

Road to ASEAN Political Security Community Vision 2025: Understanding Convergence and Divergence in ASEAN Voting Behaviors in the UNGA

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Abstract

While the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC) Blueprint 2025 envisages a centrality of regional architecture in responding to security challenges in the region, divided positions among the member states – mostly visible in the South China Sea dispute – have deepened the pessimism on the fate of APSC. Notwithstanding the persisting intra-ASEAN disunity, the organization has been projecting the goal of ASEAN centrality in the global political arena. The goal highlights ASEAN's emerging role as the 'hub' of regional cooperation in Asia-Pacific hence cohesion is highly expected. The research aims to examine ASEAN cohesion and its alignment with the institution's community-building project. The research primarily looks at the pattern of divergence and convergence in ASEAN voting behavior across security issues discussed in the UN General Assembly. It also underscores the underlying factors behind the emerging patterns. Using Agreement Index (AI), the research finds that ASEAN member states' voting highly converges on colonialism, the law of the sea, the Mediterranean region, military expenditures, outer space, peace, and transnational crimes. Alternatively, voting diverges on resolutions related to arms transfer, counterterrorism, and armed conflict. Contributing factors to this pattern include member states' preferences, the identity, value, norms, and cognitive prior of the regional organization, as well as alliance and major powers' preferences.

Keywords: ASEAN Political Security Community, APSC Vision 2025, convergence, divergence, UN General Assembly, voting behavior

Introduction

Following the establishment of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Community in 2015, the organization has been pursuing the regional integration agenda under the framework of ASEAN Community Vision 2025 (ASEAN, 2015a, 2015b). The vision aims to elevate cooperation among the member states across three integration pillars, namely the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC), ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), and ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC). The blueprints of AEC, APSC, and ASCC 2025 respectively highlight some key premises, including ASEAN's "common position on economic fora" (ASEAN, 2015c), "responsible and constructive role globally based on an ASEAN common platform on the international issue" (ASEAN, 2015d), and "proactive contribution to the global community" (ASEAN, 2015e). Furthermore, it stresses the importance of strengthening institutional capacity to promote greater ASEAN actorness abroad. While these visions are normatively achievable, the pursuit can be seen as an uphill battle, particularly that of the APSC pillar.

Arguably, the diminishing intra-ASEAN cohesion is the underlying factor behind the significant setback in the ASEAN community-building project (Fardhiyanti & Wee, 2022) and the achievement of the ASEAN centrality goal (Acharya, 2017; Indraswari, 2022). ASEAN member states' positions are often divided when dealing with various regional security challenges. For instance, ASEAN fails to produce a collective stance in the South China Sea dispute since member states continue demonstrating diverging positions. Incompatibility among member states can be observed in other issues, such as China's expanding influence in the region (Gloria, 2021), the Sino-US rivalry, the military coup in Myanmar, and the establishment of AUKUS in 2021.

The intra-ASEAN disunity arguably has undermined the organization's role in dealing with the emerging regional security challenges. Furthermore, it has lowered ASEAN's reputation within the international community and decentered ASEAN in the regional security architecture (Dunst, 2021; Beeson, 2022). Some observers have underlined contributing factors leading to the increased pessimism about ASEAN cohesion and the prospect of APSC. Beeson (2016), O'Neill (2018), and Chirathivat and Langhammer (2020) agree that ASEAN was particularly divided in dealing with the rise of China. Beeson (2016) further argues, "an effective, coherent, consistent, and collective response to the challenge of China is likely to prove beyond ASEAN abilities". This is due to China's divide and rule practices (DRP) through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) project (Chirathivat & Langhammer, 2020) and economic policies in general, particularly toward the authoritarian regimes in Southeast Asia (O'Neill, 2018). The domestic politics of individual members and the institutional set-up of ASEAN also added to factors facilitating the divergence in member states' stances on regional political and security issues (O'Neill, 2018). Acharya (2017) further argues that the diminishing intra-ASEAN cohesion has posed a serious challenge to ASEAN's inherent ambition to be the center of diplomacy and regional processes in the Asia Pacific region.

Inherently, the research endeavors to solve whether the lack of intra-ASEAN cohesion is reflected in a larger international forum in which ASEAN is expected to function as a unified regional bloc. The research argues that disagreement on key regional security challenges to a varying degree is a rational outcome as they might directly and adversely affect member states' national and regional interests. As stated in its blueprint, the APSC adopts a comprehensive security approach which takes into consideration both traditional and non-traditional, emerging, and existing key security challenges vital to national and regional interests. It includes not only military threats to national sovereignty and regional stability but also transnational crimes and trans-boundary challenges, namely people smuggling, drug trafficking, terrorism, illegal arms transfer, IUU fishing, piracy, robbery against ships, cybercrimes, and natural disasters. However, issues discussed in the extra-regional forums go beyond these regional issues. Thus, the APSC cohesion should be holistically examined by including emerging security issues at the global level.

Against this backdrop, the research aims to examine APSC cohesion by looking at its voting behavior on security issues in the UN General Assembly (UNGA). The UNGA is the largest international forum with universal membership discussing international security issues. It is, thus, expected that examining ASEAN voting behavior in this institution could provide a more comprehensive picture of the cohesion of ASEAN as a political security community as envisaged in the APSC 2025. The two research questions examined are: 1) to what extent do ASEAN positions converge and diverge on security issues in the UNGA?; 2) what explains the pattern of convergence and divergence of ASEAN positions on security issues in the UNGA? The research provides not only a deeper insight into the pattern of convergence and divergence of the member states' position but also the contributing factors shaping such a pattern. In doing so, the research will firstly provide the conceptual framework of cohesion and the theoretical framework on factors influencing actors' cohesion. Next step is outlining the research method followed by findings and discussion on the pattern and factors shaping the cohesion of ASEAN in the UNGA.

Concept and Theory: Voting Cohesion of a Regional Organization

The existing literature has discussed the cohesion of ASEAN when dealing with regional security issues such as the Indochina Crisis (Weatherbee, 1985), Myanmar (Haacke, 2008), the South China Sea (Thayer, 2012; O'Neill, 2018; Thu, 2019), China-US rivalry (Graham, 2013; Chirathivat & Langhammer, 2020) and the COVID-19 pandemic in the region (Rüland, 2021). Nevertheless, an analysis of ASEAN cohesion in its participation in the larger international forum is strictly limited. Nguitragool and Rüland (2015) suggest that ASEAN as an actor at the international fora has claimed itself as "a pioneering endeavor" and "one that will still be preliminary, tentative and incomplete in many respects" (Nguitragool & Rüland, 2015). They focus on providing a theoretical foundation to explore the cohesion of ASEAN through their roles in various stages of negotiation and not through their voting behaviors, which is done using the case study of the WTO and ILO, thereby leaving gaps in the cohesion of ASEAN in the UNGA. Ferdinand (2013) and Jang and Chen (2019) fill this gap by examining selected

international issues in the UNGA between 1970-2011 and 1991-2018, respectively. However, a focus on international security issues is still missing as the main concern of this research. The research builds on these works and other literature on states' voting behaviors in the UN (Hurwitz, 1974; Foot, 1979; Rasch, 2008; Hosli et al., 2010; Jin & Hosli, 2013; Ferdinand, 2014; Burmester & Jankowski, 2014; Meyers, 1966) to examine the cohesion of ASEAN as a political security community.

The concept of cohesion is often used interchangeably with coherence in discussions of international or regional organizations. According to Merriam Webster dictionary, as a term, cohesion means as "a condition in which people or things are closely united". Meanwhile, coherence refers to a condition with two requirements, namely the absence of contradiction and the existence of positive synergies between components (Hillion, 2008; Hoffmeister, 2008, cited in Portela & Raube, 2009). From the definition, it seems that both terms have different emphasis. Cohesion is more political and often used together with the word political, hence political cohesion (Gebhard, 2017), such as the cohesion policy of the EU and ASEAN in narrowing development gap among members. Coherence is more institutional and is, in fact, often associated with the word policy, hence policy coherence, such as the well-known Policy Coherence for Development (PCD) by the OECD to ensure synergies among policies on development.

The definition also suggests that coherence is of higher quality than cohesion as it requires positive synergies rather than a nominally united position. Therefore, coherence is more apparent in the discussion of foreign policies of regional organizations, particularly the EU (Algieri, 1999; Rasch, 2008; Carbone, 2009; Nilsson et al., 2012; Mayer, 2013; Pertiwi, 2019). Meanwhile, cohesion is more apparent in the discussion of voting behaviors of both EU (Luif, 2003; Kissack, 2009) and ASEAN (Nguitragool & Rüländ, 2015; Jang & Chen, 2019). The inquiries are on the extent to which members of these organizations have a common position (even though more consistently used for examining ASEAN voting behaviors). Rasch (2008) uses voting coherence, but it is to discuss to what extent members of the EU vote in line with the position of the EU. Based on this consideration, this paper will use cohesion in discussing to what extent ASEAN positions converge and diverge on security issues in the UNGA.

The cohesion of an international or regional organization is essential for its actorness in international relations. Nguitragool and Rüländ (2015) argue that a highly cohesive regional organization is necessary to increase its capacity to be an effective actor who can influence an international forum's agenda, norms, and institutional design. A cohesive organization also tends to have a more favorable bargaining position as a negotiator to achieve its interests. Even for intergovernmental organizations, cohesion is beneficial for member states from the perspective of the political scale in the way that collective action tends to have more weight in international negotiation and lower the costs of policy implementation (Ginsberg, 1989; Ginsberg, 1999). Externalization theory also acknowledges the positive impacts of cohesion for regional integration in the way that cohesion requires greater coordination among members (Haas & Rowe 1973, cited in Nguitragool & Rüländ, 2015). All these considerations are present in the APSC vision 2025, where ASEAN seek greater cohesion to increase its actorness and presence at the international level.

Achieving greater cohesion, however, is not easy particularly for intergovernmental organizations. Member states take full control of the bargaining process in these organization, hence individual state's preference matters. This is in line with the findings of many literatures on states and regional organizations' voting behaviors in the UN which also suggests preference as the main driver of actors' cohesion (Voeten, 2013; Bailey, Strezhnev, & Voeten, 2015; Bailey & Voeten, 2018). According to liberal intergovernmentalism theory, these organizations are cohesive which even could speak with one voice or set common position when the preference of individual member states converge, when they need commitments from others, or when they believe that joint policy is more beneficial (Moravcsik, 1993; Moravcsik, 1995). Likewise, member states are divided or lack of cohesion when their preferences diverge, and the benefit of cooperation is low. Preference, and thus voting, tends to converge on issues in the minimum interests of member states as the cost of cooperation is low. However, preference tends to diverge on issues in the higher interests of member states as it is more indivisible, and the risk of cooperation is higher.

Using the case of the EU, Ginsberg (1999) adds that international or external stimuli and regional contexts, such as the organization's identity, norms, and interests, are other factors shaping the foreign policy of a regional organization. Pertiwi (2019) argues that the key external stimuli shaping the cohesion of a regional organization are the other actors' preferences, particularly that of more powerful actors, who, in pursuing their preferences, intentionally shape or unintentionally have impacts on the cohesion of the regional organization. Powerful actors tend to support the cohesion of a regional organization when they see that a more cohesive organization is beneficial for them. Meanwhile, they tend to adopt divide and rule strategy when they are threatened by the collective position of the regional organization, when they only need to deal with certain countries and not the entire group, or when they are frustrated in dealing with the complexity of the regional organization. Other literature on state's voting behaviors focuses on alliance as another key external stimuli. As far as regional context, Nguitragool and Rüländ (2015) add that cognitive prior, defined as "an existing set of ideas, belief systems, and norms which determine and condition' current world views and behaviors of ... regional organizations" is the key regional factor shaping the cohesion of an organization. It is related to Ginsberg (1999), who included the identity, norms, and values of the regional organizations as key factors shaping the foreign policy of a regional organization. It follows that aspects of organizational identity, norms, and values facilitate cohesion or vice versa. Factors shaping the pattern of convergence and divergence of a regional organization are provided in Table 1.

Table 1 Factors influencing the pattern of voting cohesion of a regional organization

National context	State's preference
Regional context	Identity, value, norms, and cognitive prior of the organization
International context	Alliance and preference of the more powerful actors

Research Method: Agreement Index of Voting Cohesion

The research uses mixed methods to examine the extent of and factors influencing ASEAN cohesion on security issues in the UNGA. First, the research uses a quantitative method to examine the extent of ASEAN voting cohesion using the agreement index (AI). AI is chosen since it is considered the most suitable index to measure the extent of cohesion of political groups in the UN. It is helpful for large numbers of countries and resolutions. In doing so, this paper initially collects the voting data of ASEAN member states at the UN General Assembly on security issues from the UN Digital Library website (United Nations, n.d.). The research filters the data to include only resolutions adopted in the UN General Assembly, through a vote, from 2011-2020. There were 847 resolutions adopted through a vote at the UN General Assembly in 2011-2020, with an average of 84,7 resolutions per year (Figure 1). The site records the vote by each member state on each resolution listed in textual forms, such as 'Y' for yes, 'N' for no, 'A' for abstention, and 'blank' for absence or non-voting.

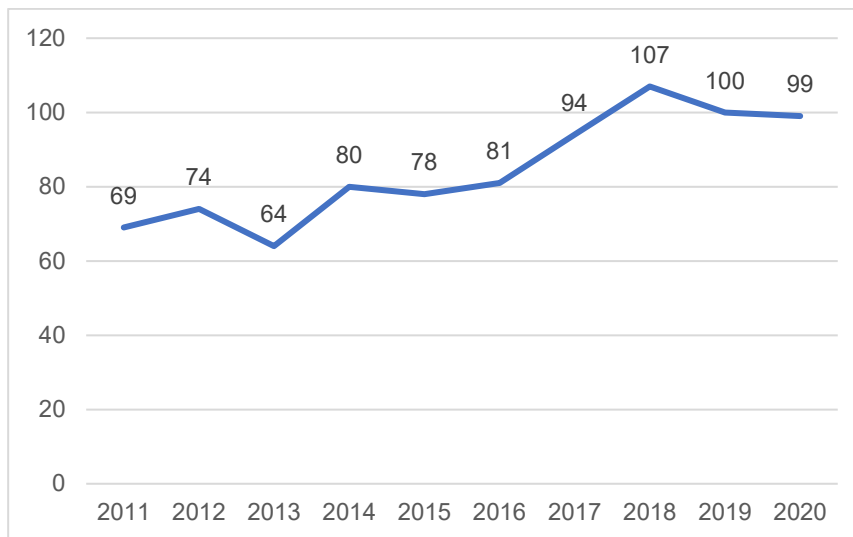


Figure 1 Number of Resolutions at the UN General Assembly, 2011-2020

The research codes whether resolutions are categorized as security issues such as armed conflicts, colonialism, nuclear issues, disarmament, human rights, and/or others for non-security issue areas (Table 2). Our definition of security issues refers to issues that are explicitly included in the APSC blueprint. A resolution can fit into multiple categories, namely: 1) resolutions on the Arms Trade Treaty are coded both 'arms transfers' and 'disarmament'; 2) resolutions on nuclear disarmament are coded both 'disarmament' and 'nuclear'; and 3) resolutions on disarmament agreements in outer space are coded both 'disarmament' and 'outer space' (Arms Trade Treaty, 2020). Figure 2 shows the number of resolutions in each category. Human rights, Middle East, nuclear issues, disarmament, and colonialism are the top five most discussed in the UN General Assembly with higher number of resolutions.

Table 2 Resolution Issue Categories

Issue Areas		
Armed conflicts	Human rights	Outer space
Arms transfers	Law of the Sea	Peace
Colonialism	Mediterranean region	Refugees
Counterterrorism	Middle East	Transnational crimes
Cybersecurity	Military expenditures	Other
Disarmament	Nuclear	

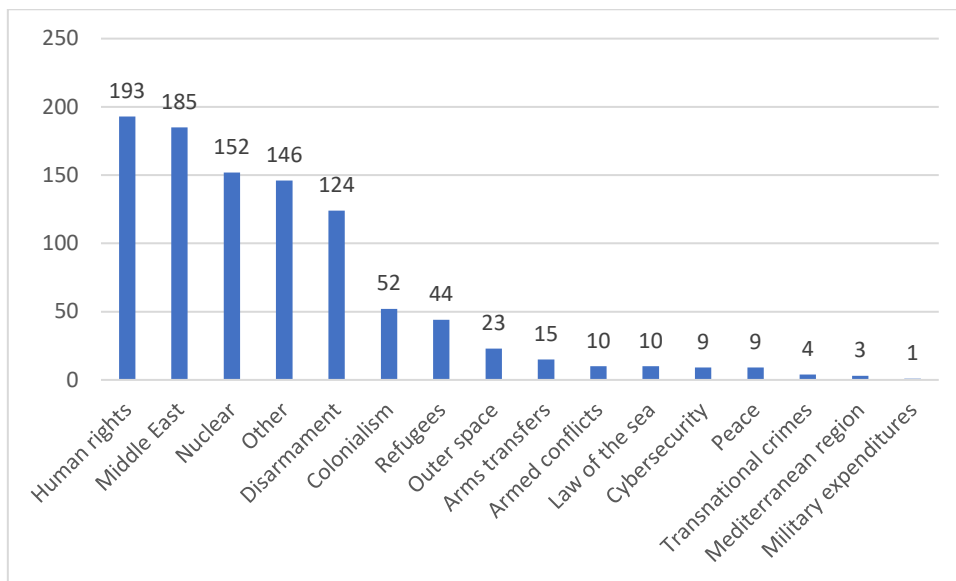


Figure 2 Resolutions Based on Issues at the UN General Assembly, 2011-2020

Finally, this research uses agreement index (AI) by Hix, Noury, and Roland (2005) to measure the extent of ASEAN voting cohesion:

$$AI = \frac{\max\{Y_i, N_i, A_i\} - \frac{1}{2} [(Y_i + N_i + A_i) - \max\{Y_i, N_i, A_i\}]}{(Y_i + N_i + A_i)}$$

where Y_i denotes the number of 'yes' votes expressed by group i on a given vote, N_i the number of 'no' votes, and A_i the number of abstentions.

To examine factors influencing the pattern of convergence and divergence in ASEAN positions, this paper uses qualitative method by applying variables in the theoretical framework explained earlier.

Findings and Discussions

Statistical Overview of ASEAN Voting Cohesion

There are at least three observations that can be made on the ASEAN voting cohesion on security issues in the UNGA. First, ASEAN overall demonstrated active presence in the UN General Assembly even though their positions do not always converge. Table 2 demonstrates the high number of voting by the ASEAN member states compared to their non-voting number. It means that the 2025 Vision to increase the Community presence at the international level has been well implemented. However, Table 3 demonstrates that there are varying numbers of 'yes', 'no', and 'abstain' votes. Thailand is the one that voted 'yes' on most resolutions (789), followed by Malaysia (780) and Singapore (778). Meanwhile, Myanmar voted 'no' the most (36), followed by Vietnam (28) and Cambodia (26). Myanmar is also the one that abstained the most (74), followed by Indonesia (71) and Singapore (62). Myanmar also had been absent the most (110), with a big gap with the next most absent states, Cambodia (39) and Laos (23).

Table 3 ASEAN Member States' Votes at the UN General Assembly, 2011-2020

All Resolutions	Yes (Y)	No (N)	Abstentions (A)	Non-Voting
Thailand	789	0	56	1
Malaysia	780	8	52	6
Singapore	778	6	62	0
Brunei	770	20	52	4
Philippines	770	16	53	7
Indonesia	762	13	71	0
Cambodia	761	26	20	39
Laos	742	20	61	23
Vietnam	742	28	55	21
Myanmar	626	36	74	110

Second, the average of ASEAN voting cohesion on security issues in the UNGA has interestingly decreased since the establishment of the Community in 2015. Figure 3 shows that the agreement index of ASEAN member states had been trending upward in 2011-2015, but then decreased in 2016-2020. The research argues that there are two explanations on this trend. First, as can be seen in Figure 2, the number of resolutions in the UN General Assembly has relatively increased and almost doubled in 2018. This increases chances of incoherence among member states. Second, many issues discussed in 2018 were related to issues that have been divisive among ASEAN member states, such as human rights, Middle East, and disarmament. Given the unavoidably rising complexity of international security following from

globalization, this finding should be an early warning for ASEAN to strengthen its cohesion in response to emerging issues.

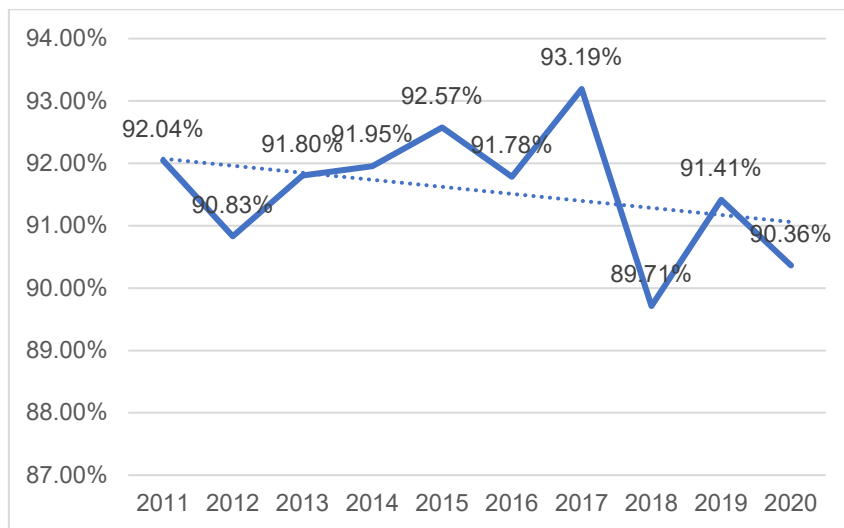


Figure 3 Yearly Average of Agreement Index of ASEAN Member States' Votes at the UN General Assembly, 2011-2020

Third, despite of the decreasing trend on the ASEAN voting cohesion overtime, ASEAN maintained a relatively high level of coherence with yearly average of 91,50% (Figure 3). One way to understand this trend is that the APSC has divided positions over various issues. However, in many instances, member states demonstrate their differing preference not by voting 'no', but by abstaining or simply being absent.

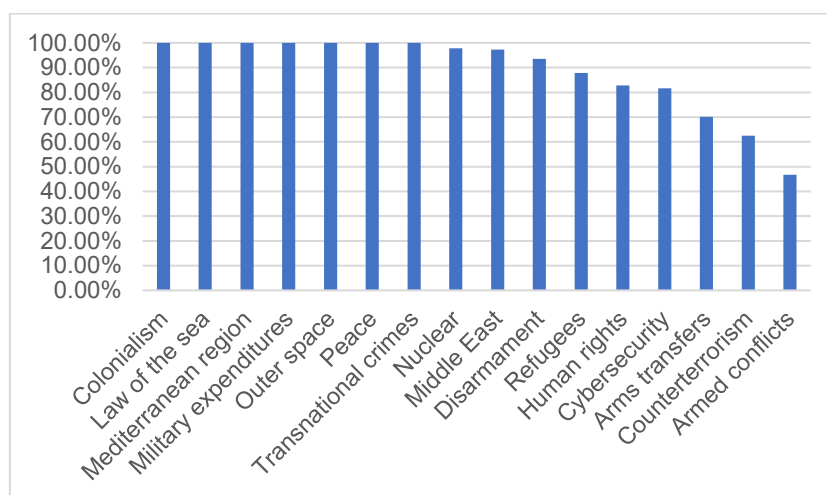


Figure 4 Average of Agreement Index of ASEAN Member States' Votes at the UN General Assembly, 2011-2020, by Categories

The Pattern of Convergence

Figure 4 also shows the pattern of convergence in ASEAN voting behavior on security issues in the UNGA. ASEAN voting cohesion is highest (100%) on issues fallen under colonialism, law of the sea, Mediterranean region, military expenditures, outer space, peace, and transnational crimes. The category of colonialism consists of resolutions on dissemination of information on decolonization, fourth international decade for the eradication of colonialism, implementation of the declaration on the granting of independence to colonial countries and peoples, questions of Guam, the rights of Palestinian people, and use of mercenaries as a means of violating human rights. The Law of the Sea consisting of annual resolutions aims to reaffirm the importance of and the implementation of the United Nation Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). The Mediterranean region includes resolutions on strengthening of security and cooperation in the Mediterranean region. Military expenditure includes a resolution on objective information on military matters. Outer space included resolutions on prevention of an arms race in outer space, no first placement of weapons in outer space, further practical measures for the prevention of an arms race in outer space, transparency and confidence building measures, and reducing space threats through norms, rules, and principles of responsible behaviors. Peace includes resolutions on the implementation of the Declaration of the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace, International Day of Multilateralism and Diplomacy for Peace, Academy for human encounters and dialogues, and promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogues. Lastly, transnational crimes include resolutions on preventing and combating illicit brokering activities.

ASEAN voting cohesion remains relatively high (80-99%) on nuclear, Middle East, disarmament, refugees, human rights, and cybersecurity. Nuclear consists of 99 resolutions, where ASEAN is only divided into 17 resolutions. The lowest agreement index of 55% comes from the discussion about joint courses of action toward a world without nuclear weapons. Most ASEAN member states voted for the resolution except Indonesia, Malaysia, and Myanmar, who abstained from the voting. Myanmar has been consistently abstaining since 2011. Middle East consists of 137 resolutions related to the Middle East, where ASEAN is only divided into five resolutions dedicated to Palestinian issues. Similarly, lower agreement indexes are largely due to the abstention and absences of some member states. Disarmament consists of 122 resolutions, where ASEAN member states are divided into 26 resolutions. These resolutions with lower agreement indexes included resolutions on Anti-Personnel Mines, Chemical Weapons, Cluster Munitions, and Ballistic Missile Proliferation. Refugees consist of 13 resolutions where ASEAN's position converges on the global refugees' situation but significantly diverged (25-66,6%) on the status of internally displaced persons and refugees from Abkhazia, Georgia, and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia as Laos, Vietnam, and Myanmar have continuously voted against the resolutions while the other ASEAN member states mostly abstained.

Human rights deserve separate discussion as it has often been the source of criticism to ASEAN, yet ASEAN cohesion on this issue in the UNGA is relatively high (82,77%). Human rights consist of 193 resolutions. Even though ASEAN is only divided into only 68 resolutions, the agreement index is significantly lower. These include issues on capital punishment (10-

40%), human rights (25%) and democratic reform in Myanmar, human rights crisis in Syria (25%), discrimination against religious minority and the implementation of Sharia Law in Iran (25%-55%), human rights situation in North Korea, human rights in Crimea and Ukraine, and human rights in Palestine (25-70%). On cybersecurity, ASEAN voting cohesion reach 81,67% but only 55% in three resolutions due to abstain position of some member states. Some divided issues are on responsible state behavior in cyberspace, countering the use of information, and communications technologies for criminal purpose.

The Pattern of Divergence

Figure 4 shows that ASEAN demonstrate divergence in voting on security issues in the UNGA in arms transfer, counterterrorism, and armed conflict. On the issue of arms transfer, the relatively low agreement index among ASEAN member states (50%-66,67%) resulted from continuous abstention by Indonesia, Laos, and Myanmar. Counterterrorism is one resolution to address the alleged assassination attempt against the Ambassador of Saudi Arabia to the United States. ASEAN voting cohesion is moderate (62,5%) due to divided position among member states on the resolution which calls out Iran for the attempted execution of the plot to assassinate the Ambassador. In this case, Malaysia and the Philippines voted for the resolution, Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Myanmar, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam abstained, while Cambodia and Laos were absent. Armed conflict is the category of issue where the average ASEAN voting cohesion is the lowest (46,76%). Within this category, Syrian civil war and conflict in Crimea had the lowest agreement index, which is 25% and 25-40% respectively. On the escalation of violence in Syria (Resolution 71/130 2016), five states including Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand voted for the resolution. Meanwhile, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam, and the Philippines chose to stay abstained. On the Resolution 74/17 2019 on Crimea, ASEAN was divided with five abstentions (four 'no', and one 'yes'). Similarly, the agreement index for Resolution 68/262 on the territorial integrity of Ukraine is inherently low (33,3%). Four states including Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Myanmar, and Vietnam abstained to the resolution. Meanwhile, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and the Philippines voted for the resolution. Laos was absent in this roll call vote.

Factors Explaining the Pattern of Convergence and Divergence in ASEAN Voting Behavior

The National Context: Individual State's Preference

Liberal intergovernmentalism argues that the cohesion of a regional organization is shaped mainly by the dynamics of individual member states pursuing their own preferences. These organizations are cohesive and even could speak with one voice or set common position when the preference of individual member states converge, when they need commitments

from others, or when they believe that joint policy is more beneficial (Moravcsik, 1993; Moravcsik, 1995).

Based on the pattern of convergence in ASEAN position, ASEAN is also cohesive on issues that are beneficial for member states such as transparency on military expenditure, peaceful use of the outer space, Indian Ocean as a zone of peace, fighting transnational crimes, decolonialization and reaffirming commitment to the UNCLOS. ASEAN consists of relatively small and middle states, but is in a strategic geographical position in the global politics. Hence, maintaining regional security and autonomy has been central for the ASEAN amid continuous presence and intervention by major powers in the region. In this context, transparency of military expenditure, peaceful use of the outer space and the Indian Ocean, and commitment to the UNCLOS are important for all ASEAN member states. The last mentioned is particularly relevant given the unresolved maritime disputes in the region where major powers tend to use their might instead of international law to exert their claim or influence in the region. Transnational crimes are also common issues among member states who are still struggling to fight illicit drugs, human trafficking, arms smuggling, money laundering, terrorism, and sea pirates (ASEAN, 2015).

ASEAN also demonstrates a relatively high cohesion on issues with minimum costs which are not directly intervening into their own national preferences. Resolutions on the security of Mediterranean region has no direct impact to individual member states or the APSC as a group, thereby member states have more freedom to decide on their vote in these resolutions. Understandably, voting for the resolutions is preferable as it demonstrates good citizenship in the international arena. In addition, ASEAN shares similar security issues with the Mediterranean region, thereby voting for the resolution also symbolizes their position against similar security threats.

Preference also plays a key role in shaping the cohesion of ASEAN. ASEAN has a relatively high level of coherence on security issues in the UN General Assembly. In fact, lower levels of coherence in some issue areas are contributed by abstain or absence of the ASEAN member states. However, there are indeed notable divergence among ASEAN member states, and they are shaped by different preferences. First, ASEAN member states are divided on issues that have different direct impact to their national preference. ASEAN is divided on capital punishment because of their diverging national preference on the use of death penalty at home. Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei Darussalam, Vietnam, and Thailand allow death penalty, meanwhile Cambodia and the Philippines has abolished it (ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights, 2020; Human Rights Watch, 2020). On democratization, national reconciliation, and discrimination against minority in Myanmar, Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos, and the Philippines voted against the resolution given the shared problems at home. Meanwhile Indonesia, Brunei Darussalam, and Malaysia voted for the resolutions on Rohingya given the strong public opinion supporting the Rohingya in these Muslim majority countries. On cybersecurity, Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar voted against the responsible state behavior in the cyberspace given the government stronghold on the cyberspace. This contrasts with more opened countries such as Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines.

ASEAN also diverges on issues that have different indirect impact to their national interests. These are usually resolutions on specific countries or regions where they have some aspects of similarities at home. On refugees, for examples, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam voted against the resolutions on the status of displaced persons and refugees from Abkhazia, Georgia, and Tskhinvali Region. These resolutions include the right of return of all internally displaced persons and refugees and their descendants and the unacceptability of forced demographic changes. As countries that have contributed to significant numbers of refugees abroad, it is not surprising that the three countries voted against the resolution. Meanwhile, other ASEAN member states who have been struggling with the coming of refugees voted for the resolutions. On human rights in other countries, such as Iran, Syria, Ukraine and North Korea, ASEAN member states were divided based on their domestic condition related to human rights, democracy, and public opinion from Muslim majority (in the case of human rights in Middle Eastern countries).

Regional Context: Identity, Value, Norms, and Cognitive Prior of the Regional Organization

The pattern of convergence also shows that ASEAN is cohesive on issues that have been well agreed at the ASEAN level, which resonates the importance of identity, value, norms, and cognitive prior of the regional organization in shaping member states' voting behaviors. In this case, ASEAN upholds the norms of 'Asian values', which appreciate authority, hierarchy, and power as well as prioritize economic, social, and cultural issues over civil and political and security issues. ASEAN's cognitive prior can be seen in the so-called 'ASEAN Way', which posits the organization's cooperation norms, including non-interference, informality, consensus, nonbinding decisions, pragmatism, flexibility, close interpersonal relationships, and lean institutionalization. These norms and cognitive prior were informed by political realism: the belief that power shapes international relations, and that states are placed in an imagined hierarchical order defined by attributes of power (Rüland, 2017; Rosyidin & Pattipeilohy, 2020; Agastia, 2021).

The norms of Asian values and the ASEAN Way influence the organization's voting cohesion. The more central an issue in the ASEAN, the more likely ASEAN member states act cohesively on this issue. As the theoretical framework argues, preferences of individual member states will interact with policies/norms/principles taken at the institutional level. Member states will strongly support a resolution where their preferences and the APSC policies/norms/principles converge. They will moderate their disagreement when their preferences and the APSC policies diverge. They will act incoherently when they have different preferences and have no common regional policies on this matter.

In this context, all issues in which ASEAN member states' vote converges have common regional policies bases. Decolonization, for example, is central in the ASEAN six fundamental principles as written in the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) (ASEAN, 1976). They include "mutual respect for the independence, sovereignty, equality, territorial integrity and

national identity of all nations; the right of every state to lead its national existence free from external interference, subversion or coercion; [and] non-interference in the internal affairs of one another” (TAC article 2) (ASEAN, 1976). The Law of the Sea is no less important as maritime cooperation is among prioritized areas of cooperation in the APSC Blueprint 2025. In addition, ASEAN also has ASEAN Maritime Forum (AMF) as an institution which helps to strengthen regional maritime cooperation. Both repeatedly refers to ASEAN adherence to the UNCLOS.

Regarding peace and the outer space, ASEAN has declared itself as Zone of Peace, Freedom, and Neutrality (ZOPFAN) in 1971 and continues to emphasize peaceful relations in the regions including in the APSC Blueprint 2025. While not all ASEAN member states are members to United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Use of Outer Space (COPUOS), ASEAN has expressed its full support to the Committee and has dedicated a series of workshop under the ARF and has established ASEAN Research and Training Center for Space Technology and Application (ARTSA) to promote peaceful use of the outer space (UNOOSA, n.d.). Lastly, transnational crimes and security threats in the Mediterranean region are all central in the APSC Blueprint 2025 which adopts comprehensive security and promote cooperation to combat transnational crime. The APSC is also equipped with the ASEAN Ministerial Meetings on Transnational Crimes to promote cooperation on shared challenges among ASEAN member states.

Similarly, ASEAN tends to diverge on issues that have no bases or no common regional policy at the ASEAN levels such as capital punishment, refugees, and arms transfer. Common regional framework is not a cause by itself, but it is an intervening variable that increases the chance for incoherence among member states. The principle of non-interference central in ASEAN cooperation also contributes to the incoherence of the APSC. In general, ASEAN member states are incredibly careful in deciding their voting in the UN General Assembly particularly on issues specific to other countries, such as the Crimean conflict, Syria, Iran, North Korea, and Palestine. At first, it might be argued that this should help them to act coherently, but with the already diverging preferences among member states, the APSC is still divided usually between ‘no’ vote and abstain.

International Context: Alliance and Major Powers’ Preferences

The incoherence of ASEAN member states’ voting behaviors at the UN General Assembly on security issues may be influenced by each member states’ alignments with external great powers. This seems evident in resolutions in which ASEAN member states do not have common regional policies bases, and in which great power rivalry between the United States, Russia, and China is apparent. Among the examples are the resolutions on human rights in Syria, Iran, and North Korea, as well as resolutions regarding the conflicts in Ukraine and Georgia.

In the case of human rights in Syria, Russia and other countries are supporting the Syrian government in the Syrian civil war, while the United States and its allies are supporting

the Syrian opposition. Out of ten resolutions on human rights in Syria, the average agreement index of ASEAN member states' voting is 51,75%. There are more abstentions (58) than 'yes' votes (25) on this issue, 14 absence/non-voting, and three 'no' votes. Only Thailand always voted 'yes' on this issue, while Laos and Singapore always abstained, and Myanmar and Vietnam never voted 'yes'. Brunei voted 'yes' once and abstained nine times. Cambodia was absent eight times, while Myanmar was absent five times.

In the case of human rights in Iran, the United States and other countries have criticized Iran's alleged human rights abuses, while Russia and others have backed Iran. Out of ten resolutions on human rights in Iran, the average agreement index is 36,17%. There are more abstentions (52) than 'no' votes (42) on this issue, six absence/non-voting, while there is no 'yes' vote from ASEAN member states. Brunei and Vietnam voted 'no' in all ten resolutions, while Laos, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand abstained all the time. Myanmar was absent six times.

Meanwhile, the case of human rights in North Korea, the United States and other countries have criticized North Korea's alleged human rights abuses, while China and others have supported North Korea, even dismissing a UN report on human rights in North Korea in 2014. Out of three resolutions on human rights in North Korea, the average agreement index is 30%. There are more abstentions (16) than 'no' (eight) or 'yes' (six) votes. Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore abstained in all three resolutions, while the Philippines and Thailand voted 'yes' in all three, and Myanmar and Vietnam voted 'no' in all three.

In the cases of conflicts in Ukraine and Georgia, Russia is one of the belligerents in both. Regarding the conflict in Ukraine, there are nine resolutions, including five on human rights in Crimea and Sevastopol, three on the militarization of the region, and one on the territorial integrity of Ukraine. Out of the ten resolutions, the average agreement index is 49,26%. As with the previous issues, there are more abstentions (58) than 'no' votes (23), 'yes' votes (eight), or absence/non-voting (one). Brunei and Vietnam abstained in all ten resolutions, while Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand abstained eight times. Cambodia voted 'no' eight times.

The pattern is considered similar if seen closer on each issue. Out of five resolutions on human rights in Ukraine, the average agreement index is 61%, while the average agreement index of the three resolutions on the militarization of the region is 35%, and the agreement index of the one resolution on the territorial integrity of Ukraine is 33,33%. In the first two issues, there are more abstentions than the 'yes' or 'no' votes. However, only in the resolution on the territorial integrity of Ukraine there are more 'yes' (five) votes than abstentions (four) or 'no' (none) votes.

Meanwhile, regarding the conflict in Georgia, there are ten resolutions on the status of internally displaced persons and refugees from the location of the conflict, out of which the average agreement index is 46,50%. There are more abstentions (59) than 'no' votes (31), absence/non-voting (eight), or 'yes' votes (two) votes. Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand abstained in all ten resolutions, while Laos and Vietnam voted 'no' in all ten. Cambodia was absent eight times.

In many of these cases, the 'yes' and 'no' votes indicate support or opposition, while the abstentions or absence of ASEAN member states seem to indicate the member state avoiding the opposite position of external great powers with which the member state has alliance or strategic partnership. Among ASEAN member states, the Philippines and Thailand are the closest ally of the United States, having treaty commitments with the superpower, although Manila-Washington relations have been unstable during the presidency of Rodrigo Duterte, who favors closer relations with China and Russia. Another close partner of the United States in the region is Singapore, which had turned down an offer to be a major non-NATO ally but maintains close military relations with Washington. While far from being a historical ally of the United States, Vietnam's relations with Washington have been improving in the context of its disputes with China in the South China Sea. Meanwhile, the closest partners of China and Russia in the region includes Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Duterte-era Philippines. Other member states, like Indonesia and Malaysia, have been taking somewhat neutral positions between the external great powers.

Thailand's alignment with the United States explains its support for the resolutions on human rights in Syria and North Korea and its lack of 'no' votes on other resolutions that Washington supports in the above cases. Singapore's mostly abstain positions on the above resolutions, and its lack of 'no' votes, shows that while it does not support most of the resolutions, it avoids taking a position opposite of the United States. The Philippines' votes on these resolutions seem to have shifted along with regime change, with 'yes' votes and abstentions before the Duterte presidency, while 'no' votes only cast during the Duterte era. Meanwhile, Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar mostly voted 'no' or abstained on the above resolutions, suggesting their lack of backing for the United States-supported resolutions and their inclination towards China and Russia.

Conclusions

The research has discussed the extent to which ASEAN member states converge and diverge in their voting on security issues in the UNGA. The research has shown that ASEAN member states have generally high level of cohesion in their voting behavior. However, despite the expectation that the establishment of the Community in 2015 will improve the cohesion of ASEAN member states, in reality it does not have a significant effect on cohesion, and it has been decreasing ever since. The findings should be an early warning for the ASEAN member states to strengthen its cohesion going forward. However, this will be an extraordinary task, considering the emerging security issues regarding the conflict in Myanmar, which seems to keep ASEAN divided, between states and competing imperatives.

The research has identified the security issues in which ASEAN member states converge and diverge. ASEAN member states converge on issues that have common regional policies bases. The member states do not have significant difference in preferences among each other. Meanwhile, ASEAN member states diverge on issues without those criteria, and in which great power rivalry is apparent. This means that if division between ASEAN member states

thickens, the organization's incoherence will only grow larger, fueled by chance and uncertainty in the organization's particular nature.

The findings complement the previous research by Jang and Chen (2019) as the only literature on the voting behaviors of ASEAN member states, thus generating crucial new knowledge for studies on ASEAN and Southeast Asian regionalism. Further research is suggested to expand the scholarship on this topic by applying different theoretical perspectives, aside from liberal intergovernmentalism to explore other factors that may explain the coherence of ASEAN member states. Another way to expand the literature on this topic is by using other methods of measurement for the coherence of vote behaviors to see whether the results will be consistent with this research.

Further research may also focus on different time frames to find out changes in the voting behaviors of ASEAN member states over shorter or longer periods of time. The research suggests an additional comparative analysis of ASEAN and other regional organizations, such as the European Union or the African Union, to discover whether the level of coherence among ASEAN member states conforms to a normal standard, or whether it is too high or low from the expected level from a regional organization.

Finally, the research also highlights the finding that the number of resolutions in the UN General Assembly has relatively increased and almost doubled in 2018, which increases chances of incoherence among member states. Therefore, this paper acknowledges that in addition to the variables mentioned in the theory, the increasing number of incoherent voting behavior among ASEAN member countries can be influenced by the number of issues that are getting bigger than in previous years so that the possibility of divergence also increases.

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