SOUTHEAST ASIAN SOCIAL COHESION RADAR

An Adaptation of the Bertelsmann Stiftung Asian Cohesion Radar

Regional Thought Leaders' Perspectives

ICCS

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ABOUT THE STUDY

The inaugural International Conference on Cohesive Societies (ICCS) hosted by Singapore in June 2019 brought together over 1,000 delegates from diverse faiths and perspectives. The delegates comprised scholars, practitioners, and youth from 40 countries, who discussed ways to meet the challenges of the time and identified strategies towards building on social harmony and working towards social cohesion. Arising from ICCS 2019 was the recognition of a tangible gap within social cohesion discourse in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), given the lack of data-driven research on faith, identity, and cohesion.

Amongst the more robust attempts to study social cohesion in the region was the research conducted by the Bertelsmann Stiftung, using their Social Cohesion Framework. In this study, we aim to build on the work by the Bertelsmann Stiftung and to fill the research gaps in social cohesion literature on Southeast Asia, as past research was mostly based on secondary or country-specific data. In addition, we seek to adapt the established Bertelsmann Stiftung methodological framework for Southeast Asia, while collecting primary data from thought leaders in ASEAN to develop a better understanding of social cohesion in the region.

With data aggregated around the themes of faith, identity, and cohesion in this region, this study could provide the building blocks and a much-needed direction for a longitudinal research study in Southeast Asia. A unique Social Cohesion Index may also be developed to better capture and measure the diversity and nuances of social cohesion in the region. As the first research of its kind in Southeast Asia, this study will provide valuable perspectives on the current research gaps in Southeast Asia, support the development of empirical strategies for a structured understanding of social cohesion in the region, and better inform policies on social cohesion across the ASEAN member states.

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This inaugural research study is a modest attempt to understand the nature of social cohesion within ASEAN against the changing and varying cultural and physical landscape in the region. Conducted under pandemic conditions, this study adapts the Social Cohesion Framework developed by the Bertelsmann Stiftung, which seeks to understand the level of cohesion in countries using quantitative methods. It also taps into the perspectives of 1,000 thought leaders in Southeast Asia (100 from each country) to explore their views on social cohesion in their country and the region. The findings provide insights that could hopefully allow the various stakeholders to develop strategies and solutions to continue their efforts to strengthen social cohesion in their respective communities.

Previous studies that examined Southeast Asian countries using secondary data overlooked the strong impact of racial, ethnic, religious, and linguistic identities on social cohesion in the region. The lack of dedicated focus on the 10 ASEAN member states did not allow a complete or adequate appreciation of social cohesion in the region. This inclusive study, taking into account all 10 ASEAN members, seeks to establish a better understanding of the nature of social cohesion within the region, and to enrich the discourse on social cohesion in Southeast Asia. A deeper appreciation of cohesion will help to nuance government policies and initiatives aimed at strengthening social cohesion in the respective countries, and provide insights for civil society actors, Non-Government Organisations (NGOs), and others in their work for social cohesion.

Respondents from the 10 ASEAN member states comprising individuals from government agencies, academia, think tanks, research institutions, civil society organisations, non-government organisations, regional and international organisations, and the media were surveyed.[1] The survey questions were based on Bertelsmann Stiftung's Social Cohesion Framework, which identifies three domains that contribute to social cohesion: social relations, connectedness, and focus on the common good. Each domain is further organised into three dimensions. The social networks, trust in people, and acceptance of diversity dimensions come under the social relations domain. Identification, trust in institutions, and perception of fairness dimensions fall within the connectedness domain. Finally, the solidarity and helpfulness, respect for social rules, and civic participation dimensions are categorised under the focus on the common good domain. Questions to understand the thought leaders' perceptions of social cohesion within their country and across the region were also included for a cross-country analysis.

As this is an initial study and based upon particular views and a snapshot in time, it should not be taken as providing a ranking of the most and least socially cohesive societies in Southeast Asia. Rather, it provides perspectives on which factors are seen as most

[1] *Please see page 20 for details on the profiles of participants.*

conducive towards social cohesion, and reflects perceptions of the situation on the ground. Such quantifiable metrics may or may not reflect a variety of intangible and qualitative factors that play into the actual situation of cohesion in any location, and diversity within each nation is also noted.

Perspectives from the Southeast Asian region based on the study were as follows:

1. The overall level of social cohesion in Southeast Asia was at 69%. This reflected the percentage of those who saw social cohesion overall as "strong", with 13% seeing it as "weak". However, within both the region and in each country, there was considerable variation across the three domains of social relations, connectedness and focus on the common good. This established a current benchmark figure, although it was not in itself an absolute indicator.
2. Of the three domains, social relations had the strongest influence on social cohesion in Southeast Asia, while the domain of focus on the common good had the least impact on social cohesion in the region.
3. Of the nine dimensions, there was a strong respect for social rules within the region. The dimensions of social networks, trust in people, acceptance of diversity, and identification, fared relatively equally. The dimension of solidarity and helpfulness seemed relatively less influential in determining social cohesion among the regional countries.

These findings will provide Southeast Asian communities with the opportunity to:

1. **Enhance strategies** that strengthen the dimensions that contribute the most to social cohesion;
2. **Engage community and religious leaders as well as relevant stakeholders** to support dimensions under the focus on the common good domain; and
3. **Explore initiatives** that could boost the domains and dimensions that have been flagged as weaker in building social cohesion, such as solidarity and helpfulness and perception of fairness.

The survey provided an overview of the level of social cohesion in Southeast Asia. Many factors, such as the ongoing pandemic and the shifting public morale as well as travel restrictions and isolation measures imposed by governments to stem the COVID-19 virus, could have impacted the findings. Some of the influences that are unique to ASEAN member states may not have been significantly addressed by the framework or sampling population. Sentiments towards social cohesion may also change suddenly due to unexpected global and domestic incidents. Moving forward, it would be important to explore the diverse impact of religious traditions, gender, age, sentiments, leaders, general population, and grassroots activists on social cohesion in each country.

2 INTRODUCTION: LOOKING AT SOCIAL COHESION IN A SOUTHEAST ASIAN PERSPECTIVE

2.1 Social cohesion: A Southeast Asian perspective

Southeast Asia is made up of a multitude of peoples, races, religions, cultures, identities, and languages. Its vast human diversity accentuates the importance of building a culture of peaceful coexistence and social stability, particularly in times of insecurity. In the 2022 Global Risks Report by the World Economic Forum (WEF), nearly 1,000 global experts and leaders from academia, business, civil society, government, and other organisations said that societal risks "have worsened the most since the pandemic began."[2] The report warned of deteriorating levels of social cohesion amidst global divergence that would create tensions within and across borders.

ASEAN epitomises diversity. Owing to the historical migration and settlement patterns and distinct heritage of the member nations, ASEAN embodies "diverse customs and traditions, religious beliefs, economic progress, innovation, and technological sophistication."[3]

This year, ASEAN commemorates a milestone of 55 years since its founding in August 1967. As social cohesion in each member state is a building block for peace and stability in the region, ASEAN's 55th anniversary marks a timely occasion to reassess the progress of social cohesion and explore avenues for regional cooperation.

For clarity, the focus of this report will be on the countries under ASEAN, i.e., Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. These countries are known as the ASEAN 10. Timor-Leste, which is also part of Southeast Asia, was not included in the study.

Social cohesion is influenced and threatened by politics, global conflicts, and most importantly, rapid urbanisation. People are becoming increasingly mobile, educated, and wealthy, whilst being exposed to new ideas that challenge existing traditions and values. This has brought about socio-economic inequality and other societal challenges to many places in the region.

It is therefore important to understand the mechanisms that hold Southeast Asian societies together, so as to explore how social cohesion could be further strengthened both within each of the ASEAN member states and the broader Southeast Asian region.

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[2] *"Global Risks Report 2022," World Economic Forum, 11 January 2022, https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-risks-report-2022/.*

[3] *"Diverse ASEAN," Invest in ASEAN, accessed August 2022, http://investasean.asean.org/index.php/page/view/about-the-aseanregion/view/707/newsid/930/diverse-asean.html.*

2.2 Defining social cohesion

Social cohesion is a highly-contested concept that often comprises overlapping definitions. Broadly, social cohesion refers to a sense of solidarity, resilience, and togetherness by members of a community. Other terms that are also used to describe a similar phenomenon are social harmony, unity, and inclusion. The varying terms used to explain social cohesion give room for it to be misconstrued and misused by both governments and individuals. A static definition of social cohesion would be to describe it as **"the state of affairs in which there are stable interactions among members of a society that take place in various domains of human associate life."** [4]

The challenge in defining social cohesion arises from identifying the qualities that make up social cohesion. While the discourse identifies the qualities that socially cohesive societies may manifest over time, the drivers of a socially cohesive society could differ within communities and countries. Clearly too, cohesion should not just measure the sentiments of majoritarian in-groups, but also the views of minorities and potentially oppressed groups. Hence, the pursuit of what drives a socially cohesive society has become more pronounced in recent years, as factors like modernity, globalisation, growing religiosity, a burgeoning middle class, shifts in values, growing secularism, and economic pressures result in growing social tensions within communities.

2.3 Importance of social cohesion

Prescient warnings by policy analysts and academics underscore the importance of social cohesion, both as a concept and a driver. Amidst a matrix of threats[5] and concomitant societal tensions, social cohesion has an appealing quality that, whilst broadly identifiable, seemingly cannot be fully expressed. Socially cohesive societies appear to be better poised for stability and growth, with a general sense of satisfaction and trust in both inter-community and intra-community relations. These characteristics could provide a scaffolding for a harmonious society. Social cohesion is also often taken to be a prerequisite for both economic success as well as a functioning democracy.

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[4] *Aurel Croissant and Peter Walkenhorst, Social Cohesion in Asia: Historical Origins, Contemporary Shapes and Future Dynamics (London: Routledge, 2019).*

[5] *Paul Hedges, "Conceptualising Social Cohesion in Relation to Religious Diversity: Sketching a Pathway in a Globalised World," Interreligious Relations 16 (2020), http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep40175.*

2.4 Social cohesion as a domestic policy objective

The centrality of social cohesion in domestic policy is often tied to the national ethos of each country. In this study, social cohesion will be referenced and discussed within the national context of each of the 10 ASEAN member states.

In conceptualising social cohesion, problems often arise from the myriad of compounding and (sometimes) confounding circumstances that impact social cohesion. As a key component of domestic policy, it would be important to differentiate between the means of arriving at social cohesion and the elements that affect it. More specifically, it would be meaningful to explore if social cohesion was merely a means to achieving a larger policy objective, or if it was the end.[6]

In Southeast Asia, social cohesion is often broadly manifested as a:

1. **Perennial value** that national policies aspire to inculcate in its communities;

2. **Prized destination** that a country works towards through positioning and pivoting national policies towards the goal of social cohesion;

3. **Positive effect** arising from a series of unintended circumstances;

4. **Protected asset** wherein all policies undertaken make a sustained effort to safeguard and hold paramount the asset of social cohesion in decisions undertaken.

Much work has been done to emphasise how social cohesion is the foundation of political and economic stability of a country that is secure. The indicators of social cohesion will enable the policy community to navigate the complexity of how such factors are manifested in the region.

[6] *Loris Vergolini, "Social Cohesion in Europe: How Do the Different Dimensions of Inequality Affect Social Cohesion?" International Journal of Comparative Sociology 52, no. 3 (June 2011): 197–214, https://doi.org/10.1177/0020715211405421; and Joseph Chan, Ho-Pong To, and Elaine Chan, "Reconsidering Social Cohesion: Developing a Definition and Analytical Framework for Empirical Research," Social Indicators Research, no. 75 (2006): 273–302, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-005-2118-1.*

3 LITERATURE REVIEW: CONCEPTUALISING SOCIAL COHESION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

3.1 Social cohesion in Western[7] studies

The concept of social cohesion has been part of Western policy and academic discourse for several decades. Driven by the effect of increased migration on communities, the initial intent of the social cohesion discourse was to understand the changing times. More recently, the concept of social cohesion has found its place in the lexicon of Asian communities. This time around, in addition to the stressors of migration, the challenges of differentiated access to resources, widening income gaps, and rising cases of civil unrest, have inspired deeper conversations on social cohesion as a concept, and perhaps more importantly, its implications for Asian societies.

This study aims to fill the literature gap in the research of social cohesion in Southeast Asia. The fragmented data sets and lack of empirical evidence reaffirm the challenges faced by countries in the region as they work towards making sense of the change trajectories brought about by increased globalisation.

One of the prominent quantitative studies on social cohesion, initially in Europe, and then more broadly in Asia, was conducted by the Bertelsmann Stiftung. Their conceptual framework was built around the idea that the quality of social cohesion can be understood in terms of the attitudes and behaviours of individuals residing in the country. Hence, a socially cohesive society can be characterised by the resilience of the relationships between members of the state, the emotional connectedness between individuals living in the country and the community, and whether there is a distinct interest and focus on the common good of everyone.[8]

This Bertelsmann Stiftung framework holds together **nine dimensions** grouped under **three domains**. These domains are social relations, connectedness, and focus on the common good. The social relations domain encompasses horizontal relationships among individuals in a country and the various groups in society. Hence, it incorporates the strength of social networks, the extent of interpersonal trust among individuals and groups in society, and the level to which individual lifestyles are accepted in society.[9]

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[7] The West refers to the majority of the countries in Europe and North America, plus Australia and New Zealand.

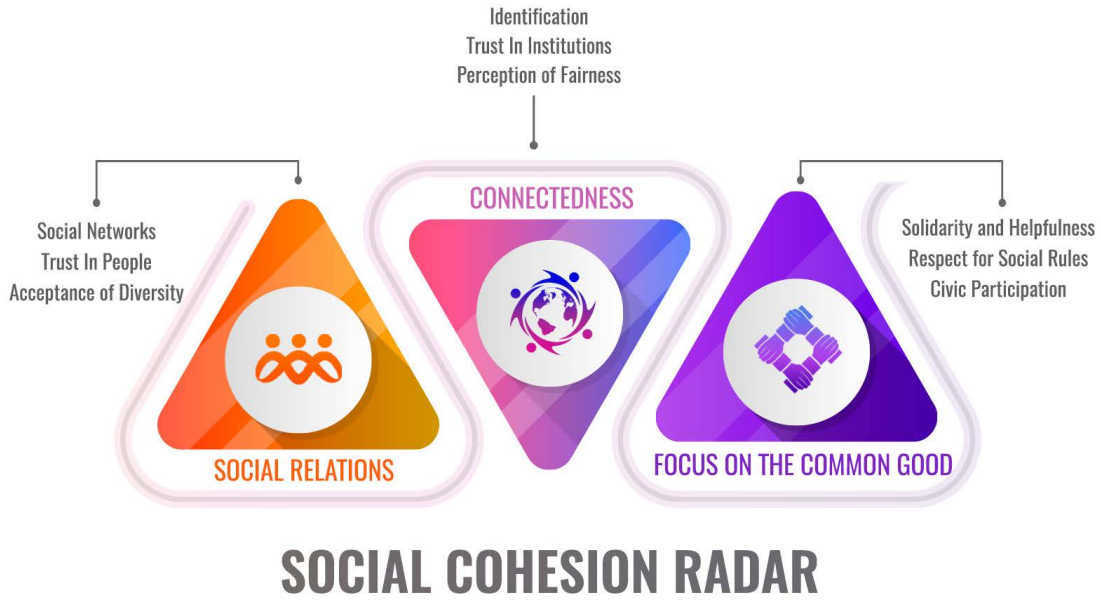
[8] Georgi Dragolov, Zsófia S. Ignácz, Jan Lorenz, Jan Delhey, Klaus Boehnke & Kai Unzicker, *Social Cohesion in the Western World. What holds societies together: Insights from the Social Cohesion Radar (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2016).*

[9] Bertelsmann Stiftung (ed.), *What Holds Asian Societies Together? Insights from the Social Cohesion Radar (Gütersloh:* Verlag Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2018).

The second domain of connectedness looks into the vertical linkages among individuals, their social groups and its institutions. The dimensions within this domain seek to determine if individuals have a positive identification with their social groups, a high level of trust towards institutions in their country, and a strong perception of fairness in society.

The third domain, or the focus on the common good, explores the cross-sections of the vertical and horizontal linkages among individuals by looking into the aspects of social interaction. The domain encompasses individuals' attitudes and behaviour towards solidarity and responsibility for others in the society, the extent of respect they have for social rules, and the level of civic engagement that exists for the community. Figure 1 shows the three domains and the nine dimensions.[10]

Figure 1: Bertelsmann Stiftung's Social Cohesion Framework



The Bertelsmann Stiftung framework was used to investigate the extent and nature of social cohesion in 34 European societies and 16 German states, thereby mainly providing the findings for European or Western-oriented industrial nations.[11] The Bertelsmann Stiftung's initial attempt to apply the framework outside Europe was to assess the scale and dynamics of social cohesion in Asian societies, as Asia was seen as the epicentre of global economic progress. Given that Asia was also the most diverse part of the world, the initiative would provide the Foundation with an opportunity to gain broader insights on the nature of social cohesion. It would also help them to understand if their framework could be universally applicable.[12]

[10] Ibid.
[11] Bertelsmann Stiftung (ed.), *What Holds Asian Societies Together? Insights from the Social Cohesion Radar (Gütersloh:* Verlag Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2018).
[12] Ibid.

The Bertelsmann Stiftung study was conducted using mainly secondary data and country-specific information, which included the aggregation of data from the World Values Survey, Asian Barometer, and Gallup World Poll.[13] It was arguably the most robust attempt to study social cohesion in the Asian region. The Foundation described their framework as "a multi-dimensional measuring instrument that integrates different facets of cohesion", calling this first study of the broader Asian region the **Asian Social Cohesion Radar**. The term "radar" had been chosen as an apt metaphor for making visible what cannot be seen by the naked eye, resonating well with the need to detect a range of issues that may otherwise have been missed.[14]

Adapting both the framework and the metaphor, this study — the **Southeast Asian Social Cohesion Radar** — will take a closer look at the 10 ASEAN member states. Our goal is to shed light on possible drivers of social cohesion in each Southeast Asian country.

3.2 Research gaps when applying the Western framework to Southeast Asia

The Bertelsmann Stiftung Social Cohesion Framework covered the ideational ties across individuals, social groups, the state, and how these related to what may be termed as behavioural factors leading towards social cohesion. However, social cohesion is a multi-faceted concept that encompasses a complex set of experiences, economic status, values, policies, views, contexts, and cultures. Thus, the Bertelsmann Stiftung framework was only able to measure certain aspects of social cohesion in any country. [15]

The following weaknesses and research gaps were identified in the social cohesion research conducted by the Bertelsmann Stiftung in the Asian region:

Absence of primary data

The first weakness of the Asian Social Cohesion Radar was its sole reliance on secondary surveys and sources to build an understanding of social cohesion in Asia.

To overcome this limitation, our research was based on the collation of primary data as well as more evidence-based discourse to further develop the themes that are vital to understanding social cohesion within Southeast Asia. This initial attempt will lay the foundations for later surveys on faith, identity, and cohesion that could become a signature for future runs of ICCS.

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[13] Georgi Dragolov, Zsofia Ignacz, Jan Lorenz, Jan Delhey and Klaus Boehnke, *Social Cohesion Radar Measuring Common Ground: An International Comparison of Social Cohesion Methods Report (Gütersloh: Verlag* Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2013).

[14] Bertelsmann Stiftung (ed.), (2018), op. cit.

[15] Ibid.

Focusing on a generalised bloc

Secondly, the Asian Social Cohesion Radar had grouped the study of 22 countries under three Asian blocs comprising South Asia, Southeast Asia, and East Asia. While holistic, the breadth of coverage did not account for the stark differences between these disparate blocs in Asia, which cannot be dismissed.

Our reason for focusing only on the ASEAN member states was to provide much-needed attention to the intricate diversity that exists between individual countries, despite their proximity within the Southeast Asian bloc.[16] Additionally, we have included Brunei (which was left out of the Asian Social Cohesion Radar despite being in Southeast Asia) in our study. This would enrich the ongoing social cohesion discourse in ASEAN member states and support the development of critical insights that could inspire better domestic and regional policies.

Incorporating religious belonging and identity

Thirdly, the Asian Social Cohesion Radar failed to incorporate religious belonging and identity into its conception of social resilience, factors that strongly influence the thoughts and actions of individuals in dynamic Asia.

Hence, we intended to build on the established Bertelsmann Stiftung framework, and include the elements of religious behaviour and faith by leveraging the "reflective-index building" approach to close the research gap. The synthesis of ethno-racial groups, religion and language would provide fuller insights on social cohesion and social resilience within the ASEAN member states.

We also sought to adapt the methodologies used in the Asian Social Cohesion Radar by aggregating primary data from thought leaders in ASEAN. The unique insights gleaned from the thought leaders would provide much-needed perspectives on issues and localised experiences within the region, offering the data-driven and evidence-based discourse that was lacking previously.

[16] It must be acknowledged that what we call Southeast Asia is neither a natural nor unified geographical region. Rather, it comprises a mainland that is historically Theravadin Buddhist, islands and archipelagos belonging mainly to Muslim-majority countries, and some outliers such as the Philippines and Singapore. Besides their religious and ethnic diversity, various regions had been colonised by Portugal, Spain, the Netherlands, Great Britain, France and the United States at different times. As such, while the countries are united by ASEAN, it should be noted that Southeast Asia is not a distinct, indigenous conception for a naturally defined area.

The findings from this survey will be discussed during the 2022 ICCS conference through plenaries, breakout sessions, exhibitions, and a post-conference publication. The aim is to inspire dialogue among governments, religious leaders, civil society organisations, international organisations, and academia on the nature of and elements present in cohesive societies in the ASEAN member states.

3.3 Studying the concept of social cohesion in Southeast Asia

The objective of this research study is to understand the localised experiences of social cohesion and identity, and analyse the factors and environment that would make societies in ASEAN member states cohesive. It is an initial attempt to navigate the complexities of social cohesion in Southeast Asia, and determine the best way forward in understanding social cohesion in the region. It should not be regarded as an attempt to provide a ranking of the most and least socially cohesive societies in Southeast Asia.

A survey, carried out over a period of two months, was conducted across the ASEAN member states to identify factors that could help to foster and maintain social cohesion in Southeast Asia. The aggregation of insights would enable us to fill the research gaps with evidence-based discourse on faith, identity, and cohesion.

We attempted to answer three key questions through the survey:

1. What factors hold societies together in ASEAN member states?
2. What dimensions of social cohesion contribute most to cohesion?
3. What elements of social cohesion do ASEAN member states share? And what elements are distinct? What could be the reasons?

Findings from the research would enable us to evaluate the factors that make the diverse societies in Southeast Asia resilient and enable people to live peacefully together. It would also provide cross-country insights as to how much trust and acceptance citizens have towards each other despite their differences, and how the role of faith and inter-faith dialogues could feature in social cohesion.

More specifically, it would enable us to evaluate how a cross section of individuals from academia, the public sector, businesses, civil society (e.g. media and community groups) and religious organisations (e.g. faith leaders) from the ASEAN member states might view social cohesion in their country, through the lens of their personal relations with other citizens, connectedness to society and involvement in the well-being of others in the country.

We also sought to determine the best research mechanism for understanding social cohesion, and how the tools for measuring specific issues relating to individuals living in ASEAN member states could be improved.

By revealing the core elements underlying social cohesion, the research findings would put policymakers in a better position to make nuanced policies that could bolster social cohesion both nationally and within the Southeast Asian region.

4 METHODOLOGY: EVALUATING SOCIAL COHESION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

4.1 Survey components

While desktop research guided the general scope, depth and breadth of the survey, a number of key considerations were built into the components of the survey.

Extensive desktop research

Scholastic research focused on faith, identity, and social cohesion was extensively reviewed. Dominant themes in social cohesion and localised experiences within ASEAN member state were identified. The latest theoretical and empirical research on social cohesion in societies was also explored.

Online questionnaire

In developing the 20-minute survey, the modality of an online questionnaire was selected, with the added possibility of conducting a telephone interview. This would ensure greater engagement with the respondents, even in instances where limited access to the Internet would otherwise prevent participation. A pre-test was conducted by the research team to ensure that the respondents were able to complete the survey within the allocated time frame. No financial incentive was given to the participants in order to overcome any anticipated bias in the survey responses. The Confirmit platform was selected for administering the online questionnaire due to its reliability, security, and compatibility with laptops, desktops, mobiles, and tablets, and accessibility via Internet Explorer, Chrome, Firefox and Safari. The platform was able to generate unique URLs for ease of tracking the completed responses and participation quotas.

Anonymity and data security

The survey was conducted anonymously to facilitate honest responses. The anonymity of the survey was reiterated to all participants. Throughout the survey, rigorous steps were taken to ensure the anonymity of the respondents and the confidentiality of all responses. All names were alpha-numerically coded. Any information that could identify the survey respondents was changed for confidentiality. Survey respondents could only be identified by their countries on all material documents, including notes, transcripts and publications. They were not privy to the identities of their fellow respondents.

Where an online survey was not possible due to exigencies, only pertinent details were extended to the interviewer to facilitate the conduct of a telephone survey. All hardcopy listings of telephone numbers were serialised and tagged to the interviewers, who were required to sign-out for the listings in the event of a telephone interview.

The online surveys were hosted on a secure server. All data collected was strictly protected and cannot be accessed by unauthorised parties. The data was stored in a password-protected external hard drive under lock and key in a secure location. The data will be kept for 10 years after the completion of the research, as per the RSIS and NTU regulations.

Language barriers

As English was not the first language for most of the survey respondents, the research team translated the questionnaire into eight languages: Bahasa Indonesia, Malay, Tagalog, Burmese, Khmer, Lao, Thai, and Vietnamese. Back translation was also done to ensure the accuracy of the translated questionnaire. The survey was administered in English by default, or in the local vernacular where requested.

In addition to choosing the language of the survey, respondents had the option to skip any question they were uncomfortable to answer, or to stop the survey altogether. The respondent's decision on the matter would be final and respected. Respondents who could not complete the survey within the stipulated time limit would be allocated additional time to complete the questionnaire.

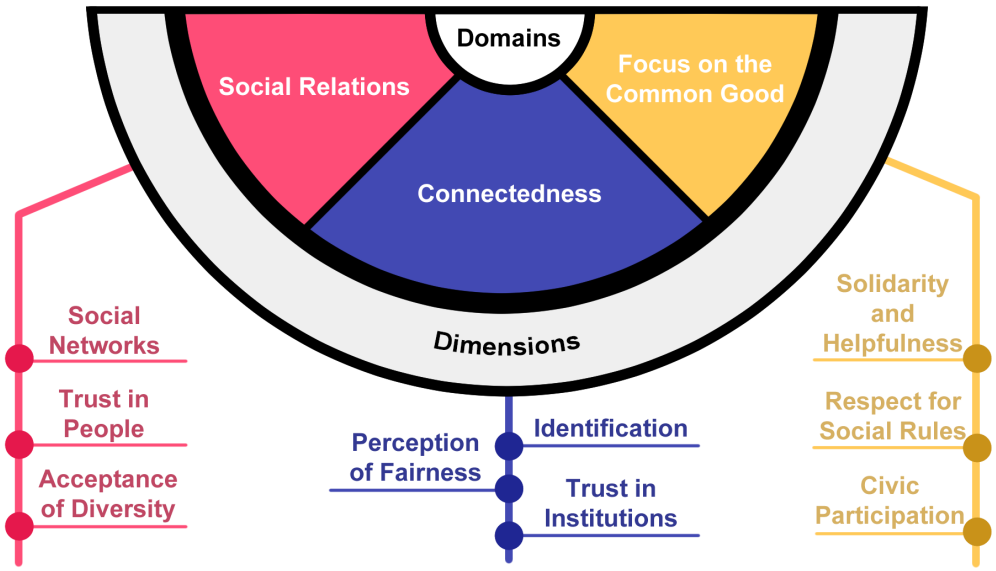
Clarity and definition of key terms

When drafting the survey, care was taken to ensure that statements were not double-barrelled or unduly complex. This was to reduce ambiguity in the question and ensure clarity in the responses for each indicator statement. The definitions of key terms, such as social cohesion, were highlighted in the questionnaire to ensure that respondents had the same understanding of the key terms, and could approach the questions objectively. The definitions of the key terms were also translated into eight languages, as with the main survey.

The survey was divided into five sections. The first section established the demographics of the participant. Sections two to four were developed using the Asian Social Cohesion Framework, which organised the concept of social cohesion into the three key domains. Each of these domains had three measurable dimensions, as illustrated in Figure 2. The domains and their dimensions were: social relations (social networks, trust in people, and

acceptance of diversity), connectedness (identification, trust in institutions, and perception of fairness) and focus on the common good (solidarity and helpfulness, respect for social rules, and civic participation). The final section of the survey was crafted to understand respondents' perception of social cohesion within their own country and in Southeast Asia as a whole.

Figure 2: Domains and dimensions in the Bertelsmann Stiftung Social Cohesion Framework



In adapting the Asian Social Cohesion Framework, the questionnaire took into account the political sensitivities in the Southeast Asian region.

A five-point Likert scale was used for responses in sections two to four of the survey. The scale allowed respondents to convey degrees of opinion on each indicator statement, or no opinion at all. Questions were randomised in each of these three sections to overcome survey bias and fatigue. The survey also featured open-ended questions, especially in the first section on demographics.

To ensure consistency between multiple questions addressing the same construct, additional indicator statements of a similar nature were added for inter-item reliability.[17] Steps were taken to ensure that the design of the questionnaire was representative and robust.

[17] John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (New Delhi: Sage Publications Inc., 2009).

4.2 Participant Profiles

A total of 1,000 thought leaders, 100 (N=100) from each of the 10 ASEAN member states, participated in the survey. Thought leaders refer to individuals who possess domain expertise in academia, the public sector, businesses, civil society (e.g. media, community groups) and religious organisations (e.g. faith leaders) — where they would be in positions that influence public opinion. Among them were 325 participants from academia, think tanks, and research institutions; 281 government employees; 185 business and finance executives; 94 Non-Government Organisation (NGO) personnel; and 64 representatives from international/regional organisations.

Thought leaders were selected as this was the first attempt to apply the Bertelsmann Stiftung Social Cohesion Framework in the Southeast Asian bloc. Speaking to thought leaders would be a judicious start to understanding the ground realities and challenges. Future studies could be tweaked to better address the specific issues and scenarios faced by the population in this region.

At the time of the survey, the travel restrictions and safe distancing measures imposed by government authorities to stem the spread of COVID-19 posed significant challenges for the research team, who had to seek various ways to access key personnel across Southeast Asia. Expectations were managed based on ground realities as well as the research team's resources and time limitations.

4.3 Survey Limitations

Sample size, age, gender, and religious affiliation

While the sample size of 100 per ASEAN member state may not be representative of each country as a whole, the indicator statements would still hold true in a general population survey. The decision to engage with regional thought leaders was to facilitate deeper discourse, based on the influence these individuals would have in shaping opinion and strategies that impact social cohesion in their respective domains.

The study was conducted from 10 February 2022 to 6 April 2022. While the survey was designed to be both representative and robust, the time limitations and the current global pandemic made it challenging to broaden the sample size. A few vulnerable points surfaced. Many of the thought leaders who responded to the survey were under the age of

50. Women featured less than men in the survey. In Malaysia, there was a disproportionate number of respondents who were Buddhists. To ensure accurate representation of the country's religious demography, the findings were weighted to reflect the national census. In several countries, such as Myanmar and Laos, the majority of the respondents were government employees.

External circumstances

In instances where Internet access was disrupted, the survey was conducted through telephone calls. The anonymity of the respondents was protected at all times. Data security protocols ensured minimum to no risk to the respondents.

In adopting the Asian Social Cohesion Framework, certain modifications were made to account for religious factors that are key to Southeast Asia. The limitations, flaws and biases that have surfaced could help to advise and refine the constructs, scope and modality of future surveys.

Minority-majority dynamics

We were cognisant that the adopted framework did not explore the impact of economic status on social cohesion, and that economic inequalities could impact how individuals perceive and treat one another.[18] In addition, the framework did not assess the level of homogeneity in a country, nor the individual's views on discriminatory values.[19] These are avenues that can be further explored in future research.

Designed primarily to provide a snapshot of respondent views at a particular time, this survey is certainly not well-attuned to the minority-majority dynamics in the region.[20] The effort to record both qualitative and quantitative data from thought leaders with diverse backgrounds was intended in part to mitigate some of these flaws.

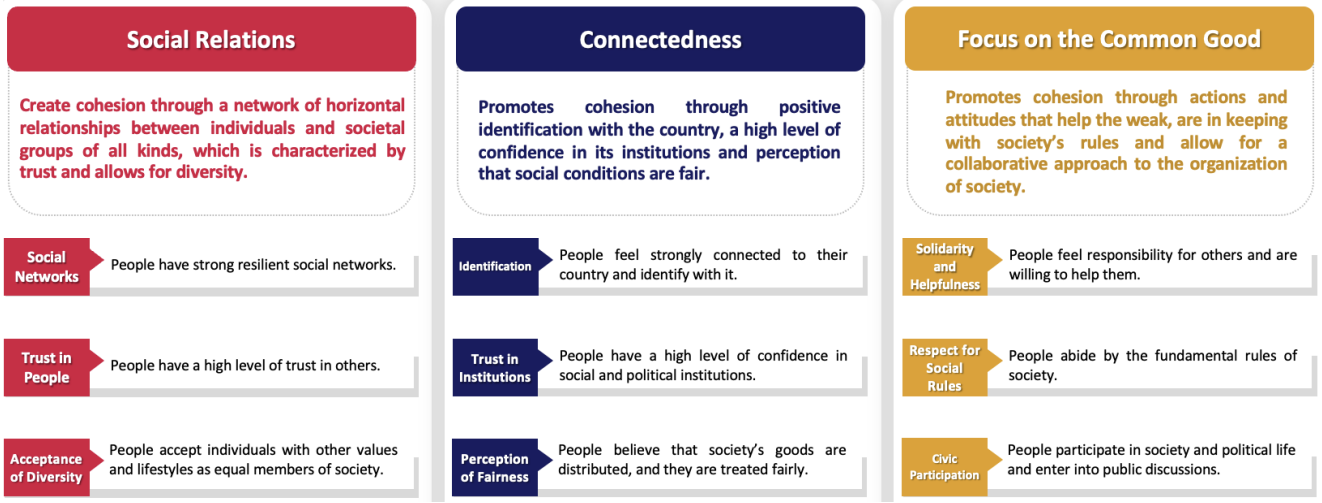
[18] M. Hadler, "Why do people accept different income ratios? A multi-level comparison of thirty countries," *Acta Sociological 48, no. 2 (2005).*
[19] Bertelsmann Stiftung (ed.), (2018), op. cit.
[20] For a detailed critique, see Paul Hedges, (2020), op. cit., especially note 23 on page 4, and note 69 on page 10.

4.4 Analytical methods

A multi-dimensional approach was taken to analyse the findings of the survey. The responses from each country were first examined to ensure that the voluntary respondents did not skew or distort the official demographic representation.

Each section of the survey was dedicated to a specific domain. This allowed us to understand the level of social cohesion within the country and the key influencing factors, which were namely respondents' perspectives on social relations, connectedness, and focus on the common good. See Figure 3. The mean score based on the responses from participants within the country, the top box score[21] for each of the responses, and any significant difference within the society, were tabulated.

Figure 3: Breaking down Bertelsmann Stiftung's Social Cohesion Framework



The findings from all the countries were then compared to derive the overall **Southeast Asian Social Cohesion Radar**. The results were also used to evaluate the nature of social cohesion in the ASEAN member states and explore areas within the three domains and nine dimensions that contributed to social cohesion.

[21] The top box score is the sum of the percentages for the top three highest points.

5 FINDINGS: TRENDS AND PROFILES OF SOCIAL COHESION IN EACH ASEAN COUNTRY

5.1 Overview of findings

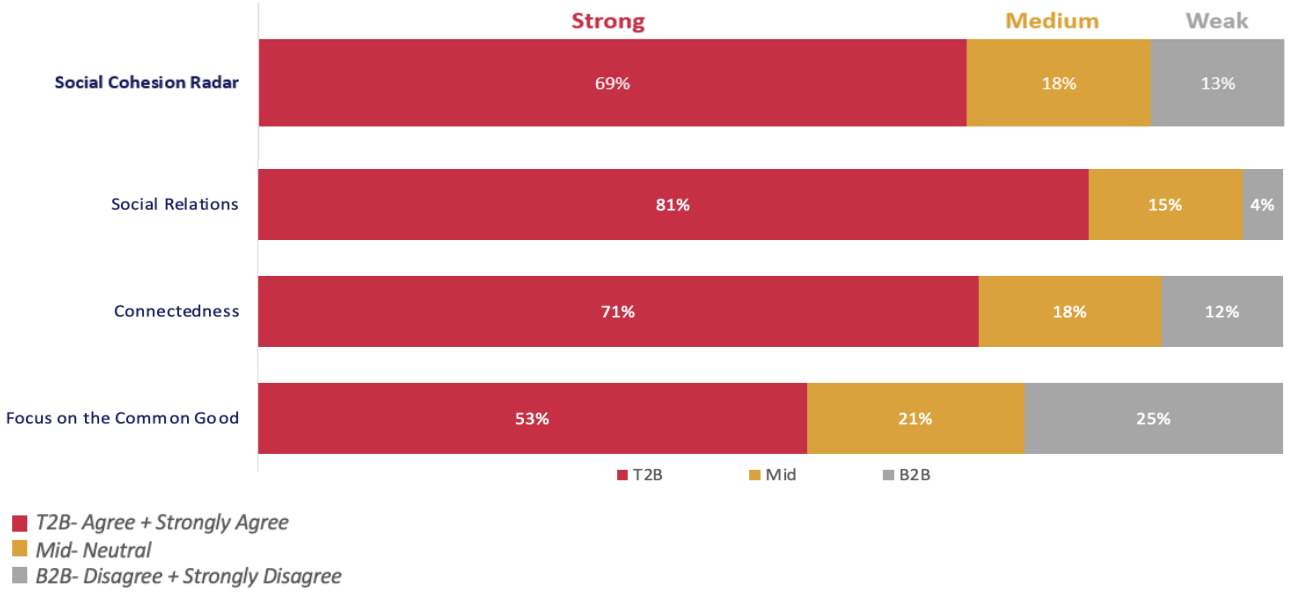
Figure 4 provides an overview of the sample size, comprising 1,000 thought leaders who participated in the survey.

Figure 4: Overall sample size

	Academia, Think-Tanks, or Research Institutions	Business or Finance	Civil Society, Non-Government Organisations, or Media	Government	Regional or International Organisations	Religious Based Organisations (Faith Leaders)	Total
Brunei	19	21	11	41	4	4	**100**
Cambodia	52	10	10	12	12	4	**100**
Indonesia	40	20	10	13	12	5	**100**
Laos	15	14	1	61	5	4	**100**
Malaysia	40	20	10	21	4	5	**100**
Myanmar	27	10	8	40	5	10	**100**
Philippines	32	26	5	20	13	4	**100**
Singapore	25	27	15	25	3	5	**100**
Thailand	45	23	8	15	4	5	**100**
Vietnam	30	14	16	33	2	5	**100**
Total	325	185	94	281	64	51	**1000**

Of the three domains, social relations had the strongest influence on the Southeast Asian Social Cohesion Radar. The domain of focus on the common good performed the weakest in the region's cohesion index. See Figure 5.

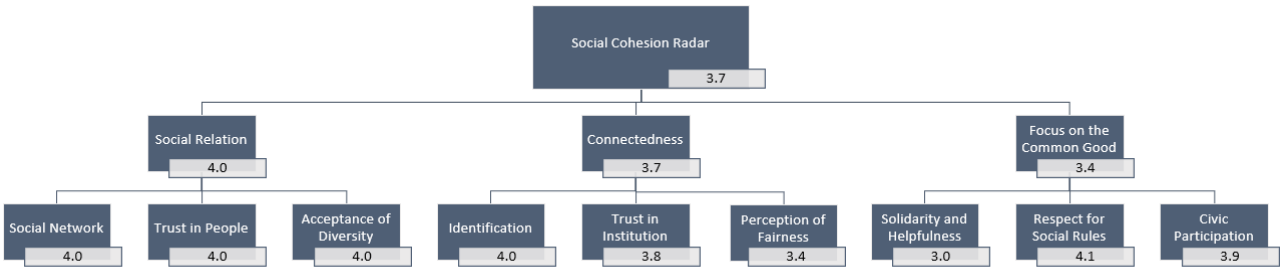
Figure 5: Southeast Asian Cohesion Radar in 2022



T2B- Agree + Strongly Agree
Mid- Neutral
B2B- Disagree + Strongly Disagree

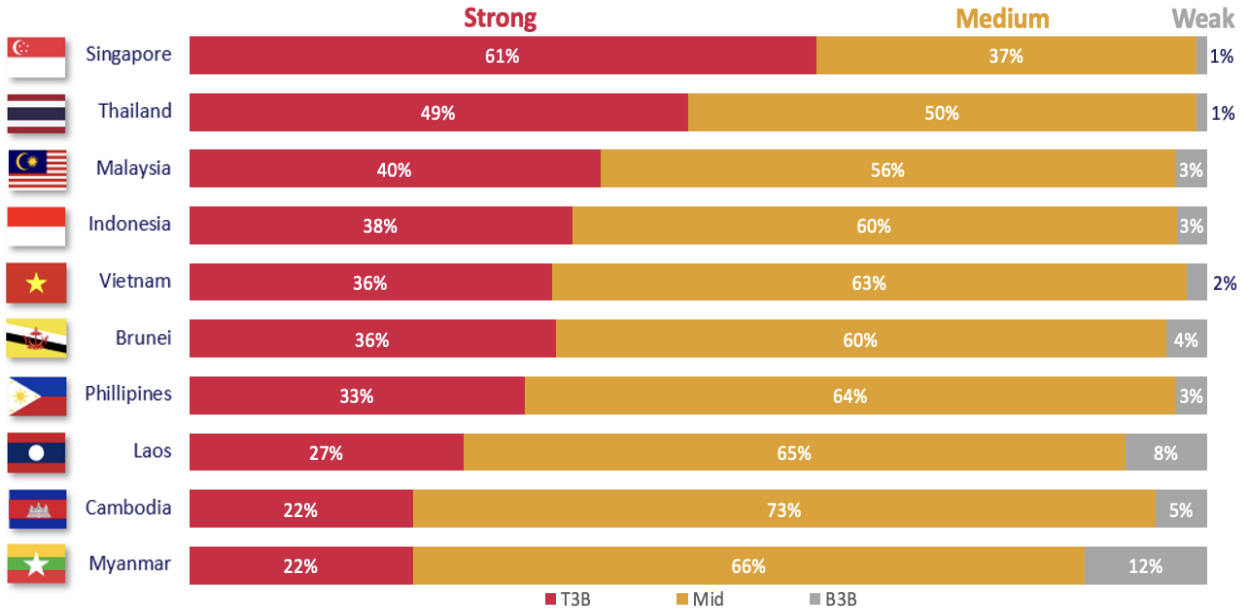
Figure 6 shows the dimensions that contributed the most to social cohesion in Southeast Asia. The highest contributing dimension was respect for social rules, followed by social networks, trust in people, acceptance of diversity, and identification. Many respondents opined that solidarity and helpfulness had the least influence on social cohesion in their country. The overall social cohesion mean score was 3.7. This was above the average of a five-point Likert Scale.

Figure 6: Overall mean score of the responses in each dimension



Among the Southeast Asian countries, Singapore was perceived as the most socially cohesive. Thailand ranked second on the list. See Figure 7.

Figure 7: Overall perceived level of cohesion



A breakdown of the survey findings by country is as follows:

5.2 Brunei Darussalam

Majority of the Bruneian thought leaders who responded to the survey were government employees, from business and finance sectors, and educational institutions. The respondents were generally young and 82% of them practiced Islam. Their ages, affiliations, religions, and ethnic-racial groups are depicted in Figures 8 to 11 respectively.

Figure 8: Age of survey respondents from Brunei (%)

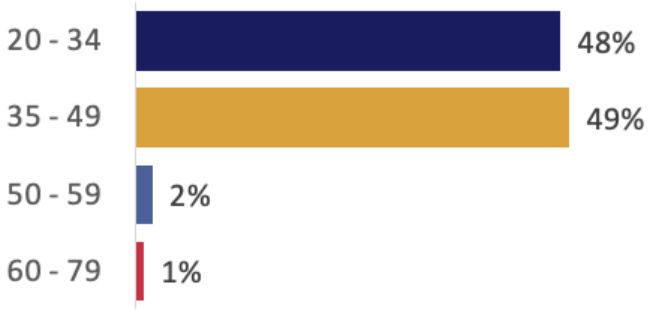


Figure 9: Affiliation of survey respondents from Brunei (%)

Figure 10: Religion of survey respondents from Brunei (%)

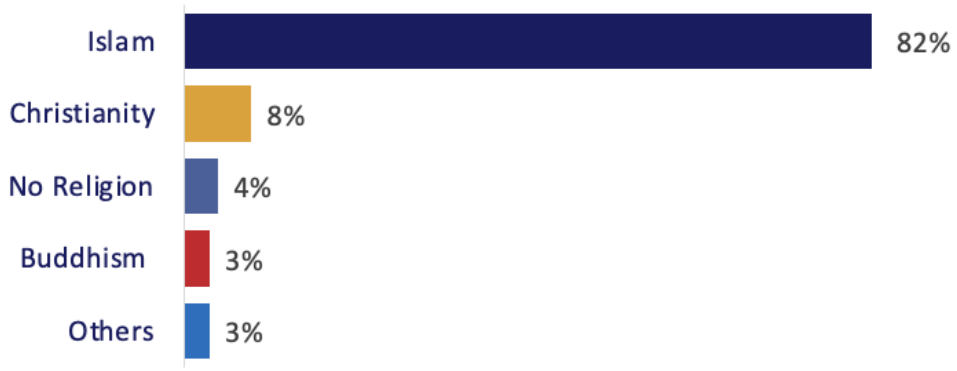
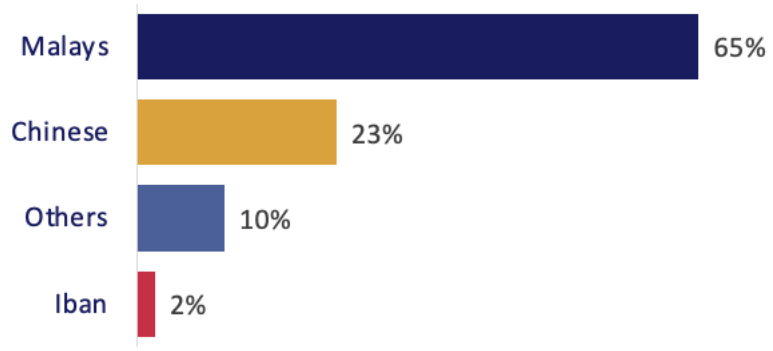
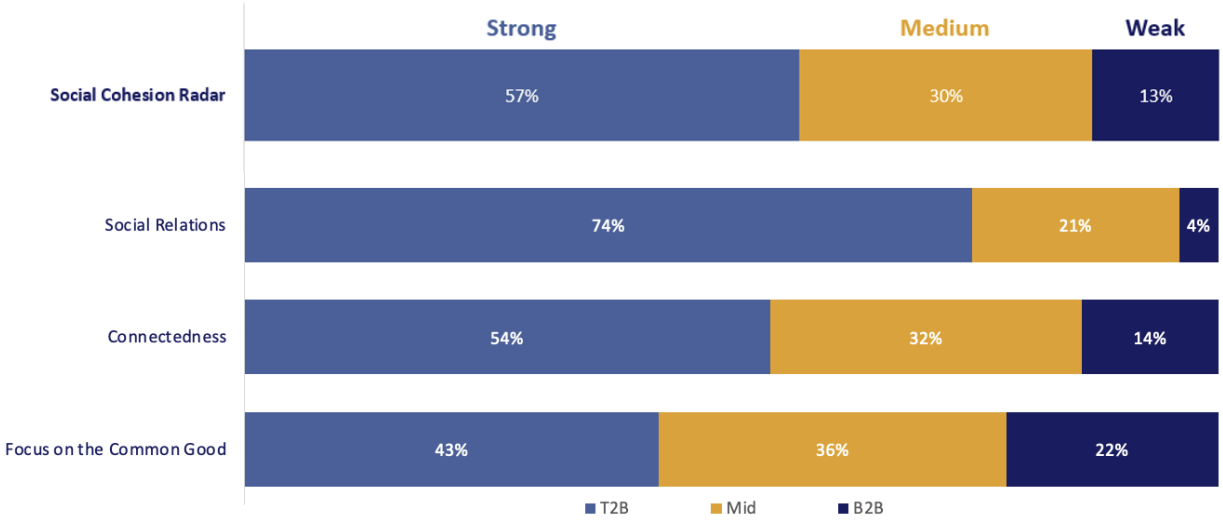


Figure 11: Ethnic-race of survey respondents from Brunei (%)



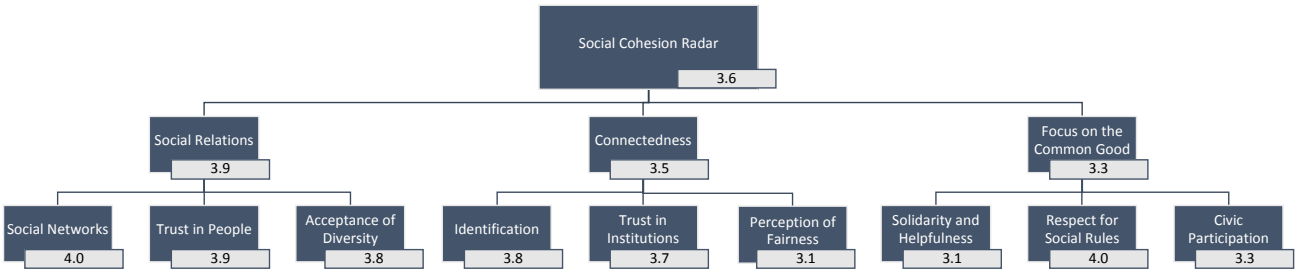
According to the Bruneian respondents, social relations played a key role in building social cohesion in the country. The connectedness domain was the second most important in influencing social cohesion in Brunei. The domain that least affected social cohesion was focus on the common good. See Figure 12.

Figure 12: Top box scores of social cohesion in Brunei



Delving deeper into their views on social cohesion, a majority of the Bruneians believed that strong social networks and respect for social rules helped to bind their society together. According to their responses, perception of fairness and solidarity and helpfulness had the weakest impact on social cohesion in the country. The mean score of the responses to assess social cohesion in Brunei was 3.6, which was slightly below the regional average of 3.7. See Figure 13.

Figure 13: Mean score of the responses in each dimension in Brunei



A significant finding from the responses was the belief that donating to the poor and voluntary work would support social cohesion in Brunei. See Figure 14.

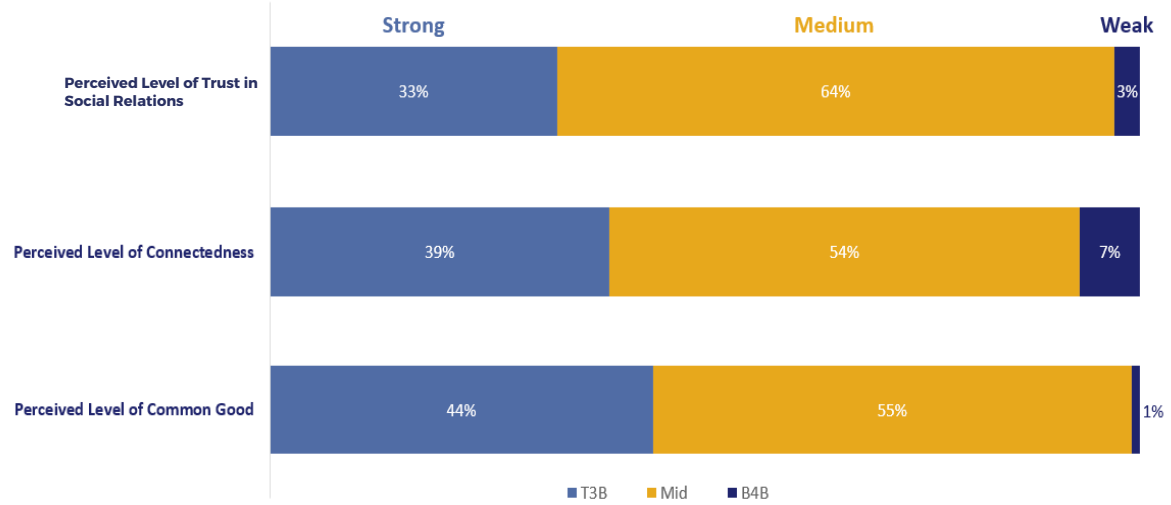
Figure 14: Bruneians' responses to questions on solidarity and helpfulness (%)

Statement	Percentage	
You find it important to donate to the poor.	Strongly Agree	52%
	Agree	42%
	Neutral	5%
	Disagree	0%
	Strongly Disagree	1%

Statement	Percentage	
You find it important to do community or voluntary work.	Strongly Agree	33%
	Agree	48%
	Neutral	18%
	Disagree	1%
	Strongly Disagree	0%

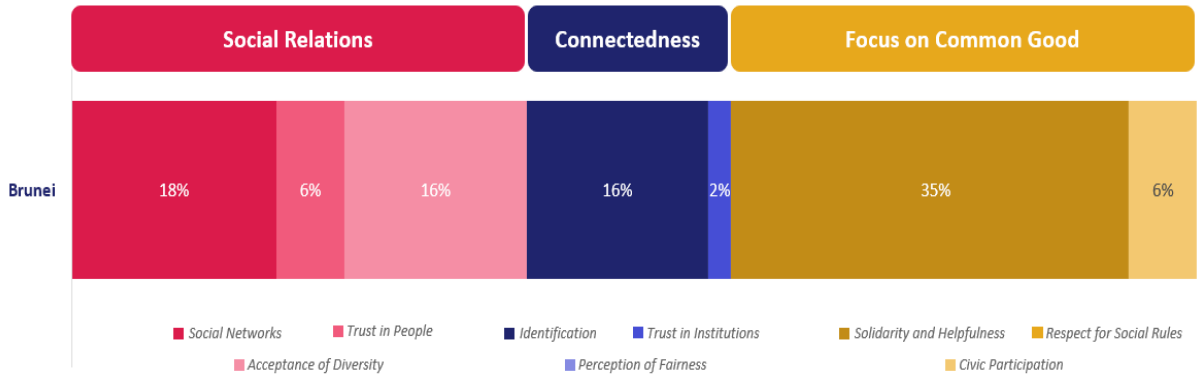
In Brunei, the perceived level of common good was the strongest among citizens, followed by the perceived level of connectedness. See Figure 15. Interestingly, almost twice the number of men attributed social cohesion in Brunei to the common good, compared to women.

Figure 15: Top box scores of perceived level of social cohesion in Brunei



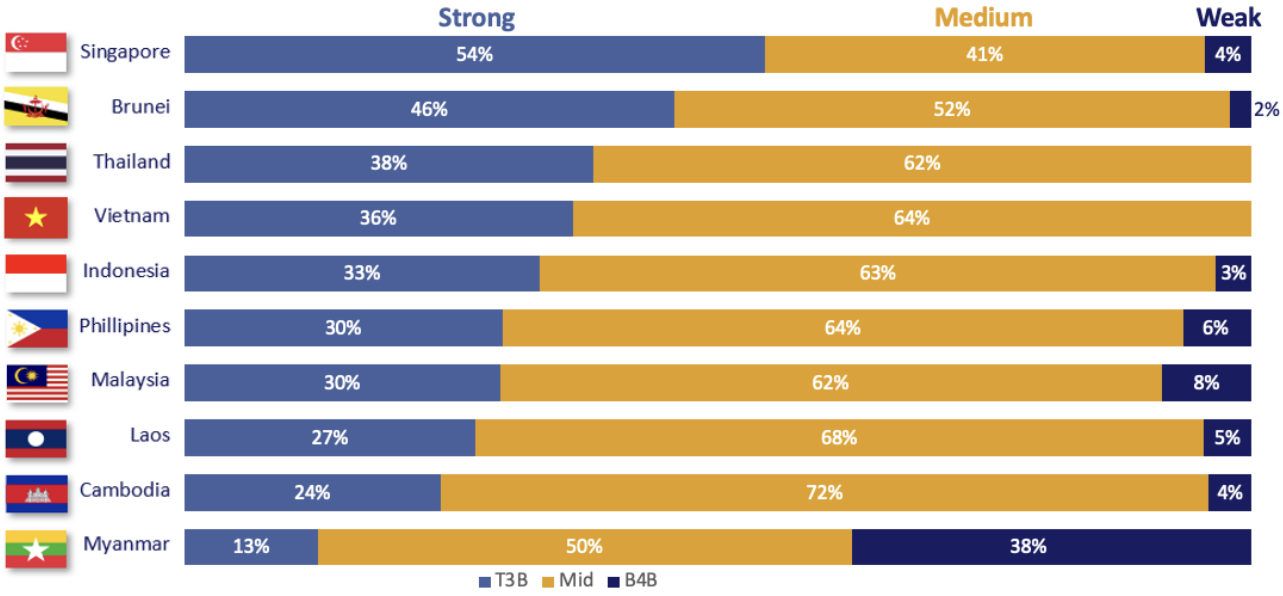
In terms of perception towards others in Brunei and the rest of the Southeast Asian region, the Bruneians were of the view that their country's strength lies in the solidarity and helpfulness dimension. See Figure 16.

Figure 16: Overall perceived level of cohesion in Brunei



A majority of the Bruneians ranked Singapore top in terms of the level of social cohesion, and themselves in second place. See Figure 17.

Figure 17: Overall level of social cohesion in Southeast Asian countries as perceived by Bruneians



5.3 Cambodia

Among the Cambodian thought leaders who responded to the survey, 95% were under the age of 49. Most of the respondents came from academia and research institutions, and a majority of them were Khmer Buddhists. The demographic profiles of the Cambodians who responded to the survey are depicted in Figures 18 to 21.

Figure 18: Age of survey respondents from Cambodia (%)

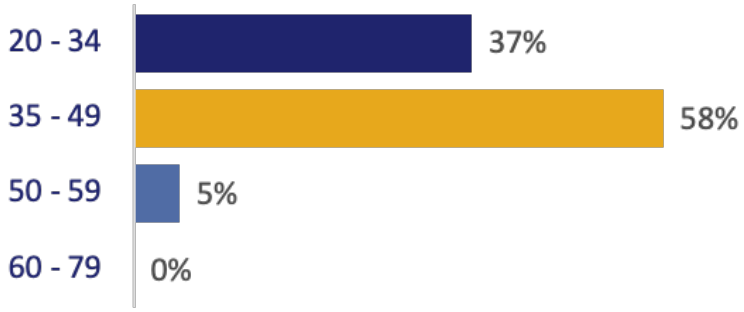


Figure 19: Affiliation of survey respondents from Cambodia (%)

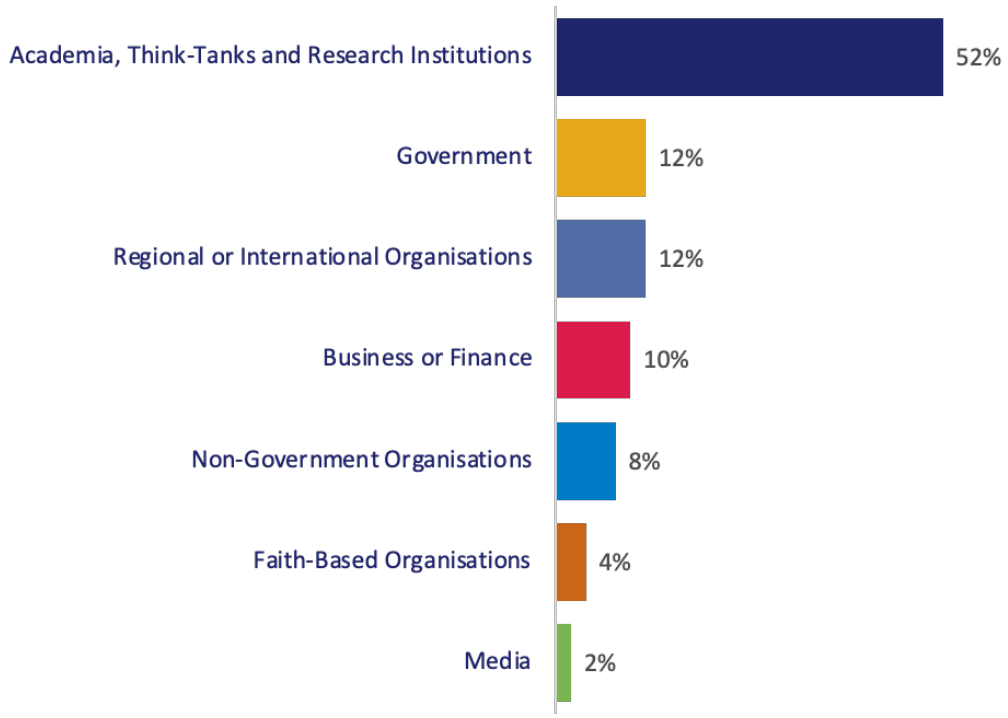


Figure 20: Religion of survey respondents from Cambodia (%)

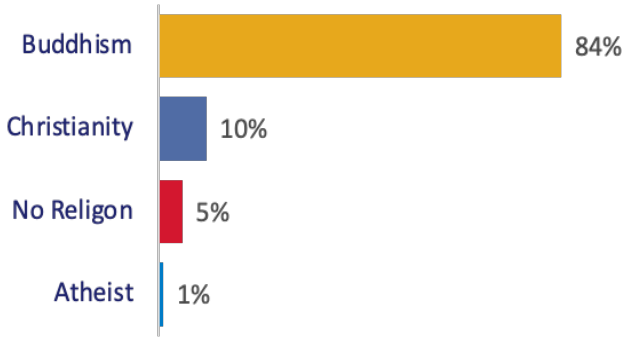
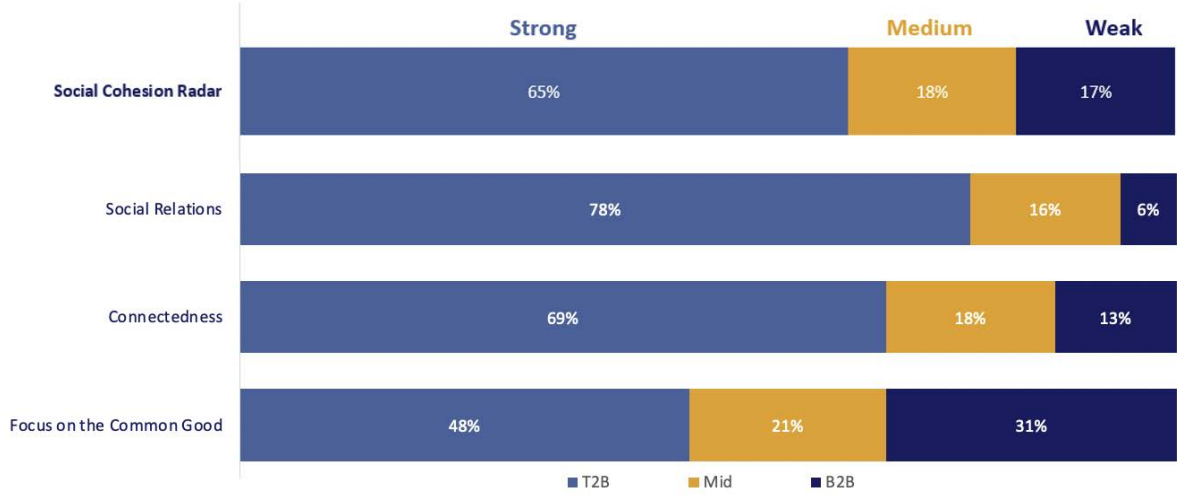


Figure 21: Ethnic-race of survey respondents from Cambodia (%)

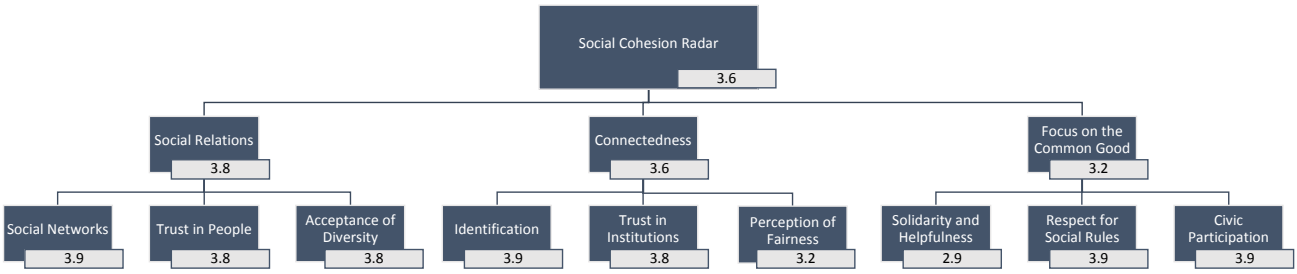
According to the top box score, social relations was the most significant domain contributing to social cohesion in Cambodia. The connectedness domain's influence on social cohesion was 9% lower than social relations. See Figure 22.

Figure 22: Top box scores of social cohesion in Cambodia



The dimensions with the strongest contribution to social cohesion in Cambodia were social networks, identification, respect for social rules, and civic participation. The focus on the common good domain fared the weakest overall, as the score on solidarity and helpfulness was the lowest compared to all the dimensions. The mean score of the responses to assess social cohesion in Cambodia was 3.6, which was slightly lower than the regional average of 3.7. See Figure 23.

Figure 23: Mean score of the responses in each dimension in Cambodia



The Cambodian respondents believed it was important for citizens to respect social rules and norms and the religious practices of others in order to strengthen social cohesion in the country. See Figure 24.

Figure 24: Cambodians' responses to questions on respect for social rules (%)

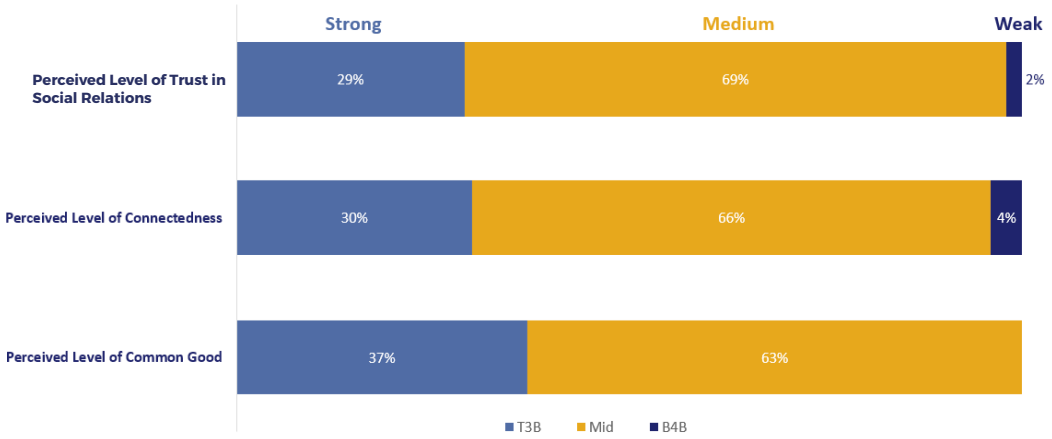
Respect for Social Rules

Statement	Percentage	
You respect social rules and norms in your country.	Strongly Agree	24%
	Agree	70%
	Neutral	6%
	Disagree	0%
	Strongly Disagree	0%

Statement	Percentage	
You understand the need to respect religious practices that are not directly applicable to you.	Strongly Agree	9%
	Agree	72%
	Neutral	13%
	Disagree	5%
	Strongly Disagree	1%

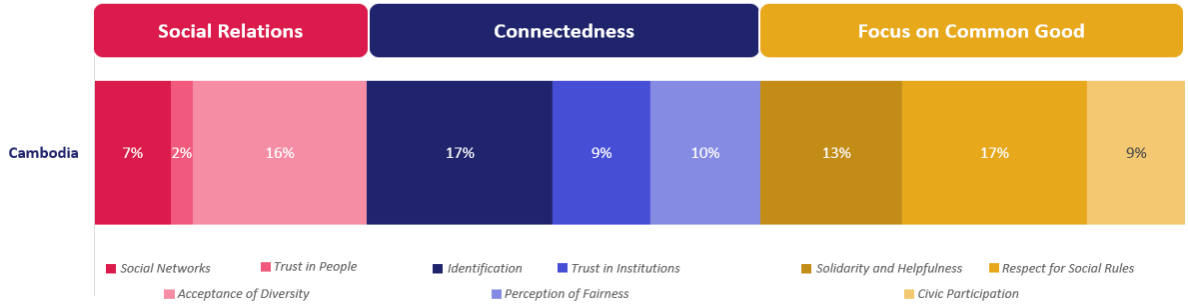
The Cambodians perceived that the level of common good in their society was the strongest, and that it has played a critical role in maintaining harmony in the country. They believed that the second strongest contributor to cohesion in Cambodia was the level of connectedness among citizens. See Figure 25.

Figure 25: Top box scores of perceived level of social cohesion in Cambodia



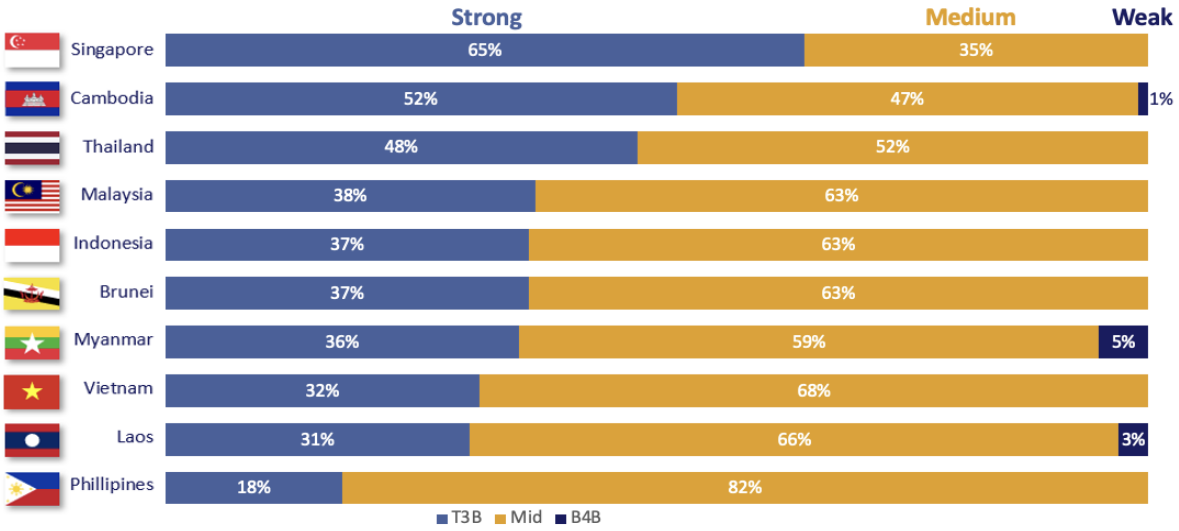
The Cambodian respondents believed that acceptance of diversity, identification, and respect for social rules have helped to strengthen social cohesion in the country. See Figure 26.

Figure 26: Overall perceived level of cohesion in Cambodia



A majority of the Cambodians also ranked Singapore as the most socially cohesive country in the region, and themselves second. See Figure 27.

Figure 27: Overall level of social cohesion in Southeast Asian countries as perceived by Cambodians



5.4 Indonesia

The largest proportion of the Indonesians surveyed were from academia and research institutions, followed by business or finance. The age range of the respondents were wider in Indonesia, potentially ascertaining a better representation of views on social cohesion. All respondents were from the two major religious groups in Indonesia: Islam and Christianity. The demographic profiles of the Indonesians who responded to the survey are depicted in Figures 28 to 31.

Figure 28: Age of survey respondents from Indonesia (%)

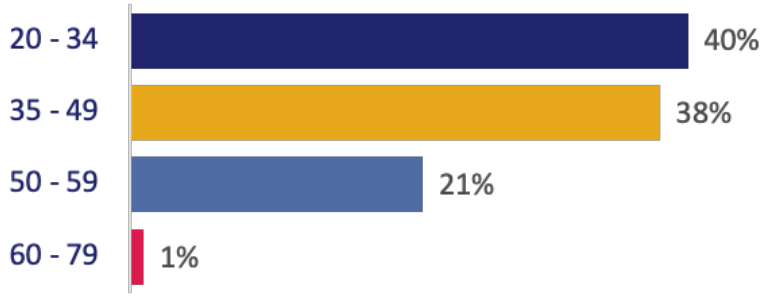


Figure 29: Affiliation of survey respondents from Indonesia (%)

Figure 30: Religion of survey respondents from Indonesia (%)

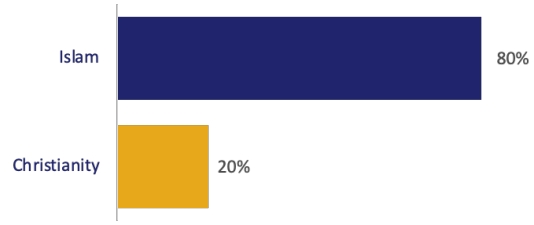
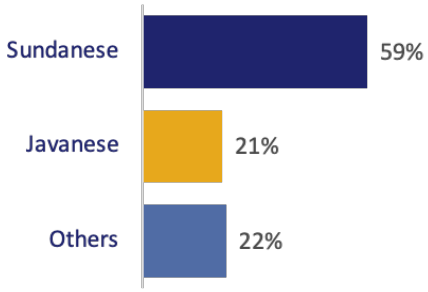
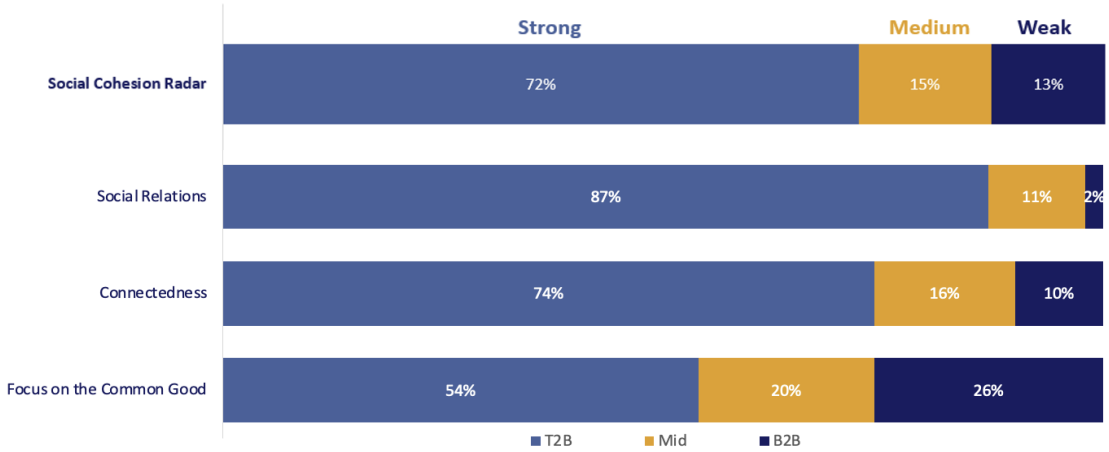


Figure 31: Ethnic-race of survey respondents from Indonesia (%)



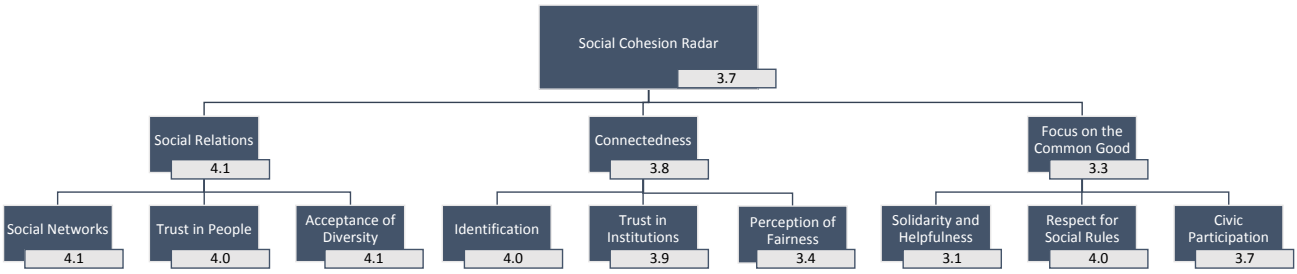
Overall, 87% of Indonesians said that social relations strengthened social cohesion in Indonesia. Slightly more than half of the Indonesians were of the view that focus on the common good contributed to cohesion in the country. See Figure 32.

Figure 32: Top box scores of social cohesion in Indonesia



All the dimensions under social relations performed strongly for Indonesia. The second most impactful domain for Indonesia was connectedness. Within the connectedness domain, the identification dimension performed the best. Amongst all the dimensions, solidarity and helpfulness fared the poorest. The mean score of the responses to assess social cohesion in Indonesia was 3.7, which was the same as the regional average. See Figure 33.

Figure 33: Mean score of the responses in each dimension in Indonesia



The Indonesian respondents felt strongly about their identification with their country. A significant number of them agreed that their individual identity has remained the same over the years and that they were comfortable to openly express their religious identity to other members of the state. See Figure 34.

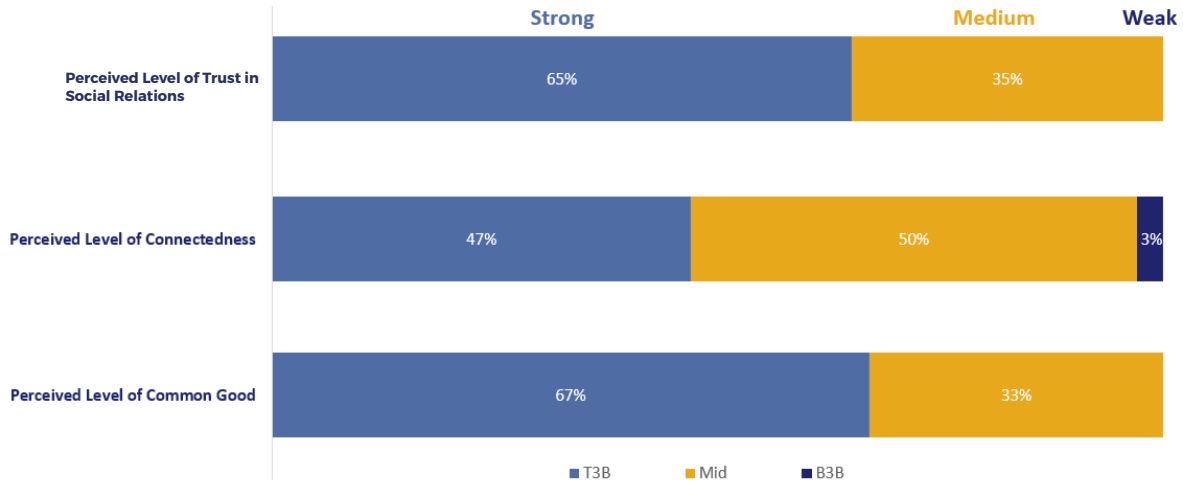
Figure 34: Indonesians' responses to questions on identification (%)

Identification		
Statement	Percentage	
Your sense of individual identity has remained the same over the years.	Strongly Agree	27%
	Agree	67%
	Neutral	3%
	Disagree	2%
	Strongly Disagree	1%

Statement	Percentage	
You are not afraid to openly express your religious identity to other members of the state.	Strongly Agree	32%
	Agree	62%
	Neutral	6%
	Disagree	0%
	Strongly Disagree	0%

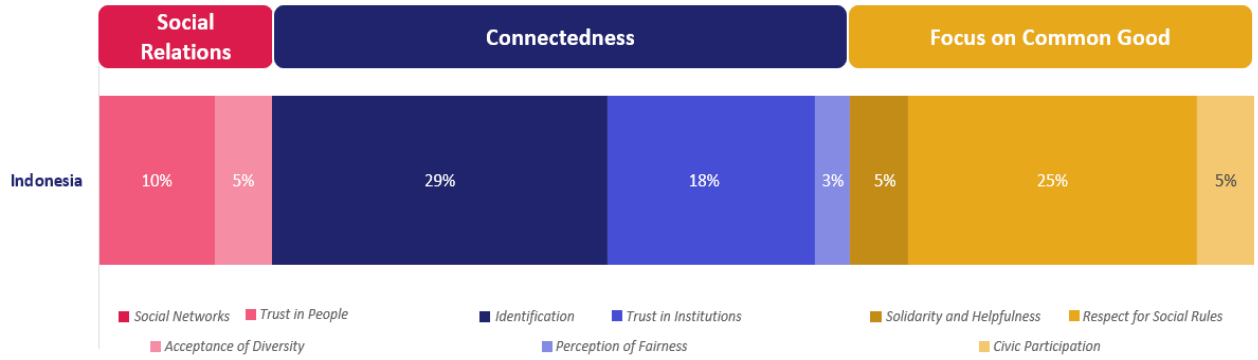
A majority of the Indonesians agreed that citizens focused on the common good of everyone, with 65% believing that there was trust amongst fellow citizens and in institutions. See Figure 35.

Figure 35: Top box scores of perceived level of social cohesion in Indonesia



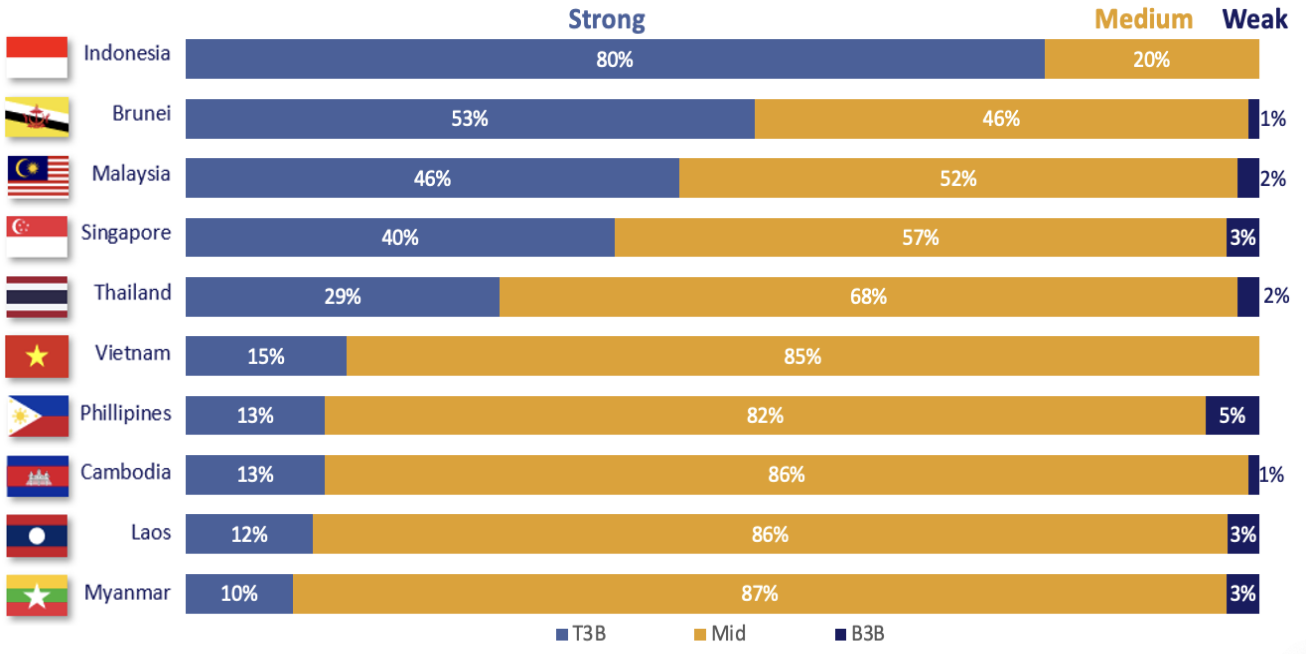
The respondents from Indonesia felt that identification and respect for social rules were the two dimensions that have helped to build cohesion in the country. See Figure 36.

Figure 36: Overall Perceived Level of Cohesion in Indonesia



Indonesians ranked themselves top in the region for social cohesion, with Brunei in second place. See Figure 37.

Figure 37: Overall level of social cohesion in Southeast Asian countries as perceived by Indonesians



5.5 Lao PDR

A majority of the respondents from Laos were between the ages of 20 and 49 and 61% of them were government employees. Seventy-eight per cent of them were Buddhists. The demographic profiles of the respondents to the survey are depicted in Figures 38 to 41.

Figure 38: Age of survey respondents from Laos (%)

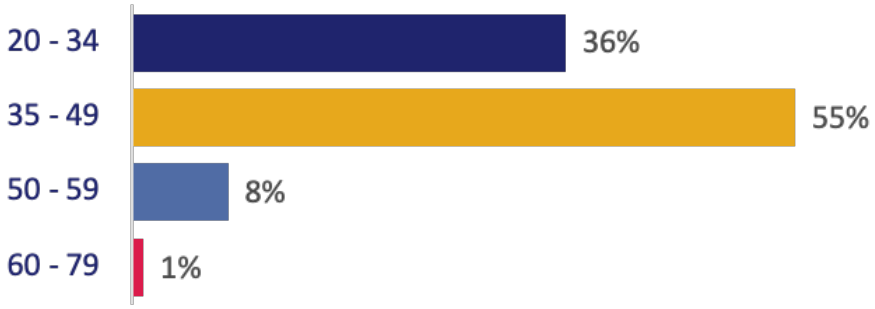


Figure 39: Affiliation of survey respondents from Laos (%)

Figure 40: Religion of survey respondents from Laos (%)

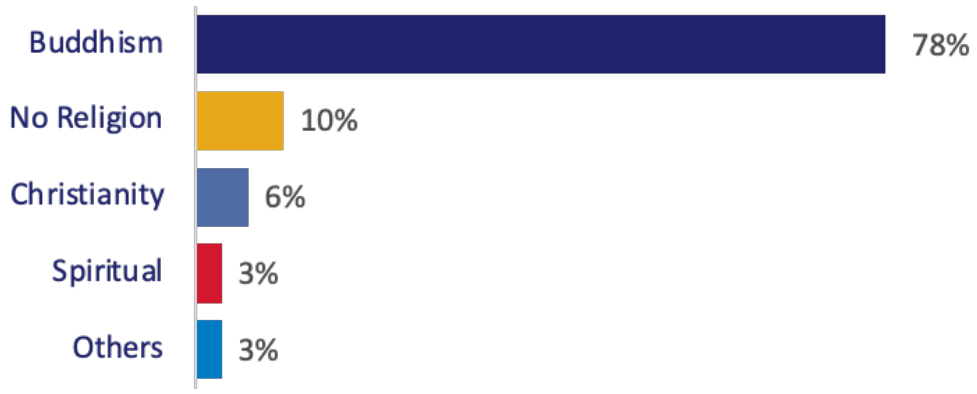
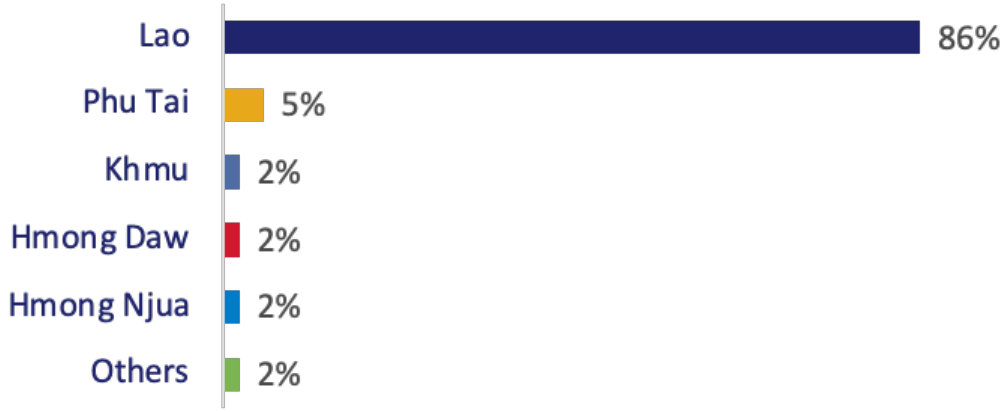
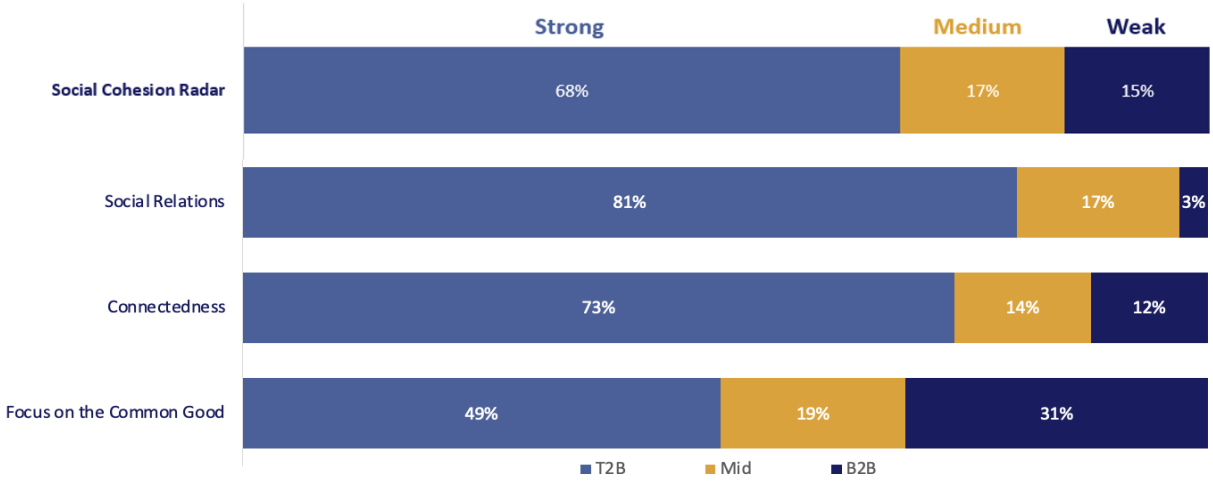


Figure 41: Ethnic-race of survey respondents from Laos (%)



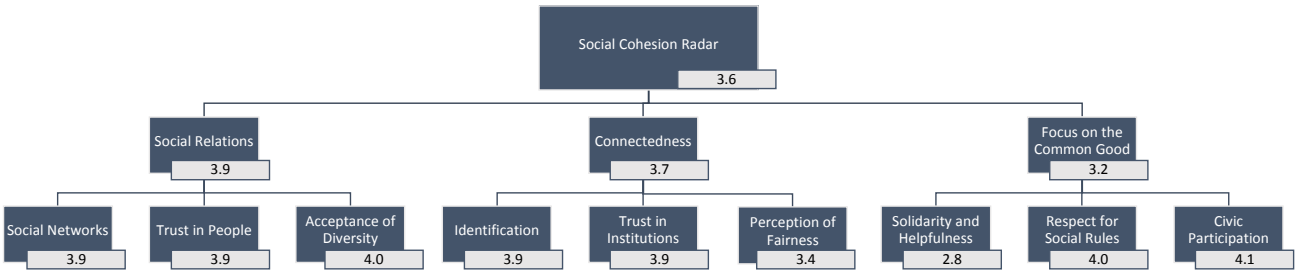
Overall, 81% of the respondents were of the view that social relations had a strong impact on social cohesion in Laos. Thirty-one per cent said that the focus on the common good domain had a minimal impact on social cohesion in the country. See Figure 42.

Figure 42: Top box scores of social cohesion in Laos



Among all the dimensions, civic participation contributed most significantly to social cohesion in Laos, followed by the acceptance of diversity and respect for social rules. Majority of the respondents were of the view that solidarity and helpfulness did not particularly strengthen social cohesion in their country. See Figure 43.

Figure 43: Mean score of the responses in each dimension in Laos



The majority of the thought leaders from Laos strongly felt that they were able to identify themselves, and share their individual identities, with those around them. See Figure 44.

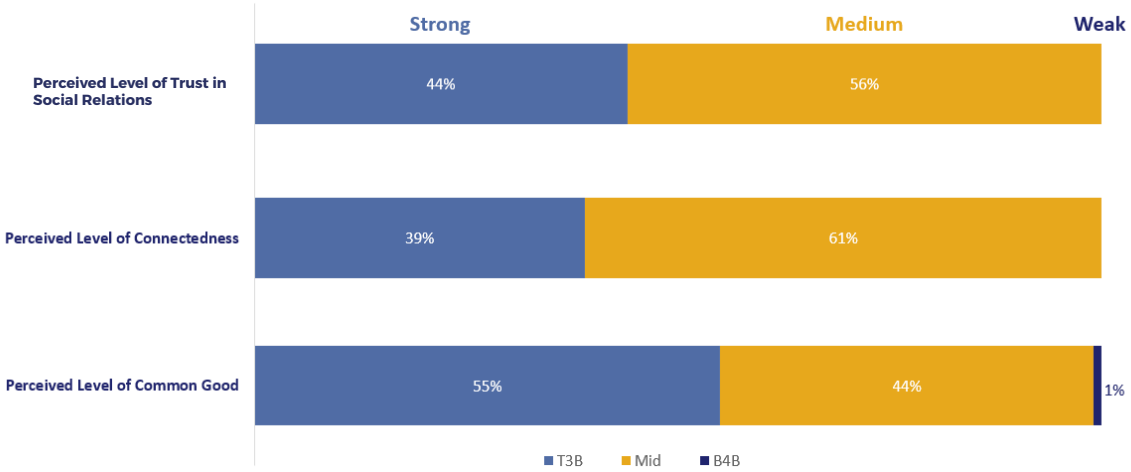
Figure 44: Responses from Laos to questions on identification (%)

Identification		
Statement	Percentage	
You easily identify yourself with members of your state.	Strongly Agree	15%
	Agree	77%
	Neutral	6%
	Disagree	1%
	Strongly Disagree	1%

Statement	Percentage	
You are not afraid to openly express your linguistic identity to other members of the state.	Strongly Agree	23%
	Agree	69%
	Neutral	5%
	Disagree	1%
	Strongly Disagree	2%

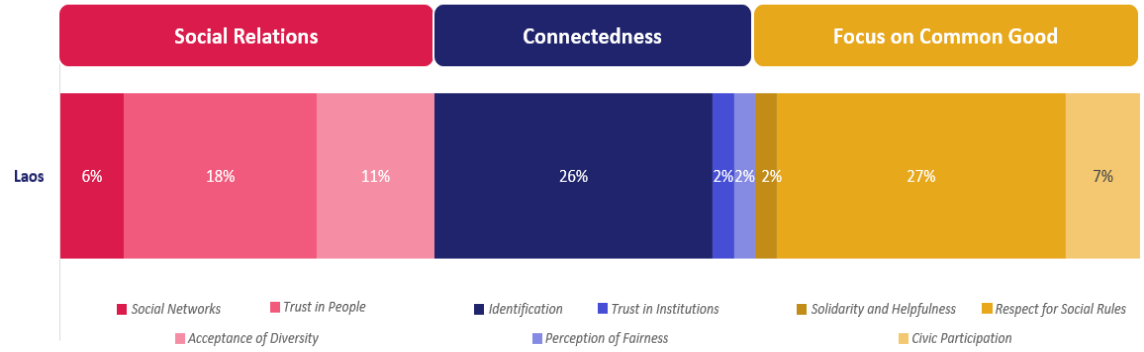
Respondents from Laos perceived the level of common good within the country to be the highest, followed by the perceived level of trust, and perceived level of connectedness. See Figure 45.

Figure 45: Top box scores of perceived level of social cohesion in Laos



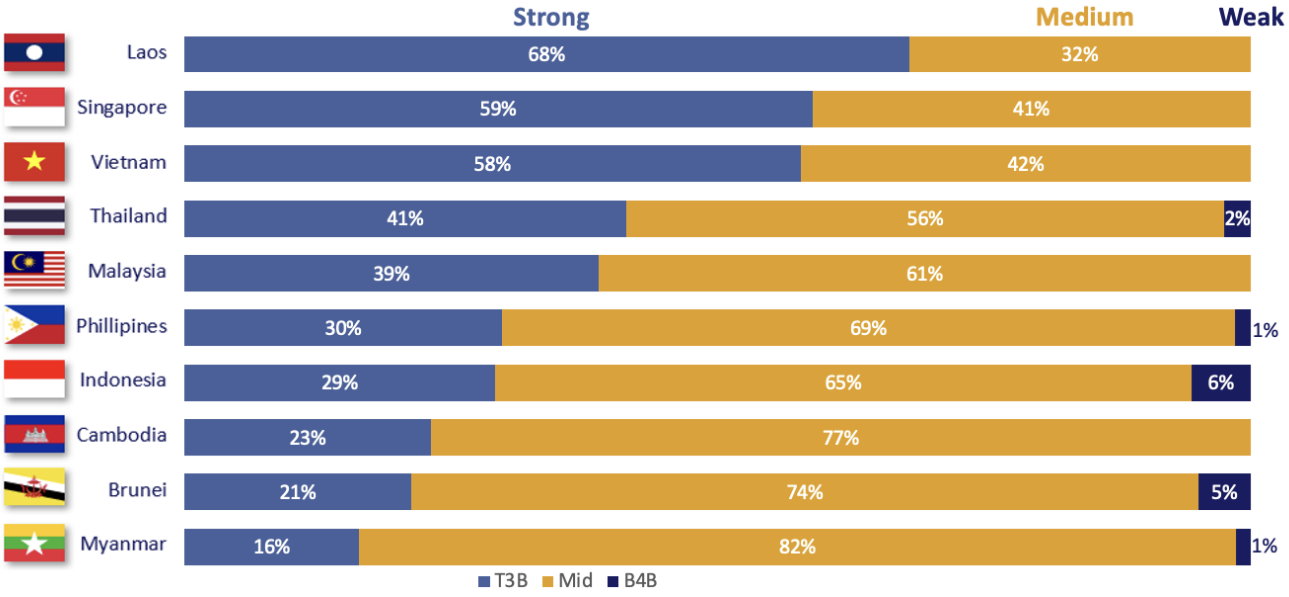
Respondents also believed that identification and respect for social rules have helped people in Laos to live together peacefully. See Figure 46.

Figure 46: Overall perceived level of cohesion in Laos



Most of the respondents from Laos believed their own country to be the most socially cohesive in Southeast Asia. Singapore and Vietnam were closely ranked as second and third respectively. See Figure 47.

Figure 47: Overall level of social cohesion in Southeast Asian countries as perceived by people from Laos



5.6 Malaysia

The Malaysian thought leaders were from a wide age group, ranging almost entirely from 20 to 59 years old. They were primarily from academia and research institutions. A majority of them were Chinese and/or Buddhists, and hence their representation in relation to the general population statistics was inflated. A weighted score based on the general population statistics[22] was used when tabulating the results from the Malaysian sample. The demographic profiles of the Malaysians who responded to the survey are depicted in Figures 48 to 51.

Figure 48: Age of survey respondents from Malaysia (%)

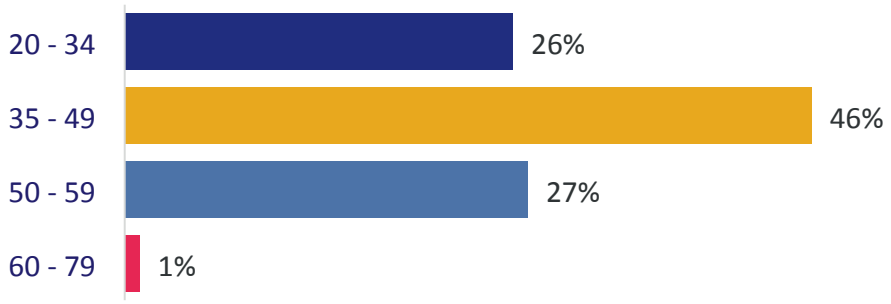
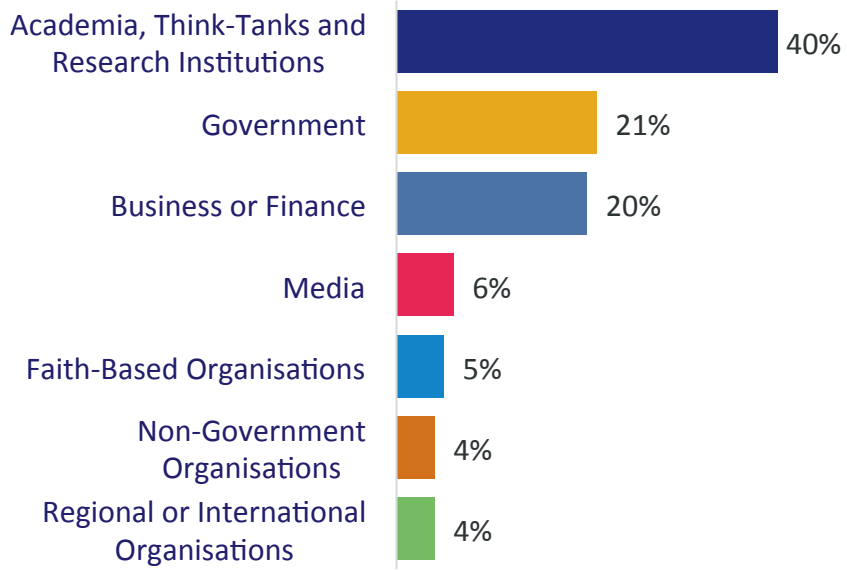


Figure 49: Affiliation of survey respondents from Malaysia (%)



[22] "Current Population Estimates, Malaysia, 2021", Department of Statistics Malaysia, 15 July 2021, https://www.dosm.gov.my/v1/index.php?r=column/cthemeByCat&cat=155&bul id=ZjJOSnpJR21sQWVUcUp6ODRudm5JZz09&menu_id=L0pheU43NWJwRWVSZklWdzQ4TlhUUT09.

Figure 50: Religion of survey respondents from Malaysia (%)

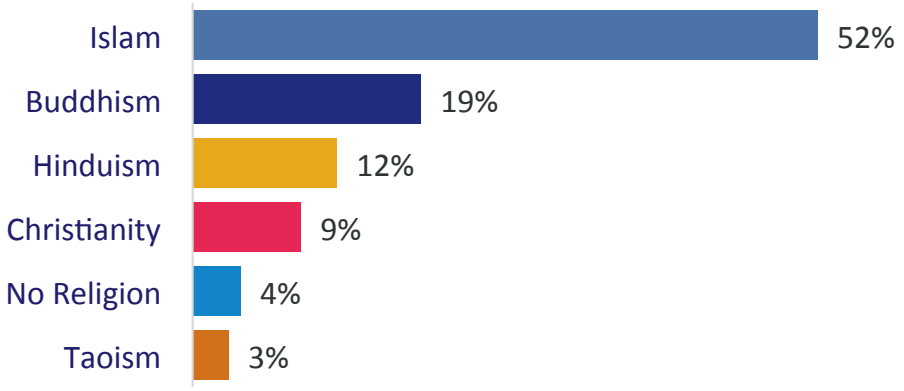
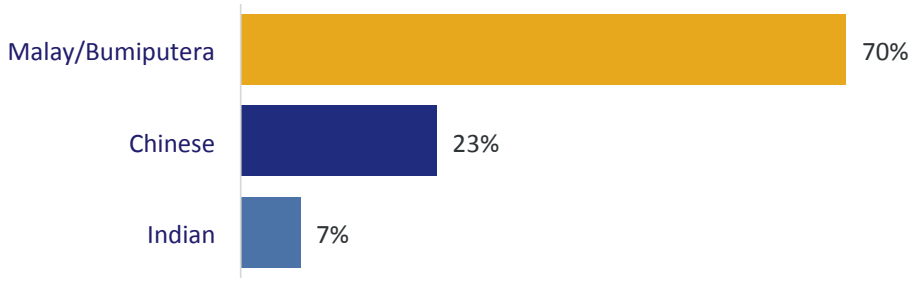
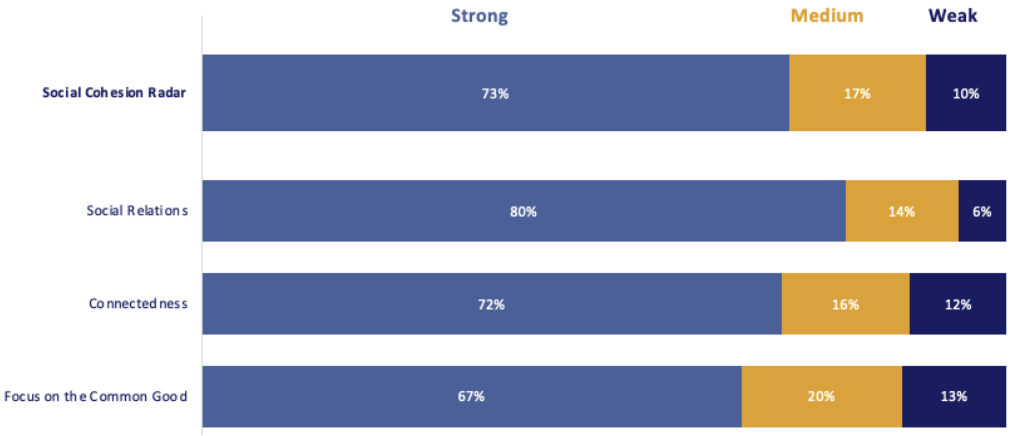


Figure 51: Ethnic-race of survey respondents from Malaysia (%)



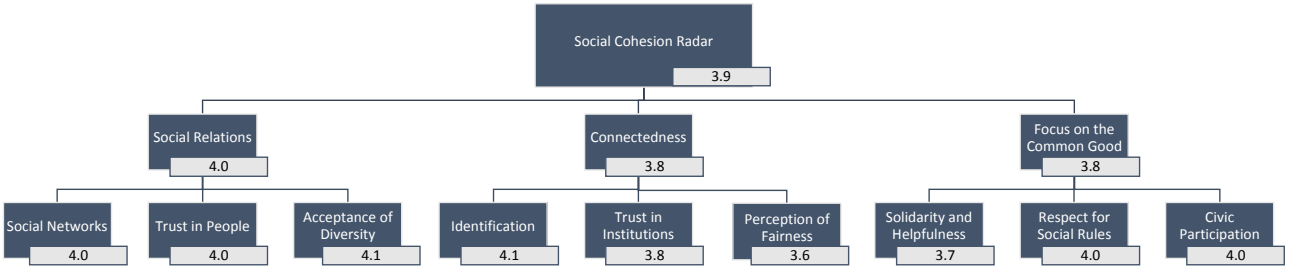
The Malaysians were of the view that strong social relations played an important role in social cohesion in Malaysia. The domain of connectedness was the second strongest factor influencing social cohesion in Malaysia. The domain of focus on the common good was the weakest contributor. See Figure 52.

Figure 52: Top box scores of social cohesion in Malaysia



Acceptance of diversity and identification were the two dimensions that were viewed as the most important in building social cohesion in Malaysia. The dimensions of social networks, trust in people, respect for social rules, and civic participation had a similar impact on social cohesion in the country. The solidarity and helpfulness dimension had the weakest impact. See Figure 53.

Figure 53: Mean score of the responses in each dimension in Malaysia



A notable finding was the fact that identity played an important role in Malaysian society. Eighty-six per cent of the respondents felt that it was easy to identify themselves from citizens of a different linguistic group, and that their religious identity was important to them. See Figure 54.

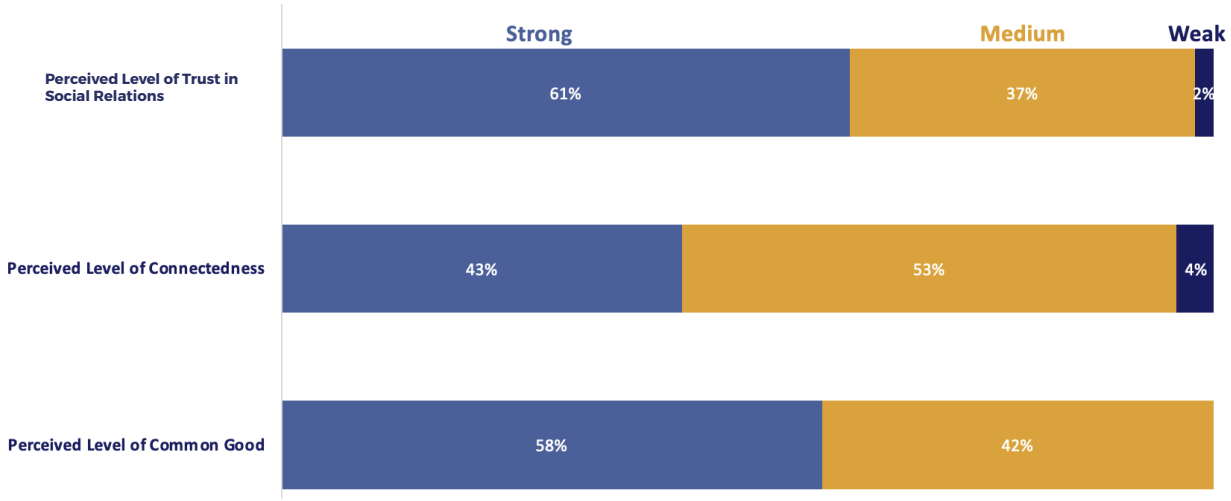
Figure 54: Malaysians' responses to questions on identification (%)

Identification		
Statement	Percentage	
You easily identify yourself apart from members of your state who are of another linguistic group.	Strongly Agree	15%
	Agree	71%
	Neutral	13%
	Disagree	1%
	Strongly Disagree	0%

Statement	Percentage	
Your identity based on your religion is important to you.	Strongly Agree	22%
	Agree	64%
	Neutral	8%
	Disagree	5%
	Strongly Disagree	1%

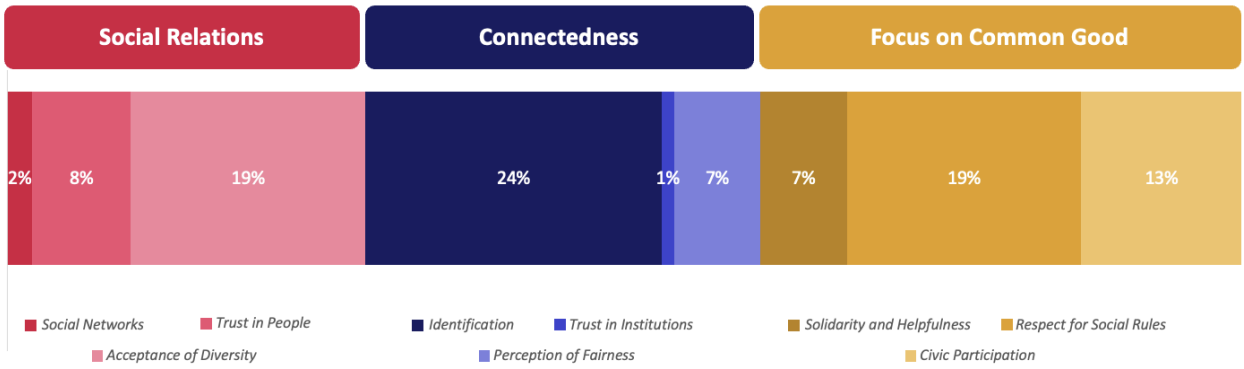
The Malaysian respondents perceived that the levels of trust and common good strengthened social cohesion in the country. See Figure 55.

Figure 55: Top box scores of perceived level of social cohesion in Malaysia



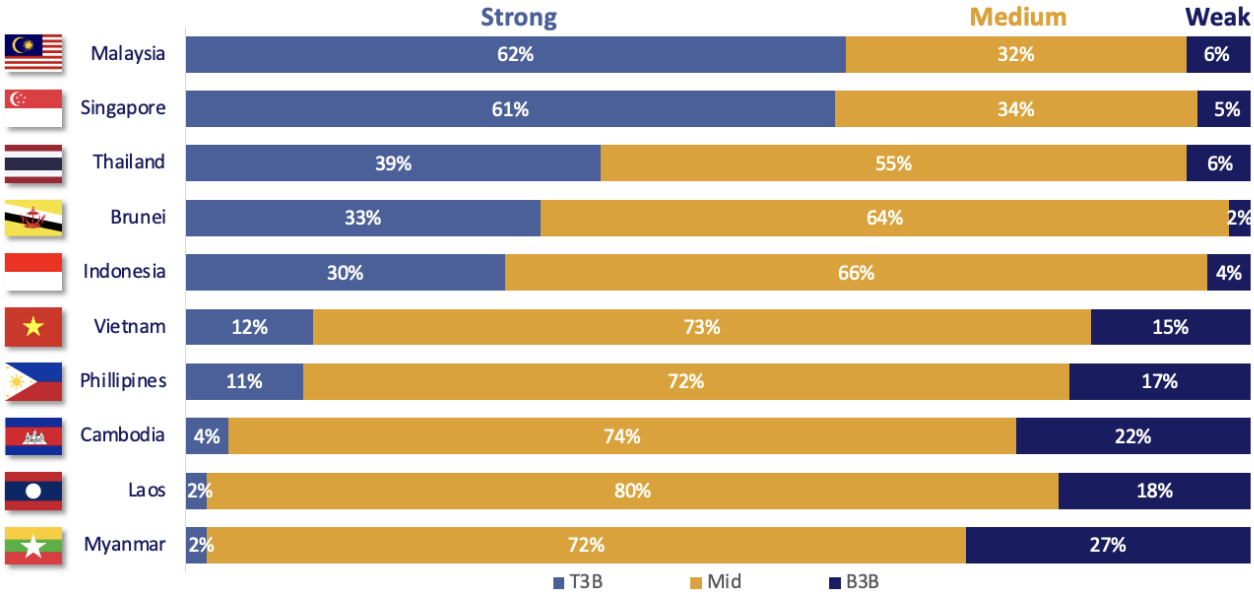
Thought leaders from Malaysia also stated that identification, acceptance of diversity, and respect for social rules, were the top three dimensions that have helped to maintain cohesion in Malaysia. See Figure 56.

Figure 56: Overall perceived level of cohesion in Malaysia



An almost equal number of respondents ranked Malaysia and Singapore as the most socially cohesive country in the region. See Figure 57.

Figure 57: Overall level of social cohesion in Southeast Asian countries as perceived by Malaysians



5.7 Myanmar

More than half of the respondents from Myanmar were between the ages of 35 and 49. 40% of them were government employees, with 87 out of the 100 respondents being Buddhists. However, only 67% of them identified themselves as Burmese. The rest of the respondents were foreigners who have been working and residing in Myanmar for many years. The demographic profiles of the survey respondents are depicted in Figures 58 to 61.

Figure 58: Age of survey respondents from Myanmar (%)

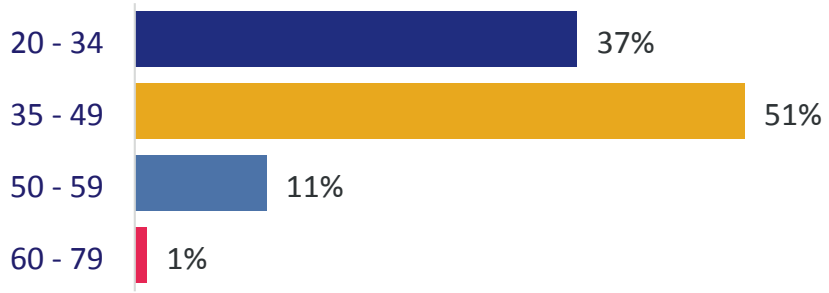


Figure 59: Affiliation of Survey Respondents from Myanmar (%)

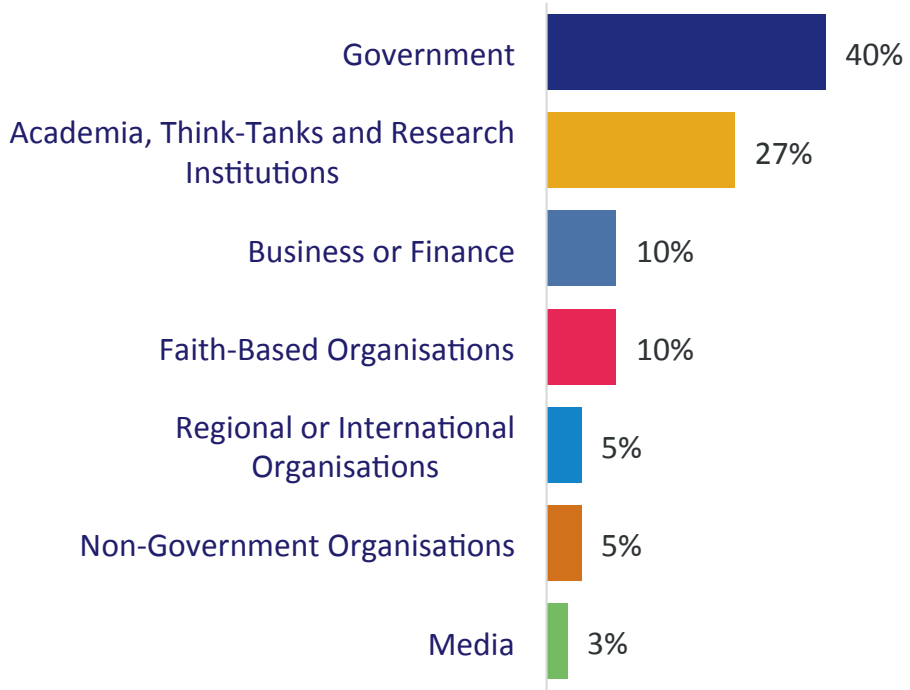


Figure 60: Religion of survey respondents from Myanmar (%)

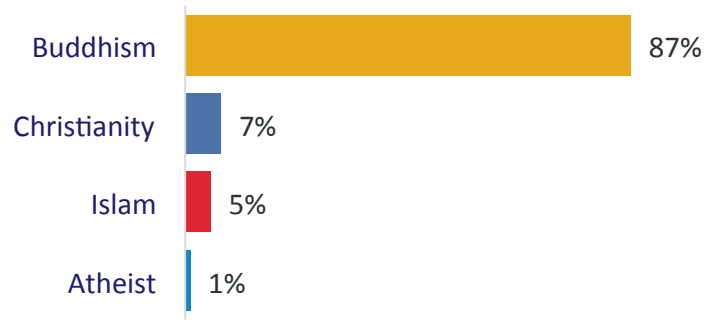
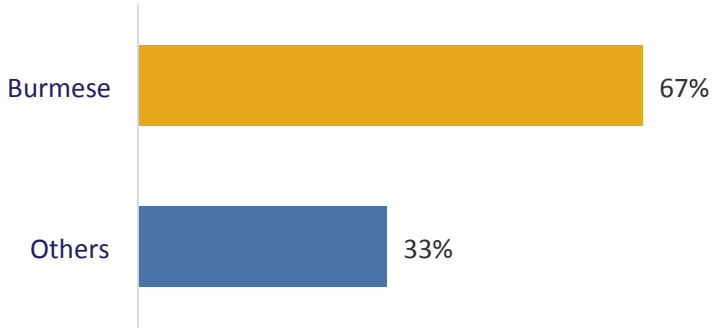
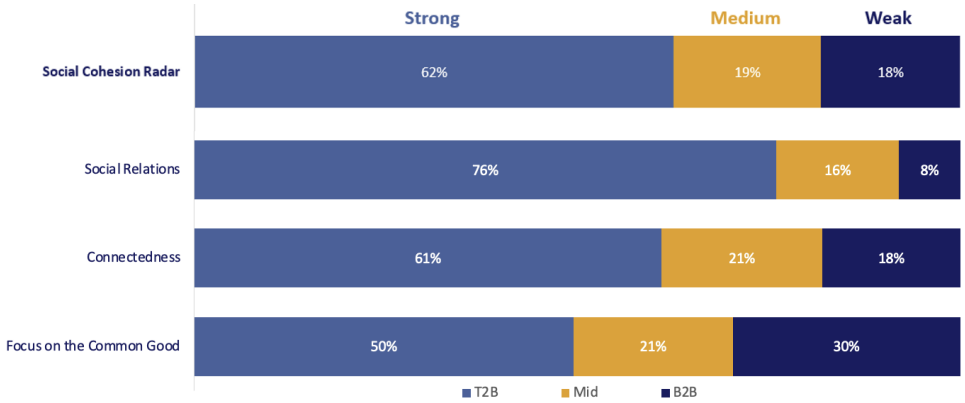


Figure 61: Ethnic-race of survey respondents from Myanmar (%)



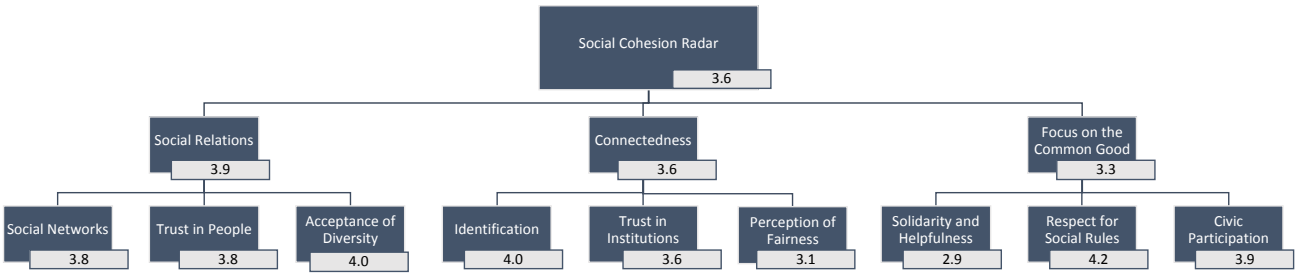
Among the three domains, social relations contributed the most significantly to social cohesion in Myanmar. This was followed by the connectedness domain, with 61 out of 100 respondents stating that it helped maintain cohesion in the country. See Figure 62.

Figure 62: Top box scores of social cohesion in Myanmar



Respect for social rules was the dimension with the strongest contribution to social cohesion in Myanmar. This was followed by acceptance of diversity and identification. Solidarity and helpfulness had the least influence on social cohesion in Myanmar. See Figure 63.

Figure 63: Mean score of the responses of each dimension in Myanmar



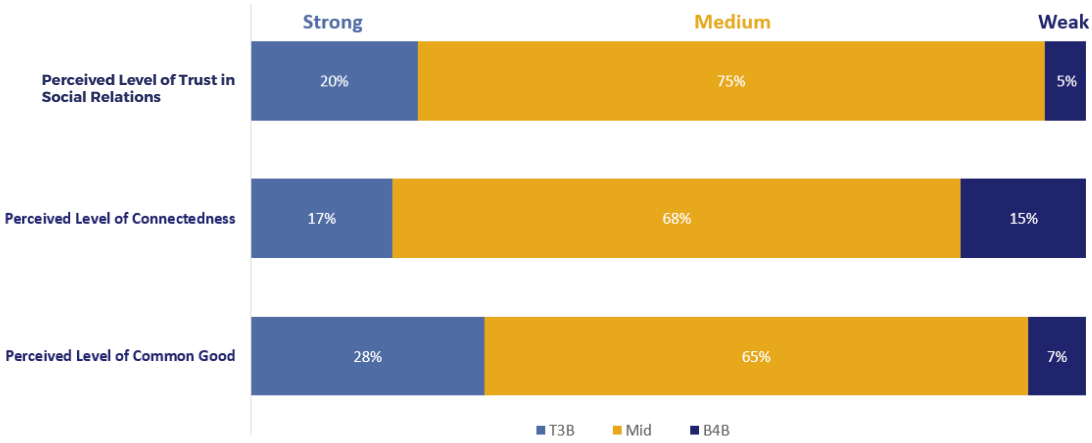
A significant finding that respondents from Myanmar noted that everyone that lived in the country had the opportunity to vote. See Figure 64.

Figure 64: Responses from Myanmar to the question on civic participation (%)

Statement	Percentage	
All members of your state are allowed to vote.	Strongly Agree	40%
	Agree	43%
	Neutral	13%
	Disagree	1%
	Strongly Disagree	2%

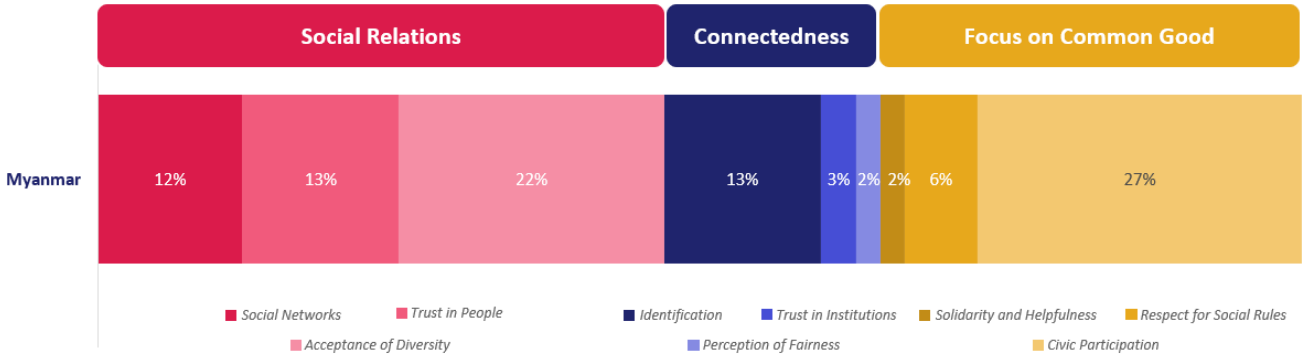
According to the respondents, the perceived level of common good in the country was the highest, followed by the level of trust among members of the state. See Figure 65.

Figure 65: Top box scores of perceived level of social cohesion in Myanmar



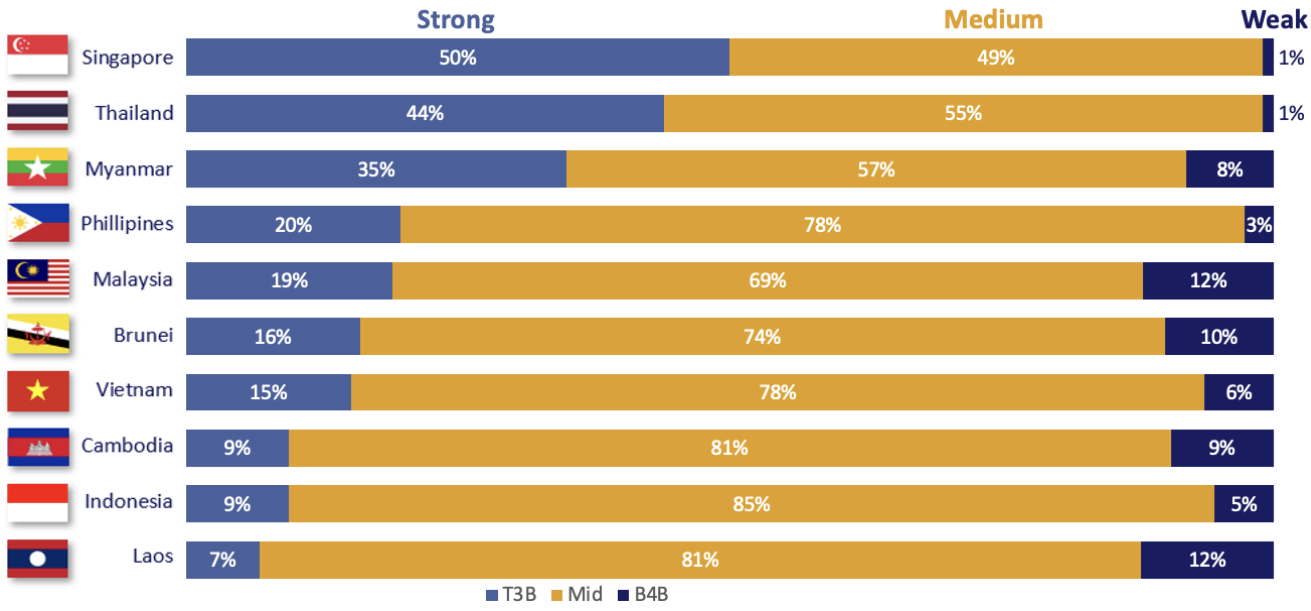
The thought leaders from Myanmar also believed that civic participation was the most important element to building cohesiveness in their society. This was followed by acceptance of diversity. See Figure 66.

Figure 66: Overall perceived level of cohesion in Myanmar



Most of the respondents from Myanmar ranked Singapore as the most socially cohesive country in the region, followed by Thailand. They ranked themselves third in terms of social cohesion. See Figure 67.

Figure 67: Overall level of social cohesion in Southeast Asian countries as perceived by respondents from Myanmar



5.8 Philippines

Every age group was well-represented in the survey conducted in the Philippines. Most of the Filipino thought leaders were from the education and business sectors. A majority of them were also Christians. The three most predominant ethno-racial groups among the survey respondents were the Filipinos, Visayans, and Bicolanos. Their demographic profiles are depicted in Figures 68 to 71.

Figure 68: Age of survey respondents from the Philippines (%)

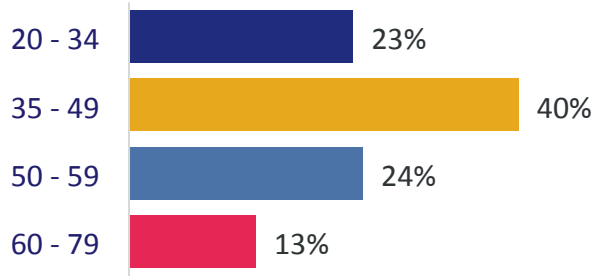


Figure 69: Affiliation of survey respondents from the Philippines (%)

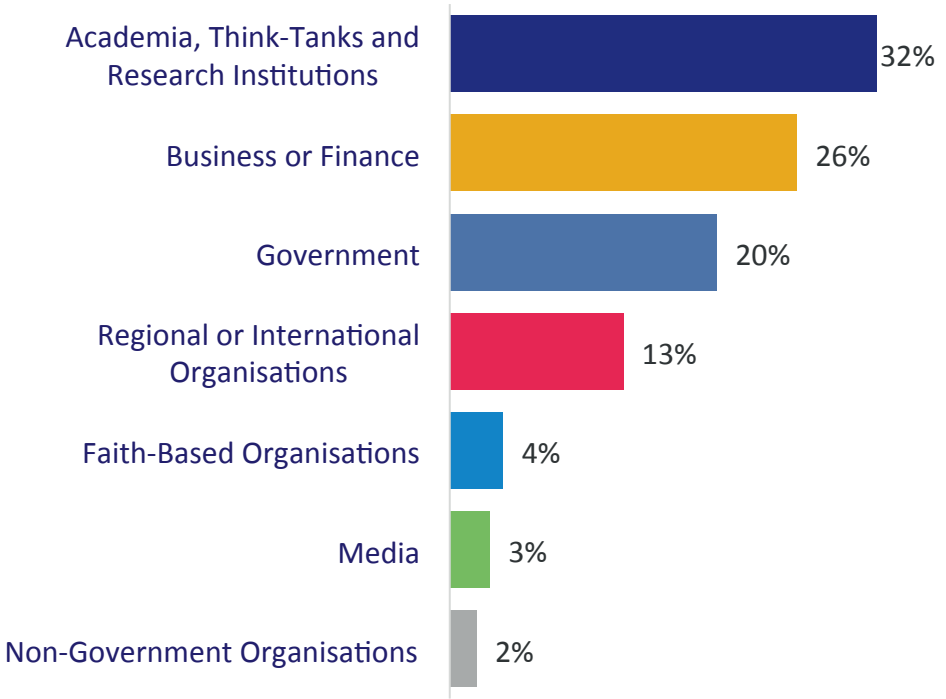


Figure 70: Religion of survey respondents from the Philippines (%)

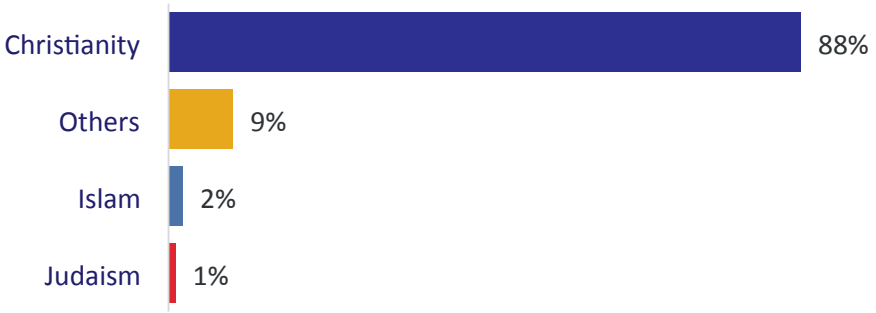
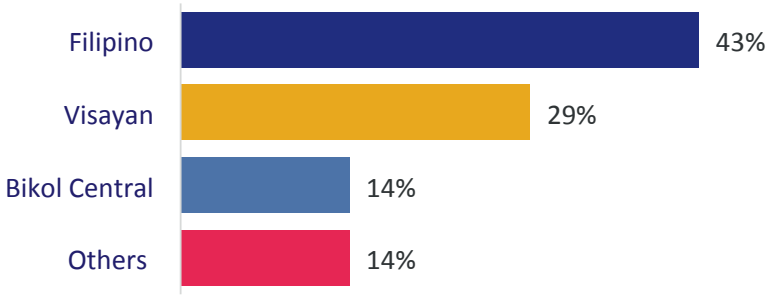
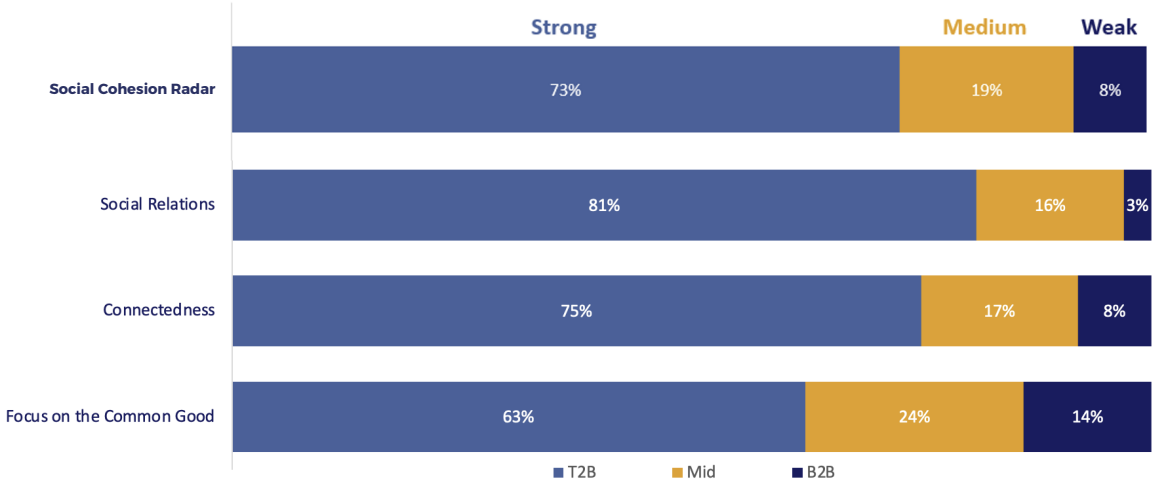


Figure 71: Ethnic-race of survey respondents from the Philippines (%)



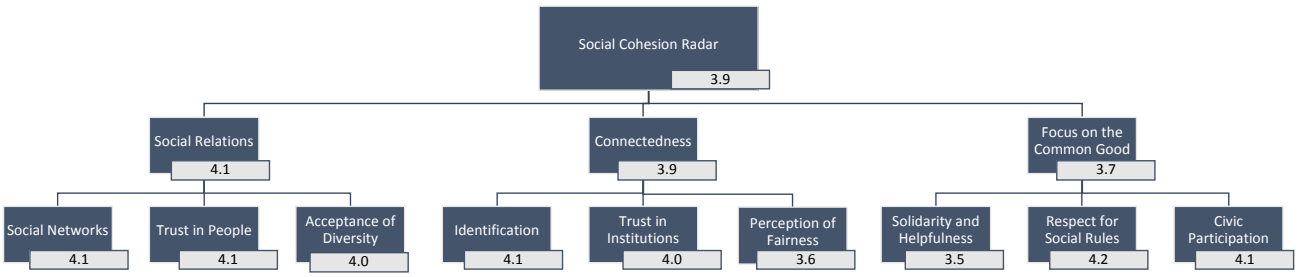
According to the Filipino thought leaders, the social relations domain played the biggest part in building social cohesion in the country. The second most important domain was connectedness. Again, the focus on the common good domain had the least influence on the social cohesion index of the country. See Figure 72.

Figure 72: Top box scores of social cohesion in the Philippines



The respondents from the Philippines opined that respect for social rules was the most important for strengthening social cohesion. Their scores on the dimensions of social networks, trust in people, identification and civic participation were higher than average. See Figure 73.

Figure 73: Mean score of the responses in each dimension in the Philippines



From the survey results, it was clear that the respondents from the Philippines firmly believed that building strong bonds with fellow citizens regardless of their religious background, and having a sense of belonging to their family and kinship, held their society together. See Figure 74.

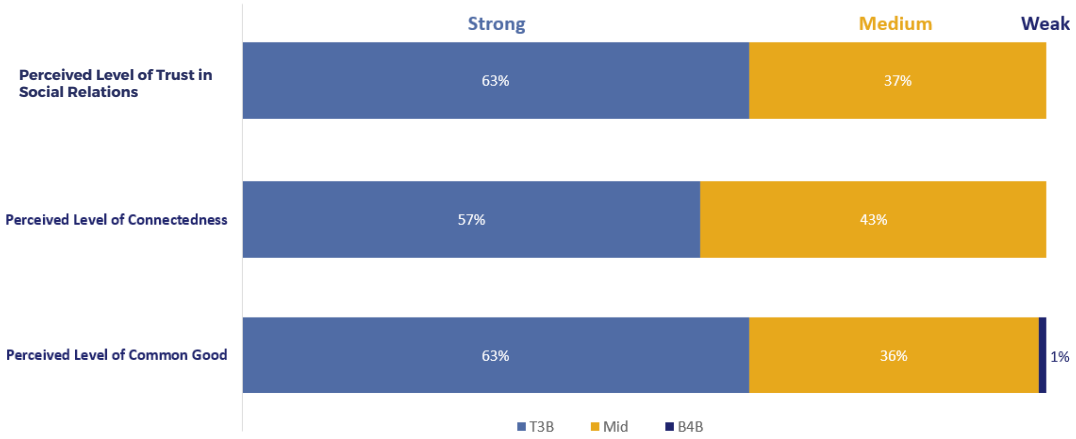
Figure 74: Filipinos' responses to questions on social networks (%)

Statement	Percentage	
You are comfortable with building strong relationships with members of your state who identify themselves differently from your religious background.	Strongly Agree	28%
	Agree	61%
	Neutral	10%
	Disagree	0%
	Strongly Disagree	1%

Statement	Percentage	
You feel a sense of belonging to family and kinship.	Strongly Agree	49%
	Agree	42%
	Neutral	9%
	Disagree	0%
	Strongly Disagree	0%

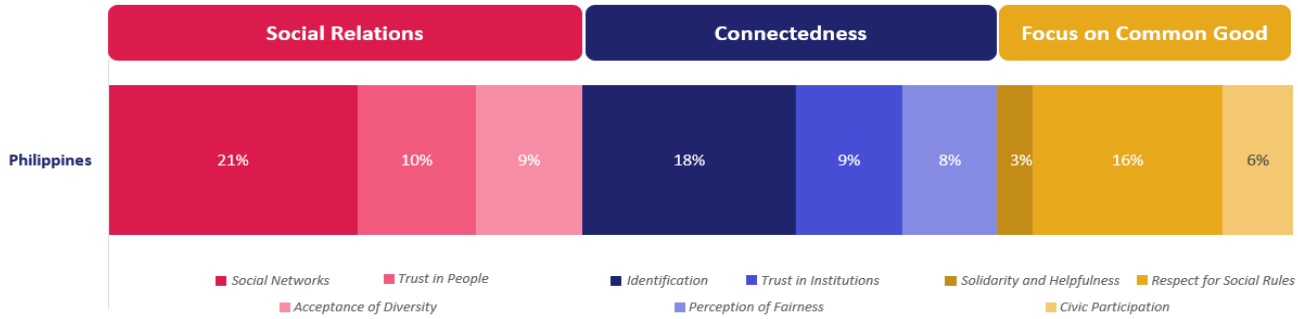
The respondents also perceived the level of trust and common good to be high in society, believing that these elements could strengthen social cohesion in the Philippines. See Figure 75.

Figure 75: Top box scores of perceived level of social cohesion in the Philippines



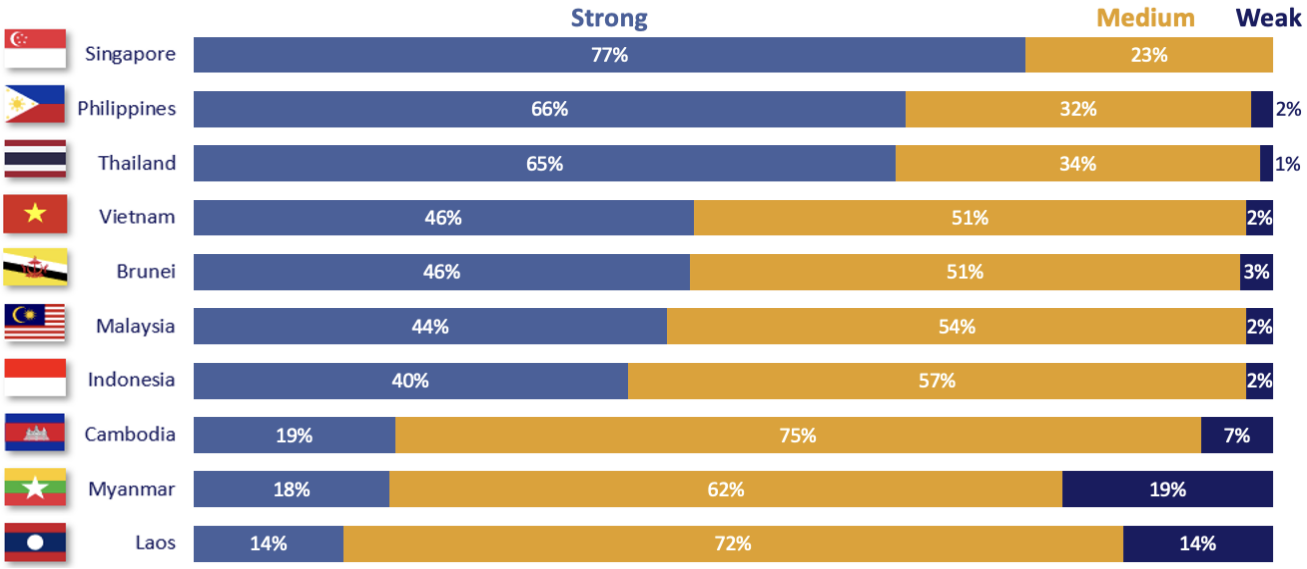
The Filipino thought leaders stated that the social networks dimension was the most important contributor towards social cohesion in the Philippines. The second and third most important dimensions were identification and respect for social rules respectively. See Figure 76.

Figure 76: Overall perceived level of cohesion in the Philippines



The respondents from the Philippines ranked Singapore as the most socially cohesive country in the region, followed by the Philippines and Thailand. See Figure 77.

Figure 77: Overall level of social cohesion in Southeast Asian countries as Perceived by Filipinos



5.9 Singapore

The thought leaders from Singapore were primarily between 20 and 49 years old. Only 14% of them were above the age of 50. Half of the survey respondents came from either think tanks and tertiary institutions or were government employees. The largest proportion of the participants were Buddhists. Sixty-nine per cent of the survey respondents were Chinese. The demographic profiles of the Singaporeans who responded to the survey are depicted in Figures 78 to 81.

Figure 78: Age of survey respondents from Singapore (%)

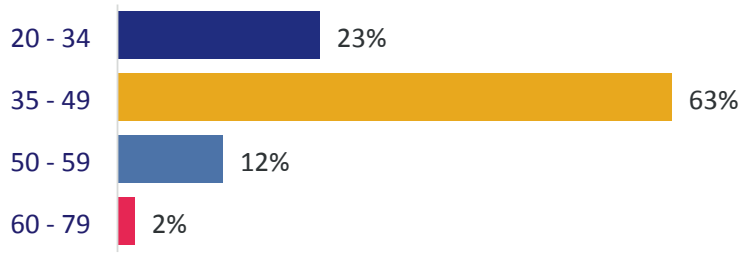


Figure 79: Affiliation of survey respondents from Singapore (%)

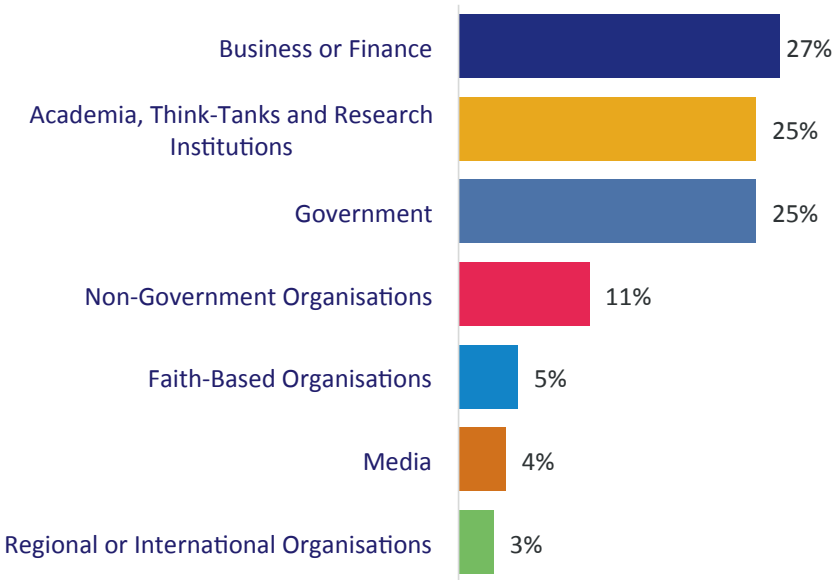


Figure 80: Religion of survey respondents from Singapore (%)

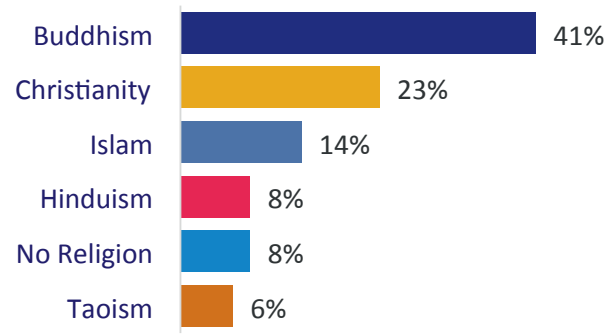
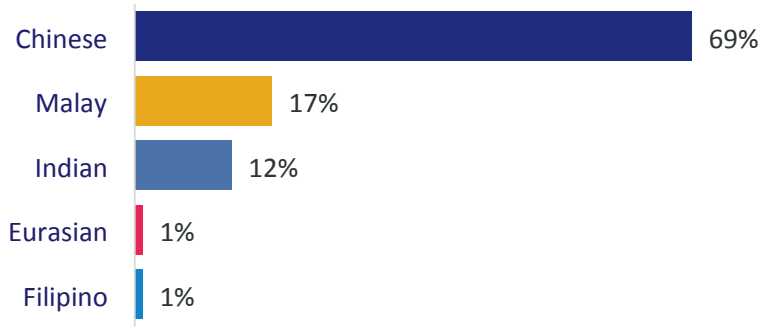
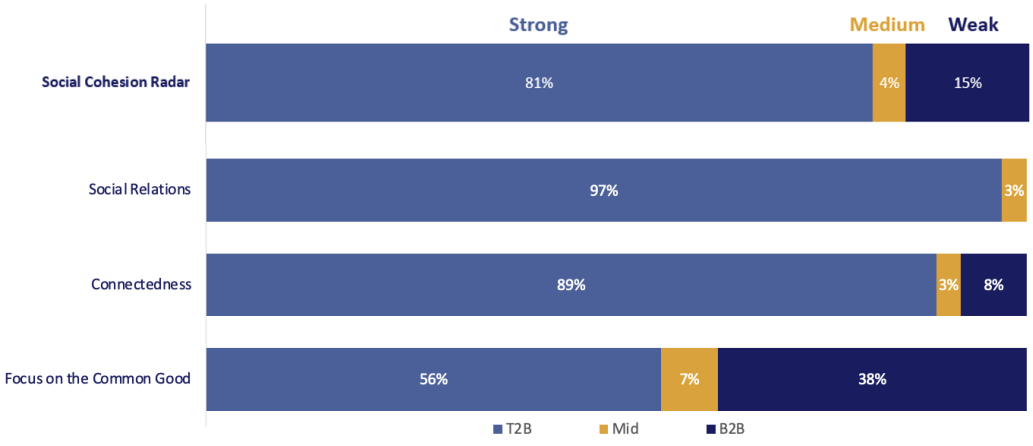


Figure 81: Ethnic-race of survey respondents from Singapore (%)



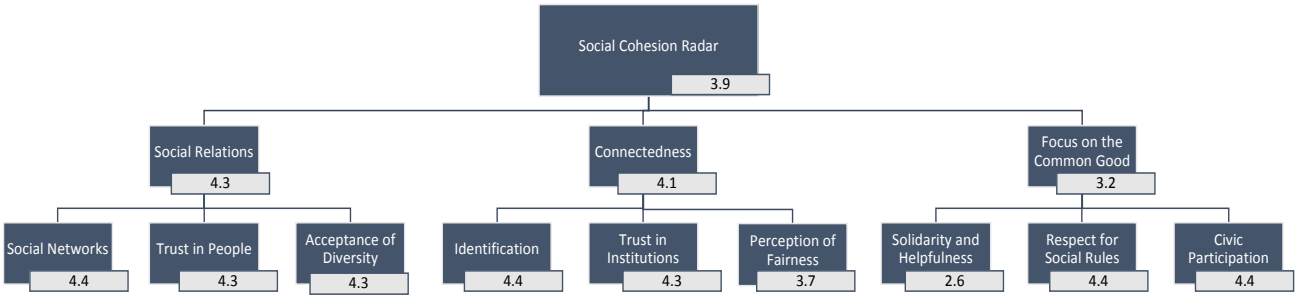
Ninety-seven per cent of the respondents strongly agreed that social relations was important to maintaining social cohesion in the country. The findings indicated that the connectedness domain was also significantly high for Singapore. See Figure 82.

Figure 82: Top box scores of social cohesion in Singapore



Singaporeans responded positively to all dimensions in the Southeast Asian Social Cohesion Radar, except for the dimensions of solidarity and helpfulness and perception of fairness. The mean score of the responses to assess social cohesion in Singapore was 3.9, which was higher than the regional average of 3.7. See Figure 83.

Figure 83: Mean score of the responses in each dimension in Singapore



Almost all Singaporeans responded that they do not feel isolated from people of a different ethno-racial background in their country. Respondents also feel a very strong sense of belonging to their family and kinship in Singapore. See Figure 84.

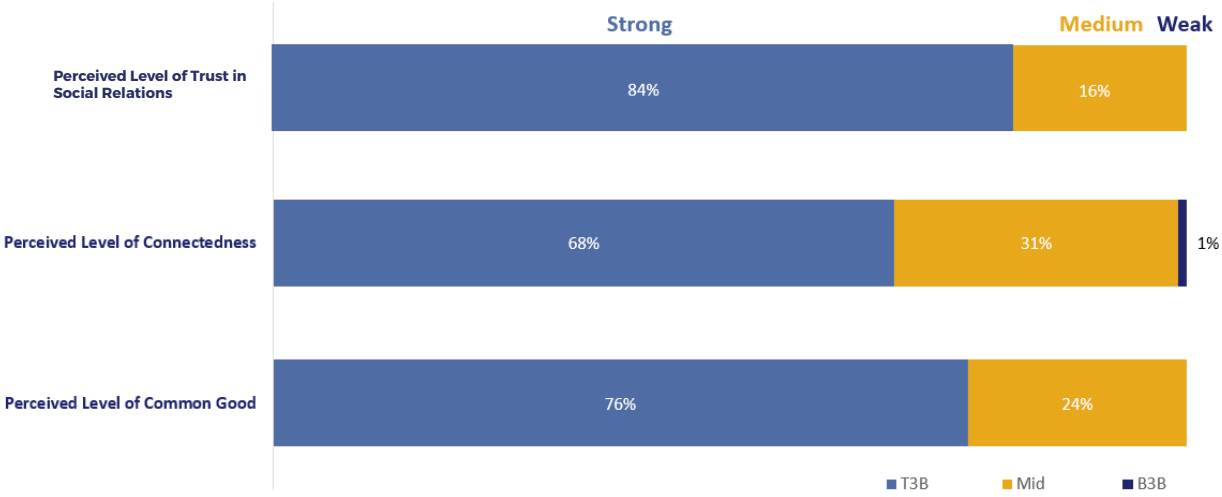
Figure 84: Singaporeans' responses to questions on social networks (%)

Statement	Percentage	
You do not feel isolated from members of your state who are from a different ethno-racial background.	Strongly Agree	45%
	Agree	53%
	Neutral	2%
	Disagree	0%
	Strongly Disagree	0%

Statement	Percentage	
You feel a sense of belonging to family and kinship.	Strongly Agree	46%
	Agree	54%
	Neutral	9%
	Disagree	0%
	Strongly Disagree	0%

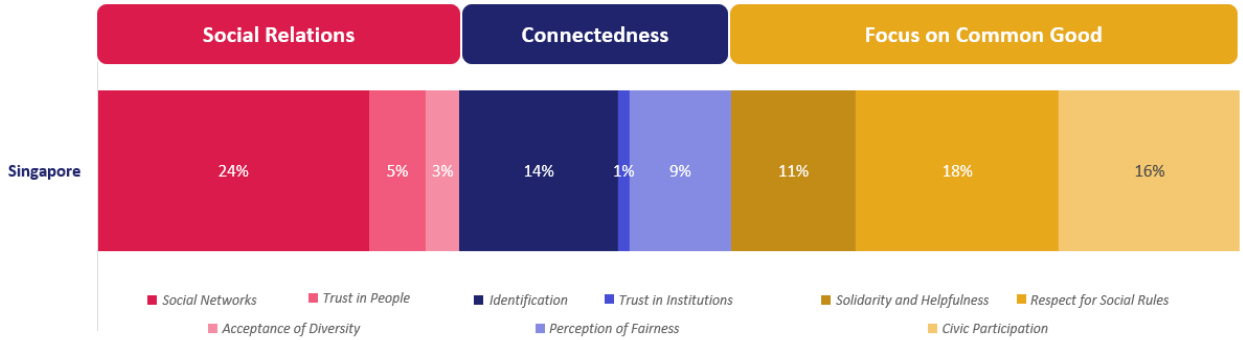
The survey respondents from Singapore perceived the level of trust in society and common good to be high. The perceived level of trust was slightly stronger that the perceived level of common good. See Figure 85.

Figure 85: Top box scores of perceived level of social cohesion in Singapore



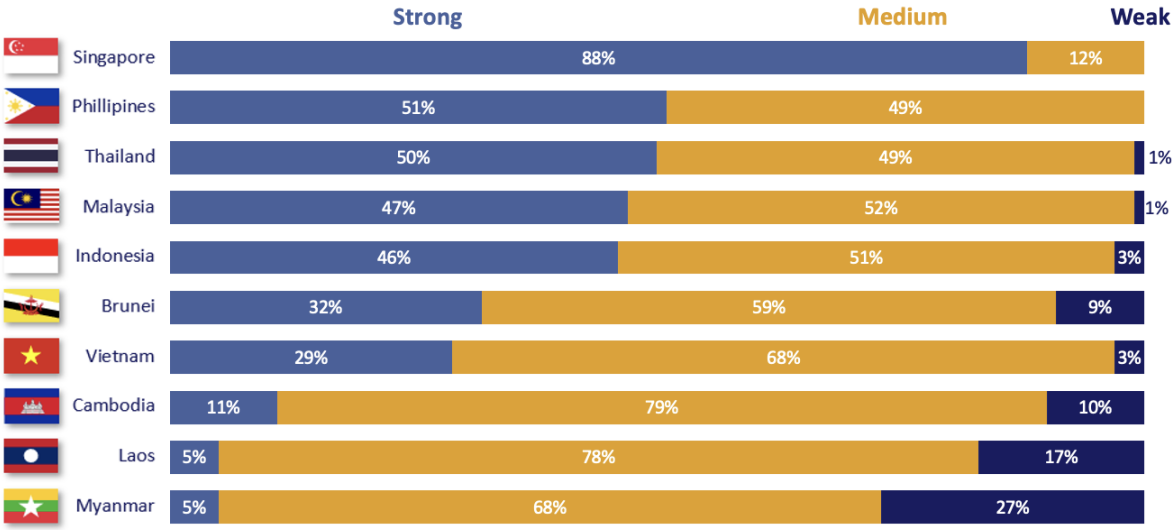
Singaporeans believed that social networks, followed by social rules, have strengthened social cohesion in the country. See Figure 86.

Figure 86: Overall perceived level of cohesion in Singapore



Eighty-eight per cent of the Singaporeans ranked Singapore as the most cohesive country in Southeast Asia. The respondents ranked Philippines and Thailand very close to each other, in second and third place respectively. See Figure 87.

Figure 87: Overall level of social cohesion in Southeast Asian countries as perceived by Singaporeans



5.10 Thailand

Ninety-five per cent of the Thai thought leaders were below the age of 49. Almost half of them were from academia, think tanks and research institutions. Ninety-eight out of the 100 respondents were Buddhists. All the respondents identified themselves as Thai and did not differentiate themselves by ethnicity. Eighty-two per cent of them stated that they were committed to their religious teachings. The demographic profiles of the Thai respondents are depicted in Figures 88 to 91.

Figure 88: Age of survey respondents from Thailand (%)

Figure 89: Affiliation of survey respondents from Thailand (%)

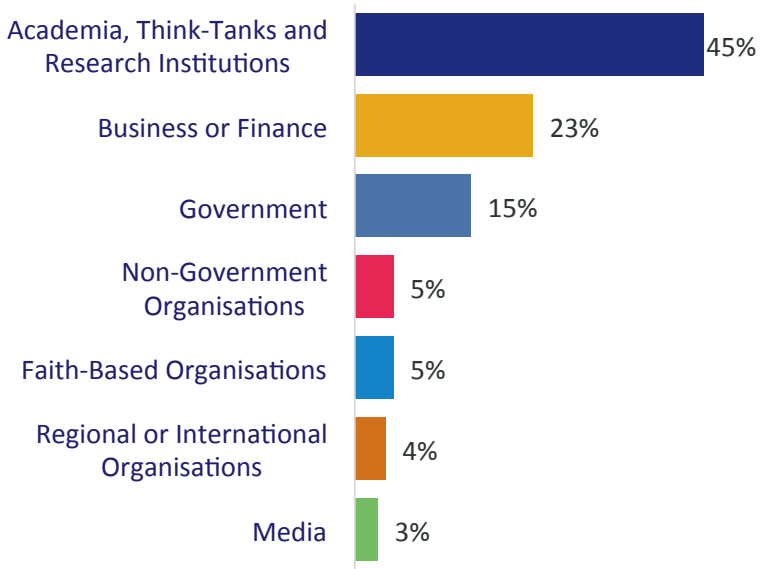
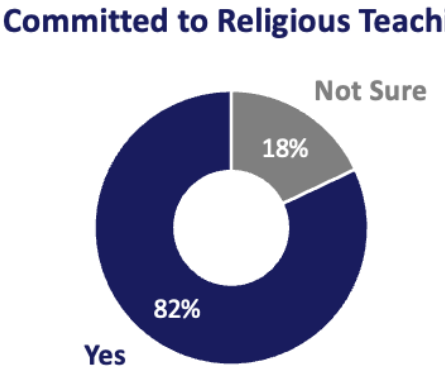


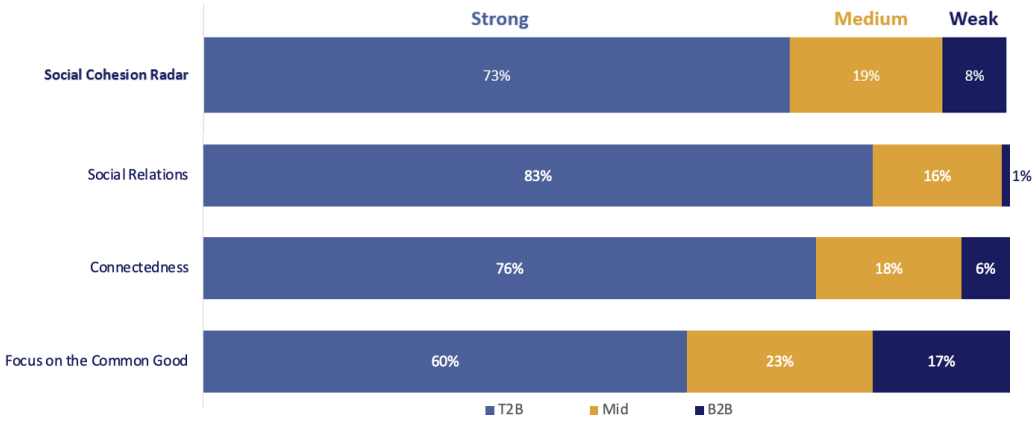
Figure 90: Religion of survey respondents from Thailand (%)

Figure 91: Thai respondents' commitment to religious teachings (%)



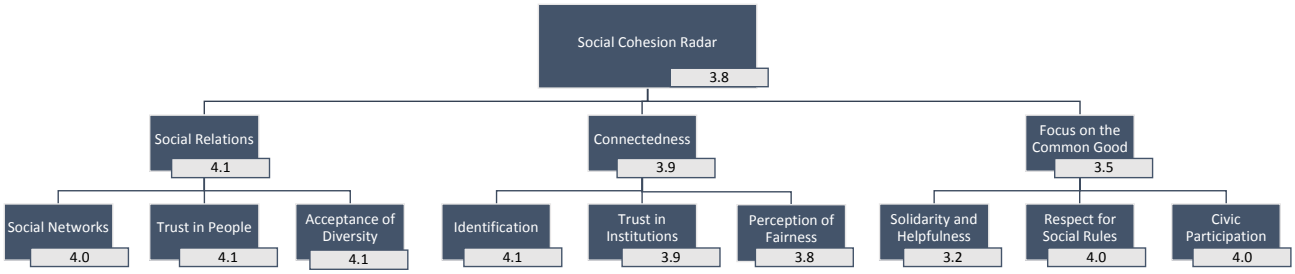
The thought leaders from Thailand were of the view that the social relations domain had the biggest influence on social cohesion in Thailand. The connectedness domain was 7% lower than the social relations domain. See Figure 92.

Figure 92: Top box scores of social cohesion in Thailand



The three dimensions with the greatest influence on social cohesion in Thailand were trust in people, acceptance of diversity, and identification. Like many other Southeast Asian countries, the dimension of solidarity and helpfulness had the lowest score. See Figure 93.

Figure 93: Mean score of the responses in each dimension in Thailand



At least 90% of Thais were of the opinion that doing community or voluntary work and donating to the poor would help to strengthen social cohesion in the country. Both questions came under the focus on the common good domain. See Figure 94.

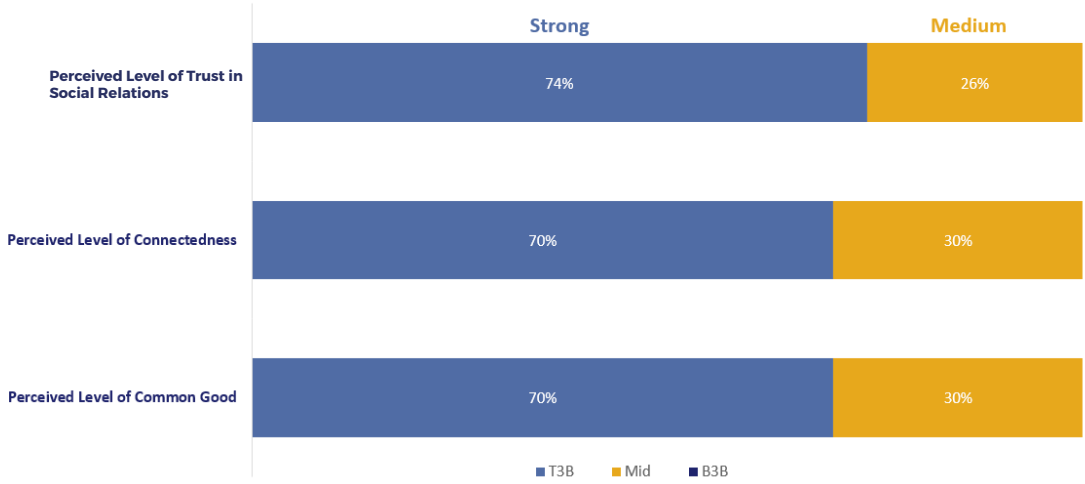
Figure 94: Thais' responses to questions on solidarity and helpfulness (%)

Statement	Percentage	
You find it important to do community or voluntary work.	Strongly Agree	30%
	Agree	60%
	Neutral	10%
	Disagree	0%
	Strongly Disagree	0%

Statement	Percentage	
You find it important to donate to the poor.	Strongly Agree	37%
	Agree	55%
	Neutral	6%
	Disagree	2%
	Strongly Disagree	0%

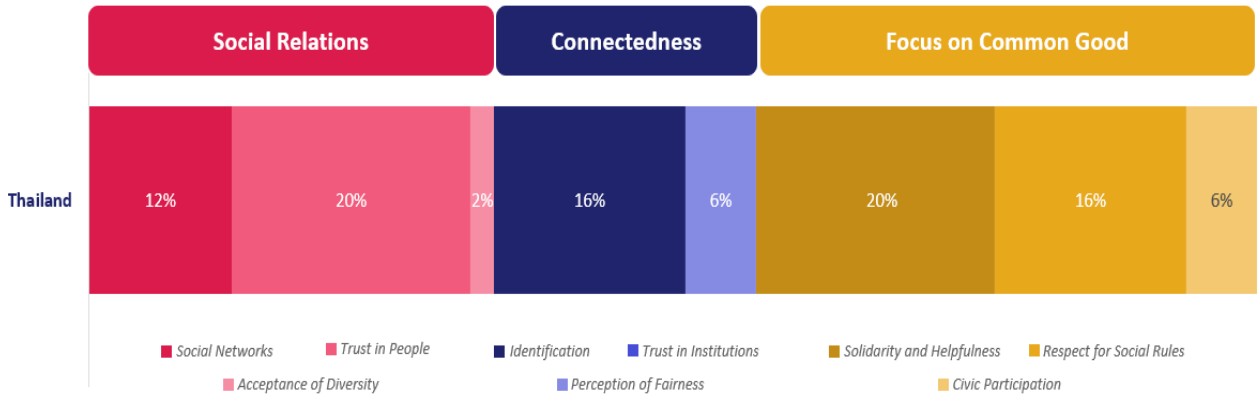
A majority of Thais perceived that the high levels of trust, connectedness, and focus on the common good have strongly supported social cohesion in Thailand. See Figure 95.

Figure 95: Top box scores of perceived level of social cohesion in Thailand



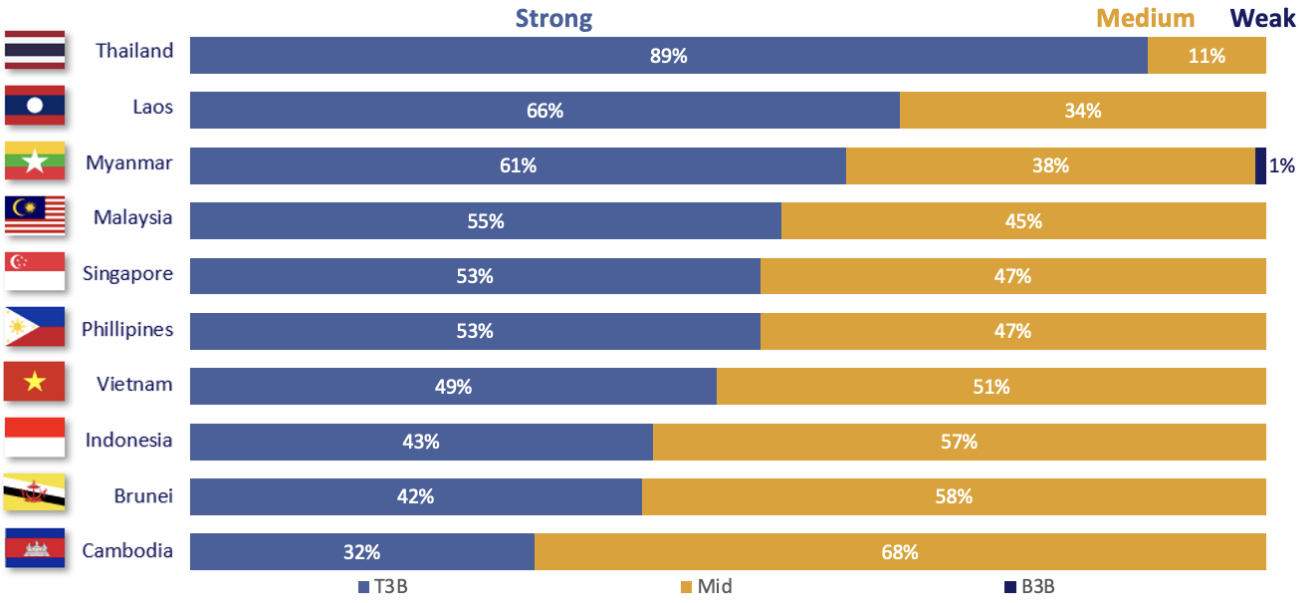
From the perspective of the Thai respondents, trust in people, and solidarity and helpfulness, were the key dimensions that help maintain peace and harmony in the country. See Figure 96.

Figure 96: Overall perceived level of cohesion in Thailand



Lastly, most of the Thai thought leaders ranked Thailand as the most socially cohesive country in the region. Many Thais ranked Laos second, and Myanmar as the third most cohesive country in the region. See Figure 97.

Figure 97: Overall level of social cohesion in Southeast Asian countries as perceived by Thais



5.11 Vietnam

Out of the 100 Vietnamese respondents, 53% were under the age of 34. Sixty-three were government employees, or came from academia, think tanks or research institutions. Forty-five per cent of the thought leaders identified themselves as Buddhists, 24% said that they had no religion, and 7% described themselves as Atheists. The demographic profiles of the Vietnamese who responded to the survey are depicted in Figures 98 to 101.

Figure 98: Age of survey respondents from Vietnam (%)

Figure 99: Affiliation of survey respondents from Vietnam (%)

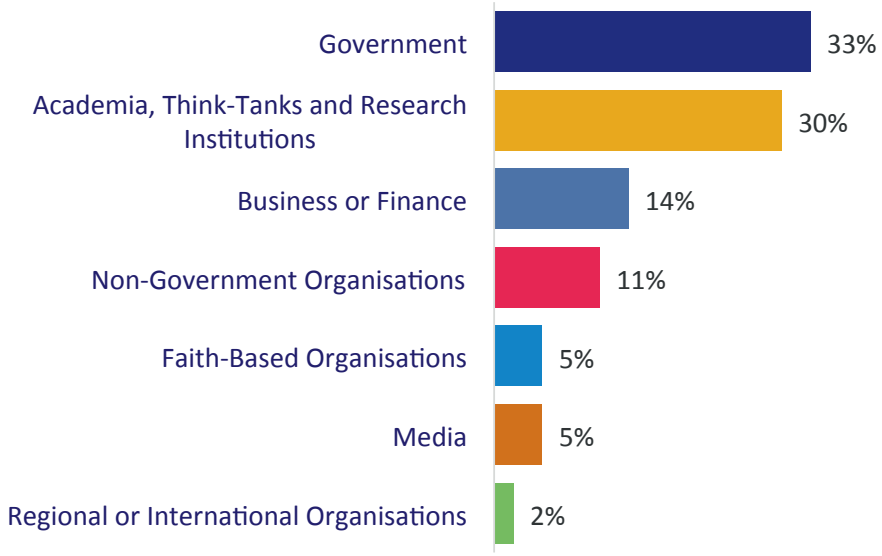


Figure 100: Religion of survey respondents from Vietnam (%)

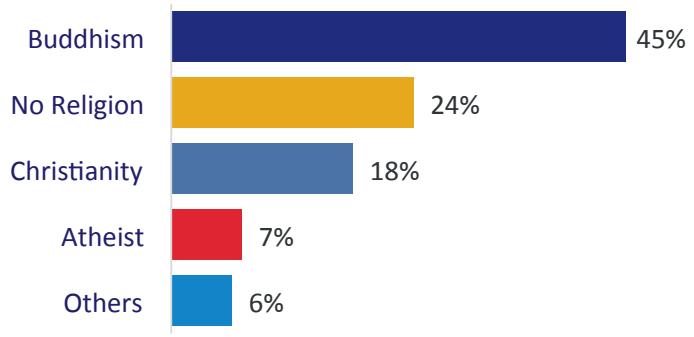
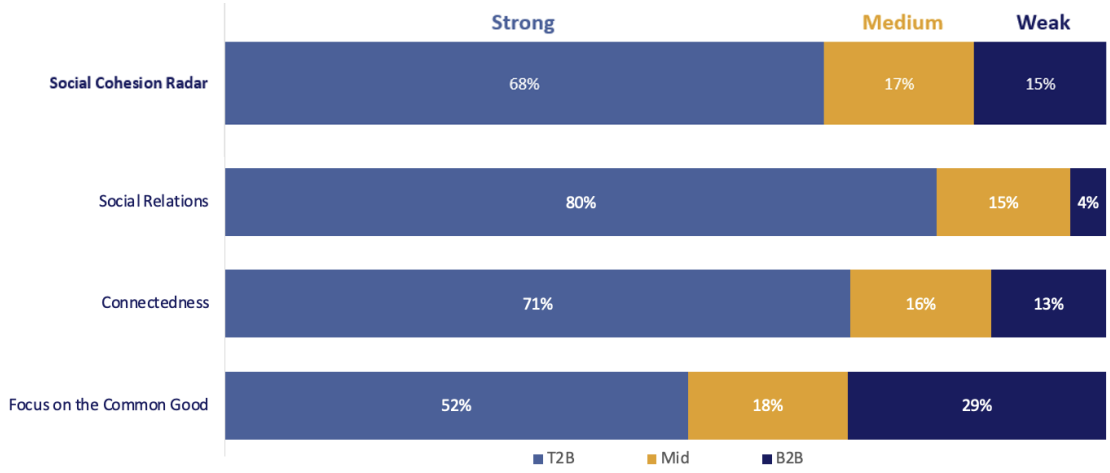


Figure 101: Ethnic group of survey respondents from Vietnam (%)

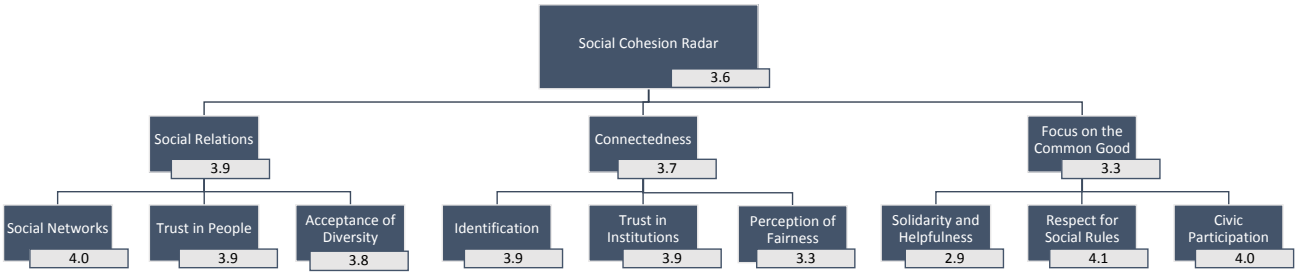
Eighty of the Vietnamese respondents were of the view that the social relations domain had the strongest influence on social cohesion in Vietnam. Like many other Southeast Asian countries, the focus on the common good domain performed the poorest in improving social cohesion in the country. See Figure 102.

Figure 102: Top box scores of social cohesion in Vietnam



In Vietnam, the respect for social rules dimension scored the highest in the survey. The solidarity and helpfulness dimension scored the poorest. The dimension on the perception of fairness also performed relatively poorly. Trust in people, identification, and trust in institutions, were dimensions that were equally important in strengthening social cohesion in Vietnam. See Figure 103.

Figure 103: Mean score of the responses in each dimension in Vietnam



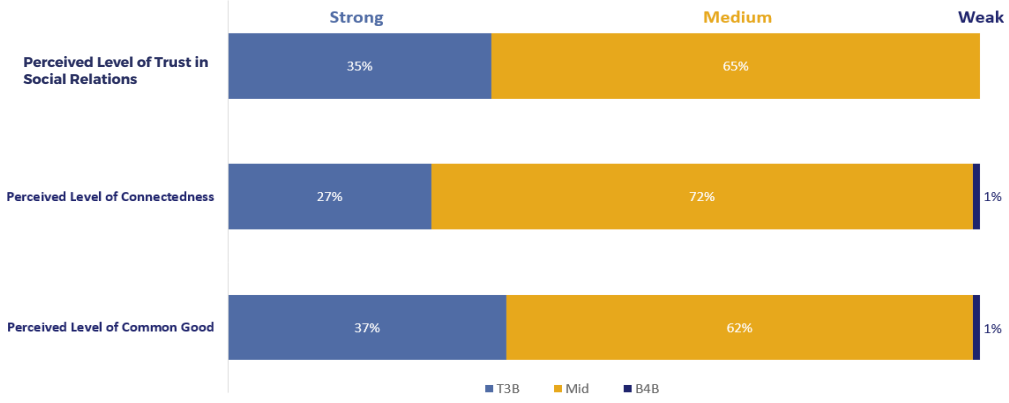
Eighty-nine of the 100 Vietnamese surveyed indicated that they were happy with the social networks that they had built with others in the country. See Figure 104.

Figure 104: Vietnamese' responses to questions on social networks (%)

Statement	Percentage	
You are happy with the social networks you have built with members of your state.	Strongly Agree	26%
	Agree	63%
	Neutral	10%
	Disagree	1%
	Strongly Disagree	0%

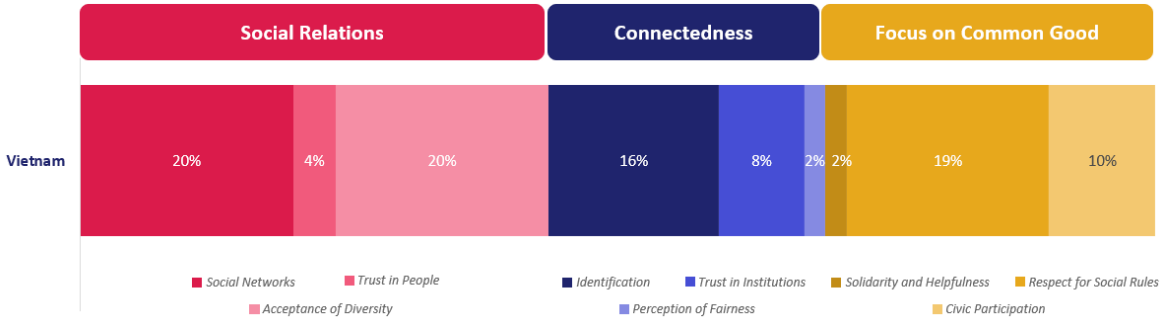
A majority of the Vietnamese respondents had moderate views about the level of trust, connectedness, and common good that exists in their society. Less than 40% of the thought leaders perceived any of the three domains to be strong within the society. See Figure 105.

Figure 105: Top box scores of perceived level of social cohesion in Vietnam



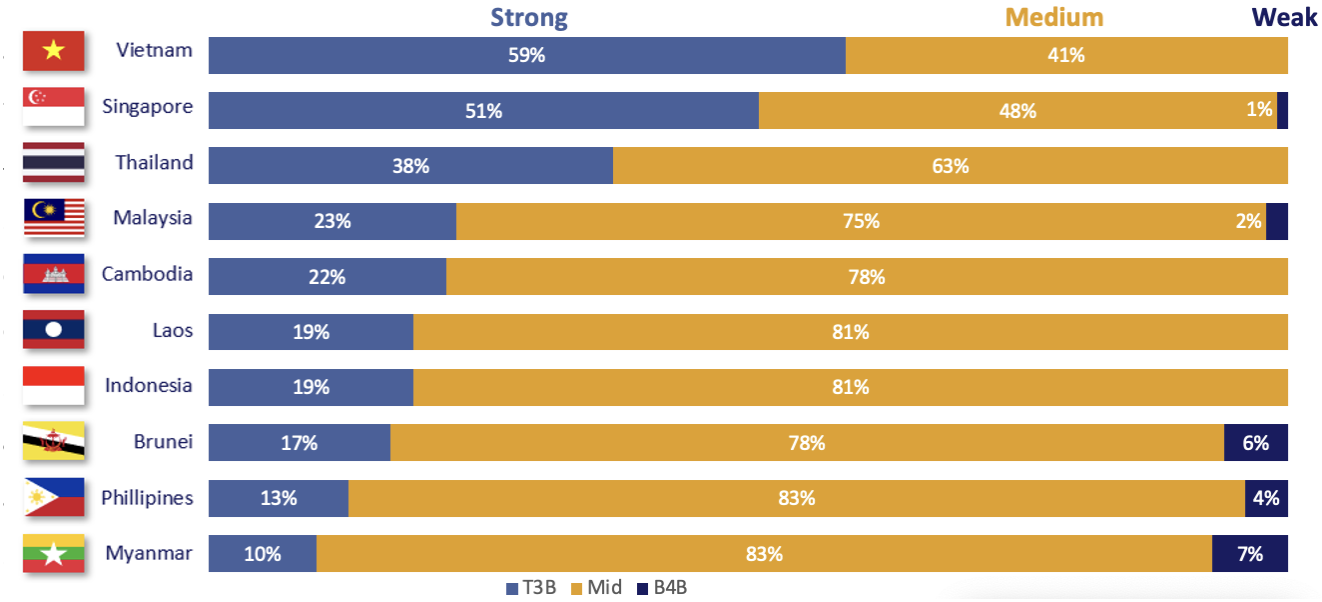
The Vietnamese respondents believe that social networks, acceptance of diversity, and respect for social rules, were the key dimensions that promoted social cohesion in the country. See Figure 106.

Figure 106: Overall perceived level of cohesion in Vietnam



Finally, respondents from Vietnam ranked themselves as the most socially cohesive country in the region. Most of them ranked Singapore as second on the list. See Figure 107.

Figure 107: Overall level of social cohesion in Southeast Asian countries as perceived by Vietnamese



6 ANALYSIS: DETERMINANTS OF SOCIAL COHESION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

This research study seeks to understand the current state of social cohesion in Southeast Asia as we emerge from the pandemic, the dimensions (sub-domains) that contribute significantly to social cohesion in the region, and how Southeast Asian countries are similar and distinct from each other in relation to social cohesion.

It does not seek to rank Southeast Asian countries in quantifiable terms.

6.1 Current State of Social Cohesion: Cross-Country Comparison by Domains

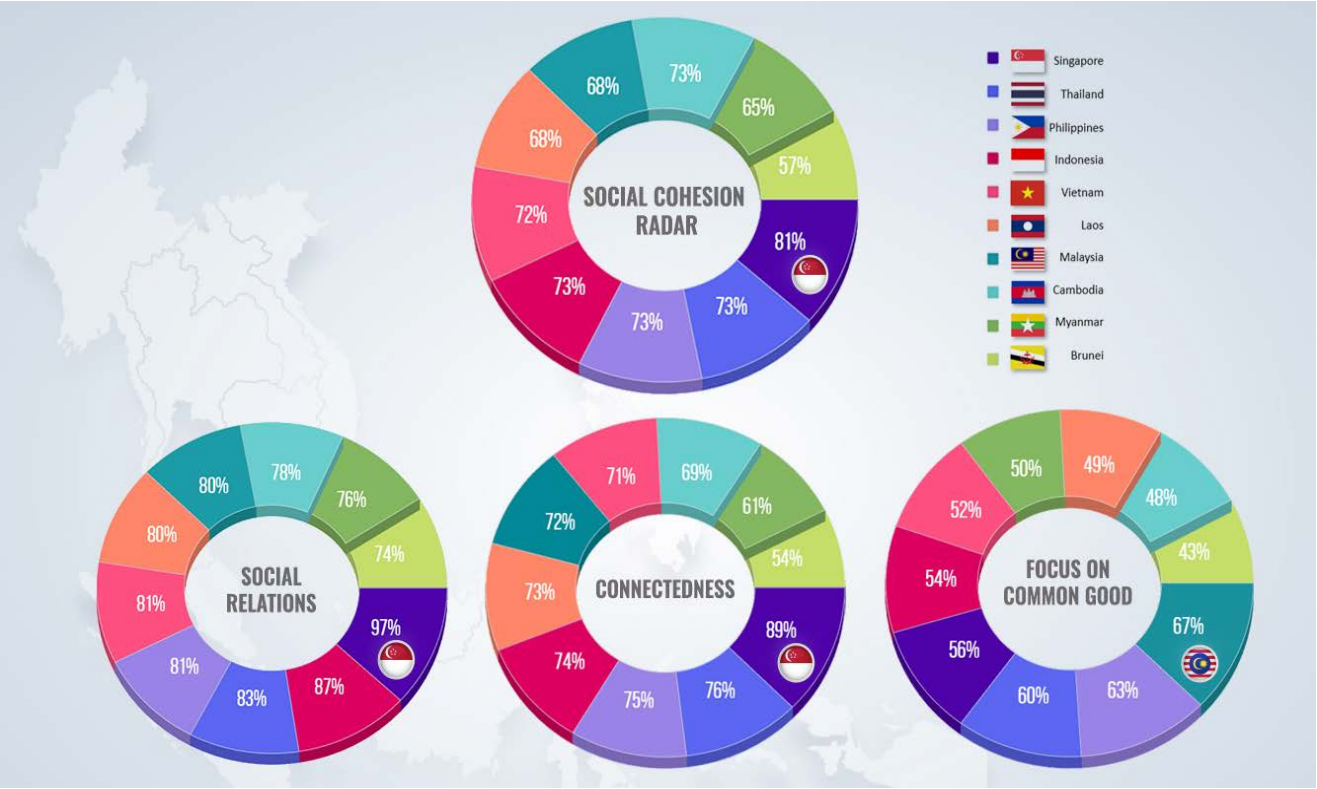
According to the survey findings, the level of social cohesion in Singapore (81%) was the highest in the Southeast Asian region. This was followed by Thailand (73%) and the Philippines (73%), which scored equally. Indonesia (72%) was placed as the fourth most socially cohesive country in Southeast Asia. Brunei (57%) was ranked the lowest on the Southeast Asian Social Cohesion Radar. Myanmar (62%) was ranked just above Brunei.

The Bertelsmann Stiftung's research on social cohesion in Asia also found social cohesion in Singapore to be the strongest in Southeast Asia, followed by Thailand.[23] Given that their study was conducted more than four years ago, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, we are able to affirm that the level of social cohesion in the region, particularly in Singapore and Thailand, has remained steadfast.

It is noteworthy that Singapore's current scores in the domains of social relations and connectedness were significantly higher than the other ASEAN countries. Malaysia had the highest score for the focus on the common good domain. See Figure 108.

[23] Bertelsmann Stiftung (ed.), (2018), op. cit., page 75.

Figure 108: Cross-country comparison by the three domains



Among the three domains that were examined to determine the level of social cohesion in each of the Southeast Asian countries, the social relations domain played the strongest role in influencing social cohesion in the region. The countries that fared the highest in the social relations domain were Singapore (97%), Indonesia (87%), and Thailand (83%). The three countries that performed the weakest in the social relations domain were Brunei (74%), Myanmar (76%), and Cambodia (78%).

Under the connectedness domain, Singapore (89%), Thailand (76%), and the Philippines (75%) were ranked highest. Brunei (54%), Myanmar (61%), and Cambodia (69%) had the lowest score on the connectedness domain.

Finally, the focus on the common good domain had the weakest effect on social cohesion in Southeast Asia. Most thought leaders in the region indicated that it had marginal impact on overall social cohesion in their respective countries. The countries that ranked the highest in the focus on the common good domain were Malaysia (67%), the Philippines (63%), and Thailand (60%). The countries that scored the lowest were Brunei (43%), Cambodia (48%), and Laos (49%).

The overall index from the Southeast Asian Social Cohesion Radar was 69%, with social relations contributing the most to the overall score. Broadly, the study results reaffirmed the latent complexity in ascribing a number and quantifying the state of social cohesion. The numbers do not tell the full story. Scoring high in one domain may, in turn, raise the collective score for social cohesion in a country. In attempting to ascertain areas that countries can strive to work on to improve the levels of social cohesion, understanding how the nine dimensions impacted broader social cohesion would be essential.

6.2 Contributing to Social Cohesion: Cross-Country Comparison by Dimensions

In essence, the overall scores of the Southeast Asian Social Cohesion Radar have highlighted the dimensions that contributed most to social cohesion in each country. Whereas social cohesion is often taken to be a single entity, our findings have revealed the deeper dimensions that play a dominant role in driving social cohesion in each country.

Based on the factors affecting the perceived level of social cohesion, the top box scores for ASEAN countries indicated that Singapore had the highest perceived level of social cohesion while Myanmar had the weakest perceived level of social cohesion. The trend indicated that perceived level of trust was the strongest, followed by perceived level of common good. The perceived level of connectedness was the weakest across all the countries.

Looking at the regression analysis across the ASEAN member states, the social relations domain emerged the strongest driver of the social cohesion score. Social networks was the top dimension affecting social cohesion, registering the highest scores (80% and above) in eight out of 10 countries (excluding Malaysia and Myanmar). Solidarity and helpfulness, and perception of fairness dimensions, were the weakest drivers of social cohesion, scoring the lowest in all the countries.

The dimensions that contributed most to the social cohesion scores across the ASEAN countries were acceptance of diversity, identification, respect for social rules, and civic participation. The recognition of these dimensions will enable countries to:

1. **Enhance strategies** that support the domains and in particular the dimensions that contribute the most to maintaining social cohesion.
2. **Engage community and religious leaders as well as relevant stakeholders** to play a more active role in building on the dimensions related to focus on the common good (this domain has been identified to currently have one of the least influences on social cohesion).

3. **Explore initiatives** that could boost the domains and dimensions that have been flagged as weaker in building social cohesion, such as solidarity and helpfulness, and perception of fairness.

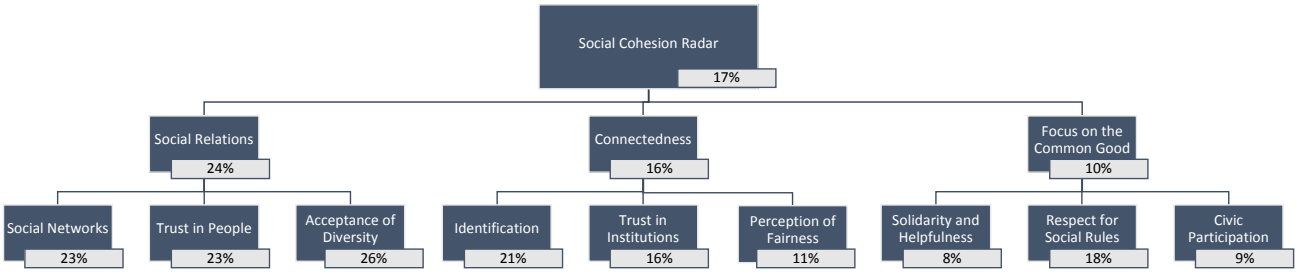
As a concept and construct, social cohesion will continue to evolve. The domains and dimensions examined in this study can be further leveraged on and expanded.

Dimension 1: Acceptance of diversity

For Indonesia and Thailand, the acceptance of diversity was a key driver of social cohesion.

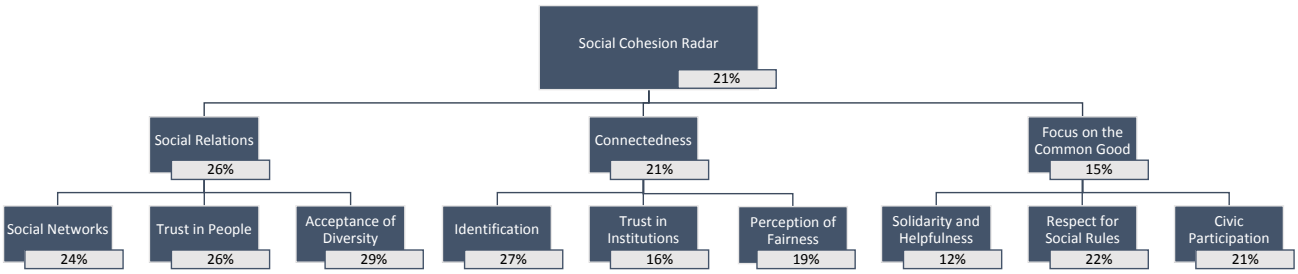
In Indonesia, the domain of social relations scored the highest. The dimensions of **acceptance of diversity** (26%), social networks (23%), and trust in people (23%), contributed most to its levels of social cohesion. See Figure 109.

Figure 109: Social Cohesion Radar of Indonesia



Like Indonesia, the domain of social relations in Thailand scored the highest of the three domains. The dimension of **acceptance of diversity** (29%) contributed most to its levels of social cohesion. See Figure 110. Notably, Thailand comprises not only a variety of ethnic groups, but also a sizable population of foreigners.

Figure 110: Social Cohesion Radar of Thailand

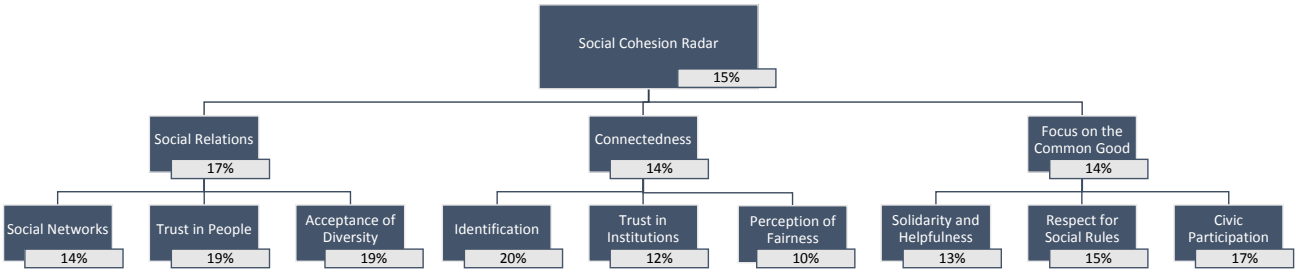


Dimension 2: Identification

In Malaysia and Singapore, the dimension of identification was a key driver of social cohesion. Identification refers to the sense of belonging that people feel towards their country and their ability to identify with the state.

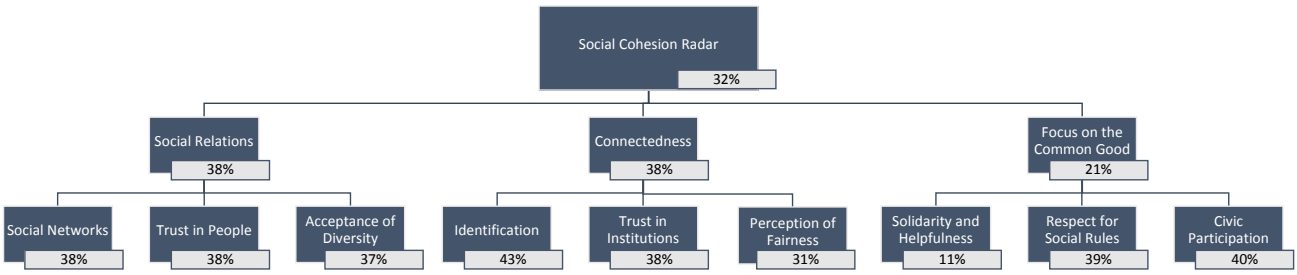
In Malaysia, the dimensions of **identification** (20%), trust in people (19%), and acceptance of diversity (19%), contributed most to social cohesion in the country. See Figure 111.

Figure 111: Social Cohesion Radar of Malaysia



In Singapore, the dimension of **identification** (43%) contributed strongest to its social cohesion score. See Figure 112.

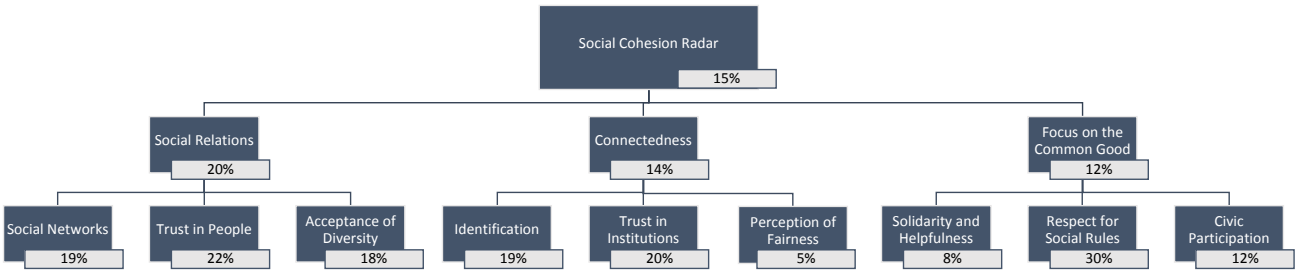
Figure 112: Social Cohesion Radar of Singapore



Dimension 3: Respect for social rules

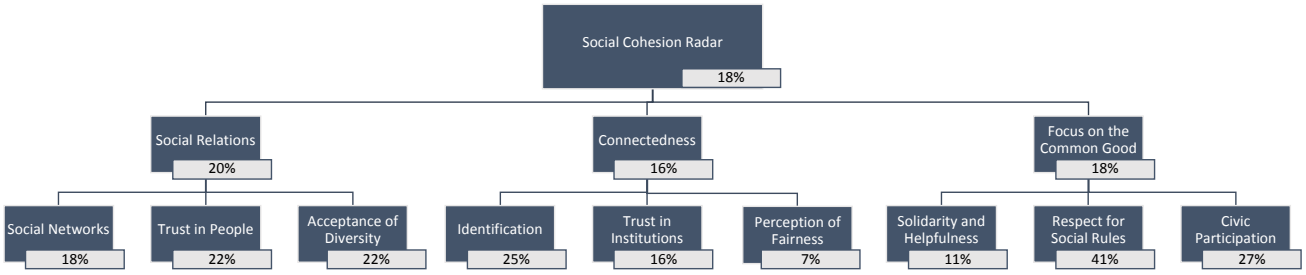
In Brunei, whilst the domain of focus on the common good scored the lowest (12%), the dimension of **respect for social rules** scored the highest (30%). See Figure 113. Respect for social rules refers to the ability of people to abide by the fundamental rules of society.

Figure 113: Social Cohesion Radar of Brunei Darussalam



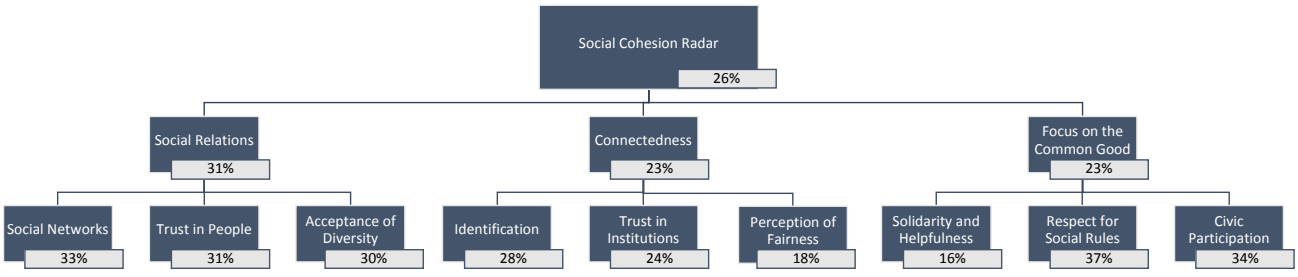
In Myanmar, there appears to be a broadly similar distribution across the three domains. The dimension of **respect for social rules** scored the highest at 41%, which was considerably higher than the other eight dimensions. See Figure 114.

Figure 114: Social Cohesion Radar of Myanmar



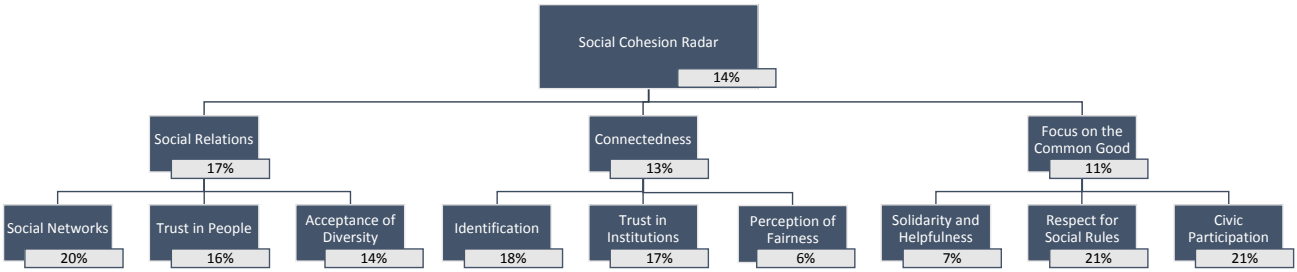
In the Philippines, the domain of social relation scored considerably higher than that of connectedness and focus on the common good. The dimension of **respect for social rules** scored the highest at 37%. See Figure 115.

Figure 115: Social Cohesion Radar of Philippines



In Vietnam, the dimension of respect for **social rules** (21%), civic participation (21%) and social networks (20%) were amongst the key drivers for social cohesion in the country. See Figure 116. Social networks are characterised by the ability of people to establish strong and resilient social networks in the country.

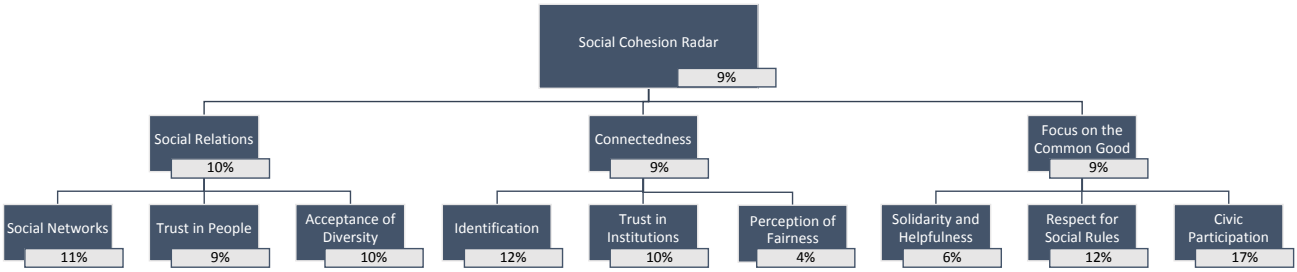
Figure 116: Social Cohesion Radar of Vietnam



Dimension 4: Civic participation

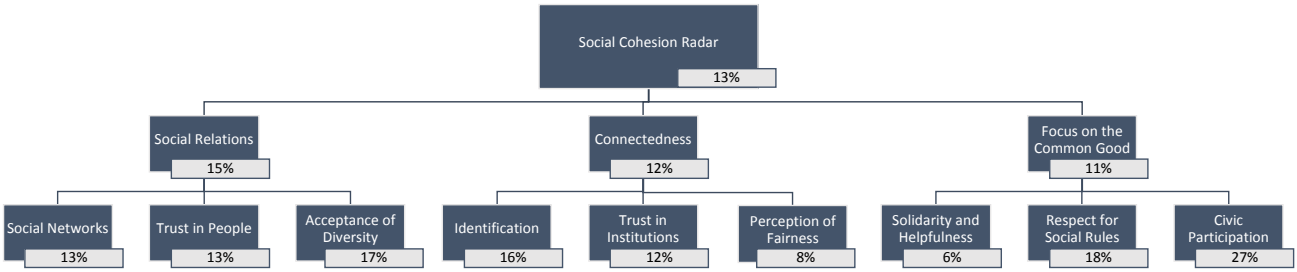
In Cambodia, the dimensions of **civic participation** (17%), identification (12%), and respect for social rules (12%), contributed most to the social cohesion score. See Figure 117. Civic participation refers to the ability to take part in social and political activities and public discussions.

Figure 117: Social Cohesion Radar of Cambodia



In Laos, the **civic participation** dimension achieved the highest score (27%). The score was considerably higher than all the other dimensions, as reflected in Figure 118.

Figure 118: Social Cohesion Radar of Laos



Vietnam scored equally for **civic participation** (21%) and respect for social rules (21%). These two dimensions registered the highest contribution towards social cohesion in the country. See Figure 116 above.

While the dimensions of acceptance of diversity, identification, respect for social rules, and civic participation have contributed most to the social cohesion scores across Southeast Asia, understanding the scale contributed by each of the nine dimensions will enable countries to identify the right strategies to improve their social cohesion goal.

6.3 Social Cohesion in Southeast Asian Countries

In determining the top features impacting social cohesion in each ASEAN country, the dimension of social networks was perceived to affect social cohesion in Singapore, the Philippines, and Vietnam the most. The dimensions of identification and respect for social rules had the highest importance in Malaysia, Indonesia, Laos, and Cambodia. The dimension of solidarity and helpfulness was perceived to have the highest importance in Brunei and Thailand. Finally, civic participation was perceived to have the highest impact on social cohesion score in Myanmar. See Figure 119.

Figure 119: Factors affecting perceived levels of cohesion

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable								
	Social Relations			Connectedness			Focus on Common Good		
	Social Networks	Trust in People	Acceptance of Diversity	Identification	Trust in Institutions	Perception of Fairness	Solidarity and Helpfulness	Respect for Social Rules	Civic Participation
Singapore	24%	5%	3%	14%	1%	9%	11%	18%	16%
Philippines	21%	10%	9%	18%	9%	8%	3%	16%	6%
Vietnam	20%	4%	20%	16%	8%	2%	2%	19%	10%
Brunei	18%	6%	16%	16%	2%	0%	35%	0%	6%
Malaysia	13%	0%	12%	32%	1%	0%	1%	33%	7%
Myanmar	12%	13%	22%	13%	3%	2%	2%	6%	27%
Thailand	12%	20%	2%	16%	0%	6%	20%	16%	6%
Cambodia	7%	2%	16%	17%	9%	10%	13%	17%	9%
Laos	6%	18%	11%	26%	2%	2%	2%	27%	7%
Indonesia	0%	10%	5%	29%	18%	3%	5%	25%	5%

Remark: Top 1 / Top 2 factor Top 3 factor

The social relations domain had the strongest influence on social cohesion across all countries. Underlying Singapore's high social cohesion score were high social relations and connectedness. Thailand scored the second highest in social cohesion after Singapore, mainly supported by high social relations. See Figure 120.

Figure 120: Comparison of social cohesion across ASEAN countries

Resilient social relationships

The social relations domain comprises the social networks of the respondents, the level of trust they place in people in the country, and the degree of acceptance of diversity.[24] It seeks to evaluate the resilience of social relationships of different individuals in a country.

Social relations appeared to be the strongest determinant of social cohesion in countries that ranked the highest in the Southeast Asian Social Cohesion Radar, with Singapore, Thailand, and Indonesia, performing the best in this domain. Interestingly, the dynamics of these three countries are distinct from each other, with Singapore being a multi-cultural society, Thailand being primarily monolithic ethnically and culturally, and Indonesia being a blend of diversity and homogeneity across its many parts. Yet, they all placed the same emphasis on social relations.

[24] Georgi Dragolov, Zsofia Ignacz, Jan Lorenz, Jan Delhey and Klaus Boehnke, "Social Cohesion Radar: Measuring Common Ground," 2013, https://aei.pitt.edu/74134/1/Social_cohesion_radar.pdf.

We postulate that other underlying factors could have influenced their views on social relations. For example, in Singapore, the strong acceptance of diversity could be due to four decades of national policies and programmes developed to cultivate stronger relationships between people from diverse backgrounds. Singapore introduced prominent policies such as the Housing and Development Board's Ethnic Integration Policy (EIP), which stipulates the proportion of each ethnic group in owning homes in an apartment block or neighbourhood to create opportunities for people of diverse backgrounds to interact constantly.[25] It also enacted the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act to allow pre-emptive action to be taken to prevent religious conflict and to maintain harmony in Singapore.[26]

Positive emotional affinity between people, community, and state

The connectedness domain encompasses the strength of the identity of individuals in their society and their ability to be open with it, the level of trust in institutions, and the perception of fairness in the country. It strives to understand the kind of connectedness people feel towards others in their society and state actors.

Most countries in the region, except for Vietnam, Malaysia, and Brunei, asserted that they have a strong sense of identity. Even countries like Cambodia and Myanmar, who have been ranked relatively lower in the overall Southeast Asian Social Cohesion Radar, fared well in the identification dimension.

In Myanmar, decentralisation reforms in the 2008 Constitution created more opportunities for civic actors to participate in decision-making, even at the urban ward and village tract levels.[27] Since then, there has been growing participation among the Myanmar public in civic affairs, spurred on by civil society organisations across religious and cultural lines. Unfortunately, the military coup in Myanmar in 2021 has caused severe disruptions in the economic, political and social arenas.

However, for the dimension of perception on fairness, the countries that scored the lowest were ranked at the bottom of the radar. This highlighted that fairness had a strong influence on social cohesion.

[25] "HDB's Ethnic Integration Policy: Why It Still Matters," Government of Singapore, 13 April 2020, https://www.gov.sg/article/hdbs-ethnic-integration-policy-why-it-still-matters.
[26] "Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act," Government of Singapore, last modified 2020, https://sso.agc.gov.sg/act/MRHA1990.
[27] "Strengthening Subnational Civic Engagement in Myanmar," The Asia Foundation, February 2020, https://asiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Strengthening-Subnational-Civic-Engagement-in-Myanmar_EN_4.22.20.pdf.

The perception of fairness is influenced by how we believe others around us are treated. According to research, perceptions of unfairness could have long-lasting negative effects on society.[28] Among others, unfairness could be defined by income inequality, poverty, and ethnic conflicts.[29] Thus, public policy implementation and any attempts of community engagement could play an important role in fairness.

After racial tensions broke out in 1969, Malaysian governance saw affirmative action policies that have since safeguarded Malays and placed non-Malays at a disadvantage.[30] Islam has become an increasingly mobilising factor of Malaysian politics in the 21st century, deprioritising the values of non-Muslims.

In Indonesia, reports by academic researchers noted that political leaders have publicly embraced the discriminatory rhetoric of Chinese Indonesians to gain favour with indigenous Indonesians, leading to widespread acts of hate towards ethnic Chinese proprietors and citizenry.[31] Riots and public demonstrations in response have amounted to a breakdown in social cohesion.

Lack of motivation towards the common good

The domain of focus on the common good was the most multi-faceted of the three domains. It includes dimensions measuring the level of solidarity and helpfulness, the degree to which individuals are willing to respect social rules, and the level of civic participation. It stresses the importance of how caring for the welfare of the society will build social cohesion in a country.

All countries in Southeast Asia received low scores in this domain. The respect for social rules dimension was the strongest among the three domains, with Singapore at the top followed by Vietnam. The Philippines, Laos, and Myanmar, tied in third position. All countries received a low score for questions relating to solidarity and helpfulness. From this, it can be understood that individuals were willing to respect social rules to maintain social cohesion, but they did not see the importance of solidarity and helpfulness in building it. As the survey was conducted during the pandemic, it is possible that people may not have had the opportunity to be helpful towards others due to movement restrictions.

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[28] David Chan, "Perceptions of Fairness," October 2011, https://ink.library.smu.edu.sg/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=4053&context=soss_research.

[29] Bertelsmann Stiftung (ed.), (2018), op. cit., page 107.

[30] J. Chin, "Racism towards the Chinese Minority in Malaysia: Political Islam and Institutional Barriers." *The Political Quarterly,* 12 July 2022, https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1467-923X.13145.

[31] F. H. Winarta, "Grey Side of Chinese Community in Indonesia." *In Investing the Grey Areas of the Chinese Communities in Southeast Asia: Proceedings of the Symposium organised by IRASEC at the Hotel Sofitel Silom (Bangkok), 6–7 January 2005*, ed. A. Leveau, (2007), 61–74.

As the region emerges from the COVID-19 crisis, more can be done by governments and religious leaders to encourage solidarity and helpfulness in society and engage individuals in activities that promote these qualities. For example, in Vietnam, religious volunteers from churches came together during the pandemic to provide help in medical units to COVID-19 patients.[32] Such volunteer opportunities can be created by both governments and religious leaders to encourage interaction across different segments of society, to promote social cohesion.

In Thailand, civil society organisations (CSOs) have redirected their attention from conflict to collaboration to redress social issues and help those in need. While Thailand's government has attempted to hinder the work of CSOs, relevant official agencies have also frequently partnered with CSOs to help mitigate rural poverty and empower Thais affected by income inequality.[33] One regional study had suggested that Thais' "involvement in CSOs, at all levels of society, is contributing to deepening opportunities for people to participate in public life,"[34] thus enforcing the value of solidarity and helpfulness amid national political turbulence.

Future studies can explore the relationship between solidarity and helpfulness and enhancing social cohesion in Southeast Asia, and alternative strategies to measure the focus on the common good domain. This is because countries that ranked highly on the overall cohesion index (such as Singapore) could perform poorly on this dimension. This suggests that the co-relation between solidarity and helpfulness and social cohesion in Southeast Asia may be low.

Some questions arise from this. Firstly, while the focus on common good may be a feature of social cohesion elsewhere, perhaps in Southeast Asia, it is simply not significant. Secondly, it may be that the phrases and languages for describing the focus on common good did not resonate in this region, or that the idea was seen as a part of other factors. Thirdly, it is possible that the focus on common good has assumed a less significant role, as seen in this post-COVID-19 snapshot. Fourthly, the focus on common good may be something that could or would contribute to social cohesion, but the emphasis on this was weak in the region for various reasons. Further research and reflection would be required.

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[32] "Vietnam authorities laud religious volunteers' services," Union of Catholic Asian News, 16 August 2021, https://www.ucanews.com/news/vietnam-authorities-laud-religious-volunteers-services/93731.

[33] "Civil Society Briefs: Thailand," Asian Development Bank, November 2011, https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/29149/csb-tha.pdf.

[34] R. Albritton and T. Bureekul, "Civil Society and the Consolidation of Democracy in Thailand," *Asian Barometer Survey: Taipei (2002)*: 18.

6.4 Notes for further research and investigation

While this study has offered a snapshot of the social cohesion situation in Southeast Asia, we are mindful of certain extenuating factors that could have impacted the survey responses, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns.

Another shortcoming of a general survey on social cohesion is the natural tendency to capture majoritarian sentiments, thereby ignoring any form of prejudice towards or discontent amongst minorities. Also, the potential for ruptures in the social fabric can occur suddenly,[35] even in seemingly harmonious societies, and the depth and resilience of cohesion could be hard to measure in these terms.

More research could also take place in terms of how religious traditions, sentiments, leaders, and grassroots activists either promoted or worked against social cohesion in each country. Again, it must be recognised that given the massive size of some countries, the social dynamics could vary greatly between its provinces and sub-districts.

The findings from this study can be used in future for comparative studies through comparisons with findings from the World Values Survey and the Asian Barometer Survey. However, while such quantitative surveys (including the Bertelsmann Stiftung survey) have afforded some crude metrics in terms of generalisable and measurable data, deeper and richer qualitative surveys would be needed to reveal more specific dynamics. The effort would require a more critical eye towards the forms of metric collation, the categories, regional distinctiveness, and intra-region distinctions.

Furthermore, in providing a snapshot of social cohesion across the countries, this survey had focused on the views of a selection of thought leaders from government organisations, academia, and civil society. While this followed other established precedents to provide a survey of views within various countries, other methods of data collection may show differing perceptions.

Finally, the distinctive attributes of social cohesion in Southeast Asia deserve further exploration and research/policy attention, given the diverse contexts of the region and the varying dynamics that may be at play.[36] Further reflection on the "common good" domain would be needed to assess whether it is regionally meaningful or applicable, including in how it is phrased and conceptualised. This would involve deeper research into specific local conceptions of social cohesion.

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[35] On dynamics, see Paul Hedges, *Religious Hatred: Prejudice, Islamophobia, and Antisemitism in Global Contexts* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021), 27-41.

[36] On diversity, see note 8, which could be referenced alongside Paul Hedges, (2020), op. cit., and Chang-Yau Hoon, "Putting Religion into Multiculturalism: Conceptualising Religious Multiculturalism in Indonesia," Asian Studies Review 41, no.3 (2017): 476–493.

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