NCEE
National Center On
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Legislative International
Education Study Group

OVERVIEW OF SINGAPORE'S POLITICAL STRUCTURE

Background:

Singapore is an island state located at the tip of the Malay peninsula. It was formerly a British colony and only became a fully independent country in 1965. The People's Action Party (PAP), guided by the ideas of the late prime minister from 1959-90, Lee Kuan Yew, has dominated politics since then. The PAP's success has been founded on a combination of economic dynamism and its ability to restrict support for Singapore's weak and divided opposition parties.

Political structure:[i]

- Singapore is a parliamentary democracy.

- The prime minister and the cabinet are appointed by the president and responsible to parliament. The president has very little power other than his role in appointing the prime minister. The prime minister sets policy in the country.

- The requirements for the presidency are very stringent, including having to fulfill a public sector or private sector requirement.[ii] In 2017, there was an additional requirement that the president be Malay, as it is a racial group which had not been represented for 30 years. A Constitutional Commission in 2016, per the direction of Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, recommended these changes.[iii]

- The president, Halimah Yacob, was elected for a six-year term on September 14, 2017. She became president without an election as she was deemed the only eligible candidate given her being Malay and having served in public office, leading to protests around the electoral process.

- Singapore has a single-body parliament, which sits for five-year terms. The last election was in September 2015. The legislature has 89 elected members: 13 members of parliament (MPs) are directly elected from single-member constituencies, and 76 are elected in teams of four to six to represent the 15 group-representation constituencies (GRCs). GRCs were introduced in 1988 to help ensure minority representation in Parliament by requiring that all teams of GRC representatives include at least one member of a minority group (non-Chinese ethnicity).[iv] The next parliamentary election will take place by January 2021.

- The ruling People's Action Party (PAP) won 69.9% of the vote (or 83 seats in parliament) in the September 2015 election.

- The current Prime Minister is Lee Hsien Loong, eldest son of Lee Kuan Yew.

Ministries

There are 16 Ministries in Singapore, each responsible for a specific area of public policy or government function. Below are overviews of the two ministries most relevant to the study group work:

Ministry of Education

The [Ministry of Education](#) (MOE) is responsible for education for kindergarten (ages four to five) through higher education. The current Minister of Education is [Mr. Lawrence Wong](#). The Ministry allocates funding for all schools, sets course syllabi and national examinations, oversees teacher credentialing, manages the teacher and principal evaluation and promotion system, and hires and assigns principals and teachers to schools. MOE is accountable to the government for the outcomes of the system, and it controls all aspects of policy within the system, including the management of semi-autonomous agencies (e.g., Early Childhood Development Agency, National Institute of Education, and the Examinations and Assessment Board, described below).

Ministry of Social and Family Development

This mission of the [Ministry of Social and Family Development](#) (MSF) is to "Nurture-Resilient Individuals, Strong Families And A Caring Society." The minister of MSF is Mr. [Masagos Zulkifli](#). The MSF, in conjunction with the MOE oversees the Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA), described below. MSF administers ComCare, which provides cash grants to low- and moderate-income families on a sliding scale. The aid includes temporary assistance for unemployed individuals, as well as long-term assistance, including financial support for school-related expenses for children of elderly adults or adults with cognitive or physical challenges. The MSF also oversees the National Council of Social Service, an umbrella group of 450 private organizations that provide services to Singapore citizens.

Agencies

In addition, there are three key national agencies that work closely with MOE and MSF.

Early Childhood Development Agency

[Early Childhood Development Agency](#) (ECDA) manages child care services in Singapore, setting regulating for centers and inspecting them. The agency also developed the Early Years Development Framework for children aged 2 months to 3 years, which is voluntary but centers which accept government subsidies must adhere to it. The current Chief Executive Officer is Jamie Ang.

National Institute of Education

[National Institute of Education](#) (NIE) is the only institution authorized to prepare teachers. The current director of NIE is [Professor Christine Goh](#). It offers master's and bachelor's degree routes into teaching. Through NIE, MOE limits its teacher recruitment only to those students who are able to get into the country's rigorous research

universities. Each year, Singapore calculates the number of teachers it will need, and opens only that many spots in the training programs.

Singapore Examinations and Assessment Board

The Singapore Examinations and Assessment Board (SEAB) is a statutory board, formerly the Examinations Division of MOE. Their objective is to develop and conduct national examinations and provide other assessment services locally. The chief executive of SEAB is Mr. Yue Lip Sin.

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i https://country.eiu.com/article.aspx?articleid=1230158106&Country=Singapore&topic=Summary&subtopic=Political+structure

ii https://singaporelegaladvice.com/law-articles/singapore-president-qualifications

iii https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-41237318

iv https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_2013-10-25_182746.html