

Singapore 2012



Total: 70.37

Political Freedom

Free and Fair Elections : 4.29

Elections are held every five years in Singapore and voting is mandatory. Citizens who fail to cast a ballot are excluded from the electoral register and banned from participating in future elections, unless they present an acceptable reason for not voting and pay a fine. The last general election 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 it being officially encouraged by the government. The opposition is often intimidated and the space for political participation is heavily restricted. Reformers who 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. Still, the opposition parties proved to be much more active; in the run-up to the last election, they filed candidates for 82 of the 87 directly elected seats. However, this can hardly be taken to mean that Singapore is an electoral democracy.

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 : 3.3

All national media in Singapore are controlled by the Singapore Press Holdings, leading them to practice self-censorship. On several occasions, not only are foreign newspapers subject to lawsuits and forced to pay high fines, but they also have their circulations restricted. Moreover, political films and documentaries are entirely banned. Although the Internet is widely accessible, the government keeps track of online content and blocks some websites. However, the use of social media such as Facebook and Twitter are on the rise, especially amongst the younger generation. Political activists have also recently begun to make use of these media.

Rule of Law

Independence of the Judiciary : 7.73

The Singaporean government's overwhelming success rates in court cases call into question the country's judicial independence, not least because opposition politicians and parties who are prosecuted often end up going bankrupt. Whether the government pressures judges or simply appoints those who share its conservative philosophy remains unclear.

Corruption : 9.2

Singapore has traditionally been lauded for its strict adherence to a no-tolerance policy on corruption. The main agency responsible for combating corruption is the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB), which has been equipped with extensive powers to investigate and prosecute corruption cases. As the CPIB operates rather effectively and civil servants receive high salaries, corruption remains low in Singapore. However, corruption allegations do rise to the public scene every once in a while. These include the case in June 2012 involving two senior bureaucrats accused of obtaining sexual favours from female executives of companies that supplied information technology and goods to their organisations. Nevertheless, Singapore continues to be perceived as one of the least corrupt countries in the world. In the 2011 Corruption Perceptions Index surveyed by Transparency International, Singapore was ranked 5th out of 183 territories.

Protection of Human Rights : 5.61

The human rights situation in Singapore remains a cause for concern. Although the rights to free speech, peaceful assembly and association are constitutionally guaranteed, the government continues to impose restrictions in the name of security, order and public interest. Religious practice is allowed as long as it does not violate any other regulations, and most groups worship freely. However, religious actions perceived as threats to racial or religious harmony are not tolerated. Academics do engage in political debate, but their viewpoints rarely deviate from those of the government on matters related to the country. The Societies Act requires that organisations of more than ten people register with the government, and only registered parties and associations may engage in an organised political activity. Political speeches are tightly regulated. Although citizens' right to privacy is generally respected, the Internal Security Act and the Criminal Law Act permit warrantless searches and arrests if national security, order or public interest are perceived to be under threat. Meanwhile, ethnic Malays continue to lag behind ethnic Chinese or Indians in terms of education and income levels, and they reportedly face discrimination in employment. What is more, Singapore continues to sentence people, including foreign nationals, to death for a number of crimes (particularly drug-related ones) and is amongst the countries with the highest execution rates compared to the number of citizens. In 2011, at least four people were hanged according to Amnesty International.

Economic Freedom

Security of Property Rights : 8.38

Both private and intellectual property rights are well protected under Singaporean law. Contracts are secure, and if urban needs make the acquisition of real estate necessary, compensation will be provided. Singapore has one of the region's most sophisticated intellectual property rights regimes. The Intellectual Property Office 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 : 8.06

Government spending is still relatively low, standing at 17% of the GDP. The state is involved to a considerable extent in the economy through government-linked companies.

The top income tax rate equals 20%, whereas the top corporate tax rate is 17%. Other taxes include value-added tax and property tax. Overall tax revenue accounts for about 14% of the GDP.

Regulation of Credit, Labour, and Business : 8.92

Singapore's financial sector is highly competitive. Banking is dominated by three groups, the largest being the government-owned Development Bank of Singapore. An additional 114 foreign banks operate more or less freely.

Starting, running and closing a business are fairly uncomplicated under Singapore's regulations. Starting a business takes a mere three days and three procedures. Getting a business license can be done in 11 procedures and 26 days. Closing a business is uncomplicated.

Singaporean labour regulations are flexible. The non-salary cost of an employee is low; dismissing one is easy. Work hour regulations are flexible.

Freedom to Trade Internationally : 9.05

Singapore is one of the freest countries in the world with respect to foreign trade. A founding member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations 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%. However, some import and export restrictions, service market barriers and licensing requirements continue to be obstacles to foreign trade.