

Singapore 2010



Total: 70.04

Political Freedom

Free and Fair Elections : 3.57

Elections are held every five years in Singapore and voting is mandatory. People that fail to cast a ballot are excluded from the electoral register and therefore banned from participating in future elections “ unless they have an acceptable reason for not voting and pay a fee. The last elections in 2006 resulted in the ruling People’s Action Party (PAP) winning 82 out of 84 seats. There is no independent authority to monitor the electoral process. Political pluralism is practically non-existent despite officially being encouraged by the government. The opposition is often intimidated and its space for political participation heavily restricted.

Absence of Unconstitutional Veto Players : 5.83

There are no unconstitutional veto players in the political system of Singapore. The government entirely controls the country’s politics. Unfortunately, this also means that oppositional political parties have virtually no space to operate: Reformers that could become potential veto actors are denounced as dissidents and can be silenced by the government at any time.

Freedom of Press : 3.2

All national press in Singapore is controlled by the Singapore Press Holdings (SPH) that effectively practices self-censorship. On several occasions, foreign newspapers have not only been subject to lawsuits and forced to pay high fines, also their circulations have been restricted. One can say that in Singapore, rather than freedom of the press, there is freedom from the press. Moreover, political films or documentaries are entirely banned. The internet however has resisted to governmental censorship. The index published by Reporters without Borders ranked Singapore in 2009 on position 133 out of 175. Korea in position 69 out of 175.

Rule of Law

Independence of the Judiciary : 7.99

Judges are appointed by the president on advice of the prime minister, a fact that makes it hard to imagine that judges are free from political influence. And indeed, several cases involving opposition politicians have driven them into bankruptcy. Many a judge is closely connected to the PAP. In terms of their usually PAP-friendly judgments however, it is not entirely clear, if the judges act on their own beliefs or if they are pressured by members of the party.

Corruption : 9.2

The Singaporean government adheres to a strict no-tolerance policy regarding corruption. This is essential to the economic success of Singapore: If investors felt that their funds are not safe, the image of Singapore as one of the region's biggest financial hubs would be severely damaged. Anti-corruption efforts are by and large successful. Transparency International rated Singapore in its 2009 Corruptions Perceptions index on position three of 180 surveyed countries.

Protection of Human Rights : 5.86

The protection of human rights is rather deficient. Singapore is not party to any of the UN's major conventions on the protection of human rights. The freedom of expression is restricted , defamation charges are pressed against anyone who criticises the government. Moreover, the death penalty is in force: Singapore rejected a UN motion calling on a worldwide moratorium on the use of the death penalty. From our liberal point of view, this is more than regrettable. Religious freedom is only respected as long as it is not considered endangering the integrity of state. In 2009, 23 suspected Islamists were detained without trial – concerns about inhuman treatment or torture have been voiced in this respect.

Economic Freedom

Security of Property Rights : 8.38

Both private property rights and intellectual property rights are well protected under Singaporean law. Contracts are secure, if urban needs make the acquisition of real estate necessary, compensation is provided. Singapore has one of the region's most sophisticated intellectual property rights regimes. The Intellectual Property Office of Singapore is the country's leading agency that serves as government advisor on intellectual property rights and promotes intellectual property awareness.

Size of Government: Expenditures, Taxes, and Enterprises : 8.17

Government spending is low, reaching about 12.5 percent of the GDP. Through government-linked companies the state is to a considerable extent involved in Singapore's economy. Taxes are comparably low. The top income tax rate equals 20 percent whereas the top corporate tax rate is 18 percent. Other taxes include a VAT and a property tax. Overall tax revenue is about 14.3 percent of the GDP.

Regulation of Credit, Labour, and Business : 8.5

The financial sector of Singapore is highly competitive. Banking is dominated by three groups, the biggest is the Development Bank of Singapore which is owned by the government. Additionally, 110 foreign banks operate more or less freely in the country. To start, run, and close a business is easy under Singapore's regulations. Starting a business takes a mere three days (the world average is 35 days), a business license is obtainable in less than the world average of 18 procedures and 218 days. Closing a business is uncomplicated. Singaporean labour regulations are flexible. The non-salary cost of an employee is low, dismissing him is easy. Work hour regulations are flexible.

Freedom to Trade Internationally : 9.34

A founding member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, Singapore promotes the reduction of trade barriers between member states. Singapore's foreign trade is by and large liberalised, its weighted average tariff rate is 0 percent. However, some import and export restrictions, service market barriers, and licensing requirements are obstacles to foreign trade.