

# Regional Organizations and Global Governance: The Case of ASEAN

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## Abstract

ASEAN, as the leading regional organization in Southeast Asia, has successfully established cooperation mechanisms in various fields, especially through security forums such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and East Asia Summit (EAS) as well as economic integration programs through the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC). The results of this study show that although ASEAN has achieved a lot of progress, the organization faces significant challenges, especially the different levels of economic and political development among member states, which slow down the integration process. In addition, external pressures from major powers such as China and the United States create complex geopolitical dilemmas for ASEAN. Interviews with academics highlighted that global political and economic uncertainties also have the potential to weaken solidarity among member states. Nevertheless, this research emphasizes that ASEAN still has great potential in global governance, with a focus on regulatory harmonization, improved policy coordination, and a role as an effective multilateral dialogue platform in the Southeast Asian region.

**Keywords:** ASEAN, Regional Integration, Global Governance, Geopolitics

## Introduction

In the last decade, the importance of regional organizations such as ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) in global governance has garnered increasing attention in international relations. Established in 1967, ASEAN has evolved into a significant actor, primarily focused on promoting peace, stability, and development in Southeast Asia (Usaimeen Waenalai, 2024) and (Adi Joko Purwanto, 2024). The 1967 ASEAN Declaration laid the foundation for this cooperation, emphasizing social, cultural, and economic collaboration among member states without mandating regional economic integration (Mely Caballero, 2023). Central to ASEAN's effectiveness is the "ASEAN Way," which embodies behavioral and procedural norms that guide its approach to regional security cooperation. This diplomatic framework facilitates conflict management and peaceful dispute resolution, as enshrined in the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia established in 1976 (Rudy Sutanto, 2023) and (Pushpanathan Sundram, 2023). By promoting a unified voice in external relations and establishing a nuclear-free zone in 1987, ASEAN has demonstrated its capacity to enhance regional stability and security, thereby contributing significantly to the broader global governance landscape (Usaimeen Waenalai, 2024) and (Adi Joko Purwanto, 2024). ASEAN plays a critical role in global governance by addressing significant challenges such as climate

change, terrorism, and transnational migration. Since its inception, ASEAN has evolved to facilitate regional stability and create a unified voice in external relations, which is essential to addressing these global issues effectively (Ferdyan Samuel Karunia, 2023). The organization is actively involved in shaping environmental governance, particularly through its commitment to multilateral agreements such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) (Cholidah Cholidah, 2022). However, ASEAN faces challenges, including criticism regarding its effectiveness in regional trade liberalization and the need for a stronger military alliance to address security concerns (Joshua Samuels, 2023). Despite these challenges, there are opportunities for ASEAN to strengthen its international standing through enhanced cooperation among member states. Collaborative efforts can lead to more effective responses to emerging cross-border issues, thereby strengthening ASEAN's role in global governance (Indonesian Journal of Multidisciplinary Science, 2023). By adapting to the complexities of the global landscape and fostering unity among its members, ASEAN can better navigate the challenges it faces and capitalize on opportunities for growth and influence (Alistair D. B. Cook, 2024) and (Ferdyan Samuel Karunia, 2023)

ASEAN has implemented various mechanisms and initiatives to enhance its capacity as a global actor, with a focus on economic cooperation, political dialogue, and regional security. The ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) aims to create a single market and production base, facilitating trade and investment among member states, which are essential for regional integration and sustainable development (Mrs. Reena Shinde, 2023). This economic integration is complemented by the ASEAN Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), which strengthens trade ties with key partners, further strengthening ASEAN's position in the global economy (Kazushi Shimizu, 2021). In addition to economic initiatives, the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC) promotes political and security stability through dialogue among member states, addressing critical issues such as the South China Sea dispute (Su-Hyun Lee, 2021). This political framework is critical to maintaining regional peace, which is a prerequisite for effective governance and sustainable development. Furthermore, the involvement of civil society and the private sector in governance processes is essential. Their participation can enhance the legitimacy and effectiveness of ASEAN policies, ensuring that they are more responsive to the needs of the region's diverse populations (Mrs. Reena Shinde, 2023). By fostering these collaborative efforts, ASEAN can better navigate the complexities of regional and global challenges.

ASEAN plays a critical role in navigating the complexities of great power competition, particularly between the United States and China. As a regional organization, ASEAN is tasked

with balancing the diverse interests of its member states while managing external influences that threaten regional stability (Jiaxuan Wang, 2024) and (Jaehyon Lee, 2024). The ongoing geopolitical competition necessitates a hedging strategy, whereby ASEAN seeks to minimize the security risks posed by an assertive China while simultaneously capitalizing on the economic opportunities presented by closer ties with Beijing (Brice Tseen Fu Lee, 2024). This approach is particularly important in the context of intensifying US-China competition, which spans strategic, economic, and technological dimensions (Yulida Nuraini Santoso, 2024). Furthermore, ASEAN's centrality in regional affairs allows ASEAN to foster dialogue and cooperation between its members and external partners, thereby strengthening its influence in global governance (F. B. L. Tobing, 2023). By maintaining this central role, ASEAN has not only contributed to peace and stability in Southeast Asia but also positioned itself as a key player in the broader geopolitical landscape (Jaehyon Lee, 2024). Ultimately, understanding ASEAN's strategies and challenges in this dynamic environment is critical to understanding the future of regional cooperation and governance in the face of great power competition (Jiaxuan Wang, 2024) and (Yulida Nuraini Santoso, 2024).

As the geopolitical and economic landscape has evolved, ASEAN has effectively adapted to emerging challenges, especially non-traditional security threats such as climate change and the pandemic. The organization has initiated closer cooperation among its member states through platforms such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and ASEAN Plus Three, which facilitate dialogue and collaboration on pressing global issues (Mely Caballero, 2023) and (Alistair D. B. Cook, 2024). This proactive approach underscores ASEAN's commitment to multilateralism and collective security, positioning it as a key player in addressing these complex challenges (Chanthaboun Luangphane, 2024). ASEAN's engagement with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) exemplifies its efforts to address climate change as a significant non-traditional security threat (Joshua Samuels, 2023). Furthermore, the organization's initiatives on climate change adaptation highlight its recognition of the need for resilience-building among member states, ensuring sustainable development in the region (Hüsnü Çelik, 2023). By fostering cooperation and dialogue, ASEAN not only strengthens its relevance in the regional security architecture but also enhances its capacity to respond effectively to global challenges that require shared attention (Mely Caballero, 2023) and (Chanthaboun Luangphane, 2024). ASEAN plays a critical role in global governance by enhancing the capacities and capabilities of its member states through various cooperation mechanisms, most notably the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC). The AEC aims to promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, addressing common

challenges such as trade and economic stability among member countries (Fu Lee, 2024). This initiative is part of a broader strategy to create a single market and production base, ultimately strengthening the region's economic resilience (Fu Lee, 2024). In addition, ASEAN is actively working to enhance the bargaining power of its member countries in international fora, thereby increasing their influence in discussions related to trade, human rights, and sustainable development (Serhii Kuzminov, 2023) and (Mrs. Reena Shinde, 2023). Events such as the 45th ASEAN Economic Ministers' Meeting serve as important platforms for member countries to coordinate their positions and advocate for collective interests in global trade discussions (Koichi Ishikawa, 2021). Through these efforts, ASEAN not only addresses complex global challenges but also aspires to become a model for other regional organizations, promoting stability and prosperity in Southeast Asia while encouraging collaborative solutions to pressing issues (Endra Wijaya, 2020).

## **Literature Review**

### **Regional Organization Theory**

A regional organization is an entity formed by countries in a particular region to achieve common goals in the political, economic, and social fields. The theory of regional integration, as proposed by Ernst Haas (1958), emphasizes the importance of the dynamics of integration between member countries that can influence global policy. This concept is relevant to understanding how ASEAN functions as a platform for member countries to work together on issues that affect regional stability.

### **ASEAN as a Global Actor**

ASEAN has developed into one of the most influential regional organizations in the world. According to Acharya (2014), ASEAN plays a key role in creating norms and cooperation mechanisms that contribute to security and economic development in Southeast Asia. For example, ASEAN has successfully integrated economic and trade policies through the "ASEAN Free Trade Area" (AFTA) and the "ASEAN Economic Community" (AEC), which have not only strengthened cooperation among members but also increased ASEAN's bargaining power on the global stage.

### **Global Governance**

Global governance refers to the mechanisms and processes used to manage issues that cross national boundaries, including climate change, international security, and trade. In this context, researchers such as Held and McGrew (2000) argue that regional organizations such as ASEAN can act as a bridge between local and global interests. This study focuses on how

ASEAN can contribute to global governance through structured and responsive cooperation on global issues.

### **Security and Stability Issues in Southeast Asia**

Security is one of the main pillars of ASEAN's agenda. In this context, the concept of a “security community” proposed by Karl Deutsch (1957) is relevant to understand how countries in the Southeast Asian region can build trust and cooperation to create a stable environment. Research by Smith (2018) shows that ASEAN has taken steps to address traditional and non-traditional security threats, including terrorism and cybersecurity, which have an impact on regional and global stability.

### **Challenges in Global Governance**

Although ASEAN has shown progress in regional governance, the organization is faced with various challenges, such as economic disparities among members, differences in development levels, and internal political dynamics. Lee's (2020) study highlights how global political and economic uncertainty, as well as pressure from major powers, can affect ASEAN's effectiveness in carrying out its role as a global actor. This is important to explore in this study, considering how ASEAN can adapt and overcome these challenges.

### **Multilateral Approach in Global Governance**

ASEAN also adopts a multilateral approach in dealing with global issues, participating in international forums such as the G20, APEC, and the UN. According to Hill (2013), involvement in multilateral forums allows ASEAN to contribute to global policy-making and strengthen its bargaining position on the international stage. This study will explore how ASEAN plays a role in global decision-making and its impact on regional policies.

### **Methods**

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study method. This study will focus on ASEAN as a regional organization, with an in-depth analysis of policy documents, official reports, and interviews with stakeholders, including government officials, academics, and practitioners involved in the decision-making process in ASEAN. This research is limited to the analysis of ASEAN's role in the context of global governance and does not include an in-depth analysis of other regional organizations. In addition, time and resource constraints may affect the number of interviews and participation in FGDs.

### **Results and Discussion**

#### **Contribution to Security Issues**

ASEAN has succeeded in building cooperation mechanisms in the field of security through various forums such as the “ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF)” and the “East Asia

Summit (EAS)”, which have become important platforms to encourage dialogue between member countries and external partners on regional security issues. The ARF, established in 1994, is one of the first forums in Asia to specifically discuss security issues at the multilateral level. This forum serves as a forum where ASEAN member countries and external partners such as the United States, China, Japan, and Russia can discuss security issues openly. The ARF not only focuses on traditional security, such as border disputes and military conflicts, but also includes non-traditional security, such as terrorism, climate change, and maritime security.

Stakeholders noted that although ASEAN does not have military instruments or execution authority to directly resolve conflicts, ASEAN's existence as a dialogue platform plays an important role in easing tensions in the region. The principles of “non-interference” and consensus decision-making, which are the foundation of ASEAN diplomacy, help create an atmosphere where member states feel safe discussing sensitive issues without fear of external pressure or direct interference. For example, in the South China Sea issue involving several ASEAN member states and China, forums such as the ARF and the EAS have provided an opportunity to discuss the dispute peacefully. Although no immediate resolution has been achieved, the dialogue process facilitated by ASEAN has helped reduce the risk of escalation and allowed for short-term agreements, such as the “Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea” (DoC), which emphasizes the commitment to resolve disputes peacefully. Furthermore, ASEAN has also played a significant role in fostering confidence-building among member states and external partners. Initiatives such as intelligence exchanges, joint military exercises, and discussions on defense policies have strengthened the network of cooperation at the regional level. This shows that even though ASEAN does not have a military force, its role as a facilitator of dialogue and guardian of regional stability is crucial in creating an environment conducive to peace and security. Thus, despite its limited capacity as a dialogue platform, ASEAN has played a key role in maintaining stability in the Southeast Asian region and beyond. This cooperation mechanism reflects the importance of preventive diplomacy and confidence building in the context of regional security governance, where security challenges are increasingly complex and require a multilateral approach.

### **Economic and Trade Integration**

The ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) program has made significant positive contributions to economic integration in the Southeast Asian region since its launch in 2015. The AEC aims to create a region with a single integrated market and production base, enhance ASEAN's competitiveness, and deepen regional economic integration at the global level. One of the main achievements of the AEC is the elimination of tariffs for most goods traded between



member countries, which encourages a freer flow of trade and increases the competitiveness of products in the region. Interviews with business people and governments in various member countries show that many parties feel they have benefited from the implementation of the AEC, especially in terms of tariff elimination and the formation of a single market. Countries with strong production bases such as Vietnam and Thailand, for example, have successfully utilized AEC policies to attract more foreign direct investment (FDI), which in turn drives national economic growth.

However, although the AEC has shown progress in strengthening economic integration in ASEAN, there are still a number of challenges faced by several member countries. Interviews with stakeholders at the government level revealed that the implementation of the AEC agreement is often uneven. Several member countries have struggled to adapt to the new standards and regulations agreed under the AEC, mainly due to differences in national policies and regulations across countries. One of the main challenges is the differences in regulatory harmonization across economic sectors. Although tariffs have largely been eliminated, non-tariff barriers, such as product standards regulations, licensing, and customs procedures, remain significant obstacles to true economic integration. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in several member countries often find it difficult to adapt to the different regulations of other countries in the region, thus denying them the benefits they could derive from the single market. Furthermore, the study also indicates that although the AEC has succeeded in creating a platform for regional economic integration, the lack of monitoring and enforcement mechanisms for the implementation of agreements between member countries has slowed down the implementation of agreements in several sectors. ASEAN member countries generally implement policies that benefit their domestic needs first, which in turn slows down the process of policy harmonization at the regional level. To ensure that the AEC can achieve its goals optimally, ASEAN needs to focus on improving regulatory harmonization and strengthening cooperation among member countries. A more integrated and coordinated approach in aligning domestic policies with regional standards will be key to addressing existing non-tariff barriers. In addition, training and technical support should be provided to developing economies to accelerate the implementation of the AEC agreement. Overall, while the AEC has made significant progress in promoting economic integration in ASEAN, challenges in regulatory harmonization and economic disparities among member states suggest that there is still work to be done for ASEAN to truly enjoy the full benefits of an integrated single market and production base. Role in Climate Change Mitigation: ASEAN has recognized the importance of cooperation on climate change issues. Official documents indicate joint initiatives, such as

the “ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution,” which aims to reduce haze pollution caused by forest fires. Interviews with government officials indicated that despite progress, coordination among member states still needs to be improved.

### **Internal and External Challenges**

This study found that ASEAN faces various internal challenges that have the potential to hinder regional integration and cooperation efforts. One of the main challenges is the significant differences in the level of economic and political development among its member countries. ASEAN consists of countries with diverse economic backgrounds, ranging from developed economies such as Singapore to developing countries such as Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar. These differences create a gap in terms of ability to meet the standards and obligations set out in various ASEAN cooperation initiatives, such as the “ASEAN Economic Community” (AEC). Countries with weaker economies often face infrastructure, technology, and human resource constraints, which slow down the process of economic integration and hinder the achievement of more progressive agreements at the regional level.

In terms of politics, ASEAN is also faced with a variety of government systems, ranging from established democracies to countries with authoritarian regimes. These differences in political systems create complex dynamics in reaching consensus, considering that ASEAN adheres to the principle of non-interference, where intervention in the domestic affairs of member countries is very limited. This often makes ASEAN slow to respond to crucial issues that require immediate action, especially those related to human rights violations or internal political conflicts in its member states. In addition, political disparities also affect how member states view regional threats, such as maritime security, terrorism, and climate change, which are often prioritized differently by each country. In addition to internal challenges, external pressure from major powers such as China and the United States also affects ASEAN's position in the global order. ASEAN is often in a complicated position, given that the region is a geopolitical competition arena between the two major world powers. China, as one of ASEAN's largest trading partners, has significant economic influence in the region, especially through its Belt and Road Initiative that involves many ASEAN member states in major infrastructure projects. However, China's involvement also raises concerns about increasing economic dependence and political risks, especially in the South China Sea dispute involving several ASEAN member states. Meanwhile, the United States remains a strategic ally for several ASEAN countries in terms of defense and security, as seen through its presence in regional forums such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and bilateral defense cooperation. Pressure from both of these great powers creates a dilemma for ASEAN in



maintaining its neutrality and strategic autonomy. Interviews with academics highlighted concerns that global political and economic uncertainty could threaten ASEAN's solidarity. The escalating tensions between China and the United States, especially on trade, technology, and security issues, put ASEAN in a difficult position, where member states may have to choose which side to support, or risk losing economic or security support from one of the great powers. Overall, this study highlights that while ASEAN has made considerable progress in regional cooperation, internal challenges related to differences in the levels of economic and political development among its member states, as well as external pressures from great powers, have the potential to hinder further integration efforts. ASEAN must continue to navigate complex global dynamics and find ways to maintain its solidarity and strategic autonomy amidst increasing global uncertainty.

## **Discussion**

These findings suggest that ASEAN has successfully functioned as an adaptive regional organization in facing global challenges. Its contribution to security issues and economic integration are important aspects that demonstrate ASEAN's ability to play a role in global governance. However, the challenges faced by ASEAN indicate the need for internal reform. For example, differences in policies among member countries in the implementation of the "AEC" indicate that although the goal of integration has been set, its realization on the ground still requires stronger commitment and cooperation. This is in line with the view expressed by Acharya (2014) that ASEAN's success in achieving its goals is highly dependent on the willingness of member countries to compromise and cooperate. Furthermore, ASEAN's role in mitigating climate change suggests that this organization has the potential to contribute to pressing global issues. However, to increase its effectiveness, ASEAN needs to strengthen cooperation among member countries and create better mechanisms for coordinating actions. This study supports Lee's (2020) argument that without strong collaborative efforts, countries in the region will struggle to address complex global challenges. External challenges faced by ASEAN, especially in the changing geopolitical context, also need to be considered. The uncertainty faced by member states regarding external influences can affect ASEAN's bargaining position in the international arena. Therefore, it is important for ASEAN to strengthen its identity and solidarity as an organization, and to enhance its diplomatic capacity to face these challenges.

## Conclusion

1. ASEAN's Role in Regional Governance: ASEAN has successfully established effective cooperation mechanisms in various fields, including security and economics, which have contributed positively to the stability and growth of the Southeast Asian region.
2. Dialogue and Security Platform: Forums such as the "ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF)" and the "East Asia Summit (EAS)" have become important platforms for member states to discuss regional security issues. Although ASEAN does not have the direct power to resolve conflicts, its existence helps to ease tensions in the region.
3. Economic Integration through the AEC: The "ASEAN Economic Community (AEC)" program has promoted economic integration through the elimination of tariffs and the establishment of a single market, which has provided tangible benefits to businesses and governments. However, policy implementation still faces challenges, especially related to differences in regulations among member states.
4. ASEAN's Internal Challenges: Differences in the level of economic and political development among ASEAN member states pose challenges in efforts to achieve deeper integration. Countries with weaker economies often find it difficult to follow agreed regional standards.
5. External Pressure from Great Powers: ASEAN is under geopolitical pressure from great powers such as China and the United States, which have economic and security interests in the region. The rivalry between these two countries creates a dilemma for ASEAN in maintaining its neutrality in the global order.
6. Global Uncertainty: Global political and economic uncertainty, including issues such as climate change, pandemics, and economic instability, can affect solidarity and cooperation within ASEAN. Internal divisions may occur if member countries prioritize domestic interests over regional ones.
7. Importance of Harmonization and Coordination: To achieve deeper integration, ASEAN needs to focus on harmonizing regulations among member countries and improving policy coordination across sectors. Training and technical support for developing countries in ASEAN are also needed so that they can accelerate the implementation of regional policies.
8. ASEAN's Potential in the Global Order: Despite facing various challenges, ASEAN still has great potential to play an important role in global governance, especially on issues of economics, security, and regional stability. ASEAN's strength lies in its ability to serve as a platform for multilateral dialogue and cooperation in a highly dynamic region.

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