

Study flags fault lines on immigration, class, LGBT

A study by the Institute of Policy Studies on fault lines in Singapore has found that most Singaporeans recognise there would be dire consequences if racial and religious issues are mismanaged.

Most respondents also feel the Government has done enough to manage these divisions.

However, fresh fault lines have emerged on class differences, immigration and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) rights, with more Singaporeans, especially younger ones, wanting the Government to intervene more.

These issues, if mishandled, are also seen to impact Singaporeans' trust in the Government more, compared with race and religion.

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Majority now aware of race, religious issues, but study flags new fault lines

40% in IPS survey link trust in Govt to how issues of immigration, class, LGBT are tackled

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A large majority of Singaporeans are aware of the seriousness of race and religious issues, and feel the Government has done enough to manage these divisions.

But fault lines have emerged on class, immigration and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) rights, where more Singaporeans, especially younger ones, want to see greater state involvement and public discourse.

These emerging issues, if mismanaged, are also seen to affect Singaporeans' trust in the Government the most, compared with race and religion.

These and other findings from a study of public opinion on fault lines in Singapore, carried out by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS), were released yesterday.

Based on a survey of about 4,000 citizens and permanent residents last year, the study noted that about a third of the respondents identified race and religion as having the potential to result in violence in Singapore if not managed properly – significantly more so than class, immigration and LGBT issues.

Yet only about a quarter tied race and religion to trust in the state and politicians, compared with almost 40 per cent who said trust levels in the Government would likely fall if class and immigration issues are mismanaged.

Close to half of both younger and older respondents felt there should be more state involvement in immigration, reflecting possible higher levels of xenophobia and job insecurity in recent times, regardless of age, said the researchers.

These results could mean that citizens now accord the Government more responsibility to do more to manage class differences and immigration issues, they added.

"People may feel that the Government already has clear policies and frameworks that are fairly robust when it comes to race and religion. But perhaps for immigration, socio-economic status and LGBT issues, people might want the state to be more involved in managing those issues," said IPS senior research fellow

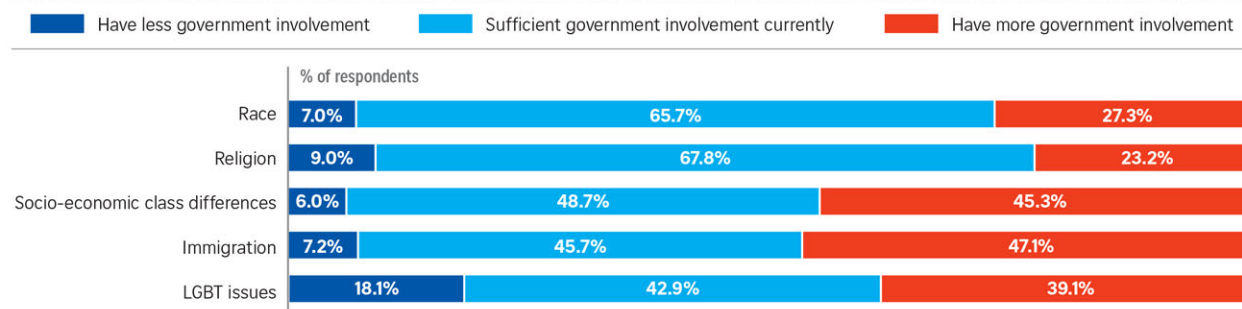
Overall opinions on implications of fault-line mismanagement

There are certain issues in society which may have an impact on social cohesion. If not managed well, in your opinion, what are the likely consequences to Singapore of each of these issues? (You can tick as many choices as you feel are appropriate for each. For example, if you feel that a particular issue may lead to suspicion/mistrust among groups, anger, and polarisation, you can tick all three.)

Fault lines	% of respondents indicating "yes"*						
	No consequence	Suspicion / mistrust among communities	Polarisation (sharp differences in views)	Anger against particular communities	Decreased national identity / sense of belonging to Singapore	Fall in levels of trust in Government / politicians	Violence
Race	12.8%	48.5%	35.3%	48.1%	30.6%	29.6%	34.0%
Religion	13.8%	42.0%	42.6%	46.3%	22.7%	24.0%	31.9%
Socio-economic class differences	12.4%	27.8%	36.6%	36.5%	27.9%	37.2%	14.6%
Immigration	11.4%	28.9%	31.1%	37.6%	41.3%	39.5%	16.6%
LGBT issues	16.5%	23.2%	42.4%	41.2%	19.6%	23.5%	13.8%

NOTE: * Percentages represent proportion of participants who checked boxes for the outcome and will not equate across the outcomes to 100% due to multiple selections.

Overall opinions on government involvement in mitigating key fault lines



NOTE: Figures may not add up due to rounding.

Source: IPS WORKING PAPERS NO.37 STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

low Mathew Mathews.

This is unlike in the early years after independence, when the focus was on surviving communal politics.

Besides Dr Mathews, the other researchers were IPS research associate Melvin Tay and research assistant Shanthini Selvarajan.

Youth less keen on more govt intervention on race and religion

Just over a fifth of young people aged between 18 and 25 surveyed wanted more state involvement in race issues, compared with one-third of those aged above 65.

Similar results were observed for religion.

This could be due to the lived experiences of the older generation, who experienced the Maria Hertogh and 1964 race riots, said researchers.

The former took place in 1950, after a court decided that a child who had been raised by Muslims should be returned to her Catholic biological parents.

In 1964, clashes took place between the Malays and Chinese amid

rising ethnic and political tensions.

For older Singaporeans, these events drove home the need for a robust state apparatus to intervene and keep the peace, added the researchers.

Significantly more Malays and Indians (about 40 per cent each) wanted greater state involvement in race issues than Chinese (24 per cent) – a sign that ethnic minorities are more likely to perceive or experience discrimination than the majority. A similar trend was seen for religion.

In addition, people of minority races with a university degree and above desired more state intervention than their less-educated counterparts, showing that increased education results in greater awareness of, and desire to resolve, racial and religious issues, said the study.

Minority races, youth more likely to probe potential discrimination

When asked how they would respond after getting an e-mail or phone message that a business had

refused to serve people from a certain race or religion, nearly half of both Malays and Indians said they were likely to investigate the issue, compared with 37 per cent of Chinese.

About 30 per cent each of Malays and Indians were also more likely to take the allegation seriously by reporting it to the authorities, compared with 13 per cent of Chinese.

Younger Singaporeans would also be more proactive in tracing the source of such a message, with two-thirds saying they would check with their friend who sent it, compared with only half of respondents aged 65 and above.

This could be because younger people aged 18 to 25 are more sensitive and concerned about discrimination. Being digital natives, they are likely to investigate matters further, said the study.

Overall, the study showed that an overwhelming 92 per cent of respondents believed the Government had done well to improve racial and religious harmony.

An example of vigorous state intervention to combat social divides, it said, can be seen in the area of religion – where a range of hard and soft legislation like the Internal Security Act, Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act, and the Inter-Racial and Religious Confidence Circles has prevented potential discord and wider conflict.

But while seven in 10 aged above 65 agreed that the Government is responsible for racial and religious harmony in Singapore, only half of respondents aged 18 to 25 felt this way, it added.

The researchers said this shows older Singaporeans may attribute greater responsibility to the state, or believe these fault lines are most effectively managed by strong government intervention.

But going forward, younger generations could prefer a more community-driven approach to race and religion.

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Religious reactions on LGBT could cause discomfort

Religious people or leaders speaking up strongly on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) issues could cause significant discomfort among Singaporeans, a study on fault lines in Singapore has found.

Some six in 10 respondents said they would be uncomfortable with this scenario.

The respondents also identified religion and LGBT issues as the fault lines most likely to lead to the polarisation of society.

These findings, which were released by the Institute of Policy Studies yesterday, attest to the importance of the Government's policy of separating religion and politics, said the study's authors.

They also highlighted the need for consultative and inclusive policymaking to mitigate polarisation over LGBT issues.

Between 2013 and last year, there were "steep drops" in opposition towards LGBT issues, the study said. But divisions along this fault line are likely to deepen given the role that other social divides like religion, age and education level play in shaping attitudes towards LGBT issues.

Christian respondents were the most likely to be amenable to religious leaders being vocal about LGBT issues. Slightly over half of them said they would be comfortable with it, while the majority of those professing other religions or no religion – between 55 and 71 per cent – said they would feel uncomfortable.

On the potential consequences of managing LGBT issues poorly, younger and more educated respondents were more likely to feel this could result in polarisation and anger against particular communities.

Half of those aged 18 to 25, the youngest cohort surveyed, said polarisation and anger were likely consequences, as did more than half of respondents who held a bachelor's degree and above. Just over a third of those aged above 65, and those with secondary education and below, felt the same way.

This could indicate that LGBT issues were seen as more crucial among younger and more educated respondents, who tended to be more accepting of LGBT rights, the study said.

The divisiveness of LGBT issues also came through in respondents' desired levels of state involvement and public discussion. Younger and more liberal respondents were the most likely to want greater government involvement and more public discussion of LGBT issues.

They might want the Government to ensure equal rights for LGBT people or to repeal Section 377A of the Penal Code which criminalises consensual sex between men, said IPS senior research fellow Mathew Mathews, the study's lead author.

Older respondents and those who said they held neutral or more conservative views were more likely to find current levels of government involvement and public discussion sufficient.

Christians (46 per cent) and Muslims (about 44 per cent) were also more likely to support greater government involvement – but for different reasons.

Adherents of monotheistic faiths are less likely to support LGBT rights, and may want the state to retain Section 377A or curtail the rise of LGBT discourse and events such as the annual pro-LGBT Pink Dot rally, the study said. "They may want the Government to deal with what might be seen as intrusions on the status quo," said Dr Mathews.

Class and immigration: Younger S'poreans want more talk, govt action

Younger, better-educated and wealthier Singaporeans want more discussion and government involvement in class and immigration issues. They are also more likely to feel that trust levels in the Government and politicians will fall if both issues are not managed well.

According to an Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) study released yesterday, half of young Singaporeans aged 18 to 25 surveyed wanted more public discourse and state involvement in issues concerning class differences, compared with just over 40 per cent of those aged 65 and above.

Almost half, too, indicated lower trust in the Government if class differences were not properly managed. Almost a third said that it would decrease their sense of belonging to Singapore, compared

with less than 30 per cent of older Singaporeans.

Explaining this, the study said younger Singaporeans may be more affected by inequality issues, as they experience more competition for jobs and a widening socio-economic divide.

Perceived financial mobility plays a part too. Those who perceive downward personal and inter-generational financial mobility expect trust in the Government to deteriorate the most – more so than other consequences like polarisation, mistrust among communities, anger and violence.

And with two-thirds of the study's respondents saying that they are experiencing downward or negligible financial mobility, it is critical that class differences are addressed, said the study. "If misman-



Half or more of those living in private property felt trust in the Government and national identity can erode if immigration is mismanaged, compared with a third of those living in three-room or smaller flats, the study shows. ST PHOTO: GIN TAY

aged, these would result in increased disenfranchisement within younger cohorts, and perceptions of greater discord."

Half or more of those living in private property felt that trust in the Government and national identity can erode if immigration is mismanaged, compared with a third of those living in three-room or smaller Housing Board flats.

The study said that wealthier Singaporeans, who tend to live in more

expensive housing, are likely to be more educated and in increased competition with employment pass holders for similar jobs.

They are also jostling with foreigners to buy and invest in private housing, unlike HDB flats which have foreign ownership restrictions. "Hence, more affluent individuals may tie the management of immigration issues more directly to their trust in the state, as well as their sense of national belonging and

identity," said the study.

Immigration is a pain point especially for the Chinese. More local born Chinese compared with Malays and Indians said it could lead to erosion in national identity and trust in the Government – a difference of 12 percentage points.

"It is possible that more Chinese respondents want to maintain a distinctly Singaporean Chinese identity and fear that immigration might change that," the researchers said.

Overall, close to half of both younger and older respondents felt there should be more state involvement in immigration, reflecting possible higher levels of xenophobia and job insecurity in recent times regardless of age, they added.

While almost all respondents (93 per cent) agreed it is good for their children to play with others from a variety of backgrounds, over a third still prefer to associate with others of similar income levels.

This is particularly entrenched among less educated Singaporeans, who should be given "greater confidence in interacting with those who are better off", the study said.

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