

An Update of ASEAN Awareness and Attitudes – A Ten Nation Survey Fact Sheet of Key Findings

When was the ASEAN Awareness Survey first undertaken?

The first survey on “Awareness and Attitudes Towards ASEAN” was undertaken in ten universities in the main cities of ASEAN countries, from September to November 2007. The 2014 survey primarily aims to update the findings from 2007, to assess whether attitudes and awareness have changed. Both surveys received funding support from the ASEAN Foundation.

How different is the current survey update from the first one?

The 2014 survey replicates the 18 questions of the 2007 survey, addressing awareness, knowledge and attitudes, and adds two questions aimed at gauging 1) how the students across the region think about ASEAN and its members, and 2) students’ perceptions of similarity and differences amongst ASEAN countries.

The 2014 survey also expands the scope of investigation to 12 additional universities across the region, to represent regional, ethnic and socioeconomic diversity within the nations. The list of universities is in Annex 1.

What does the survey measure?

The survey measures: 1) attitudes toward ASEAN; 2) knowledge about the region and the Association; 3) orientation towards the region and countries; sources of information about the region; and 4) aspirations for integration and action. As with 2007, the current survey targets undergraduate students in the universities surveyed. The average age of the students is 20.5 years old. The 2014 survey was undertaken among 4,623 students among 22

universities in the ten ASEAN member states. The sample size for each university is 200 to 220, with roughly equal numbers for male and female students.

What are the main findings?

Key findings of the current update show several similarities with the 2007 survey. There is a strong trend in commonality of responses and overall positive attitudes towards ASEAN throughout the region. Positive attitudes towards ASEAN have remained generally consistent, while awareness and knowledge of ASEAN show some increase.

Overall, the students display high knowledge of ASEAN; positive attitudes towards ASEAN; and consider themselves “citizens of ASEAN” (over 80%). The strongest ASEAN-enthusiasm continues to be among ASEAN members such as Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam, with Myanmar now following this trend. ASEAN ambivalence continues to be found in Singapore. Self-reported familiarity (with ASEAN) declined modestly from 2007, but the objective knowledge measure generally improved between 2007 and 2014. Across the region, there was greater recognition of the ASEAN flag, with the highest recognition in Brunei, Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam.

Students continue to see ASEAN members as culturally similar but economically and politically different. Singaporean students tend to see the greatest dissimilarity, while Indonesia, Vietnam, and, in 2014, Myanmar see the greatest similarities overall.

Generally, students are most aware of and familiar with countries in their own sub-region (maritime or mainland). Overall for the region, Laos and Brunei seem to be the least familiar or

“outliers” to the others. For mainland ASEAN countries, Myanmar is the outlier; and for maritime ASEAN countries, the Philippines and Brunei are the outliers. According to the update, the most salient countries in ASEAN are Thailand and Malaysia; and the most familiar to all respondents are Thailand and Singapore.

Similar to 2007, students’ orientations towards travel and work rank Singapore as the 1st preferred destination. Thailand and Malaysia continued to rank 2nd and 3rd, but Thailand is more popular than in 2007 and Malaysia less. Vietnam is a close fourth.

In 2007, the sources of information about ASEAN were primarily television, schools, newspapers, and books. Internet and radio were secondary sources. In 2014, the internet has moved up as a primary source of information (third source overall) after newspapers and books. Secondary sources include friends, advertising and sports, in addition to radio. Radio has declined in importance as a source of information. The least important sources continue to be family, movies, travel, music, and work.

Main differences from the 2007 findings are found in the responses from Myanmar and Thailand, and in the ranking of aspirations for integration.

Myanmar respondents show more positive attitudes towards ASEAN. Findings from Myanmar tracked closely with regional norms for the survey, and, in some places, were close to the ASEAN enthusiasm seen in the other newer members. On the other hand, Thai respondents show greater ambivalence toward ASEAN as compared to 2007, together with higher objective knowledge about ASEAN.

In 2007, economic cooperation was ranked as the most important aspect of regional integration and cooperation, followed by tourism and development cooperation.

In 2014, tourism was ranked the most important, followed by development cooperation, and economic cooperation in third place. Both 2007 and 2014 surveys indicated political cooperation as the least important aspect of integration. Students in Vietnam gave a high rank to regional identity and solidarity.

What do the additional questions tell us?

One of the two additional questions asked in 2014 was to give one-word descriptions of ASEAN and each of its ten members, among others. Overall, words describing ASEAN primarily related to regionalism and cooperation. Many associate ASEAN with their own nation, and also mention diversity and culture. About 10% of Singapore respondents and about 7% of Thai respondents viewed ASEAN negatively. About 15% of Vietnamese students and 5% of Singapore students described ASEAN in positive terms.

The final additional question asked students to judge the similarities and differences among the ASEAN members. The results indicate a strong national framing of perceptions of the region.

Who are the survey investigators?

Dr Eric C. Thompson of the National University of Singapore led the survey investigations for 2007 and 2014, supported by Dr Chulanee Thienthai of Chulalongkorn University, Thailand. Ms Moe Thuzar of the ASEAN Studies Centre at the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute joined as project investigator for the 2014 survey.

When will the full report be out?

A summary of the key findings was shared at a public seminar on 24 August 2015. ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute will publish the full survey findings as a report.

Annex 1

Universities surveyed in 2014

Returning to 2007 sites:

1. University of Brunei Darussalam
2. Royal University of Phnom Penh
3. University of Indonesia
4. National University of Laos
5. Universiti Malaya
6. University of the Philippines (Diliman)
7. National University of Singapore
8. Chulalongkorn University
9. Vietnam National University (Hanoi)

New site for Myanmar:

10. Yangon University (in 2007, due to university closures, distance education students in Yangon were surveyed)

Additional sites for 2014:

11. University of Syiah Kuala, Aceh, Indonesia
12. Universiti Nusa Cendana, Kupang, Indonesia
13. University Tunku Abdul Rahman, Malaysia
14. Universiti Malaya–Sarawak, Malaysia
15. Mandalay University, Myanmar
16. University of the Philippines – Visayas
17. Mindanao State University
18. Singapore Polytechnic
19. Khon Kaen University, Thailand (Northeast)
20. Walailak University, Thailand (South)
21. St John's University, Bangkok, Thailand
22. Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City