

## **Institutionalizing Inclusive Sustainability: The Role of Green Diplomacy in Advancing Environmental Governance between ASEAN and the EU**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This research aims to analyze, examine, and compare current environmental policies governing ASEAN and the EU. To ensure a comprehensive and objective study, this paper will utilize two established theoretical frameworks, namely Comparative Institutional Analysis and Political Analysis. These frameworks will consider the complex institutional and political intricacies that underpin both regions. Moreover, this study will argue the importance of green diplomacy in promoting collaboration and knowledge-sharing as a fundamental step towards an institutionally standardized environmental policy that will benefit both ASEAN and the EU by drawing on a range of relevant literature and case studies. It will investigate in further detail specific ways in which green diplomacy advances the integration of environmental policies and identify best practices that enable cooperation and collaboration.

This research works under the liberal assumption that sustainable development goals will be achieved not by centralized authority but through intergovernmental bargaining wherein states are actors that play a critical role in the achievement of SDGs. The research findings will reveal the potential for collaboration between ASEAN and the EU founded on mutual respect and a shared commitment to advance environmental sustainability. By highlighting the importance of institutionalizing sustainability, this study will help facilitate a transition to a more equitable future as it reaffirms both the region's environmental goals carrying on to play a vital role in resolving one of the world's most pressing issues today, climate change.

**Keywords:** *Sustainability, Environment, Institutions, Europe, Southeast Asia, Green Diplomacy, Liberal Intergovernmentalism*

### **INTRODUCTION**

As global temperatures unnaturally rise, the heat gets concentrated to certain parts of the globe—the polar ice caps, which causes several increases in water levels. These increases mean differently in various regions. For ASEAN, whose majority of member-states are tropical, this would mean much more consistent flooding (Eccles, et al. 2019). This will not only sink many people in low-lying ASEAN areas but also cause major shifts in rainfall patterns as well as produce more extreme weather events that would damage the ASEAN ecosystems and agriculture such that this could undo the 30-year attempts to reduce poverty (Open Access Government 2021)

In response to this, the ASEAN community has created several individual solutions. For instance, Thailand and Indonesia have respectively invested \$6 billion and \$7.7 billion into the green bond market (Asia Development Bank 2023). However, the same cannot be said with ASEAN as an institution that could directly affect its member-states. These kinds of associations of countries lie within a spectrum of strength and in extension, the kinds of policy they can pass and enforce. On one end, there is ASEAN. The ASEAN's environmental plan consists of “Acquaint” (providing information), “Integrate” (contextualize actions in relation to other stakeholders),

“Involve” (adapt and recognize the importance of said stakeholders,) and “Motivate” (incentivize groups or individuals to act) (ASEAN 2021). This action plan reflects one of the foreign policies that govern ASEAN, the policy of non-interference, which as in its name, prevents ASEAN from interfering with domestic laws, policies, and issues.

On the other end, there is the EU. One of its action plans was to write a European Climate Law, which sets the goal for Europe to lessen the net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030 and net zero by 2050.(European Union n.d) This action plan reflects a much stronger and radical step on checking up on its member-states. This research juxtaposes the two (ASEAN and EU) with the institutions they have placed, its powers, and its limitations using the Comparative Institutional Analysis framework as well as the political dynamics that affect the decision-making of the political actors in these institutions using the Political Analysis framework.

To strengthen ASEAN's capacity to combat the rapid effects of climate change, this paper looks at Comparative Institutional Analysis (CIA) and Political Analysis (PA) as theoretical frameworks. On one hand, the CIA emphasizes the individual analysis of ASEAN and EU institutions and comparison of institutions that either strengthens or weakens them. Since the CIA framework assumes that the institutions are the ones that build the foundations of how a nation-state is seen, it also takes these institutions as the frameworks to recreate the strength of a nation-state as a solution to an issue. On the other hand, PA gives context on how the two main parties, ASEAN and the EU. This is vital as this framework foretells the possible decision-making processes, and political dynamics between the two parties thus having a clearer and more contextualized view of the two parties' perceptions of each other and the institutions they have placed, especially with regards to their environmental laws and policies. In this paper, the researchers aim to bridge both theoretical frameworks to reveal the importance of applying green diplomacy for the achievement of the SDGs. It explores how ASEAN and the EU can use their institutional strengths and political dynamics to be of advantage in fostering effective cooperation and collaboration.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### **A. Material**

#### **1. Green Diplomacy**

Different types of diplomacy manifest in our world, fortunately, there is a type of diplomacy that is rooted in environmental sustainability that serves as a foundation for the international community to address shared environmental challenges. Green diplomacy is the shared understanding of commitment to act on the consequences of environmental degradation and the imperative need to build climate resilience on a global level. The cornerstone of G.D. is to promote sustainable development through international corporations which entails an institutionalized framework that caters to understanding, negotiation, and the implementation of necessary environmental action measures. The application of green diplomacy in international matters can help overcome hurdles to the advancement of the SDGs as its practice lays the groundwork for tackling transboundary environmental concerns by strengthening collaboration while upholding each state's right to self-determination. (Ioan 2013)

Truth be told, the international community has already practiced green

diplomacy in more ways than one, even if sometimes it might be quite hard to believe given that significant improvements to the welfare of the climate has not been felt. In the case of the ASEAN, G.D. is likely to remain a priority in its goal withstanding the fact that the region has been at the forefront of numerous environmental challenges, most especially climate change. Further noting the fact that ASEAN has been implementing initiatives aimed at sustainable development while maintaining external partners for better collaboration, one of which is the EU. Recently, dialogues between ASEAN and the EU have sparked national interest. The title of which is ‘EU-ASEAN Dialogue on GreenTech & Innovation Mapping’, which serves as a platform for presenting new and innovative technologies and solutions to address several issues concerning the future of sustainability. (European Union 2023) It is no secret that the EU's institutions have a greater deal of capacity to combat environmental challenges as opposed to ASEAN (which will be discussed in the latter parts of this paper). Thus initiatives aimed at aiding the incapacities of the latter region must be at high interest of the EU under their commitment as stated in the ‘ASEAN-EU Commemorative Summit 2022: Joint Leaders’ Statement’. (ASEAN-EU 2022)

Issues related to the environment, such as climate change, pollution, biodiversity loss, and depletion of natural resources, continue to threaten ASEAN and the EU. Without a doubt, these issues go beyond national borders, making it an overarching threat that would likely hamper the international community. Knowledge-sharing to enable the development and implementation of sustainable solutions allows innovation from both regions to function more effectively. Addressing transnational issues is within the scope of G.D., as it continues interaction for both regions to exchange information, identify best practices, and give resources to combat these challenges in which the ASEAN poses a greater need for.

In order to overcome the disparities in achieving sustainable development, ASEAN and the EU must take an active role in green diplomacy. Both regions have to recognize the shared responsibility in order for more collaborative work to happen. Furthermore, there have been ratified agreements and partnerships within the scope of environmental preservation. Green diplomacy enables both regions to meet and fulfill regional to international commitments and reaffirms their stance to work on SDGs compliant with international standards. It highlights a kind of leadership that is democratic in nature, allowing for discussions and overseeing compliance in sustainability initiatives.

## **B. Methods**

### **1. Comparative Institutional Analysis Framework**

The Comparative Institutional Analysis framework centers the institutions that shape the economic landscape of a state such that these institutions are made and implemented state-wide. These institutions are also the ones analyzed in evaluations that rank different countries. This means that a country would attempt to recreate a situation from another country by building similar institutions that would be made key actors in recreating the situation they would want to be in. This transnational-learning approach of Comparative Institutional Analysis does not undermine the institutions at a “nation-state” level, but rather, they restore the interdependence of each society

before the building of a nation-state. Furthermore, this approach also takes into consideration the interconnectedness of different institutions such that it tackles its history (from how it was made), the institutions that affect it (to how it is sustained), and the sentiment towards it (to how it would be changed). (Morgan 2022)

The EU has much more effect on its member states than ASEAN. One of the frameworks this effectiveness operates under is the idea of the “Direct effect of European Union Law.” This has been in place within the European Union, which was the European Economic Community then, after the First World War as the discussions with regards to human rights sparked (Krämer 2020). The doctrine of Direct Effect was then adopted into how EU laws would be executed, not simply at the international level but also in a national one. In a way, through the “direct effect,” the EU can legitimize thus strengthening its presence in EU laws and policies. (Gallo 2022) More importantly, the doctrine of Direct Effect can be seen in how Environmental Laws in the European Union are implemented. The laws, especially those at the national level, are checked upon if they are in contradiction with the EU laws, which if they are, the Commission would have the sole power to act against a member-state.

Beyond the EU’s Doctrine of Direct Effect, the strength of EU’s institutions, especially with Environmental Laws can be felt even after a member-state has bid its farewell as seen with the UK’s Environmental Laws post-BREXIT. First off, EU Environmental Laws have been rolled over to the UK at a national-level. (Macrory 2018) More specifically, in the UK’s leaving the EU, some laws would no longer bind as per the European Union (Withdrawal) Act that the Charter of Fundamental Rights is not declared to be a part of the national law. In terms of EU’s Environmental Laws, the Charter of Fundamental Rights does not cover such laws, thus the EU gives its member-states that would leave to opt to still adopt this set of laws. In contrast, ASEAN institutions could be seen as weaker given the collective history of most ASEAN nations. The policy-turned-behavioral norm of “non-interference” in the ASEAN Charter is one of the factors that affect this weakening. (Dorman and Olsen 2019) Given the history of Western colonization and attempts of the Chinese communist party to spread Communism, the ASEAN has emphasized the importance of domestic stability of a nation-state through non-interference. This non-interference is also shown in the ASEAN community as the prioritization of informal diplomatic relationships instead of rule-based interactions between nations. (Aggarwal et.al 2010) While this non-interference is understandable, the idea becomes archaic when put into an ecological perspective. (Aggarwal et.al 2010) The environment and the issues that affect it recognize no boundaries; thus, ecologically unsound policies could affect countries beyond the reach of those policies.

Beyond that, the liberalization of markets has also given them more power, and since they are beyond the state, they are not subject to ASEAN’s “non-interference” policy. The big contrast between the EU and ASEAN’s foreign policy could be strongly felt in terms of the ecological perspective. Whereas the EU has allowed the strengthening of its institutions through interference, the ASEAN has adopted non-interference. Because of this, it can be said that ASEAN, given its history of foreign interference of Imperialism and Chinese Communism, has been much closed off from the idea of ASEAN interference. Without such historical influence in the EU, the idea of

strengthening the EU institution through the Direct Effect of European Union Law is considered much more.

Comparing the ASEAN and EU institutions and their strength with regard to their member-states and the mechanisms upon which these institutions could encourage them to adopt a more internationally inclusive environmental plan, there seems to be a disparity in power given the priorities of the ASEAN and EU, especially at the time of their founding. While the EU has recognized the need to discuss issues that involve solutions beyond their national borders, the ASEAN has adopted a more careful approach as an attempt to further preserve their interference. As a result, the EU had been given more mechanisms to impose better environmental laws than what ASEAN had. For ASEAN to have stronger environmental laws and policies, the CIA framework advises ASEAN member-states to create institutions that would make ASEAN stronger and thus more able to check on each member state’s laws and policies, especially on environmental ones.

## **2. Political Analysis Framework**

The Political Analysis framework extends a valuable and relevant lens through which to examine the political disparities, of both parties, within and between the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the European Union (EU). This analytical approach, that intensively emphasizes understanding their political dynamics, power structures, and decision-making processes within these regions, is wholly essential for any comprehensive analysis of the two organizations.

By comparing ASEAN and the EU, it is valuable to note the significant differences in their political structures and approaches into different political setup. Founded in 1967, ASEAN is a strictly intergovernmental organization where decisions are based on consensus to forego within the region. While this setup has made it difficult for ASEAN to achieve the same level of integration compared to the EU, it has also enabled the whole organization to accommodate large disparities among its 10 member states. The EU, however, is a supranational body with a more integrated political and economic structure. The EU and ASEAN's distinct modes of operation highlight the need for a nuanced understanding of political disparities between and within these regions, which can be facilitated by the Political Analysis framework. In the current environment of huge geopolitical challenges, both sides seem determined to take their bilateral cooperation to a higher level, as exemplified by the new plan of action (2023-2027), the first bilateral summit at leaders' level, and the ongoing and intensifying cooperation between the European Parliament and the ASEAN member states' parliaments. (ASEAN 2020)

The current political state of ASEAN is characterized by a diversity of governance styles and political tensions. In 2022, several member states exhibited signs of democratic regression, with ongoing geopolitical tensions, particularly in the South China Sea and Myanmar, undermining ASEAN's goal of promoting peaceful cooperation. This has had implications for both intra-regional dynamics and ASEAN's relations with external powers, including the EU. (Kurlantzick 2023) On the other hand, the political landscape of the EU in 2023 has been relatively calm, although the upcoming national and European Parliament elections may bring changes. The EU has also been working

on legislation aimed at tightening rules on foreign interference in campaigns, signifying its vigilance in maintaining the integrity of its democratic processes. (Fox and Vasques 2023)

The diverse types of government found within ASEAN and the EU could potentially impact their ability to engage in "green diplomacy," or diplomatic efforts focused on environmental sustainability. For instance, ASEAN's consensus-based approach, coupled with the diverse political landscapes of its member states, could complicate the region's ability to establish a united front on environmental issues. Counter to the EU's more integrated political structure might enable it to act more decisively and cohesively in promoting environmental sustainability. However, these are general observations and further analysis using the Political Analysis framework is needed to more precisely understand how these political disparities might affect green diplomacy.

Overall, the Political Analysis framework provides a valuable tool for understanding the political disparities within and between ASEAN and the EU. It can help illuminate how different political structures and dynamics influence these regions' ability to cooperate on key issues, including environmental sustainability. Further research in this area could provide important insights into how these regions can work together to achieve their shared goals. The type of government has a significant impact on green diplomacy. In more autocratic settings, the focus on environmental issues may be less, and the ability for green diplomacy to function effectively may be hindered. In contrast, in more democratic settings, such as the EU, green diplomacy can play a vital role in influencing policy and fostering international cooperation.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **A. Liberal Intergovernmentalism**

The demand to increase institutional capacities to better advance policies towards climate safety and resilience is a testament to the fact that effective collaboration is essential to address this issue. In this context, Liberal Intergovernmentalism explains to understand this phenomenon. Liberal intergovernmentalism is a theory in international relations that mainly argues the role of both state and non-state actors in the decision-making process. In the lens of L.I., states are the primary actors in the international system, and they pursue their interests through negotiations and cooperation with other states called interstate bargaining. For this to happen, states must be able to frame their issues as something overarching that will inevitably affect everyone. (Moravcsik 2020) This approach emphasizes the role of states as key actors in shaping and implementing local regional to even, international agreements. Liberal intergovernmentalism helps to understand the importance of equitable sustainable development in Europe and ASEAN by analyzing the roles of different actors in the decision-making process.

Based on the idea of sustainable development, this framework suggests that states will only commit to environmental policies and goals if they perceive them to be in their self-interest. As mentioned previously, ASEAN and the EU have varying degrees of interests, concerns, and methods regarding such challenges. In turn, it heightens the difficulty of fostering collaboration and cooperation because more demands need to be

met. However, this does not necessarily mean that it cannot be handled. L.I. introduces the concept of interstate bargaining—the ability to frame one’s issue as a shared concern.

By employing green diplomacy, which emphasizes collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and mutual respect, ASEAN and the EU may be able to start the process of interstate bargaining. Both regions weigh the costs, threats, opportunities, and benefits of cooperation and determine the extent to which they are willing to commit to helping the advancement of common environmental goals. Green diplomacy in the context of L.I. promotes the understanding of common environmental challenges and the benefits of grounded, institutional policies and the development of joint initiatives. Interstate bargaining within this framework involves both regions as actors negotiating and compromising to align environmental policies, standards, and regulations and better the institutions that make it.

Moreover, interstate bargaining is not a ‘one and done’ solution, it does not produce immediate success but rather it entails a gradual process of shifting dynamics and interests between the actors involved. Therefore, the application of liberal intergovernmentalism in advancing green diplomacy between ASEAN and the EU's governance would require an understanding of the institutions and political climate that dictate how these regions play out. As previously stated, the doctrine of Direct Effect reveals the influence and effectiveness of EU institutions on its member states. The EU's ability to enforce its environmental laws through centralized institutions already demonstrates the application of liberal intergovernmentalism. Ideally, this concept can be extended to aid ASEAN as a region that houses former colonies with objectively weaker institutions. Yet, the study also reveals that the concept of ‘non-interference’ in the ASEAN poses a hindrance to strengthening centralized institutions or policies. Consequently, the approach of L.I. to ASEAN must analyze the interplay between states' interests and the extent to which they are willing to negotiate and cooperate on environmental matters in which the EU proved successful—revealing the reason for collaboration.

Be that as it may, ASEAN's consensus-based decision-making process and its members' diverse political settings are still likely making it difficult to have a unified approach to environmental issues. Then again, liberal intergovernmentalism explores how ASEAN member states could reach a consensus to cooperate on addressing these discrepancies and advance cooperation on environmental sustainability. On the EU's side, green diplomacy efforts are seen as more feasible given its integrated political structure which allowed greater coordination from member states and a qualified majority voting system as opposed to clear consensus. Bridging together these two regions, the L.I. framework considers the influence of local politics and power dynamics in shaping a collective approach to achieving sustainability thereby enabling the potential for ASEAN-EU cooperative efforts using green diplomacy.

#### **B. Limitations**

The scope and diversity of environmental policies in ASEAN and the EU pose a challenge for this research, as it is not feasible to cover every aspect comprehensively. To overcome this limitation, the research will focus on a selected subset of policies or case studies that offer valuable insights into the overall context. While these examples may not capture the entirety of implemented policies, they will illustrate key principles

and trends within each region.

To ensure a rigorous examination of the selected subset of policies, the research will draw upon relevant literature and case studies. By analyzing specific subsets, a deeper understanding of environmental governance practices and strategies in ASEAN and the EU will be achieved. It is important to note that the findings and conclusions of this study may be context-specific and primarily applicable to the ASEAN and EU regions. The sociopolitical, economic, and cultural contexts that differ across regions significantly influence environmental governance approaches. Therefore, it may not be directly applicable to generalize the findings to other regions or global contexts. To address this limitation, the research will focus on the unique regional contexts of ASEAN and the EU, delving into the distinctive characteristics and challenges faced by these regions. This approach aims to contribute to a comprehensive understanding of sustainable environmental governance within ASEAN and the EU.

However, further research and analysis would be required to extend these findings to other regions or global contexts. Analyzing the environmental policies of ASEAN and the EU necessitates navigating complex political dynamics and power structures that shape policy implementation and effectiveness. Nevertheless, capturing the intricacies of these nuanced interplays poses challenges within the scope of this research. To address this limitation, the research will utilize established theoretical frameworks, such as Comparative Institutional Analysis and Political Analysis. These frameworks provide structured approaches to comprehending the complex political systems and institutional dynamics at play in ASEAN and the EU. Furthermore, drawing upon existing literature that explores the political dynamics and power structures within these regions will enhance the analysis and understanding.

A comprehensive analysis of environmental policies in ASEAN and the EU is a time-consuming endeavor. Policies continuously evolve, and new developments and emerging trends may arise during the research process, making it challenging to capture all the latest information. To mitigate this limitation, the research will rely on existing literature, case studies, and reputable sources that provide up-to-date information on environmental policies in ASEAN and the EU. Emphasis will be placed on recent and relevant sources to ensure the consideration of the most current policies and trends. However, it is essential to acknowledge that the research may not encompass all recent developments and emerging trends due to the dynamic nature of environmental governance.

By acknowledging and addressing these limitations, this research aims to provide valuable insights into the environmental policies of ASEAN and the EU, contributing to the broader understanding of sustainable environmental governance and fostering collaboration between these regions.

## **CONCLUSION**

Ultimately, it should be emphasized that strong institutional capacities as well as effective political dynamics are essential to address climate change concerns and advance environmental sustainability. ASEAN and the EU have both taken a similar stance on achieving the sustainable development goals however, the disparity lies within each region’s capacity to advance such. By understanding these inequalities and



utilizing theoretical frameworks like Comparative Institutional Analysis and Political Analysis, both regions can work towards a more sustainable future and mitigate the adverse effects of climate change. To close these gaps, ASEAN and the EU must actively participate in green diplomacy and recognize that combating climate change is a shared duty. A stronghold of practices must be honed into continuous collaboration of both regions. Green diplomacy promotes knowledge sharing and innovation, relying on global cooperation in achieving the sustainable development goals.

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