

The winner of the XVth Stein Rokkan Price for Comparative Social Research (2010) is

Beth A. Simmons

who wrote

'Mobilizing for Human Rights. International Law in Domestic Politics' Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009

There is a group of scholars who hold that international law serves the interests of powerful nation states and hence will not have much independent effect within these nations. Other authors argue to the contrary that international law is one of the building blocks of a new and effective global constitution. In *Mobilizing for Human Rights*, Beth Simmons, the winner of the XVth Stein Rokkan Price for Comparative Social Research (2010), shows that international law makes a positive contribution, which, however, is conditional, and which works particularly powerfully in states that are neither stable autocracies nor established democracies. She argues that international laws matters most where domestic groups have the motive and the means to demand the protection of their rights as reflected in ratified treaties.

The importance of scientific works depends on the importance of the questions we pose. Beth Simmons asks a major question both in scientific and in political terms: Does international law make a difference for the lives of the citizens? And she arrives at an important answer: Yes, there is an independent effect, but one that is conditional on domestic politics, and in particular on regime type and on the needs and opportunities for mobilization by domestic actors. This answer constitutes a major contribution to the scientific debate on the interaction of domestic and international politics and on the likely effects of international organizations and norms. It also offers guidance to politicians who want to advance human rights, urging them to focus their resources on the ratification of international law in countries with some history of, or prospect for, liberalization. And it counsels human rights organizations by arguing that international law contains powerful norms that can, under certain circumstances, inspire and be effectively wielded by stakeholders.

This is an outstanding book that represents a new generation of scholarship capable of fusing international relations and comparative politics. Although strongly influenced by traditional international relations, this book also incorporates many theories, insights and methodologies of comparative politics. Comparativists will learn much from Simmons's findings, such as those about the powerful domestic effects of international organizations and norms, or more specifically about false positives – countries that ratify for strategic international and domestic reasons although they do not intend to implement the international law; and false negatives – countries that do not ratify due to domestic politico-institutional reasons although they support the values of the laws. Scholars in the field of international relations will learn much from findings regarding the conditionality of the effects of international law; and scholars in both disciplines will learn much of value about how international relations and comparative politics can reinforce one other. With *Mobilizing for Human Rights* Beth Simmons proves a worthy winner of the Stein Rokkan prize, and also helps to signal the emergence of a new era in comparative scholarship.

