

Singapore 2014



Total: 69.05

Political Freedom

Free and Fair Elections : 4.29

Singapore holds parliamentary elections every five years but the country only had three different prime ministers since its independence in 1965. The People's Action Party (PAP) dominates the political process and emerged as the election winner for the 13th consecutive term in office. Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew stayed in power for 30 years before handing over the reins to a chosen successor. In 2004, his son Lee Hsien Loong became Prime Minister.

In the last election for the single parliamentary chamber in 2011, the ruling PAP was able to secure 81 of 87 directly elected seats. However; these elections saw a more concerted effort by opposition parties in particular the Workers' Party (WP), which was able to win an unprecedented 6 directly elected seats. In addition, the 2011 elections for the mainly representative position of the President saw opposition-backed Tan Jee Say coming in third and in by-elections for a vacated seat the WP candidate clearly won the constituency vote with 62%.

Absence of Unconstitutional Veto Players : 5.83

Singapore's heavily restrictive government policies do not allow for the existence of unconstitutional veto players. However; the long-governing first Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew allegedly still exerts influence on the country's politics, despite his resignation from the position as mentor to his son in 2011. Apart from that, Singapore successfully suppresses any forces which could be a threat to the ruling government, using a variety of (usually legalistic) means.

Freedom of Press : 3.3

Singapore's media landscape remains tightly restricted. All media outlets, newspapers as well as radio and television stations are owned by companies with close ties to the government. The Sedition Act, the Newspaper and Printing Presses Act and the Broadcasting Act, most of them in place since the colonial period, are banning any kind of seditious speech, publications or acts. In such a repressive environment, self-censorship is common. Public censorship also extends to pop culture, regulating references to sex, drugs or violence. Strict laws are also in place for foreign media, demanding legal representatives and high financial deposits to restrict coverage of domestic politics.

A critical public debate on politics mainly takes place online. In June 2013, the government introduced a licensing scheme regulating website content. The scheme requires providers of news websites with high penetration rates to obtain a license from the government. The online community widely criticised the regulation as just another attempt to control government-critic voices.

Rule of Law

Independence of the Judiciary : 7.79

The Singaporean judiciary is generally independent. It can review existing laws, legislations, and policies. But the Singaporean government's overwhelming success rates in court cases raise some concerns, not least because opposition politicians and parties who are prosecuted often end up going bankrupt.

Corruption : 8.6

Singapore has kept its ranking in the 2013 Transparency International Corruption Perception Index as the fifth least corrupt country worldwide and the least corrupt in Asia. The main agency responsible for fighting corruption is the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB). The Chief of the CPIB was replaced in 2013 after it was revealed that supervisory failings had resulted in a senior agency official allegedly misappropriating more than 1.7m Singapore dollars (US\$ 1.34m) of public funds.

Protection of Human Rights : 5.59

In 2012, changes were made to mandatory death penalty laws, allowing judges to use their discretion in certain cases. Although capital punishment remains, this is a step in the right direction. Singapore's 220,000 foreign domestic workers are not properly protected under Singaporean law. Cases of abuse and exploitation are not uncommon. In 2011 the International Labor Organization passed a convention to extend basic labour rights to domestic workers but

Singapore abstained from voting on the convention. A positive development was last year's introduction of a mandatory day off per week for domestic workers.

Freedom of religion is generally allowed so long as it does not break any other regulations. Religious actions that are perceived to be against the state or promote unrest are prohibited. Academics are free to debate policy, but rarely do on topics concerning Singapore. The media remained tightly controlled and dissidents continued to face political repression.

Economic Freedom

Security of Property Rights : 8.35

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 : 7.92

Government spending is still relatively low, standing at 17% of 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 GDP.

Regulation of Credit, Labour, and Business : 8.52

Singapore's financial sector is highly competitive. Banking is dominated by three groups, the largest being the government-owned Development Bank of Singapore. More than 100 foreign banks operate more or less freely. Singapore's credit information system was recently improved by a law that guarantees borrower's rights to access their own data.

Starting, running and closing a business are fairly uncomplicated under Singapore's regulations. Starting a business takes less than 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 : 8.86

Singapore is one of the freest countries in the world regarding 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.

With the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) a single regional market of more than 600 million people will be created by the end of 2015. The AEC will provide for a free flow of goods, services, investment capital and skilled labour.