

Political Science, Project on International Affairs (PIA),
the Laboratory on International Law and Regulations (ILAR),
and the Life Long Learning Program of the EU,
present



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“Heretics and Infidels: International Legal Commitments and the Enforcement of Human Rights by the EU and United States”

It is often argued that because international human rights law entails few explicit enforcement mechanisms, it either does not lead to better human rights records among signatory states or its impact depends on domestic pressure for compliance. While the relative ineffectiveness of human rights law is widely accepted, a key assumption - that there are few to no international costs to committing to a treaty and then violating it - has gone untested. In this paper, we put this assumption to the test. We ask whether ratifying key international commitments, such as the Convention against Torture and the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, reduces or increases the subsequent risk that a human rights violator will be subject to economic sanctions by outside actors. The most frequent imposers of such rights-related sanctions are the EU and United States. We do find evidence of an association between international legal commitments and human rights sanctions, but only in response to severe rights violations, and only in democracies. Otherwise, at mid- to high levels of respect for civil liberties, treaty ratification appears to actually shield members from punishment. The results of our analysis speak to the existence of an alternative mechanism for enforcing commitments to weak international regimes, and have implications for the design of such treaties in the future.

Thursday, February 11th, 2016
SSB 107 at 12:00 p.m.

Lunch provided

