

## THE ASEAN PUBLIC PERSPECTIVE ON THE IMPACTS OF RUSSIA'S INVASION OF UKRAINE ON SOUTHEAST ASIA

Rizki Damayanti

Department of International Relations,  
Universitas Paramadina, Jakarta, Indonesia  
(rizki.damayanti@paramadina.ac.id)  
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### Abstract

This research aimed to examine ASEAN public perceptions on the impacts of Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, focusing on how the conflict influenced views and attitudes across Southeast Asia. It employed qualitative methods with secondary data collected from books, journal articles, government publications, and The State of Southeast Asia 2023 Survey Report by the ASEAN Studies Center at ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute. Survey reports gathered from respondents' perspectives in various ASEAN countries showed diverse opinions across the region. While most respondents condemned the invasion, majority called for ASEAN to be more active in mediation. The key factors that shaped public perspectives include historical ties with Russia, economic dependencies, media narratives, and regional geopolitical considerations. These factors significantly influenced the diversity of opinions within ASEAN countries. The research also assessed the effectiveness of public perspectives, which is influential and directly limited by consensus-based decision-making. In conclusion, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has significantly affected public perceptions in Southeast Asia, underscoring the need for ASEAN to consider diverse viewpoints. The research recommends that ASEAN enhance its role in regional diplomacy and strengthen multilateral dialogue to address future geopolitical challenges effectively.

**Keywords:** *ASEAN, ASEAN public perspective, Russia's invasion, Ukraine, Southeast Asia*

### INTRODUCTION

Russian invasion of Ukraine is a deadly conflict that has attracted international attention for several reasons. This included geopolitical positions, military attacks, armed conflict, Russia-West tensions, international diplomacy, and the role played

in global politics (Minic, 2022). Regarding geopolitical position, Ukraine is located on the border between Western Europe and Russia, causing it to become a meeting point between Western and Russian influences. Due to the strategic position, the invasion had a major impact on regional geopolitics and European security. In the context of military attacks, it was perceived as a rare step in the post-Cold War era, violating the basic principle of international law. This regulation prohibits the invasion of another country by military force. The Russian invasion, which evolved into a military conflict, also included armed fighting and major damage in eastern Ukraine, causing deaths, injuries, and refugees (Bharti, 2022). The destruction and human suffering caused by the conflict had attracted world attention.

The invasion increased tensions between Russia and Western countries, especially the United States (U.S.) and members of the European Union (EU), leading to instability in international relations and economic sanctions. This also impacted the threat of deadlock in international diplomatic efforts adopted, such as the Minsk I and II agreements carried out to achieve peace and resolve conflicts between both countries. Regarding the role of Russia in global politics, the invasion was perceived as a broader effort to maintain influence in neighbouring regions, including assessing the international community's reactions to acts of military aggression (Hardy, 2022).

The combined impact of the abovementioned factors has attracted international attention and widespread impacts in several fields. Meanwhile, for the EU, which was highly dependent on energy supplies from Russia, especially natural gas, the invasion caused it to become more aware of the dependence, prompting efforts to seek alternative energy sources and diversify supplies. Many EU member states, especially in Eastern Europe, had increased respective defence spending in response to the perceived threat from Russia. This was aimed at strengthening the collective defence of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the EU (Davis & Slobodchikoff, 2022). Furthermore, the imposed tensions and sanctions also affected the economic growth of several EU countries that had developed cordial trade relations with Russia. This included the export sector, such as the agriculture and manufacturing industries.

In line with this, the West and the EU also provided political, diplomatic, and financial support to Ukraine to overcome the impact of the invasion, strengthening the governance. This included fiscal and development assistance, as well as military support. Finally, the Russian invasion has raised concerns about regional security in Eastern Europe. Countries in the region, especially those once part of the Soviet Union, are more vulnerable to potential military threats (Dibb, 2022).

The invasion of Ukraine reportedly affected the politics, economy, and security of the EU and Western countries. This mainly led to a shift in regional geopolitical dynamics, assessing the unity as well as the foreign policy implemented by the EU and Western countries (Bharti, 2022). However, the invasion also influenced certain situations outside Europe, including Southeast Asia, even at the public level.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine had significant ramifications outside Europe, including Southeast Asia. The ripple impacts of the conflict were felt in various areas, such as energy, security, economic stability, and regional geopolitics (Storey, 2024). Southeast Asian countries, which are part of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), have reacted in ways influenced by both government policies and public perceptions. Moreover, public opinion critical in shaping foreign policy decisions and ASEAN stance toward global conflicts. In this regard, understanding the public perspective in ASEAN member states provided deeper insight into how the conflict was viewed, including the wider impact on the region.

The public perspective in Southeast Asia is important for several reasons. First, the historical aversion to military interventions and foreign interference resonates in the regional discourse on sovereignty and non-interference—core principles of ASEAN (Acharya, 2014). Therefore, public sentiment often reflected concerns over external military actions, depicting the broader approach adopted to address international conflicts. As ASEAN had established major strategic partnerships with global powers such as the EU and Russia, public opinion on the Ukraine conflict influenced these diplomatic relationships moving forward.

Second, ASEAN-EU relations are of growing significance as both regions share interests in economic, political, and security cooperation (Koo, 2021). The Ukraine conflict presented new challenges and opportunities for these relations, particularly as the EU seeks to strengthen ties with ASEAN to counterbalance the reliance on Russia for energy and other strategic resources. This shift heightened the relevance of ASEAN perspective on the invasion, both from government and public viewpoints.

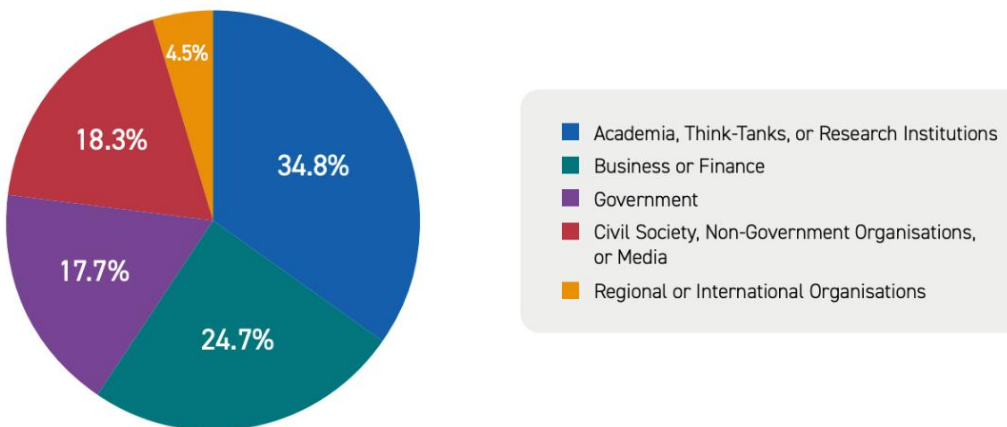
Third, public opinion tended to drive or hinder the ability of ASEAN to adopt a more proactive role in global diplomacy. The position on Ukraine had been cautious, reflecting the traditional stance of neutrality. However, the significant public interest in the conflict, particularly related to human rights violations and sovereignty issues, prompted ASEAN leaders to reconsider how the organisation engages with international crises as well as influences the diplomatic strategies adopted (Lim, 2022).

This research focused on the public perspectives within ASEAN member states, analysing how it influenced foreign policy response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. By exploring the public viewpoint on the conflict, the present research outlined the broader implications for regional security, diplomacy, and ASEAN relations with the EU. This approach addressed a major gap by assessing government actions and public sentiments, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of how Southeast Asia perceived the ongoing conflict and how big ASEAN is capable of responding to the issue.

## METHODOLOGY

The research adopted a qualitative method, and as reported by Jack S. Levy, it is particularly suitable for investigations in International Relations. This is due to the connection between international relations and historical perspectives, which demand in-depth analysis and explanations. Furthermore, case studies were adopted to provide detailed and scientifically rigorous findings (Levy, 2008).

This library research focused on secondary data from books, journal articles, government publications, reports, and the internet. The main data source used to the public perspective regarding the impact of the invasion was in *The State of Southeast Asia 2023 Survey Report* published by the ASEAN Studies Center at the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute.



**Figure 1: Respondent Affiliation**

(Source: The ASEAN Studies Center at the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute [2023, p. 6].)

This survey was attended by 1.308 respondents from ten ASEAN member countries (Figure 1) where Singapore led with the highest number of respondents at 208 (15.9%), followed by Thailand and Vietnam at 144 (11.0%) and 136 (10.4%),

respectively. Meanwhile, the details for other countries were reported as follows Cambodia (10.2%), Malaysia (9.5%), Indonesia (9.3%), Brunei (9.2%), Myanmar (8.8%), Laos (8.2%), and the Philippines (7.6%). The respondents belonged to five affiliated categories, namely (a) academics, think tanks, and research; (b) business or financial representatives, (c) civil society, NGO, or media representatives, (d) government officials, and (e) regional or international organisation personnel.

### **The Importance of Public Perspective on Issues Related to Military Invasion**

Public perspectives on military invasions influence international relations and state responses. This research explored how public views influenced regional diplomacy and policymaking. However, the relevance of the present analyses was justified by examining how the field of international relations (IR) theory addressed the intersection between public perspective and military invasions, drawing upon realism, liberalism, and constructivism. A critical review of existing literature showed gaps the current research aimed to address, particularly in the context of ASEAN public views on international conflicts.

Prior research by Kenneth Waltz and Hans Morgenthau reported that ASEAN member states prioritised security and power in an anarchic international system, often sidelining public opinion in favour of strategic calculations. Waltz (1979) and Morgenthau (1985), further proposed that military invasions were state-driven actions designed to protect national interests, irrespective of public sentiment. In ASEAN, the realist perspective suggested that states may restrain public opinion to maintain regional stability and strategic alliances. However, this approach presented a gap in understanding how public perspectives influenced non-military states, such as those in ASEAN, where related opinions exerted pressure on the government through diplomatic or economic channels. The realist framework provided a foundational view, underestimating the potential role of public opinion in shaping state behaviour in non-military contexts. The present research intends to address this gap by focusing on public perceptions of ASEAN. Holsti (1996) stated that public opinion in the U.S. had historically influenced foreign policy, especially in conflicts concerning military action, outlining the importance of exploring similar dynamics in ASEAN response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Liberal international relations theories, proposed by Immanuel Kant and Michael Doyle, stated the role of democratic norms, institutional constraints, and public accountability in shaping foreign policy. In accordance with the democratic peace theory, public opposition to military interventions tends to be more pronounced in democratic societies, leading to constraints on state actions (Kant,

1991; Doyle, 1986). This theory is relevant to ASEAN, where a mix of democratic and authoritarian regimes coexist. In democratic ASEAN countries such as Indonesia and the Philippines, public sentiment motivates the government to adopt policies condemning the actions of Russia because it is more accountable to the population. However, more authoritarian states may adopt a different approach, namely Vietnam and Laos, where public opinion is less influential. The contrast outlined a gap in the literature regarding how mixed regimes in regional blocs such as ASEAN balanced public opinion and state interests in the face of international conflicts. The exploration of this conflict enabled the present research to fill the gap by analysing how different ASEAN governments responded to public views depending on their respective political structures. Risse-Kappen (1991) explored this view by discussing how domestic structures and public opinion in liberal democracies influenced foreign policy, a relevant perspective in comparing the ability of democratic and authoritarian ASEAN states to balance public opinion with state interests.

Constructivist scholars such as Alexander Wendt and Martha Finnemore reviewed the issue from a different perspective, focusing on the impact of norms, identities, and social constructions on state behaviour. Wendt (1999), and Finnemore (1996) stated that public perspectives affected state actions by influencing legitimacy, humanitarian intervention, and adherence to international law. Meanwhile, in ASEAN, public opinion plays a role in reinforcing regional norms, including the principles of non-intervention and peaceful conflict resolution. For example, the regional identity, shaped by collective norms of sovereignty and diplomacy, influenced the internalisation of public views on the invasion of Ukraine. Constructivism often lacked practical evidence on how public sentiment was directly translated into policy shifts. The current research explored this gap by providing empirical data on ASEAN public perspectives and analysing the influence on policy decisions through regional norms.

Robert Jervis's insights on perception and misperception in international politics offered another layer to understanding the importance of public perspective in military invasions. In addition, Jervis (2017) reviewed how public perception of the legitimacy of these actions affected international reactions. If an invasion is viewed as aggressive or a violation of international norms, it prompts stricter responses, such as sanctions or military intervention. However, the research by Jervis did not comprehensively address how regional organisations, namely ASEAN, handled external conflicts based on public perception. The current research extended Jervis's framework by investigating how public perspective impacted the collective diplomatic response to Russian invasion. It

identified the complexity of balancing public sentiment with foreign policy decisions in a region with diverse political regimes.

The research synthesised findings from past reviews on the relationship between public opinion and military invasions, particularly pertaining to the ASEAN context. Tomz et al. (2020), explored the impact of public opinion on foreign policy decisions, stating that it influenced the legitimacy, international response, and diplomatic relations following a military invasion. However, these scholars focused predominantly on Western democracies, leaving a gap in understanding how public perspectives influenced non-Western, multi-regime regions such as ASEAN. The gap was filled by exploring Southeast Asia, where public opinions on military invasions remained understudied.

In evaluating existing literature, it was observed that substantial research had been conducted on public perspectives in Western contexts, while limited attention was given to ASEAN public views on international conflicts. This gap was addressed, outlining the importance of public opinion in shaping ASEAN regional policies and diplomacy. The critical analysis of existing theories and application in this context provided new insights into how public perspectives influenced international relations, even in regions where military power played a less direct role.

The literature review identified gaps in the current analysis of the relationship between public perspectives and military invasions, particularly in the context of ASEAN. This research formulated a framework for comprehending how public opinion influenced regional responses to global conflicts by comparing different international relations theories and evaluating their applicability to ASEAN. Additionally, the analysis of ASEAN public perspectives on the Russian invasion of Ukraine contributed to a deeper understanding of how public sentiment influenced diplomatic strategies, regional cohesion, and international conflict management.

## **FINDINGS**

### **ASEAN Public Concerns Regarding the Impact of the Russian Invasion of Ukraine**

The Russian invasion of Ukraine became the focal point of public attention across Southeast Asia. The State of Southeast Asia 2023 Survey Report published by the ASEAN Studies Centre at the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute reported that the conflict ranked fifth among the most pressing concerns, namely the economic impact of COVID-19, rising tensions in the Taiwan Strait, unresolved disputes

with China, and ASEAN public support for Timor Leste membership in the organisation (The ASEAN Studies Centre, 2023). These results depicted the widespread recognition of the invasion broader consequences, particularly among a population geographically distant from the conflict.

**Table 1: ASEAN Public Concern Regarding Russian Invasion of Ukraine**

Country	Very concerned	Somewhat concerned	Neutral	Not very concerned	Not at all concerned
ASEAN	47.9%	35.0%	12.3%	2.7%	2.2%
Brunei	64.2%	16.7%	7.5%	4.2%	7.5%
Cambodia	52.2%	28.4%	15.7%	1.5%	2.2%
Indonesia	61.2%	28.1%	6.6%	2.5%	1.7%
Laos	14.0%	44.9%	36.4%	3.7%	0.9%
Malaysia	41.9%	37.9%	16.9%	2.4%	0.8%
Myanmar	27.0%	51.3%	13.9%	1.7%	6.1%
Philippines	71.7%	22.2%	4.0%	2.0%	0.0%
Singapore	51.9%	35.6%	7.7%	3.8%	1.0%
Thailand	38.2%	50.7%	6.9%	3.5%	0.7%
Vietnam	56.6%	33.8%	7.4%	1.5%	0.7%

Source: The ASEAN Studies Center at the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute (2023, p. 18).

Based on the survey results, while ASEAN official response to the invasion was perceived as relatively weak, the public remained acutely aware of the conflict potential to destabilise global security. As reflected in the survey, 82.9% of respondents expressed varying levels of concern about the invasion. Specifically, 47.9% were very concerned, while 35.0% described themselves as somewhat concerned. Civil society, NGOs, and media-affiliated respondents constituted the majority of those very concerned (53.6%), suggesting that individuals engaged in international advocacy or information dissemination tended to be particularly sensitive to geopolitical instability. Meanwhile, only a few (12.3%) adopted a neutral stance, with relatively 2.7% showing minimal concern.

With respect to this, public opinion varied significantly by country. The respondents from Filipino expressed the highest level of concern (71.7% very concerned), followed by Brunei (64.2%) and Indonesia (61.2%). However, those (36.4%) from Laos showed the highest level of neutrality, with only 14.0% expressing high concern. These figures depicted ASEAN countries' geographic, political, and economic diversity, which impacted public attitudes toward external conflicts. The basic concerns of the ASEAN public regarding Russian invasion of Ukraine vary, as shown by the following survey.



**Table 2: The Most Serious Impact of Russian Invasion of Ukraine on Southeast Asia**

Country	Increases in energy and food prices causing economic hardship	Erodes trust in a rules-based order and violation of national sovereignty	Increases existing divisions within ASEAN	Worsen tensions between the U.S and China	Does not affect Southeast Asia
ASEAN	58.3%	25.9%	7.4%	5.2%	3.2%
Brunei	38.3%	19.2%	24.2%	9.2%	9.2%
Cambodia	61.2%	27.6%	3.0%	5.2%	3.0%
Indonesia	73.6%	20.7%	0.8%	4.1%	0.8%
Laos	52.3%	31.8%	8.4%	1.9%	5.6%
Malaysia	62.1%	16.9%	9.7%	9.7%	1.6%
Myanmar	52.2%	28.7%	9.6%	2.6%	7.0%
Philippines	70.7%	23.2%	4.0%	1.0%	1.0%
Singapore	48.6%	40.9%	3.4%	5.8%	1.4%
Thailand	65.3%	17.4%	7.6%	8.3%	1.4%
Vietnam	58.8%	32.4%	2.9%	4.4%	1.5%

Source: The ASEAN Studies Center at the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute (2023, p. 19).

The results showed that the ASEAN public was basically concerned about the invasion impact on the economic ramifications, particularly the rise in energy and food prices. According to the survey, 58.3% of respondents identified this issue as the most significant consequence. Moreover, with the absolute reliance on imported food and fertilisers from Ukraine and Russia, Indonesia felt the impact particularly acutely, with 73.6% of respondents citing price increases as the main concern. Similar sentiments were reported by 70.7% and 65.3% of Filipino and Thai respondents, respectively, reflecting the vulnerability of these economies to global supply chain disruptions.

The dependence of Indonesia on Ukrainian and Russian exports of wheat, sugar, vegetable oil, and fertilisers outlined the potential for economic instability should these supply chains be disrupted. The risk was compounded by the critical role of fertiliser imports in agricultural productivity, with disruptions threatening domestic food security. This concern was the significant reason behind the diplomatic visit of President Joko Widodo to Russia, advocating for the reopening of the Black Sea corridor, an effort supported through G20 negotiations (Saptohutomo, 2022).

In line with economic concerns, 25.9% of respondents also cited a breach of trust in the rules-based international order as a critical consequence of Russian actions. Singaporeans felt the impact strongly, with 40.9% reporting that global governance structures were damaged, while 32.4% of Vietnamese respondents shared a similar sentiment. These responses suggested that the violation of Ukraine sovereignty had heightened concerns about the integrity of international law and the principles sustaining global peace and security.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine had undeniably contributed to a breach of trust in the rules-based international order while simultaneously including violations of national sovereignty. This event became highly controversial within the sphere of international politics, leaving a significant impact on global relations. The violation of Ukraine sovereignty was a direct challenge to international law's fundamental principles, which prioritised respect for territorial integrity and national autonomy. These actions raised concerns about the use of violence to invade the territory of another nation, contravening the United Nations (UN) Charter and international law, leading to widespread distrust in the commitment to uphold legal standards.

The long-standing conflict between Russia and Ukraine, particularly in the Donbas region, further complicated the situation. This region had witnessed repeated violations of ceasefires and international norms, with Russian support for rebellions contributing to a protracted and complex crisis. The conflict focused on the fragility of compliance with international law in volatile geopolitical environments (Matveeva, 2022). On the international stage, the invasion had drawn widespread disapproval. Several countries and international organisations have condemned these actions, resulting in the imposition of economic sanctions against Russia (Kirby, 2022). The global reaction outlined the collective understanding of the importance of maintaining a rules-based order built on principles such as conflict resolution through dialogue and a steadfast respect for national sovereignty. The invasion depicted the significant challenges posed to this widely recognised order, identifying the need for international efforts to preserve these principles.

Another important aspect, apart from the breach of trust in the rules-based order, is the perspective of the ASEAN public. For example, a quarter of Bruneian respondents stated that the breach of trust was less of a concern than the potential worsening of divisions within ASEAN. This revealed the diversity of opinion in the region, arising from the established policy of neutrality in international conflicts outside Southeast Asia. Most ASEAN countries avoided taking sides in external conflicts and instead strived to maintain good diplomatic relations with the concerned parties (The ASEAN Studies Centre, 2023). However, there were

exceptions; some countries, namely Vietnam and Indonesia, maintained stronger bilateral ties with Russia, influencing more cautious responses regarding the conflict. These nations exhibited restraint in public stance, reflecting the delicate balance to maintain foreign policy.

Concerns about internal divisions within ASEAN regarding the response to the invasion remained relevant, given that the organisation mainly focused on Southeast Asian issues. External conflicts, such as the one between Russia and Ukraine, were often not the top priority for ASEAN as a regional body. Consequently, differing approaches to this matter were less visible than regions directly concerned with the conflict. The nuanced positions of individual ASEAN members represented the complexity of maintaining a cohesive regional stance during external conflicts.

The concerns expressed by 9.7% of Malaysian respondents outlined the possibility of the Russia-Ukraine conflict worsening tensions between China and the U.S. These were particularly pertinent in global geopolitics, where both nations compete for influence, especially in the Asia Pacific (The ASEAN Studies Centre, 2023). The invasion further complicated this global competition, as the U.S. and its allies continuously display their own strength by supporting Ukraine, while China maintains strong relations with Russia.

The economic implications of the tensions were also significant; increased hostilities between China and the U.S. could negatively impact international trade and global financial markets, with ripple impacts felt in Southeast Asia. Given the strong economic ties that ASEAN countries have with China and the U.S., the potential for economic disruptions is a serious concern. Moreover, tensions between these two major powers also posed security risks for the Asia Pacific region, a strategically important area for ASEAN countries. These tensions could affect security planning and regional cooperation on various related issues.

ASEAN countries have been striving to maintain a delicate balance between China and the U.S. in response to these challenges while promoting diplomacy and peaceful conflict resolution. This diplomatic approach conformed with ASEAN's role as a mediator in regional conflicts, outlining the organisation's commitment to fostering dialogue and cooperation between major global powers. By maintaining this balanced stance, ASEAN aimed to contribute to the peaceful resolution of global tensions while preserving regional stability.

## ASEAN Public Support for Government Response and Capability in Responding to the Russian Invasion

**Table 3: ASEAN Public Approval of Government Response to Russian Invasion of Ukraine**

Country	Strongly approve	Approve	Neutral	Disapprove	Strongly disapprove
ASEAN	17.8%	33.8%	31.3%	11.1%	6.0%
Brunei	11.7%	55.0%	21.7%	6.7%	5.0%
Cambodia	70.9%	19.4%	9.0%	0.7%	0.0%
Indonesia	12.4%	38.8%	31.4%	12.4%	5.0%
Laos	3.7%	30.8%	52.3%	11.2%	1.9%
Malaysia	9.7%	29.8%	48.4%	8.1%	4.0%
Myanmar	10.4%	46.1%	23.5%	8.7%	11.3%
Philippines	17.2%	25.3%	38.4%	13.1%	6.1%
Singapore	32.7%	35.6%	23.6%	6.3%	1.9%
Thailand	4.2%	22.2%	28.5%	26.4%	18.8%
Vietnam	5.1%	35.3%	36.0%	17.6%	5.9%

Source: The ASEAN Studies Center at the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute (2023, p. 20).

The ASEAN public exhibited significant interest despite the geographical distance in the impact of the invasion and the government's responses, as shown in the following diagram. In accordance with the survey, 51.6% of respondents across the region approved or strongly approved of the government's handling of the situation. Cambodia recorded the highest level of support, with 90.3% of respondents approving the government response, while Thailand had the lowest approval rating at 26.4%. Singapore, a regional leader in diplomatic strategy, received significant support (68.3%) for the response, which included implementing limited sanctions against Russia (The ASEAN Studies Center).

The public views in Southeast Asia regarding the invasion, as well as expectations that the government and ASEAN would be responsive, were based on various factors, including international solidarity, respect for peace and stability, economic implications, solidarity with ASEAN principles, and the influence of media and information.

International solidarity materialised in the public view of Southeast Asia because of its connection to human rights issues and principles of international law. The Southeast Asian public viewed the invasion as a serious violation of national sovereignty and world peace, demanding a firm international response. In the context of valuing peace and stability, this region had experienced a lengthy

period of relative stability following the raging conflicts of the 20th century. As a result, the citizens greatly appreciated international peace and stability. The Russian invasion of Ukraine, which could threaten European stability, triggered concerns about similar issues in the region (Shoji, 2022).

Regarding economic implications, several ASEAN countries have economic relations with Russia and the EU. The economic policies and sanctions imposed on Russia in response to the invasion could impact these countries economically. Therefore, public views may be reflected in concerns about the economic implications of the conflict. ASEAN also implemented the principle of non-intervention in members' domestic affairs. However, Southeast Asians also desire to view it as upholding the principles of democracy, human rights, and peace outside the region. The public expects a response that conforms to these values (Reeves, 2023). Finally, wider access to international news through social media and the internet enabled people to become more informed following developments in the conflict. This information influenced respective views, increasing awareness of global issues.

This led to the need to understand that public views may vary within Southeast Asian societies, with many differing perspectives. Most ASEAN public support firm action against the Russian invasion, while others have more complex or mixed views. These factors and broader political and security considerations in the region heavily influenced the government and ASEAN responses.

Regarding the public perspective, it is essential to understand that ASEAN, as a regional organisation, mainly promoted cooperation and stability within Southeast Asia. However, in the context of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the response was perceived as relatively weak or limited. Several factors aided in the explanation of this measured approach. The main reason focused on ASEAN core principle of non-intervention. This principle dictates that the organisation avoids participating in the domestic affairs of member states and, by extension, in conflicts occurring outside the immediate region. The Russia-Ukraine conflict, focused on regional issues that directly impacted Southeast Asia.

Another challenge faced in responding to international conflicts was the diverse views of member states. ASEAN countries had varied international alliances, some maintaining closer ties to Russia, while others supported Ukraine. This diversity made it difficult for ASEAN to reach a shared consensus on how to address the conflict, resulting in a more cautious and neutral stance. Additionally, this organisation had historically prioritised regionalism over global concerns (Reeves, 2023), with the main focus being regional economic integration, political stability, and conflict resolution within Southeast Asia. Global conflicts such as the Russia-Ukraine conflict tend to fall outside the main areas of concern.

ASEAN is constrained by limited resources, hampering the ability to resolve international conflict actively. In order to take a leading role in addressing global conflicts, it would require substantial expansion of capacities and resources, which ASEAN is not currently equipped. Internal challenges also played a role in limiting the ability to respond effectively to international issues. Tensions between member states or internal political problems diverted the attention and energy of the organisation from external conflicts, weakening the response.

The reaction of ASEAN to the Russia-Ukraine conflict may appear subdued, but the mandate and resources were largely centred on regional stability and cooperation. The focus remained firm within Southeast Asia, and the principles guiding respective actions were more suited to addressing intra-regional challenges than global issues.

## **ANALYSIS**

### **Factors Shaping ASEAN Public Perspectives Regarding the Russian Invasion of Ukraine**

Understanding the factors that shape public perspectives within ASEAN regarding the invasion included the consideration of various political, economic, cultural, and historical variables. These also consisted of historical context and cultural affinity, geopolitical considerations, media coverage and information sources, diplomatic relations and alliance dynamics, humanitarian concerns and international law, government messaging and elite discourse.

Historical ties and cultural affinities between ASEAN countries and Russia or Ukraine influenced public perspectives. Countries like Vietnam and Laos, which share historical connections with Russia, exhibited more sympathetic views towards the Russian narrative influenced by long-standing political and cultural relationships. However, nations such as Indonesia, which has a history of colonisation, tend to resonate more with Ukraine's struggle for sovereignty. This contextual understanding represented how historical experiences informed public attitudes, leading to varying degrees of support or opposition toward the invasion. For example, Asri (2023) reviewed how the historical legacy of Soviet support in Vietnam impacted contemporary views, fostering a sense of loyalty despite the complexities of current geopolitical dynamics.

ASEAN countries' geopolitical alliances and strategic interests were crucial in impacting public perspectives. Several member states prioritised maintaining a delicate balance between major powers, including Russia, the U.S., and China. The balancing act influenced public perceptions, particularly in nations such as

Vietnam, which has historically managed relationships with these powers to safeguard sovereignty and economic interests. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs Vietnam (2022) stated the need for a diplomatic approach, reflecting public concerns over the potential spillover impacts of the conflict on regional stability. Similarly, Indonesia stance as a non-allied country added complexity to public attitudes as the nation navigated relationships with China and the U.S. while considering the implications of the invasion on a regional leadership role (Rayda et al., 2022).

In the Philippines, the challenges of balancing relations with the U.S. and China further complicate public perceptions of the invasion. The government strategies for addressing territorial disputes in the South China Sea and enhancing economic ties while maintaining security relations with the U.S. impacted public attitudes regarding national sovereignty. This tension reflected a broader struggle within ASEAN countries to reconcile historical alliances with current geopolitical realities, showcasing how national security concerns affected public sentiment. The Singaporean pragmatic approach to foreign policy exemplified the complexity, as the nation maintained strong ties with major powers while promoting regional cooperation through ASEAN. Strangio (2022), stated that public perceptions in Singapore were influenced by concerns over economic stability and security amidst the evolving geopolitical landscape.

Media coverage and information sources influenced public perspectives on international events, including the invasion. The portrayal of the conflict in domestic and international media significantly affected how the public interpreted the situation. In Thailand, the mix of state-controlled and independent media outlets offered diverse narratives, influencing public attitudes (Storey, 2022). Meanwhile, the narratives presented by state-controlled media conformed with government positions, while independent sources provided alternative viewpoints, fostering a more nuanced public discourse. Social media also played a significant role, allowing for the circulation of a wide range of opinions and facilitating engagement among the public. This dynamic showed how media landscapes in ASEAN countries impacted and reflected public sentiment regarding international conflicts.

Diplomatic relations and alliance dynamics influenced public perspectives within ASEAN countries. The diverse diplomatic relationships maintained with Russia, Ukraine, and other parties in the conflict affected public attitudes toward the invasion. Countries with closer ties to Western allies or NATO were more closely associated with international condemnation of the invasion, while those with stronger relations with Russia adopted more nuanced positions. For example, Vietnam historical ties with Russia and growing economic partnerships with

Western nations led to a complex landscape for public opinion. While expressing concern about the invasion impact on regional stability, the nuanced response reflected both historical connections and contemporary geopolitical engagements. Cambodia's non-allied stance and close ties with China affected public perspectives, with the government adopting a cautious approach to the conflict that was in line with diplomatic priorities. Meanwhile, Malaysia maintained diplomatic relationships with a wide range of countries and had historically pursued a non-allied foreign policy stance (Storey & Choong, 2022). The diverse diplomatic ties affected public perspectives on the invasion. While Malaysia expressed concern about the conflict impact on global stability, the response was influenced by the desire to maintain neutrality and avoid taking sides in international disputes.

Considerations of humanitarian concerns and adherence to international law affected public attitudes towards the invasion. Furthermore, public awareness of human rights violations, civilian casualties, and displacement resulting from the conflict evoked sympathy and solidarity towards Ukraine and condemnation of Russian actions. Sovereignty norms, non-interference, and respect for territorial integrity, including foundational principles of ASEAN, also impacted public perspectives. The Philippines, having experienced struggles with sovereignty and territorial integrity, may be particularly sensitive to the situation in Ukraine. Public attitudes were influenced by an awareness of civilian casualties and displacement resulting from the conflict, evoking sympathy and solidarity towards Ukraine. Additionally, adherence to international law and sovereignty norms may lead to condemnation of Russia actions, resonating with ASEAN principles of non-interference and respect for territorial integrity (Association of Southeast Asian Nations, 2022). Indonesia, the world largest Muslim-majority country, advocated for peaceful resolution of conflicts and adherence to international law (Hutabarat, 2022). Humanitarian concerns, including awareness of human rights violations and displacement of civilians, also affected public attitudes. The commitment to ASEAN non-interference principles and respect for sovereignty impacted public perspectives, with calls for a diplomatic solution to the conflict.

Lastly, government messaging and elite discourse were crucial in shaping public perspectives of the invasion. Political leaders and policymakers influenced public attitudes by framing the conflict, outlining regional stability, diplomatic solutions, or non-interference in internal affairs. As a small nation highly dependent on global trade and stability, Singaporean political leaders and policymakers focused on the importance of regional stability and diplomatic solutions to the conflict. These leaders communicated official positions that



outlined the need for dialogue and negotiation, avoiding taking sides and concentrating on non-interference in internal affairs (Tang, 2022). Moreover, this rhetoric aimed to influence public attitudes by concentrating on Singaporean commitment to stability and peaceful resolution of conflicts. The official stance of Vietnam, in accordance with the history of conflict and focus on sovereignty, outlined adherence to international law, framing the invasion within these contexts to resonate with public concerns (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Vietnam, 2022). The elite discourse guided public sentiment, showing how government narratives impacted public understanding of complex international issues.

These interrelated factors provided insights into the diverse public perspectives within ASEAN. The interplay of historical context, geopolitical considerations, media influences, humanitarian concerns, and government messaging clarified the complexities of regional responses to international crises. Understanding these dynamics enabled the appreciation of how ASEAN member states navigated the challenges posed by global conflicts while maintaining national interests and regional stability.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **The Effectiveness of Public Perspectives in Influencing Decision-Making Processes in ASEAN**

The significant attention and concern in responding to the invasion presented a critical assessment for ASEAN regarding the ability to reflect on the public perspective in the decision-making process as a collective voice. This situation focused on the dynamic interaction between public opinion and regional governance, with potential implications for the legitimacy and effectiveness of the organisation in addressing pressing international issues. The effectiveness of public perspectives in influencing decision-making varies based on several factors. This includes the political systems of individual member states, cultural norms, and the level of public participation permitted by the government. For example, member states with more democratic political systems provide greater opportunities for public engagement, thereby enhancing the impact of public perspectives on decision-making processes.

In certain ASEAN member states, public input and consultation mechanisms exist in decision-making processes, namely public hearings, consultations, and civil society engagement. These mechanisms serve as platforms for the public to voice respective concerns, influencing policy outcomes. However, the extent or degree to which these mechanisms are used and the influence of public perspectives on decisions vary significantly. For example, the Philippines

tends to have more robust participatory mechanisms compared to those with more authoritarian regimes, where such mechanisms might be minimal or non-existent.

Challenges to effective public participation in decision-making processes include limited transparency, political constraints, cultural factors, and capacity issues. Limited transparency can lead to public distrust in decision-making, as citizens feel excluded from critical discussions. In some member states, political constraints such as restrictions on freedom of speech, assembly, and association significantly limit citizens' ability to express their respective perspectives. This led to the establishment of an environment where public dissent is stifled, thereby inhibiting the potential for grassroots movements to influence policy. Cultural norms and values also dictate how public perspectives are regarded within the decision-making frameworks. In some cultures, hierarchical structures prioritise elite opinions over popular sentiment, limiting public influence. Additionally, civil society organisations advocating for public participation face capacity challenges, including limited resources and expertise, hindering the ability to engage in decision-making effectively (Feraru, 2015). This outlined the need to strengthen civil societal capacities, ensuring a more robust public engagement in governance.

Despite the challenges, public perspectives influenced decision-making in ASEAN, particularly concerning environmental conservation, human rights, and social justice. The ability of civil society organisations and grassroots movements to advocate for change showed that public perspectives can penetrate governmental decision-making processes through mobilisation and awareness-raising. Civil society organisations played a crucial role in advocating for policy changes and raising awareness about issues of public concern (Tekunan, 2014).

The effectiveness of public perspectives in influencing decision-making processes can be depicted through several typical examples. A prominent case was the haze crisis in Southeast Asia, which occurred annually due to land and forest fires in Indonesia. This environmental and public health issue profoundly affected neighbouring ASEAN countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand. In response to this crisis, public outcry and pressure from affected communities, civil society organisations, and regional governments increased cooperation among ASEAN member states, including the adoption of measures such as the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution. This case exemplified how collective public pressure can spur concrete policy actions and regional agreements, outlining the critical importance of cross-border cooperation in addressing pressing environmental crises. Moreover, through various public awareness campaigns, advocacy efforts, and sustained pressure from affected communities, public perspectives have effectively influenced governments to take decisive action against the root causes of the haze crisis, including illegal land

clearing and deforestation. The success of these initiatives outlined the potential for public engagement to impact regional environmental governance (Heilmann, 2015).

Another illustrative case is the ongoing territorial disputes in the South China Sea, including multiple ASEAN member states and China, all of which have competing claims over islands, reefs, and maritime resources. Public sentiment and national interests significantly affected the positions of ASEAN member states as they navigated negotiations and diplomatic efforts regarding the disputes. In this context, civil society engagement in advocating for maritime sovereignty reflected a broader public interest in national territorial integrity and resource management (Simões, 2022). Public protests, advocacy campaigns, and various civil society initiatives have raised awareness about preserving maritime sovereignty and protecting the marine environment. These efforts had significantly influenced government policies and diplomatic strategies concerning the South China Sea disputes, showing how public activism tends to intersect with national interests in regional diplomacy.

The ratification of international treaties and agreements by ASEAN member states often included public consultations and engagement to ensure broad support and legitimacy. A typical example is the ratification of the Paris Agreement on climate change, where public awareness campaigns and advocacy efforts adopted by civil society organisations effectively pressured governments to commit to ambitious emissions reduction targets and comprehensive climate action (Association of Southeast Asian Nations, 2021). This scenario reflected a growing recognition among governments of the critical importance of public support in legitimising international commitments. Public perspectives were crucial in shaping the positions of ASEAN member states in international negotiations and agreements, outlining the need for inclusive decision-making processes and transparency. This proved that public engagement can significantly enhance the legitimacy and effectiveness of international agreements, leading to increased accountability and societal buy-in for governmental actions. The case examples showed the profound impact of public perspectives on decision-making within ASEAN, focusing on the potential for civic engagement to influence policies that address critical regional and global challenges.

These case examples demonstrate how public perspectives can influence decision-making processes in ASEAN, particularly in areas such as environmental conservation, territorial disputes, and international diplomacy. It illustrated the potential for civil society and public opinion to mobilise effectively, prompting governments to adopt more responsive and accountable policies. Civil society organisations and grassroots movements have influenced government policies

and regional cooperation within ASEAN by raising awareness, advocating for policy changes, and mobilising public support.

The effectiveness of public perspectives in impacting the decision-making process concerning the invasion is a complex situation. This arose from member states' varying priorities and interests, including the need for consensus in decision-making. While public perspectives within ASEAN countries regarding the Russian invasion contributed to discussions on regional and international issues, the effectiveness in shaping collective stance was influenced by diplomatic priorities, consensus-building processes, and diverse interests among member states. The collective response of ASEAN reflected broader geopolitical considerations rather than a unified public sentiment. This outlined the need for ASEAN to balance public perspectives with the realities of diplomatic negotiation and regional cohesion.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

In conclusion, the analysis of the Russian invasion of Ukraine revealed the significant impact of global conflicts on public perceptions within ASEAN, particularly concerning geopolitical, economic, and security concerns. This research proved that the public was deeply concerned about such conflicts due to the immediate threat to global peace and potential economic instability arising from political uncertainty, given ASEAN strong economic ties to external regions.

The main finding focused on the fact that public sentiment in ASEAN was influenced by fears of geopolitical instability potentially leading to a domino impact of conflicts, threatening regional and global security. Therefore, it was recommended that ASEAN member states intensify diplomatic efforts to promote regional stability and advocate for peaceful resolutions to conflicts at the international level. This could be realised by strengthening the role of ASEAN in international forums and peace-building initiatives, reflecting public desire for a proactive approach to safeguarding regional security.

Another important insight was the public concern about the economic consequences of conflicts such as the invasion. Given the economic dependency on external partners, regional leaders prioritised economic resilience by diversifying trade partnerships and building stronger intra-ASEAN economic ties. This recommendation arose from analysing public anxiety regarding economic instability, which called for ASEAN to formulate policies to reduce vulnerability to external geopolitical shifts.

The research explored how ASEAN commitment to non-intervention and peaceful conflict resolution resonated with the public. Therefore, these principles

were recommended to be consistently upheld by promoting diplomatic engagement and global conflict mediation. Strengthening peace and security mechanisms, such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), was crucial, as it conformed with public expectation that the organisation played a central role in maintaining peace and security within and beyond the region.

The comparative analysis of public perspectives across different ASEAN countries showed varying levels of civil society engagement and governmental responsiveness. This outlined the need for a more inclusive approach to decision-making that considered public opinion, particularly on foreign policy matters and international conflict. ASEAN should enhance public consultations, incorporating civil society inputs into the diplomatic and policy responses to global crises, ensuring it reflects the diverse populations' values and aspirations.

The research deduced that while conflicts such as the invasion occurred far from Southeast Asia, the repercussions were felt across the region. ASEAN must remain vigilant and responsive to such global developments by using public sentiment to inform diplomatic strategies, economic policies, and regional security frameworks. By closely adhering to these recommendations and the research findings, ASEAN strengthened its respective regional stance, contributing to global peace and stability. Additionally, it remained resilient and responsive in an increasingly interconnected world.

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