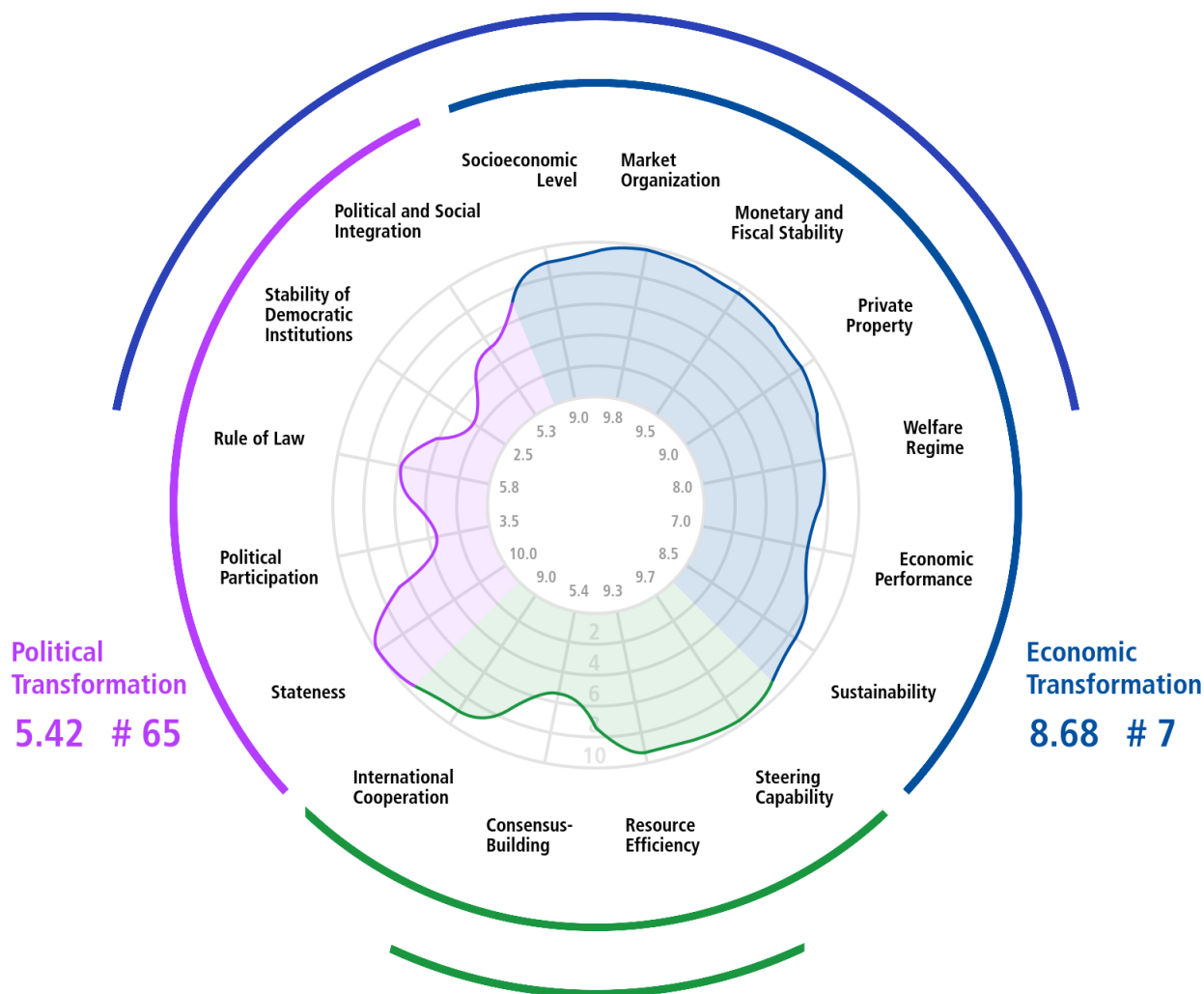


Singapore

Status Index

7.05 # 21

on 1-10 scale out of 137



Political Transformation
5.42 # 65

Economic Transformation
8.68 # 7

Governance Index

6.96 # 8

on 1-10 scale out of 137

This report is part of the **Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI) 2022**. It covers the period from February 1, 2019 to January 31, 2021. The BTI assesses the transformation toward democracy and a market economy as well as the quality of governance in 137 countries. More on the BTI at <https://www.bti-project.org>.

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Contact

Bertelsmann Stiftung
Carl-Bertelsmann-Strasse 256
33111 Gütersloh
Germany

Sabine Donner

Phone +49 5241 81 81501
sabine.donner@bertelsmann-stiftung.de

Hauke Hartmann

Phone +49 5241 81 81389
hauke.hartmann@bertelsmann-stiftung.de

Claudia Härterich

Phone +49 5241 81 81263
claudia.haerterich@bertelsmann-stiftung.de

Sabine Steinkamp

Phone +49 5241 81 81507
sabine.steinkamp@bertelsmann-stiftung.de

Key Indicators

Population	M	5.7	HDI	0.938	GDP p.c., PPP \$	98526
Pop. growth ¹	% p.a.	-0.3	HDI rank of 189	11	Gini Index	-
Life expectancy	years	83.5	UN Education Index	0.844	Poverty ³	% -
Urban population	%	100.0	Gender inequality ²	0.065	Aid per capita	\$ -

Sources (as of December 2021): The World Bank, World Development Indicators 2021 | UNDP, Human Development Report 2020. Footnotes: (1) Average annual growth rate. (2) Gender Inequality Index (GII). (3) Percentage of population living on less than \$3.20 a day at 2011 international prices.

Executive Summary

The general election of 2020 was held in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic. This was criticized by some commentators, as an election was not due until early 2021. As a result of the pandemic, campaigning was greatly restricted, with rallies held online. In the past, opposition rallies have often drawn thousands of people into public places and there was concern that online events could reduce the ability of less well known opposition candidates to canvass votes. However, the government also allowed more airtime to opposition candidates, which provided greater public access to the alternative parties. The swing in favor of the opposition suggests that there are still serious grievances over the cost of living and government accountability in Singapore that need to be addressed.

In the year before the election, Singapore's illiberal political system became even more restrictive. In June 2019, the government enacted the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (POFMA), also referred to as the "fake news" law. Using the rhetoric of the U.S. president, the Singapore government justified another legal tool to crack down on already severely curtailed freedom of speech. Even though the government denied that this was its intention, following the passage of the law, it was used liberally against many different statements. Opposition members and dissidents became frequent targets. The question of who determines what is defined as "truth" became a difficult issue for the courts, which have not yet conclusively resolved this. In addition to this law, the government continued to use other laws against peaceful political activism and criticism. Despite all of this, the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) was re-elected with 61.23% of the total valid votes, which represented a decline over the previous election in 2015 of more than 8%. At the same time, the opposition was able to gain 10 seats, the largest number of elected seats since the country's independence in 1965.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Singapore was at first heralded as a success case due to its relatively low number of cases. However, once the virus spread to the tightly crammed migrant workers' dormitories, it led to a significant increase in cases, although the number of deaths has remained low. The latter most likely is due to the fact that most migrants are relatively young.

Although the crisis was resolved, it has revealed the precarious nature of migrant labor in the city-state. Coming from countries in the region, thousands of laborers work low-paid jobs and enjoy few rights.

The pandemic has also been used to further tighten control over Singapore. To track the spread of cases, the government introduced a TraceTogether app or token, which at first was voluntary. Then it became required at certain locations, before the government announced that it would become mandatory at all public venues starting from 2021. By the end of 2020, the government had achieved an almost 70% participation rate in the TraceTogether program. Although the government at first claimed it was only for contact tracing, it was later confirmed that the data could also be used in criminal investigations.

The economy has suffered during the period of review. Even before the pandemic, Singapore was facing difficult economic conditions. The annual GDP growth in 2019 was only 0.7%. By 2020, Singapore had fallen into a serious recession, with an expected contraction of -6.5 to -6.0%. The government also ran budget deficits, which were exacerbated in 2020 by the pandemic. The various measures to soften the economic impact of the pandemic have meant that the estimated budget deficit will increase to SGD 7.6 billion in 2020, from SGD 3.44 billion in 2019. This is unusual for Singapore, which has generally enjoyed many years of budget surpluses. Given Singapore's extensive reliance on trade and a number of strategic sectors such as the maritime and aviation industries, the country's economy is likely to face a challenging period over the next two years or so. The impact of the pandemic has already registered very strongly in the hospitality industry in particular.

History and Characteristics of Transformation

Singapore initially gained independence from British colonial rule as an integral part of the Federation of Malaya in 1963 but separated from it in 1965 over political differences with the Malaysian government. Singapore is a parliamentary republic with a unicameral legislature. The parliament is composed of members elected every five years in a first-past-the-post election, up to nine non-constituency members of parliament (NCMP), and up to nine nominated members of parliament (NMP). Currently, Singapore is divided into 31 electoral constituencies, 14 of which are single-member constituencies (SMC) and 17 group representation constituencies (GRC). Since 1991, the president of the Republic of Singapore has been the elected head of state. Executive power lies with the prime minister and the cabinet.

When Singapore left the Federation of Malaya, its economic and political situation was fragile. As a result, the government facilitated foreign trade. Under the leadership of a team of mainly English-educated lawyers, the PAP came to power in 1959 through a combination of political finesse, visible dedication to the well-being of Singapore and its inhabitants, experience in legal matters and a drastic application of undemocratic measures to suppress dissent against policies that they deemed necessary for Singapore's political and economic survival. In the infamous Operation

Cold Store of 1963, the PAP organized the arrest of more than a hundred opposition politicians, labor leaders and activists in order to push Singapore's integration into the Federation of Malaya into being.

When the left-wing Barisan Sosialis Party (Socialist Front, BSP), which had previously split off from the PAP, boycotted the first general elections of independent Singapore in 1968, the PAP won every seat in parliament. Since then, the PAP has never relinquished its overwhelming parliamentary dominance. Until his death in 2015, the city-state was synonymous with the Cambridge-educated statesman Lee Kuan Yew, who was considered to be the country's founding father. Under his rule, Singapore's economy experienced rapid economic growth which transformed the city-state into one of the most modern developed countries in the world.

In contrast to neighboring Indonesia or Malaysia, there were never any large demonstrations held against the government. In the early years of independence, Singapore's leadership successfully integrated a diverse population of Chinese, Malays and Indians into a more or less harmonious whole. In recent years, however, the development has reached its limits. Economic growth has remained relatively low in recent years and is likely to remain modest in the near future. The country's leadership is also facing unprecedented challenges related to the maturing of the economy. The internet, moreover, has revealed problems of governance that were once ignored by the monopolized pro-government press. In addition, the country faces an uncertain leadership transition once the current prime minister, Lee Hsien Loong, who is the son of Lee Kuan Yew, retires. Currently, no member of the Lee family has indicated a desire to become the next leader.

The uncertainty exists because the democratic institutions have been manipulated to such an extent that a democratic renewal is not possible. Moreover, the tight limits on speech make it difficult to calibrate the policymaking process. One problem is that criticism of state policies is interpreted as criticism of the system. Drastic measures that would not stand up in the courts of more democratic countries are used to discourage dissent (e.g., bankrupting opposition politicians through defamation suits). Singapore has sacrificed democracy for wealth and embraced a way of life in which civil liberties, intellectual debate and political parties have become casualties of economic development. The relaxation of some restrictions on political liberties has been followed by renewed restrictions, which make it difficult to speak of any substantive liberalization process.

Nevertheless, politics has become more competitive over the years. In the 2015 general election, for the first time in recent history, all seats were contested. This trend had started with the 2006 general election, in which opposition parties – for the first time since 1988 – denied the ruling party a re-election victory on nomination day. Although some observers have argued that the PAP's continued success at the polls indicates broad support for authoritarian rule, this is not the case as most Singaporeans still want checks on government power. This was evident in the 2020 general election in which the PAP suffered another setback in the popular vote and accountability became a major issue. Given the PAP's most recent performance and the significantly enhanced capacity of opposition parties to attract and retain professionals, the PAP is likely to face much greater challenges in future elections. Older-generation Singaporeans who, in the past, strongly supported the PAP, will also thin in numbers.

The BTI combines text analysis and numerical assessments. The score for each question is provided below its respective title. The scale ranges from 1 (worst) to 10 (best).

Transformation Status

I. Political Transformation

1 | Stateness

The Singaporean state faces no challenges to its monopoly on the use of force throughout the country. Due to the country's character as a city-state, government control of the use of force is easier to maintain than it would be in a territorial state. Most territorial disputes have been resolved. In 2008, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled that Singapore had sovereignty over Pedra Branca, while Malaysia had sovereignty over the Middle Rocks. In the following year, Singapore signed an agreement with Indonesia over the maritime border between Sultan Shoal and Pulau Nipa. In 2014, a similar agreement with Indonesia was signed regarding the border between Changi and Batam. While Malaysia reopened the question of maritime boundaries by changing the Johor Bahru port limits in 2018, in June 2019 the Malaysian government under Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad declared that it accepted the ICJ ruling. In January 2020, officials from both governments met in Kuala Lumpur to discuss the implementation of the ruling.

All Singaporean citizens accept the nation-state as legitimate and all individuals and groups enjoy the right to acquire full citizenship rights without discrimination. Singapore's ethnic composition is very heterogeneous. It is dominated by the Chinese, who make up 74.3% of the country's population. The second and third largest ethnic groups, the Malays and the Indians, represent 13.4% and 9.1% of the city-state's inhabitants respectively.

The Singaporean state has promoted a culturally neutral concept of citizenship since 1965, which is manifested in the slogan "One nation, one people, one Singapore." In this way, the government successfully managed cultural conflicts between the different ethnic groups in the country and fostered a high level of acceptance for the concept of the nation-state. The concept of race, however, has been institutionalized by including it on identification cards. Since 2010, children from mixed backgrounds can choose their race. Race matters with regard to purchasing public housing flats and the need to acquire the so-called "mother tongue" that is related to a particular

Question
Score

Monopoly on the
use of force

10



1

State identity

10



1

ethnicity. According to data provided by the East Asia Barometer, 95% of the city-state's population are proud to be a citizen of Singapore. In the last few years however, there has been clear public disquiet regarding the government's large-scale importation of low skilled – as well as professional – workers from abroad, leading to a swelling population now at 5.69 million.

The Singaporean state is secular, and religious dogmas have little influence over the legal order or the political institutions. Although the constitution does not explicitly define Singapore as secular, the 1966 constitutional commission report does point out that the city-state is a secular state where religious groups have no influence on the decision-making process. Religious leaders and groups are not even permitted to comment on political issues under the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act of 1990.

In 2019, the law was amended for the first time. Under the new rules, the Restraining Order was expanded to cover online content, new rules on foreign interference were introduced, laws covering religious harmony were adjusted, and a new tool was introduced to assist in defusing tensions between different religious groups after an offense has been committed. The secular character of the Singaporean state is not affected by the existence of a state Shariah court, established in 1955. The court has jurisdiction if all the parties involved are Muslim, or where the parties were married under the provisions of the Muslim law and the dispute relates to the issues of divorce and marriage.

Singapore has a highly differentiated administrative structure and provides all basic public services. The highly trained and skilled administration implements the policies of the elected government. The city-state is able to fulfill its proper jurisdictional function and enforce the law throughout the small country. The country's transport network is diverse and highly developed. Singapore's port is one of the largest container seaports in the world and Singapore Changi Airport, the country's main airport, handled over 62.2 million passengers in 2017. The public rail network has rapidly increased over the years and transports approximately 3 million passengers each day.

The country has an excellent telecommunications infrastructure. According to the Infocomm Media Development Authority, an estimated 98% of the country's resident households had internet and broadband access in 2019. Finally, 100% of the population have access to sanitation and to a water source. The COVID-19 pandemic was managed very efficiently. Other than a short-term run on toilet paper, paper towels, masks and hand sanitizers, which led to shortages in shops in early 2020, there was no serious service disruption.

No interference of religious dogmas

10



1

Basic administration

10



1

2 | Political Participation

Singapore has established universal suffrage and regularly holds general elections. Opposition parties are able to run in these elections and political posts are filled according to the election outcome. Suffrage is compulsory for all resident Singaporeans who are at least 21 years old. Singapore held its last parliamentary election in July 2020, in which the ruling party suffered a setback from 69.9% to 61.2% of the vote, which almost reflected the distribution of votes in the 2011 election. The opposition was able to increase its share of the seats to an unprecedented 10 since the country's independence. The Workers' Party was able to maintain its existing seats, while also gaining the newly created Sengkang GRC, which is the second group representation constituency won by the opposition. In general, elections in the city-state are free of electoral fraud. In the case of a vacancy, there are usually by-elections, at least in single member districts, but it has not been clearly established whether a by-election has to be held or whether it is at the discretion of the prime minister.

Despite this, elections cannot be considered free and fair. The list of biases in favor of the ruling party is long. First of all, repressive laws restrict the opposition and control the media. The PAP has used various laws against opposition members, which has resulted in opposition politicians being very careful about what they say. The mainstream media is biased in favor of the ruling party as reports tend to favor the ruling party and criticize the opposition. There is extensive use of gerrymandering to draw electoral boundaries favorable to the ruling party. The campaign period is very short: currently it is limited to only nine days, with a "cooling-off day" on the last, when campaigning is not allowed. This heavily profits the incumbent. Elected representatives are responsible for estate management, which allows the ruling party to resort to pork-barrel politics because it can argue that its constituencies will benefit more. The GRC system, in which a voter casts a ballot for a team of candidates, favors the ruling PAP because it fields prominent ministers in these constituencies against relatively unknown opposition candidates. Furthermore, the election department is under the jurisdiction of the prime minister's office, raising questions about its independence. Ballots have serial numbers on them, which the government justifies as protection against voter fraud, but which have raised concern among some Singaporeans that their vote may not be secret.

In the 2020 election, the ruling party sought to maintain its support primarily by emphasizing the need for continuity during a crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic made the election unusual in many regards. Walkabouts and door-to-door campaigning were allowed. However, no political rallies were permitted, which usually attract many people interested in politics. There was more airtime on television for candidates, but it was still strictly controlled. Election vehicles were allowed, but no speeches could be made because of concern they could attract people. On election day, due to the formation of crowds, the government decided on the day to allow polls to close two hours later, at 10pm.

Free and fair elections

5

'06 '22 10

5

1

The Singaporean rulers elected in these unfair elections have the effective power to govern. The PAP dominates almost every aspect of the city-state's political, military and economic life, effectively preventing the advent of any possible veto actors. The military has strong ties to the PAP (e.g., current Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong served as a brigadier general in the armed forces). While more new candidates in 2020 were women and came from the private sector, many were still former military officers, especially selected for important positions. The Government Investment Corporation (GIC), which primarily invests in foreign countries, and Temasek Holdings, which controls the majority of government-linked corporations, are both controlled by the government. The latter is under the direction of Ho Ching, the wife of the current prime minister. Religious groups have no direct impact on the PAP's effective power to govern as they must register under the Societies Act and are thereby under the tight control of the government.

While the constitution grants Singaporeans the right to association and to assembly, in effect these rights have been severely curtailed. With regard to association, the government has passed strict legislation that distinguishes between non-governmental organizations and political organizations. The latter may not receive any funding from foreign sources. The rules are even more restrictive with regard to assembly, for which permits are required but are virtually never granted. With the Public Order Act of 2010, the police can now ban a single person from a public space for 24 hours on the suspicion that he or she is pursuing a political cause. Even indoor forums, which are permitted if they are considered private, have been obstructed.

The only place for peaceful assembly since 2000 has been the Speakers' Corner, an area of Hong Lim Park, which is not near any government offices or the shopping district. Since 2008, registration to speak there can be done online and is usually granted if the applicant is either a Singapore citizen or permanent resident. However, there are still many limitations, some of which are publicly displayed on a board. For instance, foreigners may not participate in these events. In 2016, the government furthermore announced that foreign entities would require permits to sponsor events in Speakers' Corner, which was primarily targeted at the LGBTQ+ event Pink Dot, which is held annually and has drawn increasingly large crowds. In 2017, nonresidents were barred from even attending public assemblies such as Pink Dot.

This followed changes to the Public Order Act, which blocked foreigners from promoting any form of political cause in Singapore. Jolovan Wham, who was found guilty of organizing illegal assemblies without a police permit in January 2019, was again charged with unlawful assembly in November 2020 for briefly holding a smiley in front of a police station and taking a picture in a show of support for two climate activists who had been investigated by police on similar grounds. This demonstrated that the government was willing to crack down on any spontaneous show of support for any cause even if – as in the case of Wham – it was not even apparent from his self-made sign. Protests, which are normally only permitted to take place in Speakers' Corner, have been suspended during the COVID-19 pandemic and continue to be suspended as of January 2021.

Effective power to govern

3

'06 '22 10



Association / assembly rights

3

'06 '22 10



Freedom of expression is severely limited. Public debate is vulnerable to massive distortion and manipulation by heavy government intervention. Laws, such as the Sedition Act, the Defamation Act, or the Undesirable Publications Act, heavily restrict freedom of speech. In addition, the government uses a so-called “Out-of-Bounds-Marker” to highlight when the line of permissible discourse has been crossed. There is significant self-censorship in debates.

Freedom of the press has continued to steadily decline in recent years. With the use of regulations, the government has successfully undermined the once blooming alternative media on the internet. Beginning in 2013, the government, through the Media Development Authority, required online news websites with “significant reach” to follow the same regulatory framework as traditional news media. Under the licensing framework, online media are required to remove objectionable content within 24 hours and place a performance bond of SGD 25,000. While some websites have accepted the tough new regulations, they have come under increasingly tight financial restrictions, which limit their ability to report independently. For example, The Online Citizen, which was once a very prominent blog, has been reduced to one full-time employee. In order to weaken alternative news, the government has used the need to restrict foreign involvement in local media as a pretense.

Despite already having enormous power to restrict speech, the government passed the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (POFMA) on May 8, 2019. It was enacted on June 3, 2019. The law grants government ministers great power in determining what is false or correct. A minister may issue a correction order and affected individuals must either post a correction or delete their content. The law was soon used against opposition parties, dissidents and online media, which has led to accusations that the law has been used for partisan purposes. While an accused can seek redress via court, the chances of success appear low. On January 3, 2020, the Singapore Democratic Party (SDP) appealed the correction notices that had been issued in December 2019, which was rejected three days later by Minister of Manpower Josephine Teo because the appeal lacked “sufficient grounds.” In February 2020, a judge dismissed the court, claiming the statements were false based on “statistical evidence.” The court decided that the burden of proof fell on the attorney general. The Court of Appeal failed to make a decision in September 2020 with regard to both the burden of proof and whether the statements of the SDP, as well as another case involving The Online Citizen, were false. It is not known when the court will revisit the case.

Serious sanctions are possible when websites receive three correction directions within six months. Meanwhile, the government continues to use its array of laws to restrict speech. For instance, in December 2020, the prime minister initiated a lawsuit against blogger Leong Sze Hian for sharing an article on Facebook. He is demanding SGD 150,000 in damages. However, the prime minister did not sue the website The Coverage, which published the article, or anyone else who shared it, which suggests that this is an attempt to silence a prominent critic of the government.

Freedom of
expression

3

'06 _____ '22 10

4
3

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3 | Rule of Law

The constitution provides a structure for the separation of powers. However, the ruling PAP has an ongoing monopoly on power and permeates all state institutions. As a result, it is difficult to differentiate between government bodies and the ruling party. The chief justice is appointed by the president, who selects from a range of candidates chosen by the prime minister. The president makes additional appointments to judicial positions on the advice of the Prime Minister's Office. Subordinate judges can be dismissed or transferred according to the executive's will. Jury trials were abolished in 1969. The PAP's ongoing monopoly on the executive branch, these selection procedures and the PAP's high-handedness guarantee that the party has a continued influence on the judicial branch. The Singaporean legal scholar Thio Li-ann has thus pointed out that the legislative and executive are "practically fused via the Cabinet."

The strong influence of the PAP on judicial power was demonstrated by an April 2010 High Court decision in which the High Court overruled a lower court's decision to acquit five activists who were charged with conducting a procession without a permit. The lower court's verdict was viewed as a landmark decision. However, there are still very few cases in which the judiciary has disagreed with the executive. On August 15, 2016, the Singapore government passed a controversial bill which made it easier to charge individuals with contempt of court, thereby reducing the ability to criticize legal proceedings. In 2017, Jolovan Wham became the first person to be prosecuted under the new law.

Moreover, the PAP dominates the Singaporean parliament. This means that debates are limited. While the growing number of opposition members has fostered more debates, the opposition Workers' Party has frequently shied away from challenging the ruling party. This could change with the public live-streaming of parliamentary debates which started in January 2021. The role of the opposition was also formally elevated following the 2020 election as the role of the leader of the opposition was created allocating for more time to speak to the opposition during debates.

Singapore has not invoked emergency laws to deal with the COVID-19 outbreak. The government at first relied on the Infectious Diseases Act (IDA), which had been strengthened during the SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) outbreak in 2002/03. It then quickly passed the COVID-19 (Temporary Measures) (Control Order) Regulations. At the same time, the government has avoided using the terms "emergency" or "lockdown" to describe the measures implemented.

Separation of powers

3

'06 '22 10

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The judiciary is institutionally differentiated and has the ability to interpret and review existing laws, legislation and policies. Channels of appeal and court administration are in place. It was ranked as the second best system in Asia by the Political and Economic Risk Consultancy (PERC) in 2008.

Despite this, judicial decisions and doctrines are not free from the influence of political decision-makers. The ruling PAP's dominance over all aspects of political life in the city-state has negative effects on the independence of the judiciary. Following the Singapore government's first victory in a defamation lawsuit against a blogger, which follows a string of other similar lawsuits against opposition figures and foreign newspapers, the court in December 2015 awarded the prime minister SGD 150,000 in damages. The judge argued that the blog post had severely undermined the credibility of the prime minister.

At the same time, the courts have shown greater independence with regard to a number of cases. For instance, in January 2017, the Court of Appeal rejected the government's claim that the Ministry of Defence (Mindef) could be considered a person under the Protection from Harassment Act when it demanded that the sociopolitical website, The Online Citizen, remove statements made by an inventor in a patent dispute. The court declared that "Mindef was anything but a helpless victim. It is a government agency possessed of significant resources and access to media channels." In one case in 2020, a high-ranking civil servant and his family were rebuked for the criminal intimidation of an Indonesian maid. The 100 page judgment cited lapses in the police investigation of the case, which led to procedural reviews.

Overall, however, the judiciary rarely challenges the executive because it believes this would be futile. There is also a belief that the judiciary should not usurp the power of the legislative.

In Singapore, officeholders who break the law and engage in corruption generally attract adverse publicity and are prosecuted rigorously under established laws. Its government officials are the highest paid in the world and the fight against corruption is a key component of the ruling PAP's policy.

There were just 350 corruption-related reports in 2019, which was marginally less than the 358 reports in 2018. Of these, cases in the public sector were the minority (10%) of cases registered for investigation in 2019. It is unclear why the number of corruption cases and complaints are declining over the years. Although most corruption cases end with conviction, there were a number of high-profile acquittals in recent years. For instance, in March 2018, a businessman who had been accused of match-fixing was found not guilty of the crime due to insufficient evidence.

Independent judiciary

5

'06 _____ '22 10



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Prosecution of office abuse

9

'06 _____ '22 10



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Civil rights in Singapore are partially violated, despite the fact that the government asserted in the 2016 Universal Periodic Review (UPR) that it is “fully committed” to the protection of human rights. The mechanisms and institutions to prosecute, punish and redress violations of civil rights are partially in place, but often prove ineffective.

Singapore has yet to sign most international human rights treaties and to implement a national human rights institution which could monitor the situation. Moreover, the Singaporean authorities continue to deprive individuals of rights to justice by using laws that allow detention without trial. Most prominently, the Internal Security Act (ISA) enables detention orders to be renewed every two years, which effectively allows the state to continuously rearrest the same people. Recently, the number of arrests have increased. For instance, on February 10, 2020, a 17-year-old secondary school student was detained over his support of the Islamic State. In December 2020, it was revealed that a Singaporean was arrested in March 2019 for allegedly taking part in the Yemeni civil war. Cases such as these have been used to justify the continuation of the act, which in the past has been used against opposition activists and thus had a chilling effect on the political opposition. A number of those arrested later accused the government of torture while under detention.

The Criminal Law (Temporary Provisions) Act, which permits arrest and detention without warrant or judicial review was extended for another five years in 2018 after a heated debate, with all Workers’ Party members voting against it. The law was also amended and now includes a list of offenses including secret society activities, unlicensed money-lending, drug-trafficking, kidnapping and organized crime. The Sedition Act criminalizes speeches with a seditious tendency without defining sedition. Both these acts provide the government with legal cover to take action against its critics, thereby violating civil rights in Singapore on a very large scale.

The Public Order Act of 2009 further limited the constitutional right of assembly by requiring a permit for “cause-related” activities, even of a single individual. The definition of which type of activity is included is entirely up to the government’s discretion. The Public Order and Safety (Special Powers) Act (POSSPA) of 2018 gives the police special powers in certain situations, including ordering people to stop taking pictures and videos. This potentially severely limits the ability of journalists to report on incidents.

The government continued to justify the use of the death penalty even in drug related cases. Following a review of the mandatory death penalty, judges now have more flexibility with regard to murder, but the mandatory death penalty still applies in drug-trafficking and drug manufacturing cases. There is widespread popular support for the harsh penalty. Following a moratorium, the number of executions has increased from two cases in 2014 to 13 in 2018, while four executions took place in 2019. The majority of executions are for drug offenses. In 2020, a Malaysian man was sentenced to death via the video conferencing tool Zoom.

Civil rights

6

'06 _____ '22 10

6

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Finally, Singapore also criminalizes male homosexual activity under Section 377A of the Penal Code although it is not actively enforced. A constitutional challenge led to the court refusing to repeal the controversial legislation. The law is of special human rights concern because homosexual behavior between males faces imprisonment of up to two years even if conducted in the privacy of the individuals' homes. The Court of Appeal ruled in October 2014 that the section was constitutional despite the challenge that it violated equal treatment under the law.

During the 2020 pandemic, the government initially took a relatively light approach. However, as the situation worsened, more restrictions on individual behavior were introduced, such as a strict mask mandate and limits on gatherings, which were strictly enforced. Perhaps the most problematic aspect has been the implementation of an app called TraceTogether app, which was made mandatory for visits to many public places starting from 2021. By the end of 2020, the government had achieved a participation rate of almost 70% in the program. There were assurances that the app would not collect location data, to reduce concerns about privacy. However, although the government at first claimed the app was only for contact tracing, it was later confirmed that the data could also be used in criminal investigations. The policy may use "Criminal Procedure Code (CPC) powers to request users to upload their TraceTogether data for criminal investigations." This raises serious concern for the privacy of individuals. The government has promised to end the program once the pandemic is over.

4 | Stability of Democratic Institutions

Although Singapore's system of checks and balances is weak, its key institutions are stable. The ruling PAP controls all institutions in the city-state, thereby effectively containing political opponents. The executive is strong and its dominant position negatively affects a horizontal separation of powers in the country. The prime minister and the cabinet make all key political decisions and the parliament is subordinated to them.

The Singaporean parliament is dominated by the PAP, which has won the majority of seats in every election since independence. While the visibility of parliamentary debates has increased since the 2011 general election, the overall intensity is still comparatively low. The 2015 general election demonstrated that opposition to PAP policies may not be rewarded with votes, as the ruling party was able to increase its vote share. The capability of the PAP-dominated legislature to monitor the government is heavily circumscribed. The only opposition party, the Workers' Party, has made only limited use of its ability to challenge the government. This may improve as a consequence of its electoral gains in the 2020 election and the fact that a leader of the opposition was designated. However, it is still too early to judge.

Performance of democratic institutions

3

'06 _____ '22 10



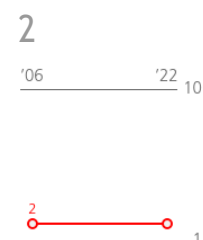
Despite the introduction of an elected presidency in 1991 with the potential to monitor parts of the government, this has not happened in reality. While the president has some important powers, it is not clear whether the office holder can make use of them. The first popularly elected president, Ong Teng Cheong, sought to make use of his discretionary power to check the budget and was rebuffed. In 2011, the government asserted that the president should not publicly oppose the government.

The judiciary, which has gained somewhat in independence, is still subject to severe constraints. Any criticism of the judiciary is heavily punished. The mainstream media is under control of the government and exercises heavy self-censorship, which means that negative news stories are always muted if not outright ignored. In sum, it is difficult to make an objective assessment of the performance of the democratic institutions. The ruling PAP dominates all institutions and continues to block democratization. A number of the institutions are even designed to curtail the emergence of effective democratic institutions.

The PAP government is not committed to democratic institutions. At a party conference in December 2014, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong openly voiced his opposition to the idea of checks and balances, which in his opinion would cause “gridlock.” He claimed that the checks would prevent the government from doing what is necessary. The ruling party believes that its own record is evidence of the fact that a dominant party system is superior to a multiparty democracy. The prime minister made this most clear when he said: “Eventually there will be no more PAP to check, there will be no more able team of ministers working and solving problems for Singapore, no progress for Singapore, no future for Singapore, and that will be the last check because that will be check mate for Singapore!”

In order to maintain control, leaders have not shied away from making use of their power over the administrative state and the media to destroy the credibility of the opposition. Moreover, the government will use any constitutional and electoral law to prevent significant gains for any political challenger. The number of candidates seeking the office of elected presidency has increased over the years. In 2011 the candidate favored by the government only won with a slim majority of 35.2%, which resulted in the government making changes to the electoral process. In 2016, the government limited the number of potential candidates in the 2017 election to the Malay minority, thus disqualifying Tan Cheng Bock. Even then, the government did not allow any contest, as only one of three candidates was found eligible to run. The result was that Halimah Yacob, a former speaker of parliament, became the first female and Muslim president of Singapore. During the 2020 parliamentary election, the prime minister asked the voters not to “undermine a system that has served you well.” In his opinion, it was more important that Singapore had a government that was “capable,” than one that offered choices.

Commitment to democratic institutions



5 | Political and Social Integration

Singapore has a predominant party system with the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) as the largest party. The PAP has won every election since independence and holds a two-thirds majority in parliament. Currently, the third generation of leaders is running the PAP, with party Secretary-General Lee Hsien Loong occupying the prime minister's office. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a leadership transfer to the next generation has been postponed. The PAP also suffered a setback at the polls in July 2020 where the party's share declined to 61.2% from 69.9% in 2015, only slightly better than its result in 2011 when it was 60.1%.

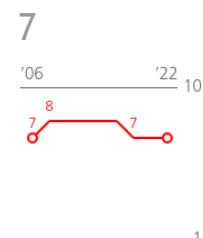
Generally, the volatility of voting has been low, although it has increased in recent years, with the election swinging by 8-9%. The main opposition Workers' Party has increased its seats from six to 10 in the 2020 election. Currently, there are 82 seats controlled by the PAP, while the Workers' Party (WP) has 10 seats. The newly formed Progress Singapore Party (PSP) won the remaining two Non-Constituency Member of Parliament (NCMP) seats.

The Workers' Party is the oldest opposition party, founded in 1957. While it is now the most prominent opposition party, the opposition camp is fragmented into many smaller parties. Even the WP only competes in a minority of seats during general elections. In the 2020 general election, there were three new parties: Peoples Voice, established in October 2018, Progress Singapore Party, founded in March 2019, and Red Dot United, formed in May 2020. The Singaporeans First party was dissolved in June 2020. Following the 2020 election, on December 24, yet another new party was formed by former Reform Party members. It is perhaps ironically called the Singapore United Party.

Attempts to create an opposition coalition have so far failed, primarily due to lack of interest on the part of the Workers' Party. The newly formed Progress Singapore Party managed to come in second with 40.8% in the 24 seats that it contested but failed to win any directly elected seats. The party was able to attract Lee Hsien Yang, the brother of the prime minister, as a member. However, the younger Lee decided not to contest any seats.

Political parties in Singapore are not openly grounded in ethnicity and can be considered catch-all parties. As a result, polarization between the parties with regard to ethnicity is notably low. Nonetheless, due to the ethnic dominance of the Chinese population, party politics are strongly determined by Chinese interests. The most powerful positions are controlled by ethnic Chinese from similar socioeconomic backgrounds. To somewhat counteract this effect, all political parties are forced to nominate election candidates of different ethnicities in the GRCs. This, however, makes it more difficult for opposition parties to contest, because they have to compete with constituencies headed by senior government officials.

Party system



Few interest groups can operate independently of the PAP in the city-state. The spectrum of interest groups ranges from social organizations such as environmental groups and community organizations that provide assistance to the poor, to professional associations such as the Law Society of Singapore.

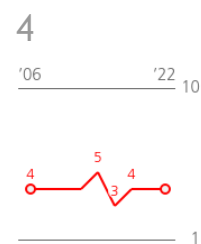
The National Council of Social Service, a statutory body established by parliament, is an umbrella organization that includes around 400 welfare organizations, including the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA). Historically, employers’ associations have no political weight. Trade unions, which have been unified under the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC), a pro-government umbrella organization which is closely tied to the ruling party, have adopted a cooperative relationship with the government. As a consequence, organized strikes have disappeared.

Independent civic groups, moreover, can only act within the narrow limits set by the Singaporean authorities under strict regulations such as the Societies Act and can only comment on “political” issues if they register as political societies. This places strict limitations on these organizations. Moreover, under the Sedition Act there are strict restrictions on discussions of issues of race and religion. Cooperation between different civic groups is difficult and often short-lived. In the period of review, noninstitutionalized activism continued to proliferate, such as signature campaigns, coalition formation, and small protests confined to Speakers’ Corner.

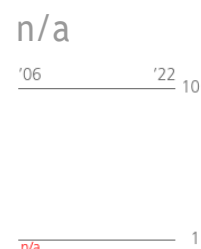
The government has become uneasy with some forms of this increasing activism. The government announced in October 2016 that foreign entities interested in sponsoring events in Speakers’ Corner must apply for a permit. This was ostensibly done in the context of the increasingly popular Pink Dot event, which is held every year in spring and which has drawn very large crowds. From 1,000 people in 2009 to a record 28,000 people in 2015, the event has, according to organizers, become too large for the park. The government has subsequently enforced stricter regulations banning the participation of non-Singaporeans and limiting event sponsorships. This has slightly reduced the number of participants. However, Singaporeans continue to support it. In 2019, thousands participated and 118 Singaporean sponsors supported the event.

Singaporeans have an ambivalent relationship to democratic norms. According to data provided by the East Asia Barometer, 80% of Singaporeans express a desire for democracy and 85% of Singaporeans believe that democracy is the most suitable form of government for the country. Data provided by the 2012 World Value Survey support these findings (90.5% believe that a democratic system is very or fairly good). However, only slightly more than half of Singaporeans believe that elections or the right to criticize those in power are essential characteristics of a democracy. Furthermore, the majority of Singaporeans feel that the current political system qualifies as a democracy (perhaps with minor problems) and not an authoritarian system.

Interest groups



Approval of democracy



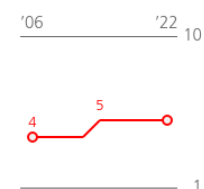
84.6% of Singaporeans are very or fairly satisfied with the way democracy works in their country. Following the surprising electoral success of the PAP in the 2015 general election, some argued that the population had become supportive of authoritarianism. However, a post-election survey by the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy revealed that 89% of the population consider checks and balances as either important or very important, an increase on previous surveys. An increasing number of people also saw a need for alternative voices in parliament. This view was shared by 86% of the people in the survey.

A National University of Singapore survey in 2018 found that people perceived fewer democratic rights. For instance, 35.5% of the population were dissatisfied with their right to criticize the government. A 2020 Blackbox survey showed that a majority of all Singaporeans, and 75% of those aged 21 to 24 years, consider more electoral choice as beneficial for Singapore's democracy. 57% of people in a survey in August 2020 said that they believed the government had a good grasp on the COVID-19 pandemic, 29% were neutral, and 15% believed the government did not have a good grasp. The pandemic is unlikely to significantly shift the people's attitude toward the government.

There is a fairly low level of trust among the Singaporean population. Social and cultural barriers divide the population, especially with regard to the growing number of foreign workers. According to data provided by the World Value Survey of 2012, only 37.3% of respondents agreed that "most people can be trusted" (which however is a significant improvement over the previous survey, when only 16.7% held this view). Higher levels of trust can be observed in relationships between relatives and neighbors. Among the Southeast Asian countries, Singapore is at the bottom with regard to the rate of membership in any forms of societal associations. A substantial 90.1% of Singaporeans are not members of any societal association, according to data provided by the Asian Barometer Survey. Mistrust exists especially between the state and newly emerging independent civil society organizations. While social capital remains notably low in Singaporean society, the increasing willingness of some civil society groups to promote issues of public concern has revealed a small but dedicated group of individuals willing to come together to fight for the protection of heritage (Bukit Brown cemetery), nature preservation (Bukit Brown cemetery, MacRitchie Forest), and other social concerns.

Social capital

5



II. Economic Transformation

6 | Level of Socioeconomic Development

Poverty and inequality exist in Singapore but are less visible than in other countries. Key indicators show a very high level of development. The country's score in the 2019 UNDP's HDI is 0.938, which is the highest in Asia. Globally, Singapore is in ninth place. The country's level of development permits freedom of choice for all citizens and is comparable to OECD countries.

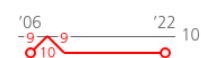
Despite its high degree of development, the country is marked by a high degree of inequality. The Gini coefficient indicates that there is a wide gap between the rich and the poor in Singapore. In 2019, it stood at 0.398 after government transfers (0.452 before government transfers), according to government data. The 2009 UN Development Report showed that Singapore had the second highest income gap among 38 countries with very high human development, trailing only Hong Kong. The income gap was partly caused by the high costs of housing, food and transport. According to Central Provident Fund (CPF) data, 26% of the population earn SGD 1,500 or less each month. While the government has sought to mitigate the problem, social assistance is heavily means-tested. In October 2018, Oxfam ranked Singapore at the bottom of countries for reducing inequality. It was 149 of the 157 countries surveyed. This was attributed to tax increases for personal income tax while the maximum rate remained relatively low.

Spending on education, health and social protection is low compared to other countries in the region. Moreover, the government continues to resist introducing a minimum wage. At the same time, it also resists setting an official poverty line, which makes it difficult to estimate the number of poor people in the country. The problem of inequality became evident in the major outbreaks of COVID-19 cases in worker dormitories. Low-income workers suffer from greater pay cuts. During the pandemic those earning SGD3,000 or less had to suffer a cut in their earnings between 10% and more than 50%, and were more likely to be laid off. While there are significant income disparities, gender inequality is relatively low. Singapore scored 0.065 on the 2019 Gender Inequality Index, with a slight downward trend over the years. It ranked as the 11th most equal country in the world. In sum, Singapore shows a very high level of development with a worrisome income gap.

Question
Score

Socioeconomic
barriers

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Economic indicators		2017	2018	2019	2020
GDP	\$ M	343337.8	375981.5	374386.3	339998.5
GDP growth	%	4.5	3.5	1.3	-5.4
Inflation (CPI)	%	0.6	0.4	0.6	-0.2
Unemployment	%	4.2	3.7	3.1	5.2
Foreign direct investment	% of GDP	29.4	22.1	32.2	-
Export growth	%	7.1	7.7	0.1	-4.3
Import growth	%	7.8	7.5	0.2	-7.1
Current account balance	\$ M	59281.6	57934.4	53398.7	59785.7
Public debt	% of GDP	107.8	109.8	129.0	154.9
External debt	\$ M	-	-	-	-
Total debt service	\$ M	-	-	-	-
Net lending/borrowing	% of GDP	7.6	4.8	7.5	-
Tax revenue	% of GDP	14.0	13.0	13.2	-
Government consumption	% of GDP	10.2	10.0	10.3	12.4
Public education spending	% of GDP	2.8	2.6	2.6	2.5
Public health spending	% of GDP	2.1	2.2	-	-
R&D expenditure	% of GDP	1.9	-	-	-
Military expenditure	% of GDP	3.0	2.8	2.9	3.2

Sources (as of December 2021): The World Bank, World Development Indicators | International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Economic Outlook | Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Military Expenditure Database.

7 | Organization of the Market and Competition

Market competition is consistently defined and implemented both macroeconomically and microeconomically in Singapore. There are state-guaranteed rules for market competition with equal opportunities for all market participants. The informal sector is very small. According to the 2020 World Bank “Doing Business” report, Singapore ranked second in the world after New Zealand. According to the report, its top three rankings were protecting minority investors, enforcing contracts and starting a business.

Although key sectors such as the telecommunication and media sector have been privatized in the past, government-linked companies (GLC) managed by the PAP-controlled Temasek Holdings, the country’s second largest investment company, play an important role in several key sectors. GLCs produce nearly two-thirds of the country’s GDP and include prominent companies such as Singapore Airlines, the world’s second best airline according to a 2019 survey by Skytrax, and Singapore Telecommunications Limited (Singtel) which in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Corporate Governance Scorecard, ranked first in terms of market capitalization of Singapore-listed corporations in 2015. In fact, most of the top-ranked companies are at least partially owned by the Singapore government.

Although GLCs operate largely independently, they compete directly with private sector companies. Competing SMEs in the private sector experienced difficulties securing bank loans for developing their businesses and did not play an important role in the city-state’s economy during the period under review. Singapore’s dependency on GLCs has potential risks, as shown during the global financial crisis. Financial experts have – to no avail – sometimes demanded a more well-balanced and competitive economy, with an increasing number of private sector companies, in order to make Singapore’s economy more resilient.

The Singaporean authorities enforce comprehensive competition laws to prevent monopolistic structures and conduct. The efficient functioning of Singapore’s markets is guaranteed under the Competition Act of 2004, which is largely modeled on the UK Competition Act of 1998. The legislation covers both foreign-owned and domestic companies. The provisions were implemented in phases.

Firstly, the Competition Commission of Singapore (CCS) was established in January 2005 with provisions on anti-competitive agreements, decisions and practices. Provisions on the abuse of dominance, enforcement, appeal processes, and other miscellaneous areas came into force one year later. Remaining provisions relating to mergers and acquisitions were implemented in July 2007. It was renamed the Competition and Consumer Commission of Singapore on April 1, 2018, to reflect the addition of consumer rights which were previously the task of the Standards, Productivity and Innovation Board (SPRING).

Market organization

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Competition policy

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However, important sectors such as telecommunications, media, energy, postal services and the airport have been exempted from the Competition Act 2004. The telecommunication sector is overseen by the Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA), which issued a code of practice for competition. However, it is noteworthy that these exempt sectors include some businesses that are monopolies managed directly by the government or controlled by Temasek Holdings. Singapore is currently a member of the International Competition Network.

Singapore's economy is one of the most open in the world in terms of foreign trade. The country strongly supports the multilateral trading system. Singapore grants at least most-favored-nation treatment to all its trading partners, and the most-favored-nation tariff stands at zero. The only exceptions are six lines for alcoholic beverages, which are subject to specific rates. Furthermore, the city-state has bilateral trade and investment agreements with countries in various regions of the world. There are over 22 implemented free trade agreements. As a founding member of ASEAN and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum, Singapore actively participates in reducing trade and non-trade barriers between member countries.

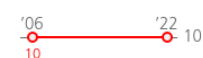
During the period under review, Singapore ratified the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) on July 19, 2018, and signed the European Union-Singapore Free Trade Agreement (EUSFTA) in October 2018. The former constitutes the remaining 11 countries of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) after the United States of America left the agreement (Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore and Vietnam). Singapore signed the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) in 2020, which links the 15 ASEAN countries and five regional partners, including China. It has been called the largest free trade agreement in history. In addition, there are bilateral free trade agreements (FTAs) with Australia, China, Costa Rica, India, Japan, Jordan, Korea, New Zealand, Panama, Peru, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Turkey and the United States of America. This demonstrates that there is a network of FTAs comprising 19 bilateral and regional FTAs and a total of 24 trading partners.

In Singapore, the banking system is solid and oriented toward international standards with functional banking supervision and minimum capital equity requirements. In 2011, the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) announced capital rules with revisions that were set at higher levels than Basel III. Singapore's capital markets are well developed, and its banks are increasingly using complex derivatives for risk management and hedging.

Financial services account for approximately 12% of Singapore's GDP. There were 131 commercial banks in Singapore in 2019. Of these, four are local banks and 127 are foreign banks. Commercial banks are licensed under and governed by the Banking Act. Despite the effects of the global financial crisis, the country's financial institutions remained stable, with ample liquidity. Furthermore, the government

Liberalization of
foreign trade

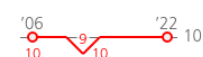
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Banking system

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guaranteed all SGD and foreign-currency deposits of individuals and non-bank customers in licensed banking institutions. However, the guarantee is for a maximum sum of SGD 20,000 and was introduced only after Hong Kong offered a similar guarantee.

Currently, there are three dominant banking groups in Singapore. The largest is the government-controlled Development Bank of Singapore (DBS). The share of non-performing loans decreased slightly from 1.4% in 2017 to 1.3% in 2018 and 2019. The government has continued its rigorous enforcement of laws. The Swiss bank UBS was fined SGD 11.2 million (\$8 million) for deceptive trading in November 2019. In October 2020, Goldman Sachs Singapore was ordered to pay SGD 165 million (\$122 million) to the Singapore government for its role in the 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) scandal.

8 | Monetary and fiscal stability

Inflation and foreign exchange policies are aligned with other goals of economic policy and have an adequate framework in Singapore. The Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) operates a managed float regime. Singapore had a low inflation rate with 0.4% in 2018 and 0.6% in 2019, which showed relative stability. Inflation is managed through a dirty float against a basket of currencies rather than control of liquidity. Fiscal pump priming is sometimes undertaken to stimulate the economy through leveraged infrastructure development. In November 2020, the Consumer Price Index stood at -0.1%. Only food prices registered a significant increase. The Singapore dollar (SGD) was at its highest since April 2018. The U.S. dollar reached SGD 1.32223 at the end of 2020. According to data provided by the World Bank, the real effective exchange rate was at 106.3 in 2019.

The Singaporean government's fiscal and debt policies promote macroeconomic stability, supported in part by institutional constraints. After the government had been forced to tap its reserves in 2009 due to the global financial turmoil, the budget has fluctuated with deficits and surpluses over the following years.

In 2019, the budget had a deficit of SGD 1.65 billion or 0.3% of GDP. For 2020, the budget deficit is expected to increase to SGD 10.9 billion or 2.1% of GDP. This is primarily due to the many measures taken to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2017, Singapore's debt-to-GDP ratio was at 130%, which is very high in international comparisons. The reason for the high debt-ratio is that the government borrows money from the Central Provident Fund (CPF) pool and channels it into investments. There has indeed been significant international borrowing to take advantage of low interest rates in recent years.

The extensive damage to the marine and aviation sector in 2020 in particular has led to more borrowing by GLCs and especially Singapore Airlines. Moreover, the country's strong institutions and governance, as well as the large fiscal reserves,

Monetary stability



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Fiscal stability



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ensure that Singapore's credit rating is not at risk. In September 2020, Moody's reaffirmed Singapore's AAA credit rating. Nonetheless, the government, through the GLCs in particular, has been raising a great amount of cash in the international market through bond issues while trying to capitalize on the low interest rate regime and this must be carefully managed to prevent excesses.

9 | Private Property

Property rights and regulations on acquisition, benefits, use and sale are well defined and widely enforced in Singapore. The Heritage Foundation's 2020 Index of Economic Freedom again stated that Singapore has Asia's strongest property rights regime, which is ranked first despite some modest declines in recent years. Furthermore, the Singaporean judiciary effectively protects private property, and contracts are secure. In addition, Singapore has ensured that its property and copyright laws are in line with underlying principles in global laws on intellectual property rights.

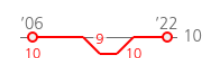
However, problems with regard to the enforcement of property rights remain. In addition, state acquisition of land is often priced under that of the prevailing market price. Politicians who lose a defamation suit against the ruling PAP often have to file for bankruptcy when they cannot pay the exceptionally high damages awarded. Outspoken opposition politicians run the risk of losing their assets. Beyond offering lower compensation for compulsorily acquired properties, the government, in control of the largest land bank which it acquired very cheaply in the 1970s, makes enormous profits through tendering such properties for sale now.

In Singapore, private companies are often portrayed as the primary engines of economic production and are given appropriate legal safeguards. In the past, the privatization of state companies proceeded with market principles. Moreover, the government-linked corporations are run like private companies. The 2020 World Bank "Doing Business" report ranked Singapore second behind New Zealand. The low level of bureaucratic procedures in particular foster private entrepreneurship. However, the dominant role of GLCs (e.g., in the telecommunication and multimedia sector) is often viewed as an obstacle to the development of private enterprises. It is very difficult to sue the government in case of legal disputes as legal costs are very high.

The government has ownership stakes in many companies either directly through its investment corporations or indirectly through the companies owned by investment corporations. The data on these structures is not fully transparent. The major listed companies of Temasek alone represent 20% of market capitalization. Studies have found that government-linked corporations, despite being subject to the same market pressures, have an advantage over private enterprise. As businesses, especially small ones, have suffered from the COVID-19 pandemic, the government has introduced a number of measures to help them survive including grants, loans, rental waivers, a booster package, a job support scheme, and a property tax rebate.

Property rights

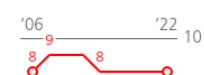
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Private enterprise

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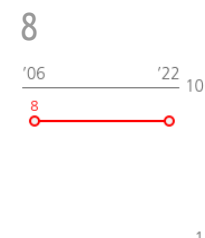
10 | Welfare Regime

Social safety nets are well developed, but do not cover all risks for all strata of the population. Social security schemes are very much centered on individual contributions to social insurances. All of the schemes targeting the poor are means-tested. An increasing number of people have received aid from the government. In the financial year 2019, 39,197 households and 78,580 individuals received \$151 million in financial help from the government's social assistance scheme ComCare, which represented a 4.6% increase over the previous year. There was in fact a decrease of financial help in the area of short to medium term assistance, while long-term assistance increased.

The government has officially rejected the notion of welfare, which it thinks would undermine the city-state's work ethic and reduce its ability to compete with neighboring economies. The Central Provident Fund (CPF) is the primary social security institution for Singaporeans and permanent residents. Contributions to the CPF go into three accounts: the Ordinary Account, where savings can be used to buy a home, pay for CPF insurance, investment and education; the Special Account for investment in retirement-related financial products, and the Medisave Account for approved medical insurance. One concern regarding the CPF system is the lack of transparency in the system. Moreover, people have been worried about increases to the minimum sum from which members are allowed to withdraw a monthly income for retirement after 55 years of age. Many people have drawn on CPF funds for housing or health care and so cannot meet that sum. This is in part due to a low percentage of public expenditure on health (2.1% of GDP in 2017). While a system of universal health care coexists with a private health care sector, there are growing concerns over the affordability of health care as co-payments in Singapore depend on the pricing of services rather than the person's income.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the government provided financial aid for employees who lost their job or suffered salary cuts or income loss. By the end of 2020, approximately 95,000 Singaporeans and permanent residents (22,000 of whom applied a second time) have received financial help through the COVID-19 Support Grant (CSG), which targeted those who suffered job losses. The support grant provides up to SGD 800 a month for three months. A Recovery Grant with broader eligibility which is set to be released soon will offer up to SGD 700 for 3 months. A fund for health care workers provides a one-time sum of SGD 5,000.

Social safety nets

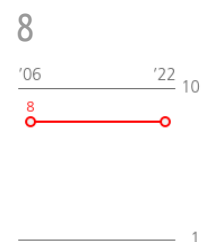


Women and members of ethnic and religious groups have near-equal access to education, public office and employment. The female literacy rate is 95.9%, less than that for males (98.9%). There is a lack of female representation in professional categories at managerial levels, which is partially due to a lack of flexible working hours. Only 29% of the members of parliament are women, which slightly increased in the 2020 election. The gender pay gap in Singapore has narrowed. Women in 2018 earned 6% less than their male peers, according to a study published by the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) in 2020.

In terms of ethnicity, Malay households are more likely to be less well-off in socioeconomic terms than those of the Chinese majority. A 2018 survey by the Institute of Policy Studies-OnePeople.sg found that 51.6% Malays said that they at least sometimes felt discriminated against when applying for a job, which marked a slight increase on previous surveys. Almost 60% of Malays and 56% of Indians experienced discriminatory treatment in their work environment. Malays have been underperforming in the job market since the 1980s. As legislation penalizes public debates on race, it is unlikely that this issue will be resolved any time soon. On a positive note, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), was signed in October 2015 and ratified in November 2017.

Low-income families and those less qualified find it increasingly difficult to make a living in Singapore. Social mobility in Singapore appears moderately low compared to other countries, although the government does not have data on this topic

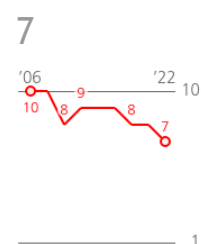
Equal opportunity



11 | Economic Performance

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, Singapore faced a sluggish economy. However, the country was badly affected by the pandemic because its economy is highly reliant on trade and its hub status for the aviation and maritime sectors. In 2019, the economy grew at only 0.7%, which was much less than the 3.1% in 2018. The economy is expected to contract between 6.5% and 6% in 2020 while a growth rate of 4% to 6% is expected for 2021. GDP per capita (PPP) increased in 2019 to \$101,376 from \$100,051 the year before. The current account balance in Singapore was \$63.14 billion in 2019. There was inflation of 0.6% in 2019, which increased slightly from 0.4% a year earlier. The unemployment rate for 2019 was 2.3% (according to government statistics, compare: World Bank statistics 4.4%), marking a slight increase over previous years. Singapore residents and citizens, however, have a slightly higher rate of unemployment, 3.1% and 3.3% respectively (2018). Tax revenue was at 13.1% of GDP in 2019. Foreign direct investments were at 28.3% of GDP in 2019, an increase over the previous year, and the second highest since 2000.

Output strength



12 | Sustainability

Environmental concerns are taken into account but are subordinated to growth efforts. Environmental regulations and incentives are in place, and are largely enforced. Industrial pollution, limited natural freshwater resources and waste disposal are viewed as the nation's primary environmental problems. The Environmental Performance Index (EPI) ranked Singapore 49 out of all countries in 2018, which marks a substantial decline from the previous index in 2016 when Singapore ranked 14. The country scored particularly well with regard to water resources, water and sanitation, and air pollution. However, biodiversity, habitat, and agriculture received low marks.

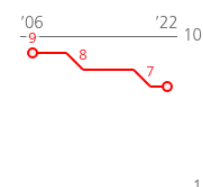
According to a study published by academics from the National University of Singapore (NUS) and the University of Adelaide in May 2010, Singapore has lost 90% of its forest, 67% of its birds, and approximately 40% of its mammals in the last 30 years. The decline in natural areas and the reliance on air conditioning has meant that Singapore is warming twice as fast as the rest of the world. Furthermore, the city-state is the 28th-highest consumer of fossil fuels among 219 countries according to data provided by the U.S. Energy Information Administration. In 2015, 97.4% of energy usage came from fossil fuels, 91.5% of which comes from natural gas.

Since 2020, there has been a carbon tax for all facilities which produce 25,000 tons or more of greenhouse gas emissions. The Singapore Environment Council released a study in 2013 which found that the city-state uses three billion plastic bags every year. The government has no plans to ban single use plastic or place levies on it.

Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) are not required by law and are conducted in secret and only when the government believes they are necessary, an approach which lags behind many other countries in the region. There have been increasing demands for passing a law concerning EIAs, which are in place in many other Southeast Asian countries. However, the government has not yet enacted one out of concern it could reduce its flexibility. The Nature Society (Singapore) has severely criticized the EIA for the Mandai project. In October 2020, the government enacted new biodiversity impact assessment guidelines which provide greater clarity and standardization. Activists initiated a petition in October 2020 to preserve Clementi Forest, a rare patch of natural forest, from development, by designating it as a nature park. The Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) considered the land suitable for housing development in the medium term (10 to 15 years) in its 1998 master plan.

Environmental
policy

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Singaporean education policy ensures a system of high-quality education and training, and the research and technology sector is dynamic and competitive. Investment in education and training is clearly above average, as is investment in R&D. Public expenditure on education was 2.9% of GDP in 2013, a slight decrease compared to 3.1% of GDP in 2012 (these are the last years for which data is available). Expenditure on R&D was 1.9% of GDP in 2017, which is about the same as the average in OECD countries.

Singapore has six public universities, six autonomous institutes, five polytechnics, two arts institutions, 13 foreign institutions and the Institute of Technical Education (ITE). Singapore's universities rank among the best in the world. The Times Higher Education Ranking ranked the National University of Singapore 25th in the world and 3rd in Asia in 2021. The sound education policy and the high level of expenditure on R&D are highlighted by the World Economic Forum's Growth Global Competitiveness Report 2019, which ranked Singapore first out of 140 economies. The city-state was the highest ranked economy in Asia. Moreover, Singapore scored higher than the OECD average in reading, mathematics and science in the PISA 2018 report. Nevertheless, education remains overwhelmingly examination-driven and assessment oriented, reducing the incentives for critical thinking and creativity. The emphasis on exams also leads to high levels of emotional stress among young people. The overemphasis on university rankings has come under increasing criticism.

Education policy /
R&D

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Governance

I. Level of Difficulty

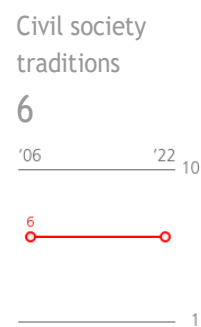
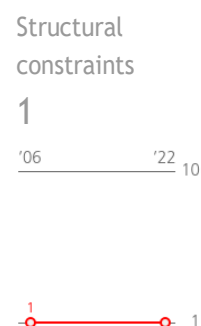
The Singaporean government faces only low structural constraints on its capacity to govern. Infrastructural development or poverty do not constraint the Singaporean administration. The country’s level of difficulty can be compared to OECD countries. Moreover, the country is not exposed to natural disasters. The educational system’s output of a highly-skilled workforce is sufficient and the level of corruption is notably low, with the fight against corruption being a key component of the ruling PAP’s policy.

However, the greatest structural constraint is the small size of the city-state, which for instance requires Singapore to import many important resources such as water (from Malaysia). Its small size and island nature, however, was of great benefit during the COVID-19 pandemic, because it facilitated more effective contact tracing and border control.

The lopsided ethnic composition of the citizen population (75.9% Chinese, 15.0% Malay, 7.4% Indian, 1.6% Others as of June 2020) requires skillful handling so as to avoid confrontation and to foster a unified Singaporean identity. This was seriously challenged during the Little India Riot in December of 2013, but the government officially rejected the notion that racism played a role in the conflict. As most of the rioters were from India, it drew attention to the problem of the massive importation of cheap labor into Singapore in recent years. The living conditions of these migrant workers became a serious issue during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 as the virus spread rapidly through the cramped worker’s dormitories.

Traditions of civil society are fairly weak in Singapore and are mostly limited to informal community assistance. During the colonial period, civil society was characterized by ethnic and religious groups such as clan associations, church, temple and mosque congregations. These organizations played an important role during decolonization. Nowadays, the landscape of voluntary organizations is slim and plagued by limitations imposed by the Singaporean government.

In general, two different cultures of civil society have emerged within the NGO landscape. There are a group of more liberal organizations that monitor human rights abuses and observe the government’s behavior with regard to opposition politicians. There are also a number of special interest groups which focus on gender equality,



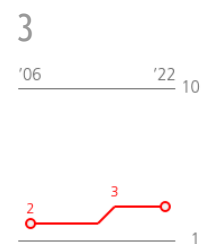
the environment and heritage preservation. While these groups have carefully avoided politics, there are a number of instances when they have become more activist.

During the period under review, activists and discontented citizens have continued to show willingness to use protests (in Hong Lim park), public walks, petitions, and open letters. However, the government continues to tighten restrictions on activism. It has targeted the participation of foreigners in protests at Speakers' Corner, the use of Malaysian and Singaporean flags, and the role of foreign funding of activities at the park. An amendment to the Public Order Act in 2017 allows the government to deny a permit if any foreigners are involved in a political event. In November 2020, Jolovan Wham, a Singaporean activist who had been charged under the law following an indoor forum that had involved a Skype interview with Joshua Wong, a democracy activist from Hong Kong, was additionally charged over a picture in which he was holding up a smiley face in front of a police station.

Generally, Singapore has few incidents based on social, ethnic or religious differences and conflict intensity tends to be low. Since independence, the political elite have managed ethnic and religious cleavages by promoting a multi-racial and multi-religious concept of citizenship. While it rejects the idea of a melting pot, as Singaporean ID cards for instance maintain ethnic identifiers, this approach to conflict management helped stabilize a heterogeneous society and inhibited violent outbreaks for more than three decades. Consequently, there is no organized mobilization along ethnic or religious cleavages. The Singaporean government uses authoritarian methods to restrict public debate on questions of race or religion, which suppresses some of the tensions. A majority of Indians and Malays, for instance, have experienced discrimination in the workplace.

While the conflict with migrants has remained of concern during the period under review, no major incidents have occurred that resembled the Little India riot of 2013. The COVID-19 pandemic has not led to any serious confrontations. The government has made some efforts to reduce tensions by moderately curbing the number of new immigrants. This raised concern among the business community, which relies on the flow of cheap labor and to fill positions for which there are shortages. Currently, foreigners make up 38% of Singapore's population, up from about 20% a decade ago. With rising housing prices and greater competition on the job market, Singaporean citizens continue to complain about the influx of foreign workers.

Conflict intensity



II. Governance Performance

14 | Steering Capability

The Singaporean government sets strategic priorities and generally maintains them over extended periods of time. In addition, it has the capacity to prioritize and organize its policy measures accordingly. Strategic Planning Divisions exist in several ministries within the Singaporean government.

During the period under review, the government continued to focus on social problems and rising income inequality. This included implementing measures to help the poor and curbing the inflow of foreigners. As part of the Smart Nation initiative, the government has sought to develop the skills of citizens in five key areas: transport and logistics, smart cities and estates, health care, education, and safety and security. The government has maintained free trade, economic cooperation and its pro-business environment to maintain economic growth. Meanwhile, it has sought to contain rising housing prices. These were not significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The government has worked quickly to address the COVID-19 pandemic and develop a plan to provide vaccinations. It has, for instance, decided to make vaccinations free for all citizens and permanent residents.

In Singapore, the maintenance of strategic priorities is not constrained by actors outside the government such as powerful economic interests or foreign governments. However, the ruling PAP's strategic long-term aims do not include the further democratization of the public sphere or the extension of democratic norms. The demands of opposition parties and human rights groups for further democratization have been ignored by the Singaporean government. The government tends to make use of short-term measures to reduce social problems, such as one-time handouts for poor people, which was also the case in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some government handouts are specially timed in the period before general elections.

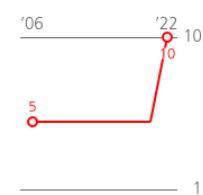
In general, the Singaporean government is able to implement its policies effectively. Singapore enjoys effective policy implementation thanks in part to the absence of a true parliamentary opposition and the PAP's dominance of almost every aspect of the city-state's political, military and economic life. For example, following the global financial crisis, the government was able to quickly implement a stimulus package to boost Singapore's economy.

In the period under review, the government implemented tighter regulations on the immigration of foreigners. It also implemented higher stamp duties on property purchases by foreigners and companies in order to contain rising property prices,

Question
Score

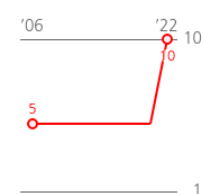
Prioritization

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Implementation

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which are in part driven by property speculation. Singapore has implemented tight regulations governing air pollution and traffic, making the country one of the cleanest places in Asia. An example are the highly unpopular Electronic Road Pricing gates, which charge people who use the road. In addition to the Certificates of Entitlements, Singapore is probably the most expensive country in the world in which to own a private car. Prices for the gantries were again increased and otherwise adjusted during the period under review.

However, besides effectively micromanaging many aspects, the executive has not carried out structural and qualitative changes in the political system in order to facilitate a transformation toward a more open and participatory regime, as is the case in liberal democracies. This raises the concern that the unpopular implementation of policies leads to long-term resentment toward the government, and thus may pose a risk to long-term stability. No major delay in policy implementation has occurred as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic.

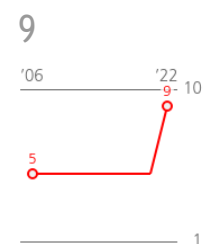
The Singaporean government responds to mistakes and failures with changes. The city-state's administration shows a considerable degree of flexibility and learning capability with reference to market reforms. In addition, the government regularly seeks advice from financial experts and academics in order to implement good practices in the financial sector. The government has reacted swiftly to the COVID-19 pandemic, which drew on its experience from the SARS crisis in 2003. No major changes in policy learning have occurred, however. The policy of housing migrant workers in dormitories remains firmly in place, even if there are some modifications that dorm operators believe will increase costs significantly.

The political elite continue to refrain from implementing democratic reforms. They show little political will to learn from past mistakes in order to facilitate democratic changes. Instead, the rulers believe their system is the best in the world and may even be an alternative to democracy. As such, the regime has attracted attention from many authoritarian regimes, including China, as a potential role model to improve one-party dominant rule without the need for democratic participation in politics. In sum, the government's projects cannot be considered as a proof of its learning process or commitment to democratic norms.

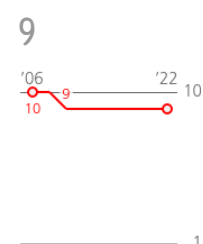
15 | Resource Efficiency

The Singaporean government makes efficient use of all available human, financial and organizational resources. The government's administrative personnel are highly professional. The existence of competitive recruitment systems and the high level of public sector salaries make the Singapore Civil Service one of the most efficient bureaucracies in the world. Consequently, the functioning of the administrative system is exemplary at every level of the Singaporean bureaucracy. Senior officers from the Singapore Armed Forces are regularly deployed in the administrative service as well as in GLCs after their retirement, although this raises questions about nepotism.

Policy learning



Efficient use of assets



The largest government-linked corporation, Temasek Holdings, under the direction of Ho Ching, the current prime minister's wife, continues to be subject to questions about its efficiency. Of particular concern is the limited transparency of the company. Leaked cables suggested problems during an attempted leadership transfer at the company.

During the period of review, the government has efficiently reallocated resources to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. This has been conducted in a relatively transparent manner. There was a budget deficit in 2019 (0.3% of GDP), which is expected to increase in 2020 to 2.1% of GDP, due to the measures dealing with the pandemic. Considering the level of challenge, the resources have been used in a targeted manner to deal with the crisis.

The government coordinates conflicting objectives effectively and acts in a coherent manner. The cabinet, under the hierarchical leadership of Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, handled conflicts over economic and social policies effectively and achieved policy coherence. The government promises that trade-offs between policy goals are well-balanced. During the period under review, there were no visible frictions within the government. Means of coordination between different departments of the state administration are in place. The Prime Minister's Office coordinates the activities of the ministries. For example, the National Security Coordination Secretariat (NSCS) and the National Population Secretariat (NPS), which are both located in the Prime Minister's Office, respectively coordinate national security planning and intelligence issues, and the various government agencies involved in population-related issues. Responsibilities within the government are ascribed in a transparent manner. Compared to other countries in the region, the government's capability to coordinate conflicting objectives and interests is highly effective. This was not affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, which the government has been handling efficiently.

The Singaporean government is largely successful in containing corruption, and integrity mechanisms are in place and effective. Corruption in the civil service is by far the lowest in the region. Numerous safeguards and rigorous audit controls are in place. The Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB) is incorporated into the Prime Minister's Office and investigates corruption in the public and private sector. It derives its jurisdiction from the Prevention of Corruption Act that was enacted in 1960. However, the fact that the CPIB is under the Prime Minister's Office has caused some concerns.

A potential problem for public accountability in Singapore is the lack of a Freedom of Information Act, which would enable Singaporeans' access to more information from the government. So far, the government has rejected demands to enact such a law. The government has argued that releasing such information may not be in the national interest and would not necessarily improve governance.

The extremely high salaries of ministers and high-ranking civil servants have been increasingly criticized and viewed as legalized corruption. In addition, the strong affiliation between the ruling PAP and the state administration is viewed as

Policy coordination

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Anti-corruption policy

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problematic, especially with regard to the high salaries paid in the higher ranks of the administration. A high position within the ruling PAP increases the possibility of obtaining a lucrative job in the public service. Allegations of nepotism have often been met with defamation lawsuits which resulted in apologies from the accusers. According to Michael D. Barr “it is no secret that a dynasty has emerged as the ruling force in Singapore.” The prime minister’s brother and sister have publicly accused him of trying to establish a dynasty. They have suggested that Li Hongyi, the eldest son of Lee Hsien Loong, may be chosen to become prime minister in the future.

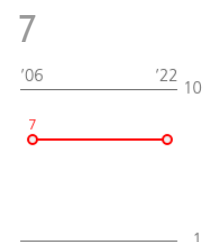
During the period of review, there were fewer corruption-related reports, but more cases were registered for further investigation. Those cases which were considered credible increased to 34%, compared to the annual average of 28% over the past four years. 90% of the cases are in the private sector.

16 | Consensus-Building

The ruling PAP continues to refrain from implementing democratic reforms aimed at facilitating democratic transformation. Instead, it maintains that liberal democracy as practiced in the West is unsuitable for Singapore’s ethnically and religiously heterogeneous society. Instead, the government believes in an elitist form of democracy which only measures the degree of support for its policies. Education Minister Ong Ye Kung said in 2017 that one-party rule may be Singapore’s way to succeed, which would be based on robust internal competition. After gains by the opposition in the 2020 general election, the government decided to more formally recognize the position of the leader of the opposition. This position was taken by head of the Workers’ Party (WP), Pritam Singh, which entitled him to 40 minutes of speaking time, which is normally allotted to office holders. While this can be seen as a small step toward a more democratic system, the government still generally resists democratic values and the opposition remains deeply divided both with regard to the form of democracy it desires and the path to achieve it. This is reflected in the failed attempts to create an opposition coalition. The main opposition party, the Workers’ Party, has declined to join such a coalition. The party has consistently avoided openly challenging the ruling party and believes in gradual change from within. This demonstrates how difficult it is to achieve a consensus even within the opposition on the path toward democracy.

All major political and social actors agree on the goal of a market-based economy. However, some environmental groups are critical of the fact that green-friendly economic plans are overlooked in favor of projects which could be detrimental to the environment, if profitable. Some political parties such as the Singapore Democratic Party propose enhanced social support systems. Prominent academics such as Donald Low and Cherian George have supported the idea of broadening the social safety net, minimizing inequality and increasing wealth taxes. They have, however, emigrated from Singapore, suggesting declining opportunities for such policy alternatives.

Consensus on goals



Nevertheless, there is no politically relevant actor who can derail either the reform process or the expansion of the market economy. The government rejected the idea that buying rail assets amounted to nationalization of the rail system. The assets were bought by the Land Transit Administration (LTA) because the expansion, replacement and upgrades of the system may have been too expensive for private operators.

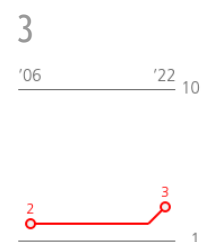
With the ruling PAP controlling the parliamentary majority in Singapore, anti-democratic actors are in full control of the government. Reformers have no power to bring about democratic reforms. In the face of the potential emergence of greater checks, the government defended its elitist form of governance. This was apparent in the denial of a presidential election in 2017, and the declaration that the elected president does not actually have the power to speak independently. Despite recognizing the electoral gains of the Workers’ Party, the government has pursued a legal approach against the party, which constitutes a threat to the rise of opposition parties and the deepening of democracy.

While interest groups such as the military and local entrepreneurs have often played an important role as anti-democratic veto powers in neighboring countries (and still do), in Singapore these groups have been successfully co-opted by the political leadership and have a strong stake in the existing political system. In general, the ruling party sees itself as the only capable political party and views any other party as a threat to the survival of the city-state. The ruling party believes Singaporeans only vote for the opposition because they know that the ruling party will be re-elected. The prime minister reiterated his opposition to democracy by asserting that the government should be able to plan for the long-term and should not be driven by the “ups and downs, the hurly-burly, the predictability, the bitterness, the division, the rancor, the splits, which will take many, many years to heal.”

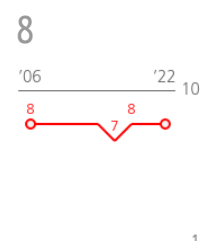
While the Singaporean political leadership continues to contain cleavage-based conflicts in spite of the city-state’s ethnic and religious heterogeneity, increasing immigration is leading to conflict. During the period of review, the Singapore government managed to reduce conflicts which had emerged as a consequence of the growing number of foreign workers. Singapore experienced its largest political protest in 2013, which was attended by a few thousand participants. The official announcements of curbs on foreign labor have reduced the discontent somewhat.

However, latent unhappiness prevails. This also applies to foreign workers, who still live in precarious conditions, even if the government has sought to mitigate the most serious problems. In 2013, Singapore also experienced its first riot since 1969, in Little India. There has been no similar event since, but this should not be seen as evidence that the underlying problems have been resolved.

Anti-democratic actors



Cleavage / conflict management



The city-state's political leadership only recognizes and accommodates the interest of civil society actors if they do not interfere with government policies. Laws pertaining to NGOs and other civil society groups continue to limit the space for civic activity. Any initiatives that foster a critical dialogue among Singaporean citizens must register under the Societies Act and be controlled by the government. The government will only involve civil society groups that will not take an oppositional stance, which is characterized as the politicization of an issue.

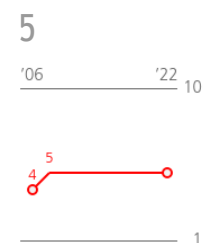
In recent years, there has been increasing political activism from more independent-minded civil society groups. Organizations such as the Nature Society and the women's rights group, AWARE, have become more assertive and frequently engage the government through various means. However, they remain very small and have limited resources. Foreign funding is not permitted for organizations which have overtly political goals.

Coalitions and alliances between civil society groups such as the Coalition of Singapore NGOs (COSINGO), established in 2011, and the Alliance of Like-Minded Civil Society Organizations, established in 2016, tend to focus on a single issue, in these cases making a report to the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). As the now defunct COSINGO illustrates, such coalitions are often short-lived. There also are deep divisions within society which pose an obstacle to cooperation. In 2017, only 13 of 60 NGOs submitted a report on gender inequalities to the UN because of disagreements on issues such as homosexuality, sex education and polygamy. Overall, the influence of civil society actors on the political process remains insufficient. Non-profit organizations have played a role in helping those affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and the migrant workers.

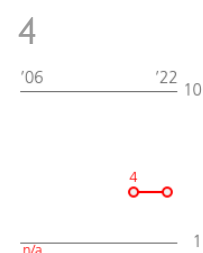
There is some disagreement over how the arrest of more than 100 left leaning opposition politicians in the 1963 Operation Cold Store, as well as the arrest of 16 people under the so-called Marxist conspiracy in 1987, should be interpreted. The government claimed that those who were arrested under the Internal Security Act were communists who wished to destroy the country, while others have rejected this version of history. The historian Dr. Thum Ping Tjin stated in a book launch in November 2013: "Were the Barisan and the other detainees of Operation Coldstore part of a communist conspiracy? No. No. No. No."

The issue with how to deal with this historical legacy gained in prominence in September 2014 when the government banned the documentary "To Singapore, With Love" which documents the experience of political exiles. The government believes the film, which challenges the government's narrative, is one-sided and a screening would be against the national interest. The banning was met with "deep disappointment" by a group of 39 Singaporean artists. Another film "1987: Untracing the Conspiracy" surprisingly received the rating of R21, which allowed it to be screened in Singapore, but makes it suitable only for adults. This meant it could be screened at the FreedomFilmFest in November 2015 and subsequently in other

Civil society participation



Reconciliation



venues. In 2017, three of the victims, Chng Suan Tze, Low Yit Leng, and Teo Soh Lung, published a book called “1987: Singapore’s Marxist Conspiracy 30 Years On,” which is available in bookstores in Singapore. Nevertheless, the government has so far refused to open the archives with regard to these incidents. Attempts to raise attention to the event, such as a blindfolded protest on the subway in 2017, resulted in legal consequences for the organizer, Jolovan Wham. In addition, Dr. Thum Ping Tjin’s attempt to question the government’s control over information regarding the events in 1963 and 1987 resulted in almost six hours of questioning in parliament, in which Law and Home Affairs Minister K Shanmugam sought to undermine the historian’s credibility, as well as to force him to provide indisputable evidence that there was no Communist conspiracy.

17 | International Cooperation

Singapore, as a very highly developed country according to the HDI, does not require or seek development support from international partners for its domestic policies. External advice with regard to the situation of human rights in the city-state is considered to be unwanted political interference. In fact, the government blocks every attempt by international organizations to facilitate democracy and civil rights in the country. Any foreign support for opposition parties or independent online media is forbidden. In September 2019, Home Affairs and Law Minister K. Shanmugam declared that additional laws were needed to counter foreign influence on domestic actors and opinion. Even though there was no evidence of foreign interference in the 2020 election, his ministry continued to review the need for further legislation. The government made little use of external support in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, as local experience was already sufficient.

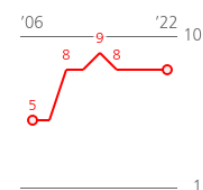
The Singaporean government is considered a credible and reliable partner by the international community. The political leadership remains engaged with the World Bank, the IMF, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and other international institutions such as the WTO. In addition, Singapore is one of the five founding members of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Professor Simon Shen believes that Singapore’s advanced economic development makes the country a “natural leader of the ASEAN.”

Through the Singapore Cooperation Program (SCP), Singapore provides technical assistance to developing countries around the world. In December 2020, the government announced that it would provide \$5 million (SGD \$6.67 million) to support the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines to poorer countries, which will be facilitated through the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) Advance Market Commitment (AMC) mechanism.

However, Singapore has not signed or ratified international core treaties such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Convention on the Protection

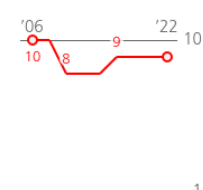
Effective use of support

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Credibility

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of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, or even the OECD Anti-Bribery Convention. The government argues that it will only sign treaties when it can fully and effectively implement them. This could be problematic, as ratified treaties and conventions only become part of domestic law when they are specifically incorporated.

The Singaporean government actively and successfully builds and expands cooperative neighborly and international relationships and promotes regional and international cooperation. As such, it is not surprising that Singapore is one of five founding members of ASEAN, which should slowly evolve into a very close-knit community. However, the rise of China is proving to be an increasing challenge as it reduces the potential for unity within the alliance. At the same time, the unpredictability of the U.S. government presents new problems for the region. In June 2018, Singapore hosted a meeting between former U.S. President Donald Trump and Kim Jong-un, which was aimed at improving relations on the Korean peninsula. In 2018, Singapore acted as the chair of ASEAN, a position which is rotated on an annual basis. For the Singapore government, this provided the chance to promote many initiatives aimed at enhancing regional cooperation. For instance, the government announced that it would upgrade three Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI) centers in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, to Singapore Cooperation Centers, in order to strengthen technical cooperation and local capacity-building. In November 2018, the 33rd ASEAN summit was held in Singapore. Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong used this opportunity to call for greater regional integration. President Trump, however, did not attend the meeting, which resulted in China gaining prominence. The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), which includes China, was signed in 2020.

Regional cooperation



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Strategic Outlook

Singapore is expected to quickly recover from the economic problems caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Projections see an average growth of about 5.5% in 2021, which would end the worst recession in Singaporean history. There is hope that the vaccines will elevate growth even further, but a delay in vaccine distribution poses a serious risk. Meanwhile, Singapore's stock market has performed less well than many others in the region. This suggests that investor optimism has declined. However, it seems likely that economic recovery will restore confidence given the overall stable environment.

As the pandemic is hopefully overcome and the economy recovers, the next item on the agenda for Singapore is the need to focus on the ongoing change from the third to the fourth generation of leaders. In particular, this means the replacement of the current prime minister with a new leader, who is expected to be Heng Swee Keat. During the pandemic, the government made it clear that it has opted for stability. However, it has not taken any concrete steps toward this goal. Having experienced leaders was considered more important than any leadership transition. At present, it is unclear when the government will feel confident enough to pursue a leadership transition. While six members of the new generation of leaders have taken up new portfolios after the 2020 election, more needs to be done to allow the new generation of leaders to establish themselves. Only a timely transition can ensure continuity in governance.

The fundamental social problems underlying Singapore's economic approach are unlikely to disappear. The government needs to do more to deal with the issue of high income inequality and lack of social mobility. The challenge of rising living costs and the lack of transparency and accountability in decision-making will continue to be serious issues. While the next parliamentary election will take place in just under five years, the next presidential election is scheduled for 2023 and will again be open to candidates of any ethnic group, unlike in 2017 when the election was limited to only one ethnic group. Although the powers of the president are strictly curtailed and the nomination requirements onerous, the election could still provide a platform to debate any of these current issues.

The inauguration of Joseph R. Biden as the new U.S. president raises the possibility of improved trade relations in Asia and could provide further benefits to Singapore's economic and strategic relations. Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong has expressed his hope that the U.S.-China relationship would become more constructive under the new administration, which would benefit Singapore greatly. He also hoped that the United States would insulate trade from other disagreements under the new administration, as this would lead to more mutually beneficial cooperation. Trade is crucial for Singapore and an improved trading environment would be of great benefit to the island nation. However, new developments in the Asia Pacific, including increased rivalries between China and its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) on the one hand, and Japan and its Free and Open Indo Pacific strategy on the other, will make the political and economic environment much more challenging. China's success in bypassing the Strait of Malacca through Myanmar, and Malaysia's development project that will do the same, will threaten Singapore's maritime hub status. Japan's involvement in developing its ports and railway networks in Myanmar and Thailand are also likely to pose challenges for similar reasons.