

The Politics of Legal Integration: Governance Consequences of International Law and Human Rights

Mohd. Ruhul Amin

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Abstract

This article examines the governance consequences of integrating international human-rights law into domestic institutions and administrative practice. It describes legal integration as a process shaped by constitutions, courts, legislatures, agencies, political incentives, professional networks, and civil-society mobilization rather than a simple transfer of treaty language into national law. The article mentions that formal commitments may produce different results depending on domestic enforcement capacity, institutional veto points, budget allocations, and the availability of remedies. It also discusses selective implementation, political backlash, multilevel responsibility, and the legitimacy of international institutions. Strong integration requires more than reports, coordinating offices, or legislative references. It must influence permitting, enforcement, service delivery, judicial reasoning, frontline guidance, and public accountability. The article concludes that international law becomes effective when external norms are internalized through routine domestic decisions, consistently applied to allies and opponents, supported by capable institutions, and connected to meaningful protection for vulnerable communities



The political turn of legal integration is particularly apparent in areas of research where international law, political science, security studies and empirical approaches are combined. What is interesting here is that, as other articles in this publication under the auspices of the University of California, San Diego, show, formal commitments need not necessarily reflect the practice of daily activities and that international connections plus domestic mobilization can make a difference. The governance implications manifest themselves in terms of institutions, incentives, networks and the enforcement decisions. So, the question of legal integration must be analyzed by means of the two elements; in doctors and behaviors.

Legal integration has been referred to as a process of going from international commitment to domestic conformity, though in reality it is not so clear-cut. The differences lie in the constitutions' characterization of treaties, in the direct effect given to them by the courts, in the way different legislatures have, or have not, developed effective practice and in the diverse capacity of agencies." Legislatively" is one jurisdiction that can incorporate a norm through legislation, another by judicial interpretation, and another by administrative guidance." The potential for convergence can thus open up regarding language, while divergence remains in law enforcement.

But backlash is part of the process, too, inasmuch as it occurs when political actors

threaten to view outside standards as challenges to sovereignty and democratic decision. Comparative analysis should not stop at the ratification, but should focus on the sequences, institutional veto points as well as distributional effects.

International human rights law works much more than by the direct enforcement from outside. Beth Simmons's treaty effects research focuses on the power of the legal instrument, in terms of providing language, process and leverage to local actors to mobilize. Institutions such as courts, legal counsel, politicians, media, labor union, and professional associations, and interest groups, are responsible for interpreting general commitments into claims suit for national institutions. This is an opportunity to comply, because of ratification.

Treaties can be "rubber-stamped" for a government's reputation and then reservations can be made, or they can be reduced to the "thin end of the wedge" in terms of the extent to which they can be implemented locally or, they can be reported on selectively or at all. The concrete issue is who can trigger a commitment and who have institutions that have the authority to implement a commitment within their everyday decision-making.

At the same time, compliance is not uniform, but has a certain degree. A government may alter its composition and form, issue instructions and directives, establish a coordinating body or simply report without necessarily having to seek to further devolve powers. Measured compliance can be influenced by tactical adaptation aiming for situation without a real internalization because external scrutiny addresses visible procedures. The four ingredients of durability budgeting, training, judicial reasoning, administrative review and frontline incentives all help to foster durable compliance with the norm.

Thus, once the public has taken notice, public officials abide by the rule even after the attention of the world subsides. The evidence of whether it is conviction or convenience is manifested in the combination of longitudinal evidence, implementation "audit," interviews, litigation outcomes and a gap between actual policy and actual outcomes. Forming a surface conformity can yet generate gain, yet a flimsy compliance is susceptible to political flipping.

International institutions only have legal authority to the extent that relevant actors are inclined to make a decision binding, authoritative or to grant it deference. The bases of legitimacy can be either consent, expertise, impartiality in procedure, consistency, participation or proven capacity to solve problems. Contestation does not necessarily drive down the legitimacy; there can be open disagreement which can shed light on shaky arguments and push institutional corrections. The problem is that motivations to burn

down criticism are often moved from a specific decision into blanket generalizations rejecting any outside boundary.

Selective applicability also erodes credibility as powerful states pick and choose when they want to apply it to rivals and are not held strictly accountable at home for compliance. Authorities rise to the extent that there is consistency in the implementation of standards, a clear understanding of the processes and effected teams have meaningful ways to question error.

The entrance of multilevel institutions further complicates responsibility as there are multiple segments of international commitments including national, regional, state, municipal and organizational ranges. Right, reinterpret, delay and blame can derive from each level. Another challenge is where authority to implement a treaty is national but implementation relies on subnational law and administration in a federal system. Even though international monitoring bodies can help to clarify what the standards are, domestic institutions generally have the say on what budgets, staff, remedies and enforcement are implemented.

Good governance thus requires specific focal points, lines of reporting, common indicators, information and protocols for conflict resolution. Otherwise, achieving compliance is a set of stand-alone efforts and not a system.

Assistance to local experience through human rights organizations, legal, political and international forums. These groups report trends, help those affected, turn the law into lay terms, brief watchdogs and keep issues on the front burner when they are no longer in the news. Donor dependency, access barriers, a threat to security and unequal representation do affect agendas. Methods should be transparent, with careful verification, as well as conflict sensitive and participation brought in by affected communities, which increases credibility.

Recommendations that include legislation, implementing body or institution, cost or funding, and a time frame for an action work best for advocacy. While moral urgency is the focus that draws in, institutional specificity is what can make attention reform.

A rigorous evidence approach ALWAYS involves making the broad comparison, along with close institutional analysis. Event data can be used to find the geographic and temporal clustering and administrative data is used to determine enforcement decisions and organizational responses. Survey experiments can be used to test public intolerance and process tracing can canvass key decisions. Additional indicators include court decisions,

guidance literature, staff turnover, staff disciplinary actions and budget changes.

There is no one single indicator which reflects democratic erosion. This is where triangulation becomes critical, as these public utterances may inflate the level of threat, those numbers may represent underreporting, and there may be legal change but no change in practice. It is when you have a number of independent sources all saying the same thing about the mechanism at different levels of governance that confidence comes up.

UC San Diego research on human-rights effectiveness exposes international promise and practice, and social linkage. Empirical analysis can assess if there is an impact of legal integration on repression or institutions' behavior or just on formal commitments. The best research design is one that relates both to cross-national patterns, and to the mechanisms and pathways that give rise to compliance and resistance.

Implementation indicators cannot be limited to a number of meetings, reports, focal points and legislative references per se; but should include outcomes and access to remedy. Administrative agencies may have more impact on the day-to-day implementation of guaranteed rights than do domestic courts in strengthening integration. Civil society networks offer a useful way of 'localizing' the international language into a language local institution can comprehend, internalize and implement.

Among other things, those institutions can defuse political opposition if they make the legal logic clear and treat all partisans and opponents equally. Comparative research should take account of the difference between incapacity and unwillingness as this distinction gives rise to a different institutional response. Long term legitimacy is achieved in a consistent way, with correction of error, procedural fairness, and a benefit for impacted communities.

Notices on reporting under the treaties can identify weaknesses and reporting periods require plans for implementation in the country: institutions and functions, periods, measurable obligations. The nature and scope of reservations and declarations should be closely monitored as there may be limitations to domestic obligations whilst being formally ratified by the state party. Parliaments can have impacts on implementation through legislation and appropriations, along with committee scrutiny and review, and appointment powers and executive reporting.

NHRIs can take international recommendations, and link them with domestic investigation and education, monitoring, and complaint settling. Services may be under

the control of local governments which may dictate practical rights whilst international responsibility may be retained by the State as a whole. The most effective professional training is in the form of standards that are elaborated Intramuros of evaluation, supervision, promotion or discipline, and not as stand-alone training sessions.

Legal integration may create distributional conflict if it results in shifts in the access to resources, authority, status, and institutional discretion. In cases involving international norms, courts should clarify the domestic legal process for implementing international norms in their judgments, thereby minimizing uncertainty regarding direct effect, interpretation and hierarchy. International institutions lend weight to the institution through recognizing mistakes, providing reasons for decisions and subjecting strong and weak states to similar scrutiny.

Implementation offices must have access to decision makers that ultimately matter; without being in decision-making position, symbolic placement results in coordination without effect.

The most important issue where international law is concerned is when outside norms are internalized practices. Implementation work is carried out primarily by domestic actors, but can be facilitated by treaties, monitoring bodies and courts, as well as by diplomatic pressures. Adopting a commitment into a sphere of action beyond a report or ceremony depends on legitimacy, capacity, political incentives and institutional design. Thus, there is no definitive way to measure when integration has been achieved, other than by its ratification; all integration is not necessarily genuine.

The more robust test would focus on whether routine decisions shift, whether remedies open up, whether officials are mindful that their decisions will be reviewed and whether there is increased protection for vulnerable groups. By embracing the regular and fair application of law, that law is strengthened and by selectively invoking law, that turns principles into strategy and opens the door for subsequent challenge.