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PERCEPTIONS OF AND CHALLENGES TO SINGAPOREAN-NESS: KEY FINDINGS FROM THE IPS-CNA SURVEY ON NATIONAL IDENTITY

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Institute of Policy Studies

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents findings from the Study on National Identity in Singapore (SNIS), involving a representative online survey of 2,000 Singapore residents and done in collaboration with CNA. SNIS examines the views and attitudes of Singapore residents on a range of matters related to national identity, including the dimensions of national identity prioritised by respondents, how Singaporeans are perceived, the role of government in shaping national identity, and potential challenges to national identity.

Defining national identity

When asked what it means to be Singaporean, the top-of-mind open-ended responses from study participants reflected overwhelmingly positive sentiments. These included the embrace of multiculturalism, being proud of one's citizenship, a sense of belonging, being born or residing in Singapore, as well as experiences pertaining to a peaceful, harmonious, and safe environment. When shown a structured list of 13 possible components that constitute Singaporean national identity and asked to rate their importance, over three-quarters of respondents indicated that unity or being united, a sense of belonging to Singapore, and feeling proud of Singapore and its

achievements were important, or very important aspects of Singapore's national identity. In contrast, everyday cultural markers such as speaking Singlish appeared frequently in open-ended responses, but were ranked lower in importance as definitions of "what counts" as national identity.

How Singaporeans characterise themselves

Over three-quarters of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Singaporeans value education and are *kiasu*, while over two-thirds indicated that Singaporeans are stressed or overworked, law-abiding, and respect authority and order. These were picked from among a list of 43 potential traits that could describe Singaporeans. Overall, it was clear Singapore residents viewed the "prototypical Singaporean" more positively than negatively. Factor analysis of the responses vis-à-vis the 43 traits yields three positive clusters: Singapore civic-communal values (e.g., helping the needy, inclusion, responsibility), personal virtues (e.g., honesty and kindness), and law, order, and efficiency. Negative traits also sort saliently into three clusters: civic friction traits (e.g., rudeness or arrogance), *kiasu/kiasi* culture which is linked to stress and competition associated with daily life in a fast-paced city-state, and a "sheltered citizen" pattern tied to dependence on authority, and guardedness toward difference. Age, income, housing and citizenship status account for some variations in perceptions, but the broad portrait is consistent in that positive trait clusters score higher overall than negative trait clusters.

Pride, belonging, and perceptions of identity shifts

Most respondents expressed a strong sense of pride and belonging to Singapore, and indicated that they would choose to be citizens of Singapore rather than any other

country in the world. At the same time, a clear majority feel national identity today is at least somewhat different from ten years ago, while nearly half judge it to be stronger. Open-ended explanations help reconcile these views: those who see difference most often cite demographic and diversity shifts tied to immigration and a changing social mix; shifting social norms and civility; livelihood pressures around cost of living and housing; and the influence of technology, social media, and global culture. Conversely, those who felt that Singapore's national identity remained somewhat or largely similar relative to a decade ago cited a stable core of shared values, everyday lives that feel mostly unchanged, and familiar multiracial or multicultural routines or norms anchored by steady institutions.

There was no firm consensus on whether the government or citizens play a larger role in shaping national identity, with half of the respondents agreeing to varying degrees that citizens should take responsibility. Meanwhile, when it came to perceptions of the strength of national identity in other countries, respondents were more likely to indicate that Japan, China, and South Korea had strong national identities.

Challenges to national identity

Respondents were asked to provide their opinions on whether other identity markers would come into conflict with national identity in Singapore. We found that socioeconomic status, country of birth, belief in diversity, race, being "woke", and not serving national service were viewed as potentially conflicting with our national identity to some extent. Views on newcomers are mixed but not uniformly negative: around one-third think foreigners and new citizens have a positive impact on national identity; at least three in ten say new citizens and PRs strengthen cultural diversity, social

cohesion, national values, and identity to some extent, though fewer say the same about foreigners.

Implications and the way forward

The data points to a resilient civic core that coexists with perceived pressures from demography, norms, and economics. Everyday cultural markers such as Singlish animate people's sense that "there is a Singapore identity," yet they are not what respondents most want to anchor the Singapore identity; instead, unity, belonging, and pride carry that weight. Policy and civic practice that reinforce these pillars, while addressing cost-of-living anxieties and strengthening fair, inclusive integration, are most likely to sustain a confident and cohesive national identity over the next decade.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Study on National Identity in Singapore (SNIS), conducted in collaboration with CNA, examines the views and attitudes of a representative sample of Singapore residents on matters related to national identity. As Singapore celebrates 60 years of nationhood, this study provides an excellent opportunity to examine what Singapore residents think about their national identity and take stock of how they perceive the evolution of identity over the past six decades.

When Singapore became an independent city-state following its separation from Malaysia on 9 August 1965, there was hardly any Singaporean national identity to speak of. With independence suddenly thrust on them, Singapore's leaders faced an enormous task: uniting and building a nation with a highly disparate population mainly comprising immigrants from the region who shared few commonalities in history, culture, religion, or language. Singapore's pioneer generation of leaders, led by founding Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, sought to build a nation in which everyone, regardless of their race, religion, or language, could identify with and belong to.

A previous study, "Making Identity Count in Singapore", conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the cohesion of Singaporeans was tested, found that national pride and identity were generally healthy despite the severe challenges Singapore was experiencing then (Mathew et al., 2021). Beyond the pandemic, it is crucial to continue examining how Singapore residents view and define their national identity.

Chapter 2 explores various dimensions of national identity as defined by respondents and provides insights into the collective understanding and importance of national identity among Singapore residents. Chapter 3 unpacks how Singapore residents perceive national identity, including measuring their pride and sense of belonging to the nation, their perceptions of whether the Singapore identity has changed over the years, and the role of the government in shaping national identity. Chapter 4 delves into how Singapore residents perceive the challenges to national identity, including the forces they believe conflict with the Singapore identity. Chapter 5 concludes the paper.

1.1 Literature Review

1.1.1 Conceptualising national identity

Benedict Anderson (2006, p. 6) posits that the nation is a social construct – an "imagined political community", in which "members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them or hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion". He further argues that national identity is not an innate, primordial aspect of human existence, but rather a constructed phenomenon derived from specific historical developments.

Another closely related term is the concept of the nation-state, in which a nation and a sovereign state overlap with one another and "there is just one nation in a given state and one state for a given nation", Smith critiques such a concept and how it is defined, since almost all states across the world are polyethnic (2010, p. 17). Instead, he posits a more "neutral descriptive term": the "national state". This term is defined

as “a state [legitimised] by the principles of nationalism, whose members possess a measure of national unity and integration (but not cultural homogeneity)”.

On the concept of national identity, Smith (2010, p. 18) argues that it has replaced earlier terms such as “national character” and “national consciousness”. While there has been no consensus on how to define national identity, Smith (2010, p. 20) proposes a working definition of the concept as “the continuous reproduction and reinterpretation by the members of a national community of the pattern of symbols, values, myths, memories and traditions that compose the distinctive heritage of nations, and the variable identification of individual members of that community with that heritage and its cultural elements”. On the other hand, Kong (1999, p. 571) takes a hybrid approach by including national consciousness within her working definition of national identity, positing it as “a people possessing a shared image of the nation” while adding that it also encompasses “the idea that this people identify with and feel a sense of belonging” to this particular nation.

1.1.2 Developing a Singapore national identity

In the Singaporean context, Chua posits that Singapore emerged as a “reluctant nation” after gaining independence against its will, following its expulsion from Malaysia in 1965 (1998, p. 169). At the same time, Singapore “lacked a sense of constitutive authenticity”, and it did not possess attributes commonly present in most nations: deep cultural roots, relative demographical homogeneity or a high level of integration among its various ethnic groups, as well as a common language at the time of separation (Yang, 2014, p. 409).

Singapore faces a “double minority syndrome” in its immediate regional neighbourhood, given that its ethnic Malay population is a national minority but a regional majority. In contrast, its ethnic Chinese population may be a national majority, but remains a regional minority (Singh, 2016, p. 123). Furthermore, Singapore’s Chinese majority were of “migrant stock and morally had no exclusive proprietary right to the new nation” (Chua, 1998, p. 169). Chua, therefore, argues that such a situation would make Singapore's independence as a “Chinese nation” unpalatable to both Malaysia and Indonesia. Hence, multiracialism was the most practical guiding principle to govern the newly independent city-state.

In the immediate decades after independence, Singapore had to rally its polyglot population through several crises. Besides the tumultuous separation from Malaysia, the 1969 race riots that spilt over from Malaysia’s May 13th incident, as well as several economic crises over the decades, have made it imperative for the government to develop a Singaporean national identity which transcends race, religion, language or culture (Kong & Yeoh, 1997, p. 213).

Against such a historical, political and demographic backdrop, the Singaporean state deliberately crafted policies to develop a Singaporean national identity based on multiracialism. One key policy was instituting the CMIO (Chinese, Malay, Indian, and Others) model, in which being Singaporean was also linked to one’s ethnic identity and culture. Singapore also established a bilingual policy requiring students to learn their mother tongue (based on their CMIO category) along with English, a neutral

language that could serve as a *lingua franca* among the various races (Chua, 1998, p. 168).

National Day Parades (NDP), held annually on 9 August since 1966, a year after independence, further seek to instil "a sense of belonging and national identity through ritual and spectacle (Kong & Yeoh, 1997, pp. 213-214, 236). The NDP also forms a key component of National Education (NE), which was launched in 1997 to foster national cohesion and instil a sense of national identity among younger Singaporeans.

National Day is listed among the four NE commemorative days, and Primary Five students in public schools attend NDP rehearsals, also known as the NE Show (Ministry of Education, 2018; National Library Board, 2014). NE is also incorporated into the teaching of school subjects, daily routines such as the flag-raising ceremony, where they sing the national anthem and take the national pledge, and co-curricular activities where students participate in Learning Journeys to museums and other sites of national significance.

The state-led discourse of Singapore's national identity, however, is not without scholarly critique. Yang notes the prominent themes in this narrative: crisis, vulnerability, survival, meritocracy, pragmatism, and continuous progress based on "ideological pragmatism and economic realism", but sees these as "an insufficient foundation" for building "strong senses of belonging and togetherness" among Singaporeans, as well as between Singaporeans and the state (2014, p. 413). Furthermore, Yang contends that the policy of bilingualism and the institutionalisation of broader, but much weaker identities – the CMIO framework – which replaced more

"authentically felt community identities" based on "dialects", along with meritocracy and elitism encouraging a "competitive individualistic ethos", has resulted in the deterioration of "social bonds" (2014, p. 414).

1.1.3 The Singapore national identity in the 21st Century

Towards the turn of the new millennium, the Singaporean state moved towards creating a cosmopolitan "global city" as the next stage of its economic development. There was a new emphasis on the need to "go global but stay local". At the same time, to develop Singapore's "talent capital", the government began to devise policies to attract talented immigrants, also known locally as "foreign talent" (Chan, 2011; Koh, 2003, p. 231).

Yang (2014, p. 419) also notes that to develop a "globally competitive knowledge-based economy", the government intensified efforts to attract "foreign talent". However, it also adopted a two-pronged approach to immigration, in which "foreign talent" faced lower barriers to immigration procedures and naturalisation, along with scholarships to attract foreign students to study at Singaporean institutions. Conversely, semi- or low-skilled migrant labour has been highly regulated and mostly transient (Yeoh, 2004, pp. 2438-2440).

As a result, the Singapore population grew from 4.03 million to 6.04 million between 2000 and 2024, with the resident population (comprising both Singapore Citizens (SCs) and Permanent Residents (PRs)) increasing from 3.27 million to 4.18 million. Over the same period, the non-resident population grew from around 0.75 million to

1.86 million (Department of Statistics, 2024). Koh asserts that while Singaporeans are generally persuaded of the need to attract “foreign talent”, they remain “ambivalent” about their presence (2003, p. 251).

As large-scale immigration to Singapore persisted in the early 2000s, the influx of newcomers caused social discontent as infrastructure could not keep up, along with tensions between “locals” and “foreigners” (Mathew, 2014). Immigration was a hot-button issue in general: presidential and by-elections held between 2011 and 2013, as well as the 2013 Population White Paper, set off an intense political debate, with a demonstration against the White Paper held at Speakers’ Corner. Rather than weakening Singaporean national identity, Yang contends that large-scale immigration has actually strengthened it, evoking “a powerful sense of feeling of subjective national attachment or togetherness” (2014, pp. 430-431).

Mathew and colleagues’ (2021) work on understanding Singaporeans’ national pride and identity is among the few publicly available perception studies on Singapore’s national identity based on representative population data. The study is set in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic and the rise of identity politics, societal inequality, marginalisation, and populist nationalism fuelled by anti-migrant sentiment. The findings showed that national pride and identity were generally healthy, and a substantial majority of respondents felt that Singapore’s approach to multiracialism had been working well. However, issues such as the extent of meritocracy, treatment of migrant workers, and inequality were also of concern, especially among respondents who were younger, more educated, and of a higher socioeconomic status.

Overall, the extant literature has documented the development of Singapore's national identity since independence from a variety of perspectives, ranging from documenting the historical development of Singapore's national identity to evaluating the state's role in constructing it, and perusing the impact of globalisation and immigration on national identity. However, there is still a need to understand how Singaporeans themselves define and perceive their national identity, and the challenges impacting Singapore's national identity and cohesion as the country celebrates 60 years of nationhood. This study attempts to address these gaps.

1.2 Survey Methodology

Fieldwork for SNIS took place from October 2024 to November 2024 and involved an online survey of 2,000 Singapore Residents (SCs and PRs) aged 21 to 65 years, both ages inclusive. Research ethics clearance was granted by the National University of Singapore's Institutional Review Board prior to the rollout of fieldwork. The online survey took respondents about 15-20 minutes to complete. It comprised approximately 115 items, including Likert-scale, close-ended and open-ended formats. The questions spanned three substantive sections as well as a demographics segment:

- Defining national identity
- Perceptions of national identity
- Challenges to national identity

An IPS commercial partner research firm with a large existing consumer panel conducted fieldwork and data collection. In total, the full survey sample comprises 2,000 unique respondents after quality checks. Participants were identified and recruited by the research company from its existing consumer panel. An online Participant Information Sheet (PIS) was provided to participants, and consent was obtained prior to survey administration. The survey was conducted online in a single sitting.

As the PIS and survey questions were available only in English, only participants who could read and communicate in English were eligible to participate. Participants who successfully completed the survey were reimbursed by the research company with reward points or through another value-based mechanism. Responses were then weighted to reflect Singapore's resident population demographics. As such, the findings are generally representative of Singapore's adult population, but exclude the inputs of a smaller group of vernacular speakers, who are primarily older.

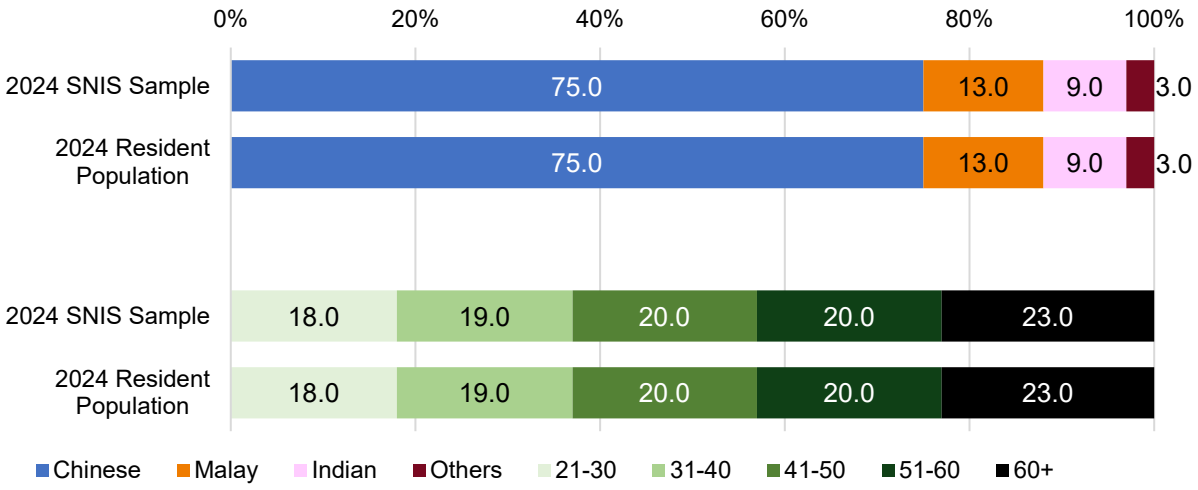
1.3 Demographics and Representation

The overall responses to survey questions reported in the ensuing chapters were weighted by age, race, and gender, with reference to prevailing Singapore resident demographics. In addition, proportions for citizenship status (i.e., SC or PR) were in line with those of the prevailing resident population. In the following sub-sections, we explore key demographic breakdowns of the samples relative to the Singapore resident population.

1.3.1 Race profiles in the 2024 SNIS sample were nearly identical to the Singapore resident population after weighting; sample was slightly overweight on younger respondents

The proportions of respondents in the 2024 SNIS sample were identical to the prevailing Singapore resident population[1] in terms of race after weighting (see Figure 1.3.1).

Figure 1.3.1: Survey Sample vs Resident Population by Race / Age

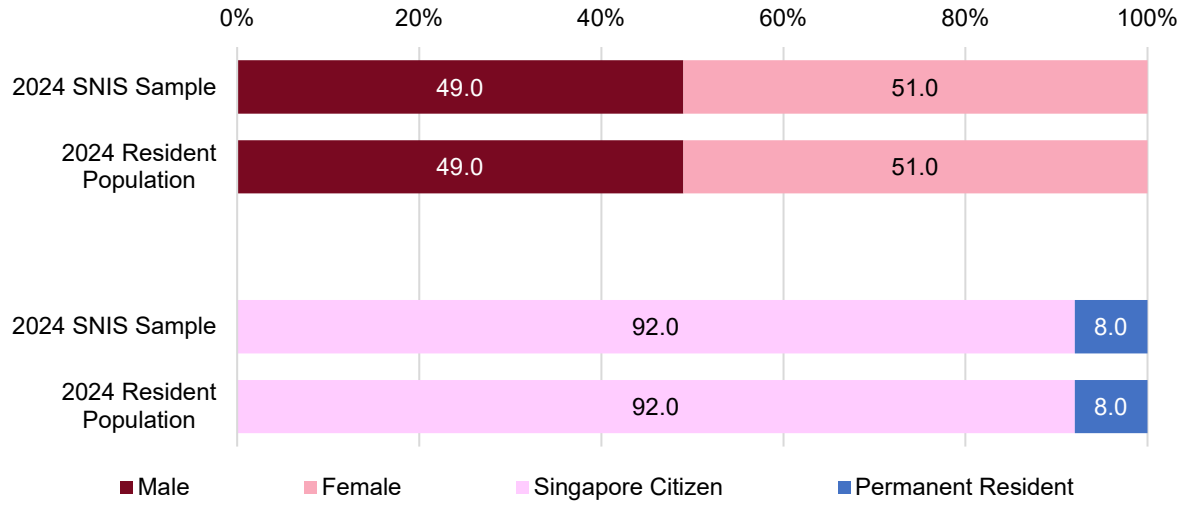


1.3.2 Gender breakdowns for the 2024 SNIS sample were also nearly identical to the resident population after weighting; there was a slightly higher proportion of SCs relative to prevailing demographics

[1] Using publicly available information from Singapore Department of Statistics (DoS); accurate as of 2024 End-June (M810011 - Singapore Residents by Age Group, Ethnic Group And Sex, End June, Annual).

The proportions of respondents in the SNIS sample by gender were also identical to those of the prevailing Singapore resident population after weighting (see Figure 1.3.2).

Figure 1.3.2: Survey Sample vs Resident Population by Gender / Citizenship Status



1.3.3 The SNIS sample was underweight on individuals with 'A' Levels or lower educational qualifications, and overweight on individuals with diploma, professional, and degree qualifications relative to the resident population

There was an underrepresentation of individuals with secondary and lower educational qualifications, and a corresponding overrepresentation of individuals with higher qualifications in the sample relative to the resident population[2]. In this regard, cross-tabulations to ascertain whether education was a factor impacting responses were applied to all question items at the outset. Where statistically significant, cross-tabulations of responses by education levels are presented in this report, alongside

[2] Numbers are for Residents aged 25 years and over, latest available 2024 from Singapore Department of Statistics (DoS) (M850581).

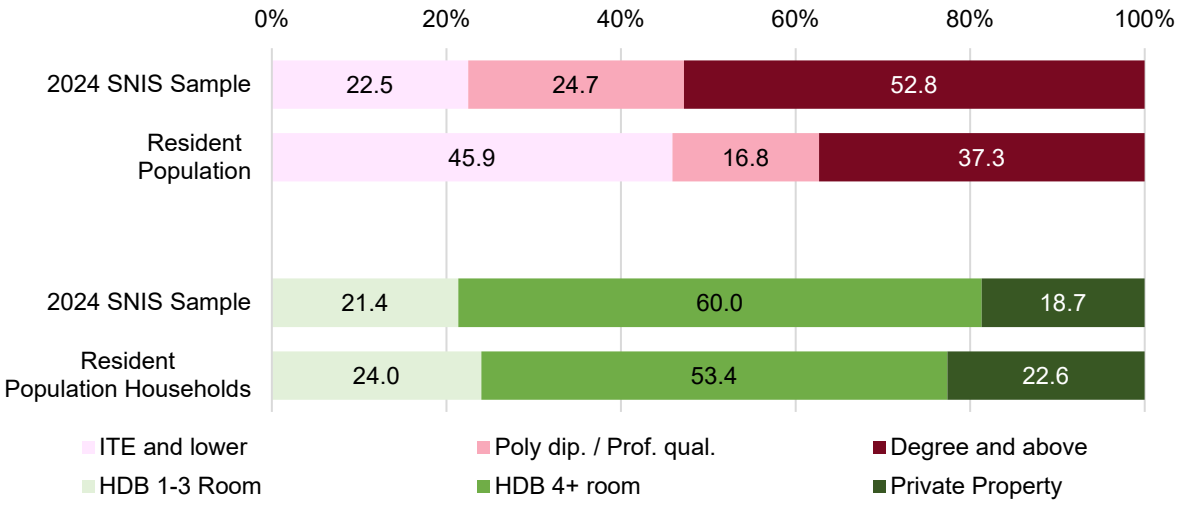
other variables. To capture broader trends, analyses presented aggregate reported highest educational qualifications into three broad ordinal categories: 1) ITE and below, 2) polytechnic diploma and professional qualifications not amounting to a degree, and 3) bachelor's degree or higher qualifications (see Figure 1.3.3).

1.3.4 The SNIS sample was overweight on individuals staying in 4-room or larger public housing; and underweight on smaller public housing dwellers and private property dwellers

The 2024 SNIS sample also has a higher proportion of HDB dwellers relative to the resident population[3] for larger flat types. Correspondingly, the sample has a slightly lower proportion of respondents residing in smaller public housing units and private property relative to the resident population. In the same vein as the education variable, housing types were aggregated into three broad ordinal categories to better capture broad trends: 1) 1–3 room HDB flats; 2) 4-room HDB flats and larger flat types including 5-room, executive, maisonette and HUDC units; and 3) private housing, comprising condominiums, landed property, or other types of private accommodation such as shophouse units (see Figure 1.3.3).

[3] Numbers are for Resident Households by Type of Dwelling, latest available 2024 from Singapore Department of Statistics (DoS) (M810351).

Figure 1.3.3: Survey Sample vs Resident Population by Highest Educational Qualifications Attained / Housing Type



1.4 Analysis Strategy

While there was a confluence of factors impacting responses to the question items, we have condensed the myriad findings across results using a two-step approach to augment the relative accessibility of the content and ease of understanding for a non-academic, general audience:

- Running ordinal logistic or ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions[4] with demographic responses and other salient responses as independent variables as a 'filter' to identify significant findings;
- Presenting single cross-tabulations based on the most salient and significant results;

[4] Ordinal logistic regressions are used to predict an ordinal dependent variable (which comprise the bulk of the survey responses), given one or more independent variables. This enables the determination of which of the independent variables (if any) have a statistically significant effect on the dependent variable.

- Processing qualitative responses using the R statistical program and associated packages to generate word clouds of respondent answers, and similar automated qualitative coding methodologies

Step 1 was omitted from the report for brevity, and the cross-tabulations in Steps 2 and 3 are featured in subsequent chapters.

It is also important to note that some analyses presented in this paper are based on relatively small samples and should therefore not be interpreted as authoritative results for those segments. For example, when we examine citizenship status (e.g., PRs) on several attitudinal variables, the analysis is limited by the 8 per cent proportion of PRs in our sample. Nonetheless, we include such analyses across the various sections to provide some indication of possible trends, but these results must be taken with caution.

2. DEFINING NATIONAL IDENTITY

This chapter seeks to explicate what national identity means to respondents, the various dimensions of national identity, and insights into the collective understanding and importance of national identity among Singapore residents. In this regard, understanding how national identity is conceived locally is essential to any evaluation of social cohesion levels in Singapore. This local conception of identity highlights the presence and traction of shared values, cultural heritage, and inclusive narratives that reflect the diverse makeup of the population.

The overwhelming majority of respondents to our survey felt that Singapore has a national identity. When asked to define what it means to be Singaporean, respondents provided positive top-of-mind qualities and characteristics, including embracing multiculturalism, feeling proud of their citizenship, feeling a sense of belonging, being born or residing in Singapore, and embracing a peaceful, harmonious, and safe environment. These findings suggest a broadly shared understanding of what it means to belong to Singapore, characterised by a focus on positive and aspirational traits.

Furthermore, over three-quarters of respondents indicated that unity or being united, a sense of belonging to Singapore, and feeling proud of Singapore and its achievements were important or very important aspects of Singapore's national identity. These responses underscore the importance of national pride and social harmony as key components of how individuals define their connection to the country.

The emphasis on unity and shared pride underscores the effectiveness of national policies and initiatives that foster these sentiments among citizens and residents.

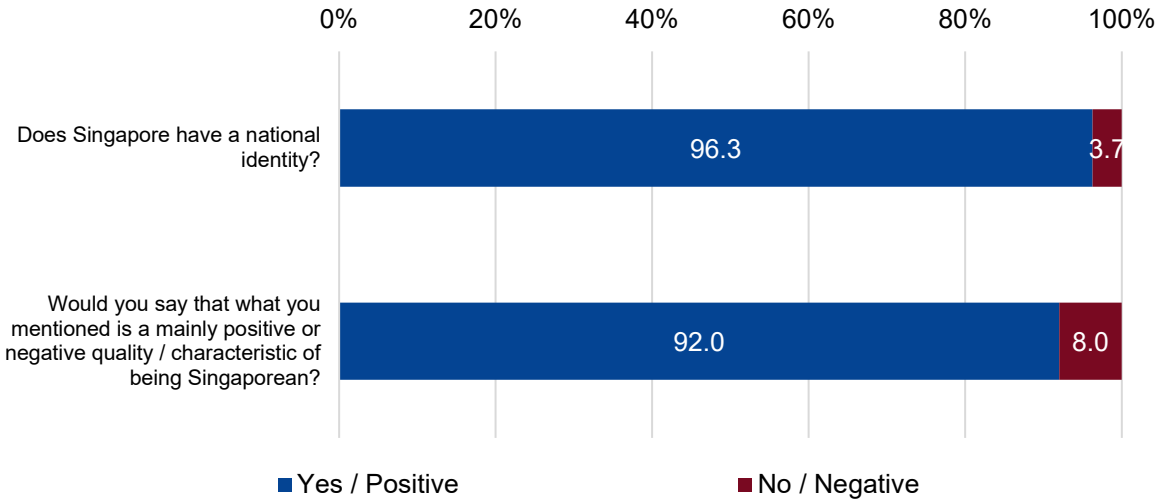
The survey also revealed that over three-quarters of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Singaporeans value education and are ‘kiasu’. Additionally, over two-thirds indicated that Singaporeans are stressed or overworked, law-abiding, and respect authority and order. These responses highlight traits often associated with Singaporean identity, and reflect societal norms and values such as a strong emphasis on education, competitiveness and hard work, as well as adherence to rules and order.

In contrast, respondents were significantly less likely to describe Singaporeans in negative terms. About one-quarter or fewer agreed or strongly agreed that Singaporeans are xenophobic, rude, outspoken, arrogant, and selfish. The absence of negative stereotypes in the collective perception of the “typical” Singaporean indicates a generally positive view of Singaporean society and culture.

2.1 Over nine in 10 feel that Singapore has a national identity, and positive characteristics were top of mind when asked to define what it meant to them to be Singaporean

When asked whether Singapore has a national identity, 96.3 per cent of respondents answered yes. At the same time, 92 per cent responded with positive top-of-mind qualities or characteristics when asked to define what it meant to them to be Singaporean (see Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1: Responses on national identity and valence of top-of-mind qualities or characteristics of being Singaporean, by proportions of overall responses



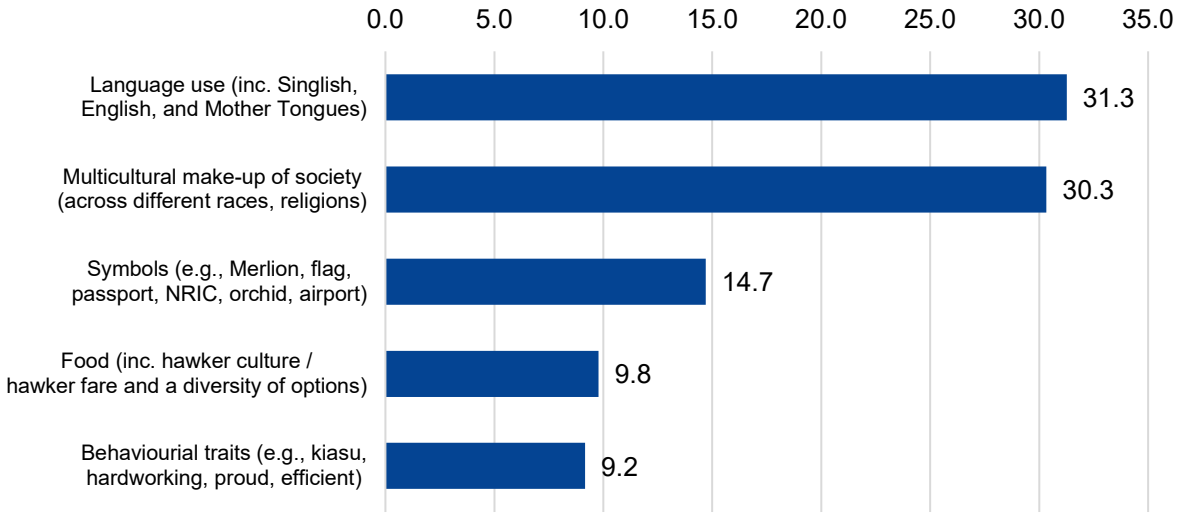
2.1.1. Respondents who noted the presence of a Singapore identity were most likely to cite language use, the multicultural make-up of Singapore society, various symbols, food options, and behavioural traits as reasons for their response

Respondents who noted the presence of a Singapore identity were further asked to provide open-ended inputs on the features or attributes of this identity. These open-ended responses should be seen as respondents' attempts to articulate what convinced them that there were distinctive features of a Singaporean identity. A word cloud was generated from these inputs, and "Singlish" (n = 390) was the most often-cited word. This was followed by "food" (n = 148), "multi" (n = 140), "racial" (n = 128), "language" (n = 110), "merlion" (n = 103) and "kiasu" (n = 86) (see Figure 2.1.1a).

Figure 2.1.1a: Wordcloud of open-ended responses pertaining to features of Singapore identity

These responses were further processed by automated text analysis and grouped into salient themes. The top-five themes included: (1) language use, which are inclusive of Singlish, English, or mother tongues (31.3 per cent); (2) the multicultural make-up of Singapore society, across different races and religions (30.3 per cent); symbols, such as the Merlion, the national flag, the Singapore passport, the orchid, and Changi Airport (14.7 per cent); (4) food, including Singapore's hawker culture, hawker fare, along with a diversity of food options (9.8 per cent); and (5) behavioural traits such as being 'kiasu', hardworking, proud, and efficient (9.2 per cent) (see Figure 2.1.1b; also see Appendix 3 for examples of qualitative coding).

Figure 2.1.1b: "You indicated that Singapore has a national identity. What would be some features or attributes of this identity?" Top-5 Themes in Qualitative Responses mentioned by overall proportions (%) of respondents



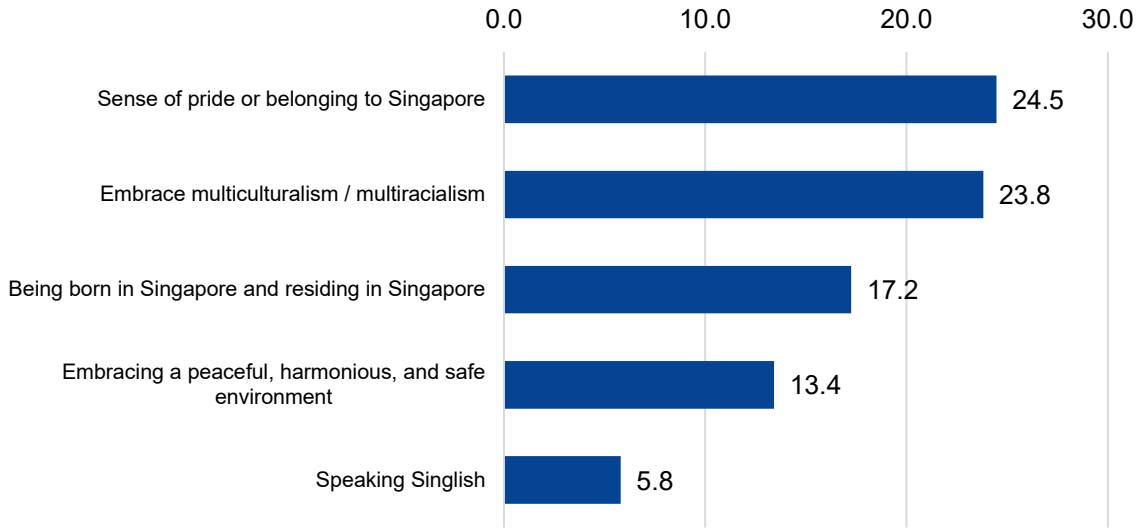
2.1.2. When asked what it means to them to be Singaporean, respondents' top five responses included embracing multiculturalism, having a sense of pride or belonging to Singapore, being born in Singapore and residing in Singapore, embracing a peaceful, harmonious, and safe environment, and speaking English

Respondents were asked what it means to them to be Singaporean and to provide open-ended inputs. A word cloud was also generated from these inputs, and "proud" (n = 353) was the most often-cited word. This was followed by "safe" (n = 135), "live" (n = 97), "living" (n = 80), "born" (n = 77), "Singlish" (n = 73), "harmony" (n = 64), "racial" (n = 62), and "home" (n = 61) (see Figure 2.1.2a).

Figure 2.1.2a: Wordcloud of open-ended responses pertaining to meaning of being Singaporean

These responses were also further processed by automated text analysis and grouped into salient themes. The top five themes included: (1) having a sense of pride or belonging to Singapore (24.5 per cent); (2) embracing multiculturalism or multiracialism (23.8 per cent); (3) being born in Singapore and residing in Singapore (17.2 per cent); (4) embracing a peaceful, harmonious, and safe environment (13.4 per cent); and (5) speaking Singlish (5.8 per cent) (see Figure 2.1.2b; also see Appendix 3 for examples of qualitative coding).

Figure 2.1.2b: "What does it mean to you to be Singaporean?" Top-5 Themes in Qualitative Responses mentioned by overall proportions (%) of respondents



2.1.3 Being 'kiasu', contending with high costs of living, competitiveness and stress, being entitled or complaints-prone, and being selfish were the top five, top-of-mind negative attributes or characteristics of being Singaporean

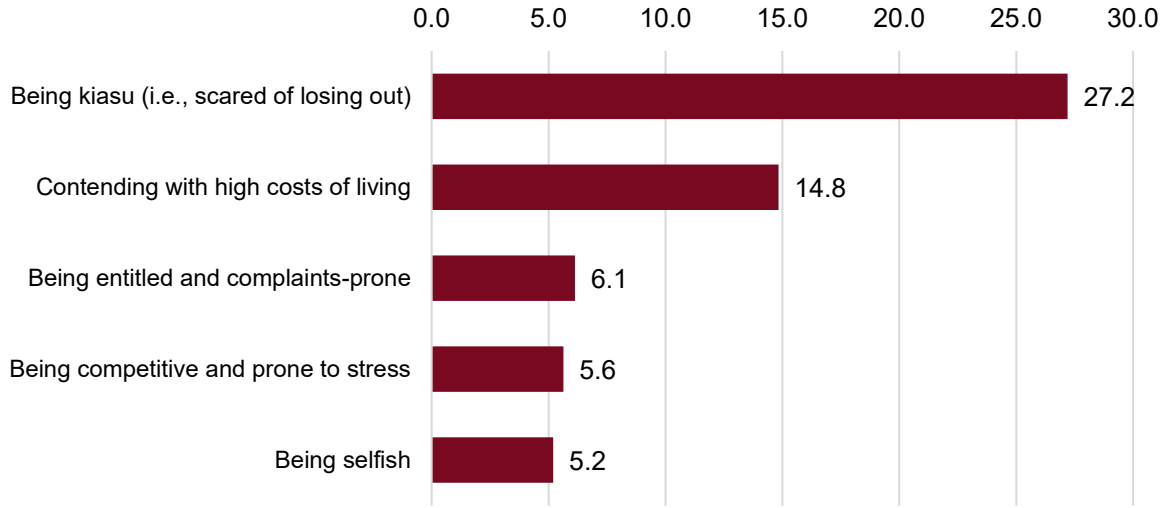
After being asked to provide the first characteristics that came to mind about being Singaporean, respondents were then asked to provide a second characteristic of the opposite valence, i.e. if they had initially mentioned a positive trait, they had to mention a negative trait next, and vice versa. As shown in Figure 2.1, 92 per cent initially provided a positive trait. Hence, most responses to the second question were negative.

These responses were processed by automated text analysis and grouped into salient themes. Correspondingly, the top five most referenced attributes or characteristics included: (1) being 'kiasu' or scared of losing out (27.2 per cent); (2) contending with

high costs of living (14.8 per cent); (3) being entitled and complaints-prone (6.1. per cent); (4) being competitive and prone and stress (5.6 per cent); and (5) being selfish (5.2 per cent) (see Figure 2.1.3; also see Appendix 3 for examples of qualitative coding).

Unlike the top five positive themes, which covered nearly 85 per cent of what respondents had shared about their conception of Singapore identity, there were fewer negative themes which resonated with the majority of respondents.

Figure 2.1.3: "What is the first thing that comes to mind when you think about a negative quality or characteristic of what it means to be Singaporean in general?" Top-5 Themes in Qualitative Responses mentioned by overall proportions (%) of respondents



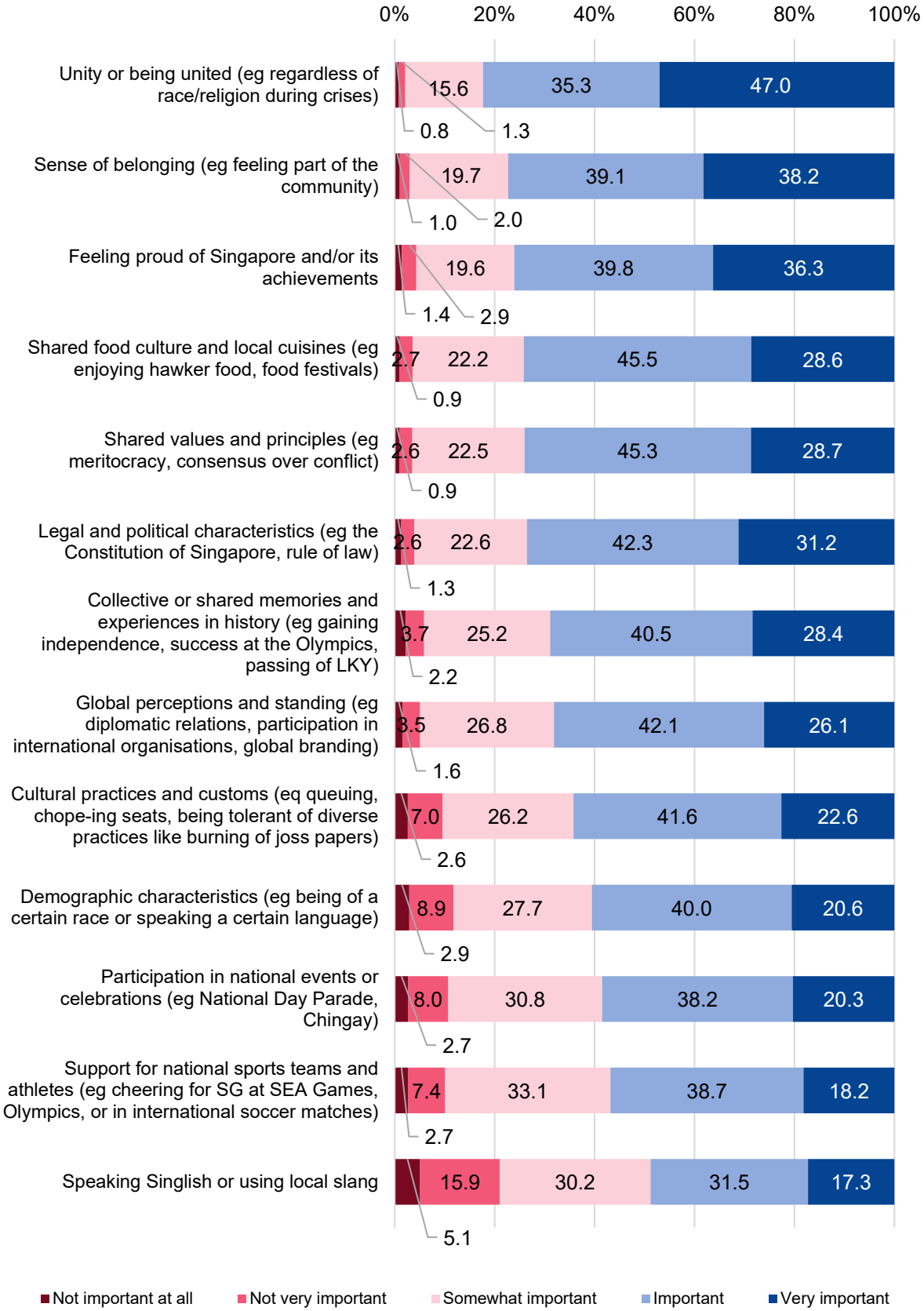
2.2 Over three-quarters of respondents indicated that unity or being united, a sense of belonging to Singapore, and feeling proud of Singapore and its achievements were important or very important aspects of Singapore's national identity

In addition to open-ended responses, the survey also asked respondents how important 13 aspects of Singapore's national identity were to them. These items were derived from an assessment of earlier works on national identity (Mathew et al., 2021) and covered (i) everyday cultural markers, (ii) civic foundations, and (iii) solidarity building of the nation.

Among these 13 aspects, over three-quarters of respondents indicated that unity or being united (82.3 per cent), a sense of belonging to Singapore (77.3 per cent), and feeling proud of Singapore and its achievements (76.1 per cent) were important or very important aspects of Singapore's national identity. The items on unity and sense of belonging have the highest levels of endorsement; this suggests that Singaporeans value features of national identity that sustain social cohesion by keeping Singaporeans unified and engendering a sense of belonging amid differences.

Conversely, less than half of respondents indicated that speaking Singlish or using local slang (48.8 per cent), support for national sports teams and athletes (56.9 per cent) and participation in national events or celebrations (58.5 per cent) were important or very important aspects of Singapore's national identity (see Figure 2.2a). While Singlish seemed to be a distinguishing feature of the presence of national identity locally, given how it conveyed a unique Singaporean language creole, respondents did not necessarily see it as central to what constitutes national identity.

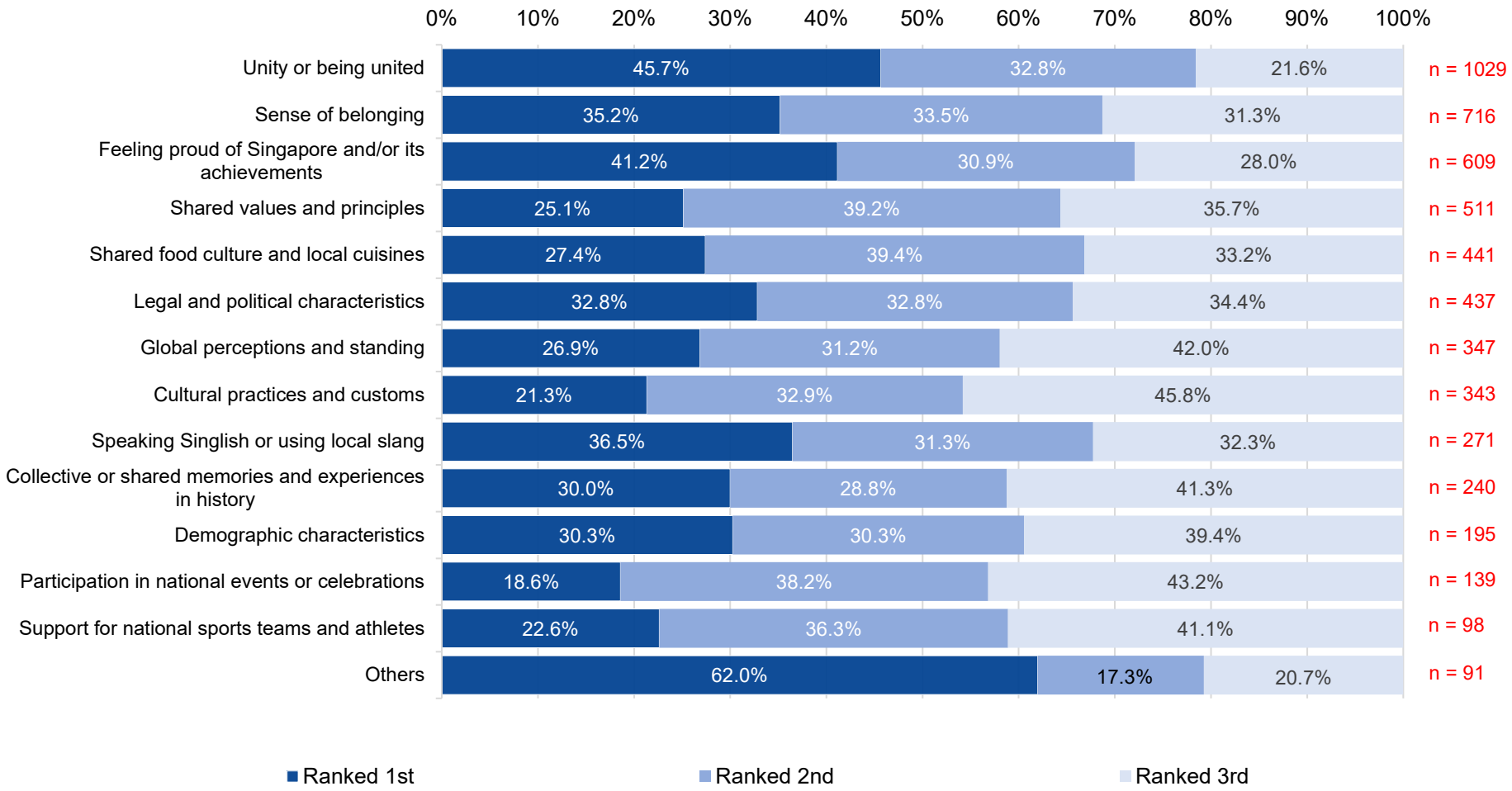
Figure 2.2a: How important do you think are the following aspects of Singapore's national identity?, by overall proportions (%) of respondents



When asked to rank the three aspects of Singapore's national identity that they thought were important or very important, the highest number of respondents viewed unity (n = 1,029), their sense of belonging (n = 716), and feeling proud of Singapore and/or its achievements (n = 609) as the most important aspects of national identity.

Conversely, fewer respondents view that support for national sports teams and athletes (n = 98), participation in national events or celebrations (n = 139), and demographic characteristics (such as being of a particular race) (n = 195) as the most important aspects of national identity (see Figure 2.2b).

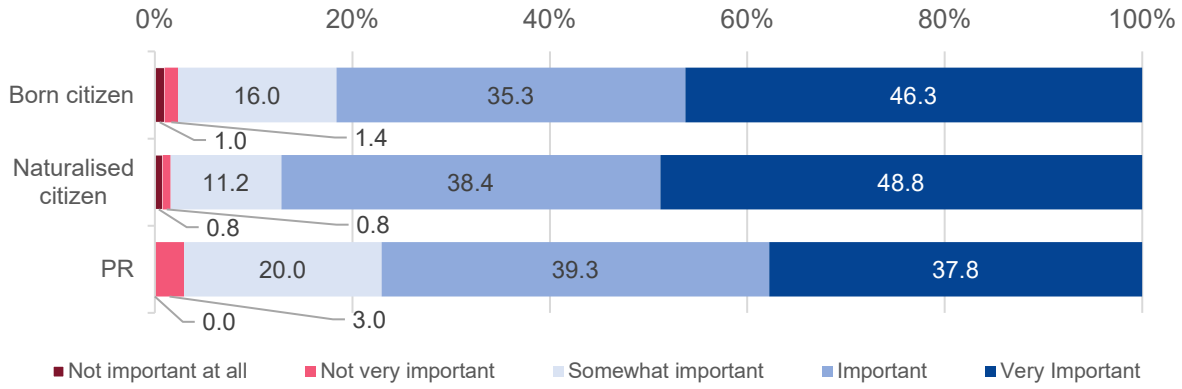
Figure 2.2b: You indicated that the following aspects of Singapore's national identity are important or very important. Please select and rank THREE (3) aspects that you think are the most important, proportions (%) by rank



2.2.1 *Naturalised citizens were more likely to view unity or being united as an important aspect of Singapore's national identity*

When compared by citizenship status, more than eight in 10 naturalised citizens (87.2 per cent) and born citizens (81.6 per cent) viewed that unity or being united as an important aspect of national identity. As for respondents who were PRs, more than three-quarters (77.1 per cent) expressed similar views (see Figure 2.2.1).

Figure 2.2.1: How important do you think are the following aspects of Singapore's national identity? Unity or being united, responses by citizenship

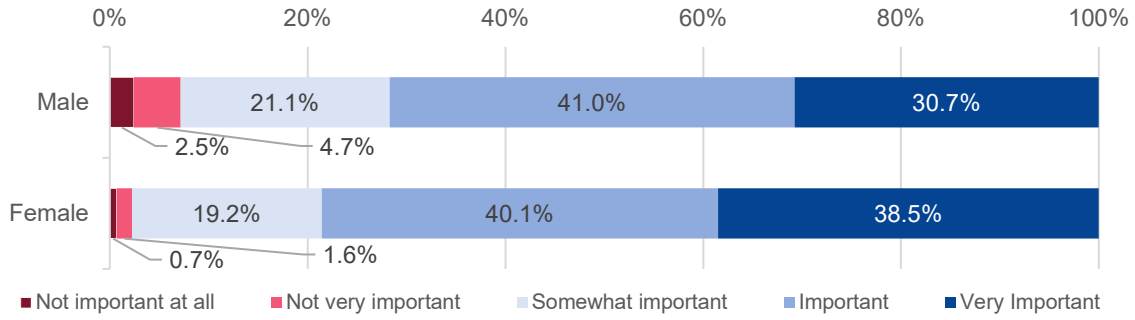


2.2.2 *Respondents who are female, older, or naturalised citizens are more likely to view feeling proud of Singapore and/or its achievements as an important aspect of Singapore's national identity*

Among respondents who indicated that feeling proud of Singapore and/or its achievements is an important aspect of national identity, differences were found for gender, age, and citizenship status.

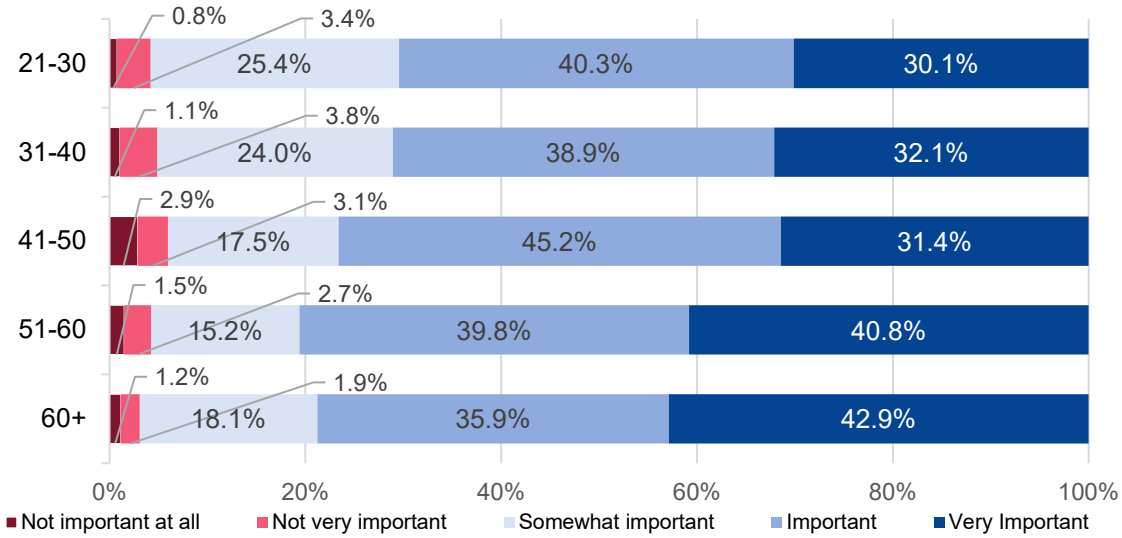
In terms of gender, a higher proportion of female respondents (78.6 per cent) tend to view pride in Singapore and/or its achievements as an important aspect of national identity, as compared to male respondents (71.7 per cent) (see Figure 2.2.2a).

Figure 2.2.2a: How important do you think are the following aspects of Singapore's national identity? Feeling proud of Singapore and/or its achievements, responses by gender



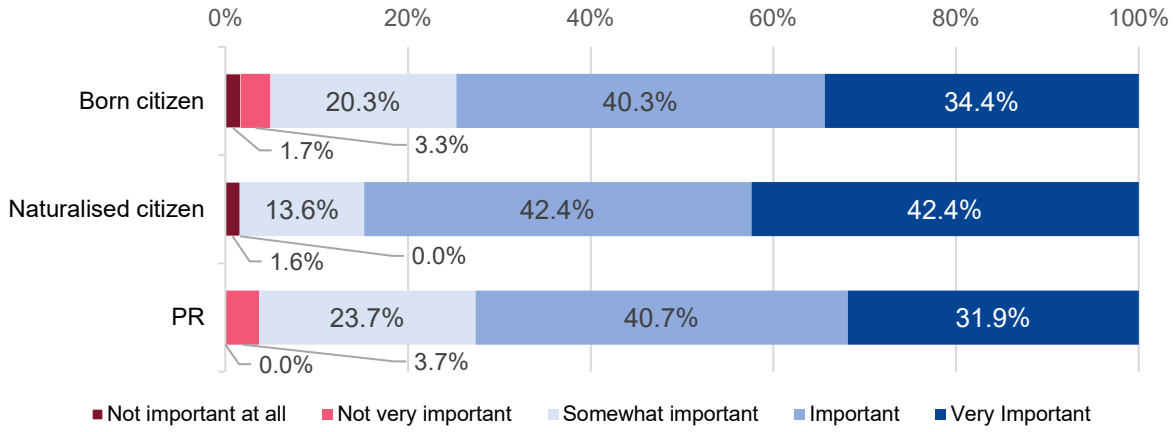
Older respondents, specifically those aged 51 to 60 years old (80.6 per cent) and those aged above 60 years (78.8 per cent), are more likely to view pride in Singapore and/or its achievements as an important aspect of national identity, compared to younger respondents. Nevertheless, over seven in 10 respondents aged 21 to 50 years held similar views (see Figure 2.2.2b).

Figure 2.2.2b: How important do you think are the following aspects of Singapore's national identity? Feeling proud of Singapore and/or its achievements, responses by age



Over seven in 10 respondents, regardless of their citizenship status, view feeling proud of Singapore and/or its achievements as an important or very important aspect of national identity. However, respondents who are naturalised citizens (84.8 per cent) are the most likely to adopt this view, compared to respondents who are born citizens (74.7 per cent) or PRs (72.6 per cent) (see Figure 2.2.2c).

Figure 2.2.2c: How important do you think are the following aspects of Singapore's national identity? Feeling proud of Singapore and/or its achievements, responses by citizenship

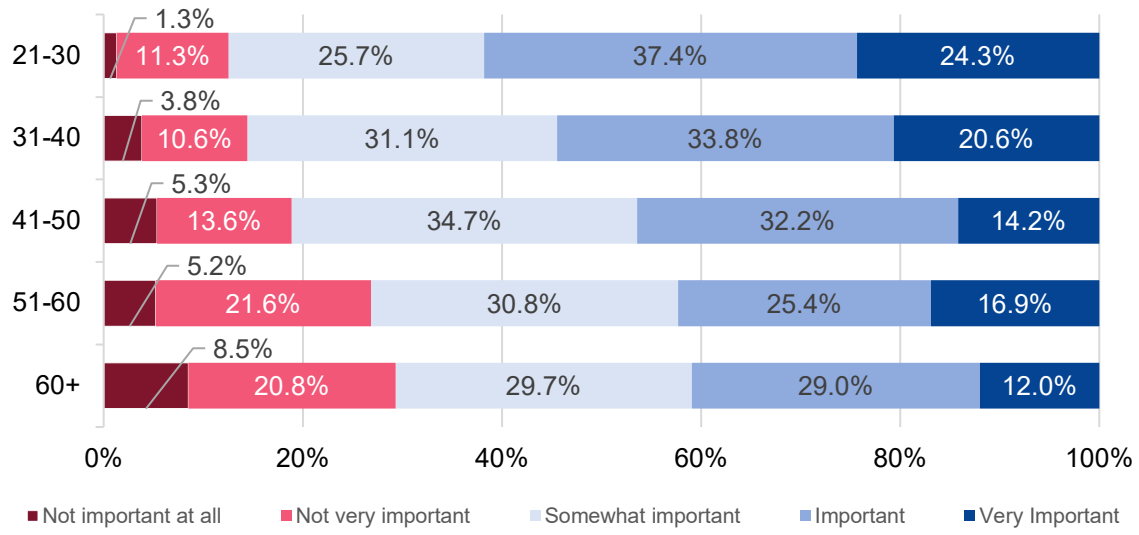


2.2.3 Older respondents were less likely to view speaking Singlish or using local slang in daily conversations as an important aspect of Singapore's national identity

Among respondents who indicated that speaking Singlish or using local slang in daily conversations is an important aspect of national identity, differences emerged by age.

Older respondents are less likely to view speaking Singlish or using local slang in daily conversations as important, with 41 per cent of respondents aged over 60 years old viewing this attribute as such. In contrast, 61.7 per cent of respondents aged 21-30 held similar views (see Figure 2.2.3).

Figure 2.2.3: How important do you think are the following aspects of Singapore's national identity? Speaking Singlish or using local slang in daily conversations, responses by age



2.2.4 Some variations observed across income levels, but there is a general consensus on what makes up national identity

Given that higher-income respondents showed greater agreement with several aspects of national identity (see Appendix 1 for relevant findings), we examined the prioritisation of national identity aspects to determine whether there were indeed differences in perceptions across income groups, or whether they were simply indicators of response patterns.

Across income groups, we note a relatively consistent pattern of results. Respondents, regardless of income, ranked unity and sense of belonging as the top two aspects of national identity, though there were differences in the proportions indicating that these were important or very important. Pride in the nation was also highly prioritised. Meanwhile, the five lowest-ranked aspects were the same across income groups (see

Table 2.2.4). These results suggest a strong and broadly shared civic attachment that cuts across income divides.

The rankings do indicate some minor variations. Higher-income respondents show a slightly higher endorsement of civic and institutional aspects, such as shared values and legal-political structures, while lower-income respondents place a marginally greater emphasis on everyday aspects, such as food culture and belonging. However, rather than reflecting profound differences, these variations likely arise more from differences in emphasis and exposure. Higher-income individuals are more likely to engage with formal institutions and global norms, while lower-income individuals may experience identity and identity formation more through community and local culture.

Overall, these results suggest that the understanding of national identity is relatively cohesive across economic lines. While the degree of endorsement of individual items may vary slightly, the hierarchy of priorities remains almost identical, indicating a shared understanding of what it means to be Singaporean.

Table 2.2.4: Prioritisation of national identity aspects, by income

Rank	< $3,000	$3,000-$5,999	≥ $6,000
1	Unity (79.3%)	Unity (82.9%)	Unity (82.4%)
2	Sense of belonging (73.3%)	Sense of belonging (75.8%)	Sense of belonging (81.3%)
3	Shared food culture and local cuisines (71.5%)	Feeling proud of SG (75.3%)	Feeling proud of SG (79.8%)
4	Feeling proud of SG (70.7%)	Shared food culture and local cuisines (74.8%)	Shared values and principles (78.6%)
5	Shared values and principles (69.8%)	Legal and political characteristics (72.6%)	Shared food culture (76.3%)
6	Legal and political characteristics (68.6%)	Shared values and principles (72.1%)	Legal and political characteristics (76.0%)

7	Collective or shared memories and experiences in history (64.7%)	Global perceptions and standing (69.0%)	Global perceptions and standing (72.2%)
8	Global perceptions and standing (60.5%)	Collective or shared memories and experiences in history (67.7%)	Collective or shared memories and experiences in history (72.0%)
9	Cultural practices (55.9%)	Cultural practices (66.9%)	Cultural practices (68.4%)
10	Demographic characteristics (54.5%)	Demographic characteristics (63.0%)	Demographic characteristics (64.8%)
11	Participation in national events or celebrations (52.2%)	Participation in national events or celebrations (58.2%)	Participation in national events or celebrations (61.3%)
12	Support for national sports teams or athletes (51.2%)	Support for national sports teams or athletes (56.2%)	Support for national sports teams or athletes (59.1%)
13	Speaking Singlish or using local slang in daily conversations (45.2%)	Speaking Singlish or using local slang in daily conversations (51.4%)	Speaking Singlish or using local slang in daily conversations (52.2%)

2.2.5 Respondents who are older than 50 or from minority races viewed outcomes of national identity as the most important aspect

To further understand what these components of national identity meant to respondents and the extent to which they considered these aspects important, we conducted a two-step analysis. We conceptualise national identity as comprising (1) everyday culture, (2) civic foundations, and (3) solidarity and participation (see Table 2.2.5a). These three categories differentiate between the symbolic and tangible representations of the nation that people encounter in their daily lives, the institutional-normative order that organises society, and the affective-behavioural processes that reinforce national consciousness through public acts.

Everyday culture includes aspects related to everyday social and cultural practices that evoke a sense of Singaporean-ness, given that national identity is not only taught or legislated but also derived and evolved from everyday experiences and symbols that anchor national meaning outside formal institutions (Smith, 1991; Edensor, 2002). These are the ordinary lived experiences (Billig, 1995) as well as the practices and habits that people can point to as uniquely Singaporean (Anderson, 2006; Bourdieu, 1990). Civic foundations, as a category, follow the literature on civic nationalism, which holds that belonging to a nation can be shaped by public principles and fair institutions (Brubaker, 1992). It also reflects findings that institutional quality and perceived fairness underpin social cooperation and trust at a larger level (Rothstein & Stolle, 2003).

Meanwhile, solidarity and participation point to attitudes and actions that indicate affinity for Singapore. This is based on social identity theory, which views identification as a combination of cognitive, affective, and behavioural aspects, positing that shared sentiment typically increases the strength of in-group belonging, while coordinated action reinforces identification (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). Research on civic engagement similarly links participation to the production of social capital that sustains cooperation (Putnam, 2000), while sociologists in the functionalist tradition view how doing things together through events like ceremonies, commemorations, and mass spectacles can renew group attachment that extends beyond private belief (Durkheim, 1912/1995; Collins, 2004). Hence, this third aspect provides the motivational component that would make people subscribe to the existing cultural meanings and civic principles.

Overall, higher mean scores were reported for civic foundations, solidarity, and participation, while everyday culture had a slightly lower score (see Table 2.2.5b).

Table 2.2.5a: Categories of Singapore's national identity

Everyday culture	Civic foundations	Solidarity and participation
Cronbach's Alpha = 0.730	Cronbach's Alpha = 0.846	Cronbach's Alpha = 0.859
Cultural practices and customs Demographic characteristics based on multicultural and language Shared food culture and local cuisines Speaking Singlish or using local slang in daily conversations	Shared values and principles Legal and political characteristics Global perceptions and standing Collective or shared memories and experiences in history	Sense of belonging Unity or being united Feeling proud of SG and/or its achievements Support for national sports teams or athletes Participation in national events or celebrations

Table 2.2.5b: Descriptive statistics of NI categories

Trait categories	Mean score	Median	Standard deviation
Everyday culture	3.714	3.750	0.721
Civic foundations	3.915	4.000	0.735
Solidarity and participation	3.918	4.000	0.727

To understand how these three categories relate to each other and how they vary across demographic groups, we conducted an ANCOVA with "solidarity and participation" as the dependent variables. This helped provide a relational view of the three mean scores and allowed us to see which aspect of national identity weighed more heavily across different demographic groups.

The analysis found that the mean scores for everyday culture and civic foundations were 3.174 and 3.915, respectively, while the overall adjusted mean for solidarity and

participation was 3.946. This suggests that when the three categories of national identity are viewed in relation to each other, everyday culture was deemed relatively less important than solidarity, participation, and civic foundations. However, there were some differences when comparing across demographic characteristics. Statistically significant results were found for comparisons across age and race. Meanwhile, no statistically significant differences were found for gender, citizenship status, education, income, or housing.

Those aged over 50 reported higher mean scores for solidarity and participation, followed by civic foundations. In comparison, respondents aged 50 and younger viewed civic foundations as the most important, followed by everyday culture, though the mean scores were very close within the youngest group. Post-hoc tests comparing group differences pair by pair showed that the mean score for only the oldest group was significantly higher than that of all the other age groups, while the rest did not differ significantly from each other.

Compared across race, Indian respondents reported the highest adjusted mean scores for solidarity and participation, followed by Malay respondents. Except for Chinese respondents, for whom the score for civic foundations was higher than that for solidarity and participation, the other respondents viewed solidarity and participation as the most important aspects of national identity, followed by civic foundations (see Table 2.2.5c). Post-hoc comparisons showed that the Chinese mean score was statistically lower than those of Malays and Indians.

Table 2.2.5c: Unadjusted and adjusted mean scores for solidarity and participation, by demographic variables

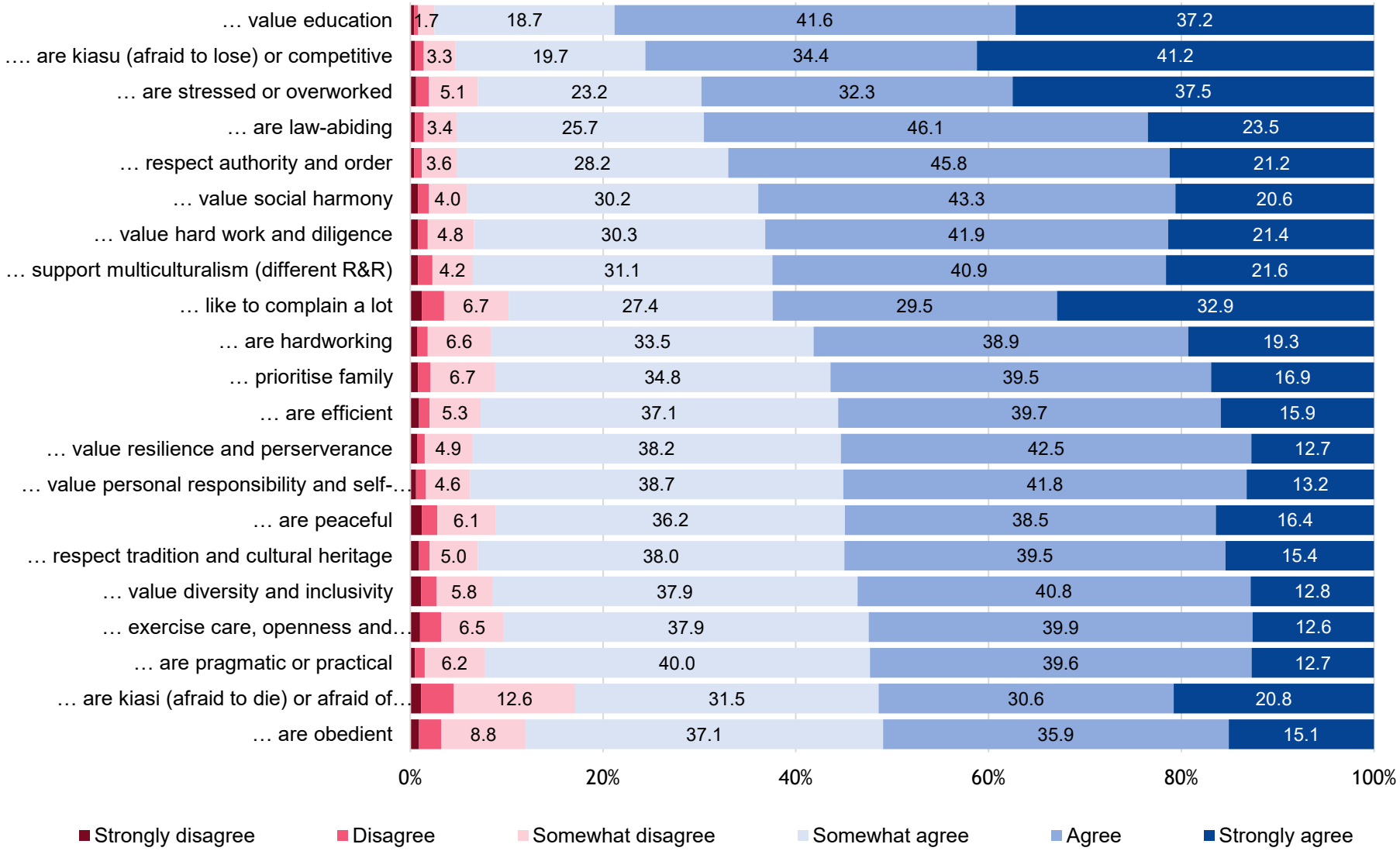
Demographic variable	Unadjusted mean	Adjusted mean
Overall	**3.918**	**3.946**
21-30	3.920	3.910
31-40	3.876	3.888
41-50	3.862	3.894
51-60	3.952	3.937
61+	4.031	4.001
Chinese	3.889	3.904
Malay	3.979	3.961
Indian	4.181	3.980
Others	3.813	3.941

** Mean scores for the other two categories held constant at: Everyday culture = 3.714; Civic foundations = 3.915*

2.3 Over three-quarters agreed or strongly agreed that Singaporeans value education and are 'kiasu'; over two-thirds indicated likewise that Singaporeans are stressed or overworked, law-abiding, and respect authority and order

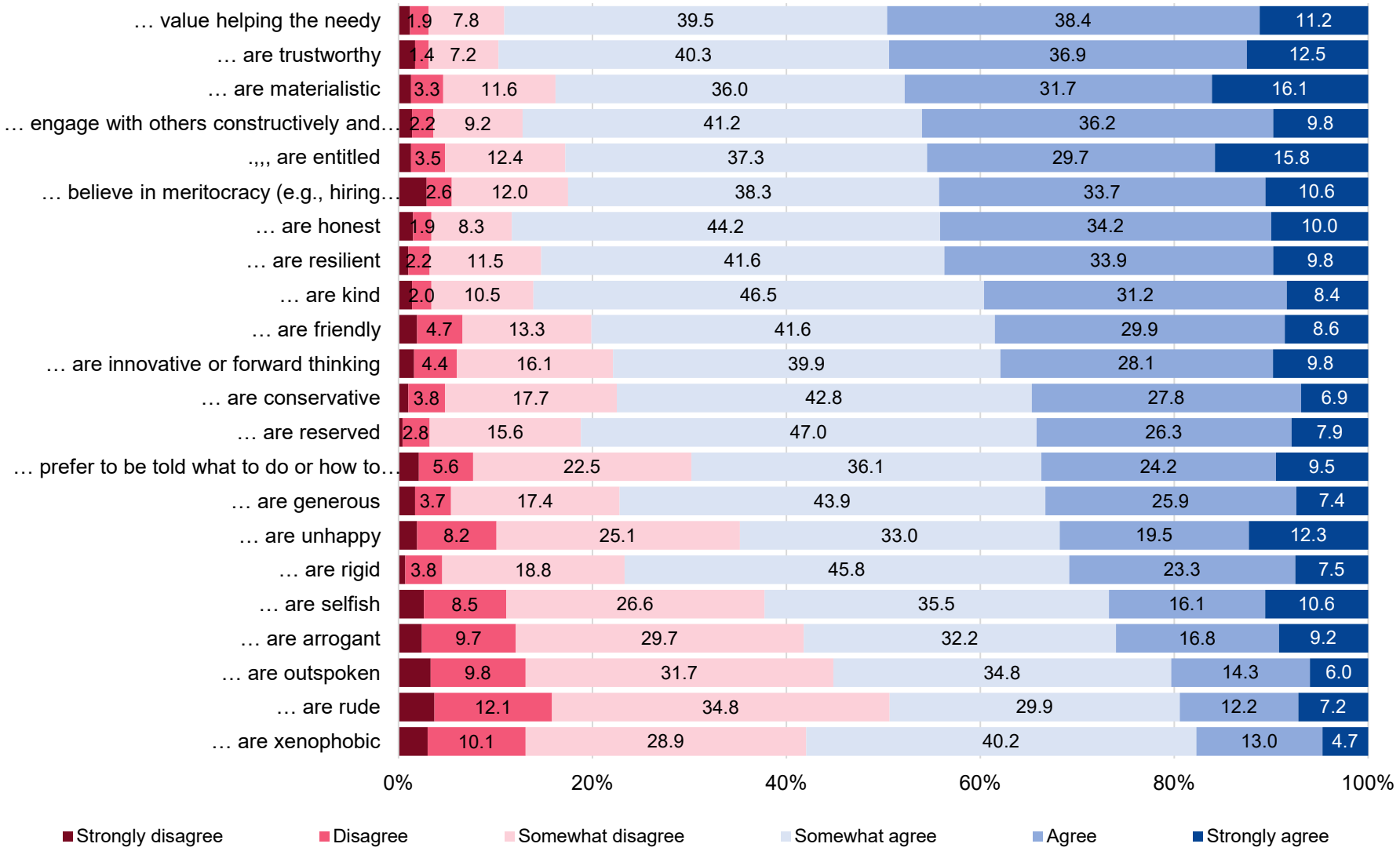
From a list of 43 different characteristics that were used to define a Singaporean, many of them previously utilised in a study of national identity (Mathew et al., 2021), over three-quarters of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Singaporeans value education (78.8 per cent) and are 'kiasu' (75.6 per cent). In addition, over two-thirds of respondents indicated likewise that Singaporeans are stressed or overworked (69.8 per cent), law-abiding (69.6 per cent), and respect authority and order (67 per cent) (see Figure 2.3a).

Figure 2.3a: "Singaporeans … _____", by overall proportions (%) of respondents*



On the other hand, respondents were significantly less likely to describe Singaporeans in negative terms, with about one-quarter or less agreeing or strongly agreeing that Singaporeans are xenophobic (17.7 per cent), rude (19.4 per cent), outspoken (20.3 per cent), arrogant (26.0 per cent), and selfish (26.7 per cent) (see Figure 2.3b).

Figure 2.3b: "Singaporeans … _____", by overall proportions (%) of respondents*



2.3.1 Respondents were more likely to say positive traits are characteristic of Singaporeans

Given the large number of traits respondents were asked about, we categorised them by salience (i.e., positive or negative). We took reference from a prior list of characteristics from the Making Identity Count survey (Mathew et al., 2021), in which respondents were asked whether each represented a positive or negative aspect of the Singaporean identity, or was not part of the Singaporean identity. From this list, we noted that aspects such as adherence to rules, multiculturalism, and cleanliness were viewed positively, while a lack of creativity was viewed negatively. These findings provided a reference point for assigning valence to the current list of 43 traits. While most of the traits could be categorised into either group, three of them – conservative, outspoken, and reserved – were more ambivalent and therefore not included in either list (see Table 2.3.1a).

Table 2.3.1a: Categorisation of traits by salience

Positive	Negative	Ambivalent / Salience unclear
Obedient	Materialistic	Conservative
Friendly	Entitled	Outspoken
Hardworking	Stressed/overworked	Reserved
Law-abiding	Kiasu / competitive	
Honest	Kiasi / afraid of taking risks	
Trustworthy	Arrogant	
Peaceful	Rude	
Pragmatic/practical	Selfish	
Innovative / forward thinking	Unhappy	
Efficient	Prefer to be told what to do or how to think	
Resilient	Like to complain a lot	
Kind	Rigid	
Generous	Xenophobic	
Believe in meritocracy		
Value social harmony		

Prioritise family Respect authority and order Value hard work and diligence Support multiculturalism Value education Respect tradition and cultural heritage Value diversity and inclusivity Value personal responsibility and self-reliance Value resilience and perseverance Value helping the needy Exercise care, openness and tolerance when discussing sensitive issues such as race and religion Engage with others constructively and avoid confrontation in disputes or disagreements		

Based on this list of positive and negative traits, we examined how respondents answered the question about the extent to which these traits characterise Singaporeans. To provide a better understanding, the mean and the median number of traits for both groups are provided.

The mean number of positive traits that respondents strongly agreed or agreed with was 14 out of 27 (51.9 per cent), while the median was 15 (55.6 per cent). For negative traits, the mean was 5.5 out of 13 traits (42 per cent of the whole group), while the median was 5 (38.5 per cent). We also derived mean scores for the positive and negative groups. Overall, the mean score for the positive group of traits was slightly higher than that for the negative group. Out of a maximum score of 6, the positive

group had an overall mean score of 4.515, compared to 4.260 for the negative group (see Table 2.3.1b).

Based on all three indicators, respondents were more likely to report that positive traits were characteristic of Singaporeans than negative traits. While statistically significant, this difference is not very large when we compare mean scores, suggesting that respondents may have tended to select answers toward the middle of the range (i.e., "somewhat disagree" or "somewhat agree") for many of the traits. The more positive portrayal of the typical Singaporean might also reflect a positive bias among respondents, who could have associated these traits with themselves and fellow Singaporeans.

Table 2.3.1b: Descriptive statistics of positive and negative traits

Group of traits	Mean number of traits indicated "Strongly Agree" or "Agree"	Median number of traits indicated "Strongly Agree" or "Agree"	Computed scores (Strongly Disagree = 1 to Strongly Agree = 6)	
			Mean score (Max = 6)	Standard deviation
Positive	14 out of 27 (51.9%)	15 out of 27 (55.6%)	4.515	0.633
Negative	5.5 out of 13 (42.0%)	5 out of 13 (38.5%)	4.260	0.700

2.3.2 Positive Singaporean traits relate to Singapore civic-communal values, personal virtues, and law, order and efficiency

Given the long list of positive traits, we were interested in how they might be further categorised and whether respondents were likely to link certain traits together. Given that some items had overlapping meanings (e.g., being resilient vs. value resilience and perseverance), we first removed those that received lower concurrence among

respondents. We then conducted a factor analysis of the remaining list and derived three categories.

Singapore civic-communal values cluster civic-communal norms and inclusion items that apply in Singapore society, and reflect Singaporeans' aspirations and values. Personal virtues are positive character traits people may possess, such as friendliness, honesty, and kindness. Law, order, and efficiency capture both rule compliance and performance discipline, which is a very recognisable Singaporean ethos compared to mere conformity (see Table 2.3.2a).

Table 2.3.2a: Categories of positive Singaporean traits

Singapore civic-communal values	Personal virtues	Law, order, and efficiency
Value education Respect tradition and cultural heritage Value diversity and inclusivity Value personal responsibility and self-reliance Value resilience and perseverance Value helping the needy	Friendly Honest Trustworthy Kind	Obedient Law-abiding Pragmatic/practical Efficient

** Cronbach Alpha scores: Singapore civic-communal values = 0.892; Personal virtues = 0.845; Law, order, and efficiency = 0.710*

Most respondents showed strong alignment with all positive trait categories. Singapore civic-communal values had the highest mean score of 4.632, while personal virtues had the lowest mean score at 4.300. Regardless, the difference between these two groups was not significant, and indicates that respondents generally fell somewhere between "somewhat agree" and "agree" for all these trait groups on average (see Table 2.3.2b).

Table 2.3.2b: Descriptive statistics of positive trait categories

Trait categories	Mean score	Median	Standard deviation
Singapore civic-communal values	4.632	4.667	0.711
Personal virtues	4.300	4.250	0.809
Law, order, and efficiency	4.623	4.625	0.668

2.3.3 Older, and higher-SES respondents were more likely to say the various positive trait categories are characteristic of Singaporeans

Some demographic differences were observed in the mean scores across the various trait categories. Respondents older than 60 years old, or who were from higher socioeconomic backgrounds, reported higher mean scores for Singapore civic-communal values and personal virtues. There were no significant age differences for law, order and efficiency, but similar racial and socioeconomic differences were observed (see Tables 2.3.3a to 2.3.3c).

Table 2.3.3a: Descriptive statistics of Singapore civic-communal values

Demographics		Mean score
Age**	21-30	4.676
	31-40	**4.566**
	41-50	4.584
	51-60	4.660
	61+	**4.735**
Income*	<$3,000	**4.574**
	$3,000-$5,999	4.641
	≥$6,000	**4.681**
Housing*	HDB 1-3 room	4.623
	HDB 4+-room	**4.611**
	Private property	**4.715**

Table 2.3.3b: Descriptive statistics of personal virtues

Demographics		Mean score
Age* **	21-30	4.293
	31-40	**4.217**
	41-50	4.252
	51-60	4.353
	61+	**4.469**
Income* **	<$3,000	**4.196**
	$3,000-$5,999	4.316
	≥$6,000	**4.387**

Table 2.3.3c: Descriptive statistics of law, order, and efficiency

Demographics		Mean score
Education* **	A Level and below	**4.546**
	ITE/ Poly/ Prof. Qual.	4.570
	Degree and above	**4.671**
Income* **	<$3,000	**4.493**
	$3,000-$5,999	4.641
	≥$6,000	**4.735**
Housing* **	HDB 1-3 room	**4.524**
	HDB 4+-room	4.620
	Private property	**4.746**

2.3.4 Negative Singaporean traits can be broadly categorised into three main groups: civic friction traits, kiasu/kiasi culture, and sheltered citizen syndrome

We conducted a similar analysis on the negative Singaporean traits. After factor analysis, three groups were derived. They separately pertained to civic friction traits, which refer to attitudes that strain public graciousness and social cooperation like being rude, arrogant, selfish, or unhappy; *kiasu/kiasi* culture, which pertain to twin fears of losing out and taking risks extending into overwork and constant comparison;

as well as sheltered citizen syndrome, which refer to a pattern marked by material comfort, dependence on authority, rigidity of thought, and guardedness toward difference, reflecting the psychological costs of a highly structured and success-oriented society (see Table 2.3.4a).

Table 2.3.4a: Categories of negative Singaporean traits

Civic friction traits	*Kiasu/kiasi* culture	Sheltered citizen syndrome
Rude Arrogant Selfish Unhappy	Being stressed or overworked Kiasu Kiasi Like to complain a lot	Materialistic Entitled Prefer to be told what to do or how to think Rigid Xenophobic

** Cronbach Alpha scores: Civic friction traits = 0.884; Kiasu/kiasi culture = 0.787; Sheltered citizen syndrome = 0.675*

Compared to the positive traits, there was more differentiation in alignment across the negative trait categories. The *kiasu/kiasi* culture category had the highest mean score, with the median (most commonly selected option) at 5 (“Agree”) out of 6. It was followed by constructs we labelled as “sheltered citizen syndrome” and then “civic friction” traits (see Table 2.3.4b). Based on these findings, respondents seem to view fellow Singaporeans as more stressed, perhaps in response to a competitive environment, and, to a lesser extent, as more demanding of themselves and others. However, there is less agreement that Singaporeans exhibit negative behaviours, such as rudeness or arrogance, perhaps because of self-perceptions of how Singapore is as a society.

Table 2.3.4b: Descriptive statistics of negative trait categories

Trait categories	Mean score	Median	Standard deviation
Civic friction traits	3.826	3.750	1.014
***Kiasu/kiasi* culture**	4.866	5.000	0.813
Sheltered citizen syndrome	4.122	4.000	0.695

2.3.5 Younger, male, and better-educated respondents were more likely to see civic friction traits as characteristic of Singaporeans

Overall, respondents who were younger, male, or better educated reported higher scores on the civic friction traits (see Table 2.3.5). Given that these groups are more likely to be exposed to the pressures of modern society, global competition, and expectations of success, they would probably be the most affected by aspects that might be viewed as negative manifestations of these stressors. Such sentiments might thus be an indicator of both stress and a desire for a more open and responsive civic culture.

Table 2.3.5: Descriptive statistics of civic friction traits

Demographics		Mean score
Age* **	21-30	**3.939**
	31-40	3.921
	41-50	3.801
	51-60	3.739
	61+	**3.668**
Gender* **	Male	**3.909**
	Female	**3.746**
Education*	A Level and below	**3.674**
	ITE/ Poly/ Prof. Qual.	**3.853**
	Degree and above	3.852

2.3.6 Local-born citizens and middle-SES respondents were more likely to see kiasu/kiasi culture as characteristic of Singaporeans

When it comes to *kiasu/kiasi* culture, local-born citizens as well as those in the middle-income and HDB 4+-room housing groups reported the highest mean scores (see Table 2.3.6). It is likely that these groups experience the highest tension between ambition and insecurity in trying to maintain their position in a competitive, high-expectation society, and thus have the strongest perceptions of these traits when thinking about Singaporeans.

Table 2.3.6: Descriptive statistics of *kiasu/kiasi* culture

Demographics		Mean score
Citizenship status* **	Local-born SC	**4.891**
	Naturalised SC	4.886
	PR	**4.524**
Income*	< $3,000	4.871
	$3,000-$5,999	**4.919**
	≥ $6,000	**4.786**
Housing* **	HDB 1-3 room	**4.714**
	HDB 4+-room	**4.909**
	Private property	4.886

2.3.7 Male and higher-SES respondents were more likely to see sheltered citizen syndrome as characteristic of Singaporeans

Males, those with higher education, those earning higher income, and those living in private properties reported higher mean scores for the sheltered citizen syndrome trait group (see Table 2.3.7). It is possible that the lived experiences of these groups reinforce the benefits of order, control, and material comforts, and they are more likely to encounter individuals who pursue these aspects to a greater degree, which may manifest in some of the negative traits in this trait group.

Table 2.3.7: Descriptive statistics of sheltered citizen syndrome

Demographics		Mean score
Gender**	Male	**4.167**
	Female	**4.089**
Education***	A Level and below	**3.947**
	ITE/ Poly/ Prof. Qual.	4.088
	Degree and above	**4.187**
Income***	< $3,000	**4.031**
	$3,000-$5,999	4.157
	≥ $6,000	**4.170**
Housing type***	HDB 1-3 room	**4.028**
	HDB 4+-room	4.126
	Private property	**4.219**

3. PERCEPTIONS OF NATIONAL IDENTITY

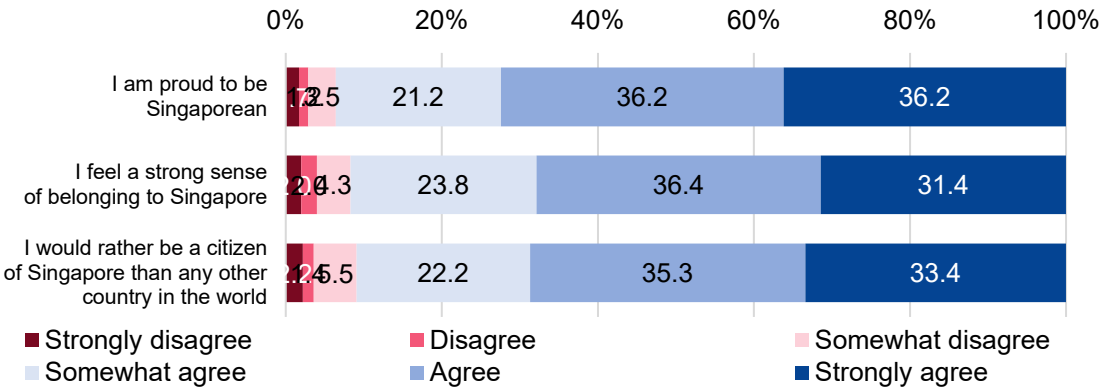
When an individual identifies with a nation, it commonly indicates a shared sense of national identity. However, the nature of national identity is not static; it evolves, perhaps with changing demographics or shifting societal norms. National identity can also grow stronger or weaker depending on the country's experiences. Bearing these in mind, this chapter examines respondents' feelings about their identities as Singaporeans, their views on how national identity in Singapore might have evolved, the roles of citizens and the government in shaping national identity, and how they perceive the national identities of other nations.

Most respondents have a strong sense of pride and belonging to Singapore and indicated that they would choose to be citizens of Singapore rather than any other country in the world. There is a sense that national identity has evolved, with nearly half of respondents indicating it has grown stronger than 10 years ago. When it came to shaping national identity, there was no firm consensus on whether the government or citizens played a larger role, with half of the respondents agreeing, to varying degrees, that citizens should take responsibility. Meanwhile, respondents were more likely to indicate that Japan, China, and South Korea had strong national identities when asked about the strength of national identity in other countries.

3.1 Nine in 10 or more respondents expressed pride and a strong sense of belonging towards Singapore, and would rather be citizens of Singapore than any other country in the world

Over nine in 10 respondents agreed to varying degrees, with over two-thirds indicating that they agree or strongly agree with these statements. Specifically, 93.6 per cent said they are proud to be Singaporean (72.4 per cent agree or strongly agree), 91.6 per cent said they have a strong sense of belonging to Singapore (67.8 per cent agree or strongly agree), and 90.9 per cent said they would rather be a citizen of Singapore than any other country in the world (68.7 per cent agree or strongly agree) (see Figure 3.1).

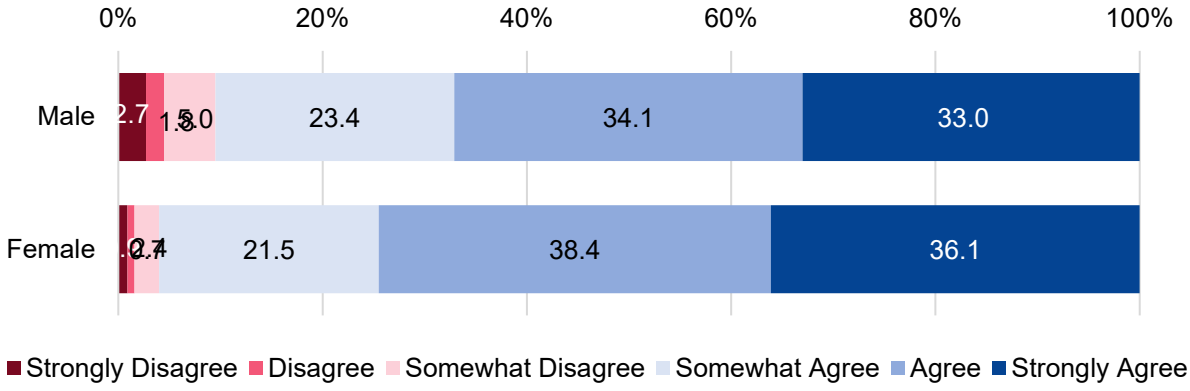
Figure 3.1: How much do you agree with the following statements?



3.1.1 Females and private property dwellers were more likely to express pride in being Singaporean

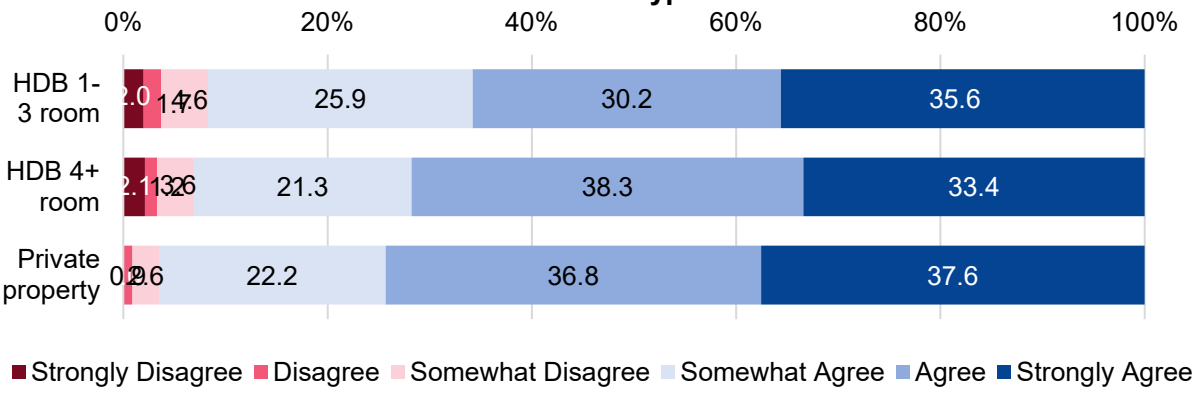
Females were more likely to indicate that they were proud to be Singaporean. Compared with 67.1 per cent of males, 74.5 per cent of females agreed or strongly agreed that they are proud to be Singaporean (see Figure 3.1.1a).

Figure 3.1.1a: I am proud to be Singaporean, responses by gender



Across housing types, private property dwellers were the most likely to say they are proud to be Singaporean to some extent. Compared to 65.8 per cent of those residing in 1- to 3-room HDB flats, 74.4 per cent of private property dwellers indicated that they agree or strongly agree that they are proud to be Singaporean (see Figure 3.1.1b).

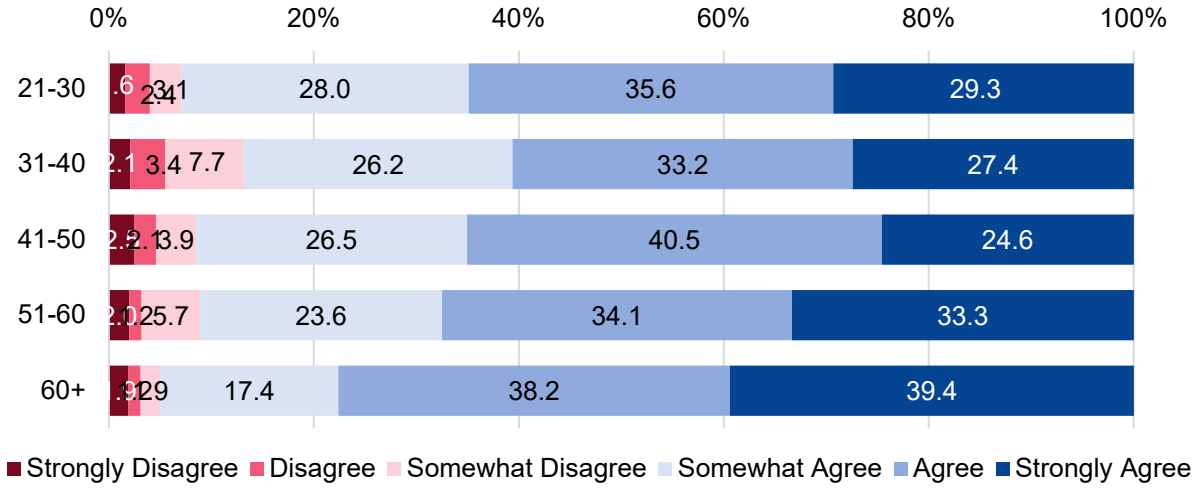
Figure 3.1.1b: I am proud to be Singaporean, responses by housing type



3.1.2 Respondents who were older than 60 and earned a higher income were more likely to express a strong sense of belonging to Singapore

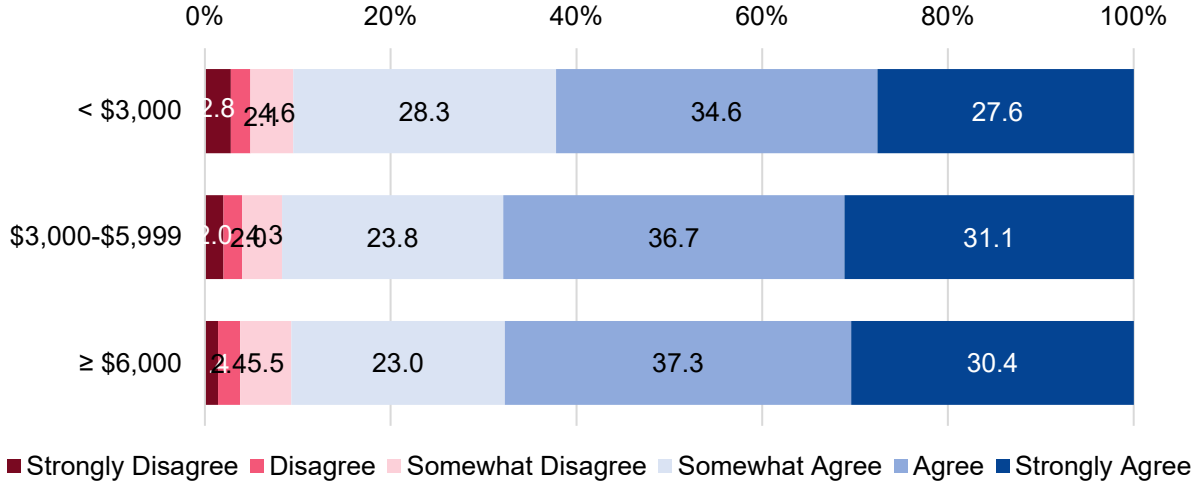
When compared across age groups, respondents aged above 60 were the most likely to agree or strongly agree that they feel a strong sense of belonging to Singapore, with 77.6 per cent indicating so. In contrast, those aged 41 to 50 were the least likely to say so, with 65.1 per cent agreeing or strongly agreeing that they feel a strong sense of belonging to Singapore (see Figure 3.1.2a).

Figure 3.1.2a: I feel a strong sense of belonging to Singapore, responses by age



When compared across personal income, there was a clear divide between those earning below $3,000 and those earning above that amount. While 62.3 per cent of those earning below $3,000 agreed or strongly agreed that they feel a strong sense of belonging to Singapore, the proportions increased to above two-thirds for those earning $3,000 and above (see Figure 3.1.2b).

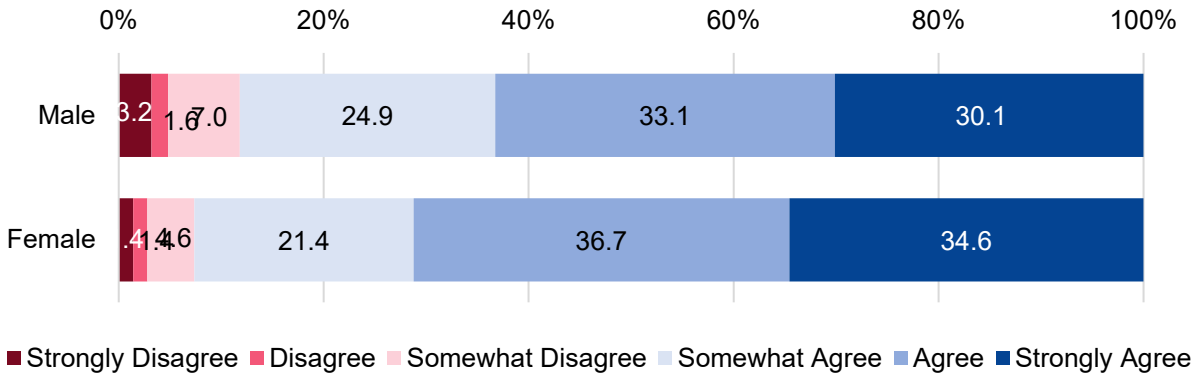
Figure 3.1.2b: I feel a strong sense of belonging to Singapore, responses by personal income



3.1.3 Females were more likely to express a preference to be Singaporean compared to being citizens of other countries

When asked whether they would prefer to be a citizen of Singapore rather than any other country in the world, female respondents were more likely than males to agree with the statement. Compared to 63.2 per cent of male respondents, 71.3 per cent of female respondents agreed or strongly agreed to this statement (see Figure 3.1.3).

Figure 3.1.3: I would prefer to be a citizen of Singapore than any other country in the world, responses by gender



3.1.4 Overall, subjective national attachment is relatively high; perceptions of national identity and quality of life were important contributors to subjective national attachment

The three items – affective pride, felt belonging, and preferential choice of Singaporean citizenship – were combined into a simple composite scale to capture subjective attachment to Singapore. The three items had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.915, and the derived mean score for subjective national attachment was 4.854 out of a maximum of 6 (see Table 3.1.4a).

Table 3.1.4a: Descriptive statistics for subjective national attachment

Mean score	Standard deviation
4.864	1.011

To better understand variables that might affect the degree of subjective national attachment, an Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression was conducted using the subjective national attachment scale constructed above. The results indicate that (1) respondents who rated the solidarity and participation or civic foundations aspects of national identity as more important, (2) rated Singapore civic-communal values or personal virtues higher as Singaporean traits, (3) rated civic friction traits lower as Singaporean traits, (4) rated *kiasu/kiasi* culture higher as Singaporean traits, and (5) had higher quality of life were more likely to have higher subjective national attachment scores. Some demographic differences also emerged. Born citizens (compared to

PRs) and those with ITE or secondary education (compared to degree holders) had higher subjective national attachment scores (see Table 3.1.4b).

Essentially, respondents who resonated with the importance of solidarity and civic values for national identity felt that Singaporeans had positive civic-communal and personal virtues, perceived the *kiasu/kiasi* culture as a Singaporean trait, and were more satisfied with their lives, and were more likely to feel a stronger sense of subjective national attachment. These aspects were, for the most part, not directly related to objective measures of wealth and socioeconomic status. Hence, it would appear that the strength of someone's subjective national attachment to Singapore is more closely related to how they view Singapore and Singaporeans, as well as their subjective perceptions of their lives.

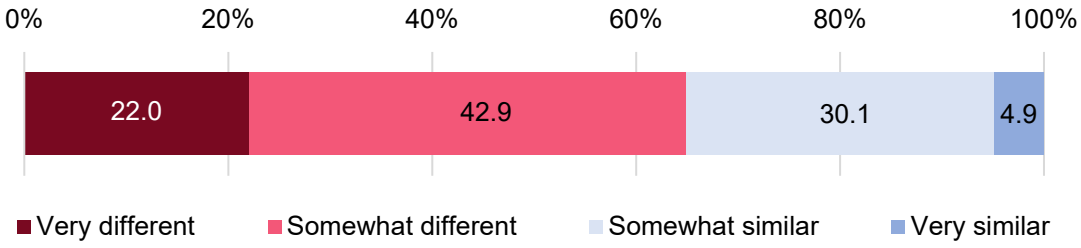
Table 3.1.4b: OLS regression model

Variables	Dependent variable: National belonging scale
	Standardised coefficient
Solidarity and participation	.304***
Civic foundations	.106***
Everyday culture	-.028
Positive traits of Singaporeans	
Singapore civic-communal values	.187***
Personal virtues	.118***
Law, order, and efficiency	-.001
Negative traits of Singaporeans	
Civic friction traits	-.145***
Kiasu/kiasi culture	.054*
Sheltered citizen syndrome	-.020
Quality of life	.140***
State of health	.001
Gender (females vs males)	.030
Age	-.003
Race (majority vs minority)	.009
Citizenship status	
Naturalised citizen	.009
PR	-.061***
Reference category: born citizen	
Education	
Secondary school/ ITE	.053**
Diploma/ Professional qualification	.026
Reference category: Bachelor's and above	
Monthly income	
$3,000 - $5,999	.024
≥ $6,000	-.012
Reference category: < $3,000	
Housing type	
HDB 4+-room	.025
Private property	.039
Reference category: HDB 1- to 3-room	
Adjusted R^2	.526

3.2 Over six in 10 respondents felt that Singapore's national identity today is different relative to a decade ago, but nearly half felt that it has grown stronger since then; over nine in 10 felt that having a national identity leads to success, unity, and stability

Respondents were asked about their thoughts on the nature and strength of Singapore's national identity. The term "national identity" was first explained to them in this section of the survey using an easy-to-understand textbook rendition – citizens feeling a sense of belonging to the nation, and identifying with a set of cultures, norms, and/or traditions that they associate with the nation (Easy Sociology, 2024). When asked to describe the nature of Singapore's national identity today compared to 10 years ago, respondents were more likely to indicate that it is at least somewhat different. Over six in 10 said that it is either very different (22 per cent) or somewhat different (42.9 per cent) compared to 10 years ago (see Figure 3.2a).

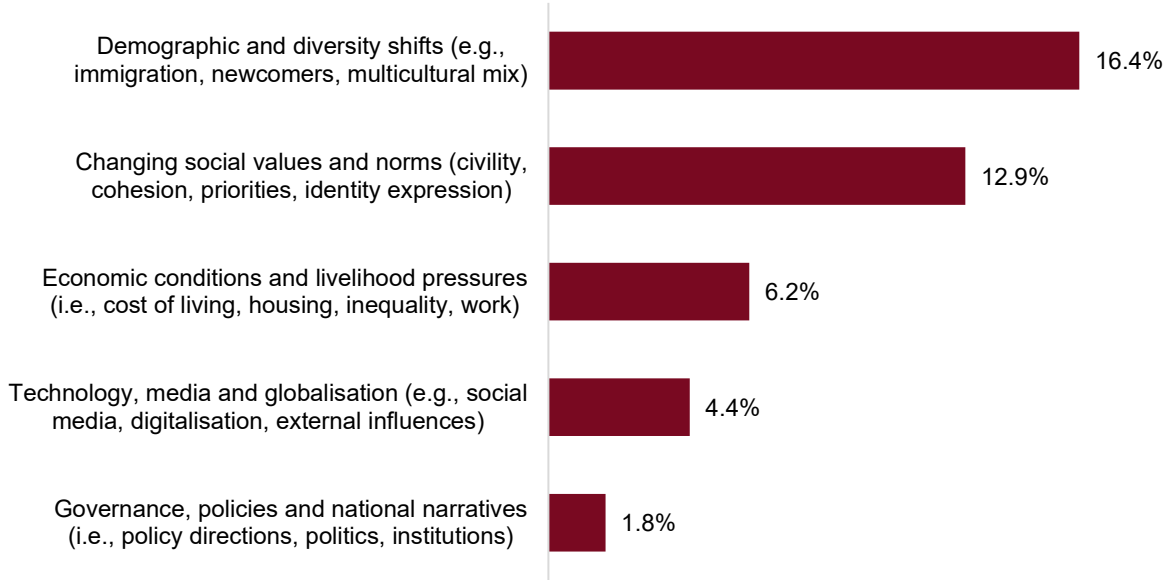
Figure 3.2a: How would you describe the nature of Singapore's national identity today as compared to ten years ago?



Respondents were further asked to provide explanations for their opinions towards the nature of Singapore's national identity in an open-ended response question item. Here, we unpack explanations from respondents who felt Singapore's national identity

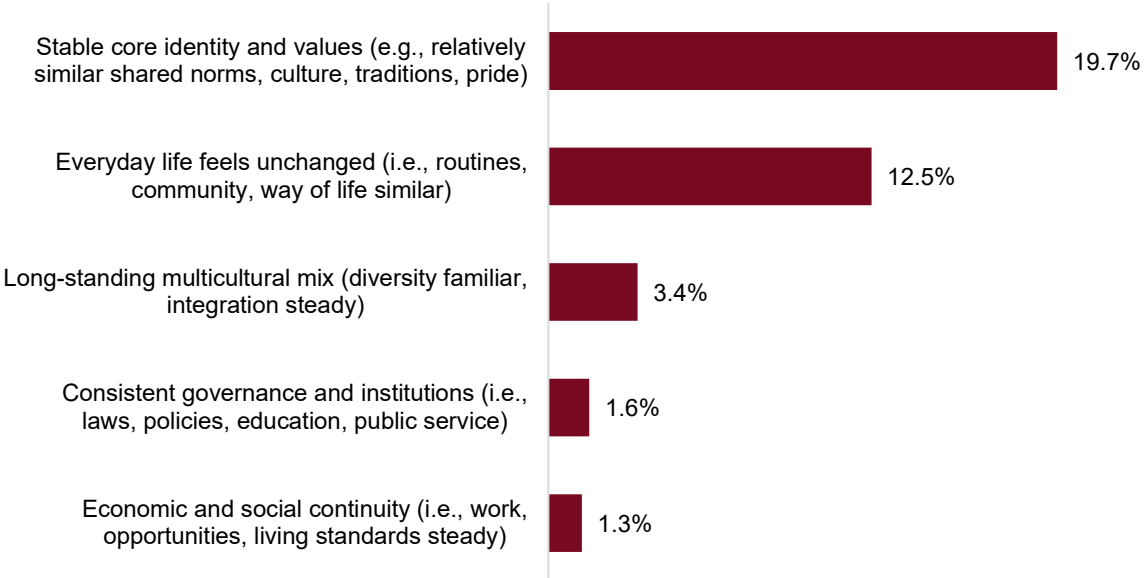
is very different or somewhat different from ten years ago; using automated text analysis, responses were grouped into salient themes. The most common reason cited was demographic and diversity shifts such as immigration, newcomers, and a changing multicultural mix (16.4 per cent). This was followed by changing social values and norms, including perceived shifts in civility, cohesion, priorities, and identity expression (12.9 per cent). A further share pointed to economic conditions and livelihood pressures, such as the cost of living, housing, inequality, and work (6.2 per cent). Others highlighted technology, media and globalisation, including social media and digitalisation, as external influences shaping identity (4.4 per cent). A smaller share referenced governance, policies and national narratives, such as policy directions, politics, and institutions (1.8 per cent) (see Figure 3.2b; also see Appendix 3 for examples of qualitative coding).

Figure 3.2b: "You indicated that Singapore's national identity today is very different or somewhat different compared to ten years ago. Why do you think so?" Top-5 Themes in qualitative responses



In contrast, among respondents who felt Singapore's national identity is very similar or somewhat similar to ten years ago, the open-ended explanations clustered around continuity rather than change. Again, using automated text analysis, the top themes were stable core identity and values such as relatively similar shared norms, culture, traditions, and pride (19.7 per cent); everyday life feels unchanged, referring to routines, community, and way of life being similar (12.5 per cent); a long-standing multicultural mix, with diversity viewed as familiar and integration steady (3.4 per cent); consistent governance and institutions, including laws, policies, education, and public service (1.6 per cent); and economic and social continuity, such as steady work opportunities and living standards (1.3 per cent) (see Figure 3.2c; also see Appendix 3 for examples of qualitative coding).

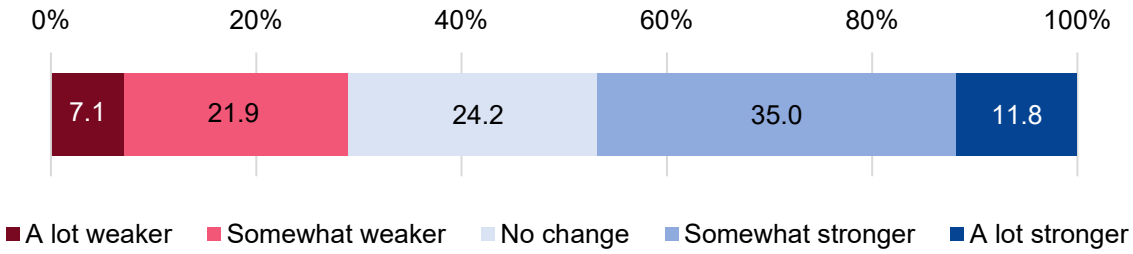
Figure 3.2c: "You indicated that Singapore's national identity today is very similar or some similar compared to ten years ago. Why do you think so?" Top-5 Themes in qualitative responses



When it comes to the strength of our national identity, 46.9 per cent of respondents said that Singapore's national identity is somewhat or a lot stronger today compared

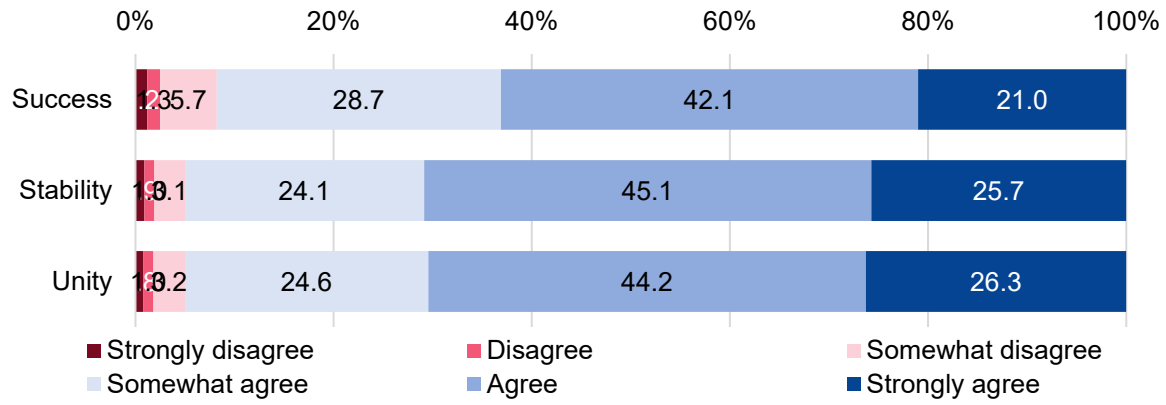
to 10 years ago. Another 24.2 per cent indicated that they felt there was no change in strength compared to 10 years ago (see Figure 3.2d).

Figure 3.2d: How would you describe the strength of Singapore's national identity today as compared to ten years ago?



Respondents were generally optimistic about having a national identity, with over nine in 10 agreeing to some extent that it will lead to success, stability, or unity. When comparing only the proportions who agree or strongly agree, respondents differed in their views of success, stability, and unity. While 63.1 per cent agreed or strongly agreed that having a national identity will lead to success, slightly over 70 per cent agreed or strongly agreed that having a national identity will lead to stability or unity (see Figure 3.2e).

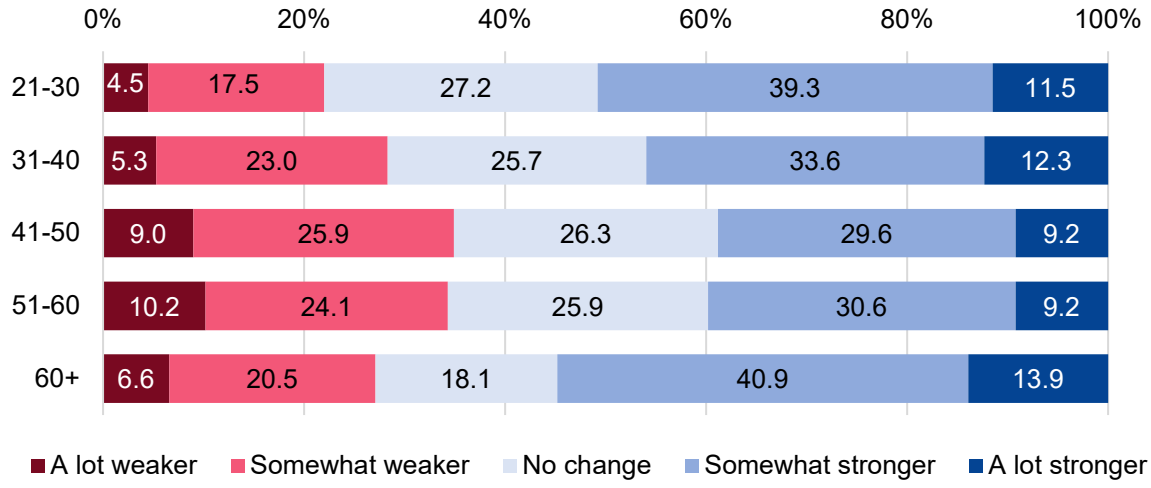
Figure 3.2e: Does having a national identity lead to...



3.2.1 Respondents who are middle-aged or have a university education were least likely to think Singapore's national identity is stronger compared to 10 years ago

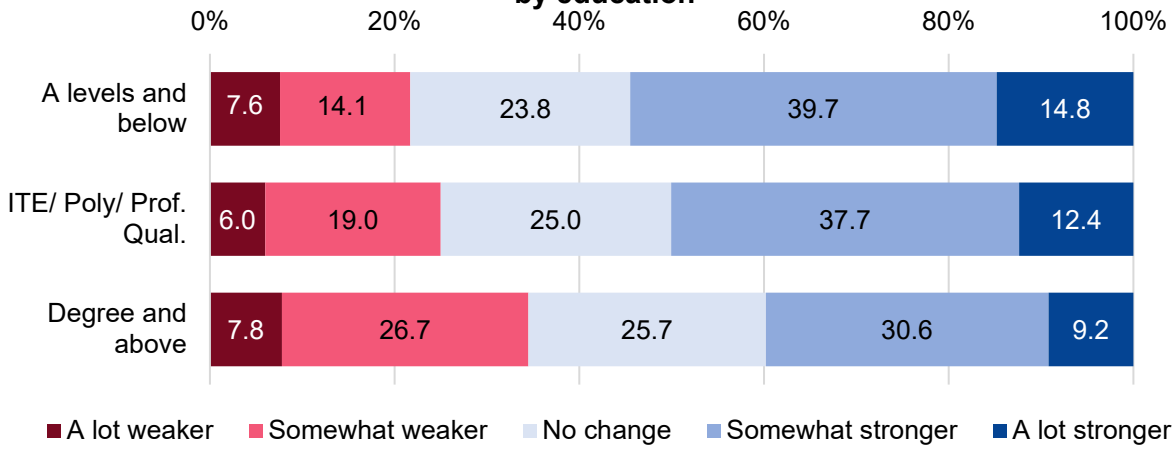
Middle-aged respondents were least likely to say that Singapore's national identity has become stronger than ten years ago. Just under four in 10 of those aged between 41 and 60 years old said that Singapore's national identity has become somewhat stronger or a lot stronger, compared to 45.9 per cent of those aged 31 to 40, 50.8 per cent of those aged 21 to 30, and 54.8 per cent of those older than 60 years old (see Figure 3.2.1a).

Figure 3.2.1a: How would you describe the strength of Singapore's national identity today as compared to ten years ago?, responses by age



Respondents with university degrees were least likely to indicate that Singapore's national identity has become at least somewhat stronger compared to 10 years ago. Just 39.8 per cent of this group indicated so, compared to over half of respondents with other educational qualifications (see Figure 3.2.1b).

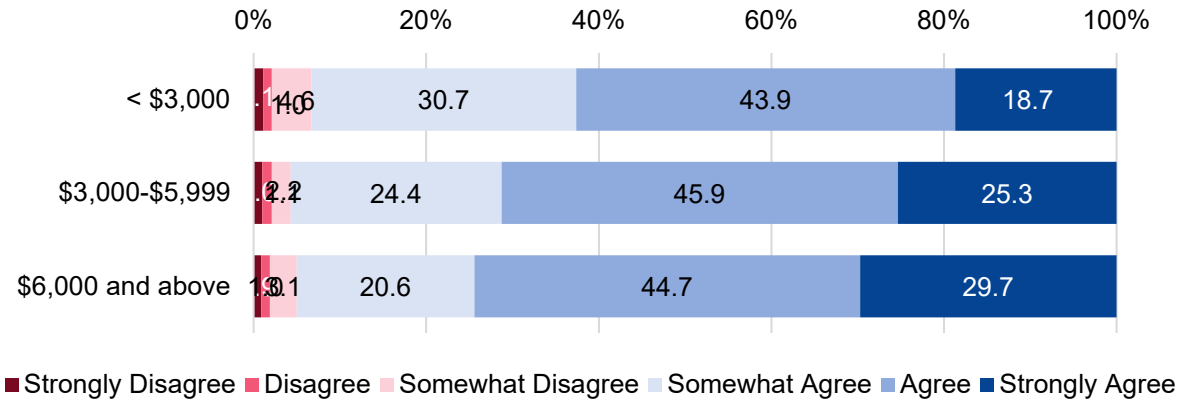
Figure 3.2.1b: How would you describe the strength of Singapore's national identity today as compared to ten years ago?, responses by education



3.2.2 Respondents who earn higher incomes were more likely to believe that national identity will lead to stability

When compared across income levels, respondents with higher incomes were more likely to express stronger agreement that having a national identity leads to stability. Compared with 62.6 per cent of respondents earning below $3,000, 74.4 per cent of respondents earning $6,000 or more agreed or strongly agreed that having a national identity would lead to stability (see Figure 3.2.2).

Figure 3.2.2: Does having a national identity lead to stability, responses by personal income

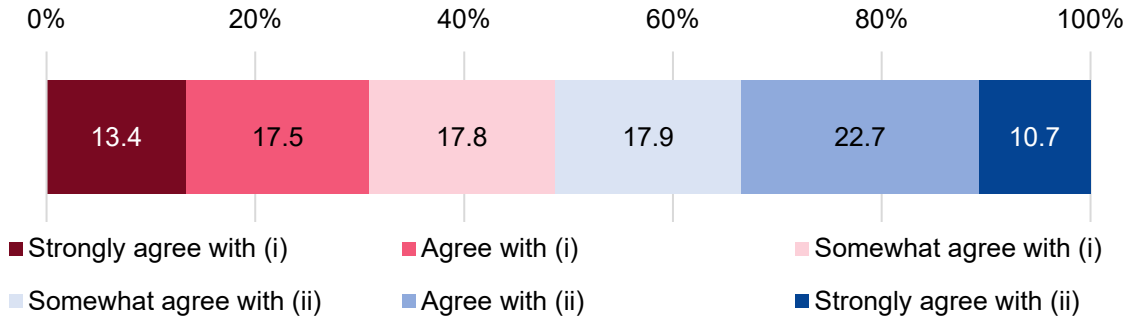


3.3 Respondents were split on whether citizens or government should take responsibility to shape national identity; about two-thirds viewed citizens' engagement with the government on policy matters as generally positive

Respondents were also asked about their views on the roles of government and citizens in shaping Singapore's national identity, as well as their willingness to participate in policy matters. In each instance, they were given two competing statements and asked to indicate which they agreed with more.

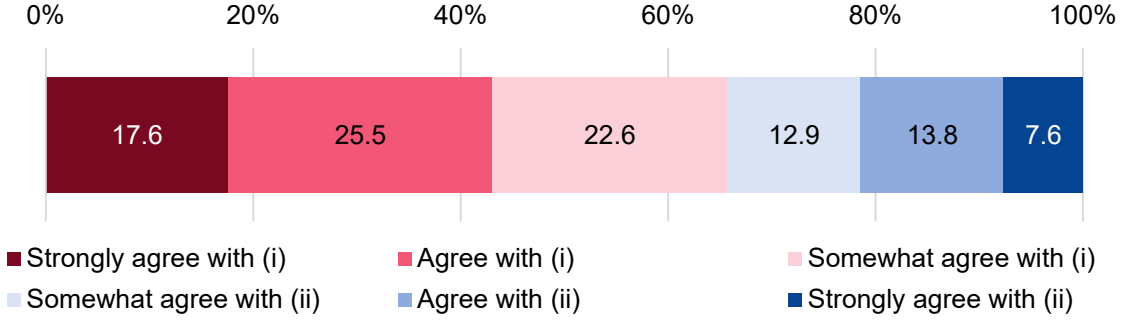
When it came to shaping Singapore's national identity, sentiments were split nearly down the middle. In total, 51.3 per cent of respondents agreed to varying degrees that citizens are responsible for shaping Singapore's national identity, compared with 48.7 per cent who felt that the government is responsible. In particular, 35.7 per cent indicated that they only somewhat agreed with either statement (see Figure 3.3a).

Figure 3.3a:
Statement (i): "The government is responsible for shaping Singapore's national identity",
or Statement (ii): "Citizens are responsible for shaping Singapore's national identity"



Meanwhile, respondents were more likely to be positive about citizens engaging with the government on policy matters. Around two-thirds agreed to some degree that citizen engagement with the government on policy matters is a positive thing, suggesting an inclination towards greater citizen participation. Even when only more emphatic levels of agreement, citizen engagement was still the preferred state of affairs: 43.1 per cent agreed or strongly agreed that it was a positive thing, compared to 21.4 per cent who agreed or strongly agreed that it was a negative thing (see Figure 3.3b).

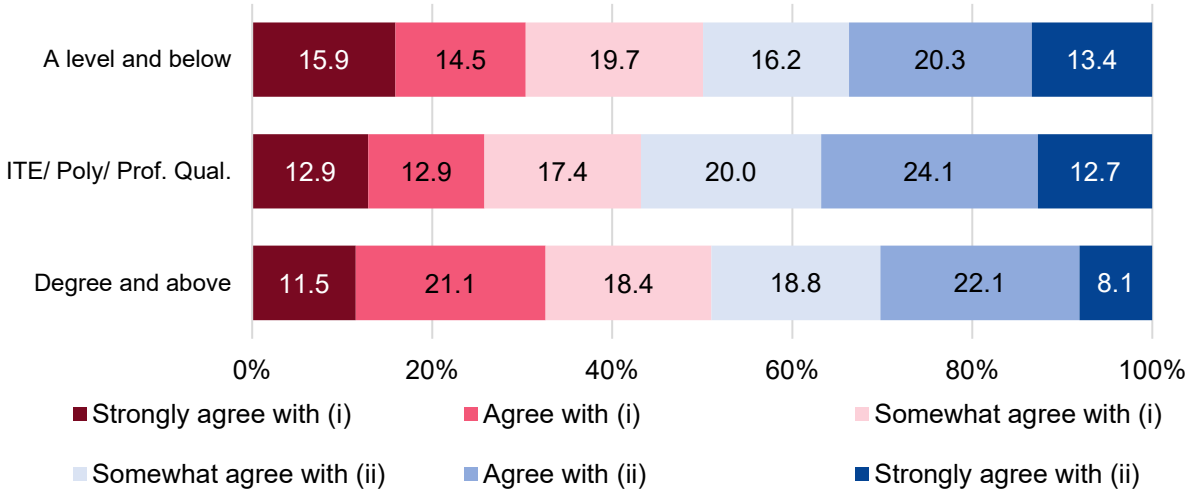
Figure 3.3b:
Statement (i): "Citizens engaging with the government on policy matters is generally a positive thing",
or Statement (ii): "Citizens engaging with the government on policy matters is generally a negative thing"



3.3.1 Respondents who have ITE, polytechnic or professional qualifications were slightly more likely to agree or strongly agree that citizens are responsible for shaping Singapore's national identity

Respondents with ITE, polytechnic, or professional qualifications were slightly more likely to believe citizens are responsible for shaping Singapore's national identity. In total, 36.8 per cent agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, compared with 33.7 per cent of those with 'A' Levels or below qualifications, and 30.2 per cent of university graduates (see Figure 3.3.1).

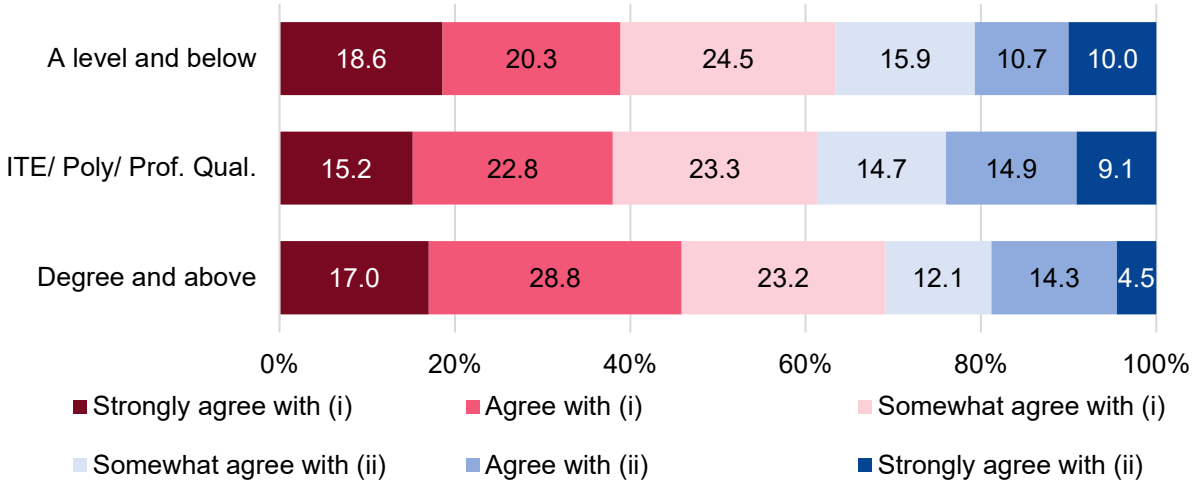
Figure 3.3.1:
Statement (i): "The government is responsible for shaping Singapore's national identity",
or Statement (ii): "Citizens are responsible for shaping Singapore's national identity", responses by education



3.3.2 Respondents who are university graduates or stay in larger housing types were more likely to think that citizens' engagement on policy matters is a positive thing

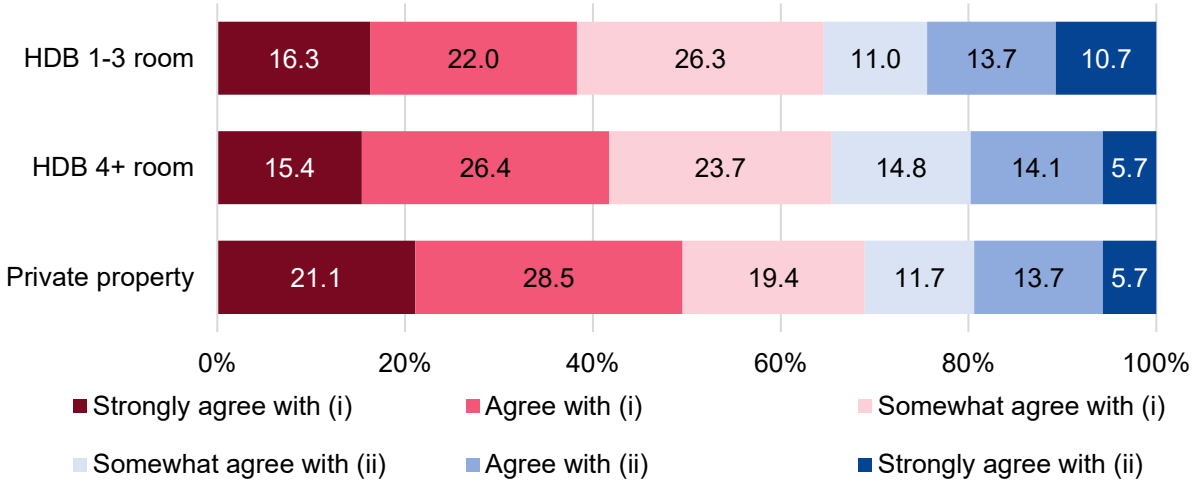
Respondents with university education were most likely to think citizens engaging with government on policy matters is generally a positive thing, with 45.8 per cent agreeing or strongly agreeing with this statement. In comparison, 38 per cent of those with ITE, polytechnic, or professional qualifications, as well as 38.9 per cent of those with 'A' Levels and below qualifications, indicated the same (see Figure 3.3.2a).

Figure 3.3.2a:
Statement (i): "Citizens engaging with the government on policy matters is generally a positive thing", or Statement (ii): "Citizens engaging with the government on policy matters is generally a negative thing", responses by education



Respondents in larger housing types were more likely to think that it is a positive thing for citizens to engage with the government on policy matters. Nearly half of private property dwellers (49.6 per cent) agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, compared to 41.8 per cent of those living in HDB 4-room flats or larger public housing, and 38.3 per cent of those staying in HDB 1- to 3-room flats (see Figure 3.3.2b).

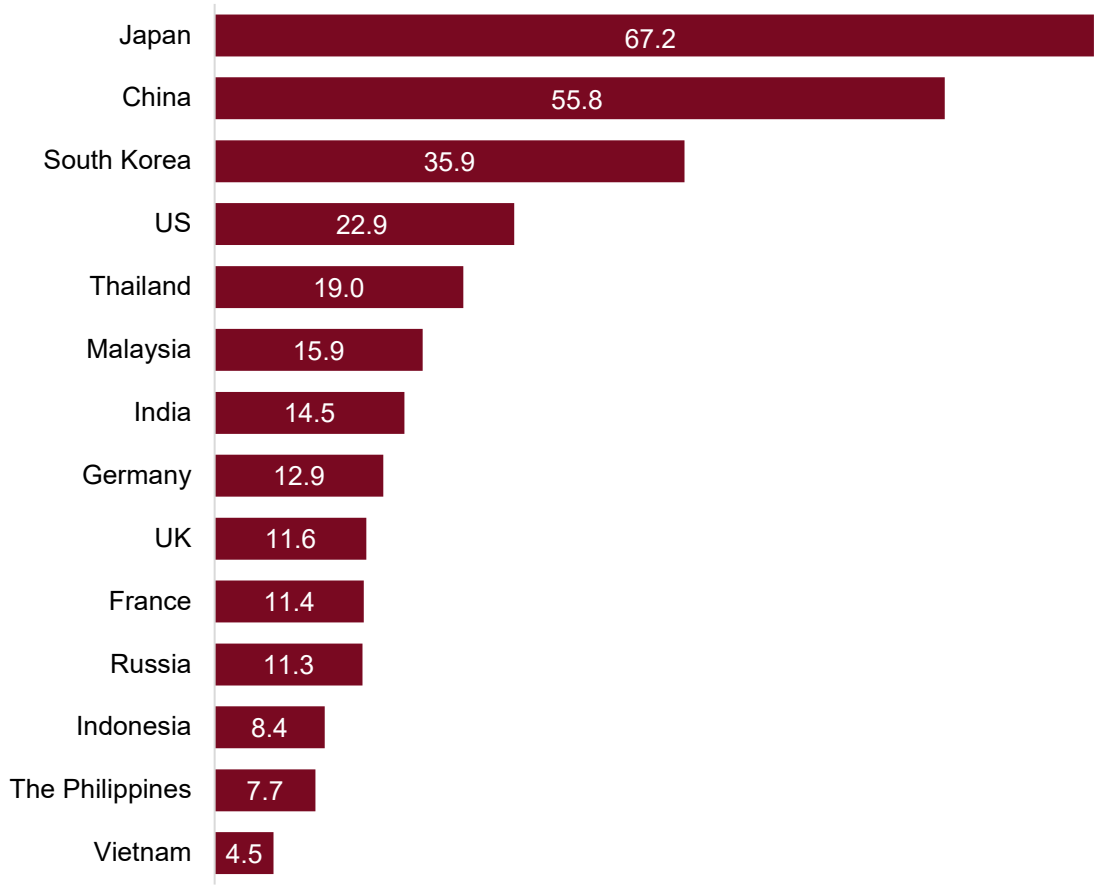
Figure 3.3.2b:
Statement (i): "Citizens engaging with the government on policy matters is generally a positive thing", or Statement (ii): "Citizens engaging with the government on policy matters is generally a negative thing", responses by housing type



3.4 Over two-thirds of respondents selected and ranked Japan as one of the top three countries with the strongest national identities; over half indicated likewise for China, and over one-third indicated likewise for South Korea

To elicit respondents' mental model of "identity strength" in the survey, we asked them to rank three countries from a list of 14 based on the strength of their national identities. Their selections provide cues about what Singaporeans equate with a "strong" identity, and reveal the reference points they use when thinking about national identity. Japan was the most popular choice; overall, 67.2 per cent of respondents selected Japan as one of their top three countries with the strongest national identity. This was followed by China (55.8 per cent) and South Korea (35.9 per cent) (see Figure 3.4). Appendix 2 provides a further breakdown of the proportion of respondents who selected each country on the list as having the strongest national identity.

Figure 3.4: Please select and rank three countries from the following list that you believe have the strongest national identities, proportions selecting each country listed



4. CHALLENGES TO NATIONAL IDENTITY

A strong national identity is often associated with social cohesion, fostering a shared sense of belonging, and trust. People who see themselves as part of the same “we” are more likely to trust and support one another emotionally and psychologically, which makes cooperation easier (Holtug, 2018).

However, national identity is just one potential facet that individuals use to form their personal identities. Other possible identity components that strongly influence an individual include cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. Identity components can vary considerably across individuals and hold traction with specific segments of the population. A recent report based on the 2024 IPS Survey on Race, Religion and Language showed that religion and race remain the most important identity markers for some segments of the population (Mathew et al., 2025). Concerns have been raised from time to time about whether certain identities conflict with national identity, alongside the ebb and flow of perceptions vis-à-vis group identities running counter to national identity.

Within the local context, there are also specific characteristics or experiences that people associate with being Singaporean, such as speaking Singlish, or males serving their compulsory national service in their late teens or early twenties. Some could also use the absence of such quintessentially local experiences or characteristics to determine whether one is indeed “truly” Singaporean. Hence, this chapter examines how respondents view the impact of group identities, demographic characteristics, and

local experiences on national identity. In this regard, socioeconomic status, country of birth, race, being “woke”, and not serving national service were viewed as potentially conflicting with our national identity. We included “being woke” and “believing in diversity” not to endorse any particular view, but because these question items reflect contemporary faultlines in public debate that can shape how people think about who “we” (Singaporeans) are. Both question items represent the discussions and disagreements surrounding equality, speech norms, history, gender and sexuality, and race; for some, they signal inclusive civic concern, while for others they raise worries about polarising identity politics or value drift.

This chapter also examines how people perceive the impact of new additions to society, on our national identity. Around one-third feel that foreigners and new citizens have had a positive impact on our national identity. Separately, at least three in 10 feel that new citizens and PRs have strengthened our cultural diversity, social cohesion, national values, and national identity to some extent, while at least two in 10 felt this way about the impact of foreigners on these four aspects.

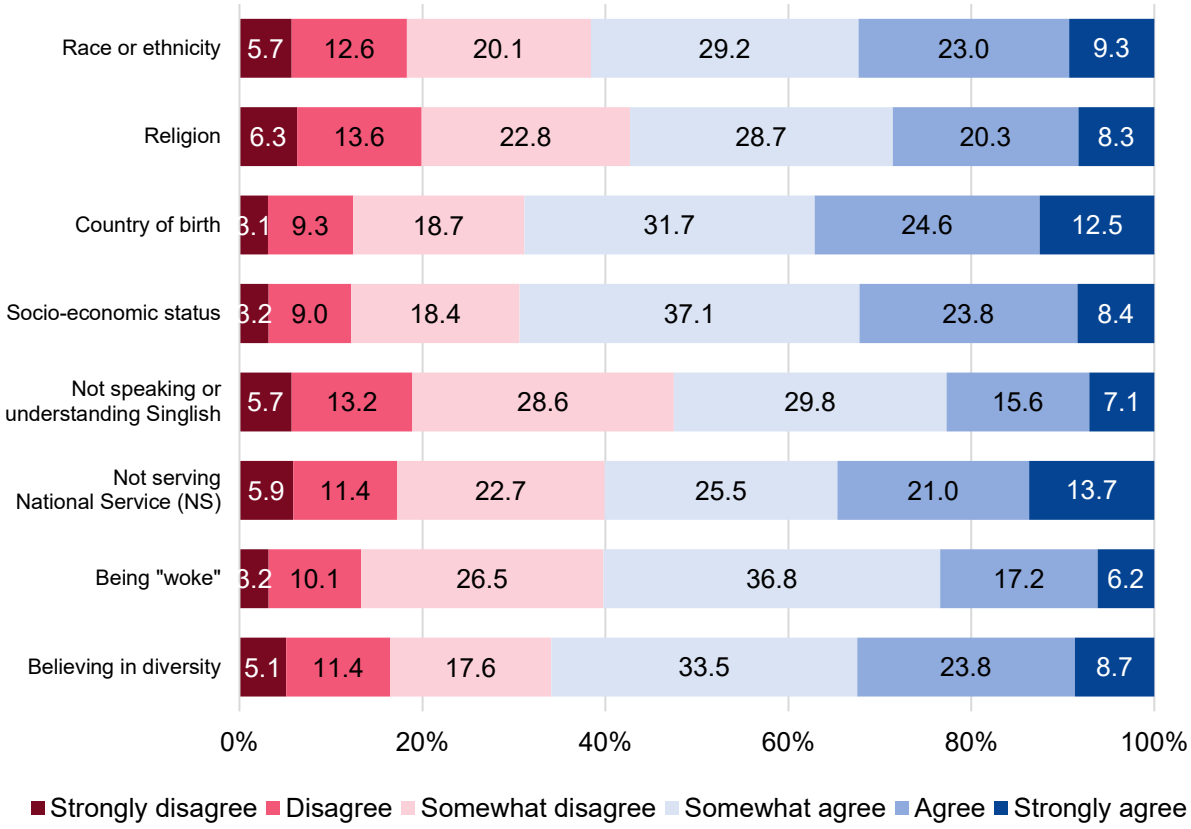
4.1 Two-thirds or more respondents agreed to varying extents that SES, country of birth, and the belief in diversity conflict with our national identity; about six in 10 indicated likewise for race or ethnicity, being “woke”, and not serving NS

We asked respondents about their beliefs on whether other common aspects of identity may conflict with Singapore’s national identity. The items we included in the

survey were those that have entered public discourse, but do not represent the complete list of possible variables that can conflict with identity.

Around two-thirds agreed to some extent that country of birth, socioeconomic status, or “believing in diversity” may conflict with national identity. Around six in 10 felt this about race or ethnicity, not serving National Service (NS), or being “woke”, while over half held such sentiments about religion and not speaking or understanding Singlish. Respondents were more likely to agree or strongly agree with this statement when it came to country of birth (37.1 per cent), not serving NS (34.7 per cent), and believing in diversity (32.5 per cent) (see Figure 4.1).

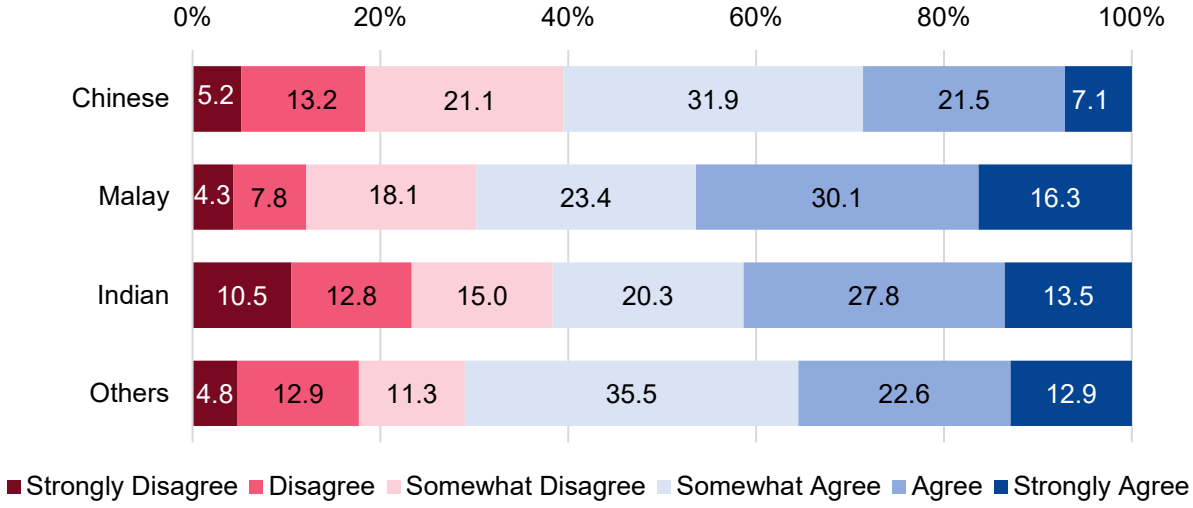
Figure 4.1: Some people may think that other things important to them may conflict with their sense of national identity (or belonging as a citizen). How much do you agree or disagree that the following may conflict with our national identity in general



4.1.1 Chinese respondents were least likely to say that race conflicts with national identity

When asked whether race or ethnicity may conflict with national identity, Chinese respondents were least likely to agree or strongly agree, with 28.6 per cent indicating that it did. Meanwhile, 46.4 per cent of Malay respondents, 41.3 per cent of Indian respondents, and 35.5 per cent of Others respondents indicated the same sentiments (see Figure 4.1.1).

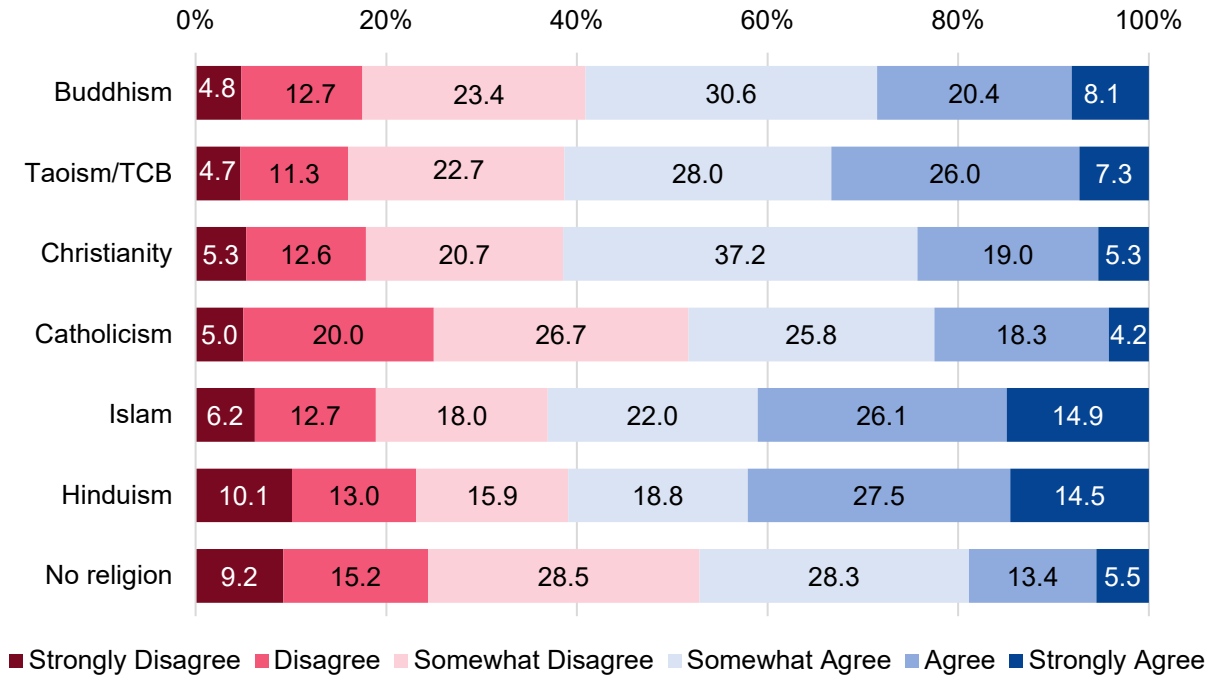
Figure 4.1.1: How much do you agree or disagree that race or ethnicity may conflict with our national identity in general?, responses by race



4.1.2 Those with no religion were the least likely to agree or strongly agree that religion conflicts with national identity

Respondents who indicated that they were Muslims or Hindus were more likely to agree or strongly agree that religion may conflict with our national identity in general. These two groups were the only ones in which more than four in 10 expressed such sentiments. In comparison, 33.3 per cent of Taoist respondents, over two in 10 Buddhist, Christian, and Catholic respondents, as well as 18.9 per cent of those with no religion agreed or strongly agreed with the statement (see Figure 4.1.2).

Figure 4.1.2: How much do you agree or disagree that religion may conflict with our national identity in general?, responses by religion

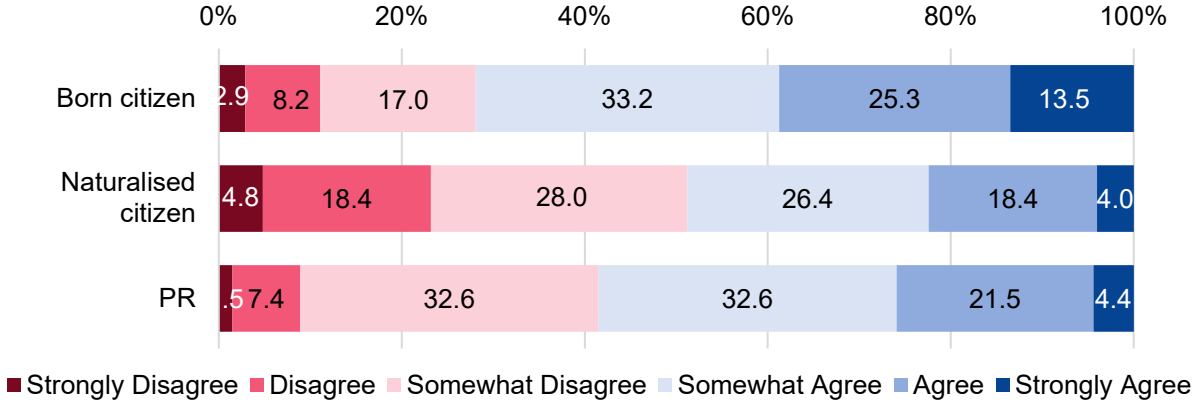


4.1.3 Respondents who are born citizens were most likely to agree that country of birth conflicts with national identity

Meanwhile, respondents who were born citizens were more likely to agree that country of birth may conflict with our national identity. Overall, 38.8 per cent of respondents

who were born citizens agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, compared to 22.4 per cent of naturalised citizens and 25.9 per cent of PRs (see Figure 4.1.3).

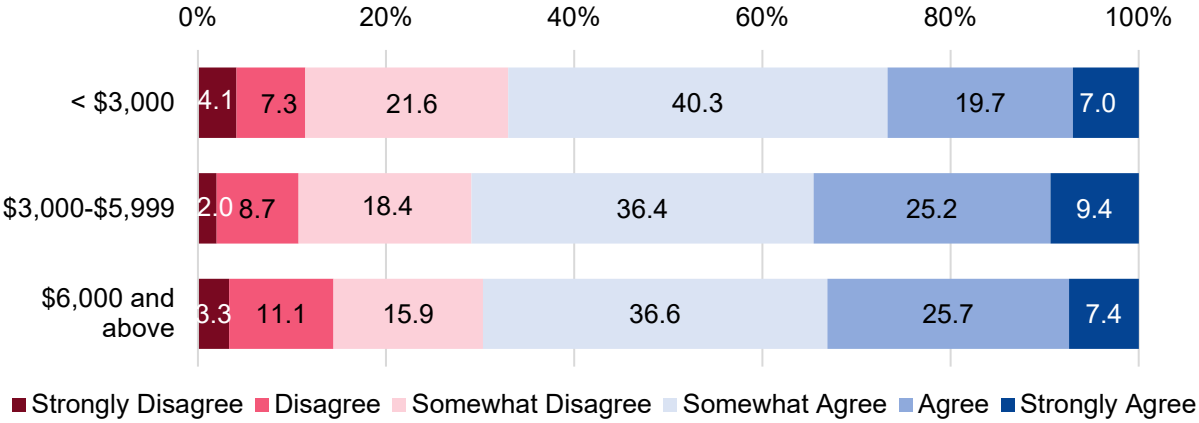
Figure 4.1.3: How much do you agree or disagree that country of birth may conflict with our national identity in general?, responses by citizenship



4.1.4 Lower-income respondents were less likely to agree that SES conflicts with national identity

When asked whether socioeconomic status would conflict with national identity, respondents earning less than $3,000 were less likely to report stronger agreement. Compared to 33.1 per cent of those earning $6,000 and above and 34.6 per cent of those earning between $3,000 and $6,000, 26.7 per cent of those who earn below $3,000 agreed or strongly agreed that socioeconomic status may conflict with our national identity (see Figure 4.1.4). Within each income group, respondents reporting a higher quality of life were also more likely to agree or strongly agree that socioeconomic status may conflict with our national identity. This difference was particularly pronounced for respondents earning between $3,000 and $6,000.

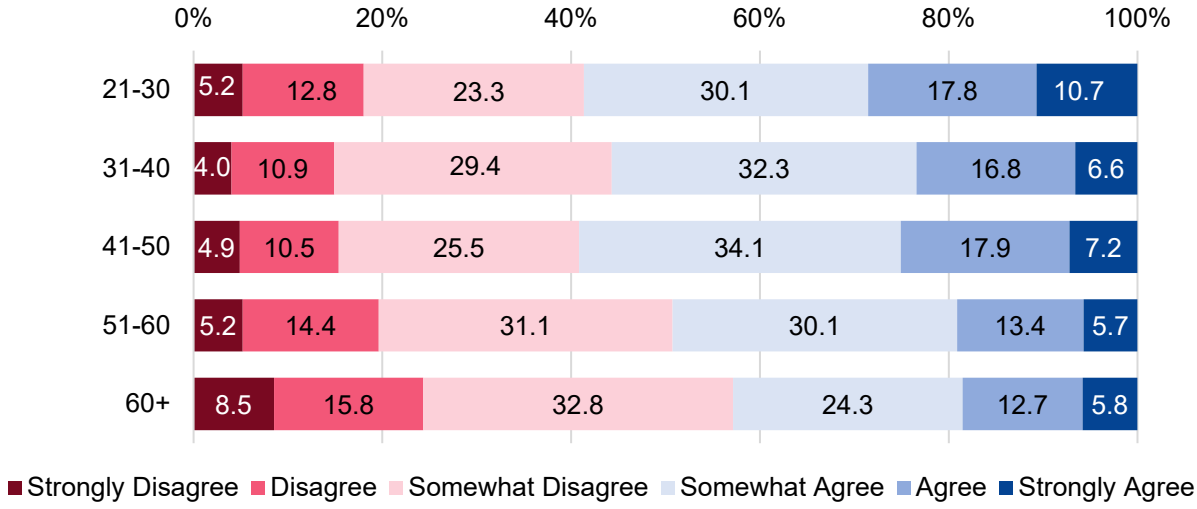
Figure 4.1.4: How much do you agree or disagree that socioeconomic status may conflict with our national identity in general?, responses by personal income



4.1.5 Older respondents were less likely to agree that not speaking Singlish conflicts with national identity

Over half of respondents from each age group indicated that they only somewhat agreed or disagreed that not speaking Singlish may conflict with our national identity. However, older respondents were less likely to agree or strongly agree with the statement. Compared with 28.5 per cent of those aged 21 to 30 years old, just 18.5 per cent of those aged over 60 agreed or strongly agreed that not speaking Singlish may conflict with our national identity (see Figure 4.1.5).

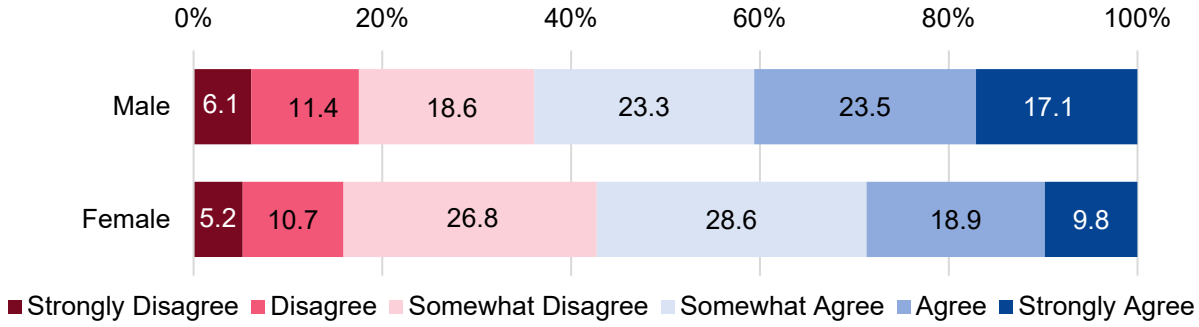
Figure 4.1.5: How much do you agree or disagree that <u>not speaking Singlish</u> may conflict with our national identity in general?, responses by age



4.1.6 Females and naturalised citizens were less likely to agree that not serving NS conflicts with national identity

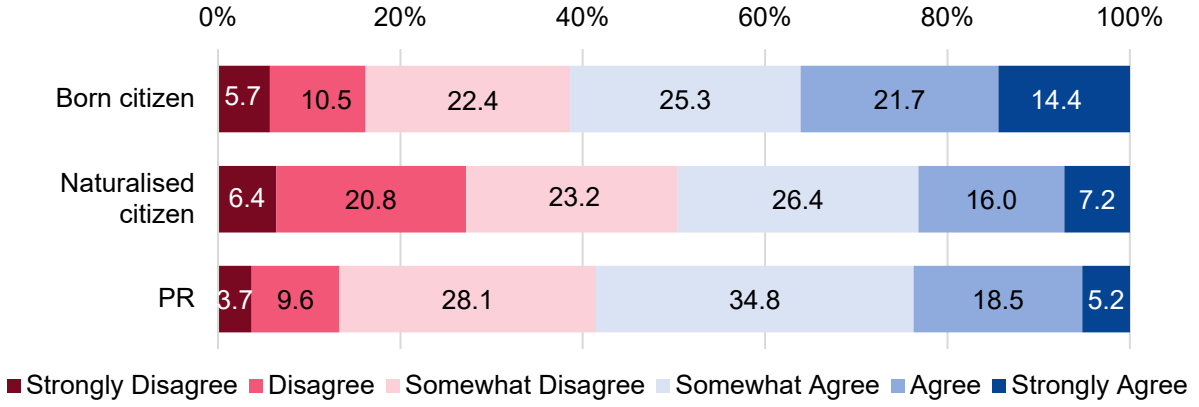
Males were more likely to agree that not serving NS may conflict with our national identity. Over four in 10, or 40.6 per cent, agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, compared to 28.7 per cent of female respondents. However, it should also be noted that a similar proportion (41.9 per cent) expressed only slight agreement or disagreement with the statement, indicating that they were less emphatic in their sentiments towards this state of affairs (see Figure 4.1.6a).

Figure 4.1.6a: How much do you agree or disagree that <u>not serving NS</u> may conflict with our national identity in general?, responses by gender



Comparing across citizenship statuses, born citizens were most likely to agree or strongly agree that not serving NS may conflict with our national identity, with 36.1 per cent indicating so. In comparison, naturalised citizens were most likely to disagree, with 27.2 per cent disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with the statement, compared to 16.2 per cent of born citizens and 13.3 per cent of PRs (see Figure 4.1.6b).

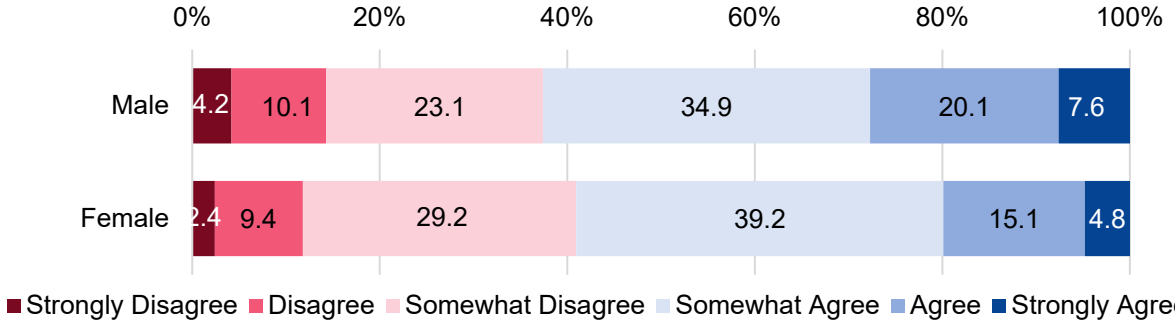
Figure 4.1.6b: How much do you agree or disagree that <u>not serving NS</u> may conflict with our national identity in general?, responses by citizenship



4.1.7 Females and naturalised citizens were less likely to agree or strongly agree that being woke conflicts with national identity

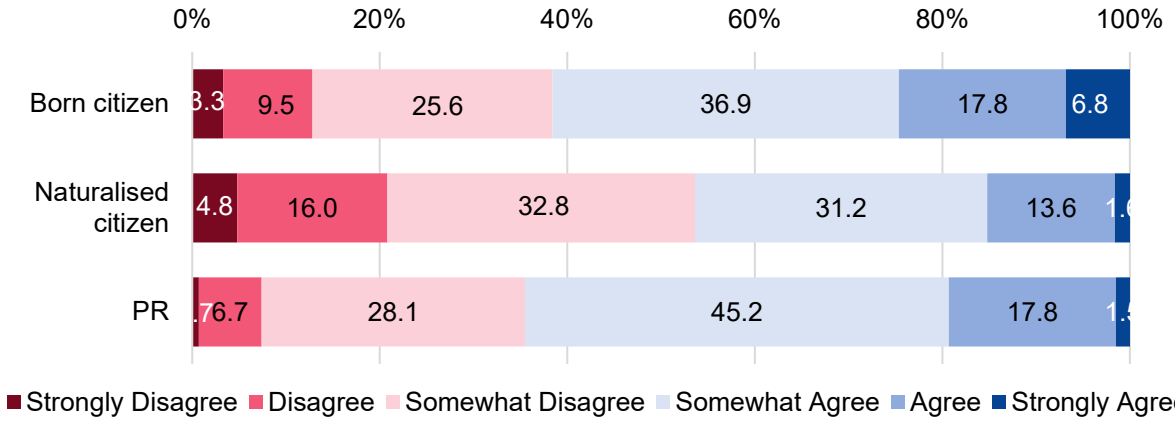
Males were more likely to agree or strongly agree that being woke may conflict with our national identity in general. While 19.9 per cent of female respondents felt this way, the proportion increased to 27.7 per cent for male respondents (see Figure 4.1.7a).

Figure 4.1.7a: How much do you agree or disagree that being woke may conflict with our national identity in general?, responses by gender



In addition, some differences were found across citizenship statuses. Naturalised citizens were least likely to agree or strongly agree that being woke may conflict with our national identity. Compared to 24.6 per cent of born citizens and 19.3 per cent of PRs, 15.2 per cent of naturalised citizens indicated so (see Figure 4.1.7b).

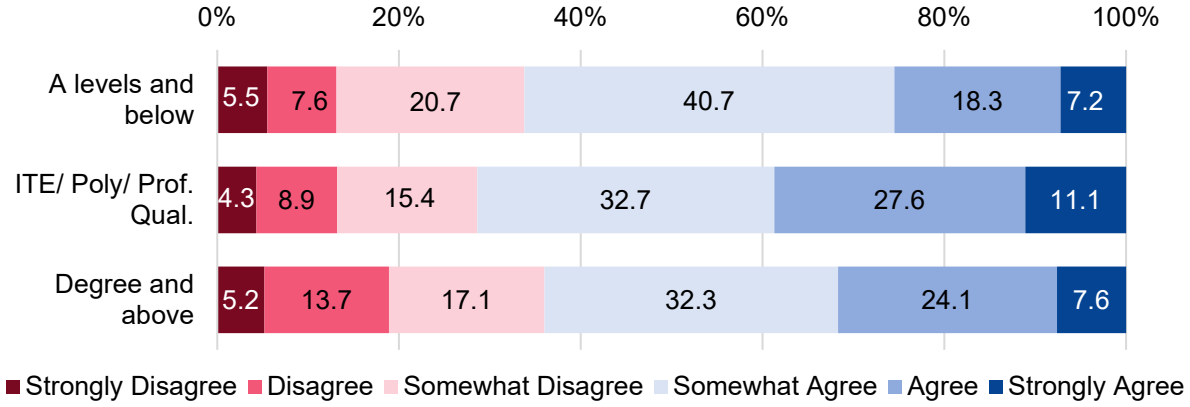
Figure 4.1.7b: How much do you agree or disagree that being woke may conflict with our national identity in general?, responses by citizenship



4.1.8 University graduates least likely to agree that believing in diversity conflicts with national identity

When it comes to believing in diversity, respondents with ITE, polytechnic, or professional qualifications were more likely to say they agree or strongly agree that it will conflict with our national identity. Overall, 38.7 per cent indicated so, compared to 23.5 per cent of those with 'A' Levels and below qualifications, and 31.7 per cent of university graduates (see Figure 4.1.8).

Figure 4.1.8a: How much do you agree or disagree that <u>believing in diversity</u> may conflict with our national identity in general?, responses by education

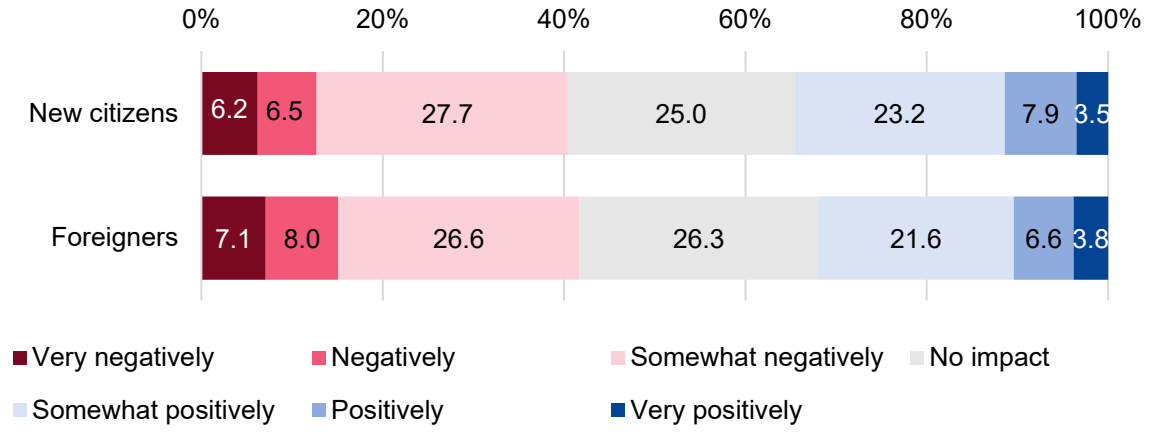


4.2 Around one-third felt that new citizens and foreigners have positively impacted national identity in Singapore; another one-quarter believed they do not impact national identity

The international literature generally agrees that new additions to society through immigration, naturalisation, or long-term residence can subtly reshape national identity over time. When newcomers enter a society, they bring diverse cultural norms, languages, and worldviews that may challenge established narratives about who "belongs" and what defines the nation. Based on Will Kymlicka's (1995) and Nils Holtug's (2020) works, this interaction can have two main effects: it may broaden national identity by encouraging more inclusive and civic-based definitions (rooted in shared values rather than ethnicity or heritage), or it may provoke defensive tightening, where existing citizens emphasise traditional symbols and behaviours to preserve perceived cohesion.

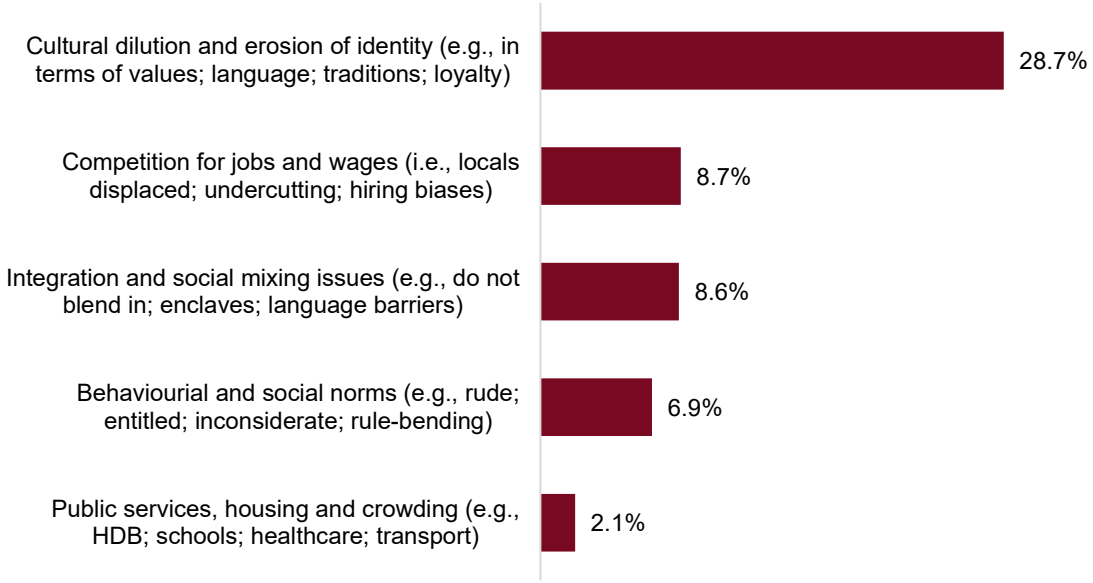
As such, we asked a series of questions about how respondents feel these new additions may have affected Singapore. In general, sentiments towards new citizens and foreigners were similar. For one, around one-quarter felt that new citizens and foreigners have no impact on Singapore's national identity. Around four in 10 felt they had negatively impacted national identity to some extent, while around one-third felt they had positively impacted it (see Figure 4.2a).

Figure 4.2a: How have _____ impacted national identity in Singapore?



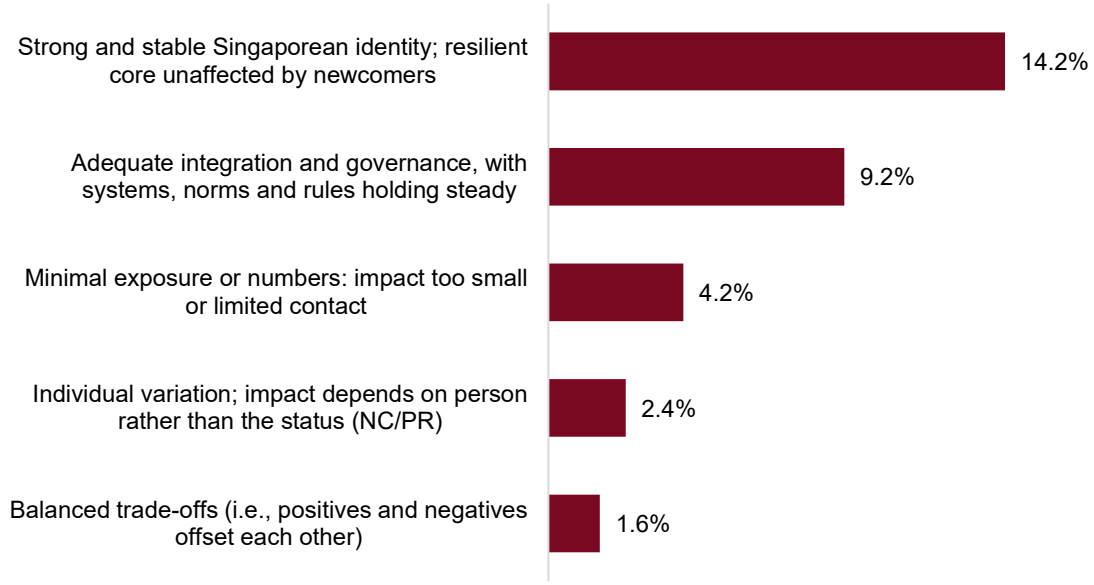
Respondents who indicated that new citizens or PRs have negatively impacted national identity were asked to explain their views. Using automated text analysis, we grouped these open-ended responses into salient themes. The top five most-commonly referenced were cultural dilution and erosion of identity in terms of values, language, traditions, or loyalty (28.7 per cent); competition for jobs and wages such as locals being displaced, undercutting, or hiring biases (8.7 per cent); integration and social mixing issues including not blending in, enclaves, or language barriers (8.6 per cent); behavioural and social norms such as being rude, entitled, inconsiderate, or rule-bending (6.9 per cent); and pressure on public services, housing, and crowding including HDB, schools, healthcare, or transport (2.1 per cent) (see Figure 4.2b; also see Appendix 3 for examples of qualitative coding).

Figure 4.2b: "You indicated that new citizens / PRs have *negatively* impacted national identity in Singapore ... why? Top-5 Themes in qualitative responses mentioned



Respondents who indicated that new citizens or PRs have not impacted national identity were also asked for the reasons behind their responses. Grouping their responses shows the top five themes included the extant presence of a strong and stable Singaporean identity with a resilient core unaffected by newcomers (14.2 per cent); adequate integration and governance, with systems, norms, and rules holding steady (9.2 per cent); minimal exposure or numbers, with impact viewed as too small or contact limited (4.2 per cent); individual variation, where impact depends on the person rather than NC/PR status (2.4 per cent); and balanced trade-offs, where positives and negatives offset each other (1.6 per cent) (see Figure 4.2c; also see Appendix 3 for examples of qualitative coding).

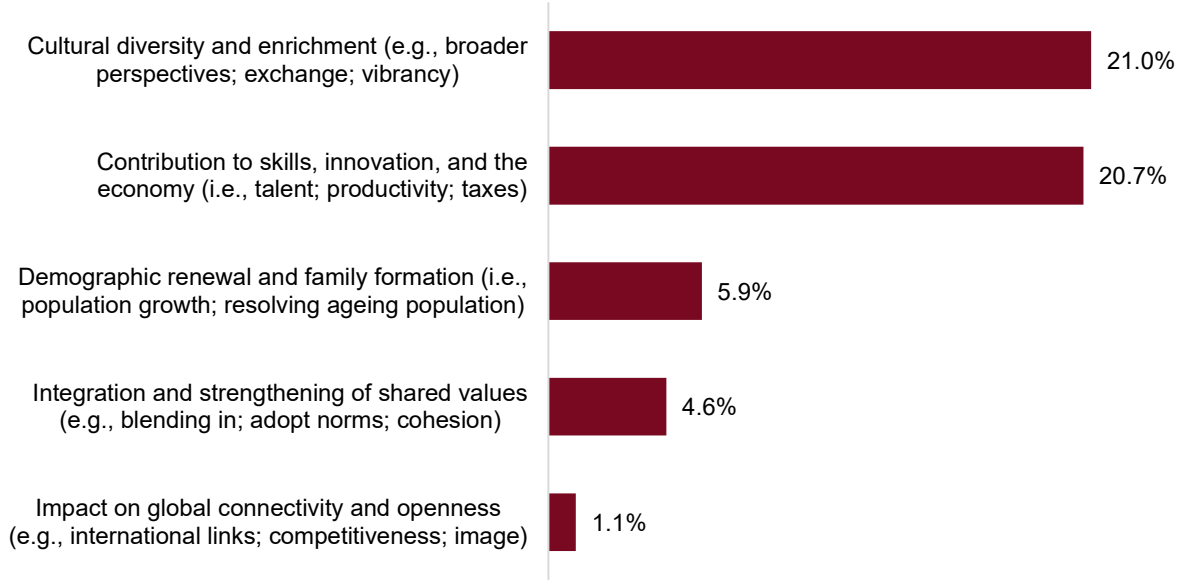
Figure 4.2c: "You indicated that new citizens / PRs have *not impacted* national identity in Singapore ... why? Top-5 Themes in qualitative responses mentioned



Among respondents who felt that new citizens or PRs have positively impacted national identity, the top themes based on a thematic analysis of their open-ended responses justifying their answers were cultural diversity and enrichment, citing

broader perspectives, exchange, and vibrancy (21 per cent); contribution to skills, innovation, and the economy, including talent, productivity, and taxes (20.7 per cent); demographic renewal and family formation, such as population growth and addressing an ageing population (5.9 per cent); integration and strengthening of shared values, including blending in, adopting norms, and cohesion (4.6 per cent); and impact on global connectivity and openness, such as international links, competitiveness, and image (1.1 per cent) (see Figure 4.2d; also see Appendix 3 for examples of qualitative coding).

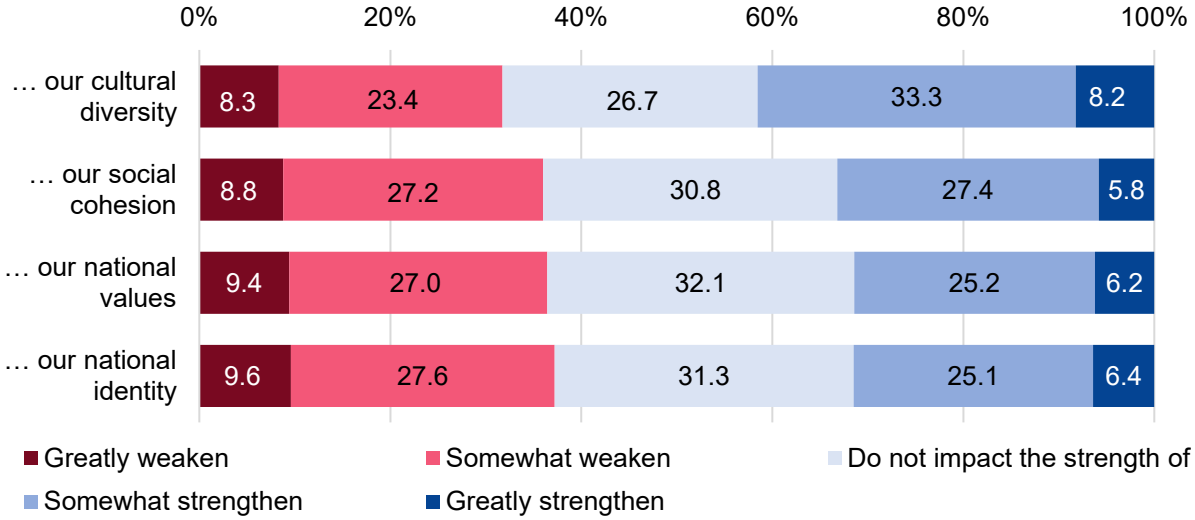
Figure 4.2d: "You indicated that new citizens / PRs have *positively* impacted national identity in Singapore ... why? Top-5 Themes in qualitative responses mentioned



When asked how these new additions affect different aspects of Singapore's national identity, sentiments were generally positive. Between one-quarter and one-third felt that new citizens have no impact on our cultural diversity, social cohesion, national values, or national identity. Sentiments were more positive about their impact on cultural diversity, with 41.5 per cent indicating that new citizens somewhat or greatly

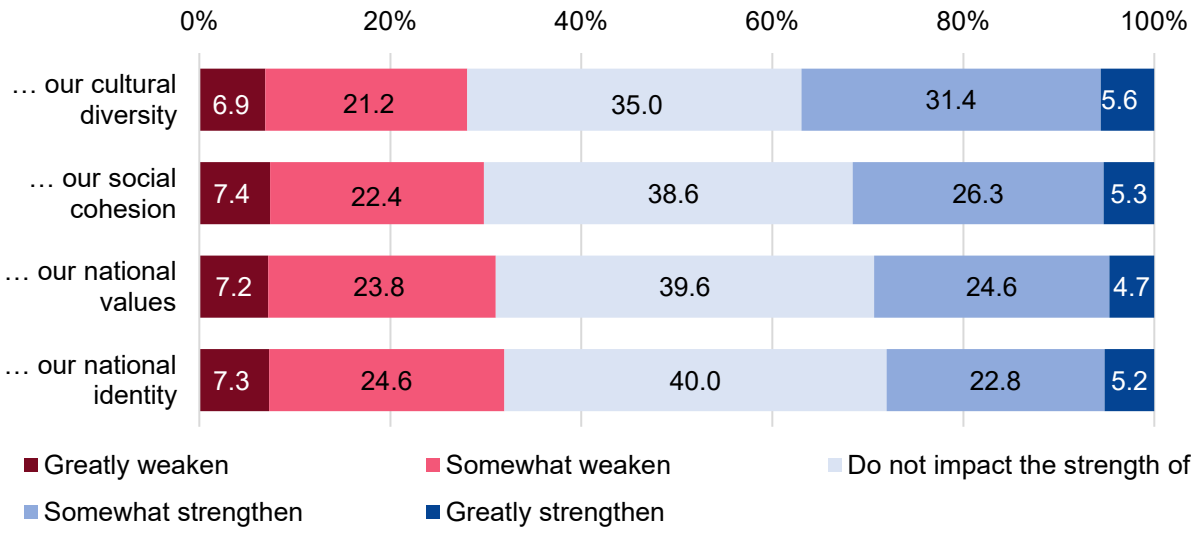
strengthen this aspect. Meanwhile, around three in 10 felt that new citizens somewhat or greatly strengthen our social cohesion, national values, or national identity (see Figure 4.2e).

Figure 4.2e: In general, what do you think is the impact of new citizens on the following aspects of national identity in Singapore? New citizens...



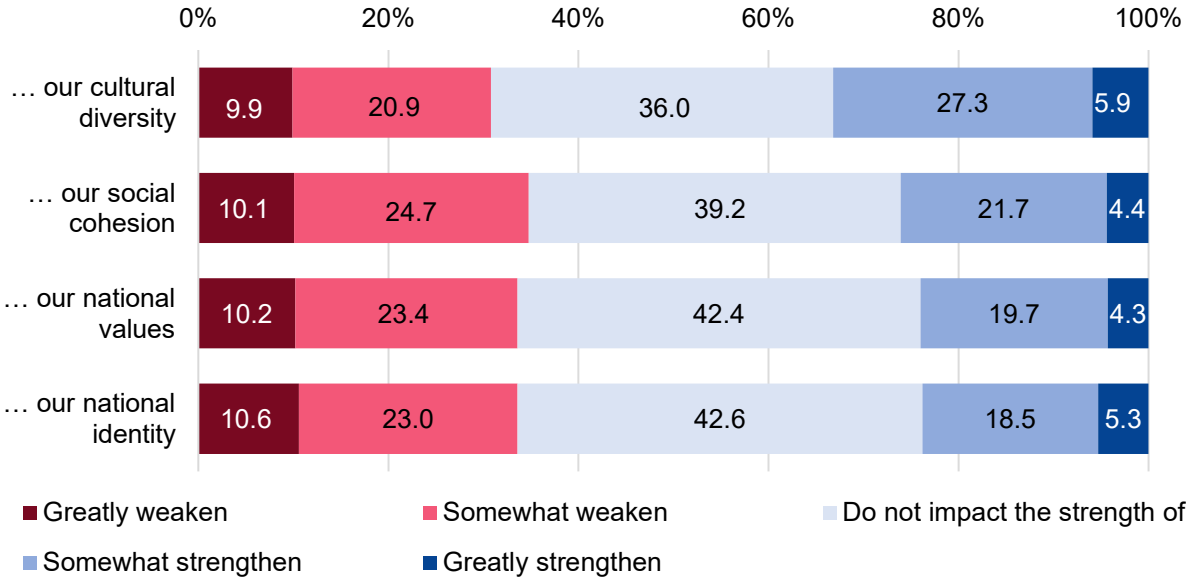
When asked about their thoughts on PRs, 35 to 40 per cent of respondents said they have no impact on Singapore's cultural diversity, social cohesion, national values, or national identity. In addition, 37 per cent felt that PRs strengthen our cultural diversity, 31.6 per cent felt that they strengthen our social cohesion, 29.3 per cent felt that they strengthen our national values, and 28 per cent felt that they strengthen our national identity (see Figure 4.2f).

Figure 4.2f: In general, what do you think is the impact of PRs on the following aspects of national identity in Singapore? PRs...



Meanwhile, 36 per cent of respondents felt that foreigners working in Singapore have no impact on our cultural diversity, while 33.2 per cent felt that they strengthen it. Responses were quite similar regarding the impact on social cohesion, national values, and national identity: around four in 10 felt they did not affect these aspects. In contrast, one-quarter felt they strengthened them (see Figure 4.2g).

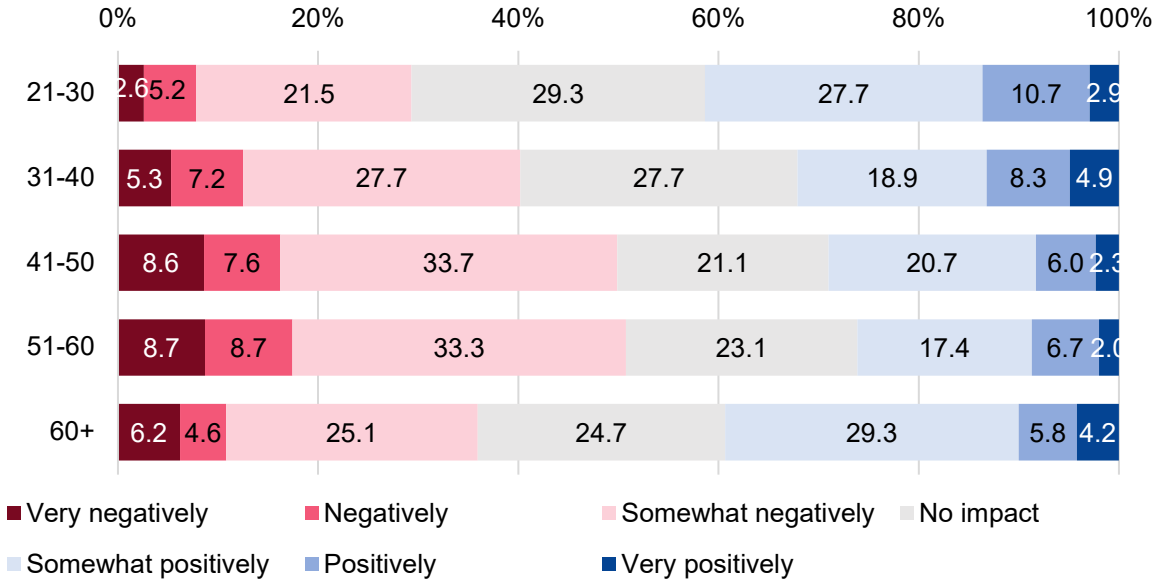
Figure 4.2g: In general, what do you think is the impact of foreigners who work here on the following aspects of national identity in Singapore? Foreigners...



4.2.1 Respondents aged 21 to 30 were most positive about new citizens', PRs', and foreigners' impact on different aspects of Singapore society, followed by those older than 60

When compared across age groups, respondents aged 21 to 30 were the most positive about the impact of new citizens on national identity. Overall, 41.3 per cent of this group indicated that the impact was positive to some extent, with 13.6 per cent saying it was positive or very positive. Those aged above 60 years old were the second-most positive about new citizens, with 39.3 per cent saying that the impact was positive to some extent, but with just 10 per cent indicating that the impact was positive or very positive, while the remaining 29.3 per cent felt that it was somewhat positive (see Figure 4.2.1a).

Figure 4.2.1a: How have <u>new citizens</u> impacted national identity in Singapore?, responses by age



The youngest cohort of respondents expressed the greatest optimism about the impact of new citizens on Singapore's social fabric. A majority (59.4 per cent) believed that new citizens strengthen our cultural diversity, while under half felt they enhance social cohesion (45.8 per cent), reinforce national values (40 per cent), and contribute positively to national identity (41.4 per cent) to a somewhat or great extent. In contrast, respondents aged 51 to 60 were more reserved in their assessments. Only about three in ten (30.3 per cent) of this group felt that new citizens bolster cultural diversity, and fewer saw positive effects on social cohesion (24 per cent), national values (23.4 per cent), or national identity (22.2 per cent) (see Figures 4.2.1b to 4.2.1e).

Figure 4.2.1b: New citizens ___ our cultural diversity, responses by age

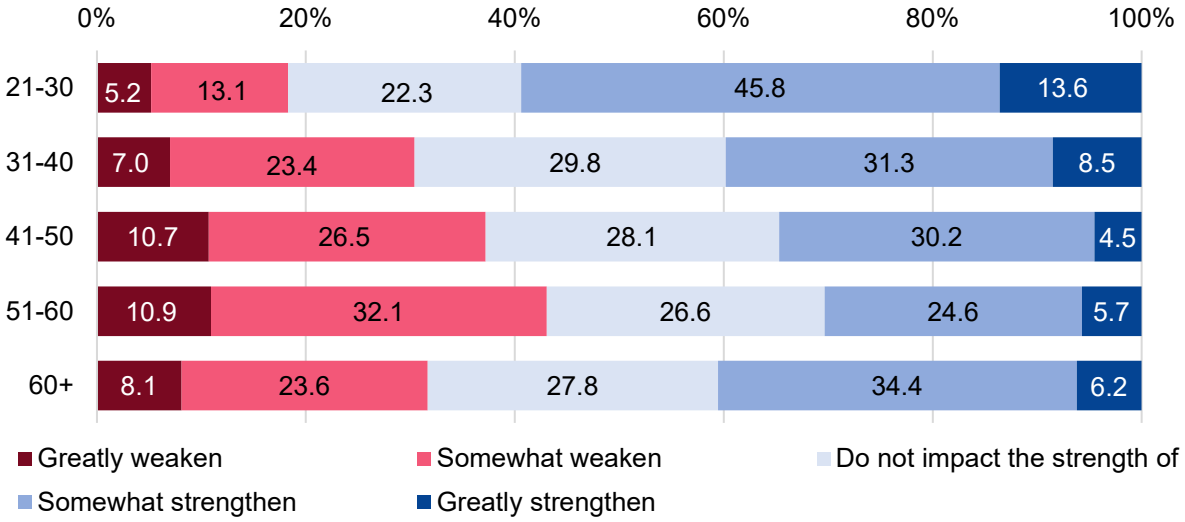


Figure 4.2.1c: New citizens ___ our social cohesion, responses by age

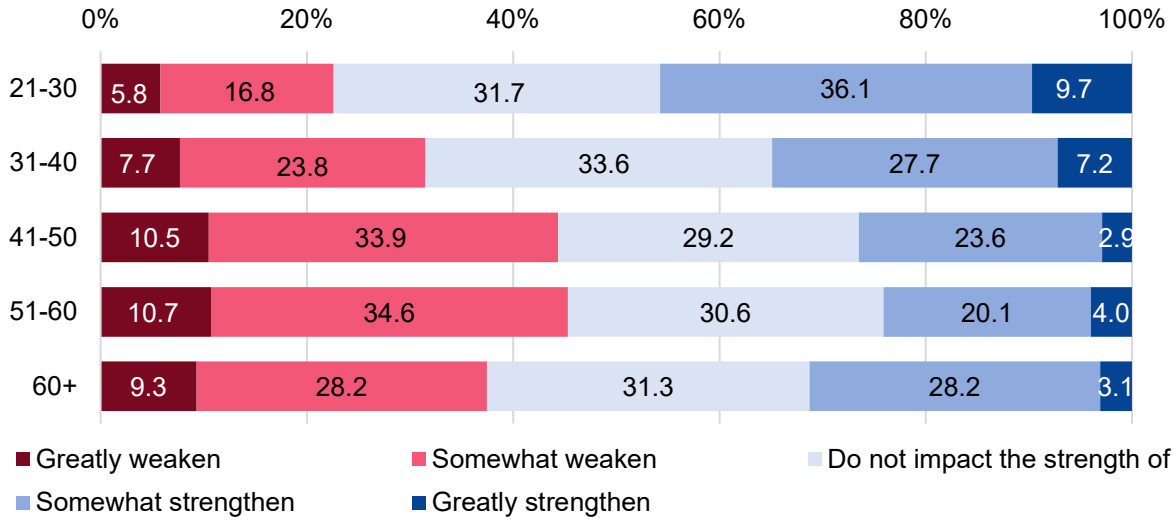


Figure 4.2.1d: New citizens ___ our national values, responses by age

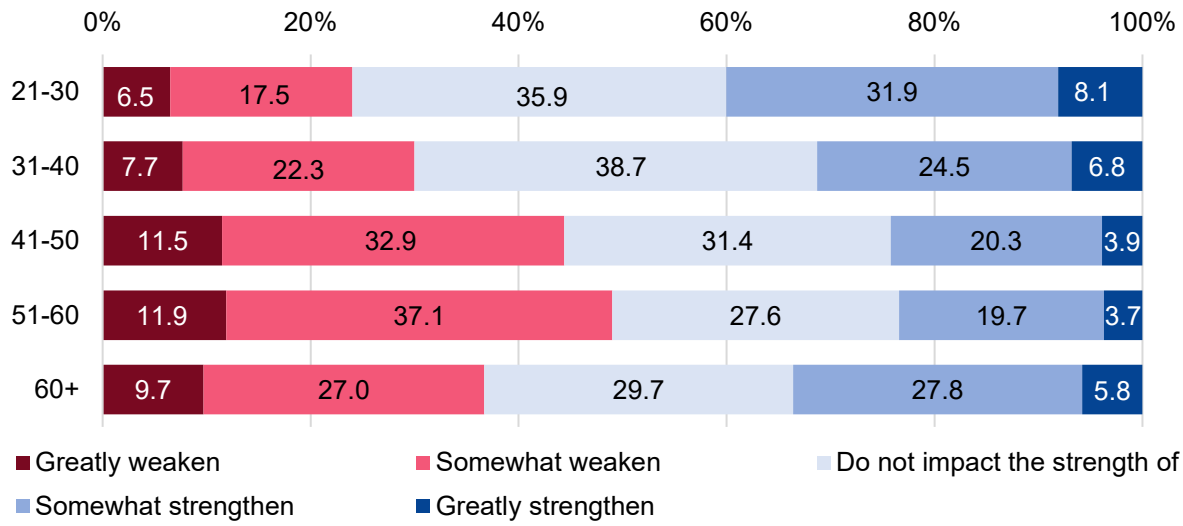
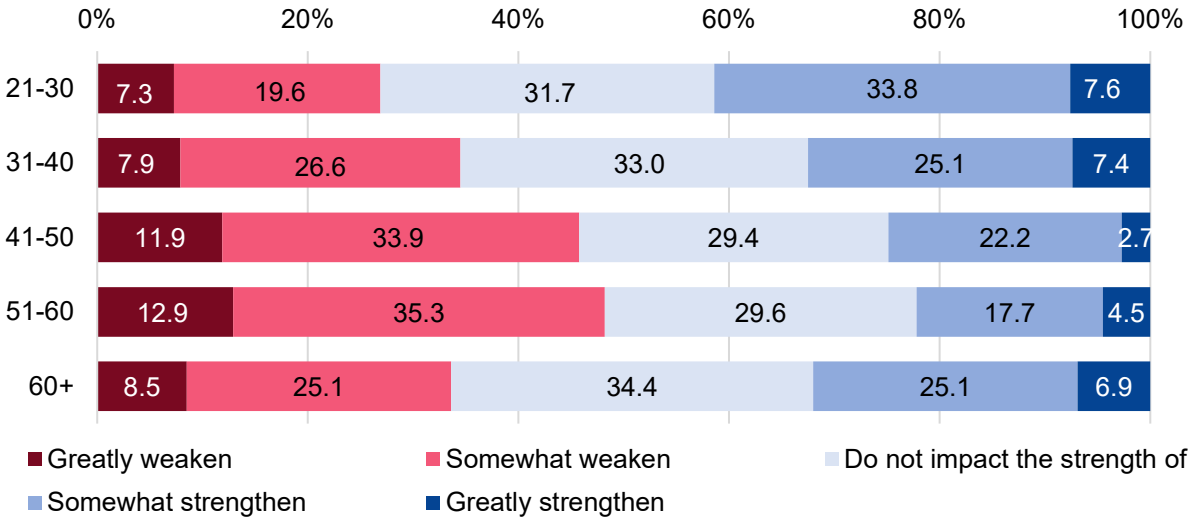


Figure 4.2.1e: New citizens ___ our national identity, responses by age



When asked about PRs, the youngest respondents again stood out as the most positive. More than half (54.9 per cent) felt that PRs contribute to cultural diversity, while nearly as many believed they strengthen social cohesion (48.5 per cent), reinforce national values (47.5 per cent), and enhance national identity (43.9 per cent) somewhat or greatly. Compared with older age groups, they were also least likely to

feel that PRs make no difference to these aspects of national life (see Figures 4.2.1f to 4.2.1i).

Figure 4.2.1f: PRs ___ our cultural diversity, responses by age

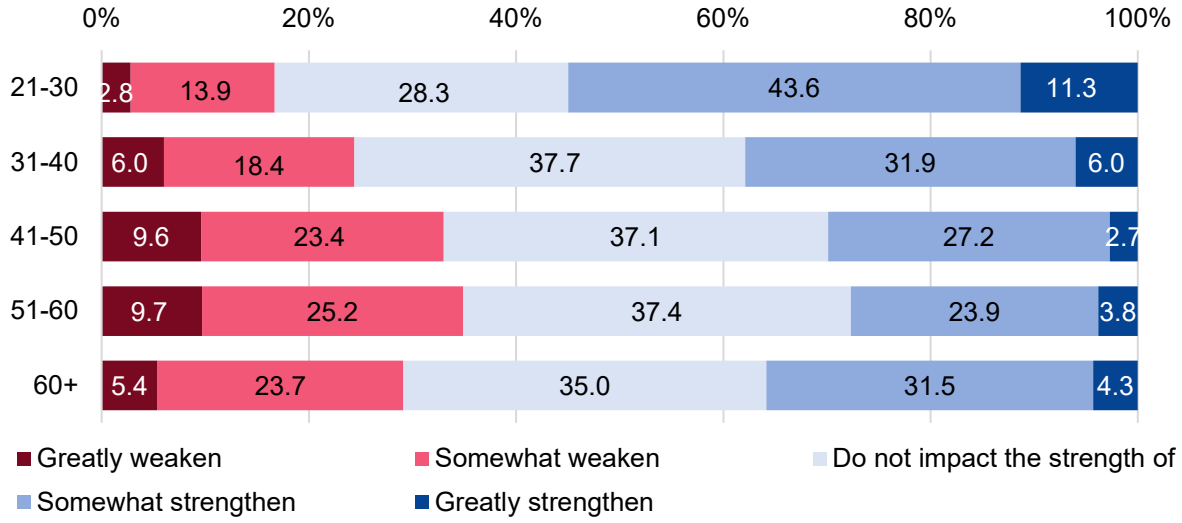


Figure 4.2.1g: PRs ___ our social cohesion, responses by age

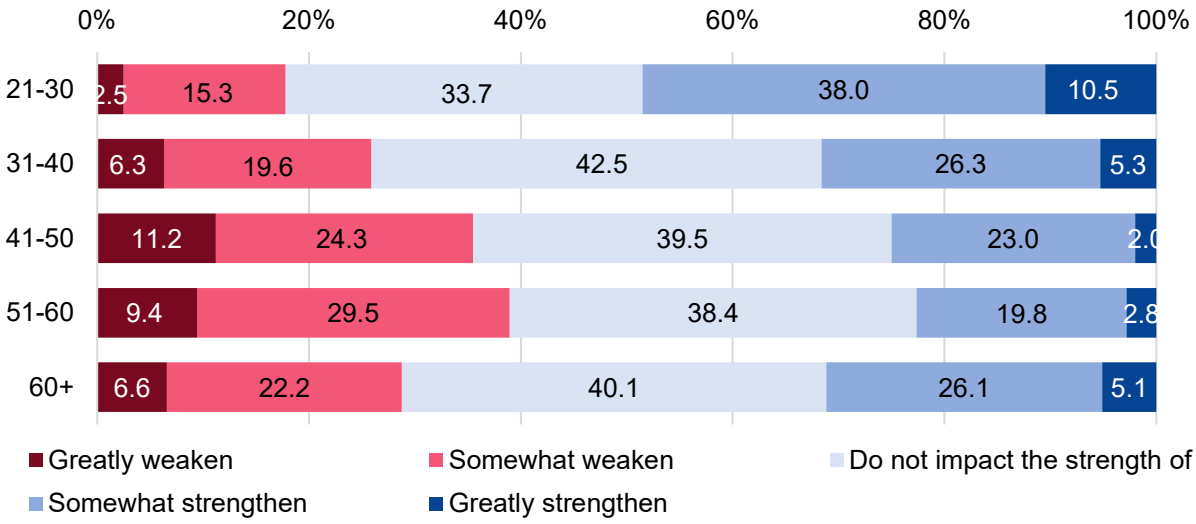


Figure 4.2.1h: PRs ___ our national values, responses by age

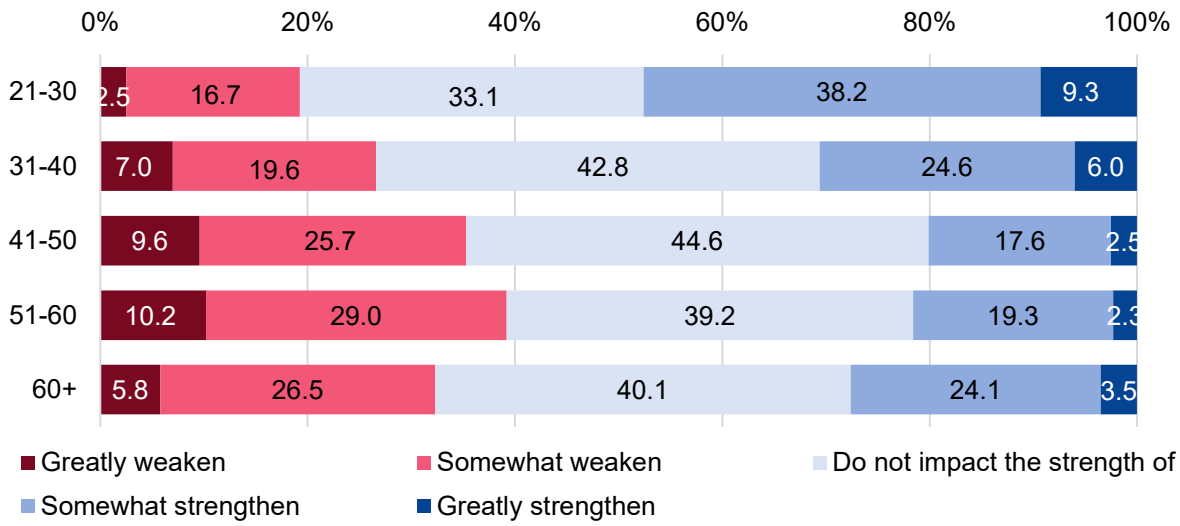
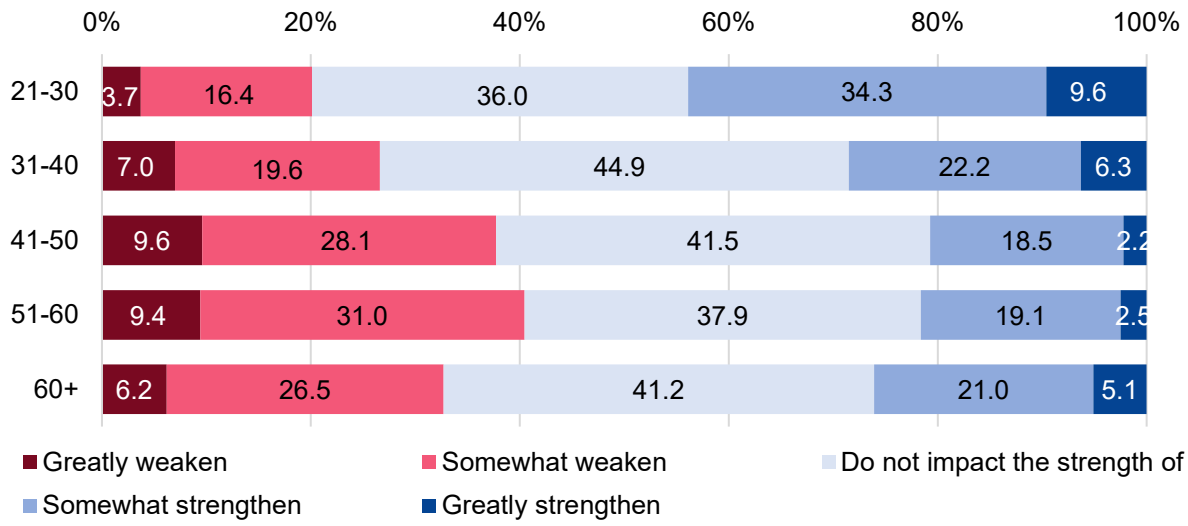


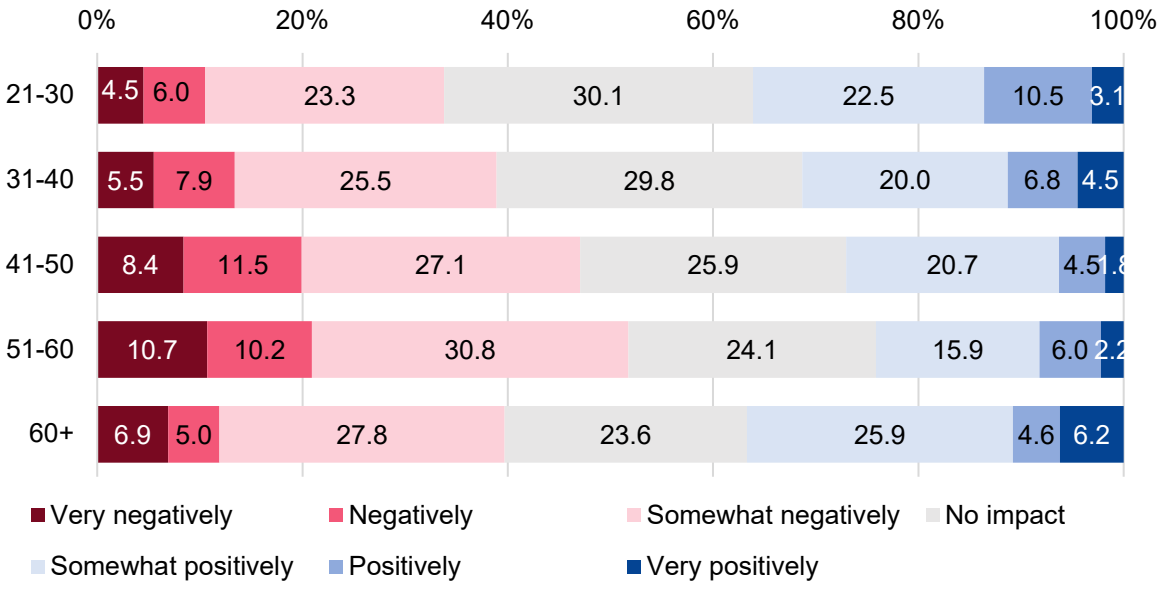
Figure 4.2.1i: PRs ___ our national identity, responses by age



When asked about the impact of foreigners, respondents aged above 60 were most likely to say they have at least a somewhat positive impact on national identity, with 36.7 per cent saying so. Meanwhile, respondents aged 21 to 30 had stronger opinions about their positive impact; compared with 10.8 per cent of those aged above 60, 13.6 per cent of those aged 21 to 30 felt that foreigners have a positive or very positive

impact on national identity in Singapore. In contrast, respondents aged 51 to 60 years were the most negative, with 20.9 per cent saying that the impact was negative or very negative, and another 30.8 per cent saying that it was somewhat negative (see Figure 4.2.1j).

Figure 4.2.1j: How have foreigners impacted national identity in Singapore?, responses by age



Regarding perceptions of how foreigners have influenced different aspects of society, the youngest respondents again emerged as the most positive group. In total, 45.3 per cent felt that foreigners enhance cultural diversity, 36.4 per cent believed they strengthen social cohesion, 32.2 per cent thought they reinforce national values, and 32 per cent felt they contribute positively to national identity. By comparison, respondents aged 51 to 60 were consistently the least likely to share these views (see Figures 4.2.1k to 4.2.1n).

Figure 4.2.1k: Foreigners ___ our cultural diversity, responses by age

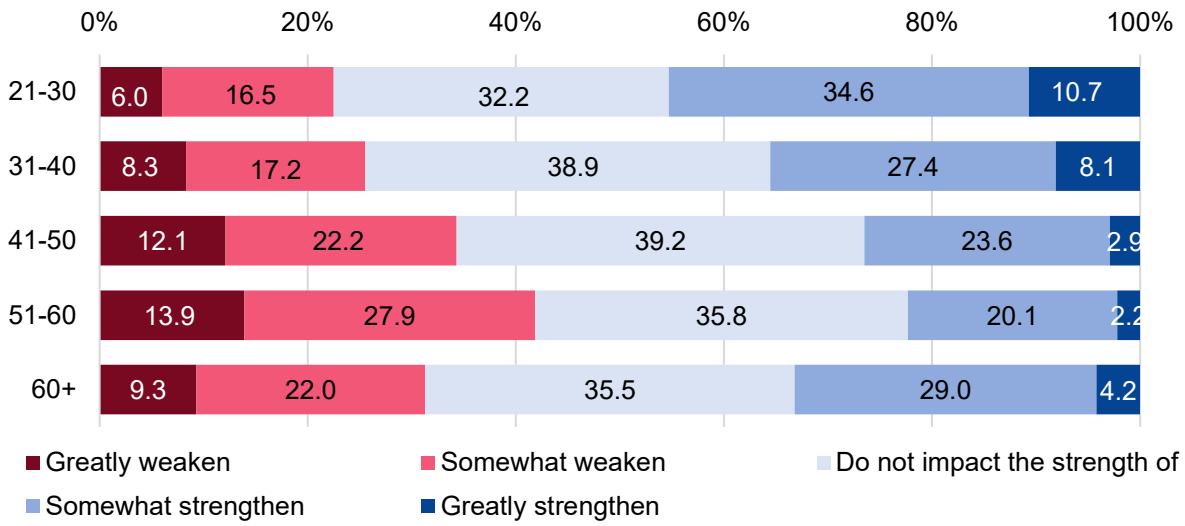


Figure 4.2.1l: Foreigners ___ our social cohesion, responses by age

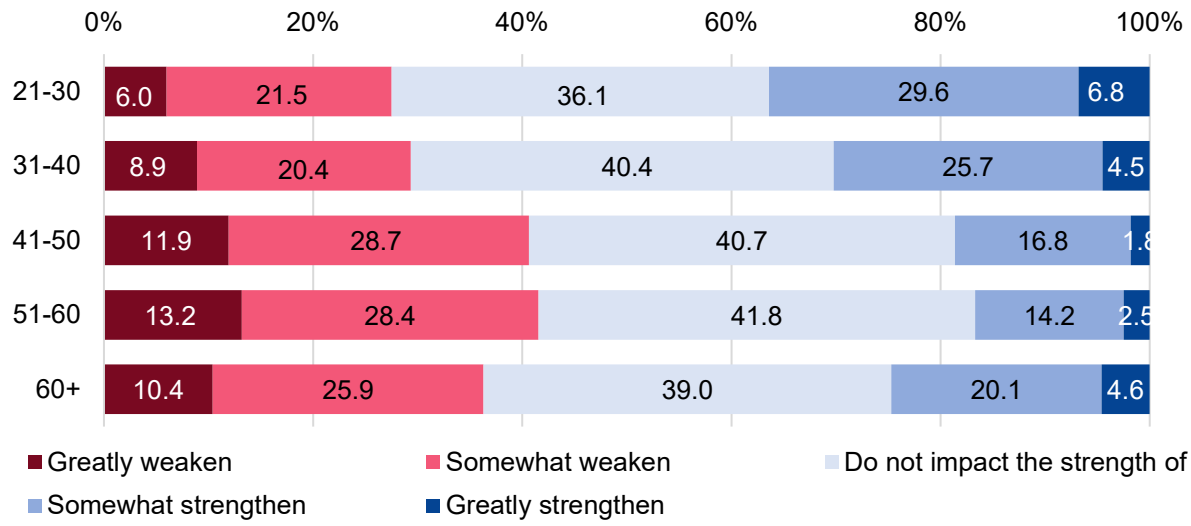


Figure 4.2.1m: Foreigners ___ our national values, responses by age

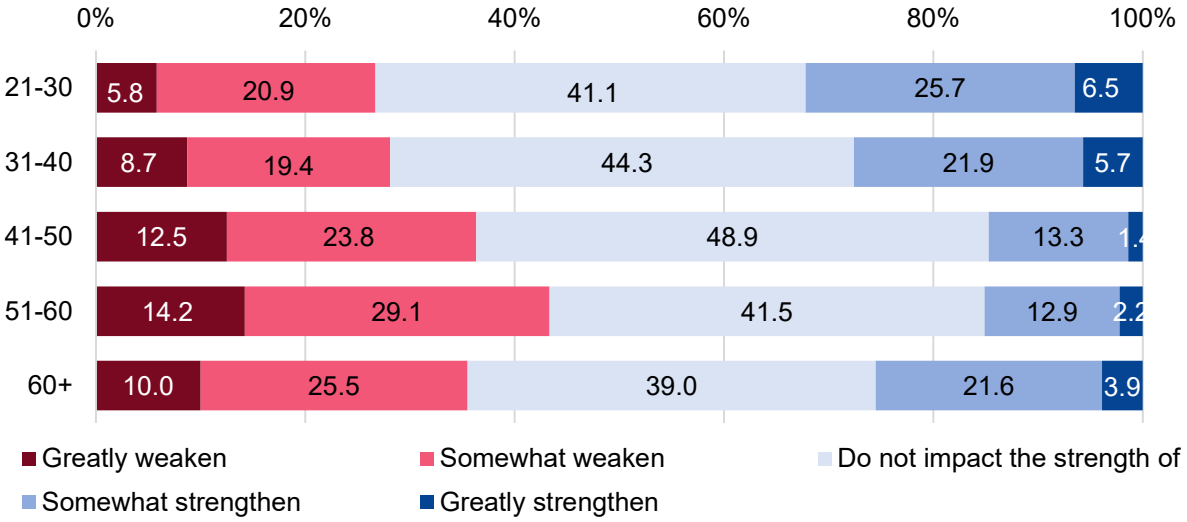
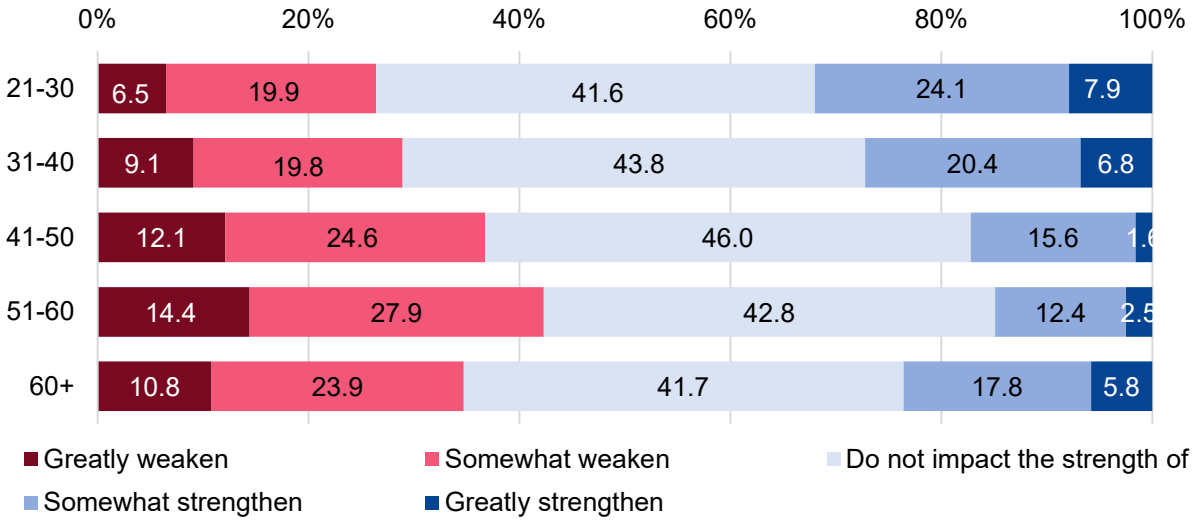


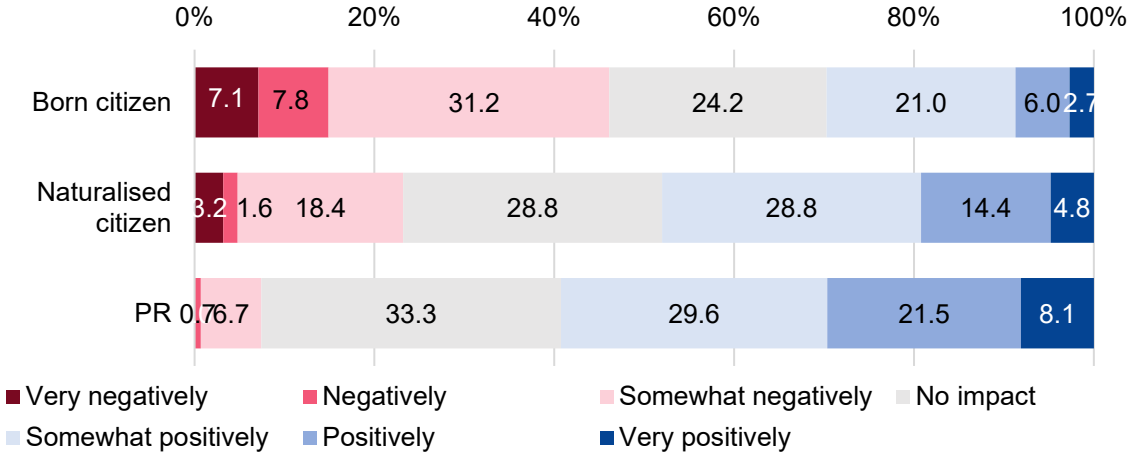
Figure 4.2.1n: Foreigners ___ our national identity, responses by age



4.2.2 PRs were most positive about the impact of new citizens and foreigners on Singapore's social fabric

Across citizenship groups, some differences emerged. Born citizens were the least positive about the impact of new citizens on national identity, with 14.9 per cent saying the impact was negative or very negative, and another 31.2 per cent saying it was somewhat negative. In contrast, 29.6 per cent of PRs and 19.2 per cent of naturalised citizens felt that the impact was positive or very positive, while just under three in 10 of these two groups felt that it was somewhat positive (see Figure 4.2.2a).

Figure 4.2.2a: How have new citizens impacted national identity in Singapore?, responses by citizenship



PRs were most positive about the impact of new citizens on cultural diversity, social cohesion, national values, and national identity. Overall, 69.6 per cent said that new citizens somewhat or greatly strengthen our cultural diversity, 63.7 per cent felt that new citizens strengthen our social cohesion to some extent, 58.5 per cent had positive views regarding their contribution to national values, while 54.8 per cent were positive about their impact on national identity (see Figures 4.2.2b to 4.2.2e).

Figure 4.2.2b: New citizens ___ our cultural diversity, responses by citizenship

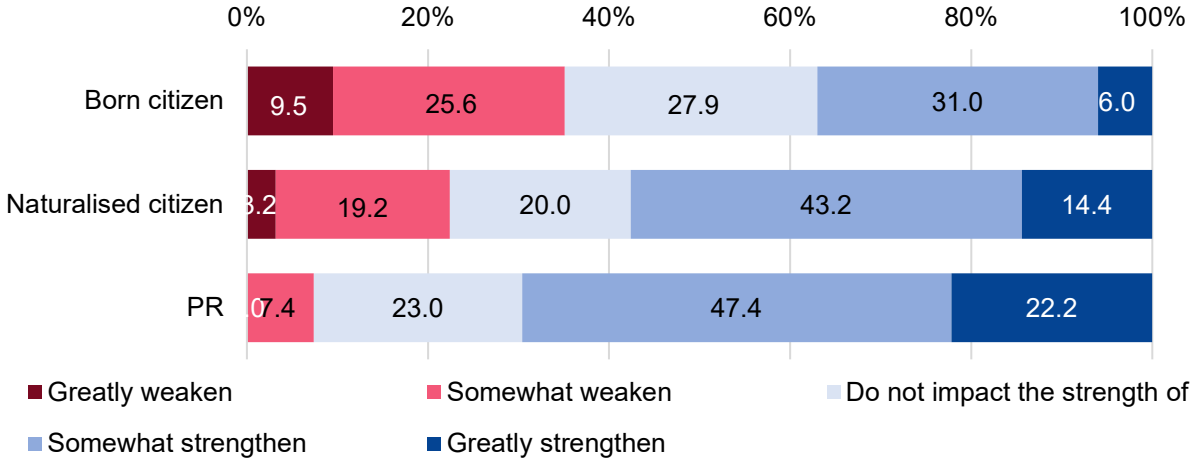


Figure 4.2.2c: New citizens ___ our social cohesion, responses by citizenship

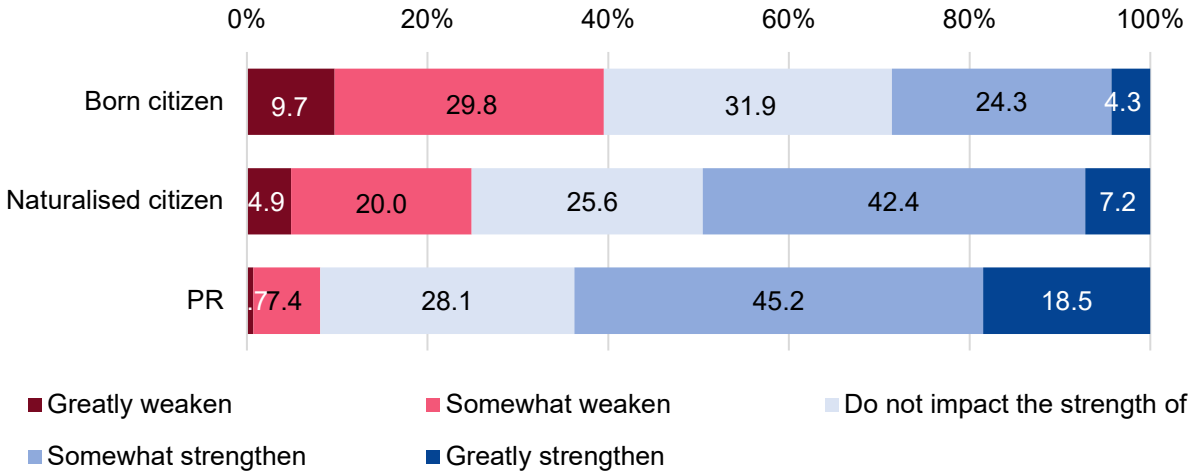


Figure 4.2.2d: New citizens ___ our national values, responses by citizenship

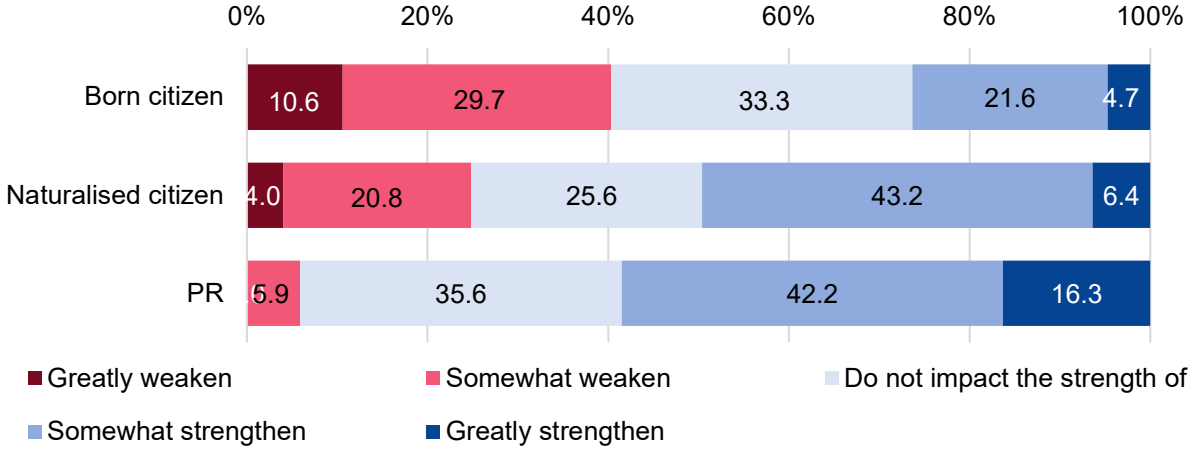
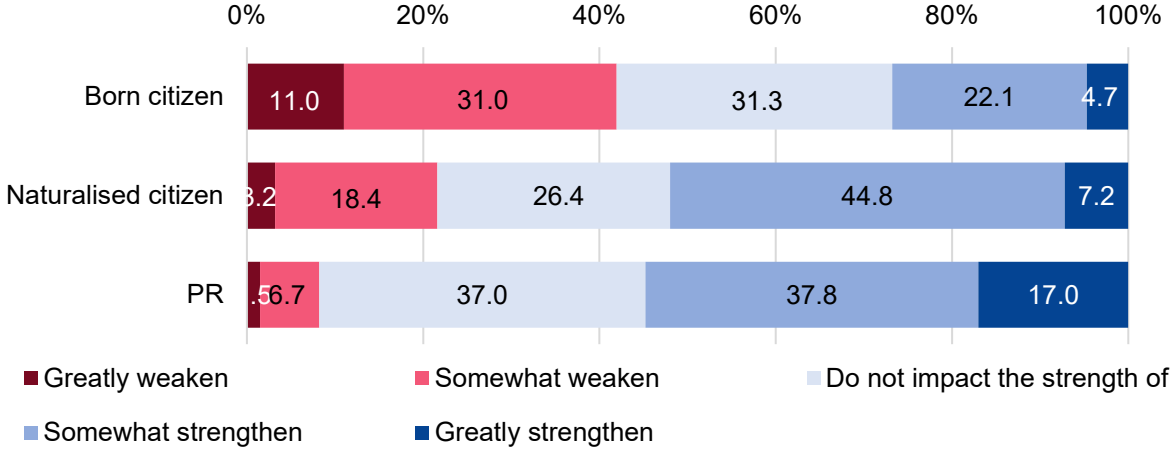
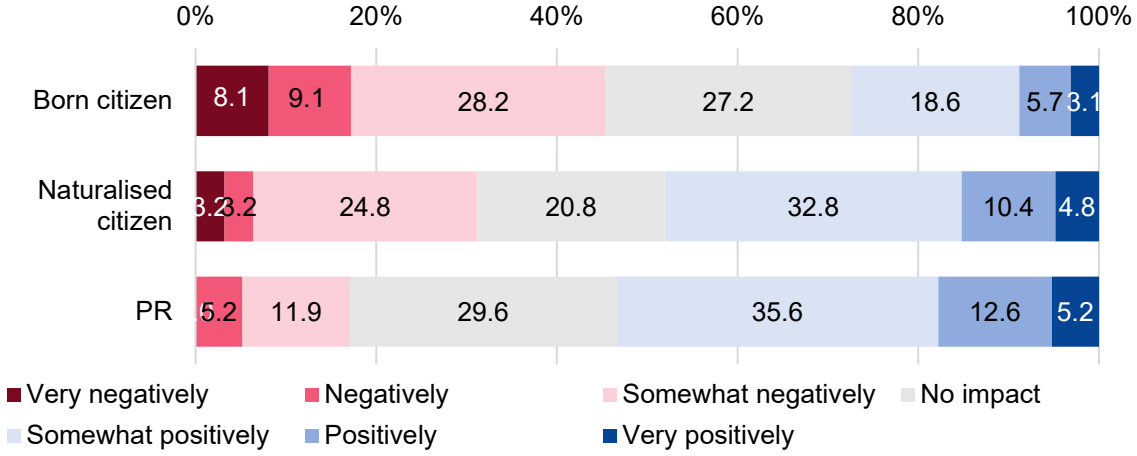


Figure 4.2.2e: New citizens ___ our national identity, responses by citizenship



Respondents who were PRs were also the most positive about the impact of foreigners on national identity. Overall, 53.4 per cent felt that the impact was at least somewhat positive, compared to 48 per cent of naturalised citizens and 27.4 per cent of born citizens (see Figure 4.2.2f).

Figure 4.2.2f: How have foreigners impacted national identity in Singapore?, responses by citizenship



When asked about how exactly foreigners have impacted the different aspects of Singapore's society, PRs were also the most positive. Overall, 57 per cent felt that foreigners strengthened our cultural diversity to some extent, 51.1 per cent held this opinion with respect to social cohesion, 46.7 per cent felt positive about their contributions to our national values, and 47.4 per cent thought this with respect to national identity (see Figures 4.2.2g to 4.2.2j).

Figure 4.2.2g: Foreigners ___ our cultural diversity, responses by citizenship

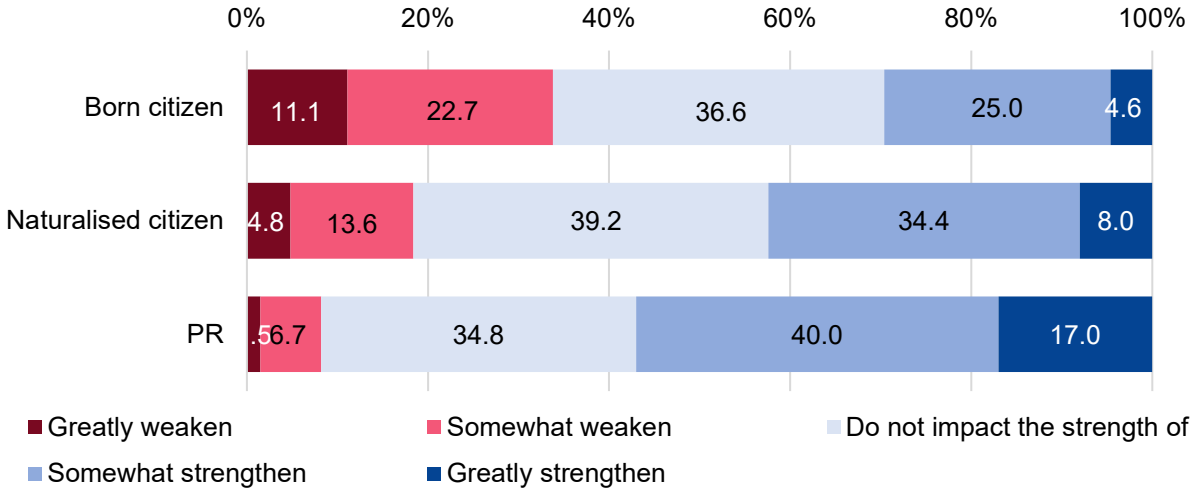


Figure 4.2.2h: Foreigners ___ our social cohesion, responses by citizenship

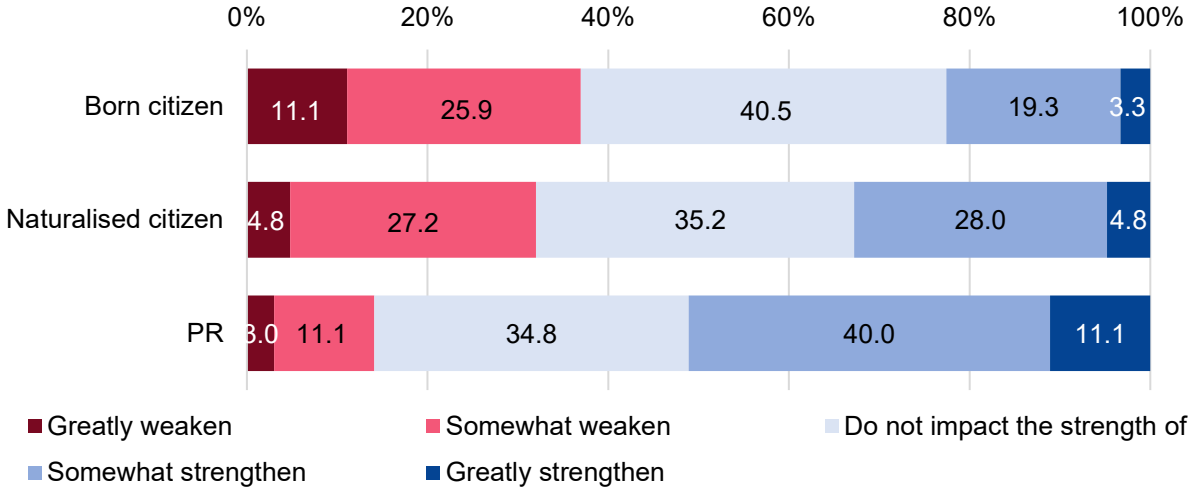


Figure 4.2.2i: Foreigners ___ our national values, responses by citizenship

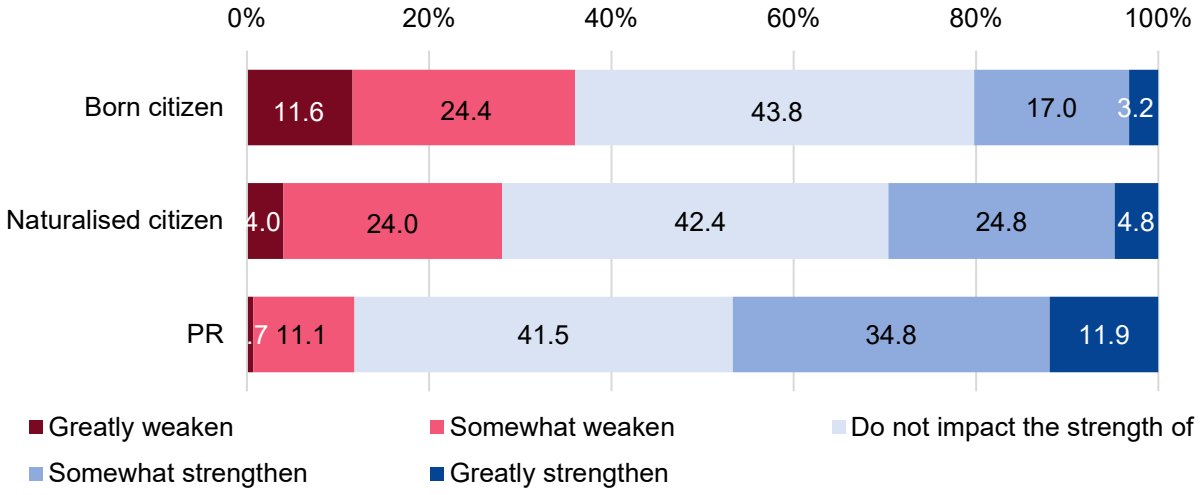
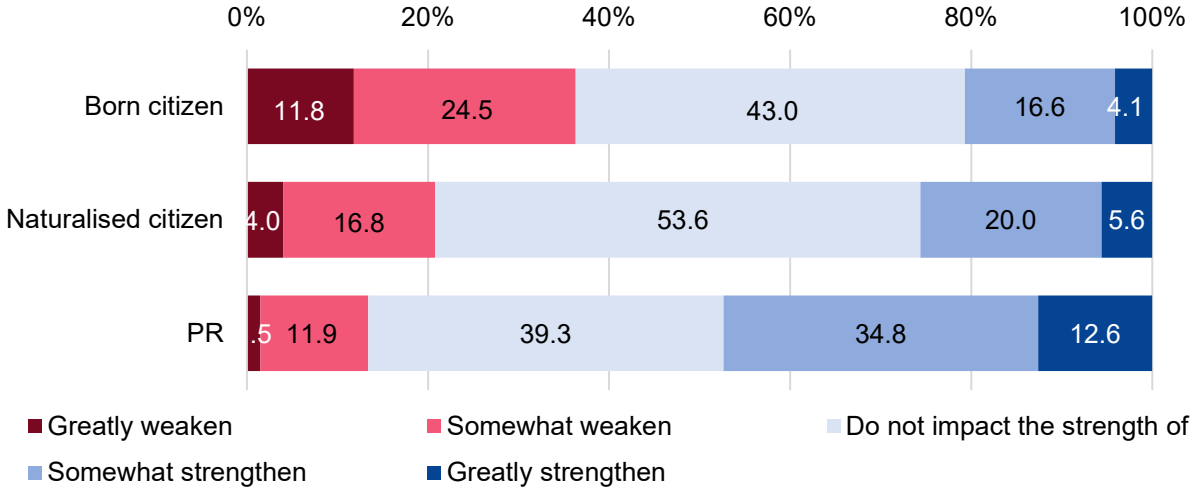


Figure 4.2.2j: Foreigners ___ our national identity, responses by citizenship



4.2.3 Naturalised citizens were more positive about the impact of PRs on Singapore's social fabric

Citizens were also asked about their views on PRs' contributions to various aspects of Singapore's society and culture. Naturalised citizens held more positive perceptions of PRs' contributions to our societal make-up. Specifically, 54.4 per cent felt that they strengthened our cultural diversity to some extent, 48 per cent thought this about social cohesion, 40.8 per cent held this view regarding national values, and 40 per cent had this opinion regarding their contribution to our national identity (see Figures 4.2.3a to 4.2.3d).

Figure 4.2.3a: PRs ___ our cultural diversity, responses by citizenship

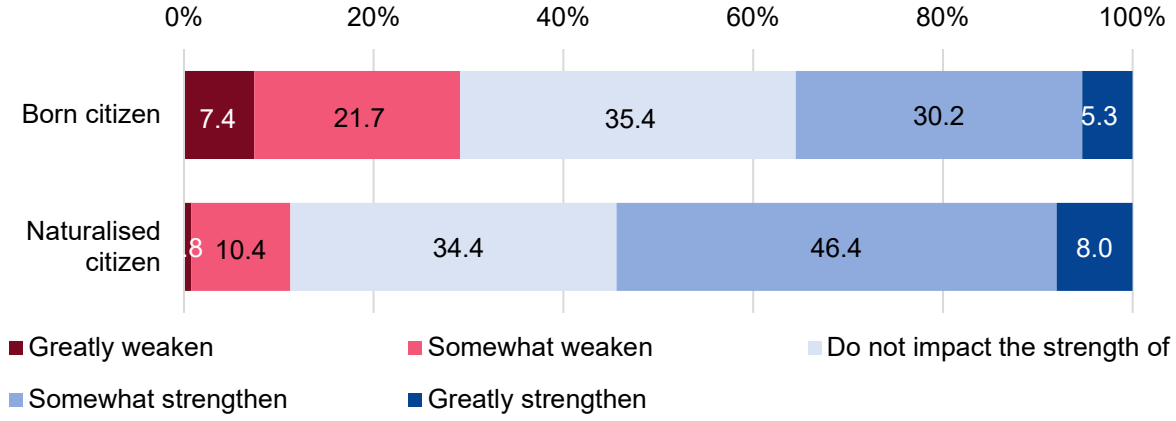


Figure 4.2.3b: PRs ___ our social cohesion, responses by citizenship

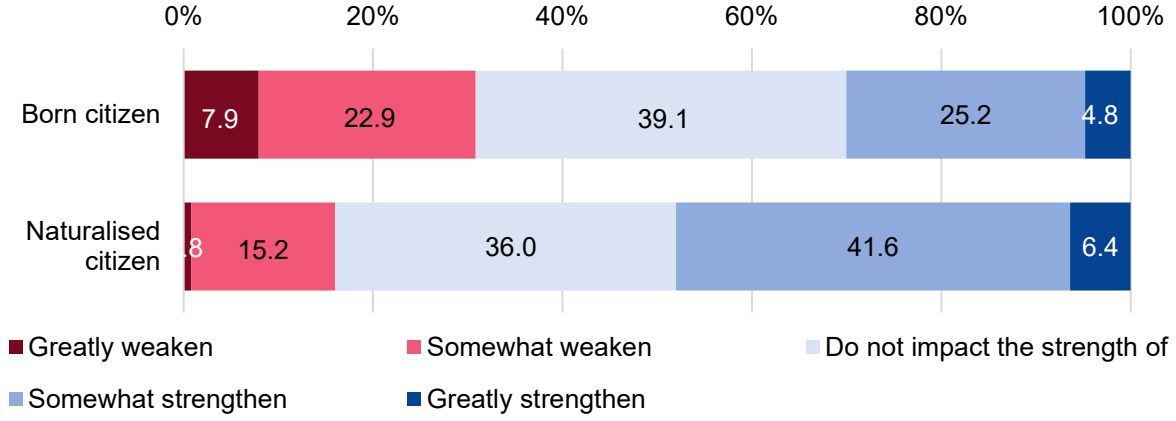


Figure 4.2.3c: PRs ___ our national values, responses by citizenship

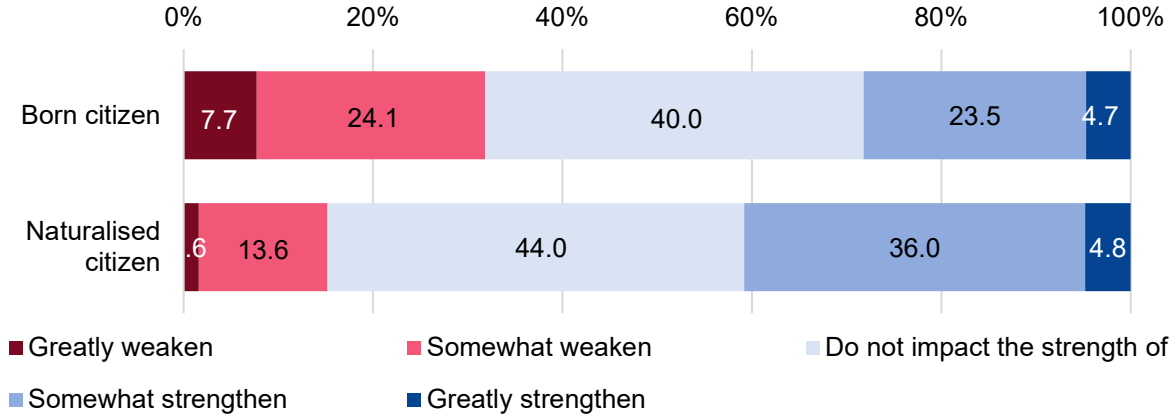
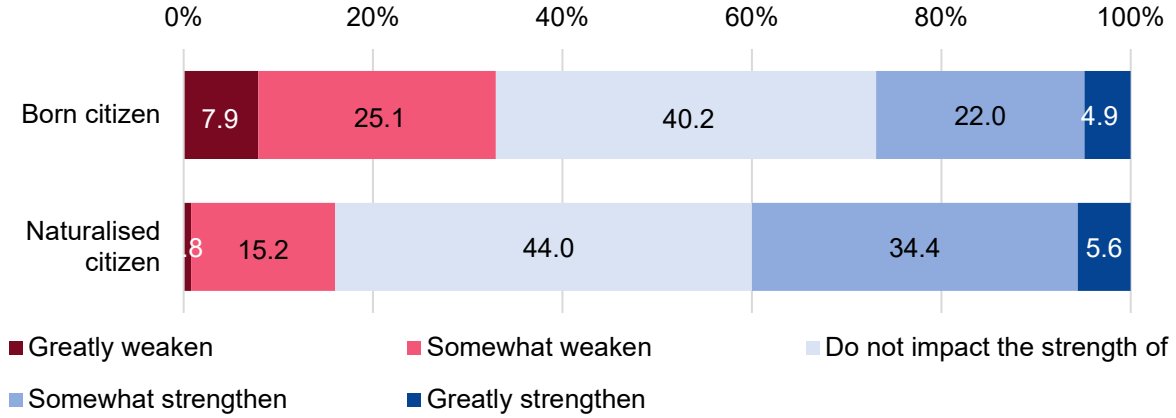


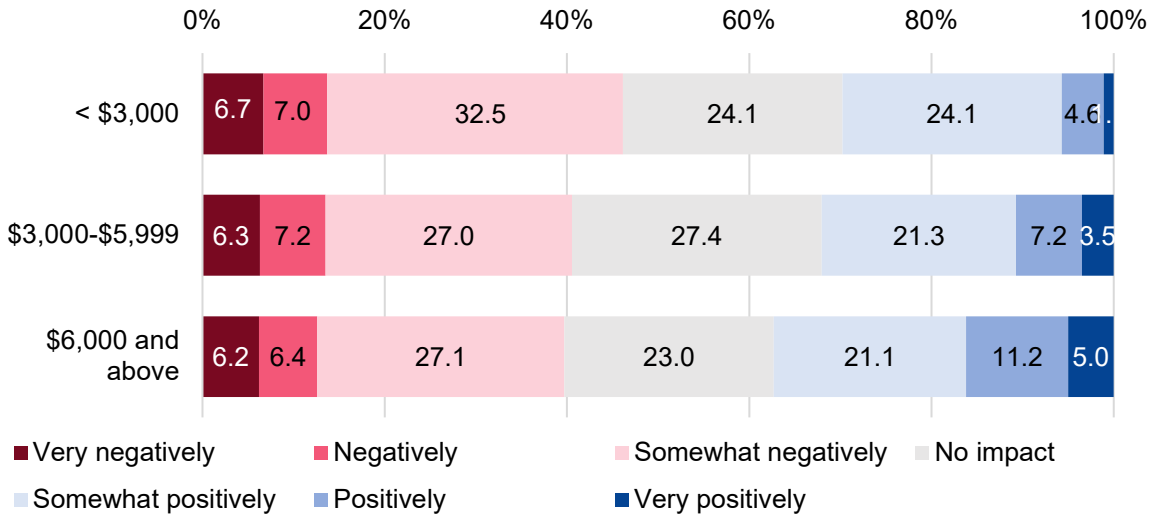
Figure 4.2.3d: PRs ___ our national idenity, responses by citizenship



4.2.4 Respondents from higher socioeconomic backgrounds were more positive about the impact of new citizens and foreigners on different aspects of Singapore society

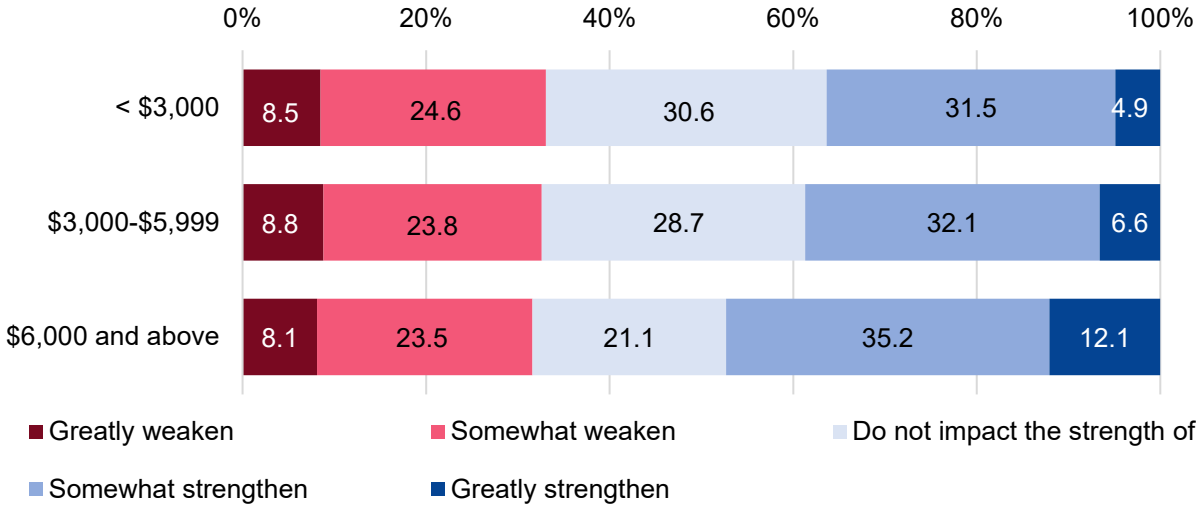
Respondents earning $6,000 and above were the most positive about the impact of new citizens on national identity. Overall, 37.3 per cent felt the impact was positive to some extent, compared with 32 per cent of those earning between $3,000 and $6,000 and 29.8 per cent of those earning below $3,000 (see Figure 4.2.4a).

Figure 4.2.4a: How have <u>new citizens</u> impacted national identity in Singapore?, responses by personal income



While proportions indicating that new citizens somewhat or greatly weaken our cultural diversity remain consistently at just above three in 10 across income levels, there were differences on the other end of the spectrum. Respondents with higher income were more likely to say that new citizens strengthen our cultural diversity to some degree – compared to 36.4 per cent of those earning below $3,000, 47.3 per cent of those earning $6,000 and above indicated so (see Figure 4.2.4b).

Figure 4.2.4b: New citizens ___ our cultural diversity, responses by personal income



When it came to social cohesion, national values, and national identity, respondents earning higher incomes were more likely to say that new citizens strengthen these aspects to at least some extent. For those earning less than $3,000, 27.4 per cent felt that new citizens strengthen our social cohesion to some extent, 25.9 per cent held this view about national values, while 26.9 per cent thought this regarding our national identity. In comparison, the proportions increased to 38.2 per cent, 35.2 per cent, and 34.2 per cent, respectively, for those earning $6,000 and above (see Figures 4.2.4c to 4.2.4e).

Figure 4.2.4c: New citizens ___ our social cohesion, responses by personal income

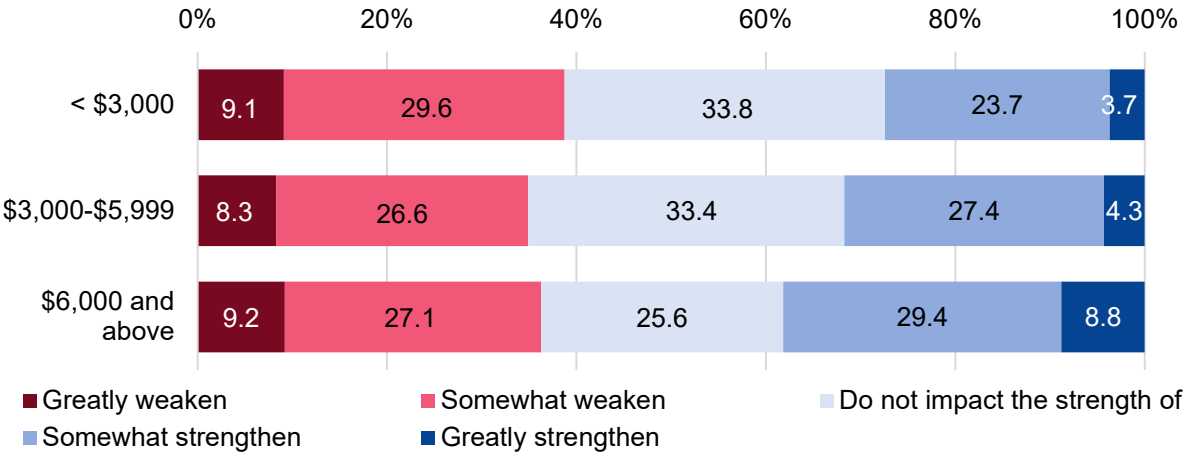


Figure 4.2.4d: New citizens ___ our national values, responses by personal income

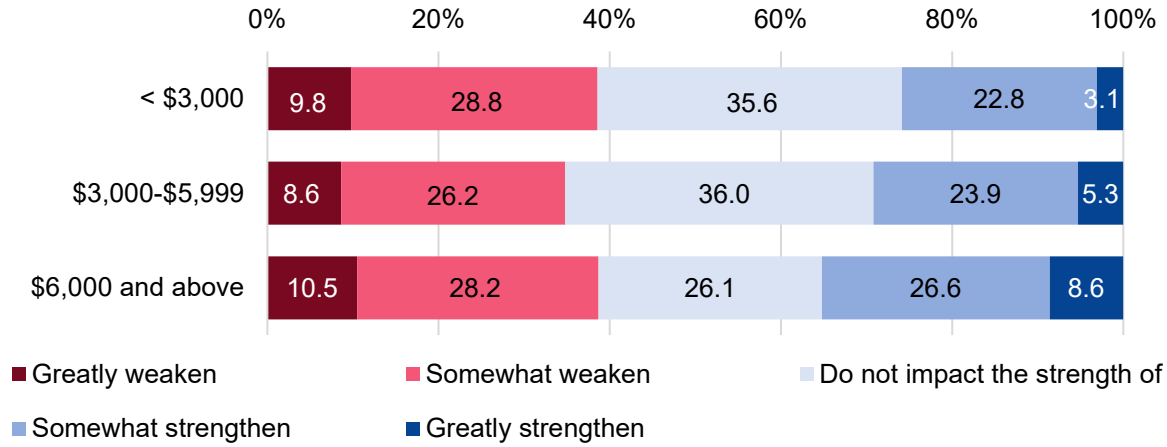
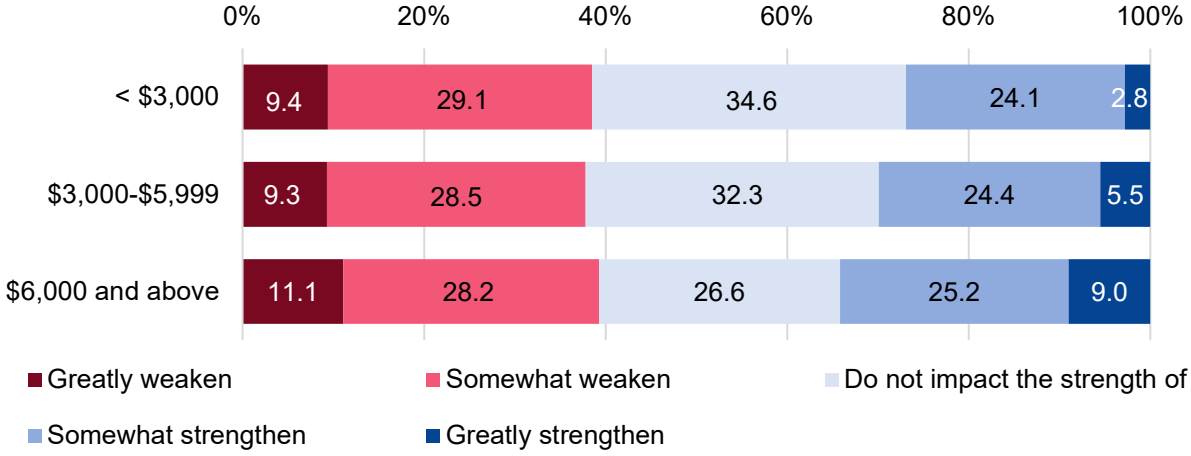
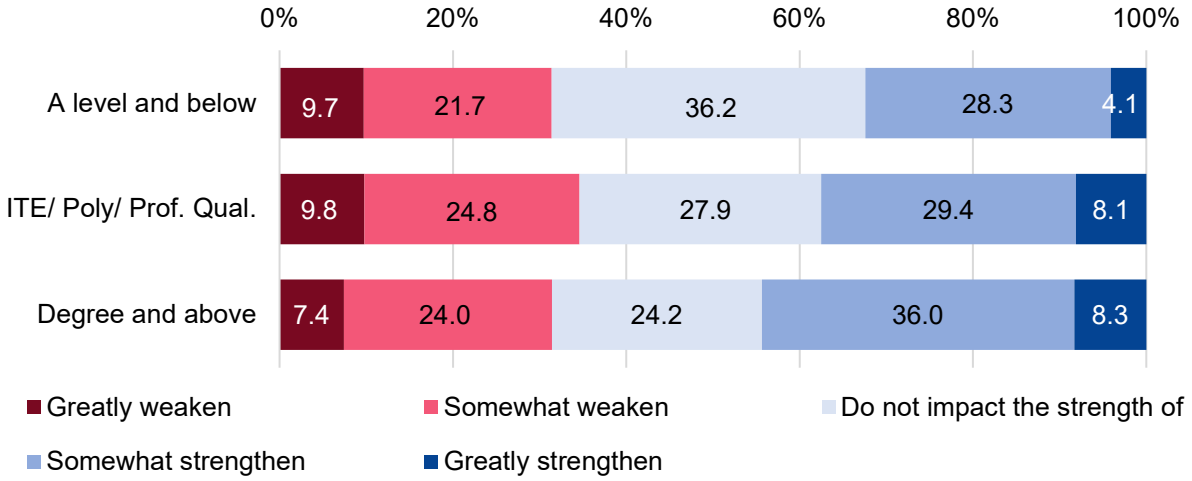


Figure 4.2.4e: New citizens ___ our national identity, responses by personal income



Meanwhile, respondents with university education were more likely to be positive about the impact of new citizens on our cultural diversity. Overall, 44.3 per cent said that they somewhat strengthen or greatly strengthen Singapore's cultural diversity. Meanwhile, respondents with lower educational qualifications were more likely to remain neutral. Compared to 24.2 per cent of university graduates, 36.2 per cent of those with 'A' Levels and below qualifications felt that new citizens do not impact the strength of our cultural diversity (see Figure 4.2.4f).

Figure 4.2.4f: New citizens ___ our cultural diversity, responses by education



When asked about the impact of foreigners on different aspects of Singapore's society, respondents with higher incomes were more positive. Among respondents earning $6,000 or more, 37.8 per cent felt that foreigners at least somewhat strengthen our cultural diversity, and 26.2 per cent felt likewise about our national identity. In comparison, among those earning below $3,000, 27.1 per cent held this view of foreigners' impact on our cultural diversity, and 17.2 per cent felt this way about their impact on our national identity (see Figures 4.2.4g to 4.2.4h).

Figure 4.2.4g: Foreigners ___ our cultural diversity, responses by personal income

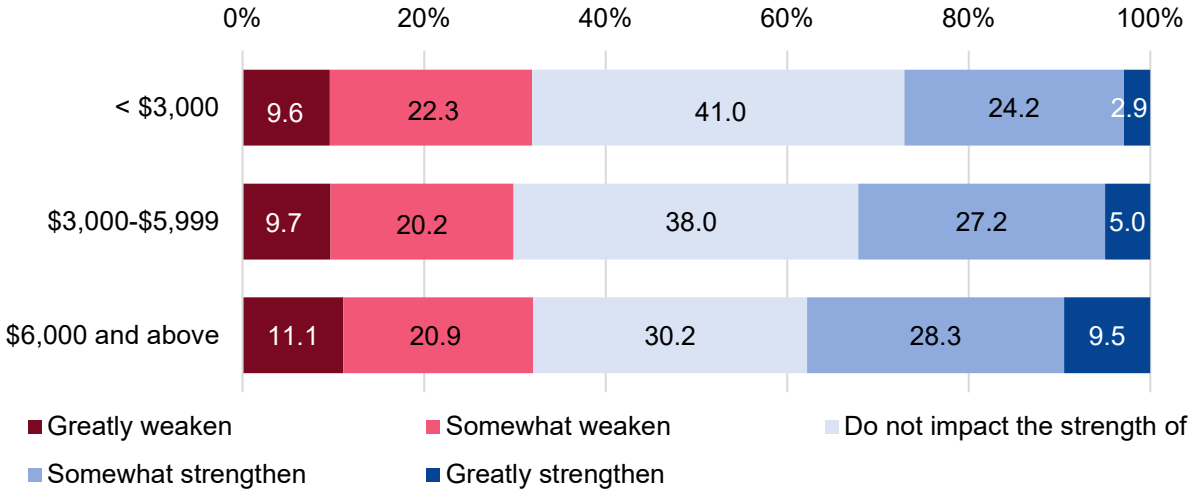
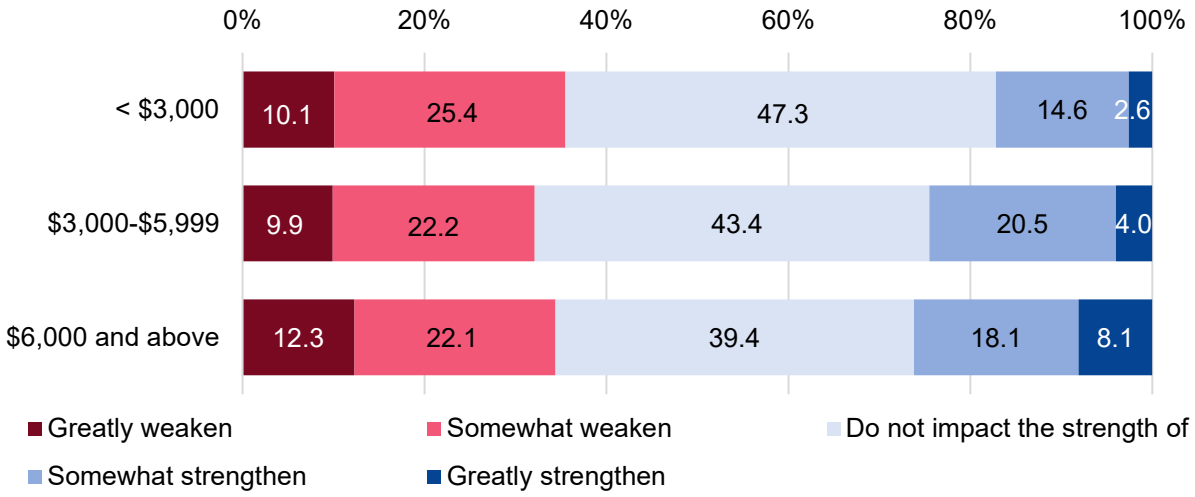


Figure 4.2.4h: Foreigners ___ our national identity, responses by personal income



5. CONCLUSION

This paper has examined how Singapore residents understand national identity, the elements they consider important, and how they describe Singaporeans in both positive and negative terms. It also assessed whether national identity has changed in nature or strength over the past decade. In addition, it explored views on who should shape national identity (the public or the government), and identified key pressures that test the boundaries of belonging. These pressures span demographic change due to migration, the shared obligations of National Service, and contested values related to being “woke”. Taken together, the findings point to a broadly shared, civic-minded identity that continues to evolve within Singapore society.

It bears noting at the outset that arriving at a shared national identity in Singapore has been no easy feat. The nation is young, forged through abrupt historical turns. Continuous migration flows, along with a reasonably large transient population moving through a dense, globally connected city, make attachment to place challenging. Its resident population is also diverse across race, religion, language of affinity and cultural practice. In such a context, cultivating national consciousness and a durable sense of belonging is intrinsically demanding.

Yet, the findings point to a healthy development of national identity. The majority of respondents report pride in their identity as Singaporeans and a preference to be a

citizen of Singapore over other possible citizenships. Many also perceive that national identity has either strengthened over the past decade, or has at least held steady.

The results discussed in this paper show that national identity in Singapore is primarily experienced as civic and affective. National identity is conceived of less in cultural terms, even though Singlish was the most often cited evidence that respondents used to justify that there was national identity in Singapore, While this response clearly reflects the salience of Singlish in everyday life and a distinctiveness etched in many minds, yet when respondents were asked to rank the importance of specific aspects of national identity, Singlish fell well below many other items. The items viewed as most important focused on civic-affective items such as being united, feeling proud of Singapore and shared values and principles. These responses indicate that while culture is recognised, it is not treated as the core of “Singaporeaness”. This pattern aligns with the literature that sees modern nation-states as imagined communities reproduced through shared symbols and commitments rather than fixed ethno-cultural traits (Anderson, 2006). In fact, scholars of civic nationalism argue that identities grounded in inclusive institutions and fair rules are better suited to plural societies than those centred on cultural conformity.

If national identity in Singapore is primarily civic and affective (and less cultural), we should expect this to surface in how people describe the “typical Singaporean”. Examining the trait profiles, therefore, reveals the lived prototype of Singaporean-ness: the norms and behaviours that signal that individuals belong to the nation.

Overall, respondents perceive more positive than negative traits arising from the idea of the "typical Singaporean". This positive bias likely reflects the salience of long-socialised civic norms and success narratives: highly-endorsed positives, such as valuing education, being law-abiding, and respecting authority and order, are both widely taught and socially rewarded, making them common traits when imagining what Singaporeans are like.

At the same time, a small cluster of negative traits has clear traction because they map the shadow side of those same prized virtues. We can think of *kiasu* and stressed or overworked traits as mirroring competitiveness, achievement pressure, and efficiency that fit alongside an otherwise positive prototype. Moreover, negative traits such as "*kiasu*" and "complain a lot" are highly familiar in everyday discourse and perhaps serve as a culturally "safe" form of self-critique. Such self-critique acknowledges that there are costs to the core civic ideals of a high-expectation, achievement-oriented ethos. Furthermore, we note that few respondents chose stigmatising attributions such as xenophobic, rude, or arrogant to describe the Singaporean.

The study also focused substantially on respondents' assessment of the state of national identity in Singapore. Nearly half of SNIS respondents judge Singapore's national identity to be stronger than a decade ago, and about half also agree (to varying extents) that citizens should take responsibility for shaping that identity. This is an interesting departure from the usual script about Singaporeans' expectations of the government to solve all issues. Perhaps, this indicates an evolution toward a more

mature civic posture, in which national identity is treated less as a top-down matter and more as a shared public good.

This appetite for citizen and community responsibility may also explain why many Singaporeans single out Japan as having a strong national identity. Japan's cohesion is widely seen as something people create together; not just through policy but through individual habits. Whether it is taking their trash with them, cleaning up after attending sports matches in Japan and abroad, returning lost items, queueing in an orderly fashion, speaking softly or not at all on trains, and showing up to help others after disasters, these practices are upheld more by shared expectations and pride than by enforcement. The implications for Singapore are straightforward enough: public ownership of the cultural and affective "feel" of national identity through everyday acts and shared rituals will undoubtedly complement the state's longstanding efforts to build national identity.

While Singaporeans often acknowledge the value of diversity, it is also not possible to discount the pressure that diversity brings; most prominent among which is the growing population diversity that has arisen with migration. The study highlighted concerns about newcomers' impacts on Singapore's identity; in particular, around four in 10 respondents indicated feeling that new citizens and foreigners negatively impacted Singapore's national identity. There is some variation in the intensity of these sentiments: less than 15 per cent actually indicate that the impact on our national identity is very negative or negative, while more than one-quarter indicate that the impact is somewhat negative.

At the attitudinal level, these differences are also explicated in part by responses to the abstract item on “believing in diversity”. Close to two thirds of respondents were prepared to say that such a belief can come into conflict with national identity to some extent, and about one in three agreed or strongly agreed that this is so. In other words, many Singapore residents accept diversity as a social ideal and regard openness to difference as part of being a “good Singaporean”. However, at the same time, they experience the practice of diversity as psychologically and socially demanding. Diversity is therefore both an expectation and a source of pressure, especially when it is perceived to intersect with competition for jobs, housing, educational opportunities, and more. The same tension runs through views on immigration and newcomers: few would say that diversity is inherently undesirable, yet a significant minority register unease about the pace and distribution of change. This is expressed through concerns about cultural dilution, integration, and fairness rather than outright rejection of diversity.

The survey findings vis-à-vis newcomers’ impacts on Singapore’s identity also reflect the reality that immigration remains a persistent concern for some demographic segments. For a portion of middle-aged, less affluent Singaporeans (especially those in sectors exposed to wage pressures or restructuring), immigration can be read through the lens of economic insecurity, status anxiety (i.e., loss of hard-won position), and cultural uncertainty because of the pace of change in neighbourhood norms. Global headwinds amplify these perceptions: as more countries adopt protectionist stances and politicise borders, local attitudes can harden by analogy.

This makes it vital to ensure all parts of immigration policy are implemented well including: (i) labour-market safeguards and upskilling opportunities for mid-career workers; (ii) clear, consistently enforced rules for fair hiring and conduct; (iii) integration-by-design in schools, workplaces, and HDB estates that creates everyday contact and shared projects, rather than symbolic events alone; and (iv) a civic narrative that emphasises common foundations (rule of law, fairness, responsibility) and two-way adaptation (expectations for newcomers and support for locals). Framed and implemented well, immigration need not weaken identity; it can strengthen Singaporean-ness by renewing confidence that the national "we" is defined by shared civic principles and contributions, not by zero-sum competition.

However, even if we disregard the impact of immigration on our society, our national identity will inevitably shift. There is also the reality that different generations of Singaporeans born here look at the world through distinct lenses, respond to differences, and aspire to new things. These generational differences will also mean that how we perceive ourselves and represent our country to the rest of the world will change. Different groups in society could also choose different ways to live their lives. However, the Singapore identity, comprising our core values such as multiculturalism and meritocracy, as well as the key institutions we admire, should still form an important part of individuals' identities. Only then will we, as a society, be able to tide through any shifts in societal norms and attitudes, and rise above group differences to feel connected through our common Singaporean identity.

Singapore's next chapter calls for what Prime Minister Lawrence Wong has described as a "we-first society". But we cannot will this into being; we must build it. That work

begins with clarity about what unites the many “me’s” in our midst: the everyday practices of unity, belonging, and pride; the civic habits that keep our diverse city steady; and the confidence that newcomers can share in our norms while we protect what is precious. If we can deepen our national identity or shared core while addressing the anxieties that tug us apart, Singapore can remain what it has long aspired to be: a community of purpose that seeks not “me first”, but “we, together”.

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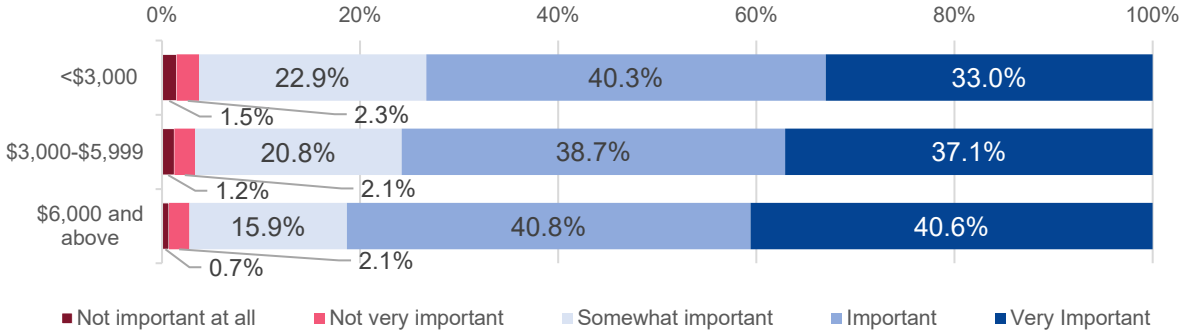
APPENDIX 1: SOCIOECONOMIC DIFFERENCES PERTAINING TO ASPECTS OF NATIONAL IDENTITY

Among respondents who indicated that one's sense of belonging is an important aspect of national identity, differences emerged across personal income and housing type.

In terms of personal income, more than seven in 10 of all respondents from all three income brackets viewed one's sense of belonging as an important or very important aspect of national identity. Notably, respondents who earned a monthly income of $6,000 and above (81.4 per cent) were most likely to view one's sense of belonging as an important aspect of national identity, compared to respondents earning below $3,000 (73.3 per cent) or between $3,000 and $5,999 (75.8 per cent) (see Figure A1a).

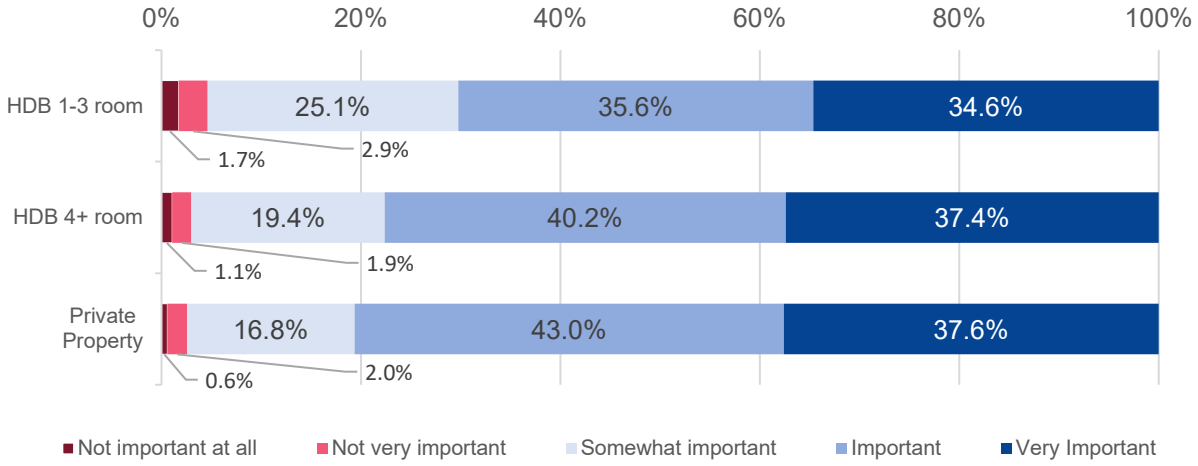
Figure A1a: How important do you think are the following aspects of Singapore's national identity? Sense of belonging, responses by personal income



Similarly, for housing type, more than seven in 10 respondents felt that one's sense of belonging was an important or very important aspect of national identity. Notably, respondents living in private property (80.6 per cent) were most likely to hold such

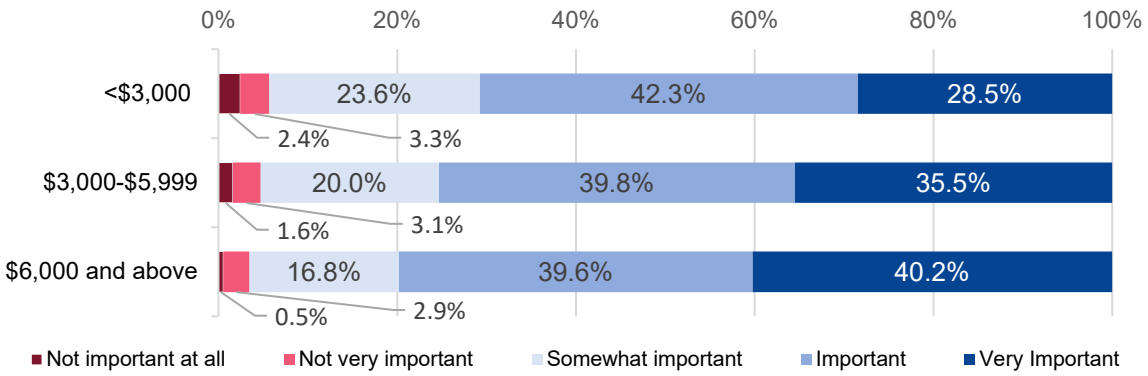
views, compared to those living in 1-3 room HDB flats (70.2 per cent) or 4 room or bigger HDB flats (77.6 per cent) (see Figure A1b).

Figure A1b: How important do you think are the following aspects of Singapore's national identity? Sense of belonging, responses by housing type



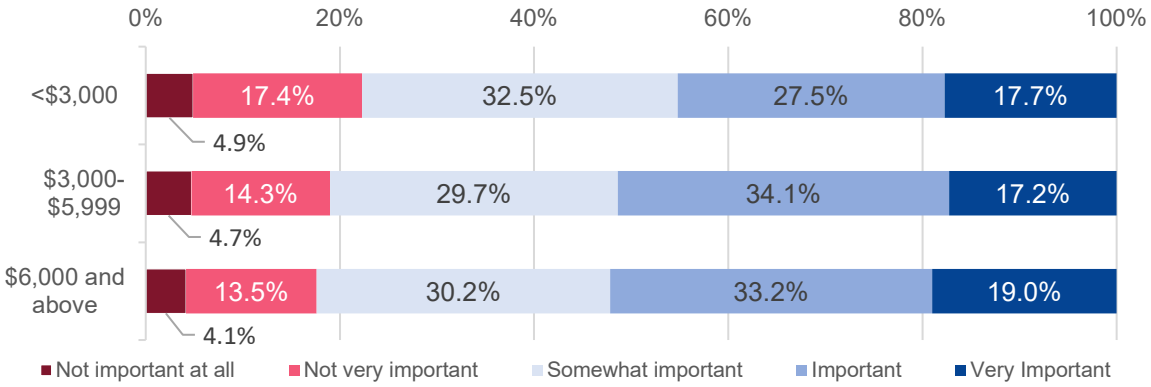
Over seven in 10 of all respondents regardless of income level view feeling proud of Singapore and/or its achievements as an important or very important aspect of national identity. Respondents with incomes of $6,000 and above (79.8 per cent), along with respondents earning between $3,000 and $5,999 (75.3 per cent), are more likely to view so as compared to respondents who earn less than $3,000 (70.8 per cent) (see Figure A1c).

Figure A1c: How important do you think are the following aspects of Singapore's national identity? Feeling proud of Singapore and/or its achievements, responses by personal income



When compared based on personal income, less than half of respondents earning less than $3,000 (45.2 per cent) view speaking Singlish or using local slang in daily conversations as an important or very important aspect of national identity. Conversely, over half of those earning $3,000 and above view likewise (see Figure A1d).

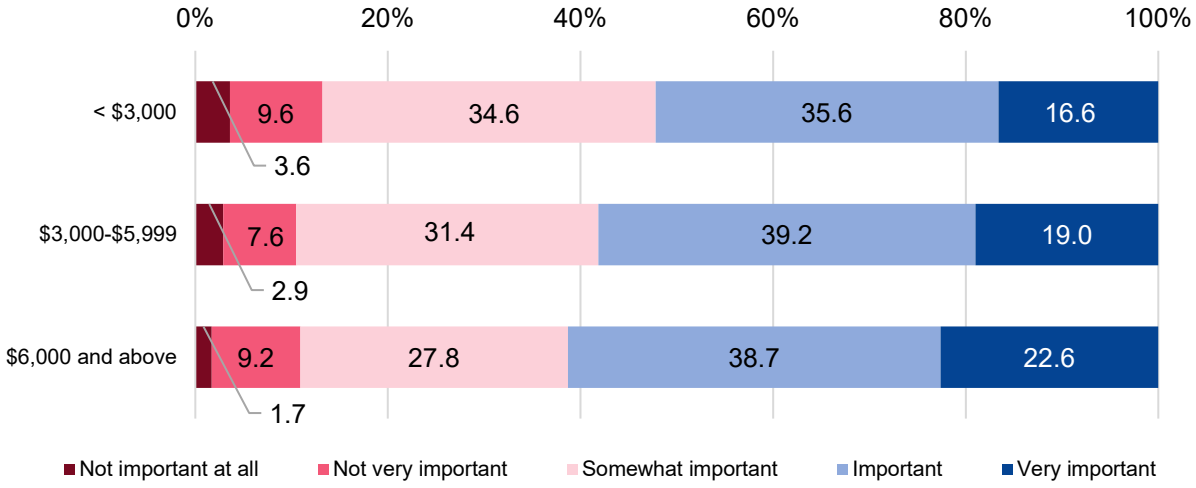
Figure A1d: How important do you think are the following aspects of Singapore's national identity? Speaking Singlish or using local slang in daily conversations, responses by personal income



A higher proportion of respondents who earn $6,000 and above (61.3 per cent) and respondents who earn between $3,000 and $5,999 (58.2 per cent) view participation

in national events or celebrations is an important aspect of national identity, compared to respondents who earn less than $3,000 (52.2 per cent) (see Figure A1e).

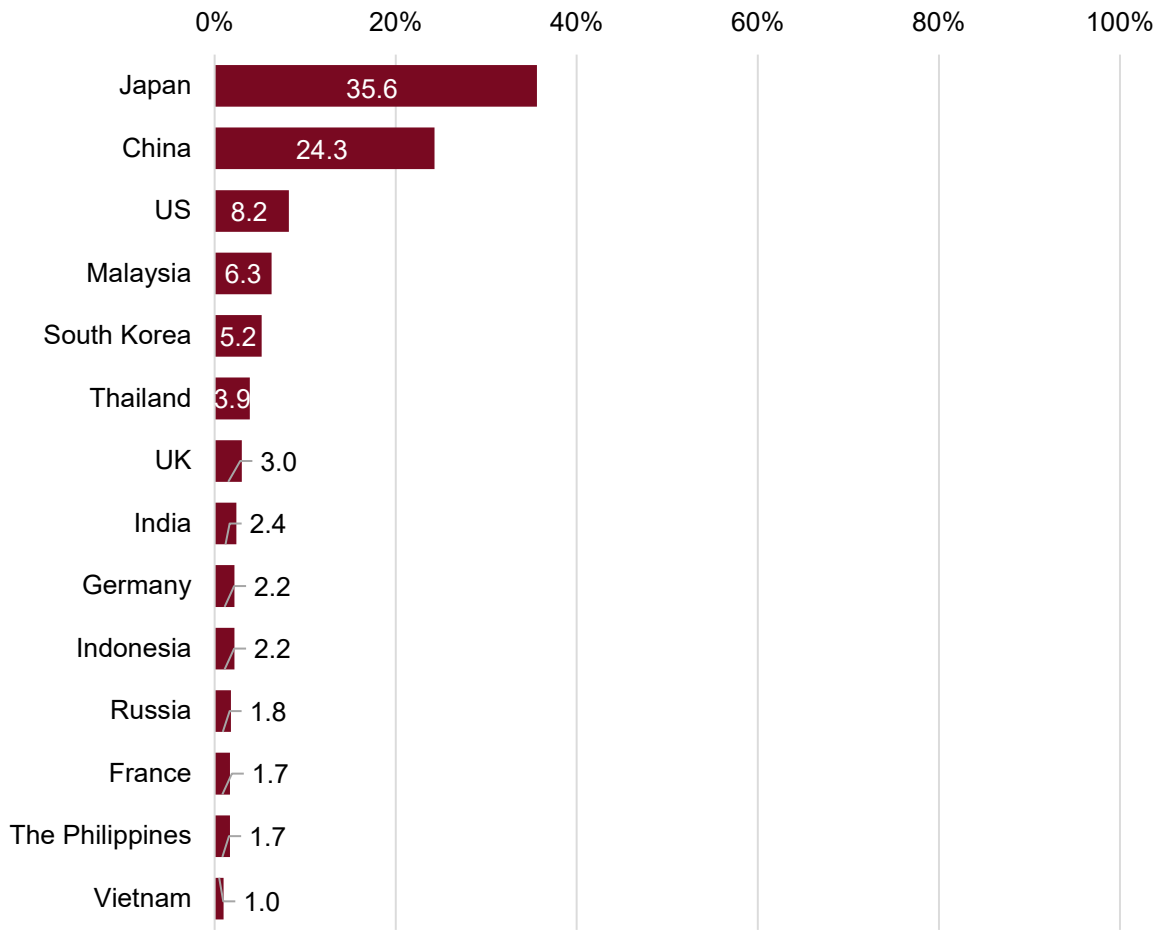
Figure A1e: How important do you think are the following aspects of Singapore's national identity? Participation in national events or celebrations, responses by personal income



APPENDIX 2: TOP-RANKED COUNTRY FOR STRENGTH OF NATIONAL IDENTITY

Respondents were most likely to indicate that Japan was the top country when it came to having a strong national identity, with 35.6 per cent indicating so. Next in line was China, followed by the US (see Figure A2).

Figure A2: Top-ranked country for strong national identity



When these proportions are further broken down by race, we note that Japan remains top choice across all racial groups, though the perceptions differ for the rest of the countries listed. China was the second most popular choice for Chinese and Indian respondents, while Malaysia was the second most popular choice for Malay respondents (see Table A2).

Table A2: Top-ranked country for NI strength, by race

<table>
<tr><th>Rank</th><th>Chinese
N = 1,523</th><th>Malay
N = 282</th><th>Indian
N = 133</th><th>Others
N = 62</th></tr>
<tr><td>1</td><td>Japan (36.9%)</td><td>Japan (27.7%)</td><td>Japan (24.8%)</td><td>Japan (32.2%)</td></tr>
<tr><td>2</td><td>China (28.8%)</td><td>Malaysia (15.2%)</td><td>China (12.8%)</td><td>US (11.3%)</td></tr>
<tr><td>3</td><td>US (8.3%)</td><td>China (12.4%)</td><td>India (11.3%)</td><td rowspan="2">Malaysia / The Philippines (9.7%)</td></tr>
<tr><td>4</td><td>South Korea (4.9%)</td><td>US (11.0%)</td><td>Malaysia (10.5%)</td></tr>
<tr><td>5</td><td>Malaysia (4.2%)</td><td rowspan="2">Indonesia / South Korea (7.4%)</td><td>US (9.0%)</td><td rowspan="4">China / India / Russia / UK (6.5%)</td></tr>
<tr><td>6</td><td>Thailand (3.9%)</td><td>Thailand (6.0%)</td></tr>
<tr><td>7</td><td>UK (2.7%)</td><td>Thailand (5.3%)</td><td>South Korea (5.3%)</td></tr>
<tr><td>8</td><td>Germany (2.4%)</td><td>The Philippines (3.9%)</td><td>Russia (4.5%)</td></tr>
<tr><td>9</td><td>Russia (1.6%)</td><td>UK (3.5%)</td><td rowspan="2">Indonesia / UK (3.8%)</td><td rowspan="3">Indonesia / South Korea / France (3.2%)</td></tr>
<tr><td>10</td><td rowspan="3">India / France (1.4%)</td><td>Russia (1.8%)</td></tr>
<tr><td>11</td><td>France (1.4%)</td><td rowspan="2">Germany / France (3.0%)</td></tr>
<tr><td>12</td><td rowspan="3">Indonesia / The Philippines (1.2%)</td><td>India (1.1%)</td><td>Thailand (1.6%)</td></tr>
<tr><td>13</td><td rowspan="2">Vietnam / Germany (0.7%)</td><td>Vietnam (1.5%)</td><td rowspan="3">Vietnam / Germany / Others (0%)</td></tr>
<tr><td>14</td><td>Vietnam (0.7%)</td><td>Others (0.8%)</td></tr>
<tr><td>15</td><td>Others (0.6%)</td><td>Others (0.4%)</td><td>The Philippines (0%)</td></tr>
</table>

APPENDIX 3: KEY EXAMPLES OF QUALITATIVE / THEMATIC CODING

Figure 2.1.1b: "You indicated that Singapore has a national identity. What would be some features or attributes of this identity?" Top-5 Themes in Qualitative Responses mentioned by overall proportions (%) of respondents	
Themes	***Example Inputs***
Language use (inc. Singlish, English, and Mother Tongues)	*"Language we spoke"* *"Bilingual…"* *"Singlish accent…"* *"speaking Singlish all day and everyday"*
Multicultural make-up of society (across different races, religions)	*"We are a cohesive country with many races and religions"* *"Her multi racial society is unique to Singapore. People of different racial and religious backgrounds live in peace and harmony"*
Symbols (e.g., Merlion, flag, passport, NRIC, orchid, airport)	*"A pink IC"* *"Merlion"* *"The national flower"*
Food (inc. hawker culture / hawker fare and a diversity of options)	*"I suppose the food we eat"* *"Food and security"* *"our hawker culture"*
Behaviourial traits (e.g., kiasu, hardworking, proud, efficient)	*"Kiasu"* *"Kiasuness, educated, hardworking and a bit of a show off"* *"Complain King & queen"*

Figure 2.1.2b: "What does it mean to you to be Singaporean?" Top-5 Themes in Qualitative Responses mentioned by overall proportions (%) of respondents	
Themes	***Example Inputs***
Sense of pride or belonging to Singapore	*"Proud to be Singaporean"* *"It's about believing in this nation, committing to its future, and standing up to defend our home, not just for the current generation, but also future generations"*
Embrace multiculturalism / multiracialism	*"Being Singaporean means identifying with a place where tradition and modernity coexist. From enjoying hawker food to celebrating multicultural festivals, or engaging with cutting-edge technology while remaining connected to cultural roots"* *"Living in multi racial society"*

Being born in Singapore and residing in Singapore	*"It simply means I was born in Singapore"* *"To live in Singapore with your family and friends and be proud of your background here"*
Embracing a peaceful, harmonious, and safe environment	*"Safe and secure, clean"* *"Being a Singaporean makes me feel proud and safe. Singapore is such a safe place where I can live in peace"*
Speaking Singlish	*"Being real, speak Singlish, xinyao music"* *"Has the Singlish accent"*

Figure 2.1.3: "What is the first thing that comes to mind when you think about a negative quality or characteristic of what it means to be Singaporean in general?" Top-5 Themes in Qualitative Responses mentioned by overall proportions (%) of respondents

Themes	***Example Inputs***
Being kiasu (i.e., scared of losing out)	*"Kiasu, self entitled mindset"* *"Afraid to lose on thing like achieving positive outcome be it in career or education"* *"To be in a rat race and being kiasu"*
Contending with high costs of living	*"High cost of living"* *"Pay and pay"* *"Too expensive"* *"Money not enough"*
Being entitled and complaints-prone	*"Some Singaporean takes things for granted. Wait till they work or live abroad then they will realise how fortunate to be a Singaporean"* *"self entitlement for some when travelling overseas, complain too much"*
Being competitive and prone to stress	*"We're not a gracious society, being groomed to survive in a 'rat race'"* *"Our society is too stressful due to meritocracy"* *"To be in a rat race and being kiasu"* *"To always chiong"*
Being selfish	*"Selfishness"* *"Selfish and not exposed to hardship"*

Figure 3.2b: "You indicated that Singapore's national identity today is very different or somewhat different compared to ten years ago. Why do you think so?" Top-5 Themes in qualitative responses

Themes	***Example Inputs***
Demographic and diversity shifts (e.g., immigration,	*"Too many foreigners"*

newcomers, multicultural mix)	*"The is a weaker sense of identity and cohesion. This is due to the mass influx of foreigners, who do not care to integrate and keep to their racial or national group or caste. Most of them are here to make as much money as possible, game the system and return to their home country or migrate to Western countries. Singapore is just a stepping stone for them even though some have obtained Singapore citizenship"* *"More arrogant ceca Indians"* *"more China people and dilutes our own culture and customs"*
Changing social values and norms (civility, cohesion, priorities, identity expression)	*"Self centred and entitled Lack of respect to elders"* *"Becoming progressive so lost cultural values"* *"People are more kiasu and selfish"* *"mindset of the people have shifted"* *"singaporean are more materistic, more lazy than ten years ago."*
Economic conditions and livelihood pressures (i.e., cost of living, housing, inequality, work)	*"Exchange rates"* *"Flats are build smaller and more expensive. Cars are getting our of reach for many. Food prices are sky high. Cost of living too high."* *"Singaporeans are facing competition in workforce. Too many foreigners who recruit their own people only."*
Technology, media and globalisation (e.g., social media, digitalisation, external influences)	*"More cosmopolitan due to easy exposure to foreign influences"* *"easily accessible to social media"* *"Technology has advanced a lot"*
Governance, policies and national narratives (i.e., policy directions, politics, institutions)	*"Government change"* *"The PM has changed from Lee to Wong"* *"Ten years ago, Govt did not try to listen citizens"* *"Our 4G is a very young and inexperienced party"* *"Government cares a lot less - a lot less compassionate"*

Figure 3.2c: "You indicated that Singapore's national identity today is very similar or some similar compared to ten years ago. Why do you think so?" Top-5 Themes in qualitative responses	
Themes	***Example Inputs***
Stable core identity and values (e.g., relatively	*"Singaporean are still resilient in overcoming challenges and are hardworking in everyday life"*

similar shared norms, culture, traditions, pride)	*"Core values like multiculturalism, meritocracy, and pragmatism remain strong…"* *"We still behave in the same manner as 10 years ago. Eg. chop table, kiasu attitude, speak singlish etc"*
Everyday life feels unchanged (i.e., routines, community, way of life similar)	*"do not see much of a change"* *"We are still proud to serve in the army"* *"The hawker food still taste about the same"*
Long-standing multicultural mix (diversity familiar, integration steady)	*"Fundamentals like social unity and racial harmony remains the same"* *"Ethnic identity"* *"Culture and harmony remain the same"*
Consistent governance and institutions (i.e., laws, policies, education, public service)	*"We have strong minister that ensure the we live in harmony"* *"stable government"* *"Continue to lead by PAP government"*
Economic and social continuity (i.e., work, opportunities, living standards steady)	*"Sustained and steady economic development has improved people's living standards and strengthened national cohesion and self-confidence"* *"We have not gone through any serious upheave in terms of law education or living standards thus now and 10yrs ago shouldn't be any different. Most of what works 10yrs ago works now too"*

Figure 4.2b: "You indicated that new citizens / PRs have negatively impacted national identity in Singapore ... why? Top-5 Themes in qualitative responses mentioned

Themes	***Example Inputs***
Cultural dilution and erosion of identity (e.g., in terms of values; language; traditions; loyalty)	*"New citizens still carrying their own culture and own nation identity"* *"New citizen will dilute and cause change to the identity"*
Competition for jobs and wages (i.e., locals displaced; undercutting; hiring biases)	*"Too many new citizens, It caused unfair treatment and system to the 'real' Singaporean. All good jobs given to new citizens"* *"THEY TAKE AWAY TRUE SPOREANS JOBS"* *"They have taken away white collar jobs meant for Singaporeans"* *"Taking on jobs and education spots that could have otherwise gone to locals"*
Integration and social mixing issues (e.g., do not	*"They not able to adapt to our culture due to their years of living style and foreign culture"*

blend in; enclaves; language barriers)	*"They don't seem to be able to blend into our culture"*
Behaviourial and social norms (e.g., rude; entitled; inconsiderate; rule-bending)	*"Rude behaviour, crime rate increase"* *"Especially China people who residing in Singapore with their loud voices and squatting everywhere in Singapore"*
Public services, housing, and crowding (e.g., HDB; schools; healthcare; transport)	*"As they cause public transport to be more crowded and our cultures to be diluted"* *"Foreign maids are overpopulating the country, especially on Sundays at Orchard area"*

Figure 4.2c: "You indicated that new citizens / PRs have *not impacted* national identity in Singapore ... why? Top-5 Themes in qualitative responses mentioned	
Themes	***Example Inputs***
Strong and stable Singaporean identity; resilient core unaffected by newcomers	*"Our national identity is already established"* *"I feel that for many years, our national identity has remained the same"*
Adequate integration and governance, with systems, norms and rules holding steady	*"They have been living in Singapore for some time and should understand and embrace our culture and national identify before deciding to be new citizen"* *"New citizens have to had live in Singapore for a while. They would have been immersed in the culture"* *"Government is playing its role to engage these new citizens"*
Minimal exposure or numbers: impact too small or limited contact	*"I feel like Singaporeans do not think new citizens directly impact them"* *"They form an immaterial % of total population"*
Individual variation; impact depends on person rather than the status (NC/PR)	*"It depends on each individual's experience as a citizen"* *"we dont define how citizenship is achieved, but our contribution and attitude towards Singapore"*
Balanced trade-offs (i.e., positives and negatives outweigh each other)	*"dont feel anything positive or negative"* *"there are pros and cons"*

Figure 4.2d: "You indicated that new citizens / PRs have positively impacted national identity in Singapore ... why? Top-5 Themes in qualitative responses mentioned	
Themes	***Example Inputs***
Cultural diversity and enrichment (e.g., broader perspectives; exchange; vibrancy)	*"We got mix of others cultures and believe but of course these new citizens would have to adapt into our society"* *"new citizens provide new points of view. even with these changes and perspectives, we still remain similar as a nation"* *"New citizens enhance Singapore's identity by bringing diverse perspectives and cultures"*
Contribution to skills, innovation, and the economy (i.e., talent; productivity; taxes)	*"Helping economic development"* *"Another source of manpower, especially talented people with special skill sets"* *"New citizens help to boost economy and take, up jobs, such as construction etc"* *"fostering inclusivity and innovation"*
Demographic renewal and family formation (i.e., population growth; resolving ageing population)	*"They will boost up the birthrate in sg"* *"increase birth rate"* *"maintain ratio"*
Integration and strengthening of shared values (e.g., blending in; adopt norms; cohesion)	*"the fact that these people will be able to be part of the national identity means that the identity is strong and has become stronger since their addition"* *"The new citizens have played an active role in maintaining social harmony and stability, promoting harmonious coexistence among diverse races and cultures"*
Impact on global connectivity and openness (e.g., international links; competitiveness; image)	*"promote economic cooperation and win-win results among countries"* *"more cosmopolitan, global"*

APPENDIX 4: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

While the four of us have had the privilege of bringing this comprehensive publication to life, it would not have been possible without the invaluable support of our colleagues and partners, whose dedication over the past year made this study a reality.

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As the saying goes, “great research is never a solo act,” and this publication is a testament to the collective effort of many.

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Melvin **TAY** is Research Fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies' Social Lab. His research interests lie at the intersection of politics and society; with a focus on societal faultlines, their significance, and their management via policy instruments and community platforms. He has scoped, managed, and contributed to several public sector-commissioned projects on race, religion, immigration, class, sexuality, age, and education – key faultlines in Singapore. Melvin previously worked in the corporate strategy team at a top consulting firm and contributed to strategy and visioning projects for key public sector agencies. Melvin is a recipient of the University of Tokyo Graduate School of Public Policy Doctoral Fellowship, and the National University of Singapore (NUS) Graduate Teaching Fellowship, Master's, and Undergraduate Scholarships. He has a PhD in Public Policy from the University of Tokyo, and a Master of Social Sciences (Political Economy) and a Bachelor of Social Sciences (1st Class Honours) in Political Science and Philosophy from NUS.

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