

Regional Governance and Global Governance: Links and Explanations



Arie M. Kacowicz

This article examines the possible links between regional governance and global governance from a regional perspective. It presents and develops a typology of linkages that include: (1) irrelevance; (2) conflict; (3) cooperation; and (4) harmonic relations. Moreover, it suggests three alternative explanations to make sense of the linkages as a function of the nature of the issue area of regional and global governance, the role of pivotal states, and the importance of ideational factors and the diffusion of norms. It succinctly refers to the Latin American experience as an illustration of the nexus between regional governance and global governance in a comparative perspective. KEYWORDS: global governance, regional governance, regionalism, Latin America, globalization, regional powers.

IN THIS ARTICLE, I EXAMINE THE POSSIBLE LINKS BETWEEN REGIONAL GOVERNANCE (RG) and global governance (GG) from a regional perspective. Regional arrangements may not fit neatly into existing global arrangements, but neither are they “islands” isolated from the larger context of global governance.¹ The global projection of regions is directly related to the *regional-global nexus* (i.e., the possible links between regional and global governance). Contemporary global governance includes regional governance as an essential building bloc of it, though not necessarily the most relevant one.

I ask two questions. First, what are the possible linkages between schemes of regional governance and general frameworks of global governance? Second, what explains those particular linkages? To answer those questions, I develop a typology of linkages that include: (1) irrelevance; (2) conflict; (3) cooperation; and (4) harmony. Moreover, I suggest three explanations that are not mutually exclusive, but rather complement each other, to make sense of these linkages as a function of: (1) the nature of the issue area of regional and global governance; (2) the role of pivotal states; and (3) the importance of ideational factors and the diffusion of norms.

Since the late 1980s and early 1990s, we have seen the reinvigoration of various forms of regional cooperation. Regionalist activity has been particularly intense in the Global South, where several overlapping bilateral, sub-regional, and regional economic and security arrangements emerged. In such complex realities, there is not a clear hierarchy among the global space (usually occupied by multilateral organizations such as the United Nations), the

national space (occupied by sovereign states), and the regional level (of international organizations).²

This article is organized as follows. First, I define the key relevant concepts to articulate the links between regional governance and global governance. Next, I present the theoretical framework, in terms of the taxonomy and the possible explanations. Finally, I succinctly refer to the Latin American experience as an illustration of the nexus between RG and GG.

Defining the Key Concepts of the RG-GG Nexus

Governance and Global Governance

Governance refers to the different ways that organizations, institutions, businesses, and governments manage their affairs. Governance is the act of governing and thus involves the application of rules and regulations but also of customs and practices, and ethical standards and norms, and it is characterized by the fragmentation of political authority. A framework of governance allows us to theorize beyond the state, including a multiplicity of different kinds of actors and different and nonhierarchical modes of steering and policymaking. Thus, governance includes the various institutionalized modes of social coordination aiming at the creation and implementation of collectively binding rules and regulations, to provide collective goods in specific issue areas.³

Similarly, we can define *global governance* as the possible regulation of the global sphere and the multiplicity of spheres of authority and nature of actors, both public and private, involved in the regulative process and the production of public global goods, in an effort to resolve pressing shared problems that defy solutions by any single national government.⁴ We grasp the concept under the slogan of “governance without government,” or as a kind of intermediary stage between the management of global problems through traditional interstate politics and the operation of a world government. Examples of global governance include the so-called global international institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Trade Organization (WTO), as well as the Group of 8 (G8) and nowadays the Group of 20 (G-20), as an amalgam of both wealthy and emerging economic powers dealing with global economic issues.

Regions, Regionalism, and Regionalization

Regionalism and governance potentially share a common vocabulary. Not only is there a strong indication that regions should be looked at as an appropriate level of analysis for the organization of governance (i.e., *regional governance*), but the variation in governance structures also raises the question of how parallel but unequal regional transformations might affect global governance in specific issue areas.⁵