

RAFFLES INSTITUTION YEAR 6 GENERAL PAPER 2023 STUDENTS' INFORMATION PACKAGE		
Unit: Politics and Governance II - Focusing on Singapore		
	EUs	Pages
1. Introduction and Learning Objectives*	-	2
2. Enduring Understandings and Essential Questions*	-	3
3. For Further Reading/Viewing*	-	4
4. Related Past Year Examination Questions*	-	4-8
Section A: Singapore and Democracy		
5. Demophobic society: Singapore's allergy to the D-word weakens us*	1 & 3	9-11
6. A Defence of Singapore-style Democracy	1-3	12-15
7. Singapore needs loving critics	1-3	16-18
8. Leader of the Opposition: A turning point but also a 'double-edged sword'	1 & 3	18-21
Section B: Negotiating Between Freedom and Stability		
9. GE2020 – Singapore's day of decision and the challenge of a generation	2-3	22-26
10. 'Hard choices' for Singapore media after controversial law passed	2-3	27-30
11. Trusting Surveillance in Singapore's 'Smart Nation'	2-3	31-33
12. The Myth of 'Trade Offs'*	2, 3 & 5	34-36
13. Concessions Singaporeans make in exchange for effective crisis management	2-4	37-40
Section C: Negotiating Between Inclusiveness and the Common Good		
14. Of Race and National Identity	2-4	41-43
15. Unpacking the government narrative about 'tribalism' in Singapore	2 & 4	44-47
16. Parents' concerns over full subject-based banding	4	48-50
17. Decision on Section 377A reflects 'Singapore formula' on difficult issues*	2-4	51-53
18. Re-examining Singapore's Social Security System	5	54-57
19. Singapore's Lesson: Managing Immigration to Create a Win-win Situation	5	58-60
Section D: Negotiating Between Domestic Interests and Global Concerns		
20. Singapore's approach to the challenges of an uncertain external environment*	6	61-64
21. Singapore responds to criticism of its climate pledges	6	65-67
22. Imposing sanctions on Russia despite potential costs	6	68-70

*Denotes foundational readings

1. Introduction

Politics and Governance II builds on fundamental concepts introduced in *Politics and Governance I* and throws the spotlight on Singapore. This package aims to provide information on the Singapore political context to help students better understand and appreciate the complexities of politics and governance in Singapore so as to provide a more informed response to **essays or Application Question answers**. Students are advised to cross-reference the issues raised in this package with those in the Politics I package (e.g. The article on Singapore's Authoritarian prosperity in this package should also be seen as a part of Section 10 in the Politics I package.) In sum, this package was not meant to be a stand-alone compilation of readings but students should reflect on how these issues are also seen on a global level.

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 awareness of the local political context, 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:

Enduring Understandings: What will students understand as a result of this unit?

Countries' methods of governance are shaped by a range of historical and socio-economic factors.

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

Governance is about negotiation between tensions. These tensions can happen on multiple levels.

EU2: The tension between 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 between 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 short-term always requires compromise

EU6: The tension between domestic interests and global pressures always require compromise.

The increasing influence of the media on society has an impact on governance.

EU7: The media can shape the public's perceptions of and behavior towards political actors/institutions, consequentially aiding or hindering governance.

Essential Questions: What are the essential questions of this unit?

1. Is government necessary and/or avoidable (in all aspects of life)?
2. What is good governance?
3. How do competing values influence political discourse?
4. Can we have effective democratic government without knowledgeable and aware citizens?
5. Is effective governance possible without democratic checks and balances?
6. How much resources should governments be required to allocate to help those who are responsible for their own problems?

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

A. Cambridge Exam Questions

1. Consider the view that people imprisoned for crimes should lose all their rights.
2. 'Power these days lies more with the people than the politicians.' To what extent is this true? (Cambridge 2021)
3. 'What an individual eats or drinks should not be the concern of the state.' What is your view? (Cambridge 2021)
4. Should politicians pursue the popular viewpoint or their own convictions, if they conflict? (Cambridge 2020)
5. Is modern technology a benefit or threat to democracy? (Cambridge 2020)
6. 'In a free society, there should be no restrictions on freedom of speech.' Discuss. (Cambridge 2020)
7. To what extent is human life in general about the survival of the fittest? (Cambridge 2020)
8. To what extent can any society claim to be great? (Cambridge 2020)
9. How far should countries have relations with others whose human rights record is poor? (Cambridge 2019)
10. To what extent should income equality be a goal in your society? (Cambridge 2019)
11. Consider the view that social media has more influence than politicians. (Cambridge 2019)
12. A leader's responsibility should always be to his or her own country, not other nations. (Cambridge 2019)
13. To what extent is the pursuit of continuous economic growth a desirable goal? (Cambridge 2018)
14. 'In the global village in which we inhabit, there is no justification for national boundaries.' How far do you agree? (Cambridge 2018)
15. Discuss the view that all countries have an equal responsibility to counter terrorism. (Cambridge 2018)
16. 'Foreign aid does not solve long-term problems.' To what extent is this a fair viewpoint? (Cambridge 2018)
17. Consider the view that we do not take enough responsibility for our own well-being. (Cambridge 2018)
18. Do events, rather than politicians, shape the future? (Cambridge 2017)
19. 'Countries experiencing conflict should be left to sort out their own problems.' How far do you agree? (Cambridge 2016)

20. 'Everyone has an opinion, but not everyone's opinion is of equal value.' What is your view? (Cambridge 2016)
21. When a government's finances for social welfare are limited, should they be directed towards the young or the old? (Cambridge 2015)
22. In times of economic hardship, should a country still be expected to provide financial and material aid to others? (Cambridge 2014)
23. 'The world would be a better place if more political leaders were women.' What is your view? (Cambridge 2013)
24. To what extent is it possible 'to make the punishment fit the crime'? (Cambridge 2013)
25. How far is increased prosperity for all a realistic goal in your society? (Cambridge 2013)
26. How far, in your society, should unpopular views be open to discussion? (Cambridge 2013)
27. 'The key criterion for good government is how well the economy is managed.' Is this a fair assessment? (Cambridge 2012)
28. Consider the view that efficient government is more important than democracy. (Cambridge 2011)

B. RI Exam Questions

1. 'Small countries are helpless in shaping global politics.' Do you agree? (RI 2022 Y6 Prelim)
2. Is conflict inevitable in today's volatile world? (RI 2022 Y6 Prelim)
3. To what extent is meritocracy in your society still desirable? (RI 2022 Y6 Common Test)
4. 'The key to good governance is in staying accountable to the people.' How far do you agree? (RI 2022 Y6 Common Test)
5. 'In today's digital age, freedom of expression works better in theory than in practice.' To what extent is this true? (RI 2022 Y6 Common Test)
6. To what extent are the young truly concerned about politics? (RI 2022 Y6 Common Test)
7. 'State censorship of the media is no longer necessary today.' What is your view? (RI 2022 Y6 Timed Practice)
8. Should individual rights and freedom be protected at all costs? (RI 2021 Y6 Prelim)
9. How far do you agree that good governance is key to the protection of the environment? (2021 Y6 Prelim)
10. Should the state intervene in matters relating to one's body? (RI 2021 Y6 Prelim)
11. Should environmental sustainability be given greater priority in your society? (RI 2021 Y6 Common Test)
12. To what extent should politicians have a say in scientific research? (RI 2021 Y6 Common Test)
13. Is diversity of people and their viewpoints truly celebrated in your society? (RI 2021 Y6 Common Test)
14. 'We are less free than before.' How far do you agree with this view of modern society? (RI 2021 Y6 Timed Practice)
15. 'It is harder than ever for voters to make the right choices in elections today.' Discuss. (RI 2021 Y6 Timed Practice)
16. 'People, rather than the government, should be responsible for their own well-being.' Comment. (RI 2021 Y6 Timed Practice)
17. To what extent is health seen as a personal responsibility in your society? (RI 2021 Y5 Promo)
18. 'Race has no place in politics today.' How far do you agree? (RI 2020 Y6 Prelim)
19. To what extent do young people have a significant voice in political affairs? (RI 2020 Y6 Timed Practice)
20. 'Freedom of speech is key to building a strong democracy.' To what extent is this true? (RI 2020 Term 3 Y6 Common Essay Assignment)

21. Do those who challenge the status quo have a place in your society? (RI 2020 Term 3 Y6 Common Essay Assignment)
22. Consider the view that individuals, not the state, are in the best position to determine their overall well-being. (RI 2020 Term 3 Y6 Common Essay Assignment)
23. 'There is no point in resisting surveillance.' Do you agree? (RI Y5 Promo 2020)
24. 'When a government's finances for social welfare are limited, the poor should be given the highest priority.' What is your view?
25. Assess the view that your society is not doing enough to eradicate prejudice. (RI 2019 Y6 Prelim)
26. To what extent is poverty the fault of the individual? (RI 2019 Y6 Prelim)
27. To what extent is progress achieved at the expense of our welfare? (RI 2019 Y6 Prelim)
28. Consider the argument that it is impossible to solve climate change in today's world. (RI 2019 Y6 Prelim)
29. How far should governments interfere in the way individuals organise their lives? (RI 2019 Y6 CT2)
30. How far is punishment an effective solution to crime? (RI 2019 Y6 CT2)
31. 'Politics is often more concerned with power than with people.' Is this a fair statement? (RI 2019 Y6 CT2)
32. In the light of increasing security threats, should countries still embrace the notion of a borderless world? (RI 2019 Y6 CT2)
33. Consider the notion that reaching a consensus is an ideal way to govern. (RI 2019 Y6 CT1)
34. Assess the view that government regulation is the best way to achieve a trustworthy media. (RI 2019 Y6 CT1)
35. Should the responsibility of taking care of the elderly fall solely on the government? (RI 2019 Y6 CT1)
36. 'Now more than ever, the arts should be subject to government censorship.' Comment. (RI 2019 Y6 CT1)
37. Should politicians be expected to always tell the truth? (RI 2019 Y6 CT1)
38. 'Surveillance of the people is a necessary evil.' Discuss. (RI 2018 Y6 Prelim)
39. Assess the view that international organisations are mostly ineffective. (RI 2018 Y6 Prelim)
40. 'Young people celebrate the wrong heroes.' How far is this true in your society today? (RI 2018 Y6 Prelim)
41. Should a government always listen to its people? (RI 2018 Y6 CT2)
42. 'The provision of financial or material aid to countries in need does more harm than good.' Discuss. (RI 2018 Y6 CT2)
43. Is it ever justifiable for people in society to make decisions for those who are unable to do so? (RI 2018 Y6 CT2)
44. Do you agree that efforts by the government to ensure greater inclusion in your society have done more harm than good? (RI 2018 Y6 CT1)
45. In times of economic hardship, should a government be expected to provide financial support to the arts? (RI 2018 Y6 CT1)
46. Should young people take a more active interest in politics, even when it is not directly relevant to their lives? (RI 2018 Y6 CT1)
47. Discuss the claim that the digital age has made it more challenging for political leaders to govern today. (RI 2018 Y6 CT1)
48. To what extent should the state have a right to intervene in the decisions of individuals when it comes to matters of health? Discuss this with regard to your society. (RI 2018 Y6 CT1)
49. Do monarchies still serve any purpose in today's society? (RI 2018 Y5 Promo)
50. Should refugees be viewed as a burden in modern society? (RI 2018 Y5 Promo)
51. 'We should abolish state funding for the Arts.' How far do you agree that this should be the case for your society? (RI 2018 Y5 Promo)
52. Consider the effectiveness of social activism in your society. (RI 2018 Y5 Promo)

53. 'Political leaders have no right to impose their own values and beliefs on the people they govern.' Do you agree? (RI 2018 Y5 CT)
54. 'A nation that simply complains.' Is this a fair comment about your society? (RI 2018 Y5 CT)
55. 'A country should take care of its own interests before others.' What is your view? (RI 2018 Y5 CT)
56. Evaluate the claim that too much has been done for the elderly in your society. (RI 2018 Y5 CT)
57. 'Business should have no place in politics.' Do you agree? (RI 2017 Y6 Prelim)
58. Is it ever justified to sacrifice human rights for a country's progress? (RI 2017 Y6 CT2)
59. In times of economic hardship, is it acceptable for a government to spend on weapons and its armed forces? (RI 2017 Y6 CT2)
60. '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 CT2)
61. How far should the State be allowed to restrict individual rights when security is at stake? (RI 2017 Y5 CT1)
62. Is it reasonable to expect politicians to be completely honest? (RI 2016 Y6 CT2)
63. In the world today, a nation's economic success is nothing more than a case of luck.' Is this a fair assessment? (RI 2016 Y6 CT2)
64. 'A good government should always put the interests of the majority first'. Discuss. (RI 2016 Y6 CT1)
65. How far do you agree that freedom has been destructive for society? (RI 2016 Y5 Promo)
66. Should your government do less for its people? (RI 2016 Y5 Promo)
67. 'The State has no place in the private lives of its citizens.' Do you agree? (RI 2015 Y6 Prelim)
68. How far is your society prepared for the challenges that diversity brings? (RI 2015 Y6 Prelim)
69. Is it ever justifiable to execute criminals? (RI 2015 Y6 CT2)
70. 'Democracy is essential for a country to become a developed nation.' Do you agree? (RI 2015 Y6 CT1)
71. 'Laws are the most effective way to combat prejudice and discrimination.' How far would you accept this view? (RI 2015 Y6 CT1)
72. 'Freedom of speech should be a privilege, not an entitlement.' How far would you agree with this statement? (RI 2015 Y6 CT1)
73. 'It is better to be an entertainment celebrity than a politician today.' What is your view? (RI 2015 Y6 CT1)
74. 'The key to a nation's success lies in economic growth.' Discuss. (RI 2015 Y5 Promo)
75. 'Ours is a country of divided people.' Is this a valid comment on your society? (RI 2015 Y5 Promo)
76. 'Personal privacy and national security cannot co-exist.' Comment. (RI 2015 Y5 CT1)
77. Should society pay more attention to the needs of criminals? (RI 2015 Y5 CT1)
78. 'Censorship is both harmful and futile in today's society.' Comment. (RI 2014 Y6 Prelim)
79. 'Pragmatism is more important than morality.' Discuss this with reference to politics. (RI 2014 Y6 Prelim)
80. To what extent have people given up their freedom for comfort? (RI 2014 Y6 Prelim)
81. 'The environment should be the responsibility of the individual, not the government.' Comment. (RI 2014 Y6 Prelim)
82. 'It is better to obey than to question.' How far is this true of your society? (RI 2014 Y6 CT2)
83. Should governments prioritise social welfare above overall economic growth? (RI 2014 Y6 CT1)
84. How far is the media responsible for promoting democracy in your society? (RI 2014 Y6 CT1)
85. 'For the sake of security, a nation has every right to monitor its citizens.' Discuss. (RI 2014 Y6 CT1)
86. Consider the view that people in your society have unrealistic expectations of their government. (RI 2014 Y5 Promo)
87. To what extent is healthy debate encouraged in your society? (RI 2014 Y5 Promo)
88. To what extent has the political climate in your society changed for the better? (RI 2013 Y6 Prelim)
89. Should the state involve itself in matters relating to the family? (RI 2013 Y5 Promo)

90. 'Democracy means more than having the right to vote.' Discuss. (RI 2013 Y6 CT 2)
91. What priorities would you set for government expenditure in your country and why? (RI 2013 Y6 CT 2)
92. 'An educated people can be easily governed.' Is this a valid statement? (RI 2012 Y6 Prelim)
93. 'Women are not suited for politics.' To what extent is this true? (RI 2012 Y6 Prelim)
94. Do you agree that the tools of social media have reinvented social activism? (RI 2012 Y6 CT2)
95. Do you think that your society will benefit from more freedom? (RI 2012 Y6 CT1)
96. 'Fine in principle but failure in practice.' How far do you agree with this assessment of democracy? (RI 2012 Y6 CT1)
97. Is it ever justified to spend large amounts of public money on national defence? Discuss this with reference to your country. (RI 2011 Y6 Prelim)
98. 'Governments have a right to censor undesirable elements of their nations' history.' Do you agree? (RI 2011 Y6 Prelim)
99. It has been said that Singapore is economically First World but socially Third World. What is your view? (RI 2011 Y6 Prelim)
100. To what extent does your country challenge the current state of affairs? (RI 2011 Y6 CT2)
101. 'The government always acts in the interest of the people.' Discuss. (RI 2011 Y6 CT1)
102. 'Democracy is not for everyone.' Comment. (RI 2011 Y6 CT1)
103. Is it always the responsibility of the state to help the poor? (RI 2011 Y5 Promo)
104. '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)
105. 'At the end of the day, government is all about teamwork and partnership.' Comment. (RI 2010 Y6 CT2)
106. Should nation-building be on the media's agenda? Discuss this with reference to your country. (RI 2010 Y6 CT1)

SECTION A: SINGAPORE AND DEMOCRACY

Reading 5: Demophobic society - Singapore's allergy to the D-word weakens us

EU 1 & 3

Adapted from Chapter 7 of Singapore Incomplete | Cherian George | 2017

The following 2 readings will help you to:

- Understand what the tenets of “liberal democracy” are
- Understand why Singapore’s style of governance is often labelled as “illiberal democracy”
- Examine arguments criticising and supporting Singapore’s style of governance

5 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.

10 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.

15 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.

20 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.

25 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

30 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.

35 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.

40 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.)

45 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.

50 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

55 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

60 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

65 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”.

70 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

75 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.

80 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
85 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
90 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
95 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.

100 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.

SECTION A: SINGAPORE AND DEMOCRACY

Reading 6: A defence of Singapore-style democracy

EU 1-3

Adapted from A defence of Singapore-style democracy | Daniel Chai and Gregory Koh | Consensus | 15 April 2017

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 democracy¹, 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."

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.

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.

35 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.

40 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.

45 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.

50 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

55 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

60 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.

65 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.

70 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 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.

For discussion/reflection:

- Chai and Koh highlight a 'pragmatic ideology' (Reading 6, line 26) 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' (Reading 5, line 25). Which depiction of the government's style and intentions do you find more representative and why?
- George argues that due to Singapore being '[s]table, compact, digitally connected and highly educated' (Reading 5, lines 95-96), she 'has better conditions than most for deepening its democracy' (line 96). In what ways might the 'conditions' cited actually be arguments against the adopting of a more democratic style of governance?
- Chai and Koh give 'strong reasons [for Singapore] to adopt a realistic and pragmatic approach to governance' (Reading 6, line 55), which they identify as being 'Singapore's early history as well as its vulnerable position in the world' (line 54). Attempt to refute this argument with your own line of reasoning.

Related Cambridge/RI essay questions:

1. 'In a free society, there should be no restrictions on freedom of speech.' Discuss. (Cambridge 2020)
2. Consider the view that efficient government is more important than democracy. (Cambridge 2011)
3. Is diversity of people and their viewpoints truly celebrated in your society? (RI 2021 Y6 Common Test)
4. 'Freedom of speech is key to building a strong democracy.' To what extent is this true? (RI 2020 Term 3 Y6 Common Essay Assignment)
5. Consider the notion that reaching a consensus is an ideal way to govern. (RI 2019 Y6 CT1)
6. 'Democracy is not for everyone.' Comment. (RI 2011 Y6 CT1)

SECTION A: SINGAPORE AND DEMOCRACY

Reading 7: Singapore needs loving critics

EU 1-3

Adapted from Pritam Singh seconds Tommy Koh's sentiment that Singapore needs loving critics | The Independent | Jewel Stolarchuk | June 12 2020

This reading will help you to understand:

- Why there is a need for more diverse voices in Singapore's political discourse, particularly voices that provide constructive criticism
- That a political environment that generates a 'contestation of ideas', rather than perspectives that merely mirror the dominant narratives, is likely to strengthen Singapore's democracy
- That normalising constructive discourse can lead to positive political outcomes, such as greater citizen engagement, and empowerment of other key political stakeholders

The WP chief urged the Government not to pick on these loving critics and alluded to an incident in Parliament last year, when Education Minister Ong Ye Kung lambasted local playwright Alfian Sa'at and accused him of trying to sow discord in Singapore.

5 Workers' Party (WP) secretary-general Pritam Singh seconded veteran diplomat Tommy Koh's sentiment that Singapore needs 'loving critics', during his parliamentary speech on the Fortitude Budget. Dr Koh, a distinguished diplomat who currently serves as Ambassador-At-Large at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Professor of Law at the National University of Singapore, urged the Government to welcome criticism from critics who love Singapore, last year.

10 Asserting that "the contestation of ideas is a necessary part of democracy" and that the Government should not "blacklist intellectuals, artists, writers because they criticise the Government or hold dissenting views, Dr Koh said: "Singapore will languish if our lovers are uncritical and our critics are unloving. What Singapore needs is not sycophants but loving critics and critical lovers."

15 Echoing Dr Koh's views, Mr Pritam told Parliament that Singapore "should count ourselves fortunate that we have citizens who are the loving critics amongst us." The opposition chief also urged the Government against picking on these loving critics and alluded to an incident in Parliament last year, when Education Minister Ong Ye Kung lambasted local playwright Alfian Sa'at and accused him of trying to sow discord in Singapore.

20 Singling out Mr Alfian for his role in a cancelled Yale-NUS module on dialogue and dissent, Mr Ong cherry-picked quotes from a poem Mr Alfian wrote in 1998 and insinuated that the poet hated Singapore and is unpatriotic.

Dr Tommy Koh was among the dozens of influential figures who threw their weight behind Mr Alfian in the aftermath of Mr Ong's aggressive parliamentary speech. Dr Koh wrote on Facebook, then: "We should not demonise Alfian Sa'at. He is one of our most talented playwrights. I regard him as a loving critic of Singapore. He is not anti-Singapore."

25 Mr Pritam backed Dr Koh's views in Parliament. Urging the Government to give space for contrarian views and perspectives, he said: "With many corporates and big businesses already perceived to be over-represented in our political ecology be it through the grassroots or through their association in private-public national level committees, Government needs to consider how it can become a better arbiter between differing views, to give and encourage more space to our youth, NGOs unlinked to GLCs and trade-unions, and the people sector to voice to their contrarian views and perspectives. This

30

should be done, while retaining a laser-like focus on fact-based conversations that portend a progressive future all Singaporeans can endeavour towards.

35 Referring to the Ong-alfian episode, he said: "In my view Mr Speaker, we should count ourselves fortunate that we have citizens who are the loving critics amongst us, some of whom have been questioned in this very House in this term of government. Members would recall one citizen's poems were nit-picked with a view to cast wholly negative aspersions on his character, even though that individual was not present in the House to defend himself."

40 Mr Pritam pointed out that the public look to people with influence on how to debate with those they disagree with and said that dealing with differences of opinion with a binary lens would make Singapore an ordinary society in the post-COVID world. He said: "Mr Speaker, when any leader or person of influence engages in what will be interpreted as dog-whistling, it sets the tone for how members of the public debate with those whose views they disagree with. If binary, black and white perspectives are the shape of how we as a society deal with differences after COVID-19, Singapore will become an ordinary society, no different from many around in the world."

45 Urging the Government to see that citizens criticise because they love the nation, Mr Pritam added: "Nobody expects the Government to willy-nilly change its decision at the first sign of pressure and agree with a critic. Singaporeans do recognise the multitude of perspectives the Government has to take cognisance of, but it is important to recognise that citizens criticise and organise because they care."

50 Calling on the authorities to consider opening more avenues for constructive discourse, Mr Singh urged the Government to place more faith in Singaporeans and encourage greater participation from citizens as Singapore traverses the post-COVID world: "Moving forward Government should look at opening more avenues like Parliament for citizen engagement, greater data-sharing and empower other institutions like our think-tanks and the mainstream media to give alternate perspectives more voice and even provide platforms piloting change on a small scale."

"As we traverse the post-COVID-19 VUCA – volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous – world, we need to place more faith and promote even greater participation from Singaporeans than ever before."

For discussion/reflection:

- How does the author define the term 'loving critics', and what role do they play in promoting open dialogue and constructive criticism in society?
- According to Mr Pritam Singh, why is it important for 'people with influence' (line 38) to not deal 'with differences of opinion with a binary lens' (line 39)?
- According to Mr Pritam Singh, what are some of the benefits of having a culture of constructive criticism in Singapore? Apart from those listed, what other benefits can you think of?
- What do you think are the potential risks and challenges associated with being a 'loving critic' in Singapore?
- How does the main perspective on constructive criticism and public discourse compare with the political climate in other countries, and what do you think can Singapore learn from these experiences?

Related past-year Cambridge and RI essay questions:

1. 'In a free society, there should be no restrictions on freedom of speech.' Discuss. (Cambridge 2020)
2. 'Everyone has an opinion, but not everyone's opinion is of equal value.' What is your view? (Cambridge 2016)

3. How far, in your society, should unpopular views be open to discussion? (Cambridge 2013)
4. Consider the view that efficient government is more important than democracy. (Cambridge 2011)
5. 'In today's digital age, freedom of expression works better in theory than in practice.' To what extent is this true? (RI 2022 Y6 Common Test)
6. Is diversity of people and their viewpoints truly celebrated in your society? (RI 2021 Y6 Common Test)
7. Do those who challenge the status quo have a place in your society? (RI 2020 Term 3 Y6 Common Essay Assignment)

SECTION A: SINGAPORE AND DEMOCRACY

Reading 8: Leader of the Opposition: A turning point but also a 'double-edged sword' **EU 1 & 3**

Adapted from Leader of the Opposition: A turning point, Channel News Asia | Chew Hui Min | 29 July 2020

This reading will help you to understand:

- The value of a creditable alternative to the political incumbent in a democratic system, which could, in theory, give rise to a greater diversity of perspectives
- Concessions made by the PAP, as the political incumbent, to allow for a more prominent opposition presence in the Parliament, in the Workers Party
- In what ways the new Leader of the Opposition position is still limited in terms of the actual power to enact significant changes

On Tuesday, it was announced that as the Leader of the Opposition, Workers' Party (WP) chief Pritam Singh will get additional parliamentary privileges, resources to hire more legislative assistants and double the pay of a Member of Parliament (MP). Accepting the position, Mr Singh said: "The Leader of the Opposition appointment carries with it many additional responsibilities that I will have to shoulder. The road ahead will not be easy, but I thank Singaporeans for their support and encouragement."

Political observer Felix Tan called the new office a "good start", and said that with more resources and information for the opposition, this could push debate in Parliament to a different level. "After more than 50 years, Singapore's political landscape is finally entering a new phase. The recognition of the role the opposition would surely put the Workers' Party in good stead," said the associate lecturer in international relations at SIM Global Education. "So, now, the ball is in the WP's court to produce and introduce feasible policies."

"KEY TURNING POINT"

Authorities said on Tuesday that the Leader of the Opposition will receive allowances to hire up to three additional legislative assistants on top of the allowances all MPs receive for one legislative assistant and one secretarial assistant. In addition to the government data or information available to other MPs, Mr Singh will receive confidential briefings by the Government on "select matters of national security and external relations, and in the event of a national crisis or emergency". In Parliament, he will generally be given the right of first response among MPs and to ask the lead question to the ministers. He will also be given more time to speak, equivalent to political officeholders. His duties include leading the opposition in presenting alternative views in parliamentary debates on policies, Bills and motions, and leading the scrutiny of the Government's positions and actions in Parliament.

Mr Leonard Lim, country director for Singapore for government affairs consultancy Vriens & Partners, said that this was a “key turning point in Singapore’s political landscape. This entrenches the role of the opposition in Singapore’s Parliament, confers a higher level of authority on Pritam within the House, and guarantees more air-time for a greater diversity of views to be aired in Parliament,” he said.

- 25 However, the appointment does not change Singapore’s political system in form and in substance, said political analyst Eugene Tan, an associate professor of law at the Singapore Management University. “The LO (Leader of the Opposition) office is not designed to create a new parliamentary system but to reinforce the existing one by formally recognising and institutionalising the role of a responsible, credible, and loyal opposition in Singapore’s constitutional system of government,” he said. “It is about furthering the goal of
- 30 a collaborative system of governance for the benefit of Singapore and Singaporeans.” Where change may take place would be in Singaporeans’ understanding, expectations and demands of the opposition, he added.

A SHADOW CABINET?

- Analysts pointed out that the move needs to be seen in the Singapore context where the number of opposition MPs remains small. There will be 10 elected Workers’ Party MPs and two Non-Constituency MPs
- 35 from the Progress Singapore Party (PSP) in the 14th Parliament, a total of 12. The People’s Action Party (PAP) retains its super majority with 83, or nearly 90 per cent, of the 93 parliamentary seats. In countries with similar parliamentary systems, the Leader of the Opposition leads a shadow Cabinet with senior members of the opposition who mirror the role of political office holders, and provide the semblance of an alternative government-in-waiting. But this may not be feasible in Singapore, where there are 15 ministries and its
- 40 Cabinet has 20 ministers, including those under the Prime Minister’s Office.

- “Singapore is going to be different from what you have in other countries because usually the idea is that the leader would be the head of the shadow government,” said Dr Gillian Koh, deputy director for research at the Institute of Policy Studies. “In this case ... one could argue that 12 might be enough to man all the key portfolios of government, so it is within Pritam Singh’s prerogative to decide if he would like to organise the
- 45 opposition parliamentarians into a form of shadow government. It is entirely within his prerogative but also his political imagination to work within what is now possible.” Mr Singh could divide the need to present alternative views in Parliament according to portfolios, Dr Koh added, and this would be moving towards “a rudimentary form of shadow government”.

- Mr Lim of Vriens & Partners said that expecting a shadow government was premature given the small
- 50 number of opposition MPs, and while it may be possible in the future, it is unlikely to occur during this term of government. It is not helpful to juxtapose the office against that in other jurisdictions as the state of the opposition in Singapore is “vastly different” compared with the established democracies, said Assoc Prof Tan. “Ours is still very much a one-party dominant system whereas the established democracies are either longstanding two-party or multi-party systems,” he said.

- 55 On whether the appointment of a leader of the opposition is a step towards a two-party system, Dr Koh said it was not necessarily so. “The way to a two-party system is through the ballot box. It has to be about the numbers and the popular will,” she said. “It remains to be seen whether WP wishes to build itself up and whether it’s got the resources and aspiration to present an alternative government. It remains to be seen whether that is their strategy or not, they may choose not to, they may choose to. And this is something
- 60 that can evolve over the next four to five years.”

MANAGING POLITICAL CHANGE

65 The Prime Minister has said that the formalisation of the Leader of the Opposition was a recognition that while Singaporeans want a PAP Government, they also want a diversity of voices and alternative views in Parliament. "I look forward to more vigorous but constructive debates in Parliament. I hope our colleagues across the aisle will step up to play their role of a responsible and loyal opposition," said Mr Lee at the swearing-in ceremony of political office holders on Monday. "Their duty is not merely to raise criticisms and ask questions of the Government, necessary as these functions are. But also, more importantly, to put forward serious policy alternatives to be scrutinised and debated."

70 The new position may be a way to "help the Government to manage the pace of political change in Singapore," Assoc Prof Tan said. Government Parliamentary Committees (GPCs) "[r]emaining as they are - as a makeshift internal opposition within the government - will not be feasible," he said. "They were conceived at a time when opposition was much weaker. Today, the idea of the PAP backbenchers functioning as an ersatz opposition is seen as an inherent contradiction that will not work at all."

75 Dr Koh said that for the detractors who think that this is a state with no opposition and no contestation, it is a way to shift and institutionalise the role of the political opposition in Parliament. "It is a representation of the fact that we do have a contestable system. The potential is there but the popular will isn't, nor did the parties, any party in GE2020 argue to be an alternative government," she said. Mr Lim said that the PAP would also benefit from a richer buffet of ideas and greater scrutiny of policies. "Singapore and Singaporeans will be the ultimate winners through policies that have gone through a much more rigorous level of scrutiny before being passed and implemented," he said.

"DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD" FOR OPPOSITION

80 However, this development can be a "double-edged sword" for the WP and the opposition in general, Assoc Prof Tan said. "If the LO office does result in the public having higher expectations of the opposition, that is a good outcome but that is unlikely to materialise in the term of the new Parliament," he said. "The resource disparity between the PAP Government and the opposition remain significant." He said that if done well, the office would be a credit to the WP and the opposition, showing what they are capable of and being able to take on greater responsibilities, but if done poorly, then the public may see the current limitations of the opposition.

90 Mr Lim said that a good performance by Mr Singh will burnish the WP's brand name and improve the robustness of debate in Parliament. "If Pritam performs well, we could see further enhancement of the WP brand as a rational opposition party with good alternative ideas rather than just one that 'checks' the PAP's every move. This would lead to positive knock-on effects in terms of volunteer recruitment and ground awareness for WP."

For discussion/reflection:

- In this article, political observer Felix Tan characterised the appointment of a Leader of the Opposition the 'entering [of] a new phase' (line 8). In your own words, explain what this 'new phase' represents/is, and suggest reasons why the new appointment seems indicative of such a phase (other than it being a brand new position)
- In Year 5, we learned that all media, being 'constructions of reality', contain 'embedded values and points of view' (See Media Issues, EU 3). When media sources like news outlets and new media political commentary continually refer to parties like the Workers Party, Singapore Democratic Party, and Progress Singapore Party as 'the opposition', what 'embedded values and points of view' do you think is being conveyed? Are such points of view beneficial to Singapore?

- Notwithstanding that the formation of a 'Shadow Cabinet' might be unfeasible and Singapore is still far from being a two-party system (lines 33-60), what might be the advantages and disadvantages of such a Cabinet and system, respectively?
- Assoc Prof Tan suggested that progressively allowing a more prominent opposition in the Parliament can 'help the Government manage the pace of political change' (lines 68-69). Reflect on what he means by this.

Related RI essay questions:

1. 'It is harder than ever for voters to make the right choices in elections today.' Discuss. (RI 2021 Y6 Timed Practice)
2. Consider the notion that reaching a consensus is an ideal way to govern. (RI 2019 Y6 CT1)
3. 'Ours is a country of divided people.' Is this a valid comment on your society? (RI 2015 Y5 Promo)
4. To what extent has the political climate in your society changed for the better? (RI 2013 Y6 Prelim)
5. 'At the end of the day, government is all about teamwork and partnership.' Comment. (RI 2010 Y6 CT2)

SECTION B: NEGOTIATING BETWEEN FREEDOM AND STABILITY

Reading 9: GE2020 - Singapore's day of decision and the challenge of a generation

EU 2 & 3

Cherian George and Donald Low | Academia.sg | 14 July 2020 | Refer to Politics I Infopack Section E – Tension between Individual Freedom and the Power of the State

This reading will help you to:

- Understand the tension between Singapore's tried-and-tested model of governance and a more politically engaged and active citizenry
- Understand how the balance of political freedom and social stability is negotiated between the ruling party and the people

An election doesn't just distribute seats to victorious candidates and bequeath legitimacy to the governing party. It also creates new opportunities that political actors and the wider public may seize or ignore, widen or block. This contentious process will dominate Singapore politics in the days, weeks and months following Singapore's July 10 general elections.

- 5 Some of it will occur in public: now that the people have spoken, multiple interpreters will compete to have the final word on what those 2.53 million crosses really meant. But much of the action will take place in the shadows, as elites jostle for influence behind the scenes, and millions of Singaporeans make private decisions about whether and how to participate in the country's democratic life.

- 10 In a piece we co-wrote three days before Polling Day, we warned that Singapore might be headed for a period of political disaffection and disillusionment, with many citizens feeling alienated from the political system, and the ruling party becoming more irritable and irascible. Our prognosis has not changed fundamentally. We know this view is not in tune with the hopeful tenor of the times. Commentators across the political spectrum are calling the GE result a good outcome, while PAP politicians have tried to be gracious in their initial public comments.

- 15 There is an old saying that nothing is as powerful as an idea whose time has come. But ideas alone, no matter how compelling, are not enough; they cannot be transformative without action. Influential individuals in the PAP need to muster the moral courage to push for change; peers need to support them; and the small number of decision-makers at the top must finally give their nod of approval.

- 20 As for the wider public, much depends on whether the attentive voter who enthusiastically sought out the latest party videos and dissected every campaign message is now willing to metamorphose into an active citizen, prepared to scrutinise boring government Bills and volunteer at the grassroots, for example. All these steps go against the grain of Singapore's political culture, so we are not holding our breath. There is every chance that the government will respond to GE2020 just as it did to GE2011 — correcting policy failures without reforming its politics. It may once again convene managed conversations while restricting the space for public discourse and whipping up populist nationalism against critics. As the PAP starts soul-searching, influential voices are already advising it to focus narrowly on livelihood issues and ignore the calls for political diversity and fairness.
- 25

The Sengkang Dividend

- 30 But, yes, the results of GE2020 open up opportunities for positive political and policy reforms and a maturing of Singapore's democracy. The Workers' Party (WP) win in Sengkang GRC, in particular, is significant beyond the obvious fact that it's the first time that the opposition has secured two GRCs.

First, Sengkang, together with the swing in the PAP's vote share toward 1991 and 2011 levels, underlines Singaporeans' desire for a "diversity of voices in parliament", as Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong acknowledged in his post-election press conference. This signal is clearer now than in 2011. Voter discontent in GE2011 had mostly to do with "bread-and-butter" issues, particularly housing affordability,

35 public transport reliability, weak social safety nets, and the angst caused by relaxed immigration policies. Although we both argued at the time that these policy lapses were intimately related to groupthink within an overly dominant executive, the PAP told itself that it did not need to fix its approach to governance, only its policies. It responded to the GE2011 debacle with a slew of technocratic solutions in the key vote-losing policy areas. But for all the “new normal” hype, the government quashed moves towards a more inclusive
40 or diverse political system. In GE2020, on the other hand, the PAP entered an electoral battlefield softened with the largest outlay of bread and butter in the republic’s history. Indeed, the COVID-19 packages were widely expected to give the PAP an unassailable competitive edge. Compared with 2011, it will be much harder this time to resist the conclusion that many Singaporeans want political change, not just practical help.

45 Second, if not for the Sengkang result, the PAP government would not have deemed it necessary to confer WP leader Pritam Singh with the honorific “Leader of the Opposition”, along with a commensurate level of staff support and other resources. Although this comes at the possible expense of opposition unity — since it will deepen the gulf in prestige and interests between the WP and parties with only non-constituency seats, not to mention those with no parliamentary presence — it is an important symbolic gesture.
50 Providing the WP with more state resources acknowledges a loyal opposition’s legitimate role in Singapore’s system of government. This is a step toward correcting the common misperception that the interests of the ruling party, the administration, and state are one and the same — a conflation that remains one of the main barriers in the way of a fairer, more contestable political system.

Third, Sengkang reflected voters’ rejection of, even revulsion at, the attacks on the WP’s Raeesah Khan.
55 The PAP chose to misrepresent Raeesah’s 2018 comments as being “highly derogatory [of] Chinese and Christians”, when they were clearly about unequal treatment of different groups by the system. The vigorous pushback against the attempted character assassination clearly caught the PAP by surprise, even though it should not have — just before Parliament was dissolved, the PAP had engaged in an equally clumsy and racialised attack on playwright Alfian Sa’at, which seemed to work only on its own hardcore
60 supporters and trolls. The attack on Raeesah ended as abruptly as it began. In his final e-rally on 8 July, PM Lee went into damage limitation mode, acknowledging a possible generation gap in the way Singaporeans talk about race. Home Affairs Minister K Shanmugam also struck an unusually conciliatory note in post-election remarks about the case. The controversy opens up an opportunity to adjust Singapore’s top-down and punitive approach to conversations on race and religion, as many experts and other thoughtful citizens
65 have long advised.

Fourth, the Sengkang result opens the door to a debate on electoral reform. At the top of the agenda is the unpopular group representation constituency (GRC) system. Even if this was not the intent, GRCs serve as hard-to-breach electoral citadels. If the opposition pips the PAP in an individual ward within a GRC, the advantage is usually cancelled out by sister wards that are solidly pro-PAP. This has long been suspected to
70 be a feature, not a bug, of the GRC system, since GRC boundaries are not drawn by an independent commission. GE2020 provided further evidence of how difficult it remains for the opposition to win a GRC: even a 28 percentage point swing against the PAP in West Coast GRC could not dislodge a PAP team led by two ministers. But the GE results also present the PAP with a dilemma. Aljunied GRC shows that, once breached, citadels are equally difficult to recover. Sengkang gives further cause for pause: there is a limit
75 to how many sitting ministers can be wagered in these high-stakes GRC contests. This, after all, is not a game of cards, and the government will at some point need to do the math. The case for reforming — or even abolishing — the GRC system is further strengthened by GE2020’s evidence that it may be getting redundant as a means of ensuring minority representation. The WP’s victorious Aljunied team had three minority candidates, while the PAP’s best-performing GRC team was anchored by another.

No blank cheque for reform

80 These significant developments, we stress, present only opportunities for Singapore — not guaranteed outcomes. The optimists may be underestimating how difficult it will be for the PAP government to change its internal culture and its approach to governance. We also anticipate that most Singaporeans will

continue to outsource political participation to a small number of activists, while they themselves venture no further than the nearest “Like” button.

85 We do not lack hope. Indeed, most of our writing on Singapore government and politics has been premised on the possibility and desirability of internal reform. We have also consciously tried to appeal to the establishment’s better angels.

90 Cherian’s 2017 volume, *Singapore, Incomplete*, was addressed primarily to supporters and future leaders of the PAP, suggesting how an embrace of Singapore’s multicultural and political diversity could strengthen both the party and the nation. “[A]nyone rooting for the PAP to remain relevant must hope that reform-minded leaders will emerge in the fifth-generation leadership, and perhaps even in the fourth,” the book argued. “Political reform may not be in the short term interests of current PAP leaders who have grown comfortable with the status quo, but if they do it soon and manage it right, it will help their successors secure Singapore’s long-term interests.”

95 Donald’s 2014 book, *Hard Choices: Challenging the Singapore Consensus*, made the case for political and policy reforms that were well within the PAP government’s ideological range. In a recent article on the coronavirus pandemic, he noted that Singaporeans are “justifiably proud of their strong, competent government”, but that “the biggest cognitive threat a decision-maker faces is not disunity; rather it is the tunnel vision that comes from ‘being in the trenches’ for too long”. He argued: “[B]etween a strong, competent state and a strong society that can check and constrain the state’s excesses lies a narrow corridor that protects our rights and freedoms while allowing the state to function effectively.”

100 We believe that the country should not put all its eggs solely in the PAP basket. But, as our commentaries over the years suggest, Singaporeans should not neglect the PAP basket either, nor underestimate the value of a strong elite (though not elitist) administration. An internally reformed PAP government has to be a key plank of Singapore’s strategy to survive and thrive, at least in the short to medium term.

110 Unlike the PAP’s response to GE2011, today’s reforms must start with politics rather than policy. Even establishment voices are calling for an end to the PAP’s culture of political bullying and greater fairness in the way it conducts politics. In a widely shared Facebook post, former Law Society president Thio Shen-yi offered a to-do list for the ruling party: “take the high road”, “stop bullying candidates”, “be humble” and learn to apologise, understand that a strong mandate does not require a parliamentary supermajority, eschew fear-mongering, ensure a scrupulously fair playing field, fight bad ideas with good instead of relying on tools like POFMA, and accept that Singaporeans are ready for a non-Chinese PM.

115 A good rule of thumb for the PAP to adopt would be to ask itself what sort of formal and informal rules of political conduct it would like to see in a world in which it is no longer dominant, or even in power. Somewhat paradoxically, only by embracing such rules can it secure its long-term success.

120 Contrary to what the PAP believes, greater political competition would also develop and sharpen the political acumen of its future leaders. Consider how the unremitting heat directed at WP’s Sylvia Lim and Pritam Singh has forged them into respected leaders, and steeled them for crises. It is clear that political competition serves the same function as market or biological competition: it forces one to grow fitter and adapt to changes in the environment. In contrast, sheltering the next generation of PAP leaders from robust challenge and competition — on the misguided assumption that protecting the highly credentialed promotes sound, technocratic and innovative policy-making — would mute the signals the PAP requires to adapt to an increasingly complex and uncertain domestic and external environment.

125 Internal reform, in theory, should be easier for the PAP than for many political parties. Parties elsewhere that are dependent on patronage networks and corrupt practices, for example, cannot clean up without first clearing out. This is essentially the story of parties like UMNO in Malaysia, Golkar in Indonesia, and the Kuomintang in Taiwan. The PAP, by contrast, has relied more on the (internal) contestation of ideas over what is in Singapore’s interests. This deeply technocratic and pragmatic streak suggests that it is well within the PAP’s capacity to realise that it is in its own enlightened self-interest to accept, even welcome, greater political competition and diversity.

130

With the PAP, a few good men and women at the top should be capable of changing the entire administration's direction. Unlike many other parties that have been (or were) in power for several decades, the PAP is not rigidly factionalised along personality lines. Such factionalism can often stymie the ability of reformists to enact reforms from within. The PAP does not suffer from this structural disadvantage, and is able to effect change quite quickly if a critical mass of its leaders so choose.

Unlike some critics of the PAP government, we do not think the administration lacks such individuals. The PAP is a national movement, comparable to a religion. No major religion speaks with just one voice. Each has opposing internal tendencies. It may have a fundamentalist strand, rigid and dogmatic, exclusive and unforgiving, ever ready to launch inquisitions against perceived infidels. Yet, at the same time, it may have an inclusivist, open-minded denomination, respectful of differences and striving for social justice. These tendencies can co-exist, although in any one time and place, one dominates. In the PAP, since the shock of the 2011, the party's fundamentalist streak has held sway at the expense of a broad-church philosophy that we believe some within the administration quietly subscribe to.

Citizen initiatives

The second ingredient for reform is a politically engaged and active citizenry. There have been positive signs over the past decade or two. Civil society is more vibrant, and many young Singaporeans find personal fulfilment in causes larger than themselves. But one should not exaggerate the political impact of growing youth participation. Much of this is easily incorporated into existing governance systems, by opening certain narrow domains for consultation, for example. The PAP's induction of Louis Ng, a wildlife protection advocate deeply respected by civil society activists, is just one indicator of how some types of participation comfortably co-exist with the status quo of one-party domination.

To ensure that ground energies are not disruptive to its power, the PAP government has operated a system of divide-and-rule. Many Singaporeans in the people sector find that they are able to achieve their narrow objectives with the government's active support. Therefore, among the PAP's newly elected candidates in the Class of 2020 are several with exemplary records of community service. But Singapore also has many activists whose valuable contributions to a more humane society are not welcomed, and some who are actively vilified by PAP leaders, punished by the authorities, and targeted for abuse and hate by their internet brigade.

After the excitement dies down, most Singaporeans will be unable to sustain their current levels of interest in politics, no matter how excited they are by the prospect of change. Just like in the post-2011 era, it is quite possible that they will shift the burden of change-making — along with its heavy personal and psychological costs — to activists who have been pushed to the margins.

The many ways to read the election results will continue to fuel public debate for a while. Some perceive GE2020 as a childish outburst. We disagree. Democratic elections are, of course, a flawed and imperfect means of collective self-government, vulnerable to irrational impulses and manipulation; but they are still by far the best system that humankind has come up with to resolve differences peacefully. Despite the inevitable messiness of the process, we are struck by the growing maturity of the Singapore public. GE2020 affirms our belief that Singaporeans — whether in the administration or the public, whether among PAP loyalists, opposition supporters or neutrals — do not lack ability or patriotism. GE2020 presents openings for government, parties and citizens to respond positively to the need for participation and distributed leadership. The question is whether Singaporeans and the party they have relied on for six decades can rise to this challenge of a generation.

For discussion/reflection:

- Political commentators have labelled GE2020 “a game changer” (political blogger Viswa Sadavsan) and described it as a “watershed election” (BBC News). PM Lee himself have promised that the ruling party would undergo some “soul-searching”. Why are the results of this election deemed so significant?

- The authors suggest that there are some benefits to increased political competition, or a dilution of the ruling party's dominance. What other pros can you think of? Conversely, what advantages might there be to continued political dominance by one party?
- Do you agree with the authors' assessment that a more engaged citizenry can only arise from greater political freedom and a 'freer' style of democracy? Even if the latter is a necessary precondition for a more politically engaged electorate, in what ways might it not be a sufficient one?

Related Cambridge/RI essay questions:

1. 'Power these days lies more with the people than the politicians.' To what extent is this true? (Cambridge 2021)
2. Should politicians pursue the popular viewpoint or their own convictions, if they conflict? (Cambridge 2020)
3. 'The key criterion for good government is how well the economy is managed.' Is this a fair assessment? (Cambridge 2012)
4. Consider the view that efficient government is more important than democracy. (Cambridge 2011)
5. 'Ours is a country of divided people.' Is this a valid comment on your society? (RI 2015 Y5 Promo)
6. To what extent has the political climate in your society changed for the better? (RI 2013 Y6 Prelim)
7. Do you think that your society will benefit from more freedom? (RI 2012 Y6 CT1)

SECTION B: NEGOTIATING BETWEEN FREEDOM AND STABILITY

Reading 10: 'Hard choices' for Singapore media after controversial law passed

EU 2 & 3

Annabelle Liang | Al Jazeera | 13 October 2021

This article will introduce you to:

- The Government's enacting of the Foreign Interference Countermeasures Act (FICA) to protect Singapore from foreign interference
- Various concerns about the effect of such a law in the country, particularly when the media and controversial views are already under strict regulation

Singapore's government says its new foreign interference law is needed to prevent outside meddling in the city state's domestic affairs. But independent news outlets and observers worry that the broadly-worded Foreign Interference Countermeasures Act (FICA) will further limit freedoms in the tightly-controlled country of 5.5 million people. An opposition member of parliament alluded to FICA as a "Trojan horse"² before it was passed into law by an overwhelming majority a week ago.

Representatives from the ruling People's Action Party, which holds 83 of 93 parliamentary seats, all supported the bill, which the government says is necessary to counter alleged incidents of foreign interference. Home Affairs Minister K Shanmugam said the broad wording of FICA was intentional while stopping short of naming the countries it targets. "The difficulty that we face ... in dealing with this foreign interference issue is that out of 10,000 interactions, one might be the sort that we are interested in," he said. "And foreign agencies and even non-agencies, NGOs and others, will try and present a legitimate front. So the language has got to be broad enough to cover that – that what is apparently normal, but is actually not normal," he said in Parliament.

Some people and entities will automatically be classified as "politically significant persons" under FICA, including political parties and members of parliament. Others can be given this status by the authorities (the Home Affairs ministry says the issue will be handled by an unnamed "competent authority") and they can challenge it by appealing to the home affairs minister, rather than the courts.

There is no mention of whether the "competent authority" needs to explain the decision – only that it must inform the person or entity that they are considered a "politically significant person". The names of the designated will also appear on a public list, according to the ministry. They will need to report "arrangements" with "foreign principals" and donations of 10,000 Singapore dollars (\$7,378) or more, among other rules. Any individual who allegedly publishes information on behalf of a "foreign principal" and towards a political end can also be fined up to 100,000 Singapore dollars (\$73,757) and jailed for 14 years if the affiliation is not declared. For entities, there is a maximum fine of 1 million Singapore dollars (\$737,550).

"There is no clarity on the extent of powers the home minister has under FICA, the intention behind the proposed laws, and how it applies to independent news organisations like us," said Kumaran Pillai, publisher of The Independent Singapore, a website. "Whether intentional or not, the government is setting up barriers to entry in the media landscape in Singapore," he added.

The Independent Singapore, which has 1.6 million unique visitors every month, routinely reports its finances in line with existing licensing requirements that prevent foreign funding. It has 10 staff and relies on advertisements to keep servers humming. "We do have foreign correspondents working on

² Defined as a person or thing that is used to trick an enemy in order to achieve a secret purpose (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary)

entertainment, lifestyle, regional and international pieces. If they are filing any local reports, we use them strictly for fact-based reporting,” Pillai told Al Jazeera. “I have instructed my editors to ensure that there is proper fact-checking and compliance. It is not the job of foreign contributors to add salt and pepper to our articles.”

‘A nuclear bomb’

Independent media outlets in Singapore have long come under fire from the authorities over alleged foreign links. The Online Citizen, a now-defunct sociopolitical website, was accused of employing foreigners to write largely negative articles about Singapore. It was recently shut after authorities said it failed to declare all its funding sources for 2020 when ordered.

New Naratif, meanwhile, an online current affairs website covering Southeast Asia established by three Singaporeans, was prevented from setting up operations in the city-state. The Accounting and Corporate Regulatory Authority (ACRA) said the website, which is funded via a membership model and collects subscription fees, “would appear to be funded by a number of foreigners”. The website had received grant funding from the Open Society Foundations, founded by billionaire financier George Soros.

Last week, during a response in Parliament, Shanmugam said the foundation had a “history of getting involved in the domestic politics of sovereign countries” and singled out New Naratif. Kirsten Han, who co-founded the site in 2017 and left the organisation last year, said it willingly provided information about the grant and that it “did not come with any expectation or ability to control the editorial decisions that we made”. New Naratif’s managing director, Thum Ping Tjin, a historian, said the website, which has its headquarters in Malaysia, has 1,221 active members from about 40 countries.

“Singapore is still our biggest country of subscribers, but it is a decreasing majority,” said Thum, who once represented Singapore as a swimmer and is an academic visitor at the University of Oxford’s Hertford College. He expects to lose more Singapore subscribers if the site is designated a “proscribed online location” under FICA. “It is a nuclear bomb. The way FICA works is by criminalising virtually everything and then giving the authorities discretion as to whether they prosecute you or not,” Thum said.

“They are trying to close off the Internet, basically, and ensure that there are no alternative and critical voices in Singapore. Because at this point, who else is there? There are a few other struggling outlets but they don’t tackle politics the way New Naratif and The Online Citizen do, and quite rightly so, since they want to survive,” he added.

Strict laws

Singapore’s mass media landscape has been a near-duopoly for decades – between Singapore Press Holdings (SPH), which publishes daily national broadsheet The Straits Times, and Mediacorp, which runs the island’s television and radio stations. While both outlets say they are editorially independent, critics are more sceptical. SPH recently named a former minister as chair of its media business, in a government-led move which was condemned by opposition politicians.

Mediacorp, which grew out of public broadcaster Singapore Broadcasting Corporation, is owned by Temasek Holdings, the state investment fund. Its board includes the permanent secretary of the Home Affairs Ministry and the country’s non-resident ambassador to Kuwait.

75 A strict regulatory and licensing environment, coupled with sweeping censorship and defamation laws, have long weighed on freedom of expression in the island nation. In 2019, the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (POFMA), which was introduced to tackle “fake news”, took effect allowing Singapore ministers to order that anything deemed an “online falsehood” be taken down or have a “correction” published alongside it. The orders can be appealed to the courts, but POFMA has already been used against journalists, and activist Jolovan Wham was ordered to post a correction notice on a tweet he shared about Shanmugam’s parliamentary speech on FICA.

80 Singapore was placed at 160 out of 180 countries in the Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index in 2021, which was compiled before FICA was passed. “Despite the ‘Switzerland of the East’ label often used in government propaganda, the city-state does not fall far short of China when it comes to suppressing media freedom,” the group said.

85 On Wednesday, in an open letter, Article19 and 10 other rights organisations, including a group of regional lawmakers, called on Singapore to withdraw the legislation, saying it breached international legal and human rights principles. “Almost any form of expression and association relating to politics, social justice or other matters of public interest in Singapore maybe ensnarled within the ambit of the legislation – making it difficult in turn, for the average individual to reasonably predict with precision what conduct may fall foul of the law,” the organisations wrote.

No known cases

90 Analysts say the media environment that emerges as a result of FICA could have a damaging effect even on SPH and Mediacorp. “It seems like in the government’s view, the ideal media is that you have SPH and Mediacorp, and they are both heavily read and trusted by Singaporeans,” said Ang Peng Hwa, a professor at the Nanyang Technological University’s Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information. “But that’s not how the news media ecosystem works anywhere in the world. You need a diversity of media, you need your oppositional and independent media sources,” he added. “And so
95 FICA looks to have the possibility of suppressing independent journalism as well as oppositional journalism. It is hard to see now, but in the long run, [the lack of competition] will hurt both SPH and Mediacorp.”

100 The ministry has stoutly defended the need for FICA and in a letter to the Straits Times just before it was passed stressed it would “not apply to Singaporeans discussing issues or advocating any matter”. There have been no known cases of Singapore journalists being involved in full-blown influence campaigns.

105 In the academic sphere, the country expelled Chinese-born American academic Huang Jing in 2017 for being an “agent of influence of a foreign country”. “He knowingly interacted with intelligence organisations and agents of the foreign country, and cooperated with them to influence the Singapore government’s foreign policy and public opinion in Singapore,” the Home Affairs Ministry said.

Although FICA does not specifically target journalists, it can be used if their ventures are found to be part of hostile information campaigns, said Eugene Tan, an associate law professor at Singapore Management University. “It’s not a question of whether but when FICA will be applied in such circumstances,” Tan said.

110 Tan, a veteran political commentator, does not believe the law will curtail independent journalism in the country. “I appreciate that it is a legitimate concern but only if FICA is misused by the authorities. It is crucial to recognise that there must be grounds for the law to be applied in the first place. So long

as journalism is independent, that is it accurately represents the journalist's reporting and viewpoints, and not done at the behest of a foreign proxy, FICA cannot be used."

115 For Pillai, the reaches of the law are personal, as an independent publisher and executive committee member of the opposition Progress Singapore Party, which does not hold any parliamentary seats. Pillai says he is currently allowed to "participate in party politics and get involved in any business without encumbrances".

120 "I am not sure how the new laws will impact my current working relationship in the various organisations that I am involved in today," he told Al Jazeera. "Personally, I might have to make some hard choices in the future."

For discussion/reflection:

- What is being implied about FICA with the label of a 'Trojan Horse' (line 5)?
- How convincing do you find Minister Shanmugan's justification for the 'broad wording of FICA' (line 8)? Why or why not?
- Based on lines 37 – 63, do you think that requiring independent news sites to either be funded locally, or alternatively banning news sites that receive significant foreign funding is an appropriate way to prevent foreign interference?
- What was the author's intention in providing details concerning ownership of Mediacorp and the identities of some board members (lines 69-71)?
- Professor Ang's believes that '[the lack of competition] will hurt both SPH and Mediacorp' (lines 96-97). Can you explain in what way(s)?
- Eugene Tan argues that the new law should worry us 'only if FICA is misused by the authorities' (line 111). How far do you agree with such a perspective?

Related Cambridge/RI essay questions:

1. 'In a free society, there should be no restrictions on freedom of speech.' Discuss. (Cambridge 2020)
2. Is regulation of the press desirable? (Cambridge 2017)
3. Is diversity of people and their viewpoints truly celebrated in your society? (RI 2021 Y6 Common Test)
4. Do those who challenge the status quo have a place in your society? (RI 2020 Term 3 Y6 Common Essay Assignment)
5. Assess the view that government regulation is the best way to achieve a trustworthy media. (RI 2019 Y6 CT1)

SECTION B: NEGOTIATING BETWEEN FREEDOM AND STABILITY

Reading 11: Trusting Surveillance in Singapore's 'Smart Nation'

EU 2-3

Teo Yi-Ling and Muhammad Faizal Abdul Rahman | *The Diplomat* | 26 January 2021

This article will help you to understand how/why:

- mass surveillance can be harnessed to deliver positive social and medical outcomes, but also poses serious risks if it is misused or abused
- the maturing of the electorate leads to greater awareness and interrogation of policies concerning mass surveillance
- the TraceTogether dispute highlights the need for Singaporeans to renegotiate the social contract question of data privacy

As of December 31, 2020, Singapore's TraceTogether COVID-19 contact tracing program had attained a national adoption rate of over 70 percent. In order to nudge the public toward adoption, the government had invested significantly in technology and community outreach, responding to initial public concerns over the app's functionality, data security, and privacy protection. These issues had weighed heavily on the public's side of the allegorical seesaw of trust, but by end of 2020, the government appeared to have successfully calibrated its priorities for tackling public health concerns with assurance about respect for personal privacy.

This achievement would have been a fitting coda to the program's launch, but for the Singapore government's disclosure on January 4 that in addition to COVID-19 contact tracing, TraceTogether data could be used for the purpose of criminal investigations. Seen as an apparent revocation of promises to the contrary, the announcement came as a bombshell for many. Decried as a betrayal of public trust and policy backpedalling, notwithstanding the technical legality of using TraceTogether data under the Criminal Procedure Code (CPC), the revelation created fodder for political contestation. Further exacerbating the damage was the fact that the government is not subject to the Personal Data Protection Act (PDPA). In an attempt to assuage public outrage, a new law limiting access to TraceTogether data for criminal investigations is now being expedited through parliament.

Taking a broader perspective, what could this decline in trust mean for Singapore's Smart Nation efforts, in which surveillance plays a prominent role? A key factor of Singapore's phenomenal transformation "from third world to first" is arguably the extensive role of the government in numerous aspects of social and economic development. In the interests of peace and prosperity, people trust and toe the line of governance models that strike a balance between pragmatism and idealism. The Smart Nation scheme, which leverages data, is the form this model takes in the digital age. This model was never without criticism, but there are growing sentiments pejoratively framing it as "big government."

Three reasons could explain the rise of these sentiments. First, the country's transformation has met most people's basic physiological and security needs, and now there is a rising demand for self-actualization needs, such as privacy and ideological expression.

Second, the vast information space online is flooded with facts, fiction, and fallacies that make clear-headed judgement difficult. This situation could create speed bumps in trust-building between the government and public and blur the lines between what is necessary and what is ideal.

Third, there is an ascendant international commentary that frames "big government" in absolute terms of state over-reach and tyranny, inviting comparisons to what the West regards as techno-authoritarian powers, such as China. This trend could challenge national crisis management, as the

35 efforts of national institutions, especially regarding data surveillance, may be perceived as malign attempts to consolidate political power instead of providing public goods like health and safety.

40 Popular culture and political discourse often cast data surveillance in an ominous light. In this scenario, data surveillance is the tool of profiteering technological companies or malign political powers aiming to control the people. This makes the discourse of individual privacy vs public good a difficult and emotive one.

45 In reality, another scenario already exists. Surveillance is conceptually broad and is a powerful tool for the common good. Data collection and analysis informs the design and distribution of public goods such as healthcare, security, transportation, and workplace safety that are vital to the functioning of society. For example, data on crowd movements aids transport planning and police patrols to deter crime. Data on sanitation could aid water management and detection of infectious diseases. Emphasizing these realities could support trust-building as the government demonstrates *care* for the people and *competency* in efficiently providing public goods and meeting Smart Nation goals. But trust also entails *credibility* in which the government's promises on the use of data matters, as well as the effective *communication* of these promises.

50 Trust is a fundamental element of any relationship: it is hard-won, requires continual management, and is all too easily broken. In the wake of this TraceTogether controversy, should government priorities focus on repairing trust rather than efficiency? This will entail the political will to address the longstanding elephant in the room: privacy.

55 In a world of social media and smartphone applications, people are grappling with the boundaries of privacy and how compromises in sharing personal identifiable data could benefit or harm them. With the PDPA, most conversations on privacy protection in Singapore were business-facing. The TraceTogether controversy has broadened public discussions on privacy as a personal right that may supersede national priorities, and what a government can but should not do. The conversations are increasingly spotlighting the government as data surveillance becomes more apparent, and formal regulation binding the government to its promises of data privacy protection may go some way to assure the public.

65 In December 2020, the Law Reform Commission of the Singapore Academy of Law issued a report on the sufficiency and effectiveness of existing legal protections with regard to unlawful disclosure and serious misuse of private information. The report concluded that the current patchwork of legal protections has gaps, shortcomings, and difficult to navigate. The report proposes a new law to remediate the situation, defining "private information" as that about which an individual has a "reasonable expectation of privacy." Most significantly, it proposes that this new law should bind the Singapore government in this respect.

70 The last five years have seen a flurry of legislative moves to speed up the drive to the Smart Nation program. Privacy rights were arguably much lower in priority but now feature more significantly in public expectations, hence the need to renegotiate the social contract. In this renegotiation, data privacy rights and the proposed law are considerations that the government must reckon with. On the public's part, it may have to bear with slower technological progress, as it will be unrealistic to expect the government to provide seamless public goods without obtaining the data necessary to understand people's needs. However, if the social contract remains uncertain, trust-building on the road to Smart Nation will continue to face speed bumps.

For discussion/reflection:

- The authors referenced public perceptions of ‘policy backpedalling’ (line 12) on the part of the government’s use of TraceTogether data. Based on additional research if necessary, explain why such a perception came about.
- In your own words, explain what is meant by the claim that ‘governance models [strike] a balance between pragmatism and idealism’ (lines 21-22).
- Summarise the key developments that have led to the ascendancy of scepticism and questioning attitudes concerning ‘big government’ (line 24)
- According to the authors, what makes public discussion concerning privacy and data surveillance a particularly fraught with ‘difficult[y]’ (line 39)?
- Based on lines 46-49, explain in your own words how the authors believe the government could build trust where data surveillance and Smart Nation goals are concerned.
- In what way has the TraceTogether controversy (line 57) been beneficial?

Related Cambridge/RI essay questions:

1. Is modern technology a benefit or threat to democracy? (Cambridge 2020)
2. ‘We are less free than before.’ How far do you agree with this view of modern society? (RI 2021 Y6 Timed Practice)
3. ‘There is no point in resisting surveillance.’ Do you agree? (RI 2020 Y5 Promo)
4. ‘Surveillance of the people is a necessary evil.’ Discuss. (RI 2018 Y6 Prelim)
5. Should a government always listen to its people? (RI 2018 Y6 CT2)
6. Discuss the Claim that the digital age has made it more challenging for political leaders to govern today. (RI 2018 Y6 CT1)
7. How far should the State be allowed to restrict individual rights when security is at stake? (RI 2017 Y5 CT1)
8. ‘Personal privacy and national security cannot co-exist.’ Comment. (RI 2015 Y5 CT1)
9. ‘For the sake of security, a nation has every right to monitor its citizens.’ Discuss. (RI 2014 Y6 CT1)

SECTION B: NEGOTIATING BETWEEN FREEDOM AND STABILITY

Reading 12: The Myth of 'Trade-Offs'

EU 2, 3 & 5

Calvin Cheng | Straits Times | 28 March 2015

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.

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.

- 5 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 clichés in the media, that they could never live under the "stifling and draconian" laws that we have.

- 10 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, 15 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.

- 20 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?

- 25 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.

- 30 And those political opponents of Mr Lee who have been bankrupted, allegedly because they were such formidable foes? No such thing. Mr JB Jeyaratnam 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

35 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
40 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.

45 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
50 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.

55 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
60 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
65 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.

For discussion/reflection:

- In this piece, Cheng 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?
- Cheng provides a rebuttal (lines 45-54) of claims that Operation Cold Store (lines 43-44) offers proof that Singapore's Founding Father Mr Lee Kuan Yew was 'an autocrat' (line 43). How convinced are you by his rebuttal? Why or why not?

- From Singapore's post-independence years to now, has the country relaxed its curbs on freedoms, and if so, how?

Related Cambridge/RI essay questions:

1. 'Freedom of speech is key to building a strong democracy.' To what extent is this true? (RI 2020 Term 3 Y6 Common Essay Assignment)
2. How far, in your society, should unpopular views be open to discussion? (Cambridge 2013)
3. Is it ever justified to sacrifice human rights for a country's progress? (RI 2017 Y6 CT2)
4. It has been said that Singapore is economically First World but socially Third World. What is your view? (RI 2011 Y6 Prelim)
5. 'Governments have a right to censor undesirable elements of their nations' history.' Do you agree? (RI 2011 Y6 Prelim)
6. 'We are less free than before.' How far do you agree with this view of modern society? (RI 2021 Y6 Timed Practice)

SECTION B: NEGOTIATING BETWEEN FREEDOM AND STABILITY

Reading 13: Concessions Singaporeans make in exchange for effective crisis management **EU 2 -4**

Adapted from What Singapore Can Tell the World About Personal Liberty | Jerrine Tan | WIRED | 29 April 2020

This next reading will introduce you to:

- The idea that efficient governance is as much about a compliant and malleable people as it is about an efficient and competent government
- The view that Singapore appears to have chosen a trade-off between curtailed freedoms and ignored inequalities, and a government that is given the leeway to act decisively and efficiently
- The possible downsides whereby too much responsibility is ceded to the authorities

In mid-January I returned to the US from a visit home to Singapore, where people were already worried about the novel coronavirus spreading in China. All through February, it was bizarre to observe business as usual in the US. Western media reports mostly critiqued the authoritarian lockdown measures implemented by China—the same measures that have since been adopted in various forms across the world as it became clear that containment was key to managing the crisis. Complacency and an unwillingness to call for severe restrictions to mobility early on in the name of not violating individual liberty doomed the US to its ongoing crisis. Donald Trump’s refusal to take the virus seriously and the delays in lockdown were myopic, prideful, and wilfully ignorant. Western liberal democracies will not emerge from this crisis with much—or any—moral or political clout. Instead, the world will look to places that have handled this crisis well, or at least better.

In the early stages of the outbreak, Singapore was roundly lauded for its prompt and efficient response, ensuring a quick flattening of the curve. But if we are to learn lessons from Singapore, they should be clear-eyed, understanding how and why it was able to respond in the ways it did, not only in a time of crisis but also because of how it operated before.

The Singapore government, synonymous with the PAP (People's Action Party), managed the first wave of infections well. Its system of contact-tracing is world-class. Masks were rationed and distributed. As the second wave of imported infections started rolling in, hotels served as dedicated quarantine rooms for returning Singaporeans, which ensured safe and proper physical distancing while propping up the ailing hotel industry and saving jobs.

But managing a crisis well does not mean that the problematic aspects of a government go away. In fact, effective crisis management can be aided by these characteristics. In *The Economist*, Kishore Mahbubani chalks the success of China, South Korea, and Singapore up to “quality of governance and cultural confidence of their societies.” But this claim is reductive. The PAP is notorious for draconian censorship laws, harsh retaliation against dissenters, and the suppression of other political parties. In the past month, the appeal to repeal Section 377A, a relic of colonial law criminalizing sex between two men, was dismissed. A local activist was jailed for unfavorably comparing Singapore’s judiciary system to Malaysia’s. These events largely passed unremarked due to the onslaught of Covid-19 news.

Is freedom and a robust democracy the price to pay for effective crisis management?

In late March, as flights from the US to Singapore got cancelled for the indefinite future, I found myself grappling for the first time in my life with the existential and psychic pain of not being able to return home if I wanted to. Remaining in a country that quickly surged to have the most cases in the world, I began to wonder about the price I was willing to pay to ensure that the Singapore government acted in a way that would secure the safety of my family. I found myself sinking into

helpless worry and making wishful deals in the dark with my government: *Get Singapore through this. If my parents stay healthy until I can get home, I swear I'll never speak ill of the government again.* In a state of emergency, more than a few of us will find ourselves cutting deals with god, the devil, or the government alike.

40 For now, Singapore has extended its “circuit breaker” period till June 1. The euphemistic term denotes stringent lockdown rules: closure of schools and non-essential businesses, mandatory mask-wearing (or risk heavy fines), among other measures. Crises invite tone-deaf and ill-informed opinions of many, including out of touch philosophers. Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben criticized current social-distancing measures as antihumanist—as a trade-off of quality of life for the mere
45 sustenance of biological life, what he terms “bare life.” Agamben’s essay is misguided at best. In order to have quality of life, you need first to *be alive*.

But Agamben’s notion of bare life is helpful in thinking about a different context—the conditions we are willing to live under in everyday life in order to ensure efficient response in a state of emergency. Emergency measures do not *simply* work. They work when a populace has been conditioned for years
50 to accept instruction. Singapore is known for its harsh punishments—ask Michael Fay, the American who was notoriously caned for vandalism, despite Bill Clinton’s plea for clemency—and has made examples of a handful of political dissidents, names that pass lips in hushed whispers. But for the Baby Boomer generation who saw vast improvements in quality of life, wealth, and social mobility, freedom to paint graffiti and criticize a government that has in fact served them well is not much to
55 give up.

Agamben worries that the draconian emergency measures put in place today could lead to future oppression. Fair enough. But what is more important to consider is the implication—and the efficiency— of the reverse: that states with fuller control can more effectively institute stringent measures. Singapore is able to respond quickly and efficiently in times like this because its
60 government has always wielded absolute control over the state, with an iron fist and a whip in it. In times of crisis, when this form of authoritative instruction saves lives, we might call it good. But in order for it to work in times of crisis, one must be willing to always live under this yoke. This, it seems, is the price many Singaporeans are willing to pay.

The US now faces the problem of people protesting stay-at-home recommendations. Singapore has
65 no such problem. Unlicensed protest is illegal.

Singapore’s former Prime Minister Lee Kwan Yew once said, “If Singapore is a nanny-state, then I am proud to have fostered one.” The problem with a nanny state, like a helicopter parent, is that it breeds reliance. And coddled children are not only unable to think for themselves, they’re also unwilling to think about others. Suddenly unable to rely fully on the government to tell us what to
70 do for ourselves, Singaporeans will have to find out if we are able to behave in a way that protects others.

Across the world, the virus is laying bare the cruelties inherent in existing systems. In America, black and marginalized communities are getting infected and dying disproportionately. With the second wave of infections, the same is proving to be true in Singapore. Unchecked clusters of infection have
75 mushroomed among the migrant worker communities, largely due to a lack of testing and abysmal, overcrowded living conditions. On April 5, two workers’ dormitories were gazetted as isolation areas, keeping over 20,000 in shamefully cramped areas. As of April 20, more than 19 workers’ dormitories had been sealed off. Singaporeans outraged by the spread of infections among foreign workers and by their living conditions were chided by the minister for manpower, who shot back that
80 citizens should not “demoralize [her team] with finger-pointing.” The problem with political

paternalism that conflates governing with parenting is that it allows governments to place themselves beyond reproach.

85 The crisis is revealing an open secret of the country—that gleaming Singapore is built on the backs of low-wage foreign labour. Even appeals to Singaporeans to be empathetic towards labourers are implicitly anchored in capitalism: The minister for home affairs said, by way of imploring Singaporeans to be more tolerant, “They clean Singapore, they build our HDB flats ... they handle our waste management... they are helping us build our prosperity.” To say they are human should have sufficed.

90 Meanwhile, Singaporean media engages in a poisonous and dehumanizing rhetoric, distinguishing between new cases of “migrant worker” and “local” infections. For an English teacher, this is a senseless distinction. What do we think “local” means? As a humanities scholar, when I say dehumanizing rhetoric, I don’t just mean that it dehumanizes the workers, it dehumanizes *me*. To imagine that I am more worthy than a migrant worker makes *me* bereft. The way this debacle has been discussed shores up the unequal ways we view different sets of humans.

95 Covid-19 is literalizing the idea that the measure of a civilization is how it treats its weakest members. The well-being of everyone is contingent upon protecting the most vulnerable among us. The world is only as close to healing as the country struggling the most with the virus right now. Failures of health care systems and systemic racism and inequality are inhumane in and of themselves. If we forget that, they will also come back to bite us in a crisis.

100 In Singapore, it is clear that our ability to deal with an emergency has to do with the existing status quo and the concessions we are willing to make in everyday life, both in terms of personal liberty and the inequalities that we accept or ignore for others. Life on the tropical island paradise is mostly good. But remember that to remain in Eden, Adam and Eve had to promise never to eat of the tree of knowledge. Draconian quarantine policing aside, often it is the injunction of the smallest liberties
105 that most define how free we are.

110 The world will survive Covid-19. When it does, we would all do well to consider just how much the freedom to taste of fruit is worth, and how easily we can sleep in our beds when others creak in cots or on floors with 12 to 19 others in their room. What concessions are we willing to make in a time of acute crisis in order to tide us over? What concessions are we willing to make in times of peace and prosperity in order to have the confidence that there will be effective management when crisis strikes in the future? For better or worse, as the crisis draws on, Singapore may well hold the answer to those questions.

For discussion/reflection:

- What does Tan mean by arguing that ‘effective crisis management can be aided by [problematic aspects of a government]’ (line 22)? What are these ‘problematic aspects’, and why do these aid in crisis management?
- Tan suggests that ‘emergency measures’ (line 49) are unlikely to be effective unless a society ‘has been conditioned for years to accept instruction’ (lines 49-50). Attempt to articulate and explain Tan’s logic as clearly as possible. Do you find this idea convincing? What assumptions might she be making, and why might they not necessarily be true?
- According to Tan, what are some adverse consequences of governing a country as a ‘nanny-state’ (line 66)? Can you think of any others, apart from what she has identified?
- In your own words, explain what Tan means when she asserts that ‘political paternalism that conflates governing with parenting [allows] governments to place themselves beyond reproach’ (lines 80-82).

- Do you agree with the perspective that 'the measure of a civilization is how it treats its weakest members' (line 95)? Why or why not?
- To what extent should a government sacrifice its citizens' freedom in a bid to achieve safety for its society? Are there any limits you can think of that should not be breached?
- How can governments continue to maintain trust between its citizens in the midst of continuing crises?

Related Cambridge/RI essay questions:

1. To what extent can any society claim to be great? (Cambridge 2020)
2. Do events, rather than politicians, shape the future? (Cambridge 2017)
3. Consider the view that efficient government is more important than democracy. (Cambridge 2011)
4. Is it ever justified to sacrifice human rights for a country's progress? (RI 2017 Y6 CT2)
5. To what extent have people given up their freedom for comfort? (RI 2014 Y6 Prelim)
6. 'It is better to obey than to question.' How far is this true of your society? (RI 2014 Y6 CT2)
7. 'An educated people can be easily governed.' Is this a valid statement? (RI 2012 Y6 Prelim)

SECTION C: NEGOTIATING BETWEEN INCLUSIVENESS AND THE COMMON GOOD

Reading 14: Of Race and National Identity

EU 2 & 4

Ng Jun Sen | Today Online | 23 November 2021

This reading will help you understand:

- That different groups in society have valid concerns linked to their identities
- Why such groups have a right to advocate for change
- What the government can and should do to listen and act as a fair and honest broker
- Possible approaches to help Singapore manage such tensions and move forward as a society
- How adopting a 'trader' instinct, which entails working towards reciprocity, trust and mutual benefit, may be beneficial

Different segments of Singapore's population, whose identities may be linked to their gender, ethnicity or sexual orientation, have concerns that are important and cannot be dismissed as illegitimate or exaggerated, Finance Minister Lawrence Wong said on Tuesday (Nov 23).

5 "That is what a fair and just society must mean. And we cannot — in the name of avoiding the dangers of identity politics — deny the rights of a variety of groups to organise themselves, so as to gain recognition for their concerns or seek to improve their conditions," Mr Wong added. On its part, the Government will not let any group feel unheard, excluded or ostracised, he said.

10 Delivering a keynote speech at a conference on identity organised by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) and the S Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Mr Wong spoke about the growing trend of identity politics and tribalism dividing countries despite their governments' efforts to forge a common nationality. The minister last spoke on the topic of race in June at another IPS-RSIS conference, following a spate of racist incidents at the time. On Tuesday, he noted how other aspects of identity have surfaced since then, surrounding gender, sex or other causes for which people feel strongly.

15 "This is not surprising: The natural instinct of humans is to look out for those who are most like us. Around the world, we see the rise of what we might call a 'new tribalism' in politics, or 'identity politics' as it is commonly described," he said. In ethnically homogeneous countries such as Poland, for example, a "new tribalism" among people emerged out of differences in views on LGBTQ (lesbians, gays, bisexual, transgender or queer) rights, with supporters and opposers of LGBTQ rights in a
20 standoff.

Melting-pot societies such as the United States, too, have seen the rise of tribalism and identity politics based on which political party they support, causing even public health measures such as mask-wearing or vaccination to become markers of such identities, Mr Wong noted. He suggested that the rise of tribalism was linked closely to the rise of individualism as the "reigning ethos", which came at
25 the expense of community and weakened connections between people. This has caused them to fall back on such primeval defences that run deep in human societies when they feel lonely and alienated. "Tribalism is inherently exclusionary and it's based on mutual hate: 'Us' versus 'them', 'friend' versus 'foe'. Once this sort of tribal identity takes root, it becomes difficult to achieve any compromise," Mr Wong said. "Because when we anchor our politics on identity, any compromise seems like dishonour."

30 Singapore, too, cannot assume that its harmony is solid or permanent, as Singaporeans' identities are formed from a diverse racial mix of three major Asian civilisational complexes — China, India, and Southeast Asia — with none of the long history or indigenous cultures in these civilisations to hold Singapore together. Before the 1964 race riots, Singapore experienced "a far more violent conflict"

35 between Hokkiens and Teochews in 1854 that had led to more than 400 people being killed, more wounded, and about 300 houses burned in more than 10 days of riots, Mr Wong said. The sectarian clash, based on historical records, came about due to a rebellion in China. "It seems astounding to us today, but barely 150 years ago, tribal identities among Chinese here in Singapore trumped their racial, cultural or national identity as Chinese," he added.

40 "Can we then really be sure, with the rise of China, India and Southeast Asia, that Singaporean nationalism will not deconstruct again into Chinese, Indian and Malay nationalisms?" He noted that Singapore has managed to avoid serious conflicts because its founding leaders went to great lengths to put in place measures to safeguard racial and religious harmony. This meant tough action such as the Internal Security Act and short-term unpopular policies such as making English the main medium of instruction in schools, and the Housing and Development Board's Ethnic Integration Policy.

45 The policy helps to ensure a balanced mix of various ethnic communities in public housing estates and prevent the formation of racial enclaves. "This harmonious state of affairs will always be on a knife-edge; so it needs constant attention and careful management," Mr Wong emphasised.

Two recent webinars organised by TODAY and that were broadcast live on Instagram and TikTok also discussed issues of identity. One, on race and religion, focused on how social media and the Covid-19

50 pandemic have affected race relations and Singaporeans' perceptions of racial and religious issues. In the second, panellists discussed LGBTQ issues, such as the discrimination they face, media representation of the LGBTQ community and how individuals can make a difference by having constructive conversations about these matters.

Instead of ignoring identities and tribes, Singapore has to recognise that the pull of identity politics

55 arises from real differences in lived realities as a starting point. Mr Wong suggested five possible approaches to address the competing demands of diverse identity groups while maintaining a cohesive and harmonious society.

1. Strengthen human relationships

First, he advocated for Singaporeans to strengthen their spirit of reciprocity and kinship at the daily level, which would ultimately increase the mutual trust between people. "We must be good friends,

60 good neighbours, good Samaritans," he said. While the Government cannot compel people to build relationships, it can work to gird social norms — in caring for others, kindness and graciousness — that bring people together.

2. Avoid stereotyping groups of people

People should avoid assuming that each community is monolithic or homogenous. Referring to his previous speech on race, Mr Wong said that the phrase "Chinese privilege" is a form of stereotype —

65 a female Chinese from a poor background would have a vastly different lived experience compared to a male Chinese from a wealthy family, for example. "Minorities especially are subject to such prejudices; and all of us must be more conscious of the stereotypes we might harbour. We must avoid reducing our understanding of each other to a single dimension," he said. Mr Wong added: "We may be Chinese, Malay, Indian, Eurasian, or any other race. But we are first and foremost Singaporeans.

70 Likewise, regardless of our gender or sexual orientations, regardless of the cause we champion, we are all Singaporeans, first and foremost.

3. Singaporeans are traders by nature

While humans are tribalists, Singaporeans are also traders by nature, Mr Wong said, noting Singapore's entrepot history. Traders are characterised by the desire to explore the unknown, meet new people to trade and live with, and grounded on norms of reciprocity, trust and mutual benefit.

75 "This same instinct is crucial in setting the tone of our society," he added. "We must continue in this vein — continue to engage with one another, cooperate and work towards mutual benefit. We must

do so not only with those outside Singapore, but also between different segments of Singaporeans as well.” That means listening, understanding, compromising and negotiating for win-win outcomes, knowing that the community will be stronger by cooperation.

4. Giving hope through inclusive growth

80 Mr Wong said that the Government must continue to give Singaporeans reason to “hope and a fair chance to have a good life”, noting the rising inequalities elsewhere in the world that have led to economic woes and, consequently, extreme politics. “We must never allow this to happen in Singapore. So we will continue to work hard to promote inclusive growth and to ensure that all Singaporeans can succeed in their pursuits.” Through this, Singapore will be able to break out of having
85 a zero-sum mindset, in which the success of one group comes at the expense of another.

5. Government as a fair and honest broker

Undergirding this is the Government’s duty to be fair and honest, even with the difficulties in establishing consensus on controversial issues. “In such cases, the Government will do our utmost to recognise the challenges and needs of different groups, decide on the appropriate policy, and convince
90 the rest of society that this is a fair way to move forward,” Mr Wong said, referring to policies such as the Ethnic Integration Policy and the Special Assistance Plan for schools, which promotes the learning of Chinese language, culture and history.

Mr Wong also said that the authorities will never waver from its commitment to work with people to broaden common space and to build a society where every Singaporean can express their views and be empowered to effect positive change. “We may not always arrive at a perfect solution.... but we
95 will never let any group feel unheard, ignored or excluded. We will never let any group feel boxed in or ostracised. All must feel they are part of the Singapore conversation, all must feel they are part of the Singapore family, all must feel there is hope.”

Reflection questions are found at the end of Reading 15

SECTION C: NEGOTIATING BETWEEN INCLUSIVENESS AND THE COMMON GOOD

Reading 15: Unpacking the government narrative about 'tribalism' in Singapore

EU 2 & 4

Adapted from The Trouble with 'Tribal' – The Discomforts of Identity Politics in Singapore | Ng Yi-Sheng / Rice Media | 6 January 2022

This reading will help you understand:

- The reductive understanding that depicts 'tribalism' to be always wrong or bad for society
- Why the theoretical distinction between 'tribalism' and 'community' may not always hold in real life
- Why appealing to a common Singaporean identity as a way to avoid stereotyping different groups of people can actually be exclusionary, since many who reside in Singapore are non-citizens
- The limits of adopting a 'trader's instinct' in order to build harmonious relationships
- Why the definition of 'Chinese privilege' as an over-generalisation of the diverse experiences of Chinese Singaporeans is actually a mischaracterization
- Why values like democracy, justice, equality, and progress, should not simply be sacrificed for peace

On Tuesday, 23 November, the Minister for Finance, Lawrence Wong, and I spoke at the IPS-RSIS Conference on Identity. He was a guest of honour, delivering the opening speech with a follow-up dialogue and Q&A; I was a respondent on a panel. He had an hour on stage to disclose how the nation's leadership views identity politics; I had four minutes via Zoom.

- 5 Still, I've been asked to share a commentary on his speech and I can see why some insight would be appreciated since The Straits Times and TODAY have given us two wildly different perspectives on the same talk. Was Wong issuing a warning (see ST: "New forms of tribalism can take root and affect politics in Singapore")? Or was he opening up for reform (see TODAY: "Concerns of groups such as women, minorities, LGBTQ are important, cannot be dismissed as 'illegitimate or exaggerated'")?
- 10 If you ask me, ST's headline is more accurate. Lawrence Wong spent most of his talk elaborating on the dangers of identity politics, which he claims to have sparked racial riots in years long past and may fuel culture wars in the future. At one point, he described tribalism as "an ancient narcotic," which makes it sound stupendously frightening.

- 15 There's also the usual celebration of Singapore's status quo ("different tribes have lived peacefully for more than half a century here") and issued the standard warning that the situation is critically unstable ("This harmonious state of affairs will always be on a knife-edge").

- 20 Now, it's true some progressive statements were made. He mentioned "LGBTQ persons feeling that society does not accept them" as a valid concern—this is original, indeed daring, content that we have not heard before from a government leader. Or that "we cannot—in the name of avoiding the dangers of identity politics—deny the rights of a variety of groups to organise themselves, to gain recognition for their concerns, or seek to improve their conditions and well-being."

- 25 There's even promise that "we will never let any group feel unheard, ignored or excluded." But I don't necessarily believe this speech signals a radical new turn in government policy, even though folks like political scientist Elvin Ong are predicting that it's heralding an upcoming repeal of Section 377A. If anything, it's a missed opportunity because I believe that Wong is more than able, and had the platform at this conference, to start a dialogue on how Singapore can shift policy to embrace those among us who feel sidelined by policy.

Still, my sense is that those of us who've historically felt "unheard, ignored, or excluded" are going to have to bear that burden a little longer.

A distracting history lesson on tribes

30 Suppose you've only read the Straits Times' edited reprint of Wong's speech. In that case, you'd have missed out on an eccentric intro: an ancient Roman history lesson, explaining the origins of the words "tribe" (from the voting unit, "Tribus") and "citizen" (from the invention of the Roman citizen, "civitas Romana"). It's a fun opportunity to show off a good grasp of general knowledge and Latin, and I won't begrudge him that.

35 But there's a problem with Lawrence Wong's fascination with history—simultaneously seduced by tradition and nostalgia while also determined to defend the progress of present-day Singapore. There are repeated contradictions in assessing tribalism in the past versus the present.

Tribalism is thousands of years old, he says. But tribalism is also a modern phenomenon, reborn through "new forms of identity politics". Tribalism was good when it inspired Chinese, Indian, and Indonesian nationalism in the 1940s, paving the way for Singaporean nationalism. But tribalism is bad now because it could lead to Singaporean disunity. Tribalism is frowned upon now because it arises out of the loneliness caused by individualism. But tribalism was worse in the distant past when it caused the bloody Hokkien-Teochew riots of 1854.

45 He does, at one point, attempt to lay down some definitions for us. "Tribalism may feel like community," he says. "But the two are not the same. Community is about inclusive connections, and it's based on mutual affection. Tribalism is inherently exclusionary, and it's based on mutual hate: "us" versus "them", "friend" vs "foe"."

50 But these distinctions are highly artificial. In real life, as everyone knows, human societies tend to exhibit both inclusion and exclusion—any community may be called a tribe, and any tribe a community. Nor is there anything consistently negative about the term "tribe". Some of us remember how, in 1996, PM Goh Chok Tong called on Singaporeans to embrace "tribes" as one of the three T's of Singapore's success.

55 The danger of a self-contradicting idea is that you can hear what you want to hear, based on, precisely, your tribe. Should you be part of a majority that is uncomfortable with minority groups, you can take comfort from Wong's speech that you are already a nation while the others are tribes. Should your tribe be a minority—in other words, no chance there of mistaking yourself for a nation—you would hear that your tribe should allow itself to be absorbed into the nation.

Unfortunately, those ensconced in the majority hear nothing in this distracting history lesson that would prompt them to different behaviour.

Unhelpful suggestions

60 Perhaps you think I'm giving Lawrence Wong a hard time—this is a complex world, and tribalism's a complex issue. So, instead, let's take a look at his practical suggestions on how to heal the divides between us. First, he says we've got to "strengthen our human relationships". OK, that works.

65 Second, we must "avoid stereotyping groups of people or assuming that each community is monolithic and homogeneous." He exhorts us to recall that "regardless of our gender or sexual orientations, regardless of the cause we champion, we are all Singaporeans, first and foremost."

Here, is where he is exclusionary. As my fellow respondent, AWARE Executive Director Corinna Lim pointed out at the panel, 40% of Singapore's resident population doesn't hold Singapore citizenship. Non-Singaporeans, including Permanent Residents, are our neighbours, family members, teachers,

70 and essential workers. Not even all the speakers at the IPS conference were Singaporeans. So Wong's gone against his own directive, stereotypically assuming all Singapore residents are homogeneously Singaporean. The message to us is to avoid the problems of tribalism by identifying with the correct tribe—that of the Singaporean citizen. Such a message needs to be balanced out with strong language on the ugly flip side of national pride: xenophobia.

75 Lawrence Wong does concede, however, that “we can and must do a lot more to integrate foreign workers in our midst” but only in his Q&A when brought up by an audience member. This is a phenomenon that hurts citizens too, as my other fellow respondent, Minority Voices co-founder Sharvesh Leatchmanan, explained. As an Indian Singaporean, he finds that his nationality is increasingly being questioned by others who are keen to police who does and doesn't belong on this island.

80 But let's move on to the third suggestion: to remember that “trade is in our blood”, i.e. that we should be open to cooperating with different cultures and communities because of “our instinctive desire to explore the unknown”. It's an on-brand metaphor, considering Lawrence Wong's portfolio as Minister for Finance. But it's wanting as a representation of the interaction between today's identity groups. How does the invitation to “trade” work with economically disenfranchised groups?

85 If we're talking about migrant workers or the disabled, does it make sense for us to relate to them on the grounds of “reciprocity, trust, and mutual benefit”? Is it fair to look at someone who's been marginalised by society and say, “Let's be friends, as soon as we can figure out how to profit from each other”? This suggestion assumes fair trade conditions, perfect knowledge between all parties, and that we are all moved by the profit motive. The first two do not exist in identity politics; while the non-ubiquity of the last is a very reason why we are even having a discussion on identity politics.

Privilege vs power

Besides logic, there's another aspect of Lawrence Wong's speech that begs closer inspection. It's the way he misrepresents specific terms. For instance, “Chinese privilege”. He calls this a mere stereotype: a sloppy overgeneralisation of the diverse experiences of Chinese Singaporeans, who may be rich or poor, male or female.

95 But the term's much more nuanced than that. It's grounded in sociology, and, as a Mothership article explains, it's a way to encapsulate how Chinese folks don't usually face the same race-based obstacles as ethnic minorities in Singapore. By trivialising concepts associated with social justice, Wong—consciously or subconsciously—seems to be avoiding the fact that different groups have different power levels. When he describes the government serving as “a fair and honest broker”,
100 he's constructing a utopian scenario where every tribe has an equal amount of influence and numbers, where no group is ideologically committed to the erasure of another.

A hint of redemption

So do I think there was nothing redeeming about Wong's speech? Not quite. He's made statements that we need to hold on to. He's said that groups have the right “to organise themselves”; that the government “will never let any group feel boxed in or ostracised.” I hope that I am right to read this
105 as an encouragement to organise, speak up, and take action for under-represented groups and causes. Plus, I haven't mentioned Lawrence Wong's fourth suggestion: “as a society, we must continue to give all Singaporeans reason to hope and a fair chance to have a good life.” This isn't just an abstract expression of goodwill; he promises “targeted support with universal coverage for essential items”—a genuine effort to reduce inequality. It's an exceptional commitment, and I'm impatient to learn the
110 details and see it enacted.

And maybe I'm going a little crazy after parsing this speech for so long, but I think I've found something profoundly redemptive to it. Yes, there are layers of frequencies, sounding differently to different ears, but there is a driving melody. If you put aside the inconsistencies, at the core of his talk you'll find a fundamental opposition towards conservatism.

- 115 When Wong defines community as being “about inclusive connections”, and condemns tribalism as “inherently exclusionary”, he’s essentially telling us to be ruled less by taboos and more open to difference. He could well be praising the arts community, which has always been focused on dialogue and diversity. Or he may be speaking of the queer community, which has had to carry on constant negotiation to include all its members—not just gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender, but now
- 120 pansexual, demisexual, asexual, non-binary, as well as a range of races, religious perspectives, classes, and political views.

- Still, as Corinna Lim said, it’s not enough to embrace a national tribal identity to unify everyone in Singapore. We need to endorse a common set of values. Fortunately, Singapore’s got an official set of five ideals, represented by the five stars on the flag. They stand for democracy, peace, progress,
- 125 justice, and equality—pretty inspiring stuff.

- The conservative tendency, which is all too common in Singapore, is to focus only on peace and interpret it as silence, submission, and obedience. But if we want everyone to feel counted, we must start talking more about the other national tenets: democracy, justice, and equality. And if we are brave enough to push for something better than the status quo—that’s progress. As it is, many parts
- 130 of the speech make little sense. It’s confusing and at parts, internally contradictory.

But if we—and I include both activists and the government here—work to reform this country a little more, then it can do something better than make sense.

It can make a real difference.

For discussion/reflection:

- There are some examples of ‘identity politics’ from other countries presented in Reading 14 (lines 17-23). Identify and explain the instances of ‘identity politics’ you have observed here in Singapore.
- Minister Wong suggests that the ‘rise of tribalism was linked closely to the rise of individualism’ (line 24). Attempt to articulate his line of reasoning.
- Minister Wong lists principles of what the government has done – or must do – to ensure inclusivity in Singapore. In your opinion, how well has government policies embodied these principles (Reading 14, lines 58-91)?
- Ng writes in Reading 15 that tribalism in ‘human societies tend to exhibit both inclusion and exclusion’ (line 48-49). What is the difference between a community that ‘may be called a tribe’ (line 49) and a ‘tribe [that may be called] a community’ (line 49-50)?
- To what extent is it crucial for Singapore to foster a national identity?

Related Cambridge/RI essay questions:

1. Should politicians pursue the popular viewpoint or their own convictions, if they conflict? (Cambridge 2020)
2. ‘Race has no place in politics today.’ How far do you agree? (RI 2020 Y6 Prelim)
3. Assess the view that your society is not doing enough to eradicate prejudice. (RI 2019 Y6 Prelim)

SECTION C: NEGOTIATING BETWEEN INCLUSIVENESS AND THE COMMON GOOD

Reading 16: Parents' concerns over full subject-based banding

EU 4

June Yong | Channel News Asia | 8 March 2023

This article helps you understand:

- The strength-based emphasis of subject-based banding, which theoretically serves to remove the labels and stigma associated with streaming
- Some parents' worry concerning possible distraction caused by disruptive classmates when mixed form classes take effect, which seems to be based on stereotypes of low-academic ability students that have been resistant to re-habilitation
- Why the realisation of the intended outcomes of full subject-based banding is still dependent on educators playing their role effectively and such an approach comes with certain challenges

The full subject-based banding (SBB) system that will kick in nationwide for secondary school students in 2024 promises to usher in a new era of a strength-based approach to learning. Along with it, the old labels of Express, Normal (Academic) and Normal (Technical) will no longer be used to build walls around groups of students. But the question is, will these walls remain in our minds?

How Full Subject-based Banding Works

- 5 Students entering secondary schools next year will no longer be sorted into Express and Normal streams. Instead, each student will take most subjects at either the G3, G2 or G1 level, which is mapped from today's Express, N(A) and N(T) standards, depending on their performance in the subject. They will take certain subjects together with their form class, such as physical education, art and character and citizenship education. But when it comes to mathematics, science and languages,
- 10 the students will be split according to the subject level they are taking.

I admit that my own first reaction to full SBB was, "Wouldn't it be mayhem to lump the different students together in one class? How would the teachers teach?" I had to call myself out for automatically assuming that the students who would take most of their subjects at the G1 or G2 levels would be the naughtier ones.

- 15 Mr Tan, a teacher whose school has been piloting SBB for the past three years, shared that very often when teachers walk into a new class, they cannot tell the difference between the students in the Express stream and those in the Normal streams. Over time, certain differences may emerge - for example, Express-stream students may be more concerned about their academic performance, while their N(A) and N(T) counterparts may be less interested in their studies or may not follow instructions as readily, he described.
- 20

But he added a caveat that this could also be stereotyping at work, admitting that both groups of students are more similar than we think. For example, he once met a student who was very well behaved and polite, and later found out that this student was from the N(T) stream. Such experiences have helped him realise that these categories really do not matter.

The Beauty of Full Subject-based Banding

- 25 When it comes to understanding the whys behind this new system, no one can fault its aim to remove the stigma of unhelpful labels that have resulted in a division between "haves" and "have-nots" at

such a formative age. Full SBB treats every student as an individual, and seeks to maximise each person's potential.

30 At the same time, I have heard many parents voice their worry about whether their children will end up being inadvertently taxed in this new system. One common concern is that they may end up being distracted by their naughtier classmates. But is this phenomenon of having disruptive classmates new? Would it be caused solely by the full SBB system itself? That we seem to fall back on the trope that lower-ability students behave poorly may be reflective of how sticky the old labels are and how much persistence is required to scrub them off. To prod us along, we may need to revisit the benefits of
35 heterogeneous classrooms.

Diversity in a mixed classroom allows students to learn from one another's differences. In such a setting, there is also the potential for role modelling to take place, as weaker students learn from positive behaviours in class.

40 According to Mr Tan's observations of his mixed form classes, the children actually get along with one other. "It doesn't take long for the students themselves to realise that different people have different gifts. Whereas in the old system, they're always made to believe that the one is better, and the other, worse... If they can co-exist in this space, it will help them later on when they enter the workplace. They can hang out with anyone," he said.

Rising to the Challenge of Mixed Form Classes

45 But friendships aside, it will remain to be seen as to whether the classroom setting will truly be more egalitarian and stigma-free. And this is where the skill level of educators comes in.

In one research study, Stanford University researchers Elizabeth Cohen and Rachel Lotan hypothesised that teachers could affect students' perceptions of status in a heterogeneous classroom by altering the expectations of competence that students hold for themselves and for one another. They proposed two interventions: The multiple ability intervention and assigning competence to low-status
50 students. The former entails discussing the many different intellectual abilities required by collective tasks, such as reasoning or problem-solving. The latter involves the teacher, after having observed instances of low-status students performing well on abilities relevant to the task, providing the student with specific, positive and public evaluations.

55 The researchers found that the interventions were effective in promoting equal-status behaviour in the classroom, and clocked significant gains in participation and achievement of low-status students. This study shows that the role of the educator is particularly important in ensuring that classrooms are safe and effective learning spaces for all. While there may no longer be different streams, teachers are the first ones who have to fully embrace full SBB and take intentional steps to ensure that lower-ability learners in their form classes are valued for their strengths. And because it might be more
60 difficult to engage everyone equally, it may also mean that form teachers will need to give themselves time to understand their students better and to adjust their teaching methods accordingly.

Helping Every Student Find Their Place

In the new system, everyone has a part to play. "Being a form teacher of a mixed class has made me realise that many of the kids are talented in different areas," explained Mr Tan. "Some of the lower-ability students have very strong leadership traits. Some of them are showmen who are not afraid of
65 going on stage and expressing themselves. They end up being the cheerleaders in class."

While it is easy to reach for labels to help explain the different behaviours we may come across in class, it may be even better to focus on each student as an individual with different strengths, weaknesses and needs. “It has also made me realise that categorising them is really my problem. We need to shift gears and help them find the thing they’re good at,” he added.

For discussion/reflection:

- What is full subject-based banding, and what is the rationale behind its implementation? How persuasive do you regard the rationale, particularly in the context of previous research that have shown that people who study in ‘elite’ schools tend to have very few friends from ‘non-elite’ schools?
- How does full subject-based banding differ from the previous system of sorting students into ‘Express and Normal streams’ (lines 5-6)?
- According to Yong, what are the potential benefits of mixed-form classes under full subject-based banding, and what challenges might teachers face in implementing such a new system? What other benefits and challenges can you list and explain?
- Yong describes the worry that some parents have concerning whether their children might be ‘distracted by their naughtier classmates’ (line 31). How might such concerns be addressed or allayed?
- Suggest possible reasons why ‘unhelpful labels’ (line 26) concerning less academically inclined students are ‘sticky’ (line 33) or very persistent.
- The ‘two interventions’ (lines 49) studied by researchers to help make mixed-ability classes ‘stigma-free’ (line 45) consist of emphasising the ‘different intellectual abilities required [to complete] collective tasks’ (lines 50-51) and public acknowledgment of ‘low-status students performing well on abilities relevant to the task’ (line 52). What might be the pros and cons of each intervention?
- In your opinion, does this policy reflect the challenge the government faces in managing the tradeoff between building an inclusive society through education and continually upholding the system/principle of meritocracy? Are the two mutually exclusive?

Related Cambridge/RI essay questions:

1. Is diversity of people and their viewpoints truly celebrated in your society? (RI 2021 Y6 Common Test)
2. Consider the view that individuals, not the state, are in the best position to determine their overall well-being. (RI 2020 Term 3 Y6 Common Essay Assignment)
3. Do you agree that efforts by the government to ensure greater inclusion in your society have done more harm than good? (RI 2018 Y6 CT1)
4. How far is your society prepared for the challenges that diversity brings? (RI 2015 Y6 Prelim)
5. ‘Ours is a country of divided people.’ Is this a valid comment on your society? (RI 2015 Y5 Promo)

SECTION C: NEGOTIATING BETWEEN INCLUSIVENESS AND THE COMMON GOOD

Reading 17: Decision on Section 377A reflects 'Singapore formula' on difficult issues

EU 2-4

Gillian Koh and Mathew Mathews | Channel News Asia | 24 August 2022

This article helps you understand:

- The government's decision to repeal Section 377A but institutionalise a heterosexual definition of marriage through the Constitution
- How advocates on both sides of the debate have regarded the issue to be of fundamental importance, given the existential burden each felt they have borne
- That the issue is a value-laden one that cannot be definitively resolved and thus the government has decided that it must be held in a state of provisional stability
- That the proposed dual track policy reform is intended to achieve balance across diverse viewpoints, but could lead to greater polarisation
- The Singapore formula for managing difficult moral and political controversies, which involves shifting policy and legislative positions towards greater inclusion of minorities while simultaneously introducing measures to address the concerns of the majority community

At the 2022 National Day Rally, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong announced that one, the Government will repeal the colonial-era law that criminalises sex between men and two, amend the Constitution so that the heterosexual definition of marriage as stipulated in the Women's Charter and Interpretation Act cannot be challenged in a court of law.

- 5 The status of Section 377A in the Penal Code is in a special breed of political issues where advocates feel that their personal value system and way of life are at stake. The differences are viewed as irreconcilable. The best route in managing them is to find compromise solutions with the assurance that these can be reviewed from time to time. There will now be debate in Parliament but neither lobby should imagine it is the only valid group of stakeholders in the room, that no new ones will arise,
- 10 or that an assertion of rights can only be defined one way.

In his speech, Mr Lee did indeed recognise that some, presumably those advocating the repeal of Section 377A and equal citizenship for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) individuals, will find the move too modest, while others, presumably those appealing for status quo to hold, will receive it with great reluctance. He added that no group can have it all their way.

Arguments On Both Sides

- 15 Over the past 15 years since Parliament last debated the status of Section 377A, the lobbies on both sides of the divide have strengthened, each treating it as an existential issue, each arguing that it has been stigmatised. The LGBT community, in particular, homosexual men, say they have experienced psychological duress because of Section 377A. The conservatives, taking reference from their peers in countries where laws on same-sex relations have been liberalised, fear the loss of their rights to preach
- 20 and teach about traditional (or heteronormative) values related to marriage and family.

This is an issue area that is not merely about rational policy issues where consensus, pragmatism and even legal coherence or integrity can be so easily arrived at. It is in a special category of public policy issues that can only see a state of "stable irresolution" as propounded by political theorist James Tully and written about by local scholar Johannis Auri Abdul Aziz.

25 This means that passionately-held, value-laden beliefs are admitted into the democratic process and
for a time, a certain accommodation is accepted not only for the sake of upholding a higher order goal
of peace and the political system, but also because it is paired with the proviso that there will be space
to contest policy and legislation at the next appropriate stage, whenever that may be. So, positions
are “provisional” because they cannot be definitively “resolved”. The arrangement is held till claimant
30 groups provide new reasons for legislative change.

A New Accommodation

Singapore is one of the most diverse countries on the planet, not only in terms of religious beliefs
including those who are agnostics or atheists, but also in terms of ethnicity and linguistic backgrounds.
Once activated, the respective communities will be heard and felt viscerally.

35 With the planned dual track policy reform of Section 377A that is supposed to have benefitted from
extensive discussion with interested segments of society, a new accommodation is proposed. The
question is whether passionate advocates on either side will cause a greater polarisation of society,
or if they will signal a belief that their interests are better served by accepting this new political
arrangement and holding it steady for some time to come.

40 In its initial response, the LGBT community said the repeal of Section 377A would be a “hard-won
victory” but was “dismayed” that there would be moves to defend the current definition of marriage.
Its members said that the intention to repeal Section 377A would be but the “first step on a long road”
towards equality.

45 In its response, a group of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christians said the decision was “extremely
regrettable” but recognised that the Government was seeking to achieve balance across diverse
viewpoints. There is deep worry that the ordinary laws on which the protection of the current concept
of family in the Constitution is proposed, can be toppled by a simple majority in Parliament.

The Singapore Formula

50 Civil contestation and the tone of it will make all the difference. Singapore has managed such difficult
moral and political controversies before like the 2004 decision to license casinos within proposed
integrated resorts. The introduction of a panoply of social safeguards and committed enforcement of
them have kept the level of problem gambling and associated social problems relatively stable. The
“wait and see” approach provided the space for this move which was similarly dual-sided – liberalise
and protect – to prove its worth. In 2021, the Government announced it would change a long-held
ban on the use of the tudung, an important part of a Muslim woman’s dress code, in the uniformed
public healthcare sector. Mr Lee has said that the public has absorbed the change relatively well.

55 Examining these, policy and legislative positions have shifted in the direction of greater inclusion of
minorities while other measures are introduced to address the concerns of the majority community
or those representing the status quo. This has been the Singapore formula.

60 Let us use an imperfect but hopefully helpful analogy of team-sports to illustrate this political model
and what it is not. Scenario One: After the final whistle, members of the vanquished team shake hands
with the victors and referees, vowing to prepare themselves to take on their adversaries (not enemies)
again. The spectators celebrate a game played in the spirit of sportsmanship, and look forward to the
rematch. A month later, the teams meet but this time, to promote the city’s new integrated sports
facilities and its sporting culture, a common interest they can all rally around.

65 Scenario Two: After the final whistle, members of both teams come to blows as they have made enemies of each other as the game ensued. The referees are caught in the scuffle because the players believe that the outcome was shaped primarily by the rulings of the referees. The fans also fight each other. The facilities are damaged and there are injuries. A month later, there are campaigns to ban the sport and certainly shut down its association.

70 As citizens, we pledge to build a democratic society amidst our diversity in values and social mores whatever the source of inspiration or authority. Scenario One is what we must maintain. Scenario Two is what we must avoid. More talk with a large dose of empathy is, paradoxically, the action that is needed. Harassment and violence will take things beyond the pale. But unlike the analogy, the issue of Section 377A cannot be distilled into a game, and no side is actually “defeated”.

75 As a small, dense nation that also hosts many a sojourner, first, this political capacity to weave a strong tapestry that accommodates differences and creates common interests, and second, the human capacity to be creative and wise to generate specific accommodations to narrow the gap between policy trade-offs and competing interests, are what must make this union called Singapore, real and workable. We have done it before, we can do it again.

For discussion/reflection:

- Why is the issue of Section 377A in the Penal Code such a difficult and sensitive issue in Singapore, and why is it unlikely to be resolved definitively in the near future?
- How have the lobbies on both sides of the divide regarding Section 377A in Singapore evolved over the past 15 years, and what are the main arguments put forth by each side?
- In your own words, explain the concept of "stable irresolution" (line 23) and how it applies to the issue of Section 377A in Singapore. Can you identify and explain any other issues that Singapore may have to manage, for which this concept may also apply currently or in the future?
- Summarise the response and arising concerns of both the LGBT community and conservative groups to the government's proposed 'dual track policy reform' (line 34).
- Explain the 'Singapore formula' (line 57) in your own words. How was this formula used to manage similar moral or political controversies in the past? What is your view of the 'Singapore formula'? How convinced are you that it is an effective and/or necessary approach towards handling contentious issues in Singapore? Try to base your answer on your understanding of Singapore's specific, even unique social, cultural, and political traits
- What lessons can be drawn from the analogy of team sports in understanding the political model used in Singapore? What are the key distinctions between the two scenarios used by the authors?

Related Cambridge/RI essay questions:

1. To what extent can any society claim to be great? (Cambridge 2020)
2. 'The key to good governance is in staying accountable to the people.' How far do you agree? (RI 2022 Y6 Common Test)
3. Should individual rights and freedom be protected at all costs? (RI 2021 Y6 Prelim)
4. Assess the view that your society is not doing enough to eradicate prejudice. (RI 2019 Y6 Prelim)
5. How far should governments interfere in the way individuals organise their lives? (RI 2019 Y6 CT2)
6. Consider the notion that reaching a consensus is an ideal way to govern. (RI 2019 Y6 CT1)
7. Should a government always listen to its people? (RI 2018 Y6 CT2)

SECTION C: NEGOTIATING BETWEEN INCLUSIVENESS AND THE COMMON GOOD

Reading 18: Re-examining Singapore's Social Security System

EU 5

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

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

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

- 10 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 insurance³ 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.

- 20 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.

- 30 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

³ 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

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 our 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.

For discussion/reflection:

- Why do you think that the Singapore government has, in our social security system, provided little by way of unemployment benefits?
- The authors suggested that 'self-reliance is a good principle in general, [but] if taken to extremes [may] neither be efficient or just' (lines 34-35). Explain the nominal benefits of promoting self-reliance as a principle in social policy. What would taking it 'to extremes' look like, and why might it be inefficient and/or unjust?
- 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?
- According to the author, why might it be said that a "more robust" social security system ultimately aids governance?

Related Cambridge/RI essay questions:

1. To what extent is human life in general about the survival of the fittest? (Cambridge 2020)
2. To what extent is poverty the fault of the individual? (RI 2019 Y6 Prelim)
3. Consider the view that we do not take enough responsibility for our own well-being. (Cambridge 2018)
4. How far is increased prosperity for all a realistic goal in your society? (Cambridge 2013)
5. Should your government do less for its people? (RI 2016 Y5 Promo)
6. Should governments prioritise social welfare above overall economic growth? (RI 2014 Y6 CT1)

SECTION C: NEGOTIATING BETWEEN INCLUSIVENESS AND THE COMMON GOOD

Reading 19: Singapore's lesson: Managing immigration to create a win-win situation

EU 5

Global-Is-Asian staff | 23 June 2017

This reading will introduce you to:

- The 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.

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.

- 5 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.

- 10 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.
- 15 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

- 20 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.

- 25 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.

- 30 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.

- 35 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.

- 40 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.

- 45 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.

- 50 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.

- 55 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.

- 65 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.

- 70 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.

75 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

80 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.

85 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

90 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.

95 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.

For discussion/reflection:

- In lines 65 – 66, 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 lines 85 – 88 the author writes of the Singapore government's attempt, for economic purposes, to engage Singaporean citizens who ‘have chosen to live and work abroad’ (lines 80-81). What efforts have the state undertaken with these ends in mind? How successful do you think these efforts are likely to be and why?

Related Cambridge/RI essay questions:

1. ‘In the global village in which we inhabit, there is no justification for national boundaries.’ How far do you agree? (Cambridge 2018)
2. Should refugees be viewed as a burden in modern society? (RI 2018 Y5 Promo)
3. ‘A nation that simply complains.’ Is this a fair comment about your society? (RI 2018 Y5 CT)
4. How far is your society prepared for the challenges that diversity brings? (RI 2015 Y6 Prelim)
5. ‘Migration creates more problems than it does solutions.’ Discuss. (RI 2015 Y6 CT2)
6. To what extent should your society welcome immigrants? (RI 2014 Y5 Promo)

SECTION D: NEGOTIATING BETWEEN DOMESTIC INTERESTS AND GLOBAL CONCERNS

Reading 20: Singapore's Approach to the Challenges of an Uncertain External Environment EU 6

Excerpted from speech by Minister for MFA Dr Vivian Balakrishnan | Committee of Supply Debate | 1 March 2019

This reading will introduce you to:

- the importance of a rules-based international order to Singapore
- the idea that credibility and reliability are reasons why other countries (both on the global and regional stages) want to partner Singapore

How should we in Singapore respond to these challenges in this current state of the world. I would submit that our foreign policy principles remain as salient today as they were at our independence and constructed by Mr Lee Kuan Yew and Mr S Rajaratnam.

- 5 First, we must continue to **promote a rules-based international order**. A system that upholds the rights and sovereignty of all states and the rule of law is important, especially to a small city state like us. Without it, small countries will have very little chance of survival. Under a rules-based system, bigger powers do not get a free pass to act as they will. But in exchange for that, what they would benefit from is an orderly, stable, global environment. We all know that in Singapore, our trade volume is three times our GDP. I think all members agree with me that we must stand up for the multilateral, rules-based, global
- 10 trading system. This is not a debating point; this is our lifeblood for us in Singapore. So we continue to play an active role at the WTO, and in constantly trying to negotiate a web of free trade agreements at both the bilateral and multilateral level. Last year, we ratified the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement on the Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP). Yes, in fact, this deal started off with four small states, Singapore, New Zealand, Brunei and Chile. Then the Americans, Japanese, everyone else came in,
- 15 and it became the TPP. And then, America pulled out. Fortunately, with Japanese leadership and active support from the other 11, we got the CPTPP signed, and then to my pleasant surprise, enough of us ratified it so that it came into force on the 30th of December. This is important. This leaves the door open. Hopefully, the United States, at some point, will find a way, a political way, to come back and to engage in trade at a strategic level with the Asia-Pacific.
- 20 The CPTPP represents a market of approximately 500 million people and 22% of global trade, and will provide our companies with increased market access in the Asia-Pacific, and these figures exclude the US. I am also happy to note there has been substantial progress on the negotiations for the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), and leaders of all the RCEP participating countries have committed to conclude the RCEP later this year.
- 25 If we get this done, it would encompass 45% of the world's population, and amount to 30% of global GDP. This would be big. We have also launched, and by this I mean Singapore, FTA negotiations with MERCOSUR, the Pacific Alliance, and the Eurasian Economic Union. The European Parliament just, two weeks ago, voted in favour of ratifying the EU-Singapore Free Trade Agreement. This is the first bilateral trade agreement signed between the EU and an ASEAN country. It signals the EU's commitment to step
- 30 up engagement with Southeast Asia, and will be a, we hope, pathfinder for future agreements between EU and other ASEAN member states, and ultimately of course, we hope that there will be an EU-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement. We should also remember that as a port at the edge of the narrow straits that ultimately connects the Pacific Ocean to the Indian Ocean, freedom of navigation under the United Nations Convention on the Law Of the Sea is absolutely critical for Singapore. And this is why we have
- 35 always participated actively at the United Nations, and in the formulation of international regimes and norms. We were a key player in the negotiation for the Law of the Sea Treaty, that is UNCLOS, and also for the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, on which I spent four and a half years of my life on. We

continue to contribute actively to shaping new norms to govern the global commons, including emerging areas such as cyberspace and outer space.

40 Second principle, we must **always be a credible, consistent and reliable partner**. We will continue to be honest brokers. We will deal fairly and openly with all parties. The key point is this and many of you have asked, how are you going to deal with people who force you, who are trying to force you to choose sides. The key point is our neutrality. And that Singapore cannot be bought, nor can we be bullied. We are not “for” or “against” anyone – we are “pro-Singapore”. We are Singaporeans. We are pro-Singaporeans. We
45 will be nobody’s stooge. We will not act on behalf of any other power. We act consistently and purely in the long term interests of Singaporeans. And in fact, it is this sense of strategic predictability that has enabled Singapore to build up trust and goodwill and relevance, with all the major powers. And because we are credible, Singapore has been able to play a constructive role in international affairs. And we have kept up good relations with all the major powers. The US remains a key partner for us. We have continued
50 our close cooperation in both defence and security spheres. We have strengthened our economic ties. Last year, both US President Donald Trump and Vice President Mike Pence visited Singapore. While the current US Administration has adopted an unconventional approach towards issues such as trade, actually the fundamentals that underpin the strong bilateral relationship with us remain.

Mr Charles Chong asked about the US’ engagement of the region. The US has significant investments in
55 Southeast Asia and broad-based links with many Asian countries. In fact the US has more invested in Southeast Asia than it has invested in India, China and Japan combined! Amazing statistic. I only discovered this when I read Vice President Pence’s speech two years ago, and every time I meet both the President and senior members of the administration, I remind them that the US has real skin in the game in Southeast Asia. The US has rolled out several initiatives to demonstrate its continued commitment to
60 the region, including the US\$113 million in new economic initiatives, and another US\$300 million in funding for regional security cooperation. In addition, Singapore remains, surprisingly, China’s top foreign investor.

Mr Low Thia Khiang delivered an excellent speech, and I really could not find anything to disagree with you. Your key point was whether we should shift our strategic focus to ASEAN. Actually it is not about
65 shifting strategic focus but **recognising that ASEAN has always been a cornerstone of Singapore’s foreign policy** and for our engagement with the region and the rest of the world. And I completely agree with you that we must strengthen the open and inclusive ASEAN-centric regional architecture. When we were ASEAN Chair last year, we launched several initiatives to boost regional integration and to increase our key partners’ stake in the development of our region, including the establishment of the ASEAN Smart
70 Cities Network and the Model ASEAN Extradition Treaty. We also achieved key milestones for the ASEAN-China relations during the three years we were the coordinator for that relationship from 2015 to 2018. We upgraded the ASEAN-China Free Trade Area, a big step towards our goal of achieving two-way trade in excess of US\$1 trillion and investment of US\$500 billion between ASEAN and China by 2020. We are well on the way to achieving these targets. Both sides agreed on a single draft negotiating text for the
75 Code of Conduct in the South China Sea. It will not solve all the problems there, but it is an important confidence building step.

Third, **Singapore must continuously create relevance for ourselves** so that we can be a successful and vibrant country. And here I want to quote Mr Lee Kuan Yew, and he said: “We must make ourselves relevant so that other countries have an interest in our continued survival and prosperity as a sovereign
80 and independent nation. Singapore cannot take its relevance for granted. Singapore has to continually reconstruct itself to keep its relevance to the world and to create political and economic space.” If we are not successful, if we are not united, if we are not stable, we would be completely irrelevant. Mr Lee has also reminded us that there is no irreplaceable function that a small country performs. Singapore was asked to host the 1st US-DPRK Summit last June. I think I have shared with members before that we did
85 not put up our hands to ask to host, but when we were asked, we had to say yes. But we are proud to

have played a small part in easing tensions on the Korean Peninsula. I think this reaffirmed Singapore's reputation as an impartial, reliable, neutral and safe country, and a trusted and consistent partner. And I want to thank all Singaporeans again for their forbearance and for showing the world what we can do at short notice, and putting on, again, a safe event which put us on the map, which made Singapore one of the most searched google terms, and hopefully people know where we are now. We know that Vietnam hosted the 2nd US-DPRK Summit in Hanoi. You know that things didn't go exactly according to plan, but both sides will continue their dialogue, and we hope that their efforts will ultimately lead to lasting peace and stability in the Korean Peninsula.

Finally, we must always **aim to be a friend to all but an enemy of none**. And this is especially so for our immediate neighbourhood, where peace and stability are absolutely essential. Our closest neighbours will always be Malaysia and Indonesia. This is a geographical fact, and therefore they will always be of special importance to us. Mr Vikram Nair and Prof Faishal Ibrahim asked about our relations with Malaysia. Mr Nair and Dr Chia Shi-Lu also asked about our relations with Indonesia.

For Malaysia, although several bilateral issues have come to the fore in recent months, in fact in just the last three months, we remain committed to resolving these issues in an amicable and constructive manner, and in strict accordance with bilateral agreements and international law. On the port limits issue, officials have been meeting to discuss measures to de-escalate the situation. And both sides are aware of the urgent need to prevent accidents and untoward incidents, like the recent collision between the Greece-registered bulk carrier Pireas and the Malaysian Government vessel Polaris, which was illegally anchored in Singapore Territorial Waters. This working group of senior officials is due to submit its recommendations to the two Foreign Ministers in early March, which is now. The Transport Ministers and the senior officials from both sides have been meeting to discuss the arrangements for Seletar Airport and the airspace over Southern Johor, including the instrumented approaches into Seletar Airport, and Malaysia's Restricted Area over Pasir Gudang. And again we look forward to finding a solution that is mutually agreeable, and – fortunately or unfortunately – as my capacity as acting Transport Minister, this is also my problem at this point in time.

For Indonesia, our bilateral cooperation remains deep, multi-faceted and reinforced by frequent high-level exchanges. Our two economies are inextricably linked, with economic cooperation robust and expanding. Singapore remains Indonesia's top foreign investor in 2018 (US\$9.2 billion worth of realised investments). We have committed investments in Indonesia such as the Kendal Industrial Park in Semarang and the Nongsa Digital Park in Batam. The US\$10 billion bilateral financial arrangement, which was announced at the 2018 Leaders' Retreat, and signed on 5 November 2018, reflects the confidence in the economic fundamentals of both countries. Singapore and Indonesia also share common defence and security challenges. And our agencies collaborate closely through frequent defence exercises, and in intelligence sharing for counter-terrorism purposes.

We will leverage on other platforms to **expand Singapore's networks and soft power**. Ms Joan Pereira asked about the Singapore Cooperation Programme (SCP). The SCP is a key example of our commitment to share our experience with other developing countries through human resource development. Since 1992, over 124,000 foreign officials have participated in our programmes and they represent an invaluable reservoir of goodwill for Singapore. My colleagues will provide further details.

Mr Low Thia Khiang and Mr Terence Ho asked about Singapore's soft power. The intangibles of foreign policy – the attitudes, the perspectives, the mindsets – are very important. And in fact, they are the ultimate currency of our foreign policy – because if people like us, trust us, depend on us, I think we will continue to do well. To cite an example, many of our overseas missions use cultural diplomacy to showcase the diverse heritage of Singapore, a heritage which embeds us firmly in the ancient and rich cultures of Asia. When we are able to showcase our arts practitioners' stories and innovative techniques,

it allows friends in other countries to understand Singapore a little better, and to get to know our people at a more intimate level.

135 More broadly, by being successful, by being honest, by building a society which is open, pragmatic, hardworking and rooted in our multicultural heritage, we build warmer people-to-people relations and a store of global goodwill to Singapore. So here again I want to agree with Mr Low Thia Khiang. I think you made a very important point about humility in success, and we will pursue his suggestions on deeper engagement with ASEAN through economic projects, people-to-people ties, and digital diplomacy.

For discussion/reflection:

- Dr Vivian outlines the definition and benefits of 'a rules-based international order' (line 4). What do you think are some challenges associated with the maintenance of such an order?
- From line 12-17, Dr Vivian recounts Singapore's path towards ratifying the CPTPP (line 13). Which of the attributes of a VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous) world are reflected and why?
- In your opinion, why might a VUCA world be particularly challenging for small states like Singapore? Conversely, how might our small size help us navigate a VUCA world?
- Dr Vivian spoke of the importance for Singapore to 'continuously create relevance for ourselves' (line 77). How does he suggest Singapore can go about doing so? What are some prerequisites he believes Singapore must possess in order to not become 'irrelevant' (line 82)?
- Another foreign policy strategy is for Singapore to 'expand [her] networks and soft power' (line 121). Why does Dr Vivian believe in the importance of soft power as 'the ultimate currency of [Singapore's] foreign policy' (lines 127-128)?

Related Cambridge/RI essay questions:

1. How far should countries have relations with others whose human rights record is poor? (Cambridge 2019)
2. A leader's responsibility should always be to his or her own country, not other nations. (Cambridge 2019)
3. 'A country should take care of its own interests before others.' What is your view? (RI 2018 Y5 CT)
4. What priorities would you set for government expenditure in your country and why? (RI 2013 Y6 CT2)

SECTION D: NEGOTIATING BETWEEN DOMESTIC INTERESTS AND GLOBAL CONCERNS

Reading 21: Singapore responds to criticism of its climate pledges

EU 6

Adapted from Analysis panning Singapore's climate targets as 'critically insufficient' lacks nuance: Government | Audrey Tan | The Straits Times | 22 September 2021

This reading will help you understand:

- How Singapore navigates the tension between domestic interests and global concerns within the context of climate change
- Singapore's climate targets and decarbonisation journey
- The unique challenges Singapore faces as a small city-state

A climate research consortium has pegged Singapore's climate targets as being "critically insufficient" - the worst rating on a five-point scale - putting the nation alongside Iran, Russia, Saudi Arabia and Thailand.

5 But the Government has refuted the Climate Action Tracker assessment, saying the analysis lacks nuance, as it does not account for constraints faced by the country in its decarbonisation journey, such as its high population density and limited access to various renewable energy sources. The Climate Action Tracker is a collaboration between two Germany-based research organisations - Climate Analytics and the New Climate Institute.

10 It analyses the climate pledges of 39 countries and the European Union, covering the biggest emitters as well as a representative sample of smaller emitters, which together contribute about 80 per cent of global emissions. The Republic contributes about 0.11 per cent to global emissions.

What the report said about Singapore

15 On Sept 15, Climate Action Tracker published its analysis for Singapore's climate targets, ranking them as being "critically insufficient". This is the worst rating on its five-point scale. The other four are: highly insufficient, insufficient, almost sufficient and 1.5 deg C Paris Agreement compatible. Only one country - the Gambia - has targets deemed suitable for the highest category.

Nations whose targets were labelled "almost sufficient" include Britain, Nepal, Costa Rica and Ethiopia.

20 Jurisdictions with "insufficient" pledges include the European Union, the United States, Germany and Japan, while countries with "highly insufficient" pledges include Indonesia, China, Australia and India. Under the Paris Agreement, nations must take progressive action to reduce their carbon footprint so the world has a greater chance of limiting warming to 1.5 deg C above pre-industrial levels - the threshold to which warming must be kept to avoid harsher climate impacts.

25 On this front, Singapore said in its updated climate pledge last year that the country's emissions will peak at 65 million tonnes by 2030. This means that even if the economy continues to grow, the amount of emissions produced should not. Over a longer time horizon, Singapore wants to halve the amount of emissions it produces from its 2030 peak by 2050, with the aim of achieving net-zero emissions "as soon as viable in the second half of the century".

30 But the Climate Action Tracker said Singapore's rating showed that the nation's climate policies and commitments "reflect minimal to no action and are not at all consistent with the Paris Agreement". "If fully implemented, Singapore's current policies would result in emissions reductions beyond its targets, but still only in line with 3 deg C warming," the analysis added. "Singapore needs to set a more

ambitious target for emissions reductions and establish associated policies to improve its Climate Action Tracker ratings."

Singapore Government responds

35 In response to this assessment, a spokesman for the National Climate Change Secretariat (NCCS) told The Straits Times that the Government is still reviewing the methodology. But he added: "Our preliminary sense is that the Climate Action Tracker may not have fully accounted for our unique challenges as a small city-state with limited access to alternative energy sources."

40 The spokesman said Singapore's population density is more than 10 times higher than the next densest country in the Climate Action Tracker list, South Korea. He added: "Given our lack of land, Singapore is unable to pursue the same types of solutions as the other countries on the list, for example hydro or nuclear power." But Singapore is still working to manage its emissions within these constraints through careful long-term planning and innovations in policy and technology, he said.

45 Singapore's energy mix has a low proportion of coal at 1.2 per cent, compared with other countries, including Japan's 29.8 per cent and Germany's 29.2 per cent, said the NCCS spokesman citing Bloomberg data. Coal is the dirtiest form of fossil fuel. Singapore relies largely on natural gas, a fossil fuel cleaner than coal, for its energy needs. More than 95 per cent of its energy comes from this source.

50 The NCCS spokesman also said Singapore is exploring ways to diversify its energy mix by harnessing greener options such as solar energy, clean energy imports, and low-carbon alternatives.

The Government is also reviewing the trajectory and level of the carbon tax, post-2023, in consultation with industry and expert groups. He added: "Even as we implement existing initiatives, we also look to enhancing our sustainability goals and actions. Singapore is committed to doing our part to contribute to the global fight against climate change, through tangible action."

55 Climate policy observer Melissa Low from the National University of Singapore's Energy Studies Institute, acknowledged the country faces constraints in decarbonisation. She said Singapore's updated climate target is closely linked to its first one, and represents progression from an emissions intensity to an absolute peak target.

60 Under the Paris Agreement, countries are urged to make new or updated pledges every five years, so that national climate action is periodically ratcheted up. But as these pledges are determined by nations, it also means that countries are not obligated to submit entirely new ones. They could, for instance, simply resubmit what they had pledged to do in their first one.

65 Under the first pledge made in 2015, Singapore's main goal was to become greener economically and reduce the amount of greenhouse gases emitted to achieve each dollar of gross domestic product by 36 per cent from 2005 levels, come 2030. It also pledged to stop any further increases to its greenhouse gas emissions by the same timeline.

70 In its updated climate pledge last year, Singapore committed to the absolute peak emission level of 65 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent by 2030. Ms Low said the Government had publicly said that Singapore, in the formulation of its 2030 target of reducing emissions per dollar of GDP, had already expected emissions to stabilise at around 65 million tonnes of emissions by then if the former was achieved.

"The aim to peak emissions highlights that Singapore will work towards reducing emissions after 2030," she said. "The enhanced target allows for better accountability but is not necessarily more ambitious."

For reflection/discussion:

- Why should Singapore adhere to global environmental targets?
- Apart from Singapore's small land size, which the NCCS spokesperson suggested as being a constraint on what we can do to meet climate targets (lines 39-42), what other 'unique challenges' (lines 37-38) do we face? Consider this in terms of social, political, and geopolitical factors.
- In your opinion, do you think Singapore is doing enough to contribute to the global fight against climate change?
- Given that climate agreements are not legally binding, and pledges are entirely determined by countries, how might that impact global efforts in addressing climate change?
- What other critical areas or stakeholders that also play an instrumental role in combatting climate change are there, which are not adequately represented by climate pledges/targets?

Related essay questions:

1. A leader's responsibility should always be to his or her own country, not other nations. (Cambridge 2019)
2. How far do you agree that good governance is key to the protection of the environment? (2021 Y6 Prelim)
3. Should environmental sustainability be given greater priority in your society? (RI 2021 Y6 Common Test)
4. How far should governments interfere in the way individuals organise their lives? (RI 2019 Y6 CT2)
5. 'The environment should be the responsibility of the individual, not the government.' Comment. (RI 2014 Y6 Prelim)

Supplementary reading:

1. What Does the Singapore Green Plan Have to Do With Us? According to These Youths, Everything – Rainer Cheung, Rice Media, 5 October 2021
(<https://www.ricemedia.co/features-singapore-green-plan-youths/>)
2. Singapore and International Efforts – National Climate Change Secretariat, 2021
(<https://www.nccs.gov.sg/singapores-climate-action/singapore-and-international-efforts/#:~:text=Singapore's%20Pledge%20to%20Reduce%20Emissions&text=In%20line%20with%20the%20agreement,aim%20of%20peaking%20around%202030>)

SECTION D: NEGOTIATING BETWEEN DOMESTIC INTERESTS AND GLOBAL CONCERNS

Reading 22: Imposing sanctions on Russia despite potential costs

EU 6

Adapted from Why Singapore Has Chosen to Impose Sanctions on Russia | Xirui Li | The Diplomat | 9 March 2022

This reading will help you understand:

- That the sanctions help demonstrate Singapore's commitment to the international community and support the rule of law
- Why Singapore's decision is also driven by her strategic interests, which are reinforced through the preservation of a stable and peaceful global environment
- The challenges Singapore faces in balancing her strategic interests with its commitment to international norms and values, given the risks of doing so
- How Singapore's conduct in this conflict can serve as an example of how small states can play a meaningful role in global security

Despite being far away from Ukraine, the government of Singapore has not only voiced its condemnation of Russia's invasion, but has also taken the rare step of imposing unilateral sanctions on the country. According to the Singaporean Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the sanctions will focus on "export controls and blocking of certain financial transactions connected to Russian banks and financial institutions."

Indeed, Singapore's move is rare in the sense that all of the sanctions that Singapore authorities currently impose on other states are based on United Nations resolutions. Indeed, the last time that Singapore imposed unilateral sanctions was more than 40 years ago, when Vietnam invaded Cambodia and overthrew the communist Khmer Rouge.

Details of the sanctions have yet to be released, but they will likely focus on export controls, which are likely to come at some cost to Singapore, and blocking of certain financial transactions connected to Russian banks and financial institutions.

Rare though the move may be, it is not surprising. Singapore's swift, strong response to the Ukraine-Russia war, especially the imposition of unilateral sanctions on Russia, is consistent with its foreign policy. The decision is rooted in Singapore's perceived leadership role among small states and its long-time concerns and worries about the survival of such states in the international system. It was triggered by the malfunctioning of existing international institutions. Meanwhile, the relatively remote relationship between Singapore and Russia has also enabled the city-state to be more vocal and brave in its stance than it otherwise might have been.

Boasting only 728 square kilometers of territory, Singapore is one of the smallest nations in the world. Since its independence in 1965, Singapore's leaders have been well aware of its small size and the vulnerabilities that come with this. Therefore, the rights of small states in world affairs enjoy an official and prominent place in Singapore's foreign policy. Moreover, being a small and developed state, Singapore has taken it upon itself to represent the world's small states. In the hope that small states could be given more "strategic weight" in the United Nations, in 1992 Singapore established and has chaired the Forum of Small States, an informal and non-ideological grouping of small nations.

Similarly, in 2009, to address the unfair treatment of small- and medium-sized states by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development and to create synergy between the G-20 and the U.N., Singapore set up another informal grouping of 30 small- and medium-sized members of

30 the U.N. known as the Global Governance Group. In addition, Singapore has also participated in two other small-state groupings, the Alliance of Small Island States and the Small Island Developing States.

Another big concern for Singapore is the survival of small states. Of course, survival is a concern for any state, but for small states like Singapore, it is undoubtedly more pressing due to their vulnerabilities and relative lack of strength in the world system. Some are pessimistic about the
35 survival of small states, pointing out that this is primarily determined by the international political environment rather than by the states themselves.

Recognizing the vulnerability of the survival of small states in the world system, Singapore has long advocated for the principles of international law and the U.N. Charter, which underscores the respect for territory integrity and sovereignty. Therefore, Singapore has been consistent in its stand of firmly
40 opposing any kinds of invasions, especially in cases when smaller states have been invaded by bigger powers, such as when Indonesia invaded East Timor and Vietnam, backed by the Soviet Union, invaded Cambodia. As Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan told Parliament last week, “Ukraine is much smaller than Russia, but it is much bigger than Singapore.” By swiftly condemning Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, Singapore does both speaks for itself and acts as a leader and representative of the world’s
45 other small, vulnerable states.

It is not the first time that Singapore has been vocal in condemning Russian actions. In 2014, when Moscow invaded Crimea, Singapore strongly objected, stating that “Russian troops should not be in Ukraine in breach of international law” and that “the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine must be respected.” Meanwhile, although expecting the U.N. to take steps to stop Russia, Singapore
50 has also realized that the U.N. Security Council (UNSC) may not be able to undertake any meaningful actions for small states like Ukraine given the fact that Russia enjoys a veto as a permanent member of the Council.

Following the invasion, Russia vetoed a UNSC resolution condemning its own actions. The malfunctioning of the U.N., and its inability to safeguard its Charter and the principle of territorial
55 integrity and sovereignty, is clear source of alarm to Singapore. Therefore, to show its responsibility as a leader among small states, Singapore decided to condemn Russia and take the rare step of imposing unilateral sanctions on the country.

Why has Singapore taken a stronger stand against Russia than its Southeast Asian neighbors, which has led some to conclude that Singapore is straying away from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)? Part of the reason is that Singapore is less linked to Russia both economically and
60 militarily. Trade with Russia makes up an insignificant proportion of Singapore’s total trade. It is true that countries in Southeast Asia are major buyers of Russia’s arms, but Singapore is an exception. According to the SIPRI database, the number of arms bought from Russia by Singapore was too small to be listed. On the other hand, Vietnam bought 80 percent of its total imported arms from Russia,
65 Laos 47 percent, Myanmar 40 percent, and Malaysia 26 percent. Therefore, comparing Singapore to the ASEAN member states whose condemnations of Moscow’s actions mentioned neither Russia nor the word “invasion,” such a stance does not come at a price for Singapore. Not only that, the city-state’s brave action stands even to enhance its reputation as a principled member of ASEAN and a leader of the world’s small states.

For reflection/discussion:

- According to Li, why is it 'not surprising' (line 13) that Singapore has decided to impose sanctions on Russia?
- What are the implications concerning the 'survival of small states' (line 32), given their 'relative lack of strength in the world system' (line 34)?
- In what ways might it be of paramount importance for small states like Singapore to show their support for a rules-based world order?
- The author suggests that Singapore has taken a 'stronger stand' (line 58) against Russia's decision to invade Ukraine compared with her ASEAN neighbours. How might Singapore's position impact its relations with other countries, particularly those with closer ties with Russia?
- What principles or values underpin Singapore's decision to impose sanctions on Russia, and how can this be applied to other similar issues faced by Singapore or other small states in the future?

Related essay questions:

1. A leader's responsibility should always be to his or her own country, not other nations. (Cambridge 2019)
2. 'In the global village in which we inhabit, there is no justification for national boundaries.' How far do you agree? (Cambridge 2018)
3. 'Countries experiencing conflict should be left to sort out their own problems.' How far do you agree? (Cambridge 2016)
4. Should young people take a more active interest in politics, even when it is not directly relevant to their lives? (RI 2018 Y6 CT1)
5. 'A country should take care of its own interests before others.' What is your view? (RI 2018 Y5 CT)

Supplementary reading:

3. Commentary: Sanctions against Russia come at economic cost to those imposing them – Margaret Allen, Channel News Asia, 8 April 2022 (<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/commentary/singapore-sanctions-russia-ukraine-war-economic-impact-prices-petrol-electricity-2614031>)