

# The global and regional governance dilemma



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## Introduction

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Since the late 1980s and early 1990s there has been an exponential growth of various forms of regional cooperation throughout the world, mainly in the so-called “global south”. The proliferation of regional cooperation processes has opened a debate about whether regionalism threatens or complements existing global arrangements. Some scholars have questioned whether regional governance can collaborate with global governance so that it increases benefits and decreases risks. For that reason, identifying potential links between regional and global governance could provide solutions to find a middle ground that can positively impact their relationship.

There are different approaches that could

be used to describe the relationship between regional and global governances. In this article, I will be focusing on two approaches. I intend to demonstrate that, even if there are some risks and challenges in finding a common ground between regional and global governance, regionalism has become an important element for global governance.

This article is organized as follows: first, I will present a brief theoretical analysis about the definition of governance at the global and regional level. Next, I will discuss two approaches that show the relationship between global and regional governance, and finally, I will present some reflections about the challenges currently faced in the world that involves global and regional governance.

## Global and regional governance: common visions in different levels

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Some scholars have highlighted that the implementation of common rules and regulations allows actors to provide collective goods in specific issue areas. As such, governance, as a concept, describes diverse modes of policymaking by different actors that attempt to create collective policies.

How did governance first appear in the international scene? After the end of the cold war, in the beginning of the 90's, multilateralism seemed to be the perfect tool to solve the global problems existing at the time. The willingness of governments and other actors to collaborate internationally promoting cooperation and the shortfall in the capacity of states to respond adequately to the international challenges and transnational issues were the most important factors that impacted the emergence of governance. States began creating common rules, procedures, and institutions to find solutions to global problems that were the expression of their interdependence.

Scholars such as Weiss and Wilkinson (2014), authors of "Rethinking Global Governance", define global governance as a sum of informal and formal ideas, values, norms, procedures and institutions that help all actors identify, understand and address trans-boundary problems. What is notable in this definition is that global governance reflects a capacity of the international system at any moment in time to provide government-like services in the absence of world government, but without a political authority that centralizes the process.

On the other hand, regional governance is typically associated with the European Union (EU) model scheme, but the concept is wider. It shows almost common characteristics with global governance: the term includes the participation of many actors, the absence of a central authority and the commitment of these actors to collaborate mutually in order to find common solutions, all this at a regional level. What is really innovative about this regional governance concept is the role of regional powers, which actually promote integration processes.

How did regional governance emerge in the international scene? The dissatisfaction with existing global institutions that opened the debate of the "multilateralism's crisis" and the demands of the regional powers to expand their global influence, were the most prominent factors that allow regional governance to emerge. The creation of BRICs in 2010 was the best example to show how regional powers such as Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa started using integration processes to expand their regional influence in global affairs.

## Linking global and regional governance: complementary or competing approaches

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The relationship between global and regional governance shows how regionalism could facilitate the diffusion of global principles and become a cooperative instrument to fulfill global objectives or, on the contrary, it could emerge as a revisionist response to economic/political models or confront multilateral institutions.

"Complementarity" is the idealistic view

when analyzing regional and global governance, because regional organizations are part of global multilateral order and have a key role to manage global problems, so they engage and contribute to the global governance system. For example, the members of the Pacific Alliance in Latin America (Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Peru) share similar views on development and promotion of free trade, and its objective is to build an area of deep integration which complements the objectives of the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Regional organizations could make contributions to multilateral institutions not only acting as “multilateral utilities”, which pursue a strong normative agenda, but also as “heading utilities”, acting as devices to facilitate the peaceful resolution of disputes and create spaces for cooperation (Ruland 2011).

The best example in this case is the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, or ASEAN, established in 1967 with the purpose of accelerating economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region. ASEAN is considered Asia’s premier regional organization and a model of regional cooperation, which has contributed to promote multilateral ideas encouraging dialogue among countries, serving as an agenda-setter in international forums such as the Cambodian conflict in the UN and supporting global multilateral order through resolutions and decisions.

From this perspective, there are many ways regional governance could complement global governance by finding feasible arrangements and coordinating actions that allow a harmonious and cooperative relationship. When regional governance is

aligned with global governance, economic and political benefits emerge. This is the case of implementing policies to generate more financial stability in crisis and improvements in sustainable development and the protection of human rights policies. Some academics such as Takur and Lankgenhove (2006) propose to build effective partnerships between global and regional agencies as a tool to find a common ground between both concepts.

On the other hand, conflicts between regional and global governance are generated basically when processes or initiatives at regional level do not have as a priority the need to complement with the global order because these have other interests, which lead to undermine global norms and policy aims. For example, regional trade agreements could produce a “spaghetti bowl” of different rules, transaction costs for private traders and exponential higher negotiation costs for governments. The recent creation of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) which gathers 14 countries representing 30% of the world’s population and global GDP, is the perfect example.

There are some risks that regional governance pose to global governance from a political perspective. When countries prefer establishing alternative forms of social and political organizations with specific features constitutes an expression of resistance to global processes and is perceived as a choice to demonstrate independence. For example, ALBA (the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America) an intergovernmental organization, founded initially by Cuba and Venezuela in 2004, is associated with socialist governments. The objectives of this organiza-

tion contradicted the liberal principles that were followed by other integration organizations in Latin America and was also created as an alternative to the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA or ALCA in Spanish), an agreement proposed by the United States.

The role of emerging powers is crucial to understand global governances because they have a great capacity to create new institutions or initiatives to enhance their international status, elevate their negotiating power, promote their interests and values in their regions, gain visibility and greater representation and elevate their negotiation power in the world. These emerging powers could risk global governance if their new rules and interests do not align with global existing norms and policy aims. This is a political issue that generates a debate between the preferences of the “emerging powers” in the international scene and their political willingness to be complementary with global governance.

Scholars such as Hurrell and Loke (2017) highlight that the emerging powers were seen to seek greater influence in the creation of alternative forms of cooperation, or ‘exit options’, such as the BRICS’ New Development Bank (NDB), the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), or China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), among others. So, these new powers bypassed the discussion about how international politics has changed and how the world should be governed.

From another perspective, the G-20 (group of 20) represents an important block that has expanded its agenda to address various global issues. Although G-20

has been criticized for being an “exclusive club”, some academics have argued that it has become the most prominent mechanism to manage global problems because it also includes the “emerging powers”. But what happens with the United Nations, with the World Trade Organization and with other international institutions that gather most of the countries in the world? It could be important to reevaluate the role of these institutions in managing global governance and to consider reforming their norms in order to be more inclusive and democratic. Is global governance collapsing?

The weakness of formal multilaterals institutions and the difficulties to reform their structures will likely result in states relying on regional organizations to address global problems (Beth and Jokela, 2011). For that reason, nowadays regionalism is stronger than ever and the question is therefore what kind of dynamic it will have in the near future that may impact and shape the world?

### Facing challenges

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The majority of the scholars that have studied this subject agree on the need to limit and restrict competition and establish norms to facilitate links between regional and global institutions, making possible cooperation, coordination and complementation. The first challenge would be, on one hand, for global governance structures to adapt to regional governance dynamics. On the other hand, it is important to establish a regional consensus on the purpose and principles of global institutions, as most regional institutions are embedded within the global system and come to assume many competences and

contribute to global public good provisions. How can this be accomplished? For example, scholars as Takur and Langenhove (2006) propose to build a proper global institutional framework in which regional arrangements can be organized in such a way that these are allowed to contribute with existing global arrangements.

What is important to recognize is the role that regional powers play in influencing how regional and global governance evolve in a cooperative or disconnected fashion, mainly because these want to pursue greater global influence. So, the second challenge would be to find ways to integrate regional powers such as Brazil, Mexico, India, Turkey, South Africa and China to global governance in order to link their preferences with the established norms in the global system and promote collaboration amongst them. Otherwise, regional governance could compete with global governance generating fragmentation, uncoordinated actions and competition.

There are various global issues that need to be addressed and many countries are not equipped to deal with these and need the assistance of global institutions or initiatives to respond adequately and effectively. For example, issues such as climate change must be managed globally. For that reason, another challenge would be for global governance to respond effectively to global problems in a more democratic fashion, being inclusive, representing all the interest of the actors and allowing them to have voice and participation in these new initiatives.

The reform of the United Nations is a sub-



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ject that has been discussed for decades; however, there has been little consensus among its members about what reforms to implement. But some key issues are how to give regionalism a greater role and the reform of the Security Council, specifically to change the composition of its permanent memberships that reflect the power structure of the world as it was in 1945. There are several proposed plans but notably this reform will imply too much debate and discussion. Do we need to create a new generation of multilateral rules?

The challenges are for both: global and regional governance. The COVID 19 pandemic could affect global and regional governance or, on the contrary, could be an opportunity to recover their roles as structures that create collective policies to generate public benefits. The international system expects that the World Health Organization (WHO) plays a prominent role leading the world's health crisis, so its performance will define if cooperation and multilateralism still work or not.

Some scholars such as Hatuel-Radoshitzky (2020) have highlighted the necessity and added value of coordinating a global response to COVID-19 and it could be shown through the good performance of WHO in distributing millions of tests to identify cases, sharing research-based information to diagnose and manage cases, supplying protective equipment to keep health workers safe, educating the public about the virus through online courses, among others. On the contrary, other experts as Levy (2020) have stated that COVID has reinforced a resurgence of state power and further weaken multilateral and regional institutions because states started adopting their own policies, such as lockdowns to flatten the curves and manage contagions for their own public health systems to cope the situation. So in their view, there hasn't been any regional or global coordination up to now, which has dramatically impacted not only economic and investment trends, but also the social dimension.

The way the world copes with COVID will determine if global or regional governance manage effectively the situation and will reveal the number of gaps and shortcomings that multilateralism has in the glo-

bal and regional scene. The great challenge will be to evaluate the future of global and regional governance performance and their implications for the world.

Another important difficulty is what Weiss and Wilkinson (2014) state: "accepting the limits of global governance without global government, because global problems require a global solution, and global governance is a halfway house between the international anarchy underlying realist analysis and a world state"

Finally, building a cooperative relationship between global and regional governance depends not only on how international institutions perform in the international scene to face current challenges, but also on how regional powers play a role that positively impact these challenges. 🌐

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