



PRESS RELEASE

18 July 2013

BASELINE STUDY ON INDICATORS OF RACIAL AND RELIGIOUS HARMONY UNVEILED

- shows Singapore has much to celebrate about the state of harmony here

Background

1. OnePeople.sg, a ground-up national body focused on building racial and religious harmony, and the Institute of Policy Studies at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore, have together created a set of indicators to gauge the state of racial and religious relations in Singapore.

2. This baseline study provides important information that will allow careful tracking of the state of racial and religious relations over the years. This will provide a scorecard on Singapore's progress in building harmonious racial and religious relations.

Headline Findings

IPS-OnePeople.sg Indicators of Racial and Religious Harmony

Indicators ranked by scores

Ranking	Indicator	Score
1	Absence of minority discrimination in using public services	9.75
2	Absence of inter racial and religious tension	7.99
3	Embracing diversity	7.63
4	Absence of minority discrimination in the work place	7.56
5	Interracial and religious comfort in private and public spheres	7.46
6	Interracial and religious social trust	7.18
7	Embracing colour blindness	6.96
8	Interest in intercultural understanding and interaction	6.49
9	Absence of minority perception of social exclusion	6.20
10	Presence of close interracial friendships	4.51

3. The top three ranked indicators are a testament to the success of Singapore policies to foster racial and religious harmony. Public services are shown to treat everyone fairly. Firm legal measures safeguard against religious and racial tension. The promotion of multiracialism through education, media, housing, community engagement and other channels has instilled the value of diversity to Singaporeans.

Methodology

4. The indicators were developed after consultation with stakeholders and consideration of the international research. The ideas behind the indicators resonated with Singaporeans; about half of those surveyed ranked this set of 10 indicators among the top five indicators of racial and religious harmony.

5. The scores for this indicators study were derived from a recently concluded national survey that captured the attitudes and experiences of 4,131 Singaporeans who were at least 18 years and older.

6. There were two components to this sample. The first was a nationally representative sample of 5,000 Singaporeans who were randomly selected to participate in this study. Interviewers visited the households of prospective respondents and explained the survey. Respondents completed the questionnaires on their own unless they had difficulties reading and writing. A total of 3,128 eligible households participated in this study. The overall profile of the sample mirrors the national demographic profile.

7. The survey asked similar questions to all Singaporeans. However, the calculation of scores for discrimination and exclusion is more appropriate if only minority sentiments are taken into account. In order to ensure that minority views were adequately represented, an additional booster sample of 492 Malay and 489 Indian Singaporeans was included in the study. This resulted in a total of 1,736 Indians and Malays in the sample that were used to calculate scores where minority views were sought. While there are other minority groups in Singapore besides Malays and Indians, the smaller numbers among these groups made it challenging to incorporate their views for an accurate reading of the indicator measures.

About the Indicators

8. The 10 indicators that have been developed in the course of this study recognise the multidimensional nature of racial and religious harmony.

Commitment to Diversity, Colour Blindness and Intercultural Understanding

9. Racial and religious harmony stems from a commitment to diversity where societal members value those of other races and regard their contribution as important to nation-building.

10. At the same time, racial and religious harmony entails embracing a colour-blind ideology where one's racial background does not become the basis for differential treatment or the levelling of stereotypes.

11. Ultimately, positive regard for other racial and religious groups will mean a greater willingness to build intercultural understanding.

Freedom from Exclusion, Discrimination and Tension

12. Internationally, when countries pursue the goal of racial and religious harmony, they envision a society where minority groups do not feel discriminated, both in their access to public goods and services as well as in the job market. In many countries, minority discrimination occurs most frequently in these two areas.

13. The pursuit of racial and religious harmony also entails that there is minimum social exclusion of minorities. This is observed primarily in minority members' ability to obtain a decent standard of living without having to work harder than majority members.

14. A more difficult goal, but often an important aspiration, is for minorities to have unhindered access to achieve top positions in corporations, again without the burden of having to outperform majority members.

15. A racially and religiously harmonious society also provides security for all groups in that they do not experience racial and religious tension. Such tension includes insults about the racial customs or religious beliefs of a community or acts that challenge such beliefs.

Social Trust, Acceptance and Connectedness

16. The promise of racially and religiously harmonious societies is that there is social trust of different races and religious groups — among the most defining criteria being the sense that all communities can be depended on during a crisis.

17. Further, the ability of members of different races and religious groups to accept those of other groups in both the public sphere — as employees and next-door neighbours — and ideally even in the private sphere — as close friends and familial relations — demonstrates harmonious intercultural relationships.

18. A significant marker of such closeness should be indicated by behaviours where members of a racially and religiously harmonious society have close friends of other racial and religious groups.

Measurement of Indicators & Brief Findings

Absence of Minority Discrimination in Using Public Services

19. This indicator was based on Malay and Indian responses to a series of questions where respondents were asked how they were treated (or thought they would be treated) when using public services compared to those of other races.

20. Items used in this indicator probed respondents' perception of discrimination when using hospital services; at school or other educational institutions; at social service agencies if they needed financial assistance; and at the courts or by the police if they reported a crime or were suspected of having committed an offence.

21. Only one in 10 Indian and Malay respondents perceived being treated worse than other races for at least one of the abovementioned dimensions of public services.

Absence of Interracial and Religious Tension

22. This indicator was based on responses to a series of questions where survey participants were asked whether Singapore was generally free from racial or religious tension, and whether they had experienced any racial or religious tension in their daily lives. They were also asked if they had been upset by a number of potentially racially or religiously tense situations that occurred in the previous two years. These circumstances included being insulted for their racial customs or religious beliefs, challenged about their religious beliefs or practices, and undesirable attempts to convert their religious beliefs.

23. No more than one out of 10 respondents from all races reported often feeling upset due to any form of racial or religious tension.

24. Six out of 10 respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Singapore is free from both racial and religious tension while seven out of 10 respondents agreed that they did not experience any religious or racial tension in their daily lives.

Embracing Diversity

25. This indicator was measured by asking whether respondents could learn a lot from other racial groups and whether it was a good thing for Singapore to be made up of people from different racial groups.

26. Six out of 10 respondents "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that they could learn a lot from other racial groups. Seven out of 10 respondents "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that it is a good thing for Singapore to be made up of different racial groups.

Interracial and Religious Social Trust

27. This indicator was measured by asking Singaporeans what proportion of those from specific racial and religious groups would help them in a national crisis.

28. Three out of four respondents from all races reported feeling that they could trust at least half of those from another racial group to do so.

Interracial and Religious Comfort in Private and Public Spheres

29. This indicator was measured by asking respondents how comfortable they were with people of different racial and religious groups at varying degrees of social relationships. These relations included those in the private sphere, such as a close friend, marriage partner or in-law. How comfortable Singaporeans were with having their employer, next-door neighbour, employee or the majority of people in Singapore from another racial group, was an indicator of the degree of interracial and religious comfort in the public sphere.

30. For public sphere relationships, Singaporeans were very comfortable with local-born members of other races. Nine out of 10 Singaporeans of all races were comfortable having someone of another race as a neighbour, colleague or employee. Fewer however were open to having them as a spouse or marrying into their family with only a third of respondents of some races willing to accept a spouse from another race or religion. However, eight out of 10 Singaporeans were comfortable of having a close friend from another race or religion.

Absence of Minority Discrimination in the Work Place

31. This indicator was measured using minority respondents' answers to several questions on whether they felt racially discriminated when at work, applying for a job or when being considered for a job promotion.

32. Only two out of 10 Malay or Indian respondents reported that they had often felt this for at least one of the items in this indicator. One out of four respondents sometimes perceived such discrimination.

Embracing Colour Blindness

33. This indicator was measured by respondents' agreement to the statements, "Someone's race does not affect how I interact with him/her" and "Someone's race or religious identity should be disregarded when it comes to considering him or her for a job". Agreement on another statement, "When I know what someone's race is, I have a good idea of what some of his/her behaviour and views will be like", was treated as indicating a lack of colour-blindness. Agreement to this statement indicated that respondents' had presuppositions of how various racial groups should behave and thus were more likely to stereotype.

34. Seven out of 10 respondents agreed or strongly agreed that someone's race did not affect their interaction with him/her.

35. A similar proportion (seven out of 10) agreed or strongly agreed that race and religion should be disregarded when considering someone for a job.

36. Just under half of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they had a good idea of someone's behaviour and views once they knew what race that person belonged.

Interest in Intercultural Understanding and Interaction

37. This indicator was measured both on the dimensions of intercultural interaction and intercultural understanding. Interest in intercultural interaction was derived from items where respondents were asked whether they liked meeting and getting to know people from other racial or religious groups. They were also asked whether they would try to get to know people of other racial and religious groups if they were given the opportunity.

38. Intercultural understanding was measured by questions that asked respondents if they understood other cultures or were interested in understanding the customs and practices of other racial and religious groups. Additional questions also asked whether they would be willing to clarify their racial and religious practices if asked or seek clarification on other people's racial and religious customs.

39. Almost six out of 10 respondents indicated that they either agreed or strongly agreed that they liked meeting and getting to know people from other racial groups. One out of two respondents indicated similar agreement for the case of getting to know people from other religious groups. Six out of 10 respondents expressed that if they were given the opportunity, they were at likely to try to get to know people of other racial and religious groups.

40. About one in two respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they were interested to understand the customs and practices of other racial groups. A fairly similar proportion agreed or strongly agreed that they were interested in understanding the customs and practices of other religious groups.

41. Six out of 10 respondents only "sometimes" asked others to share their religious beliefs and practices, but about seven out of 10 respondents only "sometimes" shared their religious beliefs and practices with others when asked.

Absence of Minority Perception of Social Exclusion

42. This indicator was measured by two questions. The first asked respondents to comment on whether different races had to work harder or much harder than other races to achieve a decent life in Singapore. The second question was directed at whether different races had to work harder or much harder to access to top positions in their organisations.

43. About two out of 10 respondents opined that Malays or Indians had to work harder than other races to achieve a decent life in Singapore. Less than four out of 10 respondents noted this for the case of Malays and Indians accessing top positions in their organisation.

Presence of Close Interracial Friendships

44. This indicator was measured by computing the proportion of respondents who had at least one close friend (someone they could share their personal problems with) of another racial group.

45. Overall, 45% of respondents had one cross-racial friend.

46. About two in 10 Chinese respondents had a Malay or Indian friend while nearly two-thirds of Malays and Indians had at least one Chinese close friend.

Analysis

47. The top ranked indicator, “Absence of minority discrimination in using public services” reveals that the strong commitment that has been entrenched through Singapore’s public policy to ensure that all races enjoy similar treatment when using public services, has actually resonated with minority experiences.

48. While there have been several high-profile incidences in the past years of racial and religious sensitivities, the second ranked indicator “Absence of interracial and religious tension” shows that this has not deterred most Singaporeans from experiencing life free from such racial and religious tension.

49. The third indicator, “Embracing Diversity” is perhaps most salient in showing that the ideology of multiracialism is well entrenched. Singaporeans of all races are positive about the cultural diversity found here and value this.

50. Despite the glowing scores on these indicators, we must pay attention to areas where the indicators show that we are not performing well.

51. Although most Singaporeans are open to cross-racial friendships, the reality as shown by the last ranked indicator is that Singaporeans still tend to have close friends among their own races. The majority of Singaporeans do not have at least one close cross-racial friend. This is possibly because of the lack of opportunities among some sectors of the Singaporean population to cultivate such close interracial friendships.

52. While experiences of discrimination among minorities in the work place was confined to the experience of only a small portion, there is a perception that they had more barriers to cross in order to attain top positions. This fact cannot be easily attributed to minority bias since there is empathy from majority members, a third of whom perceive that minorities need to work harder to get to the top. Careful consideration must be made in the employment sector to identify the source of such perceptions and correct them as needed.

53. The third lowest ranked indicator, “Interest in intercultural understanding and interaction” reveals that there is still scope for the development of greater cultural awareness among Singaporeans. As a society we value diversity but there needs to be more openness to share the uniqueness of our distinctive heritage and seek to understand those of others.

Conclusion & Future Plans

54. Based on the results of the IPS-OnePeople.sg Indicators of Racial and Religious Harmony, there is much that Singaporeans can celebrate about their strong affinity to multiracialism.

55. We call on policy makers, community and religious leaders, employers and the general public to consider the results from the indicators and build on the inherent strengths that we display and continue to address gaps. Such efforts are certain to bear fruit in further building racial and religious harmony in Singapore.

56. OnePeople.sg will be using these indicators as the basis of continued dialogue. It has already used some of these findings to inform nearly 1,000 teachers and school leaders at a recent close-door event. This engagement will continue at the HarmonyWorks conference on 27 July 2013, where youths will deliberate the implications of these indicators. There will also be a joint public forum in 11 September 2013 with the Institute of Policy Studies where a panel of local intellectuals and community leaders will discuss and deliberate on these findings.

Further Information

57. For queries on the IPS-OnePeople.sg Indicators of Racial and Religious Harmony, you may contact the Principal investigator of this study, Dr Mathew Mathews at sppmam@nus.edu.sg or Tel: 66011416 or Mr Ramesh Ganeson, Executive Director OnePeople.sg at ramesh@onepeople.sg or Tel: 62596441.