



Written by [Angeline Tan](#) on August 24, 2022

Singapore Repeals Sodomy Law While Maintaining Status Quo on Marriage

SINGAPORE — Singapore will repeal Section 377A of the Penal Code and decriminalize sodomy, the country’s Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong announced on Sunday (August 21), affirming speculation that the government might relent on the law outlawing sex between men.

However, to pre-empt a major shift in societal norms, the Singapore government will also amend the Constitution to safeguard the definition of marriage as a union between one man and one woman. Prime Minister Lee highlighted that only marriage between a man and a woman is recognized in Singapore. The prime minister further elaborated that such an amendment was necessary, as Law Minister K. Shanmugan and the attorney general had counseled that there was a “significant risk” of 377A being struck down in a future court challenge on the grounds that it breached the Equal Protection provision in the Constitution.

Lee stated, “The legal definition is contained in the Interpretation Act and the Women’s Charter. We have to amend the Constitution to protect it, and we will do so.”

The prime minister further noted that currently, the definition of marriage can be challenged on constitutional grounds, such as what happened to 377A: “If one day such a challenge succeeds here, it could cause same-sex marriages to become recognised in Singapore.”

The prime minister also expressed concern that such adversarial tactics as pushing the LGBT agenda through litigation would emphasize societal differences and polarize society.

Moreover, the prime minister said that although most Singaporeans will acknowledge the repeal of 377A, they do not want this action to catalyze a major shift in societal norms, including how Singapore defines marriage, educational materials for children in schools, what is broadcast on national television and in cinemas, or what is typically permissible public behavior. This is because many national policies in Singapore, including education, public housing, film classification, adoption rules, and advertising standards, are based on the definition of marriage as between a man and a woman. Thus the prime minister expressed the approach taken by the Singapore government as one that constitutionally defends the traditional definition of marriage and seeks to balance different views among Singaporeans.

Furthermore, Prime Minister Lee’s views were echoed by his slated successor, Deputy Prime Minister



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Lawrence Wong, an alumnus of the University of Wisconsin-Madison. In an interview conducted by *Channel News Asia*, Wong clarified his stance and that of the ruling People's Action Party (PAP), that the present legal definition of marriage between one man and one woman will remain.

Wong said,

Well, let me be very clear. The government will continue to uphold our family-centered policies. We are fully committed to that, and we will continue to uphold marriage as defined as between man and woman.

The PM himself said this very clearly in his speech — the PAP government will not change the current definition of marriage.

So this will not change, this will not happen under the watch of the current prime minister, and it will not happen under my watch — if the PAP were to win the next General Election.

After Prime Minister Lee's announcement on the repeal of 377A, various government ministries and statutory boards reiterated their stances that the prevailing definitions of marriage and family will be upheld. For instance, Singapore schools and education institutions will continue to emphasize traditional family values, the Ministry of Education (MOE) said in a statement. The Education Ministry announced that its education policies and curriculum will still be based on the prevailing family values and social norms, including family as a "cornerstone of our social fabric," and marriage between a man and woman. The ministry further elaborated that schools and institutes of higher learning must remain safe spaces for students to acquire an education. On the contrary, schools should not be places for advocacy for "socially divisive issues."

Also, the Ministry of Communication and Information (MCI) of Singapore said that existing policies on media content would remain. MCI stated,

MCI and the Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA) regulate media content to protect younger audiences from age-inappropriate content, and at the same time enable mature audiences to make informed choices over a diverse range of content. Media content with higher reach and impact is subject to more stringent requirements. To understand the community's views, IMDA regularly consults its advisory committees, made up of members of the public from all walks of life, on specific titles as well as content guidelines and regulations. Our content regulatory approach has to be sensitive to societal norms and values. We will continue to take reference from prevailing norms. LGBT media content will continue to warrant higher age ratings.

Other Singapore ministries, including the Ministry of Home Affairs, have stated that foreigners and foreign companies should not interfere in domestic Singaporean issues when it comes to LGBTQ+ advocacy and activism. The Home Affairs Ministry's statement was in response to a recent visit by U.S. Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, in which she made comments that sympathized with the LGBTQ+ cause.

Opponents of the move to decriminalize sodomy indicated that the changes should not obstruct their religious freedom to express views on public morality nor cause any "reverse discrimination" on those who do not advocate for homosexuality. The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Singapore published a



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statement on its [website](#) and [Facebook](#) page, stating that it does not desire to outlaw members of the LGBTQ community. Nonetheless, the Catholic Archdiocese called for the defense of family and marriage “according to natural law.” It further elaborated that it is vital to enshrine and define marriage as between a man and a woman in the Constitution before Section 377A is removed. Here is the Catholic Church’s entire statement:

With regards to the repeal of S377A, we do not seek to criminalize the LGBTQ, for they too are children of God and loved by Him.

However, we seek protection of the family and marriage according to natural law; and our rights to teach and practise them unhindered. We must not allow reverse discrimination to take place against those who believe in marriage as defined between a man and a woman.

To ensure that this protection is not challenged easily, it is thus necessary that it be enshrined and defined in our Constitution before S377A is removed.

Otherwise, we will be taking a slippery road of no return, weakening the fabric of a strong society which is founded on the bedrock of holistic families and marriages.

We take comfort that this safeguard will be looked at seriously in Parliament as assured by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong.



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