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# **(Don't) Fear The Regional Organization:**

## **Unraveling the Interconnections of Institutional Power in Regional Organizations**

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## **Abstract**

This study investigates the institutional design of Regional Organizations (ROs) through the prism of power distribution and checks-and-balances. Analyzing 75 ROs over seven decades, we examine the interplay between decision-making power, scope, and power concentration. Our objectives are twofold: to lay the groundwork for an institutional checks-and-balances theory in RO design and to develop quantitative measures for these concepts.

Our findings reveal a temporal trend of expanding scope and increasing decision-making power in ROs, coupled with a more dispersed power distribution among their organs. This pattern persists even in the European Union, where power concentration has progressively declined with each treaty revision. Regression analysis yields three key results: (1) a significant negative correlation between decision-making power and concentration; (2) a positive association between scope and decision-making power; and (3) a complex relationship between scope and concentration, suggesting mediation by both decision-making power and organ quantity.

These findings support our checks-and-balances hypothesis: as organizational scope broadens, decision-making power increases but becomes more dispersed among multiple organs. This research contributes to the understanding of RO institutional evolution and provides quantitative tools for further investigation into power dynamics in international organizations, offering implications for both theory and practice in global governance.

## **Keywords**

Regional Organizations, Institutional Power, Checks and Balances, Power Dispersion, Scope, Decision-Making Power

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## 1. Introduction

In an era of increasing global interconnectedness, policymakers face a critical challenge: how to design regional organizations that effectively address transnational issues while respecting national sovereignty. The European Union (EU), one of the world's most complex and deeply integrated regional organizations, illustrates these issues. The EU's extensive legal framework and deep integration have made it a subject of intense debate among scholars and policymakers. While some view it as highly authoritative, others emphasize its intricate system of checks and balances.

Proponents of the authority of the EU point to the organization's unique structure, which invests key organs with exceptional authority (Sandholtz & Stone Sweet, 2004; Kreuder-Sonnen & Zangl, 2015; Craig & De Búrca, 2020). The European Commission, the EU's executive body, possesses the right of initiative, and once its draft legislation gets passed by the Council of Ministers, the resulting laws become binding for member states within the common market. Furthermore, the transition from unanimous to majority voting in numerous policy areas within the Council has significantly enhanced the EU's overall authority, as individual member states can no longer unilaterally veto proposals. The Commission monitors member state compliance, while the Court of Justice of the European Union has the power to impose sanctions for non-compliance. Hooghe et al. (2017, p. 563) assert that the EU is "the world's most authoritative general-purpose organization." Consequently, many have expressed concerns regarding the competences of such regional organizations, which member state governments often perceive as highly intrusive.

Proponents of a more benign, checks-and-balances, approach to the EU by contrast point out that the EU is an extremely complex organization where increases in the formal authority of the European Commission have consistently been subject to checks and balances (Peterson et al., 1999). Thus, the transition from consensus to majority voting has been institutionally counterbalanced by requiring the European Parliament to co-decide with the Commission, resulting in an intricate decision-making process involving all three organs. As Tömmel (2017, p. 299) asserts, "The effect of this triangular relationship lies primarily in the mutual checks and balances of power positions." This framework incentivizes the establishment of even more organs. The Council of Ministers strives to maintain its dominance primarily by establishing new organs designed to constrain the Commission's activism. Conversely, the Commission endeavors to preserve its influence through sophisticated process management, by proposing technical solutions that facilitate consensus on politically charged issues, and by mobilizing external actors in support of its policies.

This ongoing discussion highlights a key policy question: How can we accurately assess the distribution of power within regional organizations?

Existing approaches to measuring the institutional power of regional organizations often overlook crucial nuances. By focusing solely on the scope of an organization's competencies or the authority of individual organs, these measures fail to capture the complex interplay of institutional checks and balances. This oversight can lead to misguided policy decisions based on an incomplete understanding of how power is truly distributed within regional bodies. To address these shortcomings, we propose a more comprehensive index of institutional power that considers the distribution of competences among an organization's organs, the decision-making power of these organs, and the scope of the organization's authority across policy areas. Together, these measure an organization's institutional power.

This nuanced approach reveals that increased organizational scope does not necessarily equate to greater centralized authority. Instead, it often results in a more dispersed power structure that can affect the balance between regional integration and national autonomy. For policymakers engaged in designing or reforming regional organizations, our findings suggest several key considerations:

The interplay of different organs and decision-making processes can significantly impact the actual distribution of power within an organization. We argue that governments delegate competences to international organizations with dual objectives: to resolve collective action problems through efficient and effective institutional cooperation, while simultaneously distributing decision-making power in a manner that preserves their sovereignty (Acharya, 2009; Klabbers, 2007; Solingen, 2008; Bianculli, 2016; MacIntyre, 2018). The most salient manifestation of this power dispersion is the allocation of policy-making authority among multiple decision-making organs.

Traditional measures of organizational authority may be misleading. A more holistic approach is needed to accurately assess the true distribution of power. The most influential measures of authority in international organizations focus on selected decision-making organs and key competences of these organs (Lindberg, 1970; Hooghe & Marks, 2015), only the decision-making competences of organs (Zürn et al., 2021), or the scope of an organization separately (Panke, 2020). No measurement exists bringing organs, decision-making competences, and scope together. As we will demonstrate, this is important, however, as governments designing international institutions and fearing a loss of sovereignty are likely to use all three as adjusting screws to guard their sovereignty against the too powerful organization.

Expanding an organization's policy scope need not lead to an erosion of national autonomy if coupled with appropriate institutional safeguards. Scope refers to the range of policy areas over which an organization has competence (Koremenos et al., 2001; Haftel, 2013; Panke & Starkmann, 2021). Prominent approaches to measuring institutional power have demonstrated a causal relationship between an organization's scope and its authority (Haftel, 2013; Lenz et al., 2022). Undoubtedly, an organization possesses high authority if a single organ concentrates substantial decision-making power within a policy area. Consequently, the most authoritative organization would be one that penetrates deeply into states, overseeing numerous policy areas, with decision-making competences concentrated in a single organ. However, this conceptualization becomes problematic when two organs are designed to share decision-making competences over the same policy area, serving as checks and balances on each other. In such cases, an increase in organizational scope does not necessarily translate to increased authority; rather, it can lead to greater power dispersion. This paradox is evident in the Measuring International Authority (MIA) data (Hooghe et al., 2017), where task-specific international organizations (IOs) often score higher in authority than multi-purpose organizations.

By adopting this more nuanced understanding of institutional power, policymakers can work towards creating or reforming regional organizations with a clearer understanding of how institutional design affects the balance between effective regional cooperation and respect for member state sovereignty. While a comprehensive checks-and-balances theory of international organizations—currently existing only as a fragmented collection of diverse approaches—exceeds the scope of this study, we focus on delineating key drivers of intra-organizational power dispersion. Our research aims to develop quantitative measures for these drivers and empirically test their associations using a dataset comprising of 75 regional organizations over a 70-year period.

The article is structured as follows: The next section reviews existing measures of authority, independence and the scope of international and regional organizations, and identifies a distinct measure reflecting concerns for the distribution of power as a research gap within this literature. The third section introduces institutional power as a concept and discusses three aspects of institutional power. It formulates explicit hypotheses on the relationship between these three factors. Section four presents our data and method which we use to construct the index on institutional power. Section five tests the hypotheses and summarizes our major findings. The final section six discusses the findings in light of the existing literature and presents the necessary next research steps.

## **2. Existing Measures of Institutional Power**

Recent decades have witnessed several impressive attempts to measure the authority of International Organizations (IOs). Most of these measures focus on evaluating the independence or autonomy of these organizations from their members, primarily assessing decision-making competences and the structure of selected organs. When measuring an institution's scope, they typically examine the depth of specific commitments within a policy area, considering both the level of commitment and the (in)ability of governments to withdraw from it. However, this approach is limited, as a checks-and-balances perspective on international institutions suggests that all three aspects – distribution of power, decision-making power, and scope – are crucial in evaluating an organization's authority. Therefore, their interconnections should be thoroughly explored.

### **2.1 Measures of Authority**

Prominent concepts developed to measure authority have been discussed under various labels in the literature, including independence (e.g., Haftel & Thompson, 2006), autonomy (e.g., Bauer & Ege, 2014; Haftel, 2012), delegation (Hawkins et al., 2006; Brown, 2010), delegation and pooling (Hooghe & Marks, 2015), and the extent of international authority combining the latter two concepts (Hooghe et al., 2017; Zürn et al., 2021). Notably, reflecting the influence of early work on European regional

integration, existing measures of authority continue to build on Lindberg's seminal article on measuring regional integration (Lindberg, 1970), with few exceptions (e.g., Kohl et al., 2016).

Lindberg (1970) identified two independent dimensions of authority in international and regional organizations: delegation and pooling. Delegation refers to organs to which governments have transferred decision-making authority. These organs are considered more independent from member states because they are not directly responsible to their governments and thus possess greater autonomy (see also Haftel and Thompson, 2006, who discuss this in terms of impartiality and neutrality). In contrast, pooling refers to organs where governments jointly make decisions and are staffed with member state representatives. The more the decision-making process is dominated by organs consisting of delegates, or the more such organs an organization has, the more independent of member states or 'authoritative' it is.

Haftel & Thompson (2006) and Haftel (2013) expanded on Lindberg's approach, retaining the two dimensions of decision-making beyond the state: pooling and delegation. They also identified and measured two crucial decision-making competences and voting rules. Organizations were considered more independent if their supranational bureaucracy had "proposal power" (agenda-setting power), and if their major decision-making organ (i.e., the ministerial council) made decisions via majority voting. Additionally, organizations had more authority if they possessed a judicial organ for dispute settlement that could prevent states from overturning ministerial council decisions, and if that organ issued binding verdicts rather than just acting as a standing tribunal. Their measure of institutional independence thus relies on the composition and tasks of three organs with two competences, applied additively to a sample of 30 regional integration agreements.

Building on this earlier work, Hooghe et al. (2017) maintained the two-dimensional measure of international organizations' authority. In their conceptualization, international authority refers to "the extent and respects in which an IO is an autonomous, independent institution with the capacity to bind its member states by creating legal obligations" (Hooghe et al., 2017, p. 17). The Measuring International Authority (MIA) index created by Hooghe et al. (2017) introduced several major innovations. It provides better theoretical and empirical grounding of delegation and pooling measures compared to Haftel and Thompson (2006). It also uses a much larger sample of organizations, combining Haftel and Thompson's (2006) original sample with an IO sample. Furthermore, it includes an encompassing and detailed survey of major IO organs, coded according to the "trias politica" of a modern state: legislative (assemblies), executive (council of ministers), judicial (dispute settlement), permanent civil service (general secretariat), and consultative bodies.

These organs are evaluated based on the independence granted by states (reflected in staffing: state or non-state), possession of two major decision-making competences (agenda-setting and final decision-making), and authority in three decision-making areas: member state accession and suspension, constitutional reform, and budget. Each organization receives composition scores for delegation and pooling. The delegation score reflects the powers of bodies consisting of non-state actors, while the pooling score reflects the powers of bodies consisting of state actors and whether their decisions are binding.

Zürn et al. (2021) offer another approach to measuring the authority of international organizations. They code decision-making competences for three types of organs: assemblies, decision-making bodies, and independent bodies. Using the policy-cycle as a heuristic, they code each organ according to its position in this cycle. Their dataset covers about 200 organs from a representative sample of 30 IOs. Their authority index ranks organs' authoritativeness based on voting procedures and decision-making bindingness. Like earlier efforts, they assume that authority accumulates across an organization's organs.

## 2.2 Measures of Scope

In recent years, researchers have been exploring ways to measure the scope of international institutions, particularly in the realm of trade agreements. Policy scope in this context often refers to agreement depth, with further distinctions made between an agreement's breadth (number of policy areas covered) and strength (cooperation intensity within each area). These efforts aim to understand how comprehensive and impactful these agreements are across various policy areas.

One approach focuses on what's called "agreement depth," which looks at both the range of policy areas covered and how intensively countries cooperate within each area. Researchers typically examine specific provisions in trade agreements, categorizing them based on whether they fall under existing World Trade Organization (WTO) rules or go beyond them (Horn et al., 2010).

Kohl et al. (2016) use the World Bank's Global Preferential Trade Agreements Database, covering 296 agreements signed between 1948 and 2011. They code provisions in 13 WTO+ and four WTOx policy areas, differentiating between legally enforceable and non-enforceable items. They construct three indexes by summing up the number of WTO+, WTOx, and institutional provisions each agreement covers.

Several studies have contributed to this field. One influential work identified over 50 policy areas in hundreds of treaties signed over several decades (Hofmann et al., 2017). Another expanded on this by including agreements not officially reported to the WTO, resulting in a larger database spanning from the mid-20th century to recent years. Dür et al. (2014) code provisions in various policy areas, distinguishing between 52 policy areas in 279 treaties signed between 1958 and 2015, and dividing provisions between core and non-core, border versus non-border, and preferential versus non-preferential, and legally enforceable and non-enforceable items. They have created indexes by adding up the number of provisions each agreement covers in different categories. Dür et al. (2014) expanded the database by including agreements not notified to the WTO, resulting in a database of initially 587 agreements (now 710) signed between 1948 and 2019. They cover both active treaties and those that have ended, analyzing ten main policy areas using 100 indicators, thus covering fewer policy areas but in greater detail.

Some studies have broadened their focus beyond trade agreements to look at international organizations more generally. One approach defines "policy portfolio scope" as the number of policies an international organization engages with across many areas, differentiating between core and peripheral policy areas but not measuring cooperation intensity or strength. (Hooghe et al., 2019). A particularly comprehensive effort to measure the scope of regional organizations resulted in a dataset evaluating multiple policy fields for dozens of organizations over time (Panke & Starkmann, 2021). This dataset is designed to capture the diversity of competencies these organizations have, though it doesn't aim to evaluate how strongly they cooperate in each area.

These various approaches demonstrate the ongoing efforts in the academic community to better understand and quantify the reach and impact of international agreements and organizations across a wide range of policy areas.

## 2.3 Limitations of these Measures

While each approach enhances our understanding of international organizations' authority, three key shortcomings hinder further progress in comprehending the institutional power of international and regional organizations.

Firstly, there is a lack of an encompassing index that simultaneously captures aspects of institutional composition and decision-making across an organization's entire scope. Our proposed index of institutional power addresses this gap by measuring an organization's concentration (or dispersion) of decision-making, an organ's decision-making power, and the organization's scope.

Secondly, most evaluations, reflecting International Relations scholarship's interest in the independence of international organizations, focus on the decision-making competences of a limited number of organs such as the general secretariat, a ministerial organ, and dispute settlement mechanisms. This approach significantly reduces the available information on organizations' institutional design. While justifiable from an independence perspective, the inclusion of only a few bodies in the evaluation and the additive nature of the indices limit our understanding of interorganizational dynamics' effects on authority. Existing indices overlook the fact that member states often establish additional organs to disperse power within the organization and simultaneously increase the competences of multiple organs to enable checks and balances (Hix, 2010; MacIntyre, 2018). Limiting the analysis to only a handful of organs sets artificial constraints on the potential for power dispersion within an organization (Hix, 2010; Tömmel, 2014).

In the following sections, we develop measures of institutional power that address these identified gaps. Our approach aims to provide a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the institutional power dynamics within international and regional organizations, considering the full range of organs and their interrelationships.

## 3. Institutional Power

Institutional power pertains to the power distribution within the organs of a regional organization (RO) to which member states have delegated competences. This distribution is expressed through three metrics: concentration, which reflects the



centralization or dispersion of competences among organs; decision-making power, measured by the number of policy cycle tasks assigned to organs; and scope, indicating the range of policy areas over which an organ has competences.

We contend that governments delegating competences to international organizations are equally concerned with solving collective action problems through efficient and effective institutionalized cooperation (Keohane, 1984; Raustiala, 2000) and preserving their sovereignty (Moravcsik, 1995; Abbott & Snidal, 2001; Acharya, 2009; Tallberg et al., 2014). Consequently, two important factors determine the distribution of power within an organization: the functional demands for institutionalized cooperation on one hand, and the sovereignty costs of delegation on the other.

Together, these factors are likely to lead to the dispersion of power within an international organization. This dispersion reflects a balance between the need for effective collaboration and the desire to maintain national control, resulting in a complex arrangement of organs with varied competences and scopes. Such institutional design addresses both the functional requirements for cooperation and the concerns over sovereignty, shaping the overall power dynamics within the organization.

The functional demand for institutionalized cooperation serves as a significant driver in establishing international organizations (Mitrany, 1976; Keohane, 1984). In this process, governments must make decisions about the organization's institutional design, including the number and type of organs, and their respective competences (Hawkins et al., 2006). When delegating new tasks to an international organization, governments face a choice between creating a new organ to handle the task or expanding the competences of an existing one (Jupille et al. 2013). From both functional differentiation and institutional-balancing perspectives, it is rational for governments to create specialized agencies to manage new issue areas (Radaelli, 1999; Egeberg & Trondal, 2009). The establishment of specialized organs enhances organizational efficiency, effectiveness, and adaptability (Gehring & Faude, 2014). Different actors within the organizations also have diverging preferences about which organ best represents their preferences (Calvert 1995; Tömmel 2017). Radaelli (1999) has demonstrated that organizations producing regulatory policy tend to favor actors capable of offering technocratic or scientific expertise, such as technocrats, advisory boards, and epistemic communities (Majone, 1994; Radaelli, 1999).

Specialization allows each organ to develop expertise in its designated function, leading to more proficient handling of complex tasks and processes. Creating distinct organs is also rational from an institutional balance perspective: delegating encompassing competences to only a few organs inevitably shifts power from member states to those organs. By creating new organs and endowing them with similar decision-making power, governments ensure that power is dispersed (Radaelli, 1999). This approach to institutional design reflects a balance between the need for specialized expertise and the desire to maintain a distribution of power that doesn't overly concentrate authority in a limited number of organs. The result is a more complex organizational structure that aims to address diverse functional needs while preserving a degree of balance in the overall power dynamics of the international organization.

There is a tension arising from the need for coordination among different entities and the preference for dispersed power structures within IOs (Gehring & Faude, 2014). Peters (2021, p. 665) argues that the vertical separation of powers between IOs and member states does not adequately substitute for horizontal checks and balances within an organization. Member states' oversight alone may not ensure that the interests of those affected by organizational actions are properly considered. Consequently, Peters (2021, p. 666) emphasizes the importance of systematically addressing horizontal checks and balances within IOs.

Building on these insights, we propose an index of institutional power that centers on power dispersion. Our approach examines the distribution and concentration of decision-making authority among various organs within a regional organization, as well as the organization's overall scope. From this foundation, we develop hypotheses exploring the relationships between these three key factors: power distribution, decision-making concentration, and organizational scope.

### **3.1 Concentration of Decision-Making Power**

A crucial dimension in understanding institutional power is the concentration of authority within an organization. This concept encompasses both the number of institutional bodies involved in decision-making and their relative importance. Concentration measures the extent to which competences are centralized within a single organ versus distributed among multiple entities.

It is the inverse of power dispersion and is often used interchangeably with centralization in the literature on international institutions (Koremenos et al., 2001). In contrast, power dispersion refers to the involvement of multiple entities in an international organization's decision-making process (MacIntyre, 2018).

Concentration focuses on whether key institutional tasks are performed by a single focal entity or distributed more broadly (Koremenos et al., 2001, p. 771). Much of the existing literature has primarily examined the existence and decision-making powers of specific entities, such as secretariats or member state organs like the EU Council. While these deductively generated 'focal entities' are undoubtedly relevant, this conventional approach may overlook valuable information. As demonstrated in our state-of-the-art review, scholarly consensus often determines which entities should be considered 'focal' for investigation. Although this approach has merit, it potentially neglects the complexities of power distribution within international organizations. By expanding our analysis beyond these traditional focal points, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of institutional power dynamics.

### 3.2 Decision-Making Power in the Policy Cycle

Decision-making power within an organization refers to the specific competences assigned to individual bodies. To evaluate the role and competences of various organs in the decision-making process, we employ the policy cycle as a heuristic framework. This approach aligns closely with how Regional Organization (RO) agreements typically formulate these competences and which have been the focus of other approaches in the field (see also: Bradley & Kelley, 2008; Zürn et al., 2021; Marx & Westerwinter, 2022).

The policy cycle encompasses several key stages: information collection, information distribution, agenda-setting, decision-making, evaluation (monitoring), and sanctioning power. The importance of an organ in the decision-making process is determined by the breadth and depth of its competences across these stages. For instance, an organ tasked solely with information collection holds fewer competences than one responsible for collecting information, distributing it to member states and other organs, and preparing the agenda for high-level meetings such as heads-of-state gatherings.

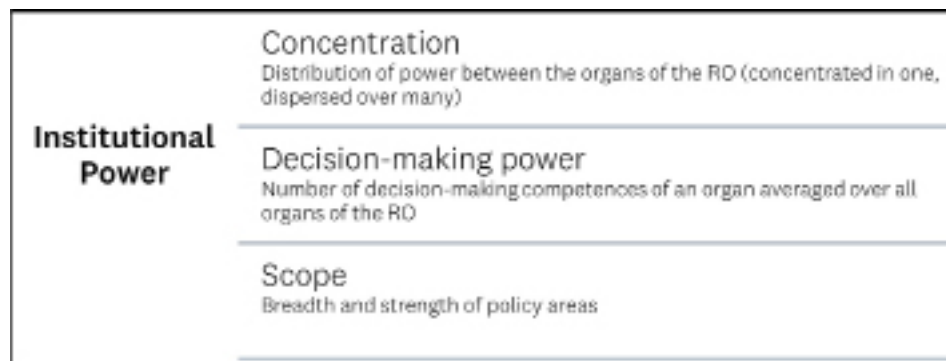
The centrality of an organ in an organization's decision-making process increases with its overall decision-making power. This concept of decision-making power, reflecting approaches by Haftel (2013) and Hooghe et al. (2017), indicates the number of organs that possess significant authority within the policy cycle. By examining the distribution and extent of decision-making power across various organs, we can gain insights into the overall power structure and dynamics within the organization.

### 3.3 The Scope of Policy Areas

Scope in the context of regional organizations (ROs) encompasses the formal policy or issue areas covered by an organization. This concept can be further divided into two sub-dimensions: breadth and strength. Breadth measures the diversity of policy areas addressed within an agreement, aligning with approaches used by Kohl et al. (2016) and Hofmann et al. (2017). Strength, on the other hand, captures the depth or intensity of cooperation within each policy area as defined by its specific provisions. This conceptualization of strength draws from literature on preferential trade agreements (PTAs), where it is understood as the commitment entailed in policy provisions (Dür et al., 2014).

Our measure of RO scope integrates both breadth and strength, providing a comprehensive view of the extent of cooperation across all policy areas. This holistic approach allows for a nuanced understanding of an organization's reach and influence across various domains. Building on these concepts of concentration, decision-making power, and scope, we now turn to formulating hypotheses about the relationships between these three key variables. These hypotheses will explore how the distribution of power, the extent of decision-making authority, and the range of policy areas covered interact within regional organizations. By examining these relationships, we aim to gain deeper insights into the structural dynamics and functioning of ROs in the international arena.

Figure 1 summarizes our conceptualization of the formal institutional design dimensions.



**Figure 1:** Aspects of *institutional power*

### 3.4 Expectations Concerning the Relationship Between the Components of Institutional Power

First, we hypothesize an inverse relationship between the decision-making power of an organization's organs and the concentration of power within those bodies. The introduction of new organs inevitably reduces the efficiency of the decision-making process and increases the need for coordination among all organs. This relationship manifests in two ways:

Empirically, in complex organizations with multiple decision-making bodies, member states define the decision-making competences for each individual organ. Consequently, an increase in decision-making competences is inherently linked to greater power dispersion. Additionally, to clearly delineate each organ's role in the policy-making cycle and its relationships with other organs, decision-making competences must be explicitly defined and allocated. This necessitates the establishment of a system of hierarchical and vertical coordination, monitoring, and decision-making, which in turn enhances the decision-making power of individual organs.

This distribution of power is particularly crucial for maintaining checks and balances within the organization. Member states aim to ensure that the enhanced competences of one organ are effectively counterbalanced by corresponding competences in another. This balancing act further contributes to the dispersion of power across multiple organs as their individual decision-making authorities are defined and expanded.

*H1: The more decision-making power, the less concentrated institutional power will be.*

Second, we propose an inverse relationship between an organization's scope and the concentration of power in specific organs, contrary to the literature on organizational authority that suggests broader scope leads to increased delegation (Lenz et al., 2022). We argue that this discrepancy arises from the specific measurement of delegation in Measuring International Authority (MIA). Our hypothesis posits that as an organization expands its scope of activities, it tends to distribute power more widely rather than centralizing it (Koop & Lodge, 2014). This distribution manifests in the establishment of additional organs. We attribute this trend to two primary factors:

*Specialization:* The growing specialization of international organizations necessitates the creation of specialized functional organs. These bodies possess the technical expertise required to address the increasing complexity of interdependence and policy implementation at the national level (Majone, 1994; Radaelli, 1999; Hawkins et al., 2006; Koop & Lodge, 2014). Decentralization enhances efficiency and adaptability by allowing greater responsiveness to the specific functional demands of various policy areas.

*Institutional power balancing:* Member states prefer to balance institutional power among an organization's organs to minimize sovereignty costs (Kahler, 2000; Dehousse, 2003; Tallberg et al., 2014). Delegating additional tasks to a central decision-making organ invariably increases that organ's institutional power relative to member states. Consequently, states opt for a more dispersed power structure as the organization's scope expands.

This inverse relationship between scope and power concentration underscores the pragmatic need for decentralized governance in large, complex organizations. It reflects both the functional requirements of specialized expertise and the political considerations of member states in maintaining a balance of power within international organizations.

*H2: The larger the scope of an organization, the less concentrated (or: more dispersed) institutional power will be.*

Third, we hypothesize a positive correlation between a regional organization's (RO) policy scope and its decision-making competences. This relationship draws on neo-functional theory, which posits that integration in one policy area often catalyzes demand for common solutions in related areas, a mechanism known as functional spillover (Haas 1958). As policy scope broadens, organizations tend to develop more specialized organs, leading to an increased propensity for task expansion (Schmitter, 1969). In our framework, this expansion manifests as greater involvement across the policy cycle. General-purpose organizations, in particular, often equip their institutions with enhanced decision-making competences to serve long-term objectives (Hooghe & Marks, 2010, p. 18f). The European Union (EU) exemplifies this trend. Scholten and Scholten (2017) demonstrate that the EU's expanding scope has not only led to a proliferation of specialized agencies (Radaelli, 1999) but also to a 'functional spillover' of policy competences within the policy cycle. Specifically, the EU has evolved from merely monitoring regulations to exercising regulatory enforcement powers.

We argue that this expansion of policy-cycle competences stems from two key factors, the need to coordinate activities between different organizational organs, resulting in more detailed descriptions of competences that indicate each organ's position in the cycle. In addition, it stems from necessity to enhance collaboration between organs responsible for specific policy areas and national governments, leading to clearer specifications of collaboration goals (e.g., harmonization, cooperation, integration). Consequently, an increase in decision-making competences within an organization often signifies a more complex organizational structure. This complexity reflects both the breadth of policy areas covered and the depth of involvement in various stages of the policy cycle, underscoring the intricate relationship between policy scope and institutional design in regional organizations.

*H3: The larger the scope of an organization, the greater its decision-making power.*

## **4. Data and Method**

### **4.1 Data**

To construct our indexes of institutional power for Regional Organizations (ROs), we utilize a recently released dataset. This comprehensive dataset codes treaty texts of ROs since 1945, encompassing over 300 content and institutional design items. It includes 75 current ROs and 42 of their predecessors or extinct organizations, enabling a thorough comparison of institutional and content characteristics on a global scale. The dataset adheres to a broader definition of regional organizations (Katzenstein, 2005; Acharya, 2009), focusing on inter-governmental, institutionalized, multipurpose international organizations with regionally defined membership. This approach distinguishes the sample from the more inclusive definition of international institutions based on the international treaties of international organizations (Pevehouse et al., 2020). Thus, the sample deliberately excludes single-issue, task-specific inter-governmental agencies (e.g., the Administrative Center for the Social Security for Rhine Boatmen or the African-Malagasy Council for Higher Education) and individual organs of larger organizations (e.g., the ASEAN Secretariat). The requirement to be institutionalized effectively excludes bilateral preferential trade agreements.

The geographical distribution of the organizations in our sample is as follows:

- Africa: 18 organizations
- Americas: 17 organizations
- Europe: 19 organizations
- Asia: 11 organizations
- Middle East: 3 organizations
- Transcontinental: 12 organizations

The dataset provides a comprehensive foundation for analyzing institutional power across regional organizations (ROs). It encompasses 276 documents, including founding and significant amending documents, allowing tracking of institutional development over time. The dataset captures the formal or de jure institutional design of ROs, focusing on competences described in agreements rather than practical implementation. It covers 19 different types of organs, differentiated by their representatives (e.g., summits, commissions, parliaments). For each organ, information is collected on competences in the policy cycle, membership, and voting rules. Separate sections cover dispute settlement mechanisms, central banks, and development funding organs.

The database specifies the presence of different RO organs and lists their competences,<sup>1</sup> distinguishing between those aimed at member states (e.g. “Recommend policies to member states” or “Report member state compliance”) and those directed at other organs within the RO (e.g. “Prepare the agenda for other organs” or “Collect information on the activities of other organs”). Three organs (central bank, dispute settlement mechanism, and development assistance) follow a different pattern due to their unique functions. This structured approach to data collection enables nuanced analysis of institutional power across various regional contexts, focusing on relationships between concentration, decision-making power, and scope in ROs.

#### 4.2 Calculation of the Concentration and Decision-Making Power Indices

To arrive at our measures of the (concentration of) decision-making power, we went through three steps: 1) identify the policy cycle steps; 2) construct the decision power scores for each organ, 3) combine the organ score into the organization’s decision-making power index and concentration of power index. We organized these competences in line with the policy cycle, complemented by budgetary norms and membership management information. As can be seen in Table 1, some steps of the policy cycle are covered more extensively, thanks to the detailed information offered by the dataset. The full list of competences included in each policy step can be found in Table 7 (Appendix C).

Number of competences for each organ, split up over the policy cycle steps					
Agenda setting	2	Implementation	6	Budgetary norms	3
Information flows	13	Evaluation	6	Membership management	4
Decision-making	5				
Exceptions: total number of competences for					
Dispute settlement	8	Central bank	1	Development assistance	1

**Table 1:** Number of competences included in organ scores.

Moreover, we combined the information on the policy cycle steps into an overall score of the decision-making power of each organ. We first combined the indicators for each step to prevent policy cycle steps with more indicators from overshadowing the others. A principal component analysis (PCA) was used to ensure we retain most of the information in the underlying data. The policy cycle scores were subsequently rescaled, and another PCA was used to combine them into a total competence score for each organ of the RO. The computation was more straightforward for those organs where the dataset listed different competences. All indicators of the dispute settlement mechanism were directly combined using a PCA, whereas the central bank and development assistance organ only had one indicator. These last three organs’ scores were rescaled to have a similar range as the other organs.

The organization’s overall decision-making power was then measured by adding up the decision-making power of each organ. Like Hooghe et al. (2017), this index assumes that an increase in power in one organ translates into more power overall. To

<sup>1</sup> The full list of organ types is summits, councils, authorities, assemblies, committees, commissions, conferences, general secretariats, Secretaries-General, parliaments and other secretariats.

account for the way in which this power is distributed, we construct additional indicators, including a count of the organs of the organization.

To compute the concentration of power, we used the Hirschman-Herfindahl index (HHI), a common way of computing the concentration of (market) power.<sup>2</sup> For an organization where one organ holds all the decision-making power, the HHI returns the maximum score of one. Increasing the number of organs lowers the concentration score only if those organs are granted decision-making power. The more power is shared, the closer the index goes to zero. By construction, an organization without decision-making power (e.g. the Mano River Union) will have a concentration score of zero. Another thing to note is that an organization that adds an organ without any power will not change either the decision-making power index or the concentration of power. If an RO strengthens the checks and balances by redistributing existing decision-making power to a new organ, the concentration of power would decrease while leaving the decision-making power unchanged. However, every time the concentration decreased in our dataset, this was accompanied by an increase in the number of organs and in the RO's overall decision-making power, suggesting that such a simple redistribution of power never occurred by itself.

### 4.3 Calculation of the Scope Index

For the scope index, we selected those policy areas from the dataset that unambiguously increase the level of cooperation between the member states. This includes both, items that describe the existence of specific provisions (e.g. a “reduction of non-tariff barriers” or “common forces”) and the overall goal of policy cooperation in a particular area (from coordination to integration).<sup>3</sup> The full list of policy items can be found in Table 8 (Appendix C).

Economic		Non-Economic	
Trade in goods	11	Security	9
Trade in services	3	Environment	6
Migration	7	Governance	6
Investment	4	Social policies	11
Monetary cooperation	3	Culture	6
Other macro-econ. cooperation	9	Human rights	11
		Infrastructure	5

**Table 2:** Number of indicators for each policy area of the scope index

Scope is a measure that combines two factors: the breadth and strength of cooperation within an RO. For breadth, we counted the number of policy areas where member states agreed to cooperate, regardless of the intensity of that cooperation. For strength, we conducted a Principal Component Analysis (PCA) for each policy area, using the indicators specific to that category. This resulted in a strength score for each policy area. For overall scope we performed another PCA on the strength scores of all 13 policy areas. This final PCA produced our overall scope index. Note that by first combining indicators within each policy area before the final PCA, we ensured that all policy areas were weighted equally in the overall scope index, regardless of how many

<sup>2</sup> If  $m_i$  is the market power score of organ  $i$ , its share of market power is equal to  $s_i = m_i / \sum_i m_i$ .

The concentration of power in the organization is then computed as the sum of the squared shares of all its organs:  $\sum_i s_i^2$ . The range of this index is between zero and one.

<sup>3</sup> The division of policy areas has been slightly changed from that used in the dataset to improve the comparability of our index with those in the economic literature. Questions in the database that could not be linked to the level of cooperation were left out (e.g., “Which economic concepts does the document utilize?”). These items are then grouped according to six economic and seven non-economic policy areas (see Table 2).

indicators each area contained. This approach is similar to the one used for the Decision-Making Power index.<sup>4</sup>

## 5. Findings on Institutional Power

Employing the methodology previously described, we calculated the *Concentration*, *Decision-Making Power*, and *Scope* scores for a sample of 276 treaties. Appendix A presents a comprehensive overview of these variables, including descriptive statistics, inter-variable correlations, and frequency distributions. Figure 2 illustrates the temporal evolution of institutional power scores. The visualization employs a color-coding scheme to differentiate treaties (ROs) based on their geographic origin: Europe, Africa, the Americas, Asia-Pacific, Eurasia, and transcontinental regions. To elucidate overall trends, we incorporated a linear regression line (depicted in black) for each metric. Specifically, Panel A of Figure 2 focuses on the temporal dynamics of power concentration within ROs.

The lower boundary of the graph is populated by organizations whose organs possess no discernible competences, resulting in a concentration score of zero. Conversely, a similarly small subset of ROs exhibits a concentration score of one, indicating that a single organ monopolizes all competences within the policy cycle. In half of these cases, this occurs because the RO comprises only one organ. However, there are also instances of multi-organ organizations where decision-making power is entirely concentrated in a single entity. A notable example is the ASEAN treaty, which enumerates six organs, five of which do not have decision-making power. The sole omnipotent organ is the ASEAN Summit, a convocation of ASEAN heads of state (ASEAN, 2008, p. Article 7).

The majority of ROs, however, occupy the spectrum between these two extremes. Since the turn of the millennium, there appears to be a trend towards more equitable distribution of power among RO organs, as evidenced by the negative slope of the fitted regression line. This observed decrease in concentration is statistically significant at the 1% level and remains robust when extreme values (0 and 1) are excluded from the analysis.

In contrast to the trend in concentration, the aggregate Decision-Making Power of Regional Organizations (ROs) exhibits a notable increase during the latter half of the 20th century, as illustrated in Figure 2, Panel B. Treaties ratified in the 2010s demonstrate nearly twice the decision-making power compared to those from the 1980s. Despite this upward trajectory, most agreements still maintain relatively low average scores in terms of decision-making power. The European Union and Andean Community emerge as exemplars, with scores of 3.6 and 2.5, respectively. These are followed by nine other ROs, predominantly situated on the African continent, whose scores exceed 2. However, it is noteworthy that 70% of the treaties in our dataset score below 1, indicating a skewed distribution.

This dichotomy suggests that the global institutional landscape is characterized by a small number of increasingly robust and autonomous ROs, while most organizations maintain relatively modest levels of institutional power. This pattern reflects a nuanced evolution in international governance structures, where a select few organizations have significantly expanded their decision-making capabilities, while most retain more limited authority.

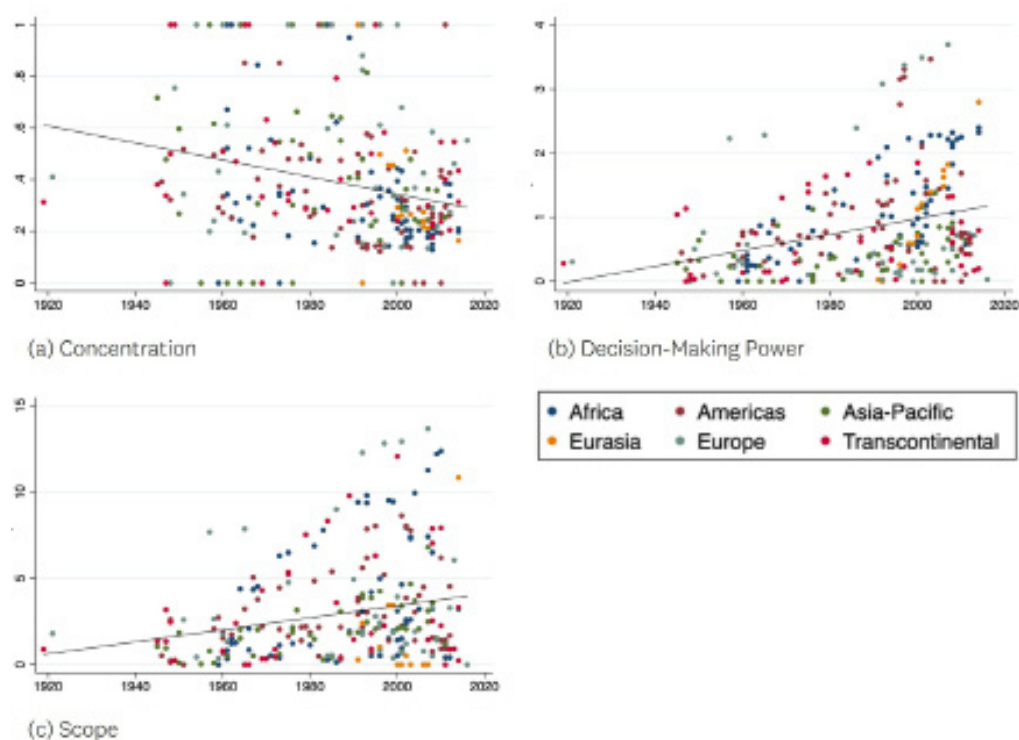
Table 6 in Appendix A presents a comprehensive analysis of the institutional power dynamics among currently existing Regional Organizations (ROs). It delineates the *Concentration*, *Decision-Making Power*, and *Scope* scores as of 2016, the most recent year included in the dataset, and provides aggregated means for distinct geographical regions. The data reveal a clear trend: as the aggregate power within an organization increases, it tends to be more widely distributed across various organs, resulting in lower concentration scores.

The final panel of Figure 2 shows the values for the scope index over time and regions. Like Decision-Making Power, the Scope increases significantly over time (at the 1% level). This pattern persists even when we exclude the outliers (those whose score exceeded 8). Appendix A provides more detail on the scores for ROs currently in existence.

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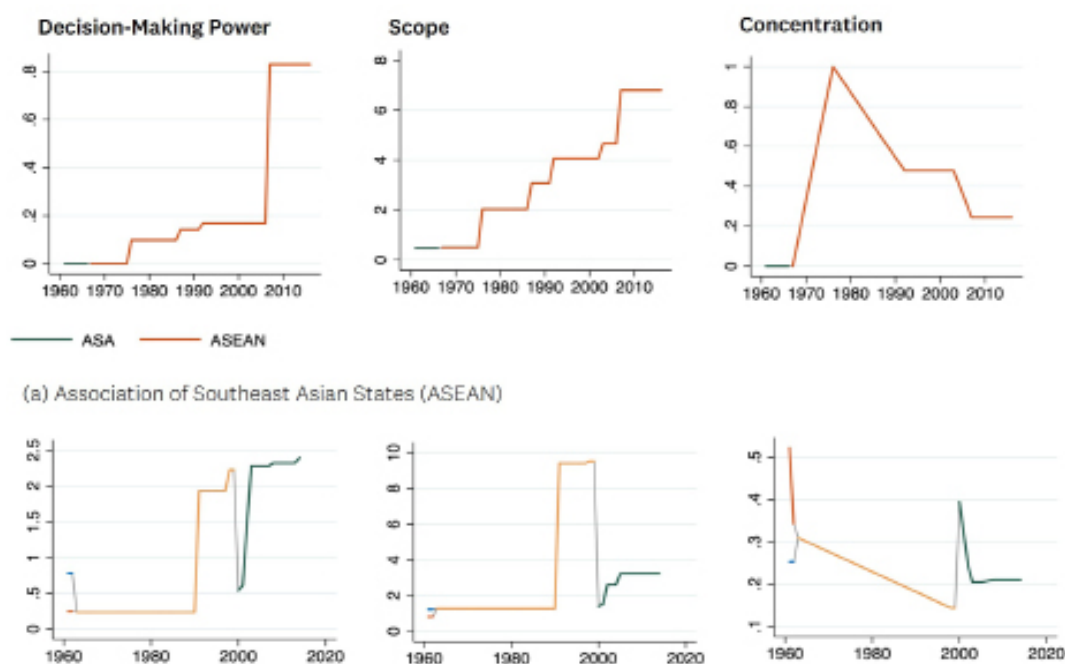
<sup>4</sup> As was the case for the Decision-Making Power index, by first combining each policy area, we ensure they get equal weight in the overall scope index regardless of the number of indicators they contain.



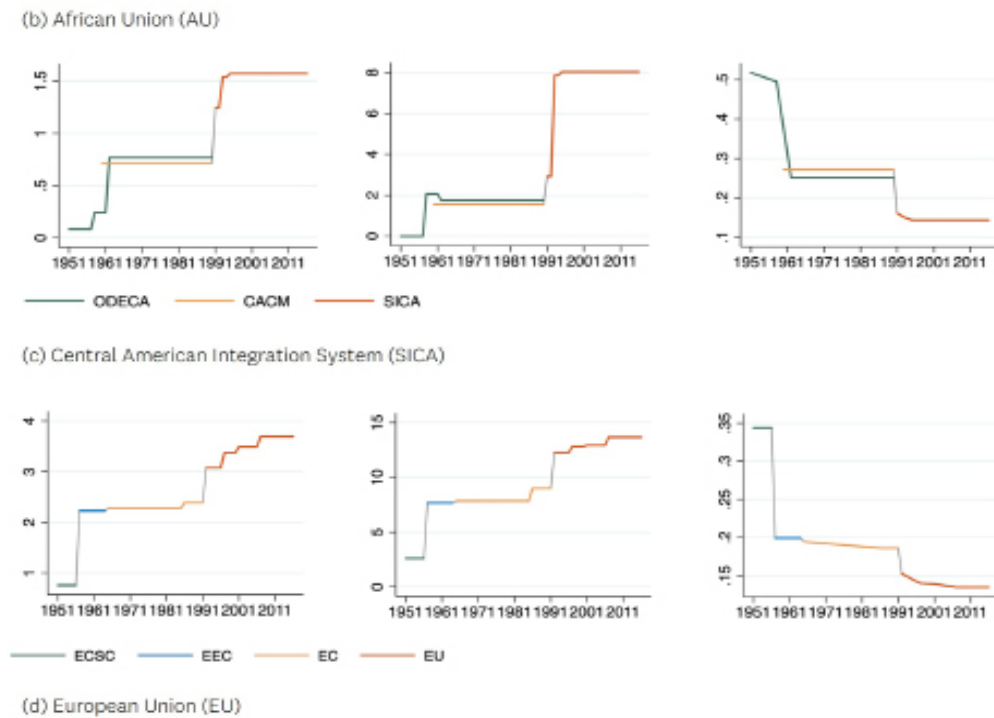


**Figure 2:** Scatter plot of institutional power on the year of signature, with linear fit (black line)

A particular feature of the dataset is that it coded the changes to the foundational treaties of ROs. Coupled with information on the successors and predecessors of ROs, this allows us to paint a dynamic picture of institutional power over time. To illustrate, Figure 3 plots the Scope, Concentration and Decision-Making Power scores for four ROs and their predecessors: the African Union (AU), the Association of Southeast Asian States (ASEAN), the Central American Integration System (SICA), and the European Union.







NOTES: Evolution over time of the Decision-Making Power (column 1), Scope (column 2), and Concentration (column 3) for The African Union (panel a), ASEAN (panel b), SICA (panel c) and the European Union (panel d) and their predecessor agreements.

**Figure 3:** Evolution in institutional power of four ROs and their predecessors  
**Source:** Authors

Starting with the first two columns, we note that the total Decision-Making Power and Scope increases over time in almost all organizations. The only exception is ODECA, whose Scope slightly decreased in the late 1950s. For the most part, this pattern persists even when one organization transitions to another. For example, SICA's predecessors, ODECA and CACM, coexisted from the 1960s until the foundation of SICA in the 1990s. Their union coincides with another significant increase in institutional power. A notable exception is the African Union: its predecessor, the Organization of African Unity, had a very high value for scope, but this increase was reversed in the AU's founding treaty.

We also observe that the changes in Scope and Decision-Making Power move very closely together. Except for ASEAN, an increase in one almost always accompanies an increase in the other. The magnitude of the changes is strongly correlated, as evidenced by the sudden jump in Scope in SICA in the early 1990s. In contrast, the Concentration of power slowly decreases over time in all four ROs and tends to decrease when the other two increase. While the changes in the EU seem more gradual than those in the other ROs, this is mainly an artefact of the scale with which its institutional power is plotted. Its maximum Scope and Decision-Making Power values are almost twice that of the other ROs.

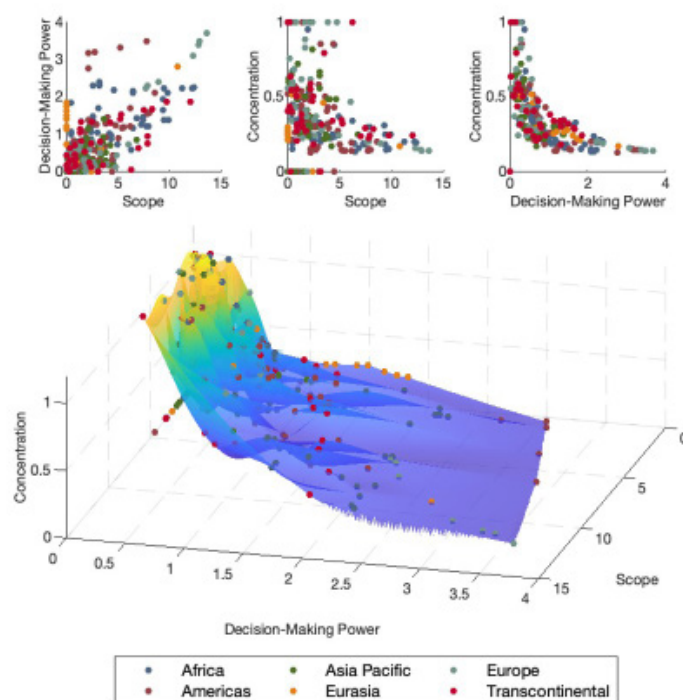
### 5.1 Relationship Between the Components of Institutional Power

Returning to the hypotheses we formulated – *the more decision-making power, the less concentrated institutional power will be* (H1), *the larger the scope of an organization, the less concentrated (and more dispersed) institutional power will be* (H2) and *that the larger the scope of an organization, the greater its decision-making power* (H3) – we conclude this paper by examining the relationship between the components of institutional power. We begin with a graphical comparison of their correlations, followed by statistical analysis that controls for confounding factors.

Figure 4 directly compares the Scope, Concentration and Decision-Making Power values of all ROs in our dataset. The top row compares these attributes two-by-two, while the bottom figure plots a three-dimensional simulacrum that combines all three variables. The graphical representation can be partitioned into four quadrants, each characterizing distinct institutional profiles:

1. Lower-left quadrant: This sector is predominantly populated by ROs exhibiting limited Decision-Making Power and Scope. A significant proportion of European ROs cluster in this region, suggesting a trend towards more constrained institutional frameworks in this geographic area.
2. Upper-right quadrant: This sector is characterized by high values in both dimensions. A preponderance of African treaties and the European Union occupy this space, indicating expansive institutional capacities.
3. Upper-left quadrant: This area, denoting high Decision-Making Power coupled with lower Scope, is primarily comprised of ROs from Africa and the Americas. This suggests a focus on concentrated authority within specific domains.
4. Lower-right quadrant: The relative paucity of data points in this sector is noteworthy, implying a scarcity or absence of ROs that maintain high Scope without commensurate Decision-Making Power.

Corroborating what we found for the individual ROs, there is a strong negative correlation between the total Decision-Making Power and the Concentration of power (Figure 4, top right). The negative correlation between both is strong ( $-0.5$ ) and follows a multiplicative inverse relationship. The organizations with high values of Decision-Making Power are all concentrated in the bottom right of the figure, meaning that they have distributed that power across various organs. Examples include the EU or the Andean Community (CAN). However, there is more heterogeneity on the other end of the spectrum. Here, we find evidence of highly concentrated and highly dispersed ROs despite a similarly low level of decision-making power. Examples of the former are the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) and the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), which have delegated all institutional power to one organ. On the other hand, the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) and the Nordic Council (NC) disperse the limited amount of power they have over three to four organs.



**Figure 4:** Correlation between the components of institutional power

**Source:** Authors

*NOTES: Scatter plot of the correlation between Scope and Control (top left), Scope and Concentration (top middle) and Control and Concentration (top right). These graphs are combined in a 3D scatter plot with a surface graph displaying the relation between Scope, Control and Concentration (bottom graph). The colour gradient indicates the Concentration score (high = yellow).*

The negative correlation between concentration and scope is less evident in Panel B of Figure 4. The pattern instead is one where if the scope is less than five, concentration can be high or low. Once the scope exceeds this limit, however, the ROs distribute their power more equally between their organs. This pattern holds irrespective of the RO's location.

Putting these together, the 3D graph (Figure 3, bottom panel) clearly shows that Scope and Decision-Making Power go hand in hand. However, as the Scope or the Decision-Making Power of an RO increases, that power is dispersed over multiple organs, providing tentative support for the hypotheses outlined earlier.

To test our hypotheses in a more robust manner, we ran a series of regressions using the indicators of institutional power, in which we also controlled for several possible confounding factors. These include the age of the organization,<sup>5</sup> the year in which the treaty was signed, the number of organs, and the number of member countries of the RO. To compute this last variable, we merged our data with the membership information from the RIKS platform.<sup>6</sup> This platform tracks the changes in membership of regional organizations from the early 1900s until today. As it covers all organizations contained in the dataset, this did not change our sample size.

The age of the RO and the year of treaty signing at each point of observation accounts for potential time-induced effects, like those reflecting contemporary assumptions of the involved actors about adequate institutional choices (Thelen, 1999), or critical junctures, i.e. periods where substantial institutional change becomes more likely, as opposed to periods of stability where actors have less incentives to change institutional designs (Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007).<sup>7</sup> We also include variables indicating the region in which the respective RO is located. In the past, several studies have emerged that systematically describe and explain such regional patterns and differences (Katzenstein, 2005; De Lombaerde, 2023). It is therefore likely that these differences also influence the institutional power of regional organizations.

## 5.2 Results of the Regression Analysis

The results of these regressions are displayed in Table 3. The first two columns show the regressions on the RO's Scope, the third and fourth columns show the regressions on Decision-Making Power, and the last two columns regress on the Concentration index. These regressions were run with (even columns) and without (odd columns) dummy variables for the geographical regions. In the former case, the parameter estimates on the regional dummies should be interpreted as the difference in the ROs from that region and transcontinental ones.

It is important to note that these regressions do not aim to establish any causal links between the indexes of institutional power. Changes to the institutional structure happen at discrete moments and mostly at the same time. As such, we lack enough information to make any causal inferences. Instead, the regression results should be interpreted as correlations in which we control for the influence of several confounding factors, like the number of organs or years of signing.

Table 3 indicates that only the number of organs consistently demonstrates significant impact ( $p < 0.01$ ) across all specifications. Scope and Decision-Making Power exhibit positive associations with organ count, while Concentration shows a negative correlation. This mechanical relationship potentially supports our hypotheses: an increase in Decision-Making Power, accompanied by an increase in organs, could lead to higher Scope and lower Concentration. However, our estimations cannot establish causality, and alternative explanations remain plausible.

Examining the coefficient estimates of the institutional power indexes reveals conditional correlations between our primary variables of interest. Concentration exhibits significant negative coefficients in the Decision-Making Power regression (columns 3-4) and vice versa (columns 5-6), providing robust support for Hypothesis 1. Similarly, Scope demonstrates significant positive coefficients in the Decision-Making Power regression (columns 1-2) and vice versa (columns 3-4), aligning with Hypothesis 3. These relationships persist when controlling for Concentration, organ count, and other variables.

<sup>5</sup> In computing the age, we ignored the existence of predecessor agreements. Our main findings are robust to using an alternative RO age that takes this into account. The results are available upon request.

<sup>6</sup> Available at: <https://riks.cris.unu.edu>.

<sup>7</sup> One particular concern with these variables could be that they are too highly correlated to be included simultaneously. While their correlation is positive (see Table 5, Appendix A), it is not high enough to cause multicollinearity issues, and neither is that of any of the other variables.

The results for the second hypothesis are less definitive. Columns 1, 2, 5, and 6 show no statistically significant impact of Scope on Concentration (or vice versa), suggesting that the negative correlation observed in Figure 4 or Table 5 is an indirect effect. Adjusting control variables indicates that this indirect effect operates through multiple channels. The correlation between Scope and Concentration becomes negative and significant only when both the number of organs and the level of Decision-Making Power are simultaneously removed from the model.<sup>8</sup> This implies that increased scope does not necessarily lead to decreased concentration directly. Rather, ROs with higher scope tend to have more organs and/or greater Decision-Making Power, both of which correlate with lower concentration of power.

VARIABLES	Scope		Decision Making Power		Concentration	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Scope	-	-	0.077*** (0.013)	0.079*** (0.013)	0.0035 (0.0060)	-0.0011 (0.0061)
Decision-Making Power	1.77*** (0.29)	1.88*** (0.30)	-	-	-0.093*** (0.028)	-0.079*** (0.029)
Concentration	0.42 (0.72)	-0.13 (0.73)	-0.48*** (0.15)	-0.40*** (0.15)	-	-
Year signed	-0.0028 (0.0095)	0.0034 (0.0096)	0.0046** (0.0020)	0.0032 (0.0020)	-0.0011 (0.00087)	-0.0017* (0.00088)
Age RO	0.027** (0.011)	0.019* (0.011)	-0.0033 (0.0023)	-0.0011 (0.0022)	-0.00058 (0.0010)	-0.00039 (0.00100)
Members	-0.0069 (0.0082)	-0.018* (0.0095)	0.0011 (0.0017)	0.00015 (0.0020)	0.00044 (0.00075)	0.00014 (0.00088)
Organs	0.13** (0.058)	0.12** (0.059)	0.093*** (0.011)	0.093*** (0.010)	-0.015*** (0.0053)	-0.012** (0.0054)
Africa	-	-1.07* (0.64)	-	-0.0056 (0.13)	-	-0.017 (0.059)
Americas	-	-1.22* (0.65)	-	0.023 (0.14)	-	-0.034 (0.060)
Asia-Pacific	-	-0.91 (0.70)	-	-0.38*** (0.14)	-	-0.040 (0.064)
Eurasia	-	-3.48*** (0.89)	-	0.27 (0.19)	-	-0.0060 (0.084)
Europe	-	-0.013 (0.69)	-	-0.18 (0.14)	-	0.15** (0.062)
Constant	5.98 (18.9)	-4.98 (19.0)	-8.91** (3.90)	-6.12 (3.89)	2.81 (1.72)	3.92** (1.73)
Observations	236	236	236	236	236	236
R-squared	0.366	0.428	0.612	0.659	0.258	0.326

**Table 3:** Regression on the components of institutional power

NOTES: Linear regressions of Scope (columns 1-2), Decision-Making Power (columns 3-4) and Concentration (columns 5-6) on the indicators of institutional power and control variables. Columns 2, 4, and 6 contain dummy variables indicating the region where the RO is located. Each region is compared to the baseline of the transcontinental treaties.

The remaining covariates demonstrate varying degrees of impact, with their directional influence and statistical significance contingent upon the model specification. Focusing on the statistically significant variables, we observe that more recently established Regional Organizations (ROs) exhibit higher Decision-Making Power and lower Concentration scores, although the magnitude of this effect is modest. While the treaty's year of ratification does not significantly influence the Scope, there is a slight positive correlation between an RO's age and its Scope score.

Regarding the regional fixed effects, several notable patterns emerge that appear to contradict the trends discussed in the

<sup>8</sup> Removing any of the other variables has no impact. Results are available upon request.

previous section. For instance, while African, American, and Eurasian ROs demonstrated the highest Scope and Decision-Making Power scores in Appendix A, they exhibit some of the lowest scores in Table 3, in some cases significantly lower than the Transcontinental treaties that serve as the reference category for the dummy variables. This apparent discrepancy is attributable to the expanded sample size: Table 3 incorporates all treaties in the dataset, whereas Appendix A is limited to currently existing ROs. When the unconditional analysis is extended to encompass the entire sample, the discrepancy with Table 3 is resolved. The most statistically significant regional effects indicate that:

1. Treaties signed in Eurasia tend to have lower Scope scores.
2. Asia-Pacific treaties exhibit less Decision-Making Power.
3. European treaties demonstrate higher Concentration scores, driven exclusively by non-EU agreements.

To assess the robustness of our findings, we conducted a series of robustness checks:

1. Redefining RO age to include predecessor agreements: No significant impact on results.
2. Restricting the sample to post-2000 treaties: Main findings remained unaffected.
3. Limiting the sample to 2016 values: Signs remained consistent, but the significance of concentration indexes was eliminated. None of the institutional power variables significantly affected or were affected by concentration.
4. Estimating the model with lagged institutional power variables or using changes in institutional power: Results consistent with those presented in Table 3.

These robustness checks largely corroborate our main findings, except for the 2016 sample restriction, which warrants further investigation. The consistency of results across various model specifications and sample restrictions enhances confidence in the validity of our primary conclusions regarding the relationships between Concentration, Scope, and Decision-Making Power in ROs. All detailed results are available upon request, facilitating further scrutiny and replication of our findings.

## 6. Discussion and Conclusion

This study introduces a novel measure of institutional power for regional organizations (ROs), focusing on the concentration of decision-making, decision-making power, and scope. Our analysis of 75 ROs from 1945 to 2016 reveals increasing decision-making power and scope over time, accompanied by decreasing power concentration among decision-making organs. This supports the notion that member states design ROs with built-in checks and balances.

Our findings demonstrate a negative correlation between Decision-Making Power and Concentration (H1) and a positive association between Scope and Decision-Making Power (H3), supporting our checks-and-balances argument. The relationship between Scope and Concentration (H2) appears to be mediated by decision-making power and organ count. These results partially challenge the assumption of earlier studies revealing an unconditional authority increase in international organizations (Lenz et al 2022; Hooghe et al 2017; Zürn 2022). While states delegate more competences, these are distributed among a larger number of organs with greater Decision-Making Power, suggesting a more nuanced approach to authority dynamics.

Policymakers should consider the trade-offs between organizational complexity, mandate breadth, and power distribution when designing or reforming ROs. Increasing the number of organs in an RO may lead to broader scope and enhanced decision-making power but may come at the cost of a decrease in the concentration of power. Likewise, as ROs expand their policy coverage, mechanisms to maintain efficient decision-making processes may be necessary to counteract power dispersion. In any case, changes in one aspect of an RO's structure or mandate might have ripple effects on other dimensions, therefore, it is necessary to regularly assess and adjust the balance between scope, decision-making power, and concentration. Our findings suggest that concerns about rising RO authority should be treated with caution. Member states design organizations to balance increased decision-making power with greater power dispersion among organs. This insight, applicable even to the EU, may help alleviate public concerns about expanding competences in ROs.

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Appendix

Appendix A. Institutional power scores and concentration

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Decision-Making Power	236	0.84	0.76	0	3.69
Concentration	236	0.37	0.24	0	1
Scope	236	3.03	2.85	0	13.67
Members	236	15.67	19.05	1	192
Year signed	236	1989.96	18.22	1945	2016
Age RO	236	9.85	14.98	0	65
Organs	236	6.16	3.81	0	17

Table 4: Summary statistics of RO characteristics

	Decision-Making Power	Concentration	Scope	Members	Year signed	Age RO	Organs
Decision-Making Power	1						
Concentration	-0.5	1					
Scope	0.58	-0.27	1				
Members	0.19	-0.09	0.10	1			
Year signed	0.34	-0.26	0.24	0.11	1		
Age RO	0.1	-0.11	0.19	0.14	0.39	1	
Organs	0.72	-0.45	0.49	0.25	0.31	0.11	1

Table 5: Correlation between the RO characteristics





Figure 5: Histogram of the institutional power scores

Africa				Americas				Europe			
RO	DMP	Conc.	Scope	RO	DMP	Conc.	Scope	RO	DMP	Conc.	Scope
MRIU	0	0	1.11	ALBA	0	0	4.5	RSPC	0.03	0.55	0
IOC	0.16	1	0.28	CONDECA	0.11	1	0.48	AC	0.09	1	0.8
CAU	0.29	0.84	4.53	ACS	0.34	0.57	0.71	CBSS	0.12	0.37	1.92
AMU	0.39	0.95	1.93	CO	0.38	0.51	0.68	NC	0.13	0.37	2.79
CE	0.73	0.34	0.41	AP	0.42	0.43	4.53	WNC	0.16	1	0.54
IGA	0.71	0.43	0.96	NAFTA	0.53	0.58	3.02	RCC	0.17	0.59	0.48
IGAD	0.72	0.37	4.99	UNASUR	0.6	0.26	1.68	WFEU	0.17	0.6	0.51
OCAM	0.75	0.33	0.85	SELA	0.7	0.48	2.17	SEECF	0.18	1	3.93
CEPGL	0.79	0.36	1.23	CELAC	0.75	0.3	1.1	BA	0.3	0.34	0.38
CENSAD	0.89	0.26	1.94	ACTO	0.75	0.26	1.38	COMECON	0.33	0.43	0.36
UEMOA	1.45	0.18	7.41	PARLACEN	0.82	0.26	0.76	OSCE	0.44	0.24	4.93
ECCAS	1.2	0.29	7.95	LALA	1.05	0.26	1.87	GUAM	0.51	0.43	0.78
UEMOA	1.45	0.18	7.41	OAS	1.2	0.13	6.18	CoE	0.58	0.61	2.24
COMESA	1.65	0.31	9.36	MERCOSUR	1.44	0.29	4	RII	0.7	0.27	3.28
ECOWAS	2.09	0.15	9.8	SICA	1.57	0.14	8.03	CEI	0.71	0.22	1.4
CEMAC	2.16	0.13	6.49	OECS	1.68	0.19	6.19	EFTA	0.72	0.46	6.05
SADC	2.17	0.23	4.63	CARICOM	2.1	0.2	8.63	EU	3.69	0.13	13.67
EAC	2.25	0.19	12.38	CAN	3.47	0.14	7.79				
AU	2.4	0.2	3.22								
Av.	1.29	0.32	4.62		1.09	0.28	3.59		0.59	0.47	2.77
St.Dev.	0.79	0.26	3.89		0.81	0.15	2.49		0.85	0.29	3.17
Asia Pacific				Eurasia				Transcontinental			
RO	DMP	Conc.	Scope	RO	DMP	Conc.	Scope	RO	DMP	Conc.	Scope
CENTO	0	0		US	0.26	0.5	1.01	OECD	0.17	0.55	0.91
SAARC	0.14	0.65		CIS	0.58	0.51	0.51	NATO	0.2	0.44	0.22
SCO	0.3	0.36		BSEC	0.59	0.46	3.43	UNDP	0.42	0.4	0
CPS	0.4	0.62		EAEU	2.79	0.16	10.84	WTO	0.52	0.27	1.79
CCTS	0.4	0.36						ILO	0.68	0.21	0.88
ACC	0.41	0.41						JORA	0.79	0.31	3.32
ECO	0.68	0.17						UFM	0.92	0.24	7.92
PC	0.65	0.25						UN	1.32	0.3	1.42
MSG	0.66	0.29						OIC	1.33	0.18	2.54
ASFAN	0.83	0.24						ACP	1.85	0.24	12.06
PIF	0.85	0.23									
GCC	0.91	0.22									
LAS	1.38	0.25									
Av.	0.68	0.29	2.66		1.06	0.41	3.86		0.88	0.33	2.81
St.Dev.	0.3	0.13	1.72		1.01	0.14	4.69		0.52	0.1	3.77

Table 6: Institutional power scores of existing Ros in 2016

Table 6 delineates the Concentration, Decision-Making Power, and Scope scores as of 2016, the most recent year included in the database, and provides aggregated means for distinct geographical regions.

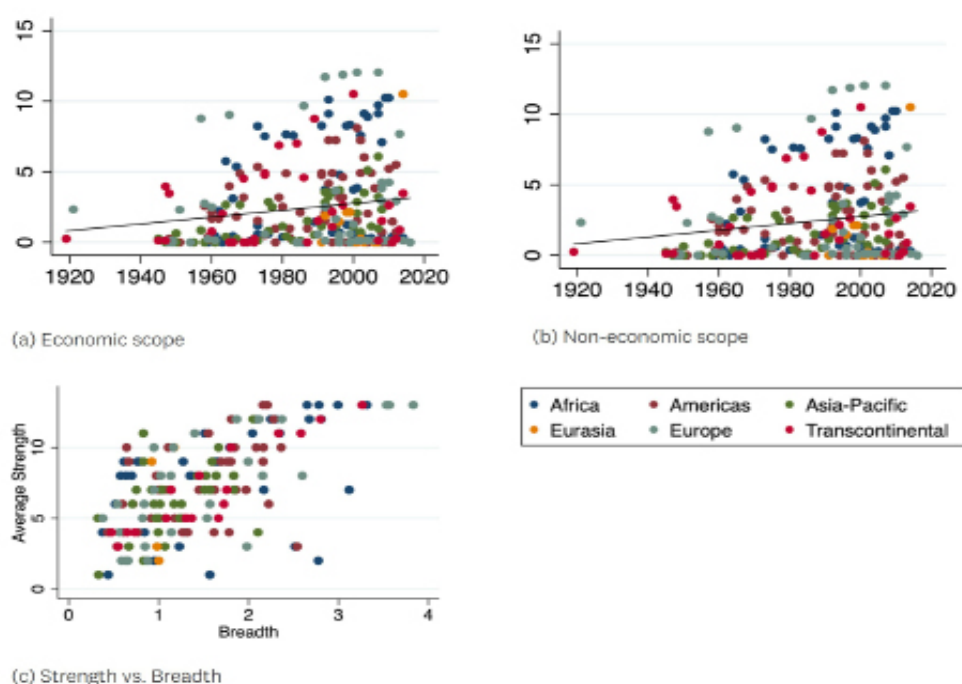
The data reveal a clear trend: as the aggregate power within an organization increases, it tends to be more widely distributed across various organs, resulting in lower concentration scores. On average, ROs in Africa, the Americas, and Eurasia exhibit the highest Decision-Making Power scores, while European and Transcontinental organizations generally demonstrate lower scores. It is noteworthy, however, that the European Union stands as a significant outlier, possessing the highest total score among all ROs examined. This pattern is generally inverted for the Concentration scores, with European and Transcontinental organizations showing higher levels of power concentration. An exception to this trend is observed in Eurasian treaties, which maintain relatively high Concentration scores despite their substantial Decision-Making Power.

This anomaly suggests a unique institutional structure among Eurasian ROs that warrants further investigation.

## Appendix B. Relationship Between the Components of the Scope Index

As noted in section 4, we can go into more detail regarding the policy Scope, as we developed separate indexes that track the economic and non-economic policy items separately. Moreover, we can examine how the overall Scope is affected by changes in the breadth of policy items versus changes in the strength of cooperation within each policy item.

Figure 6 shows the distribution of the economic (panel a) and non-economic Scope (panel b) as a function of the year in which the treaty was signed. From it, we conclude that the increase in the maximum scope can be traced back to the economic component. The non-economic scope's values remain below 8. However, the average of both components increased at a commensurate rate, indicating that the economic scope's peaks are mostly outlier values.



**Figure 6:** The components of policy Scope

NOTES: Scatter plot of Economic (panel a) and non-economic (panel b) Scope on the year of signature. Panel c plots the average strength (x-axis) on the breadth (y-axis) of each RO.

Panel c of Figure 6 shows the correlation between the breadth and average strength. Overall, treaties that cover multiple policy areas also tend to have a stronger level of cooperation in each policy area (correlation of 0.67), and the strongest cooperation happens in the treaty with the broadest coverage (i.e., the EU's 2007 Treaty of Lisbon). However, there are also plenty of exceptions to this rule. The top left corner of the graph contains those treaties that cover many policy areas but institute only weak levels of cooperation (e.g. UNASUR or AU). The bottom right corner, on the other hand, depicts those treaties where members cooperate to a large degree on a more limited number of policy areas (e.g. ECO, Andean Pact, CEAO, or NAFTA). Our index of scope combines the breadth and strength of these treaties in equal measure, and its correlation with both breadth and strength is 0.85 or higher for the policy scope, economic and non-economic scope indexes.

## Appendix C. Competences and Policy items used in the institutional power indexes

General competences
<b>Agenda setting</b> Identify actions to be taken to reach the objectives of the RO Determine the general policy of the organization
<b>Decision-making</b> Right of legislative initiative Decide on policy proposals Decide on adoption of policies Decide on the interpretation of the agreement Decide on new areas of cooperation
<b>Implementation</b> Implement the policies and decisions made by other organs Harmonize the policies of member states Coordinate the policies of member states Supervise the implementation of member states' policies Supervise the implementation of the agreement Perform duties necessary for achieving the aims of the organization
<b>Membership management</b> Consider requests for new member state Accept a new member state Suspend membership of any member state Terminate membership of any member state
<b>Budget</b> Decide on the financial contributions of member states Draft the budget of the organization Adopt/approve the budget of the organization
<b>Information flows</b> Collect information on member states' policies (e.g. through reports) Collect information concerning treaty implementation Collect information received from any other source Analyze information on member states' policies (e.g. through reports) Analyze information concerning treaty implementation Analyze information received from any other source Prepare reports based on the information provided by member states Prepare reports based on information about treaty implementation Prepare reports based on information received from any other source Distribute information provided by member states Distribute information about treaty implementation Distribute information provided by any other source Distribute information compiled by the organ itself

<b>Evaluation</b> Evaluate the (implementation of the) cooperation or integration process Develop benchmarks for policies Reporting member state compliance Ensuring member state compliance Consider non-compliance measures Initiate a non-compliance procedure, e.g. referral to court
<b>Organ-Specific Questions</b>
<b>Dispute settlement mechanisms (DSM)</b> Between who does it settle conflicts Does the agreement explicitly mention the independence of these judges? Do judges receive diplomatic privileges and immunities? How is it authorized to manage conflicts of interest among Member States? Who can initiate the dispute settlement procedure Are decisions of the dispute settlement organ binding Does the document mention sanctions for ignoring DSM decisions Over which types of conflicts does it have authority?
<b>Central Bank</b> Does the document contain provisions for a Central Bank? Development Funding Organs Does the document contain provisions for a development funding organ?

Table 7: Organ competences included in each step of the policy cycle

Economic	
Trade in goods Freedom of goods 'Rules of origin' principle 'Mutual recognition' principle Subsidies Anti-dumping measures Abolishment of discriminatory practices	Non-tariff barriers Tariffs inside region Tariffs imports Quota imports Quota exports Long-term aim (Balassa)
<b>Trade in services</b>	
Freedom of services Barriers on services	Common barriers on import of services
<b>Migration</b>	
Freedom of labour Barriers on labour within region Regulation of labour flow to region Visa waiver program  Skilled migration programs Rights of entry	Rights of residence Free movement of people Integration programs Family reunification Harmonization - cooperation - integration
<b>Investment</b>	
Freedom of capital Coordination balance of payments members Limits public debt member states	Barriers on capital within region  Regulation of capital flow to region

<b>Monetary</b>	
Monetary cooperation Pegged currency Currency board Other Macro-Economic Industry/industrial cooperation Joint ventures Fiscal privileges for joint ventures Integrated approach to trade and industry Privatization of industries Special provisions for SMEs	Devaluation of currency Floating currencies Multiple exchange rates Measures to reduce unemployment increased economic growth Increased commercial exchange Coordination of development plans Protection of employment Setting up new enterprises
<b>Non-Economic</b>	
<b>Security</b>	
Common forces Intended consultations in case of threat Mutual defence guarantee Non-aggression pact Cooperation in military aspects Establishing nuclear-free zones Peacekeeping Dispute settlement mechanism (security)	Preventive measures to avoid conflict Early warning Peaceful settlement/management/resolution Humanitarian interventions Peacekeeping with/without consent Act outside of territory Peacekeeping force Harmonization - cooperation - integration
<b>Environment</b>	
Biodiversity Natural resources Waste management Eco-friendly industrial production	Protected areas CO2 reduction Renewable energies Harmonization - cooperation - integration
<b>Good Governance</b>	
Democratic participation in the RO Promotion of democracy in member states Unconstitutional changes of government Government effectiveness	Fighting corruption Public sector reform Military sector reform Harmonization - cooperation - integration
<b>Social policies</b>	
Employment policies Labour standard Harmonization of professional certificates Mutual recognition of profession certificates Health policies Gender policies Educational policies	University exchange programs Harmonization of educational standards Mutual recognition of educational standards Educational training Common research area Vocational training Harmonization - cooperation - integration
<b>Culture</b>	

Sport Fine Arts (Music, Theatre, Literature) Architecture Common language policies Town twinning/partnerships Preservation of cultural heritage Common public holidays Tourism Harmonization - cooperation - integration Fundamental rights Civil and political rights Social, economic and cultural rights Self-determination Minority rights	Religious rights Equality rights Children's rights Women's rights Persons with disabilities Justice Equality before the law Slavery Exploitation Freedom of movement and residence Possibility for individual complaints Possibility for state complaints Possibility to conduct country visits Harmonization - cooperation - integration
<b>Infrastructure</b>	
Transport Energy Housing	Communciation Clean water and sanitation Harmonization - cooperation - integration

**Table 8:** Policy items included in each category of the Scope indexes**Appendix D. Comparison with Existing Indicators of Scope and Decision-Making Power**

We ran a comparison between our indexes of institutional power with the indexes described in our literature overview. As we are unaware of any indicators that describe the dispersion or concentration of power, we limit this comparison to the Scope and Decision-Making Power indexes. While we consistently find a positive correlation with all indicators, the poor match between the samples of the different databases makes it difficult to draw any strong conclusions.

Panel A of Table 9 compares our index of Decision-Making Power with the delegation and pooling indexes of Hooghe et al. (2017) and the institutional quality index of Kohl et al. (2016). While the former database has the best match of any of our comparisons, it still only captures about 2 out of every 5 treaties covered by the dataset. Nevertheless, we find a strong positive correlation, particularly with the delegation index. The correlation with the indicator of institutional quality developed by Kohl et al. (2016) is also positive but based on only a handful of matches between both databases. As can be seen in panel B, the comparison between the Scope indicators follows the same pattern: overall, the correlation is positive and, for some indexes, even high, but the bad match between the databases means that it was computed on a very limited number of observations.

A. Decision Making Power			
Source	Indicator	Correlation	Observations
Hooghe et al. 2017	Delegation	0,37	110
	Pooling	0,70	110
Kohl et al. 2016	Institutional Quality	0,40	19
B. Scope			
Source	Indicator	Correlation	Observations
Hooghe et al. 2019	Scope	0,61	32
Hofmann et al 2017	Covered	0,66	12
	Enforceable	0,69	12
DESTA	Count	0,52	31
Kohl et al. 2016	WTO+ covered	0,2	18
	WTO+ enforceable	0,27	18
	WTOx covered	0,55	18
	WTOx enforceable	0,57	18

**Table 9:** Comparison with existing indicators

(Don't) Fear The Regional Organization: Unraveling the Interconnections of Institutional Power in Regional Organizations

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