



Singapore — Va-PoReg Country Report

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04/01/1867 Start Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom]: Straits Settlements (amongst them Singapore) become crown colonies (subordinated to British India) on 04/01/1867 (LePoer 1991a). In December 1941, Japanese troops landed in southern Thailand and northern Malaya, quickly established a foothold on the peninsula, and captured the British air base at Kota Baharu. They began bombing Singapore and faced little resistance. During this time multiparty executive and legislative elections were absent as well as universal suffrage and political liberties were absent according to LIED and in an ambiguous state according to our interpretation of V-Dem's PCLI until 1941. For 1942, our interpretation of V-Dem's PCLI indicates that political liberties were not really present. For this regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were comprehensive, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited.

02/15/1942 End Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom, Electoral Oligarchy]/Start Direct Rule Occupation Regime [by Japan, Constitutional Monarchy]: On 02/15/1942, General Yamashita Tomoyuki accepted the unconditional surrender of British Lieutenant General Arthur Percival. The Japanese occupied Singapore until 1945, designating it the capital of Japan's southern region and renaming it Shōnan. The formal surrender was announced a week later (LePoer 1991a). For 1942-1945, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, and V-Dem's LCE is similarly interpreted as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also limited. According to LIED, no elections were held during this period. In this timeframe, LIED identifies political liberties as absent, while V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as showing that political liberties are not truly present.

09/12/1945 End Direct Rule Occupation Regime [by Japan, Constitutional Monarchy]/Start Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom, Liberal Democracy]: Japanese surrender to the British (de facto: 08/15/1945; announced takeover by the BMA 09/12/1945). On 04/01/1946 the British Military Administration ended with the formation of the Malayan Union, at which time Singapore became a separate crown colony with a civil administration (Leitch LePoer 1991). For 1946 and 1947, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were comprehensive, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited. According to LIED, no multiparty executive or legislative elections were held during the specified period. Political liberties were absent according to LIED and ambiguous according to V-Dem's PCLI.

03/20/1948 End Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom, Liberal Democracy]/Start Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom, Liberal Democracy]: On this day the first general elections for the Legislative Council took place. Six of the 22 seats were directly elected. However, voting was limited to British citizens. In 1951 the number of direct elected representatives increased to nine and to 25 in 1955. In 1957 Singapore gained internal self-government. The legislative Assembly increased to 51 members, all of them directly elected.¹ For 1948-1955, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were comprehensive, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited. For 1956-1959, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were comprehensive, whereas V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as

indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate. LIED confirms the presence of multiparty and legislative elections since 1949. However universal suffrage remained absent until 1959 (LIED). Political liberties were absent according to LIED and ambiguous according to V-Dem's PCLI.

05/30/1959 End Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom, Liberal Democracy]/Start Electoral Hybrid Regime [semi-sovereign, external affairs under United Kingdom, Liberal Democracy]: State of Singapore and internal self-government: In April 1958, Lim Yew Hock led the Singapore delegation to the third round of constitutional talks, resulting in an agreement for a State of Singapore with full powers of internal government. In August 1958, the British Parliament changed Singapore's status from a colony to a state, and general elections were scheduled for May 1959, with a record 13 parties contending. After a recommendation by the Commission of Inquiry in 1958, compulsory voting was introduced, raising participation rates to 89.4%. The parties with highest prominence were the Singapore People's Alliance (SPA), the People's Action Party (PAP), the Liberal Socialist Party (LS), and the United Malays' Organization/Malayan Chinese Association (UMNO/MCA)(Chung 1975: 63). Based on our observations, only multiparty legislative elections were held during this period, which contradicts the observations of LIED. LIED considers the elections as not competitive. Moreover, ambiguous cleanliness is scored (V-Dem CEI) and the overall election conditions were ambiguous as well (V-Dem EF&FI). The PAP, under Lee Kuan Yew, won a landslide victory by campaigning on a platform of honest efficient government, social and economic reform, and union with the Federation of Malaya, winning 43 of the 51 seats. The Singapore People's Alliance won four seats, while the remaining seats were won by three UMNO/MCA Alliance candidates and one independent (LePoer 1991a). In a high-profile scandal in 1959, the Minister of Education was reported accepting significant sums of money from foreign sources. Furthermore, while Singapore was granted full self-government under the new constitution of 1959, it still was not granted independence in matters of foreign affairs, internal security and defense until 1965 (Bellows 1967). Furthermore, no political liberties were achieved (LIED). Whereas V-Dem's PCLI classifies their presence as ambiguous. Singapore is a prototypical case of an electoral hybrid regime. For 1960-1963, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate.

09/16/1963 End Electoral Hybrid Regime [semi-sovereign, external affairs under United Kingdom, Liberal Democracy]/Start Part of Other Country [of Malaysia, Electoral Autocracy]: The leaders of Singapore, Malaya, Sabah, and Sarawak signed the Malaysia Agreement on 07/09/1963, under which the Federation of Malaysia was scheduled to come into being on 08/31 Tengku Abdul Rahman changed the date to 09/16, however, to allow the UN time to complete its survey (LePoer 1991a). For the given period, LIED identifies political liberties as absent and V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as ambiguous regarding the status of political liberties.

08/09/1965 End Part of Other Country [of Malaysia, Electoral Autocracy]/Start Electoral Hybrid Regime: On 08/09/1965, with the Singapore delegates not attending, the Malaysian parliament passed a bill favoring separation 126 to 0. That afternoon, in a televised press conference, Lee declared Singapore a sovereign, democratic and independent state (LePoer 1991a). We code this regime change event as a negotiated transition due to the preceding agreement between Malaysia and Singapore.² Before independence, the PAP led by Lee Kuan Yew won the 1959 and 1963 assembly elections. The elections were competitive, but individuals with records of „subversive activity,” that is, pro-Communists, a large group including well-known political actors, were not allowed to compete. Throughout the pre-independence period, British actions to limit the influence of the large communist movement aided Lee's dominance over rivals in the PAP and the PAP's dominance over other potential mass-based parties by removing some of the most popular potential political leaders from competition. Thus, we do not treat the pre-independence elections as democratic. Before independence, the PAP government arrested 111 „agitators,” most from a leftist faction of the party, who had opposed Lee and split from the party prior to the 1963 election, further reducing democraticness. At independence in 1965, Lee Kuan Yew and PAP were fully in control (LePoer 1991b, Means 1996: 105). The administration is regarded as

authoritarian, despite the presence of competitive elections prior to independence, due to the exclusion of parties and individuals who were anticipated to garner significant support. Following independence, suppression of leftist factions and electoral manipulation persisted (Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 93-94). On 08/11/1965 The Lee Kuan Yew government announced two days after separation that Singapore would be a republic, with Malay as its national language and Malay, Chinese, English, and Tamil retained as official languages. The Legislative Assembly was renamed the Parliament, and the prominent Malay leader, Yusof bin Ishak, was made president of the republic. The new nation, immediately recognized by Britain, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States, was admitted to the UN in September and the Commonwealth the following month. In the early months following separation, Singapore's leaders continued to talk of eventual reunion with Malaysia (LePoer 1991a). The party system is dominated by the People's Action Party (PAP) led by Lee Kuan Yew. Between 1965 and 1981, the PAP was the only political force represented in parliament. Elections were partially competitive, but some of the most popular potential political leaders were excluded from competition. Singapore operates under a multiparty political system, with 11 parties participating in the 2020 parliamentary elections. Nonetheless, several factors contribute to the dominant position of the PAP, including an electoral structure that favors incumbents, limitations on political content in films and television programs, the risk of defamation lawsuits, the PAP's significantly greater financial resources, and its control over mass media and the judiciary.³ After Lee Hsien Loong, the acting prime minister, announced his retirement for 05/15/24, he declared former finance minister Lawrence Wong his successor, ending a 20-year reign. Wong had been designated the next PAP leader in an internal election in 2022. Notably, the transition of power is set to occur before the next 2025 general elections.⁴ In 09/23 Singapore held their first contested presidential elections in more than a decade, in which former deputy prime minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam managed to secure the presidency with more than 70% of the votes.⁵ Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. In addition, LIED points out that competitive elections were absent ever since the country's independence in 1965. According to V-Dem's CEI ambiguous cleanliness is scored until 1980. Since 1981, the country achieved somewhat clean elections. Moreover, the overall election conditions were ambiguous until 2014. Since 2015, somewhat freedom and fairness for the elections is given (V-Dem EF&FI). Since 2021 the government has continued to pass laws limiting freedom of expression such as the Foreign Interference (Countermeasures) Act (FICA) on 10/04/2021, which multiple organizations claim is intended to limit dissent.⁶ As classified by FH from 1972 to 1988, the country scores between 9 and 10 as not free, which we interpret as rather not free. According to FH, from 1989 to 1991, the country is partly free with a score of 8, which we interpret as rather not free. Per FH's evaluation from 1992 to 2010, the country scores from 9 to 10 as not free, which we categorize as rather not free. According to FH, from 2011 onward, the country is partly free with a score of 8, which we interpret as rather not free. Furthermore, LIED underlines a constant absence of political liberties. V-Dem's PCLI scores them as ambiguous since 1965. Since 1966, based on Polity5's assessment, the executive faced slight limitations on power during this period. According to our criteria Singapore is a prototypical case for an electoral hybrid regime. From 1964 onward, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate.

Electoral Hybrid Regime as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Additional sources (Chua 1995, Slater 2010)

Notes

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1948_Singaporean_general_election; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Singapore

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Independence_of_Singapore_Agreement_1965

³ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/singapore/freedom-world/2022>

⁴ <https://bti-project.org/de/reports/country-dashboard/SGP>

⁵ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/singapore/freedom-world/2024>

⁶ <https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/SGP>

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