

Singapore slips from 'obstructed' to 'repressed' in global civic freedoms report

Friday 10 December 2021, by [Coconuts Singapore](#) (Date first published: 9 December 2021).

Singapore slipped into the second-worst category any country could ever be in with regards to civil liberties, an annual report by Civicus Monitor researchers showed.

The city-state has been downgraded from "obstructed" to being a "repressed" state in the [People Power Under Attack 2021](#) report of nearly 200 countries, joining the ranks of 48 others like Russia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Myanmar.

This is largely due to deteriorating freedoms in speech, press, and activism in Singapore, said the report that was jointly produced by 20 civil society groups from around the world. It is also the first time that the report was taking into account a country's respect for public assembly, which is subjected to police permission in Singapore and under the purview of the Public Order Act.

"Despite its claims to be a democracy, the Singaporean government has systematically chipped away at fundamental freedoms using ambiguous and overly broad legislation, such as on defamation, the Protection Against Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (POFMA) and the Public Order Act, to suppress activism and muzzle free speech," civic space researcher Josef Benedict said.

Other countries with downgraded freedoms were Poland, South Africa, and Nicaragua, as more governments around the world limit civil rights in the name of pandemic restrictions. Only 39 countries were rated "open" while the rest were "narrowed," "obstructed," "repressed," and worst of all, "closed."

POFMA, dubbed the fake news law, has so far been swiftly used to mostly silence activists and political critics in Singapore, such as Terry Xu, former chief editor of the [now-defunct](#) *The Online Citizen* website. He and political blogger Leong Sze Hian were also sued by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong for [defamation](#) over online posts.

"Defamation has become a popular way to silence reporters, and press freedoms are increasingly under threat in Singapore," CIVICUS' press statement said.

It also highlighted Singapore's decision to accept just a few of the [recommendations](#) recently proposed by the United Nations Human Rights Council, the Singapore authorities' arrest of peaceful demonstrators, and the government's newest controversial law said to counter [foreign interference](#).

☐☐ [#Singapore](#) has been downgraded to 'repressed' in [#PeoplePower2021](#) ratings report:

- ➡ Repressive laws used to silence dissent
- ➡ Restrictions on peaceful protests
- ➡ New foreign interference law to further curtail rights

Country summary: <https://t.co/pg4vEtD1v0> pic.twitter.com/QEUnKFledG

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