

# AIS General Research Fund (GRF) and Early Career Scheme (ECS) Success Round 2021-22

**Project Title:** Unhealthy Populism: COVID-19 in Southeast Asia

**Brief Abstract:**

Governments in Asia and beyond have obtained varying degrees of success in their responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. This research project studies six countries in Southeast Asia (Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam) to explain why some countries have done better than others in containing the virus. Since public compliance with government regulations has been crucial in ensuring the effectiveness of public policy, we focus especially on the role of ordinary people, which we study with public opinion surveys and qualitative interviews. We analyze various factors that shape patterns of public trust and compliance, and we look especially at populist beliefs to explain why some individuals may be less inclined to comply with government regulation. With its corrosive rhetoric that undermines trust in institutions and fosters political polarization, populism may hinder a country's ability to fight the virus. We aim to contribute to our understanding of public health governance in Southeast Asia and beyond by clarifying the role of political dynamics in developing social and public policy responses to infectious diseases.

**Investigator:** Dr Diego FOSSATI

**Biography:**

Diego Fossati is Assistant Professor of Asian and International Studies at City University of Hong Kong. He studies political behaviour, accountability and representation, especially in the context of East and Southeast Asia. His work has been published in leading international peer-reviewed journals. He has been awarded research grants by Hong Kong's University Grants Committee (Early Career Scheme, General Research Fund) and Singapore's Ministry of Education (Tier-II Research Grant). He received a PhD in Government from Cornell University in 2016.