

China and other Authoritarian Regimes Threaten International Order

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The international legal order faces a grave threat from authoritarian regimes. New research from Vienna University of Economics and Business (WU) therefore proposes for the first time, an abstract and normative definition of authoritarian international law norms.

There is growing concern that international human rights law could be co-opted by autocratic regimes, argues Monika Polzin, Professor of Public and Public International Law at WU.

China's praise for an undemocratic democracy and a "community with a shared future for mankind" may mask a totalitarian agenda aimed at crafting a new global order devoid of liberal human rights principles.

The research reveals there is the threat that such diluted definitions could become law, if such authoritarian ideas are not rejected by the majority of states.

The paper therefore proposes for the first time a legal definition of autocratic international law in order to combat these developments. Such a definition helps constitutional democracies to dissent and to prevent the internal application of those rules in order to protect national liberal democratic systems from being eroded. This would be particularly true if international human rights norms were distorted into authoritarian law

Such would be the case if authoritarian or even totalitarian human rights norms were developed. Authoritarian human rights norms, which support undemocratic governance by restricting free elections and citizen oversight, would pose a significant threat to the liberal democratic order.

Even more alarmingly, totalitarian human rights norms, which replace the universal principles of freedom and equality with ideological dictates, could fundamentally alter the global human rights framework.

The phenomenon of "autocratic legalism," where authoritarian regimes use the language of democracy and human rights to legitimize their rule, is increasingly evident.

As the struggle between democracy and authoritarianism intensifies, democratic states must actively defend their values both at home and on the international stage. The potential transformation of international law into a vehicle for authoritarianism represents a critical challenge to the existing global order.

"The proposed definition of authoritarian international law norms is of utmost importance as it demask the current efforts to deform the international legal order and helps to protect freedom and the rule of law."

The paper was published in the Nordic Journal of International Law.

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