

Polity IV Country Report 2007: Singapore

<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 15%;">Score:</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2006</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2007</td> <td style="width: 15%;">Change</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Polity:</td> <td>-2</td> <td>-2</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Democ:</td> <td>2</td> <td>2</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Autoc:</td> <td>4</td> <td>4</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Durable:</td> <td colspan="3">42</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Tentative:</td> <td colspan="3">No</td> </tr> </table>	Score:	2006	2007	Change	Polity:	-2	-2	0	Democ:	2	2	0	Autoc:	4	4	0	Durable:	42			Tentative:	No			
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SCODE	SIN	CCODE	850	Date of Report	1 November 2008																				
Polity IV Component Variables																									
XRREG	XRCOMP	XROPEN	XCONST	PARREG	PARCOMP																				
2	2	4	3	4	2																				
Date of Most Recent Polity Transition (3 or more point change)																									
End Date	16 September 1963		Begin Date	10 August 1965																					
Polity Fragmentation: No																									
Constitution	1959/1965																								
Executive(s)	Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong (PAP); since 12 August 2004 President S.R. Nathan (PPP); directly elected (although President Nathan, whose opposition was disqualified in the 1999 campaign, was simply designated to this office by the Prime Minister, 18 August 1999; last appointed 17 August 2005)																								
Legislature	Unicameral: National Assembly (84 seats; directly elected; up to an additional 9 may be appointed/nominated by president; most recent elections, 6 May 2006) People's Action Party (PAP): 82 Other parties: 2 Appointed/nominated: 9																								
Judiciary	Supreme Court																								

Narrative Description:¹

Executive Recruitment: Transitional or Restricted Elections (7)

Multiparty elections have been a defining feature of the Singapore state since 1959. Despite these elections, the People's Action Party (PAP) has established a hegemonic one-party system. Judged from the four core principles of political liberalism – popular representation, popular selection, political equality and majority rule – Singapore is a functioning democracy. However, this conceptualization only gives us a partial

¹ The research described in this report was sponsored by the Political Instability Task Force (PITF). The PITF is funded by the Central Intelligence Agency. The views expressed herein are the authors' alone and do not represent the views of the US Government.

understanding of politics in Singapore. While the public appeal of the PAP cannot be denied (it has received over sixty percent of the popular votes in every election since 1968), the PAP has used its position of power to control the media, intimidate its opposition through legal persecution, and organize the electoral institutions of democracy to their own advantage. Despite achieving near forty percent of the popular vote in the last five elections, the opposition has been unable to win more than four seats in parliament in any given election. However, while the PAP has used its institutional power to bias the electoral process in their favor, these elections cannot be classified as fraudulent. Contributing to the success of the PAP has been the weakness of the opposition parties and the government's ability to successfully deliver economic prosperity to its citizens. Even in the face of the country's deepest recession since the mid-1960s, the PPP was able to cruise to another landslide electoral victory in the November 2001 polls (winning all but two of the eighty-four seats). A PPP victory was a foregone conclusion before the polls opened after it found itself unopposed in fifty-five out of eighty-four districts. The most recent legislature elections did not change this arrangement; following the May 2006 election only two seats remained in opposition hands.

Lee Kuan Yew has been the dominant political figure in Singapore since its independence. While out of the political limelight for much of the past decade, nevertheless, he has continued to exert his influence on important economic and social policy initiatives. In recent years preparations have been made to transfer power inside the PPP from Goh Chok Tong to Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loang. Lee Hsien Loang, who is Lee Kuan Yew's son, ascended to the position of prime minister in August 2004. The Prime Minister re-appointed President S. R. Nathan on 17 August 2005.

Executive Constraints: Slight to Moderate Limitations (3)

Over the past forty years the PAP has created a hegemonic party system under the guise of democratic governance. The PAP dominates all three branches of government and the bureaucracy. While there can be no denial that Lee Kuan Yew has been a dominant political force in Singapore politics since independence, the PAP is no longer dependent on his leadership to maintain its hegemony (since 1990 he has served as Senior Minister in the Goh cabinet). A collective leadership style (with deference to Lee Kuan Yew on important policy initiatives) has defined the post-Lee PAP government. While factional blocs within the PAP threaten its unity, the policy of collective responsibility, as well as the strong powers of the party whip, has kept the party united.

Political Participation: Restricted Competition (2)

There are more than twenty registered parties in Singapore but they are all overshadowed by the PAP. With the exception of a brief period of competitive politics between 1963 and 1965, the political landscape has been characterized by PAP hegemony. In addition to the marginalization of opposition political parties in Singapore, public dissent against PAP dominance has been minimal. The weakness of civil society combined with PAP control of the media and intimidation of opposition viewpoints has produced a classic illiberal democracy. Opposition parties and interest groups are tolerated so long as they do not threaten the position and role of the ruling regime. The PPP Government has long used the country's libel laws to economically punish those individuals who dare to speak out against the country's political leadership. While Prime Minister Goh initially promised a greater degree of pluralism than permitted by his predecessor, very little has changed in the past decade. Just as under Lee, Goh tolerated opposition so long as it was constructive and non-combative.