

In sum, *The Terrorist's Dilemma* is one of the most important contributions made to terrorism studies in the past decade. Its importance is not limited to its author's claims but extends further to the studies it is likely to inspire.

Insincere Commitments: Human Rights Treaties, Abusive States, and Citizen Activism. By Heather Smith-Cannoy. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2012. 224p. \$29.95. doi:10.1017/S1537592714003053

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Research on the causes and consequences of international human rights treaties focuses disproportionately on states while ignoring the beneficiaries of these agreements—individuals. In *Insincere Commitments*, Heather Smith-Cannoy brings individuals back in with an analysis of treaty provisions that empower them to petition oversight committees about alleged human rights violations. The book poses two questions. First, why do governments accept individual petition mechanisms (IPMs), whose sole purpose is to spotlight human rights abuses? Second, what effect do IPMs have on domestic human rights practices?

Smith-Cannoy addresses these questions using a mixed-methods research design. First, she conducts statistical analyses to determine why countries accept IPMs. Countries, she finds, are more likely to do so during periods of economic crisis, which render governments susceptible to the human rights overtures of external actors—international financial institutions, the United States, the European Union, and so forth—on whom they rely for aid. States under financial duress therefore make “hard” but insincere human rights commitments as part of a larger public relations bid to attract needed economic assistance. Countries, therefore, commit to IPMs as a form of window dressing, in lieu of substantive changes.

Countries that assent to oversight insincerely take a calculated risk. First, they assume that donor countries and institutions will accept their cheap signal at face value. Whether this is true remains an open question; we do not know, for example, whether aid flows increase after countries accept IPMs. Second, countries bet that their citizens will not avail themselves of the opportunity to complain about abuses. But individuals call the bluff and, with the help of nongovernmental organizations, file petitions that expose human rights abuses. NGOs play a twofold role in this process. They set the process into motion by socializing individuals to stand against abusive governments and helping complainants navigate the petition process. After petitions have been decided, NGOs then draw attention to treaty violations and enlist powerful third parties to pressure the offending governments.

The second part of the book offers detailed case studies of commitment to and compliance with IPMs

established under the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in Hungary; the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) in Slovakia; and the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (CCPR) in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. These studies do two things. First, they adduce evidence to show that economic crises indeed galvanized leaders to accept IPMs, over and above other standard accounts in the literature. Countries do not accept oversight to lock in democratic reforms or placate domestic opposition; neither does commitment stem from ex ante compliance or socialization from the world community. This information provides texture and nuance to the author's quantitative findings.

The cases are also where Smith-Cannoy tackles the much tougher job of assessing the effectiveness of IPMs. Because the selected countries relied on external assistance to weather difficult times during their transitions to market-based economies, she argues that they were compelled to change their policies and practices in response to unfavorable rulings, at least on the margins. She recounts, for example, how the Hungarian government strengthened domestic-violence legislation after an oversight committee ruled that Hungarian courts had failed to issue a restraining order against an abusive husband, in violation of CEDAW. Other petitions discussed in the book deal with forced sterilization in Hungary, discrimination against Roma citizens in Slovakia, the killing of antigovernment demonstrators by Kyrgyz militia, and the use of torture to extract confessions in Tajikistan. These examples give insight into the use of treaty-based complaints procedures.

There are, however, several weaknesses in the case studies. First, there is no accompanying quantitative analysis to gauge the average effect of IPMs around the world. Had one been conducted, the case studies suggest that petitions would correlate *negatively* with countries' practices. Smith-Cannoy concludes that the effects of IPMs were strongest in the European cases but weak in Central Asia, even though very few complaints emanated from the former while many more targeted the latter. Thus, the book does not bridge the much-lamented divide between quantitative and qualitative research in human rights (see Emilie Hafner-Burton and James Ron, “Seeing Double: Human Rights Impact through Qualitative and Quantitative Eyes,” *World Politics* 61 [April 2009]: 360–401). Its quantitative analysis of commitment to IPMs does not correspond to its qualitative analysis of compliance with IPMs, which is restricted to a handful of transitional postcommunist societies. The findings cannot be generalized beyond this specific context.

Second, the case studies are purely illustrative; they are not designed to trace causal processes. The analysis follows a “pre vs. post” design, with cases serving to “recreate the

domestic and global pressures these governments experienced before and after commitment” (p. 12). A more effective approach would have compared the selected cases with similarly situated countries that either did not accept IPMs or accepted IPMs but were not targeted by complaints. Kazakhstan, mentioned only in passing (pp. 54–55), did not allow individuals to file petitions under the CCPR until 2009, and would have served as a useful “negative case” alongside Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Romania, which accepted CEDAW oversight in 2003 but to date has not been named in any petitions, might have paired well with Hungary. And a host of postcommunist states in Eastern Europe—Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovenia—have, with Slovakia, allowed individuals to complain under CERD but, unlike Slovakia, have not been targeted by petitions. Without these contrasting cases, we cannot know whether economic and diplomatic pressures might have played out similarly even in the absence of treaty-based complaints.

Smith-Cannoy recognizes these limitations, and each case study concludes with appropriate hedging. She cautions, for example, that her discussion of Slovakia should “not . . . imply that racial discrimination or minority rights claims have been resolved or that individual petitions at the UN somehow made these changes possible” (p. 112). Similarly, she warns

that “it would be incorrect to directly attribute” Tajikistan’s moratorium on capital punishment “to the cases themselves” (p. 162). A stronger analytical design, coupled with quantitative analyses of compliance, would have offered a more compelling test of her arguments.

Finally, no book can cover all ground, and *Insincere Commitments* raises several questions ripe for additional research. First, given her focus on postcommunist states, Smith-Cannoy does not consider why IPMs are used most often in countries where they are least needed: the affluent democracies of Western Europe and North America. Nor do we know why individuals submit petitions much more frequently under some treaties (CCPR) than others (CERD, CEDAW, the Convention against Torture). Once petitions are submitted, we know little about how they are handled and decided. Are some kinds of countries more likely than others to be found in violation of their treaty commitments, even after controlling for “objective” human rights conditions? Are decisions infected by political biases? The book offers a useful starting point for addressing these and related questions, which will ultimately yield a more complete understanding of a procedure that “privileg[es] citizens as the subjects rather than the objects of international law” (p. 5).