

Support for gay rights seen growing in Singapore

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Singapore has seen "distinct shifts" in attitudes to gay rights in the last five years, with support for same-sex marriage rising, a survey released on Thursday showed.

Nearly six in 10 of those aged between 18 and 25 believe same-sex marriage is not wrong, according to the survey by the Institute of Policy Studies, a Singapore-based think-tank.

Although the island remains socially conservative, the poll of 4,015 Singaporeans found opposition to gay marriage had fallen to 60 percent, down from 74 percent when it was last conducted in 2013.

"Overall, Singaporeans remain fairly conservative in their outlook, though there have been distinct shifts on issues surrounding homosexual rights," the Institute said.

"This is especially so among respondents aged between 18 and 25, who were much more liberal about moral issues compared to the respondents aged 65 and above," it added.

The poll, conducted between August 2018 and January 2019, focused on people's views on social, moral and political issues.

The findings come amid a renewed push by gay rights activists in the city-state to overturn a British colonial-era law that bans gay sex.

Two Singaporean men have filed separate petitions to court seeking to legalize gay sex since late last year, after India decriminalized gay sex in a landmark ruling.

Previous legal challenges in Singapore to overturn the ban failed but a prominent diplomat last year called on the gay community to renew legal action against the law.

Under Section 377A of Singapore's Penal Code, a man found to have committed an act of "gross indecency" with another man could be jailed for up to two years, although prosecutions are rare.

The law does not apply to homosexual acts between women.

Johannes Hadi from Ready4Repeal, a coalition that campaigns against Section 377A, said removing the law would help the Asian economic hub to retain and attract talent.

"Having Section 377A in the lawbook, even if it's not enforced, makes Singapore look extremely bad," Hadi, a lawyer, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

"It makes us look old-fashioned, close-minded compared to places like Hong Kong or Shanghai."

A poll of 750 Singaporeans last year by independent market research and consulting firm Ipsos showed 55 percent of respondents still supported the ban.