

EDITORIAL

Navigating Southeast Asia: Exploring and Evolving ASEAN in Turbulence Time

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How to Cite: Mursitama, T. N., Arnakim, L.Y., Karim, M. F., & Tahalele, M. P. (2024).
Navigating Southeast Asia: Exploring and evolving ASEAN in turbulence time. *Journal of
ASEAN Studies*, 12(2), <https://doi.org/10.21512/jas.v12i2.13643>

Keywords: Southeast Asia, regional dynamics, policy innovation, socio-political complexity,
ASEAN studies

Introduction

The study of Southeast Asia remains both intellectually stimulating and methodologically challenging. This is not only due to the region's multifaceted issues – from politics, economics, and socio-cultural developments to its unique geographical context – but also because of the diverse disciplinary approaches and theoretical frameworks that continue evolving within the academic discourse. The dynamic roles of various societal actors – governments, civil society, private sector entities, community groups, and individuals – have significantly shaped the region's contemporary trajectory (Breslin & Nesadurai, 2018). Interactions within and among these actors frequently give rise to innovative solutions, yet

paradoxically also generate new and often complex challenges. This constant interplay highlights the region's fluid and interconnected socio-political fabric.

The region's temporal development—characterized by technological advancements, shifting socio-cultural norms, policy transformations, regulatory inconsistencies, and uncontrollable natural phenomena—has endowed Southeast Asia with a set of evolving features. Although historical patterns may occasionally recur, the contextual variables ensure that each episode unfolds distinctly. The complexity of regional issues often defies conventional resolutions rooted in past experiences. Nonetheless, valuable insights frequently emerge through comparative studies, revealing convergences and divergences in policy responses, institutional arrangements, and legal or political systems. These variations are particularly noteworthy given the shared socio-cultural legacies and normative values embedded across Southeast Asian societies.

Furthermore, the influence of external forces—ranging from geopolitical pressures to global market fluctuations—remains a salient factor in the region's development. Southeast Asian countries, facing such pressures, respond in divergent ways: some assert their autonomy, others adapt pragmatically, while others are swept along by the broader geopolitical currents. The emergence of a new generation of political leaders with distinct leadership styles has further reshaped national trajectories, often reinforcing nationalist sentiments amidst the shifting architecture of the global political economy.

In this context, Southeast Asia continues to offer an expansive intellectual landscape for inquiry. Its richness lies in the constant emergence of new problems, innovative analytical approaches, and enduring relevance in academic and policy-oriented discussions. The *Journal of ASEAN Studies* is a critical platform for scholarly engagement—bridging academic inquiry and practical relevance—to foster a deeper understanding of Southeast Asia's ongoing transformation. Through rigorous debate and interdisciplinary dialogue, this journal contributes to envisioning a dignified, value-rich, prosperous region committed to fostering peace and mutual respect in an increasingly pluralistic world.

Contributors of This Volume

This volume consists of ten articles that can be categorized into three thematic areas contributing to the discussion of Southeast Asia as a dynamic region as well as institution, namely (1) values, norms, and culture related-articles; (2) economy, sustainability, and industry related-articles; and (3) politics and international relations related-articles. All articles provoke interpretation of realities, providing new insights and recommendations.

There are three articles in the first thematic article regarding values, norms, and culture. The first article is entitled *The ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management (AHA Centre): Examining Gender-Based Approach in the 2018 Lombok Earthquake* by Mardialina et al. (2024). The authors find that the activities of the AHA Centre following the Lombok earthquake were predominantly focused on emergency response

efforts and lacked significant involvement in gender-sensitive initiatives, ultimately yielding a dual impact on women. This research suggests that a masculine approach to disaster management hinders gender-sensitive disaster response efforts. This research constructs the notion that disaster management efforts conducted without gender sensitivity, regardless of their quality, will not be optimal or effective.

The second article is entitled *Academic Capitalism in Southeast Asia: Lessons from Islamic Universities in Indonesia* by Fathana (2024). The paper argues that two dominant models exist, a pragmatic model, which prioritizes global rankings and revenue generation as indicators of institutional success, and an idealistic model, which integrates rankings cautiously while emphasizing the preservation of Islamic values. The research emphasizes the need for context-sensitive approaches that align global frameworks with local religious and cultural values, offering insights into the evolving landscape of higher education in Southeast Asia. This balance underscores the critical role of identity and values in shaping the future of Islamic higher education.

The third article, written by Sirulhaq and Kurniawan (2024), underlines the shared historical legacies of Indonesian and Malay languages rooted in a 7th-century Southeast Asia lingua franca, which was later modernized during colonialism and played a pivotal role in regional trade and continues to influence the collective identity of ASEAN. This research argues that the Indonesian language has been evolving more complex linguistically; meanwhile, sociolinguistic and geopolitical advantages have bolstered Indonesia's prominence, leading to its adoption in foreign education and UNESCO recognition.

The second thematic area is economy and sustainability-related issues. There are three interesting articles on electric vehicles in ASEAN: the existence of Rupiah coins in terms of their buying power, denominational structure, and comparative analysis with other countries in ASEAN, and the complex relationship between foreign capital flows and the Human Development Index in ASEAN-9. *The Market Interest of Electric Vehicle in ASEAN Through Digital Analytics and Industry Performance* by Barus (2024) argues that The automotive industry's future generation is thought to be the electric vehicle sector. Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia are ASEAN's three main electric vehicle markets. Indeed, the automotive industry has been increasingly concerned with environmental issues as a result of changes in national regulations and technology. Environmental sustainability must be aligned with expanding enterprises. One could characterize Indonesia as having a growing, ever-evolving curiosity that is often impetuous and active. Similar to Indonesia, Malaysia experienced a significant surge in interest in electric vehicles (EVs) between 2020 and 2023.

Furthermore, another issue that has been addressed in this economic section is the Evaluation of the Rupiah denomination. Badrawani et al. (2024) meticulously investigate the presence of Rupiah coins regarding their purchasing power, denominational composition, and comparative assessment with other nations. A comparative analysis utilizes a global product index to assess the denomination structure of the Rupiah coin about the denomination structures of several ASEAN countries and other nations. They finally argue

that the denomination structure of Rupiah coins has been inadequate for the prevailing economic conditions since 2013.

Finally, the paper on economic dealing with the *Uneven Impact of Foreign Direct Investment, Sector-Specific Official Development Assistance, and Remittances on Human Development in ASEAN-9: Evidence from Panel Data Models* contributed by Nguyen (2024). The author examines the influence of foreign capital inflows on the Human Development Index (HDI) in ASEAN-9 from 2002 to 2021, employing panel data regression models and information from credible international sources. It also emphasizes the data attributes and disparities in HDI among member nations. Results indicate that although Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and remittances substantially contribute to capital inflows, only FDI influences the Human Development Index (HDI). Although a minor proportion, official development assistance (ODA) greatly impacts the Human Development Index (HDI). The benefits of ODA differ by sector; grants for social infrastructure and manufacturing, along with ODA loans for manufacturing and other industries, enhance HDI, but grants for economic infrastructure and other sectors detrimentally impact HDI. This underscores the intricate relationship between foreign capital inflows and Human Development Index (HDI) in ASEAN-9. The provision of targeted Official Development Assistance (ODA) and associated policy considerations are essential for regional human development despite the low direct effect of remittances on the Human Development Index (HDI).

The third thematic area is politics and international relations issues that comprise articles on human trafficking, power networks, Indonesia and Timor Leste border relations, and presidentialism in Indonesia and the Philippines. The first paper in this section is contributed by Indraswari (2024) on the relationship between border regulations, human trafficking, and human security in the Mekong sub-region. She utilizes a qualitative case study technique to examine border management strategies from 1993 to 2023, adopting first and second-generation human security principles as its theoretical foundation. She finally argues that although political and economic factors prevail, essential elements of human security, including personal, environmental, and community security, are frequently neglected. Merely 23% of border rules specifically tackle human trafficking, indicating the continued prevalence of state-centric, first-generation strategies that prioritize sovereignty and economic interests over human-centered solutions. The second-generation human security framework emphasizes the necessity for a multifaceted, cooperative strategy in border management. Nevertheless, the research analysis indicates that current strategies inadequately incorporate human security components, resulting in substantial deficiencies in tackling systemic risks. This research theoretically contributes by connecting human security.

Moreover, Hidayat (2024) examines Southeast Asian political dynasties from 2009 to 2024, including their presence, influence, and evolution. Using bibliometric mapping and content analysis, the author examined 74 Scopus-retrieved journals, books, and conference papers from 47 sources. The main goal was to uncover thematic tendencies, blind spots, and their implications for regional political stability, governance, and democracy. Results showed a notable concentration of studies in Southeast Asia, particularly the Philippines and

Indonesia, where political dynasties impact government and democracy. These countries dominate the literature due to their unique political landscapes and familial power systems. Political dynasties in Brunei, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Timor Leste, and Vietnam are understudied, highlighting a major need. To better comprehend Southeast Asian political dynasties, additional research is needed because to the geographic mismatch.

Further discussion on the conflict between the state and Indigenous populations at the Indonesia – Timor Leste border was written by Sugiarti et al. (2024). This kind of conflict has established a unique pattern. This topic is important as it encompasses two entities: state institutions and customary institutions. The authors examined these contestations' implications for customary institutions' function in Indonesia-Timor Leste bilateral relations. Their study utilized an ethnographic methodology, focussing on collecting both primary and secondary data for analysis. Contestation between the state and customary institutions manifests in conflicts over identity, struggles related to the formal spatial concept of the state versus the socio-cultural space of customary institutions, and disputes concerning ownership claims. A significant factor influencing these contestations is the limitation of customary participation imposed by the government via regulations and the marginalization of customary institutions. The contestation has implications for regulation, encompassing compromises between the state and customary practices, the establishment of new customary spaces, and the changing dynamics between Indigenous communities and transnational cultures.

The final paper in the volume is about executive-legislative relations in the Philippines and Indonesia, where Perdana et al. (2024) compared two multiparty presidential systems. Authors argue that the presidentialism framework warns of institutional deadlock, although Rodrigo Duterte and Joko Widodo strategically used presidential powers to negotiate these dynamics. Using a presidential toolbox framework in their studies, the authors investigate how the leaders used coalition-building, patronage, and budgetary authorities differently. Duterte depended on pork-barrel appropriations and patronage to win legislative support in the Philippines, while Jokowi built a broad coalition and included opposition parties in the Indonesian cabinet. Presidential toolboxes, not institutional architecture, are crucial to political stability in fragmented party systems. This defies deterministic presidentialism fears and provides a more nuanced view of executive adaptation in Southeast Asia. The coalitional presidentialism model in emerging democracies is refined to show how leadership styles, institutional arrangements, and informal practices affect multiparty presidential systems.

The vast variety of studies in this collection enriches our understanding of ASEAN's evolution, highlighting its multidimensional progression from value, norms, and cultural issues to economics, sustainability, industry, and International relations. It shows the region's progress and challenges in a changing world. These studies should inspire geo-economic and other ASEAN research to comprehend this dynamic region better.

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