

# *the ties that bind and blind*

A Report on  
Inter-racial and  
Inter-religious Relations  
in Singapore

Yolanda Chin  
Norman Vasu

Centre of Excellence for National Security  
S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies  
Nanyang Technological University



# *The Ties that Bind and Blind*

A REPORT ON INTER-RACIAL AND INTER-RELIGIOUS  
RELATIONS IN SINGAPORE

YOLANDA CHIN AND NORMAN VASU

2 November 2007

CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE FOR NATIONAL SECURITY  
S. RAJARATNAM SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES  
NANYANG TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY



# *contents*

	Summary	01
1.	Ties that Bind or Blind? Perceptions of Racial and Religious (Dis)Harmony	02
2.	Research Design and Methodology: Disentangling the Knots	05
	2.1 Survey Design	05
	2.2 Methodology	07
3.	Key Findings: Ties that Bind and Blind	09
	3.1 Inter-racial Ties	09
	General observations	17
	3.2 Inter-religious Ties	18
	General observations	31
4.	Implications: Forging Sustainable Inter-communal Ties	33

# summary

1. This survey (1) examined the extent to which considerations of race and religion had an effect on the preferred interaction patterns of Singaporeans; and, (2) assessed the implications on the social fabric of the nation.
2. The survey is meant to be read as a reference point for Singaporeans to engage in a critical introspection of the nation's multicultural condition necessary for evolving strategies to sustain the current communal cohesion they enjoy.
3. The findings were based on the response of 1,824 Singaporeans surveyed in a nationwide random sample. Interviewees were asked to indicate their willingness to interact with members of the identified racial and religious groups in a range of scenarios encompassing the private and public spheres as well as majority-minority balance.
4. An acceptable level of inter-racial and inter-religious integration was benchmarked at a minimum of 90% of each racial group being receptive towards inter-communal interaction. To detect racial and religious cleavages, two specific key issues were addressed: (1) whether racial and religious differences had an impact on the interaction behaviour of members of each race and religion, and if so, if it was consistent across the given spectrum of contexts, and (2) if each racial and religious group consistently regarded all other races and religious groups in the same manner or favoured particular groups over others.
5. **Key findings:**
  - 5.1 In varying degrees across different contexts, racial and religious differences on the whole appeared to have some bearing on the interaction patterns of Singaporeans.
  - 5.2 Encouragingly, inter-racial and inter-religious ties were consistently sturdy in the public sphere. In the social, economic, political and security domains where interdependence is key, race and religion did not play an important role in the choices Singaporeans made. For example, the findings indicate that there was consistently a more than 90% probability that racial and religious differences did not have any bearing on Singaporeans' choice of who their next-door neighbour, co-worker, Member of Parliament or policeman they turn for help should be.
- 5.3 The only two circumstances under which race and religion played a prominent role in decision-making – indicated by a less than 90% approval of inter-communal interaction – were with: (1) personal relationships (namely pertaining to marriage partners) and (2) majority-minority status.
- 5.4 With regards to race, the findings also indicated that the Chinese were consistently the most preferred race. Among the remaining three racial groups, none stood out as the most isolated. Although the Chinese were on the whole the most preferred racial group, they were the least receptive to non-Chinese. Conversely, the 'Others' were the most receptive of non-'Others'. However, it should also be noted that the prospect of any biases manifesting themselves (if at all) was very slim.
- 5.5 With regards to religion, the Buddhists/Taoists and Free-thinkers appeared to be the best received religious groups and the Muslims the least. Although the Buddhist/Taoists were among the best received group, they were the least receptive of non-Buddhist/Taoists. In contrast, the Hindus were in general the most receptive of those of a different religious background as them. However, the prospects of being discriminated against or favoured based on one's religious identity were very low.
6. **Key qualification:**
  - 6.1 While this survey identified faint signals of inter-racial and inter-religious cleavages, it did not shed light on the *motivations* behind the inclination towards racially and religiously inclusive or exclusive behaviour. One should especially guard against concluding that certain racial and religious groups were more predisposed to exclusive behaviour as this survey is unable to support such claims. More studies should be conducted to gain a fuller understanding of the motivations behind these decisions.

# 1. *Ties that Bind or Blind?* *Perceptions of Racial and Religious (Dis)Harmony*

*In a multi-racial, multi-lingual and multi-cultural society like ours, the communal problem... must be and will always remain one of the major problems which, if we do not resolve intelligently, could break our society, especially of an independent Singapore.*

- S. Rajaratnam, 16 March 1967.<sup>1</sup>

This survey addressed the following questions: Did Singaporeans prefer to interact along racial and religious lines?<sup>2</sup> If so, did it necessarily constitute a threat to the social fabric of the nation?

Inter-racial and inter-religious harmony constitutes an important foundation of Singapore's social cohesion. However, recent events across the globe such as the French Riots, London Bombing and Sydney Beach Riots serve as sober reminders that the multicultural fabric of seemingly well-integrated cosmopolitan societies are not immune to aberrations. It is precisely because Singapore has been spared any such crises that uncertainty remains as to whether or not its multicultural fabric can withstand an attack.

Although anecdotal evidences abound to corroborate the existence of communal biases, there exist few publicly available quantitative studies that systematically address the impact of Singaporeans' understanding of race and religion on their patterns of interaction. Results of the few publicly available quantitative surveys seem to indicate a very positive picture of

communal ties. According to a 2005 survey conducted by the Feedback Unit, 73 percent of the respondents felt that terrorism posed a threat to Singapore's security. Nevertheless, 90 percent believed that all Singaporeans, regardless of race or religion, would stand united in the event of a terrorist attack in Singapore.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, a 2006 survey by the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts (MICA) found that 87% of Singaporeans believed that Singapore citizens would stand united, regardless of race or religion, in the face of a terrorist attack.<sup>4</sup> These results concur with the findings of a survey conducted by the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports' (MCYS), *Attitudes on Race and Religion: Surveys on Social Attitudes of Singaporeans (SAS) 2002*, which is also the most comprehensive one on this issue.<sup>5</sup> It suggested that in spite of 9/11 and the exposure of the *Jemaah Islamiyah* cell in Singapore, there was still "an overall positive state of racial and religious group relations in terms of Singaporeans' attitudes on a variety of issues related to race and religion."<sup>6</sup>

However, this does not necessarily mean that racial and religious differences do not have any bearing on the attitudes of Singaporeans. Lest we forget, Singapore began its journey to nationhood in 1965 with racial and religious conflict fresh in its historical memory. The cohesion enjoyed today has been attained neither by sheer accident nor by pretending that racial and religious problems do not exist. Instead, it is in facing the problem of cultural tensions squarely that ways to mitigate them have been attained. Forty-one years on, it may be detrimental to pretend that those who desire to divide Singapore's multi-racial and multi-religious society only exist

1. S. Rajaratnam, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Singapore, at the parliamentary debates held on 16 March 1967.
2. Racial difference in Singapore is officially limited by the government to the nomenclature of *Chinese, Malay, Indian, and Others* (CMIO). This racial categorisation is largely a relic of census methods used during Singapore's colonial period and reflects the three major sources of immigration to the island when the British first set up a trading post there—China, the neighboring region of Southeast Asia, and South Asians from British India. This survey employs the same categories in its analysis.
3. The statistics were from a 2005 report by the Feedback Unit comparing Singaporeans' attitude towards terrorism in 2003 and 2005, available from the Feedback Unit website in July 2006. However, the unit has been renamed Reach and its new website no longer carries the survey results.
4. Loh, Chee Kong, "When too much trust is a bad thing," *Today*, 14 November 2006.
5. The longitudinal survey has the twin aim of firstly examining social identity in terms of Singaporeans' sense of racial, religious group, and national identities, and secondly, racial and religious group relations. The reports can be accessed from the Ministry of Community, Youth and Sports website at [http://app.mcys.gov.sg/web/serv\\_reports\\_comm.asp](http://app.mcys.gov.sg/web/serv_reports_comm.asp) (accessed on 20 April 2007).
6. Ministry of Community Development and Sports (2003) *Attitudes on Race and Religion: Survey on Social Attitudes of Singaporeans (SAS) 2002*, p. available at: [http://app.mcys.gov.sg/web/serv\\_reports\\_comm.asp](http://app.mcys.gov.sg/web/serv_reports_comm.asp) (accessed on 20 April 2007).

in the history books. Moreover, the rising religiosity of Singaporeans may further undermine social cohesion as there have been observations that this trend has led to the formation of social enclaves along religious lines.<sup>7</sup>

In light of recent trends, the positive findings of past statistics may need to be more robustly tested to ensure that faint signals of communal fissures have not been overlooked. More vigorous testing allows for complacency to be actively countered should a trend surface which existing surveys have failed to pick up on.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the identification of specific salient fault lines may allow for programmes addressing this issue to be better tailored to alleviate vigilance fatigue that a blanket approach is susceptible to. To this end, the objective of this study is to provide an alternative snapshot of communal relations in Singapore by further refining the approach taken by current surveys in order to assess the impact of perceptions of race and religion on Singaporeans' interaction patterns.

*The Ties that Bind and Blind* builds upon existing surveys in four ways. Firstly, the majority of the indicators tested in the MCYS survey that specifically addresses inter-racial and inter-religious group relations appeal to normative beliefs and perceptions on inter-communal relations. Significantly, however, the high percentage of interviewees' agreement with statements such as "it is good to have people of different races living in the same neighbourhood" and relations among both different races and religious groups in Singapore "will continue to improve over the next 10 years" may not allow us to draw conclusions on the respondents' *personal* commitments to actively engage with people of different racial and religious backgrounds in order to sustain communal harmony but only serves as an indicator of their confidence in other Singaporeans to do so. To this end, items measuring respondent's own preferred interaction patterns will provide a more comprehensive picture.

Secondly, most surveys that do track respondents' preferred interaction patterns tend to use friendship as an indicator. For example, the indicators used in the MCYS survey included the respondents' willingness to let their children play with children of other races or their friendship with members of different races (i.e. friends whom they can tell their personal problems to). Another survey assessed the respondents' willingness to marry outside of their own racial and religious groups.<sup>9</sup> A survey conducted by the Institute of Policy Studies in 2002 went beyond friendship and examined if Singaporeans would "feel uneasy in a place full of people who are not the same race as I am".<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the level of inter-racial trust measured in terms of receptiveness to invest in both intimate relationships with a person of a different race as well as attitude towards majority-minority status are sound indicators of inter-racial confidence. However, it may be argued that since the above two preferences fall within the private sphere, and should thus be unfettered by societal obligations to observe political correctness, the value of such indicators for the establishing of benchmarks of what constitutes an acceptable state of integration is limited.<sup>11</sup> Should the results yield an uneasy margin, especially in terms of the choice of a spouse, it may be misleadingly interpreted as evidence that the level of communal confidence is still precarious. Hence a survey which assesses preferred interaction patterns through multiple social lenses, especially in the shared public spaces where interdependence is crucial to social cohesion, would provide a more comprehensive picture of Singaporeans' commitment to preserving communal harmony.

7. Li, Xueying and Keith Lin, "Does God get in the way of social cohesion?" *The Straits Times*, 21 Oct 2006.

8. Experts have noted that an important lesson learnt from recent "complex global threats", such as 9/11, the Bali bombings and the outbreak of SARS and bird flu, is the need for states to monitor and detect "faint (or weak) signals" – defined as "underreported issues that are not on the 'radar screen' of most agencies and institutions but may have the potential for wider ramifications" – to alert law enforcement officers and intelligence personnel to potential crisis situations. Refer to "Singapore develops early warning security system", AFP, Singapore, 19 March 2007; Quiggin, Tom, "Scanning the horizon for threats to Singapore", *RUSI/Jane's Homeland Security and Resilience Monitor*, 1 July 2006; and *CENS Faint Signals Monitor*, 01/2007, 18 July 2007.

9. Chiew, Seen Kong, "National Identity, Ethnicity and National Identity," in Jon S.T. Quah (Ed.) *In Search of Singapore's National Values*, Singapore: Institute of Policy Studies, 1990.

10. Ooi, Giok Ling, Tan Ern Ser and Soh Kay Cheng, *The Study of Ethnicity, National Identity and Sense of Rootedness in Singapore*, Singapore: Institute of Policy Studies, July 2002.

11. "Integration" is understood here as the degree to which the different racial and religious groups are willing to interact with one another.

Thirdly, surveys that do track the preferred ties in the shared common spaces<sup>12</sup> fail to subdivide the “other races” category into discrete racial groups. For example, if a respondent were asked the question “How comfortable would you feel with a Member of Parliament who is *not of the same race as you*”, we only obtain information on the respondent’s views of all other racial groups taken together apart from his or her own. However, such a question may obscure salient fault-lines between specific groups. So if a survey that polls racial group ‘w’ about their attitude towards the aggregated variable ‘other races’ rather than the discrete racial groups of ‘x’, ‘y’, and ‘z’ and yields positive results, it is limited to suggesting that people from group ‘w’ are generally not adverse to interacting with people who are racially non-‘w’. However, it is still possible that group ‘w’ is only willing to interact with group ‘x’ but not ‘y’ and ‘z’. Hence a survey that systematically separates the “other races” variable into discrete racial categories will be able to surface fault lines between specific groups that would otherwise be missed.<sup>13</sup>

Fourthly, existing surveys do not provide sufficient substantive indication of inter-religious confidence. Items addressing the strength of religious group identity, satisfaction with current relations among different religions, optimism of future religious group relations or attitudes towards inter-religious marriages do not provide a fully comprehensive picture of how Singaporeans generally respond to people of different religious persuasions. Indeed, this is a concern compounded by the current state of heightened anxiety regarding interfaith relations across the globe. At the same time, increasing religiosity alone may not necessarily equate with intolerance. A recent survey on the attitude of Muslims in Malaysia showed that despite increased religiosity among Muslims, the majority felt that it was acceptable to live alongside non-Muslims, to learn about the other religions and to participate in interfaith dialogues.<sup>14</sup> Hence a survey that systematically measures the comfort level of interaction of respondents with adherents of other religions will bring interfaith confidence among Singaporeans into sharper focus.

12. For example, see Tan, Ern Ser, “Ethnic Relations in Singapore: Evidence from Survey Data.” In Leo Suryadinata (Ed.) *Ethnic Relations and Nation-Building in Southeast Asia*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2004, pp.207-219.

13. There are existing studies that analyses the racial variables in this manner but only selected survey items are reported as such. See for example, Chiew, Seen Kong, “National Identity, Ethnicity and National Identity,” in Jon S.T. Quah (Ed.) *In Search of Singapore’s National Values*, Singapore: Institute of Policy Studies, 1990; and Ooi, Giok Ling, Tan Ern Ser and Soh Kay Cheng, *The Study of Ethnicity, National Identity and Sense of Rootedness in Singapore*, Singapore: Institute of Policy Studies, July 2002.

14. Martinez, Patricia, “Thumbs up living in Malaysian diversity,” *The New Straits Times*, 10 August 2006.

## 2. Research Design and Methodology: Disentangling the Knots

### 2.1 SURVEY DESIGN

This survey:

- (1) examined the extent to which considerations of race and religion had an effect on the preferred interaction patterns of Singaporeans; and
- (2) ascertained if there were any fault lines that were more pronounced between certain racial or religious groups as compared to others.

The questionnaire consists of two parts: one pertains to race and the other to religion. Each part constitutes the same items covering a range of interaction scenarios. Interviewees were asked if they were willing to interact with a member of the identified racial groups for each given scenario, followed by interaction with members of the stated religious categories for the same scenarios. The questionnaire was translated into Chinese, Malay and Tamil.

The racial categories used are as follows<sup>15</sup>:

- (1) Chinese,
- (2) Malay,
- (3) Indian, and
- (4) 'Others'.

The religious categories are as follows<sup>16</sup>:

- (1) Buddhist/Taoist<sup>17</sup>,
- (2) Muslim,
- (3) Hindu,
- (4) Christian,
- (5) 'Other religion', and
- (6) Free-thinkers.

The racial and religious labels were not defined for the interviewees. This was to ensure that they responded according to their own personal understanding of the sub-groups. Moreover, they were also not asked to respond according to their actual interaction patterns in each given scenario but,

instead, to respond as though choice was available. To illustrate this point, for a question such as 'Would you feel comfortable inviting Indian friends to celebrate special occasions with you', respondents were asked to indicate their choice ('yes' or 'no') regardless of whether they had Indian friends or not. There were two reasons for requiring respondents to answer the questions in this way. Firstly, this approach allowed us to reduce ambiguity in case the data reflected a high level of intra-communal interaction among the majority Chinese population - whether this might suggest actual unwillingness to interact or merely a lack of opportunity given the disproportional number of Chinese vis-à-vis the number of members of all of the minority groups combined. Secondly, it is generally not possible for one to infer a stranger's religious persuasion except for select cases. Hence the hypothetical situation tested whether religion actually mattered, given the requisite knowledge.

The scenarios are categorized into three levels of interaction - in the private domain, public domain, and under circumstances where majority-minority status is salient.

*Private domain.* In general, willingness to engage in the private domain may be understood as an indicator of a high level of trust because it involves cultivating emotional and physical ties on a voluntary basis, often free from public scrutiny. Hence should an individual's choice of friends, family and romantic partners cross racial and religious boundaries, it can be interpreted as a healthy indication of integration. The survey items in this category are listed in Table 2.1.

**Table 2.1**  
**Survey items measuring comfort interaction in the private domain**

Item
Would you feel comfortable inviting .... friends to celebrate special occasions with you (e.g. weddings, birthdays)?
Would you mind if your children have ... friends?
Would you mind if any of your brothers/sisters married a ...?
Would you marry a ...?

15. Refer to footnote no. 2.

16. The nine official racial categories tracked by the population census are as follows: No religion, Buddhism, Taoism/Chinese traditional beliefs, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, Christianity (Catholic), Christianity (non-Catholic Christians), and Other Religion (available at <http://www.singstat.gov.sg/keystats/c2000/adr/t15-18.pdf>, accessed on 21 August 2006). However, feedback from the pilot of an earlier draft of the survey indicated that the number of religious categories should not exceed six to keep the survey at an acceptable length. The final six categories used in the survey were based on the feedback and was not highlighted as problematic in a second round of piloting with a different group of interviewees. To the best of the authors' knowledge, no surveys exist that systematically assesses the perceptions of Singaporeans towards each religious group in this manner. Hence the findings are meant to provide base line information among inter-religious relations that should be further refined in subsequent studies as required.

17. This category includes believers and practitioners of traditional Chinese beliefs.

The first and second questions relate to friendship while the third and fourth refer to marriage. Each case is further broken down to test the respondent's own attitude towards inter-racial interaction as well as to assess whether his or her attitude is imposed on their loved ones to the same degree. This gives us a better idea as to whether there is any pressure from within the community to conform to certain racial biases, if any exists at all.

*Public domain.* This category refers to socialization patterns that are dictated, to different degrees, by social norms which guide the individual's interaction in the shared or public sphere. This category can be further subdivided into the social, economic, political and security spheres. This particular category can be considered an important indicator of communal cohesion as it forms the nexus of social life as a community. The survey items in this category encompass interaction in the social, economic, political and security arenas.

**Table 2.2**

**Survey items measuring comfort of interaction in the public domain (social)**

**Item**

- Would you mind if your next-door neighbour is a ...?
- Would you mind if your teacher is a ...?
- Would you mind being treated by a doctor who is a ...?
- On the bus or MRT, would you sit next to a ...?
- When you need help in a public place, would you approach a ...?

In the social sphere, acceptance of a next-door neighbour reflects a certain degree of tolerance with respect to close proximity over a sustained period of time. A teacher represents someone whose knowledge and perhaps even value system are considered models to emulate. A doctor is someone one trusts with one's personal well-being and life. Discomfort in being physically close to a fellow commuter of a different racial or religious group on public transport would imply that communal biases are extreme enough so as to be used to profile a complete stranger. Needing help in a public place also allows us to tentatively ascertain if one's trust in a stranger in a moment of vulnerability is informed by race and religion.

**Table 2.3**

**Survey items measuring comfort of interaction in the public domain (economic)**

**Item**

- Would you mind if your boss is a ...?
- Would you mind if your co-worker is a ...?
- If you were the boss, would you hire a worker who is a ...?

Relationships at the workplace may be understood as an indicator of whether a person trusts a person of a different race with their financial well-being. Moreover, to a certain degree, the economic stability of the nation depends on the ability of Singaporeans to trust their colleagues in times of an economic crisis. Indicating the preferred race and religion of their boss, co-worker and employee allows biases in power relations (if any) to surface.

**Table 2.4**

**Survey items measuring comfort of interaction in the public domain (political)**

**Item**

- Would you vote for a ... MP (member of parliament)?
- Would you mind if Singapore's Prime Minister is a ...?
- Would you vote for a ... President of Singapore?

Trust in political office bearers to make policies that serve the interests of all Singaporeans regardless of race and religion is a critical indicator of commitment to multiculturalism. Hence the three survey items in this section measures if the voting patterns of Singaporeans are informed by race and religion.

**Table 2.5**

**Survey items measuring comfort of interaction in the public domain (security)**

**Item**

- Would you mind being helped by a policeman who is a ...?
- Would you trust a ... soldier to protect you?

In times of a security crisis, the ability of Singaporeans to put aside their racial and religious differences is critical. The two questions in this category provide an indication of the extent to which Singaporeans are willing to put their lives in the hands of security personnel (policemen and soldiers) of a different race and religion.

*Majority-minority status.* This category of questions assesses the level of integration by ascertaining the comfort level of being in an environment dominated by other racial and religious groups.

**Table 2.6**

**Survey items measuring comfort of interaction when majority-minority status is salient**

Item
Would you feel uneasy in places full of ...?
Would you feel uneasy if the majority of the people in Singapore were ...?

It should be noted that the social, economic, political and security domains (and items within each category) covered by this survey are by no means exhaustive. Rather, they provide base line information for deliberation and triangulation with other quantitative and qualitative studies on this issue.

This survey measured inter-racial and inter-religious integration by examining the attitudes of Singaporeans towards interacting with people of different racial and religious backgrounds as themselves. An acceptable level of inter-racial and inter-religious integration was benchmarked at a minimum of 90% of each racial and religious group being receptive towards inter-communal interaction in each given context.<sup>18</sup> To detect racial and religious cleavages, two specific key issues were addressed: (1) whether racial and religious differences had an impact on the interaction behaviour of members of each race and religion, and if so, if it was consistent across the given spectrum of contexts, and (2) if each racial and religious group consistently regarded all other races and religious groups in the same manner or favoured particular groups over others.

The evaluation concluded with an assessment of the identified trends on Singapore's inter-racial and inter-religious cohesion.

**2.2 METHODOLOGY**

A nationwide random sample of Singaporean citizens was surveyed between 4th December 2006 and 15th January 2007. Face-to-face interviews at the respondents' homes were conducted. The race of the interviewers was matched with that of the respondents for the categories of Chinese, Malay and Indian. Out of 2,181 respondents approached, a total of 1,824 completed surveys were yielded as follows:

**Table 2.7**

**Survey response rate**

Response type	Count
No. rejected participation upfront	306
No. rejected participation when informed of topic	42
No. terminated participation mid-way through the survey	9
No. completed the survey	1,824
Total no. approached	2,181
Response rate (1,824 out of 2,181)	83.6%

The profile of the sample was weighted to reflect the actual composition of the citizen population based on race, gender and age<sup>19</sup> according to the Census 2000 report.<sup>20</sup> A total of 922 Chinese, 425 Malays, 425 Indians and 52 'Others' were polled with the non-Chinese minorities over-sampled to ensure that the sample sizes of these racial groups were sufficient to allow for meaningful analysis. However, it should be noted that the sample was not weighted against the religious composition of the population. Nevertheless, the sample size of each religious category was still large enough to be statistically meaningful. Of the respondents that completed the survey, 655 were Buddhist/Taoist/adherents of traditional Chinese beliefs, 436 Muslims, 392 Hindus, 162 Christians, 34 of the minority religions ('Other religion'), and 145 Free-thinkers. Refer to Table 2.8 for the sampling error for the various racial and religious groups and to Table 2.9 for the weighted demographic profile of the respondents.

18. While the definition of what constitutes an acceptable level of inter-racial engagement is arbitrary, the benchmark of 90% and above of Singaporeans being receptive to inter-racial or inter-religious interaction can be said to be a very stringent criteria of inter-communal integration compared to other similar surveys. For example in the Pew Global Attitudes report *The Great Divide: How Westerners and Muslims View Each Other* conducted in 2006, it was noted that "even in the wake of the tumultuous events of the past year, solid majorities in France, Great Britain and the U.S. retain overall favorable opinions of Muslims". The "solid majorities" in France, Great Britain and the U.S. were 65%, 63% and 54% respectively. Available on <http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?ReportID=253> (accessed 20 June 2007). In a local study, it has been noted that "[f]rom a policy perspective, a 80% positive figure would suggest that the ethnic relations formula used has been successful, though policy-makers may hope for even better results." See Tan, Ern Ser, "Ethnic Relations in Singapore: Evidence from Survey Data." In Leo Suryadinata (Ed.) *Ethnic Relations and Nation-Building in Southeast Asia*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2004, p. 218.

19. It would be preferable for the sample to be weighted by an interlocking matrix of age, race, gender and religion. However, such detailed population data is not available. The data for weighting by age, religion and gender is also not available, hence the best possible weight is according to age, race and gender.

20. The latest census available for Singaporean citizens is the Census 2000. Subsequent censuses only provide the requisite information based on Singapore's resident population, which include non-Singaporean citizens.

**Table 2.8**

<b>Sampling error</b>		
	<b>Sample Size</b>	<b>Sampling error (at 95% confidence level)</b>
<b>Race</b>		
Chinese	922	3.2%
Malay	425	4.8%
Indian	425	4.8%
'Others'	52	13.6%
<b>Religion</b>		
Buddhism/Taoism/Traditional Chinese Beliefs	655	3.8%
Islam	436	4.7%
Hinduism	392	4.9%
Christianity	162	7.7%
'Other religion'	34	16.8%
Free-thinker	145	8.1%

**Table 2.9**

<b>Demographic profile of respondents (weighted)</b>	
<b>Variable</b>	<b>Weighted sample size (%)</b>
<b>Race</b>	
Chinese	79
Malay	13
Indian	7
'Others'	1
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	50
Female	50
<b>Age</b>	
15 - 19 years	9
20 - 29 years	18
30 - 39 years	22
40 - 49 years	23
50 - 59 years	14
60 years and above	14
<b>Religion</b>	
Buddhist/Taoist/ Chinese beliefs	55
Muslim	14
Hindu	6
Christian	12
'Other religion'	1
Free-thinker	12
<b>Education</b>	
None/PSLE	31
ITE/NTC	4
GCE 'N'/'O' Level	31
GCE 'A' Level/Polytechnic diploma	20
Degree	14
<b>Working Status</b>	
Employed	64
Homemaker	16
Student	10
Unemployed/Retired	10
<b>Personal Income (Monthly)</b>	
\$1,000 or less	9
\$1,001 - \$2,000	22
\$2,001 - \$3,000	18
\$3,001 and above	13
Not stated	2
Not working	36

# 3. Key Findings: Ties that Bind and Blind

In general, Singaporeans were interacting well with people of all races and religious persuasions. Nevertheless, there were faint signals of racial and religious biases. By analyzing Singaporeans' preferred inter-racial and inter-religious interaction patterns, this report first examined the state of inter-racial ties, followed by inter-religious ones.

## 3.1 INTER-RACIAL TIES

This section examines the attitudes of each race towards interacting with people of different racial backgrounds as themselves. An acceptable level of inter-racial integration is benchmarked at a minimum of 90% of each racial group being receptive towards inter-racial interaction in each given context.<sup>21</sup> To detect racial cleavages, two specific key issues are addressed: (1) whether racial differences had an impact on the interaction behaviour of members of each race, and if so, if it was consistent across the given spectrum of contexts, and (2) if each racial group consistently regarded all other races in the same manner or favoured particular groups over others. The evaluation concludes with an assessment of the identified trends on Singapore's inter-racial cohesion.

### Perceptions of individual racial groups:

#### The Chinese

Table 3.1

#### Attitude of Chinese towards interaction with non-Chinese (approval)<sup>22</sup>

Relationship Type	Chinese %	Malay %	Indian %	'Others' %
<b>Private</b>				
Friends to celebrate special occasions with me (e.g. weddings, birthdays)	99	82	82	84
My children's friends	100	98	98	99
Spouse of my brother/sister	100	76	76	84
My own spouse	99	31	31	41
<b>Public</b>				
<b>Social</b>				
My next-door neighbour	100	96	95	98
My teacher	100	99	99	100
My doctor	100	93	93	97
Someone I sit next to on the bus or MRT	99	98	96	99
Someone I approach for help in a public place	99	93	89	90
<b>Economic (Workplace)</b>				
My boss	100	92	93	99
My co-worker	100	99	99	100
My employee	99	95	95	97
<b>Political</b>				
My member of parliament	99	96	97	98
Prime Minister of Singapore	100	91	94	95
President of Singapore	99	92	94	93
<b>Security</b>				
Policeman to help me	100	99	98	100
Soldier to protect me	99	95	96	97
<b>Majority-minority status</b>				
To be in a place full of _____	99	79	75	86
Majority population of Singapore	98	58	56	66
<b>Mean<sup>23</sup></b>	99	87	87	91

- Instances where the approval of inter-racial interaction was less than 90%.
- Instances where the approval of inter-racial interaction was higher than that for intra-racial interaction.

21. Refer to footnote no. 18.

22. The percentages (%) represent the weighted proportion of Chinese respondents who indicated 'yes' (as opposed to 'no') to interacting with at least one person of each racial group in the given contexts. The figures have been rounded up to the nearest whole number.

23. The mean is a simple average of the responses to the 19 questions.

### *Chinese preferences based on context*

Based on the data contained in Table 3.1, it was only in six out of the 19 given contexts that less than 90% of Chinese would choose not to interact with a non-Chinese.

In the private sphere, three of these contexts applied to all of the four non-Chinese racial groups: (1) friends to celebrate special occasions with (82-84%), (2) their sibling's spouse (76-84%), and (3) their own spouse (31-41%).

When majority-minority status was a factor, the approval rate of non-Chinese as the dominant race in a specific place (75-86%), and the majority population of Singapore (56-66%) were consistently below 90%.

However, on the whole, the Chinese did not mind interacting with the non-Chinese in the social, economic, political and security spheres. The only instance in which less than 90% of the Chinese were open to inter-racial interaction related to the Indians as someone the Chinese would approach for help in a public place at 89%.

### *Chinese preferences based on race*

By comparing the means, in general, the category of 'Others' was evidently the most preferred non-Chinese race at 91%, followed by Malays and Indians with 87% each. The approval of the 'Others' was consistently higher than approval of Malays and Indians in five of the six 'critical' contexts<sup>24</sup> identified earlier – namely as (1) the respondents' own friends, (2) their sibling's spouse, (3) their own spouse, (4) the dominant race in a specific place, and (5) the majority population of Singapore.

Moreover, the mean of 87% based on the average Chinese approval rates towards both the Malays and Indians also indicated that on the whole, the distinction in Chinese attitudes towards the two non-Chinese racial groups was not very pronounced. In fact, in the three 'critical' contexts in the private sphere, there was no discernable difference between the percentage of Chinese accepting Malays and Indians as friends to celebrate special occasions with (82%), their siblings' spouse (76%) and their own spouse (31%).

However, in the political sphere, the Indians were consistently preferred over the Malays for all the three political leadership roles of Member of Parliament, Prime Minister and President. In fact, among the three non-Chinese groups, the Indians were the most preferred for the role of the President of Singapore.

On the other hand, when majority-minority status was salient, there was a slight preference for Malays over Indians. This was evidenced in 79% of Chinese accepting to be in a place full of Malays compared to 75% in a place full of Indians. In addition, the reception among the Chinese towards the prospect of Singapore's majority population being Malay was 2% points higher than that of an Indian one. Moreover, of all the three non-Chinese groups, the Malays were the most likely to be approached by the Chinese for help in a public place. Conversely, the Indians were the least likely with 11% of Chinese indicating unwillingness to approach them, the only case in this study where approval for inter-racial interaction in the public sphere fell below 90%.

24. As this report has defined an acceptable level of integration as 90% and above approval of inter-communal interaction, 'critical' contexts here refer to instances in which less than 90% of the Chinese were willing to interact with non-Chinese. Refer to footnote no. 18.

## The Malays

Table 3.2

### Attitude of Malays towards interaction with non-Malays (approval)<sup>25</sup>

Relationship Type	Malay %	Chinese %	Indian %	'Others' %
<b>Private</b>				
Friends to celebrate special occasions with me (e.g. weddings, birthdays)	99	90	88	89
My children's friends	99	99	98	98
Spouse of my brother/sister	99	80	80	79
My own spouse	100	52	46	49
<b>Public</b>				
<i>Social</i>				
My next-door neighbour	100	99	97	97
My teacher	100	100	99	99
My doctor	100	99	97	99
Someone I sit next to on the bus or MRT	100	99	98	99
Someone I approach for help in a public place	99	96	92	92
<i>Economic (Workplace)</i>				
My boss	100	99	99	99
My co-worker	100	99	97	98
My employee	100	97	95	96
<i>Political</i>				
My member of parliament	100	99	100	98
Prime Minister of Singapore	100	100	99	99
President of Singapore	100	99	98	97
<i>Security</i>				
Policeman to help me	100	99	99	99
Soldier to protect me	100	98	99	98
<b>Majority-minority status</b>				
To be in a place full of _____	100	94	88	92
Majority population of Singapore	99	92	81	85
<b>Mean<sup>26</sup></b>	100	94	92	93

- Instances where the approval of inter-racial interaction was less than 90%.
- Instances where the approval of inter-racial interaction was higher than that for intra-racial interaction.

25. The percentages (%) represent the weighted proportion of Malay respondents who indicated 'yes' (as opposed to 'no') to interacting with at least one person of each racial group in the given contexts. The figures have been rounded up to the nearest whole number.

26. The mean is a simple average of the responses to the 19 questions.

### *Malay preferences based on context*

According to data listed in Table 3.2, out of all of the 19 given scenarios, it was only in five where there were instances in which less than 90% of the Malays would choose to interact with non-Malays.

In the private sphere, only in the context of marriage did the approval of inter-racial engagement fall below 90% – in their choice of their sibling's spouse (79-80%) and their own spouse (46-52%). As friends they would invite to celebrate special occasions with, the acceptance rate was marginally below 90% in relation to the Indians (88%) and 'Others' (89%).

Pertaining to majority-minority status, more than 90% of Malays were comfortable with the Chinese as both the dominant race in a specific place and as the majority population. However, vis-à-vis the 'Others', only in the context of being in a specific place full of 'Others' registered an approval rate of more than 90%. In relation to the Indians, less than 90% of the Malays were receptive towards the prospect of either being in a specific place dominated by Indians (88%) or an Indian majority population of Singapore (81%).

On the other hand, in the shared public space encompassing the social, economic, political and security spheres, the preference for racially exclusive interaction was very slim with consistently more than 90% of the Malays being receptive to inter-racial engagement.

### *Malay preferences based on race*

Of the five 'critical' contexts<sup>27</sup> noted earlier, it was only in the choice of a life partner for themselves (46-52%) and their siblings (79-80%) where the benchmark of less than 90% of Malays being receptive to non-Malays applied to all the other three races. However, it was only in relation to the Indian and 'Others' as their choice of friends to celebrate special occasions (88% and 89% respectively) and the majority population of Singapore (81% and 85% respectively) that inter-racial acceptance marginally fell below 90%. In addition, it was only in relation to Indians as the dominant racial group in a specific place that the approval rate dipped below 90% at 88%. These findings suggested that to Malays, the Chinese were the most preferred non-Malay racial group, followed by 'Others' and then Indians. This order of preference reflected the mean scores across all 19 contexts with the Chinese at 94%, followed by 'Others' (93%) and Indians (92%).

27. As this report has defined an acceptable level of integration as 90% and above approval of inter-communal interaction, 'critical' contexts here refer to instances in which less than 90% of the Malays were willing to interact with non-Malays. Refer to footnote no. 18.

*The Indians*

**Table 3.3**

**Attitude of Indians towards interaction with non-Indians (approval)<sup>28</sup>**

Relationship Type	Indian %	Chinese %	Malay %	'Others' %
<b>Private</b>				
Friends to celebrate special occasions with me (e.g. weddings, birthdays)	100	94	93	94
My children's friends	100	99	99	99
Spouse of my brother/sister	100	76	76	76
My own spouse	100	35	39	35
<b>Public</b>				
<i>Social</i>				
My next-door neighbour	100	99	98	99
My teacher	100	100	99	100
My doctor	100	98	98	99
Someone I sit next to on the bus or MRT	100	100	100	99
Someone I approach for help in a public place	100	99	99	98
<i>Economic (Workplace)</i>				
My boss	100	99	99	100
My co-worker	100	99	99	100
My employee	100	98	99	98
<i>Political</i>				
My member of parliament	100	99	99	96
Prime Minister of Singapore	100	100	99	97
President of Singapore	100	99	98	96
<i>Security</i>				
Policeman to help me	100	100	100	100
Soldier to protect me	100	99	99	99
<b>Majority-minority status</b>				
To be in a place full of _____	99	98	96	96
Majority population of Singapore	99	97	93	92
<b>Mean<sup>29</sup></b>	100	94	94	93

- Instances where the approval of inter-racial interaction was less than 90%.
- Instances where the approval of inter-racial interaction was higher than that for intra-racial interaction.

28. The percentages (%) represent the weighted proportion of Indian respondents who indicated 'yes' (as opposed to 'no') to interacting with at least one person of each racial group in the given contexts. The figures have been rounded up to the nearest whole number.

29. The mean is a simple average of the responses to the 19 questions.

### *Indian preferences based on context*

In general, it was only in terms of marriage that race appeared to be a significant factor influencing their interaction patterns with less than 90% of Indians willing to choose a non-Indian. According to Table 3.3, all Indians did not mind accepting another Indian as their sibling's spouse and their own but almost a quarter of Indians (24%) were not receptive towards a non-Indian as their sibling's life-partner and more than half of them (61-65%) would not marry a non-Indian.

Nevertheless, in the remaining 17 contexts encompassing friendship, majority-minority status, and interaction in the social, economic, political and security spheres, approval of inter-racial interaction was consistently robust at 90% and above.

### *Indian preferences based on race*

Taking into consideration all 19 contexts, there appeared to be very little variation in their attitude towards non-Indians. Firstly, the range of 1% point difference in mean scores was negligible (94% for Chinese and Malays, and 93% for 'Others'). Secondly, in both of the 'critical' contexts<sup>30</sup>, the range of percentage approval was also very minimal - a consistent 76% approval of all non-Indians as their sibling's spouse, and between 35-39% acceptance of a non-Indian as their own spouse. Hence it is reasonable to conclude that Indians did not regard the various groups of non-Indians very differently.

30. As this report has defined an acceptable level of integration as 90% and above approval of inter-communal interaction, 'critical' contexts here refer to instances in which less than 90% of the Indians were willing to interact with non-Indians. Refer to footnote no. 18.

The 'Others'<sup>31</sup>

Table 3.4

Attitude of 'Others' towards interaction with non-'Others' (approval)<sup>32</sup>

Relationship Type	'Others' %	Chinese %	Malay %	Indian %
<b>Private</b>				
Friends to celebrate special occasions with me (e.g. weddings, birthdays)	100	100	100	100
My children's friends	100	100	100	100
Spouse of my brother/sister	98	75	72	78
My own spouse	98	47	44	48
<b>Public</b>				
<i><b>Social</b></i>				
My next-door neighbour	100	100	100	100
My teacher	100	100	100	100
My doctor	100	100	100	100
Someone I sit next to on the bus or MRT	100	100	100	100
Someone I approach for help in a public place	100	100	100	100
<i><b>Economic (Workplace)</b></i>				
My boss	100	100	97	97
My co-worker	100	100	94	97
My employee	100	100	97	100
<i><b>Political</b></i>				
My member of parliament	100	100	98	100
Prime Minister of Singapore	100	100	98	100
President of Singapore	100	100	97	100
<i><b>Security</b></i>				
Policeman to help me	100	100	100	100
Soldier to protect me	100	99	100	100
<b>Majority-minority status</b>				
To be in a place full of _____	100	100	98	98
Majority population of Singapore	98	99	98	98
<b>Mean<sup>33</sup></b>	100	96	94	96

- Instances where the approval of inter-racial interaction was less than 90%.
- Instances where the approval of inter-racial interaction was higher than that for intra-racial interaction.

31. It should be noted that the sampling error at 95% confidence level is 13.6%.

32. The percentages (%) represent the weighted proportion of 'Others' respondents who indicated 'yes' (as opposed to 'no') to interacting with at least one person of each racial group in the given contexts. The figures have been rounded up to the nearest whole number.

33. The mean is a simple average of the responses to the 19 questions.

#### *'Other' preferences based on context*

It can be determined from Table 3.4 that similar to the Indians and unlike the Chinese and Malays, it was only in their choice of their sibling's spouse and their own spouse that the approval rate of the 'Others' towards inter-racial engagement fell below 90%: 72-78% for their sibling's spouse, dipping to 44-48% for their own spouse.

In all the remaining 17 contexts, racial differences seemed to have minimal impact on their interaction patterns. This was especially so in both the social arena and personal friendship (both their own and their children's) where there was 100% acceptance of interaction with all races. It is also worth noting that the 'Others' was the only racial group to whom there was no preference at all to be the dominant racial group in Singapore – the prospect of accepting 'Others' as the majority population of Singapore was the same as that of a Malay and Indian one (98%), and there was even a slight preference for the Chinese (99%).

#### *'Other' preferences based on race*

Taking into account all 19 contexts, it could be concluded that the Chinese and Indians with mean scores of 96% each were preferred over the Malays (94%). Interestingly, there was even a 1% point bias in favour of the Chinese over 'Others' as the preferred majority population of Singapore. Moreover, the survey revealed a consistent 100% trust in the Chinese at the workplace and in the political sphere. While the same level of trust was displayed towards Indians as political leaders, they were accepted by 100% of the 'Others' only in the capacity of a subordinate (employee) at the workplace. However, in both 'critical' instances<sup>34</sup> pertaining to marriage, Indians were preferred the most. In comparison, Malays neither gained the confidence of 100% of the 'Others' in any of the positions at the workplace (94-97%) nor in the political sphere (97-98%). On balance, in the security sphere, the 'Others' revealed 100% trust in Malays and Indians in their capacity as both policemen and soldiers, but slightly less so in the Chinese as soldiers (99%).

34. As this report has defined an acceptable level of integration as 90% and above approval of inter-communal interaction, 'critical' contexts here refer to instances in which less than 90% of the 'Others' were willing to interact with non-'Others'. Refer to footnote no. 18.

## General observations

This survey: (1) examined the extent to which considerations of race and religion had an effect on the preferred interaction patterns of Singaporeans; and, (2) ascertained if there were fault lines that were more pronounced between certain racial or religious groups as compared to others.

With regards to the first key question of the survey on preferred interaction patterns, Singaporeans did appear to prefer to interact with people of their own race. Except in one instance<sup>35</sup>, each race indicated either a higher or equal acceptance rate of their own race vis-à-vis the other races. However, this might not necessarily constitute a threat to social cohesion as inter-racial engagement was by and large robust<sup>36</sup> in the social, economic, political and security spheres<sup>37</sup>. Only when personal

relationships and majority-minority status were significant were there instances of reception to inter-racial interaction falling below 90%. Hence this implies that generally, Singaporeans did not allow their personal racial biases (if any at all) to exclude others in their interaction in the shared common spaces.

With regards to the second key question of the survey surrounding faint fault lines between specific racial groups, Table 3.5 indicates that the Chinese were the most preferred race as their overall mean of 95% on the acceptance scale was higher compared to that of the other races. They were also consistently ranked among the best received racial group by each non-Chinese sub-group – 94% by the Malays and Indians, and 96% by the ‘Others’. Of note, none of the remaining three racial groups was more isolated than others with an overall mean of 92% each.

**Table 3.5**

### Attitudes of each race towards one another<sup>38</sup>

		Reception of other races by _____				Overall Mean <sup>39</sup>
		Chinese	Malay	Indian	‘Others’	
Acceptance of _____ by other races	Chinese		94	94	96	95
	Malay	87		94	94	92
	Indian	87	92		96	92
	‘Others’	91	93	93		92
	Overall Mean <sup>40</sup>	88	93	94	95	

35. The only exception was 99% of the ‘Others’ who approved of the Chinese as the majority population of Singapore as compared to 98% of the ‘Others’. See Table 3.4.

36. This is defined as a minimum of 90% approval of inter-racial interaction. Refer to footnote no. 18.

37. The only exception was an 89% chance of a Chinese approaching an Indian for help in a public place. See Table 3.1.

38. This is based on the means from Tables 3.1 to 3.4.

39. The overall mean is a simple average of the means from Tables 3.1 to 3.4.

40. The overall mean is a simple average of the means from Table 3.1 to 3.4.

Interestingly, although the Chinese were on the whole the most preferred racial group, they were the least receptive to the non-Chinese with a lowest overall mean of 88% on the reception scale. At the same time, in relative terms, the Chinese were also the racial group with the lowest acceptance rate of members of the same race. They were the only racial group which did not yield an overall mean of 100% towards interacting with other Chinese (see Table 3.1), unlike the other three racial groups (see Table 3.2 for the Malays, Table 3.3 for the Indians and Table 3.4 for the 'Others').

Conversely, the 'Others' were the most receptive of non-'Others' with the highest overall mean of 95% on the reception scale, and also towards each individual non-'Others' sub-group – 96% towards the Chinese and Indians, and 94% towards the Malays.

Nevertheless, it is significant that the prospect of such biases manifesting themselves (if at all) was only very slim. As noted earlier, it was only in five contexts, all relating to intimate relationships and when majority-minority status was significant, where there were recurring instances of reception towards inter-racial interaction falling below 90%. Even then, it was only in their choice of their own spouse that the approval rate dropped below 50%. Moreover, it was only in one of the 156<sup>41</sup> inter-racial relationships in the public domain that marginally did not stand up to the rigorous 90% approval rate benchmark.<sup>42</sup>

### 3.2 INTER-RELIGIOUS TIES

This section examines the attitudes of each religious group towards interacting with people of different religious backgrounds as themselves. An acceptable level of inter-religious integration is benchmarked at a minimum of 90% of each religious group being receptive towards inter-religious interaction in each given context.<sup>43</sup> To detect religious cleavages, two specific key issues are addressed: (1) whether religious differences had an impact on the interaction behaviour of members of each religious denomination, and if so, if it was consistent across the given spectrum of contexts, and (2) if each religious group consistently regarded all other religious groups in the same manner or favoured particular groups over others. The evaluation concludes with an assessment of the identified trends on Singapore's inter-religious cohesion.

41. The figure of 156 is derived as follows: 13 (number of contexts in the public domain) x 3 (number of racial categories other than one's own) x 4 (total number of racial groups) = 156.

42. This exception was 11% Chinese who chose not to approach an Indian for help in a public place. See Table 3.1.

43. Refer to footnote no. 18.

## Perceptions of individual religious groups

### The Buddhists/Taoists<sup>44</sup>

Table 3.6

#### Attitude of Buddhists/Taoists towards interaction with non-Buddhists (approval)<sup>45</sup>

Relationship type	Buddhist/ Taoist <sup>46</sup>	Muslim	Hindu	Christian	'Other Religion'	Free- Thinker
	%	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Private</b>						
Friends to celebrate special occasions with me (e.g. weddings, birthdays)	99	80	80	90	84	91
My children's friends	100	99	99	99	99	99
Spouse of my brother/sister	100	75	76	92	87	97
My own spouse	100	27	28	58	49	78
<b>Public</b>						
<b>Social</b>						
My next-door neighbour	100	96	95	99	99	100
My teacher	100	99	99	100	100	100
My doctor	100	93	93	99	97	100
Someone I sit next to on the bus or MRT	100	99	97	100	100	100
Someone I approach for help in a public place	99	92	89	97	91	98
<b>Economic (Workplace)</b>						
My boss	100	92	94	100	99	100
My co-worker	100	99	99	100	100	100
My employee	100	94	95	99	98	99
<b>Political</b>						
My member of parliament	100	97	98	100	99	100
Prime Minister of Singapore	100	89	93	99	97	99
President of Singapore	99	93	96	99	97	99
<b>Security</b>						
Policeman to help me	100	99	99	100	100	100
Soldier to protect me	99	95	97	98	98	98
<b>Majority-minority status</b>						
To be in a place full of _____	100	76	74	91	88	97
Majority population of Singapore	99	57	57	84	77	93
<b>Mean<sup>47</sup></b>	100	87	87	95	93	97

■ Instances where the approval of inter-religious interaction was less than 90%.

■ Instances where the approval of inter-religious interaction was higher than that for intra-religious interaction.

44. The 'Buddhists/Taoists' category includes believers of traditional Chinese beliefs.

45. The percentages represent the weighted proportion of Buddhist/Taoist/believers of traditional Chinese beliefs respondents who indicated 'yes' (as opposed to 'no') to interacting with at least one person of each religious group in the given contexts. The figures have been rounded up to the nearest whole number.

46. The 'Buddhists/Taoists' category includes believers of traditional Chinese beliefs.

47. The mean is a simple average of the responses to the 19 questions.

### *Buddhist/Taoist preferences based on context*

From data listed in Table 3.6, it was in seven out of the 19 relationship contexts where there were instances in which less than 90% of Buddhists/Taoists would rather choose not to interact with someone of a different religious persuasion.

In the private sphere, the only context in which more than 10% of Buddhists/Taoists were not receptive to interaction with all non-Buddhist/Taoists religious groups was in their choice of their own spouse with the approval rate ranging from 27% to 78%. With regards to their preference for their sibling's spouse and their own friends to celebrate special occasions with, the percentage of Buddhist/Taoists willing to accept a person of a different faith only dropped below 90% for the Muslims, Hindus and adherents of 'Other religion'.

Consent to the prospect of a non-Buddhist/Taoist majority population of Singapore fell below 90% for all non-Buddhist/Taoist religious groups except for the Free-thinkers – 57% for a Muslim or Indian majority, 84% for a Christian one, and 77% for the other minority religions. In the context of a specific place, only in relation to the prospect of a Christian-, or Free-thinker-dominated one was there more than 90% approval; the acceptance rate of a Muslim, Hindu or 'Other religion' majority was below 90% at 76%, 74% and 88% respectively.

On the whole, Buddhists/Taoists were very responsive to engaging with non-Buddhists/Taoists in the public domain – especially at the workplace and in the security sphere where religious differences seemed less important. The only two isolated instances where Buddhist/Taoist endorsement of inter-religious interaction marginally did not hold up to rigorous scrutiny was 11% of them preferring not to approach a Hindu for help in a public place, and also 11% who disapproved of a Muslim Prime Minister.

### *Buddhist/Taoist preferences based on religious group*

Referring to Table 3.6, Free-thinkers were on the whole the best received with a mean of 97%, followed by Christians (95%), 'Other religion' (93%), and Hindus and Muslims with 87% each. Buddhists/Taoists made the least distinction between interacting with each other and Free-thinkers. The Free-thinkers were the only group with only one instance out of 19 in which the Buddhist/Taoists approval fell below 90% – as their own spouse. Even then, the approval rate was 78%, the highest compared to the other religious groups.

On the other hand, Muslims and Hindus were the only two religious groups towards which there were instances of approval falling below 90% that pertained only in relation to them and not the other groups – a Hindu as someone a Buddhist/Taoist would choose to approach for help in a public place, and the prospect of a Muslim Prime Minister. That the mean for Hindus and Muslims were the same (87%) suggested that the Buddhists/Taoists did not display any notable preference between the two religious groups.

## The Muslims

Table 3.7

### Attitude of Muslims towards interaction with non-Muslims (approval)<sup>48</sup>

Relationship type	Muslim	Buddhist/ Taoist <sup>49</sup>	Hindu	Christian	'Other Religion'	Free- Thinker
	%	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Private</b>						
Friends to celebrate special occasions with me (e.g. weddings, birthdays)	99	91	89	92	91	92
My children's friends	100	99	99	99	99	99
Spouse of my brother/sister	100	67	69	67	67	67
My own spouse	99	44	41	44	44	45
<b>Public</b>						
<b>Social</b>						
My next-door neighbour	100	99	98	99	98	99
My teacher	100	100	99	100	100	100
My doctor	100	98	97	99	98	99
Someone I sit next to on the bus or MRT	100	100	98	100	99	100
Someone I approach for help in a public place	100	98	94	96	94	97
<b>Economic (Workplace)</b>						
My boss	100	99	99	99	100	100
My co-worker	100	99	98	99	99	99
My employee	100	97	95	97	96	97
<b>Political</b>						
My member of parliament	100	100	100	100	99	99
Prime Minister of Singapore	100	99	99	100	100	99
President of Singapore	100	99	98	99	98	99
<b>Security</b>						
Policeman to help me	100	99	99	99	99	99
Soldier to protect me	100	99	99	99	98	99
<b>Majority-minority status</b>						
To be in a place full of _____	100	93	88	92	92	96
Majority population of Singapore	99	92	83	90	90	95
<b>Mean<sup>50</sup></b>	100	93	92	93	93	94

■ Instances where the approval of inter-religious interaction was less than 90%.

■ Instances where the approval of inter-religious interaction was higher than that for intra-religious interaction.

48. The percentages represent the weighted proportion of Muslim respondents who indicated 'yes' (as opposed to 'no') to interacting with at least one person of each religious group in the given contexts. The figures have been rounded up to the nearest whole number.

49. The 'Buddhists/Taoists' category includes believers of traditional Chinese beliefs.

50. The mean is a simple average of the responses to the 19 questions.

### *Muslim preferences based on context*

The data contained in Table 3.7 revealed that across the spectrum of relationships from the Muslim perspective, it was only in five out of 19 contexts that there were instances of approval rate for inter-racial interaction registering below 90%.

In the private domain, it was only in their choices of spouses for their siblings (67-69%) and themselves (41-45%) that preference for intra-religious interaction was significantly pronounced across all non-Muslim groups. However, in the realm of friendship, it was only in relation to Hindus that marginally more than 10% of Muslims (11%) chose not to invite them to celebrate special occasions with.

In terms of majority-minority balance, at least 90% of the Muslims were comfortable with all non-Muslim religious groups as the majority in either a specific place or the dominant population in Singapore except for the Hindus; 88% did not mind being a place full of Hindus, and 83% approved of Hindus as the majority population of Singapore.

Nevertheless, Muslims were generally as open to interacting with non-Muslims as they were to engaging with Muslims in the social, economic, political and security domains with consistently more than 90% approval for inter-religious interaction.

### *Muslim preferences based on religious group*

By and large, the Muslims were most receptive to the Free-thinkers with a mean of 94%, followed by the Buddhist/Taoists, Christians and adherents of minority religions ('Other religion') with a mean of 93% each, and then the Hindus with 92%. That the Hindus were the least preferred was reflected in how other than the two involving marriage, it was only in relation to them that there were instances where less than 90% of Muslims chose to engage with them – as a friend to celebrate special occasions with (89%), to be in a place dominated by Hindus (88%) and Hindus as the majority population (83%). Nevertheless, they were not regarded significantly differently from the other non-Muslim groups as the range of means was a mere 2% points difference. Moreover, Muslims were as likely to engage with non-Muslims (Hindus included) as they would with a Muslim in the social, economic, political and security spheres.

## The Hindus

Table 3.8

### Attitude of Hindus towards interaction with non-Hindus (approval)<sup>51</sup>

Relationship type	Hindu	Buddhist/ Taoist <sup>52</sup>	Muslim	Christian	'Other Religion'	Free- Thinker
	%	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Private</b>						
Friends to celebrate special occasions with me (e.g. weddings, birthdays)	99	94	92	95	93	95
My children's friends	99	99	99	98	98	99
Spouse of my brother/sister	100	78	77	78	78	79
My own spouse	99	36	39	39	37	38
<b>Public</b>						
<b>Social</b>						
My next-door neighbour	100	99	98	99	99	100
My teacher	100	100	100	100	100	100
My doctor	100	99	98	99	99	99
Someone I sit next to on the bus or MRT	100	100	99	100	99	100
Someone I approach for help in a public place	100	99	98	99	98	99
<b>Economic (Workplace)</b>						
My boss	100	100	99	100	100	100
My co-worker	100	100	99	100	100	100
My employee	99	99	99	99	99	99
<b>Political</b>						
My member of parliament	100	100	99	100	99	100
Prime Minister of Singapore	100	100	99	100	99	100
President of Singapore	99	99	98	99	98	99
<b>Security</b>						
Policeman to help me	100	100	100	100	100	100
Soldier to protect me	100	100	99	100	100	100
<b>Majority-minority status</b>						
To be in a place full of _____	100	98	96	98	97	100
Majority population of Singapore	100	98	94	97	96	99
<b>Mean<sup>53</sup></b>	100	95	94	95	94	95

■ Instances where the approval of inter-religious interaction was less than 90%.

■ Instances where the approval of inter-religious interaction was higher than that for intra-religious interaction.

51. The percentages represent the weighted proportion of Hindu respondents who indicated 'yes' (as opposed to 'no') to interacting with at least one person of each religious group in the given contexts. The figures have been rounded up to the nearest whole number.

52. The 'Buddhists/Taoists' category includes believers of traditional Chinese beliefs.

53. The mean is a simple average of the responses to the 19 questions.

### *Hindu preferences based on context*

On the whole, Table 3.8 indicated that only in two out of 19 interaction contexts were there less than 90% of Hindus who were receptive to engaging a non-Hindu – in their choices of their sibling's spouse (77-79%) and their own spouse (36-39%).

However, in all the remaining 17 contexts pertaining to friendship (own friends to celebrate special occasions with and their children's friends), majority-minority status, and interaction in the public domain, religion did not have any significant impact on their interaction patterns, as there was consistently more than 90% approval of interacting with non-Hindus.

### *Hindu preferences based on religious group*

By comparing the means, overall, the Hindus had a slight preference for the Buddhists/Taoists, Christians and Free-thinker (95% each) over the Muslims and 'Other religion' (94% each). However, with only a range of 1% point difference, disparity in their attitude towards various non-Hindus could be said to be minimal. Moreover in both the 'critical' contexts<sup>54</sup> (sibling's spouse and own spouse), the variation among accepting a member of each non-Hindu religious group was also small, ranging just between 77-79% for their sibling's spouse and 36-39% for their own.

54. As this report has defined an acceptable level of integration as 90% and above approval of inter-communal interaction, 'critical' contexts here refer to instances in which less than 90% of the Hindus were willing to interact with non-Hindus. Refer to footnote no. 18.

*The Christians*<sup>55</sup>

**Table 3.9**

**Attitude of Christians towards interaction with non-Christians (approval)<sup>56</sup>**

Relationship type	Christian	Buddhist/ Taoist <sup>57</sup>	Muslim	Hindu	'Other Religion'	Free- Thinker
	%	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Private</b>						
Friends to celebrate special occasions with me (e.g. weddings, birthdays)	99	98	87	89	91	97
My children's friends	99	99	98	97	99	99
Spouse of my brother/sister	100	88	73	75	80	95
My own spouse	97	54	28	32	44	72
<b>Public</b>						
<b>Social</b>						
My next-door neighbour	100	99	99	97	100	100
My teacher	100	100	99	99	100	100
My doctor	100	100	98	96	99	100
Someone I sit next to on the bus or MRT	100	100	100	99	100	100
Someone I approach for help in a public place	99	100	94	92	95	99
<b>Economic (Workplace)</b>						
My boss	99	99	92	92	99	99
My co-worker	99	99	99	99	99	99
My employee	99	99	97	98	97	99
<b>Political</b>						
My member of parliament	99	99	97	97	99	99
Prime Minister of Singapore	100	100	87	94	95	100
President of Singapore	100	100	92	96	97	100
<b>Security</b>						
Policeman to help me	100	100	100	100	100	100
Soldier to protect me	99	99	97	98	97	99
<b>Majority-minority status</b>						
To be in a place full of _____	99	99	82	76	91	99
Majority population of Singapore	97	97	61	58	81	97
<b>Mean<sup>58</sup></b>	99	96	88	89	93	98

■ Instances where the approval of inter-religious interaction was less than 90%.

■ Instances where the approval of inter-religious interaction was higher than that for intra-religious interaction.

55. It should be noted that the sampling error at 95% confidence level is 7.7%.

56. The percentages represent the weighted proportion of Christian respondents who indicated 'yes' (as opposed to 'no') to interacting with at least one person of each religious group in the given contexts. The figures have been rounded up to the nearest whole number.

57. The 'Buddhists/Taoists' category includes believers of traditional Chinese beliefs.

58. The mean is a simple average of the responses to the 19 questions.

### *Christian preferences based on context*

Table 3.9 showed that only in six out of the 19 contexts were there instances of the rate of Christians open to inter-religious interaction fell below 90%.

In the private sphere, the proportion of Christians willing to marry a non-Christian ranged from as high as 72% to a low of 28%. Given a choice of a non-Christian as their sibling's spouse, only the Free-thinkers had more than 90% of their blessings (95%); approval of members of the remaining non-Christian groups ranged between 73-88%. In their choice of friends to celebrate special occasions with, only in relation to the Muslims and Hindus did the reception rate marginally fall below 90% at 87% and 89% respectively.

When majority-minority status was a factor, more than 90% of Christians were comfortable in environments dominated by the Buddhists/Taoists and Free-thinkers. In contrast, the approval rate for Muslims, Hindus and 'Other religion' as the majority population of Singapore were 61%, 58% and 81% respectively; and only being in a specific place full of Muslims and Hindus did the acceptance rate drop below 90% at 82% and 76% respectively.

In the public sphere, of the 65<sup>59</sup> permutations of inter-religious interactions, it was only in relation to the prospect of a Muslim Prime Minister (87%) that there was less than 90% approval of inter-religious interaction.

Hence it appears that, if at all, the religious affinity of Christians only infringed on their interaction in the private sphere and when majority-minority balance was salient but was by and large inconsequential to their behaviour in the shared common spaces.

### *Christian preferences based on religious group*

Table 3.9 also pointed to some variation in Christians' attitudes towards non-Christian religious denominations. Overall, the Free-thinkers were the most preferred with a mean of 98%, followed by Buddhists/Taoists (96%), 'Other religion' (93%), Hindus (89%) and then Muslims (88%).

Regarding the Free-thinkers as the most preferred, the only context in which the percentage of Christians displaying a noticeable partiality towards fellow Christians compared to Free-thinkers was in their choice of their own spouse. Even then, among all the non-Christian groups, the odds that a Christian would rather choose a Free-thinker as their own spouse is significantly higher at 72% compared to the other non-Christian religious groups (54%, 28%, 32% and 44% in relation to a Buddhist/Taoist, Muslim, Hindu and 'Other religion' respectively). In the social, economic, political and security domains, Free-thinkers were regarded no differently from Christians. It is also worth noting that in relation to the Buddhists/Taoists as a close second, while only 99% of the Christians would approach another Christian for help in a public place, 100% would turn to a Buddhist/Taoist.

On the other hand, Christians seemed slightly more guarded in their attitude towards Muslims and Hindus. Across the whole 19 contexts, the approval rates of the two religious groups were consistently no higher than the other non-Christian sub-groups. Between the two, there was also no consistent preference for one over the other when the instances where the approval rates dipped below 90% were compared. The Muslims were preferred over the Hindus as the majority religious group both (1) in a specific place and as (2) the dominant population of Singapore. However, in the private realm pertaining to (1) friends to celebrate special occasions with, (2) sibling's spouse and (3) their own spouse, and in the public domain relating to (4) their choice of Singapore's Prime Minister, the Hindus were preferred.

59. The figure of 65 was derived as follows: 13 (number of contexts in the public domain) x 5 (number of religious categories other than one's own) = 65.

The minority religious groups ('Other religion')<sup>60</sup>

Table 3.10

Attitude of 'Other religion' towards interaction with non-'Other religion' (approval)<sup>61</sup>

Relationship type	'Other Religion'	Buddhist/ Taoist <sup>62</sup>	Muslim	Hindu	Christian	Free-Thinker
	%	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Private</b>						
Friends to celebrate special occasions with me (e.g. weddings, birthdays)	98	98	98	100	98	98
My children's friends	100	100	100	100	100	100
Spouse of my brother/sister	98	76	74	82	76	79
My own spouse	79	38	35	50	36	36
<b>Public</b>						
<b>Social</b>						
My next-door neighbour	100	98	100	100	100	100
My teacher	100	100	100	100	100	100
My doctor	100	98	100	100	100	100
Someone I sit next to on the bus or MRT	100	100	100	100	100	100
Someone I approach for help in a public place	100	100	100	100	100	100
<b>Economic (Workplace)</b>						
My boss	100	100	100	100	100	100
My co-worker	100	100	100	100	100	100
My employee	100	100	86	100	100	100
<b>Political</b>						
My member of parliament	100	100	100	100	100	100
Prime Minister of Singapore	100	100	78	91	100	100
President of Singapore	100	100	91	100	100	100
<b>Security</b>						
Policeman to help me	100	100	100	100	100	100
Soldier to protect me	100	98	88	100	100	100
<b>Majority-minority status</b>						
To be in a place full of _____	100	100	88	100	100	100
Majority population of Singapore	99	98	76	94	99	99
<b>Mean<sup>63</sup></b>	99	95	90	96	95	95

■ Instances where the approval of inter-religious interaction was less than 90%.

■ Instances where the approval of inter-religious interaction was higher than that for intra-religious interaction.

60. It should be noted that the sampling error at 95% confidence level is 16.8%.

61. The percentages represent the weighted proportion of believers of minority religions ('Other religion') respondents who indicated 'yes' (as opposed to 'no') to interacting with at least one person of each religious group in the given contexts. The figures have been rounded up to the nearest whole number.

62. The 'Buddhists/Taoists' category includes believers of traditional Chinese beliefs.

63. The mean is a simple average of the responses to the 19 questions.

### *'Other Religion' preferences based on context*

According to Table 3.10, the only contexts where approval for all non-'Other religion' sub-groups consistently fell below 90% related to marriage. Approval for their sibling's spouse who was a non-'Other religion' ranged between 74% and 82%, compared to 98% for a prospective 'Other religion' in-law. The range of approval for a non-'Other religion' as their own spouse dropped further to between 35% and 50%. However, it is interesting to also note that the approval rate for another 'Other religion' as their own spouse was a mere 79%. This is an anomaly as it was the only instance where approval of one's own religious group registered below 90%. However, the scope of this survey is limited to identifying the trends and not the motivations behind them. Hence further studies need to be conducted to shed more light on the specific trend. Nevertheless, what remained consistent was that the approval for a fellow 'Other religion' as their own spouse was still significantly higher than for any of the non-'Other religion' sub-groups.

Pertaining to majority-minority status, it was only in relation to the Muslims that the approval percentages fell below 90%, both being in a specific place dominated by Muslims (88%), and the prospect of a Muslim majority population (76%).

In the public arena, the instances that did not pass the rigorous 90% approval rate also related only to the Muslims as an employee they would hire (86%), the Prime Minister of Singapore (78%) and a soldier to protect them (88%).

On the other hand, the majority of the remaining responses across all contexts registered a robust 100% acceptance of engagement with people of all faiths.

### *'Other Religion' preferences based on religious group*

Across the range of relationships in relative terms, the Hindus were the most preferred with a mean of 96%, followed by the Buddhist/Taoists, Christians and Free-thinkers with 95% each, and then the Muslims with 90%. In fact, the approval rate for inviting 'Other religion' friends to celebrate special occasions with was 98% but that for the Hindus was 100%. However, it was the Christians and Free-thinkers who were consistently regarded equally as fellow adherents of minority religions in all the remaining 17 interaction contexts other than marriage.

The Muslims, on the other hand, were the only group with the acceptance rate falling below 90% when majority-minority status was a consideration and in the public sphere, in addition to contexts involving marriage. However, it should also be pointed out that except for their choice of the President of Singapore, an equal percentage of 'Other religion' adherents were receptive to engaging with the Muslims as they were with themselves in all the remaining contexts.

*The Free-thinkers*<sup>64</sup>

**Table 3.11**

**Attitude of Free-thinkers towards interaction with non-Free-thinkers (approval)<sup>65</sup>**

Relationship type	Free-Thinker	Buddhist/Taoist <sup>66</sup>	Muslim	Hindu	Christian	'Other Religion'
	%	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Private</b>						
Friends to celebrate special occasions with me (e.g. weddings, birthdays)	98	99	85	84	97	91
My children's friends	100	100	98	98	100	100
Spouse of my brother/sister	99	100	78	80	96	92
My own spouse	91	98	39	39	84	65
<b>Public</b>						
<b>Social</b>						
My next-door neighbour	99	100	98	96	100	99
My teacher	99	100	99	98	100	99
My doctor	99	100	94	94	99	99
Someone I sit next to on the bus or MRT	100	100	99	93	100	99
Someone I approach for help in a public place	97	99	99	92	97	94
<b>Economic (Workplace)</b>						
My boss	100	100	90	91	100	99
My co-worker	100	100	98	98	100	100
My employee	99	99	92	92	99	98
<b>Political</b>						
My member of parliament	96	96	92	94	96	94
Prime Minister of Singapore	98	100	88	93	99	95
President of Singapore	97	98	89	91	97	93
<b>Security</b>						
Policeman to help me	100	100	98	98	100	100
Soldier to protect me	97	97	90	94	96	96
<b>Majority-minority status</b>						
To be in a place full of _____	99	99	78	77	99	94
Majority population of Singapore	96	97	59	55	94	81
<b>Mean<sup>67</sup></b>	98	99	88	87	98	94

■ Instances where the approval of inter-religious interaction was less than 90%.

■ Instances where the approval of inter-religious interaction was higher than that for intra-religious interaction.

64. It should be noted that the sampling error at 95% confidence level is 8.1%.

65. The percentages represent the weighted proportion of Free-thinkers who indicated 'yes' (as opposed to 'no') to interacting with at least one person of each religious group in the given contexts. The figures have been rounded up to the nearest whole number.

66. The 'Buddhists/Taoists' category includes believers of traditional Chinese beliefs.

67. The mean is a simple average of the responses to the 19 questions.

### *Free-thinker preferences based on context*

Overall, there was no particular context in which Free-thinkers consistently displayed an approval rate of below 90% in relation to all the other religious denominations.

In the private sphere, the approval rate for their own spouse fell below 90% in relation to the Muslims (39%), Hindus (39%), Christians (84%) and 'Other religion' (65%). A less than 90% acceptance of a non-Free-thinker as a friend to celebrate special occasions with, and as their sibling's spouse only applied to the Muslims and Hindus.

When majority-minority balance was a factor, the approval rate only dipped below the 90% mark vis-à-vis the Muslims (59%), Hindus (55%) and minority religious groups (81%). The prospect of less than 90% of Free-thinkers choosing to be in a place dominated by another religious group pertained to the Muslims (78%) and Hindus (77%) only.

In the public sphere, religious differences had little impact on the interaction patterns of Free-thinkers, except marginally so in relation to the Muslims as the Prime Minister (88%) and President (89%) of Singapore.

### *Free-thinker preferences based on religious groups*

All things considered, Free-thinkers did not regard their relationship with all religious denominations equally. The Buddhists/Taoists were the most preferred with a mean of 99%, followed by the Christians (98%), the 'Other religion' (94%), the Muslims (88%) and then the Hindus (87%). Of significance were Buddhists/Taoists as the best received religious group. They either scored an equal or higher percentage of approval compared to the Free-thinkers themselves, making this the only inter-communal relationship among all the 42<sup>68</sup> in this study in which a communal group showed an overall preference for interacting with another communal group. The 10 circumstances in which a Buddhist/Taoist registered a higher acceptance rate than Free-thinkers were as (1) friends invited to celebrate special occasions, (2) their sibling's spouse, (3) their own spouse, (4) next-door neighbour, (5) teacher, (6) doctor, (7) someone to approach for help in a public place, (8) the majority population of Singapore, (9) the Prime Minister of Singapore, and (10) the President of Singapore. In the security sphere (as a policeman and soldier) and at the workplace (as a boss, co-worker and employee), Buddhists/Taoists were accorded the same percentage of approval as Free-thinkers. Following on, Free-thinkers on the whole also made very little distinction between themselves and Christians as both tied with a mean of 98%. The Christians even scored a higher level of approval than Free-thinkers as a next-door neighbour, teacher, and Prime Minister of Singapore.

Generally, Muslims and Hindus were the least preferred religious groups by Free-thinkers with a mean of 88% and 87% respectively. These two non-Free-thinker groups were also the ones in relation to which there were the highest occurrence of approval rates falling below 90% – five instances with respect to Hindus, and seven in connection with Muslims, compared to none vis-à-vis the Buddhist/Taoists, one vis-à-vis the Christians and two vis-à-vis the minority religious groups. Although instances of approval rates registering below 90% in the public sphere only applied to the Muslims as the Prime Minister (88%) and President of Singapore (89%), a higher percentage of Free-thinkers chose to approach a Muslim for help in a public place than a Free-thinker.

68. This figure of 42 is derived as follows: Number of inter-racial relationship + Number of inter-religious relationships = (4x3) + (6x5) = 42.

### General observations

To reiterate, this survey: (1) examined the extent to which considerations of race and religion had an effect on the preferred interaction patterns of Singaporeans; and, (2) ascertained if there were fault lines that were more pronounced between certain racial or religious groups as compared to others.

With regards to whether religious differences had an impact on interaction between Singaporeans, based on the analysis above, it could be surmised that by and large, religious

differences did have some bearing on the interaction patterns albeit in varying degrees across different contexts for each individual religious group. The only categories of interaction where religious differences could be said to have an obvious influence on Singaporeans – and echoing the observations on inter-racial relations above – related to marriage (their sibling's and own spouses) and to a lesser degree, to circumstances affecting the majority-minority balance of a specific place or the population of Singapore. Besides these categories, in the public sphere where social, economic, political and security interdependence is key to social cohesion, inter-religious confidence was very sturdy.

Table 3.12

#### Attitude of each religious group towards one another<sup>69</sup>

		Reception of other religious groups by _____						Overall Mean <sup>71</sup>
		Buddhist/ Taoist <sup>70</sup>	Muslim	Hindu	Christian	'Other religion'	Free- thinker	
Acceptance of _____ by other religious group	Buddhist/ Taoist <sup>72</sup>		93	95	96	95	99	96
	Muslim	87		94	88	90	88	89
	Hindu	87	92		89	96	87	90
	Christian	95	93	95		95	98	95
	'Other religion'	93	93	94	93		94	93
	Free-thinker	97	94	95	98	95		96
Overall Mean <sup>73</sup>		92	93	95	93	94	93	

69. This is based on the means from Tables 3.6 to 3.11.

70. The 'Buddhists/Taoists' category includes believers of traditional Chinese beliefs.

71. The overall mean is a simple average of the means from Tables 3.6 to 3.11.

72. The 'Buddhists/Taoists' category includes believers of traditional Chinese beliefs.

73. The mean is a simple average of the means from Tables 3.6 to 3.11.

With regards to the second question of the survey pertaining to fault lines between religious groups, Table 3.12 suggests that the Buddhists/Taoists and Free-thinkers with the highest mean score of 96% each on the acceptance scale were the best received religious groups. On the same scale, the Muslims were the least preferred with a mean of 89%. Interestingly, although the Buddhists/Taoists were among the best received, they were relatively the least receptive to non-Buddhist/Taoists with the lowest mean of 92% on the reception scale. The Hindus were the most receptive to non-Hindus with the highest mean of 95% on the same scale.

That said, it is noteworthy that the prospects of being discriminated against or favoured based on one's religious identity were very low. While these biases might have been apparent, the likelihood of them materializing was considerably slim when a sense of proportion was applied. As noted earlier in Tables 3.6 to 3.11, it was by and large only when intimacy and majority-minority status were salient that there were instances where more than 10% of Singaporeans displayed exclusive behaviour along religious lines. Even then, it was only in their choice of their own spouse that one found instances of intra-religious partiality exceeding 50%. Moreover, in the public domain, only eight<sup>74</sup> out of a total of 390<sup>75</sup> inter-racial relationships (a mere 2%) failed to satisfy the prudent 90% acceptance rate, implying that Singaporeans generally did not allow their religious biases (if any at all) to influence their behaviour towards fellow Singaporeans in the shared social space.

74. The eight exceptions were (1) 89% of Buddhists/Taoists who approved of a Muslim Prime Minister (Table 3.6), (2) 89% of Buddhists/Taoists who would approach a Hindu for help in a public place (Table 3.6), (3) 87% of Christians who approved of a Muslim Prime Minister (Table 3.9), (4) 86% of 'Other religion' who would employ a Muslim (Table 3.10), (5) 78% of 'Other religion' who approved of a Muslim Prime Minister (Table 3.10), (6) 88% of 'Other religion' who would not mind a Muslim soldier to protect them (Table 3.10), (7) 88% of Free-thinkers who approved of a Muslim Prime Minister (Table 3.11), and (8) 89% of Free-thinker who approved of a Muslim President of Singapore (Table 3.11).

75. The figure of 390 was derived as follows: 13 (number of contexts in the public domain) x 5 (number of religious categories other than one's own) x 6 (total number of religious categories) = 390.

## 4. *Implications: Forging Sustainable Inter-communal Ties*

Sometimes the ties that bind can also be the very same ties that blind. On the whole, this study indicates that Singaporeans did have an inclination towards interacting with people of the same race and/or religious persuasion. However, this inclination was not necessarily a threat to Singapore's multicultural fabric for four pertinent reasons.

Firstly, as stressed in this survey report, the evaluation of what has been considered an acceptable level of inter-racial and inter-religious engagement has been defined as having no less than 90% of Singaporeans being receptive to inter-racial or inter-religious interaction. Though agreement on what constitutes a 'robust' percentage is admittedly difficult and problematically arbitrary, the benchmark of above 90% reception to inter-communal interaction may be considered a very stringent criterion of acceptable level of inter-racial and inter-religious cohesion compared to similar surveys.<sup>76</sup>

Secondly, it is encouraging to note that generally, both race and religion played an insignificant role in determining the relations Singaporeans had with each other in the social, economic, political and security domains – or expressed in another manner, the domains of the public sphere. This point is important as it indicates that civility in the public sphere was well-preserved. Singaporeans by and large did not consider race or religion important criteria when making decisions such as who their next-door neighbour, co-worker, Member of Parliament or policeman helping them should be.

Thirdly, social cohesion was clearly very strong when one considers the fact that the only context under which respondents generally indicated race and religion as a critical factor in their interaction patterns pertained to the choice of spouse with the majority of the percentages towards marrying someone from a different racial and religious groups falling below 50%. Inter-racial marriage has been referred to as the "last solvent" of racial barriers as it is not only considered the most intimate personal relationship but also one that is often subjected to parental and societal approval.<sup>77</sup> As attachment to one's religion is often seen as a primordial sentiment and – like racial identity - part of a person's personality, it is not unusual for people to have a preference for marrying someone of the same racial and religious group. Hence it is not surprising that it was only in the choice of one's own spouse that most Singaporeans were clearly less receptive to a person of a different race or religion.

Fourthly, the findings also identified two trends indicating relative progress in the forging of inter-communal trust over the years. The first pertains to attitudes towards political leadership. It is heartening to note that Singaporeans generally did not consider the racial backgrounds of their political leaders as important. This was evidenced in the consistently robust acceptance rate of 90% and above across all inter-racial group attitudes. Specifically encouraging is consistently more than

76. Refer to footnote no. 18.

77. Chiew, Seen Kong, "National Identity, Ethnicity and National Issues" in Jon S.T. Quah (ed) *In Search of Singapore's National Values*, Singapore: Institute of Policy Studies, 1990, p. 67.

90% of the Chinese majority was open to the prospects of a minority as their Member of Parliament, Prime Minister and President. This is significant as trust in political office bearers to make and execute policies in the interest of all Singaporeans regardless of race is a crucial indicator of a nation's commitment to multiculturalism. That said, the strides taken towards colour-blindness in the political arena were uneven. While the racial affiliation of political leaders was negligible, religion was a factor in Singaporeans' choice of political leaders, most notably to a Muslim Prime Minister. Except for the Hindus, there appeared to be reservations among the rest of the non-Muslim groups towards accepting a Muslim as the head of government. However, premised on a less than 90% acceptance rate among the Buddhists/Taoists at 89% (Table 3.6), Christians at 87% (Table 3.9), the minority religious groups at 78% (Table 3.10) and Free-thinkers at 88% (Table 3.11), the figures could still be said to be optimistic on the whole.<sup>78</sup> More interestingly, this reservation was not reflected in the choice of a Malay Prime Minister where there was consistently more than 90% of Singaporeans of all racial groups who were comfortable with the prospect. Read together, it would appear that being relatively more receptive to a Malay as opposed to a Muslim Prime Minister, Singaporeans displayed a rather nuanced understanding of the oft-conflated Malay/Muslim identity. On balance, religious differences, like racial differences, were insignificant to the majority of Singaporeans when choosing their Member of Parliament and President.<sup>79</sup>

The second indicator of progress relates to the security dimension of inter-communal ties. Notably, the current "global war on terror" has resurrected lingering concerns over whether Singaporean Muslims had a greater affinity with non-Muslim Singaporeans or non-Singaporean Muslims in a national security crisis. In this respect, the findings were reassuring as the Muslims did not appear to harbour any significant proclivity towards establishing a Muslim majority in Singapore. Table 3.7 indicated that the Muslims were as comfortable as the majority as well as minority religious group: between 88% and 96% did not mind being in a specific place dominated by a non-Muslim religious group, and between 83% and 95% were receptive to non-Muslim religious group as the majority population of Singapore. The reciprocation of non-Muslim Singaporeans' trust is indicated in the overwhelming vote of confidence in their fellow Muslims as both policemen and soldiers to protect them. Except for one isolated instance<sup>80</sup>, there was consistently a 90% and above reception rate among non-Malays and non-Muslims towards the prospect of both Malay and Muslim policemen and soldiers protecting them. That Malays and Muslims are trusted in security roles is a significant step forward as the role of Malay/Muslims in the armed forces had been a bone of contention in the past.

At this juncture, it would be constructive to ponder the following questions in taking stock of Singapore's efforts at enhancing communal bonds: (1) What level of racial and religious integration is Singapore, as a nation, willing to live with? (2) What do Singaporeans want to change or achieve? (3) How will Singaporeans know when they have achieved their goals?

78. Refer to footnote no. 18.

79. The exception of a less than 90% acceptance rate was the marginal 89% of Free-thinkers who were receptive to a Muslim President. See Table 3.11.

80. The exception of a less than 90% acceptance rate of either a Malay or Muslim policeman or soldier was the 88% of adherents of minority religious groups who were receptive to a Muslim soldier protecting them. See Table 3.10.

With regard to the level of integration Singapore as a nation would be willing to live with, it must be kept in mind that Singaporeans were generally well-integrated in all the other given contexts in spite of the “last solvent” remaining by and large insolvent. Even if one were to assume that the majority of Singaporeans’ choice of a life partner was indeed motivated by primordial and irreconcilable racial and religious sentiments, then it is heartening to note their ability to negotiate in a mature manner this ‘base’ instinct vis-à-vis those with differing cultural outlooks. In fact, ‘tolerating the different’, is arguably a realistic and viable option to sustaining cohesion in a culturally diverse society. It has been noted that the very act of toleration “rests on the fact that we are different and we disagree. We not only differ in appearance, in age, in ability, in wealth and in our origins, but we also differ in outlooks. We live by different religions, abide by (or abhor) different practices, and value different ways of life... We have different ideas of what constitutes the good life; and we often want others to adopt our own.”<sup>81</sup> Moreover, it is unrealistic to expect a society to commit to substantial common values in the place of tolerance because it is only possible to share a core of significant beliefs and commitments with either a small group of people, or perhaps “very weak and undemanding commitments”.<sup>82</sup> Applying these lenses to the survey results, it could be surmised that the current state of communal relations among Singaporeans reflects, to a large degree, a healthy internalization of living with diversity - with diversity defined as the general will among Singaporeans to co-exist with others of a different racial and religious group in the civil arena.

As for the question regarding what can be changed and realistically be achieved, the overall positive state of inter-communal relations should not mean that no effort and resources should be invested into promoting better communal understanding and respect. On the contrary, the course of action could be more specifically tailored to mitigate the specific cleavages identified to avoid the side effects of fatigue that blanket approaches are prone to. At the same time, it should also be consistent with the desired outcomes. So while it may be tempting to conclude that certain racial and religious groups are more predisposed to exclusive behaviour, such a dangerous parochial conclusion is misleading on two counts. First, underlying such a claim is the insinuation of ‘discrimination’, a serious accusation that may unnecessarily undermine the reservoir of communal goodwill among the majority of Singaporeans. Secondly, the possibility of intra-group rejection was implied in the fact that no racial or religious group consistently yielded 100% acceptance of their own communal group across all the 19 contexts. Hence, it is illogical to assume that those who lay claims to the same heritage are genetically predisposed to endorsing the behaviour and attitude of those among their fold, a claim when reinforced is likely to entrench unfounded and dangerous stereotypes. Furthermore, it is also unreasonable that the responsible majority be held hostage for the actions of a few bad apples.

81. Kukathas, Chandran, *Tolerating the Intolerable*, a paper presented as a lecture in the Department of the Senate Occasional Lecture Series at Parliament House, Australia, on 24 July 1998.

82. *Ibid.* At the same time, Kukathas noted that instituting tolerance should not be taken to mean that “anything goes” or “a lethargic acceptance of bad conditions” to justify criminality and irresponsibility. Instead, society as a whole needs to learn to negotiate the difference between discord they are able to live with and that which is detrimental to social cohesion.

Instead, a more accurate reading of the findings is to recognize the division for what it is - that between those, regardless of racial and religious affiliation, who chose to let racial and religious differences affect their attitude towards others and those who did not. Nevertheless, one should also caution against hastily assuming the worst intentions harboured by those who were more selective of those they choose to interact with. This survey has merely identified the interaction choices of Singaporeans but has made no claims about the motivations behind them. Following from this, measures taken to enhance community confidence by strengthening *inter-cultural* understanding could be balanced with an appreciation of *intra-cultural* diversity inevitable in the different lived experiences of each member.

Finally, how will Singapore ever know if the goal of a well-integrated and cohesive society is achieved? The forthright answer would be that no one knows. All studies on social behaviour and attitudes cannot claim to be the final word on the state of inter-communal relations in Singapore. Instead, they are snapshots of a particular historical moment shaped by local and international factors. These inter-communal relations will undoubtedly continually evolve over time and no society can confidently sit back and consider that all work has been done. To better appreciate the cohesiveness of Singapore's multicultural social fabric, this study should be complemented with other quantitative and qualitative studies on this issue. Nevertheless, this report is intended to be read as a reference point for a critical introspection of Singapore's multicultural condition – introspection crucial for evolving strategies to sustain current communal cohesion.

# About CENS

The Centre of Excellence for National Security (CENS) is a research unit of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. Established on 1 April 2006, CENS is devoted to rigorous policy-relevant analysis of a range of national security issues. The CENS team is multinational in composition, comprising both Singaporean and foreign analysts who are specialists in various aspects of national and homeland security affairs.

## Why CENS?

In August 2004 the Strategic Framework for National Security outlined the key structures, security measures and capability development programmes that would help Singapore deal with transnational terrorism in the near and long term.

However, strategizing national security policies requires greater research and understanding of the evolving security landscape. This is why CENS was established to increase the intellectual capital invested in strategizing national security. To this end, CENS works closely with not just other RSIS research programmes, but also national security agencies such as the National Security Coordination Secretariat within the Prime Minister's Office.

## What Research Does CENS Do?

CENS currently conducts research in three key areas of national security:

- Risk Assessment/Horizon Scanning
  - The art and science of detecting “weak signals” emanating from the total security environment so as to forewarn policymakers, the private sector and the public about approaching “shocks” such as terrorism, pandemics, energy crises and other easy-to-miss trends and ostensibly distant events.
- Social Resilience
  - The capacity of globalized, multicultural societies to hold together in the face of systemic shocks such as diseases and terrorist strikes.
- Transportation Security
  - The security of land-based, aviation and maritime transport networks and increasingly, the total supply chain vital to Singapore's economic vitality.

## How Does CENS Help Influence National Security Policy?

Through policy-oriented analytical commentaries and other research output directed at the national security policy community in Singapore and beyond, CENS staff members promote greater awareness of emerging threats as well as global best practices in responding to those threats. In addition, CENS organizes courses, seminars and workshops for local and foreign national security officials to facilitate networking and exposure to leading-edge thinking on the prevention of, and response to, national and homeland security threats.

## How Does CENS Help Raise Public Awareness of National Security Issues?

To educate the wider public, CENS staff members regularly author articles in a number of security and intelligence related publications, as well as write op-ed analyses in leading newspapers. Radio and television interviews have allowed CENS staff to participate in and shape the public debate on critical issues such as risk assessment and horizon scanning, multiculturalism and social resilience, intelligence reform and defending critical infrastructure against mass-casualty terrorist attacks

## How Does CENS Keep Abreast of Cutting Edge National Security Research?

The lean organizational structure of CENS permits a constant and regular influx of Visiting Fellows of international calibre through the Distinguished CENS Visitors Programme. This enables CENS to keep abreast of cutting edge global trends in national security research.

## For More on CENS

Log on to <http://www.rsis.edu.sg> and follow the links to “Centre of Excellence for National Security”.

# About RSIS

The S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) was established in January 2007 as an autonomous School within the Nanyang Technological University. RSIS's mission is to be a leading research and graduate teaching institution in strategic and international affairs in the Asia Pacific. To accomplish this mission, it will:

- Provide a rigorous professional graduate education in international affairs with a strong practical and area emphasis.
- Conduct policy-relevant research in national security, defence and strategic studies, diplomacy and international relations.
- Collaborate with like-minded schools of international affairs to form a global network of excellence.

## Graduate Training in International Affairs

RSIS offers an exacting graduate education in international affairs, taught by an international faculty of leading thinkers and practitioners. The Master of Science (MSc) degree programmes in Strategic Studies, International Relations, Asian Studies and International Political Economy are distinguished by their focus on the Asia Pacific, the professional practice of international affairs, and the cultivation of academic depth. Over 130 students, the majority from abroad, are enrolled in these programmes. A small, select PhD programme caters to advanced students whose interests match those of specific faculty members.

## Research

RSIS research is conducted by five constituent Institutes and Centres: the Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies (IDSS, founded 1996), the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR, 2002), the Centre of Excellence for National Security (CENS, 2006), the Centre for the Advanced Study of Regionalism and Multilateralism (CASRM, 2007); and the Consortium of Non-Traditional Security Studies in ASIA (NTS-Asia, 2007). The focus of research is on issues relating to the security and stability of the Asia-Pacific region and their implications for Singapore and other countries in the region. The S. Rajaratnam Professorship in Strategic Studies brings distinguished scholars and practitioners to participate in the work of the Institute. Previous holders of the Chair include Professors Stephen Walt, Jack Snyder, Wang Jisi, Alastair Iain Johnston, John Mearsheimer, Raja Mohan, and Rosemary Foot.

## International Collaboration

Collaboration with other professional Schools of international affairs to form a global network of excellence is a RSIS priority. RSIS will initiate links with other like-minded schools so as to enrich its research and teaching activities as well as adopt the best practices of successful schools.

This page is intentionally left blank

This page is intentionally left blank

This page is intentionally left blank



**S. RAJARATNAM SCHOOL  
OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES**

A Graduate School of Nanyang Technological University

**S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS)**

Nanyang Technological University  
Block S4, Level B4, Nanyang Avenue  
Singapore 639798  
Tel: (65) 6790 6982  
Fax: (65) 6793 2991  
E-mail: [wwwrsis@ntu.edu.sg](mailto:wwwrsis@ntu.edu.sg)  
website: [www.rsis.edu.sg](http://www.rsis.edu.sg)