

## Polity IV Country Report 2010: Singapore

<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 15%;">Score:</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2009</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2010</td> <td style="width: 15%;">Change</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Polity:</b></td> <td>-2</td> <td>-2</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Democ:</b></td> <td>2</td> <td>2</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Autoc:</b></td> <td>4</td> <td>4</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Durable:</b></td> <td colspan="3">45</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Tentative:</b></td> <td colspan="3">No</td> </tr> </table>	Score:	2009	2010	Change	<b>Polity:</b>	-2	-2	0	<b>Democ:</b>	2	2	0	<b>Autoc:</b>	4	4	0	<b>Durable:</b>	45			<b>Tentative:</b>	No			
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SCODE	<b>SIN</b>	CCODE	<b>850</b>	Date of Report	<b>1 September 2011</b>																				
<b>Polity IV Component Variables</b>																									
XRREG	XRCOMP	XROPEN	XCONST	PARREG	PARCOMP																				
2	2	4	3	4	2																				
<b>Date of Most Recent Polity Transition (3 or more point change)</b>																									
End Date		16 September 1963		Begin Date																					
				10 August 1965																					
<b>Polity Fragmentation: No</b>																									
<b>Constitution</b>																									
		1959/1965																							
<b>Executive(s)</b>																									
		Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong (PAP); elected by National Assembly, 12 August 2004 President Tony Tan Keng Yam (non-partisan); directly elected, 23 August 2011																							
<b>Legislature</b>																									
		Unicameral: National Assembly (84 seats; directly elected; up to an additional 9 may be appointed/nominated by president; most recent elections, 7 May 2011)  People's Action Party (PAP): 81 Workers' Party (WP): 6																							
<b>Judiciary</b>																									
		Supreme Court																							

### Narrative Description:<sup>1</sup>

#### **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 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

<sup>1</sup> 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.

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; that number increased to six seats following May 2011 elections.

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 president is supposed to be directly elected and has some oversight authority but the post has remained largely ceremonial. President Ong Teng Cheong was replaced by Sellapan Ramanathan (S. R. Nathan) who gained and retained office as a result of uncontested elections in August 1999 and August 2005. The most recent presidential election showed some relaxation in the ruling party's control of the system as four candidates were registered, the first time there has been more than two candidates and the first time since 1993 that the elections have been contested. Tony Tan Keng Yam won the presidential elections held 27 August 2011 by a very slim margin (less than half a percentage point; 35.2%); he took office on 1 September 2011.

**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 changed under his tenure. Just as under Lee, Goh tolerated opposition so long as it was constructive and non-combative. Lee Hsien Loang also seems to be following this model of limited democracy, as restrictions on speech and assembly have persisted under his leadership. In the spring of 2009, Singapore's legislature passed a measure that would require police permission for public assemblies of all sizes, removing a previous threshold of five or more people. In addition to these limits on political association, the government has also used the threat of libel suits and its influence over the courts and the media to limit any significant challenge to PAP political hegemony.