



JICA Research Institute

*JICA-RI Working Paper*

Human Security in Practice: East Asian Experiences

# Human Security in Singapore: Where Entitlement Feeds Insecurity

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No. 101

March 2015

JICA Research Institute



JICA Research Institute

This paper was prepared as part of a research project on “Human Security in Practice: East Asian Experiences,” organized by the Japan International Cooperation Agency Research Institute (JICA-RI).

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# **Human Security in Singapore: Where Entitlement Feeds Insecurity**

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## **Abstract**

This paper examines the paradoxical development of Human Security in Singapore. Despite achieving a high level of human security nationwide, the heavy top-down approach has not sufficiently empowered the Singaporean society to independently cope with risks at the community level. The study covers the following areas. First, a brief background on Singapore's efforts to achieve high levels of human security is presented. Second, we discuss that the downside risks or inadvertent policy implications for human security are the result of uneven access to, or provision of, protection by the state and a lack of empowerment (i.e., actions that enable people to cope with risks). Third, we give a snapshot of the Singapore government's recent efforts in mitigating the downside risks, particularly after the watershed 2011 general elections. Fourth, the study discusses Singapore's policies in mitigating transnational human security risks. Given Singapore's small size and proximity to other states, the city state is aware of its vulnerability and hence needs to take steps to mitigate transnational risks that would have a spillover effect into Singapore.

## Introduction

When asked about Singapore's development plans for the next 10 years, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong replied, "The purpose of life is not assurance and security (...but) to use that security in order to go and achieve something new and different, and do better than the people who came before you."<sup>1</sup> Such a remark is reflective of two things. First, it acknowledges the efforts of Singapore's pioneer generations, which have borne fruit to provide the relatively high standards of living that most Singaporeans currently enjoy. Singapore is one of the most developed countries in the region and has been able to provide above and beyond the basic human security (HS) needs to the majority population. Since becoming independent in 1965, the country has made impressive strides in the areas of healthcare and education, achieving a literacy rate of 100%, an average life expectancy of 81 years, and average schooling of 10 years.<sup>2</sup> In 2013, Singapore was ranked 18<sup>th</sup> in the global Human Development Index, above developed countries such as Finland, the United Kingdom, and Italy.

Secondly, the remarks reflects PM Lee's thoughts that Singapore's current generation can do even better by overcoming Singapore's physical challenges through innovation and creativity. But doing more may imply desiring and expecting more in return. As development levels increase, so do consumption patterns and expectations of higher standards of living. As a result, achieving basic human security is insufficient, and those with higher-order needs may not be sensitive to the concerns of other sections of the population—such as the ethnic and gender minority communities, migrant workers, and the burgeoning ageing population—that have not necessarily had access to these taken-for-granted basic needs. These issues have become more acute in recent years and the lack of sensitivity to the needs of marginalized communities is a result of Singapore's predominantly pro-economic growth strategies—particularly since the

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<sup>1</sup> Dialogue Session at the IIMPACT Gala Dinner, August, 28 2014, accessed October 14, 2014, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-i0\\_zuGEow0&index=5&list=PLqvAkd0-laMfuTGK5KeJMrwr61v4PrE0p](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-i0_zuGEow0&index=5&list=PLqvAkd0-laMfuTGK5KeJMrwr61v4PrE0p). For More, see <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLqvAkd0-laMfuTGK5KeJMrwr61v4PrE0p>.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Human Development Report 2013; The Rise of the South: Human Progress in a Diverse World* (New York: UNDP, 2013), [http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/reports/14/hdr2013\\_en\\_complete.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/reports/14/hdr2013_en_complete.pdf).

1980s—which in a bid to create efficiency and meritocracy has inadvertently perpetuated a culture of elitism and entitlement.

This therefore requires us to revisit the concept of HS and its relevance to Singapore. While the HS pillars of the “Freedom from Want” and the “Freedom from Fear” are well-established and reflect the seven dimensions of HS in the *Human Development Report 1994*,<sup>3</sup> the third HS pillar, the “Freedom to live in Dignity”—introduced by former United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan in 2005—takes into account nuances within the existing HS issues by highlighting the importance of preventing discriminatory actions that often are ignored.<sup>4</sup> This third pillar is thus a significant aspect to consider in the case of Singapore where the creation of a sense of entitlement has bred a sense of insecurity amongst Singapore citizens as well as some migrant communities. In both these sections of Singapore’s population, the sense of insecurity has particularly acute effects on marginalized groups, as there are limitations on the freedom to live in dignity which thereby compromise the quality of some dimensions of HS.

Given this context, the study will highlight the paradoxical development of HS in Singapore, where despite having achieved a high level of HS provision nationwide, the heavy top-down approach has not sufficiently empowered Singaporean society to cope with risks at the community level.

The study is divided into the following sections. First, it presents a brief background on Singapore’s efforts to achieve high levels of HS. Second, the study discusses that the downside risks or inadvertent policy implications for HS are the result of uneven access to, or provision of, protection by the state and a lack of empowerment (i.e., actions that enable people to cope with

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<sup>3</sup> The seven HS dimensions complement the two pillars of freedoms as advocated by the Commission of HS in 2005. Specifically, the HS pillar on the “Freedom from Want” relates to four HS dimensions that advocate people empowerment — i.e., economic, food, health, and environmental security. The three other HS dimensions — political, personal, and community security — would relate to the HS pillar on the “Freedom from fear” which highlights the importance of protecting communities and individuals from harm.

<sup>4</sup> Kofi Annan, *In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All* (New York: United Nations Publications, 2005), 127-152.

risks). Third, it presents a snapshot of the Singapore government's recent efforts to mitigate downside risks, particularly after the watershed 2011 general elections, in which the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) garnered only 60.1% of the popular vote (the lowest in the party's history), and for the first time lost a multi-member constituency to an opposition party.<sup>5</sup> Fourth, the study discusses Singapore's policies in mitigating transnational HS risks. Given Singapore's small size and proximity to other states, the city state is aware of its vulnerability and hence needs to take steps to mitigate transnational risks that have the potential to spill over into Singapore.

Before delving into the study's first section, some words must be said about the methodology used in this research, given Singapore's relatively unique circumstances compared to its regional neighbours. In terms of data gathering, while the research sought to gain perspectives on HS from various stakeholders, attempts to conduct one-on-one interviews with high-level Singapore government officials was particularly challenging. This was largely due to two main factors. First, when approaching the Prime Minister's Office and its coordinating offices, the researchers were directed to resource persons who would speak on specific dimensions of HS that related to the "Freedom from Want," but were reluctant to comment on the HS concept as a whole. This observation is, in itself, interesting as it indicates that the Singapore government prefers to manage HS based on specific issues that come under the scope of various ministries and statutory boards. This approach is perceived to be a pragmatic way of operationalizing a multi-faceted and complex academic concept such as HS. However, this could also suggest that efforts by the United Nations Development Programme and champions of HS (such as Japan and Canada) to mainstream HS has not received sufficient traction in Singapore.

Secondly, the difficulty contacting potential interviewees within the government was exacerbated by the timing of the research that coincided with Parliamentary Budget sessions,

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<sup>5</sup> Shamim Adam and Weiyi Lim, "Singapore's Lee Retains Power with Smallest Margin Since 1965," *Bloomberg*, May 8, 2011, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2011-05-07/singapore-s-people-s-action-party-keeps-parliamentary-majority-state-says.html>.

which was a busy period for government officials. Nevertheless, other sources of primary and secondary data have been useful in filling this void, such as publicly-viewable Facebook pages<sup>6</sup> of Singapore ministers and politicians, government press releases, and news reports. Interviews were conducted with mid-level civil servants as well as members of academia and civil society. The issues covered in this study—such as human trafficking, economic inequality, and social marginalization—were chosen as they are aspects of HS. These issues have gained greater traction in recent years given the attention brought by social media to their ramifications on society, and their resultant consequences to political stability and the credibility of the ruling party.

## **1. Development of Human Security in Singapore**

While HS is advocated in global discourses, the term does not feature in Singapore's policymaking lexicon. Nevertheless, an examination of Singapore's development trajectory reveals that the limited use of HS language has generally not prevented the state from providing strong basic protection for its citizens in the first two pillars—freedom from fear and freedom from want. The PAP, which has been in power since the country's independence in 1965 is highly regarded for transforming Singapore from a Third World to First World<sup>7</sup> nation in just one generation. Given the circumstances surrounding Singapore's forced exit from the Federation of Malaya and the country's lack of natural resources, the government adopted a mix of strong authoritarian leadership and corporatist-style governance for political survival. The ruling party subsequently anchored its political legitimacy to the country's economic performance and focused on providing citizens with the means for upward mobility, largely through an open economic and business environment, and progressive education, health, and

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<sup>6</sup> Politicians in Singapore, including Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, have increasingly been utilizing social media as a means to engage the public and to provide personal views on issues.

<sup>7</sup> Mao-Tze Tung viewed the triad of economic and social development in the world as an industrial-rural divide exploited by capitalism, where the industrial urban developed "First World" societies ruled over rural developing "Third World" societies. See Alexander Cook, "Third World Maoism," in *A Critical Introduction to Mao*, ed. Timothy Cheek (Cambridge, England; New York: Cambridge University, 2011), 290.

housing policies.

Although Singapore has achieved the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Singaporeans appear to be “fulfilled and secure” in their needs, there are underlying insecurities that belie its stellar achievements. These insecurities may appear “less serious” when compared to the larger HS challenges faced by neighbors in Southeast Asia. Nonetheless, they have the potential to destabilize Singapore’s economy and reduce social cohesion. Similarly, even though Singapore’s gross national income per capita nearly doubled from \$27,428 to \$54,040 (in current US Dollars) between 2005 and 2013,<sup>8</sup> a PAP grassroots leader noted that “the freedom from want is a moving target and can always be interpreted in varying degrees depending on the state of development of a particular economy.”<sup>9</sup> The policies implemented between 2005 and 2010 to sustain economic development in a period of global uncertainty indeed appear to have compromised some aspects of HS, with reverberating effects that continue to persist.

## **2. Downside Risks of Singapore’s Development Policies**

While the above mentioned policies have certainly put Singapore in good stead for development, there are limitations to the predominantly state-driven development policies. What emerges as a dominant thread in these limitations or downside risks is the fact that while Singapore’s development policies have been able to ensure Singapore’s HS needs at the national level, uneven access to, and provision of, protection by the state, and the lack of community empowerment has resulted in varying degrees of the quality and end-point provision of HS amongst Singaporeans. This is exacerbated by a rapidly changing global landscape and increasing inter-connectedness of the world, which age-old policy thrusts may not be equipped to adapt to.

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<sup>8</sup> “Singapore,” World Bank, accessed May 20, 2014, <http://data.worldbank.org/country/singapore>.

<sup>9</sup> Personal interview with grassroots volunteer and community leader, Singapore, May 19, 2014.



## 2.1 Uneven Access to Protection by the State: Growth for Whom?

A sense of entitlement that stems from Singapore's success is feeding into the insecurities of younger generation Singaporeans. Much as the state has established the basic pillars of protection in Singapore, there is a question of uneven protection when one examines the state's capacity to meet the higher-order expectations of the younger generation. The acquisition of material wealth and the promise of upward social mobility are no longer a given regardless of how hard one works. The top-down approach by the government and the growth-at-all-cost strategy, coupled with a narrow definition of success over the past four decades, have contributed to increased inequality, contrary to expectations that Singaporeans have of the state.

Similar concerns have been raised by Members of Parliament (MPs). During the re-opening of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Parliamentary session in May 2014, MP Inderjit Singh described the growing inequality as a shift “away from growing through motivating and encouraging Singaporeans to importing talent that the government feels will contribute to the nation's bottom-line—our GDP.”<sup>10</sup> The growth strategy, which focused more on outcomes than means, particularly since the late 1970s and 80s, has led to Singapore being the fastest place in the world to accumulate wealth and the country with the fifth highest concentration of millionaires in the world.<sup>11</sup> Despite achieving economic growth, the government's chosen means of growth through the importation of foreign capital and wealthy migrants led to an uneven provision of protection for sections of the local population.

This uneven provision of state protection is reflected by an increasing rate and visibility of economic inequality. Statistics from the Ministry of Manpower showed that wages had been stagnant in the last five years as slight increases in median gross monthly income were

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<sup>10</sup> Inderjit Singh, “Response to the President Address at the Re-Opening of 2<sup>nd</sup> Session of Parliament,” *Facebook*, May 26, 2014, accessed June 4, 2014, [https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=864760460217355&id=100000502271288](https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=864760460217355&id=100000502271288).

<sup>11</sup> Barclays Wealth and Investment Management, “Origins and Legacy: The Changing Order of Wealth Creation,” *Barclays Wealth Insights* Volume 17, June 2013, [http://www.absawealth.com/Insights/Wealth%20Insights%20from%20Barlcays%20Vol%2017\\_Brochure\\_Final.pdf](http://www.absawealth.com/Insights/Wealth%20Insights%20from%20Barlcays%20Vol%2017_Brochure_Final.pdf).

diminished by a corresponding rise in inflation between 2008 and 2013.<sup>12</sup> The disproportionate distribution of growth has caused dissatisfaction among a majority of middle-income Singaporeans who expected wages to keep pace with the cost of living. Instead of enjoying a higher standard of living as the economy grew, the majority of the population are now faced with the prospect of working past 65 and foregoing their current lifestyles as increases in the cost of transportation, healthcare, education, housing, and leisure outpace wages.<sup>13</sup>

The sense of feeling worse off is exacerbated by recent international surveys and reports that reaffirm Singapore's high cost of living. In 2013, Singapore was ranked 26<sup>th</sup> out of 136 countries for income inequality,<sup>14</sup> and in 2014 became the world's most expensive city to live in, topping perennial cities on the list such as Tokyo, New York, London, and Frankfurt.<sup>15</sup> Even though the Singapore government clarified that the Worldwide Cost of Living Survey bore greater relevance for new migrants and expatriates than for citizens as it sought to assess the cost of moving to Singapore from overseas, the results validated to some extent common perceptions that the cost of living was spiralling upwards. The high living costs could also be attributed to the prohibitive cost of car-ownership aimed at encouraging the use of public transportation, and the cost of buying clothing and importing premium food items such as wine.<sup>16</sup>

These survey results came at a time when the middle-class majority had been facing increasing pressure from a widening income gap, higher costs of living, and increased competition for jobs, schools, and housing. These pressures have largely been attributed to the government's open immigration and employment policies in the past decade, which has drawn

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<sup>12</sup> Ministry of Manpower, "National Wages Council (NWC) Guidelines 2013/2014," May 31, 2013, accessed June 4, 2014, <http://www.mom.gov.sg/newsroom/Pages/PressReleasesDetail.aspx?listid=503>.

<sup>13</sup> Inderjit Singh, "Speech on the White Paper on Population," February 6, 2013, accessed May 4, 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/kbinderjit/posts/598891680137569>.

<sup>14</sup> UNDP, *Human Development Report 2013*, [http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/reports/14/hdr2013\\_en\\_complete.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/reports/14/hdr2013_en_complete.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> The Economist Intelligence Unit, "Worldwide Cost of Living Survey 2014," accessed June 4, 2014, [http://www.eiu.com/public/topical\\_report.aspx?campaignid=Wcol2014](http://www.eiu.com/public/topical_report.aspx?campaignid=Wcol2014).

<sup>16</sup> "Lion City tops Economist Intelligence Unit List for the First Time, Bumping Tokyo from No. 1 Spot," *Today*, March 4, 2014, <http://www.todayonline.com/business/singapore-now-worlds-most-expensive-city-economist>.

criticism from a number of former senior policymakers for its perceived pursuit of economic growth at the expense of the peoples' interests. These developments have affected vulnerable communities, particularly the low-income and elderly. The problem is compounded by the lack of adequate social safety nets due to the government's long-standing emphasis on self-reliance with minimal assistance from the state.

Growing public discontentment with the national compulsory savings scheme known as the Central Provident Fund (CPF)—a key social security pillar in Singapore—is one such example where state-led protection had lacked an effective feedback loop to understand the livelihood concerns of Singapore's ageing population. CPF account holders, comprising most if not all of Singapore's workforce, are required to set aside an estimated 20% of their monthly income. The CPF Board is entrusted by the government to manage and invest the monies on behalf of account holders who may finance home mortgages and healthcare needs by drawing down these funds or withdrawing their savings at the age of retirement. The CPF system has come under public scrutiny in recent years for investment losses and more generally its inability to perform one of its key functions, to finance the retirements of account holders. According to Yee Ping Yi, chief executive officer of the CPF Board, the CPF system is faced with “global challenges of remaining financially sustainable with an ageing population, and navigating a more challenging and volatile investment environment.”<sup>17</sup> As a means of managing Singaporeans' higher life expectancy, citizens past the age of 60 are strongly encouraged by the government to continue working on annual contracts, in many cases for lesser pay and as cleaners or kitchen help, while employers are incentivized through subsidies and various schemes to retain and train older workers.

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<sup>17</sup> “Summary report from the Forum on CPF and Retirement Adequacy,” Institute of Policy Studies, Singapore, July 22, 2014, [http://lkyspp.nus.edu.sg/ips/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2014/07/IPS-Forum-on-CPF-and-Retirement-Adequacy\\_Summary-Report\\_230714.pdf](http://lkyspp.nus.edu.sg/ips/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2014/07/IPS-Forum-on-CPF-and-Retirement-Adequacy_Summary-Report_230714.pdf).

## **2.2 Uneven Protection Causing Imbalance Between Market Efficiency and Resilience**

The emphasis on growth through market efficiency principles had put Singapore in good stead in the past. In recent years however, public services, infrastructure, and social integration have come under stress given changes to Singapore's social landscape and pressures from a burgeoning population. The dominance of state-led measures has also led to a lack of responsiveness in correcting the limits of market efficiency. In the past decade, emphasis had been on de-nationalizing public goods such as transportation, healthcare, and telecommunications, among others. The performance of companies and public institutions are also measured against gains in efficiency and productivity, thereby creating systems that tend to be compromised when unexpected events occur. A former Singaporean civil service scholar has noted that Singapore prides itself on market efficiency, which is predicated on minimizing redundancies in the system.<sup>18</sup> One may therefore argue that Singapore's emphasis on economic development and market efficiency has led to the removal of redundancies that may in fact be necessary if systems were to remain resilient to downside risks.

A case in point is the series of breakdowns in train services run by the SMRT Corporation due to shortcomings in its maintenance regime. More than 127,000 commuters were affected in consecutive service disruptions in December 2011. SMRT was strongly criticized by the government and commuters for managing the situation poorly. Buses deployed to transport commuters between affected stations were unable to accommodate the volume of displaced commuters who were frustrated by a lack of information.<sup>19</sup> In his speech to Parliament, Transport Minister Lui Tuck Yew said the train disruptions exposed crisis response gaps. A Committee of Inquiry established to investigate the disruptions revealed Singapore did not have an integrated Land Transport Emergency Plan articulating response strategies and the roles of

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<sup>18</sup> Personal interview with former civil service scholar, Singapore, April 11, 2014.

<sup>19</sup> Ministry of Transport, "Report on the Committee of Inquiry (COI) into the Disruption of MRT Train Services on 15 and 17 December 2011," July 3, 2012, <http://www.mot.gov.sg/news/COI%20report%20-%20Executive%20Summary.pdf>.

various stakeholders and coordination protocols,<sup>20</sup> which resulted in the poorly coordinated response.

### **2.3 Uneven Protection for Local Companies**

From the mid-1960s to the late 1980s, Singapore's growth model has largely focused on foreign multinational corporations (MNCs) as an engine of growth, arguably at the expense of local enterprises. Local enterprises were developed as a supporting industry to supply products and services to MNCs and received no domestic protection from foreign competition. For decades, despite forming over 90% of all businesses, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) employed just half the workforce and contributed to one third of value added.<sup>21</sup> Apart from government-linked corporations (GLCs), the bulk of domestic enterprises had a peripheral role in export manufacturing, suffered limited capacity for foreign ventures, and lacked the entrepreneurship of SMEs in Hong Kong and Taiwan. The negative effect of foreign-led growth on local enterprises continues to plague the SMEs like those in Singapore.

The reasons often cited for the SMEs' unimpressive growth include the crowding-out effect due to the presence of the dominant GLCs and foreign MNCs in the competition for resources and markets, as well as the regulatory regime that discourages non-conforming behaviour and creativity.<sup>22</sup> After the 1985 economic recession, due to concern that MNCs may withdraw operations in future crises, the government began to take steps to strengthen SMEs by promoting entrepreneurship and technology transfer programs. Nonetheless, the emphasis on providing support to MNCs remained and until 1998, SMEs continued to remain in low productivity and small-scale operations.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Chia Siow Yue, "The Singapore Model Of Industrial Policy: Past Evolution and Current Thinking" (paper presented at the Second LAEBA Annual Conference held by Singapore Institute of International Affairs, Buenos Aires, November 28-29, 2005).

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.; Henry Wan, Jr., "SMEs in the Globalising Developing Economies: Some Asia-Pacific Examples," in *Globalisation and SMEs in East Asia*, ed. Charles Harvie and Boon-Chye Lee, Volume 1, (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 2002), 43-60.

<sup>23</sup> Chia Siow Yue, "The Singapore Model Of Industrial Policy: Past Evolution and Current Thinking" (paper for presentation at the Second LAEBA Annual Conference, held by, Singapore Institute of International Affairs, Buenos Aires, November 28-29, 2005).

It was not until 2000 that the government realized the importance of local enterprises in building economic resilience, innovation, and entrepreneurship, as the world moved towards a knowledge-based economy—decades after oft-compared economies such as Hong Kong, South Korea, and Taiwan. Fourteen years on, the government has turned towards nurturing SMEs to build up their capacity to compete internationally, and encourage productivity enhancements through restructuring, grants and subsidies, as well as create a pro-enterprise environment by supporting innovation. These efforts have shown results, with a handful of local enterprises becoming regional brand names. Nonetheless, the majority of local enterprises in Singapore remain weak. A recent study of local enterprises showed 80% of SMEs have seen a rise in business costs, and continue to expect high rentals and a shortage of labor that impact their competitiveness and productivity negatively.<sup>24</sup>

#### **2.4 Meritocracy: A Cause for Uneven Protection?**

In the realm of policymaking, a meritocratic approach towards talent-scouting for individuals to be recruited into the civil service has inadvertently led to elitism within the civil bureaucracy with some impact on the quality of policy making. Academically gifted students from the age of 18 are routinely identified and offered government scholarships that fund their university educations in premier overseas universities. The scholarships typically come with a contractual bond of three to ten years. Upon graduation, the scholars are assigned on “fast-track” postings among various ministries, with each stint lasting an average of two to three years. Upon the completion of each stint, the scholars are assessed on their suitability to move up the rungs of the elite civil service based on stringent key performance indicators. Those who reach the apex of the prestigious Administrative Service would enter the “Superscale G” salary where those with the lowest entry grade SR9 are paid an annual salary of USD 319,000.<sup>25</sup> This fast-track

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<sup>24</sup> Study conducted by the Association of Small and Medium Enterprises (ASME), September 2012, <http://www.asme.org.sg/downloads/ED%2045%20COMPLETE%20SET.23.pdf>.

<sup>25</sup> Prime Minister’s Office, “Administrative Officers, Political, Judicial and Statutory Appointment Holders to Get 4% to 21% Pay Increase,” December 13, 2007, <http://app.psd.gov.sg/data/Press%20release%20-%2013%20Dec%2007.pdf>.

system has cultivated a brand of elitism in the civil service, which has contributed to a growing disconnect between policy makers and the average Singaporean.

Instead of training policymakers to craft effective long-term policies that affect a majority of the population, this system runs the risk of “group-think,” producing policymakers who lack depth of knowledge and the ability to empathize with inflationary cost pressures felt by ordinary Singaporeans. One may also argue that the pressure to produce sterling results before the end of each stint may run counter to long-term planning. MP Inderjit Singh spoke in favor of a bottom-up approach to policy making and pointed to the tendency for policymakers to “fire-fight,” noting that the constant need to manage crises could be a result of policies that do not reflect a diversity of perspectives.<sup>26</sup> Additionally, there is an observable unhealthy division within the civil service, where the differentiation between scholars<sup>27</sup> and non-scholars has created a strong sense of dissatisfaction, as scholars are perceived to be promoted more rapidly by virtue of being on the scholar track.<sup>28</sup>

## **2.5 Personal and Community Security: Protection for Whom?**

Another consequence of the uneven provision of protection by the state is that protection for some has inadvertently created insecurity for others. Incidents relating to personal and community security reflect this dynamic, whereby society as a whole feels more protected, but specific communities and interest groups feel a lack of protection. This is particularly the case for minority groups and those that have limited means of representation and expression in Singaporean society.

The challenge to personal security comes to the fore when one examines the extent to which migrant workers feel a sense of personal security. While Singapore is touted to have low

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<sup>26</sup> Inderjit Singh, “Response to the President Address at the Re-Opening of 2<sup>nd</sup> Session of Parliament,” *Facebook*, May 26, 2014, accessed June 4, 2014, [https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=864760460217355&id=100000502271288](https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=864760460217355&id=100000502271288).

<sup>27</sup> This refers to recipients of government scholarships, who are then earmarked to fill designated positions within the civil service.

<sup>28</sup> Personal interview with former civil service scholar, Singapore, April 11, 2014.

rates of crime<sup>29</sup> compared to other countries, there have been recent reports of increased crime and violence, several of which have implicated foreign workers in Singapore as both contributors and victims of the crimes. Two examples in particular are cases that suggest a sense of insecurity caused by the influx of migrant workers. First, there had been concerns over the increasing crime rate in red-light district Geylang—such as illegal gambling, drug sales, and prostitution—coupled with the growing number of foreigners engaged in these activities. According to a statement by the commissioner of the Singapore Police, Geylang presented a “clear and present danger to public order”<sup>30</sup> as offenses increased from 34 in 2011 to 38 in 2013 and 49 in 2014.<sup>31</sup>

Secondly, the Little India riot on December 8, 2013 was sparked by the death of a foreign worker who was killed instantly after being hit by a bus along Race Course Road, an area where large groups of South Asian foreign workers congregate on their rest days.<sup>32</sup> In a bid to assure Singaporeans of tighter public security after the riot, the government issued a Public Order Act which banned the sale of alcohol and curtailed the freedom of foreign workers to congregate in the Little India precinct. Two months after the incident, a 5-week Committee of Inquiry was convened on February 18, 2014. The main findings from the Committee of Inquiry were:

1. Alcohol was the main contributing factor causing the riot to escalate into violence.
2. There was no evidence that widespread abuse of foreign workers was a factor contributing to the riot. Workers interviewed did not complain of salary issues or poor living conditions.

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<sup>29</sup> Singapore Police Force, “Crime Rate Falls to 30-year Low,” *Annual Crime Brief*, February 14, 2014, accessed May 28, 2014, [http://www.spf.gov.sg/mic/2014/02/20140214\\_others\\_crime\\_brief.html](http://www.spf.gov.sg/mic/2014/02/20140214_others_crime_brief.html).

<sup>30</sup> Yasmeen Banu, “Geylang—MP Expresses Frustration, Wants ‘Major Clean Up’,” *The Online Citizen*, April 2, 2014, <http://www.theonlinecitizen.com/2014/04/geylang-mp-expresses-frustration-wants-major-clean-up/>.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Ministry of Home Affairs, “Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Little India Riot on 8 December 2013,” June 30, 2014, accessed August 5, 2014, [http://www.mha.gov.sg/news\\_details.aspx?nid=MzE5NQ%3D%3D-7gL6m3ondpU%3D](http://www.mha.gov.sg/news_details.aspx?nid=MzE5NQ%3D%3D-7gL6m3ondpU%3D).



3. Training improvements were recommended for the Singapore Police Force's officers and auxiliary security officers for better communication with foreign workers and management of areas where foreign workers congregate.
4. It was recommended that lighting, safety, and surveillance devices be installed in areas where large congregations of foreign workers gather.
5. It was recommended that more services and amenities be made available to foreign workers outside of congregation areas, and measures to reduce congestion at congregation areas be developed in conjunction with local community stakeholders.

These two cases led to the belief that government officials and agencies had been prioritizing traditional security measures (i.e., managed as a law enforcement issue) over other efforts to ease the concerns of migrant workers and civil society advocates.<sup>33</sup> As a result, while law enforcement activities seek to improve the security of Singaporean society, the security of the migrant workers can be potentially impinged upon. In addition, referring solely to media reports on these issues would seem to portray foreign workers in a negative light, thus augmenting the degree of stigmatization that is sometimes experienced by these foreign blue collar laborers. Civil society organisations (CSOs)—the most prominent being the Transient Workers Count Two (TWC2) and the Humanitarian Organization for Migration Economics (HOME)—have been active in highlighting the social stigmas as well as challenges faced by migrant workers in Singapore such as delays in salary payments. Fortunately, there has been some effort on the part of the government to engage these CSOs to address some of these concerns (as the study will discuss in the section on mitigating domestic downside risks).

## **2.6 Downside Risks From the Lack of Empowerment**

Downside risks also emerge when the space for civil society to express their concerns is

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<sup>33</sup> See Alex Au, "Manpower Director Makes Incredible Claims about How Well Migrant Workers are Treated by Ministry," *Yawning Bread*, March 24, 2014, accessed on May 5, 2014, <http://yawningbread.wordpress.com/2014/03/24/manpower-director-makes-incredible-claims-about-how-well-migrant-workers-are-treated-by-ministry/#more-10808>.

curtailed. This is reflected in the limited advocacy abilities of most CSOs in Singapore, as the degree to which the government engages the CSOs is based on their ability to complement the government as service providers. Community self-help groups, for instance, are viewed as complementing efforts by the state to provide protection to vulnerable groups, such as the poor, disabled, and orphans. While there are several ground-up community organizations, state-driven community self-help groups have been formed explicitly along racial lines—i.e., the Singapore Indian Development Association (SINDA) for Indians, the Yayasan Mendaki for Malays, and the Chinese Development Assistance Council (CDAC). The rationale for such distinctions is that each community would be able to support itself and better attend to its own specific needs.

This arrangement of communities looking after themselves, however, has led to downside risks, particularly amongst Singapore's Malay-Muslim minority community, which has experienced a degree of community insecurity. For instance, retrospective statistics have shown that the highest rate of poverty and school dropouts come from the Malay community, as well as high rates of drug abuse in the 1980s to 1990s.<sup>34</sup> This large incidence was found to be disproportionate to the funding that is available from within the community itself, thus making the issue more tedious to address. These trends, amplified by mainstream media reporting, subsequently created a stigma that the prolonged limited social progress is inherently a problem of the Malay community. As such, the lack of empowerment mechanisms available for the Malay-Muslim minority has reduced their ability to achieve HS at an optimal level.

The lack of empowerment and the inability of CSOs to express their views is also due to the fact that CSOs that are seen to behave out of the fold are co-opted or given stern warnings to refrain from taking stances deemed undesirable by the government. Drawing from the experience of the Association of Muslim Professionals (AMP), members of this Malay-Muslim organization (MMOs) have been active in voicing concerns from within the community about the lack of Malay-Muslim political representation, and the fact that socio-economic issues

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<sup>34</sup> Ministry of Social and Family Development, "Progress of the Malay Community in Singapore since 1980," July 30, 2014, accessed August 2, 2014, <http://app.msf.gov.sg/Research-Room-Archives/Progress-of-the-Malay-Community-in-Singapore-Since>.

facing the Malay-Muslim community are seen as a Malay problem. Rather, the MMOs argues, it is a national issue that is characterized by class differences and not race. AMP's vocal expression was particularly evident during its 2<sup>nd</sup> National Convention in 2000, when it criticized the lack of autonomy that the existing Malay-Muslim leadership faced and started that the "way in which the Malay political leadership were hand-picked and imposed upon the community was not sustainable as such leaders would lack legitimacy in Malay eyes."<sup>35</sup> AMP also pushed the envelope further by suggesting alternative strategies to effectively address the concerns in the Malay-Muslim community, primarily through the formation of an independent, non-partisan collective leadership in the Malay community.<sup>36</sup> The outcomes of the Convention did not sit well with government interests and resulted in heavy punitive action taken against members of AMP, including a cut in funding from government sources for challenging existing political structures.<sup>37</sup> In this regard, the freedom to live in dignity has not been ensured for Singapore's Malay minority, and to an extent has been curtailed by the state.

The lack of empowerment is also because many CSOs in Singapore struggle to achieve financial independence, which invariably limits the extent of their activities. Many MMOs, for instance, get a substantial proportion of funding from the government. While it would be within their comfort zone to refrain from seeking funding from non-governmental sources, financial dependence on the government could prevent MMO members from voicing concerns that would "rock the boat" and threaten a cut in government funding.<sup>38</sup>

Despite the lack of empowerment, recent years have seen a higher level of empowerment through the use of social media. With the internet, Singapore's space for civil society has been much more active and—to a certain degree—noisier. Issues that were previously unaddressed have now come to the forefront, with people being more vocal about

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<sup>35</sup>Hussin Mutalib, *Singapore Malays: Being Ethnic Minority and Muslim in a Global City-State* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 88.

<sup>36</sup> Association of Malay Professionals, "Malay Professionals Rebutt LKY's policy on Malay Leadership," *Think Centre*, November 1, 2000, <http://www.thinkcentre.org/article.cfm?ArticleID=138>.

<sup>37</sup> Personal interview with founding member of AMP, Singapore, April 7, 2014.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

their feelings. Because of this increased ability for self-expression, there are more voices competing to be heard in the limited social space.

While the internet is a free-for-all space, the inability of the Singapore government to engage, maneuver and address issues expressed in cyber space can potentially lead to downside risks both online and offline. An example of the challenges in managing an increasingly vocal civil society is the growth of the gay movement in Singapore. The developments can be traced to Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong's term in office, where he spoke about allowing gays to take up jobs in the civil service and attracting the "Pink dollar" in the early 2000s. In this regard, it can be suggested that Singapore's top-down approach in enhancing development has also included efforts to be more accepting of the gay community and tap on their creative talents to support the economy. Fast-forward a decade later, the Pink Dot movement—a non-profit movement open to both straight and gay individuals who support the belief that everyone deserves the freedom to love—has gained traction since 2009, and congregates annually for its Pink Dot event at Hong Lim Park.<sup>39</sup> In 2014, however, the Pink Dot Movement met with overt opposition, particularly from religious groups. The "Wear White" movement—initiated by a small group of Muslims and headed by a young Islamic teacher Ustaz Noor Deros expressed the view that laws of nature should not be violated. The movement encouraged Muslims to wear white, in line with Prophetic practices to the first day of Ramadan, which coincided with the day of the Pink Dot event. The Wear White movement later gained the support of a group of Christians led by Pastor Lawrence Khong of the Faith Community Baptist Church (FCBC) who viewed the Pink Dot movement as a "decline of moral and family values."<sup>40</sup>

The incident created two polarizing views of being for or against the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) movement, and an impression that the more religious sections of society were intolerant of differences. An example of this was the fact that the Pink

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<sup>39</sup> See Pink Dot SG website, <http://pinkdot.sg/about-pink-dot/>.

<sup>40</sup> "Thousands of Singaporean Christians Wear White to Protest Pink Dot Gay Rally," *Yahoo*, June 29, 2014, <https://sg.news.yahoo.com/thousands-of-singaporean-christians-wear-white-to-protest-pink-dot-gay-rally-143235694.html>

Dot 2014 campaign video was criticized online for their inclusion of a hijab-wearing Muslim girl.<sup>41</sup> Some “keyboard warriors” questioned the girl’s religiosity and condemned her for misrepresenting Singapore’s Muslim community.<sup>42</sup> This incident pushed the religious authorities in Singapore to issue a comment on the matter. The Council of Islamic Scholars in Singapore (MUIS)—a government body administering matters pertaining to the Muslim community—called on Muslims to adopt a non-confrontational stance towards homosexuality and the Pink Dot movement.<sup>43</sup> In addition, the Singapore Islamic Scholars and Religious Teachers Association (PERGAS) released a statement that highlighted the religious standpoint on homosexuality, but also called for Muslims to show compassion and patience when interacting and engaging with those who hold different views on the matter.<sup>44</sup> The Catholic Church, too, reiterated its stance on non-discrimination but also disagreement with homosexual relationships.<sup>45</sup> In this regard, we begin to see a more complex web of understanding of community security in the context of Singapore where on the one hand, the gay minority is afforded increased security to exercise their rights in society, but on the other hand, is perceived by some sections of religious groups as a threat to their community security.

The burgeoning civil society space also has implications on the extent of intellectual freedom and space in Singapore. Building on LGBT concerns in Singapore, a debate ensued when a member of the public wrote to the Forum section of *The Straits Times*, and complained that there were books on the shelves of the children’s section in the public library he perceived

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<sup>41</sup> “Pink Dot 2014 - For Family, For Friends, For Love,” YouTube video, 4:03, posted by “Pink Dot SG,” May 22, 2014, accessed on May 29, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3iGKeIbxDoQ>

<sup>42</sup> Trinity Chua, “Pink Dot and Muslims,” *The Independent Singapore*, June 27, 2014, <http://theindependent.sg/blog/2014/06/27/pink-dot-and-muslims/>.

<sup>43</sup> “Don’t be Confrontational on LGBT Issues: MUIS,” *Channel NewsAsia*, June 20, 2014, <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/don-t-be-confrontational/1183582.html>.

<sup>44</sup> See Laura Elizabeth Philomin, “Muslims Should Not Attend LGBT-related Events: Islamic Group,” *Today*, June 21, 2014, <http://www.todayonline.com/singapore/muslims-should-not-attend-lgbt-related-events-islamic-group>; and PERGAS (Persatuan Ulama dan Guru-Guru Agama Islam, Singapore [Singapore Islamic Scholars & Religious Teachers Association]), “PERGAS’ Response to HPB’s FAQ on Sexuality,” February 11, 2014, accessed May 28, 2014, [www.pergas.org.sg](http://www.pergas.org.sg).

<sup>45</sup> Michelle Kwara, “Catholic Church in Singapore Reiterates ‘Consistent’ Position on LGBT Issue in Reply to Wijesingha,” *Yahoo*, June 24, 2014, <https://sg.news.yahoo.com/vincent-wijesingha-hits-out-at-singapore-archbishop-s-open-letter-about-lgbt-individuals-030444396.html>.

to be advocating homosexuality.<sup>46</sup> In what appeared to be a knee-jerk reaction to the public complaint, the National Library Board of Singapore (NLB) immediately removed the three books off the shelves preparatory to their being discarded. This however resulted in a downside risk where the wider section of Singapore society became upset with the removal of the books as it reflected literary censorship, and the perceived failure of the authorities to appreciate the freedom of knowledge. A group of prominent Singaporean writers showed their disapproval for NLB's actions by cancelling their participation in public reading and literature events supported by the NLB.<sup>47</sup> The online support for the books also translated into a sit-in reading event at the library attended by approximately 400 people, and an online petition against the removal of the books that gathered over 25,000 signatures.<sup>48</sup> Following these events, the NLB decided to reinstate the books in the adults section, and noted that it would look into the review process of books with controversial themes, as suggested by some members of parliament and the public.

Many more examples illustrate how social media has provided a form of empowerment, and in some cases a means of complementing or criticizing the lack of protection given by the state. A theme that has often arisen in Singapore's social media scene is the "flaming" of individuals who are deemed to be behaving inappropriately and threatening Singapore's community security. One such incident was that of permanent resident Amy Cheong who posted racist remarks toward the Malay community on Facebook. Her comments that the Malay community was too poor to conduct weddings in hotels and thus held them at the void decks of public housing estates went viral overnight, and culminated with her termination from her job as Assistant Director in a government-led agency, the National Trade Unions Congress (NTUC)

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<sup>46</sup> Charlie Campbell, "Singapore Provokes Outrage by Pulping Kids' Books About Gay Families," *Time*, July 11, 2014, <http://time.com/2975400/singapore-lgbt-gay-family-library-book-and-tango-makes-three-white-swan-express-whos-in-my-family/>.

<sup>47</sup> "NLB 'Saddened by' Reaction over Its Removal of Three Books with Homosexuality Themes, Says Chief Executive," *The Straits Times*, July 13, 2014, <http://www.straitstimes.com/news/singapore/more-singapore-stories/story/nlb-saddened-criticism-20140713#sthash.jhccMaLp.dpuf>.

<sup>48</sup> Eileen Poh, "Reading Event in Response to NLB Book Withdrawal Draws a Crowd," *Channel NewsAsia*, July 13, 2014, <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/400-people-attend-reading/1258622.html#.U8SQc33SAHs.twitter>.

within 24 hours.<sup>49</sup> Though her dismissal was certainly a harsh punishment for Ms. Cheong, NTUC Chief and Minister in the Prime Minister's Office Lim Swee Say noted that action was taken on the basis of upholding the Labour Movement's core values and beliefs in terms of inclusiveness and racial harmony.<sup>50</sup>

More recently, in November 2014, social media has been used as a means to mete out social justice. A case in point would be the public response to the video of a Vietnamese tourist being cheated while buying an iPhone 6. The video showed the tourist begging the shop owner, Jover Chew, for a refund at his shop in Sim Lim Square. The public responded in three ways. First, in a vigilante-like response, SMRT Ltd (Feedback),<sup>51</sup> a parody page on Facebook known for its "trolling" abilities, launched an online blackmailing campaign by disseminating the personal contact details and pictures of Jover Chew online and committing pranks such as making orders for fast-food to be delivered to Chew's house.<sup>52</sup> Second, the exposure of this incident precipitated previous customers who had been cheated by shops in Sim Lim Square to come forth and lodge complaints.<sup>53</sup> This development triggered a move amongst the wider Singaporean society to take civil action to address commonly known cheating incidents in Sim Lim Square.<sup>54</sup> Third, the incident also resulted in an online crowd-funding campaign to compensate the losses incurred by the Vietnamese tourist, which received overwhelming public support and raised SGD 14,000 (USD 11,000) within a day, greatly exceeding the target of USD

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<sup>49</sup> Jeanette Tan, "NTUC Fires Assistant Director for Racist Comments," *Yahoo*, October 8, 2012, <https://sg.news.yahoo.com/ntuc-assistant-director-says-sorry-for-racist-post.html>.

<sup>50</sup> "NTUC Chief Lim Swee Say: Firing Amy Cheong Was One of the Most Difficult Decisions," *Channel NewsAsia* via Facebook, October 9, 2012, accessed May 26, 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/notes/channel-newsasia-singapore/ntuc-chief-lim-swee-say-firing-amy-cheong-was-one-of-the-most-difficult-decision/10151292389877845>.

<sup>51</sup> This troll page on Facebook has no relation with Singapore's Official Mass Rapid Transport system. See <https://www.facebook.com/smrtsg>.

<sup>52</sup> Martino Tan, "Mega troll SMRT Ltd (Feedback) Pranked Sim Lim Shop Owner, Appears on Wanbao Newspaper," *Mothership.sg*, November 5, 2014, accessed on December 6, 2014, <http://mothership.sg/2014/11/mega-troll-smrt-ltd-feedback-pranked-sim-lim-shop-owner-appears-on-wanbao-frontpage/>.

<sup>53</sup> "Mobile Air Attracts More Complaints, Sparks Two Online Campaigns," *Channel NewsAsia*, November 5, 2014, <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/mobile-air-attracts-more/1455136.html>.

<sup>54</sup> "Update: Over \$14,000 Raised for Vietnamese Tourist Scammed in Sim Lim Square," *AsiaOne*, November 6, 2014, accessed November 7, 2014, <http://news.asiaone.com/news/singapore/over-8000-raised-vietnamese-tourist-scammed-sim-lim-square#sthash.IYz0kpc6.dpuf>.

1,350.<sup>55</sup> While the two latter responses were commended unanimously across Singapore, the first response met with mixed reactions. On the one hand, the vigilante citizen response was cheered on by sections of the public as a means of filling in the gap where authorities have perceived limitations. On the other hand, others felt that the persistent online harassment was too much. Minister S. Iswaran, for instance, noted that the public should avoid taking matters into their own hands and “let due process take its course.”<sup>56</sup> Additional media coverage on the issue also highlighted that such acts could be charged under the Miscellaneous Offences (Public Order and Nuisance) Act.<sup>57</sup>

While the above-mentioned example has demonstrated Singaporeans’ proactiveness in standing up for the security of non-Singaporean citizens via the use of social media, the internet has also become an arena for Singaporeans to express their resentment towards foreigners. This is largely due to perceived uneven protection by the state in its liberalization of employment and migration policies as a means of maintaining Singapore’s economic growth. However, this market logic has created social tension as migrant labor deployed in frontline service positions sometimes lacked English proficiency. The ethnic minorities in Singapore and non-Mandarin speaking Chinese Singaporeans have raised concerns about the increase in service staff from the People’s Republic of China and their inability to converse in English. Anecdotal reports of skirmishes with customers on social media add to the escalation of emotions and perceptions that local sensitivities are overlooked.<sup>58</sup> On the one hand, Singaporeans are being portrayed as xenophobic, while on the other the tensions also reflect the predispositions and cultural mindsets of some of the migrant workers.

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<sup>55</sup> Jalelah Abu Baker, “Indiegogo Fundraiser Wants to Sponsor Trip for Vietnamese Tourist Bullied at Sim Lim Square,” *AsiaOne*, November 6, 2014.

<sup>56</sup> “Some Individuals Have ‘Gone Too Far’ in Sim Lim Square Case: Iswaran,” *Today*, November 8, 2014, <http://www.todayonline.com/singapore/some-individuals-have-gone-too-far-sim-lim-square-case-iswaran>.

<sup>57</sup> Jianyue Xue, “Sim Lim Case: Citizen Action May Be Against the Law,” *Channel NewsAsia*, November 7, 2014, <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/sim-lim-case-citizen/1458478.html?cid=FBSG>.

<sup>58</sup> Ian Storey and Lee Poh Onn, eds., *Regional Outlook: Southeast Asia 2009-2010* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2009), 46.



As a result, the uneven provision of, and access to, protection and the lack of empowerment has led to downside risks such as a lack of social cohesion and community resilience, with consequences to the credibility of the ruling government. The most acute of these downside risks is best reflected in the 2011 General Elections, when Singaporeans voiced their discontent over the growing economic inequality. The 2011 general election saw the ruling party's poorest performance since 1963, where its overall share of the votes declined by more than 15 percentage points compared to the 2001 elections, which it won by 75.3%.<sup>59</sup> The poor showing that prompted "soul-searching" was largely attributed to a growing sense of alienation between the government and the electorate.<sup>60</sup> George Yeo, former Minister of Foreign Affairs and PAP member, said that the resentment for the PAP was the result of its arrogance and high-handedness,<sup>61</sup> and the party should "take a hard look at itself."<sup>62</sup> A former civil service scholar observed that the election result signalled the fraying of the social contract because the government has not delivered sufficiently on its promise to provide the population with economic gains and opportunities for upward social mobility.<sup>63</sup> This was a major blow to the ruling PAP party, and has led it to think seriously about how to be more prepared and address these downside risks.

### **3. Mitigating Domestic Downside Risks**

Following the 2011 General Elections, the Singaporean government has taken action to mitigate the domestic downside risks, namely through better engagement with Singaporeans to understand their concerns, and gradual reforms within the public service sector.

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<sup>59</sup> Elections Department Singapore, "Parliamentary Elections Results," accessed May 25, 2014, [http://www.eld.gov.sg/elections\\_past\\_parliamentary.html](http://www.eld.gov.sg/elections_past_parliamentary.html).

<sup>60</sup> "A win-win election?" *Economist Online*, May 8, 2011, [http://www.economist.com/blogs/banyan/2011/05/singapores\\_election](http://www.economist.com/blogs/banyan/2011/05/singapores_election).

<sup>61</sup> "George Yeo: PAP must change," *The New Paper*, RazorTV, May 6, 2011, <http://news.asiaone.com/News/AsiaOne%2BNews/Singapore/Story/A1Story20110506-277414.html>.

<sup>62</sup> "George Yeo Not Standing for Elections in 5 Years," *AsiaOne*, May 11, 2011, accessed November 7, 2014, <http://news.asiaone.com/print/News/Elections/Story/A1Story20110510-277985.html>.

<sup>63</sup> Personal interview with former civil service scholar, Singapore, April 11, 2014.

To better understand ground sentiments and the aspirations of Singaporeans, the government launched a national survey known as the Singapore Conversation in August 2012. The one-year survey was led by the Education Minister and was comprised of 660 dialogue sessions involving 47,000 participants and 40 non-government organizations.<sup>64</sup> The report published by the Singapore Conversation Secretariat revealed that the aspirations and concerns of Singaporeans revolved around the themes of community security, health security and economic security. The aspirations of Singaporeans can be summarized as follows:

- a. To have opportunities to make a good living, and for all Singaporeans to have chances to realize their potential, regardless of family background.
- b. To be able to access and afford basic needs such as housing, healthcare, and public transport.
- c. To live in a community that celebrates achievements beyond economics, for instance by strengthening of social bonds through Singapore's national heritage, shared memories, and communal spaces.
- d. To build a strong "*kampong*<sup>65</sup>/community spirit" and compassionate society.
- e. To have open, sincere and meaningful engagement with policy makers and with one another.

These aspirations have also been supported by various academics and commentators on Singapore politics. In a co-written article, Donald Low, Associate Dean of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy and former Director of Fiscal Policy in the Ministry of Finance and the Strategic Policy Office in the Public Service Division, noted that "Singapore also needs to reconstruct its social compact to one led by a more activist and redistributive state—one that

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<sup>64</sup> "Reflections of Our Singapore Conversation," Our Singapore Conversation Secretariat, October 2013, accessed November 7, 2014, [http://www.reach.gov.sg/Portals/0/Microsite/osc/OSC\\_Reflection.pdf](http://www.reach.gov.sg/Portals/0/Microsite/osc/OSC_Reflection.pdf).

<sup>65</sup> An Indonesian and Malay word for a hamlet or village.

strikes a better balance between growth and equity, between social protection and individual responsibility.”<sup>66</sup>

As the Singaporean government attempts to transform its governance approach from an authoritarian top-down style to one that is more consultative and engaging, it is necessary for the initiatives to be seen as genuine efforts for long-term sustainable change. Building on the aspirations of Singaporeans, the government has made several efforts to address the needs of vulnerable sections of society, such as senior citizens and the poor who may have fallen through the cracks. In 2012, the government addressed housing issues for the elderly—through the Enhancement for Active Seniors (EASE) program—“to improve safety and comfort of seniors living in Housing Development Board (HDB) flats.”<sup>67</sup> These efforts have culminated in the launching of the pioneer generation packages in 2014 for Singaporeans over the age of 65, which includes rebates for healthcare and other social services.

In addition to providing senior citizens with improved social benefits, there has been a greater recognition of pioneering communities that helped to build Singapore in its formative years. In his 2014 National Day Rally speech, PM Lee noted that the First President of Singapore, Yusof Ishak, would be honored in three ways: the naming of a mosque after him, the renaming of the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) to “ISEAS—the Yusof Ishak Institute,” and the creation of a Professorship in social science at the National University of Singapore (NUS). There have also been other efforts to honor pioneers in the Malay Muslim community, such as the renaming of Madrasah Al-Irsyad to Madrasah Irsyad Zuhri, to honor Kiyayi Haji Ahmad Zuhri Mutammim, a prominent Islamic scholar who contributed tremendously to Singapore’s Muslim community.<sup>68</sup> While one could argue that these are efforts

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<sup>66</sup> Lam Keong Yeoh, Donald Low, and Manu Bhaskaran, “Rethinking Singapore’s Social Compact,” *Global-is-Asian* No. 13, January-March 2012, [http://issuu.com/nuslkyschool/docs/gia\\_1](http://issuu.com/nuslkyschool/docs/gia_1).

<sup>67</sup> Robin Chan, “Policy, Implementation Both Vital: Civil Service Chief,” *The Straits Times*, March 27, 2014.

<sup>68</sup> “Renaming of Madrasah Al-Irsyad in Honour of Kiyai Ahmad Zuhri Mutammim,” YouTube video, 1:01, posted by “govsingapore,” September 22, 2014, accessed November 6, 2014, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LnWFI2kme4>.

to win the hearts and minds of the Malay-Muslim community, overall, it is an important step towards treasuring Singapore's history and a means to build community spirit.

Ensuring a genuine effort for change will require effective ways of communicating policies to the average Singaporean. PM Lee appears to have set an example for this, as seen by his efforts to not only communicate his policies to the people through National Day Rally speeches post-2011, but also his attempt to demonstrate awareness of the issues faced by average Singaporeans. In his 2014 National Day Rally speech, the PM joked about having played the role of a real estate agent in explaining housing issues to Singaporeans in his previous year's speech, and now playing the role of a financial planner in his 2014 speech when explaining the functioning and utility of the CPF system for Singaporeans.<sup>69</sup>

Effective public communication, however, does face the challenge of managing various public perspectives and determining to what degree those perspectives are substantive or just "noise." Permanent Secretary of the Law Ministry, Dr Beh Swan Gin, for instance noted the importance of listening to the silent majority to avoid having the very loud minority voice determine policy directions. Dr Beh cited his experience in overseeing the reform of Singapore's death penalty in 2012. Although there had been vocal expressions for Singapore to do away with the death penalty, post-reform feedback apparently showed that a conservative section of society felt the amendment of the law "signalled a reduced commitment to law and order."<sup>70</sup> This point is crucial in light of the increasing activities in cyberspace. It is therefore necessary for the government to better formulate strategies to block out "noise" while ensuring that it listens to important views from Singapore's civil society. Speaking on his experience of the flash floods in Orchard Road, Public Utilities Board (PUB) Chief Executive Chew Men Leong noted that while having an online government presence is important, that alone would be "superficial" and must be complemented by investing effort in sustained in-depth conversations

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<sup>69</sup> "National Day Rally 2014 - Full Speech in English," YouTube video, 1:25:41, posted by August 17, 2014, accessed November 6, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x2wsTopymmkk>.

<sup>70</sup> Maryam Mokhtar, "Vital to Listen to Silent Minority's Views...", *The Straits Times*, March 27, 2014, accessed November 7, 2014, <http://news.asiaone.com/news/singapore/vital-listen-silent-majoritys-views>.

offline.<sup>71</sup> Moreover, the Singapore government will also need to get accustomed to increased groupings of people expressing solidarity (such as in the Pink Dot and Wear White movement), while ensuring that the tension from a difference in opinion does not lead to violence.<sup>72</sup>

Efforts to mitigate domestic downside risks have included progressive changes in the civil service. Human resources management, for one, continues to evolve over the years. While top talent were often given security positions in the civil service in the 1960s to early 1980s, the approach in the late 1980s and 1990s differed as top talent were deployed in economics-related positions. In a move to improve policy implementation, Peter Ong, Head of the Civil Service, noted that it was also vital to tap into the wisdom of public sector specialists with in-depth knowledge.<sup>73</sup> As such, a new management scheme has been introduced to enhance skills and capabilities in 5 specialised areas: 1) economy building, 2) infrastructure and environment, 3) security, 4) social work, and 5) central administration. Under this public sector leadership program, civil servants are no longer just generalists but would be equipped with sector relevant capabilities and preparedness to address contemporary issues.<sup>74</sup>

Another area of reform is in exposing administrative officers in the civil service to operational jobs. An example of this would be a six month community attachment program, which has seen a gradual increase in the annual number of participants, from 10 participants in 1980 to 40 participants in 2014. It is said that by the end of 2014, 70% of administrative officers are expected to have undergone the program in their first 15 years.<sup>75</sup> The question that begs, however, is this: to what extent would these temporary “hardship postings” change the quality of the civil service?

There is also a need to increase incentives for social sector professionals, so as to ensure that quality personnel are engaged in addressing the socio-economic concerns of the lower

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Personal interview with civil servant, Singapore, April 10, 2014.

<sup>73</sup> Robin Chan, “Policy, Implementation Both Vital: Civil Service Chief,” *The Straits Times*, March 27, 2014.

<sup>74</sup> Personal interview with civil servant via email, March 17, 2014.

<sup>75</sup> Robin Chan, “Policy, Implementation Both Vital: Civil Service Chief,” *The Straits Times*, March 27, 2014.

sections of Singaporean society. There is a sense that a proportion of civil servants are keen towards social policy, but this must come with better incentives for civil servants to leave their current positions, as social sector positions currently do not provide as much remuneration.<sup>76</sup>

The situation following the 2011 elections has also precipitated a growing internal discussion on the compromises needed to make effective progress on political security. There is a sense within the civil service that the Singaporean government will need to get used to sharing power with members of civil society that are deemed as credible. At the same time, there is a sense that Singaporeans themselves ought to reduce their dependence on the government and exercise more agency over their lives, as the government cannot realistically meet nor sustain higher-order needs.<sup>77</sup> In addition to this, there is a need for education and awareness—for both government and civil society—on the holistic concept of human security rather than as separate dimensions or silos.

#### **4. Mitigating Transnational Risks**

Several efforts have been made by the Singaporean government to address transnational risks, such as human trafficking and migrant worker issues, trans-boundary haze, pandemic outbreaks, and disasters. These efforts can be seen in both the Singaporean government's domestic and international policies.

First, there have been efforts to address human trafficking in Singapore. What was initially a private member's bill, mooted by MP Christopher De Souza in 2008, started to receive government support through the establishment of an inter-ministerial task force in 2010 co-chaired by the Ministry of Manpower and Ministry for Home Affairs. What has been commendable about the process thus far is the series of public consultation events organized to solicit views from the public on the proposed bill.<sup>78</sup> While there has been a range of opinions on

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<sup>76</sup> Personal interview with civil servant, Singapore, March 17, 2014.

<sup>77</sup> Personal interview with civil servant, Singapore, March 17, 2014.

<sup>78</sup> Andrea Ong, "Christopher de Souza to Introduce Private Member's Bill on Human Trafficking," *The Straits Times*, November 11, 2013, accessed November 7, 2014,

the bill, the public consultations have at times been prolonged unnecessarily as some sections of civil society pushed their organizational or individual views without fully balancing the considerations of other stakeholders. This was evident in discussions on migrant rights issues, where proponents attempted to expand the human trafficking debate to include wider migrant issues and lost focus in the effort to create legislation that is specific to human trafficking. Panelists from the Taskforce also explained that while there were potential causal links between migrant workers' issues and human trafficking, these broader issues could be addressed through other forms of legislation.<sup>79</sup>

Secondly, in terms of migrant worker policies, legislation requiring an official day-off for domestic helpers was passed and began to be enforced in January 2013.<sup>80</sup> In addition to this, tougher penalties would be brought against employers if the payment of salaries to foreign workers were delayed. This has, however, generated some negative reactions due to the perception that enhancing the HS needs of migrant workers may compromise the security of their Singaporean employers. Some sections of Singaporean society have raised concerns that allowing their domestic helper a day off would potentially expose her to undesirable influences, which may risk the security of the employer's home should the helper bring acquaintances into the house without the permission of her employer.<sup>81</sup> While these claims may seem to suggest some amount of paranoia amongst employers, there have been reported cases of theft by domestic helpers or pregnancy which breaches the terms of employment. In such cases, employers are held responsible for their helpers' actions and risk losing their security deposits.<sup>82</sup> The issue of "protection for whom" therefore needs to be discussed and debated not only from

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<http://news.asiaone.com/news/singapore/christopher-de-souza-introduce-private-members-bill-human-trafficking>.

<sup>79</sup> Participatory observation at Public Consultation for Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Bill, April 2014.

<sup>80</sup> Kate Hodal, "Singapore's Maids to Get a Day Off," *The Guardian*, March 6, 2012, accessed November 7, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/mar/06/singapore-maids-one-day-off-a-week>.

<sup>81</sup> Francesca, "Domestic Workers Cheer New Day-Off Rule, Struggle with Memories of Work without Rest," *Transient Workers Count Too*, March 8, 2012, accessed November 7, 2014, <http://twc2.org.sg/2012/03/08/domestic-workers-cheer-new-day-off-rule-struggle-with-memories-of-work-without-rest/>.

<sup>82</sup> Hanqing Liew, "100 Pregnant Maids Sent Home a Year," *The Straits Times*, September 29, 2010, accessed November 7, 2014, <http://www.healthxchange.com.sg/News/Pages/100-pregnant-maids-sent-home-a-year.aspx>.

the perspective of the migrant workers, but also the issues faced by employers, and the effects of cultural perspectives and stereotypes in influencing employer-employee relations.<sup>83</sup>

Thirdly, substantive efforts have been made in terms of addressing the annual trans-boundary haze originating from Indonesia's peat land fires.<sup>84</sup> The acute effects of the haze in mid-2013—said to be worse than the peak in 1998 and 2006—prompted the Singapore government to take more decisive action in persecuting culprits of this prolonged transnational environmental crime. Reaching a Pollutant Standards Index (PSI) reading close to 400, the health security of Singaporeans was greatly threatened, in addition to the costs on trade and the economy.<sup>85</sup> While the government attempted to mitigate the effects by making masks widely available, some Singaporeans criticized the fact that the government did not issue a stop-work order, particularly for migrant laborers working in outdoor construction sites. The government's position was that given the possibility of the haze being prolonged, a stop-work order would cause further disruption to Singapore's economy.

On the August 5, 2014, the Singapore Parliament passed the Trans-boundary Haze Bill, which would allow enforcers to impose fines of up to US\$2 million on companies that cause or contribute to trans-boundary haze pollution in Singapore.<sup>86</sup> While this legislation is a milestone in the way Singapore has sought to address the Haze issue—largely through pressuring Indonesia to act and penalizing those responsible for the burning—there are other aspects that Singapore could incorporate in its domestic policies. Several of these issues were raised by

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<sup>83</sup> Online forums provide insight to the issues discussed by Singapore employers, such as the view that Indonesian domestic helpers from a certain region tend to exhibit bad behavior, and negative experiences with domestic helpers. See online forums such as Kiasu Parents, "About Full-Time Maids," accessed November 7, 2014, <http://www.kiasuparents.com/kiasu/forum/viewtopic.php?p=263924>; and Singapore Motherhood, "Bad maid? Post here!!!" accessed November 6, 2014, <http://singaporemotherhood.com/forum/threads/bad-maid-post-here.4207/>.

<sup>84</sup> The complexity of the haze issue is marred by a mix of warmer and drier climates, land clearing practices (which was traditionally used by local farmers, and has progressively been used en masse by major companies as a means of clearing land at low costs), and the effects of the burgeoning palm oil industry.

<sup>85</sup> Rahimah Rashith, "Haze in Singapore Hits PSI All-time Record High of 371," *Yahoo*, June 17, 2013, accessed November 7, 2014, <https://sg.news.yahoo.com/haze-reaches--unhealthy--level-in-singapore-085448213.html>.

<sup>86</sup> Monica Kotwani, "Parliament Passes Transboundary Haze Pollution Bill," *Channel NewsAsia*, August 5, 2014, accessed November 6, 2014, <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/parliament-passes/1297832.html>.



Nominated Member of Parliament (NMP) Faizah Jamal.<sup>87</sup> First, the implications of the bill on cooperation and technology (i.e., infringement of privacy) could potentially infringe on Indonesia's sovereignty. Second, fines imposed on companies could adversely affect consumers in Singapore as a result of higher prices on products. In this regard, NMP Faizah emphasized the importance of introducing policies that would change the way large corporations do business, as well as the need for more self-reflection and introspection into our own consumer lifestyles. Finally, she noted the importance of government cooperation with environmental NGOs and members of civil society, who have been constantly engaged in the issue and would be able to provide further input as to how best to address the situation. While these points are certainly valid, the bill does represent a new milestone in addressing the haze and would complement Singapore's existing regional efforts, such as adopting the city of Jambi in Sumatra as a pilot site for implementing sustainable livelihood practices for farmers, and trilateral cooperation with Malaysia and Indonesia in haze mitigation and relief activities.

Fourthly, Singapore plays an important role in supporting disaster preparedness and relief capabilities in the Southeast Asian region. While not a victim of major disasters itself, Singapore—its military as well as humanitarian organisations such as the Red Cross and Mercy Relief—have provided assistance to many if not all of the major disasters in East Asia, and continuously provide input into facilitating more efficient delivery of relief aid and resources. In April 2014, Defence Minister Ng Eng Hean mooted for Singapore's Changi Command and Control (C2) Centre to host a regional Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) coordination center.<sup>88</sup> This offer was made during the US-ASEAN Defence Ministers meeting, where Ministers discussed how their respective militaries could work more closely to strengthen

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<sup>87</sup> “Consumers Can Play a Role by Choosing Products with Ethical Origin: Faizah Jamal,” *Channel NewsAsia*, August 5, 2014, accessed November 7, 2014, <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/specialreports/parliament/videos/consumers-can-play-a-role/1297678.html>.

<sup>88</sup> Ministry of Defence (MINDEF), “Singapore Offers to Host Regional HADR Coordination Centre,” April 4, 2014, accessed June 16, 2014, [http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/press\\_room/official\\_releases/nr/2014/apr/04apr14\\_nr.html#.U\\_tWGmM-mtY](http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/press_room/official_releases/nr/2014/apr/04apr14_nr.html#.U_tWGmM-mtY).

the region's HADR capabilities, particularly in the wake of Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines. While this is a generous gesture, it remains to be seen how this offer will fit in with existing regional arrangements such as the role of the ASEAN Humanitarian Assistance Centre, which was set up for that same objective.

Fifth, there has been a concerted effort to socialize the Southeast Asian region to the threat of infectious diseases and contribute to the development of regional crises-management mechanisms. To this end, Singapore's Ministry of Home Affairs funded a series of three international and regional conferences on pandemic preparedness held annually between 2009 and 2011. These projects sought to map out the state of pandemic preparedness in the region by critically examining various framings of pandemic preparedness, the roles of different societal actors, as well as the prospects of enhancing regional cooperation in public health emergencies. In addition, on behalf of ASEAN, Singapore was responsible for holding the regional stockpile of antiviral drugs and personal protection equipment such as masks and isolation gowns and to distribute the stockpile in a rapid containment operation in the event that a human-to-human transmission pandemic was confirmed in the ASEAN region.

Sixth, unlike other developed countries in Northeast Asia that have explicitly provided Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) to many developing countries in Southeast Asia, Singapore's assistance of regional neighbours may not necessarily be classified as ODA. Rather its local foundations and philanthropic organizations such as the Singapore International Foundation, Lien Aid, and Habitat for Community enrich lives and enable positive change in communities through international development and volunteerism programs. The Singapore International Foundation seeks to bridge Singaporeans and world communities and effect positive change through programs addressing healthcare, education, the environment, arts and culture, as well as livelihood and business. Lien Aid is a Singapore privately funded philanthropic organization that works with partners to deliver accessible and affordable safe water and sanitation to poor communities in Asia. To date, it has successfully completed projects in Cambodia, China, Vietnam, Myanmar, Thailand, and Indonesia. Through volunteer

labor and donations, Habitat builds and rehabilitates simple houses in developing countries across Asia with the direct involvement of the homeowners. The completed houses are sold to the homeowners at cost price, financed with interest free loans.

Finally, in ensuring freedom from fear for its citizens, the Singaporean government's approach to addressing terrorism and extremism is two-fold. First, it takes a primarily hardline stance on persecuting individuals deemed to be supporting terrorist activities and transnational militant movements, such as the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq (ISIS), and the Jemaah Islamiyah network in Southeast Asia. Following the discovery of Singaporeans joining the fight in Syria, Deputy Prime Minister Teo Chee Hean noted that such persons pose "a real threat to Singapore's national security, and will be dealt with in accordance with our laws."<sup>89</sup> This hardline stance is complemented by a second softer approach that involves counseling and religious rehabilitation for the suspects. In addition to this, the government is aware of the importance of maintaining the social fabric, specifically, avoiding the association of terrorism with Singapore's Muslim minority population.

## **Conclusion**

Singapore is held in high esteem for overcoming the challenges of being a small nation with no natural resources, and meeting human security goals that other countries in the region continue to struggle with. It is often perceived as a development model by governments who look towards its corporatist-style of governance under which the citizenry willingly relinquishes some levels of personal freedom for basic protection and growth in terms of income and material wealth. In recent years, however, the thrust of Singapore's age-old social compact has been questioned and the demand for greater freedoms has become a major challenge for the government. As Benny Lim, Permanent Secretary, Prime Minister's Office and Ministry of

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<sup>89</sup> Nur Asyqin Mohamad Salleh, "Parliament: Singaporeans Planning to Support or Join ISIS Will Be Dealt with under the Law," *The Straits Times*, October 7, 2014, <http://www.straitstimes.com/news/singapore/more-singapore-stories/story/parliament-singaporeans-planning-support-or-join-isis-wi#sthash.rwdkwjJn.dpuf>.

National Development puts it, “Our level of tolerance for security problems is very low largely because we’ve been blessed by peace, stability, and safety.”<sup>90</sup> As such, the heavy top-down approach has to be complemented with a bottom-up approach in order to build up the resilience of society to downside risks and to empower society with the means to resolve or manage a range of diverse and complex issues that challenge Singapore’s human development, freedom to live in dignity, community security, and economic security.

This study has highlighted that Singaporeans are more aware and in-tune to demanding these missing HS aspects as manifested through a series of events particularly in the last ten years. Such citizen-led advocacy will likely be a feature of Singapore’s future development, and will therefore keep the Singapore government vigilant as it continues its efforts at understanding perspectives on the ground. A lesson that can be drawn from Singapore’s experience is that a social compact anchored to a country’s economic performance is unsustainable. In this information age where the use of social media is prevalent, issues are brought to the fore instantly and governments are pressured to respond just as rapidly. While Singapore’s authoritarian and corporatist style of governance has provided the majority population with basic levels of HS, the time has come to change its governance style to one that is consultative and involves more actors in the process of decision-making.

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<sup>90</sup> Prime Minister's Office, “Life is More Complicated Than Black and White,” *Singapore Challenge*, March 2012, accessed November 7, 2014, <http://issuu.com/challengeonline/docs/challenge-mar2012-single/22>.

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## Abstract (in Japanese)

### 要約

本稿では、シンガポールにおける人間の安全保障の矛盾した発展状況を検証する。シンガポールは全国的に高いレベルの人間の安全保障を達成したにも拘らず、その極度にトップダウンに偏ったアプローチにより、社会がコミュニティレベルで自立的にリスクに対処しうるだけの十分なエンパワメントは行われてこなかった。本研究がカバーするのは次の内容である。第一に、シンガポールにおける高いレベルの人間の安全保障達成のための努力について、その背景を簡単に述べる。第二に、ダウンサイドリスク、すなわち人間の安全保障に関する予期しない政策的帰結は、国家による保護の提供およびそれに対するアクセスが不公平であること、また、エンパワメント（すなわち人々がリスクに対処することを可能にする活動）が不足していることの結果であることを論じる。第三に、近年、とりわけ分水嶺となった2011年の総選挙後、シンガポール政府が行っているダウンサイドリスク低減のための取り組みの概略を示す。第四に、国境を越える人間の安全保障上のリスクの低減のため、シンガポールが行っている政策について議論する。シンガポールは国土が狭く他国に近接している都市国家として自身の脆弱性を認識しており、ゆえに国境を越えるリスクでシンガポールへの波及効果が予想される場合、それを低減するための対応を取る必要がある。



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