

Normative Commitments and Costly Signals: Explaining the Acceptance of Individual Communications and Inquiry Procedures across the Core UN Human Rights Treaties

Prof. Andreas von Staden and Andreas Ullmann

In addition to the literature on compliance with international human rights norms, a sizable stream of research in the human rights field has inquired into why states commit to human rights treaties in the first place. Many states have gone a step further and have, in addition to ratification and mandatory state self-reporting, also accepted one or more of the optional monitoring and dispute settlement provisions, such as inter-state and individual communications procedures (ICPs) and inquiry mechanisms. While states may safely expect that inter-state complaints will only rarely be lodged, empowering rights-holding individuals directly promises a much greater volume of complaints. Why do states willingly relinquish control over the initiation of the committees' monitoring activities by accepting such "fire alarm" mechanisms that are triggered by others?

Building on the theoretical arguments and findings advanced in the literature so far, we identify a number of "blind spots" that have not yet been sufficiently addressed, ranging from the number of ICPs covered to the factors motivating commitment specifically by democracies to the interaction of normative and instrumentalist reasons in making commitment decisions. Based on a large-N dataset and the statistical method of survival analysis, we address these issues and provide tentative answers as to why and under what conditions specifically democracies will commit to optional treaty body oversight.

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