-class mixing, particularly people of lower socio-economic backgrounds.

This is possibly because they might not feel like they are on the same wavelength or have the kind of esteem and status to interact with others, Dr Mathews said.

He added: "We have some work to be done on that."