

Are Borders the Reflection of International Relations? Southeast Asian Borders in Perspective

Journal of Asian Security
and International Affairs
5(3) 1–23

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Private Limited

SAGE Publications

sagepub.in/home.nav

DOI: 10.1177/2347797018798253

<http://journals.sagepub.com/home/aia>



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Abstract

Over the past decade, the concepts of border have gained resonance in several disciplines within social sciences. While critical theory of borders has made tremendous advancements, scarcity of the scholarship in border studies is still evident. Borders are, in general, cultural, social, territorial, geographical, political, sexual and racial separators. This article deals with geographical borders in the Southeast Asian (SEA) region. Most countries in SEA share borders with each other. Under a range of circumstances and relationships such as trade, security and migration flows take place. Southeast Asia's heterogeneity—politically, ethnically, religiously, economically, demographically and spatially—has crucial implications for neighbourly relationships, trade, border constructions, migration and refugee flows for all the countries. This article delves into the interplay between borders and heterogeneity in SEA and their outcomes. We argue that borders type determine the level of relationship between neighbouring countries and security outcome, trade and population mobility.

Keywords

Borders, international relations, Southeast Asia, ASEAN, heterogeneity, geopolitics

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Introduction

In today's world, the border agenda has undergone enormous expansion in the last few decades. Of course, border controls and security perceptions have transformed tremendously after the 9/11 (Kurki, 2014; Newman, 2007, p. 30). Since the election campaign of the United States of 2016 began, border debates have received renewed attention which attracted both applause and criticisms from all walks of life in the USA and beyond. The campaign seemed to have pointed that drugs and related crimes and criminals sneak through the pores of the USA–Mexico border. Therefore, it is important to erect a wall on the border.

Within business and social sciences, over the decades, border concept has gained resonance in several disciplines. While over the years 'critical theory of borders—(re)thinking borders, processes of bordering, re-bordering and de-bordering'—has made astounding advancement (Horvat, 2013, p. 108), there is still evident scarcity of border-focused research. Some events the world has witnessed in the last few decades such as the collapse of Soviet Union, the integration of European countries, the USA–Mexico border debates and the massive global migration flows have brought the border to the heart of the current global discourse (Alvaréz, 1995; Heyman, 1994; Sadowski-Smith, 2008; Schimanski & Wolfe, 2007; Vila, 2003).

Border serves two basic purposes—protection from external and internal threats and territorial determination (Newman & Paasi, 1998). Newman and Paasi (1998) and Newman (2010) also argue that borders determine the internal and external identities of territories. According to Friedrich (1903) and Julian Minghi (1963), borders and states complement each other (Gerfert, 2009).

International politics is essentially about how states influence one another's policies in ways they believe will contribute to their security. State security and sovereignty are conditional upon economic, social, political and transnational processes (Agnew, 2009; Flint & Taylor, 2007; Held et al., 1999; Ullah, 2010b). As nations have become increasingly interdependent (Scott, 2015), there are good reasons for nations to be more careful about their own security issues. Thus, social pressure becomes a tool of modern international relations (Kelley & Simmons, 2015). Today, border, trade, migration and geopolitics are very much a part of international studies. Border determines the level of relationship between the border-sharing countries. Economic integration, threats to peace and security and an international focus on human rights and environmental protection all speak to the complexity of today's international relations.

International borders are expressed in terms of border markers, national security, custom and immigration controls for passports and visas, fences, walls, border guards and national military troops (Bruce, 2008; Nelson et al., 2010; Sadowski-Smith, 2002, p. 8; Wastl-Walter, 2011, p. 2). Borders emerged in various forms as far as security challenges and migration flows came into place with heightened significance. Putting up walls on the borders—a practice from time immemorial—indicates straining relationship and distrust between countries. Historically, Chinese and Roman empires, and prosperous nation-states (i.e., France and Germany) enforced their borders from adjacent land-based national groups and states (Findlay, 1994). The Romans built Hadrian's wall about 120 years after the birth of Christ to protect the

Roman province (Beran, 1993). Recently, Hungary is building a border wall in a bid to keep out would-be migrants (Melvin, 2017).

Debates about walls on borders between countries are not new. Debates are ongoing regarding whether borders should remain or be removed. Does the essence of globalization mean to remove borders? Citing some examples of fresh constructions of border walls, Espejo (2013) argues that building separation barriers on the border seems to contradict the essence of globalization. From this point of view, it is crucial to understand why territorial boundaries have become so politicized (Andreas, 2003). Espejo (2013) was concerned about the moral justifiability of borders and presented arguments for and against walls. She further goes on to argue that the fortification of walls has grounded reasons such as defending a state from its enemies or security threat, preventing immigration or illegal trafficking of goods and persons.

Literature (Helliwell, 1998; McCallum, 1995) suggests that removing national borders would substantially reduce barriers to interregional trade. According to Spolaore and Wacziarg (2005), removal of national borders may allow the formation of larger domestic markets with a positive effect on growth. They also go on to emphasize that national borders shield some countries from slow-growing neighbours, and their removal might therefore result in economic growth (Spolaore & Wacziarg, 2005). As tariff barriers have declined dramatically due to economic liberalization, the volume of world trade in goods and services increased by more than 39 per cent between 1995 and 2001 (International Monetary Fund, 2002, p. 195) and Southeast Asian (SEA) is no exception. This means globalists bridge for commercial transactions rather than economic barriers (Andreas, 2003).

How do borders function in Southeast Asia in relation to international relations? Are the border walls divisive? Do they symbolize distrust or disintegration? What are the potential consequences of distrust between countries? When the world seems to be getting more integrated than ever in some parts of the world, some other parts tend to fragment. While passengers will soon travel from London to Tokyo on the Trans-Siberian railway via an 8,400-mile route (Petter, 2017), building walls of varied categories to obstruct mobility is common elsewhere.

This article argues that borders are not just a demarcation boundary between two countries rather it has implications for trade, population mobility, relationships and prosperity. This article aims to demonstrate how border in SEA is conceptualized and reconfigured in a fast-changing world with focuses particularly on issues such as migration, refugee flows, trafficking and neighbourly relationship. The following part of the article is divided broadly into two parts. The first part discusses borders, its theorization, and the second part discusses how borders function geopolitically in SEA and border outcomes.

Borders in a Globalized World

The world is astonishingly intertwined and interdependent. No country can stand alone in today's world. The countries sharing borders are even more dependent on each other. All the shared borders are marked by different kinds and forms of

separators. After the nation states came into being, these separators began to mean a range of relationships.

Should borders be open, closed or porous? Some scholars advocate for a world of open borders, while others uphold the full sovereignty of states in matters of population flows (Benhabib, 2004). Benhabib goes on to ask a question, is there any way to reconcile these two clashing philosophical positions? He brought migration factor into this debate which Best (2003) endorses by saying that states erect fences and walls, and post guards at the borders to control migration flows. From economic and security point of views, borders are meant to manage mobility of goods, services and humans (Clark, 1994; Jones, 1945).

After the advent of security issues over the last two decades, the entire concept of border has appeared in the global discourse more prominently than ever. It seems states, especially the developed ones, prefer closed or restricted borders. The rationale behind this is the fear that the rebels, extremists and smugglers could sneak through poorly guarded interstate boundaries (Gavrilis, 2006).

The distinctive thing is this is a wall against immigration—and to some degree also contraband drugs and gun-running—whereas historically, the other famous or infamous walls have almost always been about blocking invading armies. (Brown, 2014)

After the Berlin wall was torn down in 1989, border concepts have been re-conceptualized (Schmemmann, 2006) and as a result internal market in Europe was implemented in the mid-1990s and free movement of goods and services has become possible (Houtum, 1998).

Table 1. Military, Economic and Police Borders

Types of Border	Role	Characteristics
Military	Deter interstate military threat	Physical barriers, buffer zones, military alliances and arms races
Economic	Collect revenue/tax tariffs, commerce and protect domestic producers	Tariffs, quotas, customs houses and foreign exchange controls
Police	Territorially exclude non-state clandestine transnational actors	Physical barriers, buffer zones, tracking/inspection of people/goods, 'smart borders' and pooling sovereignty

Source: Andreas (2003).

This section discusses how different regions are connected through borders and how border behaviour changes over time between countries. In doing so, we turn to the countries that share borders globally; China and Russia have the highest number of neighbours sharing borders. China shares borders with 14 countries (22,457 km) (European Communities, 2007).¹ Russia shares 12 or 14 country borders spanning 22,408 km with a lot of coastline (37,953 km), particularly in the north² (Hassner & Wittenberg, 2015). Germany is almost

landlocked country with 3,714 km of border shared with nine other countries.³ Brazil shares borders with 10 countries spanning 16,145 km (Henrik & Fazila, 2006).⁴ Borders of these countries are not same all along. Different borders behave differently depending on the relationship and the level of heterogeneity.

Not all countries have chosen to build walls on the borders. Other than the USA–Mexico and Israel–West Bank borders (Newman, 2010), many other walls have been built or planned such as Botswana–Zimbabwe–South Africa (Campbell, 2006, p. 31), Brazil–Paraguay (Dilla Alfonso, 2008, p. 49; Turner, 2010, p. 252), China–North Korea (Nanto & Manyin, 2010, 10), Egypt–Gaza (Helfont, 2010, p. 431; Mark, 2003, p. 2; Ullah, 2014), India–Pakistan (Lakshmi, 2003), India–Bangladesh, India–Nepal (Pant, 2007, p. 241), Kazakhstan–Uzbekistan (Greenberg, 2006), Pakistan–Afghanistan (Saleem & Goraya, 2009, p. 209), Saudi Arabia–Yemen, Oman, Kuwait–Iraq (Turner, 2010, p. 252), Spain (Ceuta and Melilla)–Morocco (White, 2007, p. 705), Thailand–Malaysia (Borger, 2007; Ullah & Hossain, 2011), Turkey–Greece (Daley, 2011, p. A4), Turkmenistan–Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan–Kyrgyzstan (Dabykova, 2005, p. 78) and the UAE–Oman.

Parts of the United States–Canada border (5,500 miles—the longest international border in the world) are patrolled by armies of both countries. India–Pakistan border is dangerously barbed one. Azerbaijan and Armenia border has total four exclaves which lie in the opposite side of the country. Afghanistan–Pakistan border gate marks the divide between the two countries (Conant, 2014; Guild, 2004). This implies that historically a degree of tensions or disputes over borders remain between the countries.

Some countries' separation borders were interesting in the sense that they remain as a symbol of peace. There are some existing borders in the world that got different meaning as well.⁵ For example, Argentina–Brazil–Paraguay border—the Triple Frontier—is made by a river that connects three South American countries. Costa Rica–Panama border was separated by Sixaola River between the two countries and connected by a beautiful bridge. Trees have been removed in a thin strip between Norway and Sweden to mark the border (Hagen, 2017).

Hungary began building a four-metre-high (13 feet) fence along its border with Serbia in order to control the flow of refugees from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan (Ullah, 2011, 2014). Kenya, Saudi Arabia and Turkey are all constructing border fences in a bid to keep out jihadist groups. The fence in Turkey along its border with Syria will eventually stretch for 28 miles (Cagaptay, 2013). Israel's separation barrier from Palestine, the 2,500-mile barbed-wire fence (Morris, 2008; Ullah, 2014) and the enormous sand 'berm' separating Morocco from rebel-held parts of the Western Sahara are seen to deter migrants and rebel. This border also points to the relationship they have between them.

This speaks to the fact that the world is getting fragmented day-by-day. Vallet (2014) wondered about the changes occurred in the trend of construction of walls in the recent times. About 65 countries have erected fences on their borders—four times since 1989. A third of the world's countries have completed or are building barriers—compared to 16 at the fall of the Berlin Wall (Hastings & Wilson, 1999; Vallet, 2014). Table 2 demonstrates the complex border dynamics in the SEA. Of course, it does not mean to say that all the regional disputes are related to or generate from borders because disputes in the SEA go back to history in colonial times as well.

Table 2. Southeast Asia and Borders

Border-sharing Countries	Length of Borders	Characteristics and Perceived Purpose
Indonesia–Singapore	24.55 nautical miles (45.47 km)	Only a portion of the maritime border between the two countries has been determined so far.
Malaysia–Singapore	The island lies 24 nautical miles (44 km) from the easternmost point of Singapore and 7.7 nautical miles (14.3 km) southeast of the Malaysian coastline.	The Malaysia–Singapore border is an international maritime border between countries in SEA of Malaysia, which lies to the north of the border, and Singapore to the south. On 23 May 2008, the International Court of Justice decided on the sovereignty of Pedra Branca which gave the island to Singapore.
Malaysia–Singapore (The Johor–Singapore)	It is a 1,056-metre causeway	This causeway links the city of Johor Bahru in Malaysia to Singapore. It serves as a road and rail link, as well as water piping into Singapore.
Malaysia–Brunei	481.3 km	Except for its coastline with the South China Sea, Brunei shares a land boundary with Malaysia. Brunei is as well surrounded by Sarawak of Malaysia.
Malaysia–Indonesia	2,019.5 km	Malaysia shares a land border with Indonesia on the island of Borneo. The Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak lie to the north of the border.
Malaysia–Thailand	646.5 km	Border of Malaysia with Thailand is located to the north of Peninsular Malaysia and runs between the Straits of Malacca on the west and the Gulf of Thailand/South China Sea in the east.
Lao–Thailand	1,754 km	There is a friendship bridge located about 11 km from the entrance of Chiang Khong.
Lao–Vietnam	2,069 km	There are about seven points in this long border. Vietnam and Laos are set to launch the first iteration of

(Table 2 Continued)

Table 2 Continued

Border-sharing Countries	Length of Borders	Characteristics and Perceived Purpose
Lao–China	505 km	<p>a border friendship exchange later in 2017. The move is just one of several measures both countries are carrying out as they commemorate a couple of key anniversaries in their diplomatic relationship. At the 26th meeting of the Vietnam and Lao border delegations in Vientiane in 2017, both sides reviewed the border agreements to boost border management.</p> <p>This long border separates the northern Laotian provinces of Luang Namtha Oudomxai from the southern Chinese province of Yunnan.</p>
Cambodia–Lao	435 km	<p>Cambodia in recent years made headlines in the diplomatic realm. Recently, Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen and Lao Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith agreed on four points to resolve disputes along the border.</p>
Vietnam–Cambodia	1,228 km	<p>This long border is peaceful in general. Tourists are comfortable visiting from one country to another.</p>
Vietnam–China	1,281 km	<p>The land border starts at the Tripoint with Laos, and goes to the Gulf of Tonkin passing in essentially mountainous areas inhabited by ethnic minorities. Whilst both sides agree on land borders, the territorial dispute over the Spratly and Paracel has left maritime borders between the two nations undefined.</p>
Lao–Myanmar	236 km	<p>These two countries built the Myanmar–Lao friendship bridge in 2016 to boost commerce between them and neighbouring countries as well. The bridge is symbolic because it will be the first time in</p>

(Table 2 Continued)

(Table 2 Continued)

Border-sharing Countries	Length of Borders	Characteristics and Perceived Purpose
Myanmar–Thailand	1,800 km	<p>recent years that the two countries have been connected by an official border-trading point. However, the friendship bridge remains closed while authorities on both sides struggle to agree on where the border demarcation should lie.</p> <p>There are currently four border crossings to choose from, all of which allow passage for third party nationals either inbound or outbound—one can enter in one and exit via another as long as one has Myanmar visa—none of the overland borders have visa on arrival facilities.</p>
Thailand–Lao	1,754 km	<p>Laos and Thailand have had bilateral relations for the most part of history. They share a common border, share linguistic and cultural similarities, and have long intertwined histories since the time of their predecessor kingdoms Lan Xang and Aytthaya in the fifteenth century.</p>
Thailand–Cambodia	803 km	<p>The Cambodian–Thai border has been in dispute since the last century involving the area surrounding the Preah Vihear Temple.</p>
Thailand–Malaysia	506 km	<p>The Malaysia–Thailand border consists of both a land boundary across the Malay Peninsula and maritime boundaries in the Straits of Malacca and the Gulf of Thailand/South China Sea.</p>

Source: Amer and Thao (2009), Tun (2011), Ullah (2010a), Ullah (2011) and Collins (2008).

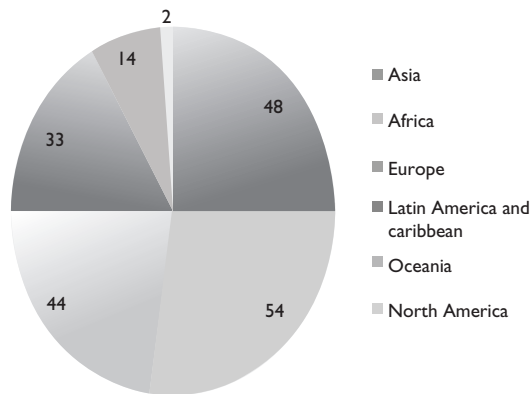


Figure 1. Number of Countries in the World

Source: Authors' calculations.

Categorizing and Theorizing Borders

The contemporary debates about border suggest that border studies have opened up questions about the rationales for understanding borders as institutions, processes and symbols (Honig, 2001; Scott, 2015) as borders emerge through geo and socio-political circumstances (Houtum & Naerssen, 2002; Nelson et al., 2010; Scott, 2011).

Borders are one of the most significant factors (Buchanan, 2003) for consolidating political power within a nation state. The territorial borders make an impact on human life. One's level of freedom and standard of life depend largely on the political authority one belongs to. According to Orozco-Mendoza (2008), borders are social, geographical and political constructions. Border is therefore categorized by both its contrasts and contradictions, permissiveness and restrictions, control and disorder, peace and violence, its justice and injustices (Orozco-Mendoza, 2008). To put it in Hannah Arendt's (1990) terms, people's right as nationals or foreigners of a state rests upon the formulation of a rule of exclusion (of visible or invisible borders) (Balibar, 2004, p. 23). As borders mark the domain of the state's territory (Lundén, 2006), a fundamental question could be asked as where should borders be drawn (Walmsley & Nine, 2014) as interstate dispute on border has been a common feature in generating conflicts. One of the major factors behind the conflicts is the contested borders (Henrik & Fazila, 2006). It is something, according to Houtum (2005), constructed everyday through political discourses and institutions, media representations, stereotypes and everyday forms of transnationalism.

The types of borders signal about the level, depth and dynamics of the relationship between neighbouring countries and beyond. For example, borders between two Koreas (South Korea and North Korea); Israel–Palestine border and India–Pakistan border clearly tell us the dynamics and depth of relationship of these countries.

Borders are demarcations where one set of conditions end (Lundén, 2006; Konrad, 2015), and are replaced by another (Pécoud & Guchteneire, 2007; Zapata-Barrero, 2013). There are two fundamental approaches to studying borders. One is concerned with borders, border crossings and bordering processes in connection with national and territorial borders, while the other (Donnan & Wilson, 2001; Wilson & Donnan, 2012) has cultural, social, territorial, political, sexual and racial dimensions.

Today, the 145 land-based nation-states around the world (% of the total 195 countries) employ three major international border types: 15–28 countries (8–14%) have open borders; 88–75 countries (45–39%) have regulated or controlled borders; and 42 countries (22%) had/have fortified borders (Gulasekaram, 2012). Most countries in SEA are into long standing and unsettled territorial disputes, thus borders in SEA fall under almost all the categories.

Fortified borders are generally created for military and, sometimes, violent encounters with other countries or cultural groups (Collins, 2008; Kaur, 2006) (i.e., Hadrian's Wall, Korean DMZ, Israel–Palestine Wall, Western Sahara Berm), but more commonly for immigration and economic reasons (e.g., the USA–Mexico, India–Bangladesh, Iron Curtain). Of the about 195 international land borders, only 42 were/are fortified (Andreas, 2003), from wired fences to militarized. And 57 per cent of these fortified borders are used exclusively for border control of illegal immigration, smuggling of products, drug trafficking and terrorists, rather than for military purposes (Andreas, 2003). The most common fortified borders today are built of wire fences (72%), often electrified (17%). During 1945–1951, the German–German border was fortified with taller wire fences and security installations. By 1961, 'the border was strengthened and guarded more than any other political frontier in the democratic world' (Lenz, 1983, p. 250). Nevertheless, only in Berlin and a few villages on the border were walls ever constructed.⁶

Broadly, two types of border concepts dominate the contemporary literature: soft and hard borders (Figure 2). Soft borders include open and regulated and controlled

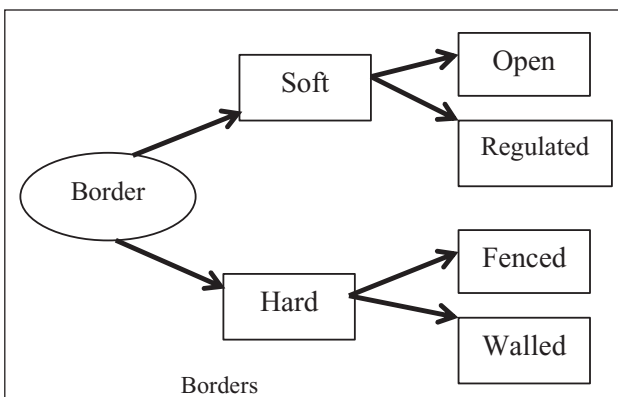


Figure 2. Types of Borders

Source: Carens, 1995 and Espejo, 2013.

frontiers. Hard borders are fortified borders that include wire fenced, walled and militarized borders (Chavez, 2012; Espejo, 2013). Border theories have three positions from the perspective of cross-border mobility: open and closed which seem to be extreme and the other one is porous—a moderate position.

(a) Open border theory contends that freedom of movement across borders enables the less fortunate to pursue their goals of better lives and thus equality is achieved by means of free mobility (Carens, 1995), (b) Closed border theories generally claim that massive redistribution from wealthy to poor countries is desirable to equalize such economic and social disparity (Miller, 2012), (c) A porous border theory contends that re-distribution and ‘regulated’ migration are not mutually exclusive strategies to address the problem (Behanbib, 2004). Borders in SEA, therefore, could also be well characterized by Houtum’s (2005) categorizations. Houtum (2005) made extraordinary distinction of borders: natural and unnatural. This distinction is closely connected to the classic distinction of good and bad borders. ‘Good’ borders are natural, that is, the physiographic variation (seas, mountains, deserts) and borders that are human-made, ‘artificial’ seen as ‘bad’ (Houtum, 2005).

Border controls have traditionally been viewed first and foremost in military terms. The reasons for this, however, are justified by the facts that the vast majority of interstate wars have historically been about territorial defense (Keegan, 1993; Mearsheimer, 2001). More so due to the increasing interest in security issues in today’s world. Militarized borders are the extreme form of international borders, of which there are 18 out of a total of 42 fortified borders (Andreas, 2003). Only a few of them are completely sealed; some border crossings are still usually possible, even into highly restricted North Korea and along the Iron Curtain (Findlay, 1994).

Debates are mounting on how border should behave in different contexts in today’s global world. Roque Planas (2014) reasons out that opening borders makes more sense than militarizing them. He argues that anyway the immigration system is universally regarded as broken. And that only rich people already live an open-borders life. If capital and goods can flow across borders, why not labour? As Europe has opened many of its borders for their neighbours and beyond, no big problems came from it. Some argue that open-border makes humanitarian sense because open-border allows people to go back home and as a result fewer people will die crossing the border. There is highly likely that border enforcement punishes and the immigration system criminalizes the wrong people.

SEA Borders in Geopolitics

This section looks into how, within a framework of international relations, homogeneity and heterogeneity transpire in a region and what are the potential outcomes. This also tests if the borders have anything to do with heterogeneity or the other way around. For some years, SEA geo-economics and geopolitics have

been changing fast, especially in two important areas: trade partnerships and South China Sea. The region has been historically linked with trafficking, beginning with the development of a border between the British and Dutch colonial regimes (Tagliacozzo, 2005).

Majority of the countries in Southeast Asia share common borders within SEA. While some countries maintain strict border control, some are left porous, if not open (Ullah, 2011). In Southeast Asia, porous borders are particularly associated with transnational challenges to security, smuggling, migration and human trafficking of women and children. Therefore, a built-in connotation with 'porous' borders exists that refrains researchers to look into their potential alternative uses, unlike the China–Nepal border which Tibetans consider as a blessing. Though the countries within the region seem to be geopolitically peaceful without major violent conflicts, there have been some unsettled disputes over borders since long. For example, Brunei Darussalam and Malaysia have unsettled maritime boundaries in the South China Sea and the Louisa Reef and land disputes over the Limbang valley (Amer, 2000); Indonesia and the Philippines have been involved in disputes over maritime boundaries in the Celebes Sea; Indonesia and Vietnam disagree over continental shelf areas in the South China Sea; Malaysia and Philippines got to agree on maritime boundaries in the Sulu Sea (Amer & Thao, 2009; Tun, 2011), Celebes Sea and in the South China Sea; Malaysia and Singapore have two disputes over Pedra Branca/Pulau Batu Puteh and on the offshore boundary in the Strait of Johor and the Singapore Strait; Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam have overlapping claims in the Gulf of Thailand; Malaysia and Vietnam have been in major disputes over the Spratly archipelago; Thailand and Laos have disputes over their land border (Tun, 2011); Thailand and Cambodia lack agreements over their land border and maritime borders in the Gulf of Thailand; and Cambodia and Laos have been in disputes over the demarcation of their land boundary (Amer, 2000, pp. 34–36). The existing disputes have not led the countries to tighten up the border in order to bolster the security issues. Instead, borders on many countries of the region remain porous. For instance, the Indo-Myanmar border has largely remained unfenced (Routray, 2009, p. 1). However, most countries are finding it increasingly necessary to impose restrictions on borders (International Union for the Scientific Study of Population, 2002, p. 8).

Criticisms about open border policies are widespread due to particularly security concerns. Perhaps, the most disputed borders in Southeast Asia are along the Thailand–Myanmar–Vietnam–Cambodia borders (Kaur, 2004, 2006). Between Thailand–Myanmar, the 2,400-km land border has not been demarcated in most cases. This is one of the reasons for the existing tension around the Moei River (Amer, 2000, p. 36). There are long-standing challenges on the Thailand–Myanmar border which are thought to be primarily due to the conflict between the Myanmar authorities and the Karen and Shan minorities. In 1999, Myanmar closed the border, froze all cooperation between the two countries, and built up military at the border following the Burmese takeover of the Myanmar embassy to Bangkok (Derks, 2000, p. 17).

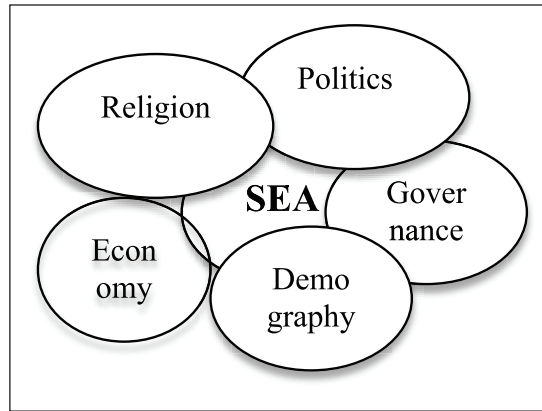


Figure 3. Heterogeneity in SEA

Source: Authors’ own.

Heterogeneity and the Border Outcomes

As argued that though there are no remarkable conflicts existing among the countries in SEA, there remains a range of heterogeneity. This section intends to look into whether the unsettled disputes have got anything to do with heterogeneity and border relations. While SEA apparently seems to be a homogenous region, it is an extremely heterogeneous one as well. Therefore, conflicts exist on different fronts. Regional heterogeneity—politically, ethnically, religiously, economically, spatially and demographically—has implications on international relations, border constructions, migration and refugee flows for all the countries involved.

We turn our attention to the fact to what extent is the SEA region heterogeneous. As Figure 3 shows, this section highlights the heterogeneity (in terms of religion,

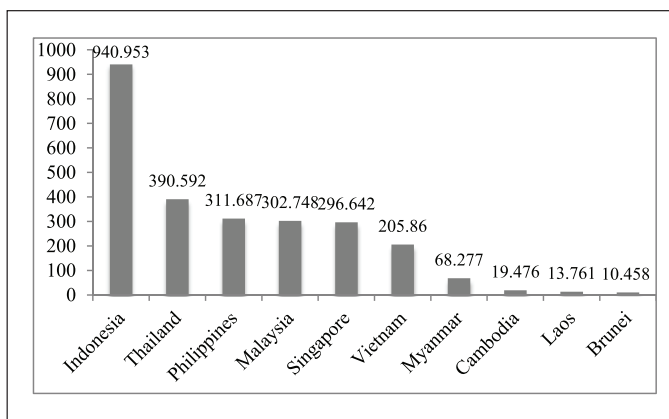


Figure 4. GDP in ASEAN Countries (in Billion Dollars)

Source: International Monetary Fund (2016).

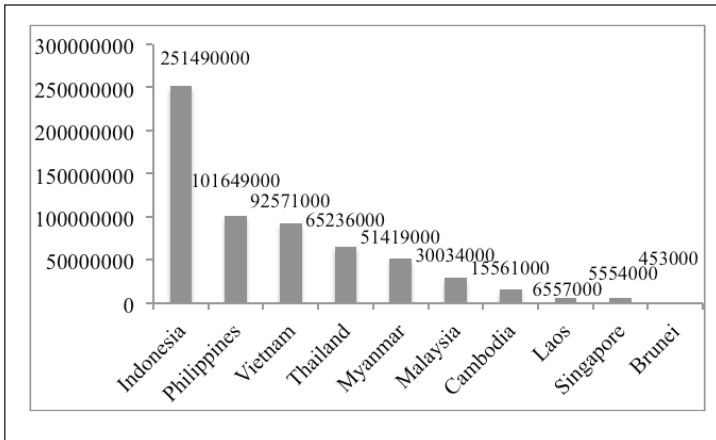


Figure 5. The Southeast Asian Population

Source: International Monetary Fund (2016).

politics, governance, economy, etc.) in the SEA. Politically, Singapore is a Republic with multi-party parliamentary system of government—often called an authoritarian democracy. Myanmar, Indonesia and the Philippines embrace almost similar kind of political system (Republic, Presidential system and multi parties). Malaysia is a Federation & Constitutional monarch with parliamentary system of government and a multi-party political system. Thailand and Cambodia are Constitutional monarchs and parliamentary system of government. Multi-parties are allowed in the national politics. Vietnam and Laos are Republic and politically single party socialist system of government and Brunei is an absolute monarchy (Hajah Sainah, 2010).

Figure 4 demonstrates the economy (at least GDP wise) of the region is highly heterogeneous. This regional economic disparity may be misleading to understand the standard of living. While Brunei's GDP in the region is the lowest, Bruneians enjoy the highest standard of life. The conventional belief is that economic disparity is a fundamental driver of migration, here it is not exactly the case. For example, Indonesia with the highest GDP is the highest migrant-sending country in the region. This implies that economic heterogeneity has a lot to do with population mobility.

It is important to look into the relationships between religious diversity and border relations in the region. SEA is a religiously diverse region with Muslim majority, Buddhist majority and Catholic majority countries. Southeast Asia is home to two of the most religiously diverse countries (Singapore and Vietnam) as well as two of the least diverse (Cambodia and Timor-Leste). Thailand (Buddhist majority), the Philippines (Catholic majority) and Indonesia (Muslim majority) are all on the less-diverse side too. Singapore is the world's most religiously diverse country and Vietnam is third most religiously diverse country (Krogstad, Gonzalez-Barrera, & Lopez, 2014). Apparently, of course, religion does not have any role in regional dispute in SEA meaning that this region is religiously harmonious one. Though there are arguments that Rohingya displacement is a result of religious heterogeneity.

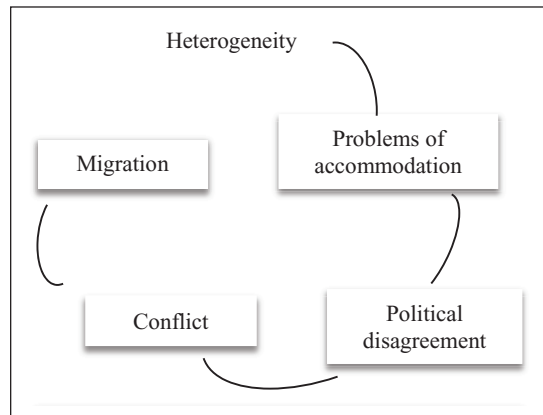


Figure 6. Heterogeneity-Conflict Dynamics

Source: Authors' own.

A dispute over border temple at Preah Vihear continued since the last few centuries between Thailand and Cambodia. It is interesting to note that two Buddhist majority countries dispute over a Hindu Temple which was given to Cambodia by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) by a 1962 ruling which both countries accepted. The dispute was still ongoing as Thailand claimed that ICJ gave the Temple but not the land area. Therefore, violent military conflicts continued to break out. This was finally settled in November 2013 by the ICJ.

The SEA is diverse ethnically as well as demographically. Chinese form one of the major demographic compositions in some countries (e.g., Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, etc.) while Malays and Tamils form a significant ethnic composition in Malaysia and Singapore. Demographically, Brunei is a country with less than half a million population while it is about 350 million in Indonesia. Density wise (per square km), there are about 7,600 people in Singapore while only 30 in Laos (Krogstad, Gonzalez-Barrera, & Lopez, 2014).

Historical rivalry, economic inequalities, demographic heterogeneity and disputes between neighbouring nations make borders between them insecure which may generate regional tensions. This circumstance eventually may create conditions for people to move over. We therefore argue that the range of heterogeneity produces a range of population outflow of varied forms such as trafficking in human, economic migrants and refugees. With both the highest proportion of human trafficking in the world as well as substantial protracted refugee situations, SEA is faced with considerable overlap when it comes to its trafficked victims and people in crisis (Silverman, Decker, McCauley, & Mack, 2009, p. 1). The greatest percentage of trafficking in the world occurs in the region, with approximately 200,000–250,000 women and children trafficked within the region each year (Silverman et al., 2009). Such a concentration of trafficking in the Southeast Asia region totals one-third of the entire global trafficking trade (Derks, 2000, p. 6; Ullah, 2014).

One predominant example is Rohingya refugees from Myanmar, many of which have been displaced from Rakhine State and south-eastern Myanmar (Ullah, 2011, 2016). There are over 140,000 refugees and asylum-seekers from Myanmar in Thailand, representing one of the most protracted situations in the world. Derks argues that the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) leads a peaceful, multilateral approach to border management in the region. We argue that ASEAN has been playing a significant role in diminishing the consequence of heterogeneity. ASEAN, however, does not intervene internal affairs of their member states. The ASEAN was formed in 1967 (with Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines and Indonesia) to promote regional cooperation, peace, progress and prosperity (ASEAN, 1971; Kaur, 2007). Its major achievement has been the promotion of a regional political order based on the principle of the individual states' support for each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity (Broinowski, 1982, 1990; Narine, 2002). Myanmar since the last one century has been producing refugees who primarily seek shelters into neighbouring Thailand and Bangladesh. The Thailand–Myanmar borders continue to be unsafe as the Thai government moves towards restrictive approaches. When conflict erupted in eastern Myanmar in November 2010, the Thai army ordered the refugees who had fled across the border to return 'within hours of gunshots ending' (Refugees International, 2011, p. 1). There are approximately one to two million refugees and irregular migrants in Thailand, of which 120,000 live in camps on the Thai–Burmese border. The first official Karenni refugee camps were established in 1992 in Mae Hong Son province, Thailand (Wilkes, 2011 ; UNHCR, 2000).

In a heterogeneous region like the SEA, inter- and intra-regional mobility does not occur prominently because the region cannot absorb their surplus population and hence international mobility appears to be an option. This implies, for example, Singaporeans would not be willing to move to Indonesia or Cambodia rather the other way around may occur. Singapore or Brunei alone cannot absorb the regional demographic pressure. However, Singapore also loses about 1,500 citizens every year as they give up their citizenship.

The relationship between people and the state is put into a new perspective. Anthropologists have long focused their scholarship on marginal ethnic minorities in the peripheries of SEA states. Many borderlands in Southeast Asia (e.g., in Southern Thailand, East Timor, Papua New Guinea, Sulawesi, Aceh, Southern Philippines, Myanmar) have become violent (Horstmann, 2006). In the peripheral spaces of SEA nation states, people flee from horrific acts of violence committed by state forces, military units, border guards, police, vigilante groups and armed guerrillas (Horstmann, 2006, p. 1).

The border can by no means be limited to a territorial line. It extends deep into the heart of the national territory—into the centre itself—extending to every agency where the state deals with the alien, the illegal, the migrant, the refugee and the political dissident detained in high-security prisons or detention camps. People at the border are at unease with the nation's centres, by whom they are considered bandits, delinquents or currently 'terrorists'. For the governments of Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and the Philippines, the proclaimed war against terror is a welcome opportunity to increase control and pressure on civil society in

the borderlands, especially its Islamic parts (Horstmann & Wadley, 2005). The insecurity justifies large military budgets, and provides the excuse for government intervention. Borderlands are therefore a realm outside the order of the state, yet integral to it and its economy.

Southeast Asia is witnessing a trend towards 'resolving border disputes' (Amer, 2000, p. 43) in connection with the region moving in the direction of stronger economic and strategic relationships. As a result, many countries from around the world (e.g., India) have developed a 'look east policy' in attempt to forge deeper economic integration with its eastern neighbours (Haokip, 2010; Routray, 2009, p. 2). During the last five decades, a number of negotiations, agreements and MoUs were signed between countries with border disputes in the SEA.⁷ Border agreements and border re-arrangements have been most actively pursued in SEA in recent times (Tagliacozzo, 2001). The 1994 Laos–Myanmar agreements on their land boundaries at the Mekong river and on an agreement with both countries and China on delimiting a Tri-junction point, and the 1997 Thailand–Vietnam agreement delimited their continental shelf and exclusive economic zones boundaries in a disputed area in the Gulf of Thailand (Amer, 2000, pp. 32–34).

Conclusions

International relations encompass studies on borders, trade, migration and geopolitics. Border determines the level of relationship between the border-sharing countries. Economic integration, threats to peace and security, and an international focus on human rights and environmental protection all speak to the complexity of today's international relations. Border control has long been a core activity of the states. In today's global world, trade, security, migration and mode of interactions are changing faster than we can imagine. Therefore, borders are constantly being reconfigured in global and regional contexts. International boundaries between two or more countries appear to have greater substantial effects on political, cultural and economic outcomes than do boundaries within countries.

Borders appear to be worth investigating in today's world because they do not signify only physical and geographical figures, but also political structures. In order of significance of the relationship between border-sharing countries, types of borders are determined: soft, hard, militarized, porous, walled and barbed. However, not all borders have the same significance; some borders offer important ramifications while others do not create distinguishable implications.

We argued in the article that borders type determine the level of relationship between neighbouring countries and security outcome, trade and population mobility. Overall, there has been communal harmony among all the countries in the region. There has been some disputes over land and maritime borders though. This has not impacted much on border constructions between countries in the SEA, meaning that no militarized, dangerous or hard borders were needed to be erected. This article distances itself from the notion of fixed, unchanging communities and embraces a perspective in which people in the borderland are

subject to constant classification by the border regime and have to bear the consequences of the border every day.

This article attempted to understand heterogeneity in the South East Asian region and if there is any implications of heterogeneity on the border relations in the SEA. Heterogeneity produces border disputes in the region and as a result trafficking in human, refugee flow and trade imbalance and wide range of security outcomes exist. Since borders contain both geographical and political implications, they are likely to bring crucial consequences in domestic and international politics in the SEA region. Therefore, it is crucial to understand why territorial boundaries have become so politicized and reconfigured in today's globalized world. In Southeast Asia, porous borders are significantly correlated with trafficking. As a result, attention from policymakers and actors in the region has primarily been focused on the negative outcomes of porous borders, which may further restrict the movement of people. A contentious border dispute between Cambodia and Thailand resulted in outbreaks of armed clashes.

Border dialogues have been on the rise in the region in order to better build the relationship between border-sharing countries. Much research needs to be done on the specific political ecology of individuals and states in SEA borderlands.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

Notes

1. On the northern border, Kazakhstan, Mongolia and Russia; to the west, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan; the southern border, India, Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar (Burma), Laos and Vietnam; and on the western border, North Korea and Russia (Snedden, 2016).
2. On the western side, Norway, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Belarus and Ukraine; to the south, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, China and North Korea; Russian oblast region of Kaliningrad (200 miles west of the main Russian border) is included, then Poland and Lithuania to the list (Hassner & Wittenberg, 2015).
3. On the north is Denmark; on the eastern border, Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg and France; to the south, Switzerland and Austria; to the western borders, Poland and the Czech Republic.
4. On the northern border, Venezuela, Guyana, Suriname and French Guiana; on the western border, Colombia and Peru; on the southwestern side, Bolivia, Paraguay, Argentina and Uruguay (Hassner & Wittenberg, 2015).
5. For example, Vatican city–Italy border—known to be a stunningly beautiful border—is marked by the entry to St. Peter's Square. Austria–Slovenia Alpine Border is a divide made by beautiful nature. Finland–Sweden–Norway is known to be the most peaceful and natural international border. Poland–Ukraine border is marked by a line. Every year, a festival is held at this border which implies that they have positive relations.

Brazil–Bolivia border is marked by a river between Brazil and Bolivia. Argentina–Chile border is marked by a statue of Jesus Christ. China–Nepal: Mt. Everest stands tall, separating China and Nepal. Spain–Portugal: A road separates two countries. Germany–Poland: A pathway on the Beach of Usedom separates the two countries. Netherlands–Belgium: no border but a line marks their border.

6. Winston Churchill’s description of this international border as ‘The Iron Curtain’ was inaccurate (Brager, 2003). Fenced and walled borders have two strikingly dissimilar and yet similar borders, for example, the Iron Curtain and the Berlin Wall kept East Germans and East Berliners within East Germany, the Israel–Palestine Walls keep Palestinians out of Israel (Gavrilis, 2008). Only four-walled borders (constructed out of earth and stone), used as military barriers, existed in ancient times.
7. For example,

[T]he 1971 and 1975 Indonesia–Malaysia–Thailand agreements relating to the establishment of a tri-junction point on the continental shelf; the 1973 Indonesia–Singapore agreement delimiting their territorial sea boundary; the 1977–1990 Laos–Vietnam agreements delimiting their land and sea borders; the 1979 Malaysia–Thailand Memorandum of understanding on the delimitation of their continental shelf boundary and the creation of the Malaysia–Thailand Joint Authority for the purposes of exploiting the resources of the disputed sea-bed through mutual co-operation. (Amer, 2000, p. 32)

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