

# Does public opinion count? Knowledge and support for an ASEAN Community in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore

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## Abstract

Scholars have remarked that the decision-making process in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is largely elitist in nature and concentrated within the higher echelon of leadership, with little public participation. Since ASEAN is moving toward community building by the year 2015, questions arise on whether the people are consulted, aware, and support this initiative – which is the focus of this article. The authors argue that increased awareness and knowledge of the public regarding the ASEAN Community initiative will eventually translate into increased support. Against this background, this article analyzes the extent the public in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore are aware of and

support the proposed initiative, based on public opinion surveys conducted by the authors in these countries. To support the discussion, this article also employs the Pearson chi-square test to analyze the relationship between public awareness and support for the ASEAN Community.

## 1 Introduction

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), established in 1967, has emerged as the leading regional grouping promoting cooperation among the 10-member countries in the region. ASEAN was founded by five states, namely Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, and Singapore in the backdrop of a Cold War setting – at a time when the world experienced ideological conflicts between the two superpowers – the Soviet Union and the United States. In fact the initial motivation for the formation of this regional organization was to mitigate and manage the power play between these superpowers in the region. The Vietnam War, the instability in Cambodia, China's support for communist insurgency, and territorial disputes among neighbors indicated that the possibility of a full-blown armed conflict in the region was imminent, leading perhaps to a prolonged tension in the region. After some 45 years since its inception, ASEAN has emerged stronger in promoting regional cooperation. Enlarging its membership to 10 countries, ASEAN has become one of the most stable and successful regional groupings of the developing world, and a force for stability and cooperation in Asia (Acharya, 2011). Having survived the Cold War period, ASEAN has successfully built an embracing coalition of 10 nations including those which were adversaries during the Cold War era (Thompson and Thianthai, 2008). Some observers regarded ASEAN as a paragon of successful regional cooperation (Nischalke, 2000).

Although ASEAN has been successful as a regional outfit, it was not immune from the various financial crises that impacted the region. In the aftermath of the 1997 financial crisis, ASEAN leaders had unanimously agreed to a range of plans and protocols aimed at strengthening regional integration – one of which was to establish an ASEAN Community (Jones, 2008). The idea was formally declared in the Bali Concord II during the Ninth ASEAN Summit in Bali in 2003 (ASEAN Secretariat, 2003). Subsequently, during the Eleventh ASEAN Summit in 2005 held in

Malaysia, member countries agreed to accelerate the implementation of the ASEAN Community by the year 2015, with the slogan ‘One Vision, One Identity, One Community’. As the idea of community building matured, member countries were more amenable to move the goals of ASEAN from building a loose ‘association of regional countries’ into a much closer ‘ASEAN Community of nations’. This change in thinking was clearly reflected in the subsequent resolutions in several ASEAN documents (AIPA, 2007).

The success of the European Union (EU) in establishing the European Community has served as an impetus for several regional organizations, including ASEAN to pursue the path of regional integration. Nonetheless, compared with the EU, ASEAN’s initiative toward regional integration seems to be taking a different route. The EU is an economic and political union of 27 European countries. It has its roots in the European Coal and Steel Community and the European Economic Community as early as 1958 (Moorthy and Benny, 2012a,b). The EU began to take shape during the intervening years by way of accession of new member states and the expanding policy scope which it serves. The EU came to life in 1993 through the Maastricht Treaty and went through some constitutional amendments through the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009 – further strengthening the regional organization. EU’s formation took many years of consultation at various levels of society and government through various channels, where the directly elected European Parliament and the *Eurobarometer* public opinion surveys were (and still are) employed as indispensable tools to gauge public sentiments on a wide range of issues concerning this regional organization.

In contrast, the ASEAN Community initiative evolved within a short period of time, with the gestation period of less than 20 years. Some scholars have even argued that the idea of a regional community and its 2015 target appears to be amorphous, unrealistic, and overly ambitious (Thearith, 2009; Levitter, 2010; Quayle, 2010). There has been criticism that ASEAN leaders were too hasty in pushing through this initiative. Some even argued that much of ASEAN’s 600 million population are still unaware of this initiative, especially due to the lack of a mechanism within member countries to engage their people. There are some criticisms toward ASEAN leaders for their lackadaisical attitude in soliciting public opinions. The EU experience suggests that regional integration initiative requires active involvement of the public. Solicitation of opinions through

direct voting and/or public opinion surveys is essential to provide certain levels of legitimacy to regional integration. Even prior to the formation of the EU, policymakers and academicians had conducted extensive studies to ascertain the public's understanding and acceptance of the regional community idea (Laffan, 1992; Benny and Abdullah, 2011; Moorthy and Benny, 2012a,b). This goes to show that an initiative without solicitation of public views may fall short of achieving its intended objectives.

The public is a primary actor in the process of regional integration. For this reason, public sentiments and opinions should provide essential feedback for the formulation of policies regarding regional integration. In fact, regional integration theories, such as transactionalism, neo-functionalism, and democratic theory, have advocated 'public opinions' as a fundamental ingredient for regional integration (Deutsch, 1957; Lindberg and Scheingold, 1970; Hewstone, 1986; Collins, 2008). The success of such regional integration may well depend on public awareness and support.

Thus far, there has been a lack of studies pertaining to public opinion on ASEAN regional integration. Even though ASEAN has attracted considerable scholarly interests, much of its focus has been on the role of political elites and states, political and economic relations of the region, the development of ASEAN as a regional institution, and ASEAN's socio-economic challenges (Acharya, 2003; Hew *et al.*, 2004; Hew, 2005, 2007; Guerrero, 2008). However, to date, there is no systematic study to ascertain whether the public is aware of or support the idea of an ASEAN Community. Since the ASEAN Charter aims to promote a 'people-oriented' ASEAN, it is important to study what the people think about this initiative.

Having established the *problematique* of the ASEAN Community initiative, this article then provides a quantitative-based analysis on the extent of awareness and support among the people of three ASEAN countries, namely Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore for the proposed ASEAN Community. The study is premised on the understanding that regional community-building process requires the support and participation of the masses. Public awareness is crucial, as without it, the support for regional integration may decline – especially when people find it difficult to reconcile their values with new values that emerge with regional integration. Based on empirical analysis of opinions surveys, this study measures public knowledge and support for the ASEAN Community and provides arguments on the legitimacy of public opinion surveys as an effective

instrument to facilitate policy formulation. The study argues that increased awareness and knowledge of the public regarding the ASEAN Community will eventually translate into increased support. Thus, it is imperative to involve the public more actively in the process of ASEAN Community building. The study may contribute to the understanding of regional integration, especially on the impact of public knowledge and attitudes toward Southeast Asian regionalism. In this article, the empirical findings are divided into four sections – first, knowledge on ASEAN; second, perception of the relevancy of ASEAN; third, awareness of the ASEAN Community; and fourth, public support for the formation of the ASEAN Community. The analysis of the impact of awareness on public support is discussed in the Discussion section.

## 2 The concept of the ASEAN Community

The ASEAN Vision 2020 envisions the ASEAN Community as ‘a concert of Southeast Asian nations, outward looking, living in peace, stability and prosperity, bonded together in partnership in dynamic development and in a community of caring societies’ (ASEAN Secretariat, 1997). Subsequently, the Bali Concord II, on 7 December 2003, provided a clearer enunciation of this concept. The ASEAN Community will comprise three pillars – the ASEAN Political Security Community (APSC), the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) – to be effective in 2015. These pillars are closely intertwined and mutually reinforcing for the purpose of ensuring durable peace, stability, and shared prosperity in the region (ASEAN Secretariat, 2003).

The APSC, the first pillar of the ASEAN Community, aspires that member states resolve their conflicts and live in peace with each other, through respect for justice and the rule of law, and through the strengthening of national and regional resilience (ASEAN Secretariat, 1997). With regard to this, the Bali Concord II has outlined seven areas where intensified political and security cooperation is to take place. This includes setting values and norms, maritime security, weapons of mass destruction, terrorism and transnational crime, defense cooperation, the ASEAN Regional Forum, and cooperation with the United Nations (ASEAN Secretariat, 2003, 2009a).

The second pillar, the AEC, aspires for deeper economic integration among member states by working toward a single market and production

base with free flow of goods, services, investments, capital, and skilled labor (ASEAN Secretariat, 2003). The AEC's blueprint has outlined four key goals, first, a single market and production base; second, a highly competitive economic region; third, a region of equitable economic development; and fourth, a region fully integrated into the global economy (ASEAN Secretariat, 2009b).

The primary objective of the ASCC, the third pillar, is to keep the Southeast Asian nations bonded together in partnership as a community of caring societies (ASEAN Secretariat, 2003). The subsequent Vientiane Action Programme for 2004–10 emphasizes four major thrust areas, which include building a community of caring societies, managing the social impact of economic integration, promoting environmental sustainability, and promoting an ASEAN identity (ASEAN Secretariat, 2004). In 2009, the ASCC expanded its scope to include six additional characteristics, which now include human development, social welfare and protection, social justice and rights, ensuring environmental sustainability, building an ASEAN identity, and narrowing the development gap (ASEAN Secretariat, 2009c).

### 3 Methodology

The study uses public opinion surveys conducted by the authors in three ASEAN countries – Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore. While an analysis of surveys from all 10 ASEAN countries may be desirable, for reasons of research manageability and limitation of resources and time, this research focuses on only three countries. The countries were chosen based on three criteria. First, they are among the founding members of ASEAN in 1967, so it is assumed that the public will be more aware of this regional organization than those from newer member states. Second, these countries are significant to ASEAN in terms of territory, population, and economy; in total they contribute 49.4% of total landmass, 44.8% of total inhabitants, 61.5% of total ASEAN's gross domestic products (GDP), 65.7% of ASEAN's total trade, and 56.8% of foreign direct investment (FDI) inflow to ASEAN (ASEAN Secretariat 2010). Indonesia is the largest country in the region in terms of area, population, and size of economy; Singapore has the highest per-capita GDP, while Malaysia is the third largest economy in the region. Third, since inception, despite some bilateral disputes and diplomatic impasses, these countries share similar

history, culture, and values, and they also have enjoyed close relations in various spheres of life. Thus, the purpose of these surveys was to gather data at the grass roots level on attitudes, opinions, and aspirations for the ASEAN Community.

The surveys involved 11 major cities, chosen for their economic, political, socio-cultural significance and interconnectedness within the region. These cities are Greater Jakarta, Makassar, Medan, Surabaya, and Pontianak (in Indonesia); Greater Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Melaka, Johor Bahru, and Kota Kinabalu (in Malaysia), and Singapore. The surveys employed structured, close-ended and open-ended questions in three regional languages – Bahasa Indonesia, Malay, and English. To ensure the validity and comprehensibility of the survey questions, we administered a pre-test of the survey to a group of 30 pre-chosen respondents. We further refined the questionnaire based on the feedback from the pre-test.

We conducted the surveys involving 1,256 respondents – 551 Indonesians, 451 Malaysians, and 294 Singaporeans – between June and December 2009 (Table 1). We selected the respondents using convenience quota sampling, balancing the proportion of university students with non-student respondents with tertiary education. The reason for this qualification is the nature of the survey questions, which requires respondents with tertiary education to respond appropriately.

We analyzed the data using statistical methods. First, we obtained the descriptive statistical profile of the variables by using univariate statistics, such as frequency distribution, percentage, mode, and mean. To ease frequency distribution analysis, we regrouped the Likert scale responses from five-response categories into three. The ‘disagree’ and ‘completely disagree’ responses were combined into one category, while the same goes to the ‘agree’ and ‘completely agree’ responses. Second, we compared the responses from the three countries using the Kruskal–Wallis and Mann–Whitney procedures for indicators with nominal measurements. We also used the analysis of variance tests and *post hoc* least squares difference (LSD) tests to compare interval data. Finally, we employed chi-square tests to analyze the relationship between awareness and support for the ASEAN Community.

The breakdown of Indonesian respondents is as follows: Greater Jakarta (37.1%), Medan (15.7%), Surabaya (15.7%), Pontianak (15.7%), and Makassar (15.9%). They consisted of 48% males and 52% females. In terms of age group, 83.8% were between 18 and 34 years. All respondents have tertiary education background. The respondents’ three major

**Table 1** Respondents' profile

	Countries						
	Indonesia		Malaysia		Singapore		Overall
Number of respondents	511		451		294		1,256
Cities of domicile	Greater Jakarta	189 (37.1%)	Greater Kuala Lumpur	125 (27.7%)	Singapore	294 (100%)	
	Medan – North Sumatera	80 (15.7%)	Melaka	93 (20.6%)			
	Surabaya – East Java	80 (15.7%)	Penang	87 (19.3%)			
	Pontianak – West Kalimantan	80 (15.7%)	Johor Bahru – Johor	79 (17.5%)			
	Makassar/South Celebes	81 (15.9%)	Kota Kinabalu – Sabah	67 (14.9%)			
Gender							
Male	48.0%		51.1%		55.5%		50.8%
Female	52.0%		48.9%		44.5%		49.2%
Age							
18 to 34	83.8%		73.1%		63.7%		75.4%
35 to 49	13.4%		20.9%		22.0%		18.1%
50 or more	2.8%		6.0%		14.3%		6.5%
Formal education							
Undergraduate	89.2%		67.0%		50.7%		72.4%
Master's degree	10.2%		22.6%		14.4%		15.7%
PhD	0.6%		10.4%		34.9%		12.0%
Expenditure level	\$110 or less	13.9%	\$300 or less	32.7%	\$960 or less	18.8%	
	\$111–220	20.8%	\$301–1,500	38.5%	\$961–2,690	27.3%	
	\$221–330	21.8%	\$1,501–3,000	19.6%	\$2,691–4,615	21.4%	
	\$331–440	11.9%	\$3,001–4,500	6.0%	\$4,616–7,690	19.6%	
	\$441–550	7.9%	\$4,501–6,000	1.6%	\$7,691–15,385	8.1%	
	\$551 or more	23.8%	\$6,001 or more	1.6%	\$15,386 or more	4.8%	



Occupation				
Lecturer	7.1%	26.4%	40.8%	21.9%
Civil servant	8.2%	6.4%	5.8%	7.0%
Private employee	33.5%	2.7%	2.0%	15.1%
Soldier/police	0.0%	5.1%	0.0%	1.8%
Doing business	3.1%	0.0%	0.7%	1.4%
Housewife	1.8%	0.0%	0.3%	0.8%
Student	40.9%	54.3%	42.9%	46.2%
Not working	3.1%	1.3%	0.0%	1.8%
Other	2.4%	3.8%	7.5%	4.1%

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Source: Result of field surveys conducted in 2009.

occupations were students (40.9%), private sector employees (33.5%), and civil servants (8.2%).

In Malaysia, the breakdown of the respondents is as follows: Greater Kuala Lumpur (27.7%), Melaka (20.6%), Penang (19.3%), Johor Bahru (17.5%), and Kota Kinabalu (14.9%). They consisted of 51.1% males and 48.9% females. In terms of age group, 73.1% were between 18 and 34 years. All respondents have tertiary education background. The three major occupations represented in this survey were students (54.3%), lecturers (26.4%), and civil servants (6.4%).

In Singapore, the respondents consisted of 55.5% males and 44.5% females. In terms of age, 63.7% were between 18 and 34 years. All respondents have tertiary education background. The three major occupations of the respondents were students (42.9%), lecturers (40.8%), and civil servants (5.8%).

## 4 Knowledge regarding ASEAN

The survey, first, measured the public's knowledge and understanding of ASEAN as a regional organization. To facilitate this, we posed four yes–no questions, as illustrated in Fig. 1.

In general, the study revealed that awareness of ASEAN was quite significant among respondents (see Fig. 1). Almost all of those surveyed claimed that they had some knowledge regarding ASEAN. Nearly two-thirds claimed that they knew the goals and objectives of ASEAN, while more than half the respondents claimed that they knew the year of its establishment. However, this awareness was rather superficial as the respondents appeared to be less aware of more comprehensive details of ASEAN such as its organizational structure (see Fig. 1).

It is interesting to note that most of the respondents in the three countries surveyed shared similar levels of knowledge regarding ASEAN and its objectives, as confirmed by the Kruskal–Wallis and Mann–Whitney tests. However, the knowledge regarding the year ASEAN was founded was significantly higher among the Indonesians compared with those in Malaysia and Singapore. Regarding the organizational structure of ASEAN, the knowledge of Malaysian respondents was significantly higher than those in Singapore and Indonesia.

The results of this study regarding public awareness of ASEAN and the year it was formed are inline with [Thompson and Thianthai \(2008\)](#). Their

**Do you know about ASEAN?**

**Kruskal–Wallis tests for comparing the responses:** Chi-square = 4.10; d.f = 2; Asymp. Sig. = 0.13. There is no significant difference.

**Results from the Mann–Whitney U tests:** There is no significant difference in the knowledge of respondents in Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore

**Do you understand the goals and objectives of ASEAN?**

**Kruskal–Wallis tests for comparing the responses:** Chi-square = 3.63; d.f = 2; Asymp. Sig. = 0.16. There is no significant difference

**Results from the Mann–Whitney U tests:** There is no significant difference in the knowledge of respondents in Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore

**Do you know that ASEAN was established in 1967?**

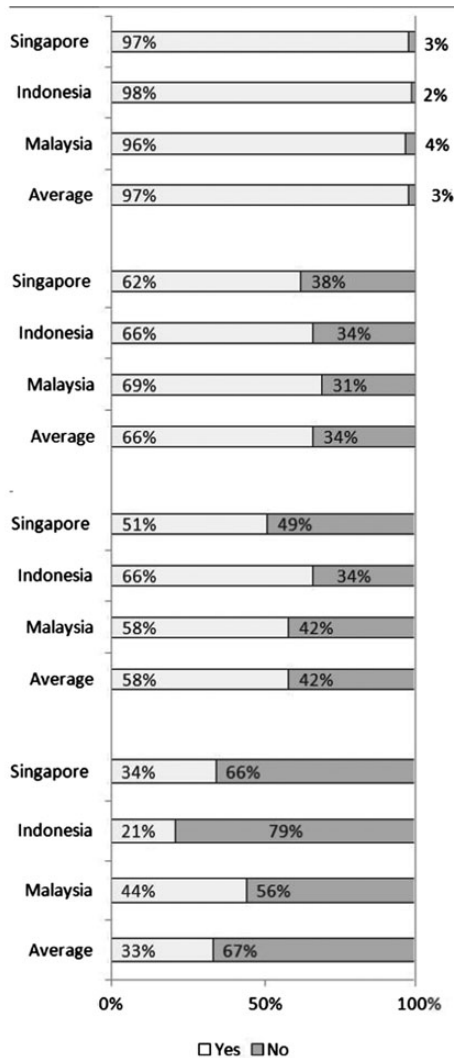
**Kruskal–Wallis tests for comparing the responses:** Chi-square = 20.02; d.f = 2; Asymp. Sig. = 0.00. There are significant differences.

**Results from the Mann–Whitney U tests:** The knowledge of Indonesian respondents is significantly higher than that in Malaysia and Singapore. The knowledge of Malaysian respondents is not significantly different than that in Singapore

**Do you know about the organizational structure of ASEAN?**

**Kruskal–Wallis tests for comparing the responses:** Chi-square = 59.79; d.f = 2; Asymp. Sig. = 0.00. There are significant differences.

**Results from the Mann–Whitney U tests:** The knowledge of Malaysian respondents is significantly higher than that in Singapore and Indonesia. The knowledge of Singaporean respondents is significantly higher than that in Indonesia



**Figure 1.** Knowledge regarding ASEAN Source: Result of field surveys conducted by the researchers in 2009.

work suggests that the knowledge (or familiarity) level of the respondents regarding ASEAN was very high – some 99.5% of Indonesians, 98.8% of Malaysians, and 92.9% of Singaporeans were familiar with ASEAN. These figures are not significantly different with the result of this study, which showed that some 98% of Indonesians, 96% of Malaysians, and 97% of Singaporeans admitted knowledge regarding ASEAN. Regarding

the year ASEAN was formed, Thompson and Thianthai found that some 66% of Indonesians, 53% of Malaysians, and 48% of Singaporeans could correctly identify the year (Thompson and Thianthai, 2008). These figures are almost similar with the findings of this study (see Fig. 1).

Our data indicate, as illustrated in Fig. 2, that knowledge acquisition regarding ASEAN was more profound through the school systems in the three countries. Some 61% of Malaysian, 94% of Indonesian, and 60% of Singaporean respondents admitted that they had learned about ASEAN in school. This finding is consistent with Thompson and Thianthai’s study that found schools to be one of the primary sources of knowledge pertaining to ASEAN (Thompson and Thianthai, 2008).

In response to the question whether it was important for ASEAN to be taught in schools, most respondents supported such learning endeavor – with nearly three-quarters admitting that it was ‘important’ or ‘very important’. However, it should be noted that the perception of importance was significantly higher in Indonesia than in Malaysia and Singapore, while there was no significant difference between Malaysians and Singaporeans (see Fig. 2). Therefore, it would be useful to integrate in-depth knowledge of ASEAN into the school curriculum, as this would

**Did you learn about ASEAN at school?**

**Kruskal–Wallis tests for comparing the responses:** Chi-square = 160.32; d.f = 2; Asymp. Sig. = 0.00. There are significant differences

**Results from the Mann–Whitney U tests:**

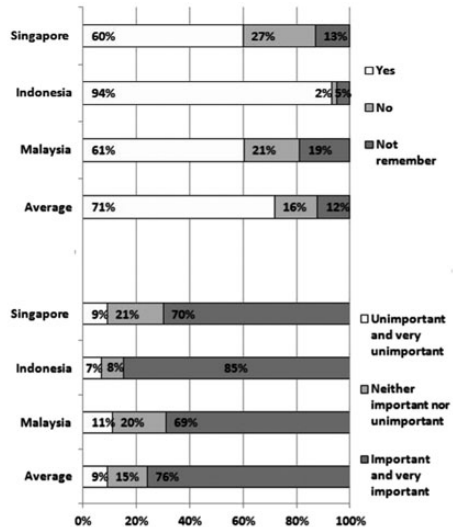
- The number of respondents who admitted they learned about ASEAN at school is significantly higher in Indonesia than those in Singapore and Malaysia
- No significant difference between the Malaysians and the Singaporeans

**Is ASEAN important to be taught at school?**

**ANOVA tests:** F-score = 22.65 Sig.= 0.00. There are significant differences

**Post hoc LSD tests results:**

- The perception of importance is significantly higher in Indonesia than that in Malaysia and Singapore
- No significant difference between the Malaysians and the Singaporeans



**Figure 2** Learning about ASEAN at schools in the three countries. Source: Result of field surveys conducted by the researchers in 2009

help to facilitate knowledge acquisition and understanding of the ASEAN Community.

### 5 Perception of the relevancy of ASEAN

The second objective of the survey was to assess the public’s perception of the relevancy of ASEAN. ASEAN is indigenous to the region and has evolved over 45 years since the Cold War. Therefore, it is instructive to assess how the public perceives ASEAN’s relevancy to the region.

Some critics, such as Mely Caballero-Anthony and Haywood (2010), Thearith (2009) and Luhulima (2011), argue that ASEAN has not been very effective in the promotion of peace, security, and political or economic development of the region. However, the findings of this study do not support this claim. There were more respondents who perceived ASEAN as successful compared with those who thought to the contrary. In fact, more than two-thirds of those surveyed considered ASEAN as important and relevant to them and their countries (see Fig. 3).

Regarding the perception of ASEAN’s success, statistical test using the ANOVA procedure followed by the *post hoc* LSD tests showed that the perception of success was significantly lower in Indonesia than in Malaysia and Singapore (see Fig. 3). Further analysis shows that almost half of Indonesian respondents perceived ASEAN as ‘neither successful nor

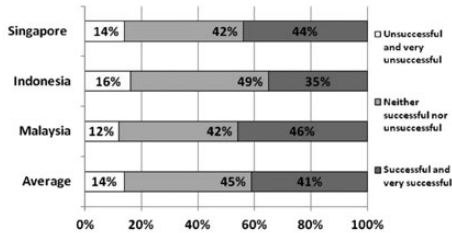
**In your opinion, is ASEAN successful?**

ANOVA tests: *F*-score = 5.16; Sig.= 0.01

There are significant differences

*Post hoc* LSD tests results:

- The perception of importance is significantly higher in Indonesia than that in Malaysia and Singapore
- No significant difference between the Malaysians and the Singaporeans



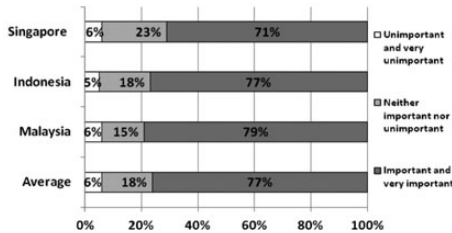
**Is ASEAN important to you and your country?**

ANOVA tests: *F*-score = 4.07; Sig.= 0.02

There are significant differences

*Post hoc* LSD tests results:

- The perception of importance is significantly higher in Indonesia than that in Malaysia and Singapore
- No significant difference between the Malaysians and the Singaporeans



**Figure 3** Perception of the relevancy of ASEAN Source: Result of field surveys conducted by the researchers in 2009.

unsuccessful' – this figure exceeded the 35% who perceived it as being 'successful or very successful'. In Singapore and Malaysia, the relations of these figures were vice versa.

On the perceived importance of ASEAN, our survey results showed that 79% of Malaysians, 77% of Indonesians, and 71% of Singaporeans perceived ASEAN as important. These figures are consistent with the findings of Thompson and Thianthai (2008). Their survey found that most of the respondents (91% of Malaysians, 84% of Indonesians, and 92% of Singaporeans) agreed that membership in ASEAN was beneficial to their countries. Some 66% of Malaysians, 49% of Indonesians, and 66% of Singaporeans also felt that membership in ASEAN was beneficial to them personally. Thompson and Thianthai's study showed similar patterns to the findings of this study.

## 6 Public awareness regarding the ASEAN Community

The third objective of this survey was to assess public awareness of the ASEAN Community initiative and its main legal documents. As illustrated in Fig. 4, about a half of the respondents surveyed said that they had heard about the ASEAN Community.<sup>1</sup> Compared with the level of awareness regarding ASEAN, the concept of the ASEAN Community recorded a much lower level of awareness. The level of awareness regarding the two founding documents of the ASEAN Community – the Declaration of the Bali Concord II and the ASEAN Charter – was even lower.

The survey revealed that most respondents were not aware of the Bali Concord II. Statistical Kruskal–Wallis tests showed that there were significant differences in the three countries. The Mann–Whitney *U* tests revealed that the awareness was significantly lower in Indonesia and Singapore than in Malaysia. When asked whether they have heard or read about the ASEAN Charter (which is the legal instrument for the establishment of the ASEAN Community), more than half the respondents answered that they had not heard about the document. The Kruskal–

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1 The statistics provided in this research is based on surveys conducted in 2009 and it does not take into account Indonesia's chairmanship of ASEAN in 2011. Thus, it can be assumed that public awareness of ASEAN Community among Indonesian may have arisen during this period.

**Have you heard about the ASEAN Community?**

**Kruskal–Wallis tests for comparing the responses:** Chi-square = 8.31; d.f.= 2; Asymp. Sig. = 0.02. There are significant differences

**Mann–Whitney *U* tests results:**

- Awareness in Malaysia and in Singapore is significantly higher than that in Indonesia
- No significant difference between the awareness of the Singaporeans and the Malaysians

**Have you heard/read about the Bali Concord II 2003?**

**Kruskal–Wallis tests for comparing the responses:** Chi-square = 15.94; d.f.= 2; Asymp. Sig. = 0.00. There are significant differences

**Mann–Whitney *U* tests results:**

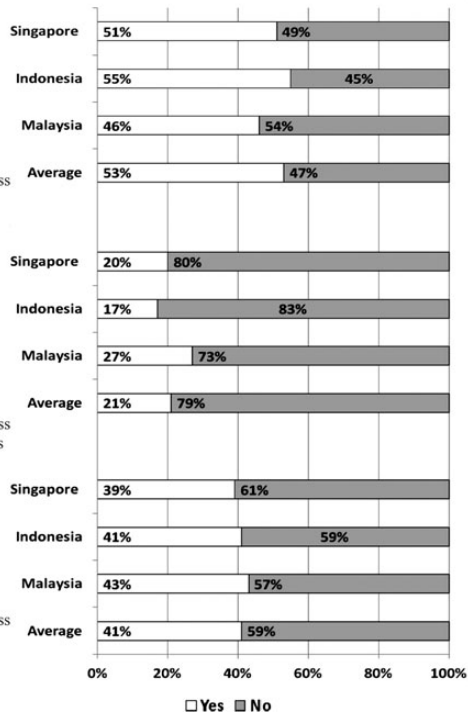
- Awareness in Indonesia and Singapore is significantly lower than that in Malaysia
- No significant difference between the awareness of the Singaporeans and that of the Indonesians

**Have you heard/read about the ASEAN Charter 2007?**

**Kruskal–Wallis tests for comparing the responses:** Chi-square = 1.33; d.f.= 2; Asymp. Sig. = 0.51. There is no significant difference

**Mann–Whitney *U* test result:**

- No significant difference between the awareness of respondents in the three countries



**Figure 4** Awareness of the ASEAN Community, Bali Concord II, and ASEAN Charter  
 Source: Result of field surveys conducted by the researchers in 2009.

Wallis tests and the Mann–Whitney *U* tests indicated that the awareness of the respondents in the three countries did not differ significantly.

The surveys clearly showed that the level of awareness regarding the ASEAN Community was significantly low, with almost half the respondents admitting that they were unaware of such an initiative. In order to identify the plausible reasons for this, the study posed four possible reasons to solicit their feedback. As shown in Fig. 5, the reasons were (i) they had not heard any explanation about the ASEAN Community from the government; (ii) they thought of ASEAN as merely the concern of the leaders; (iii) they thought they would not be affected by developments in ASEAN; and (iv) the respondents thought that the development of ASEAN was not important enough to take notice.

The survey revealed that 56% of the respondents chose the first reason – that they had not heard any explanation about the ASEAN Community from their respective governments – as the main reason for the lack of

**I have not heard any explanation about it from the government**

ANOVA tests:  $F$ -score = 8.42; Sig.= 0.00  
There are significant differences

**Post hoc LSD test results:**

- The Indonesians' level of agreement is significantly higher than those of the Malaysians and of the Singaporeans
- No significant difference between the Singaporeans and the Malaysians

**I think ASEAN is merely the concern of the leaders**

ANOVA tests:  $F$ -score = 2.69; Sig.= 0.07  
There are significant differences

**Post hoc LSD test results:**

- The Indonesians' level of agreement is significantly lower than that of the Malaysians
- The Singaporeans' opinion is not significantly different with that of the Singaporeans and of the Malaysians

**I would not be affected by the development of ASEAN**

ANOVA tests:  $F$ -score = 0.17; Sig.= 0.84  
There is no significant difference

**Post hoc LSD test results:**

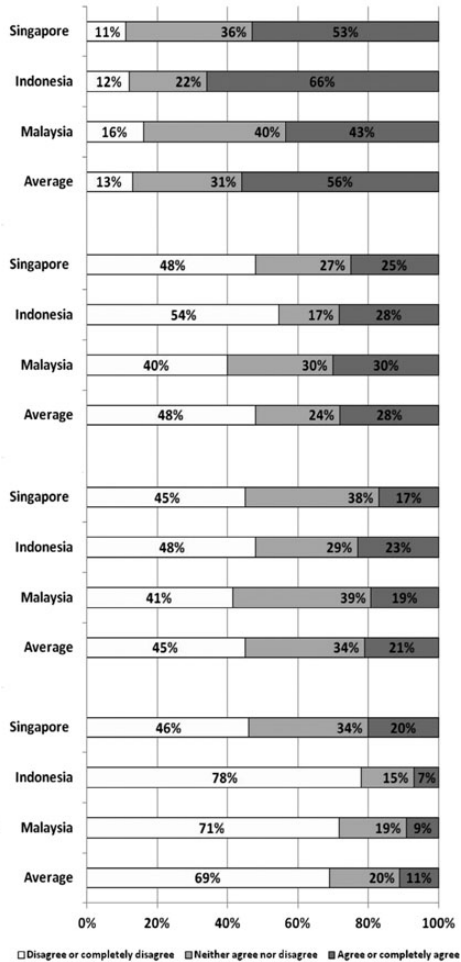
- There is no significant difference between the levels of agreement of the respondents in the three countries

**The development of ASEAN is not important to notice**

ANOVA tests:  $F$ -score = 20.67; Sig.= 0.00  
There are significant differences

**Post hoc LSD test results:**

- The Singaporeans' level of disagreement is significantly lower than those of the Indonesians and of the Malaysians
- No significant difference between the Indonesians and the Malaysians



**Figure 5** Reasons why the respondents were not aware of the ASEAN Community  
Source: Result of field surveys conducted by the researchers in 2009.

awareness. The ANOVA tests followed by *post hoc* LSD tests indicated that there was significantly more agreement to this reason by the respondents in Indonesia (mean = 3.64) than those in Malaysia (mean = 3.31) and Singapore (mean = 3.43) (see Fig. 4). The respondents did not consider the other three plausible reasons as significant. Only 28% agreed that ASEAN was merely the concern of leaders, 21% agreed that they would not be affected by developments in ASEAN, and only 11% thought that the developments in ASEAN were not important enough to notice.



**I know that ASEAN Community will be formed**

ANOVA tests: *F*-score = 16.59; Sig.= 0.00  
There are significant differences

**Post hoc LSD tests results:**

- The level of knowledge of Malaysians is higher than those of the Indonesians and the Singaporeans
- No significant difference between the knowledge of the Indonesians and that of the Singaporeans

**I know that it will comprise Security Community, Economic Community, and Socio-Cultural Community**

ANOVA tests: *F*-score = 33.30 Sig.= 0.00  
There are significant differences

**Post hoc LSD tests results:**

- The Malaysians' level of knowledge is significantly higher than those of the Indonesians and Singaporeans
- The Singaporeans have lower level of knowledge than those of the respondents in Malaysia and Indonesia

**I know that ASEAN Community will be effective by 2015**

ANOVA tests: *F*-score = 0.37 Sig.= 0.69  
There is no significant difference

**Post hoc LSD tests results:**

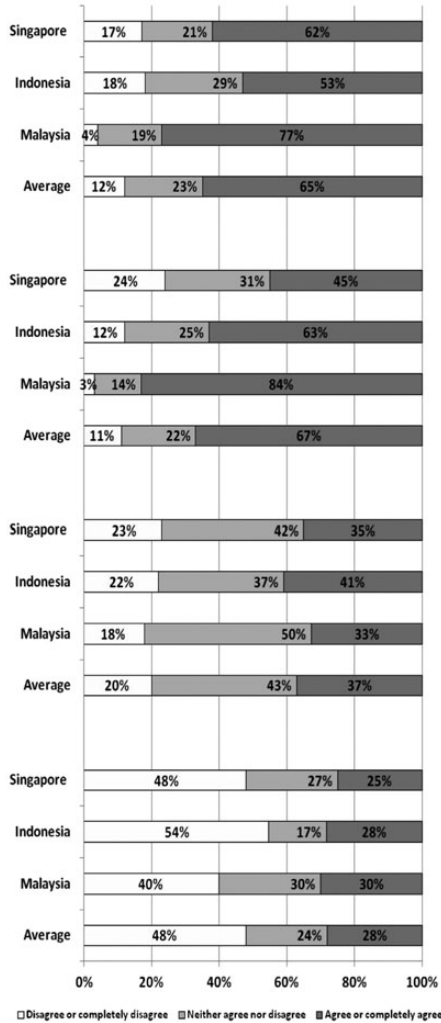
- There is no significant difference between the levels of agreement of the respondents in the three countries

**I have sufficient knowledge/ information on ASEAN Community**

ANOVA tests: *F*-score = 0.28; Sig.= 0.75;  
There is no significant difference

**Post hoc LSD tests results:**

- There is no significant difference between the levels of agreement of the respondents in the three countries



**Figure 6** Level of knowledge of the respondents aware of the ASEAN Community Source: Result of field surveys conducted by the researchers in 2009.

As shown in Fig. 4, half of the respondents claimed that they have heard about the ASEAN Community. To this group, we posed four additional statements to gauge their level of awareness regarding this concept. To the statement if they knew that the ASEAN Community would be formed, two-thirds responded positively (see Fig. 6). The ANOVA tests followed by the *post hoc* LSD tests revealed that the level of knowledge was significantly higher among the Malaysian respondents (mean = 3.85) than that in Indonesia (mean = 3.40) and Singapore (mean = 3.52).

There were some other interesting findings about those who claimed to be aware of the ASEAN Community. Although some two-thirds admitted knowledge of this concept and of its three pillars, only 37% knew the year it would come into effect (see Fig. 6). Furthermore, only 28% of those surveyed agreed that they had sufficient knowledge of the ASEAN Community.

## 7 Public support for the formation of the ASEAN Community

The fourth objective of this survey was to assess public support for the formation of the ASEAN Community. In order to gauge this support, we posed four statements to the respondents, as shown in Fig. 7.

To the first statement – I support the formation of the ASEAN Community – the survey showed substantial support from 87% of the respondents (84% of Malaysians, 91% of Indonesians, and 87% of Singaporeans) for this initiative. The next three statements were aimed at gauging support for the three pillars of the ASEAN Community. It is interesting to note that there was strong support for these pillars, with 80% of the respondents (79% of Malaysians, 84% of Indonesians, and 75% of Singaporeans) support for the ASEAN Security Community, 81% for the AEC (85% of Malaysians, 83% of Indonesians, and 73% of Singaporeans), and 77% for the ASCC (77% of Malaysians, 79% of Indonesians, and 70% of Singaporeans). It should be noted that, while the support for the ASCC is the lowest at 77%, all three pillars have actually registered high support. In comparison, the reduced support for the ASCC can be attributed to the high level of abstraction in the achievement of this pillar. The ASCC includes initiatives that cover human development, social welfare, social justice and rights, environment, ASEAN identity, and development gap. Unlike the APSC and AEC, which proffer more concrete and easy-to-grasp objectives and initiatives, the ASCC initiatives appears to be quite amorphous.

## 8 Discussion

This study argues that any regional community-building process would, first, require the support and participation of the stakeholders. Public awareness is crucial, as without it, the support for regional integration may

**I support the formation of the ASEAN Community**

ANOVA tests: *F*-score = 3.97; Sig.= 0.02  
There are significant differences

**Post hoc LSD test results:**

- The support from the Indonesians is significantly higher than that of the Malaysians and Singaporeans
- No significant difference between the support from the Malaysians and the Singaporeans

**I support the formation of the ASEAN Security Community**

ANOVA tests: *F*-score = 4.09 Sig.= 0.02  
There are significant differences

**Post hoc LSD test results:**

- The attitude of the Indonesians and Malaysians is significantly more positive than that of the Singaporeans
- The attitude of the Malaysians does not significantly differ to those of the Indonesians and the Singaporeans

**I support the establishment of ASEAN Economic Community**

ANOVA tests: *F*-score = 6.07; Sig.= 0.00  
There are significant differences between countries

**Post hoc LSD test results:**

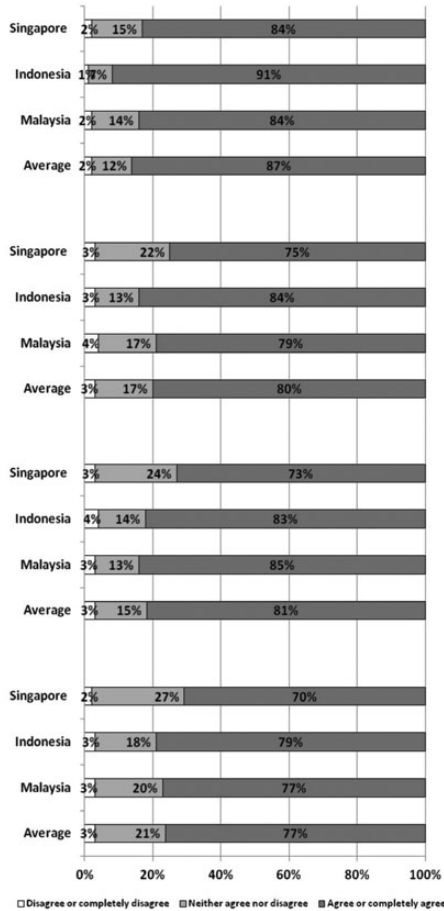
- The attitude of the Malaysians and the Indonesians is significantly more positive than that of the Singaporeans
- No significant difference between the attitude of the Malaysians and the Indonesians

**I support the formation of ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community**

ANOVA tests: *F*-score = 1.02; Sig.= 0.36  
There is no significant difference

**Post hoc LSD test results:**

- There is no significant difference between the levels of agreement of the respondents in the three countries



**Figure 7** Support for the formation of the ASEAN Community Source: Result of field surveys conducted by the researchers in 2009.

wither as the people may not be able reconcile their values with the new values of integration. At this point, it should be noted that ASEAN has remained a ‘community of nations’ and not a ‘community of people’. Despite the recent allusion of community building, the ASEAN processes are still very much controlled and driven by the state. Having said this, question arises on why ASEAN elites have not done more to engage their own people. The plausible reason for this lies in the political values and the historical make-up of the region (Moorthy and Benny, 2012a,b). In the pre-colonial period, the region was ruled by rajas and sultans who practiced absolute and authoritarian rule – often exercising tight control over

their subjects. The subsequent colonial powers also ruled the region with high levels of authoritarianism. Some colonial powers, especially the Spanish, Dutch, and French, were repressive, placing Europeans in a superior legal position, limiting subjects' civil and political freedoms, and restricting educational and economic opportunities. As a result of these experiences, regional governments have been increasingly state-centric and less amenable to liberal democratic ideals. Political cultures take a long time to change, and these traditional systems still retain their influence on the political imagination of post-colonial Southeast Asia.

Although this study found that the respondents' awareness of ASEAN was quite high, there was much less awareness regarding the ASEAN Community. Only half of the respondents surveyed claimed that they had heard about the ASEAN Community. The level of awareness regarding the two founding documents of ASEAN Community – the Declaration of the Bali Concord II and the ASEAN Charter – was even lower in all the three countries (as shown in Fig. 4). As the survey suggested, one of the key reasons for this is the lack of socialization, indicating insufficient dissemination of knowledge to the public by respective national governments and by the ASEAN Secretariat. This state of affairs is perhaps even more apparent in Indonesia, the largest and most populated country in ASEAN, where two-thirds of its respondents claimed they had not heard any explanations about this initiative from their government. It should be noted that the research findings offered in the article is based on surveys conducted in 2009. The level of awareness may perhaps be significantly higher in Indonesia since its chairmanship of ASEAN in 2011, as much of Indonesia's diplomacy has been associated with ASEAN. Furthermore, Jakarta is the nerve center for ASEAN activities, as the Secretariat is located here. Thus, it can be assumed that public awareness of the ASEAN Community among Indonesians may have arisen during this period.

The survey has indicated that there is a considerable interest among the people in these countries regarding ASEAN. They perceived developments in ASEAN as crucial, which deserve their attention as it will have an impact on them (see Fig. 5). These findings suggest that the public in ASEAN are keen to be more involved in matters regarding its development. Since public interest is high, the respective countries ought to engage their public with greater intensity. With such keenness, it may be useful to design and implement 'people-oriented and -led' projects.

**Table 2** Chi-square tests for analyzing the relationship between awareness and support for the ASEAN Community

Relationships between the awareness <sup>a</sup> and:	Pearson's chi-square			Result of analysis
	value	d.f.	Asymp.Sig (two-sided) <sup>b</sup>	
Support for the establishment of the ASEAN Community	15.191	4	0.004	Significant relationship
Support for the establishment of the APSC	12.366	4	0.015	Significant relationship
Support for the establishment of the AEC	17.815	4	0.001	Significant relationship
Support for the establishment of the ASCC	10.315	4	0.035	Significant relationship

Source: Result of field surveys conducted by the researchers in 2009.

<sup>a</sup> The independent variable is 'Have you ever heard of the ASEAN Community?'

<sup>b</sup> Chi-square is a versatile statistical test used to examine the significance of relationships between the two variables. This asymptotic significance (assymp.sig.) is the significance level that determine whether the relationship between the two variable is significant.

The analysis of the data also suggests that there is a significant positive relationship between public awareness and support for the ASEAN Community. Pearson chi-square tests indicate that public awareness has significant impact on the support for the ASEAN Community and its three pillars, as shown in Table 2. It reveals that those who are aware of the ASEAN Community have a greater tendency to support its initiatives than those who are not. This goes to show that inculcating awareness leads to public support.

The finding of Pearson chi-square tests – that awareness relates to support (see Fig. 7) – is similar to the studies pertaining to European regionalism. These studies have found that public awareness has contributed significantly to public support for European integration (Gabel, 1998). Some studies on European public opinions showed positive relationship between public knowledge and attitudes or support for regional integration initiatives. For example, studies by Inglehart (1970), Janssen (1991) and Gabel (1998) found that public knowledge influenced their identification with the supranational political community. Another scholar, Hayo (1999) found a significant positive relationship between the level of knowledge of the EU and public attitudes toward further monetary integration. Popkin and Dimock (2002), who investigated the phenomena of 'low

information rationality', explained that skepticism toward European integration might be related to poor information about it. In addition, [Constantelos and Diven \(2010\)](#) have argued that a public that understands the institutions, goals, and costs of the EU is more likely to support the organization. The EU, in its evolution, had invested substantially in enhancing public awareness with regard to regional integration.

In ASEAN, it appears that only the political elites, bureaucrats, analysts, and the more educated segments of society are aware of the inner workings of the ASEAN Community. Most people in the region are still oblivious of such a community-building initiative by their government. The paper argues that ASEAN, due to its history and nature of evolution, has 'consciously' limited the involvement of the public in its affairs. Public stakeholdership, though an essential component of community building, is very restricted in ASEAN. Without public support, there will be no community to build in the first place. Governments need to regularly share their regional integration plans with their people, educating them, seeking their views, and engaging them in policy formulation.

## 9 Conclusion

Does *public opinion* count? The paper argues that solicitation of public views and opinions is crucial for agenda setting and policy formulation for ASEAN regional integration initiatives. The public needs to be informed and involved in such processes, as it would engender greater legitimacy and support for the initiative. Through this survey, the paper has demonstrated that increased public awareness stimulates public support for ASEAN regionalism. The survey showed that respondents were knowledgeable on the rudimentary basics of ASEAN as an institution, but appeared to have less knowledge on the current developments, such as the ASEAN Community. This is a result of inadequate dissemination of information and socialization efforts from their respective governments. Since there is a strong desire among the public to be involved in the ASEAN processes, the paper proposes that national governments and the ASEAN Secretariat take measures to involve the public and their opinions in the policy formulation and decision-making processes. Although there are claims that ASEAN has engaged in public solicitation efforts, such efforts are still very limited and targeted only at certain groups of elites close to the power center.

The findings of this survey also imply that national governments and the ASEAN Secretariat should formulate effective strategies to generate support for the integration initiative. The paper also proposes that the ASEAN integration initiative considers a bottom-up approach in soliciting opinions, aspirations, and interests from among the public. The ASEAN Secretariat or related agencies should develop instruments similar to the Eurobarometer for this purpose. An *ASEANbarometer* can be developed to conduct regular public opinion surveys in its member countries, as a tool for data gathering for policy formulation. Such an exercise is important to ensure that the decisions regarding the ASEAN Community embrace the aspirations and expectations of its people. Given the plurality of society and socio-political systems of ASEAN countries, surveys can be considered as the best measure for opinion solicitation, as it would be difficult to conduct ‘direct voting’, as done in the EU.

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