Combating corruption the soft way

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1. Peer review amongst states should not be discarded as an insignificant instrument for monitoring states’ compliance with international norms. When appropriately devised and carried out, it can even present several advantages over more binding forms of agreement, such as its flexibility and the opportunities it offers for mutual learning.

2. Authority is in the eye of the beholder. A sociological and relational understanding of authority is often more suitable for studying global governance actors and institutions than a formal-legal conception of authority.

3. Though all peer reviews are soft-governance instruments and share a common set of attributes, they hold authority to varying degrees. Some peer reviews are perceived as more worthwhile and effective instruments than others.

4. Various organisational, institutional, and policy-specific factors affect the authority of peer reviews and help to explain differences amongst them.

5. Peer review is based on a system of equals. If some of the peers have more influence in the peer review than others, this might have ambivalent effects on the authority of the instrument. The peer review might be better able to deliver concrete results, but might also compromise on equal treatment and the consistent application of rules.

6. Answering the research question should be prioritised over adhering to the forced distinction between different research paradigms and their corresponding research methods. The pragmatism inherent to mixed-methods research represents a strength rather than a weakness.

7. The question of to what extent states comply with international law is an important one. However, a focus on compliance alone is inadequate to assess the significance of monitoring instruments. Moreover, such a focus might lead to a systematic under- or over-estimation of these instruments.

8. Authority transcends the constructivist-rationalist divide on compliance with international norms, as it speaks to both a logic of appropriateness and a logic of consequences.

9. In light of growing monitoring fatigue in some national administrations, caution needs to be taken that the instrument of peer review does not fall victim to its own success. To prevent reviewing fatigue, a duplication of efforts or overlap in review exercises should be avoided. Rather than establishing new peer reviews, options should be explored to expand the scope and membership of existing ones.

10. Nowadays authority no longer comes only as male, white, and in a suit, but can at times wear a colourful dress.