

RESULTS FROM THE 2024 IPS-ONEPEOPLE.SG INDICATORS OF RACIAL AND RELIGIOUS HARMONY

Aim

1. This paper presents the findings from the 2024 Indicators of Racial and Religious Harmony study, a joint project by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) at NUS and OnePeople.sg.

Background

2. This is the third iteration of IPS-OnePeople.sg's study to measure public perception of harmony, trust, acceptance and experiences of discrimination in Singapore. It rides on the IPS Survey on Race, Religion and Language which was conducted between April 2024 to August 2024, on a nationally representative sample of 4,000 Singaporean residents. The current study builds on comparable data from 2018/19 and 2013. Key trends and developments across the indicators highlight both progress and persistent challenges.

Summary of Key Findings

3. **Levels of Racial and Religious Harmony:** Two-thirds (65.4 per cent) of respondents in 2024 rated Singapore's racial and religious harmony as high or very high, up from 57.1 per cent in 2018/19. Racial minorities were more likely to indicate that racial and religious harmony was at moderate levels. Older respondents were also more likely to indicate high or very high levels compared to younger respondents.

4. **Inter-Racial and Religious Social Trust:** Trust in other racial and religious groups increased significantly. Over three-quarters of respondents trusted more than half of Chinese (77.6 per cent), and about two-thirds of respondents trusted more than half of Malays (69.7 per cent), Indians (68.6 per cent), and Eurasians (67.4 per cent) to help them during a national crisis; an improvement over the previous waves. The proportion of respondents expressing distrust in other racial groups decreased from 42.7 per cent in 2013 to 27.2 per cent in 2024, with similar trends observed for religious groups.

5. **Inter-Racial and Religious Acceptance:** As in previous studies, racial and religious acceptance was highest for public relationships (e.g., colleague or neighbour), compared to personal relationships (e.g., sibling-in-law or spouse). 78.2 per cent of respondents indicated that they would accept a local-born Chinese as their sibling-in-law, and fewer said they would accept a local-born Malay (62.1 per cent) and a local-born Indian (62.4 per cent). In comparison, more respondents said they would accept a local-born Chinese (94.4 per cent), a local-born Malay (91.3 per cent), and a local-born Indian (90.3 per cent) as a colleague. Nevertheless, the racial and religious acceptance (for all groups including new citizens) in public and private relationships has increased over the three studies.

6. **Cross-Racial Friendships:** Over half of respondents reported having at least one close friend of another race in 2024 (53.2 per cent). This is a marginal decrease relative to 2018-19 (55.5 per cent), but still a significant increase relative to a decade ago (45.6 per cent). The marginal decline could be attributed to an overall decline in close friends – regardless of race, the average number of close friends in 2024 was 6.49, which was a decrease from 2018-19 (10.67) and 2013 (8.33), as reported by respondents. Younger respondents and HDB-dwellers were more likely to report cross-racial friendships compared to their older and private property-dwelling counterparts. More racial minorities (72.5 per cent for Malay respondents; 84.5 per cent for Indian respondents) reported having cross-racial friendships, compared to respondents from the Chinese majority (45.3 per cent). This is most likely due to demographics of the population, with minorities much more likely to encounter and subsequently build friendships with majority race persons.

7. **Perceptions of Discrimination:** Discrimination in accessing public services remains rare, with about nine in 10 respondents indicating that they were treated “about the same” as other races across all three waves. In addition, less than 10.0 per cent of racial minorities felt that they were treated worse, or much worse, than other races when using public services ranging from the criminal justice system (the courts and police) to educational, health and social services. At the workplace, overall reported experiences of discrimination at the workplace have decreased, with 7.0 per cent of respondents indicating that they faced discrimination regarding a job or a job promotion in 2024, compared to 9.3 per

cent in 2018-19. Among those who reported discrimination at work, the most common forms included language use by others that excluded respondents from conversations (57.7 per cent) and perceived exclusionary behaviour during job promotions, such as perceiving that people from other races were being promoted because of their race, and not their qualifications (47.7 per cent). In particular, fewer than one in five Malays (18.4 per cent) and Indians (16.7 per cent) in 2024 reported feeling racially discriminated against in a job or a job promotion — down from over a quarter of each group in 2018/19 (27.9 per cent of Malays and 26.5 per cent of Indians) and similarly higher figures in 2013 (26.3 per cent of Malays and 24.2 per cent of Indians). When it comes to selecting employees, respondents overwhelmingly prioritised ability, with race and religion seen as not or rarely important by over six in 10 (62.3 per cent) and seven in 10 (72.3 per cent) respondents, respectively.

8. **Perceptions of Exclusion:** While the majority of respondents in 2024 (about seven in 10) felt there were no significant differences in the effort required by various racial groups to achieve a basic, decent life in Singapore, or to reach top positions in companies, a considerable proportion felt that Singaporean Malays and Indians had to work harder, or much more than others to have a basic, decent life (about 18.0 per cent for Malays and Indians), or to reach top positions in Singapore (25.7 per cent for Malays; 21.7 per cent for Indians). These proportions have however, decreased marginally (ranging from 2.7 per cent to 6.2 per cent decline) since 2018-19. Furthermore, differences were observed across age, race, and education levels. Older respondents were more likely to believe that people of all races work equally hard to achieve these goals, while younger respondents felt that, in general, Singaporean Chinese and Eurasians need to put in less effort, and Singaporean Malays and Indians need to work harder.

9. **Inter-Racial and Religious Tensions:** The majority of respondents in 2024 felt that Singapore is free from racial and religious tensions, with over eight in 10 agreeing that they do not experience such tensions in their daily lives. Older and lower-educated respondents were more likely to hold these positive views. Furthermore, racial minorities were less likely to say that they have never felt upset because someone insulted their race or racial customs. However, certain religious practices, such as the burning of religious items and loud events at void decks, continue to irritate some respondents in 2024 (13.7 per cent for burning of religious items; 10.1 per cent for loud events at void decks) compared to 2018-19

(16.0 per cent for burning of religious items; 9.3 per cent for loud events at void decks).

10. **Embracing Diversity:** In 2024, 71.1 per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that racial diversity is beneficial for Singapore, reflecting a 4.4 per cent increase from 2018/19. Malay and Indian respondents were more likely to value diversity than their Chinese counterparts. Younger respondents were also more likely to express a strong belief in learning from other racial and religious groups, which could signify that the multicultural narrative is increasingly accessible to younger cohorts of Singaporeans who have undergone national education programmes. Minority groups, such as Malays and Indians, and those of Hindu and Muslim faiths, were slightly less likely to feel that there was sufficient accommodation for dietary restrictions or cultural practices at public events as compared to respondents of other races and religions.

11. **Colour-Blind Ideology:** Most respondents (71.1 per cent) agreed or strongly agreed that they do not let a person's race influence their social interactions, showing a slight increase compared to previous studies. Despite this, there was also in 2024 a rise in racial stereotyping, with 43.5 per cent agreeing or strongly agreeing that they form assumptions about someone's behaviour based on their race, up from 35.2 per cent in 2018-19. Racial minorities, along with older, less educated, and less affluent respondents, were more likely to engage in stereotyping. In job evaluations, a majority (63.9 per cent) agreed or strongly agreed that race or religion should not be considered, which was a slight increase from 2018-19 (62.0 per cent).

12. **Intercultural Understanding and Communication:** Interest in understanding other cultures' customs and practices have grown slightly. About four in 10 respondents (41.8 per cent) agreed or strongly agreed that they had an interest in understanding other racial groups' customs and practices, up from 38.3 per cent in 2018-19. Similarly, 37.9 per cent of respondents were interested in learning about other religious beliefs and practices, compared to 33.9 per cent in 2018-19. Racial and religious minorities, as well as younger respondents, were also more likely to be curious about different customs. Additionally, more respondents reported ample opportunities to interact with individuals from other racial and religious groups at work, school, or during leisure, or online, although

Chinese respondents and older individuals were less likely to engage in these interactions.

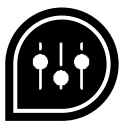


Plans Forward

13. OPSG and IPS, will release the study findings (see Annex A for the full report) through a joint press conference. The press conference will highlight salient issues arising from the study along with proactive steps by OPSG to build on the positive momentum, and address gaps, especially in areas of workplace diversity, community dialogues, and youth advocacy (See Annex B for OPSG's Response to the Indicators of Racial and Religious Harmony 2024 Findings and Annex C for OPSG Programmes and Initiatives). OPSG's recent focus on social cohesion aims to bridge intergenerational perspectives and address socio-economic divides that intersect with race and religion. By partnering with community and religious groups, OPSG aims to facilitate meaningful dialogues to tackle these challenges, develop institutional capability and foster greater understanding.




14. The study also provides opportunities for key stakeholders to better understand current trends and develop strategic interventions. To further these efforts, OPSG's biennial Community Leaders' Conference, to be held jointly with IPS this year, will bring together community stakeholders to discuss these areas in depth. There are also plans to share the study findings via a series of engagements with the National Steering Committee on Racial and Religious Harmony, educators, and youths to explore emerging issues.

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Chairman OnePeople.sg





IPS-OnePeople.sg Indicators of Racial and Religious Harmony Summary Tracker (Three-Wave Comparison)

#	Indicator	Question Item	2024 (Δ from 2018/19)	2018/19 (Δ from 2013)	2013
1	 Levels of Racial & Religious Harmony	What would you say is the level of racial and religious harmony in Singapore currently? <i>(% indicating “high” or “very “high”)</i>	65.4% (+8.3%)	57.1%	N/A (not asked)
2	 Inter-Racial & -Religious Social Trust	What proportion of people from the following races do you think can be trusted to help you if Singapore faced a national crisis (e.g., Covid-19 / SARS) <i>(% indicating that they <u>do not</u> trust more than half of any racial group other than their own)</i>	27.2% (-7.4%)	34.5% (-8.2%)	42.7%
3A1	 Inter-Racial & -Religious Acceptance	Are you comfortable with members of each racial group as your spouse? <i>(% indicating “Yes” for local-born Malays)</i>	40.7% (+5.0%)	35.7% (+0.2%)	35.5%
3A2		Are you comfortable with members of each racial group as your spouse? <i>(% indicating “Yes” for local-born Indians)</i>	42.2% (+5.9%)	36.3% (+0.2%)	36.1%
3B1		Are you comfortable with members of each racial group as your next-door neighbour? <i>(% indicating “Yes” for local-born Malays)</i>	92.4% (+1.5%)	90.9% (-2.1%)	93.0%
3B2		Are you comfortable with members of each racial group as your next-door neighbour? <i>(% indicating “Yes” for local-born Indians)</i>	90.3% (+2.0%)	88.3% (-2.4%)	90.7%

IPS-OnePeople.sg Indicators of Racial and Religious Harmony
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4	 Social Connectedness	Proportions of respondents with at least one close friend of another race <i>(% with one or more friend of another race)</i>	53.2% (-2.3%)	55.5% (+9.9%)	45.6%
5A	 Perceptions of Discrimination	How well do you think you are treated by the police in comparison with other races? <i>(% indicating “worse” or “much worse”)</i>	2.5% (-0.7%)	3.2% (-0.8%)	4.0%
5B1		How often do you feel racially discriminated when applying for a job? <i>(% of Malays indicating “sometimes”, “often”, or “very often or always”)</i>	34.7% (-17.8%)	52.5% (+4.8%)	47.7%
5B2		How often do you feel racially discriminated when applying for a job? <i>(% of Indians indicating “sometimes”, “often”, or “very often or always”)</i>	33.3% (-13.9%)	47.2% (+5.5%)	41.7%
6A	 Perceptions of Exclusion	How much do you think Singaporean Malays have to work in order to reach top positions in their companies / organisations (relative to other races)? <i>(% indicating “harder than others” or “much harder than others”)</i>	25.7% (-6.2%)	31.9% (-3.8%)	35.7%
6B		How much do you think Singaporean Indians have to work in order to reach top positions in their companies / organisations (relative to other races)? <i>(% indicating “harder than others” or “much harder than others”)</i>	21.7% (-5.0%)	26.7% (-4.2%)	30.9%

IPS-OnePeople.sg Indicators of Racial and Religious Harmony
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7A	 Inter-Racial & -Religious Tensions	In general, I do not experience any form of racial tension in my daily life. (% indicating “somewhat agree”, “agree”, or “strongly agree”)	89.2% (+2.0%)	87.2% (-4.3%)	91.5%
7B		In general, I do not experience any form of religious tension in my daily life. (% indicating “somewhat agree”, “agree”, or “strongly agree”)	90.6% (+2.5%)	88.1% (-4.8%)	92.9%
7C		In the past year, how often have you encountered and gotten upset by the burning of incense / joss sticks / other religious items in your estate? (% indicating “sometimes”, “often”, or “very often or always”)	34.9% (-6.8%)	41.7%	N/A (not asked)
8	 Attitudes towards Diversity	It is a good thing for Singapore to be made up of people from different racial groups. (% indicating “agree” or “strongly agree”)	71.1% (+4.4%)	66.7% (-4.8%)	71.5%
9	 Colour-Blind Ideology	Someone’s race does not affect how I interact with him/her. (% indicating “agree” or “strongly agree”)	71.1% (+2.7%)	68.4% (-0.9%)	69.3%
10A	 Intercultural Understanding & Communications	I am interested in understanding other racial groups’ customs and practices. (% indicating “agree” or “strongly agree”)	41.8% (+3.5%)	38.3% (-12.2%)	50.5%
10B		How likely are you to get to know people who are different racially and religiously in your neighbourhood? (% indicating “likely” or “very likely”)	55.6% (+9.2%)	46.4% (+0.0%)	46.4%

Footnotes:

- 1 Threshold: +/- 2% or more as significant change; blue = no significant change, orange = negative change, green = positive change
- 2 Only selected question items are presented for each indicator which either a) reflect the most salient and significant trends for 2024; and/or b) provide a general sense of the concepts and meanings underlying each indicator-of-interest. For the full list of question items, please refer to the full report: Results from the IPS-OnePeople.sg Indicators of Racial and Religious Harmony.