

CABINET E STUDY GUIDE - LAW AND POLITICS

Topic 1: Should Singapore do more to regulate online spaces?

Introduction

Since the advancement of the internet and online spaces in Singapore in the 1990s (GovTech, 2021), the number of Singaporeans who now have access to the internet has risen to about 99% of all resident households. The Singaporean government has actively implemented initiatives to digitise public infrastructure, including the introduction of online identification systems, digital appointment booking platforms, and data digitization projects. Such efforts have significantly improved efficiency and convenience for both citizens and businesses, with the government even making official announcements via online platforms such as on Whatsapp, a social media platform, and various websites. Even so, the increased reliance on digital systems has also raised concerns about online regulation, as public users face heightened risks of online threats even from within our own cyberwalls. The types of online harms Singaporeans and the government have to deal with come in many different forms, from problems nationwide, to those individuals face on their own. In this council, delegates will be focusing two key types of harm on our online spaces, fake news and doxxing, while exploring the various legislative measures previously implemented. Delegates will also be engaged in new ways to prevent these harms while compromising to different groups' concerns surrounding the impacts of new legislation and current problems.

Key terms

Fake news	Any information that is deliberately or accidentally misinformative or untrue, often published with the intention of misleading the public, damaging an entity, or gaining financially. (Digital for Life, 2023)
Misinformation	False or inaccurate information (APA, 2024)
Disinformation	False information which is deliberately intended to mislead (APA, 2024)
Doxxing	The publishing of information that identifies an individual or someone related to them and is also meant to harass, threaten or incite violence against them (Baker, 2022)
Public shaming	The act of sharing images or videos online that document a person's behavior, with the intention of highlighting the act and causing embarrassment or humiliation to the individual involved.
Deep fakes	A video or sound recording that replaces someone's face or voice with that of someone else, in a way that appears real (Cambridge Dictionary, 2025)

Misinformation and disinformation

Fake news has long existed in Southeast Asia, including Singapore, since colonial times. Colonial powers often wrote and published negative reports about Southeast Asian kingdoms, such as the Kingdom of Burma, aiming to influence colonial scholars and reporters. These efforts sought to undermine and destabilize the kingdoms, paving the way for eventual control by colonial powers themselves (Noor, 2017). In present day Singapore, both misinformation and disinformation can be found on various online platforms, from those shared between multiple personal group chats to those posted publicly on social media sites. Singapore faces significant challenges with the spread of fake news due to its unique societal and technological landscape. As one of the most digitally connected countries in the world, social media sites like WhatsApp and Facebook have become important sources of news for many Singaporeans. Moreover, rapid digital connectivity accelerates the spread of misinformation, as the informal flow of information—particularly through platforms like WhatsApp group chats—makes it easier for fake news to proliferate. Yet, ironically, that very trust—all too often one of Singapore's key strengths—can quickly morph into a significant weakness when its people are confronted by cleverly disguised falsehoods masquerading as legitimate announcements from trusted officials (Neo, 2019). The lack of media literacy further exacerbates the problem. While education enforces critical thinking, the nature of a fast-moving digital news cycle engenders impulsive sharing without fact-checking. Confirmation bias is also strong—people are more likely to share information supportive of their preconceived notions. A study by researchers at Nanyang Technological University (NTU) found that both cognitive ability and their own political beliefs predict the extent to which individuals believe in fake news, as well as their news consumption habits such as which sources they obtain their news from (Tandoc Jr, 2019).

Online situation during Covid-19

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Singapore witnessed the spread of fake news online increasing even further (SG101, 2025). Prior to this, most Singaporeans were already consuming news via social media. As the pandemic worsened, hundreds of fake news stories and falsified government announcements were spread around through Whatsapp and Telegram groups as well as other online messaging platforms concerning issues such as food shortages (SG101, 2025) and even on vaccines (Leo, 2021). The spread of disinformation that heightened during the COVID-19 pandemic caused worry amongst the public as reports of national shortages of masks and food resulted in Singaporeans “panic buying” in supermarkets, stocking up on necessities under the impression that supplies were low. One of the individuals who had shared such disinformation online was Kenneth Lai Yong Hui, a 40 year old taxi driver who posted on his Facebook account that as part of the then enhanced circuit breaker measures, supermarkets would only be open two days a week. Mr Lai was charged in April 2020 under Section 14D(1) of the Miscellaneous Offences (Public Order and Nuisance) Act, Chapter 184, which carries an imprisonment term of up to three years, a fine of maximum S\$10,000, or both (Singapore Police Force, 2020). He was sentenced to 4 months imprisonment and was the first person to be charged for such a crime since the outbreak of the pandemic (Iau & Alkhatib, 2020). Between 2020 and 2023, at the height of the pandemic, about 55% of POFMA cases were COVID-19 related (POFMA Office, 2025).

Fake news within politics

Within the political sphere, both voters and political candidates have spread and accused others of spreading disinformation and misinformation. The development of AI and its creative abilities have strengthened the believability of false sources, such as seen in AI deep fake videos and posts created of politicians. This can be seen in a notable incident that occurred in 2023, when an AI-generated deep fake video falsely depicted Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong promoting a cryptocurrency scheme with guaranteed returns (Chiu, 2024). The video was widely circulated on social media and later debunked and condemned by the government as a deliberate attempt to undermine public trust (Chiu, 2024). Another notable example of detecting fake news from politicians was in November 2019. Singapore's Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (POFMA) was invoked for the first time then concerning a Facebook post by Brad Bowyer, a member of the Progress Singapore Party. In his post, Mr Bowyer made statements suggesting government influence over investment decisions by state entities such as Temasek Holdings and GIC. The government deemed these statements false and misleading, asserting that Temasek and GIC operate independently and that the financial figures cited were inaccurate. Consequently, the POFMA Office issued a Correction Direction, requiring Bowyer to append a correction notice to his original post, which he complied with (Yuen & Yong, 2019).

Beyond conventional fake news, AI-generated deep fakes pose a far more sophisticated threat to Singapore's political landscape, blurring the line between truth and fabrication with unprecedented realism. In November 2024, Singapore experienced a major cyber extortion attempt involving deepfake technology, where over 100 public servants, including five ministers, were targeted with AI-generated fake images in ransom emails (Koh, 2024). The attackers used publicly available photos, likely sourced from LinkedIn, to create realistic manipulated images showing these officials in compromising situations, and then demanded a ransom of 50,000 USDT to prevent their release. The emails were sent to personnel across more than 30 government agencies, including political office holders and public healthcare institutions, raising concerns about the increasing sophistication of cyber threats. The Singapore Police Force and cybersecurity agencies swiftly launched investigations, and the Ministry of Digital Development and Information (MDDI) issued public advisories, warning of the dangers posed by deepfakes (MDDI, 2025). While no financial losses were reported, the incident underscored the vulnerability of public figures to AI-generated disinformation, particularly with the upcoming general elections on the horizon. Experts suggested that beyond financial extortion, the attack could have been a test run for future disinformation campaigns aimed at undermining public trust in institutions.

Legislative measures

On 2 October 2019, the government passed the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (POFMA) to tackle the threat of online misinformation, drawn up by the Select Committee on Deliberate Online Falsehoods composed of parliamentary members from both government and opposition parties (Parliament of Singapore, 2018).

The Act states that its purpose is:

- (a) to prevent the communication of false statements of fact in Singapore and to enable measures to be taken to counteract the effects of such communication;

- (b) to suppress the financing, promotion and other support of online locations that repeatedly communicate false statements of fact in Singapore;
- (c) to enable measures to be taken to detect, control and safeguard against coordinated inauthentic behaviour and other misuses of online accounts and bots;
- (d) to enable measures to be taken to enhance disclosure of information concerning content directed towards a political end (POFMA, 2020 revised).

Since its implementation in 2019, the POFMA office has handled 66 cases and issued 114 correction directions. Under the Act, if a statement deemed false is made online, a minister can issue a correction direction. This requires the person who made the statement to upload a correction link on the same account and platform where the false statement was originally posted (SSO, 2021). The notice contains a clarification to the false statement as well as a link to the accurate facts behind the case such as official government websites as seen in the example shown in Fig. 1.1 (POFMA Office, 2025).



Fig. 1.1 (Today Online, 2021)

Should individuals not comply with the direction, the Act states that the individual would be liable to a fine up to 20,000 or imprisonment up to 10 months. An access blocking order may also be directed by a Minister to the Infocomm Media Development Authority (IIMDA) that mandates internet service providers in Singapore to restrict user access to the website or platform that disseminated the falsehoods (MDDI, 2024). The Elections (Integrity of Online Advertising) (Amendment) Bill, was also implemented in 2024 to counter the increasing problems and worries surrounding A.I. and its ability to interfere with local politics. Under the bill, online content posted will only be regarded if the following conditions are fulfilled:

- 1) The content is online election advertising, where its intent is to promote, procure or prejudice the electoral prospects of a party or candidate.
- 2) The content is digitally generated or manipulated.
- 3) The content depicts a candidate saying or doing something that he or she did not say or do.
- 4) The content is realistic enough that some members of the public who see or hear the content would reasonably believe that the candidate did in fact say or do that thing.

During her speech, current Minister for Digital Development and Information Josephine Teo said it does not matter if the content is favourable or unfavourable to any candidate. She also added that the publication of such prohibited content during an election period, as well as the boosting, sharing and reposting of the content, will be an offence (Fang, 2024).

Non-legislative measures

When it comes to identifying and debunking fake news, technology could play a role in preventing the spread of fake news. Artificial intelligence, though poses its own dangers towards a fair democracy through the use of deepfakes as mentioned earlier, could be a tool used in helping to identify fake news and debunking it easily. Checkmate, a free homegrown fact-checking service launched in 2023 can deploy generative AI in its WhatsApp chatbot to automate the detection of telltale signs of a scam or unreliable news. Other examples of AI bots being used to identify fake news include Factually, Black dot research (Chia, 2024). Facticity.AI, another homegrown AI bot is able to fact check using Youtube URLs or content description, though it is not 100% accurate. Should further developments be made in the AI scene, there is a possibility of implementing such services in online spaces to further prevent the spread of fake news where legislation cannot. Education measures have also been taken by MOE and IMDA which include those in schools under civics classes as well as public campaigns online and offline (IMDA, 2024).

Concerns around political purpose of legislative measures

POFMA has been mentioned in reports by various foreign and local groups such as Amnesty International and Human Rights International as a controversial law that is a “disaster for online expression by ordinary Singaporeans, and a hammer blow against the independence of many online news portals” (The Guardian, 2019). Opposition parties such as the Workers Party have brought up their concerns about the law. Worker’s Party secretary general Pritam Singh commented in an official statement that “the WP opposed it because POFMA entrusts the Ministers and their Alternate Authorities to decide what is truth and what is a falsehood” (Workers Party, 2023). Mr Singh also described the powers granted under POFMA as “extreme” and suggested that Singaporeans themselves should be given alternatives and decide for themselves whether statements were false, such as in the POFMA case with Asia sentinel, a foreign news blog (Workers Party, 2023). Another opposition party, the Progress Singapore Party, also opposed the act, arguing that courts should have appropriate systems to determine whether online statements were indeed false and the courts should be given the powers to determine falsehoods to ensure independence (Cheng, 2019). Some experts have also called for more transparency in the POFMA process (Mahmud, 2021). There have been suggestions for an independent fact-checking body to be the first to review an alleged falsehood before correction directions are issued to individuals (Mahmud, 2021).

Cases for implementation of current laws

Though critics do point out that the POFMA’s key terms are vague and hence can potentially be misused by members of parliament to silence political critics, legal academics have challenged this claim. Professor Benjamin Joshua Ong from Singapore Management University argues that “vague terms” in POFMA are grounded in case law, the foundation of which most laws are developed from, meaning that such terms are not open-ended. Thus when it comes to such terms and fake news cases under POFMA, courts will interpret not just based on POFMA itself but also the foundational laws as part of case law.

Other experts have also emphasised the need for quick actions to tackle fake news posted online before it can cause unrest and distress for more members of the public. During parliamentary debate on the then-draft laws, Law minister Mr K.Shanmugam had said then in response to a proposal by the opposition Workers' Party that if the courts decided on falsehoods first, "you cannot be sure that you can act speedily" (Cheng, 2019). There are also members of the public who do show support for the implementation of POFMA. From a survey conducted by Reach in 2018, 90% of respondents felt that there should be more effective laws to require those who publish fake news to remove or correct these reports. These individuals also felt that those who publish fake news deliberately should be prosecuted "if their actions have serious consequences" (Sin, 2018).

Doxxing and online harassment

In Singapore, when there happens to be behaviour in public that other members of the public deem as inappropriate or uncivilised, such as drivers fighting, unhygienic behaviours on public transport, these instances would be filmed and uploaded to public platforms such as STOMP or Facebook (Kirk, 2014). Following the uploads of these videos, some netizens would carry out “identity hunting” and leak personal details of the perpetrators. For example, the woman who appeared in the 2022 viral video of her ripping a licence plate of another car at Tuas Link had her own and even her family members' names and employment leaked online (Baker, 2022). This act of leaking such information is also known as doxxing, or online vigilantism and harassment. It is important to note that the act of doxxing refers to the act of harassment and threats online, such as the publication of personal information of the person, not the act of publishing the video of an illegal offence committed online (Singapore Legal Advice, 2024). Doxxing and public shaming existed since the early 2010s and became increasingly common in Singapore with the development of anonymous posting platforms such as reddit where users can comfortably doxx others without fear of being exposed. In 2013 alone, the website STOMP, known for being the most popular platform for posting these public shaming videos, had 1.2 billion views (Kirk, 2014). Dr Brandon Koh, an Industrial-Organisational Psychologist at SUSS, explained during an interview in 2020 that in tightly regulated cultures like Singapore, where strict laws and societal expectations prevail, people strongly expect conformity to social norms and are more likely to impose punishments for violations. To the members of the public, public shaming serves as an informal method of punishment, used by them to encourage adherence to these unwritten rules as a form of “cancel culture”. Social media further exacerbates the effect of public shaming by reaching a wider audience, bringing disproportionate harm to the victims and even their innocent family members, as seen in the 2022 case earlier (SUSS, 2025).

Legislative measures (POHA)

The original Protection from Harassment Act (POHA) was passed in 2014, addressing mainly physical offline harassment such as stalking or physical threats of violence. In 2019, the amended POHA bill was passed to protect Singaporeans against online doxxing and strengthen judiciary measures against harassment. With the new amendment, the specialised Protection from Harassment Court (PHC) was established with the aim to “provide a one-stop solution for victims to receive holistic and effective relief” (Ministry of Law, 2019). PHC simplifies procedures and expedites timelines for certain application types if there is a risk of violence or violence. The PHC will also not be bound by the rules of evidence in the conduct of regular civil court proceedings (Ministry of Law, 2019). Additionally, the bill strengthens protections for victims by targeting three areas of doxxing offences. The three areas are, firstly, publishing personal information with the intention to cause harassment, alarm or distress, publishing personal information to cause the fear of violence, and lastly, publishing personal information to facilitate the use of violence. Fear and distress caused to the victims family members or colleagues are also covered under these offences. Under the new laws, those found guilty will be required to pay a fine of up to \$5000 and/or up to 12 months in jail (Singapore Legal Advice, 2024).

Non-legislative measures

A new Agency for Online Safety and Assurance has been created in a bid to support victims to seek timely relief from specified online harms and promote responsible behaviour online. The new agency will act on behalf of victims to direct perpetrators and online service providers such as social media services to put a stop to the online harm quickly. This provides added assurance on top of existing regulatory levers and court-based processes available today and enhances online safety for Singapore users. (Ministry of Digital Development and Information et al., 2024). It will also administer a complaints mechanism to provide timely assistance to victims of online harms. (Ministry of Law, 2025) Furthermore, MCI launched the Sunlight AfA to tackle online harms, especially those targeted at women and girls on 21 July 2021 (MCI, 2021). Other communal resource sites provide support. An example is Solid Ground, a resource site providing information for people facing online harassment or abuse to empower them to take action, created by Lee Kuan Yew Centre for Innovative Cities, and supported by the Association of Women for Action and Research (AWARE) Singapore and the National Youth Council Young Changemakers' Grant (Chang, 2022).

Scope of debate

Ensuring POFMA's effectiveness and fairness

Singapore Management University's Professor Eugene Tan aptly mentioned in a Straits Times article that "It is no longer a question of why Singapore should have a law like POFMA, but how it can reap the benefits of POFMA while mitigating its downsides". There is no doubt that Singapore requires a law such as POFMA to prevent the further spread of fake news. However, Singapore needs to adapt the law such that it continuously meets the changing technological scene, with the development of new technologies such as AI, as well as ensure its ability to continue protecting Singaporeans from the dangers of fake news. The legislative effectiveness as well as transparency and legitimacy of POFMA continues to remain a heated topic of debate on Singapore's own shores as well as from critics abroad. Delegates in this council should discuss the sufficiency of POFMA to serve its stated purpose and other possible means, whether legislative or non-legislative, to engage the public in the nation's fight against both disinformation and misinformation.

Tackling stakeholders roles

The legislative changes made to protect and prevent online doxxing is indeed an applaudable move. It has also seen an increase in applications and cases from previous years in 2023. However, online platforms such as social media companies and individuals themselves should also play a significant role in stopping the rise of online harassment. By the time the court orders charges against perpetrators, victims and related persons would already have their reputations ruined and details leaked for hundreds to view — something that is irreversible even by the law (Cheong, 2024). Social media companies must be required to give attention to such publications made online and quickly remove such content. There is a possibility of making use of developments in AI and algorithm technology to identify types of harassment online as well as doxxing content, although current technology is still unable to accurately cover the large amounts of content online (Cheong, 2024). Furthermore, although perpetrators who remain anonymous may face stricter charges (Chua, 2021), it is hard to identify individuals as social media companies have privacy tools put in place such as virtual private networks or VPNs (Cheong, 2024). Aside from recognising the onus on social media companies, the root cause of such doxxing from online vigilantes still stands. Various groups such as the Singapore Kindness Movement have called out the act of public shaming, not doxxing, itself an immoral one (Syazanna, 2019) and questions its ability to “teach good behaviour” to the public (Han, 2014a). Others stood in defence of public shaming, claiming that it is the citizens “freedom of speech” with platforms such as STOMP serving as spaces for citizen journalism (Han, 2014b).

Questions a resolution must answer

1. How can Singapore balance freedom of speech while adapting legislative and non-legislative measures to combat fake news?
 - Has POFMA been sufficient in tackling the issue of fake news in Singapore ?
 - To what extent is it justified to limit freedom of speech to contain the spread of fake news in Singapore?

2. What steps can the government take to promptly address doxxing and online harassment on social media platforms?

- How can the government improve on the current POHA and provide support for victims of online harassment ?
- What non-legislative or legislative measures can the government further take to influence the online sphere and society's perception of online vigilantism, harassment and doxxing ?

Conclusion

In navigating the challenges posed by the digital age, Singapore faces a delicate balancing act between regulation and freedom in online spaces. While legislative measures such as POFMA and the amendments to the POHA demonstrate the government's proactive approach to combating fake news and online harassment, their effectiveness depends on maintaining fairness, transparency, and adaptability. As Singapore continues to digitize its infrastructure and embrace technological advancements, it must remain vigilant and steadfast in addressing the evolving challenges of online spaces. Collaboration among the government, private sector, and citizens is needed to ensure a safer and more equitable digital environment while safeguarding essential freedoms and trust in institutions.

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Topic 2: Should Singapore's voting age be revised to eighteen years old?

Introduction

The voting age in Singapore was set at 21 years when the country first introduced voting during the colonial period, as established in the 1947 Legislative Council Elections Ordinance. This decision was influenced by British colonial governance, where 21 years was widely recognized as the age of majority and maturity (National Library Board, 2025). At the time, societal norms viewed 21 as the age when individuals could take on full legal and civic responsibilities, including voting. While Singapore retained the voting age of 21 post-independence, other countries have since adjusted their thresholds. Two examples of this is firstly, the United Kingdom (UK). In the UK, the voting age was reduced from 21 to 18 in 1969 to reflect changing perceptions of adulthood and youth responsibility (UK Parliament, 2025). Another example would be Singapore's neighbouring country, Malaysia, where in 2019, Malaysia amended its Constitution to lower the voting age to 18, acknowledging the growing political awareness among younger citizens (Leong, 2019). The voting age is a crucial factor in ensuring responsible civic participation. It determines when individuals are deemed ready to make informed decisions about their country's leadership and policies. While some argue that younger voters should be included to reflect modern education and awareness levels, others caution against lowering the age, emphasizing the need for maturity and stability in decision-making (Quek, 2024).

In this council, delegates will explore whether Singapore should lower its voting age, considering global trends, societal needs, and implications for governance.

Key terms and definitions

Term	Definition
Youths	Citizens between the ages of 15-35 (MCCY, 2024)
Generation Z	Citizens born between the year 1997 and 2012 (Geiger, 2024)
Millennials	Citizens born between 1981 and 1996 (Geiger, 2024)
Political maturity	the ability to engage in civic activities, comprehend and critically evaluate political issues, and form independent perspectives on political matters (Mahoney, 1952).

Background Information

Straits Settlement Period

The British Colonial era set the framework of Singapore's election framework. Voting in early colonial Singapore was restricted to a small group of wealthy, educated male landowners, often British or wealthy locals, who had the right to vote in municipal council elections. These elections were not representative of the broader population, and political power was concentrated in the hands of the British colonial administration (*NewspaperSG*, 2018). As the colonial government began to expand limited self-governance, changes were made to broaden electoral participation, though the process remained controlled. The 1947 Singapore Legislative Council Elections Ordinance introduced a more structured approach to elections, including the establishment of a minimum voting age of 21 (National Library Board, 2025). This age threshold reflected British legal traditions, where 21 was widely regarded as the age of majority, signifying a person's readiness to assume full adult responsibilities, including the right to vote. The legal voting age has been set at 21 since the nation's first general election in 1948. At that time, under the 1947 Singapore Legislative Council Elections Ordinance, only registered adult voters over the age of 21 who had been British subjects for at least a year prior to the election were eligible to vote (Yeo, 1973). This legal age has persisted through the decades, reflecting the country's ongoing belief in

balancing inclusivity with responsibility in shaping its political landscape (Singapore Statutes Online (2024)).

Current situation

In recent years, there has been ongoing debate about lowering the voting age to 18. Proponents argue that at 18, Singaporeans are entrusted with significant responsibilities, such as serving National Service, and should therefore have the right to vote. They also point out that many countries have adopted 18 as the legal voting age, reflecting a global trend towards recognizing younger individuals' political maturity (Quek, 2023).

Parliamentary opinions

In Parliament, Workers' Party MP Sylvia Lim has advocated for this change, suggesting that lowering the voting age could enhance political engagement among youth. She stated that lowering the voting age to 18 will allow our youths to have a stake in the future direction of our country (Office of the Leader of the Opposition, 2023). In response, Minister Chan Chun Sing acknowledged the suggestion but emphasized the need for careful consideration. He noted that while some countries have lowered their voting age, they did so for various reasons, including attempts to increase voter turnout or for perceived political advantage. He mentioned that that was not a new suggestion as both sides of the House had previously discussed that issue (PSD, 2024).

Public opinions

Public opinion on this matter is divided. Online discussions reveal a range of perspectives, with some individuals questioning the political maturity of 18-year-olds, while others highlight the inconsistency of entrusting them with responsibilities like National Service and responsible alcohol consumption but denying them the right to vote (Yee, 2024).

Academic opinions

Some academics in Singapore have called for lowering the voting age based on social demographic changes in Singapore and within voter demographics. A 2011 survey conducted during the 2011 election showed that younger voters and older voters diverge when it comes to the importance of issues such as job competition and healthcare (Sng, 2016). Furthermore, Singapore faces the ongoing challenge of a rapidly ageing population, with 19.9% of the population above 65 and above (Population in Brief, 2023), as compared to countries like Malaysia with only 5.7% of the population above 65 (Tan, 2023). Given that policy preferences, such as in the case of LGBTQ rights in Singapore, can differ across age groups, it was mentioned in a Straits Times article that it would be a form of generating “systemic discrimination against the younger generation” (Sng, 2016), whereby less of the proportion of votes would belong to those of younger age groups. Thus, some academics noted that for a more equal representation of younger voters in politics, Singapore needs to lower its voting age and allow more youths a greater voice in deciding political outcomes and its future. Academics research in the psychological and neuroscience industry, on the other hand, have differing views when it comes to the ages where intellectual maturity and independence of thought is reached. Some research papers indicate that by age 16, adolescents possess cognitive abilities comparable to adults in reasoning and information processing, suggesting they can make informed voting decisions. However, some research papers have also shown that adolescents may be more prone to peer influence and emotional decision-making, potentially affecting their voting choices (Oosterhoff et al., 2021). Other research papers also show that human brains only reach maturity, and hence possibly only reach political maturity, in ages of mid to late 20s (National Institute of Mental Health, n.d.).

Comparisons with other countries

In July 2019, Malaysia's Parliament unanimously passed a constitutional amendment to lower the voting age from 21 to 18. This reform, known as "Undi18," also introduced automatic voter registration, significantly expanding the electorate. The bipartisan support for this amendment underscored a collective recognition of the importance of youth engagement in the nation's political process (Library of Congress, 2019). The implementation of Undi18 added approximately 5.8 million new voters to Malaysia's electoral roll, increasing the total number of eligible voters by 40%. This substantial rise in the electorate was anticipated to invigorate Malaysia's democratic landscape by incorporating the perspectives and aspirations of younger citizens (Youth Democracy Cohort, 2025). Globally, many countries have lowered their voting ages to 18, recognizing the evolving capacities and responsibilities of younger individuals. For instance, nations like Argentina, Austria, and Brazil have set the minimum voting age at 16, further extending political participation to younger demographics (The Daily Telegraph, 2024). In the context of Southeast Asia, Malaysia's decision to lower the voting age aligns with regional trends aimed at enhancing youth participation in governance. This move positions Malaysia alongside countries that acknowledge the critical role of youth in shaping political discourse and policy direction.

Scope of Debate

Conflict between real outcomes and government intentions

Efforts are being made to engage young Singaporeans in politics before they reach the voting age. Initiatives such as Civic and Moral Education in schools, the National Education (NE) Programme, and exposure to national events like National Day Rallies aim to nurture political awareness and citizenship from a young age. In a parliamentary statement on the issue, Minister for Education Mr Chan Chun Sing opposed lowering the voting age. He substantiated this by claiming that current platforms like the Youth Action Plan and dialogues hosted by government organisations such as National Youth Council (NYC), Ministry of Community, Culture and Youth (MCCY) and MOE itself, are already sufficient opportunities

for young people to voice their perspectives on national issues (Chan, 2023). Minister Chan also claimed that such feedback that was given by youths on policies had been taken into account during parliamentary sessions. However, by setting the voting age at 21, many young adults who are otherwise engaged in national discussions and aware of social issues are excluded from participating in elections. This delay may create a sense of disconnection between political education and real-world participation. In this cabinet, representatives will need to evaluate whether the current platforms available for youths aged 20 and below are genuinely adequate and effective in amplifying their voices and enabling meaningful participation in politics. Representatives also need to evaluate whether current education measures for youths are sufficient for them to form independent and logical minds, and whether such opinions they form will truly improve Singapore's policies and governance for all.

Vote swinging

During the 2020 General Elections, younger voters aged 21-35 were observed to play a significant role as swing voters, with increased turnout from this demographic forming a substantial portion of the electorate (Campus Magazine, 2020). Analysts and politicians have suggested that during the 2020 elections, some youths above 21 may have voted against the ruling People's Action Party (PAP). However, then-Minister Lawrence Wong of the PAP countered this claim, stating in a press conference that it was older voters, particularly those who faced economic hardships during the COVID-19 pandemic, who acted as the primary swing voters (Sen, 2020). This raises further questions about whether extending voting rights to those under 21 would significantly influence election outcomes or enhance fair representation. Additionally, there comes the question of whether those in Generation Z, the majority of those younger than 21 and millennials, or the "older youths" have diverging opinions when it comes to various social issues, or converging ones, which would mean the sufficiency of youth representation with the current voting age. According to research and surveys carried out, Singaporean millennials and Generation Z share the same political

views on issues such as environmental sustainability (Awasthi, 2024), LGBTQ rights (Ang, 2024), political plurality (Lee, 2020) as well as economic issues such as housing affordability (Awasthi, 2024). Views seemingly only start to diverge when it comes to leadership attributes when choosing political leaders (Singh, 2023). Cabinet representatives need to come to a conclusion on whether including those below 21 in politics will help ensure all different opinions on the issue are heard and recognised adequately and whether the current young voters from ages 21 to 35, have opinions that unanimously represent those of younger non-voting ages as well. Representatives will also have to take into account other age-related constitutional laws regarding politics such as the minimum age for parliamentary members as well as age requirements for involvements in political activities when it comes to deciding the adequacy of current voting age laws.

Equating age with political maturity

While 21 is traditionally and legally seen as the age of maturity, younger people today often show political awareness, critical thinking and civic-mindedness at earlier ages due to better education and more exposure to global issues (Kai, 2023). Over the past few years, more youths have joined and participated in political parties and activist causes, showing youths' desires to have a say in the country's political scene (Kai, 2023). However, some proponents of the current voting age argue that youths under 18 don't have sufficient experiences and are not affected by current policies enough to form a logical opinion on policies (Quek, 2023). Examples include how youths still greatly depend on their parents and guardians for financial support, and thus won't feel the brunt of income tax rises, or inflation effects (Quek, 2023). Furthermore psychological research remains inconclusive and debatable in the changing context of youth education, as well as technological developments which leads to greater political awareness through social media (North, 2024). With different academic claims by both scientific and social fields, representatives need to debate on an acceptable age of political maturity for youth in Singapore while recognising their varied cognitive and social abilities.

Questions A Resolution Must Answer (QARMA)

1) How can the government ensure youths' political concerns are sufficiently heard and represented ?

- Should Singapore continue exploring alternative youth representation models, such as youth parliaments or advisory councils?
- Are current youth representation models such as enough for youths' concerns to be considered for policy making ?
- Is lowering the voting age an equally safe and more effective route to ensure youths' voices are represented in politics?

2) How should political maturity be measured in Singapore?

- At what age is socially and scientifically justified to allow youths to independently make important decisions ?
- Is the current education system and environment in Singapore developed enough to ensure youths below 21 have political awareness and maturity?

Conclusion

Having a clear and fair voting age is one of the foundations of a strong democracy. By ensuring fair representation and fostering civic engagement, the voting age plays a pivotal role in shaping a country's democratic landscape. While some argue that young people are politically aware and capable of making informed decisions, others contend that maturity and life experiences, often gained after age 18, are essential for responsible voting. Countries like Malaysia have set a precedent by lowering the voting age, yet Singapore's unique context may require a more nuanced approach. As representatives in the cabinet discuss this issue, it is crucial to balance the desire for youth representation with the need for informed, thoughtful participation in the political process to ensure a bright political future for all Singaporeans.

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