RAFFLES INSTITUTION
YEAR 6 GENERAL PAPER
STUDENTS' INFORMATION PACKAGE

Unit: Politics and Governance II - Focusing on Singapore

1. Introduction

Politics and Governance II builds on fundamental concepts introduced in *Politics and Governance I* and throws the spotlight on contemporary political issues, specifically...This package aims to provide 'just-in-time' information on the abovementioned topics, and facilitate analysis and evaluation of complex political issues, to which there are not clear solutions.

What this package is:

This package is meant to supplement your learning in class by spurring independent thinking and facilitating active discussion on questions and key issues. It is also intended for self-study to gain content knowledge, as well as reflection upon key issues raised. The articles in this package are selected and customised to be of the standard of comprehension expected of an A-level candidate. More difficult articles necessitating a closer read and/or higher order conceptual understanding are flagged out (see Content Page). Related examination questions are highlighted beneath each article—these are meant to guide your thinking and focus your learning. For students interested in going further, links and suggested readings are provided where appropriate. For students requiring background information, particularly with regards to specific countries, additional links are also provided beneath the appropriate articles.

What this package is not:

This package is NOT an exercise in memory and regurgitation, nor is it a "model answer". General Paper is not about thoughtless memorisation of facts and/or essay scaffolds. It is about close reading of sources, critical analysis of issues raised, and the formation and clear expression of your own logically sound opinions, which are substantiated by factual evidence.

2. Enduring Understandings and Essential Questions:

There are NO new Enduring Understandings (EU) in this package, but we will be revisiting 5 key EUs introduced in Politics and Governance I in the specific context of Singapore:

EU1: Whatever the choice may be in method of governance, there will be pros and cons, effects and consequences on the people, economically and socially.

EU2: The tension betwen individual freedom and social stability always requires compromise.

EU3: The tension between individual freedom and the amount of power vested in the state always requires compromise.

EU4: The tension betwen the needs of the majority and that of the minority always requires compromise.

EU5: The tension between how resources are managed and allocated over the long term and the short erm always requires compromise

What are the essential questions of this unit?

1. What is good governance? What do we expect from our leaders?
2. Are there alternatives to democracy that work?
3. How many forms of democracy are there and why are there so many forms?
4. Which is more important: principle of pragmatism and economic development or freedom and equality?
5. What is the nature of politics in Singapore? What are the changes and challenges?

3. For Further Reading/Viewing:

Recommended Reading:

1) Lee Kuan Yew, From Third World to First: The Singapore Story: 1965-2000.
2) Gretchen Liu, The Singapore Foreign Service: The First 40 Years
3) Cherian George, The Air-conditioned Nation: Essays on the politics of comfort and control (1990-2000)
4) Warren Fernandez, Thinking Allowed?
5) Ghani, Peh, Teo, Lim, et al., Struck by Lightning: Singaporean Voices Post-1965
6) Kishore Mahbubani, The New Asian Hemisphere
7) Donald Low and Sudhir Vadaketh, Hard Choices: Challenging the Singapore Consensus (2014)
8) Carol Soon, Hoe Su Fern (ed.) Singapore Perspectives 2015: Choices
9) Cherian George, Singapore Incomplete (2018)
10) Teo You Yenn, This is What Inequality Looks Like (2018)

4. Related Cambridge and RI Essay Questions

Cambridge Exam Questions:
'Your society' questions

1) In your society, to what extent is it acceptable for public money to be used for the acquisition of works of art? (Nov 2017)
2) Many developed countries are paying increasing attention to the needs of the disadvantaged. How far is this true in Singapore? (Nov 08)
3) How far is your country prepared for future crises? (Nov 06)
4) To what extent do young people in your society take an interest in politics? (Nov 06)

Other politics & governance questions:

5) 'No politician's reputation can survive the judgement of time.' How true is this? (Nov 10)
6) 'In today's world, power is determined by economic success, not military might.' Discuss. (Nov 97)

RI Exam Questions:
'Your society' questions

1) 'We should abolish state funding for the Arts.' How far do you agree that this should be the case for your society?(RI 2017 Y6 Prelim)
2) 'Ours is a country of divided people.' Is this a valid comment on your society? (RI 2015 Y5 Promo)
3) How far is your society prepared for the challenges that diversity brings? (RI 2015 Y6 Prelim)
4) Consider the view that people in your society have unrealistic expectations of their government. (RI, 2014, Y5, Promo)
5) 'It is better to obey than to question.' How far is this true of your society? (RI, 2014, Y6, CT2)
6) To what extent has the political climate in your society changed for the better? (RI 2013 Prelim)
7) What priorities would you set for government expenditure in your country and why? (RI 2013 Yr 6 CT 2)
8) Is it ever justified to spend large amounts of public money on national defence? Discuss this with reference to your country. (RI 2011 Yr6 Prelim)
9) It has been said that Singapore is economically First World but socially Third World. What is your view? (RI 2011 Yr6 Prelim)
10) "Not in my backyard." To what extent is this a growing problem in your society? (RI 2012 Yr 6 CT2)
11) To what extent does your country challenge the current state of affairs? (RI 2011 Yr6 CT2)

Other politics & governance questions:

12) Is it ever justified to sacrifice human rights for a country's progress? (RI 2017 Y6 Prelim)
13) 'At a time when the world needs capable leadership, many politicians do not seem to be up to the job.' Do you agree? (RI 2017 Y6 Prelim)
14) 'Achieving greater income equality for all is a desirable but unrealistic goal.' Do you agree? (RI 2017 Y6 Prelim)
15) 'Inequality is inevitable in society.' To what extent should we accept this? (RI 2017 Y5 Promo)

16) In times of economic hardship, is it acceptable for a government to spend on weapons and its armed forces? (RI 2017 Y6 CT2)
17) 'Business should have no place in politics.' Do you agree? (RI 2017 Y6 Prelim)
18) How important is a study of history for a nation's future? (RI 2015 Y5 Promo)
19) Should international aid only be given to others during times of economic prosperity? (RI 2015 Y6 Prelim)
20) 'Governments have a right to censor undesirable elements of their nations' history.' Do you agree? (RI 2011 Y6 Prelim)

The following 2 readings will help you to understand and examine:

- What the tenets of "liberal democracy" are
- Why Singapore's style of governance is often labelled as "illiberal democracy"
- Arguments criticising & supporting Singapore's style of governance

EU1, EU3

Reading 1(a)

Demophobic society: Singapore's allergy to the D-word weakens us

Cherian George

The strangest exchange I've had with the Singapore government occurred early in my second career as an academic. The Straits Times had just published my op-ed piece trying to explain the rationale behind opposition politician Chee Soon Juan's civil disobedience campaign. In reply, the Prime Minister's Office questioned whether I was being non-partisan, and basically accused me of using my academic position to disguise myself as a dispassionate observer.

The PMO's letter brandished a few lines from the 8,000-word academic paper on which my ST article was based – lines, it said, that revealed my "true intention": That I wanted to subvert an elected government, perhaps? Not quite. The supposedly self-incriminating lines showed – voila! – that I was in favour of democracy for Singapore.

Let's consider the irony here. The five white stars on Singapore's flag represent the nation's core principles, one of which is democracy. Every school day, children stand before the flag and promise, hand on heart, "to build a democratic society". I was basically being accused of trying to fulfil our national pledge.

The irony of the government's demophobia goes deeper. The People's Action Party has been a major beneficiary of democracy. Lee Kuan Yew didn't have to go to war to come to power, like George Washington or Mao Zedong did. Our nationalists succeeded by targeting polling stations, not enemy brigades; by counting ballots, not bodies. Thanks to democracy, no PAP leader had to lose his life to win the right to rule.

Indeed, the PAP's electoral victories in recent decades have been reflective of genuine popular support. I've not seen any opinion poll, from any source, that shows approval ratings for the government lower than the PAP's share of the popular vote, which would be the case if elections were rigged.

So why does the PAP keep badmouthing democracy? Democratisation wouldn't be fatal for PAP rule as such. But it would cramp the PAP's preferred style of government. It wants maximum room to exercise discretionary power, with as few checks and balances as it can get away with. In the government's eyes, democracy looks like the ungainly, hipswaying Olympic sport of race-walking, with esoteric rules making it unnecessarily hard to progress from point A to point B, and which is treated seriously only because it came from the West and everyone's too politically correct to say, enough already.

Democracy: Not perfect, but still the best system

Democracy is about popular sovereignty, giving all adults equal rights to pick the people who get to wield state power. Lee Kuan Yew voiced misgivings about even this basic

principle. Clearly, not everyone can be trusted to act for the common good, or even to make intelligent choices in their own self-interest.

But the democratic principle of “one person, one vote” has never been based on the fiction of uniform ability. When the American founding fathers declared as a self-evident truth that everyone is "created” equal, they meant just that: people enter the world equally endowed with certain basic rights. It is a moral statement, distinguishing democracy from systems that treat some groups as rulers by birthright while others as destined to be ruled.

No democrat claims adults are equally capable of making wise decisions in the public interest – this is just one of many myths that democracy’s opponents construct to make this form of government seem as absurd a sport as race-walking. Nor do democrats claim that the system always hands power to the most able or honest leaders. (Donald Trump. Enough said.)

What makes democracy the best political system ever devised is not that voters unfailingly choose good governments, but that it gives people a peaceful way to kick out bad ones. Democracy enables peaceful turnovers of power because of the moral legitimacy that has come to be attached to the vote. Citizens are not equal in reality, but it’s because a clean election gives equal weight to everyone’s vote that voters peacefully accept the result, even when they are on the losing side.

Of course, most citizens will never live up to their civic responsibilities. Popular sovereignty can also produce tyranny of the majority. Therefore, while every democratic system requires the government to be elected by the people and to act for them, each also carves out domains to be insulated from the vagaries of public opinion. In these protected spaces, decision-making is guided by core values, expert judgement and long-term concerns, not popular pressure. Courts, for example, are required to be guided by the law, not TV talking heads, opinion polls or lynch mobs. There are times when the ablest people need to be given the space to do the job with minimum interference by the rest of us.

Exactly where to draw the line between public participation and managerial autonomy is something we have to work out domain by domain. When countries overdo popular participation, the result may be governmental inefficiency or, paradoxically, the rise of demagogues who hijack mass movements for their own ends. On the other hand, inadequate public accountability and voice routinely leads to corruption and abuse of power.

Democracies have found that the most promising approaches lie at neither extreme. They need state institutions that are open to public scrutiny and subject to on-going checks and balances, but that are also guided by their own professional ethos and granted sufficient autonomy to get their jobs done. Yes, democracy always carries the risk of a bad government being voted in. And, yes, such a government could do irreparable damage to Singapore. But if we are unusually fragile, it’s not because we’re small. It’s because our system of checks and balances is weak. No matter how strong its mandate, an elected government's power to do harm needs to be limited by independent institutions and civil liberties.

Singapore: More mature approach needed

This is the kind of nuanced debate we should be having in Singapore, not “Democracy: Good or Bad”. A detailed audit of our political system would probably show mixed results. In some areas, popular participation is being unreasonably obstructed. In particular, Singapore is a laggard – even by non-Western standards – in introducing open government reforms such as the right to information. Since the late 20th century, many

countries have seen the wisdom of empowering ordinary citizens with government information on demand, thus crowdsourcing the battle against corruption and inefficiency.

The government's standard answer when we ask for more accountability is that Singaporeans get to hold it to account every five years in the voting booth. The problem, though, is that Singapore does not pass some of the democratic tests for free and fair elections.

The polling process itself is as clean as one can reasonably expect. But elections are not just about what happens on polling day. Democratic choice is a process requiring certain conditions to be met on both the demand and supply sides. On the demand side, voters must be able to learn about and discuss their choices fully – which requires much more freedom of media and public assembly than we currently enjoy. On the supply side, contenders for power must not be unfairly disadvantaged long before the polls – an independent election commission is a must, particularly to prevent gerrymandering. Nor should they be obstructed from fulfilling their mandates if they win – which is the effect of denying opposition MPs any say in their constituencies' government grassroots machinery.

A thorough democratic audit would also reveal some aspects of Singapore's political system that are too susceptible to populism. Due to objections from religious conservatives, the government has refused to decriminalise sex between gay men or allow LGBT activists to campaign openly for their rights. This nod to conservative public opinion subverts equality, which is a foundational principle of democracy and which no group should be denied just because it's reviled by others.

Democratising Singapore isn't about importing any other country's system or values wholesale. There is no single model; advanced democracies have some features that are exemplary and others we should avoid. Singapore has strengths of its own. Stable, compact, digitally connected and highly educated, Singapore has better conditions than most for deepening its democracy.

First, however, it will need to get over its instinctive defensive reaction the moment the D-word is brought up. That reflex may have something to do with decades of Western haranguing. Western politicians, journalists and activists kept trying to recreate Singapore in their own image.

Lee Kuan Yew was not the sort to play the role of humble student, so he went on the offensive, pointing out the dysfunctions in Western democracies. Other PAP politicians and diplomats followed his lead. After decades of practice, it's little wonder the PAP team got very comfortable with speaking up against democracy. Over time, the habit became national dogma.

Adapted from Chapter 7 of Singapore Incomplete (Cherian George, 2017, Ethos Books)

Reading 1(b)

A defence of Singapore-style democracy

Daniel Chai & Gregory Koh

Singapore's government, led by the People's Action Party (PAP), rejects Western style liberal democracy in favour of its own form of democracy. While Singapore's performance on the Economist Intelligence Unit's (EIU) democracy index has improved over the past decade, moving from a 'hybrid regime' to a 'flawed democracy', Singapore still draws international criticism for the state of its democracy.

Not a liberal democracy?

Singapore's Parliament is modelled after the UK Westminster model, with local variations. We are a representative democracy with a government elected through regular election cycles. In this respect, Singapore can be considered a democracy.

Singapore, however, does not adhere to the standards of Western liberal democracy[1], leading to the EIU's classification of a 'flawed democracy'. 'Flawed democracies' have fair and free elections and protections for basic civil liberties, but may have issues in other democratic aspects such as low press freedoms, an underdeveloped political culture, low levels of political participation, and issues concerning the functioning and transparency of governance.

Perhaps a more accurate description of Singapore's government would be the term 'illiberal democracy' – a system of governance whereby elections take place, but citizens are cut off from the knowledge about the activities of those who exercise real power because of the lack of civil liberties.

Singapore's take on Western democracy

In interviews with American journalist Fareed Zakaria, Lee Kuan Yew expressed his admiration for American inventiveness and creativity. He also liked the openness between people across all walks of society and the transparency and accountability of the government.

Lee, however, criticised the 'breakdown of civil society' in Western nations due to the propagation of liberal democratic ideas and the affirmation of the individuals' rights to behave or misbehave as they pleased at the expense of an orderly society.

To this end, Lee said, "Democratic procedures have no intrinsic value. What matters is good government." He believed that the government's primary duty is to create a "stable and orderly society" where "people are well cared for, their food, housing, employment, health".

This pragmatic ideology was echoed by other Singaporean politicians such as former Foreign Affairs Minister, George Yeo, who said in 1992 that "the test of democracy is not how we measure up against someone else's theoretical construct, but what works for us given our history and circumstances. It is a Darwinian test. What succeeds will endure."

[1] *According to the philosopher John Rawls, characteristics of a liberal democracy include, fair and free elections between multiple distinct political parties, the rule of law in everyday life as part of an open society, and the protection of human and civil rights and civil liberties, as well as the freedom religious belief and political association for all people.*

Criticism of Singaporean-style democracy

Singapore's form of 'illiberal' democracy is a balance between Western style liberal democracy and Singapore's pragmatic needs, aimed at the preservation of Singapore as a state above all else.

While Singapore ranks well in many categories the World Bank's measures for 'good governance' in areas such as basic safety and security provided by law, Singapore's one-party government is often criticised for its curtailment of the socio-political spaces accorded to civil liberties and other forms of political association and pluralism beyond that of the government.

Other criticisms of Singapore's democracy include the curtailment of the freedom of expression, assembly and association through broad legal provisions on security, public order, morality and racial and religious harmony through a slew of legal statutes such as the sedition and the Internal Security Act (ISA). The Singapore government has also been criticised for its use of strong defamation laws and the offence of "scandalising the judiciary". One prominent example of the use of these laws was against blogger Roy Ngerng, who was sued by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong for making defamatory remarks about Lee and the Central Provident Fund (CPF) policy.

Despite these laws, Singaporeans are increasingly turning to social media to voice their opinions on political matters through numerous online blogs and alternative news platforms; though as the Roy Ngerng case demonstrates, there are still stringent guidelines to be followed.

Singapore receives human-rights-related criticisms as well. Human Rights Watch, an international non-governmental organisation, has criticised Singapore on several issues including the use of corporal punishment, including caning (deemed as torture), the death penalty, and the restriction of the civil rights of homosexuals under Section 377A of the penal code, which criminalizes sexual acts between homosexual men.

The Singapore government maintains that these laws and punishments are put in place because Singapore values its order and social harmony over ideological and intangible ideologies.

Singapore's reasons for rejecting Western-style democracy

Considering Singapore's early history as well as its vulnerable position in the world, Singapore has strong reasons to adopt a realistic and pragmatic approach to governance, and prevent any negative consequences of Western style liberal democracy from hindering her progress and survival.

Singapore's reasons for its rejection of Western-style democracy can be divided into three main areas: multiculturalism, security, and economic development.

(i) Multiculturalism

Singapore is home to a diverse mix of cultures and races with a 70% Chinese majority, as well as Indian and Malay minorities. This diverse mix has the potential for racial tension and conflict, as evidenced in the years surrounding Singapore's independence. As a result, it is imperative that the Singapore government takes a tough stance on the freedom of expression, especially regarding sensitive racial remarks.

A recent example of the use of the Racial and Religious Harmony Act was against the authors of online alternative news site 'The Real Singapore' for attempting to sow discord

amongst the different communities when they published a false article claiming that an incident had occurred between the police and some members of the public during a Thaipusam procession sparked by a Filipino family's complaint that the drums played during the procession upset their child.

On the other hand, there have been incidences of racial and religious strife in European countries that champion Western liberal ideals and protect the freedom of expression. Prominent examples include the controversy surrounding the Danish Prophet Mohammed cartoons, and the Charlie Hebdo incident.

These examples give Singapore's government a strong reason to reject elements of Western style liberal democracy in the interest in the interest of preserving social harmony and stability among Singapore's multicultural populace.

(ii) Security

Being a small state with a Chinese majority, Singapore is placed in a vulnerable position in the Southeast Malay peninsula. It is therefore imperative that Singapore maintain strong bilateral ties with its surrounding neighbours and respect their cultural and religious sensitivities.

To this end, restrictions on the freedom of expression and the press need to be put in place to prevent the press or social media from being irresponsible in the way it reports on Singapore's relationship with its neighbours such as Malaysia and Indonesia. As these countries represent some of Singapore's biggest trading partners, Singapore has an economic incentive to maintain positive relationships with these countries.

Singapore's small size and population makes Singapore vulnerable to external threats. In a symposium by RSIS' Studies in Inter-Religious Relations in Plural Societies Programme, Law and Home Affairs Minister K Shanmugam highlighted the serious threat of ISIS and growing extremism in the region, stressing on the need for the continued limits on the freedom of speech, as any offensive statement or post originating here may provoke retaliation, compromising Singapore's safety.

(iii) Economic development

Singapore's economic growth has been attributed to its societal and economic stability in comparison to its regional neighbours such as Malaysia, and Thailand. In Malaysia, anti-government protests calling for the resignation of Prime Minister Najib Razak in late 2015 along with divisions within the ruling party has fuelled Malaysia's deteriorating economy. In a similar vein, frequent clashes between the 'Red Shirts' and 'Yellow Shirts' in Thailand has hampered Thailand's economic growth.

Given Singapore's lack of natural resources, Singapore relies on heavily entrepot trade and foreign investment for survival. Any instability within Singapore would cause Singapore to lose its key economic advantage over its neighbours if investors pull out of the country, and this will in turn threaten its survival. In terms of balancing between centralising enough power to deal with external threats and maximize economic opportunities against promoting individual liberty in order to foster creativity and individual expression, it is understandable that Singapore's government prioritises stability and growth over Western liberal democratic values.

Conclusion

While Singapore can be classified as a democracy insofar as it allows for religious freedom (to a large extent), and having free, fair and regular elections. Singapore does not fit the

standards of Western style liberal democracy as the electoral process favours the ruling party, and there are still restrictions on the freedom of expression as well as the press.

However, Singapore has strong reasons for doing so. The Singapore government rejects Western style liberal democracy to the extent that it threatens Singapore's survival, citing economic development and survival, security and multiculturalism as reasons for doing so. With these issues at stake, it is unlikely that Singapore will ever meet the standards of Western style liberal democracy – and that need not necessarily be a bad thing.

Adapted from an article published in Consensus (15 Apr 2017) at https://consensusg.com/2017/04/15/a-defence-of-singapore-style-democracy/

Points to Ponder/Discuss

a) Chai & Koh highlight a "pragmatic ideology" as the reason behind Singapore's style of government, while George asserts that the real motivation is having "as few checks and balances as it can get away with". Which argument do you find more convincing & why?

b) George argues that "Singapore has better conditions than most for deepening its democracy", while Chai & Koh cite "strong reasons [for Singapore] to adopt a realistic and pragmatic approach to governance". Examine the tensions that may arise from these sets of reasons.

Related Essay questions:

1) 'The key criterion for good government is how well the economy is managed.' Is this a fair assessment? (Camb 2012)
2) Consider the view that efficient government is more important than democracy. (Camb 2011)
3) 'Democracy is not for everyone.' Comment. (RI 2011 Y6 CT1)
4) 'Restriction of free thought and free speech is the most dangerous of all subversions.' Discuss this with reference to your society. (RI 2010 Y6 CT2)

This article will introduce you to:
- Out of Bound (OB) markers and what they are
- A foreigner's perspective of OB markers in Singapore

Reading 2: **EU2**

Excerpted from
Singapore must drop 'out-of-bounds' censorship
Michael Backman | Asia Online | 13 August 2004

What is Singapore? A country or a child-care centre? That is a question Singapore's new Prime Minister, Lee Hsien Loong, might do well to reflect on.
Singaporeans are sophisticated, well travelled and rich - yet the rules governing their media belong to another era. When it comes to local media, Singaporeans are fed a diet of mush and only the occasional solid.

Why? Singapore is no longer threatened by communism. The battle was won long ago and it's time to loosen up. Media freedom today is a business issue. Media that doesn't simply report but also scrutinises promotes better corporate governance in government and business. The threat of media exposure is a powerful one. But not in Singapore.

Defamation laws and anti-racial vilification laws can deal with libel and racial vilification in the media, but Singapore maintains a system whereby practically every media outlet ultimately is controlled by the Government, is licensed annually and is subject to unwritten and vague "out-of-bounds" (OB) markers - topics that the Government doesn't like canvassed in the media. And in the event these OB topics are discussed in the media, the Government promises retribution.

Last year, I fell foul of these mysterious markers. Information Minister Lee Boon Yang said in a speech that I had "crossed the line" and sought to intervene in Singapore's domestic politics. I'd written a column on media regulation in Singapore, published in the local, Government-linked Today newspaper.
Dr Lee's definition of what constitutes politics seems unique. Not that he's defined it, of course.

Earlier this year, another of my columns was published in the Today newspaper. It was about the high salaries awarded to Singapore Government ministers. I wrote that I felt those high salaries were justified. The piece received the relevant OKs from the information ministry and was published. This made clear something else about Singapore's OB markers. You only actually cross one if what you say differs from the Government line. From that, I deduced that it's not me that's political, it's the OB markers.

OB markers that are not spelt out demand that people think within a certain mindset and their nefarious nature means that people err on the side of caution. OB markers contribute to the problem of the lack of creativity and entrepreneurship in Singapore, the very problem that the Government always complains about.

Look at the case of AirAsia, Asia's first budget airline and the most significant development in East Asian aviation in decades. Where did AirAsia originate? Not in Singapore with its excellent, Government-built aviation facilities, but in Malaysia. And so on this, as in many matters now, Singapore is dancing to a Malaysian tune.

OB markers encourage people to think only inside the box, to avoid being courageous and daring - the very attributes that we associate with Lee Kuan Yew, particularly in the early years. Singapore needs more people with the courage and the daring of a young Lee Kuan Yew, not just in politics, but in business and in all aspects of life. But what has

happened to those attributes? There is far too much cowering in Singapore, particularly by its journalists.
But the greatest threat posed by the Government's OB markers is to the rule of law.

Singapore has become as rich as it is because it has a strong rule of law. The rule of law requires that laws be written down, that they are precise and that they are gazetted.

But the Singapore Government's OB markers are nebulous. They are not written down. They are not transparent. And they are applied in a discretionary manner. They are absolutely contrary to the rule of law. They offer a sample of the sort of legal chaos that reigns in China and Indonesia.

The views of foreigners particularly are targeted by the Singapore Government for censorship. But surely foreigners have a right to comment on Singapore, in Singapore. They have a right to be part of the national debate. Why? Because foreigners have invested billions of dollars in Singapore. Those billions might not buy the right to vote, but they buy the right to express an opinion. Taking foreigners' money but not allowing them a voice betrays a lack of self-confidence on the part of the Government.

Uncodified OB markers threaten Singapore's reputation as a place that observes the rule of law. And they threaten its prosperity. The Singapore Government's needless, exquisite sensitivity on this makes the world laugh at Singapore. That is a great shame because in so many other areas the Singapore Government has done so well.

Reflection Questions

- Summarise two key arguments the author makes against OB markers in Singapore.
- Should OB markers apply to foreigners here?
- Why do you think OB markers exist in Singapore? Are they necessary today?
- What are some of the pros and cons of having OB markers on free speech in Singapore?

Essay Questions:

1) Is regulation of the press desirable? (Camb 2017)
2) 'Media regulation is needed now more than ever.' Discuss. (RI Y5 Promo 2017)

This reading will introduce you to:

- A tension between the views of the majority and a minority group in Singapore
- Considerations on how government and society should manage civic space to ensure harmony between conflicting groups

EU2

Reading 3:

'Traditional values' wear white campaign returning on Pink Dot weekend

Regina Marie Lee | TODAY Online | 23 May 2016

A campaign urging the public to wear white to promote traditional family values will be held again — this time led by Christian pastor Lawrence Khong — to coincide with the annual Pink Dot rally championing the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community next month.

The campaign was first held two years ago by Islamic religious teacher Noor Deros under the name Wearwhite, but Mr Noor said the movement has since moved on to focus on educational programmes, and has no plans to carry out the campaign this year. Mr Khong's iteration of the campaign is dubbed We.Wear.White, and calls on the public to wear white on June 4 and 5 as a "pro-family, pro-Government, pro-Singapore message". It comes as the Pink Dot rally, to be held at Hong Lim Park on June 4, is set to introduce a new format this year — allowing local participants to hold up placards instead of the customary pink torchlights, a move organisers said was aimed at letting people "have a say".

The rally saw attendance grow to a record 28,000 people last year.

Mr Khong, chairman of LoveSingapore, a 100-strong network of Christian churches, said on the LoveSingapore Facebook page on May 19 that the campaign hopes to show that the church's stance on heterosexual marriage and the "natural family" is in keeping with the social norms of "Singapore's conservative majority".

"It is a message to LGBT activists that there is a conservative majority in Singapore who will push back and will not allow them to promote their homosexual lifestyle and liberal ideologies that openly and outrightly contradict our laws, our Government's stated policies, our national core values, and the conservative majority's views on public morality, marriage and family," said Mr Khong, who is also senior pastor at Faith Community Baptist Church.

The call was open to all Singaporeans regardless of race, language or religion, as long as they supported "pro-natural family values", he added. Mr Khong has regularly spoken out against homosexuality, and had also thrown his support behind the Wearwhite campaign in 2014, igniting vigorous public debate and prompting other religious organisations to interject, while Pink Dot organisers deployed additional security in light of the public opposition.

The National Council of Churches of Singapore said then that while it does not condone homosexual or bisexual practices, it also does not condemn those who are struggling with their gender identity and sexual orientation. The Islamic Religious Council of Singapore

(Muis) called for a non-confrontational approach and said that programmes conducted in mosques should not be seen as a movement to oppose members of the LGBT community.

When contacted on Monday (May 23), Mr Noor expressed support for LoveSingapore's call, but said Wearwhite's focus now is on "directed Islamic educational programmes" for youth. "We decided that real education in contrast to sloganeering and campaigning is the key to an effective and long-term change," he said.

Last year, LoveSingapore also called on church members to wear white to weekend services on the Pink Dot weekend. Wearwhite did not hold a campaign to coincide with the Pink Dot rally, but it called on Muslims to dress in white on the first evening prayer to mark the start of Ramadan on June 17. Mr Noor said it was done not as a counter-reaction to Pink Dot, but to spread awareness on the concept of "freedom and love according to Islam".

In response to TODAY's queries, Pink Dot spokesperson Paerin Choa cited churches and religious communities that accept and embrace LGBT people, such as the Free Community Church. "In a multi-cultural, multi-religious and multi-racial country like Singapore, with secularism at its core, citizens are generally accepting of diversity," he said. "We believe that families should be built on love and understanding, rather than exclusion."

The executive committee of Humanist Society (Singapore) also commented on LoveSingapore's move, saying the group's "repeated emphasis on the word 'majority' (in its Facebook post) is troubling".

"In Singapore's multiracial, multi-religious society, no particular religion or group can claim to speak for the majority," it said in a Facebook post. "The Humanist Society (Singapore) calls for respectful, informed discussion on the topic, based on reason, evidence, and compassion around the cause."

Reflection Questions

(i) What do you think the Wearwhite movement shows about Singaporeans?
(ii) Do groups with non-mainstream beliefs/practices/ideologies have a right to speak out?
(iii) How should society and government deal with conflicting beliefs?

For discussion:

1. 'A good government should always put the interests of the majority first.' Discuss. (2016 RI Y6 CT1)
2. To what extent should a government consider unpopular views? (2017 RI Y6 CT1)

This article will help you to:

- Understand that a successful revolution involves more than simply overthrowing the existing "tyrant" or government
- Recognise that adopting "democracy" post-revolution may backfire for states that have not historically practised such a system of governance
- Consider how ensuring strong civil institutions – more so than merely having powerful protests and dramatic "dethroning" of despots – is vital for a revolution to achieve its aims

Reading 4: **EU3**

The Social Laboratory

Shane Harris | Foreign Policy

In October 2002, Peter Ho, the permanent secretary of defense for the tiny island city-state of Singapore, paid a visit to the offices of the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), the U.S. Defense Department's R&D outfit best known for developing the M16 rifle, stealth aircraft technology, and the Internet. Ho didn't want to talk about military hardware. Rather, he had made the daylong plane trip to meet with retired Navy Rear Adm. John Poindexter, one of DARPA's then-senior program directors and a former national security advisor to President Ronald Reagan. Ho had heard that Poindexter was running a novel experiment to harness enormous amounts of electronic information and analyze it for patterns of suspicious activity -- mainly potential terrorist attacks.

The two men met in Poindexter's small office in Virginia, and on a whiteboard, Poindexter sketched out for Ho the core concepts of his imagined system, which Poindexter called Total Information Awareness (TIA). It would gather up all manner of electronic records -- emails, phone logs, Internet searches, airline reservations, hotel bookings, credit card transactions, medical reports -- and then, based on predetermined scenarios of possible terrorist plots, look for the digital "signatures" or footprints that would-be attackers might have left in the data space. The idea was to spot the bad guys in the planning stages and to alert law enforcement and intelligence officials to intervene.

"I was impressed with the sheer audacity of the concept: that by connecting a vast number of databases, that we could find the proverbial needle in the haystack," Ho later recalled. He wanted to know whether the system, which was not yet deployed in the United States, could be used in Singapore to detect the warning signs of terrorism. It was a matter of some urgency. Just 10 days earlier, terrorists had bombed a nightclub, a bar, and the U.S. consular office on the Indonesian island of Bali, killing 202 people and raising the specter of Islamist terrorism in Southeast Asia.

Ho returned home inspired that Singapore could put a TIA-like system to good use. Four months later he got his chance, when an outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) swept through the country, killing 33, dramatically slowing the economy, and shaking the tiny island nation to its core. Using Poindexter's design, the government soon established the Risk Assessment and Horizon Scanning program (RAHS, pronounced "roz") inside a Defense Ministry agency responsible for preventing terrorist attacks and "nonconventional" strikes, such as those using chemical or biological weapons -- an effort to see how Singapore could avoid or better manage "future shocks." Singaporean officials gave speeches and interviews about how they were deploying big data in the service of national defense -- a pitch that jibed perfectly with the country's technophilic culture.

Back in the United States, however, the TIA program had become the subject of enormous controversy. Just a few weeks after Poindexter met with Ho, journalists reported that the Defense Department was funding experimental research on mining massive amounts of Americans' private data. Some members of Congress and privacy and civil liberties advocates called for TIA to be shut down. It was -- but in name only.

In late 2003, a group of U.S. lawmakers more sympathetic to Poindexter's ideas arranged for his experiment to be broken into several discrete programs, all of which were given new, classified code names and placed under the supervision of the National Security Agency (NSA). Unbeknownst to almost all Americans at the time, the NSA was running a highly classified program of its own that actually was collecting Americans' phone and Internet communications records and mining them for connections to terrorists. Elements of that program were described in classified documents disclosed in 2013 by former NSA contractor Edward Snowden, sparking the most significant and contentious debate about security and privacy in America in more than four decades.

Because of such uproars, many current and former U.S. officials have come to see Singapore as a model for how they'd build an intelligence apparatus if privacy laws and a long tradition of civil liberties weren't standing in the way. After Poindexter left DARPA in 2003, he became a consultant to RAHS, and many American spooks have traveled to Singapore to study the program firsthand. They are drawn not just to Singapore's embrace of mass surveillance but also to the country's curious mix of democracy and authoritarianism, in which a paternalistic government ensures people's basic needs -- housing, education, security -- in return for almost reverential deference. It is a law-and-order society, and the definition of "order" is all-encompassing.

Ten years after its founding, the RAHS program has evolved beyond anything Poindexter could have imagined. Across Singapore's national ministries and departments today, armies of civil servants use scenario-based planning and big-data analysis from RAHS for a host of applications beyond fending off bombs and bugs. They use it to plan procurement cycles and budgets, make economic forecasts, inform immigration policy, study housing markets, and develop education plans for Singaporean schoolchildren -- and they are looking to analyze Facebook posts, Twitter messages, and other social media in an attempt to "gauge the nation's mood" about everything from government social programs to the potential for civil unrest.

In other words, Singapore has become a laboratory not only for testing how mass surveillance and big-data analysis might prevent terrorism, but for determining whether technology can be used to engineer a more harmonious society.

In a country run by engineers and technocrats, it's an article of faith among the governing elite, and seemingly among most of the public, that Singapore's 3.8 million citizens and permanent residents -- a mix of ethnic Chinese, Indians, and Malays who live crammed into 716 square kilometers along with another 1.5 million nonresident immigrants and foreign workers -- are perpetually on a knife's edge between harmony and chaos.

"Singapore is a small island," residents are quick to tell visitors, reciting the mantra to explain both their young country's inherent fragility and its obsessive vigilance. Since Singapore gained independence from its union with Malaysia in 1965, the nation has been fixated on the forces aligned against it, from the military superiority of potentially aggressive and much larger neighbors, to its lack of indigenous energy resources, to the country's longtime dependence on Malaysia for fresh water. "Singapore shouldn't exist. It's an invented country," one top-ranking government official told me on a recent visit, trying to capture the existential peril that seems to inform so many of the country's decisions.

But in less than 50 years, Singapore has achieved extraordinary success. Despite the government's quasi-socialistic cradle-to-grave care, the city-state is enthusiastically pro-business, and a 2012 report ranked it as the world's wealthiest country, based on GDP per capita. Singapore's port handles 20 percent of the world's shipping containers and nearly half of the world's crude oil shipments; its airport is the principal air-cargo hub for all of Southeast Asia; and thousands of corporations have placed their Asian regional headquarters there. This economic rise might be unprecedented in the modern era, yet the more Singapore has grown, the more Singaporeans fear loss. The colloquial word kiasu, which stems from a vernacular Chinese word that means "fear of losing," is a

shorthand by which natives concisely convey the sense of vulnerability that seems coded into their social DNA (as well as their anxiety about missing out -- on the best schools, the best jobs, the best new consumer products). Singaporeans' boundless ambition is matched only by their extreme aversion to risk.

That is one reason the SARS outbreak flung the door wide open for RAHS. From late February to July of 2003, the virus flamed through the country. It turned out that three women who were hospitalized and treated for pneumonia in Singapore had contracted SARS while traveling in Hong Kong. Although two of the women recovered without infecting anyone, the third patient sparked an outbreak when she passed the virus to 22 people, including a nurse who went on to infect dozens of others. The officials identified a network of three more so-called "superspreaders" -- together, five people caused more than half the country's 238 infections. If Singaporean officials had detected any of these cases sooner, they might have halted the spread of the virus.

Health officials formed a task force two weeks after the virus was first spotted and took extraordinary measures to contain it, but they knew little about how it was spreading. They distributed thermometers to more than 1 million households, along with descriptions of SARS's symptoms. Officials checked for fevers at schools and businesses, and they even used infrared thermal imagers to scan travelers at the airport. The government invoked Singapore's Infectious Diseases Act and ordered in-home quarantines for more than 850 people who showed signs of infection, enforcing the rule with surveillance devices and electronic monitoring equipment. Investigators tracked down all people with whom the victims had been in contact. The government closed all schools at the pre-university level, affecting 600,000 students.

By mid-April, fewer people were visiting the country, and hotel occupancy rates plummeted, along with revenues at shops and restaurants. Taxi drivers reported fewer fares. The unemployment rate ticked up. Officials slashed the country's economic growth forecast for 2003, from a strong 2.5 percent to a possible 0.5 percent. When the full effects of the outbreak were finally measured, the economy had actually contracted 4.2 percent from the same time the previous year. The SARS outbreak reminded Singaporeans that their national prosperity could be imperiled in just a few months by a microscopic invader that might wipe out a significant portion of the densely packed island's population.

Months after the virus abated, Ho and his colleagues ran a simulation using Poindexter's TIA ideas to see whether they could have detected the outbreak. Ho will not reveal what forms of information he and his colleagues used -- by U.S. standards, Singapore's privacy laws are virtually nonexistent, and it's possible that the government collected private communications, financial data, public transportation records, and medical information without any court approval or private consent -- but Ho claims that the experiment was very encouraging. It showed that if Singapore had previously installed a big-data analysis system, it could have spotted the signs of a potential outbreak two months before the virus hit the country's shores. Prior to the SARS outbreak, for example, there were reports of strange, unexplained lung infections in China. Threads of information like that, if woven together, could in theory warn analysts of pending crises.)

The RAHS system was operational a year later, and it immediately began "canvassing a range of sources for weak signals of potential future shocks," one senior Singaporean security official involved in the launch later recalled. The system uses a mixture of proprietary and commercial technology and is based on a "cognitive model" designed to mimic the human thought process -- a key design feature influenced by Poindexter's TIA system. RAHS, itself, doesn't think. It's a tool that helps human beings sift huge stores of data for clues on just about everything. It is designed to analyze information from practically any source -- the input is almost incidental -- and to create models that can be used to forecast potential events. Those scenarios can then be shared across the Singaporean government and be picked up by whatever ministry or department might find them useful. Using a repository of information called an ideas database, RAHS and its teams of analysts create "narratives" about how various threats or strategic opportunities

might play out. The point is not so much to predict the future as to envision a number of potential futures that can tell the government what to watch and when to dig further.

The officials running RAHS today are tight-lipped about exactly what data they monitor, though they acknowledge that a significant portion of "articles" in their databases come from publicly available information, including news reports, blog posts, Facebook updates, and Twitter messages. ("These articles have been trawled in by robots or uploaded manually" by analysts, says one program document.) But RAHS doesn't need to rely only on open-source material or even the sorts of intelligence that most governments routinely collect: In Singapore, electronic surveillance of residents and visitors is pervasive and widely accepted.

Surveillance starts in the home, where all Internet traffic in Singapore is filtered, a senior Defense Ministry official told me (commercial and business traffic is not screened, the official said). Traffic is monitored primarily for two sources of prohibited content: porn and racist invective. About 100 websites featuring sexual content are officially blocked. The list is a state secret, but it's generally believed to include Playboy and Hustler magazine's websites and others with sexually laden words in the title. (One Singaporean told me it's easy to find porn -- just look for the web addresses without any obviously sexual words in them.) All other sites, including foreign media, social networks, and blogs, are open to Singaporeans. But post a comment or an article that the law deems racially offensive or inflammatory, and the police may come to your door.

Singaporeans have been charged under the Sedition Act for making racist statements online, but officials are quick to point out that they don't consider this censorship. Hateful speech threatens to tear the nation's multi-ethnic social fabric and is therefore a national security threat, they say. After the 2012 arrest of two Chinese teenage boys, who police alleged had made racist comments on Facebook and Twitter about ethnic Malays, a senior police official explained to reporters: "The right to free speech does not extend to making remarks that incite racial and religious friction and conflict. The Internet may be a convenient medium to express one's views, but members of the public should bear in mind that they are no less accountable for their actions online."

Singaporean officials stress that citizens are free to criticize the government, and they do. In fact, one of the country's most popular books this year has been a provocative rebuttal to the decades-old official dogma concerning the country's existential peril. Hard Choices: Challenging the Singapore Consensus, by Donald Low and Sudhir Thomas Vadaketh, argues that the ruling People's Action Party, which has held uninterrupted power since 1959, may have invented the notion that Singapore is one step away from ruin in a bid to subdue the masses and cement the government's hold on power.

Commentary that impugns an individual's character or motives, however, is off-limits because, like racial invective, it is seen as a threat to the nation's delicate balance. Journalists, including foreign news organizations, have frequently been charged under the country's strict libel laws. In 2010, the New York Times Co. settled a lawsuit over a column in the International Herald Tribune about "dynastic politics," which implied that Lee Hsien Loong, the prime minister, owed his job to nepotism. Lee's father is Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore's first prime minister, co-founder of the People's Action Party, and the country's patriarch -- revered in Singapore like George Washington might be in the United States if he were still alive. The company paid $114,000, and the Herald Tribune published an apology.

Not only does the government keep a close eye on what its citizens write and say publicly, but it also has the legal authority to monitor all manner of electronic communications, including phone calls, under several domestic security laws aimed at preventing terrorism, prosecuting drug dealing, and blocking the printing of "undesirable" material. According to the civil rights watchdog Privacy International, "the government has wide discretionary

powers … to conduct searches without warrants, as is normally required, if it determines that national security, public safety or order, or the public interest are at issue."

The surveillance extends to visitors as well. Mobile-phone SIM cards are an easy way for tourists to make cheap calls and are available at nearly any store -- as ubiquitous as chewing gum in the United States. (Incidentally, the Singaporean government banned commercial sales of gum because chewers were depositing their used wads on subway doors, among other places.) Criminals like disposable SIM cards because they can be hard to trace to an individual user. But to purchase a card in Singapore, a customer has to provide a passport number, which is linked to the card, meaning the phone company -- and, presumably, by extension the government -- has a record of every call made on a supposedly disposable, anonymous device.

Privacy International reported that Singaporeans who want to obtain an Internet account must also show identification -- in the form of the national ID card that every citizen carries -- and Internet service providers "reportedly provide, on a regular basis, information on users to government officials." The Ministry of Home Affairs also has the authority to compel businesses in Singapore to hand over information about threats against their computer networks in order to defend the country's computer systems from malicious software and hackers, a defense official told me. The U.S. Congress has been debating for years now a similar provision that could compel some industries deemed crucial to the U.S. economy or security to hand over threat data, but it has been blocked by the Chamber of Commerce and businesses that see it as costly, heavy-handed government regulation of private security matters.

Perhaps no form of surveillance is as pervasive in Singapore as its network of security cameras, which police have installed in more than 150 "zones" across the country. Even though they adorn the corners of buildings, are fastened to elevator ceilings, and protrude from the walls of hotels, stores, and apartment lobbies, I had little sense of being surrounded by digital hawk eyes while walking around Singapore, any more than while surfing the web I could detect the digital filters of government speech-minders. Most Singaporeans I met hardly cared that they live in a surveillance bubble and were acutely aware that they're not unique in some respects. "Don't you have cameras everywhere in London and New York?" many of the people I talked to asked. (In fact, according to city officials, "London has one of the highest number of CCTV cameras of any city in the world.") Singaporeans presumed that the cameras deterred criminals and accepted that in a densely populated country, there are simply things you shouldn't say. "In Singapore, people generally feel that if you're not a criminal or an opponent of the government, you don't have anything to worry about," one senior government official told me.

This year, the World Justice Project, a U.S.-based advocacy group that studies adherence to the rule of law, ranked Singapore as the world's second-safest country. Prized by Singaporeans, this distinction has earned the country a reputation as one of the most stable places to do business in Asia. Interpol is also building a massive new center in Singapore to police cybercrime. It's only the third major Interpol site outside Lyon, France, and Argentina, and it reflects both the international law enforcement group's desire to crack down on cybercrime and its confidence that Singapore is the best place in Asia to lead that fight.

But it's hard to know whether the low crime rates and adherence to the rule of law are more a result of pervasive surveillance or Singaporeans' unspoken agreement that they mustn't turn on one another, lest the tiny island come apart at the seams. If it's the latter, then the Singapore experiment suggests that governments can install cameras on every block in their cities and mine every piece of online data and all that still wouldn't be enough to dramatically curb crime, prevent terrorism, or halt an epidemic. A national unity of purpose, a sense that we all sink or swim together, has to be instilled in the population. So Singapore is using technology to do that too.

In 2009, Singapore's leaders decided to expand the RAHS system and the use of scenario planning far beyond the realm of national security -- at least as it's commonly understood in the United States. They established the Strategic Futures Network, staffed by deputy secretaries from every ministry, to export the RAHS methods across the entire government. The network looks beyond national security concerns and uses future planning to address all manner of domestic social and economic issues, including identifying "strategic surprise" and so-called "black swan" events that might abruptly upset national stability.

The RAHS team has mounted a study on the public's attitude toward the housing system and what people want out of it. The provision of affordable, equitable housing is a fundamental promise that the government makes to its citizens, and keeping them happy in their neighborhoods has been deemed essential to national harmony. Eighty percent of Singapore's citizens live in public housing -- fashionable, multiroom apartments in high-rise buildings, some of which would sell for around U.S. $1 million on the open market. The government, which also owns about 80 percent of the city's land, sells apartments at interest rates below 3 percent and allows buyers to repay their mortgages out of a forced retirement savings account, to which employers also make a contribution. The effect is that nearly all Singaporean citizens own their own home, and it doesn't take much of a bite out of their income.

Future planning has been applied to a broad variety of policy problems. It has been used to study people's changing attitudes about how kids should be educated and whether it's time to lessen Singapore's historically strong emphasis on test scores for judging student achievement. The Singapore Tourism Board used the methodology to examine trends about who will be visiting the country over the next decade. Officials have tried to forecast whether "alternative foods" derived from experiments and laboratories could reduce Singapore's near-total dependence on food imports.

Singaporeans have even begun studying what officials describe as a pervasive "nostalgia" among many citizens, who are longing for a simpler, slower-paced time before the city-state's breathtaking economic rise, moving from Third World to First World status in a generation and a half. "But there is also an ugly side to nostalgia," the government warns. "It can be about rejecting certain aspects of the present, such as the growth of Singapore into a diverse, global city, and cultivating an insular sense of nationalism. We explore what can be done to channel this urge for nostalgia in a direction that is more forward-looking."

But the future is one of the things that worries Singaporeans. In 2013, the government issued a so-called "population white paper" that described its efforts to grow the country and forecast a 30 percent population increase by 2030, bringing the number of residents to as many as 6.9 million in the already crowded city-state. Immigrants were expected to make up half the total. Singaporeans revolted. Four thousand people attended one rally against the population plan -- one of the largest public protests in the country's history. The white paper revealed a potential double threat: Singaporeans were already turning against the government for growing the country too big and too fast, and now they were turning on their immigrant neighbors, whom they blamed for falling wages and rising home prices.

The protests shook the "nation's mood" at the highest level, and the government was prepared to take drastic measures to quell the unrest, starting with cutting immigrant labor. The National Population and Talent Division -- a kind of immigration-cum-human-resources department -- intends to slow the growth of the workforce to about 1 to 2 percent per year over the rest of the decade, which is a dramatic departure from the more than 3 percent annual growth over the past 30 years. With that, GDP growth is likely to retract to an average of 3 to 4 percent per year. It is impossible to know whether wealthy Singaporeans -- and the country's foreign investors -- will tolerate an economic slowdown. (Or whether a country with an abysmal fertility rate of 1.2 children can even sustain its economy without foreign labor.) But the government has concluded that a slowdown is the right price to pay for keeping a harmonious society. The data tells it so.

Singapore is now undertaking a multiyear initiative to study how people in lower-level service or manufacturing jobs could be replaced by automated systems like computers or robots, or be outsourced. Officials want to understand where the jobs of the future will come from so that they can retrain current workers and adjust education curricula. But turning lower-end jobs into more highly skilled ones -- which native Singaporeans can do -- is a step toward pushing lower-skilled immigrants out of the country.

If national stability means more surveillance and big-data scanning, Singaporeans seem willing to make the trade-off. "In Singapore, the threshold for surveillance is deemed relatively higher," according to one RAHS study, with the majority of citizens having accepted the "surveillance situation" as necessary for deterring terrorism and "self-radicalization." Singaporeans speak, often reverently, of the "social contract" between the people and their government. They have consciously chosen to surrender certain civil liberties and individual freedoms in exchange for fundamental guarantees: security, education, affordable housing, health care.

But the social contract is negotiable and "should not be taken for granted," the RAHS team warns. "Nor should it be expected to be perpetual. Surveillance measures considered acceptable today may not be tolerable by future generations of Singaporeans." At least not if those measures are applied only to them. One future study that examined "surveillance from below" concluded that the proliferation of smartphones and social media is turning the watched into the watchers. These new technologies "have empowered citizens to intensely scrutinise government elites, corporations and law enforcement officials … increasing their exposure to reputational risks," the study found. From the angry citizen who takes a photo of a policeman sleeping in his car and posts it to Twitter to an opposition blogger who challenges party orthodoxy, Singapore's leaders cannot escape the watch of their own citizens.

In the nation's 2011 elections, the People's Action Party won "only" 81 out of 87 seats in Parliament, an outcome that most political observers considered a disaster. The opposition had its best showing in Singapore's history. For the first time, partisan adversaries mounted a credible threat to the status quo, and Singaporeans voted in larger numbers against the government's management of the country. Even Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong saw his party's victory as an alarming loss. "It marks a distinct shift in our political landscape," Lee told reporters after the vote. "Many [Singaporeans] wish for the government to adopt a different style and approach."

The election results had little to do with surveillance per se, but surveillance and its ostensible benefits are an integral part of how the government has defined Singapore as a nation. When Peter Ho, the senior defense official, met with John Poindexter back in 2002 about the Total Information Awareness program, Poindexter suggested that Singapore would face a much easier time installing a big-data analysis system than he had in the United States, because Singapore's privacy laws were so much more permissive. But Ho replied that the law wasn't the only consideration. The public's acceptance of government programs and policies was not absolute, particularly when it came to those that impinged on people's rights and privileges.

It sounds like an accurate forecast. In this tiny laboratory of big-data mining, the experiment is yielding an unexpected result: The more time Singaporeans spend online, the more they read, the more they share their thoughts with each other and their government, the more they've come to realize that Singapore's light-touch repression is not entirely normal among developed, democratic countries -- and that their government is not infallible. To the extent that Singapore is a model for other countries to follow, it may tell them more about the limits of big data and that not every problem can be predicted.

Reflection Questions:

- How do data-driven predictive technologies identify and forecast risk for the future?
- To what extent can technology be used to engineer a more harmonious society in SG?
- How can Big Data mined through specific technologies either preserve or threaten human dignity in Singapore?
- How does the mining of big data impact the "who", "where", "when", and "how" of mass surveillance in Singapore, including policing?
- Consider the impact on dissent and compliance.

♦ Consider Foucault's metaphor of the panopticon and his argument that one might be under surveillance conditions. How does the panoptic state condition behaviour?
♦ How then can citizens' privacy and liberties be protected in order to foster a more ethical, transparent, accountable, and dignified social order?

Essay Questions:

- To what extent can the regulation of scientific or technological developments be justified? (Cambridge 2014)
- How effectively is public health promoted and managed in your society? (Cambridge 2015)
- How far is science fiction becoming fact? (Cambridge 2017)
- 'In an increasingly uncertain world, there is little point in predicting the future.' Discuss. (RI Prelim 2017)
- Are machines making humans obsolete? (RI Prelim 2017)

This next reading will introduce you to:

- The challenges governments face in maintaining equilibrium between individual rights and state priorities.
- Singapore's unique model of governance, its merits and shortcomings, as well as how a country's economic dependencies can shape its political thinking.

Reading 5: The Myth of 'Trade-Offs'

EU2, EU3 & EU5

Calvin Cheng | 28 March 2015

The Western press has been relentless in trotting out the opinion that Mr Lee Kuan Yew had built Singapore's undeniable economic success while trading off fundamental civil liberties.

Much as I understand that it is in the West's fundamental DNA to assert certain inalienable freedoms, as a Singaporean, I strenuously object that there has been any such trade-off

Some of my Western friends who have never lived here for any period of time have sometimes self-righteously proclaimed, no doubt after reading the cliches in the media, that they could never live under the "stifling and draconian" laws that we have.

My answer to them is simple: Are you the sort to urinate in public when a toilet isn't available, the sort to vandalise public property, the sort that would leave a mess in a public toilet that you share with others? Are you the sort who would throw rubbish on the streets for others to pick up, the sort that would stick gum on train doors or leave them on the floor to dry up into one ugly black scar in the pavement? Are you perhaps a drug smuggler? Because we execute those. Or maybe you molest women? Because we would whip you. Are you the sort that would get drunk and then get into fights and maybe beat up a stranger in the bar? Back home you may get away with it but if you are that sort, then maybe this place isn't for you.

In short, are you a civilised person who wants to live in a civilised society? Because the things you cannot do in Singapore are precisely the sort that civilised people should not do anyway. If you are, you have nothing to fear.

Or maybe like the Western press has kept saying these few days in their commentaries on Mr Lee, you fear that you could be locked up because we do not have freedom of speech?

Do you want to come here and insult other people's race and religion? Maybe these are fundamental freedoms in your country, but in ours, because we have experienced deadly racial riots at the birth of our country, these are a no-no. But then again, why would you want to purposely offend others anyway?

Or maybe you want to tell lies about our public figures, accuse them of corruption when you have no evidence to back them up, or accuse them of stealing, cheating, or all manner of untruths? If so, then be prepared to be sued for libel. Even if Western societies think that you can say these things about your political figures, we don't and we are better for it.

And those political opponents of Mr Lee who have been bankrupted, allegedly because they were such formidable foes? No such thing. Mr JB Jeyeratnam and Mr Chee Soon Juan may be the martyrs much adored by the Western press, but have you heard of Mr

Chiam See Tong, the longest-serving opposition Member of Parliament who won five consecutive elections against Mr Lee's People's Action Party? Or Mr Low Thia Kiang, who not only won five consecutive general elections, but in the last one in 2011, also led a team that unseated the incumbent Minister for Foreign Affairs and our first-ever female Cabinet minister?

Both these opposition MPs have never been sued, much less bankrupted. In fact, Mr Chiam won several libel lawsuits against Mr Lee's ministers. You would never have heard of them, or have chosen not to, because it doesn't fit the Western narrative that legitimate opposition was stifled by Mr Lee through lawsuits. It doesn't suit your narrative of trade-offs. The fact is that every single opposition politician successfully sued for libel engaged in the type of politics that we do not want, the kind founded on vicious lies being told in the name of political campaigning.

What about detention without trial? Again and again ad nauseam, the Western press has used the example of Operation Cold Store to bolster its narrative of Mr Lee as an autocrat, where 111 left-wing politicians were arrested on suspicion of being communist in 1964.

But what about Operation Demetrius, where in 1971, 342 persons suspected of being involved with the IRA were detained without trial by the British Army? Or closer to the present where thousands have been interred without trial by the United States in Guantanamo Bay on suspicion of being terrorists? Firstly, detention without trial is not something used only by the Singapore Government, but countries need to make their own judgment about applying such laws when they feel their security is threatened and the normal judicial process is inadequate; in the 60s and 70s, communists inciting armed revolution were Singapore's greatest threat.

Whether those people were indeed communists will be a question no doubt debated endlessly by historians, in the same way as whether the 342 in Northern Ireland were indeed IRA members, or the thousands in Guantanamo Bay were indeed terrorists.

So where is the trade-off? How are we unfree?

I tell you what freedom is.

Freedom is being able to walk on the streets unmolested in the wee hours in the morning, to be able to leave one's door open and not fear that one would be burgled. Freedom is the woman who can ride buses and trains alone; freedom is not having to avoid certain subway stations after night falls. Freedom is knowing our children can go to school without fear of drugs, or being mowed down by some insane person with a gun. Freedom is knowing that we are not bound by our class, our race, our religion, and we can excel for the individuals that we are - the freedom to accomplish. Freedom is living in one of the least corrupt societies in the world, knowing that our ability to get things done is not going to be limited by our ability to pay someone. Freedom is fresh air and clean streets, because nothing is more inimical to our liberty of movement than being trapped at home because of suffocating smog.

These are the freedoms that Singaporeans have, freedoms that were built on the vision and hard work of Mr Lee, our first Prime Minister. And we have all of these, these liberties, while also being one of the richest countries in the world.

There was no trade-off.
Not for us.

Reflection Questions:

- In this piece, the author asserts that fundamental civil liberties, valued in more liberal democracies, such as freedom of speech and expression, ultimately restrict the social freedoms Singaporeans today enjoy. How valid is this perspective?
- From Singapore's post-independence years to now, has the country relaxed its curbs on freedom of expression, and if so, how?

Essay Questions:

- Is regulation of the press desirable? (Cambridge, 2017)
- How far, in your society, should unpopular views be open to discussion? (Cambridge, 2013)
- It has been said that Singapore is economically First World but socially Third World. What is your view? (RI 2011 Yr6 Prelim)

This reading will help you to:

- Recognise that race and religion continue to shape perceptions and policies in Singapore
- Reflect on the impact of multiracial policies in Singapore
- Understand that fostering national identity in a multicultural context is a tricky process that requires constant, meaningful engagement with different parties

Reading 6: Of Race and National Identity **EU4**

Lydia Lim | The Straits Times | 22 Oct 2017

In the five weeks since Madam Halimah Yacob was sworn in as President on Sept 14, I witnessed two incidents that showed how race continues to colour the way Singaporeans view each other.

The first took place at a concert at which President Halimah was the guest of honour. When she entered the concert hall with her entourage, there was a stir of excitement. Some people whipped out their smartphones to snap photos of her.

A young boy sitting in front of me - intrigued by the adults' reaction and wondering who the celebrity was - climbed up on his chair for a better look. On seeing the President, who was as usual wearing a *tudung* and on this occasion accompanied by a group of men in batik shirts, he exclaimed to his sister: "It's just a bunch of Malay people!"

The second incident involved a cab driver zooming past a young Indian man who had flagged his taxi. I was standing nearby waiting my turn, and I had a sense that the cab driver would have stopped for me if I had raised my hand. I chose not to.

During a recent visit to New York City, I had seen cab drivers refusing to pick up a black man. Still, I found it disturbing to see a similar instance of casual racism here in Singapore, and in my neighbourhood.

There is no denying that race and religion shape many people's sense of identity, and how they view and choose to interact with others in society.

Recent events both here and in other countries have also cast a spotlight on how race and religion underpin some people's sense of national identity. These events include the recent federal election in Germany, the presidency of Mr Donald Trump which is now into its 10th month, and closer to home, the plight of the Rohingya people and Singapore's own presidential election.

In Germany, the recent election saw the rise of the right-wing Alternative for Germany(AfD) party - now the third largest party in the Bundestag - after a campaign in which its leaders and members vowed to "take back our country and our Volk!" and said the country should stop apologising for the Nazis; as well as an election manifesto with a section setting out why "Islam does not belong to Germany".

In the United States, President Trump has both stirred outrage and pumped up his electoral base with his anti-immigrant, anti-Islam stance and his failure to condemn the

racist values of white nationalists and supremacists, including those behind an August rally in Charlottesville that left one woman dead.

Here in South-east Asia, the Myanmar government's refusal to recognise the Rohingya people as citizens - even though they have resided for decades in an area in Rakhine state located within Myanmar's borders - exploded in a fresh round of violence in August. That has in turn triggered loud protests in several of the region's Muslim-majority countries, including Malaysia and Indonesia, as an expression of solidarity with the Rohingya who are Muslim, unlike the majority of Myanmar people who are Buddhist.

And last but not least, Singapore's presidential election, which was reserved for Malay candidates and thus, in the eyes of some citizens, a repudiation of two founding national values, namely multiracialism and meritocracy.

How do race and religion relate to national identity? The latter is a fuzzy concept that serves to unite members of nation states in ways that can be either inclusive or exclusive. In a thought-provoking piece on the Rohingya crisis for The New York Times' Interpreter series, journalist Amanda Taub wrote: "It is easy enough to define a 'state' - a place with borders, territory and a sovereign government. But a 'nation' is a hazier concept - a group of people bound together by some common characteristic, which may or may not match up precisely with state borders. That is where things get tricky.

"Most countries have a majority ethnic or religious group whose customs, culture and religion dominate public life. But ethnic or religious definitions of the 'nation', when translated into political priorities, put minority citizens at a disadvantage. If the majority group wins self-determination, the resulting state will not be designed to represent minorities, even if they technically have full citizenship."

Alternatively, nations can also be defined in terms of "civic nationalism", she wrote.

"Civic nationalism, which is based around citizenship and shared political beliefs rather than ethnicity, is more inclusive. But that same inclusivity can make it challenging to create a strong, cohesive sense of national identity. When that happens, focusing on outsiders - identifying who is not part of the nation, rather than who is - can seem an expedient shortcut."

A good example of a backlash against inclusive nationalism was that against German Chancellor Angela Merkel for her 2015 decision to admit a million immigrants and refugees. She believed Germany had a humanitarian duty to offer asylum to those fleeing war, and thought the German public would agree. But large segments of German society disagreed so vehemently with her stance that she was forced to backtrack; and even after she did, her Christian Democratic party still lost considerable ground to the exclusivist AfD in the election.

Singapore too has been in the throes of debate over a core tenet of national identity - multiracialism. The debate centres around changes to the Constitution to provide for reserved elections for the presidency, so members of minority races have a chance to be elected. Former Speaker of Parliament Halimah Yacob emerged as the only qualified

candidate and was sworn in as President last month, making her the first Malay head of state since President Yusof Ishak more than 50 years ago.

Some Singaporeans are unhappy with the reserved election, regarding it as a step backwards towards racial politics, but Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said at a recent dialogue that the opposite was true, as the reserved election is necessary to strengthen Singapore's multiracial system.

"Sometimes we think we have arrived, and that we can do away with these provisions and rules which feel like such a burden," he said, referring to ethnic quotas in housing estates and group representation constituencies, among others. "But in fact, it is the other way around. It is precisely because we have these provisions and rules, that we have achieved racial and religious harmony. We have not yet arrived at an ideal state of accepting people of a different race. Yes, we have made progress, but it is work in progress."

Multiracialism is Singapore's founding ideal. On Aug 9, 1965, in the very first hours of Singapore's independence, Mr Lee Kuan Yew pledged that: "We are going to have a multiracial nation in Singapore. We will set the example. This is not a Malay nation, this is not a Chinese nation, this is not an Indian nation. Everybody will have his place, equal: language, culture, religion."

Singapore thus rejects national identity defined in terms of the majority race and its language and culture. That is no small commitment, in the light of how the race and religion cards are being played in other countries as parties campaign on the basis of exclusivist identity politics.

Yet this ideal of multiracialism has itself become a source of tension because as society matures, people's interpretations of what it means to be multiracial have begun to more obviously diverge. That is not to say differences did not exist from the start. Singapore's first foreign minister S. Rajaratnam, who penned the National Pledge that summons us to become "one united people, regardless of race, language or religion", famously disagreed with founding prime minister Lee Kuan Yew on the realisability of this aspiration.

Today, Singapore seems divided between those who believe we have become a post-racial society and thus no longer need race-based provisions and rules - whether to ensure minority representation in government, prevent the formation of racial enclaves in housing estates or direct language use through policy - and those like the Government who believe we still do.

This is a gap that the Government and people will have to try and bridge going forward. To do so, we need to remain open to listening to each other and be respectful of each other's views. There should be room for open and sincere dialogue on matters of race and religion.

For Discussion:

1) Putting yourself in the shoes of someone who believes that "we have become a post-racial society and thus no longer need race-based provisions and rules" (lines 96-97), cite reasons / evidence to support that stand.
2) Suggest ways to encourage "open and sincere dialogue on matters of race and religion" in Singapore (line 102).
3) To what extent is it crucial for Singapore to foster a national identity?

This reading will help you to:

- Recognise that well-meaning government policies may work to entrench inequalities rather than alleviate them
- Acknowledge that the hope of changing entrenched systems to address injustices lies with the effort of society as a collective, and not just governmental action

Reading 7: When Kids Say I Lazy What **EU4**

Teo You Yenn | The Straits Times | 8 Feb 2018

When we look at the Singapore education system, we see certain things that are widely and internationally regarded to be laudable. A great deal of attention and resources are channelled into public education. Teachers receive rigorous and continual training, and teaching is a well-compensated and well-respected job. We see high regard for academic rigour - pegged to global standards of abilities, and in specific foundational subject areas (Mathematics and Science).

There is bilingual education which takes into account, to a degree, the needs of different ethnic groups, including minorities. We see attention to children with different learning styles and abilities, and we see the existence of programmes and human resources that target these differences. There are financial aid programmes in place for children from lower-income households so as to provide opportunities for material resources and extra-curricular activities.

Yet, on the other hand, there are notable differentiating mechanisms and inequalities in outcomes.

Worries about inequalities in the education system often centre on the "low-performing" and focus on "levelling up". Kids from low-income families are often the target group. The presence of numerous programmes, personnel, and public expenditure intended to level up these kids, combined with the persistence of low performance among them, leads to the perception that kids from low-income families are less motivated or lack the right home environment for studying. More generally, many Singaporeans take for granted that the system is merit-based and there are ample opportunities for everyone regardless of their family backgrounds.

These perspectives are not wrong per se, but they are insufficiently precise. In their imprecision, they inadvertently slip into faulting low-income parents for the poor academic performance of their kids. The logic goes that if our systems are fair, then surely, they fail because parents are not doing what they should be doing.

To understand why kids from low-income households do poorly in school, we would do well to understand what their lives at home are like. But we must also step back and situate their lives within the broader social context. This includes trying to understand what material conditions are like for parents, what school experiences are like for kids, and finally and least often done, what higher-income families are doing for their kids. It is when we do all this that we can have a more complete and accurate understanding of how kids from low-income families, within this system, are compelled to play a game they cannot win because someone else is setting the rules.

Homework Help

In conversations with low-income parents, education comes up repeatedly as a major source of anxiety. Low-income parents - and especially mothers - tell me that an important reason why they need to quit their jobs or cut back on wage work is because their kids are struggling in school.

My low-income respondents cannot really help their kids with homework. Many of them barely finished primary school. My friends, mostly university graduates, tell me that by Primary 3 or 4, they struggle to help their kids with homework. A few of my middle-income respondents (from an ongoing research project) told me about attending courses in order to learn how to coach their children, particularly in Mathematics.

The difficulty of the curriculum, the understanding that exams have high-stake consequences for their kids' futures, and the difficulty of teaching one's own children, have fuelled the growth of the tuition industry. Parents with ample means use these to help their children from the get-go (in some cases as young as pre-school) and on a regular basis (that is, throughout the school years).

Parents with moderate means forgo other household needs and hire tutors in crucial exam years and/or on subjects especially tough for their kids. Tuition has become a billion-dollar industry, with parents spending significant proportions of household income on it.

'I Lazy What'

In theory, all educational paths can lead to reasonable lives and decent well-being. In reality, the limited educational credentials of underperforming children of low-income parents will put them in similar low-wage jobs. It is disingenuous to claim that all tracks are good and all paths valued; if this were the case, and if Singaporeans actually believe this, tuition centres would be out of business.

How does a system that places a premium on achievement lead to these patterns of underperformance?

People who work with kids will know that students are sensitive about how they compare to their peers. A teacher I spoke with told me that students who are in lower bands say things like "I stupid lah" or "I lazy what".

They do not try because they do not believe they can possibly succeed. Teachers working with kids in low tracks have to spend time and energy on behavioural issues linked to low self-esteem and lack of motivation. They are more disruptive in classrooms and more likely to skip school or neglect homework.

This phenomenon is not something limited to Singapore nor unknown to pedagogical researchers. Jeannie Oakes, in a classic study on tracking, shows that one of the detrimental effects of tracking students according to narrow criteria of academic abilities is that students in low tracks often think of themselves as poor learners and thus do not try as hard as students in high tracks who think of themselves as capable.

In other words, "low motivation", a reason cited by educators who work with kids from low-income families, is something reproduced within the school context. Specifically, the labelling of kids is something of a self-fulfilling prophecy that shapes learning behaviours.

There are some positive things to an education system that has multiple tracks. Kids are not completely thrown out - there are still tracks open to them, which prevent them from dropping out of school altogether. At the same time, however, there also appears an irrational outcome: most of these kids appear to be of regular intelligence and do not have learning disabilities, but they are labelled "slow" from a young age.

In speaking to an allied educator whose job it is to work with kids with learning disabilities, I learnt that it takes some time for her to figure out which kids have disabilities. Why? Because most of the kids who come to her attention are "behind" simply because they have not had as much exposure to school materials and not because they are unable to learn in neuro-typical ways. In other words, given time and exposure, they are no less capable of learning than most other children.

They lack exposure for a variety of reasons: they have less pre-school education; their parents do not speak English (or the type of English required in schools); there is limited reading at home; and they do not have extra coaching by tuition teachers. In other words, the main reason they "fall behind" can be traced to their relative class disadvantages.

Turn our view around and we see that, given the ubiquity of enrichment centres and tutors, some kids - because of class advantages - are advantaged in a system where early exposure and precocity are rewarded. The kids who are able to run forward the moment the gates are open are neither more "meritorious" nor more deserving.

Why do I call this an irrational outcome? If we think of schools as places of learning, if "equality of opportunity" is upheld as our education system's mantra, and if the purpose of mass education is to train as many capable individuals as we can who will grow up to be contributing members of our society, then kids who have insufficient exposure outside of school should have sufficient exposure within it and sufficient time to even out the advantages/disadvantages resulting from class differences. They should not be punished for having insufficient exposure outside of it. By virtue of rewarding precocity - expecting kids to be able to read and write when they begin Primary 1, for example - the school system puts its role in sorting ahead of its role in teaching.

What is our current system rewarding, and what is it punishing? It is in stepping back, going well beyond focusing on individual low-income families, that we can see what is going on.

American journalist Nikole Hannah-Jones writes about the racial segregation and inequalities of schools in contemporary US. She puts it this way: "It is important to understand that the inequality we see, school segregation, is both structural, it is systemic, but it's also upheld by individual choices... As long as individual parents continue to make choices that only benefit their own children... we're not going to see a change."

A lot of my research and writing in the past decade have been about institutions and policies. I have talked primarily about how we need to rethink the principles underlying our policies if we want to see more equal outcomes. I still believe that if we want to see significant change, we need to have collective action, we need to work to alter big structural things - rules, regulations, criteria, principles underlying policies.

But doing this more recent research, I am also continually reminded that life is lived at the micro level, at the level of everyday decisions, everyday interactions, everyday exercise of power and agency and responses to constraints and restraints.

We who have the power to make choices disproportionately shape outcomes and limit options for people who don't have the power to make choices.

It follows that if we don't share the power to make choices, we will never see a change to those things we say are bad or unacceptable to our society. When those of us who have the means maximise our own children's and our own families' advantages, we are contributing to strengthening norms about achievement, success/failure, that undermine our fellow citizens' well-being. Everyone may say, as my respondents do, that "I want my children better than me", but not everyone can see this to fruition nor have the same impact on standards and norms when they do.

Equally if not more important, we must ask what we are allowing to perpetuate when we do not resist a system many of us can now see is deeply problematic. If those higher in the social hierarchy, ahead in the pack, refuse to pause and change their ways, the call to extend assistance to the low-income or to "level up" will continue to ring hollow.

It may seem like higher-income and lower-income families have conflicting interests, that what is good for one group will be bad for another. In reality, there is a lot of potential for a better system which more truly serves the needs of all. Regardless of class, everyone is subject to state policies on education. It is becoming increasingly clear that a high-stakes, examination-oriented education system exerts costs on parents and kids across the class spectrum.

We should care because we are losing potentially valuable human resources. We will all grow old in societies populated by other people's children; our well-being depends on their capabilities. We contribute to public education precisely because there are collective returns on this expenditure. To enhance our shared well-being, we have an interest in ensuring that all kids growing up in our society can fulfil their human potential.

For Discussion:

4) Reflect on your own formal education experience in Singapore. What are the factors that enable you to succeed and do well?
5) Based on the article, what are the current problems in Singapore's education system that disadvantage low-income families?
6) Outline the writer's argument for why Singapore society should work together to address the problem of inequality, and in the context of this article, inequality of opportunity within the education system.

Essay Questions:

1) How far is increased prosperity for all a realistic goal in your society? (Cambridge 2013)
2) 'The key criterion for good government is how well the economy is managed.' Is this a fair assessment? (Cambridge 2012)

The next two articles will help you to:

- Recognise the social policy model in Singapore, which emphasises individual responsibility as a necessary precursor to governmental responsibility.
- Evaluate the overall success, thus far, of the programmes and policies underpinned by this social policy model.
- Note how this policy model - and the provisions it entails or withholds - has meant that the needs of a minority (e.g. low-income families, the elderly poor) are not fully met even as the educational policies and pension system adopted by the government have provided for the needs of the majority.
- Consider whether any expansion of the existing social security system may will hinder or aid governance in the long term.

Reading 8(a): **EU4, EU5**

Social Policy in Singapore: A Crucible of Individual Responsibility

Ron Haskins | 1 June 2011

An important achievement of the capitalist democracies is the creation of policies and programmes that put a human face on capitalism. To use a word popular in Europe, these nations have found ways to balance capitalism with solidarity. Solidarity is the principle that the people of a nation, often operating through their government, accept some responsibility for helping fellow citizens (and even non-citizens) avoid destitution and enjoy some of the fruits of modern economies. There are substantial differences across the capitalist democracies in both the nature and the impacts of their solidarity programmes, but they all provide public help for the elderly, the unemployed, the sick or disabled, and the destitute. These four groups are at risk of poverty or worse because their ability to work and support themselves and their families is impeded by age, infirmity, or difficulty finding a job. It is not unusual at any given time for 40% or more of the individuals in a capitalist country to fall into one or more of these four work-inhibiting categories. Thus, without solidarity programmes that express the commitment by society to help the troubled, a capitalist nation – even a productive and affluent one – could have high levels of poverty, suffering, and even early death.

In addition to public spending on the unfortunate, capitalist nations invest heavily in human capital programmes which help people develop their knowledge and skills to become economically productive and financially independent. The most fundamental and most expensive of these programmes is education at the pre-school, elementary, secondary and post-secondary levels. The specific policies and programmes vary across nations, but education and other human capital programmes are universally regarded as vital to efficiency and economic growth. These programmes also promote the solidarity principle because they offer opportunity for advancement to everyone. Smart and hardworking people regardless of background have many opportunities to get ahead in capitalist democracies. On the other hand, family factors and structural factors in society can be so difficult to overcome that no nation has achieved complete equality of opportunity. Even so, the capitalist democracies have achieved substantial economic mobility, in large part because a significant portion of the cost of education is borne by taxpayers. Thus, due to the productivity of capitalist economies and the aim of citizens and their governments to provide equality of opportunity, many children of poor and low-income families receive educational benefits that their parents could not afford.

Recent work by Irwin Garfinkel and his colleagues shows that if all expenditures on social programmes and education are combined, many capitalist democracies in Europe and Scandinavia spend over 35% of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on these programmes. Even the US, often assailed as a laggard in social spending and solidarity, spends 32%. Clearly, promoting both solidarity and opportunity are primary goals of the capitalist democracies and they put their money where their mouth is.

In the case of Singapore, which gained independence peacefully in 1965 after over a century of British colonial government and a few years as part of federated Malaysia, three wise policy decisions were made early on that have had continuing influence on Singapore's ethos and social environment

The first was to emphasise education. By 1965, it was already evident that education would be key to a nation's economic progress and wealth. An educated workforce was becoming increasingly important for employment and productivity in trade, finance, technology and manufacturing; education and creativity could also prompt economic innovation. Consequently, the early leaders of newly independent Singapore emphasised public education. Primary education in Singapore is universal and free; both secondary and pre-university education are heavily subsidised and virtually free for low-income families; and undergraduate education is also highly subsidised for students from low-income families.

As a result, Singapore is among the world's leaders in educational achievement. Singaporean children's scores on international achievement tests are astonishing. In 2007, for example, on the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), Singaporean children scored second (of 36) and third (of 48) countries respectively on 4th and 8th grade math and first on both 4th and 8th grade science. The US by comparison did not score higher than eighth on either test for either grade and finished eleventh on both 4th grade math and 8th grade science. In addition, nearly 97% of Singaporean men and about 93% of Singaporean women are literate (and most of the permanent residents are bilingual), and about a third of the permanent residents have university degrees, a figure that more than doubled over the previous decade.

The second fruitful decision by Singapore's early leaders, made over a period of years preceding and following independence, was to build the nation's social policy around pensions, healthcare and housing. Unlike most capitalist nations, Singapore established a pension system in the 1950s based on defined contributions rather than defined benefits. The crucial difference between defined benefit and defined-contribution plans is their respective allocation of risk. Governments that promise to provide their citizens with defined benefits are at great risk of insufficient long-term financing such that benefits due can exceed contributions owed, which at some point leads to bankruptcy of the entire system and perhaps even of the government. This problem has plagued nearly every government-sponsored defined benefit plan in the world, primarily because of rapid increases in life expectancy and an unexpected slowdown in population growth. Indeed, many nations have been forced, often under emergency conditions, to refinance their pension system by increasing contributions, reducing benefits, or both.

By basing its pension system on defined contributions, the Government of Singapore avoided these problems. Thus, Singaporeans and their employers pay into personal accounts under the Central Provident Fund (CPF); the funds in the account are invested; the remainder of funds in the account can be withdrawn, or used to purchase a life annuity, upon retirement. Part of the money paid into the fund is also used to help pay for medical expenses, or as a source of borrowing to finance a home or other approved investments.

The Government's roles are to require regular contributions to the account, administer the accounts, make the investment decisions or provide approved opportunities from which participants can select their own investments and, from time to time, contribute excess government funds into the accounts, providing account owners with a kind of windfall bonus. The individual's role is to make contributions, to make decisions about investment of funds in their account (within limits established by the Government), and to withdraw funds only for major purchases such as a home.

There are numerous advantages to a defined-contribution pension scheme, which amounts to enforced savings. Establishing its pension system around the central principle of individual ownership is consistent with Singaporean society's emphasis on individual responsibility. Not surprisingly, interviews show that Singaporeans like the fact that they own their own account and do not have to share it with others. Another major advantage of enforced savings is that individuals have a source from which they can borrow at reasonable rates to make major purchases such as homes. Given that health expenses are paid for out of a separate section of the individual accounts, it seems likely that individuals and families are aware of how much their healthcare costs: perhaps the most fundamental aspect of using the market to control medical costs, and something that many other nations have failed to do.The role of the CPF in teaching individual responsibility and self-reliance must be counted as a considerable advantage of Singapore's pension system.

The decision to base government supported pensions on defined contributions 30 or 40 years ago could be made to seem like the Government was erring on the side of social policy that was too conservative. But today, with government pension systems all over the world in need of cash infusions and with the solvency of entire governments at risk because of flawed pension fund financing, Singapore's decision to base their pension system on defined contributions looks better and better.

The third emphasis of Singaporean social policy is housing, now administered by the Housing Development Board (HDB), which is responsible both for overseeing the construction of public housing and the sale of units to the people of Singapore. The result is that 81% of the population is served by the Government's housing programmes; 79% of households own their own apartments and 2% rent from the Government. A key public priority during the early years of post-independence nation-building was to help the population obtain decent housing and in this way bind them to the Government and to the nation. Whether housing actually achieved this purpose is difficult to measure, but there is no question that this policy created a nation of homeowners and avoided the growth of slums and the incidence of homelessness that plague many other capitalist countries. As a foreign observer, I think any fair reckoning of housing policy in Singapore would have to conclude that it has been a success – and again I would emphasise the role of the CPF in providing a sound home financing mechanism that has encouraged choice and individual responsibility.

Over the years since independence, the Government of Singapore has gradually expanded its social policy to include wage subsidies for low-income workers, child care programmes, work training and other programmes. But education, enforced savings for retirement and other purposes, and housing remain the cornerstones of Singaporean social policy.

Like the standard criticism of defined-contribution pension plans, the standard criticism of somewhat minimalist social policy such as that which characterises Singapore is that it does not cover enough risks and actual problems faced by the poor, the elderly, and the

sick and disabled. As we have seen, European, Scandinavian and North American countries spend around 35% of their GDPs on social programmes. Although a comparable figure on total social welfare spending is not available for Singapore, the Government of Singapore spends only 16.7% of its GDP on all its programmes, a figure that is less than half as much as European and Scandinavian programmes spent just on social welfare.

But a nation's social policy should be judged on more than the percentage of its GDP devoted to social programmes. Sociologists and anthropologists constantly remind us about cultural differences, so perhaps we should grant that a nation's social policy is conditioned by the cultural values of the society that created and sustains the government. In the case of Singapore, similar in many ways to the US, the culture is one that emphasises individual responsibility as a necessary precursor to government responsibility. In Singapore, solidarity begins with a nearly universal commitment to individual, family and community responsibility. Reading government documents that describe the goals of Singapore's social policy is like reading speeches of conservative politicians in the US criticising government spending on social programmes, and arguing that individuals and families should do more to support themselves. Here is a recent mission statement of Singapore's Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS):

> *The three core principles that underlie [the Ministry's] responses to the range of social challenges are: (i) Self-reliance and social responsibility; (ii) Family as the first line of support; and (iii) The Many Helping Hands approach.*

The MCYS focuses on organising its activities and spending its resources on programmes designed to promote personal, family and community responsibility. Note the emphasis on "Many Helping Hands". The idea of helping hands is that "volunteer welfare organisations and grassroots bodies" work with Government to implement the safety net. Again, the emphasis on private responsibility is emphasised, in this case by Government providing social assistance through volunteer and grassroots organisations.

As a foreign observer who has spent more than three decades participating in the formulation of federal social policy in the US and studying the enactment, implementation and impacts of social policy in the US and Europe, I see a great deal to admire and emulate in Singapore's social policy. Its education system is one of the world's finest and produces young students of world-class achievements; its defined contribution pension plan and government discipline in managing the system have helped Singapore avoid the type of financial crisis that threatens the solvency of the pension funds of many nations and plays a major role in developing individual responsibility in its citizens; its housing policy has led to huge rates of home ownership and virtually no homelessness; and its health policy has produced a healthy and longlived population without threatening government solvency. Its legislation on child care, wage subsidies, and employment and training programmes for low-income workers has created a system that provides economic opportunity for all; and its emphasis on self-reliance and family and community responsibility has inculcated self-reliance and a minimal dependency among its citizens. It is little wonder that the World Economic Forum recently determined that Singapore is the world's third most competitive nation, ahead even of the US.

There is, of course, always room for improvement. It might make sense for Singapore to focus even more resources on high-quality pre-school programmes, especially for children from low-income families. It might also prove worthwhile to provide greater work support in the form of child care and wage subsidies to low-income workers. Fairness would also

be advanced if Singapore did more for its guest workers, especially by focusing more attention on their housing.

But none of these suggestions should detract from the achievements of Singapore in creating one of the best educated, most disciplined, and most self-reliant populations in the world. These great achievements have provided the foundation on which a social and economic miracle has been built.

Reflection Question:

- Compare the author's arguments with those of criticisms opining that the state needs to do more for its less able segments of society. In view of Singapore's unique constraints, which perspective do you consider more valid?

Essay Questions:

- In your society, how far is equality for all a reality? (Cambridge, 2012)
- Is it always the responsibility of the state to help the poor? (Y5 Promo 2011)

This reading helps you to:

- Identify more of the programmes and policies within our social security system
- Recognise the need for a compromise between preserving the State's financial resources for the future and addressing the current needs of an aging generation
- Consider reasons why an expansion of Singapore's existing social security system may complement governance in the long term

Reading 8(b): **EU5**

Re-examining Singapore's Social Security System

Adapted from New Options in Social Security, essay from 'Hard Choices' by Donald Low and Sudhir Vadaketh, published in 2014

Singapore's social security system is premised on the principles of individual and family responsibility, community help (sometimes referred to as the "Many Helping Hands Approach"), and government assistance as a safety net of last resort. Besides housing and healthcare, the main expressions of our social security system are the Central Provident Fund (CPF) system, to help Singaporeans achieve a certain degree of retirement adequacy – and more recently, Workfare – to encourage low wage workers to stay in work. For the chronically poor and others requiring targeted assistance, various programmes under the umbrella of ComCare have been developed in recent years, and delivered at the community level.

Weaknesses of our Social Security System

The three main innovations in our social security system over the last few years have been the Workfare Income Supplement (WIS), CPF LIFE, and the various efforts to enhance and increase the coverage of MediShield. The first addresses the problem of wage stagnation among low income earners through the government topping up the wages of low wage workers; the second addresses longevity risks by introducing social insurance[2] into a system that has otherwise relied mainly on individual savings; while the third addresses the risks of catastrophic illnesses by increasing insurance benefits for a wider range of medical conditions and treatments, and by extending coverage to previously excluded citizens.

These measures are important steps in strengthening our social security system. But the system still has significant gaps and is not sufficiently robust for three main reasons.
First, **Singapore's social security system provides hardly any protection against the risks of involuntary unemployment**. Workfare is aimed at employed, low-wage workers in the formal sector (roughly corresponding to the bottom fifth of the income distribution). CPF savings cannot be withdrawn before the individual reaches the age of 55. Even the subsidies that the government channels into various training programmes are mostly mediated through employers. While the unemployed are not excluded from these training subsidies, the principle of co-payment requires them to fork out their own monies to benefit from government subsidies in training and skills upgrading. We should think hard about how we can provide lower- and middle-income Singaporeans better protection against the risks of involuntary unemployment without creating significant risks of moral hazard.

[2] public insurance program that provides protection against various economic risks (e.g., loss of income due to sickness, old age, or unemployment) and in which participation is compulsory

Second, **for the majority of Singaporeans, our social security system relies mostly on the principle of individual savings.** With the exception of the subsidies in healthcare, Medishield and CPF LIFE, Singaporeans do not fully benefit from social insurance and the power of risk-pooling to deal with contingencies such as a loss of earnings, disability, or an extended period of illness. They are almost entirely reliant on their own accumulated resources to deal with such episodes of income instability. While self-reliance is a good principle in general, if taken to extremes, it may neither be efficient or just. We should think hard about how our social security system can find a better balance between individual savings, social insurance and direct subsidies.

Third, despite Singaporeans having one of the world's highest savings rates and highest social security contribution rates, **many Singaporeans struggle with attaining retirement adequacy.** For instance, among active CPF members who reached 55 years in 2009, only 37.5 per cent had met the Minimum Sum stipulated by the government with both cash and a property pledge, and only 20 per cent could meet the Minimum sum wholly in cash. This means that four out of every five active CPF members who turned 55 in 2009 did not have sufficient cash to meet their basic needs in old age if they did not have sources of financial support other than their CPF savings.

This lack of retirement adequacy has different causes for different segments of the population. Among lower-middle to middle-income Singaporeans, this is, in large part, due to the fact that so much of their CPF savings are locked up in housing. While housing represents a store of value that can be unlocked for retirement needs, this presumes that monetisation incurs relatively low costs. The fact is monetisation options are currently quite limited, not to mention households that need to unlock their housing assets may be doing so in the wrong part of the property cycle. While the lease buyback scheme introduced by government in 2008 is a step in the right direction, it is also incumbent on the government to develop more monetisation options for older Singaporeans.

Among the poorest Singaporeans, poverty both in terms of difficulties meeting basic needs (i.e. the bottom 10 per cent of working households) and the lack of retirement adequacy (i.e the bottom 30 per cent of working households) arises from the fact that their wages are barely enough to cover basic needs. The solution for this smaller segment of the population will probably need to be some combination of increased Workfare (especially the cash component), direct subsidies to meet their basic needs, and government assistance to pay for medical and longevity insurance.

Principles for Reforming out Social Security System

Singapore's social security system needs to be enhanced and reformed along two key principles. First, in the context of intensifying global competition, low-wage competition and rapid technological change, Singapore is likely to experience a more rapid technological change, Singapore is likely to experience a more rapid pace of economic restructuring, increasing economic volatility and higher income inequality. If so, Singapore's social security system needs to be expanded to go beyond simply meeting the retirement, housing and healthcare needs of Singaporeans to also providing a cushion and buffer against rapid economic change and adjustment. Such a social security system will facilitate the process of economic restructuring. It will also help our workers transit from one industry to another as the economy moves up the value chain, provide them greater protection against periodic bouts of unemployment and income instability, and enable them to save enough for retirement. Seen in this light, **an expanded social security system is an essential counterpart of our basic economic strategy of globalisation and plugging into the global economy**.

Second, **well-designed social protection programmes can be achieved through the careful incorporation of social insurance into our social security system.** Our own experience in healthcare financing provides a "model" for how the overall social security system should evolve. In healthcare, the government has accepted that it is neither efficient nor equitable for individuals to save for large medical bills arising from catastrophic illnesses, and it has – over time – expanded the use of medical insurance to deal with more of these risks and contingencies. In dealing with longevity risks, the government has also come to accept that such risks are best dealt with through risk-pool and social insurance in the form of CPF LIFE.

Constructing a more robust social security system that provides Singaporeans greater protection against the uncertainties and vagaries of the global economy is an economic, not just a social, imperative. **By providing Singaporeans greater social protection, the government builds public support for the tough policy choices necessary in globalisation and economic restructuring**: attracting and integrating foreign talent, outsourcing or relocating lower value-added jobs, maintaining flexible labour markets, and increasing Singapore's integration into the global economy. **A more robust social security system also gives Singaporeans a stronger stake in the nation, enabling government to use social insurance programmes to foster social cohesion.**

Ensuring Intergenerational Equity

A third major area that needs to be carefully re-examined in the context of our baby boomers entering retirement is **intergenerational equity and how our reserves can be optimally deployed to help us cope with an ageing society**.

On intergenerational equity, perhaps the most important fact is that it is the baby boom generation that contributed the most to the accumulation of national reserves. A significant part of our reserves is the result of fiscal surpluses generated in the 1980s and 1990s – the period when the baby boom generation was most economically productive. Indeed, we should view the reserves accumulated as a net transfer from the baby boom generation to the state. **Now that the generation that contributed the most of our reserves is entering retirement, it is only fair from an intergenerational perspective that the state reverse part of that transfer.** To impose the fiscal burden of looking after the needs of the baby boomers onto subsequent generations in the form of higher taxes while continuing to accumulate reserves is not only inequitable but also inefficient.

A likely objection to the proposal to set aside part of our reserves to fund the needs of the elderly is that this represents a raid of our reserves, which the current Constitutional rules on the protection for reserves were designed to forbid. But this objection ignores the fact that the rules on the use of reserves were formulated at a time (the early 1990s) when Singapore was still generation large fiscal surpluses and the concern then was how we can set aside sufficient resources to deal with future contingencies. It is timely and necessary for government to review how the rules on the use of reserves should be adapted for a radically different context.

Conclusion

The current social compact served Singapore well for the first 40 years of its nationhood. It ensured growth with equity, and delivered good education, a fiscally sustainable social security system, good basic healthcare, housing for all, and an excellent infrastructure. Nothing in this paper is meant to diminish the achievements of the Singapore government in building the current social compact.

At the same time, the social compact as it is currently conceived is not adequately equipped to deal with the forces unleashed by globalisation, technological change, and Singapore's own policies. The socio-political and economic contexts are also changing, and strains are already showing in our social and political fabric. These trends suggest that the Singapore state needs to reinvent and expand the current social compact.

The policymaker's reflexive belief that an expansion of social security will erode our work ethic and reduce national competitiveness may have been appropriate for a previous era. These widely held beliefs and assumptions are not entirely unjustified; they were probably necessary and largely correct for an earlier context. **But these may now be precisely the things that hold the government back from thinking creatively and comprehensively about today's inequality and how it should be addressed over the long-term.** What is needed therefore is a return to the innovative, integrated, pragmatic and adaptive approach that characterised the Singapore government when it first formulated the current social compact and built institutions like public housing and the CPF.

Reflection Questions

1. Why do you think that the Singapore government has, in our social security system, provided little by way of unemployment benefits?
2. This article was published in 2014. Consider the developments that have taken place between then and now. How far have policymakers addressed the gaps and issues highlighted by the author?
3. According to the author, why might it be said that a "more robust" social security system ultimately aids governance?

For discussion:

1. Should your government do less for its people? (RI 2016 Y5 Promo)
2. Should governments prioritise social welfare above overall economic growth? (RI 2014 Y6 CT1)

This reading will introduce you to:

- A tension between how manpower as a resource is managed in the long term and its consequences in the short to medium term
- A range of reasons why the Singapore government actively courted immigration since the 1980s
- The positive economic impact enabled by these immigration policies as well as the social and political challenges that have emerged as a result
- A few ways the state is exploring to mitigate the above consequences.

Reading 9:
Singapore's lesson: Managing immigration to create a win-win situation **EU5**

Published 23 June 2017, Global-Is-Asian

Singapore's policymakers have had to balance the economy's need for immigrants with negative public sentiment towards the influx of these newcomers. Its experience serves as a good learning point for other countries facing similar issues.

Singapore has always been an immigrant society. Even before the founding of modern Singapore in 1819 when the British claimed it as a colony, people from all over the world had stopped or settled on this soil to trade or seek a better life.

After gaining independence in 1965, Singapore's founding political leaders were acutely aware that given the country's small land size and lack of natural resources, human labour and skills were the only thing it had to offer.

Why Singapore emphasised its immigration policy

When Singapore's economy had to evolve from manufacturing to high-tech and value-added activities in the late '80s, the government started pursuing a clear and distinct immigration policy. It was also then that the term 'foreign talent' was officially coined and debated in parliament.

The reasons cited for encouraging immigration were consistent and clear. The first reason was to boost the economy with much needed talent, especially in new high-tech industries that the government was trying to build. The second was to counter the low fertility rate and greying population that Singapore was experiencing like many developed countries. A third was to replenish Singapore citizens who had chosen to migrate to other countries. There was also a fourth but less-cited reason. As Singapore developed and its citizens became more educated and affluent, there was an acute need to import transient workers for lower-level blue-collar jobs that Singaporeans shunned, such as construction labourers, shipyard workers, sanitation staff and domestic helpers.

The economic and social impact of immigration

Singapore's economic miracle since independence from colonial rule is well known. Between 1965 and 2015, its economy grew at an average rate of about 8 per cent. It has also successfully nurtured world-class industries such as petrochemicals, life sciences, information technology, precision engineering, creative media and financial services, which rely heavily on attracting foreign talent to broaden and deepen these industries. Developing these cutting-edge and high value-added industries attracted the foreign direct investment and jobs needed to keep Singapore prosperous.

However, this success has not been without social costs. Researchers at the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS), a research centre of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy at

the National University of Singapore, discussed the social impact and integration issues that have arisen over the years in a comprehensive study published in January 2016.

Some of the key social issues include the perception that immigrants were taking away white-collar jobs, places in schools and hospitals, as well as driving up property prices. Some citizens also expressed a fear that the national identity was being diluted, and that many expatriates will leave as soon as better opportunities were offered elsewhere. When social media became popular, some isolated incidents of derogatory remarks posted online by 'foreign talents' on Singaporeans also caused widespread anger.

Over the last three decades, various measures have been introduced to balance out the social costs.

Social harmony and integration strategies

Singapore's approach towards managing new immigrants and foreign talent can be summarised into two key strategies. The first attempts to incentivise foreigners into settling and integrating into the local society. The second involves social stratification strategies to distinguish between transient workers and knowledge-based talent.

Singapore's government incentivises non-residents on work visas to look towards progressively becoming a Permanent Resident (PR) and then a citizen through different levels of subsidies, taxation and general welfare schemes for each category. For example, Singapore citizens enjoy very high rate of subsidies in housing, education and healthcare as opposed to non-residents or PRs.

Singapore also makes a distinct effort to tier its work visas according to skilled and highly educated foreign talent as opposed to transient blue-collar workers. Although every country does this, Singapore goes even further by enforcing general orientation programmes on the local laws and demarcating special zones for their housing (other than domestic helpers).

Limitations of the Singapore experience

It should be noted that Singapore's experience in implementing and managing immigration policies as an economic driver does have its limitations in terms of transferability and context.

As a small island, Singapore has benefitted from its strategic geographical position and high reputation of transparency and efficiency as a business hub, as well as law and order and an excellent bilingual education system. As a result, Singapore's approach of attracting non-residents to plant their roots here with their families work well, especially for foreign talent from developing countries.

Furthermore, Singapore is a young nation composed mostly of second- or third-generation immigrants. Since its independence, its style of governance and way of life has been centred on meritocracy. Most individuals and companies accept and embrace a market-based approach to conducting business and hiring of talent. However, such a pragmatic approach to economic development may not work well in other countries that adopt a socialist view towards society and governance. There are also many larger countries that would regard social stratifications as unacceptable, especially in the European context.

A shift in political narrative towards migrant integration

The political cost of pursuing a pro-immigration policy to boost the economy struck home in Singapore's 2011 General Elections. The People's Action Party (PAP), who has

governed the country since independence and retains an overwhelming majority of seats in parliament, saw its lowest-ever vote share.

Immigration – more specifically, the pace of immigration – and the tensions, disconnects and divides it creates between locals and newcomers had become one of the key points of discontent amongst the voters.

In the face of vocal and rising discontent, the incumbent government had to change its narrative and strategy towards immigration. Tightening the conditions for the hiring of foreigners and reducing the number of permanent residence and new citizenship statuses granted were obvious enough. What was more subtle and interesting was a distinct shift in the narrative towards integration.

Leong Chan-Hoong, a Senior Research Fellow at IPS, recently published a paper analysing this shift in political narratives. He noted that while in the early days government propaganda advocated Singaporeans to accept and embrace the new immigrants, the narrative is now shifting more towards a balanced approach of encouraging new immigrants to proactively engage and integrate with locals.

Leong also noted in an interview with Global-is-Asian that Singapore's government is increasingly aware that due to the social tensions that immigration policies inevitably produce, policymakers will have to look towards other ways of continuing to attract the best talents to drive the economy.

Upgrading and increasing the pool of local talent

In addition to investments into upgrading and retraining the skill sets of local citizens for sectors facing a talent shortage, the Singapore government is now also looking to bring back Singaporeans who have chosen to live and work abroad. About 6 per cent of Singaporeans live and work overseas. They have gained the international network and experience to help Singapore elevate its economy and compete in the global economy.

By tapping on this pool of mobile and skilled Singaporeans, the need for importing foreign talent can be alleviated. The government is actively looking at ways to attract them back to contribute to the local economy. As part of this effort, Leong, who heads the IPS centre for social indicators research, the IPS Social Lab, has initiated a survey to reach out to them and understand their motivations for relocating as well as their perceptions of their Singaporean identity.

The future for Singapore's immigration policies

Ultimately Singapore is a small country with a land area of just 720 square kilometres. This is already an increase of about 24 per cent since 1965, largely through land reclamation. There is a limit to how much immigration can be tapped as one of Singapore's economy-boosting tactics.

In a 2013 population white paper, the government projected an increase in the population to 6.9 million by 2030, an almost 30 per cent increase from the number then. This caused immediate public debate on the efficacy and sustainability of such a policy. Since then, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong has clarified that the 6.9 million figure was not a population target but a basis to plan for infrastructure for the long term.

Global-is-Asian is the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy (LKYSPP)'s flagship digital platform focusing on policy issues affecting Asia and the world. Backed by research and grounded in practitioners' experience, our content aims to shape global thinking and steer

meaningful conversations on Asian policy issues, especially among policymakers and fellow academics.

Reflection Questions

- In ln 75-76, the passage mentions how immigration has resulted in "disconnects and divides between locals and newcomers? To what extent do you agree with this? Support your view with example(s).
- In ln 95-102 the author writes of the Singapore government's attempt, for economic purposes, to engage Singaporean citizens who "have chosen to live and work abroad". What efforts have the state undertaken with these ends in mind? How successful do you think these efforts are likely to be and why?

For discussion:

1. 'National boundaries make little geographical or economic sense nowadays.' Discuss. (Cambridge 2006)
2. To what extent should your society welcome immigrants? (RI Y5 Promo 2014)
3. "Migration creates more problems than it does solutions." Discuss. (RI Y6 CT2 2015)

This article will help you examine:

- *the changing nature of governance in Singapore, in particular the shift from big and interventionist government towards one working in tandem with markets towards partnership with what can be seen as an increasingly critical and demanding public.*

It looks at some key questions:

- *What should be the role of the government? How can the government best harness the efficiency of the market while regulating it? How can governments adapt to a 21st Century world?*

The Paradox of Singapore and Governance **EU3, EU5**

Adapted from Peter Ho's third IPS-Nathan Lecture delivered 3 May, 2017

Thrust into an unwelcome and unwanted independence, the Singapore government was in a hurry to transform Singapore into a "modern metropolis", in the matchless pledge of Mr Lee Kuan Yew in 1965. So, it is not surprising that in the beginning**, governance in Singapore was characterised by big government – if you will – through strong regulation, seeking compliance with policy rules, and maintaining as efficient a system as possible**, in order to get things moving and to get them done.

Through this approach, the government embarked on a number of major initiatives that helped to lay the foundations for Singapore's prosperity and stability. These included a massive public housing programme; heavy investments in infrastructure – in public transport, our port and airport; and an activist, government-led approach to attract foreign investments and build up the capabilities to support higher value-added activities.

In these and many other policy domains, the visible hand of government was as critical as the invisible hand of markets. The government's interventions enabled new markets and industries to develop. They also helped to ensure that economic growth throughout the 1970s and 1980s benefited all segments of the population. **Some see this as the Singapore government as exercising substantial influence not just over traditional areas of policy**, like defence, macroeconomics and infrastructure, but also in areas like tree-planting and compulsory savings which are seen as more municipal or personal in other countries. The ban on the sale of chewing gum has been cited by many as an example of **a pervasive and intrusive government role**.

Mr Lee Kuan Yew made no bones about his belief that government should intervene in a spectrum of issues. He famously said, *"I am often accused of interfering in the private lives of citizens. Yes, if I did not, had I not done that, we wouldn't be here today. And I say without the slightest remorse, that we wouldn't be here, we would not have made economic progress, if we had not intervened on very personal matters – who your neighbour is, how you live, the noise you make, how you spit, or what language you use. We decide what is right. Never mind what the people think."*

Government Spending

But on many significant measures, Singapore's government is not at all big. The Washington think tank, the Heritage Foundation, together with the Wall Street Journal, compiles an annual "Index of Economic Freedom" measuring several dimensions of a country's economic freedom.

One of these dimensions is the **size of government spending, which in Singapore has been very low for a country of our level of development**. According to the most recent Index of Economic Freedom, total government expenditure in Singapore constituted 18.2% of GDP. This is among the lowest in the world. In comparison, Hong Kong's total government expenditure amounted to 18.3% of GDP, and it does not have to spend on defence. In New Zealand, which was ranked third behind Hong Kong and Singapore for economic freedom, government expenditure totalled 42.2% of GDP.

Evolution of Government in Singapore and Thatcherism

The system of government in Singapore was inherited from the British. It is not surprising that the practice of governance in Singapore has broadly tracked the trajectories of other governments in countries like Australia, Canada and New Zealand, and especially in the United Kingdom, the birthplace of the Westminster system of government. Nevertheless, it has always been to adapt, and not to adopt blindly.

Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister of Great Britain in 1979. She was a strong believer in small government – as opposed to big government – and in the **ability of the private sector to provide goods and services more efficiently**. She believed in **reducing the role of the state in the economy**. In her worldview, the private sector was often better placed to deliver public services, and market forces should be given a free hand, and entrepreneurial energies unshackled. In taking such a laissez-faire approach towards regulating the private sector, it is argued that small government lowers costs and promotes efficiency by allowing the market to determine prices and economic outcomes. The underlying philosophy of Thatcherism had a huge impact, and influenced governments around the world, including Singapore's. So, in the 1990s, the Singapore government began changing its approach, focused on creating a leaner public administration while delivering better services.

To this end, the government **sought to harness the creativity and dynamism of the private sector to deliver public services**, and to achieve efficiency gains from the forces of competition. It explored ways in which government could divest its interests and allow for entrepreneurial energies to flourish. The privatisation of our state-owned utilities began with Singapore Telecoms in 1993. This was followed by the liberalisation of the telecommunications sector. In the electricity sector, our own privatisation and liberalisation experience was also very much influenced by the experience of the British government, particularly in its decision to vertically separate the industry.

Free Market versus Market Intervention

A major factor that determines the size of our government has been our belief that free market forces should determine prices and economic outcomes. This is the approach that is the foundation of small government.

But in Singapore**, faith in the market has not been uncritical or absolute**. Instead, the government recognises that in certain cases, unfettered market forces can result in excessive volatility, negative externalities and under-provision of merit goods, like education, as well as public goods, like defence.

The economist, Dani Rodrik, outlined a framework that can be usefully applied to understanding how Singapore has chosen to blend the work of markets and the government:

- First, the government has sought to **enable markets**. This includes ensuring rule of law, property rights, and public infrastructure – functions that most governments perform. In Singapore, enabling markets has also included industrial policy and

capability development, subjects of some controversy in policy circles around the world, especially among proponents of small government that believe in the laissez-faire approach.

- Second, the government has sought to **regulate markets**. This includes supervision of the financial sector, competition regulation, and taxation of negative externalities, such as high charges for car ownership and road usage, and sin taxes on alcohol and tobacco products – and maybe in future, taxes on sugary drinks. But a key feature of Singapore's approach has been the **shift towards lighter regulation accompanied by risk-based supervision**, most recently exemplified by MAS FinTech regulatory sandbox.

- Third, the government has sought to **stabilise markets**. This is the bread-and-butter of macroeconomic management. Singapore's basic approach in monetary and fiscal policy is not far different from global practices. But its efforts to address asset price inflation and credit crises are interesting examples of targeted interventions that harness market forces.

- Fourth, the government has sought to **legitimise markets**. Globalisation, free trade, and open markets lead to significant dislocations. Some of the sharpest debates over the role of governments centre on this: to what extent should governments facilitate adjustments, redistribute incomes, or provide social safety nets, so as to maintain public support for market-oriented policies?

Engaging the People Sector

Complementing government and markets, is the role that society will play in tackling the great challenges and wicked problems of the 21st century.

A key part of this governance process will be **growing mutual engagement between the public and people sectors**. In his 2011 National Day Rally, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong underscored the importance of such engagement, pointing out that the nation needs to "harness diverse views and ideas, put aside personal interest and forge common goals". This is especially important because people's expectations have changed – and are changing, continuously.

I think that there are a couple of reasons for this development. The first reason is that as **government policies lead to improvements, the needs of the people change in tandem**. This is explained by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Maslow's proposition was that after the basic physiological needs of a person are met, more complex psychological needs will have to be fulfilled. At the top of this hierarchy of needs are the need for self-actualisation, which is to realise the individual's potential, and transcendence, which is helping others achieve self-actualisation.

So, if you accept this proposition, then after government has delivered on the basic needs of food, security, shelter, transport and health, expectations of the people are going to change, not in demanding more of the basic needs, but in fulfilling their more complex needs in the upper reaches of Maslow's hierarchy, including social, emotional and self-actualisation needs.

The challenge for governments everywhere is that success in **delivering the material goods of life** – housing, food and so on – **is no guarantee that it can be successful in**

delivering "the good life", however defined. I suppose the reverse is true as well, although it is hard to imagine the good life without the basic necessities of liveability

The second reason is what I term the **third generation effect**. Singapore is now 51 years old, and into its third generation of Singaporeans. The first generation of Singaporeans lived through the turbulence and uncertainties of Merger and Separation. The next generation started life on a firmer footing, but at the same time imbibed from their parents a sense of the vulnerabilities. But the third generation of Singaporeans have known only the affluence and success of Singapore. For them, the uncertainties of the 60s and 70s are abstractions from their school history books. When their grandparents speak of the turmoil and danger that they experienced, they shrug their shoulders because it is an experience outside theirs. Of course, they are hardly to blame for this, and they certainly need not apologise for it.

Singapore's founding generation made the sacrifices in order that their children and grandchildren would enjoy peace and prosperity. But clearly, what persuaded their parents and grandparents will not wash with the third generation. But as long as we are all in this together – and I hope that they feel they are in this together – the hopes and dreams of our youth must also appreciate the tough realities that endure. By all means, dream, but dream with your eyes wide open. So, communicating to the third generation will require fresh arguments and different approaches.

People Empowerment

Today, citizens and businesses alike have **far higher expectations of government than before**. Access to information has increased dramatically in scope and speed as a result of the Internet revolution. Social networking platforms like Facebook, YouTube and Twitter have empowered citizens to express their views. Virtual communities are beginning to shape the debate and context of public policy issues.

The view that **"government knows best" that perhaps characterised the situation in the beginning is increasingly challenged in today's world**, in which citizens and businesses can easily gain access to much of the information that governments used to monopolise and control in the past.

Citizens today feel empowered, because of the social media, and higher levels of educational achievement. Indeed, Singaporeans today are much better educated than their grandparents. In 1965, the cohort participation rate for university education was a miniscule 3%. Today, it is 30%.

The non-profit group, Ground Up Initiative (GUI), points precisely to how attitudes are changing in Singapore. GUI operates a "Kampong Kampus" space in Khatib, with the aim of reconnecting urbanites to the natural environment. The group's founder, Mr Tay Lai Hock, said, "I think the top should set the example, but I also believe, you first and foremost, must take responsibility for your own life... Don't blame anybody. Don't blame the Government**… I have a choice to decide that even though they have made this policy, I don't want to be a victim of their policies**."

The Bukit Brown Case Study

In 2011, the Land Transport Authority announced plans to construct a road that would cut through Bukit Brown, the oldest cemetery in Singapore. Heritage groups protested, while the government maintained its position on needing land in land-scarce Singapore. When Bukit Brown Cemetery was placed on the World Monuments Watch in 2013, one member of the group All Things Bukit Brown said, "I hope it shows that we are serious, that we

want a seat at the table, just so we can present what we have heard from the community, what we have heard from the people who have encouraged us… you want development, but let's have a discussion, perhaps."

The government has to deal with an **electorate that feels empowered, demanding, and actively seeks participation**. In this regard, Our Singapore Conversation, launched in 2013, signalled the government's commitment to listening to the people's views.

The Case of the Missing PM2.5

By **looking at issues from the perspective of end-users – namely the citizen – the government is able to design better policies** than if they were just developed using the usual top-down approach.

During the 2013 haze, experts had advised the government to consider releasing another indicator besides the Pollutant Standards Index (PSI) readings: the PM2.5 readings, which measure particles smaller than 2.5 microns. This is because PM2.5 particles greatly affect people with heart disease, as well as children and the elderly.

When the haze began, the government published the three-hour PSI readings and 24-hour PM2.5. But netizens and doctors pointed out that the PSI did not factor in PM2.5 readings as air quality indicators. Members of the public also expressed concern that the PSI values appeared different from what they had observed. Singaporeans even resorted to taking their own real-time air quality readings with commercial equipment.

The government said at first that it would be confusing for the public to have too many figures to read. But in the end, because of persistence of the public, NEA began providing more information on PM2.5, and from 20 June 2013, publishing the PSI and PM2.5 figures hourly, six days after the haze began. And eventually, from 1 April 2014, Singapore moved to an integrated air quality reporting index, with PM2.5 incorporated into the PSI as its sixth pollutant parameter

Government with You

I have spent some time explaining how and why society in Singapore is evolving, and how government itself has to evolve in tandem. **Put simply, it means a shift from the paternalistic and interventionist "government to you" and "government for you", to "government with you". The imperative is for government to move towards a collaborative approach to policymaking, and be prepared to connect, consult, and co-create with the people and the private sectors**.

The bureaucratic propensity is to create order and consistency, both in the external environment and domestically. In Singapore, the inclination to manage extends even to our wildlife. The recent case of chicken culling in Sin Ming is one example. Ms Natalia Huang, an ecologist at an environment consultancy Ecology Matters, recently suggested in The Straits Times that since Singapore is land scarce, even regulating the number of cars on the road, wildlife should likewise be regulated. With scientific research on how much space to allow wildlife density growth, we could ensure that wildlife in Singapore is sustainable.

Conclusion

When it comes to governance there are **no absolute "rights", especially not when the world is constantly changing**. What the government needs to do is to prepare itself –

and Singapore – for the black swans[3] and disruptions that will surely surprise us in the future.

To achieve this, the government **must put into proper perspective the pressing, day-to-day concerns within the larger context of longer-term challenges and uncertainties**. The question you might wish to pose is, what is "the long view"? How far ahead can and should we really think?

Some policy issues, such as demographics, the environment and education, stretch out over many years. In contrast, government institutions are designed for four to five year electoral cycles. Even if we had the political will, do we really have the imagination to view and tackle challenges that lie beyond the life-time of the already-born citizen?

At the same time, we talk about making the future; but if we were to reframe it, is it not also the case that our actions in the present are "taking the future" away from unborn generations to come? Here I am thinking of our actions – or rather inaction – on a global basis with regard to climate change, for example.

This is a question of responsibility and trade-offs. On one hand, the current generation has a responsibility of stewardship, for example in steering Singapore to SG100 and beyond. However, in order to **fulfil that duty of stewardship of the future, certain tough decisions have to be taken in the here and now**. How much appetite is there really for long-term thinking in a society that is focused on the short term, dealing with the problems of the day, and "putting out fires" all the time?

This is why thinking about the future is an essential and yet delicate task for governments to foster – both as a matter of institutional processes and as a habit of thinking. Singapore's success in managing its paradox has been achieved by a mixture of good government, good luck and a heavy dose of kiasuism. But Andy Grove, late CEO of Intel, once said, "Success breeds complacency. Complacency breeds failure. Only the paranoid survive."

This echoes something that Lee Kuan Yew himself once said, "What I fear is complacency. When things always become better, people tend to want more for less work."

But, of course, too much paranoia can ultimately consume a society. Paranoia suggests always looking over your shoulder, always being driven by threats, rather than also looking out for opportunities. Paranoia, taken too far, can also lead to a loss of solidarity within society, leading to people viewing the world purely in zero-sum terms. What about being pulled forward by the better angels of our nature, instead of being chased by demons?

Discussion Questions:

1. According to the author, in what key ways have our governance processes evolved?
2. What forces have contributed to this evolution?
3. In the conclusion, what are some of the concerns and challenges the author raises regarding governance of our society? Do you agree that these are valid concerns, and why / why not?

[3] 'Black swan' events refer to occurrences that deviate beyond what is normally expected of a situation and are extremely difficult to predict; black swan events are typically random and unexpected.

Essay Questions:

1. To what extent has the political climate in your society changed for the better? (RI 2013 Prelim)

250

Asian Barometer Survey 2014-2016

conducted by the Centre for East Asia Democratic Studies, National Taiwan University

Some major research findings from the Asian Barometer Survey are highlighted below. The survey was conducted in several waves. The first wave was conducted across eight countries/territories: China, Hong Kong, Japan, Mongolia, the Philippines, South Korea, Taiwan, and Thailand.Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Vietnam were added in the Second Wave, and Myanmar was added in the Fourth Wave.

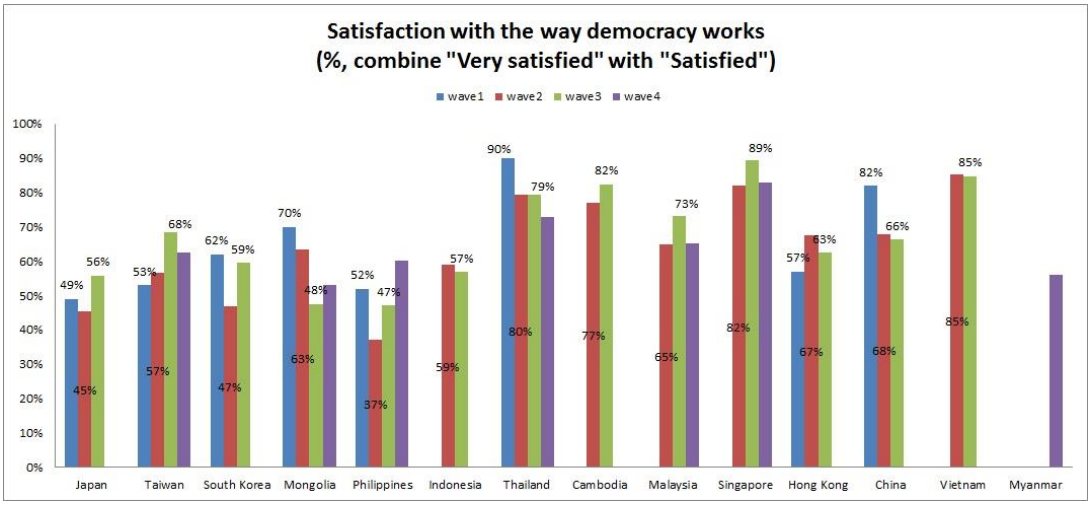
(i) How do Asians Understand the Meaning of Democracy?

In the ABS Third Wave, four items were designed to measure how respondents understand the meaning of democracy. For each item, respondents were asked to choose for one of four definitions of democracy corresponding to social equality, good governance, norms and procedures, and freedom and liberty respectively. Unlike people in the West, Asians tend to understand the meaning of democracy in terms of substantive outcomes (social equality or good governance), rather than the procedural aspects of democracy (norms and procedures or freedom and liberty). Furthermore, this finding was consistent across regime types.

Country	Social Equity	Good Governance	Norms and Procedures	Freedom and Liberty
Japan	27.9%	**42.3%**	16.7%	13.1%
Korea	21.4%	**38.0%**	22.2%	18.4%
Taiwan	**33.9%**	30.9%	22.3%	13.0%
Philippines	28.8%	21.1%	22.4%	27.8%
Thailand	**36.4%**	32.8%	17.3%	13.4%
Cambodia	27.3%	24.0%	26.7%	22.0%
Indonesia	25.8%	**34.2%**	23.0%	17.0%
Mongolia	22.5%	**30.5%**	23.0%	24.0%
China	**34.9%**	29.7%	25.3%	10.2%
Hong Kong	**32.5%**	25.5%	21.6%	20.4%
Singapore	29.5%	**36.4%**	18.2%	16.0%
Malaysia	24.7%	**34.9%**	26.2%	14.2%
Vietnam	**42.4%**	34.9%	16.6%	6.1%

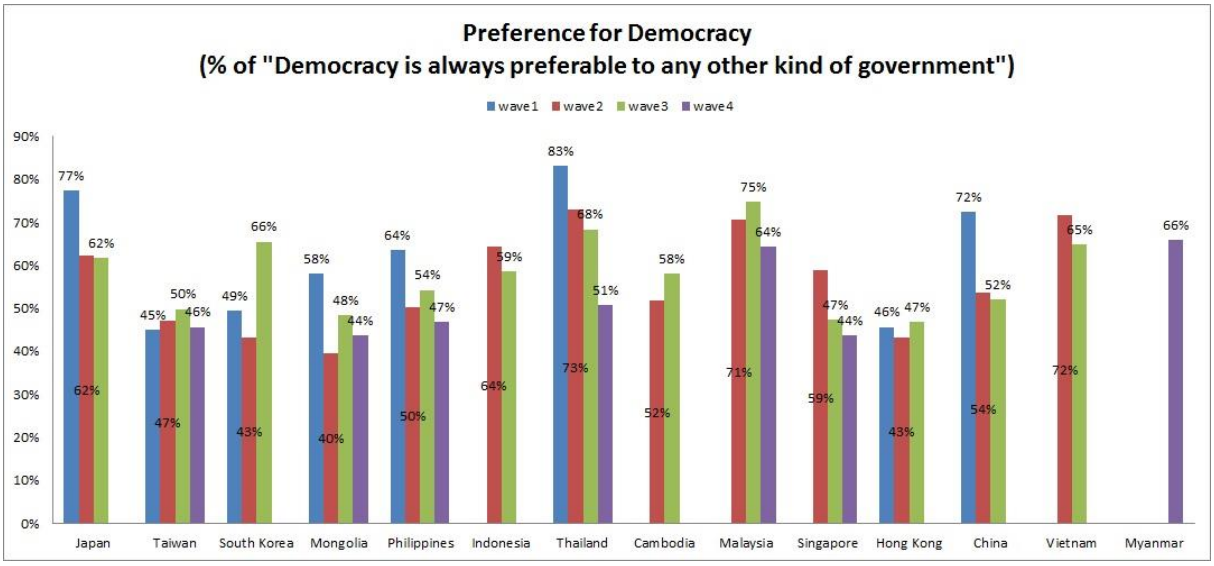
(ii) Are Asians Satisfied With the Performance of Democracy in their own Country?

Since the First Wave, the Asian Barometer Survey has asked respondents if they are satisfied with the performance of democracy in their own country. Our results consistently show that satisfaction with the performance of democracy is lowest in the region's liberal democracies (Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea), indicating a gap between citizens' expectations of democracy and the actual performance of democratic institutions.



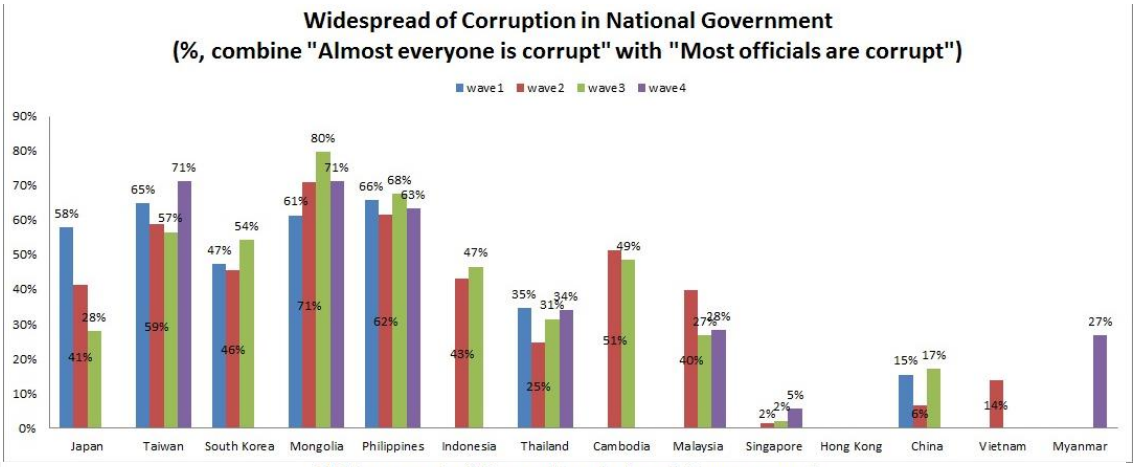
(iii) Preference for Democracy

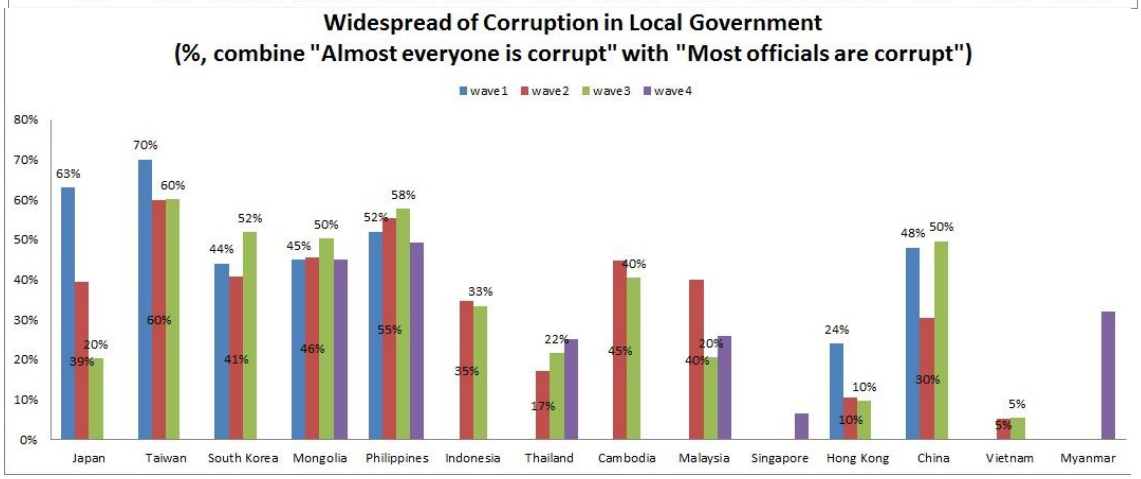
Many respondents do not regard democracy as always the best form of government. This finding was consistent across different regime types, including liberal democracies. For instance, in Japan, the region's oldest democracy, only 62% of respondents stated that democracy was always the best form of government in the Third Wave, a decline from 77% in the First Wave. In Taiwan, the proportion of respondents who regarded democracy as always preferable did not exceed 50% in any wave.



(iv) Perceptions of Corruption

Citizens in democratic countries are also more likely to perceive widespread corruption among government officials than those in authoritarian countries (especially at the national level), despite the fact that democracies generally have better scores on objective indicators of corruption.





Global Competitive Index 2017-2018

Below is Singapore's profile in the Global Competitive Index (2017-2018), indicating how Singapore ranks across various areas of competitiveness, among the 137 countries analysed.

Singapore

3rd / 137

The Global Competitiveness Index 2017-2018 edition

WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM

Key indicators, 2016

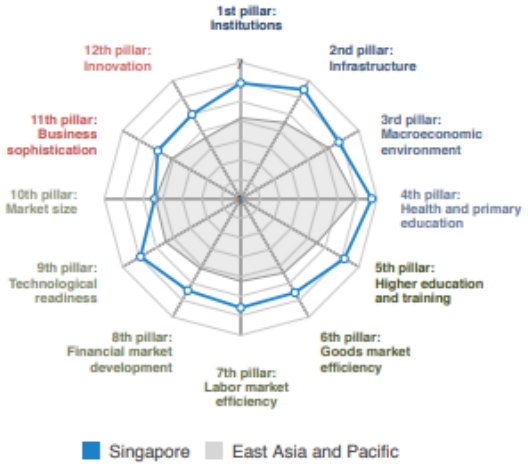
Source: International Monetary Fund; World Economic Outlook Database (April 2017)

Population millions	5.6	**GDP per capita** US$	52,960.7
GDP US$ billions	297.0	**GDP (PPP)** % world GDP	0.41

Performance overview

Index Component	Rank/137	Score (1-7)	Trend	Distance from best
Global Competitiveness Index	3	5.7		
Subindex A: Basic requirements	2	6.3		
1st pillar: Institutions	2	6.1		
2nd pillar: Infrastructure	2	6.5		
3rd pillar: Macroeconomic environment	18	6.0		
4th pillar: Health and primary education	3	6.8		
Subindex B: Efficiency enhancers	2	5.7		
5th pillar: Higher education and training	1	6.3		
6th pillar: Goods market efficiency	1	5.8		
7th pillar: Labor market efficiency	2	5.8		
8th pillar: Financial market development	3	5.7		
9th pillar: Technological readiness	14	6.1		
10th pillar: Market size	35	4.8		
Subindex C: Innovation and sophistication factors	12	5.2		
11th pillar: Business sophistication	18	5.2		
12th pillar: Innovation	9	5.3		

Edition	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
Rank	2 / 144	2 / 148	2 / 144	2 / 140	2 / 138	3 / 137
Score	5.7	5.6	5.6	5.7	5.7	5.7



Singapore (3rd, down one) posts an excellent performance across the board. It continues to lead the **Higher education and training** pillar and the **Goods market efficiency** pillar, and features in the top 10 of six others. In particular, Singapore ranks first worldwide for public sector performance, one of the categories of the **Institutions** pillar, where it also excels (2nd). The country also possesses superior **transport infrastructure** (2nd), its **labor market** is extremely efficient (2nd), and its **financial sector** is well developed, stable and trustworthy (3rd). Singapore's **macroeconomic environment** (18th) has slightly deteriorated as a result of a persisting deflationary spell. There exists room for improvement among **innovation** (9th) and **business sophistication** factors (18th). Singapore continues to lag behind the world's most prolific innovation powerhouses in these areas.

Most problematic factors for doing business

Source: World Economic Forum, Executive Opinion Survey 2017