

# The Dark Side of a Successful Developmental State: Prosperity and Poverty in Singapore

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From the outside, Singapore is widely cited as a successful developmental state that has seen tremendous economic transformation within a short span of five decades. Many have argued that its rapid, sustained growth is built on hard choices made by its authoritarian state in the domains of economics and politics. However, few have studied the dark side of these choices.

This research investigates the socioeconomic dilemma faced by Singapore today, analysing historical trends of growth and inequality; and associated levels of societal wellbeing in terms of health and social outcomes. It finds that Singapore's robust growth has come accompanied by significant inequality and incommensurately low levels

of wellbeing vis-à-vis other developed countries. While the strong emphasis on growth has enabled it to attain stellar economic progress to date, emerging costs in terms of inequality and health and social problems have begun to render the continued adequacy of this paradigm contentious.

In 1974, Singapore's first Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew stated that "growth must come before sharing". Today, this research raises the question of whether the time has come for sharing to claim equal, if not greater, priority as that of growth. Ultimately, whether Singapore's hard-earned growth and social stability can be sustained moving forward will depend on the extent and commitment with which it recalibrates its economic and social strategies to meet evolving needs.