THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF SOURCES OF LABOR LAW

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ABSTRACT

This Article examines in depth an important but underappreciated development in international labor law: How norms promulgated by the International Labor Organization (“ILO”) have affected the development and implementation of domestic labor laws and practices since the early 1990s. The newly globalized focus of labor law—energized by substantial expansions in international trade and investment—has been recognized by scholars, practitioners, and governments, but it has not previously been explored and analyzed in this systematic way.

The Article focuses on two central regulatory areas—child labor and freedom of association—and relies on doctrinal and policy developments in these areas, as evidenced by the actions of legislatures, courts, and executive branches in more than twenty countries.

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In doing so, the Article addresses how international labor standards have influenced national labor law and practice in the Americas (excluding the United States)—directly through the soft-law route of convention ratification and ILO supervisory monitoring, and indirectly through trade agreement labor provisions that incorporate ILO norms. The resultant changes in domestic laws and practices have been evolutionary rather than transformative, and developments in law outpace those in practice, but within these parameters the changes have been substantial. The Article then places this internationalizing trend in the context of two recognized theories that seek to explain the socialization of human rights law.
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1. INTRODUCTION

Since the early 1990s, the rights and protections accorded to workers in their own countries have been increasingly influenced by international labor norms. A major reason for labor law’s more globalized focus has been the substantial expansion in levels of international trade and investment. The growing attention paid to the relationship between international and domestic labor law has consequences for tens of millions of workers and also for national governments, multinational corporations, and international public bodies. This Article examines how international labor law norms—specifically those promulgated by the International Labor Organization (“ILO”)—have affected the development and implementation of national labor legislation in the past twenty-five years. The Article focuses on laws and practices in the Americas, although its descriptive and normative observations have broader reach.

A threshold question is how to characterize the impact of international labor norms in the domestic labor law arena. The title given to me for an earlier presentation on this topic referred to The Evolution and Transformation of Sources of Labor Law. This suggests a view that there has been both evolution and transformation in labor law sources. Yet, these two concepts—evolution and transformation—are often viewed as divergent, if not contrasting. One tends to think of a body of law as evolving or, in the alternative, that same body of law being transformed.

In the United States setting, for example, labor law has evolved over seventy years since the National Labor Relations Act of 1935 (“NLRA”) and the Labor Management Relations Act of 1947.

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It has done so essentially without legislative participation—based on a series of incremental decisions from courts and agencies, engaged in a continuing dialogue during decades of legislative gridlock. Indeed, the relative absence of legislative or constitutional change in U.S. labor law over many decades is one of its most distinctive features. If evolution in the law is considered a more gradual and incremental process, and transformation a more sudden and radical shift, the question is more aptly framed as whether there has been an evolution or a transformation of sources of labor law.

The time-frame explored in this Article begins more recently than enactment of the NLRA and LMRA. The Article examines changes in labor law sources over the past twenty-five to thirty years, dating from about 1990. In this shorter time period, it may be easier to characterize rapid evolution in sources of law as functionally equivalent to transformation. Nonetheless, the Article contends that sources of labor law in the Americas have not been transformed or altered in radically transformative ways. But, sources have been imported from outside of national contexts, and these sources have influenced and altered traditional domestic structures, in ways and at speeds I would consider quite significant—at times even rapidly incremental although not cathartically transformative.

The Article focuses on two areas of labor law: Child Labor, which implicates certain minimum substantive protections, and Freedom of
Association, which involves basic participatory voice. Within this dual focus, it addresses the impact of four fundamental ILO Conventions,\(^5\) examining how ILO norms have had a pronounced evolutionary effect on domestic labor law instruments, and to a lesser extent on domestic labor law practices. This evolutionary impact has developed through two distinct institutional channels.\(^6\) The ILO’s established mechanisms, by which member states ratify labor conventions and are then monitored for compliance in law and practice, have created soft law pressures contributing to domestic change. In addition, the proliferation of labor provisions incorporating ILO norms into bilateral and regional free trade agreements has promoted legislative adjustments as part of more traditional pressures between countries for reciprocal compliance.

This pronounced evolutionary effect is not seamlessly coherent as applied to an entire hemisphere of thirty-five countries, mainly because it encompasses two distinct fault-lines. One is the important division between changes in law and changes in practice. When labor statutes or decrees, labor provisions in constitutions, or labor decisions by domestic courts are substantially modified to take account of international norms, there remains the question of effects on the ground: How are the changes being implemented, monitored, enforced, and sanctioned? Often, the reality of changes in practice lags behind the claims or aspirations associated with changes in law. The second fault line is the existence of substantial

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country-specific variations in legal culture and history, such that labor law sources have shifted or evolved at different paces and with differing impacts over the past quarter-century. Variations in experience among countries in the Americas are admittedly quite important. At the same time, I cannot do justice to the specific narratives for twelve countries in South America, seven countries in Central America, thirteen countries in the Caribbean region, and three countries in North America. Accordingly, my examples focus on a smaller number of countries across the region.  

The Article omits considering any changes in sources of law within the United States, due to the United States’ self-proclaimed exceptionalism stance regarding the impact of international human rights law and norms. This exceptionalism, asserted regularly in Congress and the Supreme Court, has precluded any serious impact from transnational sources on U.S. domestic labor law.  

On the other hand, the United States has been a major player in leveraging
the impact of free trade agreements as sources of change for the labor laws of other countries, as discussed below.

The Article proceeds as follows. Section 2 provides background on the overall direction of labor regulation in Latin America since 1980, and on the ILO’s mission and basic structure. Section 3 examines the influence of ILO norms on domestic labor legislation in the Americas since 1990. It describes considerable changes in domestic law addressed to child labor and freedom of association. These changes reflect the influence of both soft law pressure flowing from the ILO supervisory mechanisms and incentives emanating from trade agreement labor provisions. Section 4 considers the lesser impact of these ILO norms on domestic practice. One factor that arguably creates headwinds for the practical application of labor laws in Latin American countries is the presence of a more conciliatory, less sanctions-oriented approach to enforcement than exists in the United States. In addition, presumptively related to competition between countries for export share, governments may dilute their intensity of commitment to international labor norms by lowering enforcement efforts rather than “walking back” changes in law itself. Section 5 situates the evolution of labor law sources in a larger international human rights law context.

2. LABOR REGULATION IN LATIN AMERICA AND BASIC ILO STRUCTURE

2.1. Background Pattern of Ideological Change

From 1980 onward, the overall path in the politics of labor regulation in Latin America has been toward restored or newly created labor protections.9 Labor relations scholars have attributed this

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trend to a confluence of several factors: the demilitarization of government structures; the democratization of political participation and power-sharing; and the emergence of more diversified economies. Over these decades, there has been some ebb and flow between reforms that coincide with wider democratic participation (enhancing rights and protections, both for individual workers and collectively for trade unions) and reforms that respond to free-market policies and pressures (encouraging informal employment and increased flexibilization in labor relations).

From a big-picture perspective in Latin America, governments in the 1990s often supported pro-market weakening of worker standards—through “flexibilizing” changes in law and practice—whereas, since 2000, governments have tended to be more protective of worker rights and interests. Again, speaking in general terms, the weakening of protections in the 1990s via pro-market reforms that encouraged flexible and informal employment arrangements often had an adverse effect on individual rights more than collective rights. Where organized labor was sufficiently strong, the bargaining coverage and political heft of unions minimized the prospects for such weakening.


Other factors have contributed to Latin American nations’ uneven receptivity to neoliberal economics, on the one hand, and international human rights law, on the other. See generally Yves Dezalay & Bryant G. Garth, The Internationalization of Palace Wars: Lawyers, Economists, and the Contest to Transform Latin American States (2002) (examining legal and economic developments since 1960s in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Mexico).

See, e.g., Cook, supra note 10, at 32–37; Salo V. Coslovsky, Flying Under the Radar? The State and the Enforcement of Labour Laws in Brazil, 42 Oxford Dev. Stud. 169, 171 (2014). See also Graciela Bensusan, Legislation and Labor Policy in Latin America: Crisis, Renovation, or Restoration?, 34 Comp. Lab. L. & Pol’y J. 655, 664–70 (2013) (concluding that since 2000, labor protections that eroded in the 1990s have been expanded and reaffirmed in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay, although not in Mexico).

See Carnes, supra note 10, at 2–3, 5, 14; Cook, supra note 10, at 7, 25. See also Murrillo & Schrank, supra note 9, at 972 (identifying growth of collective labor rights in 1990s and attributing this development in some countries to the influence of traditional labor-backed political parties, and in other countries to pressure from U.S.
Notwithstanding these general trends, the impact from the cycles of development has differed, at times substantially, among countries. Thus, for example, Argentina and Brazil tended to have strong organized labor and only moderate pro-market reforms during these years.\textsuperscript{14} By contrast, organized labor was weaker in Chile and Peru, and more extensive pro-market reforms took hold during the period.\textsuperscript{15} Moreover, the larger difference between the 1990s pro-flexibility direction and the post-2000 trend toward greater worker protections should not obscure the reality that cross-country variations in these labor market reforms have been more pronounced within each of the two periods than between them.\textsuperscript{16} One illustration of cross-country variations is in areas of non-standard employment: There is a broad range of reliance on temporary employment contracts and notable differences persist in the proportion of involuntary part-time workers.\textsuperscript{17}

Still, over a period of several decades when a number of European countries, enamored of market reform, have been pursuing an agenda of softer individual employee protections and/or reduced collective labor rights,\textsuperscript{18} the Latin American picture is relatively sup-

\textsuperscript{14} COOK, supra note 10, at 20–24; see also CARNES, supra note 10, at 55 (discussing Mexico’s extensive and protective labor codes); Murillo & Schrank, supra note 9, at 975 (listing countries with union-friendly and union-averse collective labor laws enacted in 1990s). As discussed infra Section 4, gaps between enacted laws and actual practices are often substantial in this collective rights area.

\textsuperscript{15} COOK, supra note 10, at 20–24.


portive of worker protections in general terms. The question addressed in what follows is the extent to which sources of law outside of increasingly democratized and economically diversified national circumstances have contributed to or accounted for these developments in labor law and practice.

2.2. The ILO Structure and 'Soft Law' Pressures

The ILO is a specialized agency within the U.N. system. It was created in 1919 as an agency of the League of Nations, becoming part of the U.N. system in 1946. Unlike other U.N. specialized agencies, the ILO has a tripartite governing structure. Each of the 187 member states is represented not only by governments but also by national and international organizations of employers and of workers (i.e., social partners); their right of participation as representatives includes the right to vote. This tripartite structure encourages free and open exchanges among governments and social partners, which tends to result in a more pragmatic and persuasive standard-setting process than is possible for intergovernmental organizations.

The ILO’s mission is to promote social justice through internationally recognized labor and human rights. It has carried out that mission by promulgating labor standards in the form of Conventions, monitoring implementation of these standards, and providing technical support and training to governments and social partners.
seeking to conform their own laws and practices with the standards. The ILO has promulgated 189 conventions through 2016. These instruments are adopted by the International Labor Conference; conventions that are then ratified by member States—at their option—essentially function as treaties for purposes of implementation.

Conventions promulgated by the ILO aim to identify certain rights and protections for individuals and to protect those individuals from transgression by their own governments. As such, they lack the reciprocal compliance incentives that exist for international agreements between governments, such as trade agreements or arms agreements where a violation by State A may be met with a reciprocal violation by State B. If, for example, Guatemala permits or participates in the imprisonment or murder of trade union leaders, the United States is not going to respond or retaliate by imprisoning or murdering its own labor leaders. Thus, while ILO conventions create hard-law commitments in that they are legally binding when ratified, these conventions have underlying soft-law characteristics inasmuch as they are largely unenforceable through reciprocal or other transnational means. Instead, they depend on domestic law enforcement for effective implementation.

How does this domestic enforcement occur? Once a member State has ratified an ILO convention, it is required to report regularly on measures taken to implement the convention in law and practice, and to submit copies of this report to representative employer and worker organizations within the country. The ILO has developed

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21 Convention 189, the Domestic Workers Convention, was adopted by the International Labor Conference in 2011. A complete list and description of the Conventions is available on the ILO website: http://www.ilo.org/global/lang--en/index.htm [https://perma.cc/7SRF-EF82]. In addition, the ILO has promulgated 204 Recommendations—also listed on its website—that do not have the binding force of conventions and are not subject to ratification. Recommendations may supplement conventions with additional or more detailed provisions, or they may address issues separate from particular conventions.

22 See Oona A. Hathaway, Why Do Countries Commit to Human Rights Treaties?, 51 J. CONFLICT RESOL. 588, 592 (2007) (showing common goal of international treaties is to protect rights of individuals against violations by their own governments).

23 See id. at 592–93 (arguing enforcement of these treaties does not depend on other states but on actors within the state itself).
various means of supervising and monitoring convention implementation. Of particular relevance here is the work of three supervisory committees.

The Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (“CEACR”) examines the government reports, along with responsive comments from employer and worker organizations. As the only non-tripartite supervisory committee, the CEACR is charged with making impartial observations that address questions or concerns regarding a country’s progress toward compliance in law and practice. Committee observations on the application of ratified conventions are published in an annual report, usually prepared in December. These observations form the basis of an ongoing dialogue with member States, as governments—with continuing input from employers’ and workers’ organizations—seek to apply the conventions they have ratified.

The annual CEACR report also is examined by the Conference Committee on the Application of Standards (“CAS”) at the International Labor Conference the following June. The CAS, which is tripartite in membership, selects approximately twenty-five CEACR observations reflecting especially serious instances of noncompliance for full discussion. The identified governments are “invited”

24 See Int’l Labour Conference [ILC], Rep. of the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations [CEACR], Application of International Labour Standards 2017 (I), at 7, Report III (Part 1A) (2017), http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/—-ed_norm/—-relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_543646.pdf [https://perma.cc/2BJG-RUKR]. Reporting cycles vary for different types of conventions. The current cycle is three years for fundamental conventions, such as the child labor and freedom of association conventions examined in this Article, and five years for technical conventions, such as those involving safety and health or social security. In cases where serious compliance issues have arisen, the CEACR often requests interim reports in a shorter time frame.

25 The CEACR, established in 1926, is composed of twenty eminent jurists appointed by the Governing Body for up to five three-year terms. The Experts, who are judges, practitioners, legal academics, and human rights specialists, come from different geographic regions, legal systems, and cultures. Their role is to provide an impartial and technical evaluation of the state of application of international labor standards. See id. at 10 (presenting Mandate of the Committee); id. at 31–34 (presenting brief biographies of current Committee members)

26 The CAS also was established in 1926. See id. at 7. The number of serious instances of noncompliance to be selected for full discussion is agreed upon between the vice chairs for the international employers’ and international workers’ organizations. It has varied slightly in recent years, but is now set at twenty-four CEACR observations. For examples of full discussion, see ILC, Conference Committee on the Application of Standards [CAS], Extracts from the Record of Proceedings, Part II/5 (2017), http://www.ilo.org/global/standards/applying-
to appear before the International Labor Conference and explain or defend their implementation efforts. Based on the information these governments provide, the CAS issues conclusions recommending that governments take specific steps to remedy a problem, or that they request ILO missions or technical assistance. The exchanges and CAS conclusions are published in the CAS annual report.

A third plank of the supervisory mechanism, the tripartite Committee on Freedom of Association (“CFA”), was established in 1951 based on recognition that the principle of freedom of association needed a further supervisory procedure to ensure compliance even in countries that had not ratified the recently promulgated Conventions 87 and 98. Unlike the CEACR and CAS, the CFA responds to outside complaints, brought against a member state by employers’ or workers’ organizations. If the CFA finds there has been a violation of freedom of association standards or principles, it issues a report through the Governing Body, makes recommendations on how the situation could be remedied, and requests a report from the government on implementation of its recommendations.27

There are important additional elements of the ILO supervisory system,28 but in essence, the soft law pressure comes from ongoing,

[https://perma.cc/9M8V-CYFV].

27 For an overview of the CFA, see Applying and Promoting International Labour Standards: The Committee on Freedom of Association, ILO, http://www.ilo.org/global/standards/applying-and-promoting-international-labour-standards/committee-on-freedom-of-association/lang—en/index.htm [https://perma.cc/L4GL-G6JV] (last visited Oct. 26, 2017). In cases where the country has ratified the relevant conventions, the CFA may refer legislative aspects of the case to the CEACR. The CFA also may propose a “direct contacts” mission to address the problem through a process of dialogue with government officials and social partners.

28 Pursuant to Article 19 of the ILO Constitution—requiring Member States to report at the Governing Body’s request on their law and practice with respect to unratted as well as ratified Conventions—the CEACR publishes an in-depth annual General Survey on Member States’ national law and practice, regarding a subject chosen by the Governing Body. ILO Constitution, supra note 19, art. 19. These General Surveys, based on information requested from all Member States, allow the CEACR to examine the impact of conventions, to analyze the challenges identified by governments as impeding their application or ratification, and to identify possible means for overcoming the challenges. Under Article 24 of the Constitution, an employers’ organization or workers’ organization may present to the Governing Body a Representation that a Member State has failed to comply with a ratified convention. Id. art. 24. Under Article 26, a Member State that has ratified a convention may present to the Governing Body a Complaint against another Member State for noncompliance with the same ratified convention. Id. art. 26. Supervision under
participatory, and transparent review of government reports addressed to compliance efforts. With worker representatives, employer representatives, and several supervisory committees providing input, governments are strongly encouraged to be accurate about the extent to which their laws and practices conform to ratified conventions, and responsive to suggestions or urgings about how to improve those laws and practices. Since roughly 1990, ILO activities through convention ratifications, supervisory monitoring, and provision of technical support to governments have had a direct and substantial influence on the development of domestic labor laws in the Americas.

3. ILO NORMS AND DOMESTIC LABOR LAW

3.1. ILO Direct Influence on Domestic Labor Laws


The first and most powerful area of influence in the post-1990 period stems from the ratification of conventions, especially although not exclusively fundamental conventions. Twenty-two countries in the Americas ratified both fundamental child labor conventions in the period since 1990, with the heaviest activity between 1990 and 2005.29

29 The twenty-two countries in the Americas that ratified both Convention 138 and Convention 182 are the following: Argentina, Barbados, Bahamas, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Granada, Guatemala, Guyana, Jamaica, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, St. Kitts & Nevis, and Trinidad & Tobago. See ILO Convention 138, supra note 5; ILO Convention 182, supra note 5. Convention 182, addressed to the worst forms of child labor, was not adopted by the ILO until 1999. Accordingly, Chart 1 focuses on countries that ratified this convention rapidly and that also approved Convention 138—adopted in 1973 and addressing the minimum age for admission to employment—during the 1990s and early 2000s. Id.
This is a period in which the ILO notably intensified its commitments to child labor as an issue, buttressed by the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child, which came into force in 1990 and has since been ratified by every member of the U.N. except the United States.30

Overall, the child labor ratification record of countries in the Americas is impressive over the past twenty-five years. The record may reflect something of a ripple effect among Latin American governments relating to child labor protections, in that widespread ratifications may reassure peer countries in the region that regulating child labor will not put them in an inferior competitive position.31

A number of these countries also ratified one or both fundamental freedom of association and collective bargaining conventions in

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30 The United States did ratify Convention 182 in 1999, ILO Convention 182, supra note 5; however, the United States has yet to ratify Convention 138. ILO Convention 138, supra note 5.

the same recent time frame. Convention 87 on Freedom of Association was adopted in 1948, and Convention 98 on the Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining in 1949, and the vast majority of countries in the Americas had ratified both conventions decades prior to 1990.

Chart 2 (Canada very recently ratified Convention 98, but the Convention will not enter into force until June 2018.)

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There have been many other ratifications of ILO conventions from countries in the Americas since the early 1990s, including technical conventions related to occupational safety and health and social security protections, as well as the governance conventions involving labor inspection and tripartite consultation. A substantial number of safety and health ratifications have occurred within the past ten years, and almost all have been since 1990.\textsuperscript{33}

\begin{enumerate}
\item For example, Argentina ratified ILO Convention 184 in 2006 and Conventions 155 and 187 in 2014.
\item Brazil ratified ILO Conventions 167 and 176 in 2006.
\item Panama ratified ILO Convention 167 in 2008.
\item Peru ratified ILO Convention 176 in 2008.
\item Uruguay ratified ILO Conventions 167 and 184 in 2005 and ILO Convention 176 in 2014.
\end{enumerate}

With respect to governance conventions, four countries have ratified ILO Convention 81 since 1989: Brazil in 1989; El Salvador in 1995; St. Vincent & the Grenadines in 1998; and Trinidad & Tobago in 2001. ILO Convention (No. 81) Concerning Labour Inspection in Industry and Commerce, July 11, 1947, 54 U.N.T.S. 3 [hereinafter Labour Inspection Convention]. While a dozen or more countries had ratified this convention in prior decades, a number of major countries in the region have yet to ratify—including Canada, the United States, Mexico, and Chile. The importance of labor inspection for achieving compliance with ratified conventions in practice is addressed \textit{infra} Section 4.
Chart 3

Convention ratifications have frequently been accompanied by changes in domestic laws, reflecting a commitment to conform national constitutional or statutory standards to the international norms approved by governments. To cite a prominent example in child labor, Brazil brought its Constitution into alignment with Conventions 138 and 182, which it had ratified in 2000 and 2001.\textsuperscript{34} Brazil’s changes in domestic law include an innovative Child and Adolescent Statute to protect the rights of children in the workplace,\textsuperscript{35} a

\textsuperscript{34} See Constituição Federal [C.F.] [Constitution], art.7.XXIII n.33 (Braz.) (stating the working age was raised from fourteen to sixteen with Amendment No. 20 on Dec. 16, 1998); see also Consolidação Das Leis Do Trabalho [C.L.T] art. 403 (setting the minimum working age at sixteen); Decreto No. 6.481 de 12 de Junho de 2008 (Braz.) (revising the minimum working age to eighteen); Jerome September, Children’s Rights and Child Labour: A Comparative Study of Children’s Rights and Child Labour Legislation in South Africa, Brazil and India, (Feb. 2014) (M.A. dissertation, Univ. of Cape Town) at 68, https://open.uct.ac.za/bitstream/item/9357/thesis_law_2014_september_j.pdf?sequence=1 [https://perma.cc/TF3L-FT4D] (outlining the progress made to reduce and eradicate the exploitation of children through the elimination of child labor).

constitutional amendment committing to a minimum age of sixteen for employment and eighteen for hazardous work,\(^{36}\) and presidential decrees in 2000 and 2002 mandating the implementation and enforcement of both conventions.\(^{37}\) As discussed in Section 4 below, Brazil’s practices have for the most part successfully implemented these new legal standards, and there has been a remarkable reduction in child labor from ages five to seventeen between 1992 and 2012.\(^{38}\)

Other countries also have adopted domestic child labor laws pursuant to their recent ratification of Conventions 138 and 182. In Peru, the ratification of Convention 138 led to the increase of the minimum working age from twelve to fourteen, and to eighteen for hazardous work.\(^{39}\) Following ratification of Convention 138, Mexico in 2012 adopted for the first time a list of dangerous jobs with restrictions for youth between ages fourteen and seventeen; in 2015, it


amended its constitution raising the minimum age for employment from fourteen to fifteen.\textsuperscript{40} Further examples include new legal requirements in Chile\textsuperscript{41} and El Salvador.\textsuperscript{42}

With respect to freedom of association, most western hemisphere governments have ratified both Convention 87 and Convention 98.\textsuperscript{43} These ratifications have served as an impetus for improvements in collective rights laws following the demise of authoritarian rule and transitions towards a more democratic polity. Thus, for instance, Brazil and Paraguay legalized unionization in the public sector.\textsuperscript{44} In four countries—Chile, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Panama—legislation reduced the number of workers required to form a union.\textsuperscript{45} In three countries—Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, and
Peru—some strike regulations have been eased; for instance, a simple majority of workers can call a strike, not the prior 60% or 75%. And Argentina and Peru gave unions a right of access to employer financial information in order to facilitate collective bargaining.

Importantly, domestic courts have invoked these Conventions and ILO norms to expand or clarify rights of freedom of association and collective bargaining under national law. Perhaps the most dramatic recent illustration is the 2015 Canadian Supreme Court decision in Saskatchewan Federation of Labour, which invalidated a provincial law that severely limited the right to strike for public employees. In holding that freedom of association encompasses a right to strike under the Canadian Constitution, the court relied in part on Convention 87 as construed by both the CEACR and the CFA. In 2007, the Canadian Supreme Court had identified ILO norms to help justify a decision expanding collective bargaining protections for public sector workers.

In another very recent case, the Argentine Supreme Court invoked Convention 87 when affirming the appropriate scope of the
right to strike under national law, relying in part on the ILO position that the internationally recognized right to strike may be reserved to authorized labor organizations rather than granted to individuals under national law. And the Colombian Constitutional Court in a 1999 decision ordered reinstatement of workers who had been dismissed for taking part in a strike that had been declared illegal by the Ministry of Labor. The court invoked Conventions 87 and 98 as construed by the CFA, concluding that because the strike had been declared unlawful by government administrative authority rather than by an independent body such as a court, the workers had been deprived of their right to an impartial determination.

The Colombian Constitutional Court has applied Convention 87 doctrine directly in other cases, guided by the constitution’s incorporation of rights of association and right to strike, and its mechanisms for their direct enforcement by the judiciary.

51 See Corte Suprema de Justicia de la Nación [CSJN] [National Supreme Court of Justice], 7/6/2016, “Orellano, Francisco Daniel c. Correo Oficial de la República Argentina S.A. / juicio sumarísimo,” http://www.cij.gov.ar/nota-21852-La-Corte-resolvi—que-solo-los-gremios-tienen-el-derecho-de-promover-huelgas-y-que-los-grupos-informales-de-trabajadores-no-pueden-promover-medidas-de-fuerza.html [https://perma.cc/Z2ZC-HLB8] (establishing that only unions, not individuals, are authorized to call industrial action); see also Supreme Court’s Ruling Limits Right of Workers to Strike, BUENOS AIRES HERALD (June 8, 2016), http://www.buenosairesherald.com/article/215769/supreme-court%E2%80%99s-ruling-limits-right-of-workers-to-strike [https://perma.cc/G3UQ-3FU3] (reporting reactions from labor leaders, political parties, and human rights organizers to the aforementioned ruling and discussing its implications on workers’ right to strike).


53 Id.; see also ILO INTERNATIONAL TRAINING CENTRE, INTERNATIONAL LABOUR LAW AND DOMESTIC LAW: A TRAINING MANUAL FOR JUDGES, LAWYERS, AND LEGAL EDUCATORS 122 (Xavier Beaudonnet ed., 2010) [hereinafter Beaudonnet] (summarizing decision).

54 See, e.g., Beaudonnet, supra note 53, at 117 (summarizing 2008 decision by Colombian Constitutional Court that invoked ILO Convention 87 to help justify limiting the scope of labor code registration requirements for workers’ organizations so as to prohibit the government from exercising prior control over contents of trade union constitutions and rules).

55 See CONSTITUCIÓN POLÍTICA DE COLOMBIA [C.P.] art. 39 (right of association); C.P. art. 56 (right to strike); C.P. arts. 83–94 (protection and application of rights).
courts in Chile and Paraguay similarly have invoked Convention 87 doctrine—to reinstate trade union representatives whose dismissal was deemed invalid, or to support a ruling that a presidential decree specifying rules for the election of trade union leaders was unconstitutional.\footnote{See Corte Suprema de Justicia [C.S.J.] [Supreme Court], 19 octubre 2000, “Stuardo, Víctor Améstida y otros c. Santa Isabel S.A.,” Rol de la causa: 10.695 (Chile) (summarized in Beaudonnet, supra note 53, at 124); Corte Suprema de Justicia [C.S.J.] [Supreme Court], 23 septiembre 2000, “Acción de inconstitucionalidad planteada por la Central Unitaria de Trabajadores (CUT) y la Central Nacional de Trabajadores (CNT) c. el Decreto núm. 16769 dictado por el Ejecutivo,” No. 35 (Para.) (summarized in Beaudonnet, supra note 53, at 34).}

overturn a national law restricting the rights of indigenous peoples.\textsuperscript{58} Indeed, there are numerous instances of Latin American domestic courts invoking Convention 169, especially concerning development-related activities.\textsuperscript{59}

Stepping back, certain ILO Conventions have been effectively incorporated into the domestic legal order for some countries in Latin America without the need for a separate statute beyond the Act that authorized ratification of the treaty.\textsuperscript{60} Thus, for instance in Uruguay, where the constitution recognizes the right to unionize, ratification of Conventions 87 and 98 are the only legislative initiatives in the area: broad union freedoms are protected under the Conventions without any other domestic laws.\textsuperscript{61} And in Colombia, the Constitution establishes that ILO Conventions ratified by the country are part of its internal rules of law.\textsuperscript{62} Additionally, the direct application

\textsuperscript{58} See Antonia Blanco Rodríguez y otros c/ el Presidente de la República, la Ministra de Gobernación y Policía, el Instituto de desarrollo Agrario y la Comisión Nacional de Asuntos Indígenas, Supreme Court of Justice, Constitutional Chamber, 11 de Agosto 1999 (Costa Rica), http://compendium.itcilo.org/es/compendium-decisions/corte-suprema-de-justicia-sala-constitucional-antonio-blanco-rodriguez-y-otros-c-el-presidente-de-la-republica-la-ministra-de-gobernacion-y-policia-el-instituto-de-desarrollo-agrario-y-la-comision-nacional-de-asuntos-indigenas-11-de-agosto-de-1999 [https://perma.cc/38E5-S98G] (summarized in Thomas et al supra note 57, at 269-70; Beaudonnet, supra note 53, at 19).


\textsuperscript{60} See David Sloss, Domestic Application of Treaties, in THE OXFORD GUIDE TO TREATIES 373–76 (Duncan B. Hollis ed., 2011) (detailing the role of domestic courts in treaty application).


of ratified ILO Conventions as a primary source of law has been an increasingly potent arrow in the quiver of domestic courts—when there is no legislation addressing an issue covered by the Convention or when applicable domestic law is less detailed than the Convention’s text or its application by ILO supervisory bodies.63

Convention 169 is another useful illustration of the direct application aspect. The Convention has been ratified by fifteen countries in the Americas region—out of twenty-two ratifications globally. This ratification has led to enactment of implementing domestic statutes but also to the Convention being applied through court actions brought by litigants on behalf of indigenous peoples.64

These examples are not meant to suggest that ratification of conventions is invariably followed by conforming changes in domestic labor laws. Despite ratification, a country may retain labor laws that are incompatible with the norms set forth in the convention itself.65 For instance, El Salvador ratified Convention 87 in 2006, but the Supreme Court of El Salvador held in 2007 that extending the right of freedom of association to employees in the public service was contrary to an article of the national Constitution. While this article was amended in 2009 to grant public sector workers a basic right to organize, the amended provision excluded from coverage more categories of public sector workers than are recognized as legitimate to

217, 224, http://ojs.urepublicana.edu.co/index.php/revistarepublicana/article/viewFile/214/191 [https://perma.cc/NK4R-T7DZ] (pointing to Articles 9, 53, and 93 of the Colombian Constitution establishing that the ILO Conventions ratified by Colombia are part of its internal rules).

63 See Thomas et al., supra note 57, at 268 (analyzing recent court decisions relying on ILO standards as well as reports from ILO and the supervisory bodies).

64 See Courtis, supra note 59, at 416–32 (discussing decisions from domestic courts in Argentina, Costa Rica, Colombia, Guatemala, and Bolivia).

65 ILO governance does not allow for reservations to ratification by member states; however, flexibility is built into some conventions. For instance, ILO Convention 158, Termination of Employment, leaves to the ratifying state the choice between different methods of implementation in accordance with national law and practice—allowing for its provisions to be made effective by means of collective agreements, arbitration awards, or court decisions, as well as laws or regulations. ILO Convention (No. 158) Concerning Termination of Employment at the Initiative of the Employer, art. 1, June 22, 1982, 1412 U.N.T.S. 159 [hereinafter ILO Convention 158]. Similarly, in ILO Convention 182, Worst Forms of Child Labour, certain practices are defined without qualification (e.g., slavery, sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage, and child pornography), but the definition of “work which, by its nature . . . is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children” is to be determined by national laws or regulations. ILO Convention 182, supra note 5, art. 4.
exclude under the ILO Convention. Similarly, despite Peru’s ratification of Convention 87 back in 1960, the domestic law governing contracts in the non-traditional export sectors undermines freedom of association by allowing companies to employ workers indefinitely on consecutive short-term contracts.

Overall, however, the positive impact of ILO convention ratification as a source for domestic labor laws has been considerable. In part, this may reflect the reality that the ILO regularly provides support and assistance in drafting these labor codes and constitutional amendments, and many if not most reforms are aimed at areas of incompatibility between domestic law and ILO conventions. Moreover, when the pace of domestic law adjustment lags, the ILO supervisory mechanisms have been additionally responsive in various ways.

3.1.2. Supervisory Mechanisms

A second area in which ILO activity influences the evolution of domestic labor law involves the work of the supervisory committees, notably the CEACR, the CAS, and the CFA. These three supervisory committees publish regular reports, responding to submissions from the member states regarding actions taken to comply with ratified conventions as a matter of law and practice. In their constructively critical responses, the three committees consider comments on government submissions received from worker and employer organizations, as well as taking account of any separate

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69 For an overview discussion of these three supervisory bodies, see supra notes 24–27 and accompanying text.
ILO-authorized proceedings brought against member governments by employers’ or workers’ organizations or by other governments.70 The ongoing attention from these supervisory bodies, reflecting concerns about compliance with ILO conventions, lacks a traditional hard-law framework of monetary or other sanctions. Nonetheless, the soft-law impact of the ILO’s longstanding, transparent, and well-publicized reporting system can contribute in meaningful ways to changes in domestic laws or legal requirements.

One illustration involves complaints lodged against Canada before the CFA alleging violations of workers’ freedom of association. In the three decades prior to 1982, there had been a total of sixteen complaints; between 1982 and 2002, there were sixty-two such complaints brought to the CFA.71 During this later period, the Canadian courts were not overly receptive to worker complaints alleging employer interference with organizing and bargaining rights and protections.

The labor movement turned to the ILO, where freedom of association and collective bargaining are considered fundamental human rights.72 When the Canadian Supreme Court substantially modified its prior restrictive interpretations of Canadian law starting in 2001, it referred to the observations of ILO supervisory bodies as interpretive sources.73 Ultimately, the Canadian Supreme Court—in its groundbreaking 2007 and 2015 decisions—found that while the determinations of the CFA and CEACR were not binding, those determinations “shed light on the scope of” the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms as it was intended to apply to both collective bargaining and the right to strike.74 In this respect, domes-

70 See ILO Constitution, supra note 28, art. 24 (authorizing “representations” initiated by worker or employer organizations); id., art. 26 (authorizing “complaints” brought by other member states).
72 See id. at 248.
73 See Judy Fudge, Constitutionalizing Labour Rights in Canada and Europe: Freedom of Association, Collective Bargaining, and Strikes, 68 CURRENT LEGAL PROBS. 267, 280 (2015) (discussing Canadian Supreme Court’s reliance on international labor law in interpreting freedom of association in the labor context); Langille, supra note 50, at 60–61 (reporting that Canadian Supreme Court relied extensively on ILO norms in the 2007 and 2015 decisions).
tic constitutional courts have given ILO supervisory body observations indirect legal effect by utilizing them when interpreting fundamental rights in their own constitutional instruments.\textsuperscript{75}

The Mexican labor movement has similarly raised concerns with the ILO supervisory bodies regarding “contracts of protection.” Mexican law does not require a negotiating party to demonstrate its representativeness of the workers, and as a result these contracts are often made without workers’ support or knowledge.\textsuperscript{76} Worker organizations have complained for many years to the ILO about the prevalence of protection contracts as violating their freedom of association rights under Convention 87, and both the CEACR and the CAS have pressured Mexico to enact the legislative reforms needed to comply with the Convention.\textsuperscript{77} Mexico enacted several labor reforms in 2012 attempting to address these concerns (among others),

\begin{itemize}
  \item See generally Robin Alexander & Dan LaBotz, Mexico’s Labor Reform: A Workers’ Defeat – For Now, NACLA REP. ON AM., at 49, 53 (2014) (noting little hope remains for “positive change from a government that has clearly demonstrated its commitment to pursue neoliberal policies and to attract foreign capital”).
\end{itemize}
including a requirement for greater transparency in collective bargaining agreements and in the identity of negotiating unions, but these reforms have not yet had the desired effect. Since then, the President of Mexico has conceded that contracts of protection are problematic and has vowed to take steps that will address the issue and also to move toward ratification of Convention 98.

In Colombia, the ILO supervisory committees have repeatedly criticized the government for legal shortcomings in the areas of freedom of association and the right to organize. These critical reports and exchanges have been accompanied by an increasing ILO presence in the country, in the form of high-level missions and an ongoing series of contacts. Although a lot remains to be done, especially

78 See ILAB, Public Report Mexico, supra note 76, at 4-6 (noting there often are not online databases to view collective bargaining agreements in Mexico, and when there are, the databases are difficult to access).


80 Between 1998 and 2009, Colombia appeared nine times on the CAS annual twenty-five worst-offenders list with respect to ILO Convention 87, requiring efforts by the Colombian government before the Conference to explain its extended record of serious non-compliance. See Lists of Individual Cases Before the CAS, 1998-2016 (on file with the Author and the University of Pennsylvania Journal of International Law).

in the area of practices and implementation, there have been changes in law—notably a 2011 reform of the criminal code, covering employers that undermine the right to organize and bargain collectively—82—and a 2012 executive decree substantially expanding collective bargaining rights for public sector employees.83 And, in Costa Rica, following identification of serious noncompliance with Convention 98 over a number of years,84 some reform of labor procedures has been reported since 2010.85

While these illustrations all relate to Conventions 87 and 98, there also are numerous instances where governments have made substantial changes in domestic law following supervisory body pressure to comply with other fundamental conventions.86 Yet, as the examples from Colombia and Costa Rica make clear, the monitoring of ILO supervisory bodies may yield, at best, incremental

Section 3.2.2., some of this more aggressive monitoring arose in connection with the 2007 Free Trade Agreement between the United States and Colombia. Id. at 357.

82 See Villareal, supra note 81, at 381.


84 Between 1999 and 2010, Costa Rica appeared seven times on the CAS annual twenty-five worst-offenders list with respect to ILO Convention 98, requiring continuing efforts by its government before the Conference to explain its record of serious non-compliance. See Lists of Individual Cases Before the CAS, supra note 80.

85 See CEACR, 2014 Rep., supra note 83, at 87–89 (providing Observation on Costa Rica and ILO Convention 98); Law No. 9343, 25 January 2016 (Costa Rica), http://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/ELECTRONIC/101727/122702/F836437510/ley%209343%20COSTA%20RICA.pdf [https://perma.cc/Y2VA-QSMK] (amending Costa Rican Labour Code to add protections on right to strike and right to collective bargaining that respond to and better comport with ILO norms.); see also Questionnaire Reply from Costa Rica to Author Preparing for Regional Congress 3 (translated Sept. 14, 2016) (on file with Author); E-mail from Prof. Fernando Bolanos to Author (Sept. 27, 2016) (on file with Author).

changes in law following many years of persistent review. Indeed, such supervisory vigilance sometimes fails to result in any meaningful changes in domestic labor laws to comply with ratified conventions.

In Guatemala, for instance, ILO committees have regularly sought to persuade the government to enact legislative reforms addressing problems of nonconformity with Conventions 87 and 98. Legislative issues raised by the CEACR over the years include restrictions on the freedom to establish labor organizations, limitations on the freedom to elect trade union leaders, restrictions on access to trade union rights for public sector workers, and limitations on the right to strike. Although the legislature and the Ministry of Labour are now more actively considering ILO recommendations for reform, in a dialogue that includes worker and employer groups, the requested reforms have not yet been enacted.

Moreover, in Bolivia, a 2014 law kept the official minimum working age at fourteen—as required under Convention 138—but permitted children to work at age ten, provided they are supervised by a parent and are attending school, and to work at age twelve under contract, again subject to parental authorization and school attendance. Bolivia is the only nation that approves legal employment at such young ages. Children working regularly make up as

87 Between 1999 and 2016, Guatemala appeared on the CAS annual twenty-five-worst-offenders list, on thirteen occasions for ILO Convention 87 and on three occasions for ILO Convention 98. No other country in the Americas matches such a record of noncompliance for these two freedom-of-association-based fundamental conventions. Lists of Individual Cases Before the CAS, supra note 80.


89 CEACR, 2010 Rep., supra note 88, at 71; see van Roozendaal, supra note 88, at 26 (summarizing recent reports from U.S. Labor and State Departments and Cingranelli-Richards (“CIRI”) Human Rights Data project).

much as 35% of the Bolivian workforce, and over half are under the age of fourteen, often laboring in dangerous occupations such as sugar cane harvesting and underground mining. In addition, about 40% of children enrolled in school are not attending, with poverty and indigenous status the most important factors accounting for their failure to attend.

Child labor laws are notoriously difficult to monitor and enforce in practice, because so much of child labor is performed in the informal economy. The ILO continues to devote considerable attention to the challenges posed by the informal economy for the rights of workers, including the challenge of abolishing child labor. Still,
even with these practical challenges, Bolivia’s 2014 statute, tolerating legal employment at ages ten to thirteen, undermines the commitment to Convention 138 as a matter of law—as distinct from practice.

3.1.3. Partnering Efforts.

A final area of direct and substantial ILO influence on the development of domestic laws is the ILO’s partnering efforts with different governments to provide education, training, and technical assistance. These partnerships can facilitate the government’s efforts to impose domestic protections—sometimes through actual changes in the law and often through changes in domestic legal practices.

One example of a partnership effort was in Brazil, where in 2008 the ILO began a four-year program to help end child labor in the state of Bahia.\(^95\) The objectives of the $4.9 million project included: expanding the knowledge base about child labor; strengthening political and institutional frameworks for the prevention of child labor; increasing the capacity of public and private actors to help eradicate child labor in Bahia; and enhancing the state social safety network to victims of child labor.\(^96\)

In addition to achieving its goal of removing or preventing 14,000 children from getting pulled into the worst forms of labor, the program was also effective in bringing together Brazil’s various agencies and initiatives to address the complex problem of child labor. Examples of the collaborative practices observed in Bahia included: (1) the passage of a law restricting state funding and tax incentives for employers that do not adopt decent work practices, notably combating child labor as one of its standards; (2) the expansion of the national child labour eradication program (“PETI”) through an active, house-to-house search effort conducted by a collection of social actors (e.g., education, social assistance, and health care groups) to identify children working or at risk of working; and


\(^96\) Id. at 2.
(3) the surveillance of the Labor Prosecutor’s Office, in conjunction with the State Government of Bahia, to ensure the fulfillment of their obligations to combat child labor.

A second example is in Chile, where, despite ratification by the year 2000 of the two core child labor conventions and the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child, progress has been slow in both law and practice. Since 2002, the Chilean Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare has partnered with the ILO on projects to assess the magnitude and characteristics of child and adolescent labor, in an effort to educate civil servants and construct policies that will eradicate child labor and assure adequate working conditions for adolescents. The initial survey in 2003 and a second survey conducted in 2012 each identified over 100,000 children and adolescents working in unacceptable conditions. These national surveys, and the dialogue they created between ILO specialists and government officials, have helped focus attention on developing a stronger enforcement process in Chile, although much work remains to be done.

A further illustration of ILO partnering efforts involves Nicaragua, specifically the Better Work Nicaragua program launched in

97 Id. at 4.
100 See ILO, CHILD LABOUR IN FIGURES, supra note 99, at 10–11. “Unacceptable work” is defined as children working below age twelve; from twelve to fourteen, if the work interferes with their school attendance and studying and/or exceeds thirteen hours a week; or from fifteen to seventeen, if the work interferes with school attendance and exceeds twenty hours per week. Id.
101 See generally César F. Rosado Marzán, Punishment and Work Compliance: Lessons from Chile, 29 HOFSTRA LAB. & EMP. L. J. 343 (2012) (calling for more participatory and cooperative regulatory processes and the use of persuasive as well as punitive enforcement orientations in order to obtain better compliance results).
2011 by the Nicaraguan government and the Nicaraguan Association of Textile Manufacturing.\(^{102}\) The Better Work program is a collaborative effort around the world, catalyzed by the ILO and the International Finance Corporation, to realize workers’ rights in the garment industry by educating workers and influencing the laws and policies of governments and businesses. The annual reports for Nicaragua have been able to corroborate government findings of progress to root out child labor and protect freedom of association, although these reports also have uncovered instances of noncompliance with Conventions 87 and 98.\(^{103}\)

A final recent example of partnering efforts involves El Salvador, which in October of 2015 became part of an EU-funded ILO pilot program to strengthen the capacity of national public administrations to apply the eight fundamental ILO conventions.\(^{104}\) This program, which is tied to EU trade preferences for the identified countries, serves as a transition to considering the role of trade agreements when promoting changes in domestic labor laws.


Importantly, trade-agreement-related changes may also involve a role for the ILO. That role may be in the form of ILO technical assistance and support during the negotiation or monitoring of trade labor provisions. Additionally, it is often because the labor provisions include linkages to ILO norms.

3.2. ILO Norms and Trade Agreements

Prior to the North American Agreement on Labor Cooperation (“NAALC”), which is a side agreement to NAFTA, in the early 1990s, bilateral and regional trade agreements did not contain labor provisions. This reflected a widespread view – particularly from exporting countries – that the challenge of securing labor standards protections from a trading partner had little to do with negotiating for the reduction of trade barriers between nations.105 This mindset has changed dramatically in the past two decades. On a global scale, the number of free trade agreements (“FTAs”) containing labor provisions increased from four in 1995 to seventy-six as of December 2015; nearly half of them came into existence after 2008.106 In the Americas, the United States has played a pivotal role in negotiating

105 Outside this negotiated context, the United States’ GSP regime requires the President to consider – when designating a country as a beneficiary – whether that country is “taking steps” to accord its workers internationally recognized workers’ rights. See William A. Douglas et al., An Effective Confluence of Forces in Support of Workers’ Rights: ILO Standards, U.S. Trade Laws, and NGOs, 26 HUM. RTS. Q. 273, 276 (2004). The United States’ GSP regime is a recognized exception to the WTO Most Favored Nation principles that essentially prohibits differential tariff treatment between WTO members. See Kevin Kolben, Integrative Linkage: Combining Public and Private Regulatory Approaches in the Design of Trade and Labor Regimes, 48 HARV. INT’L L.J. 203, 213–14 (2007). The design and inclusion of labor provisions in GSP programs is unilateral (i.e., not subject to negotiation between the United States and the implementing country) and enforcement is completely discretionary on the part of the implementing government. Id. at 215–16. In addition, the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative has at times been less than enthusiastic about monitoring and enforcing the GSP. See Douglas et al., supra at 277.

these provisions—in regional trade agreements like the Central American Free Trade Agreement (“CAFTA”)\(^\text{107}\) and the controversial proposed Trans-Pacific Partnership (“TPP”)\(^\text{108}\) as well as bilateral agreements with Chile (2003), Peru (2006), Colombia (2012), and Panama (2012).

3.2.1. Positive Elements of Linkage to ILO Norms.

As a party to most FTAs in the Americas,\(^\text{109}\) the United States is persistent about including a commitment to international standards on labor rights. This persistence is primarily the result of legislative branch pressure. Congress has been generally uninterested in ratifying ILO standards for domestic application,\(^\text{110}\) but since the Trade Act of 2002, Congress has required that U.S. trade agreements aim


\(^{108}\) This 2015 agreement covers twelve countries—including the United States, Canada, Chile, Mexico, and Peru in the Americas. President Obama was influential in negotiating the TPP, but in January 2017, President Trump declared that the United States would not join the agreement. Peter Baker, Trump Abandons Trans-Pacific Partnership, Obama’s Signature Deal, N.Y. TIMES (Jan. 23, 2017), https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/23/us/politics/tpp-trump-trade-nafta.html?r=0 [https://perma.cc/U4DN-8VT6].

\(^{109}\) Canada has separate bilateral agreements with some countries, e.g., Canadian Agreement on Labour Cooperation with Peru (2009) and Colombia (2012). See ILO, Social Dimensions of FTAs, supra note 106, at 33.

“to strengthen the capacity of United States trading partners to promote respect for core labor standards,” and has defined core labor standards to track fundamental ILO norms. Labor provisions of U.S. trade agreements now regularly feature linkages to ILO norms. Thus, for instance, the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA, 2004) and the agreement with Chile (2003) specify that the parties shall “strive to ensure” that labor principles internationally recognized under the ILO 1998 Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (Declaration) are protected by their domestic laws. Labor provisions in more recent U.S. trade agreements with Colombia (2012), Panama (2012), and Peru (2006) go somewhat further, providing that each party shall “adopt and maintain in its statutes and regulations, and practices thereunder,” the rights “as stated in the ILO Declaration.”

These linkages have encouraged countries to push domestic labor law reform toward compliance with international standards, often as a condition of having the agreements ratified in the United States. Accordingly, changes in national labor laws have occurred

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111 Trade Act of 2002, Pub. L. No. 107-210, § 2102(b)(11)(C), 16 Stat. 994 (2002); see also § 2102(c)(2) (requiring the President to establish consultative mechanisms among parties to trade agreements in order to accomplish this objective).

112 See id. at § 2113(6) (defining core labor standards to include protection for freedom of association and collective bargaining, prohibition of forced labor and child labor, and acceptable working conditions regarding wages, hours, and safety and health).


115 See ILO, ASSESSMENT OF LABOUR PROVISIONS, supra note 106, at 3 (discussing effective enforcement of labor rights and reforms through pre-treaty and post treaty ratification requirements).
in response to concerns raised pursuant to these agreements by the U.S. Congress, the U.S. Trade Representative, or the U.S. Labor Advisory Committee. In Peru, apart from the previously described changes to the laws regulating strikes, presidential decrees and existing law have addressed the use of temporary employment and outsourcing arrangements and protection against anti-union activities.116 In Panama, executive decrees and new labor laws created a specific bureau to combat child labor and protect young workers, and also to remove restrictions on collective bargaining rights and the right to strike in the country’s export processing zones.117 And in Colombia, a national labor rights Action Plan was announced in 2011, dealing especially with preventing anti-union violence, limiting the evasion of national laws, and enabling stronger enforcement.118 By 2014 there had been meaningful progress under the Action Plan, including the enactment of laws that strengthen workers’ rights protections and the hiring of hundreds of new labor inspectors, although problems of implementation remain.119

As noted above, the labor provisions in these trade agreements refer not to particular ILO Conventions but to the 1998 ILO Declaration. This is not the place to revisit the debate among legal scholars as to whether the Declaration’s emphasis on a limited number of conventions,120 or its focus on “promot[ing] and realiz[ing] the principles concerning the fundamental rights” in those conventions,
have damaged the efficacy of the traditional ILO supervisory system.\textsuperscript{121} For present purposes, it is enough to describe briefly why the Declaration’s central role in trade agreement labor provisions has contributed constructively to the development of domestic labor laws in Latin America.

First, the promotional focus of the Declaration includes a pragmatic recognition that the ILO has an obligation to help member states achieve compliance with these fundamental principles—by offering technical assistance and advice and by assisting members’ efforts to secure enhanced economic and social development.\textsuperscript{122} This pragmatic approach has encouraged countries to re- elaborate their laws and practices as they seek to conform to the fundamental principles, and relatedly to secure outside financial and technical assistance in support of their efforts.\textsuperscript{123}

Second, the Declaration, through its treatment of economic growth and social justice as closely interrelated, in effect identifies

\textsuperscript{121} Compare Philip Alston & James Heenan, Shrinking the International Labor Code: An Unintended Consequence of the 1998 ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work?, 36 NYU J. INT’L L. & POL. 221, 256–63 (2004) (stating that the Declaration has had detrimental effects on the ILO’s supervising and monitoring mechanisms), with Francis Maupin, Revitalization Not Retreat: The Real Potential of the 1998 Declaration for the Universal Protection of Workers’ Rights, 16 EUR. J. INTL L. 439, 443–44 (2005) [hereinafter Maupin, Revitalization Not Retreat] (contending that the Declaration has helped overcome limitations in the existing supervisory mechanisms), and Brian Langille, Core Labour Rights – The True Story (Reply to Alston), 16 EUR. J. INTL L. 409, 420–27 (2005) [hereinafter Langille, Core Labour Rights] (questioning the validity of the assertion that the Declaration has had mainly negative effects on the supervisory system).


\textsuperscript{123} See Maupin, Revitalization Not Retreat, supra note 121, at 446 (discussing ILO’s obligation to assist member countries in respecting and realizing the fundamental principles and rights through technical cooperation and advisory services); ILO Strategies, supra note 122, at 12–28; Jean-Marc Siroën, Labour Provisions in Preferential Trade Agreements: Current Practice and Outlook, 152 INT’L LAB. REV. 85, 88–89 (2013) (chronicling the Cambodian government’s leverage of quotas to assist ILO monitoring).
the fundamental or core labor rights as human rights. This has helped make the fundamental principles an essential element of the dialogue involving trade and investment arrangements between governments. In addressing how “to ensure that trade liberalization upholds or improves labor standards, rather than put[ting] them at risk,” national leaders contemplating trade agreements have come to appreciate that respect for the Declaration should be part of their efforts, and to worry that they may be disadvantaged if they fail to take sufficient action in this area.

Finally, and relatedly, ILO adoption of the Declaration has been followed by a torrent of new ratifications for these eight fundamental conventions. Historically, ILO member States have ratified the eight conventions at a combined level over 90%, and 30% of those ratifications occurred between 1999 and 2006. The enormous increase in ratifications presumably reflects a combination of strong encouragement and removal of obstacles, due to trade agreement factors; the Declaration’s requirement that States report every year on why they have not ratified and their consideration of the ILO’s

124 ILO Declaration, supra note 122, at pmbl. 5. See Langille, Core Labour Rights, supra note 121, at 419 (discussing the centrality of social justice as the goal and precondition to the creation of durable economies and societies); Janice R. Bellace, The ILO Declaration of Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, 17 INT’L J. COMP. LAB. L. & INDUS. REL. 269, 269–70 (2001) (attributing ILO’s implementation of the ‘Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work’ to the concerted effort to focus on those conventions that protect fundamental human rights).

125 ILO, Social Dimensions of FTAs, supra note 106, at 6.


127 The 187 member states could ratify up to 1496 times for the eight fundamental conventions. Author calculations based on ILO website data indicate a combined 1365 ratifications for the fundamental conventions; 408 of these occurred between 1999 and 2006. See also Kahn-Nisser, supra note 31, at 525 (reporting on the impact of the Declaration in forty-five studied European countries: thirty-nine of forty-five had ratified seven or eight of the fundamental conventions by 2002, compared with seventeen countries in 1998, twenty-four in 1999, thirty in 2000, and thirty-six in 2001).
offer of technical and financial assistance;\textsuperscript{128} and perhaps even a concern that the ILO might begin to supervise the Declaration.\textsuperscript{129}

3.2.2. Limitations on the Linkage to ILO Norms.

Notwithstanding this elevation of ILO norms in the labor provisions of trade agreements, the impact on domestic labor laws from such trade agreement provisions may be somewhat limited. One important factor is that trade agreement labor provisions are usually drafted to avoid a specific commitment to compliance with ILO conventions. Over 70\% of trade-related labor provisions make reference to ILO instruments, but as noted above, the vast majority of these incorporations are made explicitly and exclusively to the 1998 Declaration, not to particular Conventions.\textsuperscript{130} The labor provisions language in recent U.S. trade agreements involving the Americas—including the now-shelved TPP—includes a footnote stating unequivocally that the parties’ obligations to adopt and maintain practices consistent with ILO norms “refer only to the ILO Declaration.”\textsuperscript{131} The language creating linkage to ILO norms has been strengthened from “strive to ensure” to “adopt and maintain,”\textsuperscript{132} but the reference point remains the Declaration rather than the underlying Conventions.

Although inclusion of the Declaration has been beneficial in certain broad ways previously described, its use as a reference point is problematic from the standpoint of domestic labor law reform. For a start, the exact scope and meaning of the Declaration are unclear.

\textsuperscript{128} See ILO Declaration, \textit{supra} note 122, art.3, annex II.B.1.-3. (providing assistance to member countries through operational and budgetary resources to attain objectives of the convention).

\textsuperscript{129} See id., annex II.-III. (stipulating annual follow-up with member countries that have not ratified all the fundamental conventions).

\textsuperscript{130} ILO, \textit{Assessment of Labour Provisions, supra} note 106, at 2; ILO, \textit{Social Dimensions of FTAs, supra} note 106, at 107 (reporting that only 15\% of all agreements with labor provisions refer specifically to ILO fundamental conventions).


\textsuperscript{132} See \textit{supra} notes 113-14 and accompanying texts.
The drafting history indicates that a number of governments as well as the ILO legal advisor described the Declaration as “refer[ring] to adherence to principles and values and not to specific Conventions,”133 a distinction that invites questions as to its precise or definitive content.134 Further, a commitment to principles appears less binding than a commitment to adhere to Conventions that a state has ratified. Because the Declaration applies universally to all member states as an aspect of ILO membership, including member states that have not ratified some or many of the fundamental conventions, it cannot obligate members to uphold all the standards in these eight Conventions.135

A related consideration is that the 1998 Declaration is not subject to monitoring by the ILO supervisory bodies in the way that Conventions are. The absence of close and continuing interpretive guidance from these supervisory bodies means that it is more difficult to achieve consistency of meaning for the principles set forth in the Declaration. This, in turn, invites and may even demand more decentralized interpretations of the international norms, perhaps effectively diminishing their strength as legal standards, or “law.”136

I do not mean to suggest that ILO supervisory positions constraining the meaning or scope of Conventions are consistently followed by all national courts. Some conventions, perhaps especially those drafted and promulgated as relatively general texts, have given rise to good faith differences in interpretation at the national level.137


134 Id. at 1047, 1049, 1074–1076; ILO, Social Dimensions of FTAs, supra note 106, at 107.

135 Cabin, supra note 133, at 1074–75.


Further, the increased use of fundamental ILO Conventions by private actors as well as governments may make it more difficult to maintain a coherent interpretive practice regarding these conventions. And the recent questions raised by the ILO Employers Group regarding the right to strike indicate that prevailing CEACR and CFA interpretations are susceptible to challenge from inside the tripartite governing structure.

Nonetheless, the current levels of difference or disagreement about how the textual language of Conventions should be applied

Convention 87, the right to strike belongs to the organization and not the individual), with Corte Suprema de Justicia [C.S.J.] [Supreme Court], 8 marzo 2016, “Actionline Chile c. Claudio Yutronic Rojas y Rodrigo Carmona Millanao,” Rol de la causa: 28919-2015 (Chile) (on file with Author) (rejecting the position taken by employer parties in reliance on ILO Convention 87, that the right to strike belongs only to organizations). With respect to the right to strike, the ILO supervisory bodies' interpretations of ILO Convention 87 on this issue may be capacious enough to support national laws that point in either direction—laws protecting the collective right to industrial action through trade unions or workers’ organizations as well as laws recognizing that strikes by individual workers may be part of freedom of association rights under the Convention. See generally ILO, FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION: DIGEST OF DECISIONS AND PRINCIPLES OF THE FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION COMMITTEE OF THE GOVERNING BODY OF THE ILO ¶¶ 520, 524 (5th ed. 2006).


can be understood as fairly characteristic of rule-of-law regimes at both national and international levels. In this regard, the debates and controversies about Convention interpretations that have been developed over decades by ILO supervisory bodies are occurring against a background of stability and legitimacy emanating from the ILO supervisory structure, which includes the CAS as well as the CEACR and CFA. Such a background is unlikely to be comparably established with respect to the scope and meaning of the Declaration.

3.2.3. Limitations Due to the Architecture of Trade Agreement Labor Provisions.

Apart from the challenge of requiring commitment to ILO principles (as distinct from ILO Conventions), certain structural aspects of the labor provisions have impeded efforts to incorporate international norms into domestic labor law. First, these trade agreements follow the state-focused “enforce your own labor laws” model, established under the North American Agreement on Labor Cooperation (“NAALC”) that was part of NAFTA. Standard labor provision language provides that a party “shall not fail to effectively enforce its labor laws . . . through a sustained or recurring course of action or inaction, in a manner affecting trade or investment between the Parties . . . .” But the parties also retain the right to exercise reasonable discretion regarding regulatory and resource-allocation matters, including options for enforcement among the fundamental labor rights articulated earlier. This approach is at one level understandable given considerations of sovereignty and the unequal

141 U.S.-Peru Agreement, supra note 114, art. 17.3.1(a); CAFTA, supra note 113, art. 16.2.1(a).
142 U.S.-Peru Agreement, supra note 114, art. 17.3.1(b); CAFTA, supra note 113, art. 16.2.1(b).
resources available across states for enactment, enforcement, and dispute-settlement purposes. Nonetheless, the internalized state-action, state-sanctions model means that labor rights provisions in trade agreements do not benefit from serious transnational oversight.\(^{143}\) Thus, for instance, the United States may draw attention to the prevalence of children working on farms in Peru, in violation of national laws and Convention 138.\(^ {144}\) However, the United States has not ratified Convention 138, and laws in the United States allow children to work on family-owned farms, or on small farms regardless of the hazards involved.\(^ {145}\)

In addition, violations require a showing that the failure to adopt or maintain ILO fundamental principles has been done “in a manner affecting trade or investment between the parties.”\(^ {146}\) This language appears to subordinate labor law protections to mercantile law and transnational mercantile interests. Even willful violations of statutory or constitutional provisions that protect freedom of association or prohibit child labor do not warrant intervention under the trade agreement unless it is proven that the violation is directly impacting free trade.

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\(^{143}\) See Kolben, supra note 105, at 221–22 (discussing criticisms of bilateral and regional trade agreements due to “weakness of the enforce-your-own-labor-law standard”); Stroën, supra note 123, at 88–90 (contrasting U.S. bilateral agreements that focus on enforcement of one’s own labor legislation, and Canadian bilateral agreements that give precedence to compliance with domestic legislation over ratification of ILO conventions, with 1999 bilateral textile agreement between United States and Cambodia, which expired in 2005, where ILO was assigned to carry out workplace inspections).


\(^{145}\) See Fair Labor Standards Act, 29 U.S.C. § 213(1)(A)(iii) (exempting children of any age working on their family-owned farm); OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY & HEALTH ADMIN. [OSHA], U.S. DEP’T OF LABOR, POLICY CLARIFICATION ON OSHA’S ENFORCEMENT AUTHORITY ON SMALL FARMS (2014), https://www.osha.gov/dep/enforcement/policy_clarification_small_farms.html [https://perma.cc/BG85-9DKX] (exempting small farms with ten or fewer non-family employees from enforcement activities). To be sure, United States or international trade unions could comment to CEACR with respect to hazardous work covered under ILO Convention 182, which the United States has ratified. But any follow up would be between the United States and the ILO, not within a bilateral or regional trade agreement.

\(^{146}\) U.S.-Colom. Agreement, supra note 114, art. 17.2 n.2; U.S.-Pan. Agreement, supra note 114, art.16.2 n.2; U.S.-Peru Agreement, supra note 114, art.17.2 n.1; TPP Agreement, supra note 131, art. 19.3 n.4.
Finally, trade agreement labor provisions typically provide for a three-stage process of enforcement: complaints addressed through consultations between governments; followed by an intermediate stage of non-binding recommendations that may involve an independent experts’ panel; and ultimately a final stage of arbitration and possible sanctions. Disputes involving labor provisions almost never get past the initial stage of consultation between governments. Perhaps as a result of the lengthy and inconclusive resolution process, complaints filed under the NAALC declined significantly after 1998, and there have been relatively few complaints filed under the other trade agreements. Complaints that have been filed primarily involve freedom of association—including violence against trade unionists, state interference in internal union affairs, and the failure to enforce domestic labor laws involving freedom of association and collective bargaining. There have also been complaints alleging violations of child labor laws.

A recurring problem with the dispute resolution mechanisms in these agreements is that while trade unions and their supporters can file complaints and denounce failures to act on alleged interference with fundamental labor rights, what happens to the complaint—how hard to push a case forward or whether to push at all—is completely under government control. Governments generally would prefer to negotiate diplomatic solutions with their trading partners behind closed doors, rather than allow a more public airing of possibly serious violations of domestic laws that are intended to em-

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147 See, e.g., North American Agreement on Labor Cooperation, art. 27-41, 1, September 13, 1993, 32 I.L.M. 1499 (stating the mechanism for dispute resolution); CAFTA, supra note 113, art.16.6 (stating the mechanism for cooperative labor consultations between parties); U.S.-Chile Agreement, supra note 113, art.18.6 (stating the mechanism for cooperative consultations between parties); U.S.-Colom. Agreement, supra note 114, art.17.7; U.S.-Peru Agreement, supra note 114, art.17.7 (providing the mechanism for cooperative labor consultation between parties).
149 Id. at 44.
150 Id. at 50–51.
151 See id. at 51–52 (discussing complaints filed against Guatemala (2008); Costa Rica (2010); Peru (2010); and Honduras (2012)).
152 See id. at 51–52 (discussing complaints against Dominican Republic (2011) and Honduras (2012)).
brace international norms. In more than twenty years of trade agreement labor provisions in the Americas, only a single case has reached the final dispute resolution stage. Nine years after a complaint was filed against the Guatemalan government, an arbitral decision was recently issued—finding a violation of domestic labor laws but no persuasive proof of trade impact.154

Sanctions are not a panacea for protecting fundamental labor rights enshrined in international norms. A trade agreement penalty clause for violation of child labor laws would similarly require establishing a causal link between violation of the national law and economic injury experienced by an industry in the receiving country.155 Moreover, once establishing the link, any penalty substantial enough to have a deterrent effect, such as either withdrawing trade benefits or a severe fine, could well cause more immediate harm to workers in the affected country (e.g., through lost jobs) than to the offending government or the perpetrating employers.156 One could argue that trade sanctions should not target the country as a whole

154 A complaint filed in 2008 under CAFTA by six Guatemalan unions and the AFL-CIO alleged serious and repeated failures by the Guatemalan government to enforce its labor laws, primarily related to freedom of association. The United States called for an arbitral panel in 2011, which was put on hold following an agreement in 2013 on an “action plan,” but the United States again requested a panel in 2015. In June 2017, the panel ruled against the United States. Andrew Wallender, United States Labor Dispute Failure Prompts Calls for NAFTA Changes, BLOOMBERG BNA: DAILY LABOR REPORT (June 29, 2016, 6:01PM), https://convergenceapi.bna.com/ui/content/articleStandalone/247183204000000001/388272?itemGuid=de67db2-20c6-49d2-bb5e-7e2852289bca [https://perma.cc/JZ5C-K6WM]. See OFFICE OF THE U.S. TRADE REPRESENTATIVE, EXEC. OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT, IN THE MATTER OF GUATEMALA – ISSUES RELATING TO OBLIGATIONS UNDER ARTICLE 16.2.1(A) OF THE CAFTA-DR, ¶ 594 (2017), http://trade.gov/industry/ tas/Guatemala%20%20%E2%80%93%20Obligations%20Under%20Article%2016-2-1(a)%20of%20the%20CAFTA-DR%20%20June%20%202017.pdf [https://perma.cc/8MNQ-FH6A] (“The United States has proven that at eight worksites and with respect to [seventy-four] workers Guatemala failed to effectively enforce its labor laws by failing to secure compliance with court orders, but not that these instances constitute a course of inaction that was in a manner affecting trade. The United States has not proven sufficient failures to adequately conduct labor inspections to constitute a course of action or inaction.”).

155 See supra note 146 and accompanying text.

or an entire industry, but only the offending company or companies.\textsuperscript{157} And in some national settings, a combination of positive incentives and more accurate information about working conditions might yield better results than the threat of negative consequences for noncompliance.\textsuperscript{158}

But whether incentives for compliance are positive or negative, if complaining parties (e.g., labor unions and employers) could continue to participate in and influence the process, one result might be a more sustained interest in the capacity of trade agreements to promote adherence to international labor norms. Importantly, the successes of the ILO supervisory system are illustrative in this regard. Although they lack authority to impose monetary or other sanctions, ILO supervisory mechanisms feature a more transparent, ongoing, and participatory process. This process—devoted to reporting and monitoring and supplemented by the provision of technical assistance—engages social partners as well as governments in the effort to achieve compliance with labor norms.

Further, the primary focus of the implementation process is compliance with ratified international law, rather than a government’s capacity or willingness to follow its already existing domestic laws. In this setting, conforming changes in national labor law can flow from the public dialogue involving a country that feels obliged to respond to compliance concerns raised by the CEACR or CFA, or to address in person other governments—along with worker and employer members—before the CAS when those supervisory actors are searchingly critical of the country’s violations of a ratified convention.\textsuperscript{159}

4. ILO NORMS AND DOMESTIC LABOR PRACTICES

As discussed in Section 3, ILO norms have had a meaningful impact on the development of domestic labor laws in the Americas

\textsuperscript{157} See Siroën, \textit{supra} note 123, at 98.

\textsuperscript{158} See Polaski, \textit{supra} note 156, at 21–22.

\textsuperscript{159} For discussion on some of the twenty-five worst cases, see generally ILC, \textit{Committee on the Application of Standards at the Conference: Extracts from the Record of Proceedings}, at 56–62, ILC104 (2015) (El Salvador); \textit{id.} at 62–68 (Guatemala); \textit{id.} at 71–78 (Mexico); \textit{id.} at 84–94 (Venezuela); \textit{id.} at 124–28 (Bolivia).
since the early 1990s. Legislatures and courts have adjusted or expanded workplace rights relating to child labor and freedom of association, relying on a diverse set of interactions with those ILO norms: (1) ratification of Conventions; (2) response to the supervisory mechanisms; (3) support gleaned from training and technical assistance; and (4) commitments undertaken through trade agreements. Progress has been uneven as between countries, and the relative contribution from trade agreement commitments may be more debatable, but the cumulative changes have been quite substantial over three decades.

It remains true, of course, that evolutionary changes in labor laws do not always translate to the same degree into progress on the ground. One labor scholar has recently observed that a decade after pro-worker reforms in many Latin American countries, labor unions continue to lose members, and their strength is shrinking. Some of this dissonance between law and practice is due to extrinsic factors such as those mentioned in the United States context—global competition, the pace of technology, and political opposition to unions.

But an important factor limiting the impact of labor law reform is the lack of adequate enforcement. Labor laws in the Americas are increasingly influenced by international norms. However, such laws cannot function effectively as part of a rule-of-law regime without an adequate means to detect violations, a system of meaningful punishments, and a commitment to apply both the detection and sanctions aspects with some degree of rigor. Section 4.1. addresses certain challenges relating to the implementation process for laws sourced increasingly from international norms, and Section 4.2. briefly discusses some serious instances of failure to comply with child labor and freedom of association laws that are on the books.

4.1. Dueling Frameworks and Resources for Enforcement

Scholars have observed important differences between labor inspection approaches undertaken in the United States versus in most

\[\text{See Anner, supra note 9, at 150.}\]

\[\text{See supra note 4.}\]
Latin American countries. In the U.S. legal system, inspection is specialized in that different regulations are administered by different agencies or divisions within an agency. Moreover, the command-and-control enforcement approach is geared to sanctions for noncompliance, especially civil damages or fines, and sometimes criminal penalties as well. By contrast, labor inspection systems in Latin America, which are derived from Franco-Iberian roots, are more unified. The entire labor code is, in principle, administered by a single agency, and the inspector’s remit covers every aspect of the establishment being examined. The Latin American approach is also more conciliatory in that the inspector’s role is to initiate and oversee a process that can bring about reasonable compliance with the law — through advice and consultations perhaps more than fines and penalties.

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162 See Schrank & Piore, supra note 9, at 10 (contrasting specialized agency inspections and use of penal sanctions in U.S. system of labor market regulation with a more unified and conciliatory approach to inspection in Latin America); see also Andrew Schrank, Rewarding Regulation in Latin America, 41 Pol. & Soc’y 487, 489 (2013) (“[H]ighlighting the prospects for rewarding regulation — i.e., regulation that redounds to the benefit of the regulated as well as society as a whole — in a number of Latin American countries and issue areas.”).


164 See, e.g., 29 U.S.C. § 216(b) (providing civil penalties for back pay and liquidated damages for minimum wage and overtime work violations); § 216(e) (providing civil fines for child labor violations); § 216(a) (providing criminal fines or imprisonment for specified willful violations of § 215). 29 U.S.C. § 666(a)–(d) (providing civil penalties up to $70,000 per violation); § 666(e)–(g) (providing criminal penalties for violations). 42 U.S.C. §1981a(b)(1)–(2) (providing compensatory and punitive damages for intentional discrimination violating Title VII or ADA).

165 See Schrank & Piore, supra note 9, at 10.

166 See Coslovsky, supra note 12, at 172–173 (discussing alternative labor inspection methods used by Brazilian inspectors to ensure compliance); Michael J. Piore & Andrew M. Schrank, Transnational Integration and Labor Market Regulation
Some observers contend that the Latin American approach is appropriate for its time and place: Generalist inspectors are in a position to establish realistic priorities, negotiate deals with those priorities in mind, and produce acceptable levels of compliance while operating within constrained budgets.\footnote{167} The underlying rationale is that lack of compliance with labor laws is in large part a function of \textit{inability} to comply or \textit{ignorance} of how to manage competitively with better labor standards, and addressing these deficiencies of resources and knowledge requires a more collaborative approach to enforcement.\footnote{168}

On the other hand, it may well be that many employers do not comply because they are \textit{unwilling} to do so: Their competitive advantage stems in important respects from exploiting the realities of low labor standards. Under such circumstances, a vigorously watchful labor inspection system becomes more of a priority. And unfortunately, there is ample evidence of instances where labor inspectorates in Latin America lack sufficient training and expertise, experience large-scale inefficiencies, or are prone to corruption.\footnote{169}
Disagreement over the optimal framing approach to labor inspection is paralleled by difficulties in interpreting the available evidence on changes in enforcement resources. When examining available data that compares labor inspection activities across Latin American countries, there is a broad correlation between increased inspector resources in recent years and the existence of a trade agreement with the United States.

![Inspectors Per Worker](image)

**Figure 1**

Most Latin American countries ranking above average in the ratio of inspectors to workers have signed trade agreements with the United States. El Salvador, Panama, Chile, Costa Rica, and the Dominican Republic are five of the six top ranked nations among eighteen Latin American countries surveyed in 2010–11.\(^{170}\) Four of these to comply with the provisions, ILO Convention 81 has not been ratified by Canada, Mexico, Chile, Nicaragua, St. Kitts & Nevis, St. Lucia, and the United States. Labour Inspection Convention, supra note 33.

\(^{170}\) See Piore & Schrank, supra note 166, at 90 (illustrating graphically labor law enforcement resources in Latin America). El Salvador, Costa Rica, and the Dominican Republic are members of CAFTA, while Chile and Panama have bilateral agreements. See supra notes 107–08 and accompanying text. The sixth country is Uruguay, which does not have a trade agreement with the United States.
five, along with trade agreement signatories Peru and Colombia, experienced an enormous increase in their enforcement resources between the late 1980s and 2009. These improvements reflect, in part, the impact of cooperative activities with the U.S. Labor Department to build capacity pursuant to the trade agreements.

At the same time, this interesting data can be somewhat misleading. Several countries that rank high in terms of inspectors-per-worker—El Salvador, Chile, and Guatemala—are also known for failures to comply with ratified ILO conventions and their own domestic laws. Brazil, which ranks comparatively lower in terms of inspectors-per-worker, has a substantially better track record for implementation. Additionally, two countries ranking with or below Brazil in terms of inspectors-per-worker—Peru and Colombia—also have trade agreements with the United States. Further, the data on inspectors-per-worker do not adequately capture the depth or rigor with which inspections take place. For instance, among five Central American countries with roughly an equal number of inspectors-per-worker, the number of annual inspection actions per inspector

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171 See Murillo et al., supra note 11, at 806 tbl.31.3 (displaying increase in enforcement resources as the following: Chile 185%, El Salvador 175%, Dominican Republic 100%, Panama 80%, Colombia 100%, and Peru 135%). The authors measured changes in the ratio of labor inspectors to the economically active population. Id.

172 See ILO, ASSESSMENT OF LABOUR PROVISIONS, supra note 106, at 3, 41, 65-66, 74 (describing examples of United States using trade agreement provisions to help build capacity in Cambodia, Jordan, Colombia, and Honduras).


174 See, e.g., CEACR, 2016 Rep., supra note 77, at 227-28 (welcoming government information from national household surveys indicating 59% decrease in child labor from 1992 to 2012); ILO, Business and Child Labour, supra note 36, at 33–59 (discussing wide range of business initiatives to end child labor in Brazil); CAS, Dynamic and Impact, supra note 86, at 75–81 (discussing Brazil’s substantial changes in law and practice from 1995 to 2010 to comply with ILO Convention 111 on nondiscrimination).
ranges from 427 to 55, a difference of almost 8 to 1.

**Inspectors Per Worker**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>El Salvador</th>
<th>Dom Rep</th>
<th>Costa Rica</th>
<th>Honduras</th>
<th>Guatemala</th>
<th>Nicaragua</th>
<th>Peru</th>
<th>Brazil</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inspectors</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>411</td>
<td>2,949</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inspection Actions</td>
<td>29,728</td>
<td>36,818</td>
<td>14,385</td>
<td>15,277</td>
<td>13,131</td>
<td>6,681</td>
<td>84,995</td>
<td>334,625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actions per Inspector</td>
<td>186.67</td>
<td>427.67</td>
<td>154.68</td>
<td>127.31</td>
<td>15.18</td>
<td>7.17</td>
<td>264.61</td>
<td>113.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Workforce</td>
<td>2,546,696</td>
<td>4,336,454</td>
<td>2,100,289</td>
<td>2,899,155</td>
<td>5,652,786</td>
<td>2,355,120</td>
<td>15,457,249</td>
<td>101,850,665</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 2*

From a broader perspective, it is possible that the increased exposure to international trade in Latin America since the 1980s has subtly encouraged governments to walk back the rigorosity of their labor standards.175 This hypothesis of weakened implementation may reflect that governments faced with global or regional competition for export share yield to pressure to engage in some form of

a race to the bottom regarding labor standards. For reasons of political visibility to the electorate, governments contemplating such a walking-back may be more likely to weaken labor standards by lowering enforcement (“turning a blind eye to noncompliance”) than by ratcheting down existing labor legislation.176

Even presuming some validity to this hypothesis, regional trends in enforcement during the period since 1990 are difficult to decipher; the results seem decidedly mixed by country. One study reported that enforcement resources increased in nine Latin American countries and decreased in eight others between 1985 and 2009.177 Another study showed similarly divergent results, reporting an increase in enforcement resources between the 1990s and 2000s for six countries and a reduction for seven others.178 One way to reach beyond the uncertain empirical record on inspection resources is to consider country-specific instances of noncompliance with ratified Conventions or enacted domestic laws.

4.2. Examples of Gaps between Law and Practice

This section does not purport to be comprehensive; rather, it examines several instances of noncompliance for illustrative purposes. In this regard, it may be somewhat easier to measure progress on child labor legislation and practice (or an absence thereof), given that national data on children in the workforce are collected with some regularity and precision. By contrast, measuring progress on freedom of association laws and practices tends to involve analyses that are less quantitative, and perhaps somewhat more subjective.179

176 Id. Ronconi adds that empirical studies do not find that more openness to international trade results in a greater likelihood of labor law deregulation, but that comparable empirical data is lacking regarding the impact of increased trade on labor law enforcement. See id.

177 See Murillo et al., supra note 11, at 806 (indicating that the largest proportional increases disclosed by the compiled data are in Chile, El Salvador, and Peru; the largest proportional decreases are in Bolivia, Ecuador, and Mexico).

178 See Ronconi, supra note 175, at 95 (reporting an increase in enforcement resources for Argentina, Uruguay, Colombia, Guatemala, Panama, and Peru; and a reduction for Bolivia, Brazil, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Honduras, Mexico, and Paraguay). These results are generally consistent with those from Murillo et al.—perhaps not surprising given that Ronconi, a co-author on the Murillo study, uses a dataset that updates the earlier version. See id. at 91.

179 See Stephanie Barrientos, Gary Gereffi, & Arianna Rossi, Economic and Social Upgrading in Global Production Networks: A New Paradigm for a Changing World, 150
In El Salvador, reports indicate that the Ministry of Labor has not been effective in enforcing the child labor laws that are in place. The government’s focus is almost exclusively on the formal economy although child labor is a far bigger issue in agriculture (especially coffee and sugarcane) and throughout the informal economy. Assessed penalties are insufficient to act as a deterrent, and the number of child workers in the country in 2014 appears at least as large as the number identified in 2001.

The gap between law and practice with respect to freedom of association is also substantial. Both United States and leading NGOs report a range of unlawful employer practices including dismissals for participating in legal strikes or for other attempts to unionize, blacklisting of workers who are former union members, and declaring strikes illegal when they appear to follow domestic law. The
Salvadoran government is reported to contribute to such practices, through legal recognition of employer-controlled unions, support for corrupt labor organizations, and weak enforcement of existing labor laws which in any event include less than adequate penalties for employers who retaliate, as well as labor inspectors who are prone to corruption and bribery.\textsuperscript{183}

Guatemala is another country with a solid record of ILO ratifications and relatively strong protections in its labor code, but a sizable gap between law and practice. The country has a history of employers and governmental authorities engaging in violence against trade unions and workers, including death threats, abduction, torture and murders.\textsuperscript{184} Perhaps unsurprisingly, it has the lowest rate of unionization among seventeen Latin American countries.\textsuperscript{185} Even for workers who are unionized, government policies effective in enforcing labor law, and that it encourages corrupt labor organizations and employer-controlled unions).

\textsuperscript{183} See U.S. DEP’T OF STATE, 2015 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT, supra note 180, at 26 (arguing that the $114 maximum penalty for employers who interfere with the right to strike was not sufficient to deter violations); Johnson, supra note 180, at 169 (quoting from State Department’s 2001 Report stating that government inspectors were prone to bribery);\textsuperscript{184} UNHOLY ALLIANCES, supra note 182 at 8–10 (describing history of ILO raising serious noncompliance concerns with the government through the years).


\textsuperscript{185} See Mark Anner, Meeting the Challenges of Industrial Restructuring: Labor Reform and Enforcement in Latin America, 50 LATIN AM. POL. & SOC’Y 33, 37 (2008) (reporting unionization rate below 2%, compared to rates over 20% in Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Nicaragua; between 11% and 20% in Bolivia, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Honduras, Panama, Venezuela; and between 5% and 10% in Colombia, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, and Peru).
establish registration and support requirements that seriously impede collective bargaining and the right to strike.\(^\text{186}\) Further, child labor is widespread for ages seven to fourteen, mainly in rural areas, and legal protections are difficult to enforce because some three-fourths of the workforce is employed in the informal economy.\(^\text{187}\)

In Mexico, extensive legal protections for freedom of association are in place, reflective of international and domestic legal principles,\(^\text{188}\) but they are far from fully realized in practice. The pervasive control exercised by “official” unions, through contracts of protection and other “sweetheart” arrangements, has undermined the exercise of rights to organize and bargain for independent, democratic workers’ organizations.\(^\text{189}\)

\(^{186}\) See Freedom House, Countries at the Crossroads 2012: Guatemala 8 (2012), https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/Guatemala%20-%20FINAL_0.pdf (“Anti-union policies include a 25 per cent union registration requirement for collective bargaining within a company; a stipulation that strikes need to be supported by 51 per cent of the workforce, as well as a broad definition of the ‘essential services’ sectors within which strikes are barred.”); CEACR, 2015 Rep., supra note 169 (asking the Guatemalan government to amend requirements such as requiring strikes to be called by a majority of the workers instead of a majority of those casting ballots).

\(^{187}\) See Countries at the Crossroads, supra note 186, at 8–9 (reporting on serious shortcomings in administering the rule of law); U.S. Dep’t of Labor, 2014 Findings on Worst Forms of Child Labor: Guatemala 1, https://www.dol.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ilab/reports/child-labor/findings/2014TDA/guatemala.pdf (reporting that one-third of children aged 7 to 14 were either working (e.g., 19.2%) or combining work and school (e.g., 14.6%)); Understanding Children’s Work in Guatemala 2–4 (ILO, UNICEF, & World Bank eds., 2003) (describing prevalence and characteristics of children’s work).

\(^{188}\) See Constitución Política de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos [C.P.] as amended, Diario Oficial de la Federación [DO], 5 de Febrero de 1917, Title VI, art.123 (Mex.); Maria Teresa Guerra & Anna L. Torriente, The NAALC and the Labor Laws of Mexico and the United States, 14 Ariz. J. Int’l & Comp. L. 503, 514–16 (1997) (noting the rights Article 123 of the Mexican Constitution establishes such as a maximum working day of eight hours, paid day of rest, vacation and equal pay for equal work).

Finally, in Peru, despite laws prohibiting child labor, nearly 20 percent of children age six to fourteen are working and not in school.\textsuperscript{190} This very high proportion of noncompliance—three times higher than in Argentina or Colombia and five times higher than in Brazil\textsuperscript{191}—may reflect the challenges of child labor enforcement in rural areas and across the informal economy. Yet it seems that other Latin American countries faced with comparable challenges are achieving substantially better results.\textsuperscript{192}

These examples of sizable gaps between law and practice should not be taken to mean that such gaps are uniformly present or even broadly prevalent. In Brazil, the combined efforts of the national government, the ILO, NGOs, and local businesses have reduced the number of children at work by more than 50 percent since the early 1990s—a removal of nearly five million children from the labor force.\textsuperscript{193} Key elements of the country’s implementation effort were


\textsuperscript{192} Based on Department of Labor data, Guatemala, with 19.2% of children working, not in school, is close to Peru’s results. For discussion of the extent of informality in labor markets across Latin America, see ILO, NONSTANDARD EMPLOYMENT AROUND THE WORLD: UNDERSTANDING CHALLENGES, SHAPING PROSPECTS 60-62, 104 (2016). The South American country closest to Peru in terms of exhibiting a high level of temporary employment contracts as well as informal economy jobs is Ecuador. See id. Yet in 2014, only 2.7% of children age 5 to 14 (75,689) in Ecuador were working and not in school—a proportion less than one-sixth that in Peru. U.S. DEP’T OF LABOR, 2014 FINDINGS ON WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR: ECUADOR 1 (2014), https://www.dol.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ilab/reports/child-labor/findings/2014TDA/ecuador.pdf.

\textsuperscript{193} See CEACR, 2016 Rep., supra note 77, at 227-28 ("The Committee welcomes the Government’s information that the results of the national household surveys from 1992 to 2012 indicated a drastic reduction in child labour from 8.4 million children (between the ages of 5-17 years) in 1992 to 3.51 million children in 2012,”).
the establishment of a specific inspection scheme within the Child Labor Eradication Program, and the registration of hundreds of thousands of families with child labor participants for social and monitoring services.\textsuperscript{194} In Mexico, efforts undertaken since 2000 have resulted in a 40\% decrease in the number of twelve- to fourteen-year-olds working.\textsuperscript{195} In addition to the commitment of public and private actors in the labor law arena, the success stories in these two countries result from more active policies in the area of education as well as a transformation of the economy away from the agricultural sector.\textsuperscript{196}

Further, child labor experience in Canada illustrates that even within a single country, variations in local government practices can be substantial—some essentially consistent with international norms while others depart from those norms.\textsuperscript{197} And the experience indicating a reduction of 4.9 million [59\%] during this period."; del Vecchio, \textit{supra} note 38, at 27 (detailing Brazil’s concerted effort to eradicate child labor since the 1990s through school stipends, labor inspections, special task forces, and the National Forum for the Prevention of Child Labor).

\textsuperscript{194} \textit{See CEACR, 2016 Rep., supra note 77, at 228 ("[T]he fight against child labour in Brazil, through regular inspections and specific programmes for the eradication of child labour, comprises both the formal and informal sectors, including family enterprises."); ILO, Evaluation Summary, \textit{supra} note 95, at 2 ("The project has contributed with methodologies for the process of identification and registration of working boys, girls and adolescents and their families, as well as with the creation of monitoring instruments . . . .")}.


\textsuperscript{196} \textit{See id. at 32–33, 45 (discussing factors in Mexico); ILO, \textit{Business and Child Labour, supra} note 36, at 34 (emphasizing importance of Brazil’s increased access to educational opportunities including free mandatory education for all children between ages four and seventeen).}

\textsuperscript{197} \textit{See BC CHILD AND YOUTH ADVOCACY COALITION, CHILD LABOUR IS NO ACCIDENT: THE EXPERIENCE OF BC’S WORKING CHILDREN 26–28 (2013), http://firstcallbc.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Child-Labour-Is-No-Accident-FirstCall-2013-05.pdf [https://perma.cc/8YEZ-DJS7] (reporting on child labor practices in British Columbia and Alberta that follow lowering of the work-start age to twelve—with parental permission—in those two provinces; the work-start age is fourteen or sixteen in Ontario and Saskatchewan, and several other provinces allow children to work under age fourteen only with detailed restrictions beyond parental permission); Lynette Schultz & Alison Taylor, \textit{Children at Work in Alberta}, 32 CAN. PUB. POL’Y 431, 432–433 (2006) (criticizing lowering the working age in Alberta as contravening principles of international labour agreements). Canada recently ratified ILO Convention 138 in June 2016, and there may be pressure for a more nationally imposed set of requirements and practices going forward.}
of implementing Convention 169 concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples reflects variation among ratifying countries regarding perceived implementation costs—in one very recent instance, costs associated with prior consultations on energy and infrastructure investment projects.198

Overall, the magnitude of gaps between law and practice can be seen at least in part as a function of country-specific factors involving distinctive economic organization, political dynamics, and background cultural elements.199 Accordingly, a satisfactory account of national variations may need to dwell on the saliency of these economic, political, and cultural factors, as well as on larger evolutionary developments across continents or regions.

5. INTERNATIONALIZED LABOR LAW SOURCES IN A BROADER SETTING

Having identified and analyzed an evolution toward reliance on international sources for domestic labor law and, to a lesser extent, labor practices in the Americas, I close by suggesting ways in which this evolution may be understood as consistent with larger patterns in the development of international labor and human rights law.

5.1. Sourcing of International Law by National Governments

Halton Cheadle has concisely noted certain significant obstacles to the direct importation of international labor law into domestic law.200 International labor law tends to be general and flexible in its obligations and focuses on government conduct, whereas domestic


199 These factors are manifested in a lack of resources devoted to enforcement, a lack of will—attributable to politics and/or corruption—or some combination of the two.

laws and regulations are usually more detailed and reticulated and they centrally regulate the conduct of private actors. In addition, approval of labor conventions at the national level may be perceived as a threat to values of federalism, based on the division of authority between national and provincial or local governments in many countries. Finally, the possible adoption of international labor norms through domestic court decisions before those norms have been legislatively approved, or perhaps even debated, raises concerns about the outsized role of a national judiciary, especially in common law countries.

However, as Cheadle also observes, these genuine obstacles hardly operate as absolute barriers to application of international norms in suitable domestic circumstances. Harold Koh has written about the complex processes by which countries come to adopt and comply with international law, including human rights law. In addition to well-recognized motivations stemming from national self-interest and national identity, Koh emphasizes the importance of three distinct procedural elements: "interaction within the transnational legal process, interpretation of international norms, and domestic internalization of those norms as determinants of why nations obey." Each of these elements is importantly present in the international labor law context I have examined.

There is multidimensional interaction with a transnational legal process. Countries are regularly engaged with ILO governance and supervisory mechanisms—through review and ratification of conventions, through exchanges with the CEACR, CAS, and CFA, and

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201 Id. at 351.
202 Id.
203 Id.
204 Id. at 351–62 (discussing various channels through which international law has been adopted in domestic settings—legislation, self-executing provisions, customary international law, and judicial interpretation).
206 See generally Koh, Human Rights Law, supra note 205, at 1407 (discussing obedience related to economic incentives such as trade benefits, and conformity related to a desirable political identity in the global community of nations).
207 Koh, International Law, supra note 205, at 2634; see also Koh, Human Rights Law, supra note 205, at 1399–1400 (identifying the same three-phase process and noting its evolutionary quality).
through partnering efforts involving ILO staff and advisors. This interaction is deepened through countries’ participation in the proliferating number of bilateral and regional trade agreements, almost all of which invoke ILO principles if not ILO standards as attainable goals.

The interpretation of international norms has been conveyed on a provisional basis, initially and continuously through the ILO supervisory bodies—the CEACR, CAS, and CFA—as well as through ILO leadership and staff. Interpretations also have been conveyed on occasion through transnational tribunals, including the European Court of Human Rights, the European Court of Justice, and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. And the internalization of those norms has been accomplished through the efforts of national law-making entities. This has taken place across all three branches of government: statutes embody or assimilate the norms; executive decrees or regulations provide for their implementation; and judicial decisions apply and extend them in the context of national facts and circumstances.

Koh’s approach is not the only explanatory theory that seeks to account for the internalization of international human rights law. Ryan Goodman and Derek Jinks contend that international law may change state behavior through a process they refer to as “acculturation,” and which they distinguish from two recognized social

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208 Under Article 37 of the ILO Constitution, authoritative interpretations of Conventions occur through referral to the International Court of Justice or appointment of a special tribunal. In the absence of such referral or appointment, the CEACR, as part of its “impartial and technical analysis of how the Conventions are applied in law and practice by member States . . . must determine the legal scope, content and meaning of the provisions of the Conventions, [through] opinions and recommendations [that] are non-binding, being intended to guide the actions of national authorities.” CEACR, 2016 Rep., supra note 77, at 9.


210 See Ryan Goodman & Derek Jinks, How to Influence States: Socialization and Int’l Human Rights Law, 54 DUKE L.J. 621, 626 (2004) (“By acculturation, we mean the general process by which actors adopt the beliefs and behavioral patterns of the surrounding culture. This mechanism induces behavioral changes through pressures to assimilate-some imposed by other actors and some imposed by the self.”).
mechanisms for influencing states’ behavior—persuasion and coercion.211 According to Goodman and Jinks, a state may adopt the behavioral norms and policies of a surrounding culture, influenced by social expectations and the perceived conduct of important reference groups. These conformity-induced adjustments in norms are not tantamount to full acceptance of the persuasiveness or legitimacy of a given norm, nor are they based on a calculation of material costs and benefits.212

One might understand the considerable internalization of international labor law in the Americas to be a function of acculturation as distinct from persuasion or coercion. The ripple effect resulting from Convention ratifications across the region is likely to have contributed to a socialized acceptance of ILO norms on child labor and freedom of association.213 At the same time, increasing conformity with ILO norms in law, with a meaningful lag in practice, reflects that states may be less than fully persuaded of the norms’ intrinsic merits or legitimacy. And conformity to those norms is not a function of material cost-benefit assessment. Despite the presence of labor provisions in trade agreements, the costs of noncompliance with ILO norms are likely to be shaming and shunning rather than loss of favorable trade or investment status.

Stepping back, international labor and human rights law is not typically enforced through interstate action. In contrast to agreements focused on commercial trade or arms limitations that have an important element of self-enforcement between states, the direct beneficiaries in ILO conventions are not the governments but third parties.214 For this reason among others, the internalization of international labor law at the domestic level seems incompletely realized when compared to certain other forms of international law. Unlike nations’ willingness to endorse and comply with international treaties governing security and self-defense, or commercial transactions,

211 See id. at 633–38 (describing coercion and persuasion).
212 See id. at 638–55 (describing how acculturation differs from both persuasion and coercion as mechanisms of social influence over States).
213 See Kahn-Nisser, supra note 31.
214 See JACK L. GOLDSMITH & ERIC A. POSNER, THE LIMITS OF INTERNATIONAL LAW 119–27 (2005). As stated supra in notes 22–23 and accompanying text, in a bilateral commercial trade or arms limitation agreement, violation of a provision by one state effectively invites a violation by the other. The same dynamic does not apply when one state violates child labor norms or unlawfully restricts trade union activities.
transnational labor standards have not often been embraced in the same comprehensive or nuanced ways by national governments.

Still, the liberalization of trade and investment—while hardly free from controversy—is perceived by almost all governments to be in their national self-interest. This liberalization has been accompanied in the Americas and elsewhere by a substantially expanded role for ILO norms and ILO supervision, as governments have come to understand that public support for trade and investment requires a fairer distribution of its benefits across entire populations. In recognizing the essential nature of this social dimension, the World Trade Organization, the World Bank, and other transnational bodies dedicated to economic growth have accepted the ILO regime as the primary means to promote decent working conditions and minimize exploitation or abuse of workers. Consequently, more countries view efforts to impose labor protections of their own, through adoption of and compliance with international labor standards, as one of the keys to admission into full-partner nation status. Again, trade agreements play a role in these developments: They attract the appetite and interest of governments and they often lead to increased consciousness about the links between domestic labor laws and international labor standards.

And yet, there remains a meaningful distance between acceptance in law and compliance in practice. The gaps are evident with respect to implementation of both ratified ILO conventions and negotiated labor provisions in trade agreements. That declared commitments to monitoring and enforcement have been incompletely realized indicates that internalization of these norms remains a work in progress.

5.2. Sourcing of International Law by Transnational Corporations

The internalization of international labor law norms reflects contributions from transnational private actors as well as governments, although such contributions are not the focus of this article. In addition to convention ratifications and trade agreements, there are norms of corporate social responsibility (CSR) promulgated in
scores of voluntary codes and ostensibly promoted and implemented by transnational corporations. These codes can be an important reputational asset with consumers and investors, including institutional consumers such as universities and local governments, and institutional investors like public pension funds and socially conscious mutual funds.

CSR codes often embrace the eight fundamental ILO conventions, and they have become more explicit about doing so in recent years. At their strongest, these corporate codes may declare that management “adhere[s] to the eight fundamental conventions of the ILO,” including identifying by name and number Conventions addressed to freedom of association and child labor, and may further state that “where our own principles and regulations are stricter than local legislation, the higher standard applies.” At the same time, transnational corporations often have separate codes for their suppliers, which tend to accord greater protection to supplier employees than their own workers.


217 See Brudney, supra note 138, at 559–67 (reporting on codes of conduct for twenty-seven multinational corporations, including their invocation of ILO Conventions and Principles and their propensity to adopt distinct approaches for suppliers as contrasted with their own employees).


There has been ample criticism of these codes as ineffective or little more than window-dressing. But it is worth noting the parallels between development of the corporate codes, often featuring ILO norms, and the evolution of domestic law sources discussed in Sections 3 and 4 above. Since these codes were launched in the 1990s, their language has become stronger and their scope wider, and they have achieved some modest practical successes.

Part of this strengthening involves attention to ways in which transnational brands can utilize corporate codes to bring pressure on their global supply chains—acting either on their own or pursuant to the recently promulgated United Nations Principles on Business and Human Rights. Further, the codes can be important complements to efforts at the national regulatory level. Private auditors operating in particular sectors of the economy, such as export-processing zones, may mollify (if not liberate) government regulators who must allocate their limited resources among delinquent actors throughout the country. Private and public regulators also can work together—including with ILO involvement—assisting governments that lack the willpower to impose or otherwise effectuate compliance on their own.


223 See Coslovsky, supra note 12, at 172. See also Locke, supra note 103, at 164, 170 (discussing successful efforts in several countries at private enforcement of norms contained in national labor regulations and ILO standards).

224 See, e.g., Mayer & Pickles, supra note 220, at 34–35 (describing Better Work Cambodia program, in which Cambodian export apparel industry operates since...
One might well conclude that the codes are largely ineffective when standing alone, because not adequately monitored or rigorously enforced. This gap between promulgation and compliance echoes in certain respects the distinction between law and practice that is evident when governments have subscribed to international public law norms. At the same time, the endorsement of international labor standards protections by transnational brands raises possibilities for monitoring corporate compliance with those standards through certain types of contractual relationships. These possible relationships notably include agreements between brands and workers that cross national boundaries. In short, the private law codes suggest possibilities for a more horizontal form of internationalized sourcing of labor standards, one that supplements the more vertical country-by-country developments analyzed in Sections 3 and 4.

6. CONCLUSION

There has been a substantial infusion of ILO norms as sources for change in domestic labor law over the past twenty-five years. I have focused on the Americas in this article, but there is ample reason to believe that the trend exists in other parts of the world as well. Change has taken place through the more direct route of

2006 under combination of private self-regulation and national and international public interventions, notably ILO, combining independent monitoring with programs of training and technical assistance); Michael Posner & Justine Nolan, Can Codes of Conduct Play a Role in Promoting Workers’ Rights?, in INTERNATIONAL LABOR STANDARDS: GLOBALIZATION, TRADE, AND PUBLIC POLICY 207, 222–23 (Robert J. Flanagan & William B. Gould eds., 2003) (describing ILO role in monitoring the 1999 U.S.-Cambodia Textile Quota Agreement, specifically implementation of program to improve working conditions in apparel industry in compliance with international labor standards as well as domestic law); Locke, supra note 107, at 166–68 (describing complementary private and public regulation to improve conditions of electronics contract workers in Czech Republic).


226 See Kahn-Nisser, supra note 31, at 525 (reporting that between 1998 and 2002, thirty-nine of the forty-five European countries studied had ratified seven or eight of the eight fundamental ILO conventions, compared with seventeen coun-
ILO convention ratification followed by legislative adjustment, and through the less direct route of trade agreement labor provisions. The convention ratification route is classic soft law but with a continuous and participatory implementation and “shaming” focus. The trade agreement route implicates reciprocal compliance pressures, although these provisions have not yet proven to be enforceable in traditionally meaningful ways.

I have argued that the internationalization of labor law sources is aptly characterized as evolution rather than transformation, and it has been more successful at the level of laws than practices. Progress has been incremental and there have been setbacks as well as advances. Sources for both labor law and labor practice will continue to change in evolutionary ways. At least in the near-term, we can expect the process to continue to be steadier and less erratic at the level of law than of practice.

tries in 1998). Similarly, the eight Asian countries heavily involved in garment production have fifty ratifications—out of a possible sixty-four—for these eight fundamental conventions; thirty-two of the fifty occurred since the early 1990s. For a list of ratifications by Convention and date ratified for each country, see Ratifications of ILO Conventions By Country, ILO, http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:11001::NO:: [https://perma.cc/7PX8-CGQX] (last visited Oct. 26, 2017). For discussion of the eight Asian countries and the number of ratifications by each, see Brudney, supra note 225, at 354–55. See also Beaudonnet, supra note 53 (discussing substantial numbers of domestic court decisions in Europe, Africa, and Asia as well as the Americas that have invoked ILO norms as of 2010).