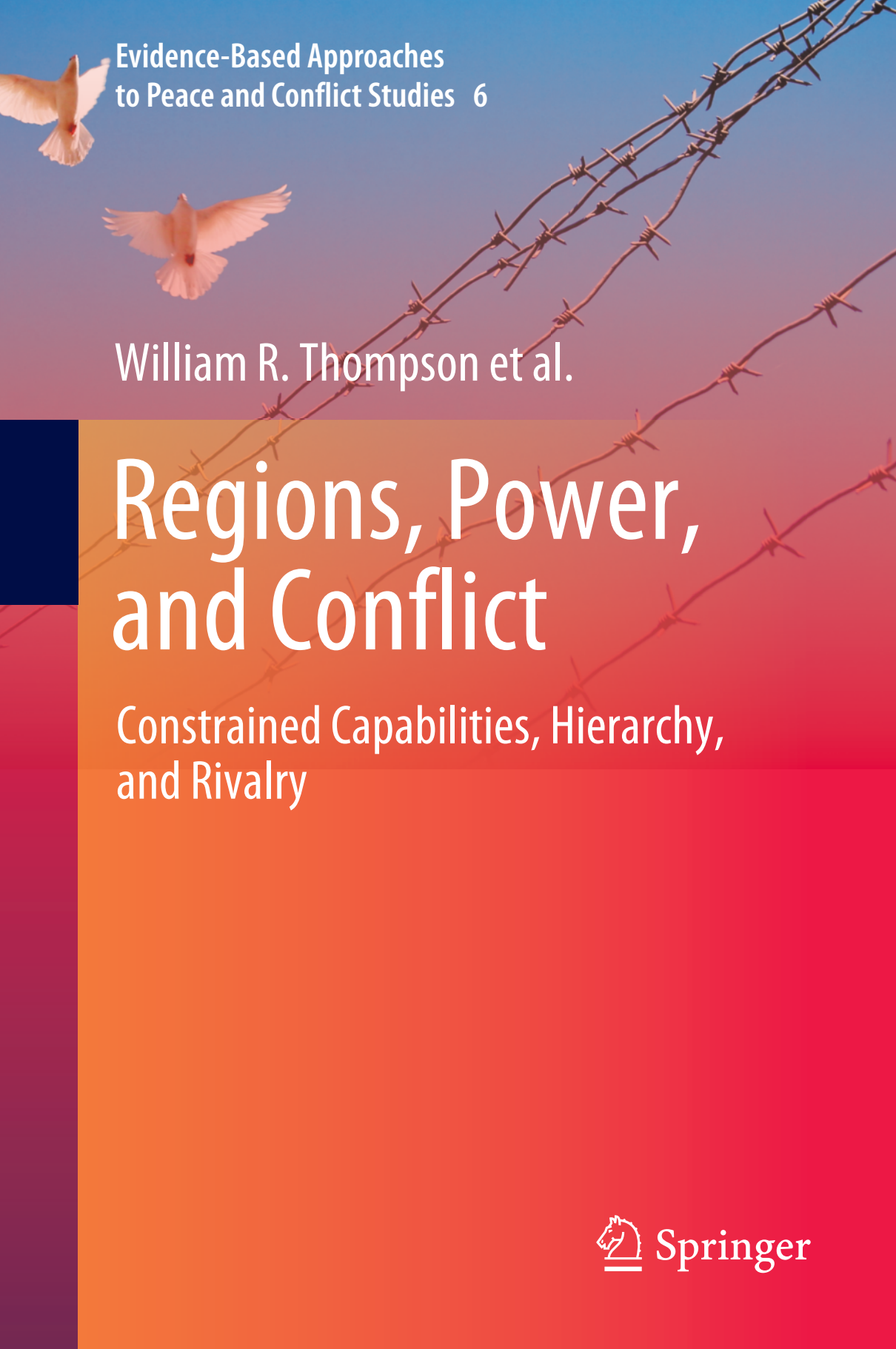
Evidence-Based Approaches
to Peace and Conflict Studies 6
William R. Thompson et al.
Regions, Power, and Conflict
Constrained Capabilities, Hierarchy, and Rivalry
Springer

Evidence-Based Approaches to Peace and Conflict Studies

Volume 6

This series aims to publish books on peace and conflict with evidence-based approaches, befitting an era best characterized by uncertainty and complexity. Even if occurrence of major wars among sovereign states has dramatically decreased, from 5 million soldiers killed between 1938 and 1945 per annum; through 100,000 soldiers killed between 1945 and 1989 per annum; to 10,000 soldiers killed between 1989 and 2019 per annum; many kinds of peace and conflict keep arising in the world, with extraordinary technological progress and unprecedented spatial coverage. All parts of the world now are so well connected and interdependent. At the same time, they easily and suddenly become sources of immense vulnerability and fragility, bringing one or another of them to the verge of collapse and destruction. The causes are diverse: climate change, migration, pandemic and epidemic disease, civil strife, religious dissonance, economic competition, arms races, terrorism, corruption—a virtual plethora of sources. Kofi Annan, former UN Secretary General, calls these and many others "problems without passports."

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Regions, Power, and Conflict

Constrained Capabilities, Hierarchy, and Rivalry

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Chapter 1
The Significance of Regional Analyses

This volume focuses on the study of regional international relations. Most of the chapters look at multiple regions and in that sense are comparative. Some chapters focus on a single region but in a way that lends itself to future comparisons. Why should we study these regions? One reason is that international relations scholars have examined monadic (single state), dyadic (state pairs), and systemic (either all states or elite states) levels of analysis. There are gains to be had by each of these approaches. There are also limitations. Ultimately, though, it is difficult to claim that any of these approaches are the only way to go. Regional analysis is not designed to eliminate other approaches. Rather, the idea is to supplement them. With the exception of major powers, monadic states and dyadic pairs of states operate in regional contexts. Rarely, do they exceed regional boundaries in their interactions. Systemic interactions can be genuinely holistic but often they disguise what are regional interactions. Take for example, world wars. We call them world wars because participation is extensive and conflict is widespread. Yet even these world wars tend to selectively focus on regions. World War II might have been a war restricted to two zones: Europe and North Africa and East Asia—that is, three regions at best. It became more complicated when Germany declared war on the United States. The regional theaters fused into one very large war. Even so, the combat remained strongly regional. Similar observations can be made in regard to earlier world wars.

So, one reason is that a lot of activity in international relations takes place within regions. A second reason is that regional analyses can supplement and complement more narrow analyses. When two states in the Middle East clash, the regional context is never absent. Clashes in a region like the Middle East have antecedents and implications in and for the larger region in which they occur. Precisely the same statement can be made about cooperation or conflict in East Africa or Southeast Asia. Why not figure out how to bring the larger context into the analysis?

A third reason for regional analysis has two dimensions. Regions are highly heterogenous places. No two regions seem exactly alike. Part of the reason for this is that they have vastly different path dependencies. Western Europe has a long history of protracted warfare between multiple states that were whittled down to a much

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smaller number of states after hundred years of combat. East Asia is characterized by fluctuations in centralization and de-centralization, with the size of China and its rule fluctuating accordingly. Sub-Saharan African regions have a history of low population density and therefore less urbanization and a different view on the value of territory than the more crowded West European region. South America has a long history of dependency on exports to first Britain and later the United States. Presumably, these path dependencies can make some difference to the activities we attempt to model in the contemporary period. Rarely, though, do we control for them beyond adding a binary instrument that registers whether a country is or is not in a given region. When we do that, it does not specify what path dependencies we are attempting to control for—nor do we usually pay much attention to the regional variables when they emerge as significant in equations.

Thus, one additional reason is that we do a poor job of capturing path dependencies when we merely assign a binary regional control. If we call it by a proper name or geographical place, we are most likely lumping together multiple path dependencies. What do we mean when we say activity is Middle Eastern, West African, or Central American? At some point, moreover, we need to determine what the proper place names mean so that we can replace them with more precise social scientific variables.

A sixth reason that overlaps with the last two is that international relations is a lumpy topic. We can make generalizations that might fit one part of the world but not another part. How major powers interact may not resemble anything that goes on in half a dozen regions. What goes on in those half a dozen regions may be very dissimilar as well. Why that might be the case requires comparative regional analysis to properly evaluate it.

The seventh reason for doing regional analyses might be called the rest of the world problem or conundrum. When we perform quantitative analyses with nearly 200 states, the statistical outcomes are apt to be shaped by regional heterogeneity. If we look at peace and find that, say, boundary settlements or democratization seem important to more pacific interactions, we are basing this conclusion on Western European and North American states shaping a scatter plot in a manner that reflects the values observed in those two regions. What are we to make of the rest of the world? Are we saying that we must wait for a cessation of boundary disputes and genuine democratization in the rest of the world before they too become pacific? Maybe so – but not necessarily if the regions that have high values on our selected drivers are unlikely to be replicated elsewhere. That is something that we have to determine. We cannot stop with the observation that the rest of the world must become like Western Europe or North America if we are not really sure why those regions exhibit pacific tendencies in the first place. Yes, they may be highly democratic regions but they are so much more than that. Until we decode what regions mean, many of our empirical analyses are simply incomplete.

Progress in the literature on comparative regional analysis has been slow and occurring in sporadically. Numerous problems have retarded its development. One issue has been the absence of any consensus over the basic concept of what a region is, and for those engaged in quantitative analysis, virtually no agreement over the empirical delineation of region boundaries and state membership within regions. A

second issue has been the absence of a comprehensive theoretical framework that would allow for a comparison of regions across time and space. In this vein, Chap. 2 reviews a large portion (roughly 230 articles) of the more recent quantitative literature on conflict and cooperation dynamics in international politics that involve some effort to include "region" as part of the analysis. While there is little consensus regarding the definition and operationalization of "region", most studies identifying regions report substantial and significant region effects on the dependent variable of interest. In order to move towards a more comprehensive analysis of region effects, a new approach is proposed for conceptualizing and delineating regions on the basis of an opportunity and willingness framework for regional delineation. Applying the approach, the changing nature of regions and their membership in both Cold War and post-Cold War eras are first discussed. Both the strengths and limitations of the approach are then discussed. The chapter then proposes a theoretical framework for examining conflict, cooperation, and diffusion dynamics across regions. It suggests three types of regional effects, but places primary emphasis on a comparative regional analysis that discriminates between regions based on differences created by hierarchical relationships both inside regions and globally, integrating structural approaches into the theoretical framework. The chapter concludes with suggestions for future research and a series of caveats regarding both the identification of regions and the utility of the proposed framework.

As we have noted above, much of our understanding of conflict and cooperation processes in international politics have come from monadic and dyadic levels of analysis. Foremost among such understandings has been the effects of regime type on conflict and cooperation. One crucial question we explore is the extent to which findings from those levels hold up when subjected to a broader regional context. Chapter 3 focuses on two major questions concerning regime type and conflict and cooperation between states. First, should peace between democracies be attributed to the nature of their political regimes or some other intervening variable that influences both democracy and conflict? Second, to what extent is democratization driven by external drivers of threat and if so, then does external conflict help to explain regime type?

The chapter conducts the inquiry with a longitudinal focus on one region (Europe) and with key variables examined at the region level of analysis. The empirical analysis indicates that rivalry and unstable boundaries are alternative manifestations of external threat and both have significant effects on stimulating interstate conflict. Contrary to the democratic peace argument, regime type does not appear to have an independent effect on interstate conflict when either of the other variables are taken into consideration. At the same time, external threat indicators negatively predict changes in democratization.

At least in the quantitative analysis of conflict (but also typically among area studies scholars as well) the limited attention to comparative regional analysis has also assumed that the boundaries of regions and membership within them are fixed. Scholars typically use a dummy variable to identify region, and both regional boundaries and state membership remain a constant in these analyses. Chapter 2 is an exception to this trend. The focus of the fourth chapter is explicitly on changes to

regional boundaries: how regional spaces change over time and how the evolution of regional space affects our understanding of both international politics of that space and as well the comparative regional research agenda. The question of changing regional space is explored through an examination of the possible rise of a "Super Asia" region. The analysis of this regional space is accomplished through a brief review of foreign policy history of the place over the last two centuries, and, using available data from 1950 through 2020, is illustrated using network analysis to identify politically relevant subgroups in the region. Consistent with Chap. 2, it draws into the analysis global and regional shifts in hierarchy, as important factors driving the cohesion of states in the Super Asian space. The chapter concludes that a Super Asia may be emerging once more, depending on the ongoing relationships between key regional powers (especially China, Japan, India, and Australia) and also depending on the relative porousness of the region to external power interference (especially the U.S.), interference which had previously served to create greater fragmentation especially during the 1960s and 1970s.

Regional delineation is not only about arguments regarding state membership (e.g., does Turkey belong in Europe or the Middle East) or about where one region concludes and another one starts (e.g., where is the dividing line between Central and Eastern Africa) but as well controversies about the existence of regions. Is there a Mediterranean region? Is there a Central American region? Is there a Central Asia? The purpose of Chap. 5 is to answer that last question by systematically delineating patterns of state interaction using an analysis of state visits between the states (from 1991 to 2021) that are thought to make up the region and assess the extent to which such state visits reflect increasing regional commonality within the geopolitical space. State visits serve as indicators of foreign policy interests; the selectivity of state visits helps to determine regional boundaries based on this type of state interaction.

The chapter focuses first on several theoretical approaches salient for determining the types of structures one might expect to find in Central Asia. Then, an analysis of state visits is created to show patterns of duration and intensity in interstate interactions, consistent with these theoretical formulations. Based on these patterns an assessment is made about the existence and viability of a Central Asian region. It concludes, based on the visits network that Central Asia rather than being an autonomous region is better characterized as a Russian-centered subsystem, and will likely continue as long as Moscow continues to actively interfere in the region's economic and political relations. Note that the chapter, compared to Chap. 2, provides for students of comparative regional analysis an alternative conceptualization and an alternative measurement strategy for identifying regions.

At the heart of international politics are studies revolving around the power of states and the extent to which relative power holds salient information regarding deterrence, winners and losers in in conflicts, and relative success in creating and maintaining global (and regional) order(s). Extant research on power (and strength) has focused on the concept at various levels of analysis, but seldom at the regional level. Chapter 6 offers a new approach to the conceptualization and measurement of state strength, and the approach developed here is used in the following chapter to

estimate the strength of regions. The chapter applies a conceptual framework that integrates a state's economic (GDP) and military (military spending) resources with two political phenomena: the extent to which the state extracts resources from its economy and the quality of governance in the use and application of those resources. Then it demonstrates that modifying basic capabilities with these two constraints creates significant differences in state strength that meet face validity criteria far better than extant measures of bulk state capabilities across a series of selected cases.

The chapter then assesses the extent to which the modified measures do better than base measures in predicting to variables associated with conflict processes and outcomes. The analysis shows that the qualified measures function better to predict the outcome of militarized interstate disputes (MIDs), the frequency with which MIDs occur between dyads, and performs better even when rivalries and territorial disputes are integrated into a regression analysis. Finally, it finds that asymmetric strength is a consistently better predictor (of reduced conflict and conflict outcomes) when using the modified measures than in the extant literature when capabilities measures are not modified.

Chapter 7 extends the discussion of strength from the previous chapter. While Chap. 6 focused on strength at the monadic and dyadic levels, this chapter extends the analysis by focusing on the relative differences in strength across regions. A region's strength becomes salient for a variety of reasons: the ability to construct a regional order; its ability to resist negative world order effects; an ability to minimize external penetration by outside actors; the successful pursuit of collaborative arrangements with other regions; and strong regions as relative incubators of emerging major or regional powers.

Chapter 7 concludes that in terms of economic strength three (North America, Western Europe and East Asia) of the 18 regions share over 55% of the cumulative strength of all regions, while at the other end of the spectrum six regions barely register any levels of economic strength. In terms of military strength, the imbalance across regions is similar to the economic dimension, albeit even more skewed towards North America and Western Europe. Consequences for regional order creation, resistance to external penetration, and the emergence of regional or major powers are addressed in the context of the two dimensions of regional strength.

One of the key puzzles raised by comparative regional analysis concerns the notion that some regions stand out as particularly conflictual in the relations between their members (think of the Middle East, or Central Africa), some are consistently pacific (North America over the last century), while other regions have moved from conducting highly conflictual intra-regional relationships to highly pacific ones (e.g., Western Europe, South East Asia, and South America). A comparative regional analysis suggests that such a framework should be able to account for such variation across regions. This is the primary objective for Chaps. 8, 9, and 10. Chapter 8 proceeds by creating a theoretical framework designed for a comparative analysis of regions for explaining variation in intra-regional conflicts between states. It does so through (a) integrating extant findings from other levels of analysis intending to stipulate conditions under which some regions are likely to be more conflict-prone than others; and (b) places those considerations for explaining regional conflict

patterns into the context of the presence or absence of regional hierarchies that may manage conflicts, either through deterrence or regional order building.

The chapter focuses on two version of intra-regional conflict: the frequency of militarized interstate disputes (MIDs) and the extent of members' involvement in those MIDs as the two salient dependent variables, covering an empirical time frame between the 1950s and the 2000s. Using an OLS regression model, the analysis finds that regions with a dominant power, compared to regions without one, are associated with a 59% reduction in the frequency of severe MIDs and a 60% reduction in the number of states in a region involved with severe MIDs. Thus, the extent to which hierarchies exist in regions may be crucial in identifying intra-regional conflict patterns.

Reviewing the extensive literature on international conflict and peace, Chap. 9 also focuses on monadic, dyadic and regional approaches for the argument that international conflict and peace differ from one region to the next. It argues that while dyadic approaches to conflict and peace have been dominant in the literature, additional approaches that aggregate states and dyads in a common geopolitical space and also focus on dependencies and interdependencies between states within regions may provide more fruitful avenues for understanding the differences across regions. Additionally, an argument is made that studies using network analysis methodologies may be particularly useful in addressing such (inter)dependencies.

The chapter begins by briefly illustrating important empirical trends that depict such regional variations, including ways in which dyadic relationships can be aggregated to the regional level. Studies that adopt different perspectives on extra-dyadic conditions are presented in the next section. Some of these studies associate regional conflict and peace with the spatial dispersion of underlying conditions while others focus on the mechanisms underlying spatial dependence and diffusion. Finally, recommendations are made for future research, particularly from a regional standpoint.

While Chap. 8's primary contribution to predicting conflict focused on hierarchies within regions, Chap. 10 argues that bad neighborhoods (those with high levels of conflict) differ from "good" neighborhoods due to a combination of domestic and international factors centered around ethnic political interactions both within and across states and are in turn aggravated by inadequate state capacities. First, the chapter builds a theoretical foundation to explain why the interactions between ethnopolitics and weak states generate international conflict. Then the chapter applies the argument empirically to account for territorial disputes. The chapter finds that the presence of transnational ethnic kin and rivalry constitute potent neighborhood effects on boundary dispute behavior, with external and domestic factors interacting to make boundary disagreements more probable, albeit external factors appear to be the most potent drivers of the existence and persistence of territorial disputes. Perhaps surprisingly, excluded transborder ethnic kin have a much greater effect on disputes than do included transborder ethnic kin. The chapter concludes by noting the geopolitical regions most susceptible to these dynamics.

One persistent concern raised by policy makers and scholars alike revolves around the extent to which the liberal world order can continue in post-Cold War international

politics. This is the motivation for Chap. 11 which focuses on the extent to which the regions that are embedded in international politics support or oppose the extant, dominant world order. This question is explored by engaging in an extensive inductive exercise designed to probe the degree to which regions differ in terms of their dissatisfaction with the status quo, and the extent to which one or more regions, consistent with the analysis of relative regional strength discussed in Chap. 7, emerge as strong advocates of an alternative order, including the likelihood that their challenge would be successful.

Relative satisfaction with the global order through an analysis of UN General Assembly voting behavior for members of regions is assessed and levels of regional dissatisfaction with regional economic and military strength are compared. The comparisons suggest that regions in substantial support of the liberal world order (LWO) continue to have substantially greater economic and military strength than regions opposed to the status quo; to the extent that the LWO is threatened, such threats would require substantial, increased opposition to the order among those still most favorable (North America, Western Europe, parts of East Asia).

This volume is not a beginning to regional analyses. There are many fine studies already available. We need more though. We have not attained a critical mass by any means. One unobtrusive indicator is that we have no standard approach to delineating regions. Everybody does it a little (or a lot) differently—just as the chapters in this volume do. For cumulation to occur, we need to standardize that feature of regional analysis better. We are not in the position to argue that the "regions of opportunity and willingness" (ROW) approach in Chap. 2 should become the gold standard. It is clear that while this approach is useful for certain purposes, its use is less clear when researchers wish to investigate long processes of continuity and change in regions. The general point here is not that there should be one uniform standard for regional delineation; scholarship in IR seldom achieves such uniformity and perhaps it should not. What will aid the advancement of knowledge in comparative regional analysis is to sketch out for which research questions an approach such as ROW is preferable and for types of research questions when it is not but other approaches are more useful.

Nor is this the only issue we have been unable to address in this volume. Many others persist and need scholarly attention. A second one is raised by Chap. 5: under what conditions do regions undergo fragmentation or amalgamation, and what are the consequences of these changes for both neighboring regions and for the international political system?

Chapter 6 raises a third issue: it is clear that under certain conditions there are clear diffusion processes undergoing in several regions, diffusing a range of phenomena from civil wars to increasing (or decreasing) democratization. Yet such diffusion occurs unevenly across regions and across phenomena. Can that be attributable to certain properties of regions that make the creation of diffusion firewalls (Solingen, 2012) more or less likely? Little scholarship has explored this issue in a comparative, regional perspective.

The literature in international politics has consistently pointed to the very different interests and capabilities created by major powers that are continental versus maritime

powers (e.g. Thompson 2022). As a fourth issue, does a similar distinction apply to the politics of landlocked regions versus regions with maritime connections? We would expect that regions that have maritime segments are more likely to be connected to the outside world, consistent with the way the world economy developed. States with coasts are better connected than those without and are more susceptible to both change and as targets of major power concern, given trade routes and investment patterns, possibly making these regions more susceptible to both external penetration and more susceptible to democratization pressures.

Fifth, several of the chapters that follow, either directly or indirectly, theorize about the differences in intra-regional patterns of conflict and cooperation, given the existence of a hierarchy or a dominant power in the region. For instance, Chap. 6 finds that where dominant powers exist conflict is dampened substantially compared to regions lacking such dominant powers.[1] Certainly the most conflictual of regions (Middle East, Central Africa) lack a dominant major or regional power. Yet, we know all too little about the causal driver(s) that may link such a hierarchy to diminished conflict. Nor do we know the extent to which such hierarchical arrangements can be swamped by other factors that stimulate additional intra-regional conflict. Note the hierarchy constraining exception in South Asia, with a dominant power (India), but one caught in a long-term rivalry, with the consequence that South Asia is riddled with intra-regional strife.

Sixth, there appears to be an assumption in this literature that one of the reasons why dominant powers may depress conflict and enhance cooperation in their own regions is through the creation of institutions that facilitate cooperation between the region's members and perhaps create regional orders that differ from extant global orders. Yet, the creation and maintenance of effective regional institutions is costly and relatively rare. Most regional institutions are not highly effective. We need to know more about the conditions that will incentivize dominant states to invest in such institutions, and/or conditions that will allow such institutions to develop without such dominant power investment.

We could list dozens of other questions that require future research. But to get to the larger point, we need more regional analyses which would mean that more analysts recognize the value of regional analysis. We also need more theories of regional behavior to justify analysis within this level of analysis. If this volume encourages more regional analysis and theory building, it will have fulfilled one of our goals. Ideally, it will also provide some explanatory value-added in the interim as well.

[1] A recent study (Duursma and Tamm 2021) focusing on mutual military interventions by states in intrastate conflicts also finds that in Africa the overwhelming numbers of such interventions occur in the two regions lacking a dominant power (Central and East Africa) and few such interventions in the two regions with an extant dominant power (West and Southern Africa).

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Chapter 2
The Case for Comparative Regional Analysis in International Politics

Regions are prominent in much of international relations research. 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 typically find that regions matter, at least statistically. Most states conduct their political relationships within regions rather than globally (Acharya 2007; Hurrell 2007). At a minimum, the geopolitical context constitutes a strong conditioning effect on how states conduct their external (and often internal) affairs.

Yet rarely are explanations of interstate relations embedded in a comparative regional perspective,[1] using region as either the primary level or unit of analysis. This state of affairs is due to various definitional, conceptual, theoretical, and empirical issues that have inhibited development of systematic, comparative, and rigorous inquiry at the regional level. Our intention is not to address those problems fully nor to resolve them. Instead, we wish to offer a view of more recent quantitative literature and 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 intra-regional cooperative relationships between states? Some regions contain far more extensive cooperative relationships and institutionalization than others; regions also go through cycles of greater or lesser cooperation. Are these differences already explained by state-level and dyadic findings or may regional dynamics provide additional insights?

For an earlier version of this work, see Volgy, Thomas J., Paul Bezerra, Jacob Cramer, and J. Patrick Rhamey. 2017. "The Case for Comparative Regional Analysis in International Politics," *International Studies Review*, 19, 3: 452–480.

[1] Most 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. There are substantially fewer cases of 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 2012).

W. R. Thompson et al., *Regions, Power, and Conflict*, Evidence-Based Approaches to Peace and Conflict Studies 6, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-1681-6_2

Second, regions vary in 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 or firewalls that may retard the diffusion of phenomena, including conflict and cooperation (Solingen 2012).

2.1 A Brief Look at the Literature

The literature on regions is vast, addressed by scholars from political science, international politics, geography, sociology, area studies, and economics. 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 expanse of literature here; fortunately, that is not our purpose. Instead, we focus on recent, large-N, quantitative research relevant to issues involving conflict and cooperation between states 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.[2] 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.

Our review focuses on quantitative studies of international politics, analyzing articles where scholars included "region" as part of the analysis. We sampled literature that is most likely to be read by quantitative scholars, focusing on conflict and cooperation dynamics. The sample is not meant to reflect the larger volume of scholarship on the development, integration, and institutionalization of *regions*, although we draw on some of that literature in our theoretical section. We sampled eleven journals from 2010 to 2020, involving a total of over 445 issues.[3] We focused on high visibility journals most likely to contain large-N studies.[4]

The articles chosen for analysis included quantitative studies where either the key dependent variable or one or more of the key independent variables used in the analysis involved phenomena typically studied by international relations scholars. We further narrowed our focus to studies where the models included "region" in the empirical analysis and utilized a research domain that included more than a single region. Roughly 230 articles (15%) met our criteria. Among the articles that include region in empirical models, it appears primarily for methodological

[2] Thus, this literature review is not focused 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.

[3] These 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.*

[4] Based on the TRIPS survey of international relations journals and the Thomson citation index.

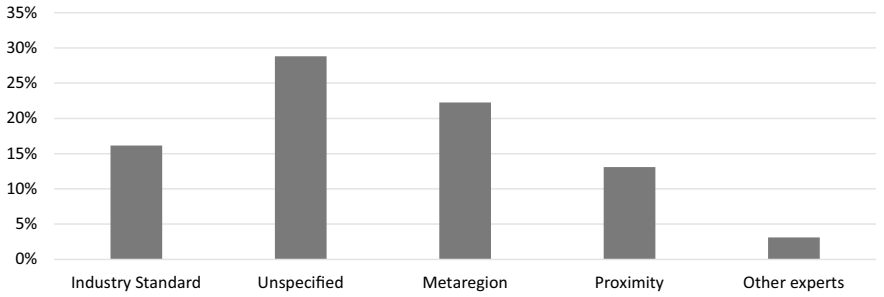

Fig. 2.1 Percent of articles categorizing regions in their analysis, 2010–2020, N = 229

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 most cases when "region" appears to be significant, the theoretical consequences are not discussed.

Overall, there is little consensus about either conceptual meaning or operationalization of region as a concept. Thompson's (1973) seminal review of the regions literature—now nearly five decades ago—continues to ring true: classifications range from large, geographical entities (meta-regions 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"). Appendix 1 demonstrates no fewer than 70 different regional labels included in these studies, reflecting the lack of any emerging consensus. States in the Western Hemisphere are sometimes lumped together ("Americas"), sometimes disaggregated ("Central and South", "Central, South and Caribbean", "Central", "Latin", "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"). There are twenty-two different designations for Asian states.

Figure 2.1 illustrates the dominant classifications in the surveyed literature. "Industry Standard" are World Bank, United Nations, or Correlates of War (COW) classifications; "Unspecified" indicates insufficient information in the article to make a judgment about how regions were classified; "Meta-Regions" are large, continent-wide geographical areas[5];"Proximity" reflects the carving out of regions defined primarily by contiguity criteria; while "Other experts" refers to classifications replicating earlier studies with unique classifications.[6]

As Fig. 2.1 illustrates, the dominant approach to regional classification is "unspecified." Trailing close behind (at around 23%) are meta-regional classifications, with or without modifications. Roughly fifteen percent utilize standardized codes (mostly

[5] These include either meta-regions or modifications of meta-regions, such as splitting the Americas into North and Latin America, Asia into Eastern and Western Asia, separating "Asian tigers" from the rest of Asia, or separating communist states from non-communist states.

[6] An initial inter-coder reliability test yielded aggregate agreement with the classifications at .89. After a reconciliation for minor errors, the second round yielded agreement at .95.

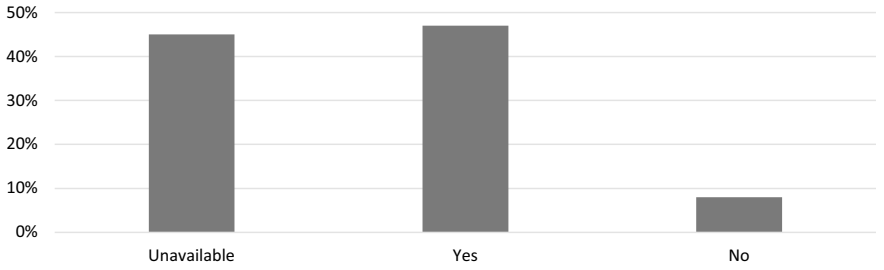

Fig. 2.2 Percent of articles finding significance in regional classification

COW codes). Less than five percent utilize classifications pioneered in previous studies.[7]

For whatever reason(s) 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 non-existent, as are issues about the validity of the empirical classification for regional membership.[8] The regional delineations used are seldom justified in terms of the options available. Virtually none of this scholarship engages the specific literature on regions that raises substantial conceptual and empirical issues regarding inter-regional comparisons (e.g., Ahram 2011; De Lombaerde et al. 2010).

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

Yet, region appears to matter substantively for the dependent variable of interest in most of these studies.[9] To assess how often this is the case, we reclassified articles according to whether they report the effects of regions on the dependent variable and whether regional classifications are significant. As Fig. 2.2 illustrates, the appropriate information is unavailable in nearly half of these articles.[10] Among those that present regional effects, region appears to matter overwhelmingly (over 86% of articles) and across a wide range of dependent variables (Fig. 6.3). Unfortunately, given the lack of agreement on regional classifications, it is extremely difficult to integrate substantive

[7] Examples include a previous effort's focus on 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); while one borrows a classification for analyzing civil wars (Hegre and Sambanis 2006).

[8] For an exception, see Dafoe (2011).

[9] We are not the first to note this (Hegre and Sambanis 2006).

[10] Typically, authors indicate that regional distinctions were used for "fixed effects" or robustness checks without disclosing the impact of regional controls on the dependent variable.

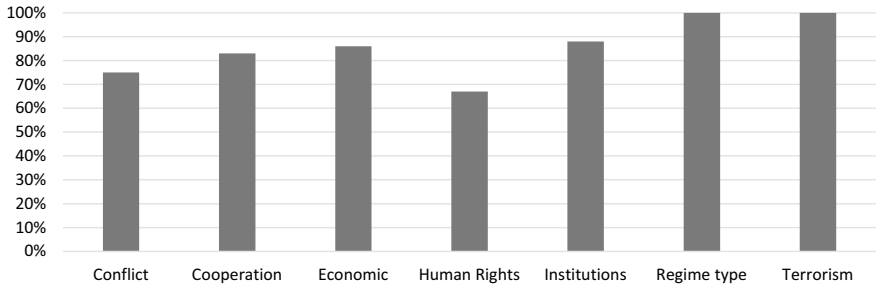

Fig. 2.3 Percent of articles reporting significance of region, by dependent variable of interest

findings. We cannot systematically gauge 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).[11] For example, the two most consistent outliers in conflict studies are "Europe" and the "Middle East", consistent with face validity, but *membership* in these two "regions" varies substantially across studies (Fig. 2.3).

To what extent does this literature utilize region as the primary level or unit of analysis? Virtually none within the scope of our review: roughly one percent of the articles reviewed focused on region as either the appropriate level or unit of analysis in international politics (e.g., Acharya 2007, 2014; Solingen 2007, 2008, 2012, McCallister 2016.)

There are numerous journals outside of those sampled that are not quantitative in focus and have region as the primary level of analysis. These highlight comparative regions, "regionalism", "new regionalism", "regionalization" and "regionness" (e.g. De Lombaerde et al. 2010, Hettne and Soderbaum 2000, Fawcett and Gandois 2010, Fawn 2009, Hurrell 2007, Sbragia 2008). We refer to some of these works below. However, very few if any of these works are cited in these journals of high visibility to quantitative IR scholars, giving some pause about the advancement of regional considerations in large-N quantitative work.

2.1.1 Where to From Here?

Our literature review indicates that while large-N quantitative works frequently account for regional influence in modeling strategies, there is not much ongoing conceptual development regarding regions in the sampled literature and little agreement on how to delineate regions. Yet, when region as a variable is explicitly included

[11] Much of the literature fails to address as well 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 the effects of spatial, temporal, and unit considerations simultaneously. For these critiques, see Franzese and Hays (2007, 2008) and Beck et al. (2006).

in the research, its effects persist over a broad range of research questions.[12] Such persistence in findings suggests that regions are salient considerations in the analysis of international relations, and it is worthwhile to seek further discussion and debate over conditions needed to better understand 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 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 discussion and research that hopefully can generate more "cumulation" over regional effects and the salience of regions for theories of international politics.

2.2 Delineating Regions

While the salience of regional spaces in international relations has a long tradition (e.g., Mackinder 1904; Passi 2020), consensus over identifying the contours of relevant regional subsystems has thus far remained elusive (Buzan 1998, Fawn 2009, Fawcett and Gandois 2010, Albert 2020). 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.[13]

As an alternative approach, we define regions[14] as those spaces where *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 activities* (consistent with Rhamey 2012; Teixeira 2012; Volgy and Rhamey 2014; Volgy et al. 2018). 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.

Restricting states to those that are contiguous and mutually capable of interacting, we parallel the literature on politically relevant dyads (e.g., Lemke and Reed 2001, Quackenbush 2006). By including a minimal willingness constraint, we set a baseline of mutual recognition between region members, capturing regions that come into existence as a function of interactive, overlapping interests, and offer a quantitative version of "socially constructed" regions. 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

[12] Even if authors often forgo discussion of regions' effects.

[13] For a similar argument, see Solingen (2014).

[14] Region designations are available at patrickrhamey.com/row including maps and a detailed codebook.

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 most regional analysis is conducted in international relations and is suitable for analyses that treat region as a fixed effect *and* those that treat regions as substantively important.

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 capabilities from state *i* to state *j* is:

$$P_{ij} = \text{Power}^{\log[(\text{Miles})/(\text{Miles Per Day})+(10-e)]}$$

where Power is the state's GDP in proportion to global GDP (Heston et al. 2012),[15] and miles per day in the post-World War II era is set at 500 (Bueno de Mesquita 1981). Conceptually, this calculation results in a series of capability "bubbles" radiating outward from each state's capital. According to the formula, each state's power 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 significantly interact at fifty percent capability loss from the capital of the projecting state to the capital of the target.[16] Directed dyads above the fifty 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 weighted 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, each state's directed weighted foreign policy activity to each other state as a proportion of their total foreign policy activity. Those states that engage in an above-average proportion[17] 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 threshold, they are coded as showing that both states had the willingness to engage one another.

Finally, we identify cliques in network analysis (Hanneman and Riddle 2005) to determine unique clusters of interaction among three or more states where dyads

[15] Others who use the loss of strength gradient typically include the Correlates of War Composite Index of National Capability (CINC) as the measure of "power," but have produced peculiar outcomes such as China holding the position of most powerful state. GDP provides a more plausible hierarchy of states, and in the post-Cold War era, is still strongly correlated with CINC scores (Rhamey 2012, 69).

[16] See Lemke (2002, 79–81) for further justification.

[17] An "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 four percent each year.

are coded as receiving a link if there were both opportunity and willingness were present, annually. A link, or "tie," in the network is then a relationship between two states 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.[18] The resulting dendogram 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 et al. 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 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.[19]

The cliques identified by this method are contiguous over land or less than 500 miles of water,[20] 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, states are placed 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 pre-selected, unchanging structural categories. The flexible nature of both regions and states within them produces additional utility.[21] Some states belong to no region (e.g., Mongolia in Fig. 2.4); others (e.g., Turkey) may 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.[22]

Using these procedures, we identify nine regions for the 2000–2009 timeframe (Fig. 2.4 and Appendix 2). States fall into three classifications: core region members,

[18] For discussion of the clique method, see Hanneman and Riddle (2005, Chap. 11) and Everett and Borgatti (1998).

[19] See, for example, the network diagrams in Rhamey (2012, 129) or Rhamey et al. (2014, 5–7).

[20] So 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.

[21] Consistent with the literature arguing for the fluidity of regions (e.g., Fawcett 2004, Passi 2020).

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

Fig. 2.4 Mapping regions, 2001–2010[23]

peripheral region members, and border states. *Core region members* are states that meet our criteria on both opportunity and willingness. Some states lack ties to others due to an absence of unique policy activity or capabilities (e.g., 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 single region (e.g., Paraguay)[24] 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., Kazakhstan) are pulled in multiple directions, resulting in no clear pattern of engagement with any one group.

This pattern 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; and see Chap. 5 in this volume) finds the Central Asian space to be too fluid to constitute what is typically considered a coherent regional space. As Appendix 2 illustrates, 141 states (73%) fall into one of the nine regions, while 53 (27%) are classified as border states belonging to no specific region. Nearly half of the border states are small, and most are relatively inactive in international and regional affairs.

To illustrate changes over time to regions and their composition, we note in Appendix 3 the movement of states and regional classifications in the European

[23] Map taken from patrickrhamey.com/row. Annual maps and those for other decades available at the same url. Map made using historicalmapchart.net, governed by an attribution-sharealike 4.0 license (CC BY-SA 4.0).

[24] While Paraguay does interact with its immediate neighbors, its limited capabilities to reach other states in the region is paralleled by its inconsistent interactions with its region's members. Its troubled relationship with both Mercosur and UNISUR is consistent with being a peripheral regional member.

meta-region during the Cold War. As the merging of Eastern and Western European states in the 1970s suggests, the boundaries of the region are drawn by the ability of contiguous states to reach one another and by greater levels of interaction, rather than by the development of a single security structure or formal economic cooperative arrangements. Indeed, competing security and economic architecture characterizes the European region in the 1970s. However, our approach nevertheless identifies one European region of states focused on each other.

There are a variety of costs and limitations 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 (both cooperative and adversarial) 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, these costs should be offset by a substantively more satisfying classification. Furthermore, a process of non-arbitrary regional determination may be created for any period 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 or a variety of other salient characteristics. For instance, applying this delineation to the twenty-first century, Figs. 2.5, 2.6, 2.7 and 2.8 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 inhibited work at that level.

We recognize that our suggested conceptual and measurement strategy may be less suitable for those with different theoretical lenses or 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

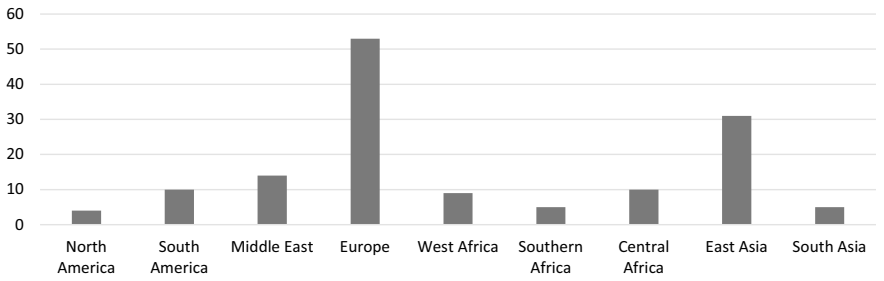

Fig. 2.5 Number of states in each region, 2000–2009. *Source* Appendix 2

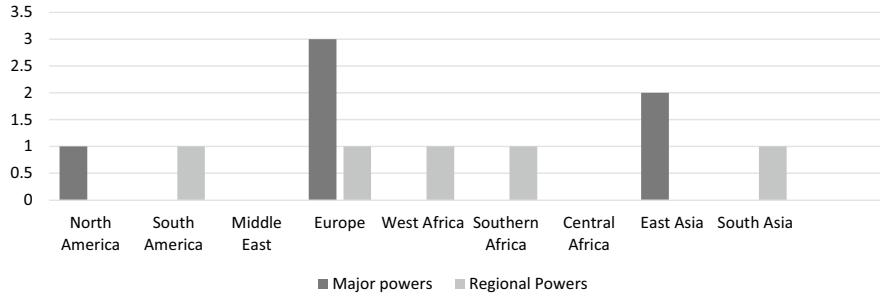

Fig. 2.6 Numbers of regional and global powers inhabiting regions, 2000–2009. *Source* Appendix 2

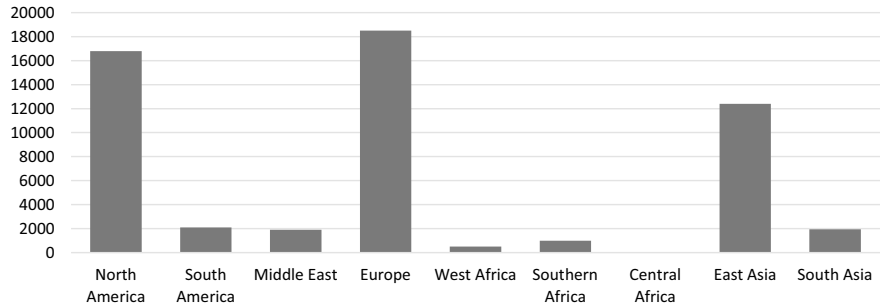

Fig. 2.7 Size of region GDP in constant (2005) US$s, averaged for 2011–2013. *Source* World Bank

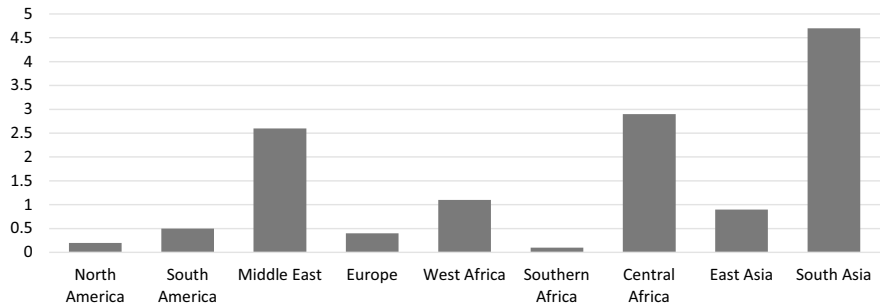

Fig. 2.8 Frequency of severe MIDs in regions, controlling for the number of states, 2001–2010. *Source* COW MIDs

research questions (e.g., under what conditions does regional cooperative architecture endure?), some may define regions in terms of formal structures of cooperation