International rankings and their limits

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The Corruption Perceptions Index

Singapore's reputation for clean government is reflected in every international comparison of corruption. In Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index for 2025 it scored 84 of 100 points and ranked third of 182 countries, unchanged from the previous year and the best result in the Asia-Pacific region. The best score worldwide was 89.[1] Switzerland scored 80 and ranked sixth, Hong Kong 76 and twelfth, the United Arab Emirates 69 and twenty-first.[2]

The index measures perceptions of corruption in the public sector, compiled from surveys of experts and business people. It leaves out corruption in the private sector. Nor does it measure the extent to which a jurisdiction's banks hold the proceeds of corruption committed elsewhere. A financial centre can therefore score very well on the index while serving as a destination for illicit money from abroad. The same gap applies to Switzerland, Luxembourg and the United Kingdom, all of which rank highly on the index while facing recurrent cases involving foreign kleptocrats.

The World Justice Project Rule of Law Index

The most detailed comparative measurement is the Rule of Law Index of the World Justice Project. It draws on more than 215,000 household surveys and 4,100 surveys of legal practitioners and experts and covers 143 countries and jurisdictions in its 2025 edition. Singapore ranked sixteenth with a score of 0.78, the same rounded score as the United Kingdom and Japan in fourteenth and fifteenth place. It ranked fourth of fifteen in East Asia and the Pacific, behind New Zealand, Australia and Japan.[3]

The aggregate figure conceals a striking spread. Singapore ranked second in the world for the absence of corruption and for order and security, third for regulatory enforcement, sixth for civil justice and eighth for criminal justice. It ranked 28th for constraints on government powers, 35th for open government and 37th for fundamental rights.[4] The pattern is the clearest available summary of the Singapore model. The factors that matter most to a commercial party, such as honest officials, consistent enforcement of regulations and efficient civil courts, are at the top of the world. The factors that concern the relationship between citizen and state, such as checks on the executive, freedom of expression and access to government information, are in the upper middle.

The World Justice Project also noted a movement in the 2025 edition. It recorded that freedom of opinion and expression had declined in Singapore, as in 73 per cent of the countries surveyed, and that the indicators measuring whether the judiciary limits executive power and whether civil and criminal justice are free from improper government influence had declined in Singapore as in a majority of

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countries. Civil justice did not weaken in Singapore, while it did in 68 per cent of countries.[5] The changes were small, since the overall score rose by less than one per cent. They show that the index is sensitive to precisely those dimensions in which Singapore differs from the liberal democracies that lead the table. The 2026 edition, published on 21 October 2026, moved Singapore up to fourteenth place with a score of 0.79 and to third in its region, ahead of Japan. The pattern of its factor ranks hardly changed: first for order and security, second for the absence of corruption, 27th for constraints on government powers and 36th for both open government and fundamental rights.[6]

From *Doing Business* to the democracy indices

The *Doing Business* series, whose figures on contract enforcement were cited above, no longer exists. The World Bank discontinued it on 16 September 2021 after reviews of data irregularities in its 2018 and 2020 editions.[7] Its figures remain useful as an indication of the speed and cost of litigation in 2019. Their successor, the World Bank's *Business Ready* project, uses a different method, so that the two series cannot be compared directly.

Indices of political freedom give a different picture. Freedom House rated Singapore "Partly Free" in 2025, with a score of 48 of 100, consisting of 19 of 40 points for political rights and 29 of 60 for civil liberties. On its question whether there is an independent judiciary it gave Singapore one of four points, while it gave three of four points for the strength of safeguards against official corruption. The Democracy Index of the Economist Intelligence Unit classifies Singapore as a "flawed democracy".[8]

What the rankings measure and what they miss

The divergence between the World Bank's first place for enforcing contracts and Freedom House's one point out of four for judicial independence calls for explanation. The two measures ask different questions. The World Bank asked how long and how much it costs to enforce a sales contract between two private companies. Freedom House asks whether the judiciary is independent of the government in politically sensitive cases, including defamation suits brought by political leaders and cases involving the opposition. A court can be fast, competent and impartial between private parties while being perceived as deferential to the state in political cases. Investors read the first measure, while human rights organisations read the second.

Three further limits apply to all rankings. They rely to a large extent on perceptions, which follow reputation with a delay and can be influenced by public relations. They aggregate very different questions into single scores, which hide the spread that the World Justice Project factors reveal. Most of them say little about the jurisdiction's role as a destination for foreign illicit funds, which is the integrity risk most relevant to a financial centre. The money laundering case of 2023, with assets worth about three billion Singapore dollars, occurred in a jurisdiction ranked among the five least corrupt in the world.[9] The case shows that a clean public sector, although necessary for a sound financial centre, must be complemented by effective controls on the money that enters it.

For a financial centre, the useful reading of the rankings is therefore selective. Singapore's positions on the absence of corruption, regulatory enforcement and civil justice measure the qualities that make

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contracts enforceable and officials reliable. Its positions on fundamental rights and constraints on government measure the political environment in which those qualities are produced. A wealthy family deciding where to establish its family office will weigh both, because the first protects its assets and the second shapes its long-term confidence in the place.

Notes

1. Transparency International, country page "Singapore" (transparency.org, accessed November 2026): "Singapore has a score of 84 this year, with a change of 0 since last year, meaning it ranks 3 out of 182 countries." Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau, press release of 28 April 2026: third least corrupt of 182 countries, "84 out of 100", top-ranked in the Asia-Pacific region. Wikipedia, "Corruption in Singapore" (accessed November 2026): in the 2025 index "the best score was 89 (ranked 1st)", the global average was 42 and the Asia-Pacific average 45.
2. Transparency International, country pages "Switzerland", "Hong Kong" and "United Arab Emirates" (transparency.org, accessed November 2026): Switzerland 80/100, rank 6/182; Hong Kong 76/100, rank 12/182; United Arab Emirates 69/100, rank 21/182.
3. World Justice Project, "Singapore Ranks 16 out of 143 in the WJP Rule of Law Index", press release, 28 October 2025 (worldjusticeproject.org): the Index "relies on more than 215,000 household surveys and 4,100 legal practitioner and expert surveys" and covers "143 countries and jurisdictions". World Justice Project, *WJP Rule of Law Index 2025* (worldjusticeproject.org, opened November 2026), global ranking table: "14 United Kingdom 0.78", "15 Japan 0.78", "16 Singapore 0.78", "24 Hong Kong SAR, China 0.72", "37 United Arab Emirates 0.64"; regional table for East Asia and the Pacific. World Justice Project, press release of 28 October 2025: Singapore ranks 4th of 15 in the region.
4. World Justice Project, "Singapore Ranks 16 out of 143 in the WJP Rule of Law Index", press release, 28 October 2025, factor score rankings: Constraints on Government Powers 28/143; Absence of Corruption 2/143; Open Government 35/143; Fundamental Rights 37/143; Order and Security 2/143; Regulatory Enforcement 3/143; Civil Justice 6/143; Criminal Justice 8/143.
5. World Justice Project, press release of 28 October 2025: "Freedom of opinion and expression" declined in 73% of countries, "including Singapore"; indicators on whether the judiciary limits executive power and whether civil and criminal justice are free from improper government influence declined in 61%, 67% and 62% of countries, "This includes Singapore"; civil justice weakened in 68% of countries, "but not in Singapore".
6. World Justice Project, "Singapore Ranks 14 out of 143 in the WJP Rule of Law Index", press release, 21 October 2026 (worldjusticeproject.org, opened November 2026): overall rank 14/143, regional rank 3/15; factor ranks Constraints on Government Powers 27/143, Absence of Corruption 2/143, Open Government 36/143, Fundamental Rights 36/143, Order and Security 1/143, Regulatory Enforcement 3/143, Civil Justice 6/143, Criminal Justice 8/143. World Justice Project, *WJP Rule of Law Index 2026* (opened November 2026), global table: "14 Singapore 0.79", "15 Japan 0.78"; regional table for East Asia and the Pacific: New Zealand, Australia, Singapore, Japan.
7. World Bank Group, "World Bank Group to Discontinue Doing Business Report", statement, 16 September 2021 (worldbank.org, opened November 2026): data irregularities in *Doing Business 2018* and *Doing Business 2020* reported internally in June 2020; "management has taken the decision to discontinue the Doing Business report". The economies affected (reported elsewhere as China, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Azerbaijan) are not named in this statement or in the World Bank statement of 27 August 2020.
8. Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2025: Singapore* (freedomhouse.org, accessed November 2026): status "Partly Free", Global Freedom Score 48/100, political rights 19/40, civil liberties 29/60; indicator F1 "Is there an independent judiciary?" 1/4; indicator C2 "Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective?" 3/4. Wikipedia, "Politics of Singapore" (accessed November 2026): the Democracy Index "rated Singapore as a 'flawed democracy' in 2025".

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9. Wikipedia, “2023 Singapore money laundering case” (accessed November 2026): raids on 15 August 2023; ten foreign nationals arrested; “assets worth 3 billion SGD”; all ten convicted with sentences of about 13 to 17 months; S$944 million surrendered by the ten convicts.

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