

Singapore 2011



Total: 69.93

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 then banned from participating in future elections, unless they had an acceptable reason for not voting and also pay a fee. The last elections in 2011 resulted in the ruling People's Action Party winning 81 out of 87 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 space for political participation is heavily restricted. Reformers that could challenge the government's power are denounced as dissidents, and can be silenced by the government at any time. Thus, oppositional political parties have virtually no space to operate.

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. Oppositional groupings that could be a potential threat to the country's ruling elite usually are broken up immediately.

Freedom of Press : 3.2

All national press in Singapore is controlled by the Singapore Press Holdings, which effectively practices self-censorship. On several occasions, foreign newspapers not only have been subject to lawsuits and forced to pay high fines, but also have had their circulations 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 governmental censorship. The index published in 2010 by Reporters without Borders ranked Singapore as position 136 out of 178.

Rule of Law

Independence of the Judiciary : 7.73

Judges are appointed by the president on the advice of the prime minister, a fact making it hard to imagine judges truly are free from political influence. Indeed, several opposition politicians have been involved in cases which have driven them into bankruptcy. Many judges are connected to the PAP. In terms of their oft PAP-friendly judgments, however, it is not entirely clear if judges act out of their own belief, or if they are pressured by members of the party.

Corruption : 9.3

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 were 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. Singapore leads Transparency International's 2010 Corruptions Perceptions index of 178 surveyed countries.

Protection of Human Rights : 5.79

The protection of human rights is deficient. Singapore is not party to any of the UN's major conventions on the protection of human rights. 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 as endangering the integrity of the state. In 2009, 23 suspected Islamists were detained without trial, and concerns about inhuman treatment or torture have been voiced in this respect.

Economic Freedom

Security of Property Rights : 8.39

Both private property rights and intellectual property rights are well protected under Singaporean law. Contracts are secure, and if urban needs make the acquisition of real estate necessary then 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 serving as government advisor on intellectual property rights and promoting intellectual property awareness.

Size of Government: Expenditures, Taxes, and Enterprises : 8.12

Government spending is still relatively low, but has reached 17 percent of the GDP (compared to about 12.5 percent in 2010). The state is involved to a considerable extent in Singapore's economy through government-linked companies.

Taxes are comparably low. The top income tax rate equals 20 percent, whereas the top corporate tax rate was recently reduced to 17 percent. Other taxes include VAT and property tax. Overall tax revenue is about 14.3 percent of the GDP.

Regulation of Credit, Labour, and Business : 8.6

The financial sector of Singapore is highly competitive. Banking is dominated by three groups, the largest being the government owned Development Bank of Singapore. Additionally, 113 foreign banks operate more or less freely.

To start, run, and close a business is easy under Singapore's regulations. Starting a business takes a mere three days, and a business license can be obtained in 11 procedures and 25 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 : 9.4

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, by and large, is 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.