

Part 1: Social Studies Essays

MYCT Question

“A liberal democratic system is the best form of government for Singapore”

How far do you agree with this statement? Explain your answer with reference to liberal democracy and at least one other political system, and substantiate your answer with relevant example/evidence.

Essay Structure

Introduction: Background, explanation of key terms, analysis of SG’s current standings, explanation of given factor, slight comparison to other factors

Points (1, 2, 3): Advantages and disadvantages of government structure, examples from different countries

Conclusion: What Singapore’s current stance is, which government structure will be the best by weighing (choose a factor to weigh with, and explain which one is best)

EOY Essay Spotting

1. “An illiberal democratic system is the best form of governance for Singapore.” How far do you agree with this statement? Explain your answer with reference to illiberal democracy and at least one another political system, and substantiate your answer with relevant evidence.
 - a. For the points, list the advantages and disadvantages of each of the political systems
 - b. In the conclusion, explain which system is best suited to Singapore, and why (e.g. because Singapore’s needs are as such, and ____ is best suited)
2. “Singapore’s democratic system is that of a liberal/illiberal democracy.” How far do you agree with this statement?
 - a. For the points, list the advantages, disadvantages, and features of each of the three political systems – and state which features apply to Singapore.
 - b. In the conclusion, decide which of the applications to Singapore are the most pertinent, hence Singapore is a ____.

Part II: Content

Key Definitions

Governance: The process of decision-making and the process by which these decisions are implemented (UN ESCAP).

Government: The formal and institutional processes that operate at the national level to facilitate collective action (Heywood, 2007).

Legislation: Laws, when considered as a whole.

Legislature: The legislative body of a country or a state.

Power: The ability to influence the behaviour of others in a manner not of their choosing; associated with the ability to reward/punish.

Authority:	The right to influence the behaviour of others, based on an acknowledged duty to obey
Nation:	A group of people that have a shared sense of imagined community, and regard themselves as a natural political community]
State:	A political association that exercises sovereign jurisdiction within defined territorial boundaries. The state exercises authority through a set of permanent public institutions (legislature, judiciary, bureaucracy, military, police, etc)
Sovereignty:	Supreme legal authority and unlimited political power over the entire population within a territorial boundary.

Government

Reason for government:

- Community and nation-building
 - o Create a sense of national identity (by social engineering)
- Security and order
 - o Enforce laws by means of legislation (internal)
 - o Maintain defence (external)
- Protect rights
 - o Property
 - o Civil rights
- Promote efficiency and growth (regulation of and participation in markets)
- Social justice
 - o Redistribution of wealth
 - o Social safety nets
- Protecting the weak (disabled/other minorities)

Reasons against government:

- Destruction of community (in the form of oppressive regimes)
 - o Examples: Stalinist USSR and China during the Cultural Revolution
- Violation of basic rights
 - o Restrictions on freedom of speech, and other rights
- Economic inefficiency
 - o Poor policies that worsen economic situations of state
 - o Corruption
- Government for private gain
 - o Rent seeking by Mobutu Sese Seko
- Vested interests and inertia
 - o Groups with power tend to want to preserve their power (such as in the democracy in Thailand)

Social Contract

The social contract entails **individuals giving up certain rights and freedoms by submitting to the authority of the state** and taking on responsibilities. In return, these individuals **receive certain**

benefits from the government (protection from harm, social services, etc) and **guarantees of other freedoms**.

The social contract is what grants governments legitimacy – they have no authority without the consent of the ruled.

“The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of the government” – Article 21, Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

John Locke:

- State of nature is generally peaceful, as individuals live the way they want, guided by morality. War only arises when violence is used to protect lives or property.
- Social contract entails individuals giving up right to violence to enjoy peace.
- Government should only protect lives, property, and liberty of individuals (*limited government*)

Jean-Jacques Rousseau:

- State of nature is one where man is free and equal to everyone else. Social and economic inequalities restrict that freedom and equality (and need to be hence regulated).
- Social contract entails individuals submitting themselves to a collective will directed at the common good of the people – to protect our freedom
- Government's role is to ensure that everyone's interests are addressed (*direct democracy*)

Thomas Hobbes:

- State of nature is filled with fear and violence, where individuals engage in a “war of all against all”
- Social contract entails individuals giving up some freedoms in exchange for protection from harm by government
- Government must be strong and have absolute power to enforce peace (*absolute monarchy/dictatorship*)

Branches of Government

Legislature:

- Makes laws, enacts legislation
- Represents people: scrutinizes work of executive, recruits politicians, grants legitimacy to government
- Unicameral (1 chamber, such as in Singapore) or bicameral (2 chambers, such as in USA or UK)

Executive:

- Implements law, executes law, performs ceremonial duties
- Makes policy, provides popular political leadership, bureaucratic management, responds to crises

Judiciary:

- Interprets and adjudicates on the meaning of law
- Arbitrate disputes between state, major institutions and individuals

Liberal Democracies

1. Liberal democracies offer greatest protection of individual rights and freedoms
2. Clear communication channels allow highest degree of feedback and interest articulation between the population and the government
3. Fixed terms and regular elections (coupled with near-universal suffrage for the people) allow greatest ease of peaceful regime change and population representation.
4. Decisions are:
 - a. Populist (government lacks the ability to make unpopular and necessary decisions)
 - b. Slow (higher degree of political conflict between competing interest groups results in slower decision making process)

14 states in the United States are issuing licences for same sex marriage, but countries with illiberal democratic governments such as Singapore are still strongly opposed to same sex marriage.

US government shutdown because of a disagreement between the Democrats and the Republicans. Republicans in the House of Representatives refused to pass a budget resolution, unless the Democrats agreed to give concessions over ObamaCare law.

Illiberal Democracies

1. Illiberal democracies have the ability to make decisions that are unpopular but essential to the welfare of the country and its people.
2. Reduced protection of individual rights and freedoms, as they may be curtailed by certain laws
3. A lack of effective monitoring systems can lead to corruption and abuses of power (lack of checks and balances for the government). Government may even become more preoccupied with regime survival than meeting the needs of the people.

Gerrymandering refers to the act of manipulating the boundaries of an electoral constituency in order to unfairly advantage a certain political party. This was seen in the Malaysian General Elections of 2013, where voting was biased towards Barisan Nasional – as one rural vote (where BN was generally more popular) was worth 6 urban votes. 50.4% of parliament was won with 18% of the votes.

PM Lee, together with previous PM Goh threatened legal action against The New York Times, as an article published in the International Herald Tribune suggested that the 'younger Lee did not attain his position through merit' but rather via 'dynastical politics'.

Authoritarian Regimes

1. Able to make extremely unpopular decisions which may be deemed by the government as beneficial to the country.
2. Maintains strong power – ability to single-handedly prevent civil wars, etc which might align with the interests of the people
3. Limited individual rights and freedoms; heavily curtailed by laws or through fear.
4. Lack of checks and balances might result in oppressions, and the lack of opportunities for regime change might result in violence/unrest.

Examples:

The authoritarian government of Yugoslavia managed to prevent civil war in the country and maintain peace despite the social hatred between the Serbs on one side and Croats and Bosniaks on the other. As soon as the government broke up in 1991, civil wars ensued.

There has been no change of government in Syria since 1971, and the Ba'ath government continues to hold strong power. This has led to the Syrian conflicts (part of the larger 'Arab Spring') which have been ongoing between Bashar Al-Asaad's troops and those who seek to oust the government since March 2011.

In North Korea, individual rights and liberties are not respected at all: Even though Article 5 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that "No human shall be subject to torture", any citizen of DPRK found saying anything critical towards the government is sent for torture in one of DPRK's ten concentration camps. Furthermore, although there was a mass famine in the 1990s (due to which 3.5 million North Koreans died), DPRK refused to accept grain donations.

Unpopular decisions include: The Golden Shield Project (of China) that was started in 2003 and is currently functional.

Singapore's Case Study

Some freedom of expression in Singapore, seen in avenues like Speaker's Corner and the annual Pink Dot demonstrations at Hong Lim Park. However, even the Speaker's Corner itself does not truly respect the value to free speech, for this is a stringent application process that first needs to be passed.

Unpopular decisions made by the PAP include: the GST increase to 7% on 1 July 2007, the importing of sports talents into Singapore to increase sporting honour (such as Feng Tianwei's bronze medal in the 2012 London Olympics) even though many Singaporean netizens claimed they did not feel proud of the win as the talent was imported.

REACH (Reaching everyone for active citizenry at home) was a feedback initiative launched in 2006 when the Feedback Unit was restructured to move beyond gathering public feedback, to become the lead agency for engaging and connecting with citizens. REACH is the Singapore's government online engagement platform, from and after 2009.

In the Asian Financial Crisis of 2007, the government placed pressure on banks to sell off many investments; although this was largely unpopular a decision, it promoted the stability of Singapore's economy during the time of the financial crisis, and helped to sustain it.

Our Singapore Conversation had 47,000 participants and 4000 were surveyed. Our Singapore Conversation is an attempt by the government to receive collective feedback about what Singaporeans want for the future.

PM Lee's national day rally of 2013 was centred around the theme of "change" and promised efforts towards: affordable housing, improved healthcare financing, and greater support for those who study in Madrasahs, those who are homeschooled, and those who study overseas.

When a blogger known as 'mrbrown' published an article titled 'TODAY: Singaporeans are fed up with progress', the Ministry of Communication and Information published a report calling him 'partisan' and claiming that he 'distorts the truth'. He was duly suspended from his newspaper column three days later.

The scripts of all plays in Singapore must be vetted in advance by the Media Development Authority.

