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Q4(b)

Explain the success of ASEAN as a regional organisation

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2021 · PSIR GS 2 · 15 marks · Comparative Politics

Comparative Politics: Nature and major approaches; political economy and political sociology perspectives; limitations of the comparative method.

Core demand of the question

- Discuss the success of ASEAN
- Write at 15-mark length

Revision summary

ASEAN's success is peace, process, and diplomatic centrality.

The **ASEAN Way** traded speed for inclusion.

AFTA and related economic projects thickened interdependence.

- **SAARC is the usual foil:** ASEAN had no permanent intra-club freeze of that kind.

South China Sea and Myanmar show the ceiling of consensus.

Introduction

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations, founded in 1967, is the most successful regional club in the developing world. Success is peace among members, centrality in Asian diplomacy, and thick economic habits. It is not a European Union.

Body**What success looks like**

- No interstate war among members after the expansion of the club, despite earlier Konfrontasi-type memories.
- **The ASEAN Way:** consultation, non-interference, and consensus lowered the cost of sitting together.
- Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, ASEAN Regional Forum, and later the East Asia Summit placed ASEAN in the chair of wider tables.
- **AFTA** and the ASEAN Economic Community built a production and tariff habit even if the single market is incomplete.

Why it worked better than many Souths

- Anti-communist founding core, later inclusion of Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, and Cambodia, turned a sub-region into a diplomatic unit.
- External powers were invited in as partners, not as members that could capture the secretariat.
- Compared with SAARC, there was no enduring dyadic veto equal to India-Pakistan inside the room.

Limits of the success story

- Myanmar, the South China Sea, and great-power split show the **ASEAN Way** stalling on hard security.
- Consensus can mean lowest-common-denominator statements.
- Inequality among members and weak enforcement are the price of keeping all flags in.

Measure against the mandate

- Success is regional peace and agenda-setting centrality, not a security community in Karl Deutsch's full sense.

Flow diagram

ASEAN 1967 -> ASEAN Way consensus
ASEAN Way consensus -> Peace among members
ASEAN Way consensus -> Centrality ARF EAS
ASEAN Way consensus -> AFTA economic habit
SCS Myanmar -.limits. -> Centrality ARF EAS

Conclusion

ASEAN succeeded as a diplomatic and economic process that kept diverse States talking and trading. The **ASEAN Way** and centrality are the achievements. Hard security and China policy remain the unfinished tests. Against SAARC, the success is clear.

Facts & figures

ASEAN 1967

Bangkok Declaration; original five, later ten members.

ASEAN Way

Informality, non-interference, and consensus as the working method.

TAC / ARF / EAS

Legal and diplomatic instruments that made ASEAN the hub of wider East Asian process.

AFTA

ASEAN Free Trade Area as the core economic success relative to South Asia's thin intra-trade.