



**Domain Area:** Singapore: Everyday Diversity

**Topic:** Hearing Every Voice

**Guiding Question:** How might we hear the diverse viewpoints of everyday Singaporeans?

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### General Information

Having overtaken Hong Kong last year, Singapore now ranks as Asia's leading financial centre.<sup>1</sup> The combination of its strategic location and openness to international commerce has allowed Singapore to cement itself as a cosmopolitan entrepôt that constantly adapts to market demands.<sup>2</sup> However, unlike other cosmopolitan cities like New York and London that seek to attract global talents, the Singaporean government has shown an unwillingness to align its domestic policies entirely to those of its foreign competitors, in areas such as freedom of expression and political openness. While Article 14 of the Constitution of the Republic of Singapore guarantees to Singaporean citizens “the right to freedom of speech and expression”, these rights are not absolute.<sup>3</sup> Notably, the Human Rights Watch has criticised the Singaporean government’s “all-encompassing control over speech and association” and “unrelenting harassment and prosecutions of the few critical voices” in its World Report 2022.<sup>4</sup> As the world becomes increasingly interconnected through social media and cultural exchange, the free exchange of ideas from diverse communities is essential to ensure Singapore keeps pace with other developed countries in terms of economic innovation and social progress. However, accommodating greater liberalisation might come at the cost of igniting deep social divides on contentious issues that could undermine the social harmony that the Singaporean government has painstakingly maintained.

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<sup>1</sup> CFI. 2023. “Singapore – the Leading Financial Centre in the Asia-Pacific Region.” CFI.co. January 4, 2023. <https://cfi.co/asia-pacific/2023/01/singapore-the-leading-financial-centre-in-the-asia-pacific-region/#:~:text=Singapore%20is%20the%20leading%20financial>.

<sup>2</sup> Ruehl, Mercedes. 2022. “Increasingly Cosmopolitan Singapore Clings to Conservative Values.” Financial Times, November 2, 2022. <https://www.ft.com/content/e1a4b2ff-ec42-466e-a5ec-9e50daf6514a>.

<sup>3</sup> Constitution of the Republic of Singapore - Singapore Statutes Online.” 2020. Agc.gov.sg. 2020. <https://sso.agc.gov.sg/Act/CONS1963>.

<sup>4</sup> “Singapore: Tightening the Screws on Speech.” 2022. Human Rights Watch. January 13, 2022. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/01/13/singapore-tightening-screws-speech>.





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In light of this, the Singaporean government has incrementally expanded the scope of political discourse via initiatives that offer everyday Singaporeans the chance to voice their grievances in a constructive manner such as the creation of the Speakers' Corner in 2000, Singapore Together movement in 2019, and Forward Singapore exercise in 2022.<sup>5</sup>

## Scope of Policy Proposal

You should consider the following points and address these in your policy proposal. If you are intending to take on a specific perspective (e.g., a certain Ministry, organisation), do state it clearly in your proposal.

- 1) **Target Demographics:** Your policy should take into account the disparities in representation afforded to different communities in Singapore, and offer targeted solutions to bridge this gap.
- 2) **Justification for Reform:** Address the potential consequences of maintaining the status quo, and elucidate how your proposed policy is designed to alleviate these concerns.
- 3) **Addressing Potential Concerns:** Do consider the possible implications of implementing your policy and adapt accordingly, such that it remains in line with the Singaporean government's stance on preserving social harmony and political stability.

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<sup>5</sup> Sim, Cheryl. 2014. "Speakers' Corner | Infopedia." Eresources.nlb.gov.sg. September 22, 2014.

[https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP\\_515\\_2005-01-25.html](https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_515_2005-01-25.html);

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## Points of Interest

We would recommend considering the following points to guide your research into this topic, but are optional to be included in your policy proposal.

- Engaging with relevant stakeholders in the public and private sectors
- Incorporation of new media platforms or other forms of digitalisation
- Mediating potential conflicts of interest between different communities



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