

# **Singapore 2024 Human Rights Report**

## **Executive Summary**

There were no significant changes in the human rights situation in Singapore during the year.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of detention by the government without prior judicial review or warrant, and serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom.

The government took credible steps to identify and punish officials who committed human rights abuses.

## **Section 1. Life**

### **a. Extrajudicial Killings**

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

### **b. Coercion in Population Control**

There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization on the part of government authorities.

## **Section 2. Liberty**

### **a. Freedom of the Press**

The constitution provided for freedom of expression but allowed 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.”

The government significantly restricted public statements it contended would undermine social or religious harmony or the legal system, interfered in domestic affairs, or did not safeguard national or public interest.

In March a court extended to March 2025 an arrest warrant for former chairman of the opposition Reform Party Charles Yeo, who earlier fled to the United Kingdom after being charged with “wounding the religious feelings of the Christian community” with remarks on his Instagram and Facebook pages and for making a threatening communication to a police officer. The warrant was for breach of bail conditions by failing to return to Singapore. In October media reported that authorities earlier applied to the United Kingdom to extradite Yeo.

The law gave the home affairs minister discretion to authorize special police

powers if a “serious incident,” such as a terrorist attack, occurred or was threatened. These powers allowed 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 could lead to up to two years’ imprisonment, a substantial fine, or both.

The law prohibited the public display of any foreign national emblems, including flags or symbols of political organizations or leaders. The law required permission from the minister of culture, community, and youth to use the country’s flag outside of the July to September national-day period. The law included the national pledge, flower, lion head emblem, and public seal as recognized symbols and provided for a substantial fine, a jail term of up to six months, or both for their misuse. Barring limited exceptions, the national coat of arms could not be used without prior written permission. The national anthem could be performed or sung on any appropriate occasion but use for commercial purposes required permission from the minister of culture, community, and youth.

The government-approved Speakers’ Corner remained the only outdoor venue where citizens or Singapore-registered entity members could give public speeches without a police permit, provided certain criteria were met. The Speakers’ Corner could be used for exhibitions, performances,

assemblies, and processions. Event organizers were required, however, to preregister online with the National Parks Board and had to provide the topic of their event. Regulations stated the event should not be religious in nature or cause feelings of enmity, ill will, or hostility among different racial or religious groups. The commissioner of parks and recreation had the right to cancel or disallow any event or activity determined to endanger, cause discomfort to, or inconvenience other park users or the general public. Only citizens or permanent residents of the country were allowed to attend events at Speakers' Corner. If the event required a police permit and the permit was obtained, nonresident foreigners could also attend.

Authorities maintained the prohibition on any demonstrations advocating for political causes related to other countries. Authorities throughout the year investigated incidents involving expression related to the Israel-Hamas conflict, such as placing posters and unfurling banners in public places.

Citizens needed a permit to speak at indoor public gatherings if the topic referred to race or religion. Indoor private events were generally not subject to the same restrictions. Organizers of private events, however, had to prevent inadvertent access by uninvited guests or they could be cited for noncompliance with the rules regarding public gatherings. In February police stated they were investigating a private event at which someone livestreamed (and thus made public) attendees chanting phrases about the situation in Gaza that police alleged could lead to racial tensions.

Although faculty members at public universities were not government employees, they were potentially subject to government influence. Academics spoke, published widely, and engaged in debate on social and political problems, but Freedom House noted self-censorship on topics related to the country occurred among academics, who could face legal and career consequences for critical speech. Publications by local academics and members of research institutions rarely deviated substantially from government views.

According to a 2021 survey of 198 academics, 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.

### **Censorship by Governments, Military, Intelligence, or Police Forces, Criminal Groups, or Armed Extremist or Rebel Groups**

According to the Internal Security Act (ISA) and other legislation, the government could restrict or place conditions on publications that incited violence, counseled disobedience to the law, had the potential to arouse tensions in the country's diverse population, or threatened national interests, national security, or public order.

Government leaders 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 in its 2024 report stated “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 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. The two companies’ coverage of domestic events and reporting on 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. The government did not censor international news channels, but entertainment programs were required to meet the content codes of the state’s Infocomm (information and communication) Media Development Authority (IMDA), which operated under the Ministry of Digital Development and Information and regulated broadcast, print, and other media. The IMDA had the power to sanction broadcasters for transmitting what it deemed inappropriate content. All content broadcast between 6 a.m. and 10 p.m. had to be suitable for viewers of all ages. 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 relationships, or offended any religion.

The government could limit broadcasts or the circulation of publications by gazetting (listing) them under the Broadcasting Act and could ban the circulation of domestic and foreign publications. The law empowered the minister of digital development and information to gazette or place formal restrictions on any foreign broadcaster the minister assessed was reporting on domestic politics in a one-sided or inaccurate manner.

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

The Online News Licensing Scheme required heavily visited internet sites focused on news regarding the country to obtain a license, submit a bond, and remove prohibited content within 24 hours of notification from the IMDA. Many 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.

Smaller news sites that covered political topics were required to register

under the Broadcasting Act for a Class License, which required registrants to report their income sources and not receive foreign funding.

In previous years international and regional human rights organizations criticized the government's use of the law to file contempt of court charges against government critics.

The law allowed the banning, seizure, censorship, or restriction of written, visual, or musical materials if authorities determined such materials threatened the stability of the state, contravened moral norms, were pornographic, showed excessive or gratuitous sex and violence, glamorized or promoted drug use, or incited racial, religious, or linguistic animosities. The banned publications comprised sex-related and religious material.

The IMDA regulated movies, video materials, computer games, and music. The law gave 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.

In November IMDA barred the film *Small Hours of the Night* from being screened at the Singapore International Film Festival, on grounds that the film was potentially illegal and "likely to be prejudicial to national interests." The film featured a person being interrogated and drew on the real-life story of a Singaporean prosecuted in the 1980s for attempting to fulfill his late



brother's wishes and inscribe a revolutionary poem on his brother's grave.

## **b. Worker Rights**

### **Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining**

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

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

The law provided for the right to strike with certain limits. A legal strike required 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, were required to give 14 days' notice to an employer before striking, and there was 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.

Unions were unable to carry out their work without interference from the government. The law limited how unions could spend their funds, prohibiting, for example, payments to political parties or the use of funds for political purposes. Legal strikes were 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 People's Action Party. The organization 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 had to certify all collective bargaining agreements before they went into effect. Although transfers and layoffs were excluded from the scope of collective bargaining, employers consulted with unions on both matters.

Foreign workers constituted approximately 15 percent of union members. Labor nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) provided support for migrant workers, including legal aid and medical care.

In September parliament passed legislation, scheduled to go into effect January 1, 2025, recognizing taxi and private-hire drivers and delivery workers as a distinct labor class between employees and self-employed. This would enable 70,500 workers to get better labor protection and form representative bodies called platform work associations, with legal powers similar to those of trade unions. The change would allow these workers to negotiate and sign legally binding collective agreements with operators, and gain access to avenues of redress, including the right to strike.

In January e-commerce company Lazada suddenly laid off an estimated 100 individuals without prior notice or consultation with the National Trade Union Congress and its affiliate at Lazada, even though the company was headquartered in Singapore. Following intervention from the National Trade Union Congress, the two sides reached a settlement with an enhanced support package for affected employees.

## **Forced or Compulsory Labor**

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

## **Acceptable Work Conditions**

### **Wage and Hour Laws**

The law did not specify a national minimum wage for all sectors. All firms hiring foreign workers were required to pay local employees a minimum salary. The government, in consultation with unions and employers, had a sectoral progressive wage model, which set wage floors and skills requirements for specific positions in employment with companies providing cleaning, landscaping, elevator maintenance, security services, retail, food and waste management. The government also had an occupational progressive wage model that covered administrators and drivers because these occupations existed across many sectors. Employers in the sectors mentioned above were required to follow these pay scales to obtain a business license.

The law set the standard legal workweek at 44 hours and required 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, overtime pay, and protection against wrongful dismissal, was

available to all private-sector employees except domestic workers and seafarers, covered under separate laws. Foreign domestic workers were required to receive one rest day per month that could not be compensated through additional payment. They were also required to receive one rest day per week but could be compensated with at least one day's salary in addition to their basic salary or a replacement rest day. The law also mandated benefits for part-time employees, defined as those working 35 hours per week or less.

Wage and hour laws applied 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. As of June, approximately 442,900 migrant workers employed in the construction, marine shipyard, and processes sector lived in the country, with most residing in regulated dormitory housing that met clearly defined living standard conditions.

The majority of foreign domestic workers, mainly from the Philippines and Indonesia, worked under clearly outlined contracts. Certain offenses, such as causing harm or insulting modesty, had significantly higher penalties if the victim was a foreign domestic worker than if the victims were other foreign workers.

In April the government introduced new guidelines requiring that starting December 1 employers fairly consider formal requests from employees for

flexible work arrangements such as remote work, staggered work hours, part-time work or job sharing.

Throughout the year the government investigated and sentenced several employers for abuse of their foreign domestic workers. In October a woman was sentenced to six months and three weeks' jail and a fine of 4,000 Singapore dollars (\$2,950) for physically abusing her domestic worker and trying to cover it up.

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

### **Occupational Safety and Health**

Occupational safety and health (OSH) standards were appropriate for the main industries in the country, and OSH experts actively identified unsafe conditions in addition to responding to workers' OSH complaints. The law established a framework for workplaces to comply with OSH standards, and regular inspections enforced the standards. Officials encouraged workers to report situations endangering health or safety to the Ministry of Manpower. The law incentivized companies to prevent workplace injuries by permitting employers with better safety records to pay lower insurance premiums; expedited the benefit claim process for workers; and increased the size of benefit payouts to injured workers. The law provided employees the right

to remove themselves without jeopardizing their employment if they felt working conditions were unsafe. 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.

### **Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement**

The Ministry of Manpower was 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 inspectors had authority to make unannounced inspections and the government stated such inspections were generally unannounced, some NGOs contended this was not always the case. Inspectors had broad powers to act against offenders, including to arrest without warrant, search arrested persons, and seize weapons. 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 included the Ministry of Manpower, unions, and the employers' federation, offered mediation

services to help employees and employers settle employment disputes such as disagreements on salary. In 2023 the ministry conducted 7,500 worksite inspections in higher-risk sectors. It took 17,000 enforcement actions in response to safety breaches and issued 65 stop-work orders with twice the average duration of 13.5 weeks. The government fined 868 companies a total of 3.47 million Singapore dollars (\$2.56 million) in 2023. The government also enforced rest day requirements for foreign domestic workers.

The ministry had in place policies and programs to address workplace injuries, including 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.

Since March at least one senior executive from every company in the construction, manufacturing, marine, and transport and storage industries were required to attend an OSH program.

In June two previously announced OSH measures took effect. The government more than doubled the fines for breaches of OSH legislation that could result in death or serious injuries. All construction sites with a contract sum of five million Singapore dollars (\$3.68 million) were required to install video surveillance systems at locations where high-risk work activities were conducted.



In September the government also released a revised framework to better protect outdoor workers against heat stress.

In November the government called on contractors to impose timeouts at public-sector construction worksites, and urged other construction companies to do the same, after an increase in construction workplace deaths from July to October. During the timeout, senior management, site teams, and workers were to review safety protocols and address concerns.

The government had a multiagency workplace safety taskforce to strengthen work safety practices, and specific ones to improve OSH at the sectoral, company, and worker level including mandatory safety training for directors and installation of cameras that were expected to take effect progressively.

Companies were required to 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 could consider noncompliance with the new code in their judgment.

Under a demerit system, companies with poor safety performances could be placed on the ministry's business-under-surveillance program and be barred from hiring foreign workers for up to two years.

The government charged numerous employers with OSH violations during

the year. In April a man was sentenced to 138 days in jail for a workplace safety lapse that resulted in a death.

The World Bank estimated the informal economy in 2018 constituted approximately 11 percent of GDP. The government set and enforced basic employment standards and protections, some of which also applied to workers in sectors that could be considered informal. The law covered all contracts of service and employment, regardless of whether the contract was oral or written, express or implied. The law tightly regulated and provided protections for migrant labor, which accounted for a large proportion of jobs that typically fell in the informal economy.

## **c. Disappearance and Abduction**

### **Disappearance**

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

### **Prolonged Detention without Charges**

The law prohibited arbitrary arrest and detention. The law permitted arrest without warrant and detention without trial in defined circumstances.

Persons detained under these circumstances had a right to judicial review of their case, but the scope was limited in certain instances by the law. The government generally observed the laws.

In most instances the law required issuance of an authorized warrant for arrests, but some laws such as the ISA provided for arrest without a warrant if the government determined the suspect acted in a manner threatening the security of the country. The law specified that some offenses, such as robbery or rape, did not require an arrest warrant.

In April, under the Law Enforcement and Other Matters Bill, parliament amended the Mental Health (Care and Treatment) Act to specify that the threshold for police to apprehend someone posing a danger to themselves or others – and when the danger was reasonably suspected to be attributable to a mental disorder – was that the danger to human life or personal safety be reasonably likely to occur; the danger need not be imminent, and actual harm was not required.

Some laws, such as the ISA and the Criminal Law (temporary provisions) Act (CLTPA), contained provisions for arrest and detention without a warrant, trial, or full judicial due process in defined circumstances when there was evidence a person was associated with any of the criminal activities listed in the law that posed a threat to public safety, peace, and good order. ISA cases were 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 CLTPA mostly against persons suspected of organized crime activity, predatory lending, or drug trafficking.

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

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

The CLTPA specified the criminal activities for which individuals could be detained without trial or placed under police supervision. Under the law, which in April parliament extended for another five years, the minister of home affairs' decision regarding a suspect's engagement in criminal activities was final and not subject to appeal, as was the minister's decision whether detention was necessary for reasons of public safety, peace, and good order, once concurrence by the public prosecutor was secured. The courts could review the decision but only based on the tests of illegality, irrationality, and procedural impropriety.

The CLTPA allowed for supervision within the community through means such as curfews, residence limitations, requirements to report regularly to authorities, and limitations on travel.

The ISA allowed authorities to order detention without filing charges if they determined a person posed a threat to national security. The initial detention could be for a maximum of two years, after which the president could renew the detention indefinitely for up to two-year periods at a time.

The ISA specifically excluded recourse to the normal judicial system for review of a detention order made under its authority, except in questions related to compliance with the ISA's procedural requirements.

In October authorities announced they detained an ISIS sympathizer for alleged plans to stage a terrorist attack on non-Muslim men by stabbing them in an open community space.

In addition to detention, the ISA allowed for restriction orders that required 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.

The country's drug laws permitted the involuntary admission of drug abusers to an approved institution for treatment and rehabilitation without judicial approval. If a suspected drug abuser tested positive for controlled drugs, the director of the Central Narcotics Bureau could commit the person to a drug rehabilitation center for a 12-month period, which a review committee of the institution could extend for a maximum of four years. By law the bureau director could order treatment for up to six months after first sending the suspected drug abuser for medical examination or observation to determine the person to be an abuser of controlled drugs.

## **d. Violations in Religious Freedom**

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

## **e. Trafficking in Persons**

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

# **Section 3. Security of the Person**

## **a. Torture and Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment**

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

The law mandated imprisonment and mandatory caning for approximately 30 offenses, such as certain cases of rape, robbery, and drug trafficking. Caning was discretionary for other charges involving the use of force, such as kidnapping or voluntarily causing grievous hurt. Caning also could be used as punishment for legally defined offenses while in prison if a review by the Institutional Discipline Advisory Committee deemed it necessary and the commissioner of prisons approved. Women and girls, men older than 50,

boys younger than 16, men sentenced to death whose sentences were not commuted, and persons determined medically unfit were exempt from caning.

## **b. Protection of Children**

### **Child Labor**

The law prohibited all the worst forms of child labor. The law prohibited employment of children younger than 13. A child 13 or older could engage in light, nonindustrial work, subject to medical clearance. Exceptions existed for family enterprises; children 13 or older could work in an industrial undertaking if it employed members of their families. Ministry of Manpower regulations prohibited night employment of children and restricted industrial work for children ages 15 and 16. Children younger than 15 could not work on commercial vessels, with moving machinery, on live electrical apparatus lacking effective insulation, or in any underground job, and normally they were 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. The

incidence of children in formal employment was low, although some children worked in family enterprises.

## **Child Marriage**

The law characterized unmarried persons younger than age 21 as minors and persons younger than 14 as children. Individuals younger than 21 who wished to marry were required to obtain parental or a legal guardian's consent, and the couple was required to attend a mandatory marriage-preparation program. Individuals younger than 18 also required a special license from the Ministry of Social and Family Development to wed or, if marrying under Muslim law, required permission from the *kadi* (a Muslim judge appointed by the president), who granted permission only under special conditions.

## **c. Protection to Refugees**

The government occasionally cooperated with organizations such as the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees to repatriate or send refugees to a third country.

## **Provision of First Asylum**

The law did not provide for granting asylum or refugee status. The government did not accept asylum seekers and had no system for providing protection to refugees.



#### **d. Acts of Antisemitism and Antisemitic Incitement**

According to the Jewish Welfare Board, there were approximately 2,500 members in the Jewish community. There were no known reports of antisemitic attacks, although in July authorities issued a restriction order against a public servant for advocating violence against Israelis and Jews. According to authorities, she became radicalized after Hamas's October 2023 attack on Israel through online material; she later helped to garner public support for terrorist organizations. In response, government officials warned the country would not allow extremist narratives to take root in society, even as individuals were concerned with the humanitarian situation in Gaza. Speaking to the Jewish Welfare Board during an interfaith event in April, the minister for home affairs and law said the government wanted to protect everyone, including members of the local Jewish and Muslim communities, from the impacts of the situation in the Middle East, emphasizing past and present contributions from the Jewish community in building Singapore.

For further information on incidents of antisemitism in the country, whether or not those incidents were motivated by religion, and for reporting on the ability of Jews to exercise freedom of religion or belief, see the Department of State's annual *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.