

Constrained integration?

A study of regional integration in the Gulf Cooperation Council

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Abstract

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) encompasses similar countries in matters of culture, language, and economic structure. However, the organization has only achieved modest levels of integration despite having existed for over 40 years. Previous research points to the absence of supranational institutions and low levels of economic interchange. The study of the core reasons behind the observable manifestations constraining integration has however largely been left out. This study investigates two measures of integration argued to be indicative of the integration process in the GCC: the institutional design and major treaties. The objects of study are tested against the hypothesis that it is the autocratic nature of the GCC countries that are constraining integration. The study uncovered a jagged integration process with major variation in the levels of ambition over time. Furthermore, the study concluded autocratic jealousy of power to offer comprehensive explanations for all three study objects. The hypothesis was therefore found to be strengthened by the study.

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1 Introduction

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is an international organization encompassing the six oil-producing countries of the Arabian Gulf. The member states are Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, The United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, Qatar, and Oman (Britannica 2021). The organization was founded in 1981 as a response to new security threats in the Gulf region but has since developed into a forum for economic integration as means to enhance regional stability (Guzansky 2015, p. 20). Fast forward 40 years to the present day and the achievements of the GCC can at best be described as modest (ibid). The integration process has been characterized by ambitious goals, but slow progress towards the agreed goals (Copper 2013; Mishrif 2021). At its inception, the organization set out goals of a customs union, common market, and even a future common currency (UEA 1981)¹. However, the GCC has consistently faced challenges implementing even agreed integration, with member states not seldom pulling out of common projects (Ulrichsen 2018a).

The GCC has also suffered several events highlighting its deficiencies. The organization was unable to respond to an immediate security threat against the member state of Kuwait, which was invaded by Iraq in 1990 (Owen 1994). The Gulf states had to rely on foreign sources of security, despite security concerns being the main reason for the creation of the GCC (Alasfoor 2007, p. 44). In 2017, a diplomatic crisis broke out between members of the GCC, as a Saudi-led blockade of Qatar was initiated (Milton-Edwards, 2020). The crisis both started and ended entirely outside the realm of the common institutions offered by the GCC, uncovering the weakness of the organization (ibid). The level of economic integration in the bloc is still low, despite the countries being similar in many aspects, such as culture, the structure of government, and economics (Copper 2013). Experts have continued to point out the benefits of deeper integration, not seldom offering policy recommendations to the bloc. How can an integration project between countries which are so similar in many ways have achieved such modest results? This essay will examine the integration process in the GCC to offer a deeper understanding of how the organization ended up the way it did.

¹ Unified Economic Agreement of 1981

1.1 Purpose and research question

The purpose of the essay is to offer a deeper understanding of the integration process in the GCC. Going beyond the specific case, the use of theory will make it possible to develop knowledge about the dynamics of integration with autocratic states. The essay aims to answer the research question:

What can explain the low levels of integration in the Gulf Cooperation Council?

The thesis will take an examining approach, putting the case in the center and testing a formulated hypothesis to unpack the dynamics integration process. With the help of intergovernmental and neofunctional integration theory, the essay aims to test the following hypothesis:

The autocratic nature of the governments of the GCC, and the derivatives thereof, constitute fundamental constraints on integration and offer a comprehensive explanation of the integration process.

1.2 Disposition

Following the introduction and the presentation of the research question, an overview of previous research as related to the research question will be presented. The theories will then be outlined to give the reader a clear picture of how theory is used to answer the research question. Subsequently, a section on methodological considerations will provide the reader a with clear picture of how the essay aims to answer the research question. Having presented the background, the results of the study will be outlined. The two main agreements central to the study will be presented, as well as the common institutions of the GCC. The study objects will be analyzed with the aim of testing the theories against the integration process. Lastly, a section on conclusions will discuss the findings and implications of the study.

1.3 Literature review

Previous research identifies several possible explanations for the slow integration process. These include explanations emphasizing government reluctance, as well as weak intergovernmental institutions and lack of trade. Numerous previous researchers approach the GCC from a perspective of economics. This perspective has a descriptive and normative focus, dissecting the key parameters of the integration process. Furthermore, the two main entry points can in many ways be described as neofunctional and intergovernmental.

Firstly, many authors lean towards *neofunctional* theory, pointing to weak economic interdependence and the lack of any significant supranational institutions. Rutledge (2008, p. 132) and Takagi (2012, p. 6, 20) are two of the authors that have pursued this argument. Rutledge draws parallels to the creation of the EMU, and Takagi states that the lack of any real power being delegated to supranational institutions is a fundamental constraint on further integration (ibid). Andersson (2015) examines the impact of hydrocarbon reserves on the GCC economies, concluding that while offering great benefits, they also constitute obstacles to development in other areas. The countries of the GCC are suffering from many of the effects of the classic resource curse, with lack of trade in goods other than oil and gas being the most essential for our case. Andersson also points to the presence of a ‘rentier culture’ with a heavy emphasis on income from hydrocarbon exports, and physical assets as important resources for the country, at the expense of other sectors (ibid).

Mishrif (2021, p. 92) concludes that the economic agreements between the states have only had a modest effect on intra-regional trade. He points to the inability of the GCC countries to replace imports or exports with trade from another member of the bloc. In this sense, similar economic structures are obstacles to economic interchange and positive spillover effects (Mishrif 2021, p. 87). Mishrif also notes the inability of the GCC to take advantage of the Khaleeji (Gulf Arab) identity, with identity instead centering around nationalism focused on the individual states (Mishrif 2021, p. 77-78). Mishrif paints a picture of unfavorable conditions for neofunctional integration theory, with a focus on individual states, limited regional identity, and low levels of economic interdependence.

Then there is the *intergovernmental* perspective. Here, the authors often also point to the lack of intra-regional trade and the absence of supranational institutions, but with the states comprising the GCC being the point of departure for the analysis. In his analysis of the integration process, Looney (2003, p. 148) points to the autocratic governments of the GCC as a fundamental constraint to further integration and lays out a classic case of intergovernmental integration theory. He further dismisses hydrocarbon dependence as a sufficient explanatory factor (ibid). Looney reasons that the states engage in an act of judging the potential pluses and

minuses of deepened integration and argues that the governments have not seen integration as enough of a positive during the first 20 years of the blocs' existence. He concludes that the more ambitious agenda set in the 2001 agreement might be evidence that the balance has shifted, making deeper integration from 2001 and onwards quite plausible (Looney 2003, p. 154). Looney thus arrived at a conclusion regarding the research question but predicts that a different pattern would be visible from 2001 and onwards.

Going further into the realm of intergovernmentalism, Bianco and Stansfield (2018) maintain that while similar in matters of government, culture, and economic structure, the Gulf states display increasingly diverging security interests. The authors bring up the blockade of Qatar by other members of the GCC as an example of the supremacy of national interests over commitments to the GCC (ibid). At the time of the founding, the GCC countries were marked by high levels of interdependence in matters of security, prompting them to pool their resources. This condition is no longer true today (ibid). The GCC can therefore be seen as an arena for the coordination and pooling of security, with little weight of its own when state interests no longer converge.

2 Theoretical framework

The essay will analyze the integration process using two integration theories: neofunctionalism and intergovernmentalism. The choice of these two theories is motivated both by the difference in emphasis in the analytical process, as well as the exclusion of other alternatives. To invite the reader into the process, a brief discussion on which theories were not chosen will be presented.

A study of the GCC through the classic theories of realism and liberalism was initially considered. This approach was abandoned given that the focus of the study is not primarily international security politics, but rather the dynamics of political and economic integration. Secondly, there is the advantage of intergovernmentalism and neofunctionalism being theories conceptualized specifically for the study of integration (Saurugger 2014, p. 34, 54). This is a clear advantage compared to broader theories of international relations, since the essay will use process-tracing to unpack the integration process. Intergovernmentalism and neofunctionalism describe integration as a process in stages and point to key manifestations, which can provide structure to process-tracing in a way that other theories cannot (Saurugger 2014, p. 37, 55).

Furthermore, two other factors of potential relevance have been left out: Pan-Arabism and family relations. The Pan-Arabist ideology was a great influence on the politics of the Arab world in the post-war era (Ould Mohamedou 2019). The ideology envisioned the unification of all Arabs under a single state, and several influential Arab leaders adhered to this ideology (ibid). At first glance, the pan-Arab idea seems highly relevant to a study of the GCC, with its emphasis on functional pressures arising from the dissonance between the Arab nation and the Arabian nation-states. However, pan-Arabism never gained traction in the conservative Gulf monarchies. The idea was viewed with skepticism and as a threat to the power of the monarchies (ibid). Pan-Arabism does thus not have an obvious place in the discussion of integration between the Gulf states, even though one might believe this to be the case at first glance.

The study will also not discuss the variable of family relations and personal relations between political leaders. As several studies have pointed to, family relations do play a major role in the politics of the Arab world, with institutions such as the clan being of particular importance (Ulrichsen 2018b; Del Sarto & Soler i Lecha 2018, p. 8). The study does not take this into account for two reasons. Firstly, time and resource constraints do not allow an inquiry into this variable. For a meaningful analysis of the variable to be made one would have to dedicate

substantial time and resources, which is not deemed to be realistic given the scope of this study. Secondly, giving a large role to a variable such as family relations brings up the classic dilemma of a more accurate description of a single case, but at the expense of generalizability. The study will therefore stick to the more generalizable theories of integration outlined below.

Given that the study of integration in the GCC is also the study of integration between autocratic states, the two chosen theories point to the very core of the question: how do the autocratic governments of the GCC affect the integration process? A neofunctionalist understanding of the integration process is likely to focus on the benefits of further economic integration, or in the case of the GCC: the lack of sufficient economic integration to generate spillover effects (Saurugger 2014, p. 37). Neofunctional theory also points to some of the same challenges to integration as does the resource curse theory, with hydrocarbon dependence being an obstacle to intra-regional trade (Andersson 2015, s). On the other hand, the theory of intergovernmentalism emphasizes the role of the states that constitute the GCC. The integration process is fundamentally dependent on the will of the governments to move forward with integration in a given field (Saurugger 2014, p. 55).

Notice the differing explanatory value of the governments of the GCC countries in the two theories. The tendency of the governments to accept or oppose the process of integration is the very foundation on which the intergovernmental theory stands (*ibid*). In other words, it is highly relevant that the countries in the GCC, being autocratic, might have a lukewarm interest in handing over power necessary for serious integration. The neofunctionalist theory however does not primarily take interest in the nature of the governments involved. With the choice of these two theories, the study will hopefully be able to come to conclusions not only about the integration process in and of itself but also about the effect of autocratic leadership on the integration process.

It should be stated that while being one of the two theories of the study, neofunctionalism will be given a slightly smaller role. This is due to the neofunctional focus on inter-state interchange in matters of economics and trade. As noted by Haas, neofunctionalism views integration as most likely to occur in liberal democratic capitalist states, with inter-state commerce being a key driver of integration (Haas 1968). The central components of the theory are still highly relevant to the study of an organization like the GCC, but it should be noted that neofunctional theory might be facing an uphill battle. As outlined in the foreword of the 2004 edition of Haas's book, neofunctional theory struggled to explain moments of stalled integration within the EU context as well (Dinan 2004, p. xi-xii). Such a situation is thus not new to the study of integration.

A second question that needs to be addressed is whether the theories of neofunctionalism and intergovernmentalism are a good fit for studying the GCC. Critics might point out that the theories were both conceptualized with the European integration process in mind (Saurugger 2014, p. 35, 54). Choosing European-centered

integration theories to analyze integration processes outside the EU context might hence bring about a classic traveling problem (Saurugger 2014, p. 226-227).

The most explicit problem is of course that the GCC consists of autocratic states, while the states of the EU are democracies (Mishrif 2021, p. 77; V-Dem 2021). This is no immediate issue with neofunctional theory, since none of the stages of neofunctional integration are applicable only in a democratic form of government, as outlined by Saurugger (2014, p. 37-42). On the intergovernmental side, this issue eliminated Liberal Intergovernmentalism, in favor of the original intergovernmental theory laid out by Stanley Hoffman (1966). This is because of the democratic transfer of power within states being a central component of Liberal intergovernmentalism (Moravcsik 1998). Such a model is of course not applicable in the autocratic Gulf States (Saurugger 2014, p. 67-72). Hoffman's theory of intergovernmentalism rests on central concepts and assumptions applicable to both autocracies and democracies. The intergovernmental emphasis on governmental elites and leaders as central actors in the integration process rhymes well with the reality on the ground in the GCC (Hoetjes 2021).

It should also be noted that the theories used in the study have been utilized in several studies examining non-European integration. Kaltenthaler and Mola are some of the authors who have used neofunctional theory to study the integration process of MERCOSUR (Kaltenthaler & Mola 2002). Furthermore, Cockerham notes the high explanatory value of intergovernmental theory in his 2009 study of ASEAN (Cockerham 2009). The previous study of non-European, and non-liberal-democratic integration using the two theories adds to the resilience and reliability of the theories as comprehensive explainers of integration.

It is not because the two theories are a perfect fit, but rather because of their ability to both contrast one another and put center the role of the governments, that they have been chosen. As mentioned in the literature review, prior research often touches upon aspects of either Intergovernmentalism or Neofunctionalism, although without explicitly making references to the theories.

2.1 Neofunctionalism

Neofunctionalism is a theory of integration originally laid out by Ernst B. Haas in his 1958 book *The Uniting of Europe* (Haas, 2004). The theory conceptualizes the integration process as characterized by growing economic interdependence, and positive spillover effects (ibid). The neofunctional integration process rests on the assumption of there being functional pressures to integrate certain areas and reap

the benefits of scale (Haas 2004, p. XV). The thinking goes that successful integration in one field of integration might quasi-automatically lead to integration in other fields as well. In other words, a spillover effect. Saurugger (2014, p. 37) presents an outline of neofunctional theory as three main assumptions:

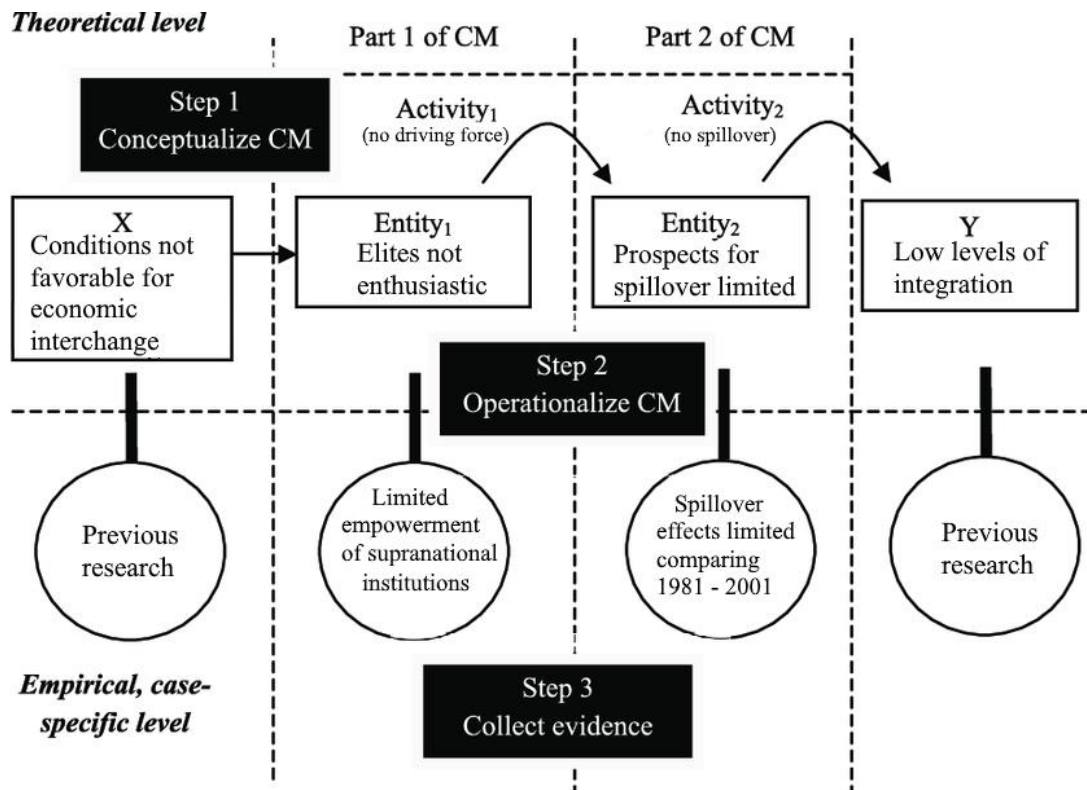
1. Relevant actors (elites) are rational and act out of interest. Integration, and elites' transfer of loyalty to new institutions are results of rational considerations (Saurugger 2014, p. 42).
2. Once integration has moved forward in any given field, new functional pressures arise prompting further integration. Decisions have unintended consequences.
3. Institutions created through integration do not only act to execute the powers they are delegated, they become independent policy entrepreneurs with their own agenda of deeper integration (Saurugger 2014, p. 37).

2.1.1 Neofunctionalism and the GCC

The low levels of integration in the GCC might be explained by lack of spillover effects, supranational institutions, and transfer of loyalty to new sources of identity. The GCC is perhaps simply not an area where the central effects of neofunctional integration can be triggered? Enter the level of intra-regional trade. As several researchers have pointed to, the fact that no country in the bloc offers goods any other country within the bloc wants to import makes major economic interchange impossible (IMF 2018, p. 9) The hydrocarbon-dependent nature of the GCC countries may cause economic elites to lack the incentive needed to kickstart the process of integration, despite the countries being similar. The recurring issue of low levels of intra-regional trade can thus be seen as largely fitting within the neofunctional story of the GCC. However, this fact also makes the GCC a tougher case for neofunctional theory.

Unfavorable conditions for economic interchange might be constraining the prospects for integration from the onset. Should neofunctional theory have a high explanatory value, the results will likely show spillover effects causing at least some integration in areas not originally envisaged, as outlined by Haas (2004, p. 292). Supranational institutions of the bloc are also expected to act as entrepreneurs pushing for deeper integration, and becoming more powerful over time (Haas 2004, p. 451, 484). While it has been noted that low level of economic interchange is a challenge for neofunctional theory, it is likely that integration treaties result in an increased appetite for integration and increased trade (Haas 2004).

Using the template presented by Beach and Pedersen (2013, p. 16-18) in their book on process-tracing, the neofunctional integration process will be studied according to the following model:



2.1.2 Operational indicators

Institutional design

Empowerment of supranational institutions, these institutions growing more powerful over time. Possibly gradual transfer of loyalty to new institutions over time.

1981 treaty

Reflecting wishes to reap benefits of scale. Elites are a driving force.

2001 treaty

Deeper integration than in previous treaty. Integration in more areas than envisaged when the GCC was founded is likely. Positive experiences from previous integration have increased appetite for more integration (spillover).

2.2 Intergovernmentalism

The theory of intergovernmentalism was outlined by Stanley Hoffman as an alternative to the theory of neofunctionalism (Hoffman 1966; Moravscik & Schimmelfennig 2019, p. 64). In her overview of the intergovernmental theory, Saurugger (2014, p. 54, 57) points to the so-called ‘crisis of the empty chair’ of the 1960s, when France refused to take part in meetings of supranational European institutions. The crisis sparked new interest in the theoretical debate about European integration, highlighting the limits of neofunctional emphasis on spillover and supranationalism (ibid).

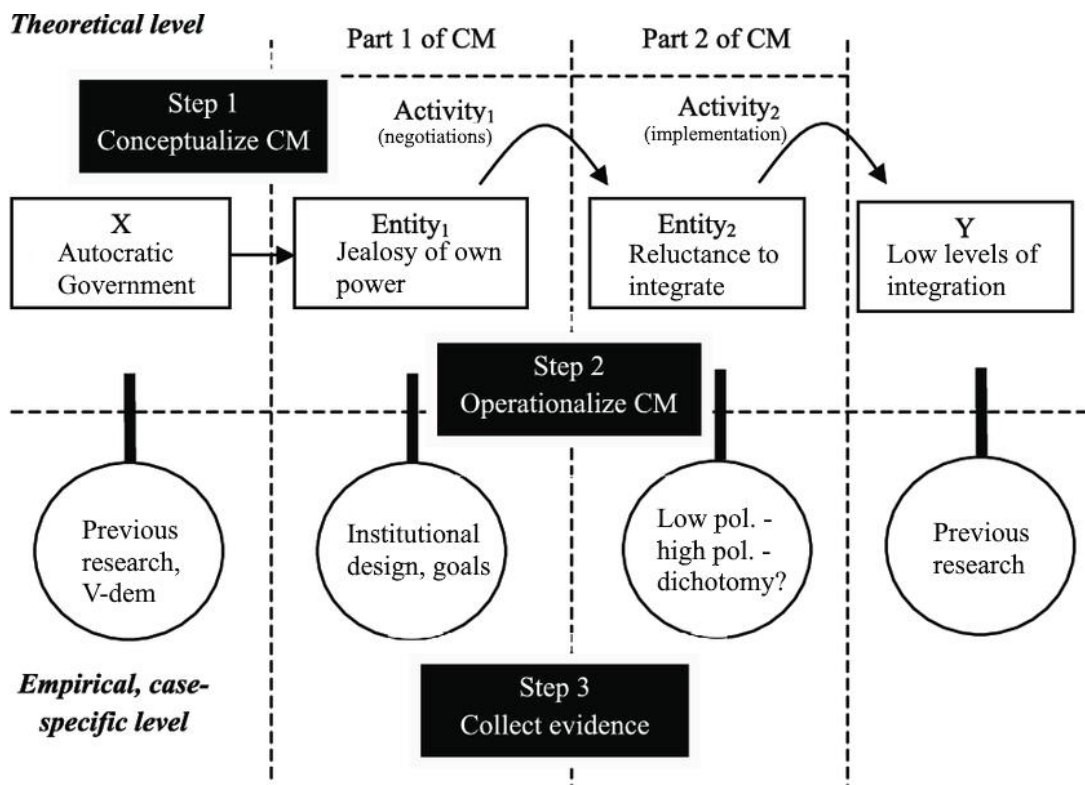
The intergovernmental theory laid out by Hoffman (1966) does not offer a detailed process of integration in stages, but rather highlights a number of central assumptions and things to look for (Saurugger 2014, p. 58). Following Hoffman's assumptions, two facts are of central importance to the study. Firstly, there is a distinction between integration in the economic and the political sphere, and the rejection of the idea that integration in one sphere automatically leads to integration in the other. Hoffman (1966, p. 157) speaks of the two spheres as ‘high politics’ (issues of sovereignty and state identity) and ‘low politics’ (economics and integration in less salient areas) (ibid; Saurugger 2014, p. 58). Following this assumption, Hoffman emphasizes the supremacy of politics over economics. In other words, contrary to the neofunctional notion of spillover, successful economic integration cannot drive integration further than what is considered acceptable by the states in an organization (Hoffman 1966, p. 166).

2.2.1 Intergovernmentalism and the GCC

The intergovernmental theory puts the states comprising a regional organization in the center (Saurugger 2014, p. 55). Since Hoffman's theory does not conceptualize integration as a process in stages, the hypothetical intergovernmental integration process in the GCC will have to be staked out for process-tracing to be applied. The intergovernmental theory points to an unwillingness to jeopardize state sovereignty as a pattern for all areas of integration. In practice, this means that jealousy² of sovereignty is likely to be a comprehensive explaining factor when looking into the two study objects.

² I will use ‘jealousy’ as meaning ‘feelings of protectiveness regarding one’s own advantages or attachment’ (Merriam-Webster.com, retrieved 2021-12-14)

An intergovernmental scenario for the institutional design can be drawn up as crafted in a way which relies on intergovernmental institutions, rather than supranational ones, with very limited delegation of power. Regarding the treaties, intergovernmental theory would predict little or no integration in the areas defined by Hoffman (1966, p. 157) as high politics, and integration to move forward without major hiccups in the areas defined as low politics. Lastly, the intergovernmental emphasis of supremacy of politics over economy means that spillover effects and increasing power of supranational institutions are not likely to be observed in the intergovernmental scenario. Using the template outlined by Beach and Pedersen (2013, p. 16-18), the integration process in the GCC will be studied according to the following conceptualization:



2.2.2 Operational indicators

Institutional design

Reliance on intergovernmental institutions instead of supranational ones. Powers of supranational institutions strictly confined to what is delegated by the states of the GCC.

1981 treaty

A dichotomy³ between high politics (integration unlikely), and low politics (integration likely) in the treaty.

2001 treaty

A dichotomy between high politics (integration unlikely), and low politics (integration likely) in the treaty.

³ I will use 'dichotomy' as meaning 'something with seemingly contradictory qualities' (Merriam-Webster.com, retrieved 2021-12-29)

3 Method

The following section will outline the methodology of the study. The choice of study object and research design will be presented. Following this, the method of process-tracing and general methodological considerations will be discussed, along with the material. Lastly, a short discussion on the reliability and validity of the study is presented.

3.1 Choice of case: Why the GCC?

As is always the case with case studies, a researcher is wise to motivate the study by presenting the study as a case a wider phenomenon (Teorell & Svensson 2007, p. 82-83). The study of integration follows the logic of the critical case study: an odd case of seemingly favorable circumstances for integration prompts the study of why the GCC is not more integrated. (Esaïasson et al. 2012, p. 161-162; Copper 2013; Alasfoor 2007, p. 9, 31). The hypothesis broadens the study to not only the study of integration in a single case, but as a generalizable study of autocratic integration. Given the logic of attempted isolation of the independent variable of interest (autocratic governments), the given strategy is to find a naturally occurring example with other possible variables with explanatory value held as constant as possible (Teorell & Svensson 2007, p. 247). The GCC can be seen as such an example, and the two presented objectives might very well both decide on the GCC as the best object of study, even though the point of departure is different.

Integration amongst autocracies is highly relevant to study for several reasons. Firstly, the autocracy is by far the most common form of government, hosting 68% of the world's population in 2020 (V-Dem 2021). Secondly, as alluded to in the section on theory, the study of regional integration has traditionally focused on integration between democracies, with the European Union being the most studied organization (Saurugger 2014, p. 226). These factors combined prompt an inquiry into the prime example of autocratic integration that is the GCC.

3.2 Research design

The choice of research design follows the expectation to study both integration in the GCC itself, and to generalize the results to integration amongst autocratic states. Several possible designs were discussed. A comparative study would allow for the isolation of possible confounding variables while also providing a framework for comparison (Teorell & Svensson 2007, p. 236-240). An obvious disadvantage with this approach is the lack of a comparable case. Hence, such a design would almost certainly be criticized for inadequate comparability between the GCC and another international organization. A way around this problem is to compare the study object over time. The study is strictly speaking still a case study, but as Esaiasson et al. (2012, p. 109) point to, the difference between a case study and a comparative study is in this sense not very large.

The study will take an examining character with the goal of unpacking the integration process of the GCC to come to conclusions regarding support for the hypothesis. This will be done with the use of process-tracing. The method of process-tracing is described by Esaiasson et al. (2012, p. 129-130) as useful when the value of the dependent variable (integration) is known beforehand, and the number of potentially comparable study objects is limited.

Beach and Pedersen (2013) provide a comprehensive guide to process-tracing in their book on the subject. Three main types of process-tracing methods are outlined, depending on the focus of the study: Theory testing, theory building, and explaining outcome. (Beach & Pedersen 2013 p. 12). The study will utilize a 'Y-centric theory building, approach. The approach is used when the value of the dependent variable (Y) is already known, and the interest of the study is the uncovering of a causal chain of mechanisms leading up to a possible independent variable (X) (Beach & Pedersen 2013, p. 16). The approach is chosen over a case-centered explaining outcome approach for two reasons (ibid). Firstly, the study is not completely in the dark regarding possible explanations. The Y is known beforehand (low levels of integration), and the hypothesis points in the direction of a possible X (autocratic governments). The primary interest is to uncover a possible causal link between X and Y through the study of the integration process.

Secondly, the chosen approach is crafted with generalizability in mind. Should a case-centric approach be chosen, the ability to explain the specific case might be enhanced, but at the expense of generalizability (Beach & Pedersen 2013, p. 21). Since the GCC is examined both in and of itself and as a generalizable case of integration between autocracies, it makes sense to choose the more generalizable design. Do note that it is of course still possible that a process too unique to the GCC to be generalized is uncovered. This does however not mean that one should limit oneself from the onset by choosing a design that does not lend itself to generalization (ibid).

Given the interest in the effects of autocratic governments on the integration process, an adaptation of the method is necessary. The variable of autocratic rule

does not lend itself to be studied in a neat chain of events. Rather, process-tracing is used to draw up a theoretical chain of events should each theory have a high explanatory value. The empirical result of the study is then compared to the conceptualized chain of events, in line with the strategy presented by Beach and Pedersen (2013 p. 17). This has been outlined in the section on theory.

3.3 Material

The integration process will be examined through the study of the common institutions of the GCC, and the major treaties of integration. Treaties is a classic operationalization of integration, utilized by influential scholars such as Andrew Moravcsik (1998, p. 1) in his book *'The choice for Europe'*. Institutional design is another common object of study, highlighted in both neofunctional and intergovernmental theory (Hoffman 1966; Haas 2004). The study will investigate the three main GCC institutions established by the GCC charter of 1981, as well as the Unified Economic Agreement of 1981, and the Economic Agreement of 2001. The institutions and the treaties have been chosen as they allow for a manifestation of what powers the states are willing to relinquish when confronted with the prospect of integration. In other words, they allow for overlap between a theoretical and operational definition of integration. The two chosen objects of study are by no means perfect but given the aim of the study they are concluded to offer the least flawed insight into the impact of the independent variable of autocratic jealousy upon the GCC.

3.4 Reliability and validity

Arguably the most important step in the study is the operationalization of the dependent variable of integration. The goal is the highest possible overlap between the theoretical and operational definitions (Teorell & Svensson 2007, p. 59). As Copper (2013), Caporaso and Jong Choi (2002) points to, the volume of intra-regional trade is a frequent measure of the depth of regional integration. The volume of intra-regional trade is pointed out as unusually low by a number of studies, supporting the claim that the GCC is characterized by low levels of integration (Copper 2013; World Bank 2010, p. 8). Using intra-regional trade as a measure of economic integration is however an implicit rejection of another side of the story. Should a measure of obstacles to trade actually in place be used, the results are entirely different, with the GCC now appearing to be fairly integrated (IMF 2018, p.

9; Mishrif 2021, p. 73). The GCC is therefore perhaps a somewhat unique case of substantial economic integration without any significant effect on the volume of intra-regional trade, rendering this operationalization insufficient (Mishrif 2021, p. 92).

While the study does not employ a specific definition of integration, the operationalization of integration as institutional design and treaties does emphasize politics over economics. Given the interest in the role of autocratic rule, it makes sense to look at integration through study objects where the impact of autocratic rule can be observed. Both Haas (2004, p. 11-12) and Deutsch (1957, p. 5) offer definitions of integration. The choice has however been made to not use a traditional definition for the same reasoning as the rejection of intra-regional trade: there is the possibility of the definition biasing the study. Integration 'defined' as the integration of and pooling of resources in certain areas regarding the treaties, and the granting of powers to supranational institutions regarding institutional design is of course by no means a perfect definition. However, since the essay focuses on these two areas of integration, it has been concluded that a comprehensive definition of integration would be more misleading than helpful.

4 Analysis

The following section will offer a brief background to the founding of the GCC. Subsequently, the three study objects will be presented and examined through each theory to determine the support for the hypothesis for each object.

4.1 Founding of the GCC

The Gulf Cooperation Council came to life in 1981 with the signing of two treaties: The *Charter of The Cooperation Council* in May, and the *Unified Economic Agreement* in November (Alasfoor 2007, p. 44). The charter set out the foundations for the organization, by establishing three key institutions: The *Supreme council*, The *Ministerial Council*, and The *Secretariat General* (Siegfried & Sturm 2005, p. 24). The Unified Economic Agreement laid out the ambitions of integration for the GCC by replacing all previous bilateral agreements between the six countries (UEA 1981)⁴. Most scholars emphasize security concerns as the immediate reason for the founding of the GCC. Alasfoor (2007, p. 19, 108) points to the 1968 British decision to withdraw from commitments in the gulf by 1971. The decision prompted the Gulf states to look towards new sources of regional security, with cooperation beginning to be discussed (Alasfoor 2007, p. 108). Another more immediate factor was the 1979 Iranian revolution and the subsequent breakout of the Iran-Iraq war bringing about fears of regional instability and spillover onto the Arabian Peninsula (Alasfoor 2007, p. 109).

The emphasis on security as the catalyst for the founding of the GCC is however somewhat misleading. As many scholars point to, the increasingly unstable situation in the region prompted the countries of the Gulf to pool their resources to maintain stability and enhance their cooperation (Hoetjes 2021). The GCC was thus not founded as a Gulf equivalent of NATO, but as a recognition of the importance of working together to enhance regional stability in the face of growing instability (ibid). Looking through the intergovernmental lens, security issues (high politics) prompted further cooperation, but well established, the immediate

⁴ *Unified Economic Agreement of 1981*

focus of the GCC became not security cooperation, but the establishment of common institutions and a treaty to govern the integration process (low politics). As pointed out by Worrall (2017), neither the charter nor the economic agreement even mention security issues (GCC Charter 1981; UEA 1981). A neofunctional analysis would point to the founding of the GCC as prompted by rational acts of elites in the Gulf countries to further their interests but would likely not emphasize the exogenous security threats as a driving force for the founding (Saurugger 2014, p. 35-35). As pointed out by Alasfoor (2007, p. 34-35), the inception of the GCC can be understood as elites wishing to reap the benefits of economic integration by utilizing the newly formed organization. Alasfoor describes the process as 'reverse spillover' going from politics to economics, in contrast to the idea as originally envisaged by Haas (2004). Already at its founding, the GCC is clearly not a clear-cut case of either neofunctional or intergovernmental theory. This prompts the study of the first step of integration indicative of what organization was actually being founded; the common institutions.

4.2 Institutional design

The Supreme Council

Described as an intergovernmental institution, the Supreme Council is the highest decision-making body of the GCC (GCC Charter 1981, article 7). The council is composed of leaders from the member countries, with the presidency rotating annually. The main tasks of the Supreme Council are to provide direction for the GCC, as well as to review reports and recommendations issued by its subsidiary bodies. The council meets twice a year, with the option for additional sessions upon the request of a member. For substantive matters unanimity is required while procedural matters are decided by a simple majority (Alasfoor 2007, p. 37-40).

The Ministerial Council

Also described as an intergovernmental institution. The Ministerial Council operates in a similar fashion to the Supreme Council but is instead composed of delegated ministers in relevant areas (GCC Charter 1981, article 11). The council meets once every three months. The council also oversees a number of sub-committees operating in different policy areas, the most important one being the committee for financial and economic cooperation (Alasfoor 2007, p. 40)

The Secretariat General

The main supranational institution of the GCC. In contrast to the Ministerial and Supreme Council, the Secretariat General is created as an independent body, and not an arena for intergovernmentalism. The Secretariat is headed by the secretary-general, elected for a three-year term (GCC Charter 1981, article 12). The secretary-general nominates directors for each policy area, which are then approved by

the Supreme Council (Alasfoor 2007, p. 40-41). The Secretariat is also tasked with preparing GCC summits and monitoring the implementation of GCC resolutions and recommendations (World Bank 2010, p. 5).

The common institutions of the GCC are largely intergovernmental in character. Two of the institutions are composed of representatives of the governments, with only one having a distinctly supranational character (Siegfried & Sturm 2014, p. 24-25). Intergovernmental and neofunctional integration theory see intergovernmental institutions in a very different light. Neofunctional theory stresses the unpredictability of the integration process; once an actor has been delegated power, it tends to take on a life of its own, and act as an agent pushing for deeper integration (Saurugger 2014, p. 37). Intergovernmentalism on the other hand sees intergovernmental institutions as fundamentally constrained by state interests, being delegated only as much power as are in the interest of the governments taking part in the GCC (Hoffman 1966).

As presented in the method section, neofunctional theory predicts two things regarding common institutions. Firstly, the supranational Secretariat General growing more powerful and acting as a policy entrepreneur seeking deeper integration (Haas 2004) Secondly, the gradual transfer of loyalty to new supranational institutions, spearheaded by elites (ibid). As the study can draw conclusions about the development of the GCC institutions since their original conception, it has been concluded that the neofunctional prediction of the secretariat becoming a driving force for integration has fundamentally not come to fruition, as pointed out by Mishrif (2021, p. 71, 92). The Secretariat has been assigned some new powers but has not been able to become the driving force for further integration (Ulrichsen 2018a; Mishrif 2021, p. 71). Even though the Secretariat was granted the power of enforcement of the 2001 treaty, it ultimately proved unable to do so, with states opting out of key parts of the agreement (ibid)

Furthermore, even though the GCC is a relatively homogeneous area no transfer of loyalty to GCC institutions from the national arena has taken place (Mishrif 2021; Hoetjes 2021). The nation-state is still the dominating source of identity and loyalty in the Gulf, and of increasing importance in recent years (Hoetjes 2021). The intergovernmental prediction of state constraint on supranational bodies is a nicer fit for the institutional design of the GCC. However, the institutional situation of the GCC can be seen as even more extreme than what intergovernmental theory would point to. This is true both in the original institutional design of the 1981 charter, and the reality since (Ulrichsen 2018a). The institutions are not only given only as much power as the member states are comfortable with, but are systematically bypassed and ignored when member countries find it convenient (ibid). To conclude, the inquiry of the GCC institutions found no support for the operational indicators of neofunctional theory, while finding support for the mechanisms envisaged in the intergovernmental scenario. This strengthens the hypothesis of the study.

4.3 The Unified Economic Agreement of 1981

The 1981 Unified Economic Agreement offers a first answer to the question of what the GCC set out to accomplish, and what organization was actually being founded. In the following section, the sections of the treaty which amount to integration and coordination in any given area are presented. The agreement does contain more areas than those presented, however, only the areas that amount to integration are presented.

Chapter 1

-Freer trade in certain areas (agricultural, animal, industrial products, and natural resources). Coordination of trade policy and regulations.

-Introduction of a common external tariff within five years.

-Coordination of commercial policies through the following means:

1. Coordination of import/export policies and regulations.

2. Coordination of policies for building up strategic food stocks.

3. Conclusion of collective economic agreements in cases where joint benefits to the Member States would be realized.

4. Taking action for the creation of collective negotiating power to strengthen the GCC negotiating position vis-à-vis foreign parties in fields of importation of basic needs and exportation of major products.

Chapter 2

-No discrimination against citizens of any other GCC countries in the following areas (creation of a GCC Economic citizenship):

1. Freedom of movement, work, and residence.

2. Right of ownership, inheritance, and bequest.

3. Freedom of exercising economic activity.

4. Free movement of capital.

Chapter 3

-Economic coordination, the goal of common oil policy

-Coordination of industrial policy, aiming to increase diversification and take advantage of relative advantages.

-Encouraging joint ventures.

Chapter 4

-Increasing technical cooperation.

-Introducing joint standards for job qualifications and coordinate manpower policy.

Chapter 5

-Strengthening joint economic development through infrastructure cooperation.

-Same treatment of GCC ships in any other GCC port.

Chapter 6

-Coordination of investment, banking, financial and monetary policies. The goal of establishing a common currency.

-Coordination of aid policy.

Chapter 7

-No member state shall grant any other member states privileges beyond those stipulated in the treaty.

-The agreement supersedes any prior national law in case of conflict.

As is the case with the institutions, the treaty emphasizes coordination and cooperation, with the treaty as a rule not moving into any areas encroaching on the sovereignty of the states. The areas subject to integration are mainly economics, trade, and the harmonization of laws (UEA 1981). No integration in the field of high politics was presented in 1981 apart from the goal of establishing a common currency (UEA 1981 chapter 6). There is however no timeline, nor convergence criteria for the establishment of the currency (ibid). Now the independent variable of autocratic jealousy of state power is introduced. In an intergovernmental scenario, integration is expected to go the furthest in apolitical areas of low salience, and be more constrained the more of a perceived threat to state sovereignty an area is perceived as. Given the focus on low politics and absence of serious ambition to integrate high politics, the 1981 agreement must be seen as compatible with the intergovernmental dichotomy of high politics and low politics. As pointed out by Ulrichsen (2018a), already in the 1981 agreement a trend of deeper integration in areas that can be described as apolitical and technical in nature is discernable.

As for the neofunctional view, the areas subject to integration in the treaty of 1981 can be seen as compatible with elite wishes to reap the benefits of scale, as pointed out by Alasfoor (2007, p. 34-45). The creation of a GCC economic citizenship, and the equal treatment of goods and ships, are clear examples of the organization moving forward with integration to alleviate functional pressures. The most far-reaching example is the goal of a future common currency. Although there is as previously mentioned a distinct lack of any timeline or outline of the process (UEA 1981). However, the treaty fails to move the GCC towards alleviating functional pressures in any field other than technical and economic matters, or in other words: low politics (Ulrichsen 2018a). This points to the limitations of neofunctional theory: the GCC might not have any trouble agreeing to reap the benefits of scale by integrating certain areas, while having a more cautious view when it comes to other areas. Such a situation bears much resemblance to how Hoffman (1966) outlines the dynamics of integration in his 1966 essay.

Lastly, given the emphasis of integration as a process over time, a full picture of the explanatory value of neofunctionalism is possible only when the treaty of

2001 is included in the study. With a comparison over time, one can draw conclusions about the empirical support for neofunctional predictions such as of transfer of loyalty and spillover effects (Haas 2004). It is after all not unexpected for a newly formed organization to start with integration in areas of low salience, only for integration to grow as time passes and spillover effects settle in. With this said, as the 1981 treaty stands on its own the provisions of the agreement were found to be compatible with both intergovernmental and neofunctional theory, although the intergovernmental dichotomy of high and low politics offered a somewhat clearer picture.

4.4 The Economic Agreement of 2001

Rutledge (2009, p. 7) and Al Hinai (2004) describe the period between 1981 and 2001 as characterized by little tangible progress, with the main achievement being the enactment of a common market in 1983. The introduction of a common external tariff, to be introduced within five years of the ratification of the economic agreement, and a precondition for a future customs union, had still not been implemented by 1999 due to disagreements between Saudi Arabia and the UAE (Al Hinai 2004). The 2001 treaty is therefore marked by recognition of the slow pace of progress, and the desire to raise the level of ambition for integration (2001 EA)⁵. One of the ways that the organization seeks to address the sluggish pace of progress is by establishing a concrete timeline for future integration. The timeline stipulates that a customs union is to be established by 2003, a common market by 2008, convergence criteria for a common currency to be met by 2005 and launch of the currency by 2010 (Al-Jassar & Al-Hamidy 2003, p. 116). Furthermore, the Secretariat General is given the power to enforce the treaty (2001 EA). As in the previous section, only the sections that amount to integration in any form are presented.

Chapter I

*-All GCC trade to take place within a GCC customs union, to be realized in 2003.
-Coordination in trade policy towards outside actors, through collective negotiation and coordination of rules and regulations.*

Chapter II

-No discrimination against citizens of another GCC country in more areas than in the 1981 agreement, economic citizenship expanded.

Chapter III

⁵ *Economic Agreement of 2001*

- Establishing criteria and meeting of said criteria for the launch of a common currency.*
- Promotion of intra GCC investment through the following steps: unification of standards and laws, national treatment for all investors, integration of financial markets.*
- Coordination of aid.*

Chapter IV

- Deepening the coordination of development plans.*
- Unified industrial strategy.*
- Unified oil and gas policy.*
- Cooperation in oil, gas, mineral industry-related research*
- Increased agricultural integration, optimization of resource use, especially water.*
- Encouraging joint projects by:*
 - 1. Adopting integrated policies for projects such as infrastructure, transport, Communications, electricity, information technology, health, education, tourism projects; and the oil and gas industry.*
 - 2. Establishing joint projects based on comparative advantages of member states.*
 - 3. Further incentivize joint projects.*
 - 4. Further eliminating non-tariff obstacles to trade.*

Chapter V

- Compulsory education and the eradication of illiteracy.*
- Further cooperation between GCC universities.*
- Matching of university output with labor market demand.*
- Increase labor force participation rates among nationals and rationalization of the employment of foreign workers.*

Chapter VI

- Further cooperation in research and technical development, the establishment of national databases.*

Chapter VII

- Transport from any GCC country to be regarded as the same as national transport. This concerns the use of physical infrastructure as well as matters of tax.*
- Integration of land and air transport.*
- Further integration of communications services.*
- Unification of electronic commerce legislation.*

Chapter VIII

- Agreement to be implemented by committees working under the GCC.*
- Implementation of the agreement shall be followed up by the Secretariat General.*
- The Secretary-general shall inform the Supreme council of progress.*

-Non-compliance and disputes shall be supervised by the Secretariat General, disputes to be settled amicably.

-Should the Secretariat General be unable to settle a dispute, the matter shall be referred to the GCC commercial arbitration center, should the two parties not agree to this, a specialized judicial commission shall be formed. Until a special commission has been formed, the two parties shall be referred to relevant GCC committees for settlement.

Chapter IX

-Treaty enters into force with ratification from member states.

-Exemptions from treaties may be granted due to local circumstances, but they shall be temporary and granted only after authorization by the Supreme Council.

-No GCC member state may grant preferential treatment to any other member.

-Supremacy of the treaty over national legislation.

-Supremacy of the treaty over the 1981 agreement.

-Amendment only possible through the consent of the Supreme Council.

-Interpretation is the authority of the Financial and Economic committee.

The Economic Agreement of 2001 is more ambitious than the treaty of 1981, although still largely concerns integration in the field of low politics. There are however some distinct moves beyond the constraints seen in the treaty of 1981. The agreement recognizes that the reliance on cooperation and coordination has only taken the GCC so far, and speaks of the 2001 agreement as utilizing the adoption of specific programs and workable mechanisms (2001 EA).

It is in this context that the Secretariat General is assigned new powers to enforce the agreement, in line with the neofunctional notion of supranational institutions growing in power as integration deepens (Saurugger 2014, p. 37). There is also the setting of a concrete timetable for the rolling out of the GCC common currency, moving clearly into issues of sovereignty and state identity. All in all, the 2001 treaty weakens the notion that the GCC can only agree to integrate technical and apolitical areas, and thus also the hypothesis of intergovernmental dichotomy.

As for neofunctional theory, several aspects of the 2001 agreement can be seen as spillover effects. The GCC drew on lessons from the first treaty, seeking to address the functional pressures arising from the 1981 agreement becoming outdated. The customs union and common market were rolled out on time in 2003 and 2008 respectively, although agreement on a common external tariff would be reached later in 2014 (Ulrichsen 2018a). Most notably however there is the move to establish a common currency, which can be seen both as alleviating a functional imperfection in the bloc, and as a possible precursor to transferring of loyalties to a new common institution.

Optimism and description of the integration process as gaining momentum is expressed by several contemporary scholars. Writing in 2003, Looney sees the in-

creased level of ambition in the 2001 treaty as an indication of the pluses of integration now exceeding the minuses. Looney accurately points out that the GCC has now moved forward areas in previously off-limits due to reservations about state sovereignty (Ibid). While this is an understandable conclusion having only studied the 2001 treaty itself, one can note that Looney's prediction failed to materialize when looking at the integration process after 2001, as pointed out by Mishrif (2021) and Ulrichsen (2018a). Instead, it is Looney's description of the GCC prior to the 2001 treaty that continues to paint an accurate picture of the organization, with jealousy of state sovereignty overriding several areas of integration agreed in 2001 (ibid). When looking at the treaty not only as agreed, but as implemented, the intergovernmental dichotomy remains, in spite of the 2001 agreement itself pointing towards movement in the other direction.

As stated by several authors, the member states achieved much of the convergence criteria for the launch of a currency with relative ease (Ahmed 2021). The actual roll-out however was marked by the return of intergovernmental concerns. In 2006, Oman announced its intention not to join the currency by 2010, followed by the UAE, after the announcement that the central bank of the new currency would be located in Saudi Arabia (Takagi 2012, p. 12). With the 2010 deadline around the corner, the launch of the currency was postponed indefinitely (Mishrif 2021, p. 71). The Secretariat General also proved unable to enforce the 2001 agreement, with the institution proving to be incapable of punishing or hindering states from departing from key provisions of the 2001 agreement at their convenience (Ulrichsen 2018a). After the 2010 deadline had come to pass, no major progress has been made by the GCC and the union has even come to suffer moments of crises (Mishrif 2021, p. 71). This fact can be seen as indicative of the increasingly diverging interests of the member states in the 2000s. As the agreements themselves are an arena for integration, the inability to produce further agreements tells a story of a stagnating integration process. While the immediate aftermath of the 2001 agreement was marked by the fastest pace of integration yet in the GCC, the organization has since suffered both setbacks and signs of fatigue (Mishrif 2021). The absence of further agreements can be seen as just as much of an active choice as a new agreement, highlighting the absence of ambitions to move integration further.

While the 2001 agreement initially seemed to provide proof of the neofunctional notion of spillover, a study of the implementation of the agreement tells a different story entirely. The GCC does move forward with a more ambitious agenda, breaking the intergovernmental dichotomy and moving into the field of high politics, while strengthening the supranational Secretariat General in order for it to act as a guardian of the treaty. When time comes to implement agreed integration, however, the same dynamic of jealousy of power that characterized the organization prior to 2001 emerges once again. The 2001 agreement starts out looking promising for neofunctional theory, but with the full picture accounted for, the agreement reinforces the explanatory value of the intergovernmental theory.

Therefore, the Economic Agreement of 2001 is concluded as having strengthened support for the hypothesis.

5 Conclusions

5.1 Integration in the GCC

The systematic inquiry into the integration process of the GCC has uncovered a jagged process with substantial differences over time. The institutional design sets the stage for cooperation relying mainly on intergovernmentalism as opposed to the empowerment of any major supranational body, although one such body is established (Siegfried & Sturm 2014, p. 24-25) The Secretariat General, being the one supranational institution in the organization, has further remained weak, refuting the neofunctional prediction of supranational institutions becoming independent policy entrepreneurs. Furthermore, there has been no meaningful transfer of allegiances to GCC institutions, or the emergence of any regional identity tied to the organization (Mishrif 2021, p. 77-78)

Looking at the two major agreements, the intergovernmental prediction of a dichotomy between low politics and high politics was observed in both treaties, although less so in the treaty 2001. In the agreement of 1981, intergovernmental reservations about state sovereignty offered a comprehensive account of what areas were integrated. The treaty of 1981 was also found to in large part be compatible with neofunctional theory, which explained the first treaty as a wish to take advantage of the newly formed organization by moving forward with economic integration.

The 2001 treaty went beyond low politics by establishing a concrete timetable for the rollout of the GCC single currency and establishing the Secretariat General as the guardian of the treaties (2001 EA). The ensuing development of the organization points to a higher explanatory value for neofunctional theory, with both spill-over effects and empowerment of supranational bodies being observed compared with the 1981 treaty. The dichotomy of low politics and high politics offers a weaker explanation of the 2001 treaty than the treaty 20 years prior. The 2001 agreement in and of itself was concluded as strengthening neofunctional theory and weakening the intergovernmental monopoly on accounting for the dynamics of the GCC. However, looking at the implementation of the treaty, a familiar pattern of intergovernmental concerns over sovereignty once again emerges, trumping the neofunctional deepening of integration in the treaty of 2001 and the years

thereafter. To this date (2021) there have still not been any new major GCC treaties.

Revisiting the research question, the study does point in the direction of autocratic jealousy of state power setting the playing field for the GCC and acting as a fundamental constraint on integration. The hypothesis, operationalized as institutional design reliant on intergovernmental institutions, and difficulty to move forward with integration outside of low politics, was found to offer a comprehensive explanation when tested against the integration process. The competing theory of neofunctionalism offered some insight into the integration process, most notably in the early 2000s, but did not offer the same comprehensive explanation of the underlying dynamics of integration in the GCC. Two of the most central assumptions of neofunctional theory; spillover, and the growing power of supranational institutions, did not materialize in any significant way.

The GCC is however not a clear-cut case of intergovernmental theory as laid out by Hoffman (1966). The theory might have proved to be a good fit for explaining what areas are likely to be integrated, the integration process of the GCC starts in the opposite order as envisaged by Hoffman (*ibid*). The GCC was brought about by security concerns, before shifting focus towards economic integration (Guzansky 2015, p. 20; Del Sarto & Soler i Lecha 2018, p.8). This gives the impression integration in the field of high politics, contrary to what intergovernmental theory would predict. However, the study found that the organization almost exclusively moved forward with low politics in the agreements of 1981 and 2001. This seemingly paradoxical course of events can be explained by the security concerns leading to the inception of the GCC never prompting any integration in the field. Instead, there was coordination in the areas of high politics, but never serious integration. With this anomaly accounted for, the integration is largely compatible with the intergovernmental scenario as presented in the methods section.

5.2 The GCC as autocratic integration

The GCC was found to be a clear case of ‘autocratic integration’, with jealousy of state power significantly impacting the three study objects. In addition to the having a clearly intergovernmental design, member states both ignored and opted out of agreed integration at their convenience (Ulrichsen 2018a) The organization is an extreme case in this regard, but similar underlying mechanisms might also be observed in other organizations encompassing autocracies. Another manifestation of the impact of autocratic governments on the GCC is the level of discrepancy between the ambitious integration outlined in the treaties and integration as implemented. While an ambitious agenda of integration might be unexpected coming from states jealous of their power, this unique feature of the GCC speaks volume

to the impact of the authoritarian nature of the countries involved. The large variation in levels of ambition in the GCC points to the integration process as driven by something other than spillover and functional pressures. In the case of the GCC, the alignment of national interests has a profound effect on the organization, setting the rules of engagement for integration. Looking at the GCC through the lens of autocratic jealousy, the seemingly schizophrenic variation in integration becomes quite logical. If interests align, integration can go far in a given area. If interests cease to align, the GCC carries little weight of its own. This is true even though the member countries share culture and language, and have similar structures of government and economy, pointing to the importance of autocratic jealousy as a variable.

6 Discussion and Future Research

The main contribution of the study has been a deeper understanding of the mechanisms underpinning the integration process of the GCC. As mentioned in the literature review there is no lack of studies with a descriptive or normative approach, but few studies have attempted to unpack the ‘rules of engagement’ for the integration process. The essay has hopefully made a contribution towards filling the gap of studies on the GCC from an examining perspective.

As a generalizable case, the integration process of the GCC highlighted several aspects true to autocratic integration. Firstly, authoritarian jealousy of power was found to set the rules for integration in a comprehensive way, with the dichotomy of low politics and high politics being a clear pattern throughout the process. Secondly, the GCC demonstrates that organizations encompassing authoritarian states are not confined to lower levels of ambition than any other regional organization. Jealousy of power does not mean that countries cannot find common ground when interests align, but authoritarian integration seems to make agreed integration much less entrenched than what is the case in integration amongst democracies. The countries of the GCC were quick to agree on an ambitious agenda, but also just as quick to distance themselves from commitments to the GCC in the event of a collision with national interests.

A quantitative study of opt outs and discrepancy of integration as agreed and as implemented would offer valuable contributions to both the understanding of the GCC as well as of the dynamics of authoritarian integration. The same can also be said about other approaches, such as studying integration through the lens of family relations, or looking at the implications of the 2017-2021 GCC diplomatic crisis. As for authoritarian integration, an inquiry into ASEAN would allow for a study of integration amongst autocratic states without the variable of homogeneity exhibited by the GCC. Similarly, regional organizations on the African continent offer many possible study objects. Depending on the variable of interest, a research design could be crafted to include various degrees of homogeneity, democracy, and similarity of economic structure.

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