

Development outlook: Exploring the opportunities of Southeast Asia

Andrea Haefner and Sovinda Po



**GRIFFITH ASIA PACIFIC
STRATEGIC OUTLOOK**

2024

POLICY BRIEF

CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Why Southeast Asia matters	1
Geopolitics and foreign policy in Southeast Asia	2
Public health challenges in Southeast Asia	2
Democracy and the rule of law	3
Climate change in Southeast Asia	4
Digital economies in Southeast Asia	4
Summary and recommendations	5
Notes	6

ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

The Griffith Asia-Pacific Strategic Outlook policy briefs are a publication of the Griffith Asia Institute, Griffith University, Queensland, Australia. These briefs serve as a platform for disseminating initial research outcomes pertaining to sustainable development within the Asia-Pacific region. The findings, interpretations and conclusions expressed in this paper are those of the author(s) and should not be attributed to Griffith University or affiliated organisations.

For more information, email gai@griffith.edu.au or visit our website at griffith.edu.au/asia-institute.

© 2024 Griffith University

All rights reserved.

To be cited as: Haefner, A and Po, S, 2024, 'Development Outlook: Exploring the opportunities in Southeast Asia', *Griffith Asia Pacific Strategic Outlook*, Griffith Asia Institute, Queensland, Australia, DOI: 10.25904/1912/5206.

Cover image: Shutterstock

Introduction

Southeast Asia stands at the crossroads of geopolitical, economic, and cultural significance, influencing not only its regional dynamics but also shaping global affairs. Comprising ten diverse nations, this dynamic region holds strategic importance due to its central maritime position, proximity to major powers like China and India, and its pivotal role in international trade routes. As the third-largest economy in Asia and the fifth-largest globally, Southeast Asia's rapid economic growth and burgeoning middle class present a colossal consumer market. Countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam have become integral players in the global supply chain, attracting substantial foreign direct investment.

However, amid the economic success, Southeast Asia grapples with a spectrum of security challenges, both traditional and non-traditional. The unresolved South China Sea dispute, involving multiple claimants and China's assertive actions, poses a significant threat to regional stability. Non-traditional risks, ranging from transnational terrorism to public health crises and environmental issues like deforestation and climate change, further compound the challenges faced by the region.

This paper discusses the key developments in the Asia-Pacific region with a specific focus on Southeast Asia that will influence the period between 2024-2026 and beyond. These five key trends, including geopolitics and foreign policy, public health, democracy and rule of law, digital economy, and climate change will shape Southeast Asia and the wider Asia-Pacific region. Addressing these key developments are crucial in achieving a sustainable, inclusive, and economic prosperous subregion with the ability to accelerate growth and progress for its population.

Why Southeast Asia matters

Southeast Asia is a dynamic and diverse region comprising ten countries holding significant geopolitical, economic, and cultural importance beyond its region due to its strategic location, economic potential, and cultural values. Southeast Asia sits in close proximity to major powers—China and India—has a central maritime position along vital sea lanes, including the South China Sea and the Strait of Malacca, and is positioned as a focal point for geopolitical competition alongside traditional trading routes.

Southeast Asia boasts a rapidly growing and diverse economy, currently being the third largest economy in Asia and the fifth largest economy globally. With a combined population of over 650 million people and a rising middle class, the region presents a massive consumer market. Countries like Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam have become key players in the global supply chain, attracting significant foreign direct investment. The economic success of Southeast Asia contributes not only to regional stability but also to global economic growth. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has emerged as a crucial regional bloc, fostering economic cooperation, and acting as a bridge between major economies.

However, Southeast Asia remains prone to both traditional and non-traditional security risks. The South China Sea dispute has not been resolved with incidents and clashes

involving several countries, particularly Vietnam, China, the Philippines, and Indonesia. Non-traditional risks include transnational issues such as terrorism, and public health crises alongside environmental impacts, including deforestation, haze pollution, and climate change which have far-reaching consequences, impacting weather patterns, sea levels, and ecological balance. Climate change, and haze pollution have caused vast damage to the life and health of millions of people and will only increase in the future, including mini hotspots such as the Mekong River Basin.

Geopolitics and foreign policy in Southeast Asia

The South China Sea dispute poses a significant threat to regional security in the Asia-Pacific. Competing claimants Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Vietnam have expressed dissatisfaction over China's broad assertions of maritime sovereignty. China maintains twenty outposts in the Parcel Islands and seven in the Spratlys. Together with a significant increase in its presence in the Paracels, China has been dredging and building artificial islands in the Spratly Islands since 2013, resulting in the creation of 3,200 acres of additional land. In an increasingly aggressive action that puts all neighbouring countries in danger, China has established highly developed military installations on its man-made islands, complete with airstrips, radar stations, artillery installations, anti-aircraft missile systems, lasers, and jammer technology. On August 28, 2023, the Ministry of Natural Resources in China revealed a new "standard map" of the South China Sea. Presently, the "nine-dash line" is merging into the waters off Taiwan's eastern shore to create a "ten-dash line". Notably, this development has drawn criticism from Taiwan, the Philippines and Vietnam who have territorial issues with China. The Philippines criticised the map for violating international law and demanded China to follow the 2016 ruling by The Hague Tribunal. Vietnam accused China of

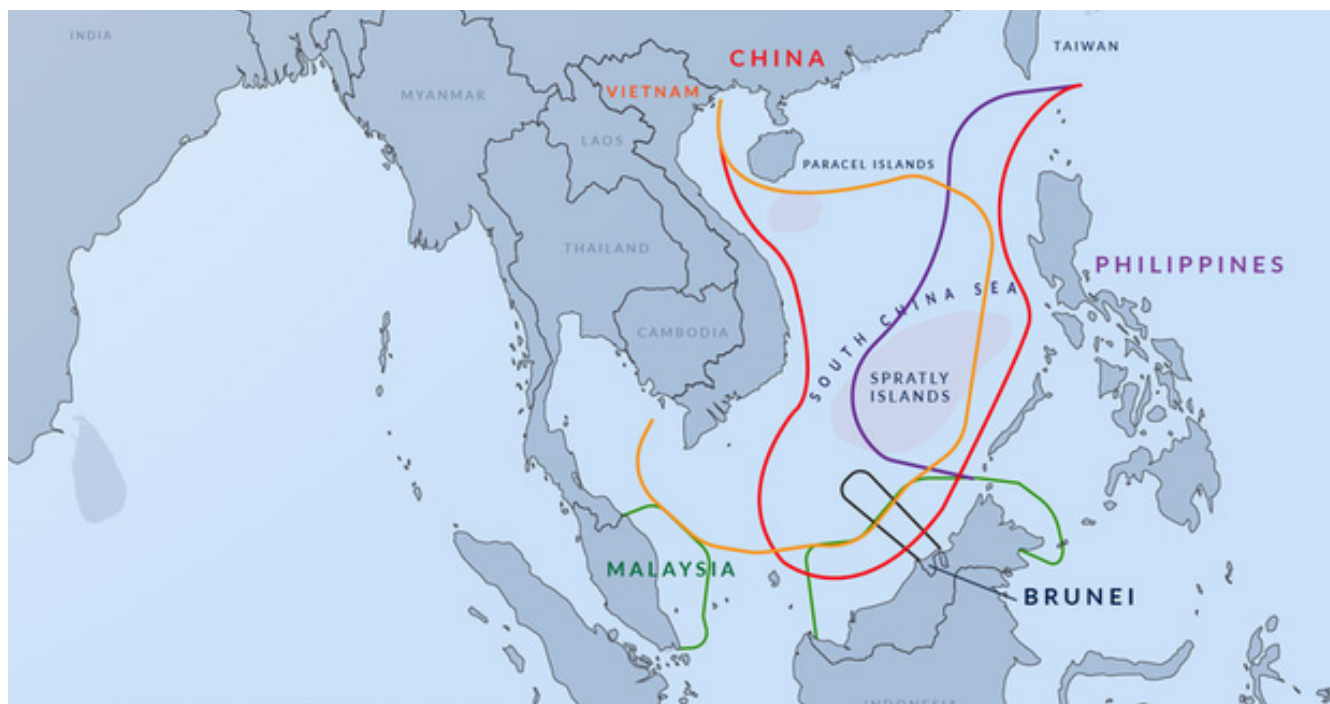
violating its sovereignty and jurisdiction over its sea regions. Taiwan denied being part of China, whereas Malaysia criticised China for claiming authority over waters off the coast of Borneo that overlap with its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

The South China issue is unlikely to be resolved anytime soon, rather an increase in maritime build up is expected in the next few years alongside the exploration of natural resources, including for example Vietnam building reefs. This will further lead to rising tensions impacting beyond Southeast Asia. Under the ASEAN mechanism, a non-binding Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DoC) was signed by ASEAN and China in 2002 as part of the ASEAN framework. Three main objectives of the DOC focused on encouraging activities to boost confidence, participating in practical maritime cooperation, and laying the groundwork for the formal, legally binding Code of Conduct's (COC) discussion and conclusion.

After that, many negotiations for a binding COC in the South China Sea have begun to address the conflict. To reflect international norms, principles, and rules by international law, particularly the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), Indonesia recently reported that ASEAN has agreed on new guidelines to accelerate talks for a legally binding COC on the South China Sea to achieve stability, safety, and peace. However, there are still many obstacles to overcome because the negotiations have focused on issues that are still up for debate, such as the COC's geographical scope and whether or not it should even be legally binding. It is unlikely that the ASEAN COC will be concluded in the near future as countries, including China and Vietnam, are reluctant. More dialogue and negotiations are needed to drive this forward.

Other opportunities include further work on the freedom of navigation and open sea under UNCLOS, although China is not a signature to it. Similarly, a further internationalisation of the issue for example by involving the Quad, including US, Japan, India and Australia or a focus on balancing power by increasing the importance of Vietnam, Indonesia, and the Philippines to balance China could be strategies to address the South China Sea conflict.

Figure 1: South China Sea territorial claims



Source: Radio Free Asia.

Public health challenges in Southeast Asia

Southeast Asia faces various public health challenges including haze pollution and the threat of infectious diseases. Infectious diseases are the most important public health challenge, driven by dense populations, rapid urbanisation, and environmental changes, creating an environment conducive to the spread of various pathogens, from emerging viruses to longstanding infectious diseases. In Southeast Asia, diseases such as dengue fever, malaria, and tuberculosis remain endemic, while emerging threats like Zika virus and chikungunya have garnered attention in recent years. The issue of infectious disease in Southeast Asia is severely dangerous. It has caused thousands of deaths annually. ASEAN has reported that in Southeast Asia, as of 10 May 2023, the death toll of COVID-19 was around 367,407 deaths out of around 35 million confirmed cases, the death toll due to dengue was 148 out of 99,614 infected cases, and the death toll due to measles was 17 out of 2,547 infected cases. There are also significant economic losses linked to public health emergencies; however concrete data and estimates are not available.

Inadequate sanitation infrastructure and limited access to clean water in some areas contribute to the persistence of waterborne diseases. The region's socioeconomic disparities also play a role, with marginalised populations facing greater challenges in accessing healthcare services and preventive measures. The emergence of

novel infectious diseases, as exemplified by the COVID-19 pandemic, underscores the need for robust systems and preparedness. Countries like Vietnam and Thailand were initially praised for their successful COVID-19 containment strategies, including early and decisive actions, robust testing, contact tracing, and public compliance with health protocols. However, disparities in healthcare infrastructure and access to medical resources highlighted existing inequalities. The region faced difficulties in securing an adequate supply of vaccines, leading to disparities in vaccination rates among different countries. COVID subvariants are increasing and are driven by several XBB subvariants for example in Singapore, including XBB.1.5, XBB.1.9, XBB.1.16, and XBB.2.3, which are emerging at different times but presenting as a single confluent outbreak that began in early March 2023.

COVID and other infectious disease outbreaks emphasise the importance of improving national and regional public health networks and connections through ASEAN and beyond to share information, resources, and coordinate responses. The region's resilience was tested, but collaborative efforts played a crucial role in navigating the complexities of the global health crisis. Infectious diseases will continue on various scales and if mismanaged will spread and create regional and global crisis. Moving ahead, a focus needs to be on strengthen healthcare systems, improve preparedness for future health crises, enhance surveillance systems, and continue regional cooperation to foster a more resilient and united response to shared challenges. Additional public and private investment in



public health is crucial, particularly addressing public health governance at all levels, including local, district, province, national and regional levels.

International health organisation such as the WHO and international partners such as the US, Australia, Japan and China can further provide assistance related to combatting infectious diseases in Southeast Asia. A focus should be on technical assistance, capacity building, epidemiological surveillance, emergency response, access to medicines and vaccines, advocacy and policy, and research and development.

Democracy and the rule of law

While Southeast Asia has been backsliding in democracy as a whole, there has been an increase in democratic practices in some countries, particularly Malaysia and the Philippines. According to the Freedom House in March 2023, Malaysia and Philippines increased three points on a 100 scale to 53 and 58 respectively which designated the two countries as Partly Free. In contrast, democracy is eroding in Myanmar, Thailand, and Cambodia. The military led government in Myanmar has used the military to crackdown and oppress dissent and execute pro-democracy activists. By July 14, 2023, it was estimated that around 23,800 people had been arrested. It is also reported that the military junta uses various approaches, including killing, torture, detention, and disappearance leading to the death of around 2,940 people and the destruction of 330 townships by March 2023.

Likewise, Thai politics remain dominated by the military, particularly after Prayut Chan-o-Cha staged a coup against the elected democratic leader Yingluck Shinawatra in 2014. Thai politics showed signs of leaning toward democracy with the rise of Pita Limjaroenrat's Move Forward Party among young and urbanist voters in 2023. However, the military-dominated parliament blocked Pita from becoming prime minister despite gaining victory in the general election, preventing the country from achieving any meaningful democratic reform. In Cambodia, the ruling party known as the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) further consolidated its power, while jailing members of the opposition parties, and putting pressure on civic freedom. Even though the new government of Cambodia from Hun Sen to his son Hun Manet has not taken any repressive measures since taking office in July 2023, the future prospect of the Hun Manet government resorting to violence remains uncertain.

Regarding the rule of law, ASEAN adopted the ASEAN Charter in 2017 representing a significant shift of ASEAN in dealing with the rule of law. However, the approach mainly focused on diplomacy and adhered to the ASEAN Way of non-interference and consensus. There is no clear definition of the rule of law. For example, Article 1.7 of the Charter stated that "strengthen democracy, enhance good governance and the rule of law, and to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms". However, ASEAN does not have a specific approach to deal with human rights issues and strengthen rule of law among its member states.

In order to facilitate meaningful progress, it is time for ASEAN to strengthen its institution, particularly on human rights issues. The development should make it possible for ASEAN to interfere in domestic issue of its member states regarding human rights violations. The reform is needed for ASEAN to solve internal issues of the organisation

particularly linked to Myanmar. In addition, an increasing focus should be on improving justice systems with a focus on reducing corruption. Also, separating the rule of law from democracy could be seen as advantage as it is more likely for the rule of law to increase in comparison to democracy as many countries in Southeast Asia are staying firmly in authoritarian regimes driven by family or political dynasties while there have been some minor positive changes linked to the rule of law across some countries. Key upcoming elections and trends to follow in the next few years are the upcoming election in Indonesia in 2024 and Singapore in 2025 with current Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong having announced his plan to relinquish his leadership responsibility prior to the election.

Climate change in Southeast Asia

Global warming has become a major concern in the Asia-Pacific region particularly in Southeast Asia. In 2021, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change raised concerns that Southeast Asia is experiencing the fastest speed of global warming, and it could reach 1.5 C, a dangerous level, by 2030. Without stable and predictable weather, rice production in ASEAN is under threat. The recent rise of temperature to 45 in Thailand, Myanmar and Laos and 40 degrees celsius in Cambodia, Vietnam and Malaysia led to a prolonging rice planting season. Global warming could greatly affect the socio-economic development in the region as the region consists of many rice producing countries such as Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand, Myanmar, and the Philippines. The region is producing around 26 per cent of global rice and exports around 40 percent of total rice, demonstrating the impacts beyond the region.

In October 2021, ASEAN released the ASEAN State of Climate Change Report. The paper highlights ASEAN's approach for 2030, which aims to utilise mitigation and adaptation to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050. However, achieving net-zero emissions is far from being materialised. ASEAN does not have a common mechanism and approach to reduce greenhouse gas emission. But the ASEAN State of Climate Change Report should be seen as a common aspiration of ASEAN members to reach net-zero emissions. For instance, in 2021 ASEAN shared common concerns of global emission. However, the paper was focused mainly on deforestation and forest degradation as the main source of global emission instead of coal power plants. On the contrary, fossil fuels such as oil, gas and coal are the main contributors to global warming and yet very critical for economic growth. This implies that ASEAN does not have a common position regarding greenhouse gas emissions.

Overall, there is a lack of financial support in pursuing renewable and clean energy in Southeast Asia. While the US and Western countries warned countries in the region of the consequences of Chinese investment in Southeast Asia, they have shown little commitment to support countries to move to renewable energy. In 2022, the US and Western countries announced their support of Indonesia and Vietnam to move from coal power plants to renewable energy under the Just Energy Transition Partnerships (JETP). The partnerships will assist Indonesia and Vietnam with around US\$35.5 billion. However, there has been no financial distribution from that so-called partnership yet.

In the next few years, climate change is continuing to increase with more extreme floods and droughts particularly

in mainland Southeast Asia and along key river basins such as the Mekong River Basin and related tributaries, alongside more intense cyclones in Indonesia and the Philippines with urbanisation also playing a major role and being impacted.

Key opportunities lie in linking climate change more actively to the Sustainable Development Goals and further ensuring the ASEAN framework and national policies on climate change are implemented and appropriately financed. Forecasting of disasters and climate related events, for example droughts and floods on the Mekong River, through regional intergovernmental organisations such as the Mekong River Commission, should be expanded further to minimise impacts on people and communities. An increase of sharing data and creating networks across countries and the region will further support addressing upcoming key challenges and support creating more resilient communities.

A stronger focus needs to be placed on climate financing while enhancing research and development. This means that ASEAN should work on the sustainable finance mechanisms through ASEAN based on the ASEAN Taxonomy for Sustainable Finance. This can be done through the joint ASEAN green development bond issuances, with the support from the international finance institutions like the ADB. A good start here is to learn JETP between Vietnam and EU members. Through JETP, Vietnam is set to receive around \$8 billion from its partners to focus on finance, technology, and capacity building. In addition, ASEAN should adopt a common resolution encouraging member states to set targets for greenhouse gas emissions along with the reduction of coal power plants in Southeast Asia.

Digital economies in Southeast Asia

The digital economy is growing in Southeast Asia as in the rest of the Asia-Pacific region, with people adopting technology for use in their daily lives and transactions. By 2022, there were 400 million digital consumers in Southeast Asia, contributing around US\$130 billion revenue. While Singapore is performing very well according to the ASEAN Digital Integration Index, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar are the least developed digital economies based on the index within Southeast Asia. Regardless of this diversity, ASEAN is progressing in its cross-border payment system, in which all ASEAN member states can retain their own currency while working to use digital payment within all ASEAN countries.

Many Southeast Asian countries have adopted their own digital payment method, known as Quick Response Code (QR code), making it easier for online transactions with lower risk of Covid-19 infection. While Cambodia has been perceived as lacking behind the digital economy, the country has managed to improve its online transactions. By 2020, there were only around 482.14 million online transactions, estimated to be US\$95.31 billion. The number increased to 707.57 million transactions, estimated to be US\$234 billion by 2025.

During the 43rd ASEAN Summit in Jakarta in 2023, ASEAN countries reached an agreement to enhance cross-border payment. The digital payment scheme will use the

Figure 2: Southeast Asian national climate policies and CO2 emissions per capita (in brackets)



Source: Griffith Asia Institute. Data drawn from Worldometer and Climate Policy Database, 2023.

Indonesian Standard QR Code as the regional payment system, known as QRIS. Many other countries such as Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, and Brunei are working to strengthen its domestic local payment so that the dream of adopting a cross-border payment scheme can be materialised. For instance, the National Bank of Cambodia signed an agreement with the Bank of the Lao PDR and the State Bank of Vietnam. The agreement will make it possible for consumers using Khmer Riel to purchase products in Laos and Vietnam using their domestic account. Against this backdrop, it is expected that ASEAN will be able to achieve its cross-border payment. Such payment will help ASEAN to strengthen its economic integration among its member states further contributing to the standing of Southeast Asia as third largest economy globally.

Key trends and opportunities include the governance of the digital economy, including the governance of digital currencies in each country, alongside increasing growth of online business and online platforms within Southeast Asia and beyond, alongside transactions via QR code. Albeit it is a major achievement to agree on a secure and resilient cross border payment system, ASEAN countries should focus on the following key priority developments. Firstly, ASEAN should enhance cooperation in the banking sector among its member states. Secondly, there should be more cooperation on technological development and information. This will ensure that transitions are more secure and efficient. Without this, ASEAN cross-border payment can be prone to hacking and scamming. Thirdly, financial integration does not reach full potential across all Southeast Asian countries and all citizens within the populations yet. A focus needs to be on reducing the digital divide, particularly ensuring digitalisation includes all people, including people in rural communities, the poor, ethnic minorities, the elderly and other marginalised groups. Lastly, a focus should be on regulating online business and related legislation. This provides opportunities for more collaborative work between academic, government and business to fight against scams.

Summary and recommendations

Despite its challenges, Southeast Asia is a fast-growing region with a lot of potential, particularly driven by its young populations, an increased uptake of digitalisation and connectivity, alongside growing innovation, and entrepreneurship. As the f largest economy globally and due to its significant geopolitical location, developments in Southeast Asia are crucial to follow due to its impact beyond the sub-region. As the region continues to evolve, its role in shaping the Asia-Pacific region and beyond, will become even more evident. Addressing the five key trends (geopolitics and foreign policy, public health, democracy and rule of law, digital economy, and climate change) and highlighted recommendations over the next few years is important.

Overall, ASEAN should focus on investing in research and development in the areas of digitalisation, public health prevention and crisis reediness, green technology and legal international best practices regarding maritime management.

ASEAN should also invest in building more capacity of workers in the key trend areas and explore joint financing mechanism that enables ASEAN to invest in the five highlighted areas. This will be crucial for Southeast Asia in achieving a sustainable, inclusive, and economic prosperous subregion with the ability to accelerate growth and progress for its population and beyond.

RECOMMENDATION 1

Territorial conflict in the South China Sea

1. Increase dialogue and negotiations to conclude the legal binding Code of Conduct in the South China Sea.
2. Advocate for a free and open sea by involving QUAD, including Australia, India, Japan, and the US.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Public health challenges and crises

1. Closer collaboration among all levels of governments, including local, district, province, national and regional levels.
2. Stronger collaborative efforts and network across the region focusing on better surveillance and healthcare systems.
3. Increased private and public investment in public health, including clinics and hospitals.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Democratic backsliding and the role of rule of law

1. Strengthen ASEAN's options to interfere in domestic affairs of its members if serious human rights violations occur.
2. Improving justice systems to reduce corruption and strengthen the rule of law.
3. Strengthening freedom of speech and the role of media to address democratic backsliding and the rule of law.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Climate change, including increasing floods, droughts, rising temperature and cyclones

1. Stronger push for the effective and appropriate implementation of ASEAN-related and national frameworks on climate change.
2. Focus on forecasting of floods, droughts and severe weather events, including sharing meteorological data among ASEAN countries.
3. Develop joint climate financing to assist most vulnerable ASEAN members and communities.
4. Support ASEAN members to reduce reliance on coal power plants with a stronger focus on renewable energies.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Increasing online transactions and businesses

1. Enhancing banking sector among member states, including governance of digital currencies.
2. Stronger collaboration on technological development and information, particularly linked to security and efficiencies.
3. Focus on bridging the digital gap between urban and rural populations and across all ASEAN countries.
4. Develop regulations and guidelines to govern online transactions and businesses.
5. Increase collaboration between academia, government and businesses to address key challenge



Notes

1. ASEAN. 2022. "Investing in ASEAN 2023." Available at <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/investment-report-2023.pdf>.
2. ASEAN. 2020. "ASEAN Investment Report 2020-2021: Investing in Industry 4.0." Available at <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/AIR-2020-2021.pdf>.
3. Center for Preventive Action, 2023, Territorial disputes in the South China Sea, <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/territorial-disputes-south-china-sea>
4. Sacks, B. J., 2022. "The Political Ecology of South China Sea Disputes." Perspective: Expert Insights on a Timely Policy Issue, Rand Corporation. Available at https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/perspectives/PEA2000/PEA2021-1/RAND_PEA2021-1.pdf.
5. Ibid.
6. Mori, H., 5 September 2023. China's New 'Ten-Dash Line' Map Infuriates Asian Neighbors. Japan Forward. Available at <https://japan-forward.com/chinas-new-ten-dash-line-map-infuriates-asian-neighbors/>.
7. Zhen, L., 13 July 2023. China and Asean take another step towards South China Sea code of conduct. South China Morning Post. Available at <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3227601/china-and-asean-take-another-step-towards-south-china-sea-code-conduct>.
8. ASEAN, 2023. COVID-19, Mpox, and Other Infectious Diseases: Situational Report in the ASEAN Region, Jarkata. Available at https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/COVID-19-Mpox-and-Other-Infectious-Diseases_Situational-Report_ASEAN-BioDiaspora-Regional-Virtual-Center_10May2023.pdf.
9. OECD/WHO, 2022. Health at a Glance: Asia/Pacific 2022: Measuring Progress Towards Universal Health Coverage. Paris: OECD Publishing. Available at <https://www.oecd.org/els/health-at-a-glance-asia-pacific-23054964.htm>.
10. Pung, R., Kong, X.P., Cui, L., Chae, S.R., Mark, I., Chen, C., Lee, V.J. and Ho, Z.J.M., 2023. Severity of SARS-CoV-2 omicron XBB subvariants in Singapore. The Lancet Regional Health-Western Pacific, 37.
11. Freedom House, 2023. Freedom in the World 2023, Washington D.C. Available at https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/FIW_World_2023_DigitalPDF.pdf.
12. Chau, T., 14 July 2023. Myanmar military regime accused of murdering political prisoners. Aljazeera. Available at <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/7/14/myanmar-military-regime-accused-of-murdering-political-prisoners>.
13. United Nations, 27 July 2023. Warming trend in Asia set to cause more disruption: UN weather agency. Available at <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/07/1139152>.
14. Walker, T., 20 September 2023. Thailand: What next for reformist Pita after failed PM bid?. DW. Available at <https://www.dw.com/en/thailand-what-next-for-reformist-pita-after-failed-pm-bid/a-66873844>.
15. Leang, S., 24 August 2023. Cambodia's National Election 2023: Pressure, Control and Legacy. Heinrich Böll Stiftung. Available at <https://www.boell.de/en/2023/08/24/cambodias-national-election-2023-pressure-control-and-legacy>.
16. Ludher, E. and Teng, P., 12 July 2023. Rice Production and Food Security in Southeast Asia under Threat from El Niño. ISEAS Perspective, 53(2023).
17. Ibid.
18. Radio Free Asia, 1 November 2022. Southeast Asia remains world rice bowl as pockets of region suffer crop disasters. Available <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/cambodia/southeastasia-rice-10302022114716.html>.
19. Maulia, E, 2023, 'Indonesia finalizes renewables target with G7 climate finance plan', Nikkei Asia, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Environment/Climate-Change/Indonesia-finalizes-renewables-target-with-G7-climate-finance-plan>
20. Haefner, A., 20 October 2020. Duelling diplomacy over Southeast Asia's most important river. The Interpreter. Available at <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/duelling-diplomacy-over-southeast-asia-s-most-important-river>.
21. Seah, S., 5 April 2023. Obstacles to Decarbonisation in Southeast Asia. Fulcrum. Available at <https://fulcrum.sg/aseanfocus/obstacles-to-decarbonisation-in-southeast-asia/>.
22. Yang, ATH, 20 April 2023. ASEAN's splintering digital economy governance. East Asia Forum. Available at <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2023/04/20/aseans-splintering-digital-economy-governance/#:~:text=ASEAN%20has%20more%20than%20400,and%20this%20number%20is%20growing>.

23. Sefrina, M., 2023. Understanding the ASEAN Digital Economy Framework Agreement: A Means to Support ASEAN Integration, Jakarta: Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia.
24. Guild, J., 13 June 2023. ASEAN's Cross-Border Digital Payment System Explained. The Diplomat. Available at <https://thediplomat.com/2023/06/aseans-cross-border-digital-payment-system-explained/>.
25. Staff Writer, 2023, Cambodia to promote cross-border digital payment with Viet Nam, Laos, Khmer Times, 21 June, <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/501311878/cambodia-to-promote-cross-border-digital-payment-with-viet-nam-laos/>
26. ASEAN. 2022. "Investing in ASEAN 2023." Available at <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/investment-report-2023.pdf>.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Dr Andrea Haefner is a Senior Lecturer at the Griffith Asia Institute, a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy, and has over 15 years of experience working with academia, government, and international organisations across Australia, Germany, and Southeast

Asia, especially the Mekong region. Andrea has lived and worked for several years in Southeast Asia and is currently leading as Deputy Director WIL (Work Integrated Learning) Griffith Business School the award-winning Griffith Asia Business Internship Program, a global Work Integrated Learning program allowing Australian students to experience Asia through an overseas internship building upon well-established industry partner links.

Andrea's research focuses on governing civil society in Southeast Asia and a strong interest in transboundary river basins in Southeast Asia, Latin America, and Europe, especially the Mekong River Basin. Besides publishing several peer-reviewed articles, Andrea's book on Negotiating for Water Resources - Bridging Transboundary River Basins was published with Routledge in 2016. Andrea also worked on several projects on the ground in water resources management and climate change, focusing on the Mekong region.



Dr Sovinda Po is Director at the Center for Southeast Asian Studies (CSEAS) of Royal University of Phnom Penh. His research agenda evolves the relationship between China and mainland Southeast Asia and the strategic use of multilateral institutions by both major powers

and small states. His journal articles have appeared in Australian Journal of International Affairs, Asian Studies Review, Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs, European Journal of East Asian Studies, Southeast Asian Affairs, Journal of Greater Mekong Studies, Explorations: A Graduate Student Journal of Southeast Asian Studies, and UC Occasional Paper Series. His op-eds have appeared in the Diplomat, East Asia Forum, New Mandala, the Interpreter, ASEANFocus, IPP Review and Australian Outlook. He has also published many book chapters on China, Southeast Asia and the IndoPacific security. He is often quoted in the Phnom Penh Post, and the South China Morning Post, and also is interviewed by the Wire (Australia), the Voice of America and the Radio Free Asia. He received his PhD in Political Science with Award of Excellence in a Thesis Research from Griffith University, Australia.

ABOUT THE GRIFFITH ASIA INSTITUTE (GAI)

Griffith Asia Institute (GAI) is an internationally leading partner for an inclusive, sustainable and prosperous Asia-Pacific. We build capacity and create positive impact through partnerships in sustainable economics and business, politics, international relations, security, and inclusive development.

Founded more than 25 years ago, GAI has 130 members and is the largest institute of Griffith Business School at Griffith University.

griffith.edu.au/asia-institute

CENTER FOR SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES (CSEAS) OF THE INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDIES AND PUBLIC POLICY (IISPP)

The Center for Southeast Asian Studies (CSEAS) within the Institute for International Studies and Public Policy (IISPP) strives to become a leading, dependable source of expertise on Southeast Asian matters. CSEAS's goal is to drive progress, foster integration, peace, and development in the region. Through a team of esteemed researchers, CSEAS seeks to offer a sustainable alternative to ad-hoc research, training, and policy discussions, ensuring lasting national and regional impacts.

rupp.edu.kh/iispp/cseas/



Griffith Asia Institute

Griffith University Nathan campus
Nathan Queensland 4111, Australia

Email: gai@griffith.edu.au

griffith.edu.au/asia-institute