This paper will discuss the level of religious freedom in Singapore as well as various limitations on this freedom as imposed by law.

**Singapore’s Demographic**

Singapore is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society. The most followed religion is Buddhism (33%), followed by Christianity (18%), Islam (15%), Taoism (10%) and Hinduism (5%). Close to 20% of the population is non-religious or are adherents of other religions. There is no state religion and the Government of Singapore is a secular institution.

**Provision of Freedom of Religion in Singapore**

Article 15 of the Singapore Constitution provides that every citizen has a right to profess, practice or propagate his/her religious belief as long as these activities do not come into conflict with any other laws relating to public order, public health, or morality.

The government ensures that there is a multitude of religious organisations and worship places in every neighbourhood to cater to all denominations. There are also racial quotas within housing flat blocks to ensure a good diversity of residents to promote inter-racial and inter-religious interaction. Singapore celebrates every major religion’s important days (e.g. Good Friday, Vesak Day etc.). There is also a Sedition Act in place to counter any bigots who attempt to incite inter-religious tension via actions, speech or publications.

The government has also set up the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (MUIS) to oversee the Muslim community, who the government is required to protect under Constitutional law, since they are the “indigenous people of Singapore”. This, along with the Administration of Muslim Law Act, allows Muslims to abide by Muslim Law where applicable; for example, they are allowed to engage in polygamy. This ensures that their religious intentions are not bounded by state law (which prohibits polygamy) and guarantees their freedom in practicing Islam.

An interesting phenomenon in Singapore is the harmony between religious groups in Singapore, which has led to some merging of places of worship. A prime example would be the Loyang Tua Pek Kong Temple, which is a place of worship for Taoists, Hindus and Muslims. While a unique case, it is reflective of the larger social situation – religion is often not a divisive factor, and if anything, serves to unite the people.

**Limits/ Impositions in Singapore**
While there is no state-imposed religion or religious boundaries, all religious groups must be registered legally and subject themselves to regular government checks in order to own property, hold public meetings etc. The state is allowed to outlaw any religious groups as it sees fit, and has in fact done so to the Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Unification Church. The Jehovah’s Witnesses were outlawed, as their refusal to salute the national flag and to perform military service, which is compulsory in Singapore, was deemed detrimental to public order and national security – a major reason for allowing or disallowing any religion.

All forms of religious instruction are banned in public schools and overt religious expression/ attire is disallowed (e.g. Muslim headscarf) as such expression is seen as heightening religious differences. With regard to the specific concessions allowed for Muslims, it must be noted that the government reserves the right to deny any actions undertaken under Muslim Law, such as preventing polygamous marriage if they deem the actors to be economically unstable (amongst other reasons).

As Singapore is a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic society, if any religious activities are seen as disrupting the social order and causing inter-religious tension, they are deemed unlawful and a suitable punishment will be meted out. This attitude is summed up by the Minister of Home Affairs, "We cannot have unbridled freedom of religion at the expense of nation-building and social cohesion, or to such an extent that it foments divisiveness among our people."

References:
