

Research on Government Gaming Behavior in Regional Economic Integration

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Abstract

China's regional economic integration process has accelerated rapidly as the country has successively introduced major regional integration strategies. Under this background, what characteristics of the government's gaming behavior will appear, and what impact will it have on regional cooperation and economic development? Through the study of different game models, such as competition, cooperation and matchmaking, this paper focuses on the different results caused by the government's choice of competition or cooperation strategies during a single game. The paper takes the competitive strategy to pursue profit maximization and the cooperative strategy to promote regional economic development as the starting point, and quantitatively analyzes the distribution of their benefits in the game models.

Keywords

Regional economic integration; prisoner's dilemma.

1. Introduction

In the process of regional economic integration, the game of government has formed a multi-level relationship, among which the game between regional governments has the most significant impact. The government's game mode is mainly divided into three kinds of competition, cooperation and competition. However, only the competitive game can better solve this game behavior. In a purely competitive game, individuals aim to maximize local benefits, but this contradicts the optimal choice under group rationality, which may lead to the "Prisoner's Dilemma" problem. Such competition may lead to vicious competition, destabilize regional cooperation, make the cooperation agreement useless, and ultimately harm the interests of the local area and the region as a whole. In contrast, in the cooperative game, individuals seek to maximize the overall interests, but in reality, incomplete information and limited rationality make pure cooperation not the best choice. In fact, in regional economic integration, there exists a dual face of competition and cooperation between governments, and the competitive game becomes the most realistic choice. This game model transforms individual rationality into group rationality.

However, governments are usually trapped in their preoccupation with local interests, and this "self-interest" makes cooperation lack of incentive, and may even fall into the so-called "prisoner's dilemma". Therefore, in order to solve this dilemma, it is necessary to change and reposition the role of the government, and design a reasonable mechanism to promote more effective cooperation between governments, so as to break the cooperation problem. The game theory model is used to analyze the optimal game behavior between governments, explore the conditions for realizing the cooperative game, and identify the reasons for the cooperation dilemma between governments, which can provide better policy suggestions and solutions for regional economic integration.

2. Literature review

With the booming development of regional economic integration, scholars at home and abroad have shown increasing interest in research in this field, producing rich and diverse research results. In recent years, the research on the government in the process of regional economic integration has gradually emerged, built on the basis of the previous exploration of many scholars. Scholars at home and abroad, have achieved fruitful results. At present, the research on the government in the process of regional integration mainly focuses on the economic and management fields. In particular, the research on the relationship, cooperation mode and game behavior between governments in regional economic integration has accumulated rich theoretical and empirical results.

1. Cooperation of governments in the process of regional economic integration

In the context of regional economic integration, government competition and cooperation are the two most important aspects of government relations. These two aspects are particularly important in the study of governments in regional economic integration, and have received the fullest attention and the most in-depth research by scholars at home and abroad, accumulating the richest research results. In the study of government behavior under regional economic integration, competition and cooperation have become the focus. Scholars at home and abroad have explored this in depth and produced rich research results. Milward (1992) studied the member states of the European Union and concluded that the formation of the Union will significantly enhance the economic activity space of the member states [1]. Long Zhaoshuang and Wang Xiaozeng (2007) explored the intrinsic motivation and extrinsic resistance of cooperation by dividing the factors influencing intergovernmental cooperation into internal and external promotion of administration from the power mechanism [2]. Ma Baobin (2010) proposed the induced and dominant push factors of governmental cooperation dynamics, covering the response to pressure and the exploitation of opportunities, as well as spontaneous and induced motives [3]. These studies provide an in-depth analysis of the drivers of government cooperation and competition and offer valuable insights for a better understanding of government behavior in regional economic integration.

2. Government competition effects

Governments compete in attracting investment, usually by lowering the level of taxation, which results in the inability to provide the best quality public services (Break George, 1976) [4]. On the other hand, Renwid (2005) argues that excessive competition between governments can cause regional development imbalance and widening of the gap. Due to the differences in governments' economic starting points and resource endowments, governments with advantages are more attractive, while inferior governments become exporters of quality factors of production [5]. Li Hui (2013), on the other hand, analyzed the utility of competition from the perspective of the effect of government competition on credit. He argues that competition between governments can improve government effectiveness, enhance government credit, and increase public goods. However, such competition may also interfere with the market economy, pursue individual interests, and lead to unfairness, thus damaging government credit [6].

Luo Ruoyu and Zhang Longpeng (2013) pointed out that the government's enthusiasm for investment attraction has not waned despite the negative impact of competition between governments on economic growth. This is because the more effort the government makes, the greater the amount of industrial transfer it attracts, which in turn leads to more significant economic growth effects. Government competition in industrial transfer may be masked by economic growth, and this effect not only did not affect the political promotion opportunities of local officials, but also strengthened the competitive dynamics between governments [7]. Currently, academic research on government competition and cooperation behavior mainly focuses on theoretical elaboration and empirical analysis. However, these two research

methods can only observe the surface phenomenon of government competitive choices, and the internal mechanism that causes differences in government behavior has not been fully studied and analyzed. Based on the traditional game theory, this paper aims to analyze the internal mechanism affecting government behavior in order to solve the problem of excessive government competition in practice.

3. The government interest game analysis

In the government's interest game, competition, cooperation and competition all three ways present different results. This paper chooses a single game process to simplify the analysis. At the same time, ignoring the difference between the government and society, "private interests" and "public interests", and collectively referred to as the government's interests. Participants in the game are from different administrative regions of the government (A, B), the game strategy includes competition and cooperation two options.

1. Competitive government game

Competitive game is the result of governments pursuing the maximization of their respective interests, and this game model often leads to competition between governments. In the matrix model of the competitive game (see Table 1 for details), you can see the gains and losses from different combinations of government strategies. When government A and government B choose the cooperative game strategy, both governments benefit equally from it. Similarly, when both governments choose a competitive strategy, both parties suffer greater losses, losing 2 units of benefits each. In fact, for government A, its strategy choice is often influenced by government B's decision. As can be seen in Figure 1, when Government B chooses a cooperative strategy, Government A is able to maximize its benefits by adopting a competitive strategy; conversely, when Government B chooses a competitive strategy, Government A maximizes its benefits by choosing a competitive strategy. This logic also applies to Government B.

Therefore, the (competitive, competitive) strategy combination reaches a Nash equilibrium, but Pareto optimality occurs under the (cooperative, cooperative) strategy combination. However, due to the "egoism" of the two governments, they are more inclined to adopt a competitive strategy, which results in a decrease in economic efficiency and a typical "Prisoner's Dilemma". The governments' pursuit of maximizing their own interests may lead to vicious competition among the subjects of interest [8], including superficial regional cooperation agreements, administrative segregation, trade barriers, and serious duplication of construction, which is not conducive to optimal allocation of resources. Therefore, in order to achieve regional economic integration and optimization of public interests, the government needs to actively promote the development of cooperative games, transcend the "Prisoner's Dilemma", and achieve the coordinated development of the region as a whole.

Table 1 Government Competitive Game Model

	Government B	Cooperation	Competition
Government A	Cooperation	2,2	-4,4
	Competition	4,-4	-2,-2

2. Government cooperation game

The regional coordinated development strategy promoted by the central government has had a far-reaching impact on governments at all levels, prompting them to change their development models. Motivated by performance appraisal and promotion mechanisms, governments have begun to seek to break through the constraints of administrative divisions, strengthen cooperation with other governments and departments, and are more inclined to adopt the strategy of cooperative gaming.

Cooperative game is based on the assumption of complete information symmetry, is the result of rational choice, but also a key means to get rid of the "Prisoner's Dilemma". Compared with the competitive game, the cooperative game is more conducive to enhancing the interests of both parties, thus improving the interests of the whole region. For example, in the case shown in Figure 1, the Pareto optimal state can be realized when both governments A and B choose the cooperative strategy.

However, in the process of regional economic integration, certain conditions need to be met for governments to engage in cooperative games. First, the gains from cooperation between governments must be higher than the gains from each acting alone. Second, governments that participate in economic integration need to ensure that they receive more benefits than those that do not. Typically, the first condition is relatively easy to fulfill, but the second condition is subject to greater uncertainty, which means that in some cases, governments may choose a competitive strategy.

In order to deal with this situation, the central or higher level government needs to intervene and adjust the structure of interests within the region in order to promote a relatively balanced development of the regional economy. Such a mechanism could include measures such as setting up cooperation funds, formulating tax-sharing policies, and establishing risk-sharing and benefit-sharing mechanisms.

In addition, communication and coordination and information-sharing mechanisms need to be strengthened in order to enhance the level of intergovernmental cooperation. A regularized communication channel and platform should be established between governments to strengthen information exchange and policy coordination. By strengthening ties with other governments and departments, governments can better understand each other's needs and concerns, and thus better adjust their strategic choices.

In short, the regional coordinated development strategy implemented by the central government has provided the impetus for the government to change its development model. Incentivized by performance appraisals and promotional postings, the government is shifting toward a more cooperative game. By meeting specific conditions and establishing corresponding mechanisms and platforms, the cooperative game between governments can be promoted to a higher level to realize the coordinated and balanced development of regional economy.

3. Competitive governmental games

In practice, pure cooperative games are often difficult to achieve, because the interests of governments are often complex and diversified. Therefore, the competitive game has become the best choice for the game of government interests in regional economic integration.

In this game, the government's interests determine the dominance of competition and cooperation. Which strategy can bring more benefits to the government becomes the basis of its choice. The benefits to the government vary greatly in different situations. In regional economic integration, there are two possible scenarios for the government's competitive game. In the case of Table 2, the impact of different governments' strategic choices on their gains can be seen. When both Government A and Government B choose a cooperative strategy, both parties benefit by increasing their gains by 2 units each. On the contrary, if the strategy choices of Government A and Government B do not coincide, the party that chooses a competitive strategy gains 1 unit of revenue, while the party that chooses a cooperative strategy reduces its revenue by 1 unit. When both Government A and Government B choose a competitive strategy, both will lose 2 units of benefit. Therefore, when both Government A and Government B do not choose the cooperative strategy, it will produce the minimum benefit gain (-2, -2); however, when both parties choose the cooperative strategy, they are able to maximize the benefit (2, 2). However, in practice, the realization of the benefits of cooperation is often affected by a variety

of factors, such as the policy environment, the stage of economic development, and resource endowment. Therefore, although the combination of (cooperative, cooperative) game strategies is optimal, the specific real-world conditions that ensure that cooperative benefits outweigh competitive benefits are required to achieve this outcome. This requires the government to take into account a combination of factors when formulating strategies, as well as to take appropriate actions to facilitate the realization of cooperation.

In addition, governments need to establish effective communication mechanisms and trust relationships to facilitate the realization of cooperation. Communication mechanisms can help governments to pass on information, negotiate issues and reach consensus, so as to better realize common interests. Relationships of trust, on the other hand, can help reduce doubts and misunderstandings among governments and enhance the sustainability of their willingness to cooperate and take action.

In conclusion, the competing game of governments is a complex and important phenomenon in the process of regional economic integration. By understanding the choice of different strategies and their impact on benefits, as well as establishing effective communication mechanisms and trust relationships, governments can better realize the goals of the cooperative game and promote the coordinated and balanced development of regional economies.

Table 2 Cooperative Benefits > Competitive Benefits

	Government B	Cooperation	Competition
Government A	Cooperation	2,2	-1,1
	Competition	1,-1	-2,-2

In the case where the benefits of cooperation are less than the benefits of competition, this paper constructs a matrix model (shown in Table 3) to analyze the strategy choices of Governments A and B. In this case, for governments A and B, choosing a competitive strategy can achieve higher benefits than choosing a cooperative strategy. Specifically, when both governments A and B choose the cooperative strategy, it is not an optimal choice, although both parties are able to benefit from it by gaining 2 units each.

In the case where the strategy choices of governments A and B are inconsistent, the party that chooses the competitive strategy is able to gain 4 units of benefit, while the party that chooses the cooperative strategy loses 2 units of benefit. This difference in benefits makes the governments more inclined to choose the competitive strategy in their decision making as it ensures more benefits. When both governments A and B choose the competitive strategy, although this is detrimental to the economic growth of both parties, resulting in a loss of 1 unit of benefit each, the governments will still choose the competitive strategy in this case because it is a relatively better option.

Therefore, regardless of the strategy chosen by the other party, there is a strong tendency for either government A or B to choose the competitive strategy in order to secure more benefits. This results in the combination of (competitive, rival) game strategies becoming a Nash equilibrium. However, this Nash equilibrium is not Pareto optimal because it leads to a decline in the overall interest and the emergence of the Prisoner's Dilemma.

The "Prisoner's Dilemma" refers to a situation where each government, in the process of maximizing its own interests, ends up with less than it would have if all parties had chosen to cooperate. This reflects the fact that in the absence of trust and effective communication mechanisms, individual rationality can lead to collective irrationality. Even if all parties realize that cooperation may bring better results, they will still choose the competitive strategy due to the fear of being betrayed by the other party.

In order to get rid of the "Prisoner's Dilemma", the government needs to establish mutual trust mechanisms and cooperation norms to promote information sharing and smooth communication. By strengthening the sense of cooperation and the recognition of common interests, governments can better coordinate each other's strategic choices and achieve better results. In addition, the intervention and coordination of the central government or related organizations is also one of the effective ways to solve the "Prisoner's Dilemma".

In conclusion, in the case of cooperative interests less than competitive interests, the combination of (competitive, competitive) game strategies becomes a Nash equilibrium, but also leads to the emergence of the "Prisoner's Dilemma". In order to get out of this dilemma and achieve better cooperation, the government needs to establish mutual trust mechanisms and cooperation norms, strengthen the awareness of cooperation and common interests, and seek the intervention and coordination of the central government or related agencies.

Table 3 Benefits of cooperation < benefits of competition

	Government B	Cooperation	Competition
Government A	Cooperation	2,2	-2,4
	Competition	4,-2	-1,-1

4. Difficulties in government cooperation

According to the previous analysis, the government prefers to adopt competitive gaming strategy in many cases, which is mainly due to the imperfections of the real environment and mechanism of regional economic development, resulting in government cooperation facing various difficulties.

1. Imperfect coordination mechanism of interests

Uneven distribution of interests among governments, especially for the utilization and distribution of important resources, often seriously affects the momentum and stability of regional economic integration. There are many such examples, one of which is the management and utilization of water resources.

Upstream and downstream of a river, different governments may face very different water utilization situations. Upstream governments, due to their topography, are usually able to fully utilize the water resources, sometimes even over-exploiting them, resulting in large amounts of effluent discharges. Downstream governments, on the other hand, often need to invest huge financial and manpower resources to treat sewage discharged from upstream to protect the health and living environment of their residents.

This unbalanced pattern of interests will easily lead to conflicts and contradictions between upstream and downstream governments. The upstream government may think that they have fully utilized the water resources, while the downstream government needs to bear the full cost of combating water pollution. The downstream government may thus become dissatisfied with the upstream government and may take action to stop the upstream's water resources development program.

This situation not only affects the dynamics of regional economic integration, but also poses a threat to its stability. To address this problem, it is crucial to establish and improve a mechanism for coordinating interests. Such a mechanism should ensure equitable distribution of water resources upstream and downstream, while also encouraging governments to pursue economic development while protecting the environment.

Such a coordinating mechanism may include the establishment of an independent and neutral body responsible for monitoring and regulating the allocation and use of water resources, as

well as the formulation and implementation of equitable water management policies. There is also a need for an effective communication mechanism that allows upstream and downstream governments to engage in regular dialog and consultation on water issues.

Only when all stakeholders are able to receive their due rights and benefits in a fair and just environment can regional economic integration develop in a sustainable and healthy manner. Therefore, the establishment and improvement of an interest coordination mechanism is undoubtedly a key means to promote regional economic integration.

2. "Free-riding" behavior affects public provisioning

In some regions, the uneven distribution of resources has led to many difficulties in economic cooperation, the most typical of which is the so-called "free-riding" behavior. This pattern of behavior is manifested in the fact that some governments or individuals only want to share the benefits rather than bear the corresponding costs in the process of resource allocation.

Take a concrete example to illustrate this situation. Suppose Government A invests a large amount of resources in a certain area to improve the transportation infrastructure, and such an initiative can promote local economic development and improve the living standards of the people. However, if government B chooses to "free ride" in the process, it will only enjoy the benefits of government A's investment rather than share the cost of improving the transportation infrastructure.

This pattern of behavior is likely to lead to conflicts between governments, with government A believing that government B is not fulfilling its responsibilities, and government B believing that government A is unilaterally reaping the benefits. Such conflicts, if not properly resolved, tend to have a negative impact on the supply of public goods, which in turn affects the operation of the overall economy.

In the long run, although "free-riding" behavior may bring some short-term benefits to Government B, it is not conducive to the healthy development of the overall economy. This is because if every government chooses to "free-rider", the supply of public goods will not be guaranteed, and the overall economic development will be limited. Therefore, how to solve the problem of "free-riding" and break the dilemma of collective action is an important issue that needs to be solved in the current economic cooperation.

3. The negative impact of administrative division

Administrative divisions have a far-reaching impact on regional economic integration and are also a potential obstacle to intergovernmental cooperation. Different administrative divisions often imply different administrative leaders, and this in turn implies possible differences in decision-making and strategy choices. When leaders of a particular administrative division adopt a positive cooperation strategy, this strategy usually promotes the interests of relevant stakeholders, thus creating a benign competitive gaming situation in the region. This positive cooperation strategy can promote economic integration within the region and improve overall economic efficiency and social welfare. However, if the leader of a particular administrative division chooses to adopt a competitive strategy, or even a vicious competitive strategy, then this will have a direct impediment to the process of regional economic integration. Such competitive strategies may lead to local protectionism and unfair competition, making the utilization of resources less efficient and resulting in a waste of resources. Although the Chinese government has been continuously improving the performance appraisal system for governments and officials at all levels, in reality, the incorporation of regional economic cooperation into the appraisal index system is still at the stage of theoretical exploration, and there have not yet been any typical practice cases. This has also led some government officials to favor competitive strategies in their decision-making, as such strategies can bring obvious benefits in the short term. This strategy choice in favor of competition actually hinders the process of regional economic integration and hinders the effective allocation and utilization of

resources. It may lead to the prevalence of local protectionism, which makes economic ties between regions fragmented and reduces overall economic efficiency and social welfare. In order to break out of this predicament, the Chinese government needs to further explore and improve the appraisal index system for regional economic cooperation, and incorporate the actual effects of regional economic cooperation into the scope of appraisal. At the same time, it also needs to strengthen the communication and coordination among regions, and promote the development of benign competitive games in order to realize the goal of regional economic integration.

4. Lack of legal supervision mechanism

The government's legal supervision mechanism in terms of cooperation is not yet perfect, although the environmental protection regulations require the government to cooperate, but the relevant regulations in the economic field are still insufficient. This situation not only affects the process of regional economic integration, but also hinders effective cooperation between governments.

At present, governments in some regions have signed some cooperation agreements in order to promote economic or industrial integration. However, the binding force of these agreements is relatively weak and the cost of violating them is relatively low. When confronted with their own interests, some governments are more inclined to choose competitive strategies, which not only reduces overall economic efficiency but also leads to a waste of resources. For example, although a cooperation agreement may explicitly prohibit the introduction of highly polluting and energy-consuming enterprises, due to the imperfections of the legal monitoring mechanism, if a government ignores the agreement, other governments are unable to impose legal sanctions on it. This situation actually acquiesces to or allows violations of the agreement to occur, rendering the cooperation agreement devoid of substance. In order to solve this dilemma, governments need to accelerate the pace of cooperation. First, governments need to reposition their roles from traditional competition-oriented participants to cooperation-oriented facilitators. Second, the government needs to reconfigure its role positioning to adapt to the new cooperation model and economic development needs.

Specifically, the government can take the following measures: Improve the legal supervision mechanism: Enhance the binding force of the agreement by formulating relevant laws and regulations and clarifying the legal responsibilities and sanctions for violating the cooperation agreement. Strengthening communication and coordination: Establishing an effective communication and coordination mechanism to ensure smooth information flow and consistent action among governments to jointly promote the cooperation process. Promote healthy competition and gaming: by guiding governments to engage in healthy competition and gaming within the framework of cooperation, encourage all parties to seek opportunities for cooperation while competing on a level playing field, so as to realize a win-win situation. Promote regional economic integration: Promote the process of regional economic integration and improve overall economic efficiency by strengthening infrastructure construction, optimizing resource allocation, and promoting synergistic industrial development. Strengthening performance appraisal: By incorporating regional economic cooperation into the performance appraisal system, government officials are incentivized to actively participate in the cooperation and promote the quality of economic development. To summarize, improving the legal supervision mechanism, strengthening communication and coordination, promoting benign competitive games, promoting regional economic integration and strengthening performance evaluation are effective ways to solve the dilemma of government cooperation.

5. Policy recommendations and conclusions

1. Improve the regional interest coordination mechanism

Governments often aim at maximizing their own interests in the decision-making process, so it is crucial to establish and improve the regional interest coordination mechanism for government cooperation in regional economic integration.

First of all, it is necessary to establish a sound regional interest consultation mechanism. Resource complementarity is the basis for promoting regional economic integration, and governments need to fully consult with each other on resource demand, supply, cost payment and benefit acquisition to ensure that the interests of all parties are reasonably distributed. Through the establishment of regular joint meetings and other institutional designs, governments can express their own interests and resolve possible conflicts of interest. Second, it is crucial to establish a sound regional benefit-sharing mechanism. The balance of interests directly affects the government's willingness to cooperate, and there may be unbalanced distribution of interests within the region. Therefore, it is necessary to establish an interest-sharing mechanism to coordinate the interests of all parties, eliminate local protectionism, and realize the sharing of interests among administrative subjects. In addition, it is also key to build a perfect compensation mechanism for benefits. Differences in economic development within a region are the basis for establishing a benefit compensation mechanism, and the government should establish a corresponding compensation mechanism for different levels of economic development or degrees of benefit acquisition. Transfer payments, ecological compensation and benefit complaint mechanism can be utilized to rationally distribute the overall interests of the region and adopt relevant mechanisms to solve the problem of inequality.

2. Create and improve the infrastructure and environment for regional cooperation

First of all, it is necessary to innovate in regional infrastructure and improve the quality of public products. To this end, modern information and communication systems and transportation systems need to be established to ensure the smooth flow and effective allocation of resources among different administrative regions. The central government or higher level governments can first innovate the public product supply system and integrate the strengths of various governments to jointly promote this process. For example, a cost-sharing mechanism for the provision of public goods can be established to ensure that the costs of building and maintaining public goods are shared fairly. Those governments that benefit from public goods should bear more of the costs. Second, a fair, open and competitive market environment should be created.

A unified market is the key embodiment of regional economic integration, and the government should change its role to focus on service delivery and improve the efficiency of resource utilization. The market should be allowed to play a decisive role, and government functions should be actively transformed to position itself as a service provider rather than an economic leader. In order to achieve this goal, a fair market competition mechanism needs to be established to encourage innovation and competition and to ensure that all market players can compete in a level playing field. At the same time, it is also necessary to establish a sound market supervision system to safeguard the orderly operation of the market and the rights and interests of consumers.

Through the implementation of the above measures, the process of regional economic integration can be promoted, and the optimal allocation of resources and synergistic economic development can be achieved. This will bring more benefits and opportunities to the society and inject new impetus to the national economic development.

3. Establishing legal supervision and incentive mechanisms for regional cooperation

First of all, it is crucial to strengthen the formulation and implementation of laws on regional cooperation. In order to ensure the stability of cooperation, stronger legal supervision mechanisms need to be established to provide clear guidelines for higher and governmental levels of cooperation. For example, laws and regulations involving compensation for benefits should be formulated to clarify the principles, circumstances, and amount of compensation, so as to strengthen the practical basis of governmental cooperation and to reduce or eliminate fierce competition and negative cooperation among governments.

Second, strengthen the incentive and punishment mechanism of regional cooperation. Considering the nature of government's pursuit of interests, the implementation of incentive and punishment mechanism can effectively increase the possibility of government cooperation game. The implementation of this mechanism may rely more on the higher level government, or establish a special independent regulatory body to monitor the behavior of each government, punish governments that violate the cooperative agreement with benefits, and compensate or reward governments that comply with the cooperative agreement with benefits. At the same time, cooperative development indicators can be used as an important criterion for the promotion of officials to push government officials to choose cooperative strategies.

Through the implementation of the above measures, the development of regional economic integration can be promoted to achieve the optimal allocation of resources and the synergistic development of the economy. This will bring more well-being and opportunities to society and give new impetus to national economic development.

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