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## **Regional Public Opinion Towards the Formation of Political Security Community in Southeast Asia**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study is aimed to examine and analyze public opinion on the formation of regional political and security community initiated by the Association Southeast Asian Countries (ASEAN). It has been argued that the Southeast Asian regionalism and community building initiatives need to have general public's support and understanding as it had been shown during the early stages of the European integration process. For decades, Southeast Asian regionalism tends to be governed by state. Hence, the study analyses and compares several interlinked variables such as awareness, attitudes, perception and aspiration on the proposed ASEAN Political Security Community (APSC). It is based on a survey conducted in Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore. The questionnaire for the survey combined close-ended and open-ended questions. The questionnaire was made available in three different languages (Bahasa Indonesia, Bahasa Melayu and English). A total number of 1,256 respondents were involved in the study. The quota-sampling procedure was employed to ensure that the respondents were balanced by gender and working status. The study found that respondents in the three countries did show lack of awareness on APSC. They perceived APSC as an elitist and dominated by state agenda. However, the majority of respondents were positive on the future of APSC since they believe that it would contribute among others constructive peaceful resolution in the region. Generally, the study found that respondents displayed some positive attitudes and support for the regional political-security community process, but their aspirations appeared to be different from that of the European regionalism.

**Key words:** Public opinion, perception, attitude, ASEAN political security community, regional integration

### **INTRODUCTION**

In 1997, the Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN) conceived the idea of forming of regional community. The idea comprises three pillars, one of which is the ASEAN Political Security Community (APSC), to be achieved by 2015. APSC is intended as "the institution where the members will live at peace with each other where the causes for conflict have been eliminated, through abiding respect for justice and the rule of law and through the strengthening of national and regional resilience" (ASEAN Secretariat, 2003). It outline seven areas of cooperation among

member countries: Setting values and norms, maritime security, weapons of mass destruction, terrorism and transnational crime, defense cooperation, the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and cooperation with the United Nations. Critics however remain skeptical. Acharya (2003, 2009), Caballero-Anthony (2009), Chavez (2007) and Sutherland (2009) argue that the development and process of the Southeast Asian regional community appeared to be elitist and state-centric. Promoting the APSC idea needs to go beyond state-led guidance and involvement. It can be argued that forming a regional identity through APSC needs basic conceptualization, understanding and appreciation from the general population of the region. So far regional identity formation in Southeast Asia lacks the public involvement in its process. History has also shown that the involvement of the general public—both through direct voting and through public opinion surveys—is crucial as it is one of the key components that had brought about the success of other similar regional organizations such as the EU. The European countries, for instance, undertook extensive studies to ascertain the public's understanding and acceptance of the regional community idea before the formation and formalization of the EU (Laffan, 1992).

Regional integration theories expounded by the transactionalist, neo-functionalist and democratic theories also argue that the opinions and participation of the general public would determine the success of regional community building (Guido and Abdullah, 2011; Abdullah *et al.*, 2010; Collins, 2008; Ortuoste, 2008; Thompson and Thianthai, 2008). For this reason, public sentiments are important to take into consideration while making policies on enhancing regionalism. Nevertheless, there has been no comprehensive study so far to measure support, opinions, or consensus of the general public on the creation of the APSC. Thus, this article is aimed to examine, evaluate and analyze public awareness, attitudes, opinions and aspirations in Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore toward the proposed formation of APSC.

## **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

Regionalism is considered as the expression of general consciousness of the region for a sense of identity as well as for conducting cooperation to attain common goals. The idea of “regionalism requires not merely geographical proximity and increased economic interdependence. Other factors such as historical experience, power and wealth distribution within and outside the grouping, cultural social and ethnic traditions and ideological or political preferences” are also crucial in the regional integration process (Buttler, 1997). In this sense, ‘regional awareness and identity’ are involved where a mixture of historical, cultural and social traditions lead to a ‘shared perception’ of belonging to a community. Regional cohesion is attained through “a combination of these first four processes (regionalism, regional awareness and identity, regional inter-state co-operation and state-promoted regional economic integration) that may lead to the emergence of a cohesive and consolidated regional unit” (Habib, 1996). Such a highly politically cohesive grouping can have a decisive impact upon both its ‘internal’ environment and upon global politics (Hurrell, 1995). Regional community, furthermore, has a looser meaning and tends to convey the sense of ‘big family’ rather than pooled sovereignty. A community can be defined as a “body of persons or nations having a common history or common social, economic and political interests” and may imply common rights and duties (Frost, 2008). As for Asians, Frost (2008) further argues, the idea of community “suggests that people coexist peacefully and cooperate with each other according to common sense, courtesy and habit”.

Furthermore, a regional security community concept can be referred to as a group of states between which war has become inconceivable as states share an understanding that force should not be used to resolve disputes between them. According to Deutsch (1961), a security community

is 'a group of states that has become integrated, where integration is defined as the attainment of a sense of community accompanied by formal or informal institutions or practice, sufficiently strong and widespread to assure peaceful change among members of a group with 'reasonable' certainty over a 'long period of time'. The community subsequently would have common security policy cooperation. The cooperation is made possible due to stable social relations between states. Deutsch (1957) also argues as quoted by Flemes (2005) that there are three important characteristics of a security community: Firstly, "mutual interdependence within the intraregional relations", secondly, "a high degree of collective identity and common values", finally a strict "network of common institutions and standards, which regulated the relations and contributes to the peaceful conflict resolution".

Anderson (1991), on the other hand describes security community as an imaginary community of states and non-state players adhering to the peaceful process of resolving conflicts among them and pursuing cooperative measure with one another against what they perceive as common threats to their national security. It is an imaginary community because, despite the complex diversities of players in the community, there is a general perception or shared imagination. Hence, relative peace and security may be attained by cooperating with one another and by ruling out the threat or the actual use of force in settling their disputes. This type of security community can be organized through a formal structure with a permanent secretariat. Another form is an informal grouping of states without a permanent secretariat but with a regular process of constant dialogues and consultations. Since, a security community may be viewed as an imaginary community, it is socially constructed. Therefore, the process of forming it will be a little time consuming.

The structure of a security community can be in the form of formal or official political merger or a loosely-formed group with independent identity and sovereignty. Deutsch (1957) refers, as quoted by Stein (1985) the loosely-formed group as pluralistic security community where each individual state can eliminate 'war and expectation of war' within the boundaries of participating nation states. Adler and Barnett (1998) furthermore, define pluralistic security community as "a transnational region comprised of sovereign states whose people maintain dependable expectations of peaceful change. A pluralistic security community must meet the following conditions: (1) comparability of values among decision makers, (2) mutual predictability of behavior among decision-makers of units to be integrated and (3) mutual responsiveness of a government to actions and communications of other governments (Acharya, 2009, 1996).

While the Deutschian conception of security communities may have its appeal in Europe and North America, other scholars in the field have made an attempt to apply the framework in the context of developing countries. Acharya (1996, 2009), for example, examines the prospects of building a security community in Southeast Asia and identifies the following four basic requirements: (1) total absence of armed inter-state conflict, or prospects for such conflict within a region, (2) absence of a competitive military build-up or arms race of the regional actors, (3) existence of formal or informal institutions and practices and (4) Existence of a high degree of political and economic integration as a necessary precondition for a peaceful relationship.

Questions however remain-how regional community building process affects the population? What is the level of public's awareness and perception on the idea of regional security community? Or does the general public have any idea what the regional community really is? This study conceptualizes the regional public's understanding of the regional security community in general and the APSC in particular into three research inquiries. The first research inquiry is the general

understanding on ASEAN itself. The three most important variables-the knowledge of ASEAN, perceived relevancy of ASEAN and awareness of the ASEAN Community-were used to ascertain the public understanding of regionalism. The knowledge of ASEAN is conceptualized as the awareness about ASEAN and issues associated with the regional organization-the goal and objectives of ASEAN, the organizational structure of ASEAN, the founding year of ASEAN and the difference of ASEAN with other security frameworks. The perception was conceptualized through the importance of ASEAN in terms of relevancy and achievement. Finally, awareness was conceptualized as the cognizance about the concept of the ASEAN Community and its two most important documents (The Declaration of Bali Concord II and the ASEAN Charter).

The second research inquiry focuses on three variables-attitudes towards the ASEAN Community and its three pillars (Economy, Socio-culture and Political Security), opinion on the formation process of the ASEAN Community and aspiration for the formation of the ASEAN Community. The concept of attitude here refers to respondent's support, perceptions of benefits for the respondent's country and its people and their optimism (or pessimism) for the ASEAN Community and its three pillars. This article, however, will only discuss the result of the political-security dimension of the ASEAN community. The concept of opinion in this study relates to attitudes and evaluation of the process of establishing the regional community. The concept measures the respondent's assessment on the formation process of ASEAN Community and whether it involved the public, the perception of the objectives of the ASEAN Community and the perception of difficulties on realizing the objectives. Furthermore, aspiration for ASEAN community is defined as the evaluation about the future direction of the regional community. It includes the aspiration for the establishment of European-like integration, single monetary union, abolition of visa and passport and the formation of the ASEAN Commission, ASEAN Court of Justice and the ASEAN Parliament.

The final research inquiry specifically deals with the three pillars of ASEAN Community idea. This article will discuss the first pillar-political security community. The inquiry seeks to understand how the public perceive the impact of APSC on their countries sovereignty, security, identity. The three variables-sovereignty, security and identity-were measured through the perception of the possibility of national sovereignty and security being negatively affected by the community idea and the possibility of national identity being diluted into that of the region.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This study was based on surveys conducted between July 2009 and March 2010 in two phases in three ASEAN countries-Indonesia, Singapore and Malaysia. The first phase of survey was conducted in Indonesia between July-December 2009, whereas the second phase was conducted between January and March 2010 in Malaysia and Singapore. These three countries were chosen because, firstly, they are one of the founders of ASEAN Secretariat (1967), apart from Thailand and the Philippines, secondly, these countries are considered important in ASEAN in terms of size of territory and population and economy. Another reason for choosing these countries from the possible ten is the limitation of resources and time.

The survey was conducted in eleven major cities. The cities were purposively chosen in terms of their importance and influence to the economy, polity and socio-culture of the countries and their connectedness to other countries in the region. In Indonesia, it was conducted in five major cities-Jakarta, Makassar, Medan, Surabaya and Pontianak. Greater Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Melaka, Johor Bahru and Kota Kinabalu were the five major cities in Malaysia selected for the survey.

The questionnaires were made available in three national languages, Bahasa Indonesia, Bahasa Malaysia and English. The questions were screened in some pilot studies, in each country, to check the understanding of the target respondents. A number of 1,256 respondents were involved in the study -- 551 in Indonesia, 451 in Malaysia and 294 in Singapore. The respondents were selected by a convenience quota sampling method, trying to balance the proportion of students and staffs respondents. Due to the complexity of the questions, tertiary education was a required criterion for the respondents.

The survey data were analyzed statistically. Firstly, 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. Secondly, we compared the responses in three countries using the Kruskal-Wallis and Mann-Whitney tests for nominal data and the Analysis of Variance tests and Post-Hoc Least-Square Difference (LSD) tests for interval data.

Those surveyed consisted of 50.8% male and 49.2% female. The majority were younger mature (75.4%) and with undergraduate education background (72.4%). Students (46.2%), civil servants (37.0%) and private employees (15.1%) were three major occupations of the respondents in the three countries.

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% male and 52% female. In terms of age group, 83.8% are between 18-34 years old. Majority are with undergraduate education background (89.2%) and with lower to middle level monthly household expenditure of less than US\$ 330 (56.5%). The three major occupations represented in this survey are students (40.9%), private 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% male and 48.9% female. In terms of age group, 73.1% are between 18-34 years old. Majority are with undergraduate education background (70.7%) and with lower to middle level monthly household expenditure of less than US\$ 1,500 (71.2%). The three major occupations represented in this survey are students (54.3%), lecturers (26.4%) and civil servants (6.4%).

In Singapore, the respondents consisted of 55.5% male and 44.5% female. In terms of age group, 63.7% are between 18-34 years old. Majority are with undergraduate education background (50.7%) and with lower to middle level monthly household expenditure of less than US\$ 4,616 (56.5%). The three major occupations represented in this survey are students (42.9%), lecturers (40.8%) and civil servants (5.8%).

## **RESULTS**

This section discusses and analyses the findings of the survey. The discussion focusses on four major variables: Awareness, attitudes, perception and aspiration. It analyzes and compares how those interlinked variables has impacted or influenced regional public perception on the proposed ASEAN Political Security Community (APSC).

**Awareness on the concept of ASEAN political security community (APSC):** Although, the idea of the APSC has been discussed for about fifteen years, the level of awareness on the idea among the public was not so high. The study found that, as shown in Fig. 1, only half of the

	Response		Kruskal-Wallis tests for comparing the response		
	Yes	No	Chi-square:	df:	Asymp. sig.
<b>Have you ever heard about the ASEAN Political Security Community (APSC)</b>			8.31	2	0.02
			<b>Meaning: There are significant differences</b>		
			<b>Result from the Mann-Whitney U tests:</b>		
Malaysia	53%	47%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Awareness in Malaysia and in Singapore was significantly higher than that in Indonesia</li> <li>• No significant difference between the awareness of the Singaporeans and the Malaysians</li> </ul>		
Indonesia	46%	54%			
Singapore	55%	45%			
Average	51%	49%			
<b>Have you ever heard/read about the Bali Concord II 2003?</b>			15.94	2	0.00
			<b>Meaning: There were significant differences</b>		
			<b>Result from the Mann-Whitney U tests:</b>		
Malaysia	27%	73%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Awareness in Indonesia and in Singapore was significantly lower than that in Malaysia</li> <li>• No significant difference between the awareness of the Singaporeans and that of the Indonesians</li> </ul>		
Indonesia	17%	83%			
Singapore	20%	80%			
Average	21%	79%			
<b>Have you ever heard/read about the ASEAN Charter 2007?</b>			1.33	2	0.51
			<b>Meaning: There was no significant difference</b>		
			<b>Result from the Mann-Whitney U tests:</b>		
Malaysia	43%	57%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No significant difference between the awareness of respondents in the three countries</li> </ul>		
Indonesia	41%	59%			
Singapore	39%	61%			
Average	41%	59%			

Fig. 1: Awareness of the ASEAN Political Security (APSC), the Bali Concord II and the ASEAN Charter, Kruskal-Wallis Test, a non-parametric test for examining differences between three or more independent groups (Pallant 2003), is used to compare responses in three countries. If its asymptotic significance (asyp. sig.) score – in corresponding to Kruskal-Wallis Chi-Square and Degree of Freedom (df) scores is equal to or greater than 0.05 (asyp. sig.>0.05), it can be concluded that there is no significant difference in terms of responses in the three countries. However, this test cannot be used to examine the difference between two countries, so the study uses the Mann-Whitney U Test, a non-parametric test for examining differences between two independent groups on a continuous measure (Pallant, 2003), to confirm whether the respondents in the two countries exhibit significant differences on the issue

respondents (51%) admitted that they had heard of the idea of APSC-the percentage was lower (46%) in Indonesia than in Malaysia (53%) and Singapore (55%). The Kruskal-Wallis tests and the Mann-Whitney U Tests discovered that, in general, the awareness of regional political security community was significantly lower in Indonesia than that in Malaysia and Singapore.

The level of awareness on the two crucial documents of the ASEAN Community and APSC- the Declaration of the Bali Concord II and the ASEAN Charter-were even lower. The study discovered that more than three-quarters of the respondents admitted that they were aware of the Bali Concord (in general 79%, 73% in Malaysia, 83% in Indonesia and 80% in Singapore). In addition, more than half the respondents claimed that they had never heard of the ASEAN Charter-a crucial document that served as the legal instrument for the establishment of the ASEAN Community (in general 59%, 57% in Malaysia, 59% in Indonesia and 61% in Singapore).

How do we explain the lack of awareness on APSC among the public? The study found that lack of interaction, information and promotion to the public was the key to the issue. The public in these three countries (in general 56%, 43% in Malaysia, 66% in Indonesia and 53% in Singapore) cited the three factors as reasons to their unawareness towards the APSC. This shortcoming is a key

concern for the Indonesians since almost two-thirds of the respondents in this ASEAN's largest country, claimed that they had never heard any explanations about the Community from the government. Almost three-quarters of respondents (72% in general, 70% Malaysians, 72% Indonesians and 75% Singaporeans) denied that ASEAN is merely the concerns of the leaders. In fact, more than two-thirds of them (in general 69%, 71% Malaysians, 77% Indonesians and 46% of Singaporeans) asserted that the development of ASEAN is crucial and deserved attention. The finding showed that public interest on the Community idea is generally high but lack of government's exposure and promotion on the idea resulted in public's unawareness on the APSC.

**Attitudes towards the formation of APSC:** The study also found that the attitudes of the respondents across the three countries were positive on APSC. The majority of the respondents in Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore appeared to be supportive for APSC and perceived its formation is good for their country and population in general.

Figure 2 shows that most of the respondents in the three countries supported the formation of APSC (in general 80% answered agreed or completely agreed: 79% Malaysians, 84% Indonesians and 75% Singaporeans). ANOVA statistical tests showed that there were significant differences in the responses in the three countries; the post-hoc LSD tests indicated that the support was significantly higher in Indonesia (Mean = 4.00) and Malaysia (Mean = 3.92) than Singapore (Mean = 3.84).

The survey showed that the majority of those surveyed perceived the formation of APSC is good for their country and society (in general 80% agreed or completely agreed, 80% Malaysians, 84% Indonesians and 74% Singaporeans). ANOVA statistical tests showed that there were significant differences between the responses; the post-hoc LSD tests indicated that the perception was significantly more positive in Indonesia (Mean = 3.99) and Malaysia (Mean = 3.94) than in Singapore (Mean = 3.82).

The respondents were also confident that APSC is a long term regional mechanism for Confidence Building Measure (CBM) and conflict resolution. Respondents also agreed that APSC would become a conduit for creating more friendly relations among member countries. In general, the respondents showed their optimism on APSC. For example, two-thirds of them expressed their belief that ASEAN countries would be fully committed to the peaceful resolution of conflicts and differences (in general 67% agreed or completely agreed, 69% Malaysians, 69% Indonesians and 58% Singaporeans). ANOVA statistical tests showed significant differences in the responses in the three countries; the post-hoc LSD tests revealed that the belief was significantly higher in Malaysia (Mean = 3.78) and Indonesia (Mean = 3.78) than in Singapore (Mean = 3.55).

Furthermore, majority of the respondents believed that APSC mechanism would provide effective cooperation among ASEAN countries to combat transnational security threats and challenges such as terrorism, drugs trafficking, people smuggling and cross border crimes. In general, 72% of the respondents (72% Malaysians, 75% Indonesians and 65% Singaporeans) agreed or completely agreed to the statement. ANOVA statistical tests showed that there were significant differences in the responses; the post-hoc LSD tests showed that the belief was significantly higher in Indonesia (Mean = 3.94) and Malaysia (Mean = 3.88) than in Singapore (Mean = 3.69).

Another major objective of this study is to ascertain whether some current's ASEAN political principles such as ASEAN's non-interference policy would have political bearings APSC comes to effective. ASEAN has been characterized by the maintenance of the doctrine of national



	Disagreed or completely disagreed	Neither agreed nor disagreed	Agree or completely agreed	Mode	Mean	Analysis of variance comparing the responses
<b>I supported the formation of the APSC</b>						F score: 4.09   Sig.: 0.02
						Meaning: There were significant differences
Malaysia	4%	17%	79%	Agree	3.92	Result from the Post Hoc LSD tests: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The support of the Indonesians and Malaysia was significantly higher than that of the Singapore</li> <li>• The attitude of the Malaysia did not significantly differ to those of the Indonesians and the Singaporeans</li> </ul>
Indonesia	3%	13%	84%	Agree	4.00	
Singapore	3%	22%	75%	Agree	3.84	
Average	3%	17%	80%	Agree	3.94	
<b>The formation of the APSC good for my country and society</b>						F score: 4.82   Sig.: 0.04
						Meaning: There were significant differences
Malaysia	3%	17%	80%	Agree	3.94	Result from the Post Hoc LSD tests: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The support of the Indonesians and Malaysia was significantly higher than that of the Singaporeans</li> <li>• The attitude of the Malaysia did not significantly differ to those of the Indonesians and the Singaporeans</li> </ul>
Indonesia	3%	14%	84%	Agree	3.99	
Singapore	4%	23%	74%	Agree	3.82	
Average	3%	17%	80%	Agree	3.94	
<b>I believe that every ASEAN country would be fully committed to the peaceful resolution of conflicts and differences</b>						F score: 6.857   Sig.: 0.001
						Meaning: There were significant differences
Malaysia	5%	25%	69%	Agree	3.78	Result from the Post Hoc LSD tests: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The attitude of the Malaysians and Indonesians was significantly more positive than that of the Singaporeans</li> <li>• No significant difference between the attitude of the Malaysia and that of the Indonesia</li> </ul>
Indonesia	5%	25%	69%	Agree	3.78	
Singapore	14%	28%	58%	Agree	3.55	
Average	7%	26%	67%	Agree	3.73	
<b>I believe that ASEAN countries will be able to cooperate in combating terrorists, drugs trading, human trafficking, and cross border crimes</b>						F score: 7.46   Sig.: 0.00
						Meaning: There were significant differences
Malaysia	5%	23%	72%	Agree	3.88	Result from the Post Hoc LSD tests: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The attitude of the Malaysians and Indonesians was significantly more positive than that of the Singaporeans</li> <li>• No significant difference between the Malaysian's and Indonesian's</li> </ul>
Indonesia	3%	22%	75%	Agree	3.94	
Singapore	9%	26%	65%	Agree	3.69	
Average	5%	23%	72%	Agree	3.86	

Fig. 2: Attitudes towards Formation of the ASEAN Political Security (APSC), The “agree” category represents those who answered “agree and completely agree”; NAND category represents those who answered “not agree nor disagree”, the “disagree” category represents those who answered “disagree and completely disagree”. One-Way Analysis of Variance (The One-Way ANOVA), a parametric statistical test to examine whether the distribution of scale numerical data several are equal (Pallant, 2003), was used to compare the responses in three countries. If the sig. score-in corresponding to ANOVA's F score-was equal to or greater than 0.05 (asyp. sig.>0.05), it can be concluded that there was no significant difference between the responses in the three countries. This test was followed by ANOVA's *Post hoc* LSD (Least Square Difference) Tests to show the difference between each country

sovereignty and non-interference in the foreign and security policy as well as in the internal affairs of each ASEAN country. For the Southeast Asian countries, the doctrine of protecting the sovereignty of states has a history that predates ASEAN. It was a key principle reaffirmed at the

Bandung Asian-African Conference in 1955. Since the founding of ASEAN, this doctrine remains to be the single most fundamental principle underpinning ASEAN regionalism. The doctrine has been incorporated in all the key political statements of ASEAN, from the very outset: 'The Bangkok Declaration' (ASEAN Secretariat, 1967), 'The Treaty of Amity and Cooperation' and 'The Declaration of ASEAN Concord' (ASEAN Secretariat, 1976a, b). These doctrines-as explicitly stated in the Bali Concord II (ASEAN Secretariat, 2003) and the ASEAN Charter (ASEAN Secretariat, 2008)-would continue to be maintained as one of the key features in the ASEAN Community.

Past studies generally argued and observed that ASEAN's principles of national sovereignty and non-interference policy are contravened with the spirit of regional integration. The principles and policy would hinder ASEAN from taking meaningful action over economic crises, internal crisis and transnational security threats (Chau, 2008; Thearith, 2009; Mohamad, 2002; Caballero-Anthony and Haywood, 2010; Nesadurai, 2003; Ramcharan, 2000). It was also argued that regional integration and community building are usually being characterized by dilution of sovereignty of member states to a supranational body to undertake out tasks previously reserved for the national government (Kuhlman and Mensonides, 1976; Martinez, 1996; McMahan and Baker, 2006). In this sense, the regional organization might take some parts of state's sovereignty to exercise several functions. In order to achieve such integration, there should be a strong will from the national governments. Nonetheless, studies made by Severino (2007), Acharya (2009), Harun (2010) and Wanandi (1984) show that such political wills are simply absent in the process of ASEAN community.

Hence, it is not surprising that the study found that, as shown in Fig. 3, most of the respondents supported the current ASEAN principles of non-interference. As for the principle of noninterference in the foreign and security policy, almost three-quarters of respondents supported (in general 73% agreed or completely agreed: 72% Malaysians, 82% Indonesians and 59% Singaporeans). ANOVA statistical tests, however, did show significant differences in the responses, the *post-hoc* LSD tests showed almost overwhelming support in Indonesia (Mean = 4.04) and in Malaysia (Mean = 3.77), it was significantly lower in Singapore (Mean = 3.57).

The majority of the respondents also demonstrated their support for the rights of national government from external interference in relation with their home affairs (in general 70% agreed or completely agreed: 73% Malaysians, 71% Indonesians and 64% Singaporeans). ANOVA statistical tests showed that there were significant differences in the responses; the *post-hoc* LSD tests showed that the support was significantly higher in Malaysia (Mean = 3.85) than in Indonesia (Mean = 3.74) and Singapore (Mean = 3.62).

**Opinion on the formation of APSC:** While the general attitudes toward the ASEAN Community were positive, it is interesting to note the respondents tended to have similar opinion with that of past studies made regional scholars on the elitist nature of the APSC process (Severino, 2006, 2007; Acharya, 2003, 2009; Sutherland, 2009; Chavez, 2007; Caballero-Anthony, 2009; Dang, 2008; Sukma, 2003). All these scholars consistently argued that only leaders, bureaucrats and businesspeople are the influential and domineering actors in ASEAN Community building process (Guido and Abdullah, 2011).

This study provides additional support for the above arguments. Figure 4 shows that more than half of Indonesian respondents (51%) admitted that the formation of APSC was the initiative of the elite and did not involve the public in its creation. Although, the majority of Malaysian and Singaporean respondents did not fully concur with their Indonesian respondents, there were still

Attitudes	Disagreed or completely disagreed	Neither agreed nor disagreed	Agreed or completely agreed	Mode	Mean	Analysis of variance comparing the responses
I supported the principle of non-interference in the foreign and security policy of each ASEAN country						F score: 23.74   Sig.: 0.00 Meaning: There were significant differences
Malaysia	11%	17%	72%	Agree	3.77	Result from the <i>post hoc</i> LSD test:  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The attitude of the Indonesians was Significantly more positive than that of the Malaysians and Singaporeans</li> <li>• The attitude of the Malaysians was significantly more positive than that of the Singaporeans</li> </ul>
Indonesia	5%	13%	82%	Agree	4.04	
Singapore	13%	28%	59%	Agree	3.57	
Average	9%	18%	73%	Agree	3.84	
I supported the rights of national government from external interference in relation with their home affairs						F score: 4.16   Sig.: 0.02 Meaning: There were significant differences
Malaysia	8%	19%	73%	Agree	3.85	Result from the <i>post hoc</i> LSD test:  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The attitude of the Malaysia was Significantly more positive than that of the Singaporeans</li> <li>• The attitude of the Indonesians did not Significantly differ with that of the Malaysians and the Singaporeans</li> </ul>
Indonesia	17%	12%	71%	Agree	3.74	
Singapore	10%	25%	64%	Agree	3.62	
Average	12%	18%	70%	Agree	3.75	

Fig. 3: Attitudes towards the principles of non-interference

a significant number (45% in Malaysia and 40% in Singapore) who hold the same opinion with the majority of the Indonesian respondents. However, this perception did not appear to undermine the perceived benefit of the initiatives, as almost three-quarters of them (in general 72% disagree: 65% in Malaysia, 78% in Indonesia and 71% in Singapore) admitted that the APSC would benefit the people. Hence, it can be concluded that, while the formation process of APSC was perceived to be elitist, the respondents were still have positive opinion to its formation since it was perceived to be beneficial to the people.

Respondents in the three countries also believed that there would some obstacles to achieve APSC. More than two-thirds of the respondents perceived its formation and objectives as very impressive but difficult to materialize (69% in general: 73% in Malaysia, 61% in Indonesia and 74% in Singapore). The findings also indicated that more than of half the respondents (in general 56%: 51% in Malaysia, 55% in Indonesia and 60% in Singapore) perceived that the support for APSC was based on their own parochial interests and not the common interests of the region.

The pessimistic opinion on APSC's objectives can be explained in two ways. Firstly, lack of national government's efforts to promote regional community building ideas may be one of the problems. This has been shown in the survey where the majority of respondents were unaware of the concept of the ASEAN Community (Fig. 4). Hence, their lack of awareness to the regional

Opinion	Response		Kruskal Wallis tests for comparing the responses		
	Yes	No	Chi-square:	df: 2	Asymp. sig.:
The formation of ASEAN political Security (APSC) is merely a declaration of leaders and not beneficial to the people			8.79		0.01
			Meaning: There were significant differences		
	Malaysia	45%	55%	Results from the Mann-whitny U tests: • Agreement to the statement was significantly higher in Indonesia than that in Singapore • The opinion of the Malaysians was not significantly different with that of the Indonesians or Singaporeans	
	Indonesia	51%	49%		
	Singapore	40%	60%		
Average	46%	54%			
The objective of APSC is impressive but very difficult to be achieved			16.91		0.00
			Meaning: There were significant differences		
	Malaysia	73%	27%	Results from the Mann-whitny U tests: • Agreement to the statement was significantly lower in Indonesia than that in Malaysia and Singapore • There was no significant difference between the opinion of the Malaysians and Singapore	
	Indonesia	61%	29%		
	Singapore	74%	26%		
Average	69%	31%			
The support of a country towards the APSC is only for its self-interests: Not because of the regional common interests			5.28		0.07
			Meaning: There was no significant difference		
	Malaysia	51%	49%	Results from the Mann-whitny U tests: • No significant difference between the awareness of respondents in the three countries	
	Indonesia	55%	45%		
	Singapore	60%	40%		
Average	56%	44%			

Fig. 4: Opinion on the formation of ASEAN political security (APSC)

community process also contributes to the negative opinion of APSC. It has been observed by the authors that the national governments have been propagating their own national agenda in the mass media, with the thick sense of national interests. The regional agenda tend to be absent in each individual country's media. Rarely would the public hear about regional measures to forge the ASEAN Community-something that has been emphasized in the APSC Blueprint (ASEAN, 2009). It is then not surprising that lack of proper dissemination of information on ASEAN community building has thwarted initiatives to sell the other three major pillars of regional community building. As a result, the respondents were in opine that there were more obstacles to achieve the APSC idea since the national government appear to have focused more on its national interests rather than that of the region.

Another explanation is that national governments tended to be highly preoccupied with their own internal affairs. The challenging tasks of national development and nation building leave regional affairs at the back seat. Singh (2010) contends that, as young nation-states, most ASEAN countries are highly engrossed with their internal obstacles of incomplete or unsuccessful nation-building and underdevelopment. Given these obstacles, national governments become more focused on national rather than the regional interests. This reality might have influenced the perception of the respondents and lead them to believe that APSC's objectives difficult to achieve.

**Aspiration on the formation of the APSC:** Aspirations in this study referred to of respondent's wishes and expectation from the formation of APSC. The study found that most respondents (in general 70, 76% in Malaysia, 77% in Indonesia and 57% in Singapore) hope that the

Aspiration	Response		Kruskal-Wallis tests for comparing to responses		
	Yes	No	Chi-square:	df:	Asympt. sig.:
The formation of ASEAN community should be directed to wards the establishment of regional intergration as in the European Union			36.15	2	0.00
			Meaning: There were significant differences		
Malaysia	76%	24%	Results from the Mann-Whitney U tests:		
Indonesia	77%	23%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Agreement to the statement was significantly hight in Malaysia and in Indonesia than that in Singapore</li> <li>● There was no significant difference between the opinion of the malaysians and Indonesians</li> </ul>		
Singapore	57%	43%			
Average	70%	30%			
The ASEAN community should include the abolition of passports for ASEAN citizens when visiting other ASEAN countries			36.77	2	0.00
			Meaning: There were significant differences		
Malaysia	42%	58%	Results from the Mann-Whitney U tests:		
Indonesia	56%	44%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Agreement to the statement was significantly hight in indonesia than that in Malaysia and Singapore</li> <li>● There was no significant difference between the opinion of the malaysians and Singaporeans</li> </ul>		
Singapore	34%	66%			
Average	44%	56%			
The ASEAN community should include the ASEAN parliament which has full authority as a legislative power over the region			103.6	2	0.00
			Meaning: There were significant differences		
Malaysia	62%	38%	Results from the Mann-Whitney U tests:		
Indonesia	40%	60%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Agreement to the statement is significantly higher in Malaysia than that in Indonesia and Singapore</li> <li>● Agreement to the statement is significantly higher in Indonesia than that in Singapore</li> </ul>		
Singapore	24%	76%			
Average	42%	58%			
The ASEAN community should include a single executive body (ASEAN commission) which has full aythoria as an executive in the region			142.3	2	0.00
			Meaning: There are significant differences		
Malaysia	70%	30%	Results from the Mann-Whitney U tests:		
Indonesia	39%	61%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Agreement to the statement was significantly higher in Malaysia Than that in Indonesia and Singapore</li> <li>● Agreement to the statement was significantly higher in Indonesia than that in Singapore</li> </ul>		
Singapore	28%	72%			
Average	40%	54%			
The ASEAN community should include a single judicial body			127.9	2	0.00
			Meaning There are significant differences		
Malaysia	71%	29%	Results from the Mann-Whitney U tests:		
Indonesia	44%	56%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Agreement to the statement was significantly higher in Malaysia than that in Indonesia and Singapore</li> <li>● Agreement to the statement was significantly higher in Indonesia than that in Singapore</li> </ul>		
Singapore	29%	71%			
Average	48%	52%			
The ASEAN community should include the abolition of visa for ASEAN citizensvisiting other ASEAN countries			33.93	2	0.00
			Meaning: There were significant differences		
Malaysia	55%	45%	Result from the Mann-Whitney U tests:		
Indonesia	73%	27%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Agreement to the statement was significantly higher in Indonesia and in Singapore than that in Malaysia</li> <li>● There was no significant differences between the opinion of the Singaporeans and Indonesians</li> </ul>		
Singapore	68%	32%			
Average	66%	34%			

Fig. 5: The aspiration on the establishment of the ASEAN political security (APSC)

formation of ASEAN Community should emulate EU's style of regional integration. However, the survey also showed some interesting results. Respondent's understanding of regional integration concept was in fact differed from that of the European model. Figure 5 shows that the majority of the respondents rejected the abolition of passports (rejected by 58% respondents in Malaysia, 44% in Indonesia and 66% in Singapore). They also did not accept the idea to establish an ASEAN Parliament which has full legislative authority over the region (rejected by 38% respondents in Malaysia, 60% in Indonesia and 76% in Singapore). Furthermore, the respondents were also not keen to have a strong executive body at regional level (rejected by 30% respondents in Malaysia,

61% in Indonesia and 72% in Singapore). They, in fact rejected the establishment of the ASEAN Court of Justice (rejected by 29% respondents in Malaysia, 56% in Indonesia and 71% in Singapore). Finally, the majority of respondents only agreed to the abolition of visa requirements (supported by 66% of respondents, 55% in Malaysia, 73% in Indonesia and 68% in Singapore).

The findings of the study also suggested that the aspirations for the ASEAN Community were different in the three countries. The idea of abolishing passports was supported by many Indonesian respondents but rejected by the majority of Malaysians and Singaporeans. The aspiration reflects the call by the chairman of *Himsataki* (the Association of Indonesian Labor Exporters), Mr. Yunus Yamani who proposed that the Indonesian migrant workers should be allowed to use their Indonesian identity card to travel and work in Malaysia because it would save a lot of money (Chew, 2011). However, for Singapore, Brunei and Malaysia, the abolition of passports would not likely to get support due to the threat it would pose to their sovereignty and national security. Furthermore, the abolition of passports would also make it more difficult to control transnational crimes and immigration flows.

The study also found that the EU-like regional government infrastructure such as the Regional Parliament, a stronger regional executive body and a single judicial body (ASEAN Court of Justice)-while accepted by the Malaysian respondents-were rejected by the Indonesian and Singaporean respondents. It showed that it would be difficult to establish the EU-like regionalism in Southeast Asian as it is not supported by the majority of the public. Furthermore, the study also noted that although, the majority of the respondents stated that they would like to have an EU-like organization in Southeast Asia, they nonetheless rejected some basic principles of the EU formation such as the abolition of passports and the establishment of stronger regional government structures. The findings showed although the idealism was very much accepted by the general public, in reality however, they are not ready for the radical changes.

## CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that despite respondent's lack of awareness the elite-centric formation of APSC, their attitudes towards the formation process were positive and supportive. Respondents also exhibited positive attitudes towards the concept of APSC, but their aspirations for Southeast Asian regionalism appeared to be different from the European integration model. In addition, while the respondents in the three countries still perceived the proposal would be beneficial to the people, most of them also realized that achieving APSC's objectives would be an uphill task since most of member countries tended to give priorities to their own national interests than to that of the regional ones. It may not augur well for the community building process in Southeast Asia. Effective strategies hence are needed to foster positive attitudes towards ASEAN regional integration. Yet, as the public opinion may change over time, continuous assessments is needed to assist effective decision making in the region.

This study argued that the views of the public needed to be further gauged to ensure the success of the regional integration. It also called for more concerted efforts by the regional political elites to understand the public opinion and attitudes and to ensure that the public are ready and susceptible to the idea of regional community. For future studies, it is recommended to extend the study to cover all of the ASEAN countries to gather a more thorough opinion on the ASEAN regionalism.

Finally, the findings of the study should become the very basis for policy makers and regional political elites to take into account general public opinion and attitudes in order to ensure the success and sustainability of the APSC. Otherwise, the proposed idea of the community, slated to be fully introduced in 2015, would only a dream for the regional political elites.

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