

Singapore Media and Psychology

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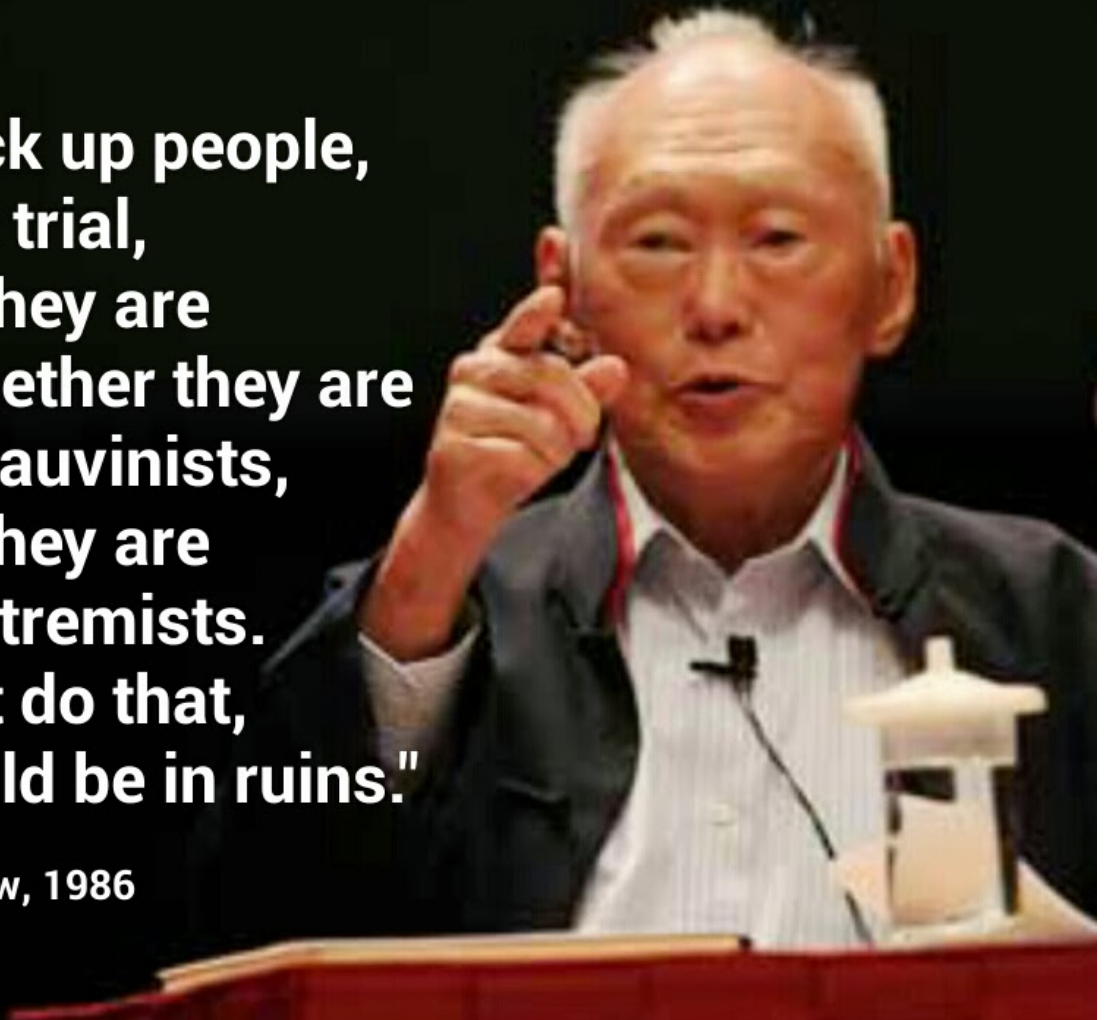
History of Singapore

- 49 years since independence in 1965
- PAP (People's Action Party) government
- Few opposition (alternative) parties
- Strong-arm rule to consultative style
- Many lessons learnt from history



**"We have to lock up people,
without trial,
whether they are
communists, whether they are
language chauvinists,
whether they are
religious extremists.
If you don't do that,
the country would be in ruins."**

Lee Kuan Yew, 1986



Media Development in Singapore



- The **media of Singapore** play an important role in Singapore, one of the key strategic media centres in the Asia-Pacific region.
- This is in line with the government's aggressive push to establish Singapore as a media hub in the world under the Media 21 plan launched in 2002.
- Comprising the publishing, print, broadcasting, film, music, digital, and IT media sectors
- Collectively employed about 38,000 people and contributed 1.56% to Singapore's gross domestic product (GDP) in 2001 with an annual turnover of S\$10 billion. The industry grew at an average rate of 7.7% annually from 1990 to 2000, and the government seeks to increase its GDP contribution to 3% by 2012.

Media Development in Singapore



- The Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts is the government's regulatory body that imposes and enforces regulation over locally produced media content. It also decides on the availability of published media from abroad.
- In 2012/13, Reporters Without Borders ranked Singapore 149 out of 179 countries in the Press Freedom Index, making it the worst country among other developed economies based on the Human Development Index, moving down 14 places from the 2011/2012 ranking.
- Most of the local media are directly or indirectly controlled by the government through shareholdings of these media entities by the state's investment arm Temasek Holdings, and are often perceived as pro-government.

Media Development in Singapore

- William Gibson's *Disneyland with the Death Penalty* described Singapore's newspapers as "essentially organs of the state", while political scientist and opposition politician James Gomez has studied the role of self-censorship in restricting expression in Singapore.
- In 2011, 56% of 1092 respondents to a telephone poll agreed that "there is too much government control of newspapers and television", and 48% felt that "newspapers and television are biased when they report on Singapore politics, political parties and elections".

Media Development in Singapore

- Radio and Television broadcasting is under Media Corp.
- The Newspaper and Printing Presses Act of 1974 states: “No person shall print or publish or assist in the printing or publishing of any newspaper in Singapore unless the chief editor or the proprietor of the newspaper has previously obtained a permit granted by the Minister authorising the publication thereof, which permit the Minister may in his discretion grant, refuse or revoke, or grant subject to conditions to be endorsed thereon.”
- Newspaper and Printing Presses Act of 1974, Cap. 206, Sec. 21. —(1). Section 10 of the same act gives the Minister the power to appoint the management shareholders of all newspaper companies and to control any transfers of such management shares. The same section specifies that a management share equals 200 ordinary shares for "*any resolution relating to the appointment or dismissal of a director or any member of the staff of a newspaper company*", and that the number of management shares must equal at least 1% of ordinary shares. **This gives the management shareholders, and by proxy the government, a minimum 66% majority in any votes regarding staffing decisions.**

Media Development in Singapore

- The print media are largely controlled by Singapore Press Holdings (SPH), publisher of the flagship English-language daily, *The Straits Times*.
- SPH publishes all daily newspapers with the exception of *TODAY*, which is owned by MediaCorp.
- A United States diplomatic cable leaked by WikiLeaks quotes Chua Chin Hon, *the Straits Times*' U.S. bureau chief, saying that the paper's "editors have all been groomed as pro-government supporters and are careful to ensure that reporting of local events adheres closely to the official line", and that "the government exerts significant pressure on ST editors to ensure that published articles follow the government's line".
- As of 2008, there are 16 newspapers in active circulation. Daily newspapers are published in English, Chinese, Malay and Tamil.
- There are restrictions on importing foreign newspapers to Singapore, especially for politically sensitive publications. Also, under a reciprocal agreement, Malaysia's *New Straits Times* newspaper may not be sold in Singapore, and Singapore's *Straits Times* may not be sold in Malaysia.

Censorship in Singapore



- Targets political, racial and religious issues, defined by out-of-bounds markers.
- The Government of Singapore argues that censorship of political, racial and religious issues to a certain extent is necessary to avoid upsetting the balance of Singapore's delicate multi-racial society.
- The Media Development Authority (MDA) approves publications, issues arts entertainment licences and enforces the Free-to-air (FTA) TV Programme Code, Subscription TV Programme Code, TV Advertising Code, Radio Programme Code and Radio Advertising Code through financial penalties. The MDA's decisions may be appealed to the Broadcast, Publications and Arts Appeal Committee (BPAA) and the Films Appeal Committee (FAC).
- The Censorship Review Committee (CRC) meets every ten years to "*review and update censorship objectives and principles to meet the long-term interests of our society*". The CRC was most recently reconvened in 2009 and made some 80 recommendations the following year, most of which were accepted.

Censorship in Singapore

- The categories **G**, **PG** and **PG13** are age-advisory ratings. **NC16**, **M18** and **R21** are age-restricted ratings.
- In February 2008, the Academy Awards acceptance speech for the short documentary *Freeheld* was censored by Mediacorp in the rebroadcast of the program due to the filmmakers' mention of equal rights for same sex couples.
- Movies that are classified as **R21** are excluded from video releases and television advertisements. However, as recommended by the latest CRC in September 2010, **R21** Video-on-Demand (VOD) is now allowed on Pay TV.
- As of March 2004, only cinemas located in downtown Singapore are licenced to screen **R21**-rated movies such as Hollywood's gay biopic *Milk* which won Sean Penn the 2009 Best Actor Oscar for his portrayal of a homosexual politician. A ban on showing **R21** movies remains in suburban cinemas.

Censorship in Singapore

- The importing, making, distributing or exhibiting of films in Singapore is governed by the *Films Act* of 1981.
- Film censorship has historically been strict, although the gradual introduction of the **NC16**, **M18** and **R21** ratings now allow most major Hollywood features to be shown uncut in Singapore. The rating system was first introduced in 1991 with the now defunct **R(A)** rating to allow those aged 18 years and above to watch films with explicit content. However, due to public objection, the rating system was revised and the age limit was lifted from 18 to 21 years old.



Censorship in Singapore

- Released films are presented to the Media Development Authority (MDA) which classifies the films under six different ratings for different groups of audiences:
- **G** (General. **PG** (Parental Guidance) - Suitable for most but parents should guide their young. **PG13** (Parental Guidance Strongly Cautioned - Suitable for 13 And Above); **NC16** (No Children Under 16) - Nobody under age 16 is admitted. (This classification was introduced in 1993); **M18** (Mature 18) - Nobody under age 18 is admitted. (This classification was introduced in 2004); **R21** (Restricted 21) - Nobody under age 21 is admitted. (This classification was introduced in 2004); **NAR** (Not Allowed for all Ratings/Banned) - Contains issues that are likely to cause controversy in Singapore.
- **Note: Any outright denigration of race or religion, matters that threaten national interest, depictions of hardcore pornographic scenes/unsimulated sex and depiction of explicit homosexual acts are still banned. Royston Tan's award-winning 15, a graphic depiction of Singapore's underbelly, was only allowed after over 20 scenes were cut.**

Party political films

- The controversial Section 33 of the Films Act bans of the making, distribution and exhibition of "party political films", at pain of a fine not exceeding \$100,000 or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 2 years. The Act further defines a "party political film" as any film or video
- *(a) which is an advertisement made by or on behalf of any political party in Singapore or any body whose objects relate wholly or mainly to politics in Singapore, or any branch of such party or body; or (b) which is made by any person and directed towards any political end in Singapore* Exceptions are, however, made for films "made solely for the purpose of reporting of current events", or informing or educating persons on the procedures and polling times of elections or referendums.
- In 2001, the short documentary called *A Vision of Persistence* on opposition politician J. B. Jeyaretnam was also banned for being a "party political film". The makers of the documentary, all lecturers at the Ngee Ann Polytechnic, later submitted written apologies and withdrew the documentary from being screened at the 2001 Singapore International Film Festival in April, having been told they could be charged in court. Another short documentary called *Singapore Rebel* by Martyn See, which documented Singapore Democratic Party leader Dr Chee Soon Juan's acts of civil disobedience, was banned from the 2005 Singapore International Film Festival on the same grounds and See is being investigated for possible violations of the Films Act.

Party political films

- Channel NewsAsia's five-part documentary series on Singapore's PAP ministers in 2005 were not considered a party political film. The government response was that the programme was part of current affairs and thus does not contravene the Films Act.
- Since they do not concern the politics of Singapore, films that call out political beliefs of other countries, for example Michael Moore's Fahrenheit 911, are allowed.
- Since March 2009, the Films Act has been amended to allow party political films as long as they were deemed factual and objective by a consultative committee. Some months later, this committee lifted the ban on Singapore Rebel.



Music

- In 1963, Singapore banned the hit song *Puff, the Magic Dragon*, fearing that it referenced marijuana. Janet Jackson's albums *Velvet Rope* and *All For You* were also banned due to homosexual and sexually explicit themes that the BPAA found "not acceptable to our society".
- The bans have since been lifted. Katy Perry's hit single, *I Kissed a Girl*, is banned on the airwaves as it discusses homosexuality however the album is available on sale at retail outlets.

Video games



On 14 April 2008, the Media Development Authority announced that an official video games classification system will be in effect on 28 April 2008. Under the system, video games that contain nudity, coarse language, drug use and violence, will be given a rating sticker similar to those found on home video media in Singapore with either one of the two ratings:

- **ADV** (Age Advisory) - Anyone can buy a video game with this rating, but it's not recommended to children. Contains mature themes, some violence with little or no blood, mild drug use, implied sexual activity, partial nudity and infrequent explicit language.
- Examples: Mass Effect 2, Assassin's Creed II, Resident Evil 5, Left 4 Dead and Hitman: Blood Money
- **M18** (Mature 18) - Nobody under age 18 can buy a video game with this rating. Contains adult and/or offensive themes, realistic depictions of violence with/without blood, strong drug use, nudity with/without sexual context and frequent explicit language.
- Examples: Kingpin: Life of Crime, Yakuza 3, Age of Conan: Hyborian Adventures, Ninja Gaiden Sigma 2, Grand Theft Auto III and Manhunt 2

Video games

- Games that do not fall into any of these categories and are approved for general audiences do not require these stickers and games containing offensive material (such as racial or religious denigration) are still banned. The purchase of games with the M18 rating legally require retailers to conduct age checks, while "Age Advisory" games are not required to have mandatory age checks.
- Previously, the Media Development Authority and by extension, the Singapore government has also banned several video games before the introduction of the classification system. For example (as of November 2007) the video game The Darkness (due to presence of graphic violence and swear words) and more recently Mass Effect from Bioware due to the in game option of a homosexual romance if the player chooses to play as a female. Mass Effect was later unbanned with the implementation of the aforementioned games ratings system that was still in development then. However, similar games with graphic violence such as Prince of Persia and Gears of War (players can perform decapitation moves) or other Bioware games like Neverwinter Nights and Jade Empire (which both allow the possibility of male-male and female-female romances) have not been banned or censored.

Performing arts

- The scripts of all plays to be performed in Singapore must be vetted in advance by the Media Development Authority (MDA), which has the right to ban any it views as "contrary to the public interest". Appeals against MDA's decisions can be made to the Broadcast, Publications and Arts Appeal Committee (BPAA).
- In 1994, performance artist Josef Ng protested the arrest and caning of 12 homosexual men by caning slabs of tofu, then turning his back to the audience and snipping off some pubic hair. He was charged with committing an obscene act and banned from performing in public, and his theatre group's grants were cancelled.

Performing arts



- In 2005, the MDA withheld the licence for the play *Human Lefts* unless some scenes were edited and all references to the death penalty removed. The play was originally written about the hanging of Shanmugam Murugesu and was to have been staged one day after the controversial execution of Australian national Nguyen Tuong Van.
- In August 2006, a play *Smegma* was banned by Media Development Authority which said that: "the play portrays Muslims in a negative light."
- In May 2010, the National Arts Council has cut the annual grant given to local theatre company Wild Rice. It will get \$170,000 this year, down from \$190,000 the year before. It is the lowest annual grant that the company has received from the council. Artistic director Ivan Heng says the council told him funding was cut because its productions promoted alternative lifestyles, were critical of government policies and satirised political leaders. In March 2011, NAC increased to \$1.92 million, a 25% hike, the amount to be given to 16 arts companies, including Wild Rice, under its one-year Major Grant scheme.



Print media

- **Local press**

The local papers ... are essentially organs of the state, instruments of only the most desirable propagation.

—William Gibson, *"Disneyland with the Death Penalty"*, *Wired Issue 1.04*, September 1993.

- With the sole exception of MediaCorp's daily freesheet *Today*, all daily newspapers including the flagship *Straits Times* are printed by Singapore Press Holdings, whose management shareholders are appointed by the government in accordance with the Newspaper and Printing Presses Act of 1974. While current shareholding structure does not imply direct governmental control on media content, their active presence promotes self-censorship amongst journalists. In 2008, Reporters without Borders ranked Singapore as 144th out of 173 surveyed countries in terms of freedom of the press. [The Singapore Government said it is not ashamed of its low rank for press freedom because it has achieved top ratings for economic freedom and prosperity. Instead of subscribing to the Western press model, it believes that a non-adversarial press can report accurately and objectively. A recent Gallup poll found that 69% of Singaporeans trusted their media.](#)

Print media

- On 30 June 2006, blogger mrbrown wrote an article, titled "TODAY: S'poreans are fed, up with progress!", for his weekly opinion column in *Today* newspaper concerning the rising income gap and costs of living in Singapore.
- Three days later, on 3 July, an official from the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts published a response letter on the same newspaper calling mrbrown a "partisan player" whose views "distort the truth".
- On 6 July, the newspaper suspended his column. Fellow blogger Mr Miyagi subsequently resigned from his column for *Today*. This was followed by *Today* newspaper chief executive and editor-in-chief Mano Sabnani's resignation in November 2006.
- The action fuelled anger over the Internet due to the perceived heavy-handedness action taken by the government over criticisms.

Print media

- **Foreign publications**
- The MDA requires importers to "ensure that the publications/ audio materials brought in for distribution do not feature content which could be considered objectionable on moral, racial or religious grounds, or deemed detrimental to Singapore's national interests". According to the MDA, more than 2 million publications and 300,000 audio materials are imported into Singapore each year under the Registered Importers Scheme.
- Foreign publications that carry articles the government considers slanderous, including *The Economist* and the *Far Eastern Economic Review (FEER)*, have been subjected to defamation suits and/or had their circulations "gazetted" (restricted). The sale of Malaysian newspapers in Singapore is prohibited; a similar ban on the sale of newspapers from Singapore applies in Malaysia.

Print media

- **Foreign publications**
- In August 2006, the government announced a tightening of rules on foreign publications previously exempt from the media code. *Newsweek*, *Time*, the *Financial Times*, the *Far Eastern Economic Review* and the *International Herald Tribune* will be required to appoint a publisher's representative in Singapore who could be sued, and to pay a security deposit of S\$200,000. The move comes after *FEER* published an interview with Singaporean opposition leader Chee Soon Juan, who claimed that leading members of the Singaporean government had "skeletons in their closets". On 28 September 2006, *FEER* was banned for failing to comply with conditions imposed under the Newspaper and Printing Presses Act.
- Pornography is strictly prohibited in Singapore; this encompasses magazines such as *Playboy* or *Penthouse*. However, magazines which are deemed to contain "mature content" such as *Cosmopolitan Magazine* are free to be distributed at all stores with a "Unsuitable for the young" label on its cover.
- In December 2008, a Singaporean couple was charged with sedition for distributing the Chick tracts *The Little Bride* and *Who Is Allah?*, said to "to promote feelings of ill-will and hostility between Christians and Muslims in Singapore", an offense punishable by death.

Television

- The state-owned MediaCorp controls all free-to-air terrestrial local TV channels licensed to broadcast in Singapore, as well as 14 radio channels. Both free-to-air and pay television channels are available on cable, but the popular HBO series *Sex and the City* was not permitted to be shown in Singapore until 2004, after its original run had ended. Private ownership of satellite dishes is illegal, though international TV broadcasts (such as CNN, BBC, Fox News Channel etc.) are available on Starhub TV and SingTel IPTV service mio TV.
- The Media Development Authority, through its Programme Advisory Committees for each of the four official languages, constantly monitors and provides feedback on broadcast content. Permissible content on Singaporean TV is minutely regulated by the MDA's *Free-to-Air Television Programme Code*.
- Part 5 of the Code states that TV programs "should not in any way promote, justify or glamorise" homosexuality in any form. MediaCorp has been fined repeatedly for violations of this, most recently in April 2008 for showing an episode of *Home and Design* that depicted a gay couple.
- Part 7 of the Code states that "Gratuitous and graphic portrayals of violence, such as cutting up body parts and spurting of blood, should be avoided.", and that programs "should not glamorise or in any way promote persons ... who engage in any criminal activity". Local productions thus typically avoid depicting the local police or military personnel as victims of violence, resulting in predictable storylines considered "ethically correct". The police, for example, are increasingly shown to rarely succumb to graphic violence or other unfortunate events, and even if they do, are typically shown to prevail ultimately, as depicted in police dramas *Triple Nine* and *Heartlanders*.

Television

- Part 12.3 of the Code states that use of the local English-based creole Singlish "should not be encouraged and can only be permitted in interviews, where the interviewee speaks only Singlish." The popular Singlish sitcom *Phua Chu Kang* was singled out in a National Day rally speech. The Programmes Advisory Committee for English TV and Radio Programmes also singled out the use of Singlish in local sitcoms in its 2005 annual report, saying they "contain excessive Singlish" and "this should be avoided as it could give the wrong impression, especially among the young, that Singlish is the standard of spoken English in Singapore"
- Part 12.4 of the Code states that "All Chinese programmes, except operas or other programmes specifically approved by the Authority, must be in Mandarin." The Cantonese used by popular TV serials from Hong Kong had to be dubbed into Mandarin, while local television series or programmes may not use dialects. Similarly, local newspapers were not allowed to carry listings for Malaysia's TV3, which showed programmes in Cantonese. However, Hong Kong's TVB, broadcasting in Cantonese, is now available on cable.
- The latest annual report by the Advisory Committee for Chinese Programmes, for instance, chastised dramas such as *Beyond the Axis of Truth 2* (police thriller on the supernatural) and *Wing of Desire* (contemporary family-feud drama) for graphic violence, while giving credit to *A Promise For Tomorrow*, *A New Life*, *A Child's Hope*, and so on, for the "positive messages" transmitted. Hence, locally-produced dramas in recent decades are overwhelmingly family-based, with action-thrillers generally avoided.
- As of September 2010, Singapore relaxed television broadcast guidelines allowing Pay TV operators to screen **NC16**, **M18** and **R21** films containing explicit content on Video-on-Demand (VOD) services.

Internet

- Internet services provided by the three major Internet Service Providers (ISPs) are subject to regulation by the Media Development Authority (MDA), which blocks a "symbolic" number of websites containing "mass impact objectionable" material, including Playboy and YouPorn. In addition, the Ministry of Education, Singapore blocks access to pornographic and similar objectionable Internet sites on its proxy servers. Nevertheless, MDA adopts a "light-touch" approach in regulating the Internet, with minimal Internet filtering.
- Government agencies have been known to use or threaten to use litigation against bloggers and other Internet content providers. The first instance of such activity was against Sintercom in July 2001 when the founder, Dr Tan Chong Kee was asked to register the website under the nascent Singapore Broadcast Authority Act (now Media Development Authority). Dr Tan chose to shutdown Sintercom due to concerns over the ambiguity of the Act. In April 2005, a blogger, Chen Jiahao, then a graduate student at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, was made to apologise and shut down his blog containing criticisms on government agency A*STAR, after its Chairman Philip Yeo threatened to sue for defamation. In September 2005, 3 people were arrested and charged under the *Sedition Act* for posting racist comments on the Internet. Two were sentenced to imprisonment. Later, the Teachers' Union announced that it is offering legal assistance to teachers who want to take legal action against students who defame them on their blogs, after five students from Saint Andrew's Junior College were suspended for three days for allegedly "flaming" two teachers and a vice-principal on their blogs.

Internet

- In the last few years, the government has taken a much tougher stand on Internet-related matters, including censorship. Proposed amendments to the Penal Code intend to hold Internet users liable for "causing public mischief", and give the authorities broader powers in curtailing freedom of speech.
- In September 2008, US citizen Gopalan Nair was sentenced to 3 months imprisonment for insulting a public servant after he accused a Singapore judge of "prostituting herself" in his blog.
- Starting June 1st, 2013 the Media Development Authority requires sites "that report regularly on issues relating to Singapore and have significant reach" among website visitors in Singapore to apply for individual licenses, which will be subject to annual renewal. These websites must then post a "performance bond" of 50,000 Singapore dollars and remove any objectionable content within 24 hours of receiving a government order. On June 14th, 2013 the Asia Internet Coalition responded.

Stomp Law



- "Stomp law" is an adage used in Singapore that states that any article about any anti-social or impolite behaviour that is published on Stomp (Straits Times Online Mobile Print) which concerns the behaviour of unidentified person or persons who appear to be of Chinese race will quickly be attributed to people from PRC (People's Republic of China) either by the author of the article, or soon after by people commenting on the article. This attribution is almost always pure conjecture and indicative of a trending negative attitude of Singaporeans towards PRC citizens, especially of those working in Singapore.
- Since its inception in 2006 Stomp has been a fairly good way to judge public opinion in Singapore on various social issues, in a country which has high censorship and controlled media.
- By monitoring trends of expressed sentiments, keywords and phrases used by the readers in their comments, as well as monitoring the subject of articles themselves (which are posted by citizens and not professional journalists) it has been possible to obtain a general picture of Singaporeans' concerns and attitudes.
- Since 2009 a very constant trend has emerged relating to the attitudes towards citizens of the People's Republic of China. There is a growing resentment and belief that PRC citizens are less developed in their social skills. Subsequently almost any posted article about negative behaviour involving an unidentified person who appears to be of Chinese race, that person will almost certainly be labelled a PRC

Stomp Law

- **Examples**
- [Example 1 "Couldn't leave parking lot because of inconsiderate PRC driver"](#)
- A typical example of Stomp Law being used in the article itself, where the unknown individual is labelled a PRC due to [conjecture](#) or subjective opinion such as “her appearance and accent”.
- [Example 2 "Man bags fruits left as offerings for start of Hungry Ghost Festival"](#)
- In the above example of Stomp Law the individuals are purported to be Chinese citizens based on their appearance. This thought is further reinforced by the comments with unsupported accusations such as “i saw a PRC took the offering too” [sic]

Public demonstrations in Singapore

- **Public demonstrations** are rare in Singapore due to laws that make it illegal to hold cause-related events without a valid licence from the authorities. Such laws include the Public Entertainment and Meetings Act and the Public Order Act.
- **Speaker's Corner**
- In the past, political speeches in Singapore were only permitted at the Speaker's corner, an area created and designated for such events. However, a police permit was still a requirement before one could proceed with his or her speech.
- On 1 September 2008, the government decided that Singapore citizens wishing to hold events there need not obtain a permit from the police, and the restriction on using audio amplification devices was lifted. However, they are still required to register with the National Parks Board, a statutory body that manages nature parks.
- In 2008/2009, members of the public led by former National Trade Unions Cooperation (NTUC) CEO Mr. Tan Kin Lian held several biweekly meetings at the Speaker's corner to protest the failure to protect investors in the wake of the financial crisis that began in September 2008.
- In 2010, following the closure of the beauty parlours Wax in the City, True Spa and Subtle Senses, members of the public gathered in the Speaker's corner to protest against the loss of fees paid to the spas. Customers of True Spa and Subtle Senses had made advance payments to businesses, only to find out days later that the spas had ceased operations.

Public demonstrations in Singapore

- Nevertheless, such laws did not deter some groups conducting a number of illegal public demonstrations.
- ***Aung San Suu Kyi***
- On 18 March 2009, three activists held a demonstration at the Botanic Gardens to denounce the visit by Myanmar's PM and Junta leader Thein Sein, in which an orchid was named after him. The protestors also paid tribute to Aung San Suu Kyi by presenting a bunch of orchids on her behalf at the Myanmar Embassy.
- ***Deportation of Myanmar Nationals***
- On 12 January 2009, two Singaporeans staged a protest outside the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) building to voice their disapproval over the treatment of two Myanmar nationals who had their work permits cancelled. It was alleged that the Singapore government refused to allow them to continue working because they were involved in Myanmarese pro-democracy movement. The two activists were arrested but released on bail later. As of present, no charges have been laid yet.

Public demonstrations in Singapore

- ***Tak Boleh Tahan***
- A group of 20 people turned up at Parliament House on 15 March 2008 to protest against the escalating cost of living in Singapore. *Tak Boleh Tahan* stands for "I can't take it anymore" in colloquial Malay. The event was organised by the SDP and included their members. 18 were arrested when they refused to disperse as ordered by the police. All 20 were subsequently charged under Section 5(4)b Chapter 184 of the Miscellaneous Offences (Public and Nuisance) Act. The Singapore Police Force described this incident as an escalation on the scale and level of defiance exhibited by the group and stated that their actions and arm-locking with each other was "militant like".
- **Recent changes**
- The Public Order Act gives authorities the power to prevent an individual from leaving home or a building if it is deemed that that person intended or intends to be part of a demonstration. Police are also allowed to order a person to leave a specific area should they determine an intention of offence. Second Home Affairs Minister K. Shanmugam argues that this was necessary to maintain security at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit held in 2009. However, opponents like Chee Soon Juan, leader of the Singapore Democratic Party argues that the law is intended "for the long run" to silence discontent against the government.

Human rights in Singapore

- The government in Singapore has broad powers to limit citizens' rights and to inhibit political opposition. In 2009, Singapore was ranked 133rd out of 175 nations by Reporters Without Borders in the Worldwide Press Freedom Index. Freedom in the World 2006 ranked Singapore 5 out of 7 for political freedom, and 4 out of 7 for civil liberties (where 1 is the most free), with an overall ranking of "partly free".
- **Internal Security Act**
- The Ministry of Home Affairs Internal Security Department enforces the country's Internal Security Act (ISA) as a counter to potential espionage, international terrorism, threats to racial and religious harmony, and subversion. The ISA permits indefinite detention without formal charges or recourse to trial, and has been used to imprison political opponents, including Chia Thye Poh, who was held for 32 years without trial before being released. As of 2005, 36 men were being held under the ISA.



Human rights in Singapore

- Singapore enforces the death penalty by hanging and has, according to Amnesty International, one of the world's highest execution rates relative to its population. The government has contested Amnesty's claims, and denies that its use of the death penalty constitutes a violation of human rights. Singapore is against euthanasia, and mercy killing is not legalized.
- In Singapore the death penalty is mandatory for first-degree murder and for the possession of more than 15g of heroin in its pure form (dia-morphine), which is deemed to be evidence of trafficking. Amnesty International, which opposes all capital punishment on principle, notes that some 400 criminals were hanged between 1991 and 2003, for a population of 5 million.

Human rights in Singapore

- The government states that drug-trafficking is one of the most serious crimes, because Singapore is particularly vulnerable to the drug menace due to its small size and location near the Golden Triangle. The government also states that Singapore does not mete out the death penalty lightly and uses it only in the most serious cases. The government claims that, as a result of its strict policies, Singapore has among the lowest prevalence of drug abuse across a range of hard and soft drugs.
- The government has restricted freedom of speech and freedom of the press and has limited other civil and political rights. Censorship of sexual, political and racially or religiously sensitive content is extensive.

Human rights in Singapore

- In Singapore, under the Public Order Act 2009, outdoor public processions or assemblies require police permits. Without police permits, such outdoor assemblies are illegal. Indoor assemblies, however, can be held freely without the need to apply for police permits. The only place in Singapore where outdoor public assemblies do not require police permits is at the Speakers' Corner which is modelled on Hyde Park, London. However, one must still register one's personal details with the National Parks Board online before speaking or protesting at the Speakers' corner, and there are also many CCTVs in the park, a situation that had some Singaporeans and Singaporean MPs complaining.
- Government pressure to conform has resulted in the practice of self-censorship by journalists. According to Amnesty International, in 2010 laws were tightened to limit the freedom of expression and assembly, and used to threaten critics and opposition activists. Lawsuits were taken out by the authorities against dissidents. Government critics and human rights defenders nevertheless held public gatherings.
- A British journalist, Alan Shadrake, was convicted in Singapore in 2010 of contempt of court for scandalising the Singapore judicial system, through his published views on the country's criminal justice system, sentenced to six weeks' imprisonment and a fine of \$20,000.



**“ANYBODY WHO DECIDES
TO TAKE ME ON
NEEDS TO PUT ON
KNUCKLE-DUSTERS.
IF YOU THINK
YOU CAN HURT ME
MORE THAN I CAN HURT YOU,
TRY.
THERE IS NO WAY YOU CAN
GOVERN A CHINESE SOCIETY.”**