

SINGAPORE 2022 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Singapore is a parliamentary republic where the People's Action Party, in power since 1959, dominates the political scene. The Elections Department declared Halimah Yacob president in 2017; she was the only candidate who qualified for the ballot, which was reserved that year for an ethnic Malay. Observers considered the 2020 general election to be free and open; the People's Action Party won 83 of 93 parliamentary seats with 61 percent of the vote. The president subsequently reappointed party leader Lee Hsien Loong as prime minister.

The Singapore Police Force, under the direction of the Ministry of Home Affairs, maintains internal security. The Singapore Armed Forces, under the Ministry of Defense, train for deployment alongside the Home Affairs Ministry for certain domestic security operations, including joint deterrence patrols with police in instances of heightened terrorism alerts. Civilian authorities maintained effective control over the security forces. There were no reports of abuses by members of the security forces.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: preventive detention by the government under various laws that dispense with regular judicial due process; monitoring private electronic or telephone conversations without a warrant; serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media, including the enforcement of criminal libel laws to limit expression; serious restrictions on internet freedom; and substantial legal and regulatory limitations on the rights of peaceful assembly and freedom of association.

The government prosecuted officials who committed human rights abuses and engaged in corruption. There were no reports of impunity for such abuses.

Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person

a. Arbitrary Deprivation of Life and Other Unlawful or Politically

Motivated Killings

There were no reports the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings.

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of disappearances by or on behalf of government authorities.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and Other Related Abuses

The law prohibits such practices, and the government generally respected these prohibitions.

The law mandates imprisonment and mandatory caning for approximately 30 offenses, such as certain cases of rape, robbery, and drug trafficking. Caning is discretionary for convictions on other charges involving the use of force, such as kidnapping or voluntarily causing grievous hurt. Caning also may be used as a punishment for legally defined offenses while in prison if a review by the Institutional Discipline Advisory Committee deems it necessary and the commissioner of prisons approves. Women and girls, men older than 50 and boys younger than 16, men sentenced to death whose sentences were not commuted, and persons determined medically unfit were exempt from caning.

Impunity was not a significant problem in the security forces. The government took active steps to investigate and file charges against members of the security services when it deemed their behavior inappropriate or illegal.

In April Central Narcotics Bureau officer Vengedesh Raj Nainar Nagarajan was sentenced to five years' imprisonment on three counts of voluntarily causing hurt to extort a confession concerning drugs found in a suspect's possession in 2017. Nainar was ordered to pay compensation of 4,500 Singapore dollars (\$3,380) to the victim.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Observers described some conditions as harsh, including cramped and poorly

ventilated cells. The government described the conditions as “intentionally austere,” but consistent with the basic needs of inmates. Inmates may be subject to long solitary confinement and occasional canings.

Administration: Prisoners may file complaints alleging mistreatment or misconduct with judicial authorities without censorship and may request investigation of credible allegations of problematic conditions. When called upon, the Provost Unit investigates complaints. Criminal charges may be brought against government officials.

The Board of Visiting Justices, composed of justices of the peace appointed by the home affairs minister, examines the prison system, and oversees any investigations undertaken by the Provost Unit. The board conducts regular prison inspections to monitor prisoners’ basic welfare and adherence to prison regulations. It may also conduct random visits. All inmates have access to the visiting justices. Authorities documented the results of investigations in a publicly accessible manner. Members of the Board of Visiting Justices visited prisons at least once a month.

The Institutional Discipline Advisory Committee renders an opinion to the commissioner of prisons on whether an instance of corporal punishment (which is permitted) was excessive.

Independent Monitoring: Authorities allowed members of the press to visit prisons with prior approval. Between January and September, the Prisons Service facilitated 19 media engagements within prison complexes. The Prisons Service also hosted visits for nongovernmental organizations (NGO) such as Prison Fellowship International and volunteer welfare organizations during the year. The Ministry of Home Affairs also appointed a nongovernmental body composed of citizens to conduct regular prison inspections.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The law prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention. The law permits arrest without warrant and detention without trial in defined circumstances. Persons detained under these circumstances have a right to judicial review of their case, but the scope is limited by the law. The government generally observed the laws.

The constitution provides the right of habeas corpus in regular criminal law, although not in Internal Security Act (ISA) or Criminal Law (temporary provisions) Act (CLA) cases.

Under the CLA, the decision by the minister for home affairs regarding a suspect's engagement in criminal activities is final and not subject to appeal, as is the minister's decision on whether detention is necessary for reasons of public safety, peace, and good order, once concurrence by the public prosecutor is secured. The courts may review the decision, but only based on the tests of illegality, irrationality, and procedural impropriety.

Persons detained under the CLA and remanded for trial may apply to the courts for a writ of habeas corpus. Persons detained without trial under the CLA may challenge the substantive basis for their detention only to the CLA advisory committee, which is chaired by a Supreme Court judge.

Under the ISA, detainees may challenge their detention in the judicial system only by seeking judicial review of whether their detention complied with the procedural requirements of the ISA; they have no right to challenge the substantive basis for their detention through the courts. Detainees under the ISA have a right to legal counsel and to make representations to an advisory board chaired by a past or sitting judge of the Supreme Court. The ISA specifically excludes recourse to the normal judicial system for review of a detention order made under its authority.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

In most instances the law requires issuance of an authorized warrant for arrests, but some laws, such as the ISA, provide for arrest without a warrant if the government determines the suspect acted in a manner prejudicial to the security of the country. The law specifies that some offenses, such as robbery or rape, do not require an arrest warrant.

Those arrested according to regular criminal procedure must appear before a magistrate within 48 hours or be released. Authorities expeditiously charged and brought to trial the majority of those arrested. A functioning bail system existed.

Persons who face criminal charges are allowed access to counsel within a

“reasonable,” but undefined, period. Any person accused of a capital crime is entitled to free counsel assigned by the state. The government also funded a Criminal Legal Aid Scheme run by the Law Society that covers additional, but not all, criminal offenses.

Arbitrary Arrest: Some laws, such as the ISA and the CLA, have provisions for arrest and detention without a warrant, trial, or full judicial due process in defined circumstances when there is evidence that a person is associated with any of the criminal activities listed in the law that pose a threat to public safety, peace, and good order. ISA cases are subject to review by the courts to provide for compliance with its procedural requirements. Authorities invoked the ISA primarily against persons suspected of posing a security threat and employed the CLA mostly against persons suspected of organized crime activity or drug trafficking.

Pretrial Detention: Pretrial detention was not excessively long. Some individuals, however, were in prolonged detention without trial and with minimal judicial due process under laws that allowed for such detention.

The ISA and the CLA permit preventive detention without trial for the protection of public security, safety, or the maintenance of public order.

The government used the CLA against serious criminal activities involving narcotics, loan sharks, or criminal organizations. The law specifies the criminal activities for which individuals may be detained without trial or placed under police supervision. Before issuing a CLA detention order for an initial period of one year, the home affairs minister must obtain the consent of the public prosecutor. A Supreme Court judge chairs a committee that reviews all cases and conducts hearings in which detainees, or their lawyers, are present. The country’s president considers the committee’s recommendations when deciding whether to cancel, confirm, or amend the detention. The president may extend detention for unlimited additional periods of up to one year at a time. Each detention, however, is reviewed by a separate advisory committee on an annual basis.

The CLA allows for supervision within the community through means such as curfews, residence limitations, requirements to report regularly to authorities, and

limitations on travel.

The ISA authorizes the home affairs minister, with the consent of the cabinet and with formal endorsement from the president, to order detention without filing charges if the minister determines that a person poses a threat to national security. The initial detention may be for a maximum of two years, after which the minister may renew the detention indefinitely. ISA detainees are permitted legal counsel. An independent advisory board consisting of a Supreme Court judge and two other presidential appointees reviews each detainee's case within three months of initial detention and at intervals of no longer than 12 months thereafter. If the advisory board recommends that the detainee be released but the minister disagrees, the president has discretion regarding the detainee's continued detention.

As of October, the government held 14 persons under ISA orders of detention for alleged involvement in terrorism-related activities, and one for espionage-related conduct.

In June authorities disclosed the detention in April of Mohamed Hassan bin Saynudin, a 48-year-old senior member of the country's Jemaah Islamiah network. Hassan fled the country in 2001 but continued to participate in terrorist activities and was subsequently incarcerated overseas. Upon completion of his sentence in March, he was deported, sent back to Singapore, and arrested under the ISA as he was assessed to continue to hold violent radical beliefs and to be an imminent security threat.

In addition to detention, the ISA allows for issuance of restriction orders that require an individual to seek official approval for a change of address or occupation, overseas travel, or participation in any public organization or activity. Individuals subject to restriction orders could be required to report regularly to authorities. As of October, 23 individuals were subject to such restrictions for terrorism-related conduct. This number included both released ISA detainees and alleged terrorists whom authorities never detained.

In January the Ministry of Home Affairs announced that a secondary school student, who was the youngest ISA detainee when he was arrested at age 17 in January 2020, was released on a restriction order and had successfully enrolled for

further studies at a post-secondary institution.

There is also a category of restriction called “suspension direction” that replaces a suspended order of detention and may prohibit association with specified groups or individuals and overseas travel without prior written government approval.

Suspension directions also include reporting conditions. As of October, two individuals were subject to suspension directions for terrorism-related conduct.

In January Hazim Syahmi bin Mahfoot was released on a suspension order after his detention under the ISA since 2019 for planning to undertake armed violence against the perceived enemies of his religion.

The country’s drug laws permit the involuntary admission of drug addicts to an approved institution for treatment and rehabilitation without judicial approval. If a suspected drug abuser tests positive for an illegal drug or displays signs of drug withdrawal, the director of the Central Narcotics Bureau may commit the person to a drug rehabilitation center for a six-month period, which a review committee of the institution may extend for a maximum of three years. By law the bureau director may order treatment for up to six months of a person after first sending the suspected drug abuser for medical examination or observation to determine the person to be an abuser of intoxicating substances. The director’s decision may be challenged in court and the detained individual has the right to file a complaint to a magistrate who may issue an order to release the individual from the institution.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The constitution provides for an independent judiciary, and the government generally respected judicial independence. Some civil society activists and government critics expressed concern regarding undue government influence in the judicial system. Laws limiting judicial review, moreover, permitted restrictions on individuals’ constitutional rights.

The ISA and CLA explicitly preclude normal judicial due process and empower the government to limit, on broadly defined national security grounds, other fundamental liberties provided for in the constitution.

Trial Procedures

The law provides for a fair and public trial, except for persons detained under the ISA, CLA, and similar legislation. The judiciary generally enforced this right when applicable. Some commentators observed a small number of exceptions in cases involving direct challenges to the government or the ruling party. The judicial system generally provided an efficient judicial process.

Criminal defendants enjoy a presumption of innocence in most cases. Cases involving narcotics are an exception; the law stipulates that a person who possessed narcotics shall be assumed to be aware of the substance and places the burden on the defendant to prove otherwise. For this exception to be applied, however, the prosecution must first prove certain facts and their arguments may be rebutted in court. The law also stipulates that if the amount of the narcotic is above set limits, the defendant must prove he or she did not have the drug for trafficking purposes.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

There were no reports of political prisoners or detainees.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

Access to the courts is open, and citizens and residents have the right to sue for infringement of human rights.

f. Arbitrary or Unlawful Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The constitution does not address privacy rights; statutory or common law provide remedies for infringement of some aspects of privacy rights. Several laws provide for privacy, regulate access to and processing of personal data, and criminalize unauthorized access to data. Public agencies, however, are exempt from these data protection requirements; subject to public sector-specific laws, they may intercept communications and surveil individuals if it is determined to be in the national interest or necessary for investigations or proceedings.

The government generally respected the physical privacy of homes and families.

Normally, police must have a warrant issued by a court to conduct a search but may search a person, home, or property without a warrant if they decide that such a search is necessary to preserve evidence or permissible according to discretionary powers of the ISA, CLA, and other laws.

Law enforcement authorities have broad powers to search electronic devices without judicial authorization, including while individuals are in custody. In 2020 Privacy International stated that, “Singapore has a well-established, centrally controlled technological surveillance system.” Law enforcement agencies, including the Internal Security Department and the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau, had extensive networks for gathering information and conducting surveillance and highly sophisticated capabilities to monitor telephone, email, text messaging, or other digital communications intended to remain private. No court warrants are required for such operations and the law gives police access to computers and decryption information under defined circumstances.

In September parliament passed legislative amendments increasing the number of crimes for which police may collect and store DNA from persons under arrest. Under the amendments, in addition to murder, rape, robbery, theft, and molestation, crimes for which police may collect DNA include voluntarily causing hurt, drunk driving, mischief, obstructing public servants from fulfilling their duties, and obscene acts. Collected DNA may be used for criminal investigations, forensic comparisons, criminal proceedings, and identifying dead individuals and living persons who are unable to identify themselves. The amendments also removed requirements for police to immediately delete DNA data if the suspect was acquitted or discharged, or if the case was settled out of court. Eligible individuals who previously could expect automatic removal of their data must apply to have it deleted under the revised legislation and police may reject the application on grounds of national security or relevance to other ongoing cases. Members of parliament expressed concerns regarding citizens’ privacy rights and data protection.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties

a. Freedom of Expression, Including for Members of the Press and

Other Media

The constitution provides for freedom of expression but allows parliament to impose such restrictions on freedom of speech as it “considers necessary or expedient in the interest of the security of the country or any part thereof, friendly relations with other countries, public order or morality and restrictions designed to protect the privileges of Parliament or to provide against contempt of court, defamation or incitement to any offense.”

Freedom of Expression: The government significantly restricted any public statements that it contended would undermine social or religious harmony, or that did not safeguard national or public interest.

In January former chairman of the opposition Reform Party Charles Yeo was charged with “wounding the religious feelings of the Christian community” with remarks on his Instagram and Facebook pages, and with posting a series of Instagram stories containing abusive remarks concerning a police officer between November 2020 and February 2021. Among other things, he allegedly referred to certain Christian church members as “homophobes with their trash agenda” who “distort the message of Christ,” and allegedly called the police officer “a pathetic coward and collaborator with an authoritarian regime.” Yeo relocated to the United Kingdom before the case was set for trial.

The law gives the minister for home affairs discretion to authorize special police powers if a “serious incident” such as a terrorist attack is occurring or there is a threat of one. These powers allow the commissioner of police to prohibit anyone from taking or transmitting photographs or videos in a defined area, or from making text or audio messages concerning police operations if these actions could compromise the effectiveness and safety of the law enforcement operations. A breach of the order may lead to imprisonment for up to two years, a substantial fine, or both.

The law prohibits the public display of any foreign national emblems, including flags or symbols of political organizations or leaders. In September parliament passed legislation relaxing restrictions on the use of the country’s coat of arms, flag, and anthem, which heretofore could be displayed only during the July to

September national-day period, by authorizing the minister for culture, community, and youth to permit their display outside that time. The new law, however, added the national pledge, flower, lion head emblem, and public seal as recognized symbols and increased penalties for misuse of these national symbols to a substantial fine, a jail term of up to six months, or both.

The government-approved Speakers' Corner was the only outdoor venue where citizens or Singapore-registered entities could give public speeches without a police permit, provided certain criteria were met. Speakers' Corner may be used for exhibitions, performances, assemblies, and processions. All event organizers must, however, preregister online with the National Parks Board and must provide the topic of their event. Regulations state that the event should not be religious in nature or cause feelings of enmity, ill will, or hostility between different racial or religious groups. The commissioner of parks and recreation has the right to cancel or disallow any event or activity that he or she believes may endanger, cause discomfort to, or inconvenience other park users or the general public. Only citizens or permanent residents of the country are allowed to attend events at Speakers' Corner. If a police permit was obtained for an event there, nonresident foreigners may also attend. In March Speakers' Corner reopened for events following a two-year closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic and in April the first protest took place.

Citizens need a permit to speak at indoor public gatherings if the topic refers to race or religion. Indoor private events are not subject to the same restrictions. Organizers of private events, however, must prevent inadvertent access by uninvited guests, or they may be cited for noncompliance with the rules regarding public gatherings.

Censorship or Content Restrictions for Members of the Press and Other Media, Including Online Media: According to the ISA and other legislation, the government may restrict or place conditions on publications that incite violence, counsel disobedience to the law, have the potential to arouse tensions in the country's diverse population, or threaten national interests, national security, or public order.

Government leaders openly urged news media to support the government's goals

and help maintain social and religious harmony, and authorities enforced strict defamation and press laws. Freedom House reported that “self-censorship is common, though newspapers occasionally publish critical content.” The government also strictly enforced laws protecting racial and religious harmony, which also applied to members of the media.

Although there were no legal bans on owning or operating private press outlets, government managerial and financial control strongly influenced all print and some electronic media. Two companies, SPH Media Trust and Mediacorp, owned all general circulation newspapers in the four official languages of English, Chinese, Malay, and Tamil. Following the restructuring of SPH Media Trust in 2021, the government announced in February it would provide the new not-for-profit company up to 180 million Singapore dollars (\$135 million) annually over the next five years, raising further questions concerning the company’s editorial independence. At SPH Media Trust, the government continued to hold regulatory safeguards and approved (and could remove) the holders of management shares, who appointed or dismissed the firm’s management. The country’s other major newspaper owner, Mediacorp, was wholly owned by Temasek Holdings, the government investment company. The two companies’ coverage of domestic events and reporting of sensitive foreign relations topics usually closely reflected official policies and views.

Government-linked companies and organizations operated all domestic broadcast television channels and almost all radio stations. Only one radio station, the BBC’s World Service, was completely independent of the government. Residents could receive some Malaysian and Indonesian television and radio programming, but with a few exceptions, authorities prohibited satellite dishes. Cable television was widespread, and subscribers had access to numerous foreign television shows and a wide array of international news and entertainment channels. The government did not censor international news channels, but entertainment programs must meet the content codes of the state’s Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA) that operates under the Ministry of Communications and Information and regulates broadcast, print, and other media. Broadcasters often censored or edited content they anticipated would breach the IMDA code, such as content that normalized or positively portrayed lesbian, gay,

bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) relationships, or offended any religion.

The government may limit broadcasts or the circulation of publications by “gazetting” (listing) them under the Broadcasting Act and may ban the circulation of domestic and foreign publications. The law empowers the minister for communications and information to gazette or place formal restrictions on any foreign broadcaster it assesses to be reporting on domestic politics in a one-sided or inaccurate manner.

The government may require a gazetted broadcaster to obtain express permission from the minister to continue broadcasting. The government may impose restrictions on the number of households receiving a broadcaster’s programming and may impose a substantial fine on a broadcaster for failing to comply.

In previous years international and regional human rights organizations criticized the government’s use of the law to bring contempt of court charges against government critics. In August the Court of Appeal dismissed an application by Terry Xu, editor of alternative news website *The Online Citizen*, to stop the attorney general from continuing with contempt of court proceedings against him. The website published a post on its Facebook page in 2021 questioning the equitability of the justice system and thereby allegedly impugning the integrity of the judiciary. In September, following the suspension of its class license, *The Online Citizen* reactivated its website and social media accounts after Xu relocated to Taiwan. In response, the IMDA highlighted that the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (POFMA) and the Foreign Interference (Countermeasures) Act (FICA) would continue to apply to the outlet independent of where its company was located. The contempt of court case against Xu was ongoing as of December.

Libel/Slander Laws: Defamation is a criminal offense and may result in a maximum prison sentence of two years, a fine, or both. Critics charged that government leaders used defamation lawsuits or threats of such actions to discourage public criticism, coerce the press, and intimidate opposition politicians.

In April *The Online Citizen* editor Terry Xu and site contributor Daniel De Costa

were each sentenced to three weeks in jail for criminal defamation due to a 2018 article accusing the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) leadership of "corruption at the highest echelons." De Costa was sentenced to an additional three months' jail time for unauthorized access to an email account not belonging to him from which he submitted the article.

Internet Freedom

The law permits government monitoring of internet use, and the government closely monitored internet activities, such as social media posts, blogs, and podcasts. The IMDA may direct service providers to block access to websites that, in the government's view, undermine public security, national defense, racial and religious harmony, or public morals. Political and religious websites must register with the IMDA.

Individuals and groups could express their views via the internet, including by email, and the internet is readily accessible. The government, however, subjected all internet content to similar rules and standards as traditional media, as defined by the IMDA's Internet Code of Practice. Internet service providers are required to provide content that complies with the code. The IMDA licenses the internet service providers through which local users are required to route their internet connections. The IMDA investigates content that is potentially in breach of the code when it receives complaints from members of the public.

The government invoked the POFMA 11 times during the year and issued 17 correction orders to 14 unique targets for content that government ministers deemed contained "falsehoods." The law requires individuals or online platforms, on a case-by-case basis, to publish corrections or remove online information that government ministers consider factually false or misleading, and which they deem likely to be prejudicial to the country, diminish public confidence in the government, incite feelings of ill will between persons, or influence an election. The law is not supposed to apply to opinions, criticisms, satire, or parody. Individuals in breach of the law may face a substantial fine and imprisonment for up to five years, with penalties doubled if the individual used bots. A platform that fails to remove false content may receive a substantial fine and, in the case of a continuing offense, a fine for each additional day the offense continues after

conviction.

The government issued POFMA correction orders in response to published items on a wide range of matters; in 2021 COVID-19 “falsehoods” accounted for the majority of orders. Most orders directed individuals and internet platforms to publish corrections. In March and August, the POFMA Office issued its first “conditional warnings” to two Facebook users for disseminating falsehoods related to the COVID-19 pandemic and vaccines, meaning the users would face criminal charges if they reoffended during stipulated 12-month and 24-month periods, respectively. In one incident, the government issued a “targeted correction direction” requiring internet intermediaries to directly communicate a correction notice to all in-country users who had accessed the “falsehood” in question instead of just adding a correction to the “falsehood.” No ministries withdrew their orders following appeals by recipients.

In May the High Court dismissed the opposition Singapore Democratic Party’s appeal of a 2020 correction direction on grounds that the party knew its statement was false and made the post deliberately. The POFMA Office issued the correction direction after the party asserted during the 2020 election campaign that the government was “toying with the idea” of having a population of 10 million persons. The High Court held that the party had misquoted the former Housing Board chief executive on this question, knowing its assertion was untrue. The judge ordered the party to pay the attorney general legal costs of 7,000 Singapore dollars (\$5,250). The party’s appeal to the Court of Appeal was dismissed in July and the judge ordered the party to pay the attorney general additional legal costs of 6,000 Singapore dollars (\$4,500).

The Online News Licensing Scheme requires heavily visited internet sites focused on news regarding the country to obtain a license, submit a bond of 50,000 Singapore dollars (\$37,500), and remove prohibited content within 24 hours of notification from the IMDA. Many citizens viewed this regulation as a way to censor online critics of the government. The IMDA cited the need to regulate commercial news sites and promote conformity with other forms of media such as print and television. As of October, 11 major news sites operated with IMDA licenses. In February the Ministry of Communications and Information suspended the press accreditation for local media website *Mothership* for six months after

Mothership broke an embargo on details that were not yet announced in parliament.

Smaller news sites that cover political topics are required to register under the Broadcasting Act for a Class License, which requires registrants to report their income sources and not receive foreign funding.

In July the hostile information campaign provisions of the Foreign Interference (Countermeasures) Act took effect. Passed in 2021, the law aims to strengthen the country's ability to "prevent, detect, and disrupt foreign interference" in domestic politics conducted through hostile information campaigns and the use of local proxies. The minister for home affairs may compel internet and social media service providers to disclose information, remove online content, and block user accounts. Under the provisions regarding local proxies, not yet in force, the minister for home affairs may take "countermeasures" against "politically significant persons" who are or are suspected of working on behalf of or receiving funding from "foreign political organizations" and "foreign principals."

In November parliament passed the Online Safety (Miscellaneous Amendments) Bill as an addition to the Broadcasting Act. The law requires social media platforms, but not private messaging communications, to implement measures to limit users' exposure to online content the government deems to be harmful to the country. The law allows the government to designate platforms with significant reach and impact as "regulated online communication services." The law also empowers the IMDA to direct social media services to take down or disable access for in-country users to "egregious content" or to disallow specific accounts to interact with and communicate content to in-country users, as proposed in the Content Code for Social Media Services. Such content includes sexual harm, child sexual exploitation, cyberbullying, terrorism, inciting racial or religious tensions, self-harm, public health and security, and racial and religious intolerance. Platforms are also required to proactively detect and remove such content. Social media services that fail to comply with the proposed law may be fined up to one million Singapore dollars (\$750,000) or receive a direction to have their services blocked in-country.

Restrictions on Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

Public institutions of higher education and political research had limited autonomy. Although faculty members were not technically government employees, they were potentially subject to government influence. Academics spoke, published widely, and engaged in debate on social and political problems, although public comment outside the classroom or in academic publications that ventured into prohibited fields could result in sanctions. Freedom House noted that self-censorship on topics related to the country occurred among academics, who may face legal and career consequences for critical speech. Publications by local academics and members of research institutions rarely deviated substantially from government views.

A 2021 survey among 198 academics showed that 77 percent reported at least “moderate” interference by nonacademic actors in their decision making and more than a quarter in some disciplines reported consistent censorship or self-censorship. According to the survey, however, most believed they had freedom to do research and teach.

The law authorizes the minister of communications and information to ban any film, whether political or not, that in his opinion is “contrary to the public interest.” The law does not apply to any film sponsored by the government and allows the ministry to exempt any film from the act. Certain films barred from general release may be allowed limited showings.

The IMDA regulates movies, video materials, computer games, and music. Most banned publications were sexually-oriented materials but also included some religious and political publications. In May the IMDA banned the Hindi-language movie *The Kashmir Files* for potentially causing enmity between different communities and disrupting religious harmony in the country. According to the IMDA, the film presented a provocative, one-sided portrayal of Muslims and depicted Hindus as persecuted in their ongoing conflict.

The IMDA stated it had banned six publications in the past five years for denigrating various religious communities. The IMDA develops censorship standards including age-appropriate classification of media content with the help of

various citizen advisory panels. The law allows the banning, seizure, censorship, or restriction of written, visual, or musical materials if authorities determine that such materials threaten the stability of the state, contravene moral norms, are pornographic, show excessive or gratuitous sex and violence, glamorize or promote drug use, or incite racial, religious, or linguistic animosities. The law gives IMDA officers power to enter and search premises and seize evidence without a warrant for “serious offenses,” such as those involving films prohibited on public interest grounds or the unlicensed public exhibition of a film. The IMDA has the power to sanction broadcasters for transmitting what it believes to be inappropriate content. All content shown between 6 a.m. and 10 p.m. must be suitable for viewers of all ages.

b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

Although the constitution provides citizens the right to peaceful assembly, parliament imposed restrictions in the interest of security, public order, or morality. Public assemblies, including political meetings and rallies, require police permission. It is a criminal offense to organize or participate in a public assembly without a police permit, and those convicted may be assessed a substantial fine. Repeat offenders face a steeper fine.

By law a public assembly may include events staged by a single person. Citizens do not need permits for indoor speaking events unless they touch on “sensitive topics” such as race or religion, or for qualifying events held at Speakers’ Corner. The commissioner of police may decline to authorize any public assembly or procession that could be directed towards a political end and be organized by, or involve the participation of, a foreign entity or citizen. Police may also order a person to “move on” from a certain area and not return to the designated spot for 24 hours.

International human rights organizations criticized authorities’ use of the law and their concerns regarding public order to prevent peaceful protest, especially by human rights defenders. Human Rights Watch lamented the government’s use of “laws that violate international standards . . . against the country’s few remaining

dissenting voices.” Amnesty International called on the government to stop “its penalization, intimidation and harassment of human rights defenders and activists.”

The government closely monitored political gatherings regardless of the number of persons present. Spontaneous public gatherings or demonstrations were virtually unknown.

In February activist Jolovan Wham was fined 3,000 Singapore dollars (\$2,250) for illegal assembly at the main entrance to the former State Courts building, a prohibited area, in 2018. Wham was there to attend a hearing on a defamation case against Terry Xu, editor of the news website *The Online Citizen*, and site contributor Daniel De Costa. Before entering the building, Wham stood on the steps for 15 seconds, holding a piece of paper with the sentence “Drop the charges against Terry Xu and Daniel De Costa” printed on it while a woman photographed him. Shortly afterwards, he posted the photograph on his public social media accounts. After losing an appeal against his sentence in September, Wham spent 15 days in jail instead of paying the fine.

In June police started investigations against several persons, including human rights activists Kirsten Han and Rocky Howe, for holding two public assemblies outside Changi Prison Complex without a permit. The first was a gathering of four persons holding tea-light candles at a vigil outside the prison on March 29, the night before the execution of Abdul Kahar Othman for drug-related offenses. The second was when they and two others posed for photographs outside the prison on April 25, two nights before the execution of Nagaenthran K. Dharmalingam, also for drug-related offenses. Investigations were continuing as of December. On June 28, Human Rights Watch, the International Commission of Jurists, and five other international human rights NGOs urged authorities to drop their criminal investigations and cease the harassment through legal processes. They also criticized the Public Order Act for its “interferences with the exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms.”

Freedom of Association

Most associations, societies, clubs, religious groups, and other organizations with more than 10 members are required to register with the government. The

government could deny registration to or dissolve groups it believed were formed for unlawful purposes or for purposes prejudicial to public peace, welfare, or public order, although it approved the majority of applications in recent years. The government has absolute discretion in applying criteria to register or dissolve societies, although an organization may appeal to the minister of home affairs if the registration was unsuccessful and challenge a dissolution in court.

The government prohibits organized political activities except by groups registered as political parties or political associations. These may not receive foreign donations but may receive funds from citizens and locally controlled entities. The ruling PAP was able to use nonpolitical organizations, such as residential committees and neighborhood groups, for political purposes far more extensively than could opposition parties. Due to laws regulating the formation of publicly active organizations, there were few NGOs apart from nonpolitical organizations, such as religious or environmental groups.

c. Freedom of Religion

See the Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.

d. Freedom of Movement and the Right to Leave the Country

The constitution and the law provide for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights, although it limited them in certain circumstances.

In-country Movement: The ISA permits authorities to restrict a person's movement, and they did so in the case of some former ISA detainees. Several dozen suspected terrorists were subject to such restrictions. Movement restrictions for migrant workers issued under temporary COVID-19 legislation were almost entirely lifted but one exception for visiting popular places on certain days remained (see section 7.e.).

Foreign Travel: The government may refuse to issue a passport; this was done primarily on security grounds.

Persons with national service reserve obligations (male citizens and permanent residents between ages 18 and 40 for enlisted men, or between 18 and 50 for officers) are required to advise the Ministry of Defense of plans to travel abroad. Men and boys, age 13 and older, who have not completed national service obligations are required to obtain exit permits for international travel if they intend to be away for three months or more.

Citizenship: The law allows the government to deprive naturalized citizens of citizenship if they have engaged in activities deemed harmful to public safety and order or resided outside of the country for more than five consecutive years and either did not register annually at a consulate or were believed by the government to have no intention of retaining citizenship.

e. Protection of Refugees

The government may, on a case-by-case basis, cooperate with organizations such as the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees to repatriate or send refugees to a third country.

Access to Asylum: The law does not provide for granting asylum or refugee status.

f. Status and Treatment of Internally Displaced Persons

Not applicable.

g. Stateless Persons

As of December 2021, there were 909 stateless persons in the country. Many were reportedly born in the country before independence but did not or could not meet requirements for citizenship then in force. Others were permanent residents who lost their foreign citizenship, or were children born to foreign nationals who are not recognized as citizens in their home countries. Stateless persons may apply for citizenship.

Approximately 75 percent of stateless persons have obtained permanent residency, but those who have not done so may not buy or rent real estate, are not entitled to

government health or education subsidies, and may have difficulty securing employment.

Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

The law provides citizens the ability to choose their government in open and free periodic elections held by secret ballot and based on universal and equal suffrage. In more than five decades of continuous rule, however, the PAP employed a variety of measures that effectively limited the ability of the opposition to mount a serious challenge to its hold on power. In recent years opposition parties won additional seats, although they still held a small fraction of seats in parliament.

Elections and Political Participation

Recent Elections: The law provides for the popular election of the president to a six-year term from among candidates approved by two committees selected by the government. The constitution also requires multiracial representation in the presidency. The office of the president is reserved for a member of a specific racial community (Chinese, Malay, or Indian and other minority communities) if no person belonging to that community had held the office of the president for any of the last five terms of office. The 2017 presidential election was thus restricted to eligible Malay candidates. In 2017 former speaker of parliament Halimah Yacob became president without a vote because she was the only candidate; two other applicants were ruled ineligible according to criteria applicable to private-sector candidates.

The 2020 parliamentary general election was free and open. In addition to the governing PAP, 10 opposition parties participated in the election, and all seats were contested for the second time since independence. The PAP won 61 percent of the popular vote, capturing 83 of 93 seats in parliament. The opposition Workers' Party won 10 seats, the most seats won by the opposition since independence. Because a constitutional provision mandates at least 12 opposition members in parliament, two losing candidates from the newly founded Progress Singapore Party were also seated as nonconstituency members of parliament, chosen from the highest finishing runners-up in the general election.

Political Parties and Political Participation: The opposition criticized the PAP for its abuse of incumbency to restrict opposition parties. The PAP maintained its political dominance in part by circumscribing political discourse and action. For example, government-appointed and predominantly publicly funded community development councils, which provide welfare and other services, strengthened the PAP's position.

The PAP controlled key positions in and out of government, influenced the press, and benefited from structural advantages such as the group constituency system and short campaign period that disadvantaged smaller opposition parties, according to some human rights groups. While the PAP's methods were consistent with the law and the prerogatives of parliamentary government in the country, the overall effect was to perpetuate PAP power. The government created the institutionalized position of an official leader of the opposition in parliament following the 2020 general election, which the Workers' Party accepted.

Although political parties were legally free to organize, authorities imposed strict regulations on their constitutions, fundraising, and accountability, including a ban on receiving foreign donations and a requirement to report donations. There were 33 registered political parties.

Participation of Women and Members of Minority Groups: No law limits the participation of women and members of historically marginalized or minority groups in the political process, and they did participate. Three of the 20 members of the cabinet were women, and seven were members of a minority group. The country's woman president was a minority-group member. Presidential elections may be reserved for certain racial communities. There are no other restrictions in law or practice against voting or political participation by members of minority groups; they were well represented throughout the government and civil service, except in some sensitive national security positions in the armed forces and intelligence community. The country's group representation constituency system also requires at least one candidate from a racial minority group in each group constituency to provide representation in parliament.

Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in

Government

The law provides criminal penalties for corruption by officials, and the government implemented these laws effectively. There were isolated reports of government corruption.

Corruption: Among the 83 cases the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau investigated in 2021, nine were public-sector related. Of the 165 individuals prosecuted in court for corruption in 2021, 11 were public-sector employees.

In February former senior director of the National Parks Board Teva Raj was convicted of corruption and sentenced to four months' imprisonment and fined 900 Singapore dollars (\$675). Teva accepted round-trip transport services between Singapore and Malaysia from a director of a National Parks subcontractor on six occasions between 2018 and 2020 as inducement to advance the subcontractor's business ties with the National Parks.

In November police officer Poo Tze Chiang was charged with seven counts of corruption and three counts of obstruction of justice. In 2019 and 2020 Poo allegedly received bribes totaling 32,500 Singapore dollars (\$24,400) from two men for providing information and assistance regarding police investigations against them. The case was ongoing by year's end. If convicted, Poo could be jailed for up to five years for corruption and seven years for obstruction of justice.

Section 5. Governmental Posture Towards International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Abuses of Human Rights

A variety of domestic human rights groups generally operated without government interference, but subject to close monitoring and legal restraints, and these organizations investigated and published their findings on human rights cases. Government officials were somewhat cooperative and responsive to their views. NGOs were subject to registration according to the Societies Act or the Companies Act.

Some international human rights NGOs criticized the government's policies in

areas such as capital punishment, migrant workers' rights, freedom of assembly, freedom of speech, and protection of the rights of LGBTQI+ persons. They charged that the government generally ignored such criticisms or published rebuttals.

Section 6. Discrimination and Societal Abuses

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: Under the law rape is a crime, with maximum penalties of 20 years' imprisonment and the possibility of caning. There is no marital immunity for rape and the definition of rape is gender neutral. The law imposes up to twice the maximum penalty for offenses affecting the human body – “rape, hurt, or wrongful confinement” – committed by partners in a close or intimate relationship (even if unmarried) than it imposes for these offenses committed outside such relationships. Domestic violence is a crime and penalties range from warnings and fines to sentences of up to 24 years' imprisonment. Victims may also obtain court orders restraining the respondent and barring a spouse or former spouse from the victim's home until the court is satisfied the spouse has ceased aggressive behavior. The government effectively enforced the laws on rape and domestic violence. In November a 34-year-old man was sentenced to 24 years' imprisonment and 24 strokes of the cane for repeatedly raping the family's domestic worker during a two-month period while his wife and children were not at home. This was twice the maximum punishment as domestic workers are considered vulnerable under the law.

Identity protection orders are mandatory for sexual crimes or child abuse even before a police report is lodged. Survivors of sexual crimes may video-record their testimony instead of having to recount it in person. Survivors may testify in closed-door hearings, with physical screens to shield them from the accused person. Lawyers may not ask questions concerning a survivor's sexual history unless the court grants them permission to do so.

Several voluntary welfare organizations that assisted abused women noted gender-based violence was underreported but that the number of reported incidents was increasing, which they stated was the result of advocacy campaigns to address

social stigma.

The Ministry of Social and Family Development reported investigating 2,346 cases of family violence in 2021, a 59 percent increase compared to 2020.

The Women's Care Centre run by the Association of Women for Action and Research (AWARE) reported handling more than 1,400 cases involving abuse and violence (including sexual violence and family violence) in 2021 and its Sexual Assault Care Center supported more than 1,000 survivors of sexual assault for the second straight year. Almost one-fifth of its new cases involved technology-facilitated sexual violence, and most of those were incidents of image-based sexual abuse.

The Ministry of Social and Family Development's 24-hour national helpline dedicated to addressing family violence and other cases of abuse and neglect received 8,400 calls in 2021. Another 10 helplines to report child abuse and family violence remained in operation.

During the year, the government deployed specially trained forensic psychologists to protection specialist centers to provide consultation and assessments of survivors and offenders in sexual and family violence cases.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C): Types I (a) and IV (as classified by the World Health Organization) FGM/C were practiced among a portion of the Muslim population. There was no legislation banning FGM/C and no official data on how prevalent the practice was, but 75 percent of Muslim women indicated they had undergone FGM/C, according to an End FGC Singapore survey with a sample size of 360 women in late 2020. Some medical clinics offer the procedure, requiring parents to consent and go through counseling, according to the Singapore Muslim Women's Association. This medicalization, however, contravenes the global normative guidance by the World Health Organization and the UN Population Fund on this harmful practice. End FGC Singapore, a community-based movement, criticized the practice as covert and stated girls often may not know they underwent the procedure until later in life.

Sexual Harassment: Harassment is a crime, and the law covers harassment within and outside the workplace, cyberbullying, and bullying of children. The

law also prescribes mandatory caning and imprisonment (see below) on conviction of any charge for “outraging modesty” that causes the victim to fear death or injury. The law also subjects to a fine persons convicted of using threatening, abusive, or insulting words or behavior. It also provides a range of self-help measures, civil remedies, and enhanced criminal sanctions to protect against harassment. The law makes technology-related crimes such as voyeurism and sexual exposure criminal offenses. Doxing (publishing private information regarding a person or organization on the internet with the intent to harass) is also an offense.

Additionally, stalking is an offense punishable by a fine, imprisonment for up to 12 months, or both. A specialized court hears all criminal and civil harassment cases, such as doxing and threatening behavior, to provide faster relief, and a simplified online court process for protection order applications.

In March amendments to the Penal Code took effect, increasing penalties for outrage of modesty from two to three years. According to police statistics, in 2021 outrage of modesty incidents increased by 12 percent and cases of voyeurism rose by 19 percent. Police enforced the law effectively.

From January through September 2021, police handled 378 workplace sexual harassment cases under the Protection from Harassment Act, the first year the government tracked the number of such reports.

Media covered cases of molestation and voyeurism prominently and gave significant coverage to sexual harassment convictions throughout the year. The government ran awareness campaigns encouraging women to report molestation, and several members of parliament urged the government to address sexual harassment in the workplace more actively.

In March a man was sentenced to 10 months and five weeks in jail after pleading guilty to two charges of voyeurism and one charge of insulting the modesty of a woman. The man, a Nanyang Technological University researcher, was caught in April 2021 taking “upskirt images” of a woman on an escalator at a shopping center. During a subsequent search of his home, police found approximately 400 similar photographs of women taken from 2015-2021 at various locations

including train stations, shopping centers, and his workplace.

Reproductive Rights: There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization on the part of government authorities. The government provided access to sexual and reproductive health services, including emergency contraception, for survivors of sexual violence. Contraceptives and sexual and reproductive health services were widely available. The government provided subsidies for such services to couples as long as one partner was a citizen, but the amount depended on the citizenship and residence status of the other partner.

Discrimination: Women enjoy the same legal rights as men in civil liberties, employment, commercial activity, and education. Women were well represented in many professions but continued to face discrimination in the workplace (see section 7.d.).

Polygyny is permitted for Muslim men but is limited and strictly regulated by the Registry of Muslim Marriages, which oversees Muslim marriages and other family law matters. Polygynous marriages constituted 0.08 percent of Muslim marriages.

In January the government amended legislation to allow a couple to divorce by “mutual agreement” rather than having to meet stringent conditions to cite the fault of one spouse, or by living separately for a number of years. Women’s rights groups welcomed the change but criticized retention of the requirement that couples be married for at least three years before attaining eligibility for divorce.

In April parliament unanimously endorsed the government’s white paper on women’s development. Launched in March, the white paper provides a roadmap for the next 10 years with 25 action plans in five key areas: equal opportunities in the workplace; support for caregivers; protection against violence and harm; shifting mindsets; and other support measures for women. The government implemented some measures, such as launching a National Anti-Violence Helpline, increasing the Home Caregiving Grant from 200 Singapore dollars (\$150) per month to 400 Singapore dollars (\$300) per month, and increasing penalties for three sexual offenses.

Systemic Racial or Ethnic Violence and Discrimination

The law criminalizes violence and incitement of violence against racial, ethnic, and religious minorities or groups. The government takes a proactive stance in fighting racial and ethnic discrimination and enforces the law effectively. Racially motivated violence was almost nonexistent, and even cases of racial discrimination were rare but did occur, for example in the workplace (see section 7.d.). An April survey by Channel NewsAsia and the Institute of Policy Studies showed that more than half of respondents thought racism was an important topic, but 80 percent believed that “everyone can become rich or successful irrespective of what race they are.” Fewer than 9 percent reportedly said they faced racial discrimination at work and 3 percent reported such discrimination in the housing market, “with ethnic minorities more affected than Chinese.”

In May a 69-year-old repeat offender was sentenced to six weeks’ jail time on two counts of harassment and one count of using racially offensive language with intent to harm racial feelings. The man had directed racial insults at others on three occasions in 2021, twice toward healthcare clinic staff members and once toward a librarian.

In November a 61-year-old former lecturer pleaded guilty to the charge of wounding an individual’s racial feelings by directing racist remarks against an interracial couple. In June 2021 he reportedly told the couple “it was such a disgrace, Indian man with a Chinese woman” and was caught on a video that went viral on social media accusing the man of “praying on a Chinese girl.” On December 29, the court sentenced him to five weeks’ jail and a fine.

Throughout the year individuals who committed racist or racially insensitive verbal offenses were prosecuted and sentenced under the law.

The Presidential Council on Minority Rights examines all pending bills so they do not disadvantage any particular group. It also reports to the government on matters that affect any racial or religious community.

Government measures to mitigate racial and ethnic biases and promote ethnic and racial harmony included mandated representation of all major ethnic groups in elected and nonelected government positions; allocation of public holidays for

each racial group; and the use of four official languages, with an emphasis in schools on teaching English as the common language. There was no systemic racial discrimination in terms of access to education.

The opposition and civil society groups criticized various policies for their negative side effects on access to some services and the freedom of choice of residence. They also charged that the government's policy of assigning each person a race besides the national identity would prevent the society from achieving a post-racial state and that forms of racial discrimination would persist in everyday situations such as house rentals and employment.

Indigenous Peoples

Ethnic Malays constituted approximately 15 percent of the population. The constitution recognizes them as the indigenous inhabitants of the country and charges the government with supporting and promoting their political, educational, religious, economic, social, cultural, and linguistic interests. The government took steps to encourage educational achievement among Malay students and upgrade skills among Malay workers, including through subsidies for tertiary education fees for poorer Malays. Malay educational performance has improved, although ethnic Malays have not yet reached the educational or socioeconomic levels achieved by the ethnic Chinese majority, the ethnic Indian minority, or the Eurasian community. Malays remained underrepresented at senior corporate levels and, some asserted, in certain sectors of the government and the military. This reflected their historically lower educational and economic levels, but some argued it also was the result of employment discrimination (see section 7.d.).

Children

Birth Registration: Citizenship derives from one's parents as long as one parent is a citizen of the country and the parents are registered as legally married. The law requires that all births be registered within 42 days. Dual citizens born abroad to citizen parents must renounce their foreign citizenship after turning 21 to retain their citizenship.

Child Abuse: The law criminalizes mistreatment of children, including physical,

emotional, and sexual abuse. The government enforced the law and provided support services for child abuse victims.

The Ministry of Social and Family Development investigated more than 2,000 child abuse cases in 2021, a 63 percent increase from 2020, while inquiries at the ministry's Child Protective Service increased by 25 percent. The ministry attributed the rise to increased awareness, detection, and reporting of abuse. Women's advocacy group AWARE stated that 18 percent of the new cases of sexual abuse it handled in 2021 involved children below age 16.

The courts sentenced several men to long prison terms for sexually abusing their children. In March a perpetrator was sentenced to 33 years and two months in prison and 24 strokes of the cane for sexually abusing four of his five daughters, including raping three of them, during a 14-year period. The judge called the actions "deeply horrific and horrendously reprehensible," one of the worst cases of rape and sexual assault.

Child, Early, and Forced Marriage: The law characterizes unmarried persons younger than age 21 as minors and persons younger than 14 as children. Individuals younger than 21 who wish to marry must obtain parental consent, and the couple must attend a mandatory marriage preparation program. Individuals younger than 18 also require a special license from the Ministry of Social and Family Development to wed or, if they are marrying under Muslim law, they require permission from the *kadi* (a Muslim judge appointed by the president), who should grant permission only under special conditions.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The law criminalizes human trafficking, including child sex trafficking, and authorities enforced the law.

The age of consent for noncommercial sex is 16. Sexual intercourse with a person younger than 16 is punishable by a maximum of 10 years in prison, a fine, or both, and if the victim is younger than 14 it is punishable by up to 40 years in prison and a fine or caning.

The law prohibits commercial sex provided by anyone younger than age 18. Authorities may detain (but generally do not prosecute) persons younger than 18 whom they believe to be engaged in commercial sex. They prosecute those who

organize or profit from commercial sex, bring women or girls to the country for commercial sex, or coerce or deceive women or girls into commercial sex.

The law protects minors and children from sexual exploitation and makes a distinction between child pornography and other types of pornography. It is a separate offense to use or involve a child younger than age 16 in the production of child-abuse material and a crime to be involved in the supply and consumption of child-abuse material. The law criminalizes offenses, such as sexual intercourse, pornography, or sexual grooming, committed in the context of exploitative relationships when the victim was older than age 16 but younger than age 18, even if the victim had consented.

In March amendments to the Penal Code took effect, increasing the maximum imprisonment from one to two years for engaging in sexual activity in the presence of a minor between ages 14 and 16 or causing a person of that age to view sexual images. The same penalty applies if the victim was between ages 16 and 18 and the offender was in an exploitative relationship with the child. By law those convicted for any offenses committed against vulnerable victims – children younger than age 14, persons with mental or physical disabilities, and domestic workers (see section 7.e.) – are subject to up to twice the maximum penalty.

In March a man was sentenced to 32 months in jail for downloading child-abuse pornography and for possessing nearly 47,000 electronic files of child sexual-abuse materials. After receiving a tip in 2020 that the man had downloaded multiple child-abuse materials from the internet, police raided his apartment, where they found images and videos that depicted children being sexually assaulted, including assaults on young girls in bondage.

In June a perpetrator was sentenced to 45 years' imprisonment for sexually abusing eight children, including some with special needs, during a period of 16 years. Two of the girls were five years old when they were raped, and a third was eight. The man had gained access to the girls by lying to the victims' parents that he was a qualified educational therapist.

Antisemitism

According to the Jewish Welfare Board, there were approximately 2,000 members

in the Jewish community. There were no known reports of antisemitic acts.

Trafficking in Persons

See the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

Acts of Violence, Criminalization, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity or Expression, or Sex Characteristics

Criminalization: On November 29, parliament repealed Section 377A of the Penal Code, which criminalized consensual sexual conduct between men. Authorities had not enforced this law in more than a decade and had stated that they did not intend to do so. There were no indications the provision was used intentionally to intimidate or coerce. Its existence, however, intimidated some gay men, particularly those who were survivors of sexual assault but would not report it to police for fear of being charged.

The government announced it changed the law due to the gradual shift of societal attitudes toward more acceptance and an increasing likelihood that courts would rule 377A unconstitutional during a potential legal challenge. At the same time, parliament amended the constitution to protect its prerogative to define the partners in marriage – in existing law specified as a man and a woman – through laws to prevent constitutional challenges from changing that definition. The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Communications and Information issued statements that the repeal would not impact the country's educational priorities or media content regulations which require higher minimum age limits to view films with LGBTQI+ content. Prime Minister Lee welcomed the repeal as a “major milestone for Singapore.” LGBTQI+ groups also welcomed the repeal but urged parliamentarians to end discrimination on “critical topics” like education, housing, and mental health.

Violence against LGBTQI+ Persons: There were no reports of violence against persons based on sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or sex characteristics.

Discrimination: No laws explicitly protect members of the LGBTQI+ community from discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or sex characteristics; nor does the law recognize LGBTQI+ couples or their families.

Same-sex partners were covered under the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act and the Protection from Harassment Act, which granted them access to legal protections such as expedited protection orders in cases of harassment or violence, including by close and intimate partners.

Since single persons are prevented from purchasing government housing reserved for married couples until age 35 and same-sex marriage is not permitted, LGBTQI+ couples were unable to receive certain government services and benefits available to other citizens before reaching 35. An adoption law passed by parliament in May effectively prevents LGBTQI+ couples from adopting children by limiting it to couples married under laws recognized by the government and singles if they meet certain conditions.

LGBTQI+ persons experienced discrimination in the military, which classifies individuals by sexual orientation and evaluates them on a scale of “effeminacy” to determine fitness for combat training and other assignments. Openly gay servicemembers faced threats and harassment from their peers and were often ostracized.

In June a hotel issued a public apology after a member of its staff told a lesbian couple that same-sex wedding celebrations were not allowed at the hotel, calling it an unfortunate mistake and a wrongful assumption of the law.

In July police began to investigate a school counselor for giving a sex education talk with unsubstantiated content that discriminated against LGBTQI+ persons and was not approved by the school. The school reprimanded the counselor and suspended him from conducting lessons on sexuality.

Availability of Legal Gender Recognition: Individuals were prohibited from updating their gender on official documents unless they underwent sex reassignment surgery.

Involuntary or Coercive Medical or Psychological Practices Specifically

Targeting LGBTQI+ Individuals: The practice of “conversion therapy” to change a person’s sexual orientation or gender identity or expression reportedly included talk therapy, encouragement of celibacy, and physical and psychological abuse. Perpetrators included families and religious groups. There is no law banning “conversion therapy” but abuse is punishable. In 2021 the Singapore Psychological Society for the first time discouraged “conversion therapy” on LGBTQI+ individuals due to its harmful effects and encouraged therapy that affirmed a person’s orientation and identity.

Restrictions of Freedom of Expression, Association, or Peaceful Assembly: The country’s general legal restrictions on freedom of expression, association, or peaceful assembly applied to those speaking out on LGBTQI+ issues. Critics remained concerned that media censorship resulted in underrepresentation of the LGBTQI+ community. The IMDA censored films and television shows with LGBTQI+ themes. According to the IMDA website, authorities allowed the broadcast of LGBTQI+ themes on television “as long as the presentation does not justify, promote, or glamorize such a lifestyle” (see section 2.a.).

Persons with Disabilities

Persons with disabilities can access education, health services, public buildings, and transportation on an equal basis with others. Government information and communication on disability concerns is provided in accessible formats such as screen readers, sign language interpretation, captioning, and subtitling. Websites also comply with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines.

There is no comprehensive legislation addressing equal opportunities for persons with disabilities in education or employment or preventing discrimination.

The government maintained a comprehensive code on barrier-free accessibility and standards for facilities for persons with physical disabilities in all new buildings and mandated the progressive upgrading of older structures. The SG Enable program, established by the Ministry of Social and Family Development, administered several assistance schemes for persons with disabilities, and provided a job training and placement program for them.

The Disabled People’s Association, an advocacy group, indicated that

discrimination against persons with disabilities was underreported because affected individuals either did not file complaints or were unaware of their rights and available resources. The Disabled People's Association also reported private discrimination against persons with disabilities who were seeking employment (see section 7.d.).

The country provided a high level of educational support for children with disabilities from preschool to university. Children with moderate to severe educational needs were required to participate in compulsory education until they reached age 15. Elementary and secondary levels both included mainstreaming programs and separate education schools. All primary schools and most secondary schools had specialist support for students with mild disabilities. Mainstreaming programs catered primarily to children with physical disabilities. Separate education schools, which focused on children who required more intensive and specialized assistance, were operated by social service organizations.

Other Societal Violence or Discrimination

Although no legislation bars employers from discriminating against job applicants based on their HIV status, government guidelines for employers state that employees who are dismissed based on their medical status, including HIV-positive status, have grounds for wrongful dismissal claims against their employers. Many persons living with HIV were, however, afraid to disclose their status during the job application process and, during employment, feared dismissal if they were discovered to have made a false declaration.

The government discouraged discrimination, supported initiatives that countered misperceptions regarding HIV or AIDS, and publicly praised employers that welcomed workers with HIV or AIDS. HIV-positive foreigners, however, were barred from obtaining work permits, student visas, or immigrant visas.

In June a man was sentenced to one year in jail under the Infectious Diseases Act for failing to disclose to two men with whom he had sex that he was HIV-positive; when charged in the second instance, he was already under investigation for the same offense. Advocacy group Action for Aids Singapore stated it was disturbed by the case as it contradicted medical evidence on transmission of the virus (his

doctor had earlier determined the man's viral count was so low he could not infect others through sexual activities). The group urged a review of the law requiring HIV-positive disclosure prior to sexual relations as persons living with HIV continued to be heavily stigmatized.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The law provides for the right of most workers to form and join trade unions, with limits on union independence. Workers have the legal right to strike and to bargain collectively. The law prohibits antiunion discrimination.

Parliament may impose restrictions on the right of association based on security, public order, or morality grounds. The Ministry of Manpower also has broad powers to refuse to register a union or to cancel a union's registration. Refusal may occur when a trade union already exists in an industry or occupation. Laws and regulations restrict freedom of association by requiring any group of 10 or more persons to register with the government. The law also restricts the right of uniformed personnel and government employees to organize, although the president, as head of state, may grant exemptions, and has done so. Foreigners and those with criminal convictions generally may not hold union office or become employees of unions, but the ministry may grant exemptions.

The law provides for the right to strike with certain limits. A legal strike requires the majority of affected unionized workers to vote in favor by secret ballot, as opposed to the majority of those participating in the vote. Workers in "essential services," defined broadly beyond International Labor Organization criteria, are required to give 14 days' notice to an employer before striking, and there is a prohibition on strikes by workers in the water, gas, and electricity sectors.

The government effectively enforced applicable laws. Penalties were commensurate with those under other laws involving denial of civil rights, such as discrimination. Collective bargaining was common but strikes almost never occurred. Penalties were applied in one instance against an illegal strike that occurred in 2012.

Unions were unable to carry out their work without interference from the government. The law limits how unions may spend their funds, prohibiting, for example, payments to political parties, or the use of funds for political purposes. Legal strikes are limited to trade disputes within the trade or industry in question.

Almost all unions were affiliated with the National Trade Union Congress, an umbrella organization with a close relationship with the government and the ruling PAP. The National Trade Union Congress policy prohibited union members who supported opposition parties from holding office in its affiliated unions.

Collective bargaining was a routine part of labor-management relations in the private sector. Because nearly all unions were affiliates, the National Trade Union Congress had almost exclusive authority to exercise collective bargaining power on behalf of employees. A national tripartite Industrial Arbitration Court must certify all collective bargaining agreements before they go into effect. Although transfers and layoffs are excluded from the scope of collective bargaining, employers consulted with unions on both matters.

Foreign workers constituted approximately 15 percent of union members. Labor NGOs also filled an important function by providing support for migrant workers, including legal aid and medical care.

In August the government formed a tripartite workgroup with representatives from unions and industry to develop approaches for better representation for workers in the gig economy, including a representative body, scope of negotiations, and a dispute settlement mechanism.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law does not define “forced labor,” but the government has accepted as law the definition found in International Labor Organization Convention 29. Under the law, destitute persons could be compelled to work if they resided in one of the 10 welfare homes managed by voluntary organizations as government agents, and if a medical and social assessment found them fit for work; no resident was forced to work under the relevant law during the year.

The government enforced the law, although it was more likely to prosecute

employers for less serious charges than domestic servitude or bonded labor. Penalties included prison terms and fines. In April a permanent resident was sentenced to 41 months' imprisonment and fined 27,365 Singapore dollars (\$20,500) for three charges under the Prevention of Human Trafficking Act. The government investigated fewer forced labor allegations in 2021 and received fewer reports due to COVID-19 but imposed fines on some employment agencies for illegal practices. In September 2021 the Ministry of Manpower arrested 18 persons for suspected illegal labor importation through a syndicate that obtained work passes through false declarations; by year's end, the case was ongoing. In view of the number of low-paid foreign workers in the country, however, outside observers speculated that many cases of abuse continued to go undetected.

Practices indicative of forced labor, including withholding of wages and passports, occurred. Migrant workers in low-wage and unskilled sectors such as domestic work, hospitality, and construction were vulnerable to labor exploitation.

The Ministry of Manpower reported taking enforcement action against an average of 102 offending employers between 2016 and 2020 for collecting kickbacks from migrant workers. The ministry reported that the number of complaints regarding foreign domestic workers forced to work illegally by their employers or household members was rising.

The law caps the fees payable by foreign domestic workers to employment agencies in the country at one month's salary per year of the employment contract, not to exceed two months' salary irrespective of the duration of the contract. Observers noted that unscrupulous agencies in migrant workers' countries of origin could charge exorbitant fees.

Some observers also noted that the country's employer sponsorship system made legal migrant workers vulnerable to forced labor because there were limited circumstances in which they may change employers without the original employer's consent.

Also see the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

The law prohibits all the worst forms of child labor. The law prohibits employment of children younger than age 13. A child 13 or older may engage in light, nonindustrial work, subject to medical clearance. Exceptions exist for family enterprises; a child 13 or older may work in an industrial undertaking if it employs members of his or her family. Ministry of Manpower regulations prohibit night employment of children and restrict industrial work for children between ages 15 and 16. Children younger than 15 may not work on commercial vessels, with moving machinery, on live electrical apparatus lacking effective insulation, or in any underground job, and normally they are prohibited from employment in the industrial sector.

The Ministry of Manpower effectively enforced these laws and regulations. Employers who violated laws related to child labor were subject to fines, imprisonment, or both. Penalties were not commensurate with those for analogous serious crimes, such as kidnapping. Government officials asserted they had no information on any violations of the laws and therefore there was no need to apply penalties. The incidence of children in formal employment was low, although some children worked in family enterprises.

d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation

The constitution provides for equality in employment. No specific antidiscrimination legislation exists, although some statutes prohibit certain forms of discrimination. For example, employers may not dismiss women employees during pregnancy or maternity leave, and employers may not dismiss employees solely due to age, gender, race, religion, nationality, marital status, family responsibilities, disability, or medical condition. No laws prohibit employment discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, HIV or AIDS status, or refugee or stateless status. The law does not require equal remuneration for men and women for work of equal value.

The Ministry of Manpower's Fair Consideration Framework requires all companies to comply with the Guidelines of the Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices (guidelines), which cover procedures from

recruitment to dismissal so that all employment practices are open, merit based, and nondiscriminatory. These guidelines call for eliminating language referring to age, race, gender, religion, nationality, marital status, family responsibilities, and disability in employment advertisements and prohibit questions on family status during a job interview. Employers are required to provide explanations for putting requirements such as specific language skills in the job advertisement. Penalties for violation of government guidelines are at the discretion of the Ministry of Manpower. No government guidelines explicitly recommend against discrimination with respect to political opinion, sexual orientation, or HIV or other communicable disease status. Companies found guilty of discrimination may not hire foreigners for at least 12 months and may not renew work passes of existing foreign workers.

The government effectively enforced the guidelines. Penalties were not commensurate with those under other laws related to civil rights but had a deterrent effect. Penalties were regularly applied against violators.

The Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices received and investigated complaints of employment discrimination. As of December, the Ministry of Manpower had placed 400 companies on a watch list for potential discriminatory hiring practices. In the past four years, the alliance investigated an approximate annual average of 400 cases of possible workplace discrimination with 60 percent involving discrimination based on nationality, according to the Ministry of Manpower. In January the alliance announced it would not act against video-game developer Ubisoft over claims of sexual harassment and workplace discrimination disclosed in 2021 after its investigation found the company had handled the harassment reports appropriately and had a fair remuneration process that did not discriminate based on nationality.

The Council for Board Diversity reported that as of June, women's representation on boards of the largest 100 companies listed on the Singapore Exchange increased to 20 percent from 18 percent the previous year. Representation of women also increased on statutory boards to reach the council's target of 30 percent and increased on registered NGOs and charities to 29 percent. The country's adjusted gender pay gap was 4.3 percent as of the most recent data in 2020, a decrease from 6.7 percent in 2018, but occupational segregation continued. The government

subsidized childcare and supported flexible work policies, although no laws mandate it. Some ethnic Malays and Indians reported that discrimination limited their employment and promotion opportunities (see section 6, Systemic Racial or Ethnic Violence and Discrimination). Ethnic Malays were prohibited from holding certain sensitive national security positions in the military.

There were also some reports of discrimination based on disability, pregnancy, and sexual orientation or gender identity. Pregnancy is a breach of the standard work permit conditions for foreign workers, and the government cancels work permits and requires repatriation of foreign domestic workers who become pregnant.

Approximately half of workers experienced direct and indirect workplace discrimination, as well as discrimination-related harassment in the past five years, including persons with disabilities, LGBTQI+ individuals, members of minority groups, and women, according to a survey conducted in August by the women's rights advocacy group AWARE and the research company Milieu Insight. The most common experiences of discrimination reported were unfair company policies, specific preferences in job advertisements, and discriminatory employment practices regarding performance and promotions. AWARE also noted a rise in discrimination cases overall from 2020-2022. A March survey by the Ministry of Manpower, however, found that from 2018 to 2021, the percentage of workers experiencing workplace discrimination fell from 28 percent to 8 percent, and discrimination during the job search fell from 43 percent to 25 percent. According to this survey, the most common form of discrimination was for age, and four in five persons who experienced any form of workplace discrimination did not report it.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

Wage and Hour Laws: The law does not specify a national minimum wage for all sectors. The government, in consultation with unions and employers, has a progressive wage model (PWM), which sets wage floors and skills requirements for specific positions in employment with companies providing cleaning, landscaping, and elevator maintenance, and in security services sectors. In September the government extended PWM coverage to retail sector workers and companies' in-house cleaning, security, and landscape workers. Employers must

follow these pay scales as a requirement to obtain a business license. Starting in September, all firms hiring foreign workers were required to pay local employees a local qualifying salary of 1,400 Singapore dollars (\$1,050) per month applying to approximately 159,000 workers not in PWM sectors, 33,000 of whom had been earning less than 1,400 Singapore dollars (\$1,050) per month. The government did not have an official poverty line, but a 2020 report by the National University of Singapore, the most recent data available, found that 12.5 percent of all households (PWM and non-PWM) had incomes below the absolute poverty line determined to be 1,913 Singapore dollars (\$1,430) per month per household.

The law sets the standard legal workweek at 44 hours and requires employers to apply for an overtime exception from the Ministry of Manpower for employees to work more than 72 hours of overtime per month. Workplace protection, including paid sick leave, mandatory annual leave, and protection against wrongful dismissal, is available to all private-sector employees except domestic workers and seafarers, who are covered under separate laws. Foreign domestic workers must receive one rest day per week or be compensated with at least one day's salary in addition to their basic salary. The law also mandates benefits for part-time employees, defined as those working 35 hours per week or less.

Wage and hour laws apply to migrant workers. Foreign workers were concentrated in low-wage, low-skill jobs in construction, shipbuilding, services, and domestic work and were often required to work long hours. Approximately 323,000 migrant workers lived in purpose-built dormitory housing which met clearly defined living standard conditions. Following a 2020 COVID-19 outbreak in the dormitories, migrant workers' freedom of movement was restricted under the new COVID-19 guidelines, but these guidelines were subsequently lifted until there was no distinction made in the freedom of movement between vaccinated and unvaccinated workers. As of October, however, migrant workers living in dormitories still had to apply for a special pass if they wanted to visit four popular places on Sundays or public holidays, whereas the rest of the population faced no COVID-19-related movement restrictions.

The majority of foreign domestic workers, mainly from the Philippines and Indonesia, worked under clearly outlined contracts. Certain offenses, such as causing hurt or insulting the modesty of a foreign domestic worker, had

significantly higher penalties for these workers than they did for other foreign workers.

Throughout the year the government investigated and sentenced several employers for abuse of their foreign domestic workers. In October a woman was jailed for 10 years for repeatedly abusing her domestic worker over a period of six months and refusing her medical aid, causing the worker to permanently lose her sight. The employer later sent the worker back to Indonesia, but the survivor was able to return to Singapore to seek medical help and provide evidence of the abuse in court.

NGOs advocated for structural changes to the work permit employment system in order to reduce the financial vulnerability and the potential for exploitation of such workers.

Occupational Safety and Health: Occupational safety and health (OSH) standards are appropriate for the main industries in the country and OSH experts actively identified unsafe conditions, including lack of personal protective equipment against COVID-19 in addition to responding to workers' OSH complaints. The law establishes a framework for workplaces to comply with OSH standards, and regular inspections enforced the standards. Officials encouraged workers to report situations that endanger health or safety to the Ministry of Manpower. The law incentivizes companies to prevent workplace injuries by permitting employers with better safety records to pay lower insurance premiums, expedites the benefit claim process for workers, and increases the size of benefit payouts to injured workers. The law provides employees with the right to remove themselves without jeopardy to their employment if they are threatened by a danger not agreed to in the contract. The Ministry of Manpower continued to promote training to reduce the frequency of job-related accidents in high-risk sectors such as construction, and authorities provided tax incentives to firms that introduced hazard control measures.

Workplace fatalities increased from 30 recorded deaths in 2020 to 37 fatalities in 2021 (1.1 per 100,000 workers) but remained below the pre-COVID level of 39 deaths in 2019. Nonfatal major injuries increased by 31.7 percent from 463 cases in 2020 to 610 in 2021 (18.5 per 100,000 workers). The total number of workplace

injuries increased by 12.4 percent from 11,350 in 2020 to 12,766 in 2021, as COVID-19 related work suspensions were lifted. Under a law that took effect in 2020, employers must report all work injuries with any instance of medical leave or light duties. As a result, the government recorded a total of 22,186 injuries in 2021 as per the new definition.

Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement: The Ministry of Manpower is responsible for enforcing laws and regulations establishing working conditions and comprehensive OSH regulations. Penalties for violating these regulations – fines and stop-work orders – were commensurate with those for similar crimes. The number of inspectors was sufficient to enforce compliance. While the government stated that inspections were generally unannounced, some NGOs contended that this was not always the case. The government effectively enforced wage floor and overtime laws, although penalties were lower than those for similar crimes, such as fraud. Penalties were regularly applied against violators, including for nonpayment of salaries, serious safety violations, and abuse or mistreatment of foreign domestic workers.

The Tripartite Alliance for Dispute Management, which includes the Ministry of Manpower, unions, and the employers' federation, offered mediation services to help employees and employers settle employment disputes such as salary issues. From January through June, the ministry conducted 3,500 worksite inspections, an increase of 35 percent compared to the first half of 2021. It took 9,000 enforcement actions in response to safety breaches and issued 50 stop-work orders, a twofold increase compared to the first half of 2021, with an average duration of 7.5 weeks. The government fined 550 companies a total of 1.8 million Singapore dollars (\$1.35 million). In all of 2021, the government had issued 60 stop-work orders with an average duration of 6 weeks and fined 590 companies a total of 1.97 million Singapore dollars (\$1.48 million). The Ministry of Manpower noted receiving between 2,400 and 3,800 reports of unsafe work activities each year over the past five years and that 84 percent of its 2021 inspections resulted in enforcement actions. The government also enforced requirements for employers to provide one rest day per week or compensation for foreign domestic workers.

Amid a rise in workplace injuries and deaths, the ministry put new policies and programs in place. The government doubled fines for offenses observed during

safety inspections. The government required companies subject to stop-work orders and companies where major injuries occurred to engage external auditors to review their safety systems.

In September the ministry announced a six-month heightened safety period during which companies were not allowed to hire new foreign workers for up to three months if unsafe work conditions or poor risk controls were found following serious or fatal workplace accidents. Chief executive officers of affected companies were also required to personally account to the ministry for the lapses. On September 8, the ministry issued the first such order barring contractor Le Fong Building Services from hiring foreign workers for three months after one of its employees was injured during a fall.

In September the ministry also launched the Approved Code of Practice on Chief Executives' and Board of Directors' Workplace Safety and Health Duties. Under the code, companies must set up internal reporting systems to assure workers of fair treatment, make workplace safety a regular item on the agenda of board meetings, and demand effective safety standards from suppliers. In cases of offenses against the Workplace Safety and Health Act, courts may consider noncompliance with the new code in their judgment.

In October a revised demerit point system was introduced for the construction sector. Under this system, companies with poor safety performances would reach a penalty threshold more quickly, could be placed on the ministry's business under surveillance program and be barred from hiring foreign workers for up to two years. The ministry further set up a multisectoral workplace safety task force to strengthen work safety practices.

The government charged numerous employers with OSH violations during the year, with penalties ranging from 45,000 Singapore dollars (\$33,800) to 200,000 Singapore dollars (\$150,000) and jail sentences ranging from six to 11 months. In April, for example, Gary Choo Pu Chang was fined 45,000 Singapore dollars (\$33,800) for failing to take necessary measures to ensure the safety of employees. Choo was the executive director of industrial gas supplier Leeden National Oxygen when an explosion in 2015 killed one chemist and injured seven others. The company and its managing director were fined 340,000 Singapore dollars

(\$255,000) and 45,000 Singapore dollars (\$33,800) respectively in 2021.