

Updated May 9, 2025

U.S.-Singapore Relations

Overview

With a land area about three times that of Washington, DC, and a population of 6 million, the city-state of Singapore has long punched above its weight diplomatically. Its stable government, strong economy, educated citizenry, and strategic setting along key shipping lanes afford it considerable leverage and a prominent role in regional and global affairs. Singapore has been a stalwart U.S. partner in both trade and security cooperation, and is an advocate of a strong U.S. role in the Indo-Pacific. At the same time, Singapore's leaders aim to strike a balance among powers and maintain close relations with China.

The U.S.-Singapore Free Trade Agreement (FTA)—the United States' first bilateral FTA with an Asian country—went into effect in January 2004 and trade has increased since. In 2024, Singapore was the 18th-largest U.S. trading partner, with \$89 billion in total two-way goods trade. The United States had a \$2.8 billion goods trade surplus with Singapore in 2024. The city-state is a destination for substantial U.S. foreign direct investment (FDI), with over 5,800 U.S. companies operating there. Singapore is deeply dependent on trade, with overall trade volumes annually totaling more than three times annual GDP.

Mutual security interests undergird ties between Singapore and the United States. Although Singapore is not a U.S. treaty ally, many observers consider the U.S. security partnership with the city-state to be one of the strongest in the Indo-Pacific region. In August 2021, the two nations announced new agreements to address climate change, cybersecurity, and supply chain resilience. The two also cooperate on the U.S.-Singapore Third Country Training Program, which has provided capacity-building programs for other Southeast Asian governments since 2011.

Singapore's Politics

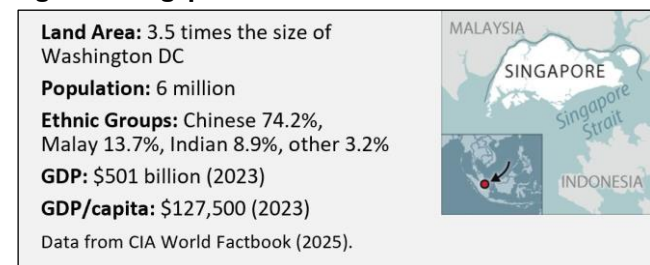
The People's Action Party (PAP) has won every general election in the city-state since the end of the British colonial era in 1959, aided by its success in delivering consistent economic growth, as well as Singapore's fragmented opposition and electoral procedures that strongly favor the ruling party. In recent years, some observers have pointed to changes in the political and social environment that may portend more political pluralism, including generational changes and an increasingly international outlook among Singaporeans. The PAP remains dominant, however. In the most recent nationwide elections, held in May 2025, the PAP won 87 of 97 seats in parliament, with 65% of the popular vote, up from 61% five years earlier. The Workers' Party won 10 seats, the same number it had won in the past election. About 96% of eligible Singaporeans voted, as they are legally required to do except in uncontested races.

Lawrence Wong, now 52, took office as Prime Minister in May 2024, succeeding Lee Hsien Loong, who had led Singapore for nearly 20 years. Wong is the fourth Prime

Minister in the nation's history and the first born after Singapore's independence. Wong attended the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. He held numerous government leadership positions before becoming Deputy Prime Minister and successor to Lee, and won favor for his handling of the city-state's COVID-19 pandemic response. Political analysts say the PAP's strong performance in the May 2025 polls has strengthened Wong's position as Singapore's leader.

Few analysts believe that Singapore's broad policy direction will shift under the new leadership slate. Still, Wong's elevation marks at least a symbolic shift. Singapore's first prime minister, Lee Kuan Yew, led the country for 32 years and was widely heralded as the architect of Singapore's success as a nation and its rapid economic development, although much of the country's authoritarian practices derived from Lee's efforts to constrain political opposition. Lee Hsien Loong is the senior Lee's eldest son, and between the two of them they served as Prime Minister for most of Singapore's history.

Figure 1. Singapore



Source: CIA World Factbook (2025).

Despite the generational shifts, the PAP still acknowledges a "contract" with the Singaporean people, under which some individual rights are curtailed in the interest of maintaining a stable and prosperous multiethnic society. PAP leaders also speak of a need to reform the party to respond to the public's concerns, which appear to focus on the rising cost of living, wealth disparities, and an influx of immigrants. Of Singapore's 6 million residents, some 2.4 million are noncitizens—500,000 permanent residents and 1.9 million non-residents who work in Singapore.

The government has long taken a hard line on corruption, and attributed much of its success to clean government. However, Singapore weathered a series of corruption scandals in 2023. Transportation Minister S. Iswaran was arrested as part of an anti-graft investigation and placed on leave from the government. The Speaker of Parliament and a Member of Parliament were forced to resign over an "inappropriate relationship," and the Foreign and Home Affairs Ministers came under parliamentary scrutiny for potentially renting government-owned properties at below market rates, though they were ultimately found not guilty.

The United States has criticized some aspects of Singapore's political system. The U.S. State Department's *Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2023* described "serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media, including the enforcement of criminal libel laws to limit expression." The political careers of several opposition politicians have been marked by characteristic obstacles erected by the ruling party, including being forced to declare bankruptcy for failing to pay libel damages to prominent PAP members.

U.S.-Singapore Defense Cooperation

The 2005 U.S.-Singapore Strategic Framework Agreement (SFA), augmented by the 2015 Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA), build on the U.S. strategy of "places-not-bases"—a concept that aims to provide the U.S. military with access to foreign facilities on a largely rotational basis, thereby avoiding sensitive sovereignty issues. The agreements allow the United States to operate resupply vessels from Singapore and to use a naval base, a ship repair facility, and an airfield on the island-state. The U.S. Navy also maintains a logistical command unit in Singapore that serves to coordinate warship deployment and logistics in the region.

Singapore's Changi Naval base is one of the few facilities in the world that can accommodate a U.S. aircraft carrier, allowing for regular port visits. Singapore-stationed U.S. littoral combat ships and P-8 *Poseidon* aircraft have undertaken patrols in the South China Sea, participated in exercises with other countries, and provided disaster relief. Singaporean troops have served in noncombat roles at U.S. Central Command and at the Combined Joint Task Force's headquarters.

The United States and Singapore hold dialogues and other cooperative initiatives on a range of security issues, including cybersecurity, counterterrorism, and space. In August 2021, the United States and Singapore signed three memoranda of understanding to deepen communication on cybersecurity, and in 2023, they added an annual Critical and Emerging Technology Dialogue to foster cooperation on areas such as artificial intelligence, the digital economy, biotechnology, quantum technology, critical infrastructure, and defense innovation. Singapore also has played a role in global counterpiracy efforts, including serving as the Commander of the Gulf of Aden counterpiracy Combined Task Force-151 in 2018.

Singapore is a substantial market for U.S. military goods, with \$8.38 billion in active sales under the Foreign Military Sales system as of January 2025. In 2024, Singapore announced plans to purchase eight F-35s, adding to previously announced plans to buy 12 F-35s. Over 1,000 Singapore military personnel are assigned to U.S. military bases, where they participate in training, exercises, and professional military education.

Law Enforcement Cooperation

The United States and Singapore engage in ongoing law enforcement cooperation. Singapore is a transit point for millions of air passengers annually, and its busy port is a major trans-shipment hub. The State Department's 2023 *Country Reports on Terrorism* said, "Singapore was a committed, active, and effective CT [counterterrorism]

partner." Among U.S. priorities are improving Singapore's port security, where the Department of Homeland Security hopes to see Singapore make greater use of advance manifests to screen containers through its busy port, as well as strengthening the bilateral extradition treaty.

Singapore's Economy and U.S. Trade Relations

Singapore's GDP per capita was the world's second highest in 2024, at over \$127,500. Its economy is dominated by financial and trade services, and its manufacturing industry is focused on specialized products such as high-end electronics and pharmaceuticals. In 2024, its port handled about 41 million 20-foot containers, making it the world's largest trans-shipment port. China is Singapore's largest trading partner. The United States is its biggest foreign investor: in 2022, the stock of U.S. FDI in Singapore totaled \$309 billion.

As a highly trade-dependent economy, Singapore has concluded at least 19 bilateral and multilateral FTAs. Its leaders have expressed concern about the Trump Administration's tariff policy. On April 8, 2025, Prime Minister Wong told Parliament that the initial U.S. tariff announcement marked "a profound turning point. We are entering a new phase in global affairs—one that is more arbitrary, protectionist and dangerous." In April, the Trump Administration imposed the 10% universal tariff rate on Singapore.

Singapore's Regional Role

Singapore is a founding member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the 10-member regional forum that helps Southeast Asia's relatively small countries manage regional conflicts and influence regional diplomacy, particularly vis-à-vis China. Singapore portrays itself as a valuable balancer and intermediary in international affairs, using its ties to all major powers to promote cooperation and providing a bridge to developing countries in fora such as international climate negotiations.

Singapore has praised greater U.S. engagement in Asia, yet has been careful to warn that anti-China rhetoric or efforts to "contain" China's rise would be counterproductive. Singapore's ties with Beijing are multifaceted and extend to cultural, political, educational, and, increasingly, defense exchanges. Singapore adheres to a one-China policy, but has extensive relations with Taiwan, including an agreement signed in 1975 that allows Singapore troops to train in Taiwan. A 2024 Pew Research Center report found that 67% of Singaporeans viewed China and its leadership positively.

Some observers believe Singapore could play an important role in diplomacy surrounding the political crisis in Burma (Myanmar), where the military seized power in a February 2021, coup d'état. Singapore is one of Burma's largest trading partners and sources of direct investment, and reportedly has been an important banking and health care center in the past for senior Burmese military officials.

Ben Dolven, Specialist in Asian Affairs

IF10228

Disclaimer

This document was prepared by the Congressional Research Service (CRS). CRS serves as nonpartisan shared staff to congressional committees and Members of Congress. It operates solely at the behest of and under the direction of Congress. Information in a CRS Report should not be relied upon for purposes other than public understanding of information that has been provided by CRS to Members of Congress in connection with CRS's institutional role. CRS Reports, as a work of the United States Government, are not subject to copyright protection in the United States. Any CRS Report may be reproduced and distributed in its entirety without permission from CRS. However, as a CRS Report may include copyrighted images or material from a third party, you may need to obtain the permission of the copyright holder if you wish to copy or otherwise use copyrighted material.