

## MEDIA RELEASE

### **Pandemic threat, ASEAN Woes and Geopolitical Competition Dominate the State of Southeast Asia 2022 Survey Report**

*Findings from the latest run of the State of Southeast Asia Survey conducted by the ASEAN Studies Centre at ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute highlighted the pandemic's threat to health, and a 'slow and ineffective' ASEAN as the top challenge and concern facing the region. The Myanmar crisis is seen as putting ASEAN's centrality and unity to the test. China continues to be highly regarded as the most influential economic and political power while Japan remains the most trusted major power. Competing spheres of influence in the region and beyond are not far from everyone's minds.*

**Singapore, 16 February 2022** - The survey was conducted from 11 November 2021 to 31 December 2021 in English, Bahasa Indonesia, Khmer, Lao and Vietnamese, gathering views from 1,677 respondents from academia, business, government, civil society and media. In a departure from previous years, ten per cent of the responses were conducted via in-country interviews.

The fourth edition of this region-wide survey covers a broader and more diverse set of questions including the top challenges facing Southeast Asia; the governments' handling of the Covid-19 pandemic; vaccine preferences; the Myanmar crisis; views of the QUAD and AUKUS; levels of trust regarding the major powers; ASEAN's role and relevance; China's bid to join the CPTPP vis-à-vis the US staying out; the US-China rivalry and its impact on Southeast Asia, and soft power.

A different methodology with 10% weighted average assigned to the responses of each ASEAN country was used to calculate the average figures for ASEAN as a whole. The 2022 survey report also includes similarly weighted results from the responses of the 2021 edition to allow for comparisons and trend analysis of the matters of concern.

Following the pandemic's threat to health as the region's top challenges are unemployment and economic recession, and the impact of climate change. More than half of respondents show support for their governments in addressing the pandemic as well as for mRNA vaccines with Pfizer and Moderna as the most trusted vaccine brands. While COVID-19 remained top-of-mind for Southeast Asians, the survey also found that respondents are also concerned that ASEAN may be too slow and ineffective in coping with political and economic developments, and that ASEAN may become an arena for major power competition.

China remains undisputed as the most influential economic power in the region and also continues to be seen as the most influential political and strategic power, outpacing the US by significant margins. China's growing influence also engenders considerable anxiety over Beijing's strategic clout in the region.

Japan remains the most trusted major power in terms of "doing the right thing" to provide global public goods, followed by the US and the EU. Japan also shines in the soft power domain in terms of tourism while the US's soft power continues to hold strong attraction in tertiary education.

While competing spheres of influence in the region and beyond are not far from everyone's minds, the survey findings show a welcoming attitude towards the QUAD, given the prospects

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for tangible cooperation, while the AUKUS arrangement is seen to balance China's growing military power. Closer to home, the Myanmar crisis continues to put ASEAN's centrality and unity to the test with the jury still out on ASEAN's response to the escalating political and humanitarian crisis. Southeast Asians are equally split between three groups - the approving, disapproving and the agnostic about ASEAN's response to Myanmar.

On the economic front, China's membership in the CPTPP is perceived to create both opportunities and challenges for the region and beyond. In the absence of the US, China's influence is expected to fill the economic void and strengthens views of an ascendant China. Meanwhile there is a fear of growing regional tensions due to the shift in the form of US engagement in the Indo-Pacific.

Commenting on the results, Mr Choi Shing Kwok, Director and CEO of ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute and Head of the ASEAN Studies Centre said: "With the benefit of four years' worth of survey data, we are mapping how Southeast Asian perceptions are changing over time in response to the rapidly evolving internal and external developments. What is becoming clear is the growing preoccupation and concern Southeast Asia has while watching the evolving geopolitical strategic rift between the US and China. This comes across in many of the responses whether they be in politics, security or trade. Like it or not, this will continue for the foreseeable future. We hope that the findings of the survey, which are broadly representative of informed regional observers, will help academics, policymakers and analysts understand some of the complex challenges facing the region."

The full survey findings were released at the E-launch this morning. A stellar panel comprising Professor Chan Heng Chee, Singapore's Ambassador-at-Large and Chairman of ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute's Board of Trustees; Professor Zha Daojiong of Peking University, Professor Thitinan Pongsudhirak of Chulalongkorn University, and Professor Evelyn Goh of the Australian National University discussed the findings and shared their insights at the launch. Mr Choi Shing Kwok moderated the discussion.

The 2022 report and those from the previous years can be downloaded from ISEAS website - <https://www.iseas.edu.sg/category/articles-commentaries/state-of-southeast-asia-survey/>

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### **About ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute (ISEAS) and ASEAN Studies Centre (ASC)**

**ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute** (formerly Institute of Southeast Asian Studies) was established as an autonomous organization in 1968. It is a regional centre dedicated to the study of socio-political, security, and economic trends and developments in Southeast Asia and its wider geostrategic and economic environment. The Institute's research programmes are the Regional Economic Studies (RES), Regional Strategic and Political Studies (RSPS), and Regional Social and Cultural Studies (RSCS).

The **ASEAN Studies Centre (ASC)** was established in 2008 to research on issues pertaining to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as an institution and a process. Through research, publications, conferences, media engagement and outreach activities, ASC seeks to promote greater understanding of ASEAN and to contribute toward regional cooperation and integration. The Centre conducts studies and provides inputs to stakeholders on issues and matters that call for collective ASEAN actions and responses, especially those pertinent to the ASEAN Community building process. The ASC is the first institutional Recipient of the ASEAN Prize in 2020, a prestigious award to honour outstanding achievements of individuals or organisations who have made meaningful contributions to ASEAN.