

What Does ASEAN Mean to ASEAN Peoples? Survey Findings from Thailand*

Thailand Development Research Institute

Saowaruj Rattanakhomfu, Senior Research Fellow**

Monnaphat Jongdeepaisal, Researcher

Duangmon Sooksmarn, Researcher

Warit Nimmanahaeminda, Researcher

Introduction

This study carried out a public opinion survey and focus group discussions (FGDs) as part of the ASEAN@50: Retrospective and Perspectives on the Making, Substance, Significance, and Future of ASEAN project. The survey and FGDs were conducted to explore the opinions of Thai people from different groups, namely students and those from business, civil society organisations (CSOs), non-governmental organisations (NGOs), academia, and government, to make inferences about the aspirations, concerns, and hopes of the Thai people for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The survey, ‘What does ASEAN mean to Thai people?’, was sent out both online and as a paper-based survey. Both Thai and English versions of the survey were provided to overcome language barriers and reach out to diverse groups of Thai people.

This chapter is structured in six parts. The first part provides the main characteristics of the survey respondents. The second explores the respondents’ awareness, attitudes, and expectations for ASEAN. The third part examines the respondents’ opinions on the role of the media and textbooks to spread knowledge and information about ASEAN’s progress, achievements, and challenges. The fourth part explores views on the pressing problems facing Thailand and ASEAN today and until 2025. The fifth part investigates expectations

* All tables and figures in this chapter were derived from the survey data.

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and aspirations for ASEAN by 2025 and the role of ASEAN Secretariat. The final part concludes and discusses the way forward.

Characteristics of the Respondents

The survey covered a total of 260 respondents. Nearly half of the respondents (46.2%) were young people aged 15–30 years old, while 45.8% were aged 31–49. Only 8.1% of the respondents were aged 50 or older (Figure 1). In terms of gender, the majority of the respondents (62.7%) were female, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 1: Age of the Respondents

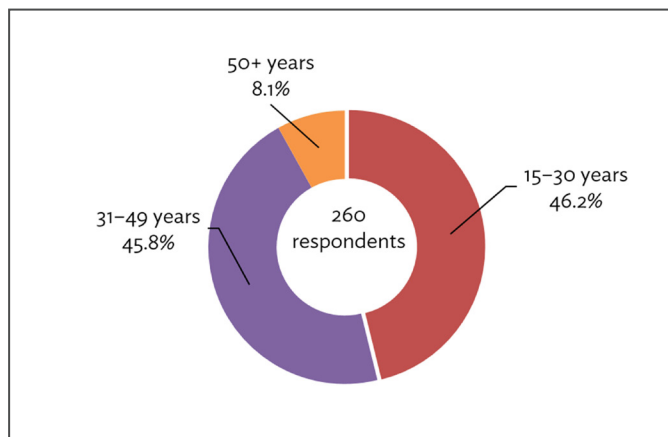
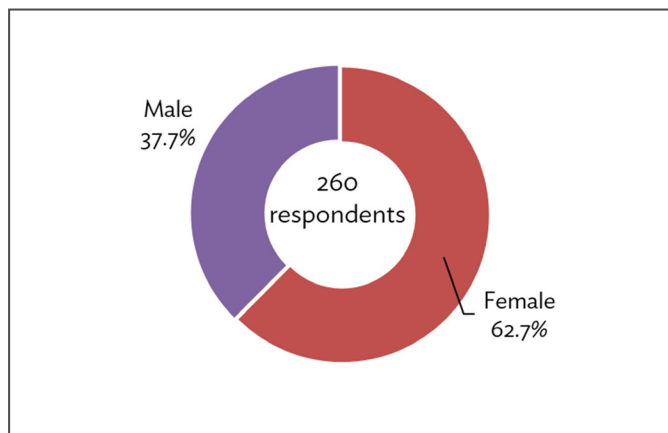
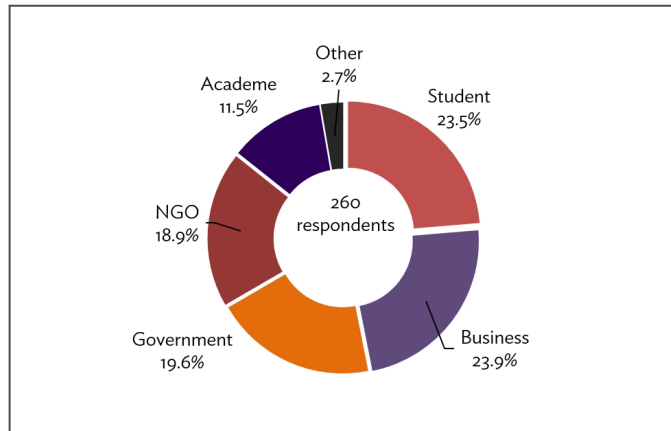


Figure 2: Gender of the Respondents



The affiliations of the respondents varied. Figure 3 shows that nearly a quarter of the respondents (23.5%) were students, while 23.9% were from the business sector. The other respondents were from the government sector (19.6%), NGOs (18.9%), academia (11.5%), and others (2.7%) (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Affiliation of the Respondents



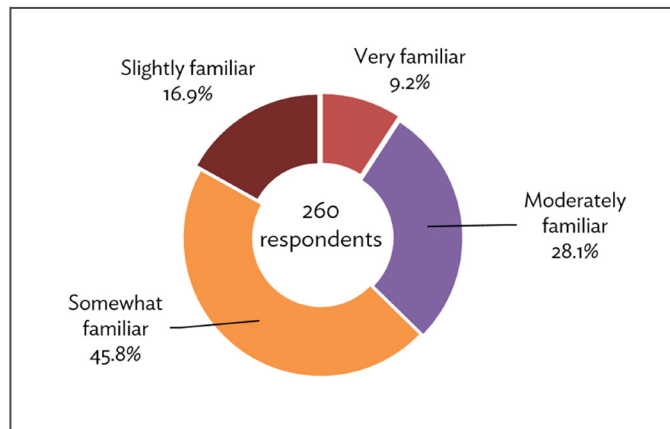
NGO = non-governmental organisation.

Awareness, Attitudes, and Expectations for ASEAN

Awareness of ASEAN

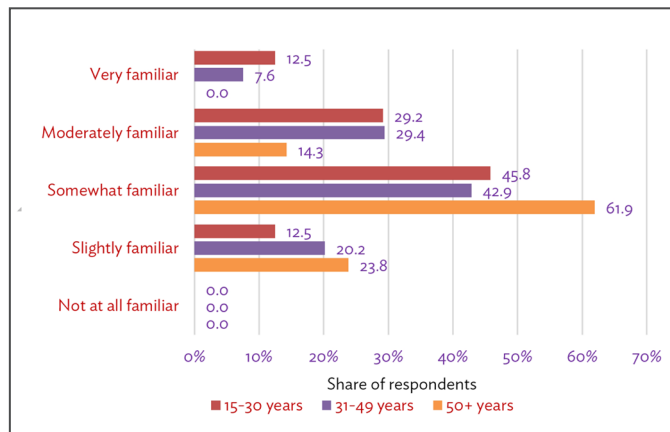
From the survey results, the largest proportion of respondents (45.8%) expressed being somewhat familiar with ASEAN. This was followed by those who were moderately familiar (28.1%), slightly familiar (16.9%), and very familiar (9.2%) with ASEAN (Figure 4). Notably, all respondents had at least some awareness of the association.

Figure 4: Awareness of ASEAN



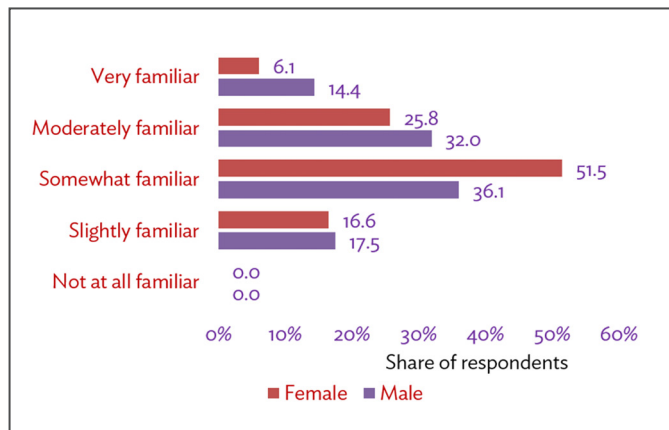
By age, the largest shares for all age groups were of those who were somewhat familiar with ASEAN, with those aged 50 or over comprising the largest share (61.9%) (Figure 5). However, the results show that the younger respondents were more likely to be familiar with ASEAN than the older respondents. This may be due to the low media exposure and lack of knowledge of ASEAN’s work in previous decades compared to today. Meanwhile, nearly 30% of the respondents aged 15–30 and 31–49 were moderately familiar with ASEAN compared to 14.3% of those aged 50 or over.

Figure 5: Awareness of ASEAN by Age



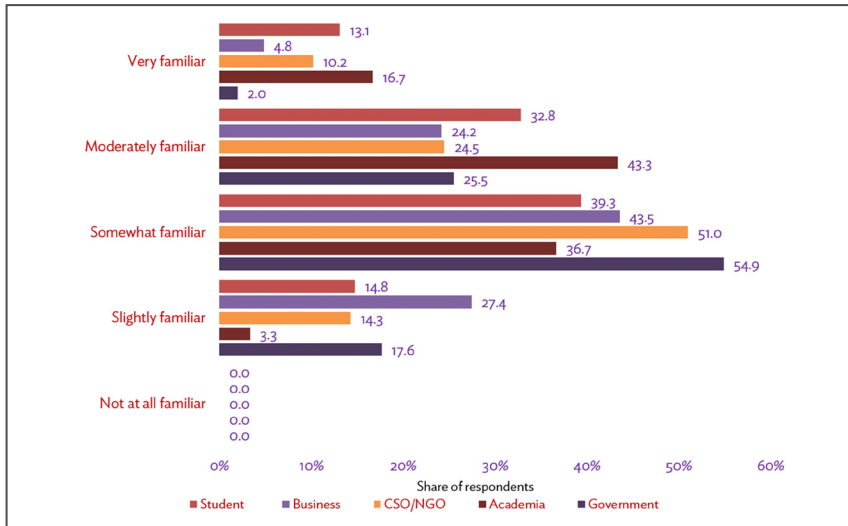
Categorised by gender, interestingly, the male respondents tended to be more familiar with ASEAN than the female respondents. Specifically, nearly half of the male respondents (46.4%), but only around a third of the female respondents (31.9%), were moderately familiar or very familiar with ASEAN (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Awareness of ASEAN by Gender



Compared with the respondents from other affiliations, those from academia and the students were more likely to be moderately or very familiar with ASEAN (60% of the respondents from academia and 45.9% of the students). Nonetheless, about a quarter of the respondents (27.4%) from the business sector indicated being slightly familiar with ASEAN, while the shares of respondents from other affiliations were considerably lower in comparison (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Awareness of ASEAN by Affiliation



CSO = civil society organisation, NGO = non-governmental organisation.

Feeling of being an ASEAN citizen

Of the 260 respondents, more than half (51.9%) indicated feeling somewhat as ASEAN citizens (Figure 8). Meanwhile, 29.6% and 15.4% of the respondents expressed feeling moderately and very much as ASEAN citizens, respectively. Interestingly, only 3.1% of respondents said they did not feel they were ASEAN citizens.

The results across age groups were mostly similar. The young respondents aged 15–30 were more likely to feel very much as ASEAN citizens than the senior respondents aged 50 or over (Figure 9).

By gender, roughly half (53.4% of the female respondents and 49.5% of the male respondents) felt somewhat as ASEAN citizens. This was followed by those who chose ‘moderately’ (27.6% of females and 33% of males) and ‘very much’ (15.3% of females and 15.5% of males) (Figure 10). Very few respondents felt they were not ASEAN citizens (3.7% of females and 2.1% of males).

Figure 8: Feeling of Being an ASEAN Citizen

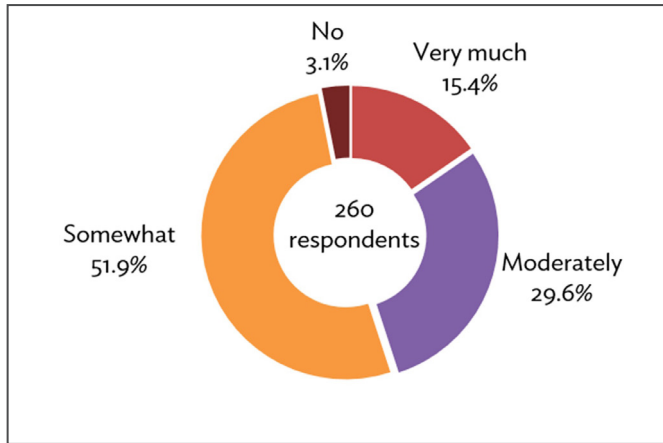


Figure 9: Feeling of Being an ASEAN Citizen by Age

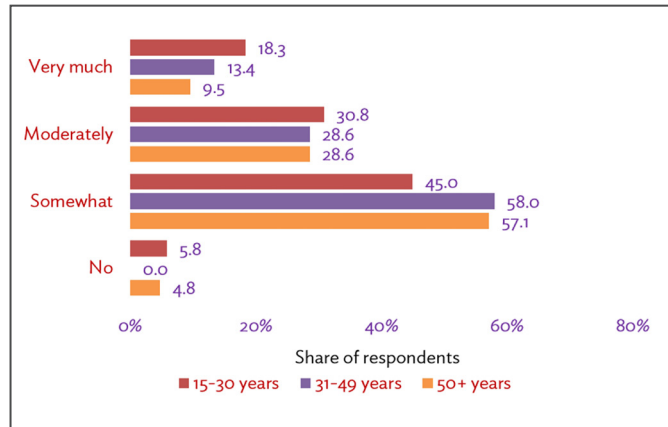
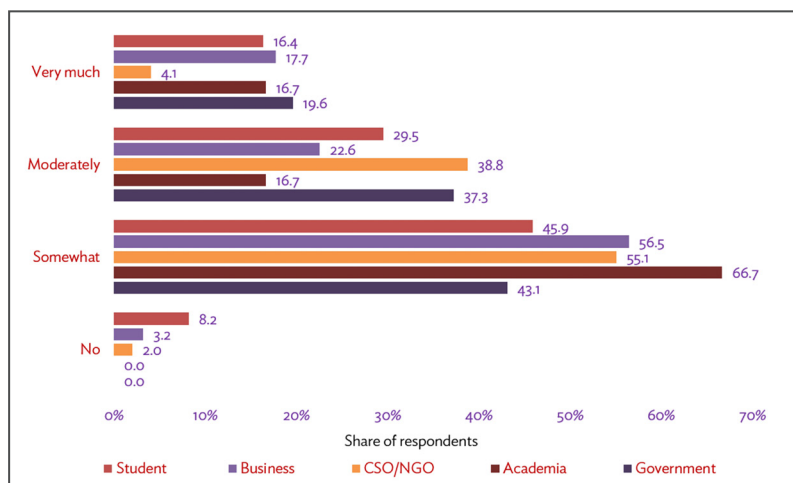


Figure 10: Feeling of Being an ASEAN Citizen by Gender



By affiliation, the respondents from the government sector were more likely to feel moderately or very much as ASEAN citizens compared to those from other affiliations (Figure 11). This may be due to the government’s approach to policymaking with other ASEAN Member States, in which policymaking processes are more government-centric rather than people-centric. As such, individuals who are not affiliated with the government may feel excluded from the negotiation process.

Figure 11: Feeling of Being an ASEAN Citizen by Affiliation



CSO = civil society organisation, NGO = non-governmental organisation.

Aspirations, expectations, concerns, and hopes for ASEAN

Of the 258 respondents, 53.1% said they did not have aspirations, expectations, concerns, or hopes for ASEAN.

By age, the youngest age group, those aged 15–30, was more likely to have aspirations, expectations, and concerns for ASEAN than the older generations. In particular, about half of the respondents in the older age groups, i.e. those aged 50 or above (57.1%) and those aged between 31 and 49 (56.4%), said they did not have aspirations, expectations, concerns, or hopes for ASEAN. In contrast, only 49.2% of respondents aged 15–30 expressed the same view. (Figure 12)

The results for the female and male respondents were similar. Specifically, 53.4% of females and 52.6% of males said they did not have aspirations, expectation, concerns, or hopes for ASEAN (Figure 13).

Figure 12: Aspirations, Expectations, Concerns, or Hopes for ASEAN by Age

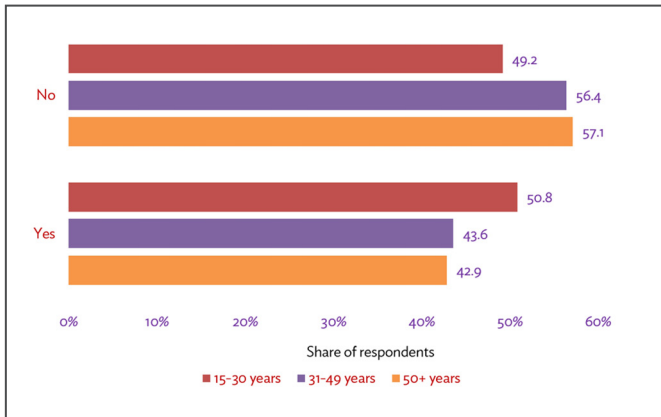
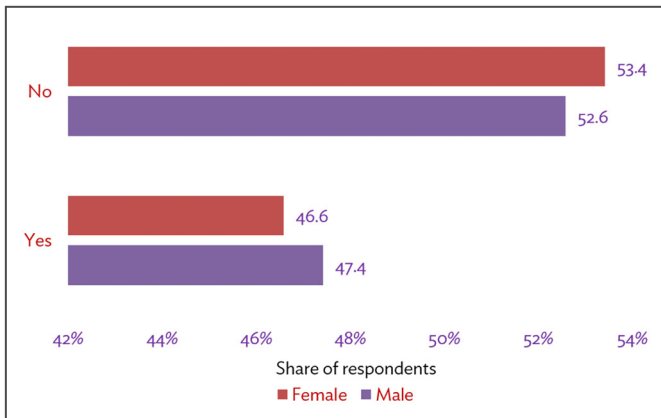
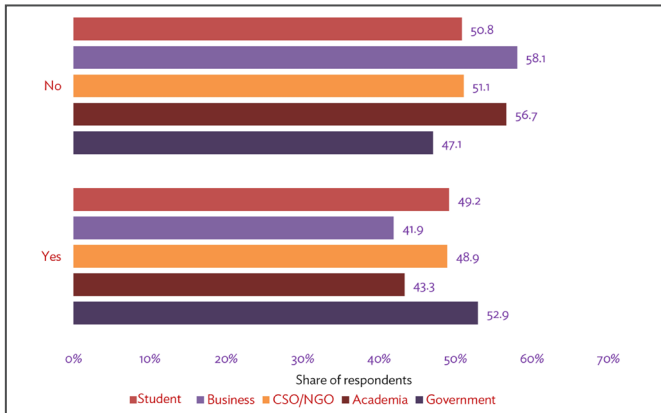


Figure 13: Aspirations, Expectations, Concerns, or Hopes for ASEAN by Gender



The majority of respondents across all affiliations, except the government affiliates, indicated not having aspirations, expectations, or concerns for ASEAN, although the results varied by affiliation (Figure 14).

Figure 14: Aspirations, Expectations, Concerns, or Hopes for ASEAN by Affiliation



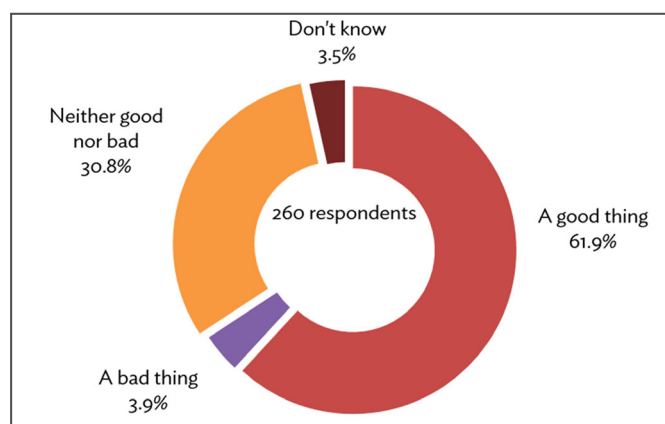
CSO = civil society organisation, NGO = non-governmental organisation.

The respondents' perspectives on their aspirations and concerns were diverse. They perceived some issues as both aspirations and concerns. For instance, labour mobility was mentioned as potentially having both positive and negative impacts on employment conditions in the country. Some of the respondents believed increased mobility would increase competition for career searching, while others felt that it would increase opportunities for better jobs with higher salaries. This difference in opinion may have resulted from a lack of knowledge and understanding about the facts related to the movement of skilled labour in ASEAN. For example, some participants in the FGDs thought that workers from ASEAN could freely move to Thailand. They were not aware that domestic laws and regulations are the main barriers for foreign workers, especially skilled workers, for working in Thailand.

Thailand's membership of ASEAN

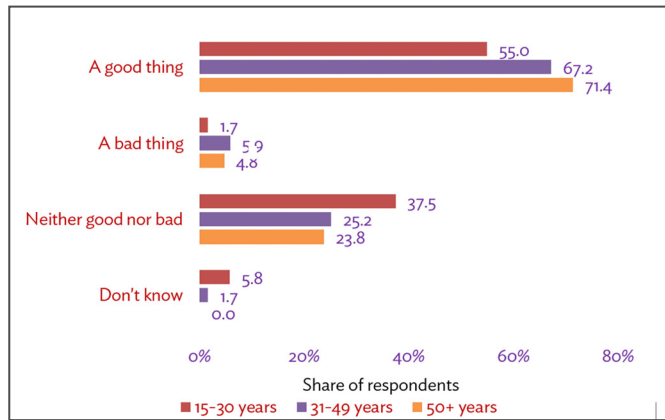
Regarding the question of whether membership of ASEAN was good or bad for Thailand, more than half of the respondents (61.9%) perceived it as a good thing. However, 30.8% thought it was neither good nor bad, and only 3.9% viewed Thailand's membership of ASEAN as bad (Figure 15). Very few respondents (3.5%) said they did not know.

Figure 15: Perception of Thailand's Membership of ASEAN



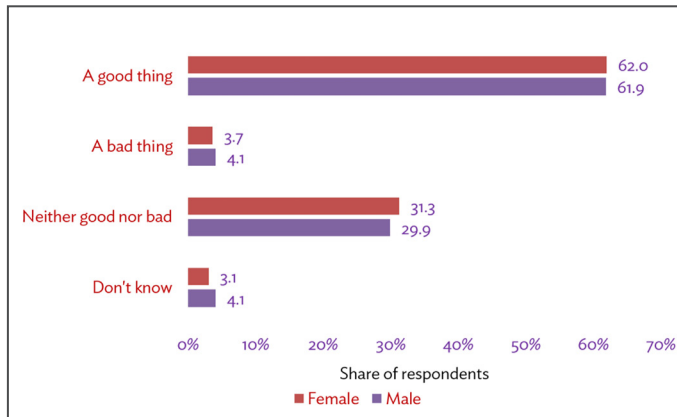
The results were not significantly different by age. Most respondents across all age groups thought that it was good for Thailand to be a member of ASEAN. The highest share was for those aged 50 or above (71.4%), followed by respondents aged 31–49 (67.2%), and those aged 15–30 (55.0%) (Figure 16). Very few respondents thought that it was bad for Thailand to be a member of ASEAN. Only 1.7% of the respondents aged 31–49 and 5.8% of those aged 15–30 did not know whether it was good or bad for Thailand. None of the respondents aged 50 or above indicated 'don't know'.

Figure 16: Perception of Thailand’s Membership of ASEAN by Age



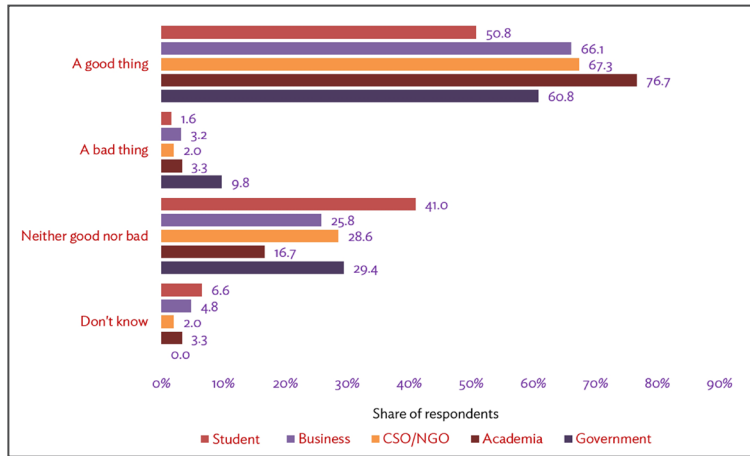
The survey results were also very similar for the female and male respondents (Figure 17).

Figure 17: Perception of Thailand’s Membership of ASEAN by Gender



By affiliation, more than 50% of the respondents from almost all affiliation groups thought that Thailand’s membership in ASEAN was a good thing. The highest share was from academia (76.7%), followed by those from NGOs (67.4%), business (66.1%), government (60.8%), and students (50.8%) (Figure 18). Interestingly, 9.8% of the respondents from the government sector considered the country’s membership to be bad, while 7% of the students did not know whether it was good or bad. Overall, more than a quarter of respondents from all affiliation groups, except academia, considered it to be neither good nor bad.

Figure 18: Perception of Thailand’s Membership of ASEAN by Affiliation

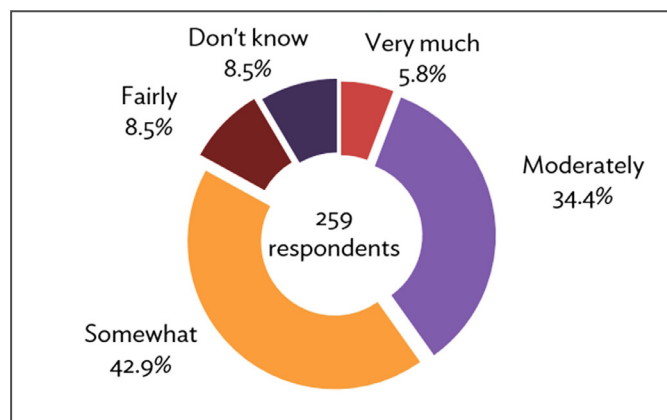


CSO = civil society organisation, NGO = non-governmental organisation.

Benefit from being a member of ASEAN

When asked whether Thailand had benefited from being a member of ASEAN, the highest share of respondents thought that Thailand had somewhat benefited (42.9%). This was followed by those who said the country had moderately benefited (34.4%), fairly benefited (8.5%), and very much benefited (5.8%) (Figure 19). Notably, nearly 10% of the respondents did not know whether Thailand had benefited or not from being a member of ASEAN.

Figure 19: Perception of Thailand’s Benefit from Being Part of ASEAN



By age, the results were similar for respondents aged 15–30 and those aged 31–49. However, respondents aged 50 or above thought that Thailand had benefited more compared to the other two age groups (Figure 20).¹

Additionally, more than 10% of respondents aged 15–30 and 50 or above did not know whether Thailand’s membership of ASEAN had been beneficial. Thailand’s benefits from being a part of ASEAN comprise mostly economic benefits. However, it is noticeable that the majority of the respondents aged 15–30 and 31–49 chose ‘somewhat’, possibly due to Thai-centric views held by some Thai individuals.

Figure 20: Perception of Thailand’s Benefit from Being Part of ASEAN by Age

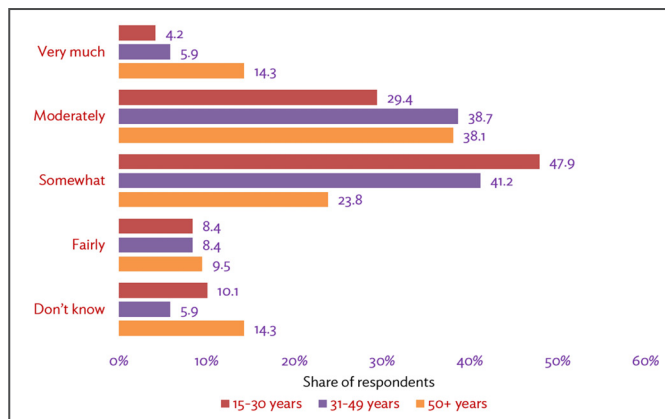
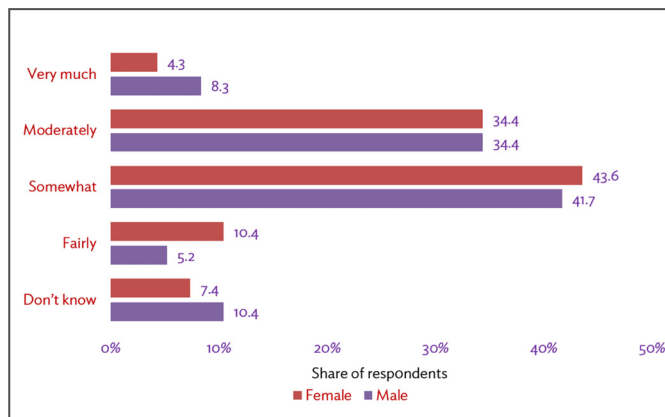


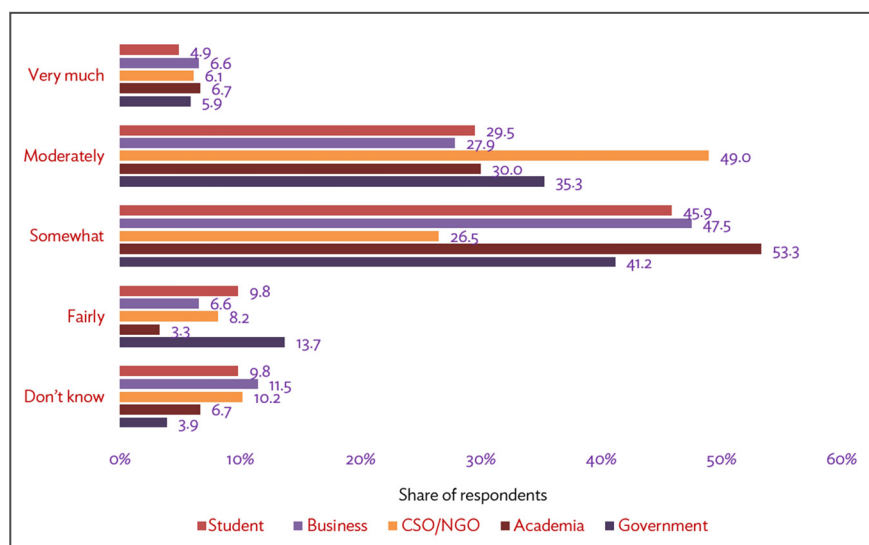
Figure 21: Perception of Thailand’s Benefit from Being Part of ASEAN by Gender



¹ We note that the sample size of respondents aged 50 or above was considerably smaller than the two younger age groups.

By affiliation, the largest shares of respondents from almost all affiliations, except those from NGOs, thought that Thailand had somewhat benefited from being a member of ASEAN, while nearly half of the respondents from NGOs believed that Thailand had moderately benefited from its membership (Figure 22). Notably, even respondents from the business sector did not think that Thailand had benefited very much from being a member of ASEAN. Some respondents from the business sector mentioned in the FGD that ASEAN economic integration tended to benefit large and transnational companies more than small and local enterprises. For example, large companies could access reliable and current information to gain advantages, while small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) had limited capabilities. As such, they said that SMEs should not be overlooked and should be promoted to enhance competitiveness and catch up with the dynamics of economic integration.

Figure 22: Perception of Thailand’s Benefit from Being Part of ASEAN by Affiliation

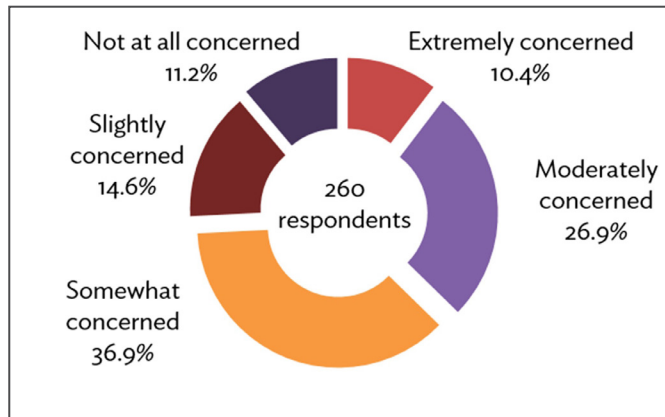


CSO = civil society organisation, NGO = non-governmental organisation.

Concerns if Thailand were to leave ASEAN

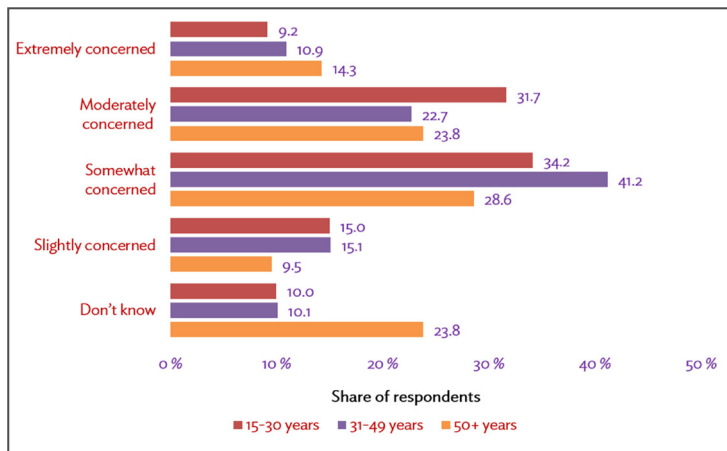
When asked about how concerned they would be if Thailand were to leave ASEAN, the largest share of respondents stated they would feel somewhat concerned (36.9%). This was followed by those who said they would be moderately concerned (26.9%), slightly concerned (14.6%), and extremely concerned (10.4%) (Figure 23). However, 11.2% said they would not be at all concerned. The FGDs suggested that some would not be concerned because they thought that Thailand leaving ASEAN was not a realistic threat.

Figure 23: Concern if Thailand Were to Leave ASEAN



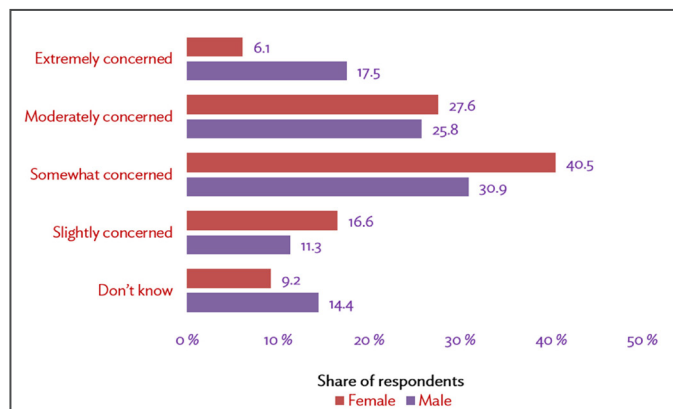
Classified by age, the survey results across all age groups were similar. In particular, the highest shares of respondents in all groups indicated they would be somewhat concerned if Thailand were to leave ASEAN. However, nearly a quarter of respondents aged 50 and above, but only 10% of respondents in the two younger age groups, answered they would not be concerned at all if Thailand were to leave ASEAN (Figure 24).

Figure 24: Concern if Thailand Were to Leave ASEAN by Age



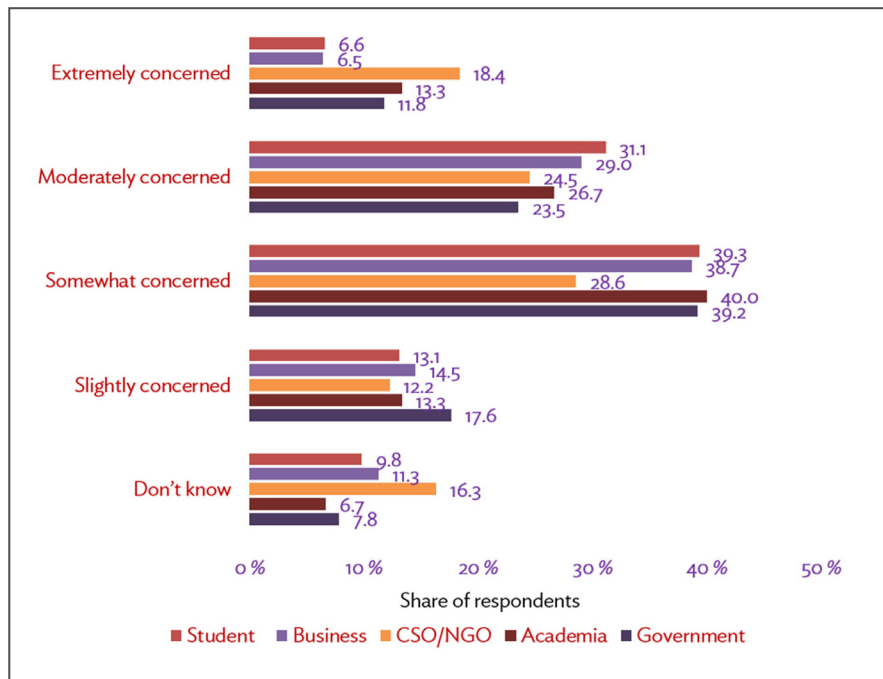
The results by gender were again mostly similar. That is, the highest proportions of respondents said they would be somewhat concerned if Thailand were to leave ASEAN. Noticeably, though, the share of male respondents who chose ‘extremely concerned’ (17.5%) was almost three times greater than the share for female respondents (6.1%) (Figure 25).

Figure 25: Concern if Thailand Were to Leave ASEAN, by Gender



By affiliation, the highest shares of respondents across all groups indicated they would be somewhat concerned if Thailand were to leave ASEAN. The proportions of respondents who indicated moderate or extreme concern were quite high (more than a third) for almost all affiliations: 42.9% for those from NGOs, 40.0% for those from academia, 37.7% for the students, 35.5% for those from business, and 35.3% for those from government (Figure 26). The business respondents, for example, said they would be concerned if Thailand were to leave ASEAN because Thai conglomerates, such as Siam Cement Group, had expanded their businesses and benefited greatly from the ASEAN market. About 23% of Siam Cement Group’s revenue is solely from the ASEAN market (Siam Cement Group, 2016).

Figure 26: Concern if Thailand Were to Leave ASEAN by Affiliation



CSO = civil society organisation, NGO = non-governmental organisation.

Views on the future of ASEAN

When asked about their opinions on the future of ASEAN, about half of the respondents said they were somewhat optimistic (51.5%) (Figure 27). The remaining 29.6% were moderately optimistic, while about 10% were slightly optimistic. Roughly 5% were extremely optimistic, and 3.5% were not at all optimistic.

The survey results were similar across the different age groups. However, respondents aged 50 or above had a higher share of those who were extremely optimistic, at 14.3%, compared to the younger groups, which comprised less than 4% each (Figure 28).

The results for the female and male respondents were also mostly similar (Figure 29). Large shares, 55.2% of female respondents and 45.4% of male respondents, were somewhat optimistic about the future of ASEAN.

Figure 27: Optimism about the Future of ASEAN

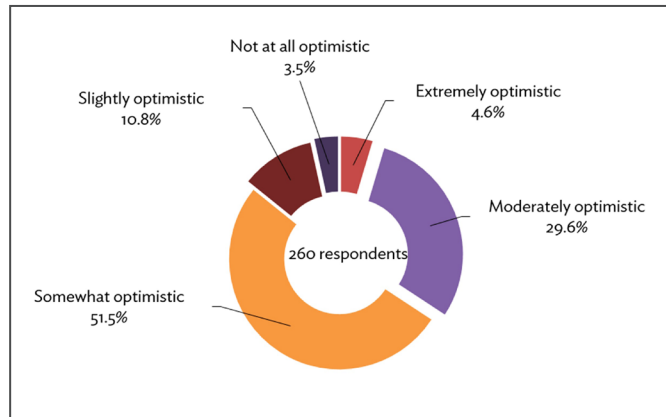


Figure 28: Optimism about the Future of ASEAN by Age

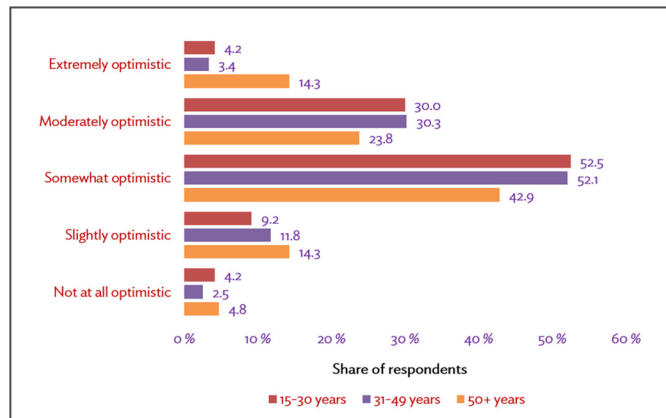
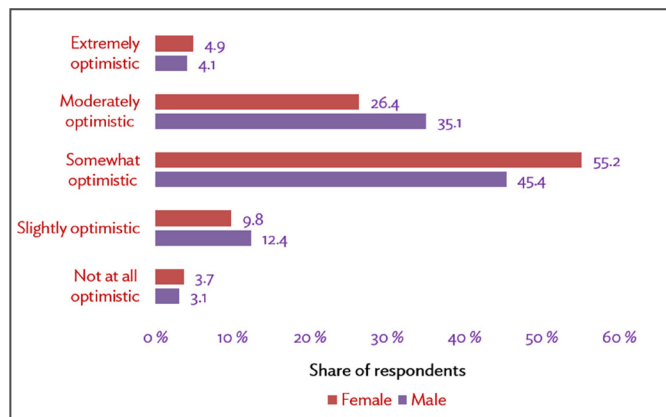
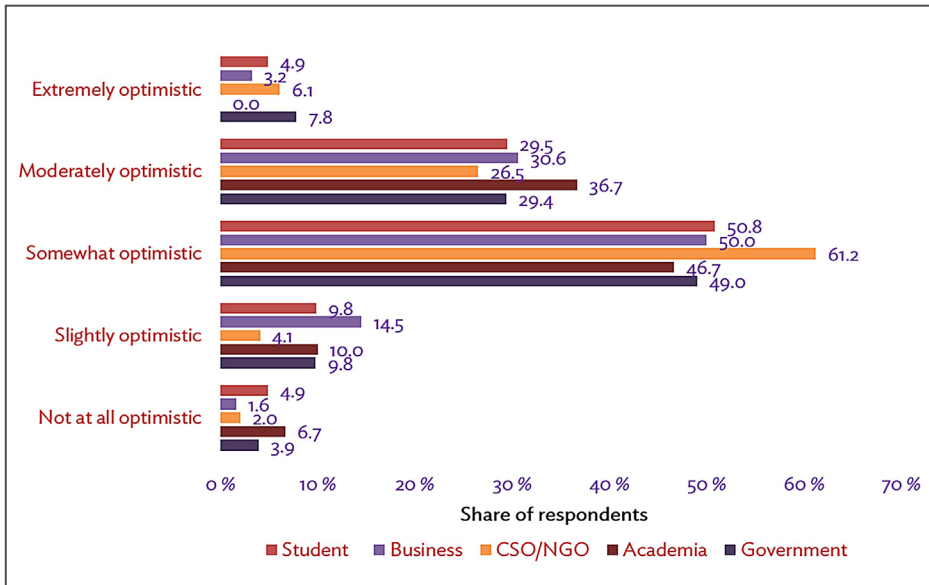


Figure 29: Optimism about the Future of ASEAN by Gender



The highest shares in all affiliations were somewhat optimistic about the future of ASEAN (Figure 30). This was followed by those who were moderately optimistic. Optimism about the future of ASEAN was neutral for some respondents because major advertised initiatives, such as the AEC Blueprints, have not been implemented by all ASEAN Member States. This shows that ASEAN has a limited role in intervening and holding member countries accountable for not implementing the blueprints.

Figure 30: Optimism about the Future of ASEAN by Affiliation



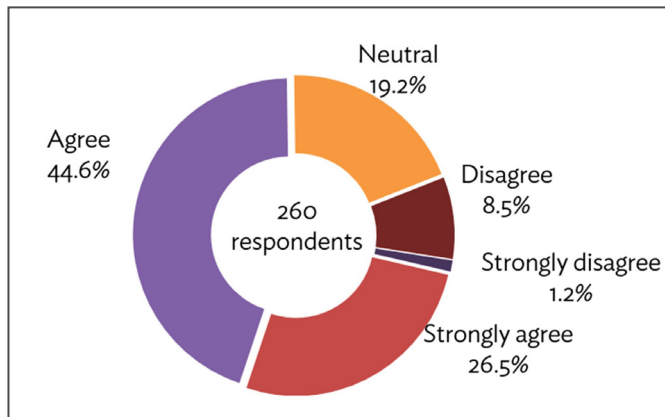
CSO = civil society organisation, NGO = non-governmental organisation.

Opinions on the Role of the Media and Textbooks to Spread Knowledge and Information about ASEAN

The role of the media

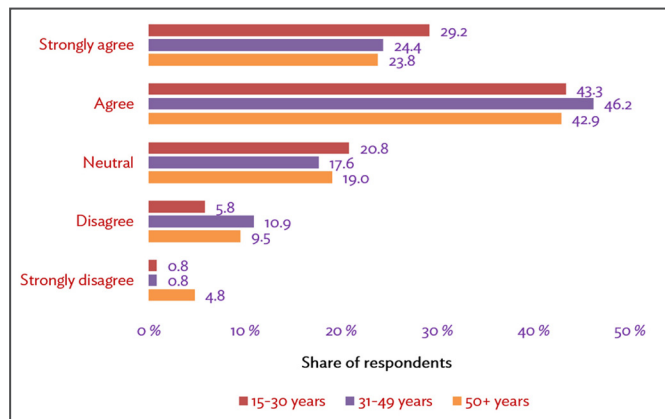
Most respondents felt that the media should play a greater role in publicising information and knowledge about ASEAN’s progress, achievements, and challenges. In particular, more than 70% of the respondents agreed (or strongly agreed) with the statement: ‘The media (newspapers, radio, television, and online news) does not enough have coverage of ASEAN’s progress, achievements, and challenges’. Meanwhile, 19.2% of the respondents were neutral about the statement, and nearly 10% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement (Figure 31).

Figure 31: Agreement that the Media Does Not Have Enough Coverage of ASEAN



The survey results were mostly similar when classified by age and gender, although there were some differences in terms of magnitude (Figure 32 and Figure 33).

Figure 32: Agreement that the Media Does Not Have Enough Coverage of ASEAN by Age



The largest shares of respondents from all affiliations agreed that the media did not have enough coverage of ASEAN’s progress, achievements, or challenges (Figure 34). Nevertheless, the shares of respondents from NGOs and academia that disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement were relatively higher than those from other affiliations. In the FGDs, some NGO participants pointed out that not only media coverage but also media content was important for spreading knowledge and information and creating true understanding about ASEAN. They also mentioned that the Thai media had publicised some myths about ASEAN.

Figure 33: Agreement that the Media Does Not Have Enough Coverage of ASEAN by Gender

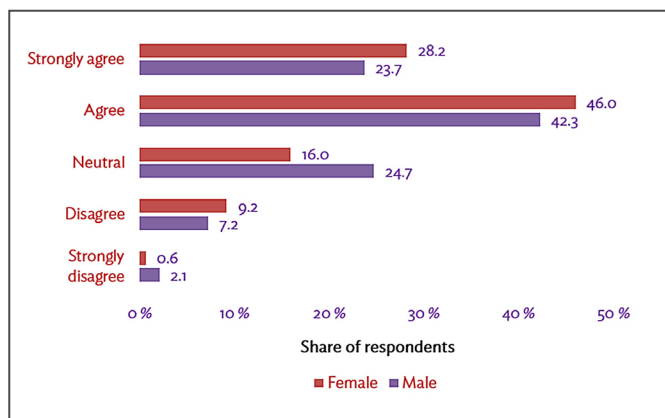
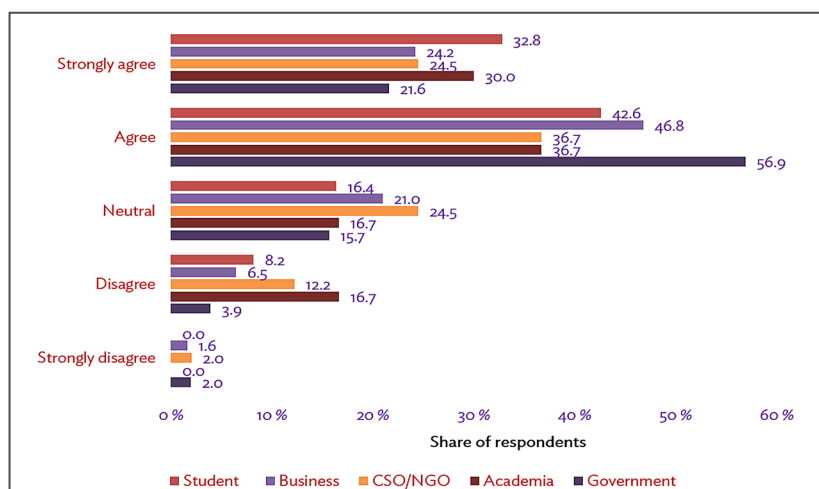


Figure 34: Agreement that the Media Does Not Have Enough Coverage of ASEAN by Affiliation



CSO = civil society organisation, NGO = non-governmental organisation.

The role of school textbooks to socialise and educate young people about ASEAN

Similarly, about 70.0% of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed with using school textbooks to socialise and educate young people about ASEAN’s progress, achievements, and challenges (Figure 35). Meanwhile, 15.0% were neutral, and 8.1% disagreed. Participants in the FGDs mentioned that school textbooks played a crucial

role in educating young people about ASEAN’s member countries. History classes were said to be limited in coverage, focusing on the Thai-centric history of conflicts and rivalry. As a result, participants said that each generation had continued to have minimal exposure to ASEAN’s achievements and progress, and the majority of the Thai population had tended to be less integrated with other ASEAN Member States.

Figure 35: Agreement with Using Textbooks to Socialise and Educate Young People about ASEAN

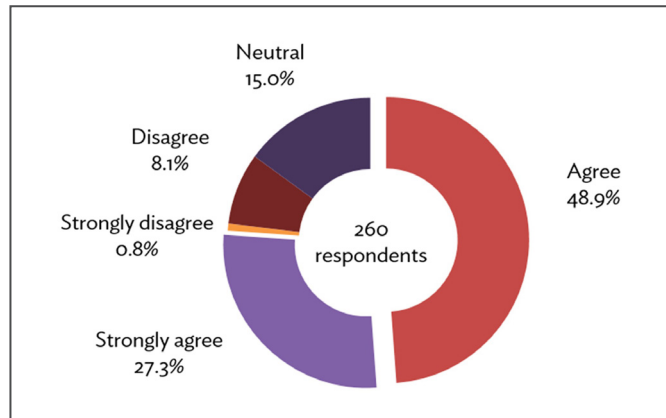
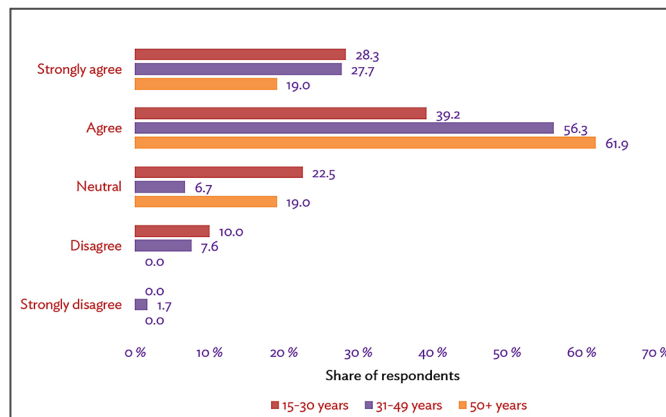


Figure 36: Agreement with Using Textbooks to Socialise and Educate Young People about ASEAN by Age



Examining the results by age, more than 80% of the respondents in the two older groups agreed or strongly agreed that textbooks should be used to socialise and educate young people about ASEAN’s progress, achievements, and challenges, while 68% of respondents in the younger 15–30 age group agreed or strongly agreed (Figure 36).

In terms of gender, the survey results for the female and male respondents were not significantly different (Figure 37). Meanwhile, by affiliation, the student group had the lowest share of respondents (68.9%) who agreed or strongly agreed with using textbooks, whereas the government respondents had the highest share (84.3%) (Figure 38).

Figure 37: Agreement with Using Textbooks to Socialise and Educate Young People about ASEAN by Gender

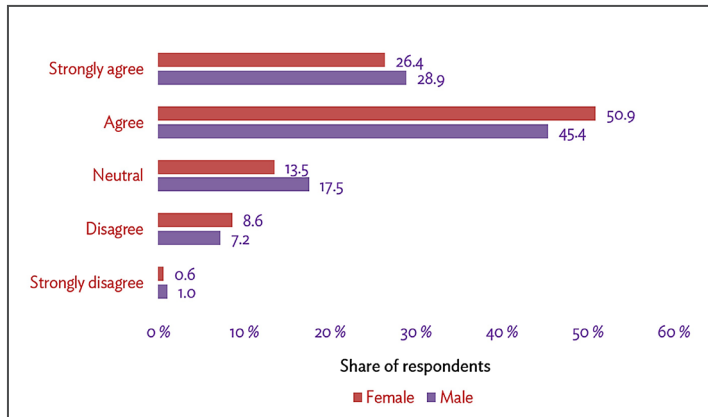
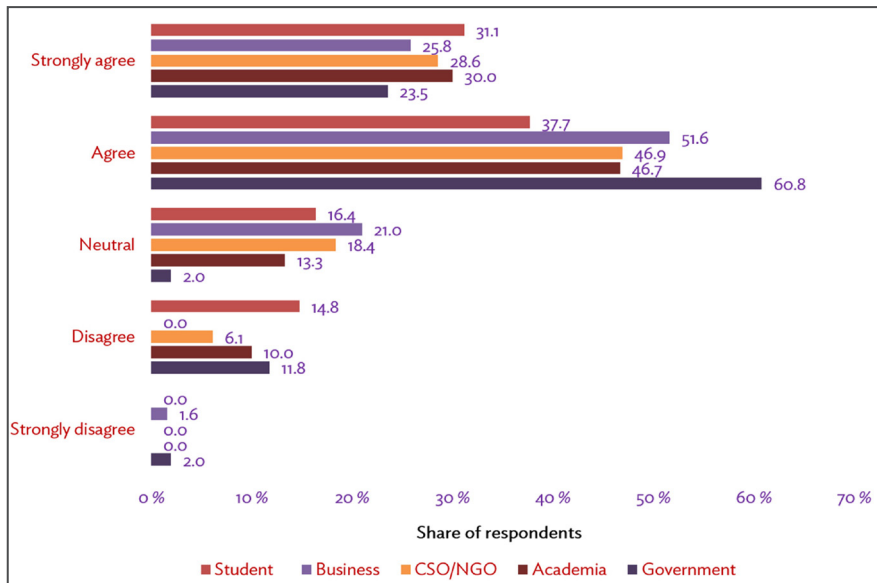


Figure 38: Agreement with Using Textbooks to Socialise and Educate Young People about ASEAN by Affiliation



CSO = civil society organisation, NGO = non-governmental organisation.

Some youths in the FGD mentioned that current textbooks for Thai students in primary and secondary education tended to cause bias and negative perceptions of neighbouring countries because they taught only topics on historical conflicts or wars between Thailand and those countries. They noted that content about present and future issues for ASEAN, such as its progress, achievements, and challenges, did not appear in textbooks. Meanwhile, some participants from the NGO and academia groups voiced concerns that the Ministry of Education and Thai teachers had limited capabilities for delivering knowledge and information about the dynamics of ASEAN, so, therefore, textbooks may not be helpful for educating young people.

Pressing Problems for Thailand and ASEAN

The survey results identified the top five pressing problems facing Thailand and ASEAN today and until 2025. Four of these were common problems, namely corruption; income disparity and social inequality; poverty; and infrastructure availability and quality (Figure 39a and Figure 39b). The unique pressing problems were the provision of quality education, considered as one of top five problems for Thailand, and trade, investment, and regulatory coherence as one of top five problems for ASEAN. The provision of quality education was ranked sixth among the problems for ASEAN.

The similarity in the pressing problems for Thailand and ASEAN may reflect the hope in solving these problems together at the country and regional levels. For example, ASEAN, as an organisation exercising non-interference, is prohibited from taking action against corruption and human rights violations. Therefore, the ASEAN region as a whole has made little progress in these areas. Increased collaboration in dealing with these common issues may satisfy Thai people's concerns and encourage a sense of togetherness in the region.

Figure 39a: Top Five Problems Facing Thailand Today and until 2025

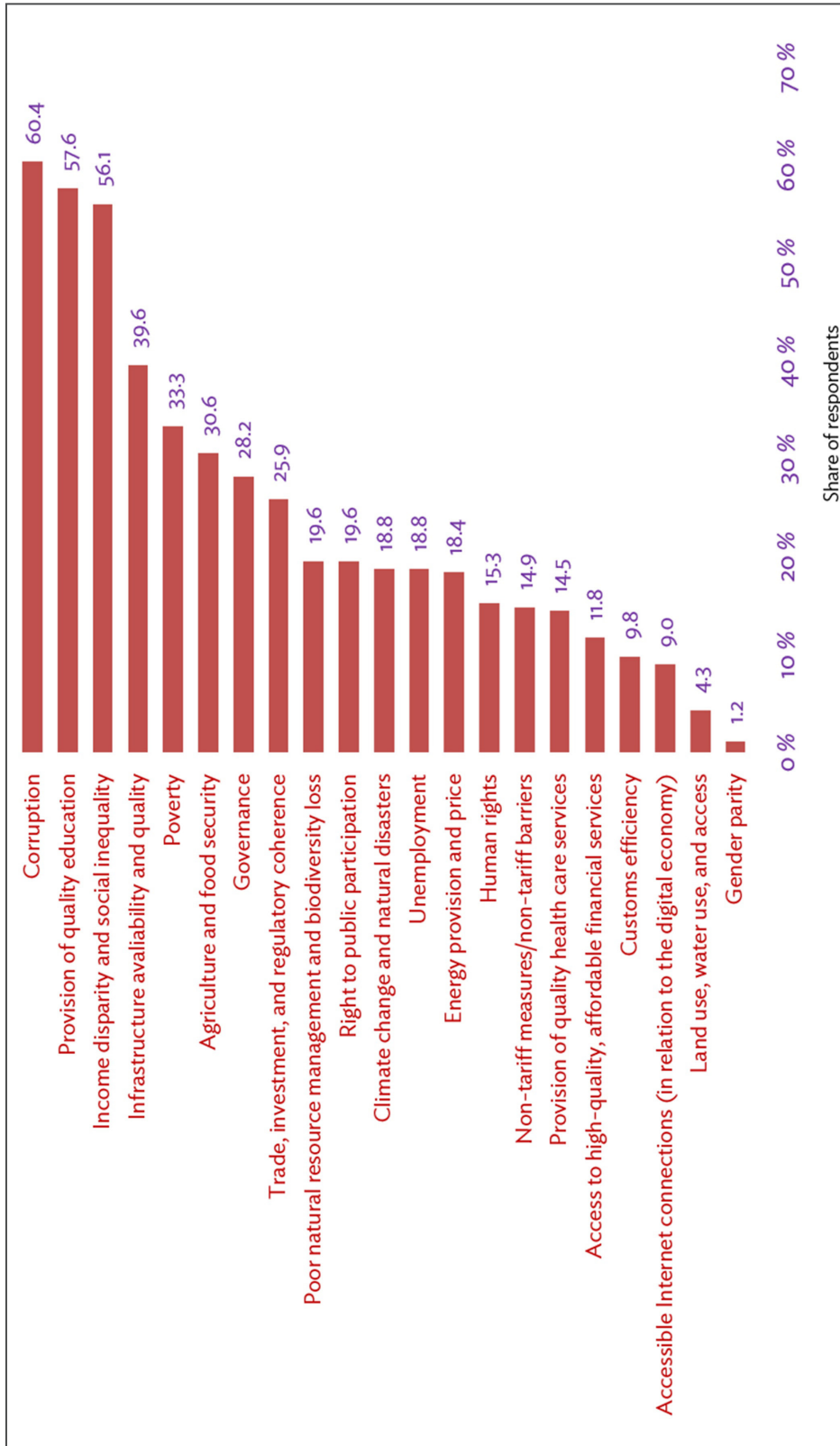
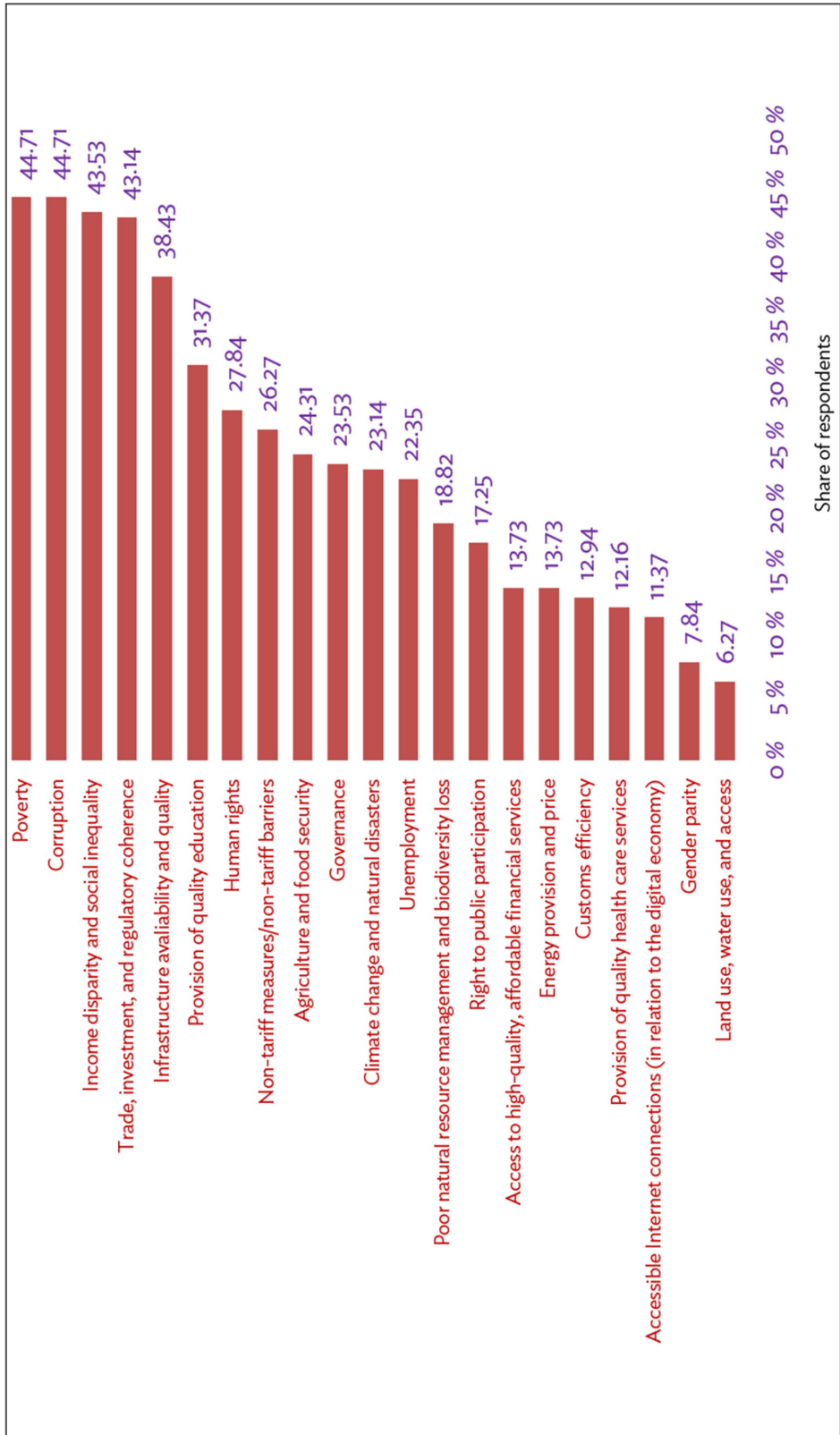


Figure 39b: Top Five Problems Facing ASEAN Today and until 2025



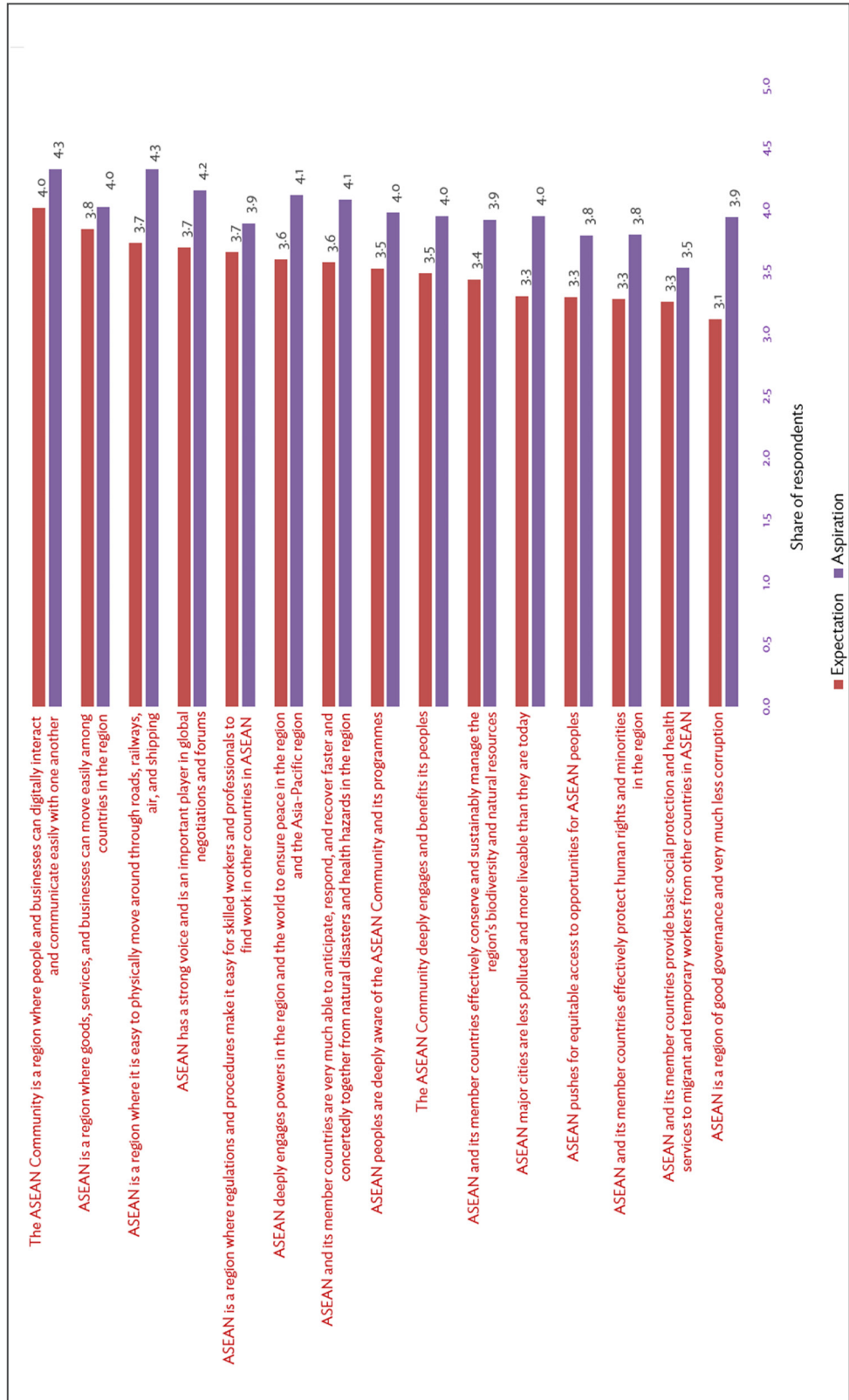
Expectations and Aspirations for ASEAN by 2025

Among the top five expectations of what respondents believed would likely happen by 2025, three were also listed among the top five aspirations by 2025. These were: ‘The ASEAN Community is a region where people and businesses can digitally interact and communicate easily with one another’; ‘ASEAN is a region where it is easy to physically move around through roads, railways, air, and shipping’; and ‘ASEAN has a strong voice and is an important player in global negotiations and forums’ (Figure 40).

However, two of the top five expectations were not among the top five aspirations of the respondents. These were: ‘ASEAN is a region where goods, services, and businesses can move easily among countries in the region’, and ‘ASEAN is a region where regulations and procedures make it easy for skilled workers and professionals to find work in other countries in ASEAN’.

Two of the top five aspirations were not among the top five expectations: ‘ASEAN deeply engages powers in the region and the world to ensure peace in the region and the Asia-Pacific region’, and ‘ASEAN and its member countries are very much able to anticipate, respond, and recover faster and concertedly together from natural disasters and health hazards in the region’. It is noted that these above issues – specifically, conflict, natural disasters, and health hazards – are persistent threats in ASEAN that remain unresolved. Therefore, it is unsurprising that these issues were at the top of the lists.

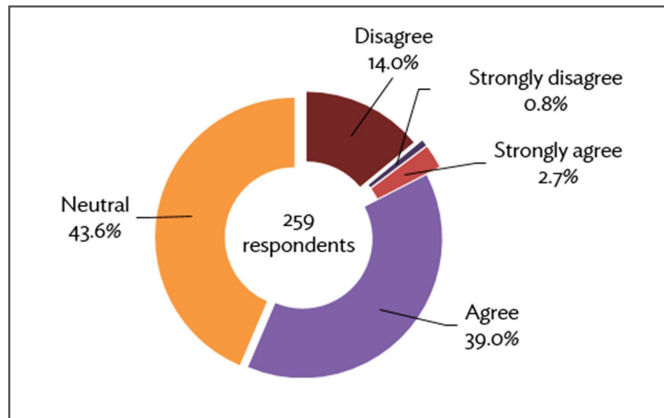
Figure 40: Expectations and Aspirations for ASEAN



Improving the role of the ASEAN Secretariat

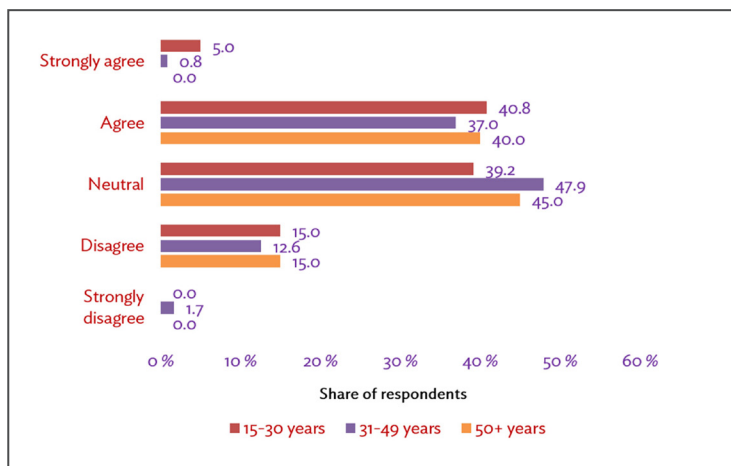
Overall, the largest share of respondents (43.6%) were neutral about the idea of gradually upgrading the implementing and monitoring capabilities of the ASEAN Secretariat to meet its increasing challenges. This was followed by those who agreed (39%), disagreed (13.9%), strongly agreed (2.7%), and strongly disagreed (0.8%) (Figure 41).

Figure 41: Agreement with Upgrading the Role of the ASEAN Secretariat



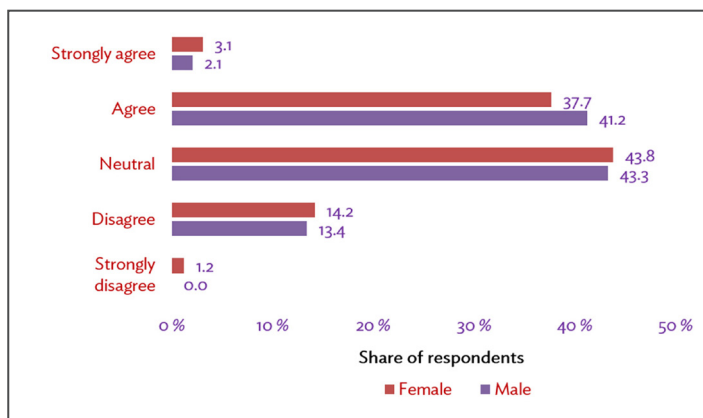
By age group, 47.9% of respondents aged 31–49 were neutral about the idea of upgrading the capabilities of the ASEAN Secretariat, while similar proportions of respondents aged 15–30 and 50 or over indicated ‘neutral’ or ‘agree’ (Figure 42).

Figure 42: Agreement with Upgrading the Role of the ASEAN Secretariat by Age



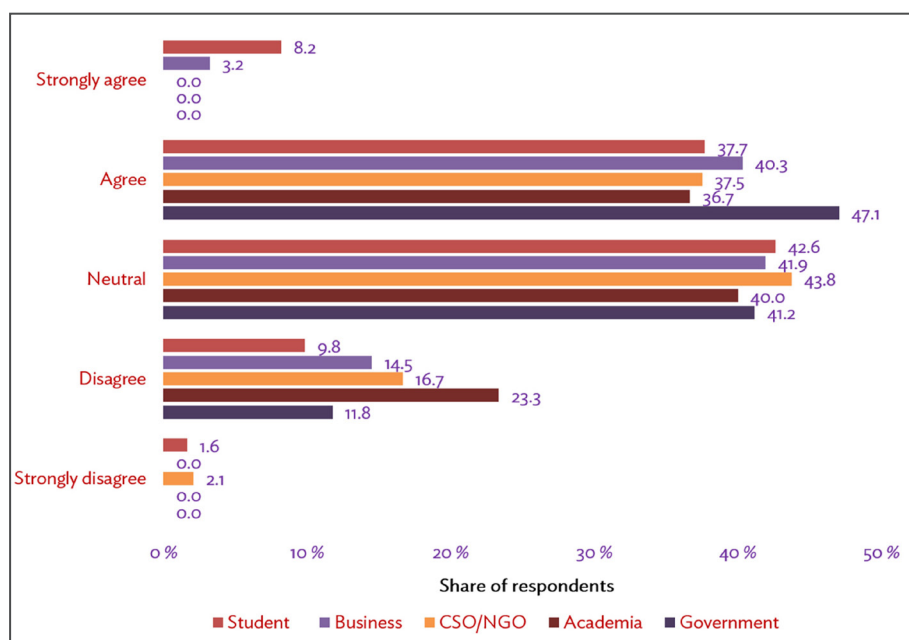
By gender, the female and male respondents expressed similar views on upgrading the capabilities of the secretariat, as shown in Figure 43.

Figure 43: Agreement with Upgrading the Role of the ASEAN Secretariat by Gender



The highest shares of respondents for almost all affiliations, except the government group, were neutral on upgrading the capabilities of the secretariat (Figure 44). Nonetheless, nearly half of the government respondents (47.1%) agreed with the idea. This may reflect that the government respondents had more belief in the ASEAN Secretariat than respondents from other affiliations.

Figure 44: Agreement with Upgrading the Role of the ASEAN Secretariat by Affiliation



In the FGDs, some participants mentioned feeling neutrally about the idea of upgrading the capabilities of the ASEAN Secretariat because they believed the decision would not create tangible changes or real impacts. The respondents believed that the basic function of the ASEAN Secretariat was to facilitate and coordinate stakeholders for the effective implementation of ASEAN's projects and activities. In addition, it must comply with the ASEAN Charter, which includes the norm of non-interference in the internal affairs of ASEAN Member States. Therefore, with limited functions and the norm of non-interference, some thought the ASEAN Secretariat would not be able to cope with the challenges facing ASEAN.

The feedback from the FGDs emphasised the increasing concerns and challenges the ASEAN Community faces today and will face in the future. It also pointed to the association's increased collective challenges that require collective action through ASEAN's mechanisms. Participants noted that the ASEAN Secretariat should have the legal authority to tackle these challenges, otherwise it would not be able to cope with the new and increasing challenges in the globalised world.

However, as much as 43.6% of the respondents were neutral about the idea of upgrading the ASEAN Secretariat. The basic function of the secretariat is to facilitate and coordinate stakeholders for the effective implementation of ASEAN's projects and activities. Nevertheless, it must comply with the ASEAN Charter, which includes the norm of non-interference in ASEAN Member States' internal affairs. The pressing problems for ASEAN, which include the provision of governance, quality education, human rights, trade, investment and regulatory coherence, and affordable Internet connections, are generally internal affairs for member countries. Thus, the respondents may not have believed that increasing the ASEAN Secretariat's role would help in coping with these challenges.

Conclusion and the Way Forward

The survey results show several differences in the views towards ASEAN across age groups. The youngest age group, those aged 15–30, had high hopes for ASEAN and its potential to operate as a successful association for the benefit of its member states. However, they also appeared to be exposed to false scepticism of ASEAN brought on by the media, newspapers, books, and what they had learned from teachers. Therefore, their feeling of being ASEAN citizens was close to non-existent, and this may carry on in the future.

In general, the majority of the Thai respondents tended to view ASEAN neutrally due to the fact that they did not perceive ASEAN as having a significant effect on their lives. From the business perspective, respondents indicated that ASEAN economic integration tended to benefit large companies more than SMEs.

Some suggestions for making Thai people feel more attached to ASEAN are as follows. First, the media should play a greater role by focusing more on media coverage and content to spread knowledge and information and create true understanding of ASEAN. For example, the media should publicise content about ASEAN's present and future issues, such as its progress, achievements, and challenges.

Secondly, the similarities in the pressing problems facing Thailand and ASEAN may reflect the hope in solving these problems together at the country and regional levels. Collaboration in dealing with these common issues may satisfy the needs of the Thai people and encourage a sense of togetherness in the region.

Finally, at present, large companies can access reliable and current information to gain various advantages, but SMEs have limited capabilities. Therefore, SMEs should not be overlooked and should be promoted to enhance competitiveness and catch up with the dynamics of economic integration.

Reference

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