

Majority of Singaporeans want 1 in 5 people or fewer to be immigrants: survey

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SINGAPORE — The majority of respondents said the ideal proportion of immigrants in Singapore would be 20 per cent or less, according to a recent survey conducted by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS).

And just under half of respondents said the ideal proportion of immigrants in their HDB block would be 10 per cent or less.

The survey by the IPS was conducted between August last year and January this year and involved 4,015 respondents who are Singapore citizens and permanent residents. Part of the findings - involving race, religion and language - were released in July.

The majority — 58.2 per cent — said the ideal proportion of immigrants in Singapore would be 20 per cent or less.

About 27.6 per cent of the respondents said the ideal proportion of immigrants in Singapore should be 11 to 20 per cent, while another 27.9 per cent of them felt the proportion should be 1 to 10 per cent. Another 2.7 per cent of them wanted no immigrants of Singapore.

Their in-depth responses to five key fault lines - race, religion, immigration, class and LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) issues - were released on Tuesday (29 October) in a working paper titled 'Faultlines in Singapore: Public Opinion on their Realities, Management and Consequences'.

On the issue of immigration, the paper said, "In light of an ageing, shrinking citizen population, sustaining economic growth, meeting infrastructural demands such as labourers in construction, and supplementing social needs in healthcare and domestic work necessitates continued reliance on foreign labour and immigrants."

"However, while most locals accept the importance and value of the latter, many nonetheless perceive themselves to be in competition with migrant skilled labour, professionals, and students — at times unfairly. For instance, perceptions of foreigners depressing wages, displacing locals in universities, driving up rents and property prices abound," it said.

"Perceptions of differential treatment and unequal allocation of resources based on the origins of individuals persist too; at times exacerbated by fast flows of information via online and social media, and a limited understanding of context," it added.

Receptive to immigrants, but not next door

According to the survey, just under 90 per cent of respondents agreed that it is good to have people of different nationalities living in the same neighbourhood.

A similar proportion also said that they could learn a lot from cultures that foreigners of different nationalities bring into Singapore.

And 72 per cent of those polled said they like meeting and getting to know people who are new migrants to Singapore.

But 67.5 per cent said immigrants are not doing enough to integrate into Singapore.

And respondents were also less likely to accept immigrants in very close proximities, such as their HDB blocks.

Close to half of the respondents, or 47.7 per cent, said the ideal proportion of immigrants in their HDB block would be 10 per cent or less.

“Overall results show marked resistance to fully embracing immigrants in Singapore, with levels of acceptability and embrace decreasing as proximity to immigrants increases,” said the IPS paper.

Younger respondents were slightly more accepting of immigrants compared with older respondents.

Negative perceptions of financial mobility

On class, the IPS survey showed a divide in perceived financial mobility based on education levels.

Less than a quarter of respondents with secondary education or below said that they foresee upward financial mobility in 10 years' time.

In contrast, 44 per cent of those with a Bachelor's degree or higher perceived potential upward mobility.

Nonetheless, 62.7 per cent of all respondents perceived negligible or downward financial mobility over the next decade.

“This would exacerbate socio-economic inequality, and render class divisions yet more capricious amidst an uncertain economic climate,” said the IPS paper.