

SUMMARY OF THE DISSERTATION

Author

Sören Bernhard Münch

Title

Checks and Balances Beyond the State: A Comparative Analysis of the Institutional Separation of Powers in 60 Regional Organizations

eDiss Open Access der Niedersächsischen Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Göttingen (SUB) Göttingen 2026

Contents

- 1 Introduction
 - 1.1 Research questions
 - 1.2 Research relevance
 - 1.3 Main theoretical arguments
 - 1.4 Central findings
 - 1.5 Structure

- 2 Literature review
 - 2.1 Comparative constitutionalism
 - 2.2 Comparative government
 - 2.3 Comparative (international) governance
 - 2.4 Comparative regionalism
 - 2.5 Summary of the literature review

- 3 Research design
 - 3.1 Research philosophy: Describing & explaining
 - 3.2 Case selection & unit of analysis
 - 3.3 Analytical methods & data processing

Part I: Patterns of RO design and the Separation of Powers Index (SOPI)

- 4 Empirical analysis I: Patterns of power separation across ROs
 - 4.1 RO organ types and their competences: Descriptive statistics
 - 4.2 Summary and overview of patterns
- 5 The Separation of Powers Index (Dependent variable)
 - 5.1 Conceptualizing SOP beyond the state
 - 5.2 Conceptualizing competences of the SOP framework
 - 5.3 Operationalization of the SOPI
 - 5.4 Classification of ROs according to the SOPI

Part II: Explaining the variance of the SOPI

- 6 Explaining variance in SOP degrees (Independent variables)
 - 6.1 Functional demands: Interdependence and uncertainty reduction
 - 6.2 Norm projection: Democratic regimes and sovereignty
 - 6.3 Power dynamics: Asymmetric capabilities and regional hegemons
 - 6.4 Summary and operationalization of the explanatory framework
- 7 Empirical analysis II: Explaining varying power separation among ROs
 - 7.1 Results from the multinomial regression analysis
 - 7.2 Alternative model specifications and robustness checks
- 8 Conclusion
 - 8.1 Summary of the dissertation
 - 8.2 Main findings and their implications
 - 8.3 Limitations and pathways for future research

Abstract

To which degree does the institutional separation of power (SOP) vary between regional organizations (ROs)? And what explains this variance? This dissertation examines the SOP in ROs from a comparative perspective. Its central objective is to identify, measure, and explain variation in institutionalized power separation across ROs. To this end, the study develops the first comprehensive conceptual framework for assessing SOP degrees, applies it to compare SOP degrees in ROs empirically, and identifies their underlying determinants.

The study integrates insights from comparative constitutionalism, comparative government, comparative governance, and comparative regionalism to develop a unified framework for analyzing SOP beyond the nation-state. Methodologically, it adopts a positivist research design with a two-step empirical strategy.

First, institutional patterns across regional organizations are mapped using a novel dataset covering 60 Ros and their relevant organs between 1945 and 2022, including ministerial councils, parliamentary bodies, and judicial institutions. The analysis reveals substantial heterogeneity in the configurations of organs and their competences within ROs. Based on these findings, the Separation of Powers Index (SOPI) is developed, classifying 193 treaty-based organizational configurations into low, medium, and high SOP degrees.

Second, the dissertation explains this variation using hypotheses derived from three theoretical perspectives: functional interdependence, norm projection, and power asymmetries. Six hypotheses are tested using multinomial logistic regression, with economic interdependence, legal bindingness, democratic density, and economic and military asymmetries as key explanatory variables on the RO-level, alongside controls for organizational age, membership size, and regional context. The results show that legally binding decision-making authority, higher democratic density among member states, and lower military asymmetries significantly increase the likelihood of higher SOP degrees. Extensive robustness checks confirm the stability of the findings.

Overall, the dissertation contributes a novel measurement instrument (SOPI) and provides new empirical insights into the determinants of institutional design in regional organizations, advancing the comparative study of international governance.