



SINGAPORE MODEL CABINET

CABINET E – Law and Politics

TOPIC 1: Can Singapore play a greater role in global affairs?



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[18th March 2026-20th March 2026]



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Dear Representative,



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Welcome to Cabinet E: Law and Politics. The Presidents warmly welcome you as we engage in three days of rigorous study, debate, and policymaking. This Cabinet convenes on pressing issues that directly affect Singaporeans, specifically global affairs and vaping.

The purpose of this Council is to simulate real-world governance at the highest level. Cabinet E comprises ministries and statutory boards that are responsible for shaping Singapore's legal, political, and regulatory landscape. Members are entrusted with developing policies that are not only effective but also legally sound and sustainable. As such, the Cabinet reflects the realities of governance, where trade-offs are unavoidable and ideal outcomes are often constrained by resources and competing national priorities.

A key mandate constraint of this Cabinet lies in the rule of law. Decisions cannot be arbitrary, nor can they prioritise expediency over legality or public trust. Furthermore, governance in Singapore requires careful coordination across institutions, where authority is distributed, and no single entity exercises unchecked power. Representatives must therefore balance assertiveness with restraint, and ambition with accountability.

As Aristotle once posited, *"The rule of law is better than the rule of any individual."* This principle remains foundational to Singapore's governance model today. Representatives are thus encouraged to ground their arguments in the broader objectives of government, including economic competitiveness, social cohesion, and long-term sustainability. These objectives often coexist in tension, and it is the responsibility of this Cabinet to navigate those tensions thoughtfully.

Ultimately, the goal of Cabinet E is not merely to reach resolutions, but to engage meaningfully with the complexities of policymaking. As representatives, the onus of balancing competing priorities, upholding legal principles, and engaging in constructive diplomacy falls upon you.

The Presidents look forward to robust, substantive debate, and hope that this council challenges you to grow not only as representatives, but as critical thinkers and leaders. Speak boldly, argue responsibly, and make the most of your time at Singapore Model Cabinet 2026.



3. Background of Topic

Despite its limited land space and natural resources, Singapore has consistently strived to find its own form of self-reliance and reached heights beyond international expectations in the realm of global affairs. After gaining independence in 1965, the city-state has shown its undying resilience towards establishing itself on the international stage, enshrining itself as a major player in the global economy and international diplomacy. With its strategic location as a port city, strong governance, and budding reputation as a neutral mediator, Singapore has successfully created a unique role in international relations for itself. In recent times, the geopolitical landscape across the globe has become precarious, with tensions between powerhouses such as the People's Republic of China and the United States rising. With such conditions, Singapore is met with both great opportunities and hurdles in expanding its influence and adding weight to its role in global affairs.

Historical Overview with Key Developments

1965-1980:

On 9 August 1965, the sovereign nation of the Republic of Singapore was formed. As a nation measuring a mere 581km² in 1960, the lack of natural resources and a hinterland proved itself an immediate challenge to a newly-established port city-state surrounded by larger neighbours such as Indonesia and Malaysia (Monetary Authority of Singapore, 2015). It became evident that Singapore would have to rely on proactive diplomacy to increase its relevance on the global stage and sustain itself as a growing, small nation.

Just weeks after gaining independence and applying for membership in the United Nations (UN), Singapore was accepted and invited to join the intergovernmental, global organisation on 21 September 1965, a decision made by unanimous agreement from both the UN Security Council (UNSC) and General Assembly (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2025). Following this legitimisation of the Republic as an international player, Singapore began embarking on a



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journey to securing international recognition, particularly by enforcing foreign policies rooted in neutrality and non-alignment.

Amid Cold War tensions between 1965 and 1980, when interventionist policies and their outcomes began to arise abroad at the hands of major global powers (National Museum of American Diplomacy, 2023) (Allison, 2013), several efforts were made to avoid entanglement with the rivalries of that era. A prominent example is the formation of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) (BERNAMA, 2025). In 1967, Singapore played a critical role in forming ASEAN as an equal, cornerstone founder of the organisation alongside the respectable Southeast-Asian states of Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand (ASEAN, 2025). The formation of this regional, non-ideological bloc represented the will of member states to ensure regional stability and security against foreign interference. In order to modernise defence arrangements with its newfound independence and deter external threats to its security, Singapore entered and signed the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA) on 1 November 1971 (FPDA, 2014), securing the protection and support of major powers outside and inside the Asia-Pacific region against external threats.

Economic development and stability also became one of Singapore's key priorities, as the nation strived to secure its value through not only diplomatic endeavours, but also by garnering soft power through fostering economic stability. The Singaporean government would make two strategic changes to its economy to realise its goal of propelling its economic status (SG101, n.d.): The first change was to prioritise export-oriented industrialisation and pivot away from export-led industrialisation to decrease the reliance on a common market. The second change was to prioritise attracting the attention of global corporations and the Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs) that they can offer, in order to achieve greater levels of industrial growth.

These changes helped Singapore offer a rare economic environment that stood out from many other nations. Through efforts such as the 1967 Economic Expansion Incentives Act (Singapore Statutes Online, 2025), the abiding by the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT)



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(NLB SG, 2024), and the curbing of union powers to ensure political stability, by 1990, Singapore's nominal GDP per capita had skyrocketed from 500 USD in 1965 to almost 13000 USD, overtaking countries such as Israel and Portugal (Monetary Authority of Singapore, 2015).

This economically-driven soft power, alongside careful diplomatic navigation during Cold War tensions, has undoubtedly highlighted Singapore's unique value as a partner and ally to countless nations across the globe.

1990s-2000s:

To establish itself as a safe haven for trade and FDI, Singapore went forth to sign numerous Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) to further reduce and eliminate trade barriers (such as trade tariffs). Singapore entered agreements with powerful organisations such as the European Free Trade Association through the European Free Trade Association-Singapore FTA (ESFTA) that came into force in 2003 (Enterprise Singapore, 2025), and major powers such as the United States through the signing of the United States-Singapore FTA (USSFTA) in 2003 (Enterprise Singapore, 2004). By the 2000s, Singapore entered more than 10 regional and bilateral FTAs with partners (Ministry of Trade and Industry, 2025) from within the continent of Asia to distant regions such as Latin America.

Singapore also became a driving force of cooperation on the international stage, leading initiatives such as the founding of The Forum of Small States (FOSS) in 1992 within the United Nations (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2025) that stands as the first voluntary, informal and non-ideological unifying of small countries. It even began inter-regional, collaborative efforts, like Singapore's 1998 initiative to bridge East Asia and Latin America through the formation of The Forum for East Asia-Latin America Cooperation (FEALAC) (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2025), creating a formal, revolutionary platform for inter-regional dialogue and cooperation between the two growing regions.



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Singapore also hosted international events such as the 2006 IMF-World Bank Annual Meetings (Monetary Authority of Singapore, 2026), further showcasing the world’s trust in Singapore and its ability to facilitate major diplomatic events.

2010s–present:

In recent years, the geopolitical landscape has become increasingly polarised and complex, more so than ever before. Singapore has been the host of many critical diplomatic efforts, such as the infamous 2018 North Korea–United States Singapore Summit. However, despite gaining a stable and respectable position as a diplomatic actor on the global stage, Singapore has faced rising difficulty in maintaining its foreign policy of being a “friend to all, enemy to none” and a neutral ally (Cheong, 2017). Intensifying United States-China tensions is extremely precarious for Singapore, who has spent immense effort fostering close partnerships and connections to both major powers, raising hurdles in maintaining Singapore’s ability to maintain neutrality in matters concerning these major powers (Woon, 2023). However, Singapore has managed to cautiously navigate a respectable number of conflicts, such as the Russia-Ukraine war, through maintaining a balance between supporting the UN convention and utilising strategic, select sanctions and measures to maintain diplomatic flexibility.

Recent developments:

In matters of humanitarian assistance and relief to countries, notable instances include Singapore Red Cross providing immediate relief and resources to Afghanistan during the 2025 earthquakes (Lim, 2025), and Singapore’s providing of humanitarian aid and resources to conflict zones such as Ukraine (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023) and Gaza in the Palestinian territories (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2025).

Digital partnerships follow closely with defence partnerships in light of the rise of the technological era. Examples of these digital partnerships include the regional partnership of the EU-Singapore Digital Partnership (EUSDP) signed in 2023 (Ministry of Digital Development



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and Information, 2023), which aimed to strengthen collaboration on a vast range of areas in the digital sector, including, but not limited to, data innovation and trade facilitation.

Economic collaborations and efforts such as the finalisation of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) in 2021 (Enterprise Singapore, 2022) show Singapore's determination to safeguard the bloc's momentum and success.

However, it is important to note that Singapore still lacks the immense influence and diplomatic sway of other global players. Despite being the 2025 host of crucial diplomatic meetings such as the Shangri-la Dialogue (Ministry of Defence, 2025), many exclusive international organisations only invite Singapore as a guest speaker. For instance, for G20 and G7 summits, it is noted that Singapore is a member of neither group (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2025) and only speaks as a guest speaker, with little sway over the official discussions and content of critical documents such as the Leaders' Declaration, revealing Singapore's lack of tangible weight in its word.

4. Key Issues

1. Limitations as a Small State

Due to its tiny size, Singapore's ability to engage internationally is limited. A country's capacity may be exceeded if it expands too quickly into global leadership positions due to its small population and limited resources. Maintaining regular high-level contact with major nations becomes more difficult when Singapore's limited capability and people are stretched by a bigger diplomatic footprint. Due to its small size, Singapore's signals and actions may be eclipsed by those of larger nations with more diplomatic resources and international support if there is a lack of presence or follow-through. This might take resources and attention away from domestic concerns, including social cohesion, economic resilience, and defence readiness. Overstretching might weaken Singapore's credibility and efficacy rather than increase its influence. (Cambridge Political Affairs, 2025)



2. Great Power Rivalry and Diplomatic Risk

At a time when tensions between major nations like the US and China have escalated, more international action puts Singapore at greater diplomatic danger. Assuming increasingly important leadership roles in areas like technology governance, digital commerce, or security cooperation may be interpreted as an implicit connection with one side, even if Singapore's objectives are impartial. This might jeopardise Singapore's long-standing positions of moral neutrality and strategic autonomy. Perceived alignment might expose Singapore to future diplomatic pressure, economic penalties, or reduced bargaining power. (Lee, 2024)

3. Leadership Expectations and Resistance within ASEAN and Regional Platforms

As a "big small state," Singapore already contributes disproportionately to agenda-setting and coordinating initiatives within ASEAN. Although this increases Singapore's power, taking on even more responsibility runs the danger of upsetting its neighbours. If activities are perceived as being motivated more by Singapore's interests or capabilities than by group consensus, some ASEAN countries may view Singapore as being unduly forceful. The cohesiveness of ASEAN countries may be weakened and regional ties strained by such perceptions. In the end, this will make it more difficult for Singapore to lead successfully via collaboration and trust. (Acharya, 2023)

4. Complex, Fragmenting Global Environment

The current state of the world is growing more unpredictable and more fractured. International cooperation is required for issues including cybersecurity, artificial intelligence regulation, and climate change. But as nations prioritise their national interests, collaboration is getting harder. As noted by world leaders, the world seems to be slowly moving away from a rules-based international order. (Straits Times, 2026) The efficacy of international law and the multilateral organisations that enforce it are facing declining authority and compliance. This functional weakening, if not outright dismantling, of certain international organisations raises critical



questions for Singapore’s foreign policy strategy. Institutions that small states typically rely on to amplify their voices may no longer provide the same level of protection or influence. Given the circumstances, Singapore’s efforts to assume a leadership role carry greater risks since it necessitates adopting more defined stances and allocating greater resources in a dispersed, cutthroat setting. This makes efforts more vulnerable to criticism, harm to one's reputation, and strategic pressure in the event that they fail or become politicised. This begs the question of whether more global involvement will result in commensurate benefits.

5. Scope of Debate

Scope of Debate (QARMA 1): Increasing Influence While Remaining Consistent with National Interests

Right from its independence, Singapore has been cognisant of how its economic survival and security are largely reliant on a stable and rules-based international order. As a result, Singapore has long adopted an outward-looking foreign policy, exerting influence through diplomacy, trade, and active participation in international institutions such as the United Nations (UN) and the World Trade Organisation (WTO). It has also positioned itself as a credible and neutral interlocutor by hosting high-level summits, facilitating dialogue, and contributing to international cooperation across multiple domains.

However, the global environment has become increasingly transactional. Major powers are now pursuing short-term strategic and material gains rather than consensus-building, while trust in multilateral institutions has weakened (United Nations, 2025). In such a landscape, influence is derived less from mediation alone and more from the tangible value a state can offer. In Singapore’s context, this refers to aspects like economic relevance, technical expertise and governance standards.



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This raises a key question for Singapore’s national interest on whether traditional approaches centred on peacemaking and multilateral participation are sufficient to expand its global influence. Delegates must therefore consider whether Singapore should place greater emphasis on strengthening its soft power. Examples include reinforcing its reputation as a trusted business hub, an education and innovation centre, and a state known for clean governance. By doing so, Singapore may indirectly increase its global involvement, as other countries are incentivised to partner with it for concrete benefits.

Ultimately, this council must assess how Singapore can expand its international influence in ways that remain aligned with its size and strategic constraints. Delegates must also consider how Singapore can ensure that greater global involvement continues to yield tangible outcomes that advance its national interests.

Scope of Debate (QARMA 2): Balancing Greater Global Involvement with Strategic Autonomy

Singapore’s foreign policy is further complicated by its position at the crossroads of multiple geopolitical tensions. These include major power rivalry between the United States and China, divisions over conflicts such as Israel–Palestine, and differing regional security priorities within ASEAN. (School of Advanced International Studies, 2025) Historically, Singapore has sought to maintain strategic autonomy while remaining relevant to all major actors.

As global politics becomes increasingly polarised, maintaining this balance has grown more challenging. Greater international involvement may require Singapore to take clearer positions or assume leadership roles that risk being interpreted as alignment. This raises concerns over whether increased assertiveness could undermine Singapore’s longstanding principles of neutrality, sovereignty, and non-interference.



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Delegates must therefore consider whether Singapore can take on a more proactive international role without compromising its diplomatic flexibility or multilateral relationships. Additionally, the cabinet should evaluate Singapore's capacity to expand its global role, as increased international engagement demands greater financial, diplomatic, and human resources, potentially at the expense of domestic priorities. The question is not only whether Singapore should play a greater role globally, but in which specific domains it can do so effectively and sustainably.

Scope of Debate (QARMA 3): The Maintenance of Neutral Positions on International Affairs

Singapore's Unique Position

As a respected and valued diplomatic actor known for its neutrality and friendliness, this unique reputation has crafted a space for Singapore as one of the handful of nations respected and closely trusted by both the United States and China. This has granted the city-state the rare position as a mediator in contentious, high-tension disputes between not only the aforementioned nations, but other nations with similar rivalries as well. In addition, Singapore's substantive soft power obtained from economic diplomacy and prowess is evident in statistics such as more than 7,000 multinational corporations located in Singapore in 2025 (Asian Business Hub, 2021), and the city-state has cultivated one of the world's most extensive FTA networks. This has granted the nation significant leverage and sway in not only global trade and finance, but also foreign diplomatic affairs at large.

Beyond Singapore's geopolitical swag in relation to its thriving economy, its national defence sector continues to use prudent and strategic use of the federal budget, with Singapore's Ministry of Defence (MINDEF) projecting that its defence budget can be maintained on the current trajectory of 3 to 4% growth each year, which would allow the nation to at least keep pace with inflation whilst providing credible, improving deterrence against external threats. With its



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reputation for a highly efficient model of governance that ranked first on the Chandler Good Government Index (CGGI) in 2025, an ideal environment for doing business, and global competitiveness, Singapore has successfully enhanced its soft power and credibility, priming itself to be a player of a far more prominent international standing. However, as Singapore increases its visibility on the global stage, questions have arisen both domestically and internationally regarding whether Singapore can progress further in the future.

Risks of Playing a Larger Role in Foreign Affairs

However, the expansion of Singapore's influence and role in foreign affairs naturally brings risks and challenges. As a smaller nation, Singapore must be cautious in the face of potential diplomatic backlash that could arise if stronger stances on contentious issues (for instance, the South China Sea) that could alienate major powers are presented carelessly. (Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, 2016) Resource constraints also prove to be a major challenge, because it proves that Singapore's small size and lack of its own natural resources mean that it must continue to carefully prioritise strong, international networks to avoid strain on sustaining its citizens and prevent hindering its development. In addition, the Singaporean public may also pose a challenge to playing a larger role in foreign affairs, as they may perceive foreign policy commitments as unnecessary costs that divert resources and attention away from domestic affairs and needs.

Scope of Debate (QARMA 4): Increasing Involvement in International Agreements and Treaties

International agreements and treaties have traditionally been a cornerstone of Singapore's foreign policy. The nation has relied on rules-based frameworks that promote stability, predictability, and access to global markets, allowing the city-state to compensate for its small size. Singapore's extensive participation in free trade agreements (FTAs), investment treaties, and sector-specific accords has enhanced its economic resilience and diplomatic relevance. According to the



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Economic Development Board, Singapore alone has an extensive network of over 20 bilateral and regional FTAs with more than 65 trading partners as of 2023.

However, there has been a growing trend of uneven compliance with treaties and weakening enforcement mechanisms in the recent past. This has raised concerns over whether deeper involvement in international agreements continues to offer Singapore proportional benefits, or whether such commitments expose it to greater constraints. Representatives must therefore examine whether Singapore should increase participation in international treaties in spite of the declining strength of global enforcement mechanisms. This includes assessing the strategic value of agreements in emerging domains such as cybersecurity, climate governance, and public health, where norms are still being shaped. On the one hand, early participation in these sectors may allow Singapore to influence standards in its favour. At the same time, increased treaty involvement may impose administrative and economic obligations that limit the flexibility of domestic policies.

Overall, this council must evaluate how Singapore can remain deeply embedded in international legal and institutional frameworks while ensuring that such commitments remain aligned with its national interests. The key point of contention is therefore whether Singapore should engage in more agreements, and if so, which types of treaties provide tangible diplomatic and economic returns in an increasingly uncertain global order.

6. Key Stakeholders

Working Singaporean adults are a crucial stakeholder as they are immediately impacted by foreign policy choices that influence Singapore's trade ties and economic stability. Improving Singapore's access to foreign markets draws in investment into Singapore, allowing the Singapore economy to develop and expand. However, there may be dangers associated with



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increased global involvement in global affairs. Increased geopolitical tensions could cause economic uncertainty for Singapore, which could negatively harm employment opportunities and living expenses of working adults, especially if the number of jobs available decreases and the cost of goods and services in Singapore increases.

Foreigners are significant stakeholders in Singapore's role in global affairs, especially since Singapore's economy and global development rely on them. Singapore's reputation for political stability and openness has made it an attractive destination for expatriates and foreign talent. A greater role in global affairs can reinforce this reputation by making Singapore appear as a credible international hub and make them more prominent on the world stage. This serves as a cycle where even more foreigners would come to Singapore to work due to the job opportunities available, resulting in the globalisation of Singapore. However, increased global visibility may also expose foreigners and their works to diplomatic tensions, especially if Singapore's actions are perceived as taking sides in international disputes, which would harm Singapore's economy. A lack of neutrality could affect Singapore's reputation as a safe and predictable environment for foreigners and deter them from working or investing in Singapore.

Multinational corporations (MNCs) based in Singapore are important stakeholders in Singapore's ability to play a greater role in global affairs. Singapore is a financial hub that has regional headquarters of many MNCs, such as Google and Dyson, whose decision to invest in Singapore depends heavily on Singapore's political stability and predictable foreign policy. A more active international role can benefit MNCs through the strengthening of Singapore's global connectivity and increasing Singapore's trade and reputation.

However, MNCs are also sensitive to geopolitical tensions and issues. If Singapore's role in global affairs is perceived as causing offence and controversy with particular major powers or taking overly defined positions on contested international issues, Singapore might face trade



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uncertainty and trade disruptions due to these geopolitical disagreements. This could then reduce Singapore's attractiveness as a regional headquarters location, causing businesses to move away.

International organisations such as the United Nations are also important stakeholders. Firstly, they help Singapore to participate actively in current affairs by providing a platform where their voice can be definitively heard. This allows Singapore to give their opinions on worldwide matters like climate change, global trade and conflicts. Secondly, as Singapore is a relatively small country, such organisations - especially the United Nations - will help to dispute any problems with other countries, which ensures justice rather than the abuse of power.

However, such large international organisations like the United Nations can be ineffective in involving Singapore in global affairs when geopolitical tensions arise. Tensions between countries result in vetoes and failed votes, which limit the UN's ability to provide clear guidance or solutions that Singapore can rely on. In addition, the UN may compel Singapore to thread the needle when it comes to voicing out and voting on controversial issues, which would result in Singapore taking stands that would complicate its neutral foreign policy.

Potential Solutions

A. Deepen ASEAN-Centric Leadership While Adapting to Power Asymmetries

Singapore can strengthen leadership within ASEAN frameworks where mandates already exist, such as the ASEAN Digital Economy Framework Agreement (DEFA), the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance (AHA Centre), and the ASEAN Single Window. Beyond implementation, Singapore can also shape agenda-setting by proposing pilot initiatives in digital trade facilitation, disaster response coordination, and regulatory interoperability. This allows them to play a greater role in negotiations and creating agreements between ASEAN countries,



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allowing Singapore to play a larger role in diplomacy. This allows Singapore to exert influence while remaining aligned with ASEAN’s principles of non-interference and regional centrality, preserving legitimacy.

However, ASEAN’s consensus-based decision-making process often results in slow progress, especially when larger member states prioritise domestic or bilateral interests. Singapore’s challenges historically have not only come from smaller neighbours, but also from larger regional actors such as Malaysia and Indonesia, who may resist perceived agenda-setting by Singapore. This might hinder the amount of progress that ASEAN is able to make in terms of reaching a common consensus, which would then make it more tedious for Singapore to play a more prominent role in global affairs and diplomacy. Furthermore, pushing “coalitions of the willing” within ASEAN risks diplomatic friction if larger member states perceive Singapore as disproportionately shaping regional norms. As a result, this strategy is well suited to Singapore’s size and diplomatic culture, enabling it to increase the quality and reach of its influence, but it is unlikely to transform Singapore into a dominant global power; its global role will remain that of a bridge and agenda-shaper rather than a primary agenda-setter. Contributions of Singapore will be taken into account.

B. Expand Strategic Engagement in Rules-Based Multilateral Institutions

Alternatively, Singapore can increase participation and leadership roles in rules-based international institutions such as the United Nations, the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the World Health Organisation (WHO), and technical standard-setting bodies such as ICAO and IMO. This would allow them to play a more prominent role in global affairs and not be limited to ASEAN. Multilateral institutions provide small states with platforms to influence global norms, preserve international law, and resist power-based coercion by major powers.



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While Singapore is already active in these institutions, its influence is often constrained by limited diplomatic manpower and competing domestic priorities. Scaling up participation requires deliberate reallocation of resources and long-term diplomatic investment. Furthermore, it may not be realistic for these institutions to use their limited resources to provide Singapore with a larger avenue and ability to contribute to diplomacy when Singapore does not have many natural resources or political power.

Additionally, increased visibility may expose Singapore to pressure from larger powers seeking to influence institutional outcomes, which may cause a strain not just to Singapore's image at the global stage, but will also affect it politically and economically if it were to experience pressure from larger powers to make decisions favourable for them. This would also make Singapore's foreign policy of being a friend to all and enemy to none hard to maintain.

Overall, this path is highly complementary to ASEAN-centred diplomacy and can enhance Singapore's global standing, but it is unlikely to fully compensate for structural constraints such as limited manpower and the realities of power politics, making it a necessary but insufficient route to a dominant global role on its own.

C. Develop Structured Multilateral and Issue-Based Coalitions

Singapore can formalise trilateral or quadrilateral “minilateral” platforms focused on specific domains, such as cyber governance, climate adaptation, digital trade, and maritime security. Singapore would be able to take on the role of a mediator or facilitator, where it would be able to garner support from allies to help in diplomacy. This allows Singapore to shape norms in specific issue areas without directly undermining ASEAN centrality or engaging in bloc politics.

Current multilateral engagements are often ad hoc and lack institutional continuity, leading to inconsistent follow-through. Furthermore, a small nation like Singapore might have a hard time



trying to garner support from allies who might not want to cooperate with a nation that is not as notable in global affairs. Additionally, such arrangements may still be interpreted by major powers as implicit alignment. Moreover, in an environment of intense US–China rivalry, even issue-specific groupings risk being read as implicit alignment, potentially exposing Singapore to pressure from major powers and complicating its “friend to all, enemy to none” posture. Overall, formalising minilateral platforms can significantly deepen Singapore’s global role in targeted areas, but its effectiveness will depend on careful framing, institutional durability, and Singapore’s ability to avoid being drawn into bloc-like politics.

8. QARMAs (Questions a Resolution Must Answer)

- 1) In what ways can Singapore expand its influence in global affairs while remaining consistent with its size and national interests?**
- 2) How can Singapore balance greater global involvement with its principles of neutrality, sovereignty, and non-interference?**
- 3) To what extent can Singapore maintain its neutral and balanced foreign policy stance while taking on a more visible and influential role in international affairs?**
- 4) Should Singapore deepen its involvement in international agreements and treaties to enhance its global reputation, despite the potential economic, financial, and regulatory risks involved?**



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CABINET E – Law and Politics

TOPIC 2: How should Singapore manage vaping?



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[18th March 2026-20th March 2026]



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1. Background of Topic



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The issue of vaping and legal management is a complex challenge with constant developments in Singapore. Initially seen and raised as a public health concern, the issue of vaping has warped and evolved into a multifaceted problem nationwide. The recent crackdown on vaping took place in September 2025, which significantly increased the penalties and consequences of individuals caught possessing, using or purchasing e-vaporisers. Through such actions, the nation has demonstrated its strict prohibitionist stance on vaping. The most prominent legislative action taken is the enforcement of the Tobacco (Control of Advertisements and Sale) Act (TCASA) in 2018, which was amended to include a ban on vaping. However, Singapore continues to see concerning developments such as the introduction of drug-laced vaping products into the illegal market. It is paramount to carry out a re-evaluation and take on further measures to confront this issue domestically.

Historical Overview with Key Developments

2010s: Rise of Global Vaping Trends

Singapore's stance on vaping has undeniably evolved over the past decade. During the early 2010s, e-cigarettes began to pose themselves as a viable and attractive alternative to tobacco products due to the elimination of contaminants such as tar and other cancer-causing substances from burning tobacco, giving the impression that vaping was a “healthier alternative” to smoking tobacco products. Its rise to popularity around the world was rapid, as it was concerning, with the World Health Organisation recording the number of vaping individuals increasing tremendously from about seven million in 2011 to 41 million in 2018.

Singapore, concerned by the rapid rise of this new vice, adopted a precautionary stance against vaping and began enforcing legal controls on vaping through the Tobacco (Control of Advertisements and Sale) Act (TCASA). Monitored by the Health Sciences Authority (HSA), the Act initially prohibited the advertising, promotion, and certain components of e-cigarettes as early as 2010–2014. This early regulatory framework highlighted the nation’s concerns about the



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potential health risks associated with vaping, which was relatively under-investigated at the time, and the normalisation of nicotine use, particularly among youth users of nicotine-infused vices.

2018: Comprehensive National Ban Under TCASA

In 2018, this precautionary stance shifted in light of alarming numbers of deaths in relation to vape usage abroad (Van Der Eijk, 2022). The regulatory landscape surrounding the use of vapes dramatically changed with the Singaporean Parliament's decision to amend the TCASA to implement a comprehensive ban on e-cigarettes nationwide, with the 2018 amended legislative framework now prohibiting all aspects of vaping, including the importation, distribution, sale, possession, and use of vaping products in Singapore (Ministry of Health, 2018). This was in alignment with the earlier partial bans in the early 2010s Tan, (G. P. P., Tan, X. Z., & van der Eijk, Y, 2025) and broadened them, positioning Singapore as one of the world's first countries to implement such a restrictive legal jurisdiction regarding vaping regulation. Justified by the government to be a necessary, hardline measure to protect Singaporean public health, these changes remain consistent with Singapore's strong anti-smoking and vice-addiction stance.

2020–2023: Illicit Market Growth Despite Legislative Tightening

Despite stringent legislation implemented by the government banning all vape-related activities, illegal and black market demand for vape products persisted. This posed a great challenge in the enforcement of the ban. From 2020 to 2023, an illicit market for vape products flourished, with the advertisement and sale of such products pivoting to encrypted, online platforms such as Telegram through their channels and cross-border courier services to evade detection from law enforcement (Health Sciences Authorities, 2022). During this time, the HSA and Singapore Customs were granted further powers to enforce the ban on vaping alongside the use of import restrictions under TCASA (Ministry of Health, 2025). However, illicit inflows were not deterred and only grew due to vape products having high levels of concealability and low unit costs (Yusof & Wong, 2025), resulting in heightened difficulty during detection in the face of smuggled goods.



2024–2025: Drug-Laced Vapes and New Legal Responses

An alarming development in the issue of vaping emerged between 2024 and 2025 when HSA discovered that a growing portion of seized vaping products contained controlled substances such as etomidate (commonly known as "K-pods"). Vaping has continued to see an uptick in users despite government crackdowns likely due to its nature as an addictive substance with a unique allure as a controlled substance (Durmuş, 2025), as well as a low-cost and/or safer alternative to more costly cigarettes. This is shown through the 8,000 illegal cases related to e-cigarettes in 2023 alone (Singapore Heart Foundation, 2024). This concerning trend and proliferation of drug-laced vape products prompted a significant policy shift from the Singaporean government (Ratcliffe, 2025), which introduced legal amendments that enabled drug-laced vape cases to be prosecuted under the Misuse of Drugs Act (MDA) rather than only under TCASA (Ministry of Health, 2025). This marked a shift from a public health lens to a public security and narcotics-control lens, signalling heightened national concern and placing stronger penalties on possession and trafficking.

The rapidly-increasing number of young individuals who use vape products remains an alarming and immediate concern for Singapore. With young people in Singapore increasingly targeted by malicious entities through social media and users within their social circles being enticed to use such vape products Yusof, Z. M. (2026), it remains paramount that Singapore increases its effort to crack down on vape usage as a means of youth protection.

In addition, the recent emergence of drug-laced vape products presents a lethal evolution of the issue of vaping in Singapore (iXchange, 2025). With the HSA reporting 28 cases of drug-laced vape seizures as of mid-2025, which is nearly triple the number of cases in 2024 (Sun, 2025), the threat of drug-laced vape products and their permeation in our society through underground networks is an immediate one to not only vaping individuals, but public safety at large. Another concern is also the normalisation of e-cigarette usage domestically, and how the persistent



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presence of vaping in Singapore would result in the eventual normalisation of nicotine usage, undermining the nation's decades-long progress in tobacco control and anti-smoking campaigns.

There are several, pressing statistics that highlight the severity and scale of the issue of vaping in Singapore. Annually, the Singaporean authorities record thousands of apprehensions of vaping offenders. Concerningly, youth have constituted a significant proportion of cases every year (Tan, 2024). Additionally, within just the first three quarters of 2024, the HSA seized over 10,000 vaping products (Ministry of Health, 2025). Hospitals in Singapore are increasingly being met with cases of respiratory distress in association with contaminated liquids from vape products. This is not to mention the alarming continued rise in the percentage of vaping cases despite how such cases are now falling under the Misuse of Drugs Act, exacerbating the threat of controlled substances finding their way into many vape products. This indicates an increase in criminal sophistication in the illicit market for vaping, making further measures to manage vaping and enforce the ban of utmost urgency.

Additionally, the stringent and hardline law enforcement efforts to combat vaping could eventually cause a strain on the law enforcement entities and their resources in Singapore, including the HSA, Ministry of Education, Singapore Police Force, and Immigration & Checkpoints Authority (ICA). Therefore, early intervention to nip the problem in the bud is critical in ensuring the situation remains manageable for our law enforcement entities.

2. Key Issues

1. Proliferation of Illicit Online and Cross-Border Supply

Singapore's zero-tolerance vaping policy is seriously threatened by the rapid expansion of illegal internet and cross-border supply pathways. Through online marketplaces, encrypted messaging platforms like Telegram, and foreign retailers, consumers may quickly and anonymously



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purchase vape products. These goods sometimes enter Singapore through small shipments and personal imports, making it difficult to detect them because of the massive volume of business and difficulties in detecting vape products at the borders. Enforcement agencies must handle constantly evolving evasion tactics in addition to the sheer amount of incoming traffic. While Malaysia has announced intentions to ban vapes nationwide, accessibility challenges are likely to persist rather than diminish. (Straits Times, 2025) Existing stockpiles, informal distribution networks, and black-market sellers may continue operating even after the ban. This may potentially divert illicit flows towards neighbouring countries such as Singapore. Furthermore, smuggling may intensify as restrictions tighten regionally, mirroring patterns observed in other prohibited goods. This highlights the need for Singapore to augment strict border enforcement with enhanced digital monitoring, regional collaboration, and disruption of online supply networks instead of depending only on traditional interdiction tactics.

2. Youth Vulnerability and Persistent Misconceptions

Due to common perceptions that vaping is "safer" or "healthier" than traditional cigarettes, young people continue to find it appealing despite Singapore's explicit legislative bans. Public health is undermined by social media trends, peer pressure, and curiosity, which further normalise and glamorize vaping. Consequently, despite severe punishments, teenagers continue to be at risk for addiction. Therefore, controlling vaping necessitates not just a deterrent but also ongoing education initiatives that explicitly refute false information, make use of youth-focused platforms, and more successfully include parents and schools to lower demand at its source. (Health Sciences Authority, 2024)

3. Emergence of Drug-Laced Vape Products

Singapore's legislative dilemma is made considerably more difficult by the rise of drug-laced vape goods, such as "K-Pods," which contain etomidate. Users may unintentionally cross over into drug offenses, which carry significantly harsher fines and far higher health hazards. This raises the stakes for both consumers and authorities by obfuscating the distinction between drug



enforcement and tobacco control. Therefore, in order to guarantee that consumers are aware of the hazards involved and to enable law enforcement to react quickly to new hybrid goods that take advantage of legislative loopholes, Singapore needs to improve testing capabilities, public awareness, and legal clarity. (Reuters, 2024)

3. Scope of Debate

Scope of Debate (QARMA 1): Evaluating Singapore’s multi-dimensional approach to counter vaping

Singapore has long maintained a zero-tolerance approach towards drugs and controlled substances, a philosophy that extends to its strict prohibition of e-vaporisers. Despite this, vaping has emerged as a growing concern in recent years, particularly among youths. (Straits Times, 2025) The rise of illicit vapes containing dangerous substances such as etomidate has heightened public alarm, with increasing cases of severe health complications and deaths suggesting that deterrence alone may be insufficient. (Straits Times, 2025)

In response, the government has adopted harsher enforcement measures, including increased penalties, school-based disciplinary actions, criminal charges, and mandatory rehabilitation programmes. (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2025) These measures signal the seriousness with which the state views the issue and aim to deter both consumption and supply.

Delegates must evaluate how effective these measures have been in curbing vaping, particularly among youths. This includes assessing whether enforcement has meaningfully reduced demand and accessibility, or whether it has merely driven vaping further underground, making detection and prevention more difficult.

High Enforcement and Resource Burden



Maintaining a zero-tolerance stance on vaping demands sustained and resource-intensive enforcement across multiple agencies, including Health Sciences Authority, Customs, Police, and schools. Investigations into online sellers, school-based interventions, and enhanced customs screening place continual pressure on manpower and budgets. Over time, this raises questions about enforcement sustainability and opportunity costs, particularly as agencies must also address other emerging public health and security threats. (Gov.sg, 2025) Policymakers must therefore consider how to optimise enforcement through targeted operations, technology-enabled monitoring, and prioritisation of high-impact cases rather than relying solely on broad-based enforcement.

Balancing Deterrence with Rehabilitation

A central challenge in managing vaping lies in balancing strong deterrence against supply networks with rehabilitative approaches for users, especially youths. While firm penalties are necessary to signal zero tolerance and disrupt organised distribution, overly punitive measures risk criminalising young offenders and entrenching long-term social harm. (Ministry of Social and Family Development, 2024) Singapore must carefully calibrate its response by differentiating between suppliers and consumers, expanding counselling and cessation programmes, and strengthening diversionary pathways for first-time or young offenders. This balanced approach aims to uphold public health objectives while maintaining social trust and preventing the normalisation of vaping within the next generation.

Scope of Debate (QARMA 2): Balancing Enforcement, Public Health, and Harm Reduction

While strict enforcement aims to deter use and prevent harm, it has also sparked debate over proportionality and long-term impact. Critics argue that heavy punitive measures, especially when applied to youths, may lead to lasting consequences such as criminal records that hinder



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rehabilitation and reintegration into society. This raises concerns over whether an enforcement-heavy approach sufficiently addresses vaping as a public health issue.

Beyond punishment, managing vaping requires addressing its underlying drivers, including social influence, online marketing, and misinformation about the safety of vaping. Organisations such as the National Council Against Drug Abuse, alongside schools, community groups, and non-governmental organisations, play a role in prevention, education, and rehabilitation. (SMU Newsroom, 2025) Delegates should assess whether these efforts are adequately coordinated and whether greater emphasis should be placed on early intervention and treatment.

Additionally, Singapore may examine foreign approaches to vaping, ranging from harm reduction and regulation to outright bans. While some countries have legalised vaping as an alternative to smoking, they have also experienced sharp increases in youth usage and public health challenges. The cabinet must therefore evaluate which elements, if any, are applicable to Singapore's social and governance context, and how best to balance deterrence, rehabilitation, and public health protection.

4. Key Stakeholders

Working adults in Singapore are an important stakeholder in how vaping should be managed, as they are affected as potential users. While vaping is often framed as a youth issue, adult usage also poses long-term health risks that could increase future healthcare burdens and reduce labour productivity. Effective management of vaping through public health education and accessible rehabilitation allows working adults by protecting their long-term health and maintaining a healthy workforce. However, overly punitive enforcement may create anxiety or stigma among adult users who are addicted but reluctant or scared to seek help.

Students are also an important stakeholder, as youths constitute a significant proportion of vaping offenders. Vaping undermines school environments and raises serious concerns about



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addiction, discipline, and student welfare. Many students get addicted to vaping due to curiosity or peer pressure and to seek the feeling of resembling adult-like behaviour with tobacco. Poorly managed and very punitive vaping policies risk criminalising students at a young and naive age, which would cause long-term negative consequences for their education and employment prospects. Hence, well-designed preventive education and rehabilitation system responses can reduce youth vaping while maintaining deterrence. Students are directly affected by whether schools and authorities emphasise punishment or rehabilitation, and they, as the youth of Singapore, ultimately determine whether long-term anti-vaping efforts are successful.

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and voluntary social support groups are also key stakeholders as they play an important role in helping to prevent individuals from vaping through educational campaigns and talks, and provide support to those addicted to vaping, such as providing rehabilitation and counselling. Examples of these support groups are the WE CARE community service and the Thye Hua Kwan Moral Charities, which help individuals recover from addiction. With the rise in accessibility of vapes, these groups are seeing a rise in individuals seeking help. Stricter regulations can play a part in reducing the number of individuals addicted and requiring assistance from these support groups.

However, very punitive laws against vaping might overly stigmatise vaping to the point where individuals addicted are afraid to reach out to these support groups and ask for help. Hence, the government has to reach a delicate balance of imposing laws that are strict enough to reduce the number of individuals who vape while also ensuring that those who require assistance to quit vaping are able to get the support they need.

5. Potential Solutions

A. Strengthen Enforcement, Surveillance, and Deterrence Measures

Singapore can expand cross-agency taskforces, intensify checkpoint inspections, enhance postal screening for small-item shipments, and partner with digital platforms to identify and disrupt



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online vape sales networks. This would disrupt the supply chain of e-cigarettes and prevent them from being accessible to the people in Singapore. Cross-agency task forces also prevent unnecessary red tape that makes investigating and catching perpetrators tedious, allowing law enforcement to quickly and efficiently catch those supplying and purchasing vapes. Strong deterrence signals zero tolerance, disrupts organised trafficking networks, and limits youth access. Moreover, Singapore can impose heavier penalties for offences involving etomidate-laced vapes, repeat trafficking, and distribution to minors, including longer custodial sentences, mandatory rehabilitation, and stricter immigration penalties for foreigners.

While enforcement disrupts supply chains, black markets adapt quickly, and punitive measures may disproportionately affect minors who might not be able to get rehabilitation easily due to the strict laws and practices against vapes. Many youths start vaping due to curiosity and peer pressure, not malicious intent. Having very strict laws and strong enforcement against vapes can lead to naive minors getting punished severely without having the proper chance to properly rehabilitate naive and addicted youths. Furthermore, such intricate taskforces and technological devices to detect vapes can also lead to fiscal constraints and be a financial burden to the Singapore government, which could use the funds for other social projects.

B. Expand Structured Rehabilitation and Diversion Pathways

Introducing diversion programmes for youth offenders represents a preventive and rehabilitative approach to addressing vaping in Singapore. Instead of relying primarily on punitive enforcement, diversion programmes focus on counselling, rehabilitation, and structured community supervision, coordinated with organisations such as the National Council Against Drug Abuse (NCADA), schools, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). This approach reframes youth vaping as a public health and behavioural issue rather than solely a criminal one, with the aim of reducing long-term harm and preventing escalation into sustained nicotine addiction.



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Despite these advantages, the effectiveness of diversion programmes varies significantly depending on individual compliance and programme quality. Youths may not fully engage with counselling or cessation support, especially if participation is perceived as compulsory rather than meaningful. Behavioural change ultimately depends on whether individuals choose to internalise the advice and apply it in their daily lives.

Additionally, the long-term effectiveness of education-based interventions remains uncertain. Despite decades of public health campaigns against cigarette smoking in Singapore, smoking persists, particularly among certain demographics. This suggests that education alone may not be sufficient to drastically reduce vaping, especially in the presence of social influences, product appeal, and misinformation.

C. Strengthen Preventive Education and Community-Based Interventions

Implement sustained school-based education modules, parent engagement tools and targeted social media campaigns to counter misinformation about vaping harms. Education on the harms of vaping and how it can quickly lead to addiction will allow many youths and adults to make more informed decisions, as they are more aware of the health risks that are prevalent when they vape, which might also act as a deterrent against vaping. These programmes allow those who are addicted to vaping to be able to have a support system to help them stop vaping without being stigmatised or heavily punished. These programmes are particularly beneficial for naive youths who might have accidentally become addicted to vaping due to curiosity or peer pressure.

However, behavioural change is gradual and may not deter high-risk users immediately, especially those who are severely addicted. Education alone might not be a strong enough motivation to stop curious people in Singapore from vaping or to get those who are addicted to stop vaping.

6. QARMAs (Questions a Resolution Must Answer)



- 1) How effective have Singapore's current measures been in addressing the rise of vaping?
- 2) What balance should Singapore strike between public health protection, enforcement practicality, and harm reduction?

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