



The Habibie Center

The Habibie Center ASEAN Studies Program ASEAN BRIEFS

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So Close, but Yet So Far: Public Perceptions of ASEAN

ASEAN Briefs is a regular publication about current developments on ASEAN regionalism, especially in the Political-Security, Economic as well as Socio - Cultural Pillars.

The Habibie Center
ASEAN Studies Program ASEAN Briefs

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SUMMARY/BRIEF

ASEAN's announcement of a ASEAN Community in December 2015 marked an important milestone in the regional organization's nearly 50-year history. Under the three pillars of political, economic and socio-cultural ties, ASEAN projects the idea of "One Vision, One Identity, One Community." These aims of bringing people together, strengthening economic ties and enhancing security and prosperity are taking on new heights, as the organization works towards a future of shared well-being. A key element in the success of these goals lies with citizens views of ASEAN, its public perceptions. To build community, ASEAN needs the public to feel connected to the organization and its activities. Recent lessons in Europe surrounding the Brexit vote reaffirm the importance of public connectivity to regional organizations.

The ASEAN Studies Program would like to thank Bridget Welsh (Senior Associate Fellow of The Habibie Center/Senior Research Associate at the Center for East Asia Democratic Studies at the National Taiwan University and University Fellow at Charles Darwin University) and Kai-Ping Huang (post-doc at Center for East Asia Democratic Studies at the National Taiwan University) for contributing this issue of ASEAN Briefs. For inquiries about this research please contact the writers directly at bridgetwelsh1@gmail.com and kaipinggh232@gmail.com.

Recently compiled survey research shows that ASEAN has a long way to go to strengthen its relationship with the public in Southeast Asia. This conclusion is drawn from the fourth wave of the Asian Barometer Survey (ABS), conducted from 2014 to 2016 in eight Southeast Asian countries – Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.² These countries comprise the most populated Southeast Asian countries, excluding Brunei and Laos. The fourth wave of the Asian Barometer Survey asked the public how close they were to ASEAN, with respondents having a range of options from ‘very close’ and ‘close’ to ‘not very close’ and ‘not close at all’. What is revealing is not just the connectivity (or rather limited connectivity) to ASEAN, but the countries and communities that have the most distant relationships to ASEAN.

The Missing Public Core

Figure 1 details the varied responses across the ASEAN countries surveyed. On average, less than 11% of those surveyed across ASEAN were ‘very close’ to the organization, with 40% of those recording a ‘close’ relationship. On a positive note, an average majority of 51% those surveyed expressed connectivity to ASEAN. The remaining 49% did not, with more than a third or 37% noting no connectivity with ASEAN and another 12% unable to choose, in part because of a lack of awareness of or ambivalence toward the organization. Given that the organization has a long history, especially in the founding ASEAN countries, these numbers reveal a serious deficit in building public support for ASEAN. Almost half of the Southeast Asian public does not connect to the regional organization. The level of ‘very close’ connectivity is especially low. This does not bode well for community building.

Views across ASEAN vary sharply. Three countries have the least connectivity to ASEAN: Indonesia, Thailand and Cambodia at 22%, 34% and 42% respectively noting connectivity to the organization. Indonesia’s low connectivity to ASEAN is especially worrying, as Indonesia is not only the most populated country in Southeast Asia, but has long played a leadership role in the organization, especially before 1997. Indonesia’s move away from ASEAN in its foreign policy in the last decade has had an impact on its public’s connectivity to ASEAN. What is surprising, broadly, is that publics in most of the founding members of ASEAN – Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore and the Philippines have lower connectivity to the organization than those that joined the organization decades later. The most populated founding countries have particularly low connectivity to ASEAN. This highlights the shallow public connectivity to ASEAN in its core members.

The countries that feel the closest to ASEAN are Vietnam, Myanmar and Malaysia – the recent chairs of the organization before the current and previous chairmanships of Laos and Brunei (not surveyed). Chairing ASEAN, with the accompanying press and activities, does seem to impact public connectivity. Yet, it is not the only factor. The high connection of Vietnamese to ASEAN, at 79%, shows that there are country-specific factors at work that shape the relationship to the organization. In Vietnam, ASEAN ties have featured prominently in the country’s foreign policy and, specifically, in its relationship with big powers, namely China and the United States. It is noteworthy that the connectivity of Vietnamese to ASEAN is nearly four times that of Indonesians.

One of the factors that helps us understand the sharp variations in connectivity to ASEAN involves the higher

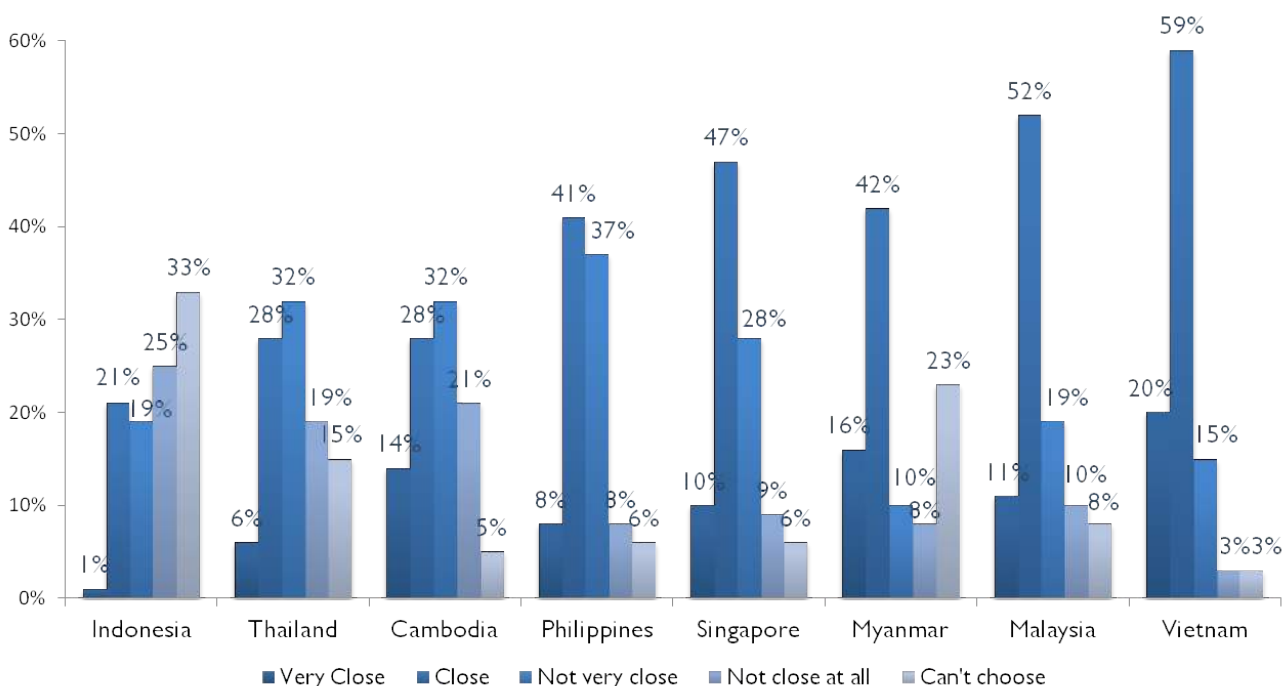


Figure 1: Closeness to ASEAN Cross-Country Comparison

share of the public in some Southeast Asian countries that cannot answer the question. In Indonesia, a third or 33%, opted not to answer the question, while in Thailand this was 15%. The results reveal gaps in knowledge about ASEAN in some countries, even ambivalence toward the organization, notably in some of the founding ASEAN members. This was not the case in Vietnam, for example, where only 3% had difficulty answering the question.

Demographic Divides and Connectivity

Despite the considerable distance in the relationship with ASEAN broadly, demographic trends point to potential strengthening of the relationship with the public. First of all, there are no significant rural-urban differences in the relationship with the public and ASEAN, as shown in Figure 2. Rural folk were only marginally less connected to ASEAN compared to urbanites, by 53% to 49% respectively. This corresponds to global patterns of views toward public organizations. Voting for Brexit, for example, showed urban areas with stronger support for the European Union. The area that needs attention, however, is the knowledge gap noted above, where rural residents were least likely to answer the question, revealing a meaningful difference in knowledge of ASEAN and the need for greater outreach by ASEAN into rural areas.

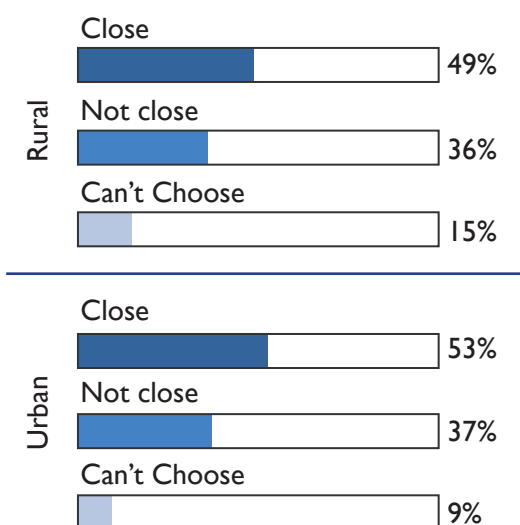


Figure 2: Closeness to ASEAN Rural-Urban Comparison

A parallel demographic trend involves education. As expected, people with higher education levels tend to be closer to ASEAN, as shown in Figure 3. Higher levels of educational attainment were associated with more connectivity to ASEAN, from 45% of those with only primary education and 52% with those with only a secondary education to 61% of those with a tertiary education close to ASEAN. The levels of those not close to ASEAN stayed above a third across levels of educational attainment, with those with lower levels of education

less able to answer the question. This finding suggests that with expanding education across Southeast Asia, that the future trajectory for ASEAN connectivity is promising. It will be important that ASEAN community building be integrated into educational outreach efforts, especially given the sizeable share of Southeast Asians who do not feel close to ASEAN across education levels.

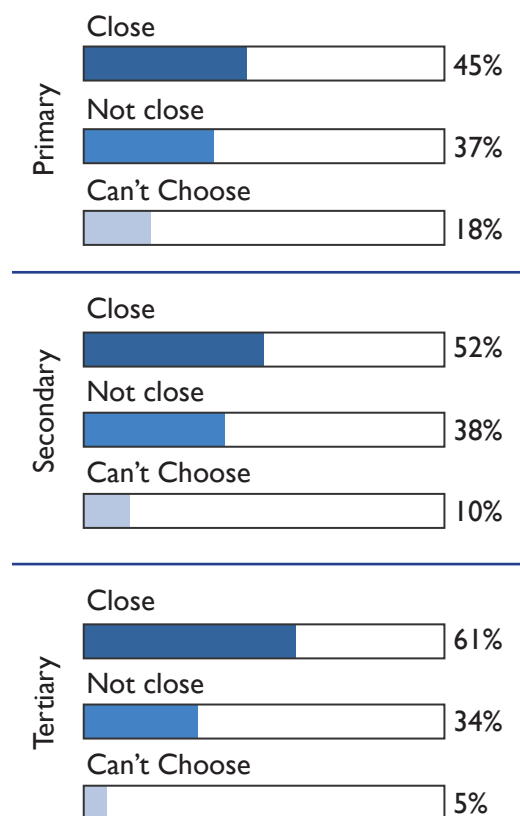


Figure 3: Closeness to ASEAN by Educational Attainment

Generation and Gender Cleavages

The ABS findings suggest that familiarity with ASEAN is surprisingly not tied to age. As shown in Figure 4, 39% young people under the age of 30 are not close to ASEAN, only slightly higher than other age groups. A little more than a majority young people, 51%, are close to ASEAN. Older Southeast Asians, those who have had the longest history with the organization that has been acknowledged to contribute to peace in the region, have the highest share connected to ASEAN at 53%, and they also have the lowest share alienated from ASEAN, at 31%. The consistency across age groups in ASEAN connectivity is unexpected. While positive overall, the task ahead will especially be to engage younger Southeast Asians, where nearly 40% expressed no connectivity to ASEAN. Given that Southeast Asia is largely a young region, reaching out to young people is particularly important.

Globalization, ASEAN and the Public

The results so far have suggested that despite a large share of Southeast Asians not connecting to ASEAN, demographic trends point to improved connectivity with the regional organization with greater education and targeted outreach in rural areas and to women. Attitudes and approaches of Southeast Asians to globalization suggest similar positive trajectories. One of the main interpretations of the Brexit vote and disengagement from the European Union has involved negative perceptions of globalization and regional integration.³ The ABS findings suggest that many of the issues that divided Europe and distanced citizens from the European Union are not currently perceived by Southeast Asians.

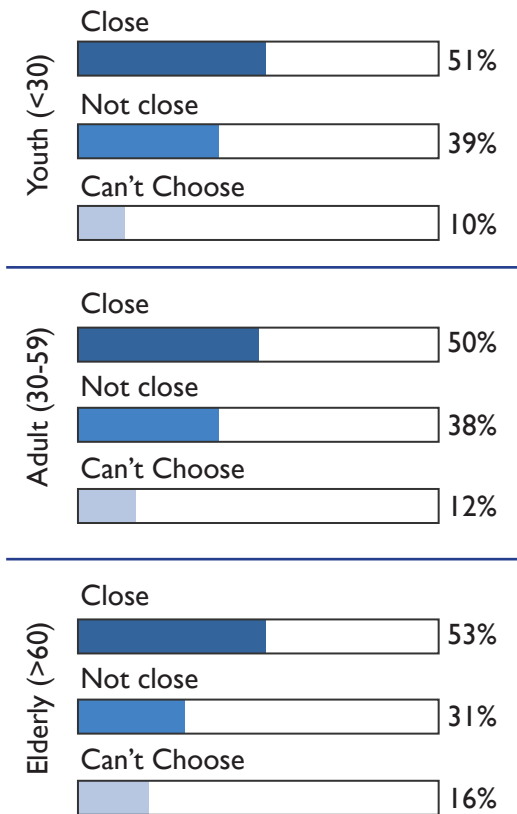


Figure 4: Closeness to ASEAN by Age Group

Views of ASEAN by gender are equally revealing. Figure 5 shows that Southeast Asian men have closer connectivity to ASEAN compared to women, at 54% and 47% showing connectivity respectively. More women opt not to answer the question. ASEAN has long been touted as an 'old boys club' and this has apparently rubbed off in how different genders relate to the organization. This said, the gap in connectivity is not large. The gap in knowledge of ASEAN between men and women is larger. Moving forward, the ABS results suggest greater outreach is needed to women in particular if the organization is to improve its public standing.

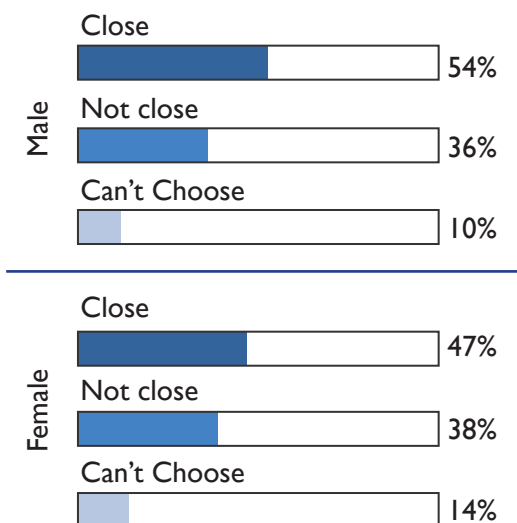


Figure 5: Closeness to ASEAN by Gender

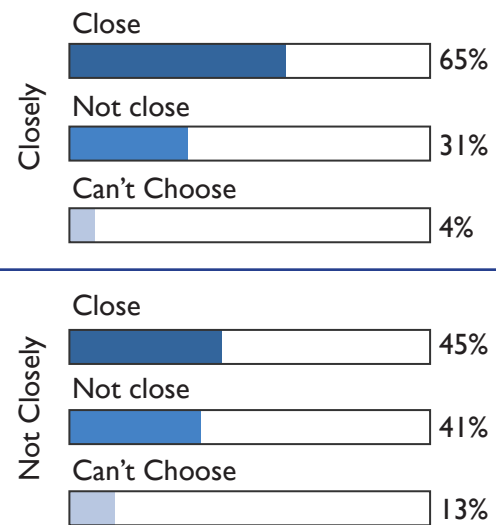


Figure 6: Closeness to ASEAN by Following Foreign Events

Figure 6 shows that those that are engaged with events overseas, including in Southeast Asia itself, are more connected to ASEAN, by a considerable margin of 65% compared to 45%. While nearly a third or 31% of those following foreign events closely are not connected to ASEAN, this is lower than those who are not engaged in following events globally. The challenge ahead will be to strengthen the tie to ASEAN and its goal of community building among those who are engaged globally, but do not (yet) connect to ASEAN.

If there was one issue that is splitting the European Union among the public it is immigration. Resistance to the liberalization of labor flows and foreigners within national borders has divided European nations. This has not extended to Southeast Asia. In fact, as shown in Figure 7, those that favor increases and consistency in immigration levels are close to ASEAN, at 61%.⁴ There is also no considerable difference with those who oppose immigration in their connectivity to ASEAN, with 56% of those opposed reporting being close to ASEAN. This suggests that immigration is not dividing ASEAN, at least for now. ASEAN does not have the same level of labor mobility as Europe, which can in part explain the

minimal impact of views of immigration on connectivity to ASEAN. Public concerns about immigration in Southeast Asia remain within national boundaries.

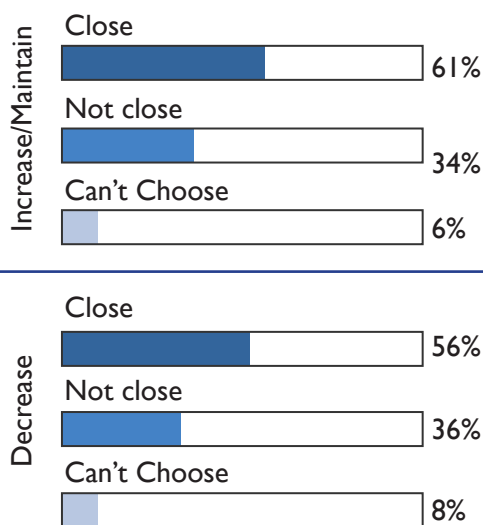


Figure 7: Closeness to ASEAN by Inflow of Immigrants

One area where ASEAN has worked hard to promote integration has been in reducing protectionism and promoting regional trade. The creation of the ASEAN Economic Community last year is part of this deepening economic integration. ASEAN has also engaged in free trade negotiations as well. This has similarly not affected public connectivity to ASEAN, with those in favor of open trade and those more protectionist having similar relationships to ASEAN. A majority of both views, 52%, hold a close relationship with ASEAN. In fact, Southeast Asians that are more open to trade are slightly more distant from ASEAN, at 41% compared to 37%, with the difference captured in those who opted not to answer the question. More Southeast Asians open to trade opted not to answer the question, 11% compared to 8%. As with immigration, views of protectionism are not shaping views of ASEAN.

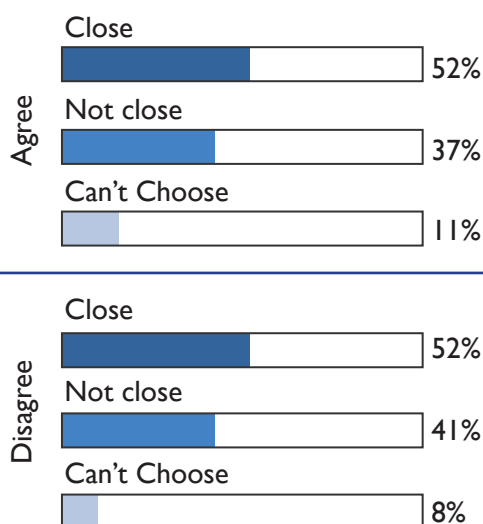


Figure 8: Closeness to ASEAN by Limiting Foreign Goods

These findings indicate that the issues that have divided Europe, namely immigration and trade, are not impacting public views of ASEAN. Ideological differences and issues are not shaping views of regional integration in Southeast Asia, as the effects of globalization have not been tied to ASEAN directly. Given this lack of an ideological obstacle, this suggests that the path ahead for regional integration and building the ASEAN community is promising. Connectivity to ASEAN is not about its agenda, but rather tied to education and outreach, issues that can be addressed with greater investment in public engagement.

Abnormal Dynamics: Indonesia and ASEAN

While the results highlight potential optimism for improving ASEAN's public connectivity broadly in the region, they also suggest that there are hurdles ahead for strengthening the public relationship with the regional organization. Nowhere is this clearer than in the Indonesian findings. Not only is the Indonesian public the most distant from ASEAN, demographic trends and public attitudes worryingly point to a negative trajectory for greater ASEAN public connectivity.

Unlike in the rest of Southeast Asia, urban Indonesians are not close to ASEAN, with 49% of Indonesians in urban areas reporting as being not close to the organization compared to 39% of rural folk. What is striking about the Indonesia findings detailed in Figure 9 is the large numbers that opt not to answer the question, a whopping 40% of rural folk and over a quarter of urbanites, 26%. The share of the public unfamiliar and ambivalent toward ASEAN in Indonesia is higher than those reporting to be close to the organization. There is a large gap in knowledge toward ASEAN in Indonesia, especially in rural areas.

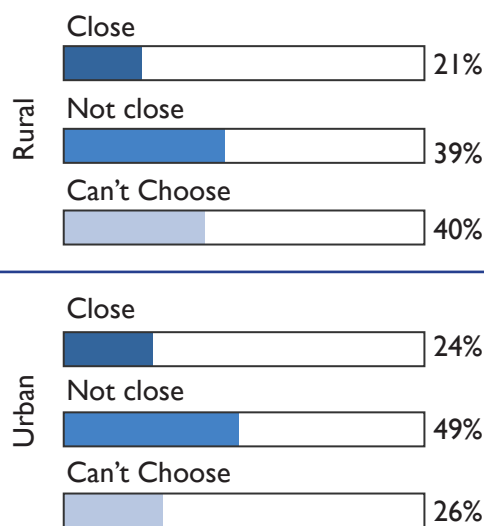


Figure 9: Indonesian Closeness to ASEAN Rural - Urban Comparison

The generational findings for Indonesia also reflect views that differ from the rest of Southeast Asia, as shown in Figure 10. Younger Indonesians are the least connected to ASEAN, at 53%, with more young people

opting not to answer the question than those noting connectivity to the organization, 25% compared to 23%. Older Indonesians, those that experienced the golden age in the ASEAN-Indonesia relationship were the least close to ASEAN, at 17%. A plurality of 49% of older Indonesians opted not to answer the question. Unlike the rest of Southeast Asia, where young people show greater affinity toward ASEAN and there is a core support among older Southeast Asians, Indonesia lacks both the forward trajectory of connectivity toward ASEAN as well as an older foundation. Building connectivity to ASEAN in Indonesia will be a challenge, as it will involve a multi-generational and a broad geographic effort if connectivity to the organization is to be strengthened.

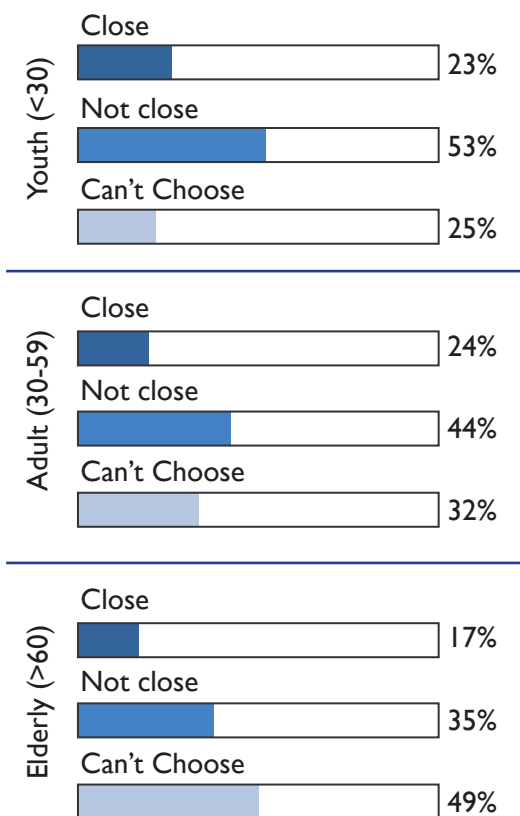


Figure 10: Indonesian Closeness to ASEAN by Age Group

The challenge ahead for enhancing connectivity to ASEAN in Indonesia extends beyond communities. There also appears to be greater resistance toward ASEAN among Indonesians according to views of regional integration. A majority of those who are in favor of foreign goods are not close to ASEAN, at 55%. While a large share of protectionist Indonesians, 45%, report being close to ASEAN. This result is surprising since those in favor of foreign goods should, presumptively, be more likely to feel close to ASEAN for economic integration is a key agenda of ASEAN. There appears to be more divided views on trade in Indonesia, with spillover in how to connect to ASEAN. If economic regional integration is to move forward, it will depend on public support of this endeavor in the region's largest economy. This is especially the case as Indonesia is a democracy, where

public views on policy matter to a greater extent than elsewhere in the region.

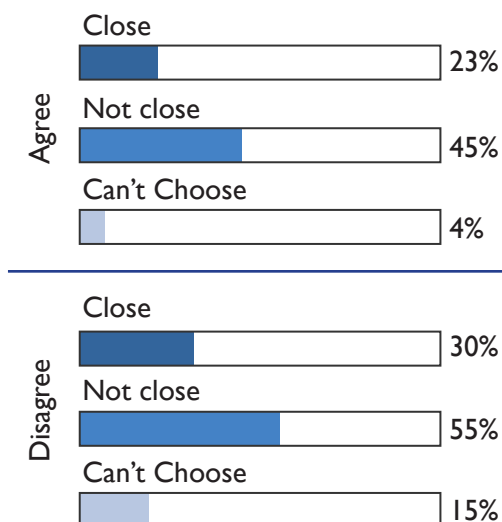


Figure 11: Indonesians Closeness to ASEAN by Limiting Foreign Goods

Conclusion

As the fallout over the June 2016 Brexit vote settles, the future of regional organizations has become more uncertain. The ABS findings reveal mixed findings of public perceptions for ASEAN. Despite a longer history in working toward the well-being and security of the region, there is less public connectivity to the organization than expected, barely a majority. Public connectivity is lower in the founding countries, especially in Indonesia. Southeast Asians who report being 'very close' to ASEAN is especially low. These findings highlight the need for ASEAN to move to strengthen its relationship with the public, especially if it is to attain the lofty goal of building an ASEAN community.

Yet there is a silver lining for ASEAN connectivity in the region as a whole. The segments of the population that should have the greatest familiarity with ASEAN, urban areas, younger and more educated Southeast Asians, are more connected to the regional organization. Knowledge and familiarity appears to be the driver in accounting for lower levels of connectivity to ASEAN, as opposed to differences with the goals of regional integration. The deficits in connectivity, notably with women and rural folk where there are gaps, can be addressed with greater public engagement.

Enhancing connectivity with ASEAN will have to be a region-wide effort, but it will also have to address unique circumstances in specific countries. Indonesian public views of ASEAN buck the regional norm, with less connectivity in urban areas and among youth and older populations. Ideological differences on regional integration have impacted views of ASEAN among the Indonesian public. Given these trends, as well as the fact that the ASEAN Secretariat is based in Jakarta,

the findings highlight the need for particular outreach efforts in Indonesia.

The challenges ahead for ASEAN are significant, and will be made more so without public support. As ASEAN turns 50 next year, the ABS findings show that further public engagement is necessary if the organization is to achieve its goals with public support.

Endnotes

1. Bridget Welsh is a Senior Associate Fellow of The Habibie Center, a Senior Research Associate at the Center for East Asia Democratic Studies at the National Taiwan University and University Fellow at Charles Darwin University. Kai-Ping Huang is a post-doc at the Center for East Asia Democratic Studies at the National Taiwan University and will join NTU's political science faculty in August, 2016. For inquiries about this research please contact us directly at bridgetwelsh1@gmail.com and kaipingh232@gmail.com
2. For more details regarding the Asian Barometer Survey please see: [http:// www.asianbarometer.org/](http://www.asianbarometer.org/).
3. See Alan Finlayson, "Who Won the Referendum," 26 June 2016, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/uk/alan-finlayson/who-won-referendum#.V2-yjDMiXhQ>
4. Please note that the Indonesia survey did not ask this question.



The Habibie Center was founded by Bacharuddin Jusuf Habibie and family in 1999 as an independent, non-governmental, non-profit organisation. The vision of The Habibie Center is to create a structurally democratic society founded on the morality and integrity of cultural and religious values.

The mission of The Habibie Center are **first**, to establish a structurally and culturally democratic society that recognizes, respects, and promotes human rights by undertaking study and advocacy of issues related to democratization and human rights, and **second**, to increase the effectiveness of the management of human resources and the spread of technology.

Cover Image: Wikipedia.org

*The Secretariat of ASEAN in Jakarta,
the cornerstone of Indonesian foreign policy.*



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About ASEAN Studies Program

The ASEAN Studies Program was established on February 24, 2010, to become a center of excellence on ASEAN related issues, which can assist in the development of the ASEAN Community by 2015. The Habibie Center through its ASEAN Studies Program, alongside other institutions working towards the same goal, hopes to contribute to the realization of a more people-oriented ASEAN that puts a high value on democracy and human rights.

The objective of the ASEAN Studies Program is not merely only to conduct research and discussion within academic and government circles, but also to strengthen public awareness by forming a strong network of civil society in the region that will be able to help spread the ASEAN message. With the establishment of ASEAN Studies Program, The Habibie Center aims to play its part within our capabilities to the ASEAN regional development.

About Talking ASEAN

Talking ASEAN is a monthly public dialogue held at The Habibie Center in Jakarta. Covering a wide array of issues related to ASEAN, Talking ASEAN addresses topics of: Economic Integration, Socio-cultural, & Democracy, human rights and regional peace, among others. Featuring local and visiting experts, Talking ASEAN is one of a series of twelve dialogues regularly held each month and open to a target audience consisting of ASEAN officials, foreign ambassadors & diplomats, academics, university students, businesses, and the media.

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<p>The Habibie Center ASEAN Studies Program ASEAN BRIEFS Issue 3/April 2014 Migrant Workers Rights The AEC 2015 and Free Movement of Labor: Case Studies of Indonesia and the Philippines</p>	<p>The Habibie Center ASEAN Studies Program ASEAN BRIEFS Issue 6/May 2014 Small and Medium Enterprises' Access to Finance in ASEAN Countries: Innovations and Regional Cooperation</p>	<p>The Habibie Center ASEAN Studies Program ASEAN BRIEFS Issue 5/June 2014 The Bali Concord III: Towards a More Common ASEAN Platform on Global Issues</p>	<p>The Habibie Center ASEAN Studies Program ASEAN BRIEFS Issue 6/July 2014 The ACHR and NHRI Effectiveness in Its Implementation of Human Rights Protection in The Region. Case Studies : The Philippines and Thailand</p>	<p>The Habibie Center ASEAN Studies Program ASEAN BRIEFS Vol. 1, Issue 1, September 2014 Strengthening Regional Security Architecture: Ensuring ASEAN Centrality through the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF)</p>
<p>SUMMARY</p> <p>This issue of ASEAN Briefs discusses the development of ASEAN agreements, especially in the field of security, towards a more holistic approach.</p> <p>SUMMARY</p> <p>Access to finance for SMEs for development states has been a common problem in agriculture, fisheries and SMEs. Finance budgets were allocated to business institutions of profitable in their operation responding to these problem.</p> <p>SUMMARY</p> <p>ASEAN Briefs is a regular publication about current development in ASEAN region, especially in the field of security, towards a more holistic approach.</p> <p>SUMMARY</p> <p>This edition of ASEAN Briefs discusses the implementation of human rights protection in ASEAN. This ASEAN Briefs addresses human rights protection in ASEAN from the national level to the regional level. However, with existence of a violation such as enforced military and police against of civilians, there are concerns that human rights protection in ASEAN is still far from ideal.</p> <p>SUMMARY</p> <p>Strengthening regional security architecture in ensuring ASEAN centrality is a major agenda for Asia-Pacific's stability. The changing nature of power distribution in the region has become a major underlying factor in how a more secure platform to ensure regional stability. The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) was created in 1994 as a security platform in the Asia-Pacific. Accordingly, ASEAN as the driver of the ARF wants to ensure the regional security architecture with ASEAN Centrality being the core objective.</p>				

<p>The Habibie Center ASEAN Studies Program ASEAN BRIEFS Vol. 1, Issue 1, October 2014 Removing Infrastructure Bottlenecks to Increase Indonesia's Competitiveness towards the ASEAN Economic Community</p>	<p>The Habibie Center ASEAN Studies Program ASEAN BRIEFS Vol. 1, Issue 3, February 2015 ASEAN Development Goals: Potentials and Lessons from the MDGs</p>	<p>The Habibie Center ASEAN Studies Program ASEAN BRIEFS Vol. 2, Issue 4, April 2015 Ensuring the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze's (AATHP) Effectiveness: A Case Study of Riau Province's Haze Summits</p>	<p>The Habibie Center ASEAN Studies Program ASEAN BRIEFS Vol. 2, Issue 2, July 2015 Banking Integration in ASEAN: Challenges and Issues</p>	<p>The Habibie Center ASEAN Studies Program ASEAN BRIEFS Vol. 2, Issue 4, September 2015 Finding a Durable Solution to Rohingya Refugee Crisis: An Overview of Regional and Domestic Constraints</p>
<p>SUMMARY</p> <p>Facing the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) 2015, Indonesia has to be more competitive in the region. The government has to improve its infrastructure, especially in the field of transportation, to increase its competitiveness towards the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) 2015.</p> <p>SUMMARY</p> <p>The ASEAN Development Goals (ADGs) are a set of goals that are designed to increase the competitiveness of ASEAN member states in the region. The ADGs are designed to be more holistic and comprehensive than the MDGs.</p> <p>SUMMARY</p> <p>Land use and forest fire in the ASEAN region are a major concern. The ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze (AATHP) is a regional agreement that aims to reduce the impact of transboundary haze in the ASEAN region.</p> <p>SUMMARY</p> <p>In order to support the development of ASEAN, the ASEAN member states have to be more competitive in the region. The ASEAN member states have to be more competitive in the region.</p> <p>SUMMARY/BRIEF</p> <p>The Rohingya refugee crisis in Myanmar has become a major regional and domestic constraint. The ASEAN member states have to be more competitive in the region.</p>				

<p>The Habibie Center ASEAN Studies Program ASEAN BRIEFS Special Feature, Issue 1/September 2014 Achieving Food Security in ASEAN</p>	<p>The Habibie Center ASEAN Studies Program ASEAN BRIEFS Vol. 1, Issue 3, October 2014 Militaryization of the South China Sea: Implications on ASEAN</p>	<p>The Habibie Center ASEAN Studies Program ASEAN BRIEFS Vol. 1, Issue 3, November 2014 Raising People's Awareness towards ASEAN: Potentials and Recommendations</p>	<p>The Habibie Center ASEAN Studies Program ASEAN BRIEFS Vol. 1, Issue 3, January 2015 ASEAN Community, Quo Vadis?</p>	<p>The Habibie Center ASEAN Studies Program ASEAN BRIEFS Special Feature, Issue 3/November 2014 The Role of Civil Society in Countering Religious Extremism in ASEAN: Lessons Learned from Indonesia</p>
<p>INTRODUCTION</p> <p>This special feature discusses the role of civil society in achieving food security in ASEAN. The ASEAN member states have to be more competitive in the region.</p> <p>SUMMARY/BRIEF</p> <p>Territorial disputes in the South China Sea have become a major regional and domestic constraint. The ASEAN member states have to be more competitive in the region.</p> <p>SUMMARY/BRIEF</p> <p>ASEAN Briefs is a regular publication about current development in ASEAN region, especially in the field of security, towards a more holistic approach.</p> <p>SUMMARY/BRIEF</p> <p>ASEAN Briefs is a regular publication about current development in ASEAN region, especially in the field of security, towards a more holistic approach.</p> <p>SUMMARY/BRIEF</p> <p>The role of civil society in countering religious extremism in ASEAN is a major agenda for the region. The ASEAN member states have to be more competitive in the region.</p>				