A. Henderson, “Why Regions Matter: Sub-State Politics in Comparative Perspective,” *Regional and Federal Studies* 20:4-5 (October-December 2010)

**Overview:**

Introduction to a collection of articles on this subject (special issue) - Regions now wield greater authority than they did in the 1970s. Strengthening of regional gov’t and supposed erosion of expectations of state-wide policy uniformity suggest now is a good time to re-examine regions as ‘small worlds’. Authors of the collection identify regions as sub-state polities with legislative capacities, looking across regions for influence of cultural capacity, etc.

**How meaningful are regions?**

Regions differ on their definition – can be defiled (1) as constituent units of federations and (2) by shared demographic or economic characteristics. This body of work “provides compelling evidence of regional variations in attitudes and behaviours, and confirms that for regions to be politically salient they need not necessarily conform to intrastate boundaries.” 2 reasons for this:

1. Political salience of region may not stem from region itself, but rather from the demographic variation that exists *across* them
   1. Demographic characteristics may cluster in a region
2. Sub-state polities are capable of generating the distinct political cultures that drive (or are characterized by) regional variations in attitudes/behaviours
   1. This could be mediated by regionally controlled education system (socialization)
   2. Breton’s view of institutional completeness – that institutions can sustain sense of distinctiveness

**How much ‘national’ unity is required for a polity to function well?**

* *Small Worlds* appeared at a time when pre-occupation of national unity was particularly high
* For Almond and Verba, identification with the state a key component of democratic stability – and attachment to other groups (religious, ethnic, otherwise) = a risk factor for unity
  + This argument now sits uneasily with lit. on national pluralism
* While regionally-based attitudinal diversity may not pose risk to national stability, it may have other features – i.e. undermining redistributive welfare regimes
* Strong regions can make it difficult for citizens to know who to hold accountable for policy successes and failures – casualty not state unity, but rather ability of votes to discharge duties as citizens