



## INCREASING PARTICIPATION OF NON-STATE ACTORS IN ASEAN: PROBLEMS AND OPTIONS

Ludiro Madu<sup>1</sup>, Hestutomo Restu Kuncoro<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup> Department of International Relations, Universitas Pembangunan Nasional “Veteran”  
Yogyakarta, Indonesia; ludiro.madu@upnyk.ac.id; hestutomo.restu@upnyk.ac.id

### *Abstrak*

*Artikel ini bertujuan untuk menilai komitmen ASEAN meningkatkan peran aktor non-negara yang telah muncul sejak akhir 1990-an. Ada kecenderungan bahwa aktivis gerakan sosial akar rumput tampaknya tidak memiliki forum resmi di ASEAN. Meskipun beberapa aktor non-negara telah mendapatkan akses ke ASEAN, hak istimewa ini sebagian besar diberikan kepada kelompok kepentingan bisnis dan think-tank elit. Dengan menggunakan konsep pelebagaan historis, makalah ini berupaya menjelaskan karakteristik suatu lembaga menggunakan peristiwa yang terjadi di masa lalu selama proses penciptaan dan konsolidasi lembaga. Konsep ini juga responsif untuk menjelaskan dan, dalam beberapa kasus, bahkan meresepkan perubahan. Penelitian ini menemukan bahwa peningkatan partisipasi aktor non-negara akan meningkatkan legitimasi ASEAN dalam menjalankan perannya yang terus berkembang di kawasan. Artikel ini berkontribusi pada beberapa pilihan yang ASEAN dapat lakukan untuk meningkatkan partisipasi aktor-aktor non-negara.*

**Kata Kunci:** aktor non-negara, ASEAN, institusionalisme historis, regionalisme partisipatif

### **Abstract**

This article aims to assess ASEAN's commitment to enhancing the role of non-state actors that has emerged since the late 1990s. There is a tendency that grassroots social movement activists do not seem to have an official forum in ASEAN. Although some non-state actors have gained access to ASEAN, this privilege is largely granted to business interest groups and elite think-tanks. This research applied qualitative method by using the concept of historical institutionalization, this paper seeks to explain the characteristics of an institution using events that occurred in the past during the process of creating and consolidating institutions. The concept is also responsive to explaining ---and, in some cases, even prescribing--- changes. The study found that the increased participation of non-state actors will increase ASEAN's legitimacy in carrying out its growing role in the region. This article contributes to offer some options that ASEAN must cultivate to improve participation of non-state actors.

**Keywords:** ASEAN, historical institutionalism, non-state actors, participatory regionalism

## Introduction

The endeavor to expand the role of non-state actors (NSA) in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) began as early as the late 1990s. ASEAN's Vision 2020, released in December 1997, demanded member states' commitment to creating a 'community of caring societies' where civil society is empowered' (ASEAN, 2012a). However, ASEAN has always been criticized as a regional organization that is not people-oriented (Langlois et al., 2017). Neuvonen (2019) added that the "people-orientation of a regional organization remains an unattainable normative goal unless the focus of regional membership politics moves from fostering regional belonging and unity to recognizing intra-regional differences." Therefore, building a community is undoubtedly also aimed to ensure the goal of creating the ASEAN Community.

Nevertheless, the fact shows that ASEAN has not intensively engaged society in making a single community group. When problems arise between ASEAN member states, government officials usually stay calm since they regularly interact and communicate. They know what to do to solve problems at the government level. Nevertheless, the public does not feel the positive side among governments in ASEAN. Until now, people in ASEAN countries have felt unconnected to each other. This criticism stands out on specific issues, such as human rights (Langlois et al., 2017).

Additionally, the role of non-state actors in ASEAN's decision-making is still far from perfect. For example, recent ASEAN summits indicated that states still play dominating roles in creating regional policies (Suzuki, 2019), while non-state actors remained on the sideline (Nesadurai, 2017). Moreover, although several non-state actors have gained access to the ASEAN decision-making process, the privilege is mainly given to business interest groups and elite think tanks. One of them is the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific (CSCAP), a think-tank that advises the ASEAN Regional Forum.

On the other end of the problem, the people of Southeast Asia tend to be skeptical about the relevance of ASEAN. This skepticism shows lack of public knowledge of ASEAN since the regional organization was formed in 1967. In their research, Abdullah and Benny revealed that less than 50 percent of Indonesian respondents said they had heard or read about the ASEAN Community. Even in Jakarta, only about 25 percent of respondents claimed to know the plan of the area. With regards to the Bali

Concord II, only 16 percent claimed to have read or heard it. Most respondents said they have not yet heard about the ASEAN Charter (Benny & Abdullah, 2011). This research undoubtedly leads to pessimist insight that a one and united ASEAN Community only was only imaginations of governments than ordinary people in the region. However, some researchers on ASEAN have expressed their optimism about this regional organization (Beeson, 2020). As such, problems of NSA participation need to be assessed and addressed. Therefore, this article seeks to examine and explain the problems and challenges of expanding the role of non-state actors in ASEAN and highlight measures that ASEAN can take to remedy them.

This article, however, utilizes the concept of historical institutionalism. This concept analyzes the characteristics of a regional institution through events in the past when it was formed and developed (Thelen, 1999). Historical institutionalism is chosen because it provides nuance and accurate explanations behind certain institutional features. Moreover, it is also responsive to explaining—and in some instances, even prescribing—changes, which is very important because this article seeks to provide policy recommendations. To that end, this article starts by describing the current state of NSA participation in ASEAN, including the options available for NSA to get involved. Then, by utilizing historical institutionalism, those options will be assessed to map the problems with each of them and, to some extent, explain the reasons behind the problems. The final section of the article will borrow historical institutionalism's notion of change to recommend policies that may steer the current state of play of NSA participation in ASEAN toward a better end.

### **Literature Review: Historical Institutionalism**

Historical Institutionalism (HI) considers that institutions are concrete products of a historical process. According to Thelen (1999), each different historical process will form different institutions. Institutional functionality was an important issue related to the political and historical processes when an institution was formed and developed (Hay & Wincott, 1998). HI views that institutional outcomes do not reflect the preferences of key actors or even compromises among them. Instead, HI suggests that the institution is sometimes an unexpected or desirable product of history (Capoccia, 2016; Mahoney & Thelen, 2009).

In that context, HI proposes that the continuity of an institution is closely related to 'path dependency.' The dependency situation determines that the process of forming a particular institution usually affects the dynamics and development of the institution (Thelen, 1999). In that path dependency situation, critical juncture is a key moment in the past that plays an important role in defining which path to take in an institutional formation. Certain developmental pathways indicate that the decision to take a particular path will determine the development of the institution. Historical events may impede the development of institution. However, the institution is deemed to be responsive to unexpected changes in the changing political environment and political behavior of various actors.

In analyzing ASEAN, historical institutionalism is the perfect tool for explaining the problems of non-state actors' participation for two reasons. First, in explaining an institution's characteristic, it considers both the institution's intention—as written in the charter and other legal documents—as well as unintended consequences. For example, in NSA participation, ASEAN has problems sprung from weak regulations and political constraints that inhibit said regulations from being fully implemented. Second, perhaps more important is that historical institutionalism does not see institutions as static entities that resist changes from every corner; it sees institutions as ever-constantly changing. As Broschek, Orren, and Skowronek indicated, historical institutionalism does not merely anticipate changes. It also predicts and can be used to prescribe it (Broschek, 2011). Therefore, this article seeks to not only assess but also recommend policies.

To apply historical institutionalism to the case at hand, this article first describes the problems of non-state actors' participation in ASEAN. Then, by tracing the path-dependency that ends with each problem, this article seeks to find the underlying institutional and structural factors contributing to the problems. Finally, based on the factors previously assessed, the article will recommend measures that may be taken to remedy—or at least prevent the worsening of—the problems.

## Research Method

This research applied analytical qualitative method. Using HI approach, this research identified various problems of ASEAN in adopting participatory regionalism. Both

positive and negative impact of ASEAN institutionalism was surveyed for building regional capacity in dealing with increasing participation of non-state actors. It assessed participation of various non-government organizations or non-state actors in various ASEAN meetings in accordance with its regional principles.

## **Result and Discussion**

### **Participatory Regionalism in ASEAN: Between a Rock and a Hard Place**

ASEAN has been inconsistent in increasing NSA's participation at the regional level. Tracing back to August 8, 2011, ASEAN's celebration on its 44<sup>th</sup> anniversary shows the hoisting of ASEAN flags alongside member states' diplomatic missions all over the world. The symbolic gesture signaled a more vital determination of ASEAN to become a single community. However, the symbolic gesture, unfortunately, mainly reflected the symbolic character of the regional organization. Even until now, after more than 50 years from its establishment, ASEAN still has a lot of work to do to realize a single community.

Several types of non-state actors' participation in ASEAN can be figured out. First, most non-state actors' participation in ASEAN is through top-down mechanisms. It is only natural, considering that ASEAN initiated the very first breakthrough through its affiliation system. The system was established in 1979 with the certification of the Federation of ASEAN Public Relations Organizations and the ASEAN Bankers Association (Gerard, 2014). More importantly, the system gives special rights to groups that fulfill specific criteria. Through the procedure, certified NSA organizations may request to become more involved with the ASEAN decision-making process (Chandra et al., 2015). However, ASEAN Secretariat is practically free to reject the request. There are no procedures to question or appeal for the rejection (ASEAN, 2012b). In the worst situation, certified organizations must follow the review process every three years. NSA organizations deemed to have different stances with ASEAN policies or interests will risk their certification (Chandra et al., 2015).

The second type of non-state actors which have relative influence in ASEAN is academic and think-tank groups. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Southeast Asia-based think-tank groups significantly influenced ASEAN's decision on regional matters. Those groups become what Haas (2015) defined as an epistemic community

that is "a network of professionals with recognized expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge within that domain or issue-area." This community provided such a decentralization tendency of the ASEAN decision-making process by building procedures that allow epistemic communities in the region to discuss various issues, including sensitive ones.

These academics form track-two diplomacy (track-one refers to diplomats officially negotiating with their counterparts from other countries). Working closely with diplomats, issues discussed among the academics can then be finalized in an official capacity by the diplomats. A perfect example is ASEAN-Institute for Strategic and International Studies (ASEAN-ISIS). Its members ---include the Brunei Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace (CICP), the Indonesian Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), the Laos Institute for Foreign Affairs, the Malaysian Institute for Strategic and International Studies, the Philippines' Institute for Strategic and Development Studies (ISDS), the Singapore Institute of International Affairs (SIIA), Thailand's Institute for Security and International Studies (ISIS), and Vietnam's Institute for International Relations (IIR)-- are influential not only at the national level but also at the regional level (Capie, 2010; Kraft, 2000; Ruland, 2002). The growing influence of ASEAN-ISIS has led it to have unique access at ASEAN Senior Official Meetings (SOM). This influence allows ASEAN-ISIS to play a bridging role between ASEAN and broader civil society, including a close linkage between ASEAN and various national-regional think-tanks (Gerard, 2013).

The significant role of ASEAN-ISIS can also be looked at in the way it gave privilege to non-state actors to participate in ASEAN through the Assembly of the Peoples of ASEAN (APA) (Caballero-Anthony, 2004). Furthermore, the establishment of APA reflects a strong attempt for redefining ASEAN's closed and exclusive. APA provided a platform on which diverse types of civic organizations can articulate their views and opinions regarding ASEAN. Currently, APA and the ASEAN-ISIS bring the region's people closer to the Association, along with the ASEAN Business Advisory Council (ABAC), the ASEAN Parliamentary Organization (AIPO), and the ASEAN University Network. However, ASEAN is seen as less accommodating to the activities of non-state actors, particularly non-state actors

who have different views to or oppose the regional organization (Breslin & Nesadurai, 2018).

Although APA was relatively successful in bridging ASEAN and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), APA, for example, lacks the capability to accommodate communication needs between the CSO and the ASEAN bureaucracy. Meanwhile, ASEAN-ISIS places its interests in various ASEAN agendas. There is broad consensus among scholars and activists about APA's inability to facilitate CSOs' interests (Gerard, 2010). Furthermore, APA's failure resulted in the cessation of APA activities. In addition, reduced CSOs' participation in ASEAN is also the main cause of the cessation of APA (Rahman, 2016). On the other hand, CSO protests against APA prompted the establishment of a new platform to participate in decision making in ASEAN. Through the initiatives of several regional NGOs, such as the Asia Forum, Southeast Asia Committee for Advocacy (SEACA), and the Asian Partnership for Human Resource Development in Rural Asia, various CSOs in Southeast Asia gathered in Bangkok in October 2005 to discuss the agenda of CSOs' regional participation in ASEAN (Chandra et al., 2015).

Furthermore, the agreement of CSOs for participating in the first ASEAN Civil Society Conference (ACSC) was important evidence of the CSOs' presence with ASEAN heads of state/government (Collins, 2013). In 2008, ASCS had a new name as a tangible form of the organization's interest to play a more prominent role in the ASEAN People's Forum (APF) (Nesadurai, 2012). This strategic development shows that the ASCS significantly marks the increasing importance of CSO participation in ASEAN. This development also confirms that most of CSOs' participation in ASEAN is issue-based.

Compared to the institutionalizing CSOs into ASEAN's central decision-making system, ASEAN's issue-based engagements seem to have better development. This positive engagement of CSOs can be found in establishing the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Relief (AADMER) in 2009 (Allison & Taylor, 2017). Further institutional development of AADMER shows the establishment of a coordinating center in 2011. CSOs also established the AADMER Partnership Group (APG), which aimed to support the agreement. APG is consortium of seven international NGOs: Child Fund International, Oxfam, HelpAge International, Save

the Children, Mercy Malaysia, Plan, and World Vision (Allison & Taylor, 2017). The APG worked closely with the ASEAN Committee on Disaster Management and the ASEAN Secretariat, which led to the creation the AADMER Working Program. Overall, the APG-ASEAN engagement was seen as positive by both parties, with ASEAN citing NGOs' vast network as a critical factor in implementing the AADMER framework among member states (Simm, 2018).

In addition to the limited access of CSOs to the ASEAN decision-making system, ASEAN faces yet another problem: lack of openness to civil society participation through its member states. Less democratic members are still reluctant to let civil society come too close with ASEAN decision-making systems, with Myanmar and Singapore actively trying to stall ---or even straightforwardly strong-armed against--- civil society engagement with ASEAN decision-making bodies (Renshaw, 2013). Nevertheless, there is a significant push toward a more democratic ASEAN and the region in general. However, at the regional level, authoritarian regimes in Southeast Asia seem to use ASEAN to maintain their domestic power (Debre, 2021; Kneuer et al., 2019; Libman & Obydenkova, 2018). The recent political crisis in Myanmar shows the tendency. Nevertheless, several other ASEAN member states, such as Indonesia and the Philippines, have encouraged CSOs' participation in several ASEAN forums and pushed democracy as part of ASEAN values (Emmerson, 2007) (Rüland, 2020).

The driving factor behind Indonesia's push for democracy in ASEAN was the belief that regional security would be better achieved between democratic regimes; in other words, Indonesia believed that democracy would serve as the foundation of regional security (Yukawa, 2018). Now, the quest for democratization as the foundation of regional security remains far from ending. This lack of democratic regimes in the region contributed to member states' not being comfortable giving platforms to CSOs to talk about sensitive issues. Rather than focusing on the issue, ASEAN included law rhetoric in agreements since its foundation (Gerard, 2018). It happens because less-democratic countries are not used to let civil society participate in their decision-making process, and it is simply not in their repertoire of actions (Emmerson, 2007). This is evident from the fact that most reserved countries about letting CSOs participate are usually the least democratic, as is the case with Myanmar

and Singapore. Furthermore, this paper is different from Gerard's stressed link between participation and legitimacy to figure out the ways participatory forms can be closely related to the legitimacy process (Gerard, 2021). However, people's participation in regional organizations, such as ASEAN, remains an urgent issue. Therefore, factors that lie behind regional participation are assessed in the following section.

### **Assessing the Participation**

Looking at the cases mentioned above of non-state actors (NSAs) or non-government organizations (NGOs) participating in ASEAN, there are several recurring problems regarding ASEAN's openness to NSAs. The first problem is the dominance of top-down mechanisms. In most cases, NSAs "was co-opted by" rather than "participated in" the ASEAN decision-making process. The affiliation system, for example, is often used by member states to exercise controls over NGOs' stances, which is known as "controlled partnership" (Rüland, 2020). This is especially true regarding specific sensitive issues, such as human rights abuse (Collins, 2019). NSAs that want to get certification need to submit their reasons for applying, their activities, their memberships, their constitutions, background information, and even data of their staff (Gerard, 2013). Furthermore, the certification of NGOs will only be given if all member states of ASEAN approved it. NGOs that want to maintain their affiliation must also undergo a review process. This process aims to stop NSAs, which are deemed too critical to ASEAN's or member states' policies (Rahman, 2016). Consequently, the critical NGOs will not have any privilege to voice their stance in ASEAN's leader meetings.

This problem of top-down dominance led to the second problem: a limited number of NGOs that can participate. Only organizations with substantial funding and support can gain the platform to have their voices heard (Chandra, 2006a). Moreover, it is hard for NSOs to follow dynamics in ASEAN's decision-making process. One of its considerations is that those whose policies are already aligned with ASEAN's can obtain the privilege. Although each member state can submit its list of NSAs to participate, each NSA needs to be approved by all member states (Gerard, 2013; Langlois et al., 2017; Rahman, 2016). Even if just one member states objects to an

NSA, they cannot participate and cannot appeal to the rejection. This makes it hard for ASEAN's forums to be measurably meaningful for NSAs.

The only actor with relative freedom concerning political stances is the epistemic community embodied by the ASEAN-ISIS. Although, by its nature, ASEAN-ISIS is an academic community, it doesn't serve the function of a political organization (nor do people expect it to). As such, it does not consistently represent other NSAs (Stone, 2011). However, even by the standard of an academic community, ASEAN-ISIS's roles are often deemed disappointing. They serve as a mere subsidiary body of ASEAN, especially in how ASEAN-ISIS often dominated the agenda of APA to make sure that all member states would not object (Chandra, 2006b).

The third problem is the lack of mechanism on the ways NSAs can ensure the ASEAN's leadership can hear their voices. This led to ASEAN's well-known elitist tendency, signifying how few of its policies correspond to the needs of Southeast Asian people (Hui & Junio, 2015). As an illustration, the only guaranteed channel of voicing an opinion is a written statement to the CPR with the affiliation system. But even then, there is no way for the NSAs to ensure that the statement is discussed in ASEAN meetings. The same is valid with APA, GO-NGO forums, and SAPA (Gerard, 2013). This very reason made NSAs disillusioned with the APA and opted to cease participating in them. Moreover, APA failed to facilitate actual interaction between NSAs and ASEAN bureaucracy. Its reason was the ASEAN-ISIS very much drove its agenda. Despite its name, APA did not have a mechanism to interfere with ASEAN's leadership in any way whatsoever (Chandra, 2006b; Mueller, 2019).

The fourth problem lies within the civil society itself, as CSOs are mostly fragmented and do not have a united front. The fact shows that regional participation of civil society in ASEAN is highly dependent on the CSOs' ability to have a unified stance vis-à-vis ASEAN. However, civil society groups in Southeast Asia are currently experiencing fragmentation. Various members of the academic community and many NGO representatives have different views on the process of CSOs' integration in ASEAN (Hui & Junio, 2015). ASEAN's limited experience has led to the increasing participation of civil society groups in setting the agenda. In addition, ASEAN also has the difficulty to interact directly with many civil society groups in the region.

Nevertheless, various recent studies evaluate ASEAN's increasing people, including groups and organizations' participation. To build one vision, one identity, and one community, it is crucial to know more about ASEAN's public feelings. On identity, Acharya defines that:

*“Identity is a complex and contested notion. In simple terms, identity refers to an actor's (which may be a person, group of persons, state, or group of states) sense of being unique or distinctive because of physical and social attributes, values, and behavior patterns. Identity is a function of two main factors, which are mainly subjective. One is how an actor sees itself. The second is how others or outsiders see that actor. The two are related but not identical. A person's or group's sense of being distinctive may be stronger than the outsider's perception or recognition of it”* (Acharya, 2017).

Having Acharya's definition, more understanding on identity relates to the ways people in ASEAN determine their participation in the regional organization. Furthermore, people's mode of participation depends generally on skill-based economic interests, socio-cultural beliefs, and assessments of national context shape people's attitude to ASEAN (Lee & Lim, 2020).

This occurrence makes ASEAN's leaders are afforded considerable freedom in neglecting CSOs' participation in the decision-making process. However, ASEAN is still elitist, and non-democratic is a significant challenge for the regional organization (Acharya, 2017). In addition, another influential factor is fragmentation among CSOs in Southeast Asia. The fragmented CSOs in the region resulted in the lack of pressure from civil society groups for ASEAN (Gerard, 2013). Without a solid united front, CSOs in the region cannot put enough pressure on ASEAN's leadership to address the importance of involving civil society in various ASEAN's topical meetings.

### **The Way Forward**

Having identified the problems, the remaining task at hand is to highlight options that can be taken to remedy the problems ---or at the very least--- prevent exacerbation. First, there is the question of consensus. Ideally, the involvement of NSAs should be rid of such rigid criteria to ensure robust and continuous participation. However, it is easier said than done, mainly because the consensus is part of what makes ASEAN member states feel comfortable enough to remain in the Association. An alternative direction would be to encourage incrementally installed changes. Borrowing from

Historical Institutionalism, changes occur at the 'soft point' in the development of the institution. A 'soft spot' is a space where there is a difference between a rule and its interpretation or between a rule and enforcement (Mahoney & Thelen, 2009).

Many changes take place through an unexpected 'reinterpretation' process. The change may indicate that the processes and mechanisms of participation of certain institutions and actors may change over time. Furthermore, the change may result in a corresponding shift in the patterns of various actions of actors or institutions (Streeck & Thelen, 2005). Applying this concept to ASEAN, the most obvious of these 'soft spots' lie in issue-based cooperation between ASEAN and CSOs. The magnitude of the potential difficulties and challenges in changing the ASEAN Way led ASEAN to take the initiative to expand the participation area of CSOs. Although this may seem like settling for less, it may serve an important role: introducing interactions with NSAs into ASEAN leadership's repertoire of actions. The actual problem lies in the sensible thing is to expand the space between what is written and what is being done (Thelen, 1999).

Second, to encourage civil society participation in ASEAN, there is a need to make ASEAN a people-driven community. To do so, the saliency of regional issues must be brought to the national level. Steps had been taken towards this end. For example, ASEAN has allowed each member state to become the chairman of the regional organization. ASEAN's position of chairmanship changes every year. One of the objectives is for people in each ASEAN member country to participate in and participate in annual activities. When Indonesia served as chairman of ASEAN in 2011, Indonesia sought to involve various non-state actors, such as NGOs or CSOs. If it is tricky to involve CSOs in ASEAN's summits, then involving them in ASEAN-themed domestic events is the next best thing. As a democratic nation, Indonesia strongly supported these efforts as a way to circumvent the elitist traditions of ASEAN.

Furthermore, various attempts to involve CSOs in ASEAN have been in line with its people-oriented commitment, an inclusive community where civil society is empowered (Rahman, 2016). A more robust civil society would also mean better preparedness to resolve conflict through peaceful means. To support the effort of making ASEAN a people-driven community, member states must take steps to encourage the proliferation of national CSOs within their respective borders. In

addition, more efforts need to be made so that CSOs can participate in various regional initiatives of transnational governance at the ASEAN level (Breslin & Nesadurai, 2018).

Third, hand-in-hand with the second point, there must be a vision to build regional demos. To achieve that, the establishment of a regional identity must be accelerated. Regional identities are usually collective or supranational owned or applicable in all ASEAN member countries. That identity consists of symbols and values. In addition to the ASEAN logo, flags, secretariat, and SEA Games, some symbolic regional identities can be used to become symbols of regional identity as a whole. Other examples of that symbolic identity, such as the ASEAN theme song and the annual celebration of ASEAN's founding as a joint holiday in Southeast Asia. ASEAN or Southeast Asia studies centers can also serve as yet another symbolic identity involving non-state actors in its policymaking mechanism. According to Emmerson, democratization in Southeast Asia can encourage establishing an environment conducive to various democratic initiatives in each member country. Further participation leads to an increase in ASEAN's legitimacy in implementing its strategic role in the global community (Emmerson, 2007).

Furthermore, the identity of regional values is based on the norms and shared values of the people in Southeast Asia. Southeast Asia's socio-cultural diversity can also form the basis for the establishment of regional norms, including differences in political ideology and economic structure. Indeed, variations of economic, political, and cultural conditions are defining characteristics of ASEAN. The norms are inevitably reflected by the "ASEAN Way," such as non-interference, respect for sovereignty, informality, and consensus, particularly portray the interaction process in ASEAN (Allison-Reumann, 2017; Murray, 2020). There is no doubt that these internal challenges are present and the dynamics of external issues (Loh, 2018). Both challenges determine the capacity of ASEAN in the future.

### **Concluding remarks**

Although the democratic deficit is still prevalent among ASEAN's member nations, recent developments obviously show that democratic values have been put into effect within the frameworks of the ASEAN Charter. The establishment of several people-

centered bodies within ASEAN and democratic development in the region asserted the possibility of ASEAN's members in reducing tendencies of democratic deficit at the regional level. Various elements of society have been involved in much topical regional cooperation to increase social participation, but these activities have not diminished criticism of the elitism of ASEAN. ASEAN's efforts to engage non-state actors in various initiatives to create regional norms and resolve regional issues are sustainable challenges. Many theme-based regional participation spaces for CSOs or NGOs have been built in various ASEAN forums. Nevertheless, ASEAN still has many activities to do in increasing people's participation. Therefore, ASEAN's member states should introduce the importance of the ASEAN Community towards their people and take a coordinating position in involving people in many activities of ASEAN.

## References

- Acharya, A. (2017). The myth of ASEAN centrality? *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 39(2), 273–279. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/319479056\\_The\\_myth\\_of\\_ASEAN\\_centrality](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/319479056_The_myth_of_ASEAN_centrality)
- Allison-Reumann, L. (2017). The Norm-Diffusion Capacity of ASEAN: Evidence and Challenges. *Pacific Focus*, 32(1), 5–29. <https://doi.org/10.1111/pafo.12089>
- Allison, L., & Taylor, M. (2017). ASEAN's 'people-oriented' aspirations: civil society influences on non-traditional security governance. *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 71(1), 24–41. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357718.2015.1135870>
- ASEAN. (2012a). *ASEAN Vision 2020*. <https://asean.org/asean-vision-2020/>
- ASEAN. (2012b). *Guidelines on Accreditation of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)*. [https://www.asean.org/wp-content/uploads/images/pdf/2014\\_upload/ANNEX B - Guidelines on Accreditation of CSOs 2012.pdf](https://www.asean.org/wp-content/uploads/images/pdf/2014_upload/ANNEX_B_-_Guidelines_on_Accreditation_of_CSOs_2012.pdf)
- Beeson, M. (2020). The great ASEAN Rorschach test. *Pacific Review*, 33(3–4), 574–581. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2019.1624384>
- Benny, G., & Abdullah, K. (2011). Indonesian Perceptions and Attitudes toward the ASEAN Community. *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, 30(1), 39–67. <https://doi.org/10.1177/186810341103000102>
- Breslin, S., & Nesadurai, H. E. S. (2018). Who Governs and How? Non-State Actors and Transnational Governance in Southeast Asia. *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 48(2), 187–203. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2017.1416423>
- Broschek, J. (2011). Conceptualizing and Theorizing Constitutional Change in Federal Systems: Insights from Historical Institutionalism. *Regional and Federal Studies*, 21(4–5), 539–559. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13597566.2011.578949>
- Caballero-Anthony, M. (2004). Non-state regional governance mechanism for economic security: the case of the ASEAN Peoples' Assembly. *The Pacific Review*, 17(4), 567–585. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0951274042000326078>

- Capie, D. (2010). When does track two matter? Structure, agency and Asian regionalism. *Review of International Political Economy*, 17(2), 291–318. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09692290903378801>
- Capoccia, G. (2016). When Do Institutions “Bite”? Historical Institutionalism and the Politics of Institutional Change. *Comparative Political Studies*, 49(8), 1095–1127. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414015626449>
- Chandra, A. C. (2006a). The role of non-state actors in ASEAN. *Revisiting Southeast Asian Regionalism*, 71–81. [http://www.alternative-regionalisms.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/chandra\\_non-stateactorsinasean.pdf](http://www.alternative-regionalisms.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/chandra_non-stateactorsinasean.pdf)
- Chandra, A. C. (2006b). *Southeast Asian Civil Society and the ASEAN Charter: The Way Forward*. September. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/324437240\\_Southeast\\_Asian\\_Civil\\_Society\\_and\\_the\\_ASEAN\\_Charter\\_The\\_Way\\_Forward](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/324437240_Southeast_Asian_Civil_Society_and_the_ASEAN_Charter_The_Way_Forward)
- Chandra, A. C., Abdulrahim, R., & Almuttaqi, A. I. (2015). Non-state Actors ’ Engagement with ASEAN: Current State of Play and Way Forward. *The Habibie Center*, 4(Building ASEAN Community: Political–Security and Socio-cultural Reflections), 221–246. [https://www.eria.org/ASEAN\\_at\\_50\\_4B.3\\_Chandra-Almutaqqi-Ibrahim.pdf](https://www.eria.org/ASEAN_at_50_4B.3_Chandra-Almutaqqi-Ibrahim.pdf)
- Collins, A. (2013). *Building a People-Oriented Security Community the ASEAN way*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203104842>
- Collins, A. (2019). From commitment to compliance: ASEAN’s human rights regression? *Pacific Review*, 32(3), 365–394. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2018.1476402>
- Debre, M. J. (2021). The dark side of regionalism: how regional organizations help authoritarian regimes to boost survival. *Democratization*, 28(2), 394–413. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2020.1823970>
- Emmerson, D. K. (2007). *Democratizing ASEAN? A Topological View* (Forum on Regional Strategic and Political Developments, Issue August). [https://fsi-live.s3.us-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/Democratizing\\_ASEAN.pdf](https://fsi-live.s3.us-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/Democratizing_ASEAN.pdf)
- Gerard, K. (2010). *Participatory regionalism in Asia*.
- Gerard, K. (2013). From the ASEAN People’s Assembly to the ASEAN Civil Society Conference: the boundaries of civil society advocacy. *Contemporary Politics*, 19(4), 411–426. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569775.2013.835113>
- Gerard, K. (2014). ASEAN and civil society activities in “created spaces”: The limits of liberty. *Pacific Review*, 27(2), 265–287. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2014.882395>
- Gerard, K. (2018). ASEAN as a “ Rules-based Community ”: Business as Usual ASEAN as a “ Rules-based Community ”: Business as Usual. *Asian Studies Review*, 7823, 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357823.2018.1444016>
- Gerard, K. (2021). Interpreting Legitimation Through Participation: The ASEAN Civil Society Conference. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 59(2), 432–445. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.13179>
- Haas, P. (2015). *Epistemic Communities, Constructivism, and International Environmental Politics*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315717906>
- Hay, C., & Wincott, D. (1998). Structure, agency and historical institutionalism. *Political Studies*, 46(5), 951–957. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9248.00177>
- Hui, D. L. M., & Junio, D. R. O. (2015). ASEAN’s Post-2015 Vision: Inclusive and Non-Elitist? *RSIS Commentary* (No. 013). <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp->

- content/uploads/2015/01/CO15013.pdf
- Kneuer, M., Demmelhuber, T., Peresson, R., & Zumbrägel, T. (2019). Playing the regional card: why and how authoritarian gravity centres exploit regional organisations. *Third World Quarterly*, 40(3), 451–470. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2018.1474713>
- Kraft, H. J. S. (2000). The Autonomy Dilemma of Track Two Diplomacy in Southeast Asia. *Security Dialogue*, 31(3), 343–356. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010600031003008>
- Langlois, A. J., Wilkinson, C., Gerber, P., & Offord, B. (2017). Community, identity, orientation: sexuality, gender and rights in ASEAN. *Pacific Review*, 30(5), 710–728. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2017.1294613>
- Lee, H. W., & Lim, S. (2020). Public Feelings toward ASEAN. *Asian Survey*, 60(5), 803–829. <https://doi.org/10.1525/as.2020.60.5.803>
- Libman, A., & Obydenkova, A. V. (2018). Understanding authoritarian regionalism. *Journal of Democracy*, 29(4), 151–165. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2018.0070>
- Loh, D. M. H. (2018). The disturbance and endurance of norms in ASEAN: peaceful but stressful. *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 72(5), 385–402. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357718.2018.1488939>
- Mahoney, J., & Thelen, K. (2009). *Explaining Institutional Change* (J. Mahoney & K. Thelen (Eds.)). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511806414>
- Mueller, L. M. (2019). ASEAN centrality under threat – the cases of RCEP and connectivity. *Journal of Contemporary East Asia Studies*, 8(2), 177–198. <https://doi.org/10.1080/24761028.2019.1691703>
- Murray, P. (2020). Managing Security: Reimagining ASEAN’s Regional Role. *Asian Studies Review*, 44(1), 44–60. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357823.2019.1680605>
- Nesadurai, H. E. S. (2012). The ASEAN People’s Forum (APF) as an authentic social forum: regional civil society networking for an alternative regionalism. In M. Beeson & R. Stubbs (Eds.), *outledge Handbook of Asian Regionalism* (pp. 166–176). Routledge. <https://doi.org/https://dx.doi.org/10.4324/9780203803608-24>
- Nesadurai, H. E. S. (2017). ASEAN during the life of The Pacific Review: a balance sheet on regional governance and community building. *Pacific Review*, 30(6), 938–951. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2017.1304436>
- Neuvonen, P. J. (2019). Transforming membership? Citizenship, identity and the problem of belonging in regional integration organizations. *European Journal of International Law*, 30(1), 229–255. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ejil/chz007>
- Rahman, S. (2016). *Orienting Asean Towards Its People: Enabling Engagement With Local Ngos* (Issue 298). <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/WP298.pdf>
- Renshaw, C. S. (2013). Democratic Transformation and Regional Institutions: The Case of Myanmar and ASEAN. *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, 32(1), 29–54. <https://doi.org/10.1177/186810341303200102>
- Ruland, J. (2002). The Contribution of Track Two Dialogue towards Crisis Prevention. *ASIEN*, 85, 84–96. <https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download;jsessionid=312505A200DD98B7E241B1944BEF098A?doi=10.1.1.597.7210&rep=rep1&type=pdf>
- Rüland, J. (2020). Democratic backsliding, regional governance and foreign policymaking in Southeast Asia: ASEAN, Indonesia and the Philippines.

- Democratization*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2020.1803284>
- Simm, G. (2018). Disaster Response in Southeast Asia: The ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Response and Emergency Management. *Asian Journal of International Law*, 8(1), 116–142. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S2044251316000205>
- Stone, D. (2011). The ASEAN-ISIS Network: Interpretive Communities, Informal Diplomacy and Discourses of Region. *Minerva*, 49(2), 241–262. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11024-011-9171-5>
- Streeck, W., & Thelen, K. (2005). Introduction: Institutional change in advanced political economies. In W. Streeck & K. Thelen (Eds.), *Beyond continuity*, (pp. 1–39). Oxford University Press.
- Suzuki, S. (2019). Why is ASEAN not intrusive? Non-interference meets state strength. *Journal of Contemporary East Asia Studies*, 8(2), 157–176. <https://doi.org/10.1080/24761028.2019.1681652>
- Thelen, K. (1999). Historical Institutionalism In Comparative Politics. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 2(1), 369–404. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.2.1.369>
- Yukawa, T. (2018). The ASEAN Way as a symbol: an analysis of discourses on the ASEAN Norms. *Pacific Review*, 31(3), 298–314. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2017.1371211>