

Voices of ASEAN

What Does ASEAN Mean to ASEAN Peoples?*

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Overview

The year 2017 marks 50 years since the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) was formed under the Bangkok Declaration on 8 August 1967. The five founding members, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand, envisioned political and economic cooperation that would promote stability and prosperity for each country and ultimately a sense of shared culture and identity for the region as a whole. Over the past 50 years, the association has not only withstood the pressures of deep transformations resulting from the significant changes in the region but has in fact doubled in size to its current 10 members by accepting new members, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Viet Nam.

With the passing of a half-century of working together, a key issue now revolves around the question of shared identity and belonging. The region is home to many cultures and languages as well as great disparities in the member states' economies and levels of development. ASEAN has provided a platform for continuous discussion between leaders, which has helped the region address these disparities and adapt to the constantly changing circumstances. But what do the people of ASEAN think about

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

ASEAN? What are their hopes and expectations for ASEAN as a region? Are they aware of how ASEAN institutions work on their behalf? And are ASEAN programmes and initiatives addressing the key concerns of ASEAN people?

To address these questions, this volume presents and discusses the results of an ASEAN-wide survey of representatives from selected sectors on their aspirations, expectations, concerns, and hopes for ASEAN. The survey was supplemented by a series of follow-up focus group discussions (FGDs) with some of the survey respondents.

The first chapter presents and discusses the major findings and results of the surveys. Each of the 10 chapters, thereafter, reports on the individual country results and findings.

This volume is part of a larger commemorative publication that consists of the following five volumes:

- Volume 1: The ASEAN Journey: Reflections of ASEAN Leaders and Officials
- Volume 2: Voices of ASEAN: What Does ASEAN Mean to ASEAN Peoples?
- Volume 3: ASEAN and Member States: Transformation and Integration
- Volume 4: Building ASEAN Community: Political-Security and Socio-cultural Reflections
- Volume 5: The ASEAN Economic Community into 2025 and Beyond

Methodology

The Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA) developed a public-opinion survey with a series of questions regarding the concerns, aspirations, and expectations of ASEAN people for ASEAN. It was designed to elicit the feelings and opinions of different groups, representing a variety of ages, genders, and affiliations, regarding their priorities for ASEAN by 2025. The survey posed a sequence of questions that first asked about the respondents' general awareness of ASEAN and what they believed were the benefits of being a member of ASEAN. The second set of questions aimed to make inferences about their concerns, hopes, and expectations for the association. The survey was carried out in all 10 ASEAN Member States, with each country team using an online platform (Survey Monkey). In some cases, the paper questionnaires were translated into the local languages. The surveys were followed up with FGDs with some of the survey respondents.

A total of 2,322 respondents participated in the survey. The affiliations represented were students, labour, business, government officials, civil society, academia, and others.

For this integrative chapter, ERIA collated the responses across all 10 countries using the country data. The cumulative totals were calculated along with the weighted averages based on the size of each country's relative population. All ASEAN figures in this chapter are reported as the non-weighted totals unless otherwise noted; the results using the weighted averages were similar to the unweighted totals reported here.

Key Findings

Familiarity with ASEAN

Virtually all respondents were at least 'slightly familiar' with ASEAN. Three-fifths of them were 'moderately' to 'very' familiar with ASEAN. Awareness increased significantly since 2014. Respondents were mostly aware of ASEAN's economic pillar.

Generally, the older respondents (those aged 50 or over) tended to be more familiar with ASEAN than the younger respondents (those aged 15–30). Also, those from academe and government tended to be more aware of ASEAN than the other groups, especially the students.

In the FGDs, a number of participants said they had learned about ASEAN first in their primary school, high school, or university classes, while there were also a number who had learned about ASEAN only in 2015 from news and media as the ASEAN Member States prepared for the realisation of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC).

Comparisons with earlier studies conducted by the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) in 2007 and 2014 indicate that awareness of ASEAN increased significantly after 2014 – perhaps as a result of all the news about the establishment of the AEC in 2015. In the ISEAS's 2014 survey of students, only 56% were aware of ASEAN – this jumped to 87% in ERIA's survey in 2016.

However, comments during the FGDs made it clear that much of the participants' awareness was related to ASEAN's economic pillar. Indeed, several respondents stated that they believed the AEC and ASEAN were the same. Many respondents could not identify the other two pillars of ASEAN. Considering some of the key findings related to the challenges and aspirations for ASEAN (which are largely non-economic in nature), awareness limited only to ASEAN's economic pillar is an issue that should be addressed.

Benefit from ASEAN

Two-thirds of respondents perceived their countries' membership of ASEAN as 'moderately' to 'very' beneficial. Thus, the respondents overwhelmingly considered membership of ASEAN to be a good thing. Not surprisingly, two-thirds said they would be moderately to extremely concerned if their countries were to leave ASEAN.

Respondents listed many perceived benefits from membership, primarily related to trade and the free flow of people. These included the following:

- access to more export markets and regional supply chains;
- greater diversity of goods for sale in their countries;
- ease of travel to other ASEAN countries and greater tourism opportunities, especially using ASEAN lanes;
- trade and investment linkages; and
- greater access to jobs.

Few understood the political and security benefits – especially the enduring regional stability – that ASEAN has brought.

Feeling of ASEAN citizenship

More than three-fourths of all respondents felt 'moderately' to 'very much' as ASEAN citizens. Combined with those who indicated feeling 'somewhat' as ASEAN citizens, a sense of ASEAN belonging was shared by virtually all the respondents. Much of this sense of ASEAN belonging is shaped by geography. A full sense of ASEAN citizenship may call for ASEAN to be more deeply engaged and more aligned with the concerns and interests of the non-elites.

Only 3% of the respondents said they did not feel like they were ASEAN citizens. The degree of the respondents' sense of ASEAN citizenship or belonging was similar across the various groups, albeit to a lesser extent among those in the business sector. Remarkably, the highest degree, 'very much', was chosen by the greatest shares of respondents for all groups except the business respondents. Half of the students indicated they felt 'very much' as ASEAN citizens. This was substantially higher than the 37% in the 2014 ISEAS survey of ASEAN university students who 'strongly agreed' with the statement: 'I feel that I am a citizen of ASEAN.' (The ERIA survey question was deliberately set similar to the ISEAS question to allow for comparisons of the results for the students as well as other groups.)

The survey results can be viewed as the fruition of the ASEAN leaders' community-building aspirations, which started since the association's establishment in 1967 when,

as former ASEAN Secretary-General Rodolfo Severino explained, ‘Southeast Asia’s peoples hardly knew one another, having been cut off and kept isolated from one another by the colonial powers’ (Severino, 2014: 8). The participants of the FGDs in Indonesia expressed it perhaps more cogently as ‘their feeling that there exists a sense of solidarity among countries and citizens in the region ... their feeling of being better accepted in other ASEAN societies than those outside the region’ (Habibie Center, 2016: 4). A participant in the Philippine FGD said she felt a sense of belonging because she did not require a visa when visiting ASEAN countries.

Nonetheless, the results of the FGDs suggest that the sense of ASEAN belonging, shaped primarily by geographic and ethnic closeness and facilitated by the ease of travel within the region, could blossom into a full sense of ASEAN citizenship. This can be achieved as ASEAN becomes less elitist, better connected with the average person, and more aligned with the concerns and interests of the ASEAN peoples.

Priorities and concerns for ASEAN

There was remarkable unanimity in the priorities and concerns for ASEAN until 2025 across the respondent groups. The most pressing concerns were non-economic ones. Thus, ASEAN belonging and identity can be strengthened by moving beyond the economic pillar.

One remarkable result of the ERIA survey was the near unanimity among the students, businessmen, government representatives, academics, and non-governmental organisation (NGO) participants about the top two priority concerns for ASEAN that require concerted action by all ASEAN Member States. These were (1) corruption and (2) climate change and natural disasters, both of which had almost the same shares of respondents that placed these issues within their top five most pressing problems facing ASEAN today and until 2025 (46%–47%). The next two most pressing concerns, again with almost the same percentage of respondents considering them as among the top five issues for ASEAN (35%–36%), were (3) trade, investment, and regulatory coherence, and (4) income disparity and social inequality. The fifth most pressing concern for ASEAN until 2025 was agriculture and food security.

We can note that the top two pressing concerns for ASEAN that require concerted action by ASEAN Member States were non-economic issues. Of the top five concerns, only one was inherently related to economic integration. This implies that ASEAN peoples do not look at ASEAN primarily from an economic integration perspective, despite the fact that the respondents were more aware of the ASEAN Economic Community. Rather, they seem to see ASEAN from a community perspective, sharing largely common concerns. This suggests that a key means of deepening the sense of

ASEAN belonging, identity, and citizenship – and, thus, a deep sense of the ASEAN community – is to concertedly address the prioritised common concerns of ASEAN peoples. This shift towards more regionally coordinated actions on non-economic issues points to a higher level of comfort with the idea of belonging to a common socio-political community.

Aspirations for ASEAN

ASEAN peoples aspire for and largely expect an ASEAN in 2025 that is integrated, connected, resilient, and a significant voice and player in global and regional affairs. There are, however, large expectations gaps in the areas of good governance, equity, the environment, and human rights.

The survey results show that the aspiration of about three-quarters or more of all the respondents was for ASEAN by 2025 to be integrated and connected as well as resilient and a strong voice and player in the region and globally. The top three aspirations were for people and businesses to have ease of communication through information and communications technology (ICT), for consumers to have easy access to goods and services from any ASEAN source, and for ASEAN to be well connected physically via land, air, and water. The next-ranked aspiration was for the ease of movement of skilled workers and professionals. Thus, the apparent overriding aspiration was for ASEAN to be integrated and connected.

It is worth noting that more than three-quarters of the respondents were reasonably optimistic that ASEAN in 2025 would indeed be characterised by the ease of communications via ICT as well as the ease of access to goods and services within the region. Two-thirds expected improvements in physical connectivity, and three-fifths were optimistic about the ease of the regional movement of skilled workers and professionals.

About three-quarters of all respondents hoped for, and at least three-fifths expected, ASEAN to be a strong voice globally that is deeply engaged with global powers to ensure peace in the region by 2025. They also wanted the association to be able to anticipate, respond, and recover faster together from natural disasters and health hazards; however, only about three-fifths of the respondents were optimistic that ASEAN would be resilient from natural disasters and health hazards by 2025.

Nearly three-quarters of all the respondents also aspired for an ASEAN in 2025 that has good governance and less corruption; environmental sustainability with more liveable cities; and greater equity and protection of human rights, especially for minorities.

However, the gaps between the respondents' aspirations and expectations were significant, especially for good governance and reduced corruption. The expectations gap was particularly high among the business sector respondents; only about one-third were optimistic about the possibility of good governance and significantly less corruption. There was a hint of scepticism among many of the participants in the FGDs on the political will for addressing corruption (and an almost cultural determinism), which explains to some extent the large expectations gap.

Corruption was the most important concern of the participants that would need to be addressed concertedly by the ASEAN Member States. As highlighted earlier, addressing this issue region-wide will help deepen the sense of ASEAN belonging and community. It is also worth noting that the near congruence between the aspirations and expectations on an integrated and connected ASEAN by 2025 reflects the appreciation of the constant push for ASEAN economic integration and connectivity as embodied in the AEC blueprints, messages from the ASEAN meetings, and the ASEAN Member States' policy emphasis on integration and connectivity in the region. Finally, it is worth noting also that good governance and good regulatory practices are now included in the AEC Blueprint for 2016–2025, although they are not yet emphasised in ASEAN communiqués.

Thus, it is important for ASEAN and its member states to place more importance on good governance and the institutionalisation of good regulatory practices in the implementation of the AEC Blueprint 2025. Doing so can enhance the synergy of good regulatory practice with the implementation of other AEC measures (e.g. addressing the trade barrier effects of non-tariff measures, more facilitative standards, and conformance regimes). It can also reduce the gap between aspirations and expectations, indicating greater credibility of the governance of ASEAN Member States, and engender a deeper sense of ASEAN belonging and citizenship.

Overlaps between national and regional priorities

When asked to rank the most pressing problems facing their country, ASEAN people were most concerned about (1) corruption, (2) income disparity and social inequality, and (3) agriculture and food security – all three of which were also included in the top five regional problems. The fourth and fifth most pressing concerns at the national level, and which had almost equal percentages of respondents that considered them among the most pressing concerns, were infrastructure availability and quality, quality education provision and access, and climate change and natural disasters. Infrastructure availability and quality are intimately linked with regional physical connectivity, one of the key aspirations of the ASEAN peoples for ASEAN by 2025. This concordance of

national and regional concerns and aspirations calls for concerted regional initiatives to be undertaken by all ASEAN Member States. Such initiatives would likely result in greater synergy among all the countries and at the same time deepen the sense of ASEAN belongingness and community.

There were also national concerns that reflected the unique circumstances of the individual ASEAN Member States. For example, the top national concern for the Philippine respondents was having accessible Internet connections because the country has been bedevilled by comparatively slower and more expensive Internet connections for some years. In addition, the continued, significant growth of the country's booming information technology and business process management industry demands a cost-effective, efficient, and dynamic ICT sector. Unemployment was among the top five national concerns for the respondents in Myanmar, Cambodia, and Lao PDR, three countries with substantial numbers of citizens that work overseas, primarily in Thailand. Surprisingly, unemployment was the number one national concern for respondents in Brunei. This was likely due to a concern for the lack of quality jobs and poor employment prospects in the future rather than unemployment per se, considering that the respondents were predominantly college students. For the Singapore respondents, corruption was not a national issue, but, nonetheless, was the number one regional issue.

A challenge for the ASEAN Member States is the melding of both the common regional and national concerns and the more country-specific priority concerns. Nonetheless, the substantial overlap of regional and national concerns indicates that there is actually large room for more concerted efforts among all the member states for addressing the common priority concerns.

Aspirations for a bigger role for ASEAN

In addition to the desire for ASEAN to act collectively to address region-wide issues, such as climate change, corruption, and agriculture and food security, there was also a strong hope for ASEAN to play a bigger role as a global player. When asked about the aspirations and hopes for ASEAN by 2025, 'ASEAN is a strong voice and important player in global negotiations and forums' was the fourth most highly ranked aspiration for respondents across ASEAN. The sixth most highly ranked aspiration was, 'ASEAN deeply engages powers in the region and the world (e.g. the United States and China) to ensure peace in the region and the Asia-Pacific region'.

These results indicate not only a willingness for ASEAN to present itself as a single region with a common identity but also the desire for the association to act at the global level.

At the same time, that two-thirds and three-fifths of all respondents expected ASEAN to have a bigger global voice and greater regional presence by 2025, respectively, suggests that the majority of the respondents were reasonably confident of the capability of ASEAN and its member states to play such roles. This indicates a growing appreciation of the increased importance of ASEAN in the global and regional arenas.

Media and textbooks

The role of the media and textbooks needs to be better understood and utilised to increase public awareness of ASEAN's programmes and activities.

Of the respondents, 72% agreed or strongly agreed that the media did not have sufficient coverage of ASEAN. Participants stated that they thought the media focused too much on conflict or other sensationalised stories and did not spend enough time on the main activities and accomplishments of ASEAN. At the same time, however, there were misgivings by some participants concerning how media and textbooks would cover ASEAN if required to do so. For example, there was an impression that textbooks on ASEAN focused too much on history and were outdated. Indeed, some participants pointed out that the focus of the textbooks tended to be on historical conflicts. Similarly, they mentioned that most ASEAN events and activities were not 'newsworthy' enough in the traditional sense for the media.

The results of the survey and the FGDs suggest that engaging ASEAN people may require more creative means of information dissemination, including greater use of social media, for example, as well as updating and complementing the information in textbooks with more current information and possibly more engaging and interactive means of disseminating such current information.

The ASEAN Secretariat

Overall, respondents agreed that the ASEAN Secretariat should be improved.

Of the respondents, 45% strongly agreed, and 42% agreed that the ASEAN Secretariat should be gradually upgraded.

Among the member states, this question generated the widest divergence in responses of any of the questions. Indonesia had the highest support for improving the ASEAN Secretariat, with 62% of respondents strongly agreeing with the idea. At the other extreme, only 3% of the Thai respondents strongly agreed. Across ASEAN, government

officials felt the strongest that the secretariat should be upgraded, with strong agreement from 51% of the respondents.

Conclusion

As former President Fidel Ramos of the Philippines said:

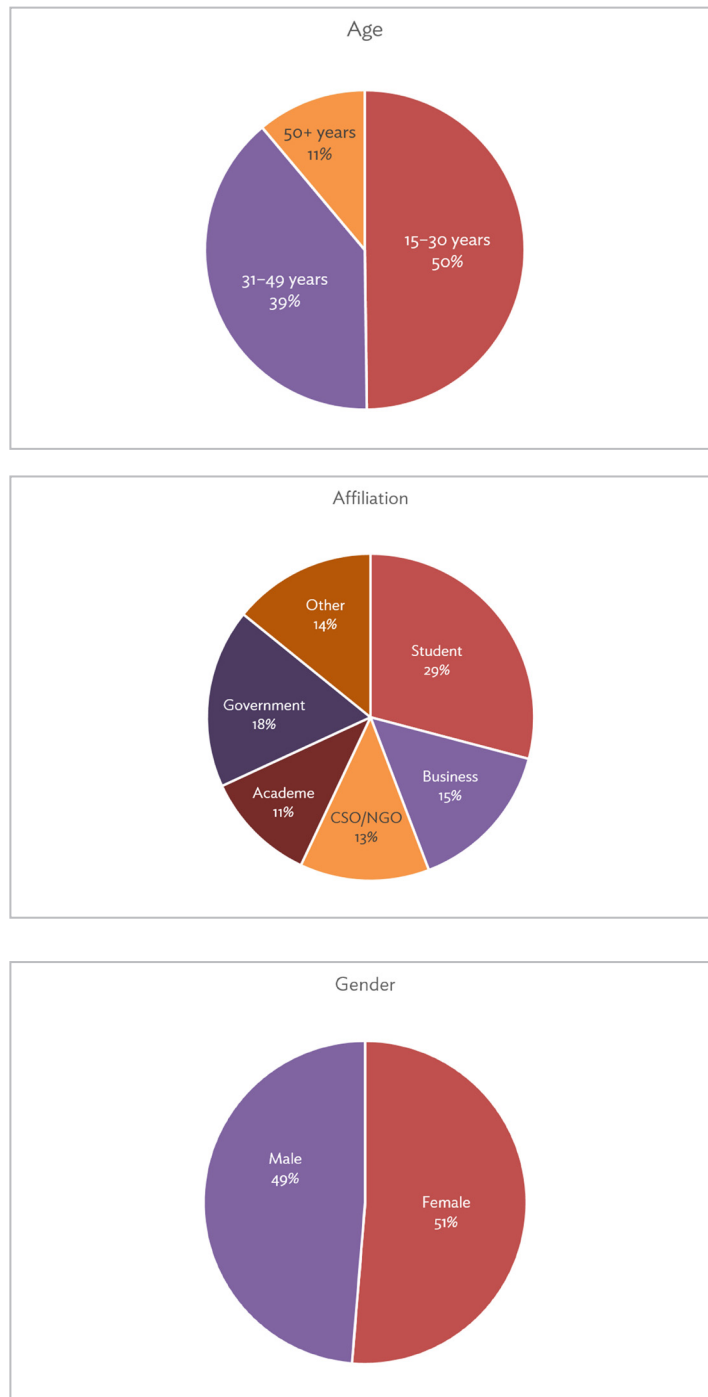
If the Southeast Asian peoples are to embrace ASEAN as their ‘Community’, they must see it as a pervading, beneficial influence on their daily lives. They must regard the ASEAN vision and mission as their own, being its most important stakeholders. (Ramos, 2013: 8)

Clearly, the ASEAN Community is still a work in progress. By concertedly addressing common concerns for the region and the individual countries, it is likely that the sense of ASEAN belonging and identity will deepen, and the sense of the ASEAN Community will be invigorated and continue to grow.

Characteristics of the Respondents

The survey’s 2,322 respondents included both men and women of a range of ages and affiliations, namely students and representatives from labour, business, government, civil society, academia, and others (Figure 1). The vast majority (89%) of respondents across all countries were under the age of 50 – only the Philippines, with a share of 37%, had more than 15% in the 50+ age range. At the other extreme, 73% of the respondents in Lao PDR were aged 15–30 years old. The gender representation was fairly balanced for ASEAN as a whole, with 51% female and 49% male respondents. There was a larger degree of variation in some of the countries. For instance, male respondents greatly outnumbered female respondents in Cambodia (65%) and Malaysia (64%), and female respondents outnumbered males in Myanmar (71%) and Brunei (67%).

Figure 1: Main Characteristics of the Respondents



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

The affiliations of the respondents were fairly evenly distributed across the member states. Many of the surveys included a separate section for ‘labour’, but for this chapter, we added ‘labour’ to the ‘others’ category because three countries did not include labour as a separate category. Overall, students were the most highly represented group in the surveys, except in the Philippines survey, where they were included in the ‘others’ category. Almost half of Brunei’s respondents (48%) were students. Government representatives were the second most highly represented group, comprising 18% of the respondents. A third of Singapore’s respondents (33%) were from the business sector, compared to an average of 15% across ASEAN. For all the member states, about 13% of the respondents were from civil society organisations (CSOs) or NGOs – although Brunei (1%), Lao PDR (5%), and Viet Nam (6%) had low shares. In contrast, Indonesia had a high number of CSO and NGO respondents, perhaps because the country has an active and engaged CSO sector. Academia was slightly less well represented, comprising 11% of the respondents across ASEAN. It was particularly under-represented in Lao PDR (2%) and Singapore (2%).

Awareness, Belonging, and Attitudes about Membership of ASEAN

General awareness

The survey asked the respondents to indicate their level of awareness of ASEAN by choosing from five options: ‘very familiar’, ‘moderately familiar’, ‘somewhat familiar’, ‘slightly familiar’, and ‘not at all familiar’. Figure 2 shows the results.

Figure 2: Awareness of ASEAN



Finding: The majority of respondents (87%) were at least somewhat familiar with ASEAN. Virtually all (98%) were at least slightly familiar with ASEAN.

Over 80% of those surveyed in each country were at least ‘somewhat familiar’ with ASEAN, ranging from a low of 80% in Brunei to a high of 96% in the Philippines, while 100% of the respondents in the Philippines and Thailand were at least slightly familiar with ASEAN. Even in Cambodia, which had the highest share of those who chose ‘not at all familiar’, only 5% said they were not at all aware of ASEAN.

The higher percentages of respondents in the Philippines who were moderately to very familiar with ASEAN can be attributed in part to the fact that the respondents in the Philippines included more people in the 50+ age group, and according to the findings, awareness of ASEAN appears to increase with age. The respondents from Indonesia also showed a higher level of awareness, with 90% indicating that they were at least ‘somewhat familiar’ with ASEAN – perhaps attributable to the fact that the ASEAN Secretariat is based in Jakarta. Similarly, the higher level of awareness in Lao PDR (91%) may be because the country was ASEAN Chair in 2016, the same year as the survey. The level of awareness in Thailand, on the other hand, was lower in comparison, with 83% saying they were at least ‘somewhat familiar’ with ASEAN, perhaps due to what the authors of the report for Thailand note as ‘the possibility of Thai-centric views or prejudiced beliefs imprinted in the country’s education system, especially in history classes and textbooks that are repeatedly taught to young kids for generations’. Viet Nam also showed a lower level of awareness, perhaps as a result of the country engaging with many other countries and regions through free trade agreements during the same period, indicating a certain level of competition between ASEAN and other regions for attention.

During the FGDs, many respondents stated that they were most familiar with the AEC and did not know about ASEAN’s other two pillars. In fact, some respondents thought that the AEC and ASEAN were the same. Respondents in several countries said they learned about ASEAN through their work. There were also more surprising explanations. For example, in Myanmar, respondents learned about ASEAN in 2014 when the ASEAN Southeast Asian Games were held in their country, and Myanmar was the Chair of ASEAN. Respondents in the Singapore and Viet Nam FGDs mentioned the ASEAN lane and visa-free travel in airports as a ‘pleasant experience that brings out a sense of ‘ASEAN-ness’.

Generally, the older respondents were more aware of ASEAN than the younger ones (Table 1). As noted in the Philippines report, this was perhaps due to greater awareness of ASEAN through work or personal experiences. Thailand was an exception, as the

youngest age group had the highest percentage of those who indicated being ‘very familiar’ with ASEAN.

Table 1: Familiarity with ASEAN by Age Group

	Age (% of respondents, ASEAN average)		
	15-30 years	31-49 years	50+ years
Very familiar	17	21	33
Moderately familiar	37	40	44
Somewhat familiar	30	28	15
Slightly familiar	14	10	6
Not at all familiar	2	1	2

Gender variations were generally not considerable. The male respondents in some countries, such as the Philippines, were more aware of ASEAN, while in other countries, such as Cambodia, female respondents had greater awareness of the association.

In terms of affiliation, respondents from government and academia had the highest levels of awareness. This may be explained by the fact that people who work in these fields are more likely to engage with ASEAN as part of their professional activities. Students and those in the ‘other’ category had the highest shares of respondents who were only slightly familiar or not at all familiar with ASEAN (Table 2).

Table 2: Awareness of ASEAN by Affiliation

	Affiliation (% of respondents, ASEAN average)					
	Student	Business	CSO/NGO	Academe	Government	Other
Very familiar	15	16	15	24	28	11
Moderately familiar	34	37	43	43	43	43
Somewhat familiar	32	34	29	29	23	26
Slightly familiar	16	12	14	3	6	16
Not at all familiar	3	2	0	0	0	4

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

Participants in the Malaysian FGDs stated they felt that awareness of ASEAN was skewed towards the economic and business aspects of the regional organisation. For example, discussions during the FGDs with industry and CSO participants revealed that they were aware of ASEAN as a platform that represented regional business relationship strengths.

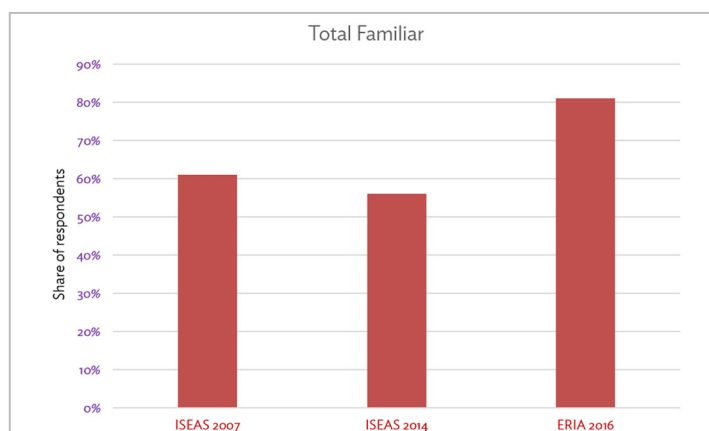
Comparison with ISEAS surveys

In 2007 and 2014, the ISEAS conducted similar surveys on attitudes and awareness towards ASEAN, which serve as an interesting comparison to this survey. They used a four-point scale with the options ‘very familiar’, ‘somewhat familiar’, ‘a little familiar’, and ‘not at all’ rather than a five-point scale as used in this study. The ISEAS survey respondents were all students.

We compared the ISEAS results with the results from our student respondents by combining the first three ERIA categories into one (‘familiar’), roughly equivalent to the two ISEAS categories of ‘very familiar’ and ‘somewhat familiar’. The last two options for both sets of surveys were comparable: ERIA’s were ‘slightly familiar’ and ‘not at all’, while the ISEAS surveys used ‘a little familiar’ and ‘not at all’.

There was a significant rise in awareness between the 2014 and 2016 surveys, with the share of those in the total ‘familiar’ group increasing from 56% to 81% (Figure 3). This is understandable given the fact that there was considerable media coverage of the AEC during 2015. It also supports statements made by several of the FGD participants that their awareness was primarily related to the economic aspects of ASEAN.

Figure 3: Comparison of Student Awareness of ASEAN



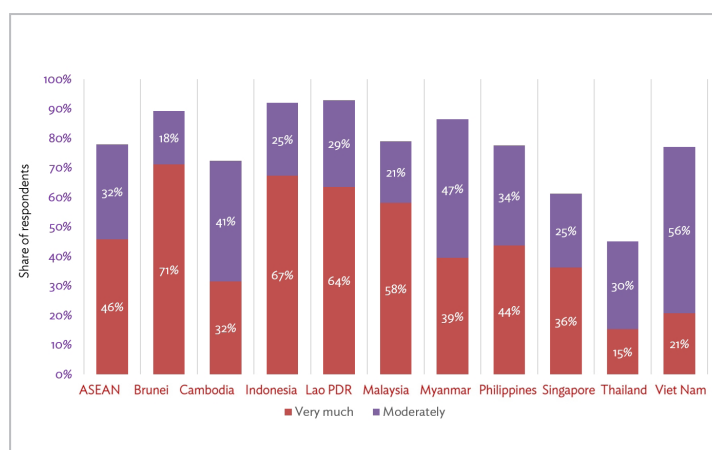
Sources: ERIA (2016); Thompson, Thianthai, and Thuzar (2016).

Citizenship

The survey asked respondents to assess the extent to which they felt like ASEAN citizens using a four-point scale with the options ‘very much’, ‘moderately’, ‘somewhat’, and ‘no’.

Finding: In all countries, except Thailand, the majority of respondents considered themselves at least moderately as ASEAN citizens (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Feeling of Being an ASEAN Citizen



As with the question on the awareness of ASEAN, Indonesia and Lao PDR expressed higher levels of feeling like ASEAN citizens. In contrast, 71% of the respondents from Brunei felt ‘very much’ as ASEAN citizens, which may be explained by the fact that Brunei is very focused on ASEAN, whereas other countries, such as Singapore, focus on other countries and regions as well. Thailand had the lowest level of feeling of ASEAN citizenship, and only 15% of respondents selected ‘very much’.

While the majority of the respondents identified at least moderately as ASEAN citizens (78%), the FGDs elicited a more nuanced perspective. For example, some Malaysian respondents revealed that their sense of citizenship was based more upon geographic proximity than upon a sense of shared identity. In fact, some respondents expressed their opinions that ASEAN was an elitist and state-centric organisation that should become more inclusive.

Overall, respondents from the CSOs and NGOs (54%), academia (51%), and government (52%) were most likely to feel ‘very much’ like citizens of ASEAN. The business respondents (34%) were the least likely to feel like ASEAN citizens. During the FGD in Indonesia, business respondents explained that they felt that there had been few positive impacts resulting from cooperation with ASEAN. Generally, there were not

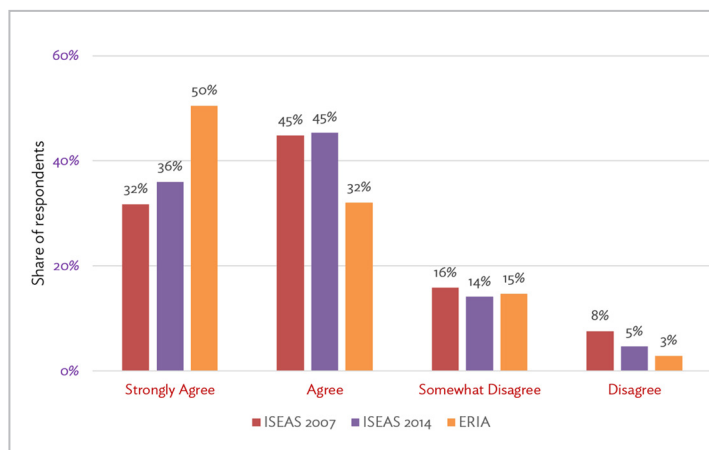
large differences among the age groups or genders, although the older respondents were somewhat more likely to indicate feeling ‘very much’ as ASEAN citizens.

Comparison with ISEAS surveys

The ISEAS survey posed the same question: ‘I feel that I am a citizen of ASEAN.’ It used a similar four-point scale with four choices: ‘strongly agree’, ‘somewhat agree’, ‘somewhat disagree’, and ‘strongly disagree’.

Overall, there was a trend towards an increasing feeling of ASEAN citizenship over time. Of the students in ERIA’s 2016 survey, 50% felt ‘very much’ like ASEAN citizens, whereas only 36% (in 2014) and 32% (in 2007) of the students in the ISEAS surveys strongly agreed with the statement (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Comparison of Feeling of Being an ASEAN Citizen



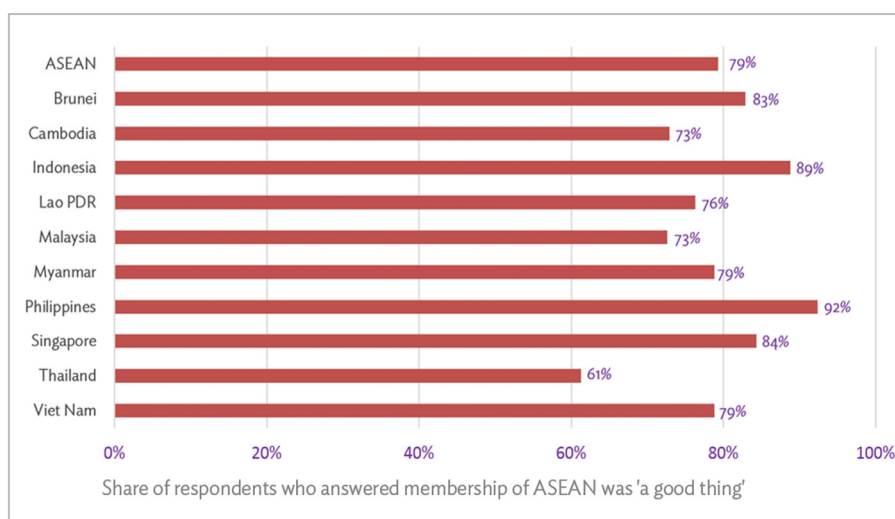
Sources: ERIA (2016); Thompson, Thianthai, and Thuzar (2016).

Membership of ASEAN

The next question asked respondents: ‘What do you think of your country’s membership in ASEAN?’ The four choices were: ‘a good thing’, ‘a bad thing’, ‘neither good nor bad’, and ‘don’t know’.

Finding: Respondents overwhelmingly believed that membership of ASEAN was ‘a good thing’. Every country, except Thailand, had at least 70% confidence that it was a good thing (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Opinions on Membership of ASEAN



Overall, 79% of the total respondents thought that membership of ASEAN was good. Thailand stood out as having the lowest opinion of ASEAN membership, with only 62% saying it was a good thing, compared to 72%–92% for the other countries. These results are similar to those of the ISEAS 2014 survey, in which only 71% of the Thai respondents felt that membership of ASEAN was beneficial compared to an average of 89% for the region. In fact, there appears to be a downward trend in Thailand as 90% of the Thai respondents in the ISEAS 2007 survey agreed that membership was beneficial.¹

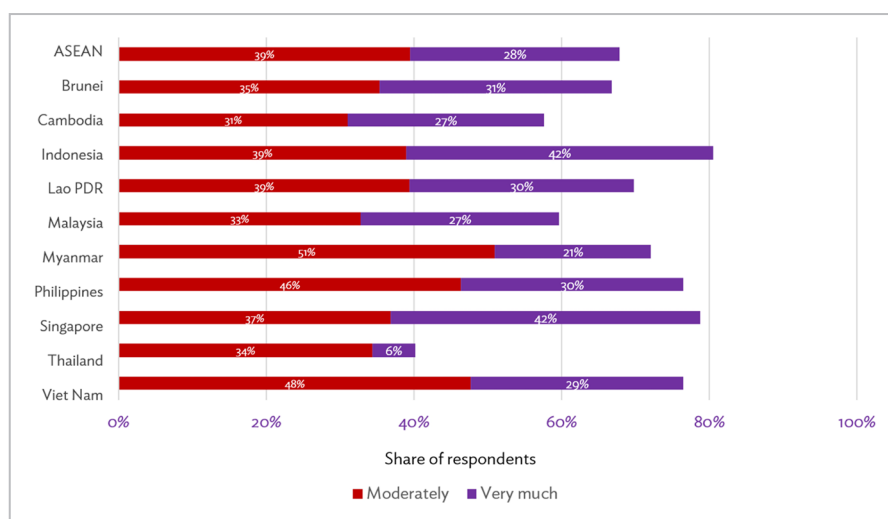
Benefit from ASEAN

The respondents were next asked: 'Would you say your country has benefited from being a member of ASEAN.' They were given five choices: 'very much', 'moderately', 'somewhat', 'fairly', and 'don't know'.

Findings: Not surprisingly, the majority of respondents (68%) felt that their countries had benefited 'very much' or 'moderately' from being a member of ASEAN (Figure 7).

¹ The ISEAS surveys used slightly different categories: 'strongly agree', 'somewhat agree', 'somewhat disagree', and 'strongly disagree'. ERIA's survey used the following: 'a good thing', 'neither good nor bad', 'don't know', and 'a bad thing'. For our analysis, we compared the ISEAS 'total agree' category (which included both 'strongly' and 'somewhat agree') with ERIA's category of 'a good thing'.

Figure 7: Benefit from Being a Member of ASEAN



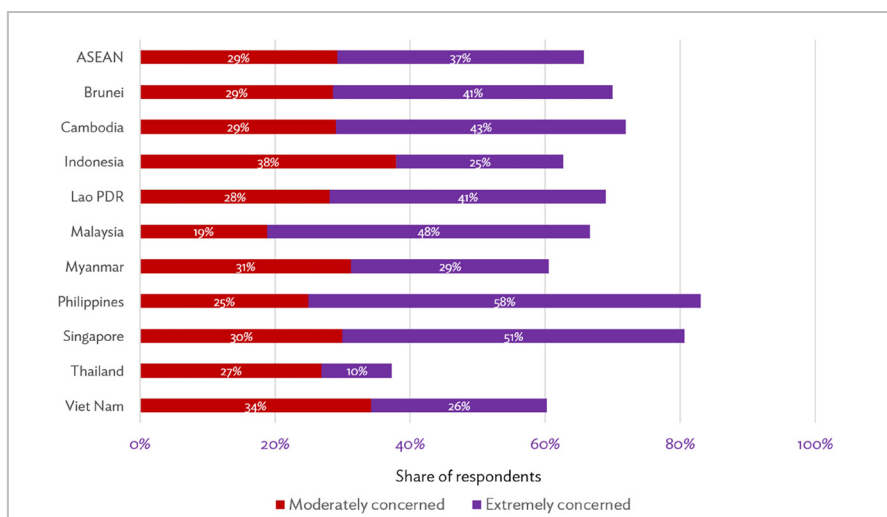
Opinions about leaving ASEAN

Respondents were asked the question: ‘How would you feel if your country were to leave ASEAN?’ They were given five choices: ‘extremely concerned’, ‘moderately concerned’, ‘somewhat concerned’, ‘slightly concerned’, and ‘not at all concerned’.

Finding: The majority of respondents (65%) were extremely or moderately concerned about the prospect of their countries not being part of ASEAN (Figure 8). Respondents from the Philippines were the most concerned, while those from Thailand were the least concerned.

The Philippines and Singapore indicated the highest levels of concern, with 58% and 51%, respectively, stating they would be ‘extremely concerned’. Respondents in Thailand stood out as having by far the lowest level of concern, with just 10.4% answering ‘extremely concerned’. The next lowest was Indonesia at 24.9%, which is surprising given that along with Singapore, they expressed the highest level of perceived benefit. One possible explanation comes from comments during the FGD, where some said they considered Indonesia’s membership in ASEAN as neither good nor bad. They said that Indonesia would be able to stand alone since the country was not dependent on ASEAN. Therefore, they thought that if Indonesia were no longer a member of ASEAN, then they would have nothing to lose.

Figure 8: Respondents' Concern if Their Countries Were to Leave ASEAN



Pressing Problems

The survey asked respondents to rank the five most pressing problems facing their countries and ASEAN as a whole until 2025. They were given a list of 21 issues to choose from and were given the option to add an issue of their choice.

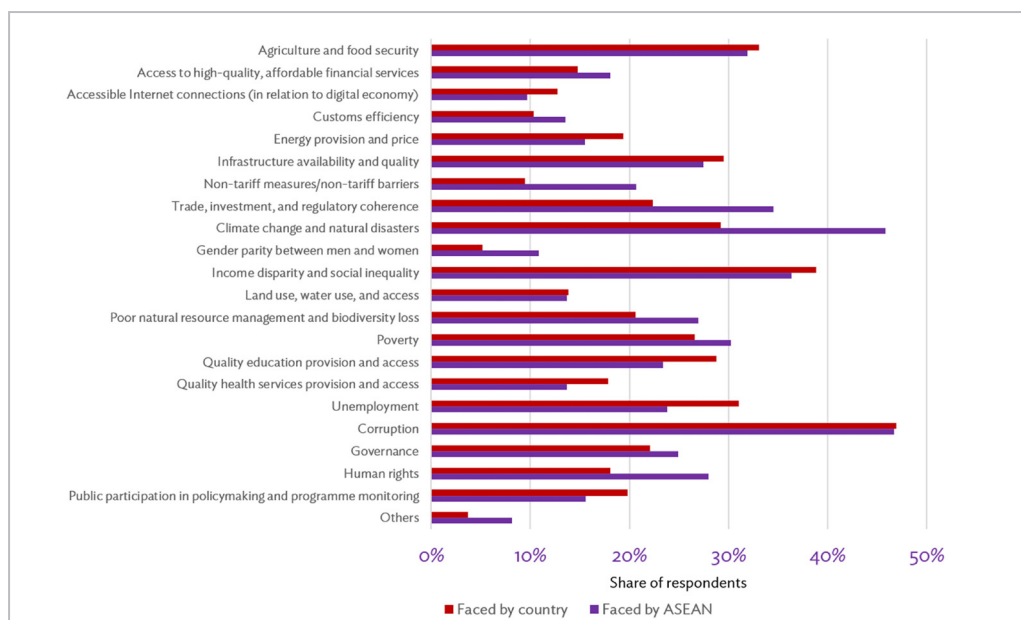
Figure 9 shows the summary results for ASEAN. It shows the percentage of respondents who indicated a given issue as one of the five most pressing problems facing ASEAN or their home country at present and until 2025.

As chosen by the respondents, the top five most pressing problems facing the ASEAN Community today and until 2025 for which the ASEAN Member States should act upon jointly and/or concertedly under ASEAN were the following:

- (1) corruption;
- (2) climate change and natural disasters;
- (3) income disparity and social inequality;
- (4) trade, investment, and regulatory coherence; and
- (5) agriculture and food security.

The next four concerns were poverty and, with almost equal shares of respondents, human rights, infrastructure availability and quality, and poor natural resource management and biodiversity loss.

Figure 9: Top Five Most Pressing Problems at Present and until 2025



The top five most pressing problems at the national level were the following:

- (1) corruption;
- (2) income disparity and social inequality;
- (3) agriculture and food security;
- (4) unemployment; and
- (5) a trio of concerns chosen by equal shares of respondents: climate change and natural disasters, infrastructure availability and quality, and quality education and access.

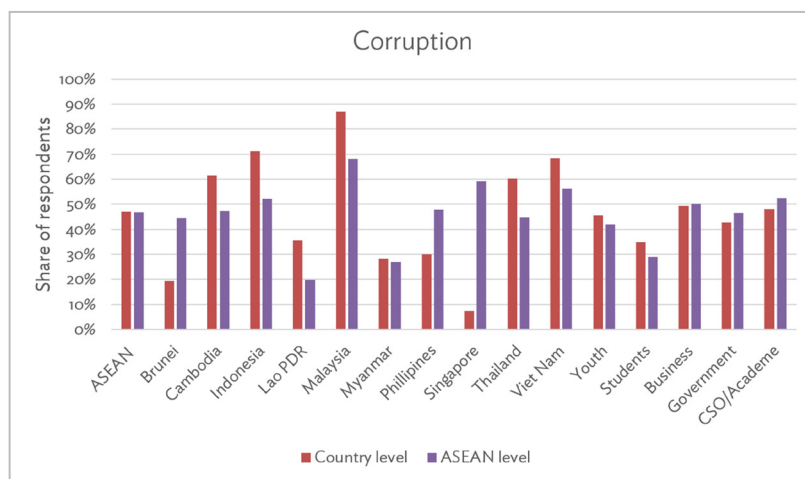
Next in the ranking at the national level was poverty. Note that the rankings at the national level are the averages for the whole region, but the national priorities differ among the ASEAN Member States. There were also some country-specific national priorities.

Corruption

Corruption was considered to be the most pressing problem facing ASEAN as a region now and until 2025 by the respondents in Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand, and the second most pressing problem by the respondents in Cambodia and Viet Nam. By affiliation, it was the pressing problem for respondents from the business sector, civil society, and academe, and the second most pressing problem for the student and government sector respondents. At the national level, corruption

was considered the most pressing problem by at least three-fifths of all respondents in Cambodia, Indonesia, Thailand, and Viet Nam, and the third most pressing problem in Lao PDR and the Philippines. The results for Malaysia were the most emphatic: 87% of all respondents considered corruption as one of the most pressing problems for Malaysia, and 68% considered corruption as one of the most pressing problems for ASEAN as a region as well, with both shares being the highest among all countries (see Figure 10).

Figure 10: Corruption as a Pressing Problem



No other problem or concern among the member states had this level of overlap between what is considered a pressing problem at the regional level and what is considered a problem at the national level. This seems to suggest that the respondents see corruption (and the related governance problems) as a critical bottleneck to production efficiency, investment attractiveness, competitiveness, and possibly even development. This is consistent with the growing literature and experience that the quality of institutions has a material impact on investment attractiveness and economic growth performance. In the Corruption Perception Index by Transparency International, most of the ASEAN Member States have comparatively mid-to-low scores, with the exception of Singapore and, to a lesser extent, Brunei (Table 3). Not surprisingly, corruption places far down the list of priority problems in Singapore and Brunei, although the countries did choose corruption as the most pressing problem for the region as a whole.

Table 3: Corruption Perception Index

Corruption Perception Index 2016	
Country Global Rank	Country Score (100 = very clean)
7. Singapore	84
41. Brunei	58
43. Malaysia	49
90. Indonesia	37
101. Philippines	35
101. Thailand	35
113. Viet Nam	33
123. Lao PDR	30
136. Myanmar	28
156. Cambodia	21

Source: *Corruption Perceptions Index 2016*, Transparency International.
http://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption_perceptions_index_2016#table
(accessed 8 April 2017).

As shown by the Corruption Index ranking in Table 3, Malaysia ranks third-best among the ASEAN Member States in terms of corruption perception. Yet, the Malaysian respondents were nearly unanimous that corruption was one of the most pressing national problems. The results of the FGD in Malaysia provide an insight on this concern. The participants mentioned they worried about the ‘tarnished reputation of Malaysia in the wake of various perceived unregulated financial practices. Some participants felt powerless in dealing with corruption as they said overcoming the problem required very strong political will’ (Yi et al., 2017: 16).

The Malaysian respondents were also the most worried about corruption in ASEAN, with two-thirds considering it as one of the five most pressing problems in ASEAN now and until 2025. The participants of the FGD in Malaysia indicated the reasoning behind their concern: ‘The participants ... viewed corruption as embedded in the system of many ASEAN Member States. They mentioned that the non-interference policy impeded accountability, meaning people in some ASEAN countries were free to engage in corrupt activities without being held accountable during high-level ASEAN meetings. This was closely linked to the problem of governance in the sense that poor governance was considered to be the main root of most problems (corruption, human rights violations, etc.)’ (Yi et al., 2017: 16).

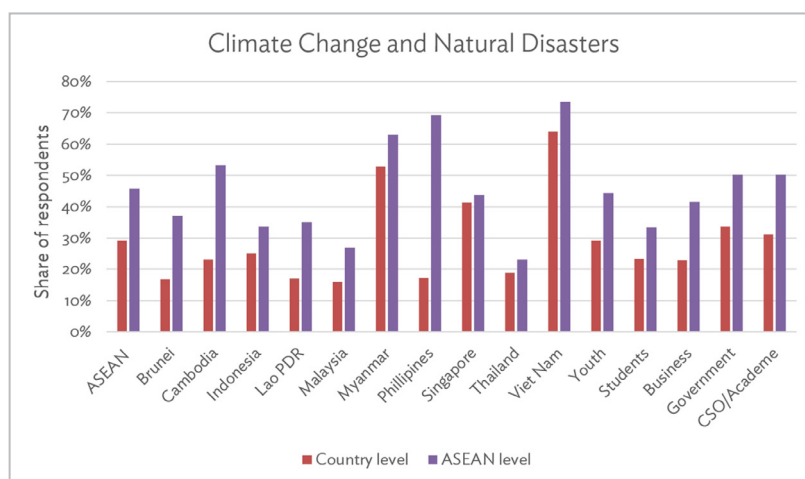
It is worth noting that a number of ASEAN Member States have been more aggressive recently in their efforts to streamline regulations and processes and combat corruption (e.g. Indonesia and the Philippines). It is also worth noting that good governance and the

institutionalisation of good regulatory practices are in the AEC Blueprint for 2016–2025. Thus, there is concordance between what people would like to be addressed through 2025, what the AEC Blueprint aims for, and what a number of ASEAN Member States are now undertaking. In short, this is largely a matter of the accelerated and coordinated implementation of what is in the AEC Blueprint and is ultimately a matter of political will.

Climate change and natural disasters

Climate change and natural disasters were chosen as the most pressing problem facing ASEAN now and until 2025 by respondents in Cambodia, Myanmar, the Philippines, and Viet Nam (Figure 11). This problem was also chosen as the second most pressing problem in the region for the respondents from Lao PDR and Singapore. By affiliation, it was the most pressing problem for the student and government sector respondents, and the second most pressing problem for the respondents from the business, civil society, and academic sectors. At the national level, only the respondents from Myanmar, Singapore, and Viet Nam considered climate change and natural disasters to be among the five most pressing concerns in their countries.

Figure 11: Climate Change and Natural Disasters as a Pressing Problem



This bifurcation between the regional level (as one of the top two most pressing problems) and the national level (where it ranked low as a pressing national concern in most of the ASEAN Member States) is interesting. ASEAN is known as one of the most disaster-prone regions and one of the most vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change. Thus, the respondents not surprisingly considered climate change and natural disasters as a pressing concern for the region. However, at the same time, for many of the member states, there were other more pressing concerns at the national level than climate change and natural disasters, with the exception of Myanmar and Viet Nam,

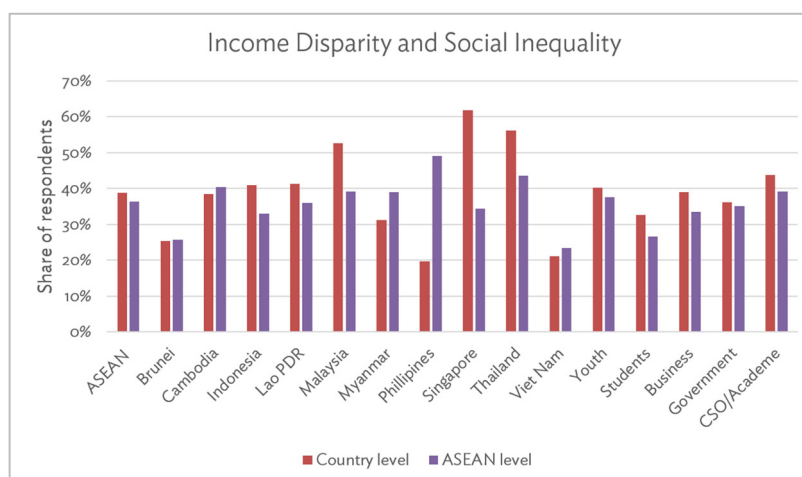
where they were considered to be the first and second most pressing national concerns until 2025, respectively.

This suggests that the way forward for addressing this important concern at the regional level is to strengthen regional cooperation in disaster prevention, response, and recovery as well as in climate change adaptation. ASEAN has indeed endeavoured to strengthen regional cooperation in this area in recent years with the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management Emergency Response and the establishment of the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management (AHA Centre). In addition, ASEAN and its member states have worked together in the global arena through the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction. Making ASEAN peoples more aware of these regional cooperation initiatives will largely mean stronger implementation and coordination at both the national and regional levels.

Income disparity and social inequality

Income disparity and social inequality comprised the second most pressing problem at the national level when averaged across all countries, and the third most pressing problem facing ASEAN (Figure 12). This issue was selected as the most pressing national challenge by respondents in Singapore and Lao PDR, the second most important national concern in Malaysia, and the third most pressing national problem for the respondents in Thailand. Wealth inequality has become a more important social issue in Singapore in recent years, while Malaysia has historically had the highest income inequality in ASEAN; indeed, Malaysia's Bumiputera policy is arguably anchored on ameliorating income disparity and social inequality in the country. It is worth noting that income disparity and social inequality ranked low as a pressing concern both at the national and regional levels for the respondents in Viet Nam. This was likely due to the comparatively more equitable distribution of income in Viet Nam than in a number of other ASEAN Member States and also due to its success in having comparatively inclusive high growth relative to China.

Figure 12: Income Disparity and Social Inequality as a Pressing Problem



Somewhat surprisingly, income disparity and social inequality topped the list of the most pressing national concerns at present and in the future for Lao PDR. The results of the FGDs provide some insight into why this has become a major concern for the respondents in the country. Specifically, the FGD participants were worried about the widening divide between the fast-growing urban areas (due to the rapid growth of the Lao PDR economy during the past one and a half decades) and the rural areas, which have experienced very little improvements in infrastructure and other facilities. With the majority of the population living in the rural areas, respondents were concerned that the economic boom in the urban areas would further widen the urban–rural divide in the country.

The third pillar of the AEC Blueprint 2015, a region of equitable development, is reflective of the importance of inclusive growth in ASEAN. Nonetheless, the major focus has historically been on narrowing the development gaps between the original ASEAN members and the newer members (Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Viet Nam). The AEC Blueprint 2016–2025 aims for a resilient, inclusive, people-oriented, and people-centred ASEAN. Inclusivity is increasingly ingrained in the overall integration agenda of ASEAN, albeit much of it through small and medium-sized enterprise development and dynamism. There is indeed strong policy support for inclusive growth and inclusive integration at both the national and regional levels. As for the previous concerns, the devil is in the implementation details moving towards 2025 and indeed even beyond.

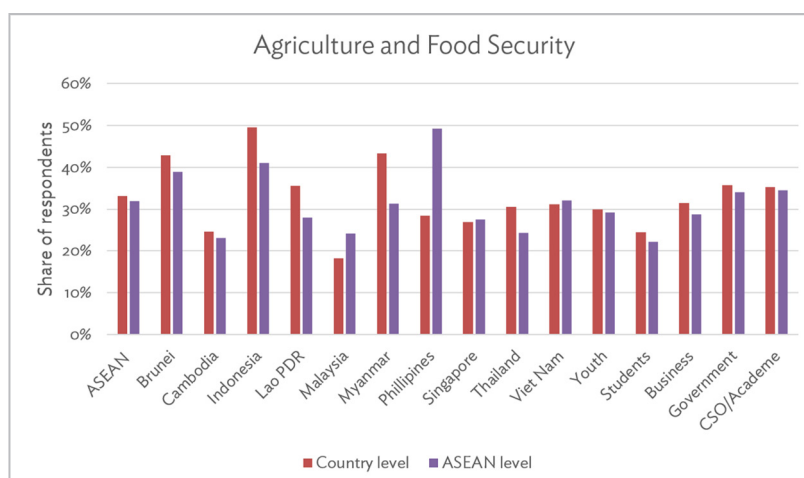
Agriculture and food security

Agriculture and food security was the third most pressing problem at the national level and ranked fifth at the ASEAN level (Figure 13). At the national level, agriculture

and food security was of particularly pressing concern in Indonesia, where half of all respondents noted it as a pressing problem, and in Brunei and Myanmar, where at least two-fifths of the respondents chose it as a pressing problem. Around one-third of the respondents in Lao PDR, the Philippines, and Viet Nam considered it as one of the top five most pressing problems. At the regional level, respondents in the Philippines, Indonesia, and Brunei were the most worried about agriculture and food security. Interestingly, the respondents from Malaysia and Singapore, two food importing countries, did not see agriculture and food security as a particularly pressing problem in their countries or the ASEAN region. Respondents in both countries said that food security did not equate to food self-sufficiency because both were not food self-sufficient (especially in food grains).

Indonesia and the Philippines have been the two largest net importers of rice in ASEAN for decades. As rice is the staple grain in both countries, fluctuations in its price are of prime policy concern due to the social (poverty) and political impacts. Thus, it is not surprising that the respondents in the two countries considered this as one of the most pressing problems now and until 2025. Respondents in Indonesia were also worried about the declining share in national output of the agriculture sector, which has been a critical source of exports and economic growth in Indonesia for quite some time. In Myanmar, the FGD participants stated that the problem stemmed from deficiencies in several areas, such as research and development; financial and physical access; and the transfer of technology, marketing skills, and quality inputs, such as seeds, fertilisers, and tools. In short, the participants from Myanmar highlighted the constraints to the development of their country's agriculture sector considering that it had a potentially substantial comparative advantage given its high land-to-population ratio and the presence of large sources of irrigation for both surface and groundwater.

Figure 13: Agriculture and Food Security as a Pressing Problem

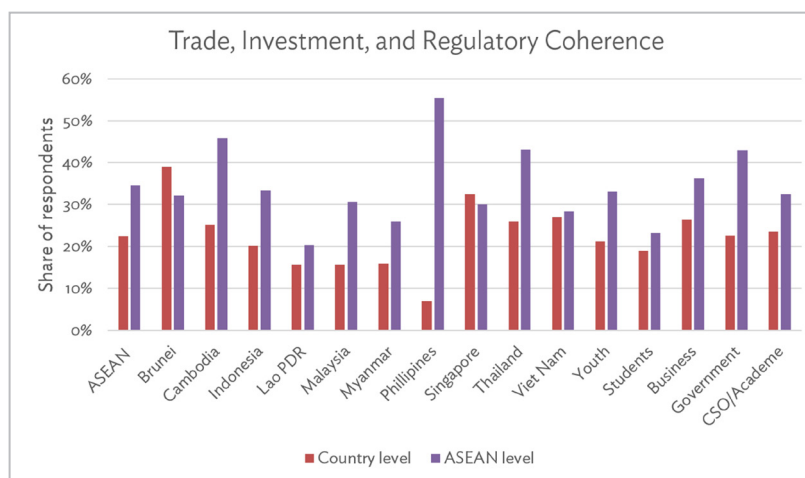


The respondents and participants from Indonesia and the Philippines, the two major net importers of rice in ASEAN, were keen to see agriculture and food security as an important area for regional cooperation. The most important regional initiative in food security is the ASEAN Plus Three Emergency Rice Reserve, which came to fruition during the aftermath of the 2007–2008 world food price crisis when global food prices, including those of rice, shot up tremendously during 2007 and into the first half of 2008. The ASEAN Integrated Food Security Framework and the Strategic Plan of Action on Food Security in the ASEAN Region provide a more holistic approach to addressing food security in the region in addition to an emergency food reserve. Again, implementation is the critical factor as indicated in the AEC 2025 Consolidated Strategic Action Plan.

Trade, investment, and regulatory coherence

Trade, investment, and regulatory coherence ranked fourth as the most pressing regional concern for ASEAN but ranked only 10th as a national concern. This is not surprising since trade, investment, and regulatory coherence are strongly related to the economic integration agenda of ASEAN. Indeed, regulatory coherence is primarily of concern at the regional level because it involves differing regulations among ASEAN Member States. Respondents from Thailand, the Philippines, and Cambodia placed this issue as the third, third, and second most pressing concern for the region, respectively (Figure 14).

Figure 14: Trade, Investment, and Regulatory Coherence as a Pressing Problem



Trade and investment were important also at the national level. Interestingly, the respondents from Brunei and Singapore highlighted trade and investment as a pressing national concern despite them being the two smallest countries in ASEAN and

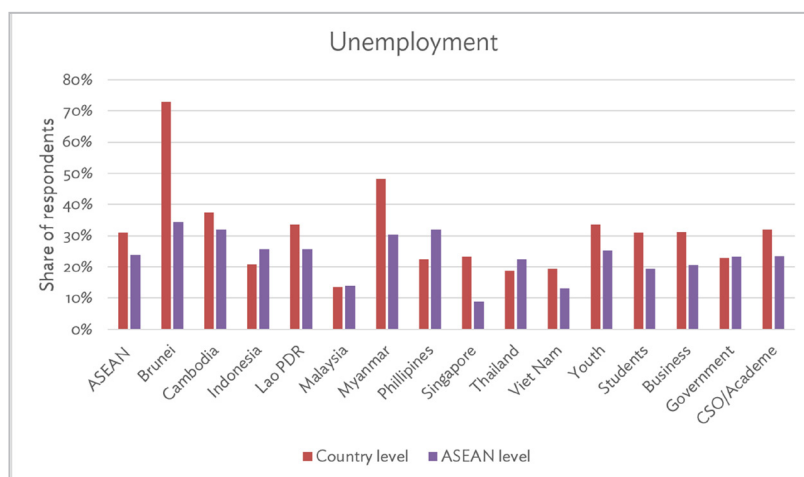
Singapore being the dominant foreign direct investment destination in the region. In contrast, the respondents from the Philippines, arguably the least successful major ASEAN country in enticing foreign investment so far, placed this issue among their five lowest-ranking problems at the national level.

The results of the FGDs with the private sector in Singapore provide a good basis for understanding the importance of trade, investment, and regulatory coherence for the ASEAN region. The private sector participants highlighted the problems of non-tariff barriers in trading with other business sectors in the region, the bureaucratic inefficiencies that hinder in attracting foreign direct investment, and restrictions on labour mobility, among others. The private sector participants said that despite the AEC, doing business on the ground remained problematic because of bureaucratic politics and institutional inefficiencies. At the same time, they noted that the rising middle class with growing purchasing power offered growing trade and investment opportunities.² In sum, there is much that remains to be done to ensure that trade and investment become an even more potent force for greater social welfare.

Unemployment and poverty

Unemployment was the fourth most pressing problem at the national level and the sixth most pressing problem at the regional level based on the ASEAN averages (Figure 15).

Figure 15: Unemployment as a Pressing Problem



2 Much of this paragraph draws from Lim, Kiruppalini, and Lee (2016).

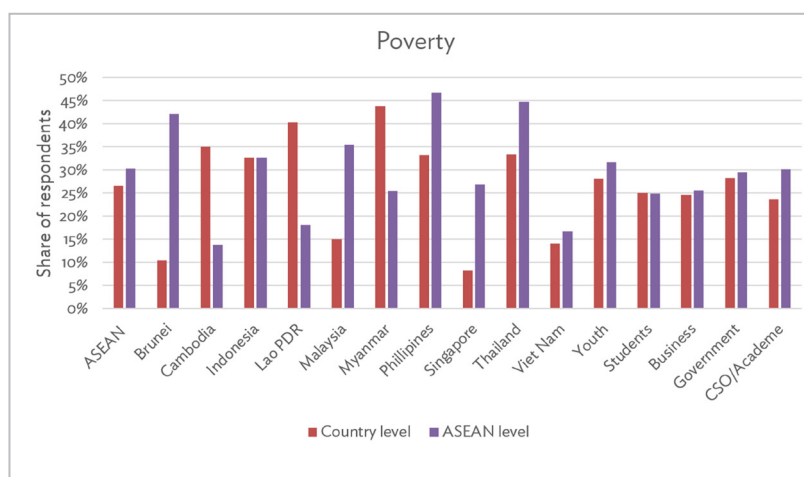
At least a third of respondents in Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Myanmar considered unemployment as one of the most pressing national problems in their countries. Over one-third of the respondents also chose poverty as among the most pressing national problems. These three countries are major exporters of (largely low-skilled and likely largely poverty-driven) labour to Thailand; hence, it is not surprising that unemployment (and poverty) was viewed as important by at least a third of the respondents in the three countries.

Surprisingly, nearly three-quarters of the respondents from Brunei considered unemployment as one of the five most pressing problems in their country now and until 2025. In fact, the Brunei respondents were the most worried about unemployment among all the ASEAN respondents. Considering that poverty was not a priority concern for the Brunei respondents and noting that nearly half of the respondents were students, it is likely that the serious concern for unemployment was based on the perceived poor employment prospects until 2025. The country's economy has been relatively stagnant in recent years because of the sharp drop in the price of petroleum since 2014 and the secular decline in the price of natural gas since 2009, the country's two main export products. This is likely the reason for the poor growth prospects – and the negative implications for the employment prospects of the youth – and why the government has been trying to diversify the economy and shift away from its heavy dependence on oil and natural gas.

It is worth noting that unemployment and poverty were not major national concerns for the respondents in Viet Nam, a country which has had one of the most sustained and dramatic declines in poverty rates in the world during the past two decades. Significant contributing factors to this decline in poverty were the success in employment creation and the surge in enterprises in the country during the period. It is also worth noting that even though poverty was a major concern in the Philippines, the respondents were less concerned about unemployment, despite the country having the highest official unemployment rate among ASEAN Member States. It is possible that the reason for this is that the unemployment rate indicates a relatively high reservation wage considering the employment prospects abroad, especially in the Middle East.

Finally, it is worth noting also that while poverty was the sixth most pressing problem for ASEAN, unemployment was significantly lower in importance as a concern for the region as a whole. This implies that the issue of unemployment is viewed as largely a national concern rather than a significant regional concern. Interestingly, for the poorer member states (Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Myanmar), poverty was ranked very low as a regional concern; this implies that for the respondents in these countries, the poverty problem was seen fundamentally as a national concern to be addressed by their respective governments (Figure 16).

Figure 16: Poverty as a Pressing Problem



Infrastructure availability and quality, and quality education provision and access

At the national level, infrastructure availability and quality, and education provision and access both shared the same ranking overall. At the regional level, respondents placed greater importance on infrastructure availability and quality than educational quality and access. Infrastructure availability and quality are central to physical connectivity nationally and regionally; indeed, infrastructure is at the core of the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity. Quality education provision and access are being increasingly viewed as important for countries to move up the technology and value chain ladder. Although not afforded as much importance as physical connectivity, regional cooperation in higher education, such as through the ASEAN Universities Network, and efforts at standardising skills certification at the regional level, such as the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework, are also important initiatives for strengthening the human capital in the region across the board while providing mechanisms for deeper interpersonal understanding of the ASEAN peoples with varying ethnicities, cultures, and religions and thereby building a greater sense of ASEAN community (Figures 17 and 18).

Human rights

Human rights was the seventh most pressing problem for the region. Half of all the Malaysian respondents considered it as one of the top five pressing problems for ASEAN now and until 2025, along with more than one-third of respondents in Myanmar and the Philippines and nearly three-tenths of respondents in Cambodia, Indonesia, and Thailand (Figure 19).

Figure 17: Infrastructure Availability and Quality as a Pressing Problem

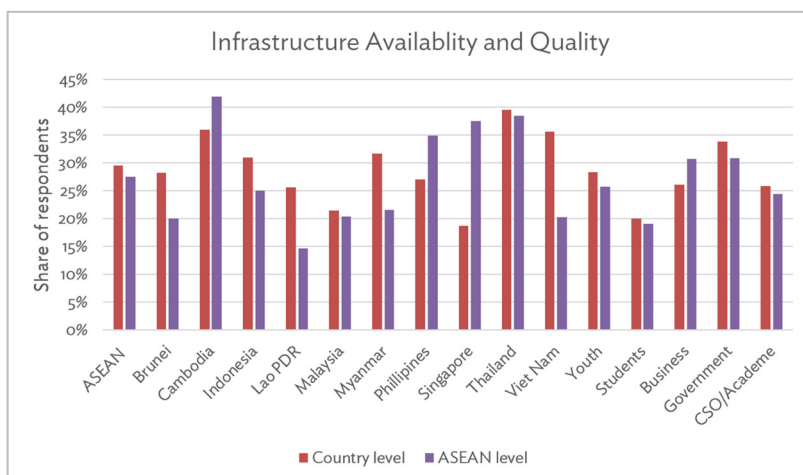


Figure 18: Quality Education Provision and Access as a Pressing Problem

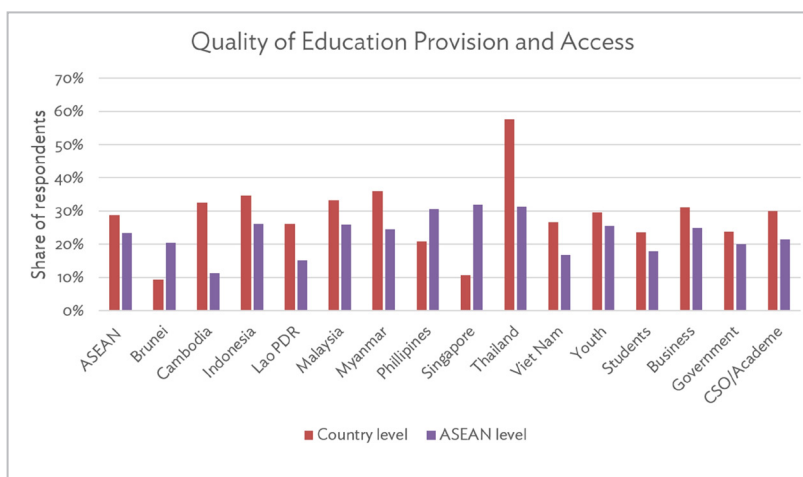
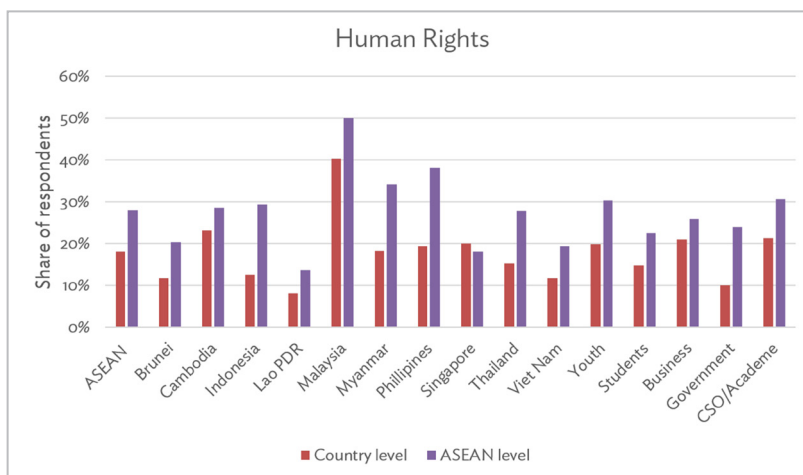


Figure 19: Human Rights as a Pressing Problem



The FGDs in Malaysia provided some insights into why human rights was the second most pressing problem for ASEAN, after corruption, for the Malaysian respondents. Some of the participants included quality education provision and access, quality health services and access, public participation in policymaking, the right to information and data, and a free and fair media as within the purview of human rights. Thus, to a large extent, they encompassed many of the previously discussed issues. Also, importantly, the participants agreed that the issue of human rights should not only cover refugees but also include other groups, such as children and even women. A number also expressed fears of racial discrimination, religious extremism, and violence in the region (Yi et al., 2017: 16–17).

Other regional concerns

Governance was highlighted as a concern for the region by the respondents in Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand; however, corruption was the number one concern for 8 of the 10 countries, as indicated earlier. Poor natural resource management and biodiversity loss were significant concerns for the respondents in the Philippines and Viet Nam. Access to high-quality, affordable financial services was a significant concern in Cambodia and the Philippines. Only the respondents in the Philippines placed high priority on the following as regional concerns: public participation in policymaking and programme monitoring for the region, land and water use and access, gender parity between men and women, energy provision and price, customs efficiency, and accessible Internet connections (in relation to the digital economy).

Other national concerns

Public participation in policymaking and programme monitoring was emphasised as a national concern in Singapore. Meanwhile, in the Philippines, two-fifths of all respondents indicated accessible Internet connections as a national concern. This is probably because the country has suffered from some of the slowest and most expensive Internet connections in the region for some time.

It is interesting to note that gender parity between men and women, provision and access to quality health services, non-tariff measures/non-tariff barriers, customs efficiency, and access to high-quality, affordable financial services were mentioned by only very few respondents as most pressing national concerns in each of the 10 ASEAN Member States.

Aspirations and Expectations for ASEAN by 2025

One of the questions in the first part of the survey asked respondents to provide a simple yes or no response to the following question: ‘Do you have aspirations, expectations, concerns, or hopes for ASEAN?’ Respondents who replied yes were asked to explain their answers. However, only the four countries who used online surveys (Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei) were able to record the responses. Their answers are incorporated into the discussion in this section.

Later in the survey, respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with 15 statements, both in terms of what they hoped for and what they expected regarding the situation in ASEAN by 2025. They were given a six-point Likert scale: ‘strongly agree’, ‘agree’, neutral’, ‘disagree’, ‘strongly disagree’, and ‘don’t know’. The responses to these questions are grouped here in four broad categories: an integrated and connected ASEAN; ASEAN global and regional engagement; a resilient and sustainable ASEAN; and people engagement, resilience, and social equity.

An integrated and connected ASEAN

An integrated and connected ASEAN is the fundamental goal of the economic integration and connectivity agenda of ASEAN. The integration goal has been popularly described in terms of Pillar 1 of the AEC Blueprint 2015, i.e. a single market and production base. This goal is now described more straightforwardly as ‘a highly integrated and cohesive economy’ under the AEC 2025. Complementing the integration agenda is the connectivity agenda under the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025, which aims for a ‘seamlessly and comprehensively connected and integrated ASEAN that will promote competitiveness, inclusiveness, and a greater sense of community’ (ASEAN Secretariat, 2016: 9). Connectivity encompasses physical connectivity, institutional connectivity, and people-to-people connectivity. Integration is akin to economic connectivity, which captures these three forms of connectivity and to a large extent is the other side of the same coin.

To capture people’s aspirations and expectations about an integrated and connected ASEAN, we posed the following four statements characterising ASEAN by 2025:

- Consumers have easy access to goods and services from any ASEAN country.
- It is easy for skilled workers and professionals to find work in other countries in ASEAN.
- ASEAN countries are well connected through roads, railways, air, and shipping.
- People and businesses can communicate easily with one another through ICT.

Figures 20–23 present the summaries of the responses. The bar graphs measure the percentages of respondents who agreed and strongly agreed with the statements. They provide the responses for each ASEAN Member state and selected group, specifically, students, youth, business, government and civil society/academe. (The group ‘others including labour’ is not included in the graphs.) The graphs show the responses for the aspirations alongside those for the expectations for comparison.

The figures show high aspirations for an integrated and connected ASEAN, at least in the areas specified in the four statements. At least four-fifths of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the first three statements, while at least three-quarters agreed with the fourth statement on the mobility of skilled workers and professionals. This group of statements under an ‘integrated and connected ASEAN’ represented the most popular aspirations, as shown by the percentage of respondents who agreed with the statements.

When comparing the results of the respondents’ aspirations and expectations (or the percentage of respondents who thought the statements would likely happen by 2025), it is not surprising that the expectations are generally lower across all the statements. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that no less than two-thirds of all respondents thought the statements related to integrated and connected ASEAN would happen by 2025. This degree of positive expectation was also the highest among all the statements. In short, a significant share of the respondents aspired for and expected that ASEAN in 2025 would be well connected and integrated, although they were slightly guarded with respect to the mobility of skilled labour and professionals. Although the respondents were not a representative sample of the whole ASEAN population, they provide a clear indication that the ASEAN integration and connectivity agenda is aligned with the aspirations of ASEAN peoples.³

³ The survey is more or less purposive and is biased towards those with access to the Internet because the Survey Monkey online platform was used in a number of the countries. Even with ERIA Research Institute Network institutes, which employed paper-based surveys (because the questions needed to be translated into the national languages), the clientele of the institutes can be expected to have been more educated urban professionals, business people, and students.

Figure 20: Consumer Access to Goods and Services

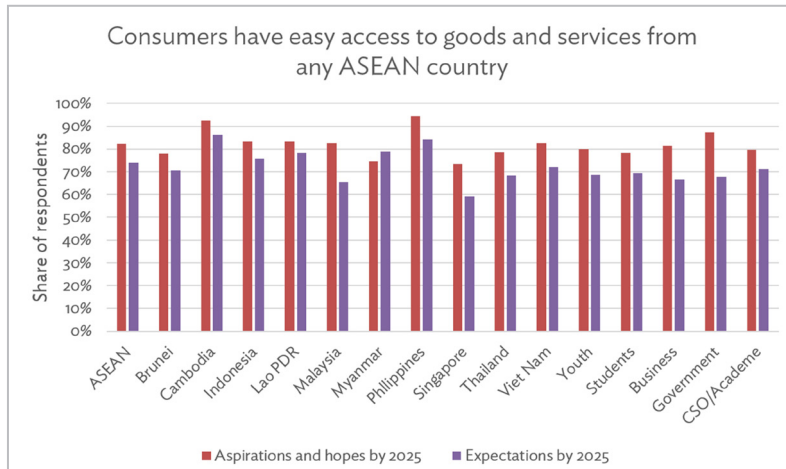


Figure 21: Mobility of Skilled Labour and Professionals in ASEAN



Figure 22: Physical Connectivity in ASEAN

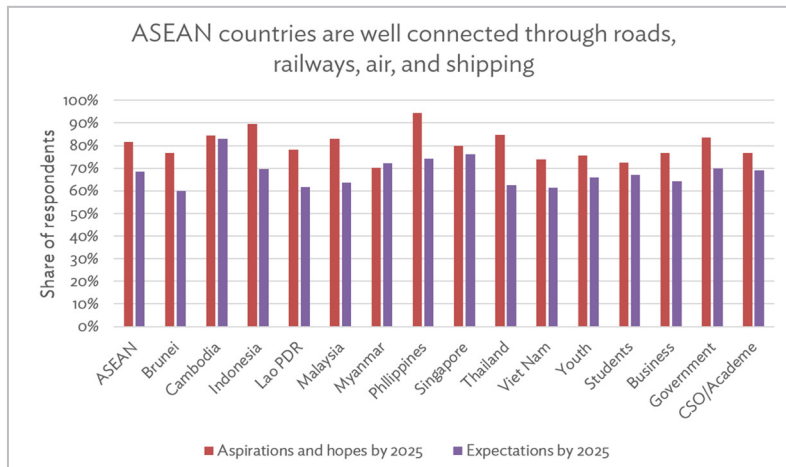
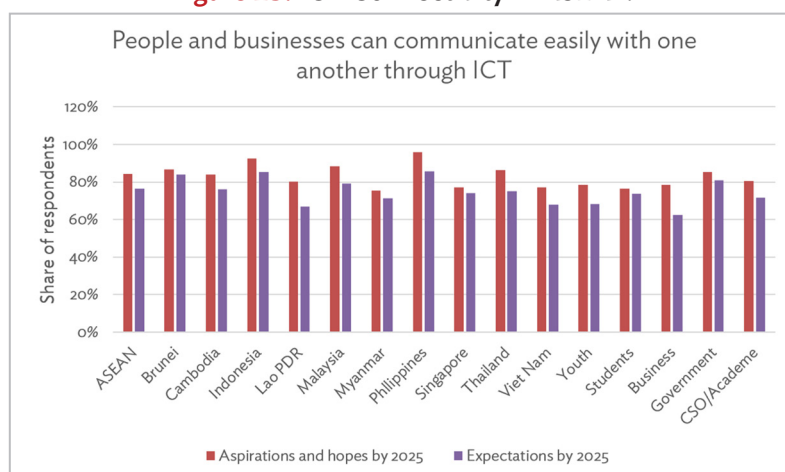


Figure 23: ICT Connectivity in ASEAN



Figures 20–23 show some variation among the ASEAN Member States around the ASEAN averages. The Philippine respondents stand out as being the most supportive and having the highest aspirations for ASEAN integration and connectivity, followed by the Indonesian respondents. The government respondents were the most supportive of regional connectivity, while the business sector representatives had the most conservative expectations of regional connectivity.

The FGD comments made it clear that many of the respondents were interested in the mobility aspect of ASEAN connectivity and integration. One Malaysian respondent summarised it as ‘freedom to choose where I live, work, and do business, subject to security controls’. Similarly, a respondent from Brunei mentioned the ‘free flows of skilled labour and economic activity to get mutual benefits among members’. One of the Indonesian business respondents wanted ‘more Indonesian businesses to explore ASEAN markets’ and urged for ‘the acceleration of standardised accreditation systems to allow Indonesian professionals to move easily throughout the region’. Of course, increasing diversity of ASEAN products in local markets was appealing to many respondents. A young Vietnamese respondent enthused that ‘buying goods from ASEAN is also a popular choice. A lot of types of fruits from Cambodia, Thailand, etc. are now available in Viet Nam. Thai consumer products are also good and thus increasingly present in their homes.’ For Singaporeans, integration and connectivity were primarily about trade matters but not just for self-interest, as indicated by one respondent’s wish ‘to have better trade relations across ASEAN so that all economies can benefit’.

The Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025 promotes connectivity through ICT, an item with huge support from all sectors and ASEAN Member States in the survey. A Vietnamese business woman elaborated that the past improvement of

telecommunication services in Viet Nam had helped her business a lot in contacting partners, with reductions in costs and more modern services. The only issues were stability and roaming fees for mobile phone services. Participants from the Philippines, although having the highest ratings in the survey, expressed doubts during the FGD: ‘Having good digital connectivity is also a long shot. All of the participants said it would be a long time before the slow speed and high cost of Internet connections in the Philippines are solved.’ Roads, railways, and other massive infrastructure for connectivity were expected to get a boost from China’s One Belt, One Road initiative. One Malaysian participant remarked that ‘with the support of the newly established Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, ASEAN countries are expected to have well-developed systems of roads, railways, and ports by 2025’.

Connectivity and its potential positive impacts will face challenges, however, including corruption and a lack of regulatory coherence. The Thai students noted that ‘highly skilled professionals are currently encountering problems with passing licence registrations in other member countries due to relevant regulatory barriers, such as language requirements, similar to the problems in the business sector’. Thai business representatives expressed similar sentiments: ‘There are barriers preventing labour mobility throughout the region. These may be caused by government policies that focus primarily on protectionism policies.’ Respondents from Indonesia, Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Viet Nam stated concerns regarding the free flow of labour and whether they could compete regionally. Participants in the Viet Nam FGDs were apprehensive that freer mobility could be a ‘threat to livelihood, even in Viet Nam, due to the employment of foreigners’. Still, they agreed that, in general, the opportunities would induce them to learn and become more competitive in the labour market – the foundation for better income.

ASEAN global and regional engagement

ASEAN centrality in a dynamic and outward-looking region is one of the key measures of the ASEAN Political-Security Community 2025. This reflects the ASEAN drive to play a significant role in the region and the international arena through deeper cooperation with dialogue partners; strengthened engagement with other parties; reaching out to new partners; and constructive participation in global affairs, ideally based on a common ASEAN platform. Indeed, even before the ASEAN Free Trade Area became a reality, ASEAN already played a critical facilitating role for peace in the region through the ASEAN Regional Forum. ASEAN has established a number of mechanisms and institutions for confidence building, enhanced cooperation, and the prevention of conflicts in the region, including the most important at present, the leaders-only, ASEAN-led East Asia Summit.

In view of the long history of ASEAN's deep engagement in regional and international affairs, it is worthwhile to gauge people's aspirations and expectations for ASEAN's global and regional engagement and voice. The following two statements were used to measure the degree of support for ASEAN engagement with the world:

- ASEAN is a strong voice and an important player in global negotiations and forums.
- ASEAN deeply engages powers in the region and the world (e.g. the United States and China) to ensure peace in the region and the Asia-Pacific region.

Figure 24: ASEAN Has a Strong Global Voice and Presence

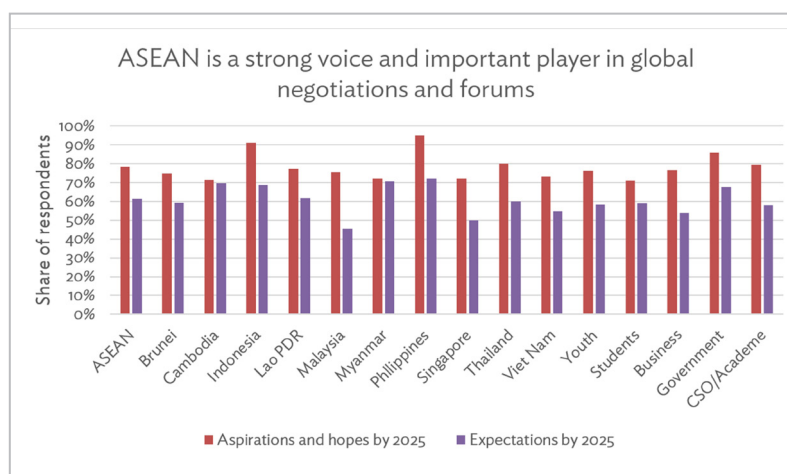
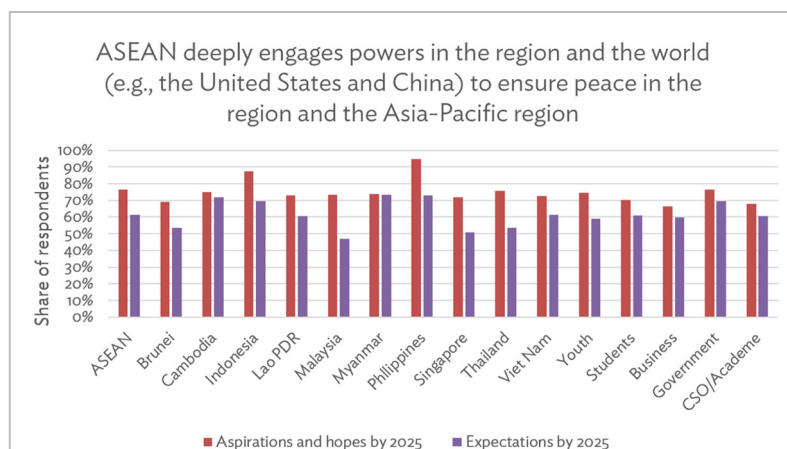


Figure 25: ASEAN Deeply Engages World Powers for Peace



Figures 24 and 25 show the survey results for these statements. As the figures show, there was robust support from more than three-quarters of the respondents for the aspiration for ASEAN to become a strong global and regional presence and voice by 2025. Remarkably, the same aspiration was shared by at least two-thirds of the respondents in each member state, suggesting a common desire in the region. Indonesia and the Philippines stood out, however, in their overwhelming support for an active and visible global and regional role for ASEAN.

Such a strong desire from the Philippine respondents may have been influenced by the constant media coverage of the South China Sea problem, while the Indonesian respondents may have been accustomed to the large leadership role expected of a large economy and polity in the region and the world. Indeed, one key theme of Indonesia's hosting of the 2011 ASEAN Summit focused on having a common ASEAN platform and voice in the international arena.

The results on the expectations side were, not surprisingly, more measured. Three-fifths of respondents supported ASEAN's deep engagement with the world and regional powers, and two-thirds supported ASEAN having a stronger global voice and presence. There was also significantly greater variation in the incidence of support among the respondents in each member state. For example, respondents in Malaysia and Singapore were substantially less optimistic than the respondents in the Philippines, Myanmar, and Indonesia. At the same time, however, the gaps between the aspirations and expectations were large for Indonesia and the Philippines and second only to Malaysia. That is, while the respondents aspired for ASEAN to have a strong voice and presence regionally and internationally by 2025, they were also more subdued as to what would likely occur by 2025. Similarly, the government representatives were more optimistic than the students, business representatives, youth, and those from civil society or academe regarding ASEAN becoming a significant global voice and presence as well as being able to engage big powers to ensure peace in the region.

The results of the FGDs and the country reports provide useful insights into why ASEAN peoples are keen to see more global and regional engagement by ASEAN. There seem to be three main motivations: a continued need to provide a platform for regional dialogue to promote peaceful resolutions to internal conflicts; an increasing need to build strength in numbers to stand up to outside influences; and a sense of pride and self-confidence of being able to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the world's greatest powers.

Respondents saw a bigger role for ASEAN as a mediator on environmental issues such as climate change and pollution, security, and human rights. Several respondents wrote about the haze from fires in Indonesia. Concerns about the South China Sea

and the Rohingya issue were also raised several times. One person from Malaysia summed up the feelings expressed by many when he stated that he hoped that ASEAN could take a 'common stand and have solidarity in regional issues, such as the South China Sea, Rohingya, and border disputes between ASEAN countries'. An Indonesian respondent observed that 'ASEAN, as a collective voice, can be more assertive in dealing with members that violate human rights. I am worried that ASEAN only acts as a ceremonial organisation that does not bring any benefit for its members.' In fact, several respondents even explicitly wanted to get rid of the policy of non-intervention. A Malaysian respondent summed it up starkly: 'Do away with the non-intervention policy; it's way too wide a term.'

As the global balance of power seems to be entering a new phase as the centre of gravity shifts to new regions, especially East Asia, there was some wariness among respondents about ASEAN's position and a sense that it needed to be strengthened. Singaporean participants in the FGD expressed a sense of foreboding due to recent global events: 'Major powers are beginning to look increasingly inward, and this leaves the small ASEAN states vulnerable as traditional security umbrellas become less dependable. ASEAN must thus stand united and fend for itself, and globalisation and the ensuing connectivity and integration it brings will help to facilitate this. Surging ahead with the consensus-based approach and going against the waves of anti-globalisation has to be the new way forward for ASEAN to prosper'.

Other regional issues were also a cause for concern for the participants. CSO representatives and students in the Singapore FGD expressed concerns over the rise of China, with particular reference made to the South China Sea disputes between China and the four ASEAN claimant states, and noted these as examples of the limitations of the ASEAN Way in achieving progress on key political issues.

Likewise, on the economic front, participants from the CSO and academia FGDs in Malaysia stated that 'as a collective unit, ASEAN had strength in numbers and experience when it came to trade negotiations with economic superpowers, such as through the ASEAN-China FTA, the ASEAN-India FTA, and the ASEAN-Japan Comprehensive Economic Partnership'.

Lastly, there was a growing sense of pride or self-confidence coming from ASEAN's bigger role on the global stage. A participant from the business sector in the Philippines expressed 'hope that the ASEAN Member States would soon be able to rank among China, the Republic of Korea, and Japan, and added that Singapore may be able to lead ASEAN in this regard'. A respondent from Singapore hoped 'that ASEAN can be as strong and unified as the European Union and be recognised internationally as a force to

be reckoned with'. Finally, a respondent from Brunei aspired for 'ASEAN to be united as a strong voice in international forums and gatherings and to have influence in ensuring peace internationally'.

A resilient and sustainable ASEAN

As a region that commonly experiences natural disasters, such as typhoons, earthquakes, and volcanic eruptions, as well as one of the most vulnerable regions in the world to the adverse effects of climate change, ASEAN has been assiduous in strengthening its resilience to natural disasters. Prime examples of this regional effort are the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response and the establishment of the AHA Centre. The ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASSC) Blueprint 2025 has a resilient ASEAN as one of its key characteristics, with a fairly long list of measures. ASEAN is also increasingly concerned with sustainable development, albeit much of it in tandem with the United Nations sustainable development initiatives, such as the Millennium Development Goals and the Sustainable Development Goals. To capture the aspirations and expectations on resilience and sustainable development, the survey asked respondents to give their opinions on the following three statements with respect to ASEAN by 2025:

- The region's biodiversity and natural resources are sustainably managed and conserved.
- ASEAN major cities are less polluted and more liveable than they are today.
- ASEAN is able to anticipate, respond, and recover faster together from natural disasters and health hazards in the region.

The survey results are shown in Figures 26–28. About three-quarters of the respondents were supportive of the three statements as aspirations for ASEAN by 2025. Respondents in Indonesia and the Philippines were particularly supportive, with at least nine-tenths aspiring for a more resilient and sustainable ASEAN by 2025. There was comparable support for the aspirations by the various affiliation groups; the only notable exception was the support by more than four-fifths of the government sector respondents for the aspiration for ASEAN to be resilient against natural disasters and health hazards.

The expectations were far more sobering, however. Less than half of the respondents expected ASEAN would have more liveable major cities and more sustainably managed natural resources by 2025. Indeed, the two sustainability aspirations had the second- and third-highest gaps between aspirations and expectations. The expectations gaps were smaller than those for the sustainability aspirations, perhaps reflecting that regional cooperation and national programmes for greater resiliency are more strongly felt and

Figure 26: ASEAN's Biodiversity and Natural Resources Are Sustainably Managed

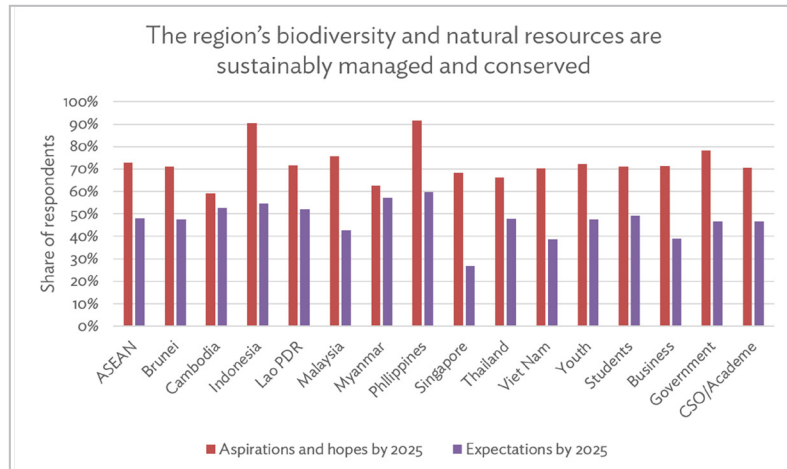


Figure 27: ASEAN Major Cities Are Less Polluted

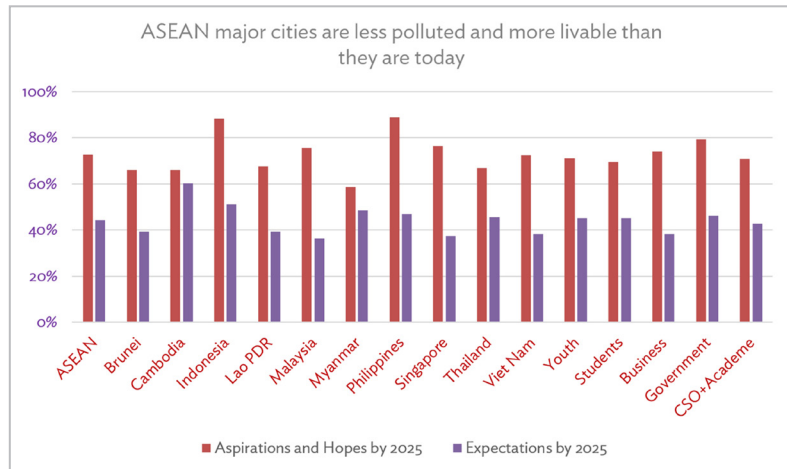
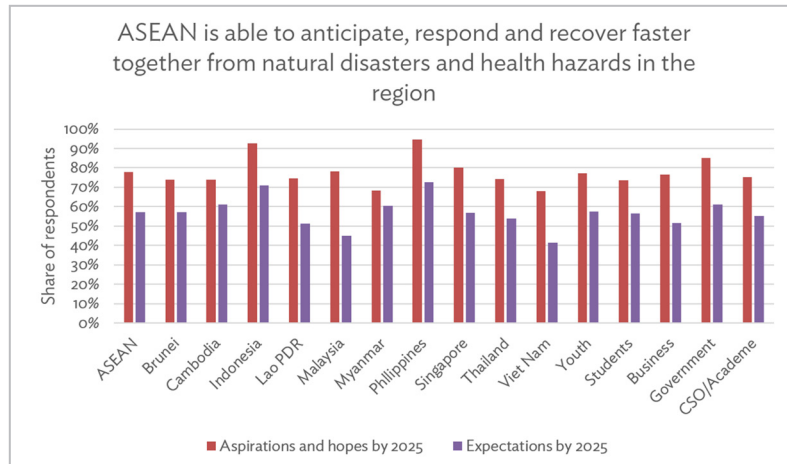


Figure 28: ASEAN Is Resilient to Natural Disasters and Health Hazards



visible. It is possible that the large expectations gaps for the sustainability aspirations reflect the respondents' views that urban pollution and natural resource management issues cannot be realistically solved within a decade given the gravity of the problems in a number of ASEAN cities and the inherently long-term, large-scale investments that are needed to address adequately these problems.

The country reports and the FGDs offer some specific insights into what ASEAN peoples hope for and expect on these matters, including some poignant observations about how sustainability and resilience impact their daily lives. The youth participants in the Viet Nam FGD asserted that 'economic well-being is neither guaranteed nor meaningful in the absence of a clean environment'. Three of the participants had volunteered in hospitals and were shocked by the incidence of cancer due to the poor environmental quality. The unlikely reduction of pollution was a clear concern. The participants agreed it would be unlikely to see less pollution in major ASEAN cities. Many complained about the existing levels of pollution and had seen few meaningful attempts to reduce the problem (Vo, Nguyen, and Dinh, 2017). The FGD business representatives also argued that pollution and traffic jams were prevalent, if not getting worse, in major cities in ASEAN, with the exception of Singapore. According to participants in the Cambodian FGD, ASEAN cities will continue 'to face problems of city pollution due to poor governance and the lack of proper city planning'. But the issue of a sustainable and resilient ASEAN is not completely without hope. One Philippines participant thought environmental protection 'appeared feasible because officials will be motivated to meet this objective given its potential advantages for tourism'. However, most of the participants felt that the realisation of environmental protection depended on leadership and governance and on the citizens themselves.

People engagement, governance, and social equity

Arguably people engagement, governance and social equity are all critical elements in building an ASEAN Community. The words of the former President of the Philippines Fidel Ramos resonate well in this regard:

If the Southeast Asian peoples are to embrace ASEAN as their 'community', they must see it as a pervading, beneficial influence on their daily lives. They must regard the ASEAN vision as their own, being its most important stakeholders. [A] great deal of ASEAN's work in building 'community' must focus on encouraging, assisting, and – if need be – pressuring member states to promote good governance, strengthen the rule of law, build an inclusive economy, and defend representative democracy. (Ramos, 2013: 8)

The ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) is at the core of the community-building project and gives a human face to integration. The Nay Pyi Taw Declaration on the ASEAN Community's Post-2015 Vision succinctly sums up the vision for moving forward as 'an ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community that is inclusive, sustainable, resilient, dynamic, and engages and benefits the people' (ASEAN, 2014). In order to gain a deeper understanding of how people feel about ASEAN as an inclusive and engaging community, the survey asked respondents to rate the following statements regarding ASEAN by 2025:

- Basic social protection and health services are provided to migrant and temporary workers from other countries in ASEAN.
- There is good governance and very much less corruption.
- There is equitable access to opportunities for ASEAN peoples.
- Human rights and minorities in the region are effectively protected.
- ASEAN peoples are well aware of the ASEAN Community and its programmes.
- The ASEAN Community strongly engages and benefits its peoples.

The survey results are shown in Figures 29–34. It is clear from the results that there is wide support for a more engaged ASEAN, better governance in the region, and a more inclusive ASEAN. These aspirations were strongest in Indonesia and the Philippines as well as with the government respondents, at least with respect to an ASEAN that is more deeply engaged with the people. The expectations were significantly lower, however. It is worth noting that the largest expectations gap was for the statement on good governance and very much less corruption. The low expectations were held by respondents in all member states. It must be emphasised that the ASCC Blueprint 2025 states that its number one characteristic is that it engages and benefits the people. Good governance and good regulatory practices are highlighted in the AEC Blueprint 2025. An inclusive ASEAN is woven into the AEC, ASCC, and APSC blueprints for 2025. This means that narrowing the large expectations gap may well be a matter of implementing the measures in the blueprints.

Figure 29: Basic Social Protection for Migrants and Temporary Workers

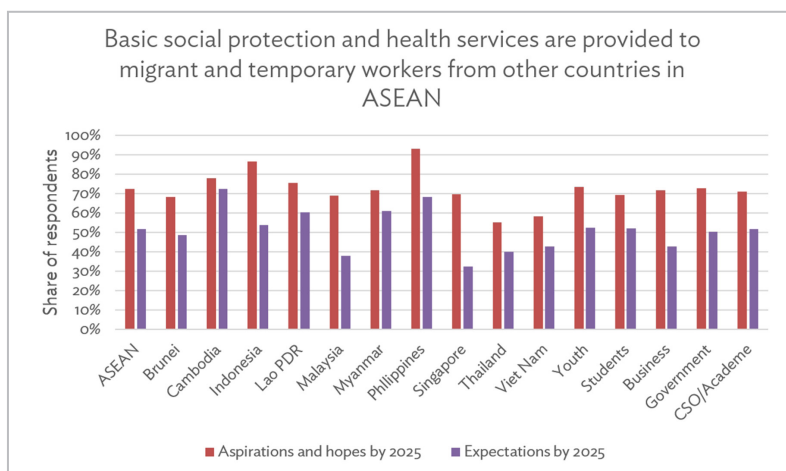


Figure 30: Good Governance and Less Corruption in ASEAN

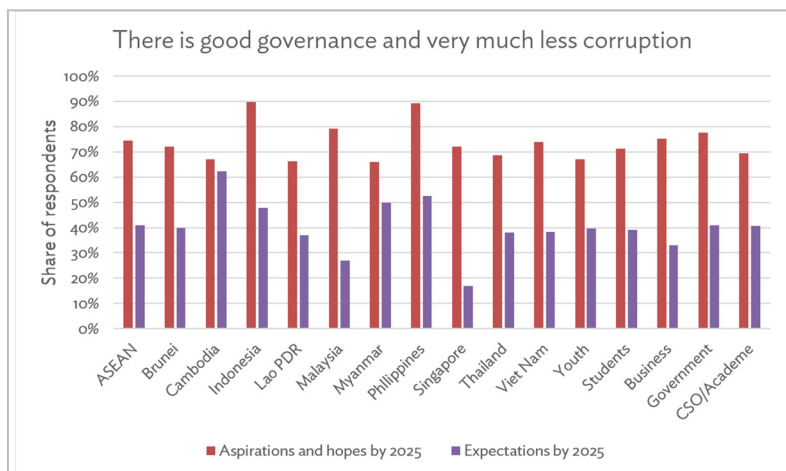


Figure 31: Equitable Access to Opportunities in ASEAN

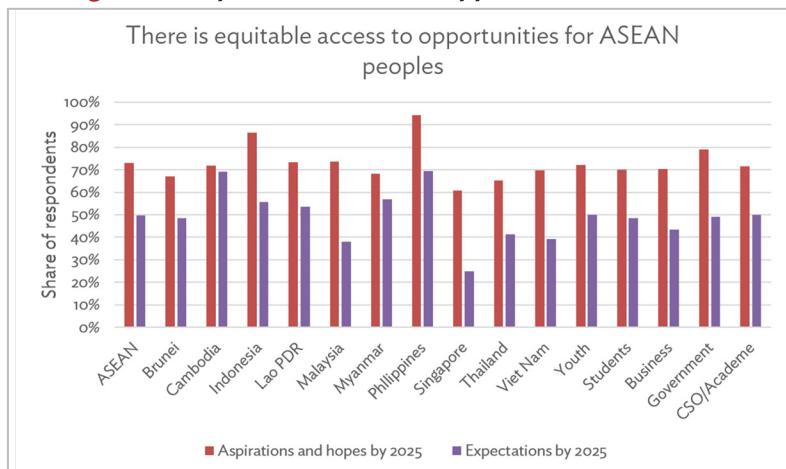


Figure 32: Protection of Human Rights and Minorities in ASEAN

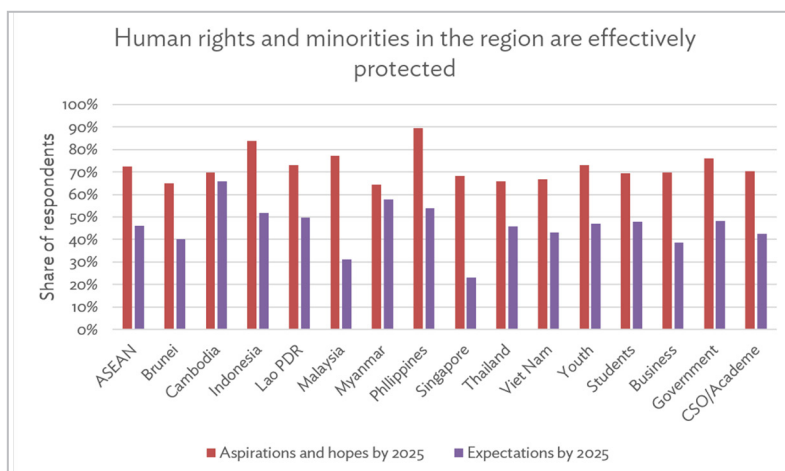


Figure 33: ASEAN Peoples Are Well Aware of the ASEAN Community and Its Programmes

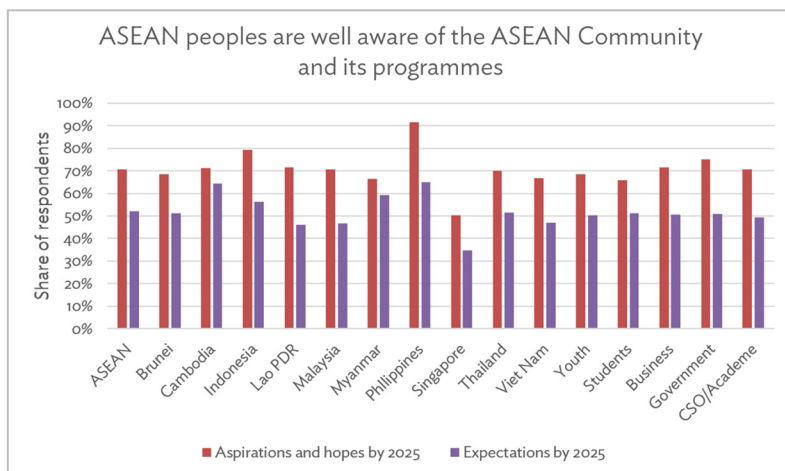
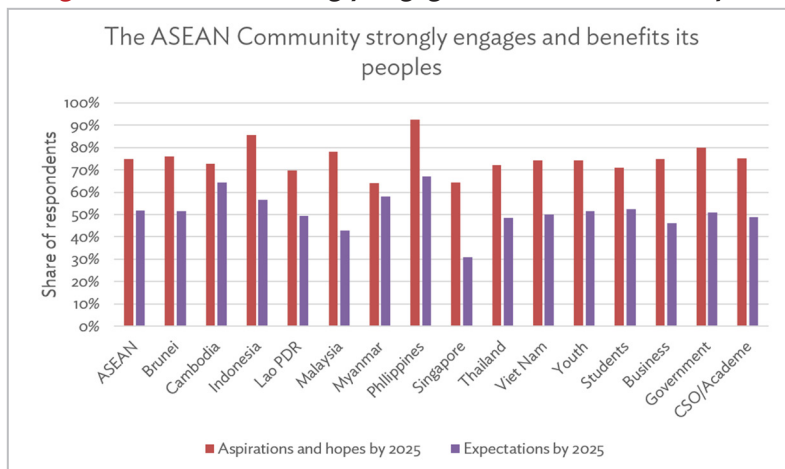


Figure 34: ASEAN Strongly Engages and Benefits Its Peoples



The country reports and FGDs highlighted the problems quite starkly. The hopes revolved around good governance, the eradication of corruption, and inclusive economic development and education. The issue of corruption elicited particularly strong comments from the FGD participants. One Filipino respondent asserted that ‘corruption will also be highly impossible to eradicate. Hence, good governance within ASEAN cannot be achieved by 2025.’ Another respondent in the Philippines gave a particularly grim forecast for the eradication of corruption, saying that it was ‘inborn’ in the culture of ASEAN countries. Thai participants thought that corruption was embedded into the systems of ASEAN Member States. Some Malaysian respondents felt ‘powerless’ in dealing with corruption and said that overcoming the problem required ‘very strong political will, which Malaysian leaders did not seem to have’.

Human rights were mentioned several times, especially by the students. Some participants were concerned with specific social benefits. The CSO participants and students in Singapore highlighted ASEAN’s lack of focus on soft issues, such as human rights violations and the protection of vulnerable populations, as their greatest area of concern. Examples raised included the Rohingya refugees in Myanmar; impoverished populations in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Viet Nam; and persistent transboundary haze pollution. An Indonesian participant stated: ‘ASEAN as a collective voice can be more assertive in dealing with members that violate human rights’.

Many comments dealt with poverty. For example, one Malaysian respondent hoped ASEAN would assist Malaysia ‘to grow out of our cycle of poverty, violence, and corrupt government and promote greater cooperation’. Meanwhile, one respondent from Brunei hoped for ‘ASEAN to eradicate poverty’. Almost all participants in the Vietnamese Youth FGD acknowledged the ‘difficulty in ensuring basic social protection and health services for immigrants and temporary workers due to the limitation of budgets and differences in attitudes towards locals and foreigners, etc’.

A Malaysian respondent hoped there would be ‘more help to give education to the underprivileged children in the region and more cross-border youth interaction for culture exchange and mutual understandings’. Similarly, an Indonesian respondent hoped that ‘ASEAN can keep on assisting their members’ development processes, especially in economic and security matters’.

The last two questions in this survey section were related to the awareness of ASEAN and the strength of ASEAN’s community engagement. Echoing the sentiments of former President Fidel Ramos, one Singaporean CSO FGD participant commented that ‘identity and pride go hand in hand, and for one to identify with ASEAN, one has to feel pride in belonging to ASEAN’. The respondent elaborated that to feel proud of ASEAN, he

had to see that ASEAN was making an effort to protect its most vulnerable citizens. However, because he had not seen ASEAN doing this, he said he did not feel pride nor a sense of ASEAN identity.

As a respondent from the Thai Government explained, ASEAN community-building needs to work on the socio-cultural aspect: 'In terms of the ASEAN Community as a people-based community, the importance of socio-cultural integration has not been extensively raised among the public compared to the economic benefits. However, culture can play a larger role in building "trust" that can contribute to the success of doing business in member countries.' He went on to provide a useful suggestion for moving forward: 'The existing lack of awareness and knowledge of ASEAN shows that the government might not have made sufficiently broad preparations to encourage public engagement in the ASEAN Community and build ASEAN citizenship among Thai people. Non-profit organisations have rather been neglected in the country's aim for ASEAN integration, despite their potential to contribute to community development. Comparing relevant players, NGOs are more connected with local people and have a good understanding of the social conditions within their countries. Therefore, Thailand should emphasise the role of NGOs in the region and engage them in the cultural and economic aspects of ASEAN integration.'

Sources of Information

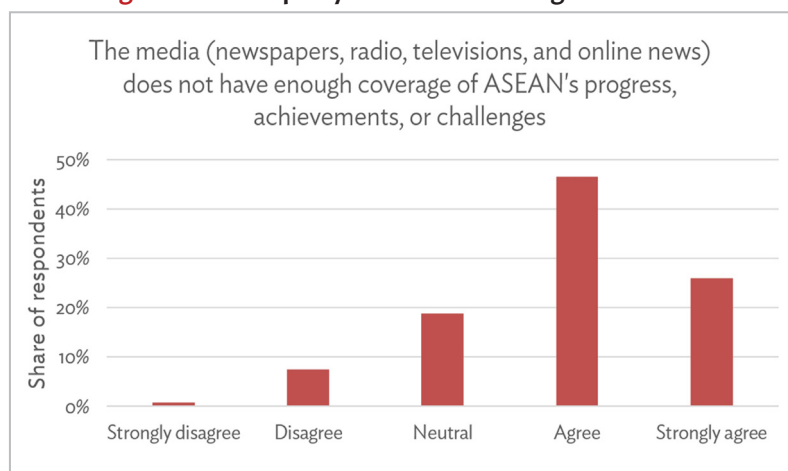
Two questions explored how respondents gained knowledge about ASEAN. The respondents overwhelmingly stated that they were not able to receive enough information on ASEAN. During the FGDs, the respondents expressed the desire to have access to better information about ASEAN. For example, the Vietnamese business participants knew that information about tariffs and rules of origin was available online but found that the language was too technical. As most of them were from small and medium-sized enterprises, they had difficulty in seeking assistance from lawyers who might be able to give clearer explanations.

Media

The survey asked the respondents whether they agreed with the following statement: 'The media (newspapers, radio, televisions, and online news) does not have enough coverage of ASEAN's progress, achievements, and challenges.' The respondents chose from five possible responses: 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'neutral', 'disagree', and 'strongly disagree'.

Finding: Of the respondents, 72% agreed or strongly agreed that the media did not have sufficient coverage of ASEAN (Figure 35).

Figure 35: Adequacy of Media Coverage of ASEAN



Across the board, the media was blamed for not providing good coverage of ASEAN-related news and issues. Of the respondents, 26% strongly agreed that the media did not have good enough coverage of ASEAN. Respondents from all member states noted the media's emphasis on economics and business in stories about ASEAN and said that there was not enough coverage of the socio-political and politico-security issues. However, some mentioned that stories like those related to the South China Sea put too much of a negative light on ASEAN. The Malaysian FGD participants described ASEAN news programmes as 'uninteresting' and 'mostly about high-level meetings that are disconnected with the general-public subscribers'.

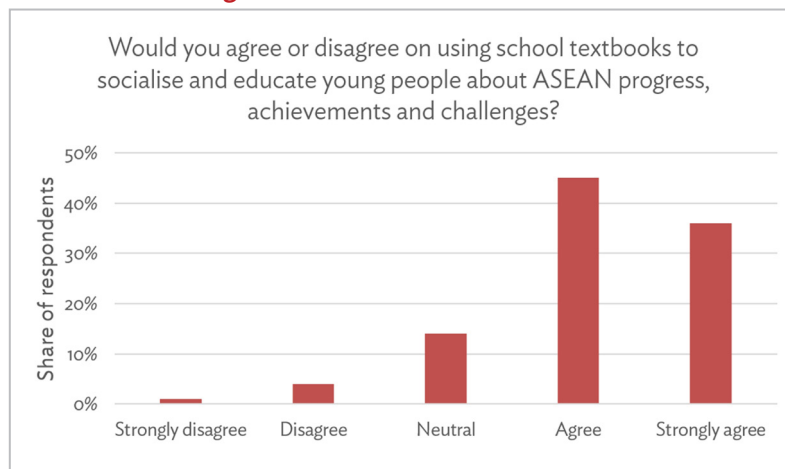
However, there appeared to be a misunderstanding on the part of the general public and even ASEAN officials about the role of the media, which needs to be more carefully analysed so that it can be better utilised for sharing ASEAN's progress. Every year there are multiple gathering of journalists to discuss how to better cover ASEAN. The problem is that most events and activities are not 'news-worthy' in the traditional sense.

Textbooks

The second question in this section asked: 'Would you agree or disagree with using school textbooks to socialise and educate young people about ASEAN's progress, achievements, and challenges?' The five possible answers were: 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'neutral', 'disagree', and 'strongly disagree'.

Finding: The vast majority of respondents (81%) agreed or strongly agreed that textbooks should be used to socialise and educate young people about ASEAN's progress, achievements, and challenges (Figure 36).

Figure 36: Textbooks and ASEAN



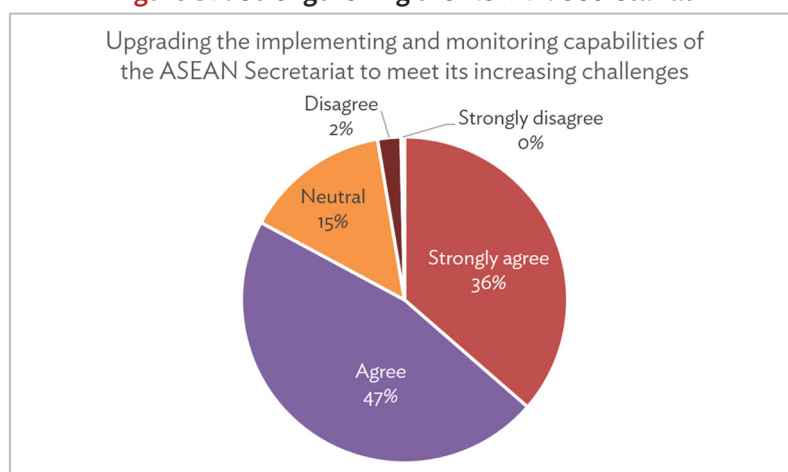
In the FGD with the Vietnamese students, respondents stated that the information in high school and university textbooks was limited and outdated. The Thai students observed that there needed to be more positive news about ASEAN to counteract the negative impressions given by their textbooks that devote many pages to discussions of conflicts between Thailand and its neighbouring countries. Some FGD participants in Myanmar wished that textbooks included content on the cultural, economic, and social development of ASEAN's Member States. The Malaysian FGD participants suggested that textbooks should contain more applied knowledge that is more dynamic and less 'static' than just the history of ASEAN. For example, they suggested components on business studies or the business culture of ASEAN.

The ASEAN Secretariat

Respondents were asked: 'Would you agree or disagree with the idea of gradually upgrading the implementing and monitoring capabilities of the ASEAN Secretariat to meet its increasing challenges?' They were given five possible responses: 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'neutral', 'disagree', and 'strongly disagree'.

Finding: Of the respondents, 36% strongly agreed, and 46% agreed that the ASEAN Secretariat should be gradually upgraded (Figure 37).

Figure 37: Strengthening the ASEAN Secretariat



Among the member states, this question generated the widest divergence in responses of any of the questions. Indonesia most strongly supported upgrading the ASEAN Secretariat, with 62% strongly agreeing with the idea. At the other extreme, only 3% of the Thai respondents agreed. By affiliation, the government officials felt the most strongly that the ASEAN Secretariat should be upgraded, with 51% in strong agreement.

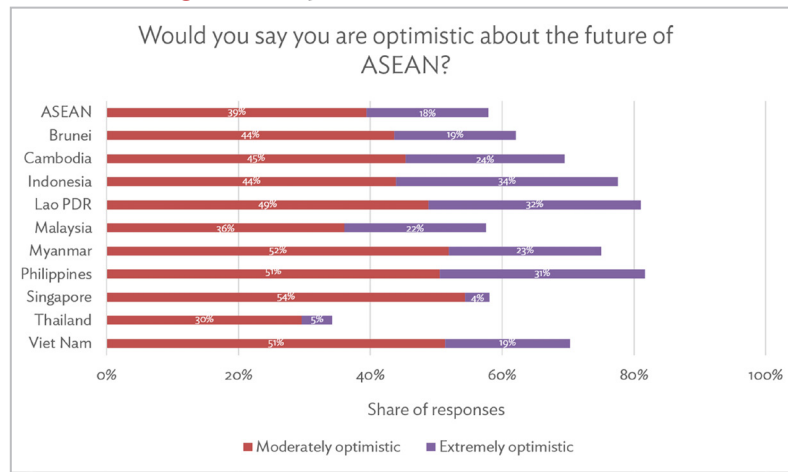
The Future of ASEAN

The last question in this section asked: 'Would you say you are optimistic or pessimistic about the future of ASEAN?' Respondents chose from the following options: 'extremely optimistic', 'moderately optimistic', 'somewhat optimistic', 'slightly optimistic', and 'not at all optimistic'.

Finding: The majority (57%) of respondents felt at least moderately optimistic about the future of ASEAN (Figure 38).

The spectrum of responses among the countries was quite large. The shares of respondents who were moderately optimistic and extremely optimistic about ASEAN's future ranged from 35% in Thailand to 82% in the Philippines. Only 4%–5% of Singapore and Thailand's respondents were extremely optimistic, while as much as 34% of Indonesian respondents felt the same. Nearly a third of the Lao PDR and Philippine respondents were also extremely optimistic about ASEAN'S future. Overall the share of those who chose 'moderately optimistic' was twice that for 'extremely optimistic' for all the ASEAN respondents. Overall, all affiliations showed similar levels of optimism for

Figure 38: Optimism for ASEAN's Future



the future of ASEAN. By age, interestingly, 74% of respondents aged 50 or older were at least moderately optimistic, much higher than the overall average of 57%.

Participants in the Malaysian FGDs expressed some pessimism and were ‘not optimistic about the future at the regional (ASEAN) level due to the inability of ASEAN governments (including Malaysia) in solving their own country-level problems’.

Perhaps it is best to view the essence of the pessimism expressed by some of the Malaysian participants as essentially a challenge and an implicit call for a greater focus on implementation and stronger political will to address the common priority concerns highlighted in the survey in a regionally concerted way. In the process, there can be both stronger national and regional commitment and pride. Repeating the statement of former Philippine President Fidel Ramos highlighted earlier in the chapter:

If the Southeast Asian peoples are to embrace ASEAN as their ‘Community’, they must see it as a pervading, beneficial influence on their daily lives. They must regard the ASEAN vision and mission as their own, being its most important stakeholders.’ (Ramos, 2013: 8)

In short, the challenge for ASEAN is that now that the ASEAN house has been built, ASEAN needs to ensure that the house is well lived and well maintained. This calls for greater focus on the implementation of ASEAN and complementary national measures and ensuring that the ASEAN Community truly engages and benefits its peoples.

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