

ANALYTICAL ESSAY

The Case for Comparative Regional Analysis in International Politics

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Regions—geopolitical spaces based on various definitions—have been judged as important for explanations about international politics. Area specialists devote their professional lives to the study of one or, perhaps, two regions. Quantitative international relations scholars use regional controls in empirical models of conflictual or cooperative relations, and they typically find that regions matter, at

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Acknowledgements. The authors gratefully acknowledge Kelly Marie Gordell in assembling data on region characteristics and advice from Amitav Acharya, Karen Rasler, Etel Solingen, William R. Thompson three anonymous reviewers and the editors of the journal, along with support from National Research University Higher School of Economics (*Political Atlas of the Modern World 2.0*).

Volgy, Thomas J. (2017) The Case for Comparative Regional Analysis in International Politics. *International Studies Review*, doi: 10.1093/isr/vix011

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least statistically. Most states conduct much of their political relationships¹ within regions rather than globally (Acharya 2007; Hurrell 2007). At a very minimum, geopolitical context constitutes a strong conditioning effect on how they conduct their external (and often internal) affairs.

Yet rarely are explanations of interstate relations embedded in a comparative regional perspective,² using region as either the primary level or unit of analysis. This is due to a variety of definitional, conceptual, theoretical, and empirical issues that have retarded development of systematic, comparative, and rigorous inquiry at the regional level. Our intention here is not to address those problems fully, nor to resolve them. Instead, we wish to offer a view of the more recent quantitative literature, suggest some trends, and offer a theoretical framework that may be useful to the development of more comparative regional analysis.

We take on these tasks in the context of three puzzles of interest concerning international relations. First, what accounts for variation in intraregional cooperative relationships between states? Some regions contain cooperative relationships and institutionalized cooperative relations that are far more extensive than others; additionally, regions also go through cycles of greater or lesser cooperation. Do state level and dyadic findings explain these differences, or, do regional dynamics exist that may provide additional insights? Second, regions vary in terms of the extent of conflict between their members. Can regional dynamics help explain variation in conflicts across regions and across time within regions? Third, we are interested in the literature on diffusion processes, including both conditions that may accelerate diffusion processes and emerging work on firewalls that may retard the diffusion of phenomena, including conflicts and cooperation (Solingen 2012). In particular, we wish to probe the extent to which regions vary in creating such firewalls and their relative effectiveness.

A Look at Some of the Literature

Scholars from political science, international politics, geography, sociology, area studies, and economics address regions. Scholarly interests range across geopolitics, economic, political and social institutions, cultural and ideational similarities, and historical processes. Methodological approaches are equally diverse, ranging from case studies of single regions to large-N empirical models. It would be virtually impossible to review this vast expanse of literature here, and fortunately, that is not our purpose. Instead, we focus on recent, large-N, quantitative research relevant to issues involving conflict and cooperation between states, in order to assess the extent to which there is substantial “cumulation” in conceptual development, empirical measurement, and substantive findings regarding the significance of regions in their models.³ We assess this literature specifically since it has systemically identified *region* as significant in empirical models and thus holds hope for the progressive identification of dynamics that could underscore regional significance. Thus, we hope to address the quantitative research audience with what follows.

We have undertaken two sweeps of recent literature. In one, we focused on quantitative studies of phenomena in international politics and analyzed articles in which

¹Many states also pursue their primary economic relationships within their own regions (including Europe, East Asia, and Northern America), albeit this is less universal across all regions in the international system.

²Most studies focus on a single region and the dynamics driving states within one region. Of these the European Union experience dominates, but has been increasingly challenged by single studies of other regions, especially East Asia and Southeast Asia, and a smaller but growing literature on Sub-Saharan Africa. There are substantially fewer cases of exemplary scholarship that focus on two (e.g., Katzenstein 2005; Solingen 1998) or more regions (Buzan and Waever 2003; Gleditsch 2002; Lemke 2002; Prys 2010; Stewart-Ingersoll and Frazier 2011).

³Thus, we do not focus this literature review on the state of the art regarding regions, but the extent to which regional considerations are integrated into quantitative research focused on conflict and cooperation processes.

scholars included *region* as part of the analysis.⁴ In the second sweep, we looked for research focusing on the region as the primary level or unit of analysis in studies of international relations. As we note below, we sampled literature that is very recent and most likely read by quantitative scholars focusing on conflict and cooperation dynamics. Such a sample, however, is not meant to reflect on the larger volume of scholarship on the development, integration, and institutionalization of regions available to researchers, although we draw on some of that literature in our theoretical section.

Regions and Regional Effects in Recent Quantitative Studies

Focusing on literature utilizing quantitative models, we sought to address the following questions: (1) how often do scholars focus on regions as a conditioning variable in their analyses; (2) how do researchers classify regions; and (3) what impacts do regions have on the analysis? In order to answer these questions, we sampled eleven journals from 2010 to 2015, involving a cumulative total of more than 245 issues.⁵ While these journals do not constitute the universe of publications yielding quantitative analyses in international relations, they do provide a broad view of current quantitative scholarship.

The articles chosen for analysis included quantitative studies in which either the key dependent variable, or one or more of the central independent variables used in the analysis involved phenomena typically studied by international relations scholars. This initial group yielded 695 research articles. Of these, we narrowed our focus to studies in which the models included region in the empirical analysis and utilized a research domain that included more than a single region. Seventy-five of the articles examined (approximately eleven percent) met our criteria.⁶ The remaining articles that *could have* included regional controls in their models indicated virtually no justification for their exclusion. Clearly, most quantitative analyses fail to take into account possible regional effects on the primary research question.

Among the seventy-five articles that include region in empirical models, it appears primarily for methodological reasons (including fixed effects) and only secondarily for substantive reasons (potentially generating independent effects). In many cases, there are no reasons given for utilizing regional controls. Unsurprisingly, in the majority of cases when region appears to be significant, scholars do not discuss the theoretical consequences.

How are Regions Classified?

Given the relative inattention to the salience of regions in the sampled literature, it comes as no surprise that there is little consensus about either conceptual meaning or operationalization. Thompson's (1973) groundbreaking review of the regions literature—now more than four decades ago—continues to ring true; classifications range from large, geographical entities (metaregions such as Africa, Asia, or Europe) to half-hearted attempts to inject political significance into geopolitical spaces (Europe East and post-Soviet Union or Asia/Tigers). The lack of an emerging

⁴We recognize that a similar review of book manuscripts may yield different outcomes, but we focused on articles to allow a systematic sampling of literature.

⁵These included *American Political Science Review*, *American Journal of Political Science*, *British Journal of Political Science*, *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, *Journal of Politics*, *Journal of Peace Research*, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, *Foreign Policy Analysis*, *International Interactions*, *International Studies Quarterly*, and *International Organization*. We focused on journals most likely to contain large-N studies that would include the utilization of regions and would have high visibility in the field (based on the TRIPS survey of IR journals and the Thomson citation index) ("Journal Rankings").

⁶If an article discussed regions but failed to include them in the empirical model, we excluded it from the sample. There is substantial variation across journals, possibly reflecting editorial judgments about the salience of regions or fixed effects considerations in empirical models; *Journal of Conflict Resolution* yielded the lowest percentage that included regional effects (2 percent), while the *American Journal of Political Science* (25 percent) and *International Studies Quarterly* (22 percent) yielded the highest percentages.

Table 1. Classifications of regions in the quantitative literature (N = 75)

	Meta-Regions	Meta-Regions with Minor Modifications	Meta-Regions with Major Modifications	Standard Codes	Unclear	Other Classifications
Number of Articles	16	13	10	17	9	10

consensus is reflected in no fewer than seventy different regional labels across the seventy-five studies (Appendix 1). States in the Western Hemisphere are sometimes lumped together (Americas), sometimes disaggregated (Central and South; Central, South, and Caribbean; Central; Latin; and North and South), and sometimes parts are lumped in with other groupings (North America and West Europe; North America, West Europe, and Japan; North America, West Europe, and Oceania). Asian states are delineated across no fewer than twenty-two categories.

Table 1 illustrates the dominant classifications in the surveyed literature. *Metaregions* are large, continent-wide geographical areas;⁷ *Minor modifications* reflect small deviations from metaregions;⁸ *major modifications* consist of modifications to metaregions based on theoretical considerations or political identity;⁹ *standardized codes* are World Bank, United Nations, or Correlates of War (COW) classifications; *other Classifications* represent regional distinctions different from the previous ones; *unclear* indicates insufficient information in the article or the data files to make a judgment about how regions were classified.¹⁰

As Table 1 illustrates, a majority of region classifications are based on metaregions with or without modifications. Another 23 percent utilize standardized codes (with half utilizing COW codes) while only 13 percent rely on other categorizations.¹¹ The preponderance of the reviewed research utilizes coding schemes created for purposes typically unassociated with the primary research questions scholars pursue.

There does not appear to be much original work on identifying and measuring regions across these works, nor much agreement about an existing “gold standard” for classification. Furthermore, discussion about the concept of region is generally minimal to nonexistent, as are issues about the validity of the empirical classification for regional membership.¹² The regional delineations used appear to follow either similar, previous work on the subject or appear to be chosen by most authors because they are conveniently available, but seldom justified in terms of the options that were available. Virtually none of this scholarship engages the specific literature on regions: literature that has raised substantial issues regarding conceptual and empirical problems in making comparisons across regions (e.g., Ahram 2011; De Lombaerde et al. 2010).

⁷As an illustration, see Choi and Salehyan (2013), who classify regions as the Americas, Europe, Africa, Asia, and Oceania.

⁸As an illustration, Bernauer et al (2010) divide some of the larger metaregions into more geographically limited spaces: Asia becomes Eastern Asia and Western Asia; the Americas become North America and Latin America.

⁹Typically, two types of modifications fit into this category, based either on political or economic qualifications distinguishing parts of metaregions or integrating parts across metaregions. For instance, Bearce and Tirone (2010) use both political (Asia–former Soviet Union) and economic bases (Asian Tiger, Asian non-Tiger) for separating geopolitical areas.

¹⁰An initial intercoder reliability test yielded aggregate agreement with the classifications at 0.89. After a reconciliation for minor errors, the second round yielded agreement at 0.96. Primary disagreements revolved around minor deviations from metaregions.

¹¹Four classifications utilize a previous effort’s focus to assess democracies (Hadenius and Teorell 2005); one replicates a categorization used for analyzing diffusion in democracies (Brinks and Coppedge 2006); one utilizes a classification used to study shatterbelts (Hensel and Diehl 1994); one borrows a classification for analyzing civil wars (Hegre and Sambanis 2006); one uses COW codes modified by Bueno de Mesquita (1981); and one (Hafner-Burton and Ron 2013) modifies World Bank classifications by creating a category of “powerful West.”

¹²For an exception, see Dafoe (2011).

Table 2. The frequency of significance for regional specifications (N = 75)

	Unavailable	Yes	No
Number of Articles Reporting Significant Regional Effects	34	35	6

Table 3. The significance of regions on the dependent variable in the literature considering regional effects

Dependent Variable	Total Articles Identified	Regions Shown Significant	Regions Not Shown Significant	Unknown
Conflict	15	6	2	7
Cooperation	9	5	1	3
Economic	12	6	1	5
Human Rights	7	2	1	4
Institutions	16	7	1	8
Regime/Democracy	10	4	0	6
Terrorism	6	5	0	1
<i>Total</i>	75	35	6	34

As harsh as this judgment sounds, it is understandable.¹³ Almost all the literature we reviewed was otherwise rigorous both theoretically and methodologically. However, researchers typically utilized the region variable as one of a subset of “controls” in models, secondary to the primary research question and used primarily as a method for introducing fixed effects. Thus, in many cases researchers did not even report the impact of region on the dependent variable in the results.

Yet, region appears to matter substantively for the dependent variable of interest in most of these studies.¹⁴ To assess how often this is the case, we reclassified all articles according to whether or not they report the effects of regions on the dependent variable, and if so, whether or not regional classifications are significant. As Table 2 illustrates, the appropriate information in thirty-four of these articles (45 percent) is unavailable.¹⁵ Thus, we are left with forty-one articles that present regional effects in the empirical models. Overwhelmingly, region matters for a wide array of phenomena (85 percent of these articles report significant relationships with the dependent variable); only six articles report otherwise.¹⁶ As Table 3 illustrates, the significance of regions appears across a wide range of dependent variables, and regional significance survives despite models that contain a rich range of independent variables (including contiguity measures, which might reasonably be expected to subsume some effect of region) and divergent strategies to identifying and measuring regions.

Given the lack of agreement on regional classifications, it is extremely difficult to integrate substantive findings on regions across these studies. For instance, we cannot gauge systematically the independent effect of regions on conflict processes when articles differ by regional classification and method (varying in terms of which region functions as the baseline comparison).¹⁷ It appears that the two most consistent

¹³For a similar assessment of the quantitative literature in comparative politics involving regional differences, see Ahrum (2011).

¹⁴We are not the first to note this (e.g., Hegre and Sambanis 2006).

¹⁵Typically, authors indicate that they used regional distinctions as “fixed effects” or for robustness checks, without disclosing the impact of regional controls on the dependent variable. Two indicate that regional classifications are significant, but the data are not contained in the analysis presented.

¹⁶Of these six, one uses a highly restricted arena for ratification of treaties (Schneider and Urpelainen 2013); another indicates previous findings showing substantial salience for regional classifications regarding crises and suggests the need for further refinement (Özdamar and Akbaba 2014).

¹⁷Much of the literature we examined fails to address some of the key issues raised by the spatial economics literature focused on diffusion and interdependence and the salient methodological implications that arise in gauging

Table 4. Number of articles focused on selected topics, when region is level or primary unit of analysis (N = 20)

	Democratic peace	Diffusion processes	Regional organizations	War and conflict	Theory of regions	Other ²¹
Number of Articles	4	3	3	5	3	2

outliers in conflict studies are Europe and the Middle East, consistent with face validity, but even *membership* in these two regions varies substantially across studies.

A Second Sweep of the Literature

We conducted a second sweep of the literature, focusing on a slightly different mix of journals likely to include conceptual work in addition to empirical analysis, and we increased the timeframe to cover more than ten years (2005 to 2015), involving more than 450 issues of eleven journals.¹⁸ The purpose here was to identify the extent to which researchers utilized region as the primary level or unit of analysis in their work.¹⁹ We excluded studies that focused only on one region, unless there was an explicit attempt and a proposed framework to expand the approach to others.²⁰

We uncovered only twenty articles (less than 1 percent of all relevant ones) across the entire time span that met our criteria (Appendix 2). Unsurprisingly, given the dearth of attention to regions in the previous literature review, few scholars appear to focus on region as either the appropriate level or unit of analysis in international politics. Furthermore, two scholars produced one-quarter of these articles (Acharya 2007, 2014; Solingen 2007, 2008, 2012).

Table 4 notes the subject focus of these articles. Studies of war, conflict, regional organizations, and the democratic peace—typical foci in the broader literature—constitute a plurality of these studies. Articles focused on theories of regions are not highly visible in the sample.²²

Where to from Here?

These two literature reviews underscore the following: there is not much ongoing conceptual development regarding the meaning of regions in the sampled

the effects of spatial, temporal, and unit considerations simultaneously. For instance, Franzese and Hayes (2007, 2008) and Beck, Gleditsch, and Beardsley (2006) present strong arguments regarding spatial impacts on variables of interest and illustrate the methodological complexity involved in differentiating empirically between unit, time, and spatial effects, especially when political dynamics likely involve diffusion processes and interdependencies. We return to this point below.

¹⁸These journals included *American Political Science Review*, *American Journal of Political Science*, *Journal of Politics*, *British Journal of Political Science*, *World Politics*, *International Organization*, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, *International Affairs*, *European Journal of International Relations*, *International Studies Quarterly*, and *International Security*.

¹⁹We exclude for instance Dafoe's (2011) excellent analysis of regional effects since region is one of, but not the primary concern in the article. We also exclude book reviews unless the author provides new theoretical or empirical material, such as Acharya's review (2007).

²⁰Henderson (2009) and Thies (2010), focusing on Africa but providing a comparative context, are examples.

²¹Includes one article on media regional bias in human rights reporting (Hafner-Burton and Ron 2013) and a comparative look at resistance to the Washington Consensus over economic development (Grugel, Riggiozzi, and Thirkell-White 2008, 98).

²²They are, however, visible in numerous other journals typically less associated with quantitative analysis in IR, focused on comparative regions, regionalism, regionalization, and regionness. See for instance De Lombaerde et al. (2010), Hettne and Söderbaum (2000), Fawcett and Gandois (2010), Fawn (2009), Hurrell (2007), Mansfield and Solingen (2010), Sbragia (2008); engagement with the literature on new regionalism in the sample is virtually non-existent outside of the five theory pieces cited.

literature²³ and little agreement on how to delineate regions. It is difficult to aggregate the impact of regional dynamics given substantial differences in the research over both regional delineation and method of regional exclusion. Yet, when regional effects are explicitly included in the research, their effects persist over a broad range of research questions.

Such persistence in findings suggests that regions are salient considerations in the analysis of international relations, and we find it worthwhile to seek further discussion and debate over conditions needed to understand better how they relate to phenomena of scholarly interest. Toward that view, we offer two proposals: first, an approach to conceptualizing and measuring regions and, second, a theoretical framework for conducting comparative regional analysis in international relations relevant to issues of interstate conflict and cooperation. Neither proposal will resolve long-standing difficulties; we offer them to stimulate further debate, discussion, and research that hopefully can generate more cumulation over regional effects and the salience of regions for theories of international politics.

Delineating Regions

While the salience of regional spaces in international relations has a long tradition (e.g., Mackinder 1904), consensus over identifying the contours of relevant regional subsystems has thus far remained elusive (Buzan 1998; Fawn 2009; Fawcett and Gandois 2010). Some have sought to avoid arbitrarily determined regions by defining composition through the existence of regional institutions (Powers 2004) or security complexes (Buzan and Waever 2003). These attempts, however, make comparisons of regions impossible for certain questions (e.g., why do some regions develop institutions while others fail to do so?) due to selection effects for delineation.²⁴

As an alternative approach, we define *regions* as those spaces in which a group of geographically contiguous states possess both the opportunity and willingness to interact with one another as a function of their capabilities and foreign policy interactions (consistent with Rhamey 2012, Teixeira 2012, and Volgy and Rhamey 2014). Underpinning our analytical approach is Most and Starr's (1989) opportunity and willingness framework, providing a means of selecting a cluster of states that have the potential to engage in regional activity. By restricting states to those that are contiguous and mutually capable of interacting, our approach is consistent with much of the literature on politically relevant dyads (Lemke and Reed 2001; Quackenbush 2006). By including a minimal willingness constraint, we provide a baseline of mutual recognition between region members, capturing politically relevant regions that come into existence as a function of interactive, overlapping interests. However, we avoid the tautological dangers of using measurements on criteria that are more specific by being ambivalent as to the nature of that interaction. The result is an operationalization of regions comprised of contiguous states interacting, to a degree, uniquely apart from the broader international system. Furthermore, the approach has the advantage of flexibility as regional composition—both the number and scope of regions—may evolve with changes in geopolitical context (Fawcett 2004, 434). This broad operationalization satisfies the conceptual criteria upon which researchers conduct most regional analysis in international relations and is suitable for analyses that treat region as a fixed effect *and* those that treat regions as substantively important.

²³Again, we underscore the caveat that outside this sample there are a substantial number of efforts seeking to understand the concept of region and its consequences for both comparative and international politics. We refer to some of those works below. However, the fact that very few of those works are cited in these journals of high visibility to quantitative international politics scholars should give us pause about the advancement of regional considerations in large-N quantitative work.

²⁴For a similar argument, see Solingen (2014).

To measure the opportunity constraint for joint regional membership, we calculate each state's ability to reach others in the international system using [Bueno de Mesquita's \(1981\)](#) loss of strength gradient that degrades the capabilities of states across distance. The projected capability from state i to state j is:

$$P_{ij} = \text{Power}^{\log[(\text{miles})/(\text{milesperday})+(10-\epsilon)]}$$

where Power is measured as the state's gross domestic product (GDP) in proportion to global GDP ([Heston, Summers, and Allen 2012](#)),²⁵ and miles per day in the post-World War II era is set at 500 ([Bueno de Mesquita 1981](#)). This calculation results, conceptually, in a series of capability "bubbles" radiating outward from each state's capital. Each state's power, according to the formula, degrades across distance until the point at which it is no longer significantly relevant to the target state's foreign policy. Following [Lemke \(2002\)](#), we designate the threshold at which states lose the opportunity to interact significantly at 50 percent capability loss from the capital of the projecting state to the capital of the target.²⁶ Directed dyads above the 50 percent threshold are coded as "1" with all others coded "0."

Second, we determine whether states with opportunity also possess observable willingness to interact through consistent foreign policy engagement. To estimate the extent of willingness, we first aggregate the total number of scaled events from the Conflict and Peace Data Bank (COPDAB) for 1950–1978 ([Azar 1980](#)) and from the Integrated Data for Event Analysis (IDEA) for 1990–2013 ([Bond et al. 2003](#); [Goldstein 1992](#) for scaling) for each state. We then calculate for each dyad, annually, the directed scaled foreign policy activity of each state to each other state as a proportion of their total foreign policy activity. Those states that engage in an above average proportion²⁷ of their total foreign policy activity with another state, regardless of whether that interaction is cooperative or conflictual, surpass our willingness threshold. If dyads surpass this willingness threshold, we code them as having a "1" for willingness, while others receive a "0."

Finally, we identify cliques in network analysis ([Hanneman and Riddle 2005](#)) to determine unique clusters of interaction among three or more states where dyads are coded as receiving a link if they receive a "1" for both opportunity and willingness, annually. A "tie" in the network is then a relationship between two states that are capable of reaching one another, given their share of global GDP and the loss of strength gradient, and engage in relatively greater amounts of foreign policy engagement as a proportion of their total foreign policy activity, each year. From this matrix of dyadic relationships, the clique algorithm determines patterns of connections between states of greater relative similarity compared to the international system.²⁸ The resulting endogram output using UCINET social network analysis software depicts groups of states organized according to the extent of correlation in their patterns of ties within the network ([Borgatti, Everett, and Freeman 2002](#)).

We employ no specific threshold for correlation between states to qualify as potential region members, only that they are relatively more correlated with one group than with others. The rationale for this flexibility is due to the variable

²⁵Others who use the loss of strength gradient typically include the Correlates of War Composite Index of National Capability (CINC) as the measure of power. In recent years, however, CINC scores have produced peculiar outcomes resulting primarily from the inclusion of total population in the index. GDP provides a more plausible hierarchy of states, but in the post-Cold War era, is still strongly correlated with CINC scores ([Rhamey 2012, 69](#)).

²⁶See [Lemke \(2002, 79–81\)](#) for further justification of the use of capitals and the 50 percent threshold.

²⁷An "above average" amount is a proportion of a state's foreign policy directed to another state that is greater than the average proportion of all states' foreign policy to each other state, annually, which is about 4 percent each year.

²⁸For discussion of the clique method, see [Hanneman and Riddle \(2005, chapt. 11\)](#) and [Everett and Borgatti \(1998\)](#).

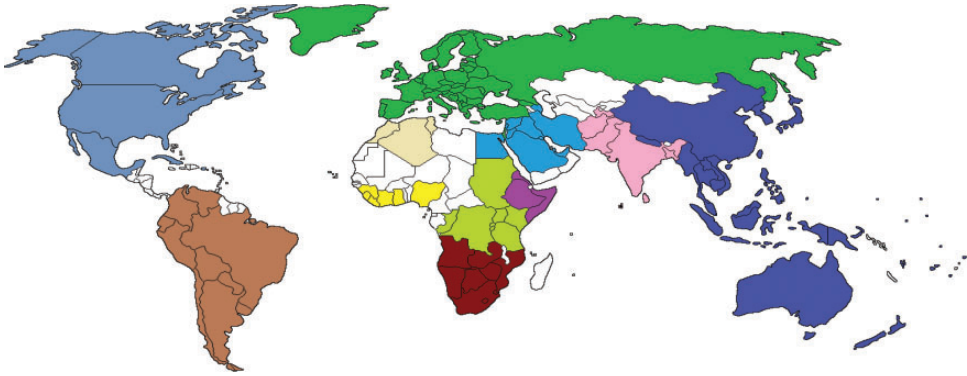


Figure 1. Mapping regions, 2001–2010.

nature of similarity within different regions; in Europe, most region members have very similar ties, whereas in West Africa, those similarities are less extensive, albeit region members possess more in common with one another than they do with any other nearby cluster of states.²⁹ In East Asia in 2001, Laos' ties in the network are not as strongly correlated with the ties of Thailand as those of Singapore. However, Laos is relatively more strongly correlated with ties to Thailand, Singapore, and the remaining members of the East Asian region than any other group, while the resulting region does not possess any clear separate cliques of three or more states within it. Thus, Laos is included as a member of East Asia.

The cliques identified by this method are contiguous over land or less than 500 miles of water,³⁰ resulting in regions consisting of geographically contiguous states whose patterns of opportunity and willingness are uniquely similar to one another relative to the broader international system. Finally, to maintain stability in regional composition and to prevent anomalous events limited to a single year from driving regional membership, we place states in the region for each year within which they most frequently identify across each decade.

By focusing on proximity with opportunity and willingness, this approach allows state location, behavior, and capability to drive classification rather than preselected structural categories. This operationalization of regions provides additional utility from the flexible nature of both regions and states within them.³¹ Some states belong to no region; others (e.g., Turkey) move from one region to another over time (and perhaps return). Some regions may come into existence or dissolve, as is the case of post–Cold War Central Asia, while others may merge to become super-regions (e.g., Europe or East Asia). These shifting dynamics reflect the observable “power and purpose of states” (Katzenstein 2005, 2), mirroring aspects of the conception of regions often employed in comparative regionalism.³²

Using these procedures, we identify eleven regions for the 2001–2010 time-frame (Figure 1 and Appendix 3). States fall into three classifications: *core region members*, *peripheral region members*, and *border states*. Core region members are states that meet our criteria on both capabilities and foreign policy activity. Some states lack ties to others due to an absence of unique policy activity or capabilities (e.g.,

²⁹See, for example, the network diagrams in Rhamey (2012, 129) or Rhamey, Thompson, and Volgy (2014, 5–7).

³⁰So as not to eliminate any country from the possibility of regional membership, those few countries not within 500 miles of any others (e.g., Iceland), we count the closest proximate state over water as satisfying the contiguity constraint.

³¹Consistent with the literature arguing for the fluidity of regions; for example, Fawcett (2004).

³²See also the similar conceptual definition by Paul (2012, 4) or the inventory of criteria for regional composition by Thompson (1973).

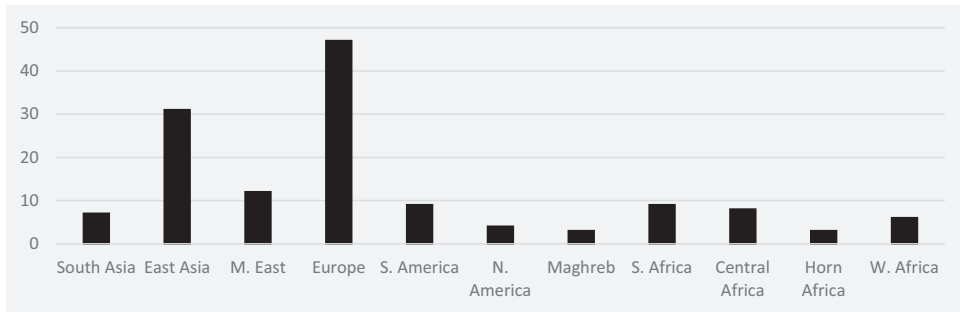


Figure 2. Number of states in each region, 2001–2010 (source: Appendix 3).

Vanuatu) while others have ties, but do not cluster with any contiguous states (e.g., Australia). These states are divided into two groups: peripheral region members and border states. Those that, while lacking ties, are surrounded by a region (e.g., Paraguay³³) are classified as peripheral region members. If a state does not cluster and is geographically between two or more regions, it is a border state that could be placed in multiple regions. These states (e.g., Libya or Kazakhstan) are pulled in multiple directions, resulting in no clear pattern of engagement with any one group.

This pattern of being torn in multiple directions among relatively limited capability states, with no consistency of interactions with one another that we would consider a unique pattern of interaction apart from the international system, is frequently the case with geographic spaces such as Central Asia and the Caribbean. Nested between cohesive regions, these groups often constitute membership in our pool of border states that do not fit neatly within one region or another and fail to form their own cluster. This observation mirrors the expectations of some area experts; for instance, [Zakhirova \(2012\)](#) finds the Central Asian space to be too fluid to constitute what scholars typically consider a coherent regional space. As Appendix 3 illustrates, 139 states (71.6 percent) cluster into one of the eleven regions, while fifty-five (28.4 percent) are classified as border states, belonging to no specific region. Nearly half of the border states are small countries and with a few exceptions are relatively inactive in international and regional affairs.

In order to illustrate changes over time to regions and their composition, we note in Appendix 4 the movement of states and regional classifications in the European metaregion during the Cold War. As the merging of Eastern and Western European states in the 1970s suggests, the ability of contiguous states to reach each other in addition to higher levels of interaction reshapes the boundaries of the region, rather than by the development of a single security structure or by structured economic cooperative arrangements. In fact, the European region in the 1970s was characterized by competing security and economic architecture, creating substantial conflicts within the region. However, our approach nevertheless identifies one European region of states focused on each other.

³³According to our measurement strategy, Paraguay belongs in the South American region, albeit not as a core member, based on its absence of substantial opportunity and willingness with other South American states. While it does interact with its immediate neighbors, its limited capabilities to reach other states in the region are paralleled by its inconsistent interactions with its region's members. Others who classify regional membership based on regional institutions (Mercosur, UNISUR) or economic relationships, may see Paraguay as more central to the region; however, its troubled relationship with these institutions is consistent with our designation of Paraguay as a peripheral regional member.

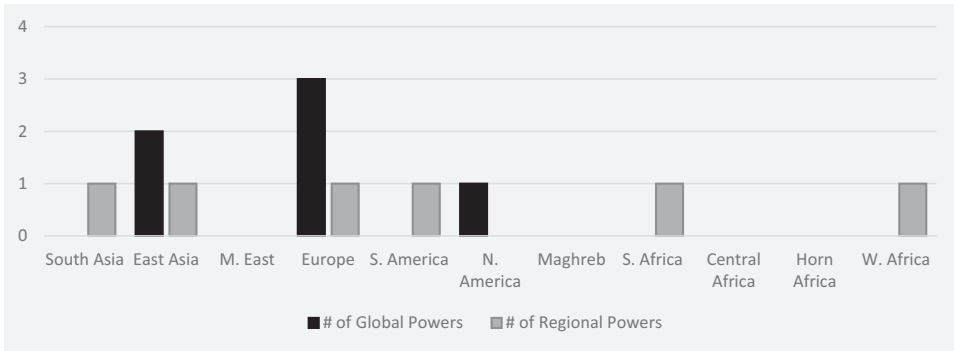


Figure 3. Numbers of regional and global powers habiting regions, 2001–2010 (source: Appendix 3).

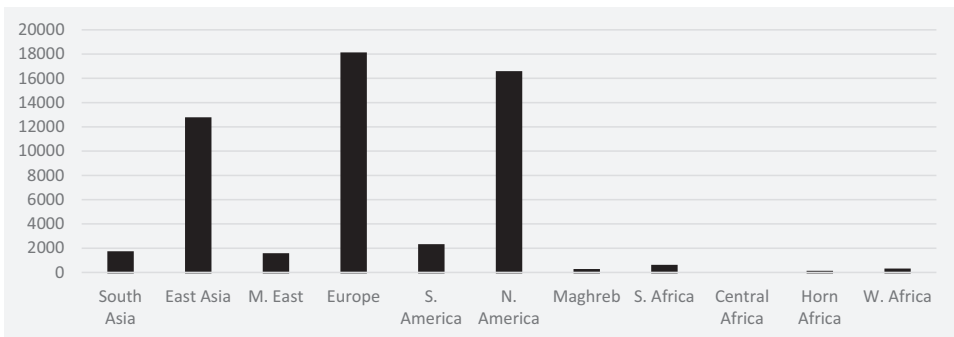


Figure 4. Size of region GDP in constant (2005) US\$(Bn), averaged for 2011–2013 (source: World Bank).

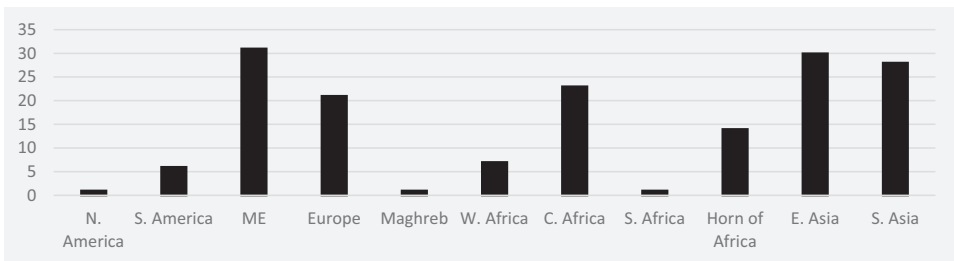


Figure 5. Total number of severe (4/5) MIDs, by region, 2001–2010 (source: COW MIDs v4.1).

There is a variety of costs to this approach to regional delineation. One is that the definition and its operationalization minimize cultural and ideational components of regions. However, we assume (and recognize it is a considerable assumption) that the extent to which such considerations create regions, they should be reflected in at least the threshold of interactions we require for states within contiguous spaces.

Additionally, and especially for researchers engaged in large-N longitudinal analyses, there are substantial costs to accommodating changes over time, both

for regions and the states populating them, rather than treating regions and their membership as invariant phenomena. Yet, a substantively more satisfying classification should offset these costs. Furthermore, a process of nonarbitrary regional determination may be created for any period of time if a single regional allocation is necessary.

Still another cost may be that the scheme we propose will yield more numerous regions than expected and the regions will not be comparable in terms of the numbers of states within them, or a variety of other salient characteristics. For instance, applying this delineation to the twenty-first century, [Figures 2–5](#) indicate a rich diversity of regions and both regional differences and similarities, creating substantial theoretical complexity for comparative regional analysis. Yet, an even richer diversity at the state level of analyses has not retarded work at that level.

We recognize that our suggested conceptual and measurement strategy may be less suitable for those with different theoretical lenses or those with substantially different research questions. For instance, an ideational approach may minimize physical location in favor of identity-based associations and carve regions from geopolitical units that violate our contiguity/proximity assumptions. Alternatively, for certain types of research questions (e.g., under what conditions does regional cooperative architecture endure?) some may define regions in terms of the existence of formal structures of cooperation and create regional membership driven by the extent to which regional structures capture the states in the region.³⁴

We note as well that our approach may be less suitable for those utilizing different methodologies for addressing regional clustering, state behavior, and diffusion. While we have developed our argument in the prevalent context of large-N quantitative international relations (IR) scholars utilizing regional fixed effects in order to mitigate correlated error terms, other approaches exist as well. These include the use of spatial error or spatial lag models (e.g., [Beck, Gleditsch, and Beardsley 2006](#)), and neighborhood-based approaches common in the diffusion literature (e.g., [Gleditsch 2007](#)). These are valuable strategies for IR scholars attempting to explain international phenomena and account for the effect of proximity. The virtue of our own approach vis-à-vis these others, however, is two-fold. First, we empirically derive relevant, behavior-conditioning geographic space for each actor based upon its physical location and its decisions to pursue interaction (either cooperative or conflictual) with others. In doing so, we account for both the opportunity (capabilities to reach across a physical area) and willingness (engagement) by states to interact. This approach moves beyond treatments of geographic location based on distance and proximity alone (including beyond spatial metrics of proximity and geography), consistent with the notion that “space is more than geography” ([Beck, Gleditsch, and Beardsley 2006](#)) by also accounting for repeated patterns of state interactions and organizing behaviors.³⁵

Second, through the identification of substantively relevant geographic spaces, we are able to consider questions directly relating to the region as the level of analysis rather than having regional location inform or condition state-level analyses. Ultimately, however, we recognize that the choice of modeling regions based purely upon spatial components or by also accounting for state behavior must depend on the nature of the research question being addressed.

³⁴Likewise, for scholars interested in political economy issues, geographically contiguous states could be reclassified in terms of their relative trade vis-à-vis each other and/or the extent to which they generate structural agreements such as regional trade agreements. However, by selecting conflict and cooperation events as the measure of interaction, we believe our approach offers broader applicability to understanding the variability of cooperation and conflict across regional spaces.

³⁵For example, without information on patterns of behavior, Estonia would be, given distance, of far greater “regional” relevance to Russia than France would. But, by incorporating patterns of behavior, Estonia has perhaps become more regionally relevant to France than neighboring Russia. Thus, not all distance is created equal, and therein lies the utility of our approach to identifying regional spaces by including behavior alongside distance.

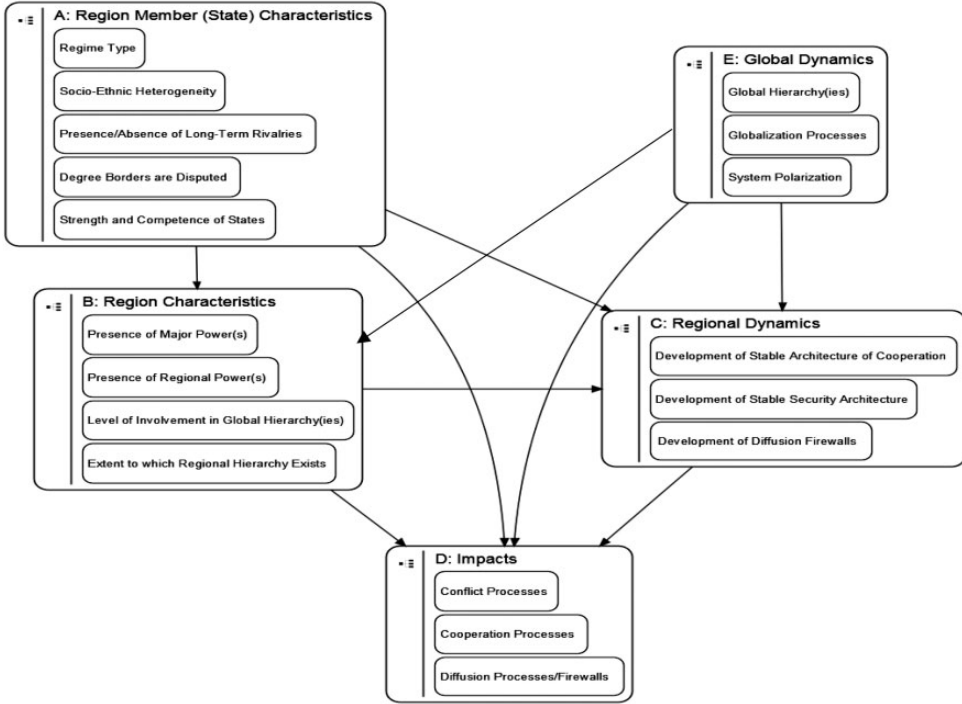


Figure 6. A Theoretical framework for assessing regional comparative effects on conflict, cooperation, and diffusion processes.

We quarrel with none of these approaches, and we recognize their utility. We offer ours with the hope that it has primary value for further theoretical development in comparative regional analyses around issues of conflict and cooperation. Hopefully, we should be able to assess at a later stage whether theoretical insights and empirical findings can be integrated across these conceptual and empirical differences and theoretical approaches, and if not, at least uncover the extent to which one approach may trump others depending on the major research question at hand—including, the use of spatial and neighborhood-based methods of analysis.

A Theoretical Framework

Figure 6 illustrates some of the plausible linkages for a comparative analysis of regions, integrating state, region, and system level considerations. The framework suggests a number of trajectories through which a focus on regions may impact interstate relationships. We focus specifically on three salient phenomena: conflict, cooperation, and diffusion. Note that there are three ways through which we can observe regional effects. First, and least interesting, are what we call Type I effects: regions may simply reflect an aggregate of considerations at the state level (A→D in Figure 6).³⁶ If, for instance, democracies do not fight each other, regions rich in democracies are less likely to engage in wars and militarized interstate disputes (MIDs). Such an outcome will tell us little more than what we

³⁶In these types of cases, approaches focusing on politically relevant dyads or spatial diffusion of proximate states may be more appropriate than analyzing discrete regional spaces as levels of analysis.

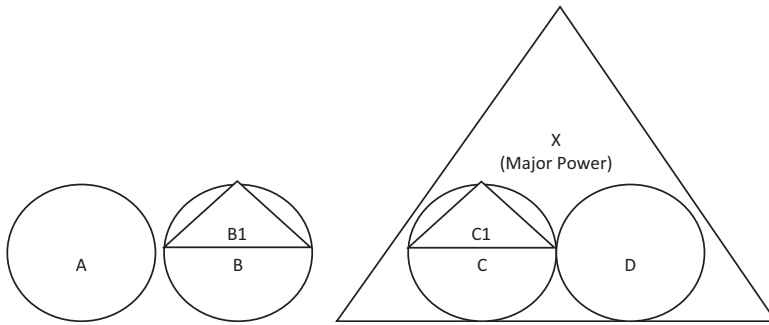


Figure 7. Hypothetical illustration of global and regional hierarchical relationships.

already know about democracy and conflict, except for the geopolitical places where these states cluster.

Second, a comparative analysis of regions may identify Type II effects: processes at the region level that result from aggregate state characteristics or through dyadic interactions ($A \rightarrow C \rightarrow D$ or $A \rightarrow B \rightarrow D$ in Figure 6).³⁷ For instance, certain state attributes or state-to-state interactions may create conditions in regions enabling the diffusion of international phenomena, such as policies or regulatory agencies (Simmons and Elkins 2004; Jordana, Levi-Faur, and Fernandez i Marín 2011), democratization (Wejnert 2005), or domestic political demonstrations (Lohmann 1994). Other attributes and interactions may lead to firewalls meant to retard diffusion effects emanating locally or globally (Solingen 2012). In these instances research would focus on the mix of domestic coalitions (Solingen 2007 in appendix) across states in a region that are likely to act together in ways that either minimize regional firewalls against globalization processes and accelerate diffusion (outward looking regimes) or collaborate to maximize regional firewalls (inward looking regimes) against the diffusion of phenomena (Ambrosio 2014). Similarly, research could focus on conditions in regions that would magnify or minimize diffusion effects stemming from ongoing rivalries (Thompson 2015). The theoretical drivers here are not simply the characteristics of states that lead to variation among regions, but the manner in which certain state attributes (or interactions) create other conditions that have region-wide consequences.³⁸ This type of inquiry moves beyond the aggregate characteristics of states by linking those characteristics to region-wide dynamics as significant explanatory variables.

Our primary interest—and theoretical bet—however is based on Type III effects: a comparative regional analysis that discriminates between regions based on differences created by hierarchical relationships (Lake 2009; Fawn 2009; Goh 2008) both inside regions and globally, integrating structural approaches into the theoretical framework ($B \rightarrow D$, $E \rightarrow B \rightarrow D$ and $B \rightarrow C \rightarrow D$ effects). Presumably, major powers that are able to create global hierarchies will not have uniform interests (and unlimited resources to deploy) across all regions, preferring the establishment and maintenance of such hierarchies in some but not all geopolitical spaces.

³⁷Although as Lake (2009, 44) notes, separating Type I from Type II effects in large-N based empirical models can become quite difficult.

³⁸Another illustration concerns the robust finding in the literature regarding the salience of unresolved territorial/border issues for interstate conflicts. In regions where such issues are at a minimum, there should be substantially fewer conflicts (Type I, $A \rightarrow D$ effects). However, regions with broadly accepted borders may also contain favorable conditions for the creation of stable institutions (e.g., Gibler and Braithwaite 2013) that further facilitate cooperation between states (Type II, $A \rightarrow C \rightarrow D$ effects). Likely, the combination of minimal territorial disputes, the prevalence of democracies, the end to ongoing rivalries, and especially security incentives provided by a major global power (United States) help account for the emergence of the Western European peace after centuries of intraregional conflict.

States (and indirectly, regions) will also vary from negotiating and accepting such hierarchical arrangements to resisting them (Acharya 2007, 2014; Goh 2013). Under what conditions major powers press for hierarchical arrangements, and conditions under which such arrangements are resisted or negotiated, become salient phenomena to explore, with substantial consequences for intraregional relationships (e.g., Hensel and Diehl 1994). Realists, liberal institutionalist, liberal, and constructivist perspectives provide contending hypotheses regarding these questions. Similarly, the literature on comparative regions and regionalism provides contending perspectives on the salience of major powers and regional powers in linking together states into stable regions and for advancing political projects involving regionalization (e.g., Hurrell 2007; Prys 2010).

Global hierarchies may also co-exist with regional hierarchical arrangements (Lemke 2002; Nolte 2010), as noted in Figure 7. Of interest to us are regional powers seeking to create order in their regions.³⁹ A comparative regional analysis can differentiate regions by (a) whether one or more regional powers exist in a region (b) if in existence, whether or not regional powers have the capability and willingness to seek to order affairs in the region, and if they seek to create such orders;⁴⁰ and (c) whether such attempts are supplemental to or independent of global hierarchical arrangements. Figure 7 illustrates the variety of plausible hierarchical arrangements across regions; regions are presented as circles and the presence of hierarchy(ies) by major and regional powers is illustrated with triangles. Regions range from those without regional or global hierarchies (Region A) to regions where regional and global hierarchies coexist (Region C). Despite recognizing the salience of global and regional powers in ordering political relationships, the extant literature is far from clear about the effects of global and regional contextual considerations on conflicts within regions, cooperative relationships, or diffusion firewalls erected by either major or regional powers.

The extent to which major and/or regional powers can create stable structures of cooperation depends on a wide range of factors including those that stem from Type I propositions: the characteristics of states in the region (e.g., ongoing rivalries, border issues, predictability and affinity brought about by similar political regimes, and ethnic conflicts spreading across political systems).⁴¹ In addition, regional or major powers cannot fashion such architecture unless they have the capacity to create them, a capacity that in part depends on the relative competence of their political institutions⁴² and the willingness of other states in the region to accept or negotiate such architecture.

Regions may provide a rich diversity of settings for diffusion processes (Elkins and Simmons 2005; Simmons 2009; Solingen 2012). There is a substantial and growing literature in international relations focused on the diffusion of a vast array of phenomena (e.g., democracies, terrorism, civil wars, human rights, etc.), along with a significant amount of work acknowledging intraregional and interregional diffusion⁴³ processes. We are particularly interested in how regions may vary in creating firewalls that minimize or fail to dampen diffusion processes both

³⁹Seeking order is not the same as minimizing conflict and maximizing cooperation between states in a region, but they should be related. The creation of certain security arrangements dampens conflicts (e.g., as Goh 2013 notes in East Asia). A complex architecture designed to promote economic and social exchanges between a region's members should facilitate other forms of cooperation. The extent to which order-seeking actually translates to greater cooperation and less conflict depends however on a number of factors that we refer to below.

⁴⁰For a nuanced differentiation of types of regional powers and their approach to order, see Prys (2010).

⁴¹For an example of the role of transethnic kin and its potential effects, see Rasler and Thompson (2014).

⁴²How much capability a regional power needs for such a successful enterprise is unclear. India in South Asia, South Africa in Southern Africa, and Nigeria in West Africa have all been relatively unsuccessful in generating stable cooperative institutions. Brazil in Southern America has been more successful (MERCUSOR, UNASUR), but even that limited success has faded with challenges from more radical Southern American states and a weakening of Brazilian political institutions.

⁴³For an excellent summary of works and the issues they raise, including about firewalls, see Solingen (2012).

within the region and from outside. For instance, the diffusion of democratic regimes appears to involve both regional and global diffusion processes (Gleditsch and Ward 2006). Yet, linked to the diffusion of democracies in some regions but not others may be the prevalence of some critical mass of intraregional political arrangements (Type II effects) or the creation of firewalls restricting such effects by regional powers (Type III effects). Similar firewalls may exist to minimize global diffusion effects and with variable utility across regions.

We propose that a good start toward understanding the impact of regions on these phenomena would be to focus on the combination of internal characteristics helping to create firewalls, or, to accelerate diffusion processes, and the relationship of these dynamics to the existence in the region of powerful regional or global actors seeking order and stability. Buhaug and Gleditsch (2008) demonstrate for instance that the neighborhood effects of civil conflicts are not about simple exposure to such conflicts but the more complex interplay of separatist conflicts involving transnational ethnic linkages. To what extent can strong regional powers erect workable firewalls to prevent such diffusion when it threatens the regional order favoring them? These types of questions have not been adequately addressed in the literature and certainly not using a comparative regional perspective.

A Theoretical Bet

The framework we suggest is far from providing a parsimonious approach to regional analysis. However, our theoretical bet is that of these linkages, the links between major powers, regional powers, and the emergence of order impacting both conflict and cooperation processes are most salient. We base this suggestion on three central assumptions. The first is that much of international politics unfolds in the context of hierarchical relationships (Goh 2013; Lake 2011, Lemke 2002; Katzenstein 2005; Organski and Kugler 1980; Modelski and Thompson 1996) when major powers have the capacity and the will to exercise such relationships. When such hierarchies are not sustainable (e.g., Fawcett and Gandois 2010), or fail to become applicable to certain regions, states in regions will experience—all else being equal—substantial uncertainties toward other regional members, leading to sporadic but unsustainable patterns of cooperation or substantial conflicts.

Second, irrespective of the existence of global orders, and especially when they may not structure regional relationships sufficiently, regional powers—when they have the capacity and the will to do so—will seek to create economic and security orders in their region.⁴⁴ Such regional orders may emerge when a region is irrelevant to global orders, or when regional powers seek to complement or contest (Goh 2007, 2008) global orders.⁴⁵

Third, we assume different types of regional and global circumstances, which may facilitate or hinder attempts by these powers to impose order and stability consistent with their interests, heavily condition impacts by major powers or regional powers on regions. The usual list of suspects for within-region conditions are well known in the literature on interstate conflict and cooperation, including territorial disputes (e.g., Gibler 2007; Huth 2009), regime types (e.g., Dafoe 2011; Peceny, Beer, and Sanchez-Terry 2002), rivalries (e.g., Colaresi and Thompson 2002; Diehl and Goertz 2001), and dissatisfaction with the status quo (e.g., Kugler and Lemke 1996; Schweller 1994). We consider these as *conflict fault lines* within

⁴⁴We do not assume this to be the case for altruistic reasons. Motivations will vary, including domestic political ones and others related to myriad foreign policy objectives.

⁴⁵We leave as an open question the substance of those orders being sought and the mechanisms used by regional powers to create them.

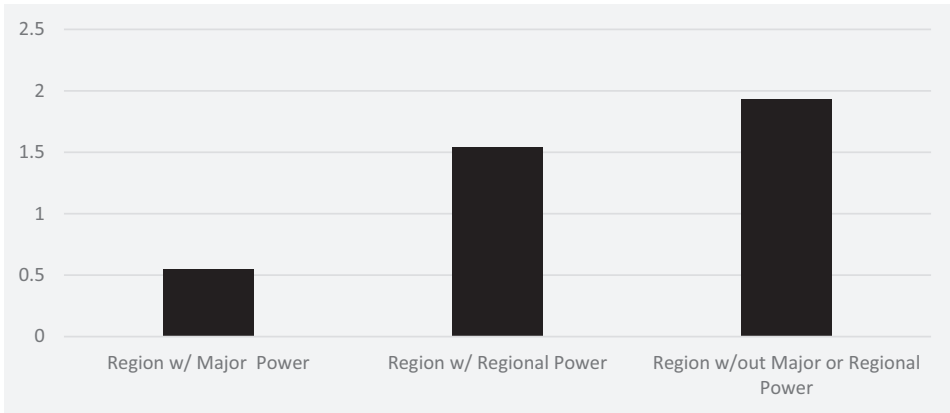


Figure 8. Frequency of severe (4/5) MID involvement per state, by region type, 2001–2010 (source: COW MIDS v. 4.1).

regions, and the larger the fault lines, the more difficult it will be for regional powers (and perhaps major powers as well) to create order within their regions.

Outside of the region a variety of global conditions are likely to create additional fault lines, or conversely, dynamics that may stimulate regional cooperative arrangements. These may include conditions such as exposure to globalization processes (e.g., Gartzke, Li, and Boehmer 2001; Mansfield and Solingen 2010; Russett and Oneal 2001; Hurrell 2007) or political polarization at the system level. A meaningful theory of regions would require as a starting point the clear demarcation of the types of regional and global conditions that would contain the most powerful effects conditioning major and regional power attempts at imposing orders and stabilities in regions.

While not the only useful approach to a comparative analysis of regions, the Type III explanation we suggest may carry considerable payoff, especially when integrated with the concept of regional fault lines. Consider at the simplest level the following relationship: whether major or regional powers domiciled in a region appear to be inversely associated with patterns of regional conflict. Figure 8 represents the total level of severe MID (levels four or five) involvement per state within regions differentiated by whether they are inhabited by major powers, only regional powers, or neither. Regions without either type of powers are most conflictual; regions inhabited by only regional powers are substantially more conflictual than regions inhabited by one or more major powers, while regions inhabited by one or more major powers appear to be least conflictual.

Yet, it is clear as well that there are other regional dynamics operating, as the range of MIDs across two categories is substantial and the existence of a regional power alone in a region is no guarantee of limiting intraregional conflict. For instance, while in the aggregate, there is less conflict in these regions compared to regions lacking a regional power; in the one region where there is both a regional power and an ongoing rivalry (South Asia), the region far exceeds the norm in terms of regional conflicts. In regions populated by regional powers but absent such rivalry, the low frequency of regional conflict involvement begins to approximate those in regions populated by major powers (0.74 versus 0.55 MIDs per number of states in the region).

A Short Propositional Inventory

As a starting point, we suggest two central propositions: First, all else being equal, the presence of a single major power in a region will have a substantially negative

effect on intraregional conflicts and facilitate intraregional cooperation.⁴⁶ Second, all else being equal, the presence of a single regional power in a region will diminish intraregional conflict and facilitate intraregional cooperation.

Not only does our framework clearly suggest the first proposition, but so does the extant knowledge regarding the salience of regional order for major powers. Minimizing regional conflict and creating regional stability appears to be a precondition for a state to emerge as a major power. With rare exceptions, major powers first developed as regional powers and did not migrate to the global stage until they had imposed sufficient order in their regional environment (Volgy et al. 2014). Major powers also possess unusually strong capabilities (Levy 1983) with which to order regional affairs, and a single major power in a region will have overwhelming capabilities with which to impose such order on its neighborhood.

The second proposition suggests that all else being equal, regional powers should have impacts similar to the presence of major powers on their regions. According to our delineation of regions and regional powers,⁴⁷ over the last decade the following regions contained a single regional power: Southern America (Brazil), West Africa (Nigeria), Southern Africa (South Africa), and South Asia (India).

Of course, not “all else” is equal, and we suggest a number of conditions that qualify our primary propositions. We focus especially on three sets of conditions that may qualify the relationships suggested by our initial hypotheses. One is about the extent to which there is a competitive environment for the power seeking to order regional relations. The second qualification regards the extent of conflict fault lines that such powers within their regions need to manage. The third condition focuses on whether or not the regional power⁴⁸ is capable and willing to act to impose regional order.

How Competitive is the Power Environment?

Two of our regions contain more than one major power. The extent to which such a condition creates competition, and thus minimizes the ability to create regional order, is likely to be a function of the relative dissatisfaction with the regional or global status quo by one or more of these powers. When such dissatisfaction is at a minimum, the potential competitive environment may not sufficiently deter the development of regional order; otherwise, the prospects of developing a stable regional order will be quite low if the major powers habiting the same region do not share a common perspective on the status quo. We guess that, in no small part, the very slow evolution of a regional order in East Asia is a function of two major powers in residence (China and Japan) and a third (United States) with active involvement and physical presence (military bases) in the region, with periodic conflicts fueled by divergent perspectives regarding both the global and the regional status quo (Goh 2013).

That potential conflicts between two or more major powers in the same region can be overcome is demonstrated clearly by the emergence of both security and economic integrationist arrangements among the states of the European Union,

⁴⁶We are differentiating throughout this effort between major powers (Levy 1983; Volgy et al. 2011) that have uniquely extensive resources and operate across regions versus regional powers that have only uniquely extensive resources compared to others in their region and have been endowed by other members of their region with regional power status (Cline et al. 2011).

⁴⁷We follow Cline et al. (2011) in identifying regional powers: those that hold unusual economic and military capabilities in their region, engage extensively with the states in the region, and are accorded the status of regional power by the member states constituting the region.

⁴⁸We assume that major powers operating in their own neighborhood—by definition—have the capacity and the historical willingness to impose such orders in their neighborhood before pursuing more global policies.

housing two major powers (United Kingdom and France), a regional power (Germany), with a third major power (United States) constituting an ongoing presence since World War II. Of course, much of that major power collusion took place in the aftermath of a global war, a huge security threat to the region from yet another major power (Soviet Union), and substantial underwriting by the United States. Once the region expanded (Appendix 4) to cover all of Europe, the region now contained two subregional orders, and conflicts over the status quo as first the Soviet Union and then Russia sought to prevent the expansion of western European regional order to the entire region. In fact, the “troubles” over Ukraine are a testament to the fragility of a region in which major powers have substantial conflicts over acceptable regional orders.

Ongoing rivalries can represent long-term competition in power relationships between major powers, but in the regional context, such competition is just as likely to occur between a regional power and a challenger to regional leadership. We assume that the intensity of such regional rivalries will substantially curb the ability of a regional power to create order in the region as in the case of the Pakistani-Indian rivalry in South Asia.

A third type of power competition may stem from the ongoing intrusion of major powers in a region inhabited by a regional power. While such involvement could be reflective of a major power seeking to supplement a regional power’s resources to establish order, it is just as likely that it will be a manifestation of different policy preferences and interests in the region, retarding the development of regional order.

How Extensive Are the Fault Lines to be Managed?

As noted earlier, the difficulty of managing regional order depends on a variety of phenomena that scholars have researched extensively at the monadic and dyadic levels of analysis. Four of these fault lines appear to be especially problematic for regional order. We anticipate that managing regions with substantial *regime dissimilarity* will be more difficult than in regions composed primarily by democratic or autocratic polities (McCallister 2016). The task of creating regional order should also vary with the *extent of territorial disputes* in the region; regions’ rife with territorial disputes may provide enormous challenges to a regional power, and perhaps a major power as well (Gibler 2007). We anticipate that the persistence of broad *ethnic conflicts within and across states* in the region and the potential spillover of ethnic conflicts and competition across state boundaries (Rasler and Thompson 2014), is likely to create substantial challenges to powers seeking to create stable regional order. Finally, we suggest that the persistence of *substantial economic inequalities* between states within a region, relatively unexplored in the literature but growing in significance (Østby 2013), may become a substantial fault line as well for managing regional orders. While the list of fault lines is undoubtedly greater than these four, we project from the extant literature that these may serve as the strongest obstacles for the development of regional order.

When Are Regional Powers Capable and Willing to Create Regional Order?

This condition has been relatively unexplored in the quantitative literature and especially as it pertains to regional powers. Our reading of the regions literature (e.g., Prys 2010; Fawcett and Gandois 2010) suggests three conditions that are likely to be pivotal. First, regional powers will require *substantial capabilities* with which to effectuate regional order. How much capability is needed may depend on the size of the region and the number of fault lines it contains. Thus, we assume that the task of regional order construction requires different capabilities in

West Africa (Nigeria), Southern Africa (South Africa), Southern America (Brazil), or South Asia (India).

Second, regional powers will vary in terms of their *domestic political competence* to translate their capabilities into developing and implementing effective strategies for creating order. Some regional powers have substantial political/bureaucratic efficiency with which to extract societal resources and apply them to foreign policy pursuits, while others have less. We can make similar arguments about the degree to which these states can create innovative and effective strategies for enhancing regional order and the extent to which they can counter domestic political pressures seeking to minimize the expenditure of resources to regional order building.

The first two conditions concern primarily the *capability* for regional order creation. The third is about *willingness*; we doubt that regional powers automatically seek regional order creation. It is more likely that there are various triggers that stimulate the willingness to do so (Prys 2010; Fawcett and Gandois 2010). One possible trigger is the pursuit of major power status by a regional power. Others include potential security threats from outside of the region along with a variety of domestic political motivations. Scholars would need to specify these in a comparative assessment of regions.

Conclusion

Given the successful inclusion of regional variables as fixed effects in extant quantitative scholarship, but without substantial theorizing about regional composition and their substantive importance to international relations, we provide here an initial attempt at laying a foundation for future comparative regional analysis and some applicable research questions. The conditions we list and the theoretical bets we offer regarding global and regional powers, we believe, constitute critical additional steps in the development of comparative regional analysis. We hope to pursue further analysis along these lines.

However, the key to a more systematic, comparative analysis of regions and their applicability to conflict and cooperation processes will require at least five additional steps. The first is the need to revisit the conceptualization and measurement of regional powers, a task that appears to be at least as complex as the conceptualization and measurement of regions.⁴⁹ Second is the delineation of specifications under which major powers and regional powers are able and willing to demark conditions for the operation of interstate politics in their region. The third task is to specify clearly the types of regional fault lines and global conditions that would comprise the most powerful effects conditioning major power and regional power attempts at imposing order and stability in a region.

Fourth, scholars need to search explicitly for systematic evidence regarding the causal mechanisms at play that may link regional powers with the reduction of conflict within their regions. A quick look at the data on regions and regional powers suggests that there are likely a range of mechanisms that may be at work. Some appear to be quite simple; overwhelming capabilities may create a deterrence effect for other regional members, making them more pacific in their relationships with each other. At the other end of the spectrum are complex, substantial efforts by powers to create architecture to maximize regional order and stability. Parsing out these different causal mechanisms that link regional/major power presence to reduced conflict and increased regional cooperation will not be an easy task.

⁴⁹For the difficulties involved with delineating regional powers and the literature that has attempted to do so, see Nolte (2010) and Neumann (1992).

The final challenge is a research design/methodological one. We suspect that one of the reasons why quantitative researchers have shied away from the region as the appropriate unit of analysis is due to the small-N problem. As an illustration, our approach to regional delineation (requiring extensive information about interstate interactions) limits our analysis to observations that span the decades between 1950 and 2010, yielding approximately an N of 50–60 regional unit observations. This small sample creates challenges when utilizing advanced statistical models; we can control for perhaps one or two variables using chi square tests⁵⁰ or analysis of variance, but we cannot generate an analysis involving simultaneously more variables. One alternative is to create hierarchical models, integrating dyadic units of analysis with region-level units, although the range of variables at the region level that can successfully fit within this model is also difficult to increase beyond one or two (McCallister 2016). A second alternative is to create a new unit of analysis, which we tentatively call the *region country MIDs involvement per year*, referring to the percentage of states in their regions engaged in MIDs annually across a decade of regional delineation. A preliminary analysis utilizing this approach yields a substantially higher N than the region unit of analysis, and the results appear to conform to our predictions for both fault lines and regional hierarchies,⁵¹ but this unit of analysis is neither as elegant nor as theoretically satisfying as the treatment of regions at their own unit of analysis. How these problems can be addressed both to maintain the validity of the theoretical argument and as a target of alternative specifications (robustness tests) remains to be seen.

These five challenges constitute formidable obstacles for theoretical development and empirical analysis. Yet, we suspect the effort is worthwhile if scholarship can move forward systematically toward a comparative analysis of regional effects in international politics.

⁵⁰For instance, doing so using two by three tables for region hierarchy type (no hierarchy, regional hierarchy, major power hierarchy) and the mean level of MIDs for each type consistent with our hypotheses, we find significance levels at 0.005, but we are unable to approximate the substantive effects of these differences.

⁵¹A preliminary regression using the combination of fault lines and the existence of hierarchies accounts for approximately 50 percent of the variation in the dependent variable of MIDs involvement by a region's states.

Appendix 1. List of regional categories used in quantitative studies of conflict and cooperation

"The Powerful West"	Asia (Former Soviet Union)
"West"	Asia (Other Non-Tiger)
Africa	Asia (Pacific)
Africa (Central and East)	Asia (South and Central)
Africa (North)	Asia (South)
Africa (South)	Asia (Southeast)
Africa (Sub-Saharan)	Asia (Southeast) and Pacific
Africa (West)	Asia (West)
Africa and Middle East	Asia (West) and Africa (North)
Americas	Asia and the Pacific
Americas (Central and South)	Australia, Canada, and Europe
Americas (Central, South, and Caribbean)	Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)
Americas (Central)	Eurcasia
Americas (Latin and South)	Europe
Americas (Latin and Caribbean)	Europe (Central)
Americas (Latin)	Europe (Central and East)
Americas (North and South)	Europe (East)
Americas (North)	Europe (East) and Post-Soviet Union
Americas (North) and Europe (West)	Europe (East) and Soviet Union
Americas (North), Europe (West), and Japan	Europe (Post-Communist)
Americas (North), Europe (West), and Oceania	Europe (West)
Americas (South)	Europe (West) and the British Settler Colonies
Americas (Caribbean)	Former Communist
Asia	Former Soviet Union
Asia ("Tiger")	Islands
Asia (Central) and Eurasia	Middle East
Asia (Central) and Europe	Middle East and Middle East (North Africa)
Asia (Central) and Europe (East)	Oceania
Asia (Central) and Soviet Bloc	Pacific
Asia (Central), Europe (East), and Post-Soviet Union	Post-Communist States
Asia (East and South)	Unclear
Asia (East and South) and Oceania	Western Democracies
Asia (East and Southeast)	Western Democracies and Japan
Asia (East)	Western Hemisphere
Asia (East) and Pacific	Yugoslavian Countries

Each entry is recorded in its corresponding article as a single region

Appendix 2. Literature focused on region as the level or primary unit of analysis in studies of international politics, 2005–2015

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- Acharya, Amitav. 2007. "The Emerging Regional Architecture of World Politics." *World Politics* 59 (4): 629–52.
- Acharya, Amitav. 2014. "Global International Relations and Regional Worlds." *International Studies Quarterly* 58 (4): 647–59.
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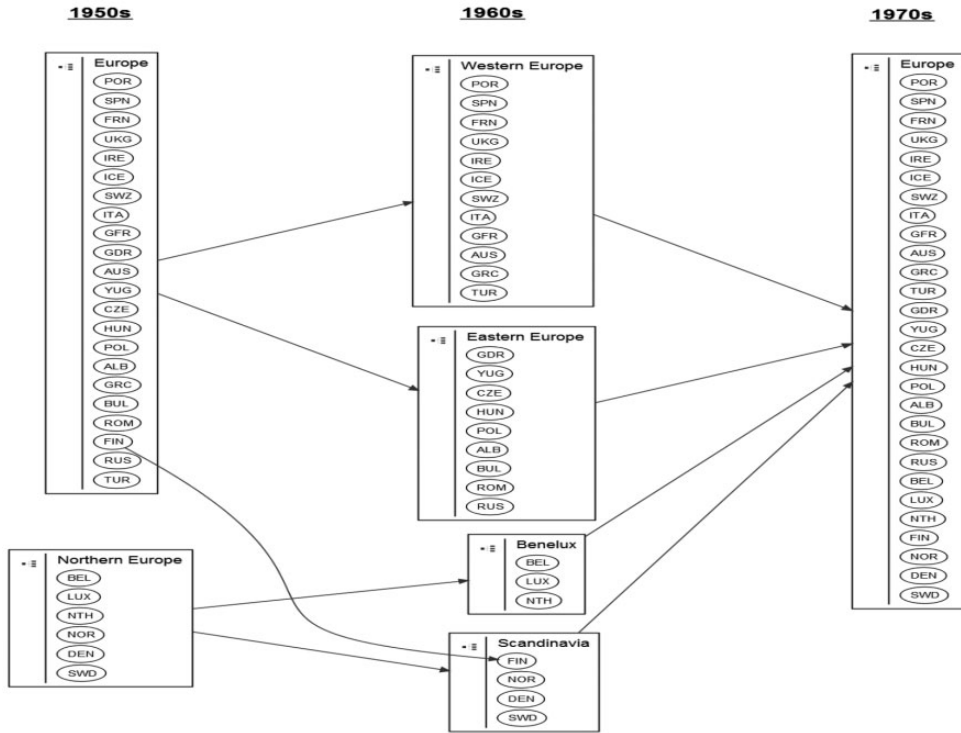
Appendix 3. States (N=139) and regions (N=11), and border states (N=55), 2001–2010

<i>Region</i>	<i>Core States</i>	<i>Periphery States</i>	<i>Region</i>	<i>Core States</i>	<i>Periphery States</i>
Northern America	Canada		Horn of Africa	Eritrea	
	Cuba			Ethiopia	
	Mexico			Somalia	
	United States			Maghreb	Algeria
Southern America	Argentina	Paraguay		Morocco	
	Bolivia			Tunisia	
	Brazil		East Asia	Cambodia	Australia
	Chile			China	Brunei
	Colombia			Indonesia	East Timor
	Ecuador			Japan	Fiji
	Peru			Korea (North)	Kiribati
	Uruguay			Korea (South)	Marshall Islands
Venezuela					
Middle East	Azerbaijan			Laos	Micronesia
	Bahrain			Malaysia	Nauru
	Egypt			Myanmar	New Zealand
	Iran			Nepal	Palau
	Iraq			Philippines	Papua New Guinea
	Jordan			Singapore	Samoa
	Kuwait			Taiwan	Solomon Islands
	Lebanon			Thailand	Tonga
	Qatar			Vietnam	Tuvalu
	Saudi Arabia				Vanuatu
	Syria		South Asia	Afghanistan	Maldives
	United Arab Emirates			Bangladesh	
				India	
Europe	Albania	Andorra		India	
	Austria	Iceland		Pakistan	
	Belarus	Kosovo		Tajikistan	
	Belgium	Liechtenstein		Sri Lanka	
	Bosnia	Moldova	Border States	Antigua and Barbuda	
	Bulgaria	Montenegro		Armenia	
	Croatia	San Marino		Bahamas	
	Cyprus			Barbados	
	Czech Republic			Belize	
	Denmark			Benin	
	Estonia			Bhutan	
	Finland			Burkina Faso	
	France			Cameroon	
	Georgia			Cape Verde	
	Germany			Central African Republic	
	Greece			Chad	
	Hungary			Comoros	
	Ireland			Costa Rica	
Israel			Djibouti		
Italy			Dominica		
Latvia			Dominican Republic		
Lithuania			El Salvador		
Luxembourg			Equatorial Guinea		

(continued)

Appendix 3. Continued

<i>Region</i>	<i>Core States</i>	<i>Periphery States</i>	<i>Region</i>	<i>Core States</i>	<i>Periphery States</i>
	Macedonia			Gabon	
	Netherlands			Gambia	
	Norway			Grenada	
	Poland			Guatemala	
	Portugal			Guinea-Bissau	
	Romania			Guyana	
	Russia			Haiti	
	Serbia			Honduras	
	Slovakia			Jamaica	
	Slovenia			Kazakhstan	
	Spain			Kyrgyzstan	
	Sweden			Libya	
	Switzerland			Madagascar	
	Turkey			Malawi	
	Ukraine			Mali	
	United Kingdom			Malta	
West Africa	Ghana			Mauritania	
	Guinea			Mauritius	
	Ivory Coast			Monaco	
	Liberia			Mongolia	
	Nigeria			Nicaragua	
	Sierra Leone			Niger	
Southern Africa	Angola	Lesotho		Oman	
	Botswana	Swaziland		Panama	
	Mozambique			Sao Tome y Principe	
	Namibia			Senegal	
	South Africa			Seychelles	
	Zambia			St. Kitts and Nevis	
	Zimbabwe			St. Lucia	
Central Africa	Burundi			St. Vincent and Grenadines	
	Congo (Dem. Rep.)			Suriname	
	Congo (Rep.)			Togo	
	Kenya			Trinidad and Tobago	
	Rwanda			Turkmenistan	
	Sudan			Uzbekistan	
	Tanzania			Yemen	
	Uganda				



Appendix 4. Changes in European regions, shown by decades, 1950—1980.

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