

Review - Comparative Regionalism: Economics and Security

Written by Hakan Mehmetcik

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Comparative Regionalism: Economics and Security

By Etel Solingen

Routledge, 2014

Since the end of Cold War, the study of regions has become a major preoccupation of international relations scholars. The world has witnessed regional cooperation booms on many international issues from culture to economics and from the environment to security. We are truly living in an age of regions. Regionalism is thus one of the overwhelming realities for the study of international politics and one of the major puzzles that scholars have tried to address over the last two decades. Etel Solingen's book, *Comparative Regionalism: Economics and Security*, is one of these attempts to make sense of the increasing regionalisation of world affairs. The book is one of the most informative, analytically rich and eloquent text books among the expanding literature on globalisation and regionalism.

There are many unique analytical merits of the book. First and foremost, it goes well beyond Europe as the only referent for understanding regionalism by shifting attention to East Asia and the Middle East in particular. Second, it goes well beyond the institutional focus of existing regionalism literature. This is also related to the fact that the European Union as an institution has been seen as a benchmark for comparative regionalism. Solingen argues that Europe, in this sense, represents an anomaly rather than the norm. Therefore, her attempt to make a comparison between East Asia and the Middle East, rather than between "European irregularity" and other regions makes sense. Third, Solingen links globalisation and regionalism by bringing up a unique framework that captures domestic and regional/international catalytic conditions. The framework's point of departure is that globalisation influences domestic competition between two models of political survival, namely internationalising and inward looking coalitions. In this framework, these domestic political survival models are driving agents of regional outcomes (not regional institutions) as well as being byproducts of regional context. That is, they are both agent and structure in the way that they both effect and are affected by regional outcomes. Accordingly, internationalising coalitions opt for increased openness to international markets, capital, investment opportunities, technology and regional cooperation and stability, while inward-looking coalitions rely on self-sufficiency, complete sovereignty and control of various issue areas. Thus, each coalition has a different set of preferences and different grand strategies to achieve their preferences.

These differences over preferences and subsequent grand strategies determine the course of the regional occurrences through outside-in and inside-out effects. As one coalition is more prone at home and throughout the region relative to other, regional occurrences will be more inclined with preferences of that type of particular coalition. Yet, at all levels—local, regional, and global—there will be continuing rivalry. Therefore, these different models do not envelop states overnight but rather evolve through competition and causal mechanisms at local, regional and global levels. This is the micro-foundation proposed in the book to study comparative regionalism and causal and counterfactual relations between what happens at domestic and regional levels. In this sense, Solingen's book provides a dynamic analysis of regions and regionalism, and this constructivist account of IR offers a better understanding of the nature and development of regionalisation than static mainstream neo-realist or neo-liberal IR

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theories.

There are four parts and ten chapters in the book. The first part deals with conceptual and analytical matters in order to lay down the main themes of the analytic framework: globalisation, economic reform, and regional relations. The rest of the book dwells more on Asian, Middle Eastern, and Latin American examples with different focuses including institutional and security related discussions. Chapter 3 in the 1st part, where coalitions strategic interactions and regional outcomes are analysed, and chapter 5 in the 2nd part, where regional orders are discussed, are especially important chapters for understanding the core theme of the book. Overall, the collection of essays revisits Solingen's former studies, and all chapters are either adapted, reprinted or revised versions of her prior works.

Solingen has provided convincing arguments on how forces of globalisation generate competition between two distinct coalitions, internationalists and inward-looking nationalists. According to her, state institutions and firms are controlled by either of these different coalitions, and regional outcomes, whether a region is conflictual or cooperative, is a function of coalition preferences. If internationalising coalitions prevail at home, the regional order will be cooperative and peaceful, as this coalition will pursue economic reforms and access to international markets through trade and investments channels. By contrast, when lead by inward looking nationalist coalitions, regional orders will be conflictual as domestic politics is dominated by military-industrial complexes and state-led firms, which overall feeds regional insecurity and competition. Articulation of this dynamic in world affairs is best represented in the East Asian context where an internationalising coalition drives local and regional outcomes, whereas in the Middle East inward-looking statist coalitions drive local and regional occurrences. Solingen takes these two regions as her prime examples for a detailed analysis of comparative regionalism, yet also provides views on Latin America as well as the European-Mediterranean area. Yet, it is not clear why some countries, such as Turkey in Middle East or North Korea in Asia, are persistently able to resist the wider effects of regional pressures even though the rest of their region can be defined within opposing coalitions. Solingen mentions these countries, yet she fails to provide a convincing account of this situation. Another issue is that according to the book's genesis, and as opposed to general regionalism theorists arguments based on European experiences, institutions are not the main agents that drive regionalism. However, the book falls short of explaining why deep internationalising coalitions are more successful in Asia where institutions are also relatively more successful than in the Middle Eastern context where both regional institutions and internationalising coalitions fail.

Solingen is one of the pioneering figures among scholars who extensively study and write on regions and regionalism. Her works appeal to those who are interested in connections between global, regional and domestic orders. Her works, as displayed in this collection, remain some of the brightest analyses of comparative regionalism that integrates all these levels.

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