Call for Papers: How and Why Do Double Standards Matter for International Law? Geneva, Switzerland, 15-17 May 2025

By:

Olabisi D. Akinkugbe

September 6, 2024

Call for Papers

How and Why Do Double Standards Matter for International Law?

15-17 May 2025 Geneva Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies; Geneva, Switzerland

States, international organizations, and non-state actors profess commitments to legal principles, such as accountability, human rights, or sovereign equality, yet act in ways that contradict these ideals. In response to the perception that international law is selectively applied, claims of double standards are ever-present. Accusations of double standards serve as a rallying call to promote consistency and the equitable application of international law; alternatively,

they are used to deflect criticism or avoid accountability. The resulting discussion of double standards intersects with and implicates other principles of international law, including fairness, equality, justice, and the rule of law. What is the function of the double standards critique in international law, and how is it different from other critiques of injustice?

While the debate over double standards in international law is not new, it has become more pronounced in the wake of Russia's 2022 re-invasion of Ukraine and amid the ongoing war in Gaza. Over the past years, critiques of double standards have often invoked accusations of hypocrisy, selectivity, whataboutism, or tu quoque ('you too') objections, challenging the legitimacy of international norms and global-governance actors in ways that have garnered significant attention from international lawyers and the wider public. Can double standards be meaningfully discussed in a universal sense, and how do we account for nuances across various subfields of international law? What are productive methods for studying double standards? And how can insights from other disciplines enhance our understanding of double standards in relation to notions of effectiveness, authority, and legitimacy of international law?

From Ukraine and Gaza to Myanmar and Sudan, perceptions of double standards have fueled widespread criticism of an international legal system seen as structurally favoring some over others. At the same time, amid globalization's association with unequal outcomes, authoritarian and populist actors have sought influence by challenging the legitimacy of the post-Second World War legal order. To what extent can historical analogies, for instance of the post-World War II period or the decolonization process, help us understand the current moment? As governments and civil society attempt to reshape global governance and multilateralism, what is included and excluded from debates over double standards, and how does such a framing contribute to solutions or, alternatively, reinforce existing inequities?

Drawing on insights from the *Double Standards and International Law workshop* held at the Freie Universität Berlin in July 2024, this event is the second step in a larger project about how debates concerning double standards impact international law's credibility, legitimacy, and efficacy. It will delve deeper into the question of how to conceptualize double standards within the practice and

study of international law. For the event in Geneva, we are particularly interested in contributions that address:

1. *Relationships between double standards and issues of fairness, equality, justice, and the international rule of law.*

2. *Critiques of double standards that focus on hypocrisy, selectivity, and the use of whataboutism and/or tu quoque arguments.*

3. *The extent to which the issue of double standards is of a legal character as opposed to a political, ethical, historical, or sociological problem.*

4. *What are productive methods for studying double standards, and how can the study of double standards concerning international law be enhanced by insights from other fields?*

5. *Whether we can discuss double standards generally within international law, or must we account for the nuances across different legal domains?*

6. *Can double standards ever be seen as serving a useful function in international law? Does international law provide criteria to ascertain whether double standards may be desirable in relation to certain contexts?*

7. *How are arguments concerning double standards formulated and employed in diplomatic discourse that implicates international law?*

8. *Are accusations of double standards an effective argumentative technique? Does the venue in which the arguments are made influence their reception and ultimately efficacy (e.g. a courtroom, the Security Council or General Assembly, an NGO report, a civil society campaign, etc.)? Does international law provide criteria to make these assessments?*

In engaging with these or other questions, the organizers welcome contributions that show the varied ways that claims and evidence concerning double standards manifest in international legal argument, as well as time- and area-specific considerations of how double standards have been said to operate in various fields of international law. We are particularly interested in how double standards function from practice-based, empirical, or theoretical perspectives. Contributions from both practitioners and academics are

welcome. Interdisciplinary or non-legal perspectives are also welcome.

This workshop aims to produce an edited volume that will build upon the past contributions from the first Berlin event to address the main themes and conclusions from academic exchanges continued in Geneva. Participants will be asked to circulate draft papers of between 5000-7000 words before the workshop so that these can be shared among the participants to inform discussions at the workshop and ensure that you receive substantive feedback. Subject to peer review, a selection of presented papers will be considered for publication in the edited volume.

This workshop is organized by the International Law Department of the Geneva Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in collaboration with the Harvard Law School Program on International Law in Armed Conflict and the Swiss National Science Foundation (Scientific Exchanges grant no. 229373). Please submit an abstract, max. 500 words, and a brief bio to Patryk Labuda (**patryk.labuda@graduateinstitute.ch**) and David Hughes (**davidm.hughes@utoronto.ca**) by **15 October 2024**. Full papers of 5000-7000 words will be due by **30 April 2025**. The workshop will allow in-person and virtual attendance. There is a limited budget for travel and accommodation assistance. **If you would like to be considered for this funding, please specify that in your email**.

View online: Call for Papers: How and Why Do Double Standards Matter for International Law? Geneva, Switzerland, 15-17 May 2025

Provided by Afronomicslaw