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INCORPORATING ASEAN INSTRUMENTS IN POLICY RESEARCH AND INTO THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESSES: PERSPECTIVE AND PRACTICES OF A LEGISLATIVE RESEARCHER

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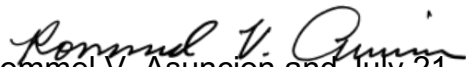
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This thesis of **ROMMEL V. ASUNCION** titled "**INCORPORATING ASEAN INSTRUMENTS IN POLICY RESEARCH AND INTO THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESSES: PERSPECTIVE AND PRACTICES OF A LEGISLATIVE RESEARCHER,"** is hereby accepted by the Faculty of Management and Development Studies, U.P. Open University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree **Master of ASEAN Studies**.

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Biographical Sketch

ROMMEL V. ASUNCION is a senior researcher focusing on the health sector. His expertise includes analyzing political, social, and economic issues and providing recommendations and policy directions. He graduated from the University of the Philippines at Los Baños with a Bachelor of Science in Development Communication. He has also undergone training in public policy analysis using various statistical methods, policy costing, monitoring, and evaluation of public programs, among other areas.

Acknowledgment

Completing this thesis has been one of the most challenging but fulfilling experiences of my life. I would not have done it without the support, guidance, and encouragement of people who walked with me on this journey.

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Dedication

To my cats and dogs, my noisy, needy, and endlessly entertaining housemates. You may not have contributed a single useful insight to this paper, but you brought chaos, noise, and the occasional paw on the keyboard. And somehow, that was exactly what I needed. Your yowling, barking, and dramatic flair for attention were constant reminders of my place in the universe: a humble servant to your whims. You helped me survive a pandemic, and more than once, kept me from climbing onto the roof just to scream into the void. This study is for you—not because you helped me write it, but because you helped me live through it.

ABSTRACT

This autoethnomethodology study examined the integration of ASEAN instruments into policy and legislative research by a researcher in the Philippine legislature. Using personal narrative and systematic content analysis of my legislative research outputs, this study examined my perspective and practices as a legislative researcher and a student of ASEAN studies in incorporating ASEAN instruments into my policy research and the legislative processes. Three practices emerged from the analysis: benchmarking and peer comparison; comparing with other country models; and using international models for policy learning. While ASEAN often plays a peripheral role rather than a central one, it provides a useful comparative framework and policy reference. Reflecting on this analysis, I recognized ASEAN's influence on my legislative research. The three practices show that I incorporate regional and international viewpoints to improve practicality, enriching legislative inquiry beyond just ASEAN instruments or objectives.

Despite extensive awareness of ASEAN, this research revealed a limited explicit reference to ASEAN in most of my knowledge products. In most of the products I analyzed, I made references to ASEAN for comparative analysis and policy learning, using either individual ASEAN member states or broader regional groupings. My experiences with the preparation and during the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (AIPA) General Assembly stood out as an exception: ASEAN became central to the task, illustrating how the requirements and expectations of the institution can influence the role of ASEAN in research work. My study further revealed that ASEAN is a reference point that appears in the periphery of policy discourse: as a benchmark when evaluating the country's programs, or to compare the position of the Philippines in international standings.

Keywords: ASEAN; AIPA; Auto-ethnomethodology; Legislative Research; Public Policy

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CHAPTER I

RATIONALE

Established in 1967, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has expanded over the years not only in terms of its size and membership but also in the scope of its goals and objectives. Its original members allied to address the prevailing issues in the region at that time, including the spread of communism and the conflicts among themselves and between their neighboring countries.

The adoption by its leaders of the ASEAN Concord in 1976 set the organization's future direction in the following years. Changes in the global and regional landscapes, along with the desire of its leaders to strengthen the organization's legal status, led ASEAN to adopt the ASEAN Charter in 2008. ASEAN pursued socio-economic cooperation not only among its member states but also with other countries and entities under the principle of ASEAN Centrality.

Article 1.15 of the ASEAN Charter asserts that ASEAN must maintain its centrality and proactive role "as the main driving force for its relations and cooperation with external partners in an open, transparent, and inclusive regional architecture (ASEAN Secretariat, 2012)." The statement reflects the aspiration of the organization to be "the regional hub to overcome challenges and engage external powers."

Understanding the Role of National Legislation in ASEAN

The Charter provides the organization with a legal personality recognized by the laws of all its members. Its crucial goal is community building and constructing a

fully integrated ASEAN through the ASEAN Community and its three pillars.[1] A fully integrated ASEAN Community envisions its members to be on the same level in economic, security, and social terms.

However, before the ASEAN becomes fully integrated, the ASEAN Member States (AMS) must harmonize the laws and other legal instruments with those required by the commitments under the pillars of the three ASEAN Communities. The members of the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Association (AIPA), composed of leaders of the ASEAN Member States' parliaments, committed their support to the ASEAN Community.

Legislation is a form of policy, along with executive orders, judicial rulings, guidelines and regulations, and other official statements that, once implemented, directly affect the actions of individuals, organizations, and governments (McClure & Jaeger, 2008). The simplest definition of public policy was the one presented by Dye (1972) that it "is whatever governments choose to do or not to do." Based on what I have read, I define public policy as a set of government principles, decisions and actions that aim to address specific issues or problems that affect the public and offer a solution to these problems (McClure & Jaeger, 2008) (Knill & Tosun, 2020) (Anyebe, 2018).

The national legislatures of ASEAN members play an essential role in establishing and maintaining the ASEAN Community because they ensure that national legal frameworks are aligned with the shared goals and commitments of the

[1] The three pillars are the ASEAN Economic Community, Political-Security Community, and Socio-Cultural Community. These pillars are important to achieve the goal of the ASEAN Vision of progress and development for ASEAN and its peoples. The Blueprints of these communities detail the specific strategic objectives and actions that the organization needs to take to accomplish its objective.

community (ASEAN Secretariat, 2015). When there are no reasonable legal frameworks that would integrate the ASEAN commitments at the national level, ASEAN cannot attain its vision of a unified, peaceful, and prosperous community. For example, within the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), harmonized laws on trade, investment, and intellectual property protection across member states will facilitate the free movement of goods, services, capital, and skilled labor. The harmonization of laws among and within the member states will foster regional cooperation and strengthen the ASEAN Community. It will also improve trust and resilience among them and strengthen the region's global competitiveness, thereby ensuring ASEAN's relevance in an increasingly interconnected world.

Research in the Legislative Process

Legislative proposals can originate from different sources. Typically, legislators have their legislative ideas and can request technical assistance in research and bill drafting from the relevant offices in the secretariat. However, the Executive Branch also has its legislative proposals outlined in its Philippine Development Plan and expressed by the President during his State of the Nation Address. The legislators' constituents can also request them to file a measure that will address a problem in their areas. Other groups or organizations, such as the business, labor, and academe, can submit their proposals to any member of the chamber.

As the research arm of the legislature, our involvement in the legislative process typically begins at this stage. With the growing demand for evidence-based policymaking, some legislators have become more aware of the need for research to support their proposals (Head, 2015). However, while research provides valuable insights and data, the progression from evidence to legislation is influenced by various

factors, including political priorities, public opinion, budgetary constraints, and the feasibility of implementation (Head, 2015; Marume, 2016).

Based on my experience, it is not often that the recommendations in my papers become legislation or even incorporated into one by the lawmakers. However, there are other stages in the legislative process where our research can inform lawmakers and other stakeholders. The legislative process is complex and involves multiple stages, with research evidence being just one component.

After the initial step, the bill undergoes a series of committee meetings and deliberations. At some point, legislators may request our input in the form of comments or even analysis of the proposed legislation. Such requests often pertain to the provision of additional data. For example, when I was still working on poverty alleviation, I was asked to provide information on the country's poorest municipalities based on the latest poverty survey. The legislators intended to use the information during their review of the administration's anti-poverty program as part of their oversight function.

The ASEAN Community

The establishment of the ASEAN Community in 2015 presented both a challenge and opportunity for our office. Our office research agenda covers almost all of the community's three pillars – the ASEAN Economic Community, the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC), and the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC). With this development, we had to look closer and study ASEAN as an economic, political, and social entity.

Given that my research focuses on social protection and health, I became more inclined towards the ASSC, which focuses on ensuring the realization of the full potential of ASEAN citizens. To achieve the goals of the ASSC, the community seeks the cooperation of the AMS on a wide array of topics, including Culture and Arts, Information and Media, Education, Youth, Sports, Social Welfare and Development, Gender, Rights of Women and Children, Rural Development and Poverty Eradication, Labor, Civil Service, Environment, Haze, Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance and Health (ASEAN Secretariat, 2016). Under health, which is my present policy sector, my areas of interest include policies on aging societies, harmonization of universal healthcare programs between member countries, human resources for health, and health social protection for vulnerable groups.

The establishment of the ASEAN Community entailed harmonizing statutes and laws between the AMSs (ASEAN Secretariat, 2009), which served as a good starting point for my study. While an initial review of literature revealed a dominance of studies, research, and source materials on the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), there are aspects in the ASCC where laws, regulations, and standards of the AMSs need to meet on common ground. For example, the question on the mutual recognition of ASEAN professionals in medical, law, and education fields could ensure that the people in every member state will receive the same level of expertise since these professionals can practice and provide their expertise in other countries (ASEAN Secretariat).

As part of my task, I would examine all the laws relevant to the subject matter, find commonalities, and identify the differences and gaps that could impede their harmonization. The data derived from this procedure would provide insights that would

help me recommend policy actions our principals can adopt to address the issues. This also presents an opportunity to identify good practices of other member states in achieving the ASCC's goals, especially since the Philippine government has pushed for this pillar to be part of the ASEAN Community.

The ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly

Aside from the establishment of the ASEAN Community, another reason for my office's interest in ASEAN is our institution's membership in the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (AIPA). The AIPA, comprising legislative bodies of the ten AMS, aims to be the forum for its members to meet, interact, exchange information, discuss problems of common interest, and promote cooperation (AIPA Secretariat). While it is not an ASEAN legislative body like the European Parliament, ASEAN recognizes AIPA as a partner in promoting peace and development in the region.

AIPA started as the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Organization in 1977 (AIPA Secretariat n.d.) after Indonesia initiated its creation in 1975 to promote closer cooperation between the parliaments of the AMSs and help in the attainment of the goals of the ASEAN.

The General Assembly (GA) meets annually to adopt resolutions and work on policy initiatives to address the common concerns on economic cooperation, security, environmental protection, and social issues among AMSs and recommend their agreements to their governments. The AIPA Chairmanship and hosting of the GA mirror that of the ASEAN. The resolutions and policy recommendations are non-binding and only intend to encourage the member national parliaments and governments to act on the issues and concerns (Wanderwalle, 2015). The GA includes dialogues between the AIPA member parliamentarians and the association's

observer countries and parliaments. These dialogues allow AIPA to expand its external relations and regional exchange and strengthen cooperation with parliamentarians from non-member states and regional organizations to address pressing issues in and out of the region that mutually affect them.

One of the criticisms about AIPA is that it only mimics the ASEAN and without legislative powers like the European Parliament, it could not hold the ASEAN accountable for its failures or excesses (Ruland, 2014; Wanderwalle, 2015). Rulland further commented that the composition of GA participants usually depends on the parliamentary leaders. As a result, many of the attendees came from the ruling party and thus, excluded the voice of the other parties in their respective parliaments.

In 2017, when the Philippines hosted the AIPA GA, I had the privilege of being part of the secretariat that assisted the Philippine delegation. The timing of the GA was very opportune as it coincided with the start of my graduate studies at UP Open University. As a student of ASEAN, the engagement gave me a first-hand experience of the inner workings of AIPA and, in a way, the ASEAN.

Preparations for the GA started several months in advance and as the host country, our institution was responsible for assisting in the preparation of the resolutions discussed by the member parliaments during the assembly. My responsibilities involved reviewing and revising some of the resolutions, particularly on the social sector, preparing supporting documents for the Philippine panel, and preparing background materials for the other delegates. I also served in the secretariat for one of the meetings with partner parliaments. Other colleagues and I documented the critical points during the discussions and prepared a synthesis of what transpired during the meeting for the chairman's report.

Like the ASEAN, the AIPA follows the norm of consensus-building, and in some instances, the organization could not pass resolutions addressing challenging issues because the parliamentarians could not agree (Ruland, 2014). An incident similar to this observation occurred during one of the meetings that I worked at as part of the secretariat. One of the member parliaments disagreed with a proposed resolution and refused to discuss it. The reason is that the measure would have significant implication on the sovereignty of that state – a violation of one of the principles the ASEAN adheres to. The chairperson suspended the deliberation to talk to the head of the delegates. For me, this was an example of the informality. As a result, the said resolution was set aside and submitted to the AIPA secretariat for further study.

How Studying National Legislation Contributes to ASEANology

The secretariats of the legislative bodies in ASEAN member states perform much of the work in the passage of these proposals. The office I belong to is part of the secretariat of Congress, which provides technical support to the chamber's leaders and members through policy research, analysis, and review of current and emerging issues, as well as the annual review of the proposed national budget. With the push for evidence-based policymaking, we conduct research and other studies to provide legislators with the information that they require for their legislative work. My unit also conducts roundtable discussions, policy briefings, knowledge sharing, and other forums for our principals when we need to inform a wider audience about emerging concerns. We collaborate with other research institutions from the government, private sector, and the academe to provide members of the legislature with evidence for their legislative work. We also utilize the results of all these activities as inputs to produce

knowledge products, including policy notes, briefs, and discussion papers, which aid legislators in crafting evidence-informed measures and policies.

Studying national legislation within ASEAN helps researchers and other scholars understand the processes of ASEAN's integration. Such assessment provides us with information on how member states adapt to regional objectives and incorporate their commitments, as outlined in the ASEAN instruments and agreements, into their national and local legal systems. The organization itself recognizes not only the cultural and social diversity of its members but also the diversity in the form of government and legal regimes.

Understanding how agreements and commitments affect the laws of ASEAN member states assists researchers and scholars to gain deeper insights into the various factors that push ASEAN's community-building efforts. These factors include the contribution of research and other evidence-based studies that inform legislators on how to approach ASEAN initiatives in their legislative work. This knowledge sheds light on the development of theoretical frameworks that explain the dynamics of regional integration within ASEAN for future research on the subject matter.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Since the conclusion of the 1967 Bangkok Declaration, ASEAN has developed numerous documents, including conventions, treaties, and agreements, to address the evolving regional challenges. These documents are collectively referred to as ASEAN instruments (ASEAN Secretariat, 2018). Before I can fully delve into the subject of the role of legislation in implementing these key documents, I realized how essential it is to understand what these documents are and examine the approaches that member states adopt to implement them locally, as well as how they affect the laws in the different member states.

An Overview of ASEAN Instruments

The ASEAN Charter is the main instrument of ASEAN and acts as the legal foundation for the Association. The Charter is essentially the backbone of the Association, laying out the main principles, goals, and organizational structure of the group. It also marked the beginning of ASEAN's gradual move towards a more institutionalized form of cooperation, after almost 50 years of being a loose organization of Southeast Asian states, and the members' hesitancy to be too legalistic in their relations with each other (Desierto, 2010).

The member states adopted the Charter in 2007, which can be considered as ASEAN's Constitution, providing the rules, legal framework, institutional structure, and outlining the goals and principles that guide ASEAN's community-building efforts (ASEAN Secretariat, 2020). The Charter expresses ASEAN's vision of creating a united and rule-based community, all the while accepting the diversity of its members' political, economic, and cultural backgrounds.

Since the signing of the ASEAN Charter, the leaders have concluded instruments and committed to various fields of cooperation. The leaders and other ministers from member states attend biannual summits and a series of meetings throughout the year. These gatherings usually produce various documents, including declarations, agreements, and action plans (ASEAN Secretariat, 2021). The documents contain the decisions made and the joint goals that member states aim to achieve.

Types of ASEAN Instruments

Article 2 of the ASEAN Charter emphasizes member states' commitment to uphold the fundamental principles outlined in various declarations, agreements, conventions, and other ASEAN instruments to achieve the goals and objectives described in Article 1 (ASEAN Secretariat, n.d.). Abdul Aziz and Dehousse (2013) identified a total of 700 instruments that the AMS adopted since ASEAN's establishment in 1967, approximately 300 of which are internal instruments or those that do not involve other parties. They also noted that ASEAN uses more than 30 names for the documents (Box 1); however, the use of the nomenclature has not been consistent (Fukunaga, 2021). Additionally, neither the Charter nor any other documents define or explain the difference between the documents (Fukunaga, 2021;Mahaseth & Subramaniam, 2021).

Figure 2.1. Nomenclature of ASEAN Instruments.

Action Plan	Memo of Understanding
Action Programme	Ministerial Declaration
Agenda	Plan of Action
Agenda of Action	Policy Guideline
Agreement	Political Declaration
Blueprint	Programme
Code of Conduct	Protocol
Concept Paper	Resolution
Consensus	Roadmap
Convention	Strategic Plan
Criteria	Strategy
Declaration	Terms of Understanding
Declaration of Objectives	Treaty
Declaration of Principles	Understanding
Framework	Work Plan
Guidelines	Work Program

Adapted from: Abdul Aziz & Dehousse, 2013

In contrast, the European Union's (EU) Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) clearly identifies and defines four types of legal instruments. These legal documents are available to European institutions to carry out their tasks and are listed in Article 288 of the TFEU (European Union, n.d.). The Article enumerates the instruments as regulations, directives, decisions, recommendations, and opinions. In addition to these instruments, the EU's internal actions produce other unique documents, such as interinstitutional agreements, resolutions, conclusions, communications, green papers, and white papers (*ibid*).

The ASEAN Secretariat maintains a database of these documents on the ASEAN website, under the "ASEAN Legal Instruments" page. The list, however, only

"*covers legal instruments by which the consent to be bound is expressed through either signature of the authorized representatives of the Parties or such signature is also subject to ratification, acceptance, and/or approval in accordance with the internal procedures of respective Parties*" (ASEAN Secretariat, 2019).

The Nature of ASEAN Instruments

Although the Charter is a binding document, some studies have noted that it leaves some flexibility for the AMS. For example, the Charter established dispute settlement mechanisms in all areas of its activities; however, some member states still chose to settle their disputes using other available mechanisms (Limsiritong, 2020).

Studies also noted that, except for the Charter and some treaties, many of the ASEAN instruments take the form of soft laws[2] (Abdul Aziz & Delhousse, 2021). While not binding, these instruments carry political significance as they sometimes provide strategies that advance the Charter's objectives. However, due to the non-binding character of these instruments, they are more difficult to enforce, and the member states have no legal obligation to implement them in their jurisdictions (Phan, 2014). Moreover, this lack of enforceability often leads to inconsistent implementation across member states, undermining collective efforts to address shared challenges. Under such conditions, ASEAN will be unable to attain its objectives.

[2] According to Abbot (2020), soft laws are international legal arrangements that are not binding and, thus, are weaker due to a lack of obligation and delegation among member states. Nevertheless, soft laws allow for greater participation due to their flexibility in adapting to changing circumstances. They can also be helpful as foundations to create future hard laws.

"Domesticating" International Agreements

International agreements come into effect in varying ways depending on how a country integrates them into its national legal system. Often, the country's constitution serves as a key source for understanding how national laws interact with international law (U.N., 2004). Experts use two theories or approaches: monism and dualism.

According to the monist approach, agreements are self-executionary, which means that they take into effect and become part of the country's legal system after ratification (Casis, 2020). Under this approach, international law ranks superior to domestic law and would prevail in a conflict between both laws. In the dualist approach, international agreements do not automatically become a law of the land. Instead, they had to be "domesticated" (Mahaseth & Subramaniam, 2021). Domestication is a broad legal term that refers to the process by which a state applies international law[3] into its national legal system through a formal act, like legislation, to make it enforceable (UN, 2004). Still, there are also experts who believe that there is no state system that is categorically a monist or dualist. Instead, their state institutions treat international law in different ways (Mahaseth & Subramaniam, 2021).

In the case of the Philippines, the Constitution governs the relationship between international law and domestic laws, which, while recognizing them, remains supreme over international law (Malaya & De Dumo-Cornista, 2020). There is also common acceptance among legal experts that the country adheres to a dualist approach (Casis, 2020). Their basis for this position is the treaty clause found in Article VII, Section 21

[3] International law, in this context, refers to a framework of rules and principles that govern the relationship of sovereign states, international organizations and individuals. It may arise from treaties and conventions, customary laws or laws commonly followed by states, judicial decisions and scholarly writings (U.N., n.d.)

of the Constitution, which provides that *"No treaty or international agreement shall be valid and effective unless concurred in by at least two-thirds of all the members of the Senate."* Only the President is authorized to ratify international agreements; however, he first needs to secure the consent of all relevant agencies that may be affected by the law (DFA, 2016).

However, other legal experts note that the Philippines actually applies both the monist and dualist approaches (Bagares, 2022). They claim that Article II, Section 2, in the Declaration of Principles and State Policies, contain the monist approach under the Constitution, which provides that*: "The Philippines renounces war as an instrument of national policy, adopts the generally accepted principles of international law as part of the law of the land*[4] *and adheres to the policy of peace, equality, justice, freedom, cooperation, and amity with all nations."* Bagares (2022) further noted that different agencies in the Philippines also apply international law on a daily basis, and controversy only arises when another party brings it to a court of law.

The ASEAN Experience: Different Approaches to Domesticating Obligations

This section provides a comparative overview of how ASEAN member states incorporate binding regional commitments into their national legal systems, focusing on the legislative mechanisms and policy tools used to ensure compliance with ASEAN agreements.

The ASEAN Charter does not use the word "domestication" but it requires member states to "*take all measures including the enactment of appropriate domestic legislation, to effectively implement the provisions of this Charter and to comply with*

[4] Emphasis provided by me.

*all obligations of membersh*ip (Article 5, Sec. 2).” This means that while the Charter emphasizes implementation and compliance, it leaves the process to the discretion of individual member states to ensure that their domestic laws are consistent with their ASEAN commitments.

ASEAN member states transform ASEAN legal instruments into national laws through a process that recognizes each other’s sovereignty, domestic legal systems, and constitutional conditions (ASEAN Secretariat, n.d.). The diversity in the legal systems among ASEAN member states also leads to differences in applying the agreements in their local laws (Smith, 2024). The table below shows the different legal systems and approaches the member states use in transforming international law.

Table 2.1

Comparison of Legal Frameworks of ASEAN Member States

Country	Legal System	Treaty Ratification Process	Transformation Method	Example of Implementation
Philippines	Mixed (Civil + Common law)	Senate concurrence required per 1987 Constitution	Legislation required for transformation	ACTIP → RA 10364 (Anti-Trafficking Law)
Indonesia	Civil law (Dutch influence)	Ratified by President; some treaties need DPR approval	Presidential decrees and ministerial regulations	ATIGA → Trade Ministry regulations
Malaysia	Common law	Ratified by executive; Parliament passes enabling laws	Dualist: Requires national legislation	MRA on engineering → Engineers Act amendment
Singapore	Common law	Ratified by executive; Parliament acts as needed	Flexible: legislation or administrative action	ATIGA → Trade/customs updates via statutory boards

Country	Legal System	Treaty Ratification Process	Transformation Method	Example of Implementation
Thailand	Civil law	Cabinet approval; Parliament ratifies major treaties	Laws or ministerial regulations issued	ACTIP → Anti-Trafficking Act aligned
Vietnam	Socialist legal system	National Assembly must ratify treaties	Implemented through laws or action plans	ACTIP → Penal Code amended + National Plan
Brunei	Common + Islamic law	Sultan and Cabinet approve treaties	Administrative circulars or orders	ACTIP → Policy-based implementation
Cambodia	Civil law (French origin)	King ratifies after Assembly approval	National laws passed post-ratification	ACTIP → Anti-Trafficking Law updated
Laos	Civil law (Socialist influence)	National Assembly approval and President ratification	Decrees and implementing laws	ATIGA → Customs decree issued
Myanmar	Mixed (Common law + military law)	President ratifies; parliamentary oversight varies	Military-led directives and partial legislation	ACTIP → Criminal Code alignment

Source: Various ASEAN Documents

Singapore's Constitution is silent on the relationship between international law and domestic law (Lim, Mohan, & Lim, 2020). The executive does not require Parliament's consent to enter into treaties; however, the treaties must be transformed into domestic law through legislation before rights and duties are established. Only the Parliament has the power to do this, and not doing so could result in a treaty violation.

In a study, Utami et al. (2025) examined the impact of globalization on Indonesia's legislative practices. They found an increasing adoption of international modern legislative principles and practices, either because of their commitments as members of international organizations such as ASEAN or the need to harmonize their

laws on trade and cooperation. However, globalization also poses challenges in preserving Indonesia's national identity while remaining competitive in the global order. Their participation in international treaties and regional agreements, such as the ASEAN, also challenges Indonesia to maintain a balance between openness to external legal influences and the preservation of its unique legal characteristics. Indonesia addressed these challenges by incorporating local wisdom, Pancasila values, and customs into its legislative process, thereby transforming into one that is adaptive, rooted in national identity, but globally competitive.

Studies on ASEAN Legislation

During the preparation of this literature review for my research, there was a lack of studies on legislation in ASEAN, in contrast to the extensive research on ASEAN's political, economic, and security cooperation, or regional identity. However, there were studies that explored how legal and legislative processes work within the ASEAN framework and how they interact with national legal systems.

Bagulaya (2019) analyzed the ASEAN Charter and argued that it, and other related instruments, only strengthen the control of its member states instead of empowering ASEAN, and weaken the position of the Secretary-General and the Secretariat. He explained that while the Charter grants ASEAN a legal personality, its core structure—the ASEAN Summit—limits its autonomy. He likened the organization to the *wayang kulit*, an Indonesian puppet, controlled by the heads of the AMS instead of functioning as a regional actor.

Furthermore, Bagulaya assessed the Terms of Reference (TOR) of the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR), pointing out that they further erode the independence of ASEAN as an international body as the TOR

provides that the commission's members are appointed by the ASEAN Summit and accountable to their national governments. He added that the AIHCR lacked enforcement powers as evidenced by its silence in two gross violations of human rights in the region: the Rohingya genocide and the Philippine drug war under former President Rodrigo Duterte.

ASEAN Identity

When the ASEAN leaders adopted the ASEAN Vision in 1997, they were looking at establishing a peaceful, stable, and prosperous community in the region. As a community, the leaders also encouraged the development of an ASEAN identity among its people while remaining mindful and respectful of the diversity of their culture, languages, and traditions. The vision highlighted the need to instill a "we-feeling" of togetherness and a regional sense of belonging among ASEAN people (ASEAN, 2020).

Jones (2004), however, argues that this diversity – cultural, political and social – can pose a problem in forging an ASEAN identity. He contends that each ASEAN member country is composed of diverse culture itself, and this lends to the dominant groups in each country to cling to power, creating exclusion within. Jones further contends that for a regional identity to develop, the people need to be educated and accept diversity and common heritage in their state.

ASEAN identity is still a work in progress. According to The Narrative of the ASEAN Identity (ASEAN, 2020), it embodies the shared history, culture, and values of the people passed down through generations (inherited values) and the goals and

aspirations its leaders agreed on (constructed values).[5] This identity will develop through the interaction of the region's peoples. The ASEAN leaders believe that having a sense of shared identity will make ASEAN a more substantial, more cohesive region that thrives on collaboration while respecting each other's independence. The narrative further identified three indicators to measure the success of the ASEAN identity: awareness or the percentage of the people that associate themselves as part of ASEAN; relevance or the understanding of the people of how they benefit from it; and appreciation or the degree at which the people appreciate being a part of ASEAN and the recognition of other parties of the ASEAN unity and centrality.

However, some scholars (Paasi, 2011; Neuvoren, 2019) argue that awareness, while important as a fundamental aspect in strengthening regional identity and citizenship, is not sufficient on its own. Experts believe that to become fully involved in community-building, the people should be aware of the objectives of and the developments within and understand the political, economic, and socio-cultural similarities and differences between the member states and their peoples (Siraprapasiri & Tharang, 2016). Citizens who are aware of ASEAN's efforts and benefits are more likely to support policies and reforms that promote regional integration (Jones, 2004). Such awareness can only be developed through social interaction, free exchange of ideas, and collaboration (Acharya, 2017a). There were also observations that the interaction within ASEAN is largely limited among its leaders, is elitist in nature, and hardly benefits the middle and lower classes (Roche, 2018).

[5] Based on “The Narrative of the ASEAN Identity” adopted by the ASEAN Leaders at the 37th ASEAN Summit in 2020.

There is limited information on how ASEAN people integrate their knowledge and awareness of the organization into their daily lives, including their work

The most relevant source I found was an article on the reflection of Filipino journalists on reporting about ASEAN (Mendoza, n.d.). The article noted that the Philippine media have limited coverage of ASEAN, and was mostly on official meetings and summits. Much of the organization's work has been underreported in the country. Some reporters noted that there had been more ASEAN news in the media, but news coverage on the organization remained "spotty and lacks context." Some reports do not explain what ASEAN means and what its benefits are to the people. The article further noted that the foreign department had used media to raise awareness among the people on ASEAN, but the public may not relate the organization to local concerns and their daily lives.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Recognizing the limited research on how citizens of the region translate their knowledge and awareness of their area into action and involvement, I conducted this study to ascertain how I, as a legislative researcher and a student of ASEAN studies, view ASEAN as integral to my technical work. The objective of this study was to examine the practices I employed to integrate my knowledge about ASEAN into my research outputs and to evaluate how ASEAN-centric approaches can enhance policymaking at the national level. Specifically, I aimed to assess the frequency and context of ASEAN references in my policy research documents, as well as the other terminologies I used when I did not make any direct reference to the organization. Lastly, I used auto-ethnomethodology as my research method to reflect on my experience as a researcher and how my personal knowledge influenced my work, identifying the difficulties and obstacles I encountered, as well as possible successes in incorporating ASEAN frameworks into my outputs.

Research Framework: Auto-ethnomethodology

For my research, I explored the role of ASEAN instruments in national legislation through an auto-ethnomethodology lens, focusing on my practices as a technical researcher in the legislature. This approach represents a significant departure from the methods I use in my research, which require us to be objective and unbiased. In my work, I primarily collect data from external sources, use quantitative methods for analysis, and draw conclusions and recommendations based on the results of my study. In doing so, I do not put myself in my research; I derive all the

discussions of results and conclusions from the interpretation of data using accepted methods.

When I was advised to use auto-ethnomethodology to frame my research, I was initially undecided. "Auto-ethnomethodology, what?" I asked myself. "Is that even scientific?" said someone who's been relying on empirical methods to do research for decades.

I did my research and found that it is a relatively new concept. According to Skains (2018), auto-ethnomethodology stands at the intersection of autoethnography and ethnomethodology. It falls under the category of practice-based research, where the researcher's practice and their outputs or the artifacts from the process become the object of inquiry to gain knowledge (Candy, 2006). Auto-ethnomethodology combines the reflective and sometimes autobiographical approach of autoethnography and the analytical focus of ethnomethodology on the methods and practices people use to make sense of their social world (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011; Garfinkel, 1967).

Admittedly, I am unfamiliar even with autoethnography and ethnomethodology. To better appreciate auto-ethnomethodology, I decided to break it down into its component parts to study.

Autoethnography: An Insider Inquiring into Legislative Work

The "auto" in auto-ethnomethodology refers to autoethnography, which serves as an entry point to this framework. It acknowledges that I, as a researcher, am both a subject and a positioned observer within the context of legislative and policy research.

Although I could not find a definitive definition, my search for a clear definition of autoethnography always led me to Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2010), who defined autoethnography as an approach to research and writing that simultaneously describes and systematically analyzes personal experiences to understand cultural experiences. They further explained that the method combines elements from autobiography and ethnography. Ellis et al. also said that an autobiographer writes about epiphanies or his memories of events that significantly changed his life and an ethnographer (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2010). A researcher's personal reflections, journals, creative writing, recordings, interviews, and observations of his environment and relationships become his data and basis for writing his autoethnography (Wall, 2006). As Ellis puts it, in writing an autoethnography,

> "I am both the author and focus of the story, the one who tells and the one who experiences, the observer and the observed, the creator and the created. I am the person at the intersection of the personal and the cultural, thinking and observing as an ethnographer and writing and describing as a storyteller" (Ellis, 2009).

Initially, I perceived autoethnography as being similar to keeping a diary or journaling, where I would take notes and organize them into a narrative that describe my experience in relation to an event or any observable fact. However, Ellis and Adams (2014) pointed out that while the emphasis in autoethnography is on the personal experience of the researcher, it is different from journals or blogs since the researcher must reflect on and interpret the experience and compare it to how and what others feel about the same experience. Likewise, Chang (2008) said that autoethnography's self-narrative could be similar to the storytelling of other

ethnographies but "transcends mere narration of self to engage in cultural analysis and interpretation."

However, not all research using the writer's personal experiences is autoethnography (Adams & Hermann, 2020). Researchers doing autoethnography draw on their personal experiences intentionally to explain and question cultural beliefs, practices, and identities. They also engage in continuous self-reflection, which Adams and Hermann refer to as" reflexivity," to identify and examine the interactions between the self and cultural life. In other words, a researcher doing autoethnography should not just write down his experience but should take a step backward and look at the data before him and situate their personal stories within a larger cultural context, analyzing how their experiences relate to societal norms, values, and issues (Adams, et al. 2015).

Ethnomethodology: Making Sense of Social Order through Lived Experience

Ethnomethodology, as developed by Garfinkel (1967), is concerned with how individuals generate and sustain a sense of order in the course of their everyday actions. Ethnomethodologists argue that social facts are constructed through the practices and interactions of individuals, and ethnomethodology seeks to unravel the constant and stable procedures that motivate these interactions across different social settings (Attewell, 1974).

Garfinkle (1996) further explains that the main concern of ethnomethodology is to provide empirical descriptions of the local construction and accountability of social order. By accountability, Garfinkle explains, it is not about holding someone responsible for their actions, but rather that actions must be intelligible and explainable to others within a social setting. For example, my research outputs should not merely

reiterate ASEAN obligations as found in the instruments; instead, I had to process these instruments by applying the standard practices where I work, enabling my target audience — lawmakers, legislative staff, and other stakeholders — to find them helpful. In ethnomethodology, all the actions I took to make the documents valuable to the audience are observable and reportable, and thus became accountable (Laurier, 2009). In some instances, we had to "laymanize" our technical reports to make them more accessible to our target clientele. This change in language is also an accountable practice that an external observer can observe and report.

However, Garfinkel and Wieder (1992) argue that social phenomena can only be understood by a competent member of the social setting being studied. This concept, which Garfinkel called the unique adequacy (UA) requirement of methods, requires that the researcher have a deep understanding of the social setting being examined (weak UA) or that in addition to having a deep understanding, the researcher should be able to explain the observed phenomena using the language and concepts of the group (strong UA). In other words, the researcher should be a member of the social setting they are studying, and as such, their insider status is not a bias but a precondition for a valid inquiry, since the processes being studied are not fully accessible to external observers.

Synthesis: Auto-ethnomethodology

Auto-ethnomethodology is an approach that takes into account the researcher's reflective and self-examination narrative in autoethnography, and their institutional practices as observed in ethnomethodology.

Engaging in Reflexivity

Based on my readings on the subject matter, I observed that, similar to autoethnography, the concept of reflexivity varies for each individual, depending on the kind of research they are doing. For Pillow (2003), reflexivity is a process to address and question issues about the research process, researcher subjectivity, and how knowledge is constructed. She added that researchers often apply it to reflect on how their identity – gender, race, or class – affects the research process and findings. In a study conducted by Olmos-Vega and his colleagues (2023), reflexivity is a set of continuous, collective, and complex procedures that researchers use to assess the impact of their subjectivity and positioning on the research process. The authors claim that with reflexivity, the researcher's subjective experiences and decisions in qualitative research become central and influence the entire research process. They argue that we should not see subjectivity as a limitation but instead as an integral part of creating meaningful data.

Reflexivity lends rigor to qualitative research (Pillow, 2003), albeit differently from quantitative research (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023). Because subjectivity is front and center in reflexivity, the researcher can construct meaning not apparent to an outsider and create a new understanding of the phenomenon under study (Jootun, McGhee & Marland, 2009).

According to Tarisayi (2023), reflexivity is a central and defining feature of autoethnography research. In this context, reflexivity refers to the critical self-examination of a researcher on how his social identity, positionality, emotions, biases, and experiences influence the research process and interpretation. It transforms this personal experience into analytical insight and is essential to render credibility and

relevance in research that links the personal to the social world. By embracing reflexivity, qualitative researchers can produce more nuanced and ethically reliable results, ultimately leading to a deeper understanding of the phenomena they are studying (Ide & Beddoe, 2024).

Working in the legislative branch allows me to observe and analyze how ASEAN initiatives impact national policies. In this context, I used auto-ethnomethodology to explore how ASEAN initiatives are reflected in national policies from the perspective of a policy researcher, based on their practices. I anticipate that reflecting on my experiences in producing papers to aid legislators in their tasks can provide valuable insights into the integration of ASEAN priorities into national frameworks.

This reflection includes analyzing how my understanding of ASEAN has evolved and its influence on my work. I also examined specific instances where ASEAN initiatives were incorporated into national policies and identified challenges and successes in this process.

My review of studies on ASEAN people's views towards ASEAN and the ASEAN Community revealed that ASEAN people have a generally positive view of the organization. Some studies have also indicated a high level of awareness of ASEAN among the region's people. One survey even showed that in the Philippines, government employees showed more heightened awareness of ASEAN than employees in the other sectors (ERIA, 2017).

Research Questions

This lack of information led me to reflect on whether I had effectively applied the knowledge and skills gained through my academic training and professional experience to my research in the workplace.

The integration of regional commitments into national policies is a critical component in the success of the ASEAN Community. Understanding how commitments on economic integration, political cooperation, and socio-cultural collaboration are reflected in domestic legislation is essential. In this context, the research explored the question: How are ASEAN commitments integrated into national policies?

To further explore the topic, this paper studied two sub-questions:

1. What are the practices of a legislative researcher in incorporating knowledge and perspectives of ASEAN in legislation work?; and

2. What perspective underlies the practices of integrating ASEAN in legislative work?

By examining these questions, I sought to provide insights into the challenges, and strategies I encountered in aligning national laws with regional frameworks in my role as a legislative researcher with ASEAN-informed perspectives.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Auto-ethnomethodology as Research Methodology

I conducted this research using an auto-ethnomethodology approach, where I drew upon my experiences and reflexive inquiry into my decisions, practices, and strategies for incorporating ASEAN initiatives into my legislative research outputs.

Using this approach, I documented how I contextualized the ASEAN instruments into my research. This involved identifying moments of interpretation, deliberation, and adaptation of the contents of the instruments into my products. The combined approaches of autoethnography and ethnomethodology are essential because I became both the subject and analyst of the practices I investigated. Through careful documentation, reflections, and analysis, auto-ethnomethodology enabled me to identify processes, reasoning, and the constraints that informed me what to consider, and how to adapt and present ASEAN frameworks into my legislative research.

Evolution of a Legislative Researcher

My professional journey began in 1989, after I graduated from university, when I entered the workforce. The same year, I started working in the legislative branch as a junior researcher. My job was to gather and organize data and information into an issue brief for the members of the House. My initial outputs were usually short and focused on the pressing issues in my sector at that time, without any analysis. The papers only presented the facts surrounding the subject, which may or may not require

legislative action. The data I gathered and used for these papers focused on the Philippines and were disaggregated up to the provincial level.

Over time, my output included a more extensive discussion of the problems in the sector I was engaged in and required in-depth analysis and specific recommendations. My initial research was on the tourism sector, after which I expanded my work to include areas such as indirect taxes, the energy sector, national defense, labor, poverty, and social protection. I am currently handling the health sector, where my focus is on access to services, service delivery, and financing.

With the onset of globalization, I had to be aware of the developments beyond our borders that could affect our country. The changes also meant that I had to expand my data sources beyond national and regional data to include data from other countries, especially our "neighbors," in my research outputs.

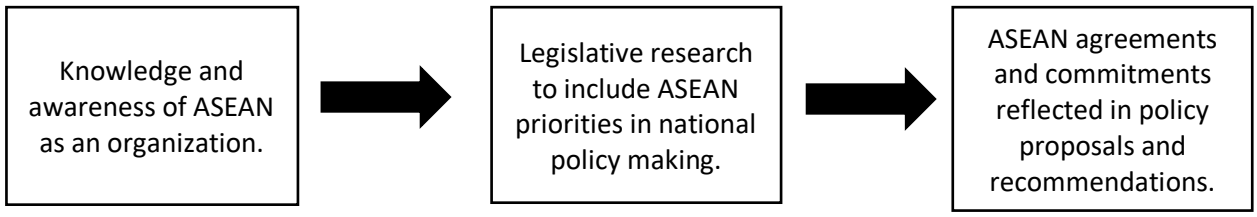
The changes brought about by globalization, free trade, and interconnection among nations have also brought new challenges to our country. The government adopted policies favoring deregulation, privatization, and liberalization to align with global economic trends (Guinigundo, 2018). The shift in policies required legislation to support their implementation and make the country competitive in the changing international market. We also had to review the 1987 Constitution to ensure that our policy recommendations were not violative of its provisions, including allowing foreign investments in the country. Trade was not the only sector affected by shifts in policies during this period. We had to study how to make the labor, finance, and some social sectors adapt to the changes.

The mandate of our department within the institution provides me, as a student of ASEAN, with the opportunity to incorporate the possible alignment of ASEAN's

official documents and agreements in my research and studies at work. It also allows me to determine whether new policies address not only national concerns but also those of ASEAN. The results of these studies and research serve as inputs to the discussions and other works of legislators.

It was in this context that I realized the need to explore how I view ASEAN in relation to my role as a policy researcher in the legislature. The illustration below shows the concept for the methodology of this study.

Figure 4.1. Research Methodology Concept.



This methodology framework supposes that my studies on ASEAN have contributed to my knowledge and awareness of ASEAN as an organization – including its goals, structures and mechanisms, and its agreements and declarations that outline the organization's strategic priorities and, that directly affect our laws and policies. This knowledge is crucial as it enables researchers like myself to identify and include ASEAN priorities in my research work and include them in policy proposals and recommendations.

After developing a firm grasp and understanding of ASEAN, I should be able to apply this knowledge in the context of national policymaking. This activity involves conducting legislative research, which includes reviewing and analyzing existing laws and identifying gaps that the legislature could address to align the laws with regional

objectives. The principle of ASEAN Centrality should serve as a guide to ensure that legislative efforts contribute to regional initiatives while ensuring our sovereignty.

Finally, this framework suggests that I should be able to translate the results of my research into concrete and actionable policy proposals and recommendations, reflecting the country's regional commitments. These proposals could include new laws or recommendations to modify or amend existing ones to comply with ASEAN agreements. For instance, while writing this paper, I am simultaneously conducting research on the ASEAN Mutual Recognition Arrangements and its possible impact on our labor and employment policies. However, new legislation should not only address the gaps to align our laws with the regional objectives, but they should also ensure that the country could both collaborate and compete in the evolving ASEAN landscape.

I employed systematic archival research to identify, select and organize the documents and materials I used to conduct my research and answer my research questions. I also included my work as a co-author, including those in which I was responsible for writing specific chapters or sections. I limited the time frame to include my outputs from 2010 and while enrolled in the Master in ASEAN Studies program. For this paper, I applied the categories our office used to differentiate the different knowledge products for our principals and other audiences. These papers are available online via our office's website and are readily accessible to all interested parties.

I used content analysis, a method researchers use to analyze data, which may be in verbal, print or electronic form and obtained through surveys, interviews, focus group discussions, or printed materials such as journal articles, books, or manuals (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Initially, I used the deductive method with the word "ASEAN"

as code and examined whether the term appeared in my documents. I used the table to document the frequency I used the term ASEAN in all my products.

Initially, I scanned eight documents for words that refer to "ASEAN" and recorded the frequency with which it appeared on a matrix using Excel. Only two of the studies contained the word. I scanned the documents several times, as recommended in the literature, and read the materials repeatedly to immerse myself fully in the data (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

One of the studies where I mentioned ASEAN read as follows:

> *"The country also lags behind its **ASEAN** peers as it is in the bottom three in both percentage of the population receiving their first COVID-19 jabs and the ratio of Filipinos fully vaccinated."*[6]

I worked on this paper after the pandemic as a chapter of a longer policy document that proposed policy imperatives for the government to take as part of its recovery efforts from the effects of the public health emergency. In this statement, I compared the government's response to the pandemic in relation to those of other ASEAN member economies. I recall that the country was still reeling not only from the health crisis but more so from the restrictions that the government imposed, which was one of if not the most stringent in the region.

I reread the two sentences where I mentioned ASEAN to find any pattern or connection in the data. In both instances, I used ASEAN to compare our country's performance with the other AMS. I reviewed the document to understand why I made

[6] CPBRD (2021). *Delving into the Country's Future Outlook*. Special Publication. Congressional Policy and Budget Research Department. Quezon City. https://cpbrd.congress.gov.ph/images/PDF%20Attachments/Special%20Publications/CSP-60_Delving_into_the_Countrys_Future_Outlook.pdf

this comparison. This document explored the country's outlook for economic recovery, growth prospects and persisting social vulnerabilities amid the pandemic. I realized that my initial focus was on the country's vaccination roll-out during the pandemic to explain the data on infection and death rates due to the virus. On hindsight, I should have mentioned in the document that Indonesia and the Philippines had the highest infection and death rates in the region during the period due to their late response.

I re-read my eight papers and observed that I had used other terms, words, or groups of words to refer to ASEAN. The words included the actual names of countries, regions, and country groupings and classifications that other organizations and agencies use. I marked the sentences that included these words and used color to differentiate the names of countries, regions, and classifications. This procedure enabled me to identify them quickly from the texts I studied.

For example, the first sentence in the first document I scanned read as:

> *"For many social protection programs in **other countries,** one of the ways to ensure that benefits are given to the right individuals is through the use of targeting."*[7]

I marked this sentence and took note of the term "other countries." After going through the other documents, I had an initial list that included Southeast Asia, developing countries, low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), neighbors, Asia, Asian countries, Latin America, and other countries. I also listed individual country

[7] Asuncion, R. V. (2014).A Survey of Targeting Practices and Outcomes in Other Countries*. CPBRD Notes No. 2014-01.* . Congressional Policy and Budget Research Department. Quezon City. https://cpbrd.congress.gov.ph/images/PDF%20Attachments/CPBRD%20Notes/CN2014-01%20Targeting%20Social%20Protection%20Programs.pdf

names such as Brazil, Mexico, Chile, Japan, China, Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, and Cambodia.

At this point, I shifted my analytical approach from deductive to inductive. The inductive method of content analysis does not begin with a set of pre-determined codes; it derives the coding categories instead from raw data (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2005). Researchers use inductive content analysis when there are no previous studies dealing with the issue (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008) or when they want to develop a theory (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2005). In my case, there were almost no studies on how I, or any legislative researcher, incorporate my knowledge on ASEAN instruments in my products, given that the findings of several surveys indicate that Filipinos have high awareness of ASEAN and moderately consider themselves as citizens of the region (Siar, Albert, & Llanto, 2016). Thus, I used inductive content analysis and had to re-read my documents for four more rounds to finally come up with categories and themes from the words I had picked up.

For the next round of examination of my documents, I used the names of countries as my initial unit of analysis and came up with 30 units. I then organized the units by continents or regional groupings and came up with four, namely: Asia and Pacific, Africa, Latin America, European Union and North America. Although I could further classify the countries into other categories, i.e., developing countries and low- and middle-income countries, I chose to limit the analysis at the regional level since the focus of my study was ASEAN, which is a regional concept. On further examination, I realized that in our studies, we really do not use continental comparisons i.e. comparing Asia with Latin America or Asia with Europe. Instead, we look at data at the country level or regional level. At most, we compare our data with

countries having the same characteristics as the Philippines such as growth, income and development.

In my paper on targeting the beneficiaries for cash transfer social protection, there was no mention of ASEAN or any other member states, apart from Indonesia. After going through my notes, I realized that Indonesia was the only AMS that has a similar program at the time I did my study. At the time, Indonesia was also in the early stages of implementing its targeting system for its social protection programs, and were having their own issues. Although it was not a viable source of good practices, their implementation offered valuable lessons I was able to use for my study. On the other hand, Latin American countries, especially Brazil, have mature systems that have been ongoing for years. The experiences of these countries offered good sources of lessons for implementing targeting systems and how to evaluate the country's targeting system for my paper.

> *"Meanwhile, historical targeting outcomes in **Indonesia** have generally been pro-poor, but many of the poor remained excluded from social assistance programs and significant improvements were still possible (World Bank, 2012). Each of the major social assistance programs (e.g., BLT, Raskin, Jamkesmas, BSM and PKH) in **Indonesia** have used a different mix of targeting methods to determine program beneficiaries, and targeting in practice has often strayed from official guidelines."*[8]

[8] Asuncion, R. V. (2014). A Survey of Targeting Practices and Outcomes in Other Countries. *CPBRD Notes No. 2014-01.* . Congressional Policy and Budget Research Department. Quezon City. https://cpbrd.congress.gov.ph/images/PDF%20Attachments/CPBRD%20Notes/CN2014-01%20Targeting%20Social%20Protection%20Programs.pdf

In another paper I used for this autoethnography, I examined the relationship between economic growth and income patterns among households.[9] I compared the economic performance of the Philippines to that of its neighbors in East Asia, particularly China and Vietnam. I also compared the country's income patterns to those of India and the countries mentioned earlier. This statement of former Economic Secretary Ernesto M. Pernia provided a clear picture of the performance of the Philippine economy: "*We are likely either the third or fourth fastest growing major Asian emerging economy in the fourth quarter after China's 6.8 percent and Vietnam's 6.7 percent. For full-year of 2016, we are so far the fastest growing economy with China at 6.7 percent and Vietnam at 6.2 percent*."[10]

While reviewing the other studies in my dataset for another round, I realized that I used individual AMSs more, not only to compare them to the Philippines but also to investigate their experiences on the issue I studied.

> "*South and East Asia countries have also implemented various eHealth projects, including telemedicine in Bhutan and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Monitoring of Vital Events in Bangladesh and* ***Indonesia****, maternal and child tracking system in India, District Health Information System (DHIS) in Bangladesh, and electronic medical records in Sri Lanka. Telemedicine and digital health services*

[9] Asuncion R. V. (2017). A Note on Economic Growth and Income Pattern Relationship in the Philippines. *CPBRD Discussion Paper No. 2017-07.* Congressional Policy and Budget Research Department. Quezon City. https://cpbrd.congress.gov.ph/images/PDF%20Attachments/Discussion%20Paper/DP2017-07_Income_Pattern_rev.pdf

[10] Statement of Secretary Ernesto M. Pernia's on the Performance of the Philippine Economy for the Fourth Quarter and Full Year 2016. 26 January 2017. https://neda.gov.ph/statement-of-secretary-ernesto-m-pernias-on-the-performance-of-the-philippine-economy-for-the-fourth-quarter-and-full-year-2016/

*rapidly grew in **Malaysia**, with private healthcare providers leading patient-focused healthcare services delivery. **Singapore's** government gave eHealth and technology priority, allowing it to lower spending and maximize patients' cost of care. The eHealth services of these countries also provided opportunities to create innovative strategies and tools to further improve the program.*"[11]

While I named the individual states, I did not clearly identify them as ASEAN and used the terms "neighbors" or "countries in the region" instead.

*"The country lags behind the connection speeds of its neighbors such as **Malaysia**, **Thailand**, and **Vietnam**. Some countries in the region also have established national broadbands which provided them with faster Internet speed connections."*[12]

Upon reviewing my notes for this particular paper, I realized that at the time I was doing the study, ASEAN had not yet concluded a policy or agreement on promoting the use of digital technologies for healthcare delivery. Instead, the individual member states established their frameworks and strategies to adopt digital health, while other member states have been slow to adopt them (Navallo & Detros, 2024).

[11] Asuncion R. V. (2017). Institutionalizing Digital Health to Promote Universal Health Care. *CPBRD Policy Brief No. 2022-01.* Congressional Policy and Budget Research Department. Quezon City. https://cpbrd.congress.gov.ph/images/PDF%20Attachments/CPBRD%20Policy%20Brief/PB2022-01_Institutionalizing_Digital_Health_to_Promote_Universal_Health_Care.pdf

[12] *ibid*

Review of Documents for the AIPA General Assembly

In reviewing the documents I prepared and submitted for the AIPA GA, I observed that they all contained the term "ASEAN." For instance, in the opening statement I prepared for the chairperson of one of the meetings during the GA, I wrote:

> "*We live in interesting times. Our region continues to show its potential. We have made strides in poverty alleviation, education, health, and jobs creation. We take pride in our greatest wealth – our people. By adopting the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint 2025, the community of leaders underscored the desire for a shared future through a people-centered community that is resilient, inclusive, sustainable, and dynamic. We, as parliamentarians, share this ideal and our participation in this committee will matter significantly in achieving our ASEAN vision.*"

The report on one of the dialogues with observer parliaments also mentioned the term ASEAN and references to ASEAN. Both the AIPA parliamentarians and the observers acknowledged their roles as partners in the development of ASEAN.

> *"In the dialogues, AIPA and Australian Members of Parliament shared ideas and initiatives as well as enhanced commitments on "Strengthening cooperation in disaster management and combatting transnational crimes, particularly on cyber security, combatting terrorism, and violent extremism and trafficking in persons".*
>
> *The Australian observers thanked the AIPA country delegates for the excellent partnership between their country and the region. They cited*

the engagement Australia had with individual ASEAN Member State. They noted the Australia's response to the region's forest fire crisis and the 2004 tsunami, and underscored the importance of sharing expertise in disaster management that will benefit the entire region. They informed the body that the Australian defense force has a dual purpose, including responding to natural disasters."

I was also involved in other activities, collaborating with colleagues from the secretariat of other AMS parliaments to identify regional issues that AIPA could address. In a series of meetings, we had a couple of breakout sessions where we threshed out common problems experienced by the AMS, although we were not expected to recommend solutions to the issues. I served as co-facilitator in one of the breakout groups focusing on human development and other social concerns, including education, health, and the environment. We had a lengthy discussion about the proposal to synchronize the opening of classes in the region. At the time, the country was the only one that began its school year in June. There was a lengthy debate, with Filipino participants opposing the proposal for several reasons, including the weather. In another session, we discussed the issue of single-use plastics and how they contribute to marine pollution. I recall that the group agreed unanimously that the problem affects all AMS. The AIPA Secretariat compiled the results of these activities and integrated them into a report, which was distributed to its member parliaments. As I recall this activity, I remember what Acharya noted regarding the development of an ASEAN identity among the people: that history, to some extent, will have a bearing on the acceptance of the ASEAN people to the regional identity that their leaders offer them (2017a).

My review of the documents I prepared for the AIPA General Assembly and my participation in the follow-up activities led me to understand that the purpose of my outputs had a direct bearing on my reference to ASEAN. Since I was aware that I was preparing documents that would impact ASEAN, I deliberately referenced the association in my outputs. I also made the effort to review previous agreements made by ASEAN and AIPA on the subject matter to align with whatever recommendations I made in the documents.

ASEAN in the Research Products of a Legislative Researcher

With this in mind, I did my archival research using the knowledge products I generated as a researcher in the legislature, which included policy briefs, discussion papers, and other materials on a wide range of topics related to health, income and poverty, and social protection.

I reviewed my knowledge products between 2010 and 2023 to determine how I had considered ASEAN in my research. Prior to this, I had not considered reviewing my completed research outputs with the aim of studying and analyzing their content. The extent of my work in the past was to reference my finished outputs for possible updating to address related current or emerging issues.

I extracted sample texts from some of my documents. I purposely selected the texts containing the unit of analysis identified and discussed earlier and took note of the number of publications that contained them. Table 4.1 presents the initial list and codes I used.

Table 4.1

Initial Codes

# of publications contributing	Excerpt	Initial Code
2	"The country also lags behind its ASEAN peers as it is in the bottom three in both percentage of the population receiving their first COVID-19 jabs and the ratio of Filipinos fully vaccinated."	ASEAN
3	"The country lags behind the connection speeds of its neighbors such as **Malaysia**, **Thailand**, and **Vietnam**. Some **countries in the region** also have established national broadbands which provided them with faster Internet speed connections."	Individual names of AMS Indonesia Malaysia Singapore Thailand Vietnam
3	Ideally, economic growth will eventually reduce poverty. China, for example, reduced its poverty by more than half from 1981-2000 due to its impressive growth	Individual names of other Asian countries Bangladesh China India Japan South Korea Taiwan
3	Some registries, such as Chile's Ficha CAS, have been in operation for decades, while others, such as Brazil's Cadastro Único, were created more recently. Similarly, the "user programs" vary in their degree of implementation: Mexico's Oportunidades (formerly Progresa) has been in operation since the mid-1990s, while Brazil's Bolsa Familia Program was only launched at the end of 2003, and its main predecessor, Bolsa Escola Federal,in 2001.	Individual names of other countries Australia Brazil Chile Colombia Costa Rica Denmark Kenya

# of publications contributing	Excerpt	Initial Code
		Malawi
		Mexico
		South Africa
		US
6	"For many social protection programs in **other countries,** one of the ways to ensure that benefits are given to the right individuals is through the use of targeting.	“Other countries”
		“Neighbors”
		Regional and other country groupings
		Africa
5	Countries in the European Union have adopted eHealth earlier on, and the use of technology and shifts in the medicine’s culture has delivered tangible benefits.	East Asia
		European Union
		Latin America
		OECD Countries
		Southeast Asia

I examined the table, looking for possible categories or relationships between the words I listed (Kleinheksel, Rockich-Winston, Tawfik, Wyatt, 2018). From the initial groupings in Table 4.1, I derived three themes that I used to reference ASEAN and other countries in the documents under study. I grouped the codes and the sample text I used according to the themes I came up with and encoded them in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2

Grouping by Themes

Excerpt	Initial Code	Practice
"The country also lags behind its ASEAN peers as it is in the bottom three in both percentage of the population	ASEAN Individual names of AMS	**Benchmarking and peer comparison**

Excerpt	Initial Code	Practice
receiving their first COVID-19 jabs and the ratio of Filipinos fully vaccinated." "The country lags behind the connection speeds of its neighbors such as **Malaysia**, **Thailand**, and **Vietnam**. Some countries in the region also have established national broadbands which provided them with faster Internet speed connections."	(Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore,Thailand, Vietnam)	
Ideally, economic growth will eventually reduce poverty. China, for example, reduced its poverty by more than half from 1981-2000 due to its impressive growth	Individual names of other Asian countries (Bangladesh, China, India, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan) “Other countries”	**Comparing with other country models**
Some registries, such as Chile’s Ficha CAS, have been in operation for decades, while others, such as Brazil’s Cadastro Único, were created more recently. Similarly, the “user programs” vary in their degree of implementation: Mexico’s Oportunidades (formerly Progresa) has been in operation since the mid-1990s, while Brazil’s Bolsa Familia Program was only launched at the end of 2003, and its main predecessor, Bolsa Escola Federal,in 2001. "For many social protection programs in other countries, one of the ways to ensure that benefits are given to the right individuals is through the use of targeting.	Individual names of other countries (Australia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Denmark, Kenya, Malawi, Mexico, South Africa, US) “Other countries”	**Use of International Models in Policy Learning**

Building on the thematic groupings I identified in Table 4.2, I analyzed how these categories relate to my research questions. In Table 4.3 below, I further categorized the identified themes in relation to my research questions. I intended to map how each theme contributes to address the main question (How are ASEAN commitments integrated into national policies?) and the two sub-questions on the practices and underlying perspectives of legislative researchers.

Table 4.3

Grouping by Themes

Research Questions	Practice
How are ASEAN commitments integrated into national policies?	Benchmarking and peer comparison
SQ1: What are the practices of a legislative researcher in incorporating knowledge and perspectives of ASEAN in legislation work?	Benchmarking and peer comparison. Comparing with other country models Use of International Models in Social Policy Learning
SQ2: What perspective underlies the practices of integrating ASEAN in legislative work?	Use of International Models in Social Policy Learning

After reviewing and assessing the information I gathered from these tables, I presented the results and discussions in the succeeding section, focusing on my insights, drawn from lived experience, to provide a better understanding of how ASEAN influences my legislative research work.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the findings of this study through a reflective analysis of selected legislative research outputs such as policy briefs, discussion papers, and technical notes that I authored and co-authored as a researcher in a legislative office. Using the lens of auto-ethnomethodology, I examined these outputs not only as products of my legislative research but as artifacts of situated knowledge, reflecting my normal practices, choices, and understanding.

I analyzed how my experiences, knowledge, and positionality as a legislative researcher influenced the incorporation, or lack thereof, of ASEAN instruments in my policy outputs. This chapter is structured using the three research questions I proffered. I began by analyzing how ASEAN commitments are integrated into national policy research, followed by an examination of practices I used to incorporate ASEAN information, and finally, I reflected on what perspective influenced these practices.

Practices in Integrating ASEAN in Legislative Research

Sifting through my research outputs felt like reviewing my personal record. The documents I used, which included policy briefs, discussion papers, and technical memos, were supposed to be objective and actionable, as informed by the requirements of evidence-based policymaking. They were not made for introspection on certain things. While I do revisit these documents, it is primarily to use them as references or starting points for other research and studies. I initially found it challenging to analyze the papers I had written not as outputs, but as artifacts of situated knowledge. I began to question whether I had, either intentionally or not,

incorporated ASEAN views into my research practice? And if I had not, what might have caused that omission? However, in the context of this study, rereading them revealed insights I had not expected. The papers have shown my evolving awareness of ASEAN.

While the Constitution is explicit about how treaties and other international agreements are incorporated into the Philippine legal system, certain treaties can have significant effects on our laws. They may require new legislation or amendments to existing laws. Legislators must understand the effects of new or amended legislation on various sectors that the amendment will impact. This need will require legislative research bodies to study the new information as the bill progresses through the legislative process.

Upon reviewing the selected research I used in this study, I found that I rarely mentioned ASEAN explicitly. In fact, as shown in Table 4.1 of the previous chapter, the term “ASEAN” appeared in two of the documents I analyzed. I used the term not even in the context of any ASEAN instrument, but to compare the country against other AMS.

In my case, this lack of direct reference to ASEAN in my policy research is a manifestation of how I approach ASEAN as a region. I used the organization and its members as comparative tools to benchmark the Philippines against the other countries in areas such as health, social protection, and other socioeconomic issues. ASEAN was not central, but rather incidental in shaping the legislative research I worked on.

Three main practices emerged that revealed how I incorporated ASEAN perspectives, albeit selectively, in my research process through this inquiry:

benchmarking and peer comparison, comparison with other country models, and using international models for policy learning. These practices show that ASEAN inclusion in my legislative research is less about formal alignment and more about pragmatic, context-sensitive actions situated within the institutional life of a legislative research office.

Benchmarking and Peer Comparison

One prominent and recurring practice was the use of the AMS as points of comparison. In many of my research outputs, I referred to the experiences and performance of AMS to evaluate the performance of Philippine policies or to identify good practices that we can adapt in our policies. I also often compared the country's programs that addressed the issues I studied with those of our ASEAN peers, which was evident in my papers on healthcare systems and digital innovations. However, the comparisons were not grounded on any ASEAN instrument; instead, I relied on the performance and anecdotal experiences of each member state and other countries in and out of the region as reference points.

Benchmarking is increasingly being recognized as a performance management tool in the public sector (Boyanov, 2024). It enables government agencies to compare their performance against that of their peers or standards, identify best practices, and adopt innovative approaches to enhance service delivery and efficiency (Ammons, 2019).

Comparing with Other Country Models.

In several outputs, I compared the Philippines with countries in other regions, such as East Asia, South Asia, and Latin America, to understand their approaches to

similar problems and identify valuable lessons for future reforms. I observed this comparison in my policy brief on social protection, where I compared the targeting practices of the Philippines and Indonesia with those of Brazil, Mexico, and other Latin American countries, which were recognized by multilateral agencies such as the World Bank as having some of the effective, most mature, and advanced targeting systems for social protection programs.

This broader comparative approach reflects a practical orientation toward global policy learning. I did not use AMS for comparison and analysis unless their experiences could provide clear theoretical or conceptual insights. My practice of comparing the country with others provided alternative models, which are often validated by multilateral institutions. It also demonstrated a results-based mode of inquiry where ASEAN is only one of several sources of learning, rather than the central reference point.

Use of International Models in Policy Learning.

The third practice that emerged from my analysis was the use of international models and global frameworks to inform my legislative research. I used a diverse selection of international policy models, mostly from non-ASEAN countries, to gain insights into policy planning and implementation in my areas of interest, including healthcare access. These models were frequently drawn from development agencies and international bodies, including the World Health Organization, UNICEF, and UNDP.

I realized again that ASEAN instruments or even any of the goals of the ASEAN Economic or Socio-Cultural Communities were notably absent. Moreover, although some AMS had experiences relevant to the topic at hand, I tended to rely on the more

widely recognized international standards and frameworks, which I perceived as more authoritative in guiding my legislative research agenda. My reason for selecting these models to draw lessons from the best practices of international agencies and other entities was not to align with regional commitments, but rather to assess their effectiveness and relevance to the policy issue.

This analysis shows ASEAN's influence on my legislative research. While ASEAN is often incidental rather than central, it remains valuable as a comparative framework and policy benchmarking. These practices demonstrate how I pragmatically integrate regional and international perspectives, enriching legislative inquiry without anchoring in ASEAN instruments or objectives.

A Notable Exception: The 2017 AIPA General Assembly

One notable exception was when I served on the secretariat during the AIPA General Assembly in 2017, where I prepared policy and background papers that were explicitly aligned with the ASCC Blueprint. In this context, the policy audience was regional, and the need for alignment with ASEAN goals was formally acknowledged. The process of drafting resolutions and facilitating committee discussions required me to review ASEAN documents, reflect on their national relevance, and propose policy language aligned with regional aspirations. This experience confirmed that policy referencing of ASEAN often requires an official mandate: when ASEAN is positioned as central to the task, it becomes central to the narrative.

Perspective of Integrating ASEAN Knowledge in My Legislative Work

Upon reviewing the results of my previous questions, I recognized that I had only included ASEAN and the AMS in my research when they served a specific

purpose. The alignment of ASEAN goals and vision with my research had not been previously considered. Instead, the organization served as a reference point when needed, and not as a focal point for policy discussions and proposals.

This perspective aligns with what Acharya (2017) and Fukunaga (2021) cite as an approach most AMS apply toward ASEAN, which emphasizes flexibility, voluntariness, and practicality. This principle is referred to by others (Tam, 2022; Gilson, 2020) as pragmatic regionalism, a concept that reflects a functional and issue-based approach to regionalism. Gilson (2020) cites the EU-ASEAN relations as an example, where both parties focus on agreements, such as trade, which present practical and tangible results. This perspective was evident in the outputs that serve as data for this research, where I perceived ASEAN as something that is not normative but rather as a tool for policy learning.

After reviewing my work, I realized that ASEAN was not entirely excluded, although it was not fully present in my research. It was only in the peripheries, used as a comparative tool, referenced briefly, but acknowledged at times when necessary, especially in relation to AIPA. However, I did not regularly use it as a framework or a guide for my legislative research, and on occasions when I engage it, I tended to group it together with other similar organizations. I have always considered my outputs to be objective, neutral, and based on empirical information. However, the findings reveal that they contain my assumptions about their relevance, utility, and audience. These outcomes highlight both the substance of my outputs and how I examined ASEAN regional integration, viewing it as practical, contextual, and sometimes incidental, which helped me understand my position within the bigger landscape of ASEAN legislative research.

Having reflected on my outputs, I will now examine the implications of these findings not only for myself as a legislative researcher, but also for the field of ASEAN studies. In the succeeding section, I will analyze these findings from the perspective of regional integration, knowledge translation, and the implicit norms that influence how ASEAN commitments are interpreted and, if consistently implemented. In this discussion, I aim to clarify the disparity between ASEAN's objectives and their practical applications within the milieu of national policies from the view of legislative research.

My initial apprehension in examining my outputs from an ASEAN perspective gradually developed into an appreciation for the broader patterns that emerged. I repeatedly realized the gap between ASEAN's commitments and the research at the legislative level, which was meant to support their implementation and success. These patterns reveal my stance as a legislative researcher and reflect the wide-ranging systemic practices that influence how ASEAN regional commitments interact with domestic policy proposals. My outputs suggest that even for someone involved in policy research who is aware of and knowledgeable about ASEAN, its instruments and processes remain peripheral unless they are directly relevant or mandated. This section aims to explore these patterns more deeply by drawing connections between the results of my analysis and the body of literature I reviewed in Chapter II.

To begin this section, I will provide a brief overview of our research process in the office, which will put the later discussion into context. At the start of the year, we develop a research agenda that we will undertake for the period. The topics are related to the sector we handle, in my case, human development with focus on health. Our research topics are typically based on the government's development plans, departmental plans, or other pronouncements from the executive branch, which often

include a proposed legislative agenda for consideration by the legislature. Some legislators, especially the head of the chamber, propose legislation that would require studies to support it. While we are guided by these plans and requirements of our principals, we are still able to propose research topics that we want to pursue, especially when they have implications for the sector I am dealing with. The guiding principle, though, is that our research should either support an existing proposed measure or advocate the filing of another one to address the issue or problem.

Where do we find other topics beyond the usual sources we consult? As I mentioned in previous chapters, we frequently attend knowledge-sharing forums and training sessions provided by our partner institutions. I often find new topics to explore and study from these programs.

For example, we had a hands-on training in costing for government programs a few years ago. We worked on actual programs and determined their costs using tools developed by the resource persons and the multilateral agency that sponsored the initiative. My colleagues and I worked on the school-based feeding program of the Department of Education (DepEd), which we selected due to the training requirements: it is a regular program of the government agency, it has a budget, and it directly impacts children's health and development. This was a case where my groupmates and I used international models, pointed out by the speakers, and a multilateral agency. We developed our final output into a costing study on expanding the coverage of the DepEd's school-based feeding program to include secondary school students. Although this particular study was not included in the dataset that I used for this research, it was indicative of the practice I employ in identifying the topics to include in my legislative research agenda.

The available literature characterizes ASEAN instruments as broad, varied, and often lacking clear legal definitions (Fukunaga, 2021; Mahaseth & Subramaniam, 2021). This description reflects my approach to ASEAN: not as a source of legal mandate but a reference for policymaking. I seldom utilized ASEAN instruments directly, and in the documents I used as data sources, I did not consider whether there were policies or agreements within ASEAN that addressed the issues that I was investigating. This aligns with Abdul Aziz and Dehousse's (2013) findings that the inconsistent terminology and unclear legal status of ASEAN documents can discourage practitioners from systematically incorporating them into national legislative research, which requires clarity of mandates and enforcement mechanisms. My experience demonstrates how this vagueness results in my unintentional exclusion of ASEAN frameworks from my outputs, unless their relevance is explicitly stated, as seen in the documents I prepared during the 2017 AIPA General Assembly.

In every research project, my initial approach involves reviewing the existing literature to gain insight about the issue, including what primarily caused it and other underlying factors. I identify the existing government programs and what has been achieved to address the problem and its causes, and identify the gaps in either policy or implementation that need to be addressed by either the legislature or the executive department.

For example, in my paper on the use of digital health, or e-health, to achieve universal health care (UHC), I found that the government had already initiated a program to provide healthcare services using digital technology. The private sector also began providing similar services, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. I also discovered that the adoption of this technology was slow among both healthcare

practitioners and their patients. The reasons include factors beyond the mandate of the DOH, such as regulation and data privacy, as well as the country's slow Internet connectivity.

When faced with such challenges in my research, I typically consider whether other countries implement similar initiatives and what issues they face. Most importantly, I want to know how they addressed these issues.

I realized that this thought process aligns with the results of my analysis, that I commonly practice benchmarking to compare the country's performance not only with our ASEAN peers but also with other countries. This practice was evident in my paper on digital health, where I noted that:

> *"According to the 2020 Speedtest Global Index, the Philippines ranked 71st out of 108 countries in fixed-broadband speed at 45.5 Mbps."*[13]

In the same document, after this statement, I narrowed down the comparison of the country's Internet speed with the speed in other member states:

> "*The country lags behind the connection speeds of its neighbors such as Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam*."[14]

[13] Asuncion R. V. (2017). Institutionalizing Digital Health to Promote Universal Health Care. *CPBRD Policy Brief No. 2022-01.* Congressional Policy and Budget Research Department. Quezon City. https://cpbrd.congress.gov.ph/images/PDF%20Attachments/CPBRD%20Policy%20Brief/PB2022-01_Institutionalizing_Digital_Health_to_Promote_Universal_Health_Care.pdf

[14] Asuncion R. V. (2017). Institutionalizing Digital Health to Promote Universal Health Care. *CPBRD Policy Brief No. 2022-01.* Congressional Policy and Budget Research Department. Quezon City. https://cpbrd.congress.gov.ph/images/PDF%20Attachments/CPBRD%20Policy%20Brief/PB2022-01_Institutionalizing_Digital_Health_to_Promote_Universal_Health_Care.pdf

There was also another document wherein I compared the status of the country's health system with those of other ASEAN members, where I wrote:

> "*Compared to its neighbors, the health status level of the Philippines is better than that of Cambodia, Indonesia, and Myanmar. However, the country lags behind Thailand and Vietnam*."[15]

My initial statement was made to indicate the performance of the country in terms of Internet speed: it has one of the slowest connections in the entire world. In the samples that followed, I used the AMS to position the country in relation to its peers. According to Boyanov (2024), it is essential in benchmarking to compare the subject with entities that have almost the same attributes – apples to apples. Indeed, the choice of AMS to compare our performance in my samples was driven by several factors, including the level of economic development, ranging from developing countries to middle-income status, albeit some, such as Singapore, may be considered outliers. The Philippines, being a lower-middle-income country (LMIC), is positioned in the middle of the group.

What is missing in all of these samples is any reference to ASEAN as an entity with which I can benchmark the country's performance. Consider the following excerpt:

> "*While growth decelerated in 2014, the economy continued to be among the best performers in East Asia"*[16]

[15] House of Representatives Secretariat. (2016). Development to Broaden Freedom in Philippine Society.

[16] Asuncion R. V. (2017). A Note on Economic Growth and Income Pattern Relationship in the Philippines. *CPBRD Discussion Paper No. 2017-07.* Congressional Policy and Budget Research Department. Quezon City.

However, I went on to explain that:

> "*In the 4th Quarter of 2016, the Philippines ranked third behind China and Vietnam in terms of economic growth and was ahead of Thailand and Malaysia."*

I essentially compared the Philippines with three ASEAN member states, but referred to them collectively as East Asia, perhaps because of China's inclusion. From the document from which this sample originated, I compared the Philippines' performance with that of these countries because, at the time I conducted this study, they all had similar growth rates and income patterns. However, as I continued to review my notes, I realized that the basic data I used for my analysis came from the World Bank, which grouped all these countries under the "East Asia" category.

Did this influence my decision to label these countries as East Asia instead of ASEAN? The source material might have affected my writing at that time. As I previously mentioned, documents from multilateral agencies are reliable sources of information and data that we could include in our publication. The inclusion of China in the comparative group, a non-ASEAN country, further convinced me to use East Asia as the basis for defining the group, even if it included several ASEAN members. This decision raises an important point: how the source material and institutional framing can shape the way researchers like myself present our findings. It also highlights the fact that data availability and the policy narratives in source materials could influence the regional grouping in research.

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https://cpbrd.congress.gov.ph/images/PDF%20Attachments/Discussion%20Paper/DP2017-07_Income_Pattern_rev.pdf

Reflecting on the preceding discussions, I would explain my choice of AMS as comparative units as an implicit desire to benchmark the country with ASEAN's overall performance as a standard. However, since I could not find data for this purpose, I had to settle for its parts or its member states.

I also used non-ASEAN countries as benchmarks and for comparison, as evidenced by my paper on targeting the government's social protection program. Consider the following sample text:

> "*In 2019, adolescent pregnancy remained high, with an estimated 35.8 live births per 1,000 females 15 to 19 years old. Though the figure is lower than the global average of 50, it is slightly higher than the Asia-Pacific region average of 35 live births per 1,000 females*."

This sample is from a chapter I wrote for a document proposing a set of legislative priorities for legislators to consider. As I reviewed the content I wrote, I reconsidered using global and wider regional averages to benchmark the country. I realized that this is another example of not having an ASEAN average for this problem. Even earlier this year, when we prepared a new set of priorities, I still could not find an ASEAN average. Instead, I found information and data on adolescent pregnancy among AMS but not in ASEAN as a regional group.

The excerpt below illustrates how I compared the country with other states that already have experience with the problem I studied. The idea I wanted to highlight was that the country's performance was not far from that of other states with more

mature programs, and using the proxy means test mechanism to target beneficiaries of the 4Ps was a step in the right direction.

> *"For example, between 80-90% of the benefits of proxy-means-tested programs in Chile and Mexico are received by the poorest 40% of the households in those countries. In the Philippines, about 71% of beneficiaries in the conditional cash transfer program or 4Ps belong to the poorest 20% of the national income distribution."*

As discussed in the earlier sections of this chapter on the analysis results, a comparison was made to identify best practices, highlight possible implementation challenges and pitfalls, and outline how to mitigate, if not avoid, them. The performance of their targeting systems, as shown by the figures I used in the text, also informed my choice of Chile and Mexico as comparative units.

My analysis of my benchmarking and peer comparison practices, and other non-ASEAN comparative models, revealed that my approach was based more on needs and functions than on the requirements of the commitments themselves. Benchmarking allowed me to position the Philippines in relation to other AMS without engaging ASEAN instruments themselves. I looked at our ASEAN peers, such as Indonesia, Singapore, and Thailand, for comparison of practices and performance, but I excluded the actual ASEAN documents.

This finding aligns with Acharya's (2017) and Gilson's (2020) characterization of ASEAN's brand of regionalism as "pragmatic" and issue-based, where the organization is not inclined to enforce some of its agreements strictly, instead choosing to facilitate cooperation when it is mutually beneficial. As shown in my documents,

that was also the practice: to use ASEAN perspectives only when they served a specific policy purpose. In my case, this theoretically explains why ASEAN was peripheral in my outputs, and it challenged me to reconsider the meaning and potential of ASEAN beyond this usage.

At some point during my research, I also looked at how other countries addressed the issues I worked on. This aligned with the third practice identified: the use of international models in policy learning. In policy learning, we utilize knowledge based on information about a policy problem, lessons from the past, and other countries, or their experience (Cairney, 2011). My purpose in reviewing or consulting other countries' policies was not to transplant those policies directly into the country, but to study what works and determine whether they can be adapted in the context of the Philippines.

In reference to my paper on digital health, during my research on the topic, I reviewed other countries to determine whether they had already implemented eHealth in their territories. Below is a sample of what I have included in the study:

> *"Countries in the European Union have adopted eHealth earlier on, and the use of technology and shifts in the medicine's culture have delivered tangible benefits. Sweden, Denmark, and Andalusia are among the successful early adopters in the E.U."*
>
> *"The high initial costs and uncertain payoffs to physicians are key barriers to implementing clinical IT applications in the U.S."*

The excerpt below shows that at least two AMS had eHealth programs in place:

"Telemedicine and digital health services rapidly grew in Malaysia, with private healthcare providers leading patient-focused healthcare services delivery. Singapore's government gave eHealth and technology priority, allowing it to lower spending and maximize patients' cost of care".

In both cases, whether the country was an AMS or not was irrelevant; my main goal was not only to determine whether countries had implemented eHealth programs, but also to inform the reader of how eHealth can improve the delivery of health services, as well as the challenges that may hinder its implementation, based on the other countries' experiences.

What stood out upon reviewing this document is that I consulted and cited an international agreement to which the Philippines is a party as justification for pursuing an eHealth program. To wit:

"The Philippines is a signatory to the WHA58.28 resolution adopted by the 58th World Health Assembly in 2005. The resolution urged member states to draw up a long-term strategic plan for developing and implementing appropriate eHealth services in various areas of their countries' health sector."

Why was this the case? I reviewed the previous drafts of the paper I wrote in 2022 and found that there was no ASEAN instrument advocating for digital healthcare at the time. As I mentioned in the previous sections, my use of ASEAN as a unit of comparison was often limited by the lack of available information and materials. In other words, ASEAN was not intentionally excluded; the omission was primarily due to the lack of materials that could support my argument.

My practice of using international models from non-ASEAN countries also aligns with studies that critique ASEAN's limited epistemic authority. The absence of ASEAN sources was not intentionally excluded, but rather other models were more readily available. In my profession, we need to address the demands and needs of our principals in a timely manner. For efficiency, we rely on accessible information and data that are institutionally validated and applicable to the situation. During the time I worked with the research outputs, ASEAN data was difficult to find, or sometimes completely unavailable. For example, the data on poverty and income for individual member states in the 2020 ASEAN Statistical Yearbook were from different years, making it difficult to compare them.

In many cases, I relied on data from multilateral agencies such as the World Bank, the United Nations, the World Health Organization (WHO), and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). One challenge with data from these agencies, however, is that they use different regional groupings for their member economies, as I discussed earlier in this chapter. Under the WHO groupings, Indonesia, Myanmar, and Thailand are categorized within the Southeast Asia region, while Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand are classified under the Western Pacific Region.

The World Bank categorized the AMSs in its East Asia and Pacific Region, while the UN organized them under the Asia-Pacific States, comprising a total of 55 member states. These different groupings presented challenges in forming a general overview of ASEAN; therefore, I often choose to identify the individual member states.

It was clear, however, that ASEAN became central when it was required in my legislative work and other activities. A good example of this was my involvement in

supporting members of the legislature during their participation in the AIPA General Assembly. Preparing briefing papers and talking points aligned with ASEAN agreements demanded that I engage with ASEAN frameworks. This process involved reviewing and consulting a wide range of ASEAN instruments to ensure that the legislators were well-informed and their notes were consistent with existing regional arrangements. For this purpose, I reviewed the documentation of past ASEAN Summits and ministerial meetings, as well as relevant AIPA documents. In this context, ASEAN was central to the mandate and became a critical reference point, integral to the research work. This points to a critical understanding: that my legislative research, along with the policies I recommend, will reflect regional commitments only when regionalism is clearly established in their processes.

An ASEAN View of Legislation

ASEAN policy instruments and frameworks were produced to harmonize standards and strengthen regional cooperation. However, they are not automatically integrated into the country's legal system or policy regime. Upon reviewing the analysis of my results, I realized that the inclusion of ASEAN instruments in my legislative research and proposals is dependent on several factors or a combination of factors.

ASEAN would be more referenced in my study when required by the institution and the legislators. This was evident in the work related to the AIPA. However, when my research needs to address a national, local or sectoral problem, ASEAN often disappears unless the issue itself takes on a regional perspective. The need to respond to these issues, or to engage with national development plans, or tackle

legislative priorities that meet public demands and expectations often takes precedence over regional goals.

Policy makers also often expect research that is grounded on global best practices, preferably those supported by robust data validated by other research institutions. Legislative researchers, including myself, use empirical data and policy analysis to meet the legislator's expectations. In this setting, ASEAN instruments, which are mostly soft laws and political, are not seen as authoritative, unless directly relevant. They are viewed as a reference but not the standard.

This brings us to another challenge in positioning ASEAN in the legislative process. The very culture of ASEAN, with its soft laws, consensus-building, and non-interference, is central to its political character; however, this also renders the commitments non-compulsory in national policymaking. Thus, ASEAN is perceived as a want rather than an obligation.

Discussion

As a graduate student specializing in ASEAN Studies, I approached this study with the expectation that my increased understanding of ASEAN, enhanced by my institutional experiences and strengthened by my academic training would naturally translate into referencing and incorporating frameworks into my legislative research. Instead of foregrounding ASEAN as a regional institution, I found myself relying more on individual states such as Singapore, Indonesia or Thailand as comparative cases or sources of policy learning. As I explored the findings of my results more thoroughly, I found myself asking a difficult personal question: Has the regional aspiration for a regional "we feeling" fully taken root in my routines as a legislative researcher? While the results were disconcerting for me, I must admit that the results suggest otherwise.

Should I consider that I produced two of the papers I examined for this research before I started my studies in ASEAN? The papers I produced before my graduate studies serve as a baseline, while those I made during my academic formation should show an evolving practice influenced by ASEAN education. However, my analysis revealed that despite my familiarity with ASEAN and its instruments and frameworks, the incorporation of these structures into my research output during my tenure as a student was still limited and fragmented.

This disconnection between ASEAN and my outputs aligns with the findings of Paasi (2011) and Neuvonen (2019), which suggest that awareness alone is insufficient to establish a strong regional identity. Awareness must be accompanied by meaningful, structured engagement with institutional frameworks. Through this auto-ethnomethodologic reflection, I realized that my lack of familiarity with these materials may have contributed to the dearth of ASEAN references in my research outputs.

It would have been interesting to determine whether public sector workers in other offices had the same experience as I did with ASEAN, or if I was just an isolated case. I searched for other studies that indicated how working ASEAN citizens consciously incorporate ASEAN knowledge and frameworks into their work. Apart from one report by a Filipino journalist, which suggests that ASEAN is often misunderstood or poorly contextualized in public discussions (Mendoza, n.d.), I did not find additional empirical evidence on the matter. My autoethnographic reflections may help address this gap by offering insights into how someone with a degree of ASEAN awareness and knowledge operationalizes or fails to operationalize that knowledge in their day-to-day practices.

The patterns I have discussed reveal that I have come to view ASEAN in the context of legislation as a reference point that is situational rather than normative. I only referenced ASEAN in my research when it supported our policy agenda. Still, most of the time, it is overlooked in favor of more critical national frameworks and evidence. In other words, as a legislative researcher, my emphasis when responding to the needs of legislators was more on country-specific evidence that is actionable over regional principles that may not be immediately enforceable in the local context.

Being both the subject of inquiry and the analyst in this study allowed me to explore the relationship of ASEAN knowledge and research practice – the awareness exists but does not influence or in any way shape policy process, unless instructed by a direct institutional mandate. It helped reshape how I approach legislative research and appreciate the potential of integrating ASEAN more deliberately into studies I will undertake in the future, particularly in how I reference and value ASEAN in the research process.

In summary, what emerged from my study is ASEAN as a reference point that appears in the periphery of policy discourse: as a benchmark for evaluating the country's programs on health and social protection, or to compare the position of the Philippines in international rankings. ASEAN rarely served as a central focus through which I conceptualized, structured or delivered my research outputs. This realization, however, does not mean that ASEAN is irrelevant to me as a legislative researcher. The fact that ASEAN appeared in my more recent work suggests its potential for greater integration in my future legislative research.

CHAPTER VI

RESEARCH SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This study examined how I reflected ASEAN knowledge and commitments in my legislative research practices. Using auto-ethnomethodology, a fusion of autoethnography and ethnomethodology, I analyzed a selection of my research outputs, including policy briefs, discussions, and other technical papers, to analyze the degree and manner in which I used ASEAN frameworks and instruments, and observed patterns on how I referenced, utilized, or omitted them.

This study employed an auto-ethnomethodology lens to explore the question: How are ASEAN commitments integrated into national policies? To further elucidate on this, I also inquired: What are the practices of a legislative researcher in incorporating knowledge and perspectives of ASEAN in legislative work?; and What perspective underlies the practices of integrating ASEAN in legislative work?

To address these questions, I conducted content analysis on eight of my research outputs I produced during the period prior to my taking up ASEAN Studies and while doing my academic work (2011-2022). I examined the documents for explicit reference to ASEAN and the context in which I made the reference. This included both the content and the assumptions made surrounding the issues being studied.

My qualitative analysis identified three principal practices I employed: benchmarking and peer comparison with AMS; conducting comparative modeling with non-ASEAN nations; and use of international models that are not based on ASEAN frameworks for policy learning.

I observed a lack of direct references to ASEAN and its instruments in all three practices. ASEAN appeared often as a comparative unit particularly when evaluating the country's performance. ASEAN's regional goals, mechanisms, and instruments, even those relevant to the issues being studied, were rarely mentioned. Instead, I relied heavily on individual member states as examples, at times, without even acknowledging that they were fellow AMS.

An additional practice observed was the use of international policy frameworks, especially those validated by multilateral agencies like the World Bank or UN. This practice reflects a broader policy orientation, in which global standards that are not exclusively based on ASEAN agreements but offer a more comprehensive perspective on the issue under examination are more preferred for evidence-based legislative proposals.

These findings suggest a pragmatic approach to ASEAN, where the regional body was utilized as a tool for comparison rather than a guide for conforming to regional standards. In the discussion of results, I identified institutional mandates, the framing of policy problems, expectations for deliverables, and the limited culture surrounding ASEAN awareness as key determinants of this orientation.

However, my experience with AIPA presented a different scenario. In this context, the mandate to align with ASEAN blueprints was explicit, and necessitated my direct engagement with ASEAN knowledge. I was required to reference key ASEAN measures, consult previous commitments, and contribute to the consensus-building process. In this situation, ASEAN became central to the task, illustrating how the requirements and expectations of the institution can shift the role of ASEAN in the research work.

Considering these findings, it became apparent that my engagement with ASEAN is still limited. ASEAN is invisible, but not entirely, omitted in my legislative work: at best, it is in the periphery but deliberately acknowledged and invoked when mandate, occasion and policy alignment require it.

Conclusion

My reflections surfaced a puzzling conclusion: ASEAN is both present and absent in my everyday work as a policy researcher. It is present and serves as an occasional reference point, but is absent in a way that its instruments, objectives, and legal texts have little influence on my research outputs. This dynamic is consistent with the concept of pragmatic regionalism, where ASEAN is seen less as an authority and more as a forum for regional cooperation.

This study indicates that my legislative research is primarily focused on national issues, and my understanding of ASEAN has mostly been peripheral in my legislative work, despite my academic and professional engagement with the organization. While ASEAN member states appear as units for my benchmarking and comparative analysis, the organization itself and its instruments and policies, were rarely central to my research outputs.

Recommendations

For Further Research

Further academic research has to be conducted on how ASEAN engages or remains disengaged in the legislative processes of its member states. Similar autoethnographic studies conducted by legislative researchers like myself across ASEAN countries could reveal the diverse institutional practices, structural challenges, and professional judgments that influence the inclusion of ASEAN knowledge in national laws. Examining institutional processes, such as committee meetings, budget deliberations, and other bureaucratic practices, may help explain how ASEAN commitments are incorporated into domestic laws. These research directions would not only advance the scholarship on regionalism and legal implementation but also provide policymakers and ASEAN bodies with practical insights.

From the standpoint of ASEANology, my reflection shows that the inclusion of ASEAN in legislative research is conditional and often influenced by institutional needs and demands put on the researcher. The lack of studies examining how professionals in the public sector engage with ASEAN highlights the need to explore the everyday practices of these workers, particularly those involved in the policy process. While ASEANology has primarily concentrated on intergovernmental relationships and regional norms, it should also consider the lived experiences of working ASEAN citizens. By drawing on my experience as an ASEAN studies student working as a researcher in the legislature, this research could help initiate a conversation on how ASEAN regionalism becomes part of or not part of regular public office work.

Practitioners of ASEANology may also consider the use of auto-ethnomethodology and autoethnography in their research. Through introspective

analysis, I was able to identify the underlying practices and process involved in the integration of ASEAN knowledge into my research process. I was unaware of my practices until I put on the auto-ethnomethodological lens to analyze my research outputs in this study. It enabled me to gain a deeper understanding of how regional obligations are transformed (or not) into policy recommendations. As a student of ASEAN Studies, this reflective process has now influenced how I would approach my official responsibilities at work, and at the same time, how I could contribute to the empirical dataset on ASEAN's relevance to domestic governance.

The findings of this auto-ethnomethodologic study also reveal that while ASEAN instruments and commitments play a crucial role in the regional policy landscape, they are often underused in domestic research environments unless they are officially mandated or clearly aligned with national interests. This gap, as my experience shows, is not necessarily due to disinterest or outright dismissal but results from institutional design, knowledge gaps, and the lack of supportive mechanisms that translate regional goals into everyday practice.

These recommendations, derived from my research and other literature, aim to enhance ASEAN's role in national policymaking. They offer practical ways for more intentional engagement, not a strict compliance model. The goal is to mainstream ASEAN in the policy conversation, fostering cooperation and the sharing of knowledge among member states.

Practical Recommendations

ASEAN should enhance the accessibility of its publications. During the course of my research and work on this study, I found that many of ASEAN's online publications were accessible only to representatives of its member states. The ASEAN Secretariat should consider making these publications available through the government institutions of its member states.

The findings of this study also suggest that awareness and knowledge are not sufficient for the transformation of ASEAN frameworks into policies. Instead, a researcher or public worker like myself would more likely internalize and engage with these measures when they are integrated in the workflows and processes of our office. ASEANology can benefit from more research into capacity building and, for students of ASEAN Studies, programs that will prepare them to operationalize in their daily practice. Developing an ASEAN perspective among policy practitioners may be useful in achieving the goals of an ASEAN Community.

To enhance the integration of ASEAN instruments into legislative research, various institutions across the national government must take several related steps in coordination with one another, as well as with knowledge producers within ASEAN, if necessary. The relevant agencies, such as the Office of ASEAN Affairs under the Department of Foreign Affairs, must coordinate with policy research offices to ensure that ASEAN instruments and the agreements and commitments they contain are considered in the formulation of laws and policies. The ASEAN Matters Technical Board (AMTB), which facilitates collaboration among the government agencies to align and implement the country's commitments and initiatives within ASEAN, should also have meaningful engagements with policymaking and lawmaking support offices. This

will help ensure that their priorities and other ASEAN interests are considered in policy and legislative processes.

Related to this recommendation, capacity building is important, especially for those in the legislative support offices. Researchers in these offices require training to understand ASEAN's institutional architecture as well as to navigate its instruments and policy blueprints effectively. As Fukunaga (2021) noted, the inconsistent and sometimes vague terminology for ASEAN instruments makes them hard to navigate for researchers. Government institutions and legislative bodies should consider offering training that includes the implications and practical applications of ASEAN instruments to provide researchers and policymakers with a firmer understanding of these documents. The ASEAN leaders and AIPA could support platforms for knowledge sharing and exchange, or even joint research among legislative researchers across AMS, which could enhance mutual understanding of domesticating ASEAN commitments.

Furthermore, ASEAN should strengthen its authority as a knowledge creator and invest in making its documents accessible. ASEAN and its affiliated bodies must develop user-friendly versions of their documents, such as summaries, thematic briefs, and annotated guides, to facilitate easier interpretation and applicability in domestic settings. For example, when my colleagues and I provided technical support for our principals during their preparations for the AIPA General Assembly, we had to navigate through ASEAN's voluminous documents on our own. It could be quite challenging to determine, as Fukunaga (2021) and Phan (2014) noted, which of the agreements are in and not in effect since the online database only covers some 74% of all concluded documents.

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