

Institutional evolution of international human rights protection mechanisms in the context of increasing global instability

Evolução institucional dos mecanismos internacionais de proteção dos direitos humanos no contexto da crescente instabilidade global

Evolución institucional de los mecanismos internacionales de protección de los derechos humanos en un contexto de creciente inestabilidad mundial

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Abstract

The article examines the institutional evolution of international human rights protection mechanisms in the context of increasing global instability. It is substantiated that the international human rights regime has evolved from predominantly declarative legal norms to a complex multilevel institutional system that integrates universal, regional, and national mechanisms for the protection of human rights. The effectiveness of international human rights institutions is determined by the institutional capacity to ensure their implementation. The findings indicate the need to strengthen coordination among different levels of the international human rights protection system and to enhance its adaptability to emerging global risks.

Keywords

International Law, Human Rights, International Legal Mechanisms, Human Rights Protection, Global Instability.



Resumo

O artigo examina a evolução institucional dos mecanismos internacionais de proteção dos direitos humanos no contexto de uma crescente instabilidade global. Demonstra-se que o regime internacional de direitos humanos evoluiu de normas jurídicas predominantemente declarativas para um complexo sistema institucional multinível que integra mecanismos universais, regionais e nacionais de proteção dos direitos humanos. A eficácia das instituições internacionais de direitos humanos é determinada pela capacidade institucional de garantir sua implementação. As conclusões indicam a necessidade de fortalecer a coordenação entre os diferentes níveis do sistema internacional de proteção dos direitos humanos e de aumentar sua adaptabilidade aos riscos globais emergentes.

Palavras-chave

Direito Internacional, Direitos Humanos, Mecanismos Jurídicos Internacionais, Proteção dos Direitos Humanos, Instabilidade Global.

Resumen

El artículo examina la evolución institucional de los mecanismos internacionales de protección de los derechos humanos en el contexto de una creciente inestabilidad mundial. Se demuestra que el régimen internacional de derechos humanos ha pasado de estar compuesto principalmente por normas jurídicas de carácter declarativo a convertirse en un complejo sistema institucional multinivel que integra mecanismos universales, regionales y nacionales para la protección de los derechos humanos. La eficacia de las instituciones internacionales de derechos humanos viene determinada por la capacidad institucional para garantizar su aplicación. Las conclusiones apuntan a la necesidad de reforzar la coordinación entre los diferentes niveles del sistema internacional de protección de los derechos humanos y de mejorar su capacidad de adaptación a los nuevos riesgos globales.

Palabras clave

Derecho Internacional, Derechos Humanos, Mecanismos Jurídicos Internacionales, Protección de los Derechos Humanos, Inestabilidad Global.

1. Introduction

The contemporary system of international human rights protection has developed as a result of a long process of institutional evolution aimed at the unification of standards and the establishment of supranational mechanisms for monitoring their observance. However, in the context of increasing global instability, manifested in the intensification of armed conflicts, political fragmentation, crises of multilateralism, and the erosion of trust in international institutions, the effectiveness of these mechanisms is increasingly being questioned. The relevance of this study is further reinforced by empirical evidence of the limited effectiveness of international human rights protection mechanisms in contemporary conflicts. In particular, the Syrian conflict, including atrocities committed by the Islamic State (ISIS), demonstrates systemic failures of international institutions to prevent crimes against humanity and ensure accountability (UN Commission of Inquiry, 2014; Hafner-Burton, 2013). Similarly, large-scale violations of human rights in Ukraine, the Gaza Strip, and Iran indicate a growing gap between universal legal standards and their practical enforcement within conditions of

geopolitical fragmentation and weakened multilateral coordination (Simmons, 2009; Amnesty International, 2024). While formally preserving their normative integrity, international human rights institutions face a limited capacity to ensure the actual implementation of adopted decisions and to respond effectively to systemic violations committed by individual states.

The problem is further complicated by the asymmetry between the proclaimed universal principles and the practical methods of their implementation, which largely depend on political will, geopolitical interests, and the resource capacity of particular actors. As a result, international mechanisms increasingly operate in a reactive rather than preventive mode, gradually losing their ability to function as a stabilizing element of the global legal order. At the same time, the transformation of the nature of threats to human rights, ranging from traditional violations to systemic and complex challenges, requires a reconsideration of the entire institutional architecture, decision-making procedures, and models of accountability at the international level.

Thus, the issue of a comprehensive understanding of the institutional evolution of international human rights protection mechanisms under conditions of an unstable global environment acquires particular relevance. Addressing this issue requires identifying the internal limitations of these mechanisms and determining the directions for improving their effectiveness in the context of contemporary global transformations of the international legal system.

2. Literature Review

The issue of the institutional evolution of international human rights protection mechanisms is addressed in contemporary academic literature through the integration of institutional theory, international law, and the political processes of global governance. Fundamental studies emphasize that international institutions emerge as a result of the historical accumulation of norms and practices that shape the rules of interaction between states and international organizations. Comprehensive doctrinal analysis of international human rights law is provided in fundamental works such as Moeckli et al. (2022), Smith (2022), and Van Dijk and Van Hoof (2023), which systematize the theoretical and practical foundations of international human rights protection. A classical institutional explanation of this process was proposed by D. North (1990), who defines institutions as a system of formal and informal rules structuring the behavior of actors and ensuring the stability of socio-political relations. Within this framework, the evolution of international human rights protection mechanisms is viewed as part of a broader process of institutional change in the system of global governance.

An important direction of research concerns the analysis of the formation and functioning of international judicial institutions. In particular, L. Helfer and A.-M. Slaughter (2005) explain the creation of international tribunals as the result of states' willingness to delegate certain powers to supranational bodies in order to enhance the effectiveness of legal regulation and resolve interstate disputes. A similar logic of institutional diffusion of international courts is demonstrated in the study by K. Alter and L. Helfer (2017) devoted to the Andean Tribunal of Justice, which illustrates how international judicial institutions can transform the legal systems of regional integration.

At the same time, the expansion of international legal intervention raises complex questions regarding the balance between sovereignty and external influence. Almahzoumi and Alhuniati (2024) analyze peacekeeping operations as a form of intervention in domestic affairs, demonstrating the legal and political tensions inherent in such mechanisms.

A significant contribution to understanding the effectiveness of international human rights regimes has been made by studies analyzing the interaction between international norms and domestic politics. B. Simmons (2009) demonstrates that international human rights treaties can stimulate internal political mobilization processes that strengthen legal protection mechanisms at the national level. In turn, T. Risse et al. (2013) substantiate a model of transition from the formal adoption of international norms to their actual implementation through processes of socialization and international pressure. Equally important is the approach proposed by E. Hafner-Burton (2013), who emphasizes the need to combine legal and political instruments in order to ensure the real effectiveness of international human rights standards.

Recent studies further demonstrate that the effectiveness of international human rights law is increasingly constrained by structural governance gaps and political-economic asymmetries. In particular, Kampourakis and Lane (2025) emphasize the persistence of systemic imbalances that limit the capacity of international mechanisms to address root causes of human rights violations, while Føllesdal (2023) highlights the growing role of international institutions as review mechanisms rather than direct enforcement actors.

The theoretical foundations of global governance are further enriched by the concepts of sociological institutionalism. In particular, M. Finnemore (2014) considers international institutions as mechanisms for the formation of collective norms and practices that shape the behavior of states within the global system. A similar perspective is reflected in the concept of the "logic of appropriateness" developed by J. March and J. Olsen (2006), according to which states often act not only on the basis of rational calculation but also in accordance with accepted international norms and expectations. A historical-sociological analysis of the transformation of the European human rights

system conducted by M. Madsen (2014) demonstrates that the institutional development of human rights mechanisms was closely connected with broader processes of political integration and the formation of new models of legitimacy.

In addition, M. Povalena (2022) examines the constitutional and legal aspects of applying international human rights protection mechanisms in Ukraine and their interaction with the national legal system. The issues of effectiveness and implementation challenges of such mechanisms are addressed by V. Orlenko (2024), who emphasizes the existence of institutional and procedural barriers to the realization of international human rights standards.

These issues acquire particular significance in the context of increasing global instability and armed conflicts. Contemporary research emphasizes that military crises substantially transform the practice of applying international human rights protection mechanisms. In particular, D. Barsuk (2025) analyzes the specific features of international mechanisms for ensuring human rights under martial law and their role in protecting fundamental rights of the population. A similar problem is examined by V. Dulska (2025), who focuses on the necessity of adapting international legal mechanisms to the conditions of armed conflicts. At the same time, I. Tolkachova and N. Omelchenko (2025) investigate the practical aspects of applying international human rights protection mechanisms in Ukraine during martial law and their interaction with national legal institutions.

A growing body of research also addresses the transformation of human rights protection in the context of digitalization. Balcerzak and Kapelańska-Pręgowska (2023) analyze the impact of disinformation and propaganda on the functioning of international human rights law, while Yilma (2023), Iashchenko et al. (2025) and Terec-Vlad (2022) emphasize the challenges posed by emerging technologies within the United Nations system. These developments indicate the need to adapt traditional legal mechanisms to new forms of rights violations in the digital environment.

Thus, the existing body of academic research demonstrates the complex nature of the evolution of international human rights protection mechanisms, which is determined by the interaction of institutional changes and the transformation of the global governance system. At the same time, contemporary literature indicates the need for further research into the institutional dynamics of these mechanisms in the context of growing global instability, which determines the relevance of this study.

3. Materials and Methods

The theoretical and methodological foundations for analyzing the institutional evolution of international human rights protection mechanisms are based on the combination of institutional, neo-institutional, and constructivist approaches, which makes it possible to comprehensively understand the dynamics of the formation, transformation, and functioning of supranational human rights structures. Within the framework of institutional theory, international human rights protection mechanisms are viewed as formalized systems of norms, procedures, and institutions designed to limit state discretion and ensure compliance with universal standards (North, 1990). The neo-institutional approach complements this analysis by emphasizing the interaction between formal rules and informal practices that determine the actual effectiveness of international regimes in the field of human rights (March and Olsen, 2006).

The constructivist paradigm also has important methodological significance, according to which international institutions not only reflect the interests of states but also shape norms, identities, and patterns of acceptable behavior. In this context, international human rights protection appears as a socially constructed process within which human rights standards are gradually internalized into national legal systems (Risse et al., 2013). This approach makes it possible to explain the varying pace and depth of institutional change in states with different political and legal traditions.

The methodological framework of the study is further complemented by the concepts of international regimes and multilevel governance, which allow for the analysis of the interaction between universal and regional mechanisms of human rights protection, as well as the role of judicial and quasi-judicial bodies in ensuring compliance with international obligations (Hafner-Burton, 2013). Empirical research demonstrates that the mere existence of institutional mechanisms does not in itself guarantee the protection of human rights, as their effectiveness largely depends on domestic political incentives and external pressure (Simmons, 2009).

In view of this, the study applies systemic and comparative-analytical approaches that make it possible to identify the patterns of institutional evolution of international human rights protection mechanisms under global instability and to assess their adaptability to transformations in the global legal order.

4. Results

The genesis and structural transformation of international human rights institutions are closely linked to the evolution of the global governance system and to changing perceptions regarding the limits of state sovereignty. After the Second World War, the establishment of universal mechanisms

for the protection of human rights emerged as a response to the recognition of the limitations of national legal systems in preventing large-scale violations of fundamental rights. The adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights laid the normative foundation for the further institutionalization of the international human rights regime, within which the mandates of international organizations were gradually expanded and specialized monitoring bodies were established (Madsen, 2011).

At the initial stage, international human rights institutions were largely declarative in nature, and their activities relied mainly on mechanisms of moral authority and political pressure. However, from the second half of the twentieth century, a transition toward a more complex institutional architecture can be observed, including treaty bodies, judicial and quasi-judicial institutions, as well as procedures for individual complaints. This transformation reflects a broader trend toward the juridification of international human rights protection, whereby legal norms are increasingly reinforced by formalized mechanisms of monitoring and accountability (Alter and Helfer, 2018).

At the same time, the structural evolution of international human rights institutions has not followed a linear trajectory but has taken place under conditions of constant tension between universalism and the political fragmentation of the global order. Research indicates that the expansion of institutional powers has often been accompanied by attempts by states to limit their actual influence through procedural barriers or selective compliance with decisions (Helfer and Slaughter, 2005). In this context, international institutions have become increasingly integrated into a multilevel system of global governance, within which universal, regional, and national human rights protection mechanisms interact.

The contemporary stage of transformation is characterized by the growing role of network-based forms of governance, the participation of non-state actors, and the increasing interdependence between human rights institutions and other segments of global governance. As noted by Finnemore (2014), international organizations increasingly perform the functions of normative entrepreneurs, shaping new standards and practices that extend beyond traditional interstate cooperation. Thus, the genesis and structural transformation of international human rights institutions reflect deeper changes in the architecture of global governance, where the human rights dimension is gradually becoming a system-forming element of the international order.

In general, international human rights protection constitutes one of the most significant branches of public international law. Within this field, the development and adoption of international agreements aimed at safeguarding human rights, as recognized in universally acknowledged documents, continues on a permanent basis. Although the process of forming substantive

international legal norms concerning the content of human rights and freedoms, as well as their guarantees, can largely be considered complete, at the present stage of its development the universal human rights system requires increasing the effectiveness of the mechanisms operating on the basis of the already established international legal framework (Gryb et al., 2023).

International mechanisms for ensuring human rights function by promoting the realization, protection, and safeguarding of human rights and represent a system of methods and instruments for implementing the provisions established in international treaties. These mechanisms include both normative and organizational-legal instruments. Therefore, it is appropriate to distinguish the key structural components of such a mechanism: normative, procedural, institutional, and resource elements. All these components of the human rights protection system are interdependent and oriented toward achieving a common objective, namely the effective protection of fundamental human rights. Within the international mechanism for ensuring human rights, the normative and institutional components occupy a central role.

“Every internationally wrongful act of a State entails the international responsibility of that State,” as stated in Article 1 of the United Nations General Assembly Resolution (United Nations General Assembly, 2001). However, the concept of international legal standards in the field of human rights has multiple interpretations. In a broad sense, international legal standards encompass the entire body of international legal instruments relating to the rights and freedoms of individuals (Donnelly, 2003). These include international treaties, resolutions of international organizations, and other agreements that reveal the essence of international human rights standards. In a narrower sense, international standards are understood as the obligations of states to ensure, protect, and develop the principle of respect for human rights (Alston & Crawford, 2000). In other words, they represent universal international legal norms that are applied uniformly within the international community in cases of human rights violations.

The mechanism for the protection of human rights as a legal phenomenon constitutes a system because it includes a number of components, such as the right to protection, the forms and methods of protecting rights, as well as the procedures and processes for appealing to relevant bodies, institutions, and organizations. This system is characterized by a dialectical interdependence among its elements, where each component occupies a specific place and performs a defined function. The mechanism of rights protection must represent a coherent and logically structured process. Its essence lies in a sequence of actions undertaken by an individual aimed at restoring the condition that existed prior to the violation of his or her rights (Vorodin, 2024).

The Charter of the United Nations serves as the conceptual and fundamental treaty that established the basis for cooperation among states in the field of human rights and constitutes the international legal foundation for human rights protection. The principles enshrined in this document subsequently became the basis for other international instruments concerning the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. The analyzed international act obliges states to improve cooperation among themselves in order to promote universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion (Povalena, 2022).

International human rights standards, while formally structured as a coherent system of universal norms, reveal significant limitations when confronted with contemporary geopolitical realities. Although these standards define a catalogue of fundamental rights, establish their legal content, and impose obligations on states to ensure and protect them, their practical implementation remains uneven and often selective.

This discrepancy is particularly evident in situations of armed conflict and political instability. For example, the Syrian conflict exposed the inability of international mechanisms to effectively prevent large-scale violations of fundamental rights despite the existence of well-developed legal frameworks. Similarly, in the context of the war in Ukraine, the application of international human rights standards has been constrained by issues of enforcement, jurisdiction, and the limited coercive capacity of international institutions (Heinze, 2022). Moreover, the regulation of permissible limitations on rights, which is formally embedded in international legal instruments, has in practice become a subject of political interpretation, especially under conditions of emergency or martial law. This creates a situation in which the same legal standards may be applied inconsistently across different contexts, undermining their universality and normative authority.

Thus, international human rights standards should be understood not only as a system of legal norms but also as a contested field of interpretation and application, where their effectiveness depends on the interaction between legal provisions, political will, and institutional capacity.

At the same time, the actual effectiveness of international human rights protection mechanisms largely depends on the institutional capacity of international organizations to ensure the implementation of adopted decisions. Despite the existence of an extensive normative framework and a significant number of specialized monitoring bodies, the international human rights system often faces the problem of limited jurisdictional and enforcement capacity. This is due to the fact that most international institutions do not possess direct coercive instruments, and their decisions are implemented through mechanisms of political pressure, diplomatic negotiations, or the influence of

states' international reputations. In this context, the interaction between universal and regional human rights protection mechanisms becomes particularly important.

Regional human rights systems, including the European, Inter-American, and African systems, demonstrate a higher level of institutional effectiveness due to the closer integration of legal norms and monitoring mechanisms. This integration is primarily manifested through the combination of binding judicial procedures, quasi-judicial review, and continuous supervisory processes.

In particular, the European system, centered around the European Court of Human Rights, provides individuals with direct access to international justice through individual complaints, while its judgments are legally binding and subject to supervision by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. Similarly, the Inter-American system combines the activities of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, which performs monitoring and investigative functions, with the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, which issues binding decisions and reparations. The African system, although comparatively less institutionalized, also includes the African Commission and the African Court, which contribute to the development of regional human rights jurisprudence and oversight practices (De Almeida, 2025). These mechanisms are complemented by reporting procedures and periodic reviews. Together, they enable continuous assessment of state compliance. In contrast to universal mechanisms, which often rely on political dialogue and soft-law instruments, regional systems operate through more direct forms of legal accountability, including binding judgments, interpretative authority, and institutionalized monitoring.

As a result, a multilevel structure of human rights protection emerges, in which universal institutions perform the function of a normative center, while regional bodies ensure the practical implementation and enforcement of relevant standards through a combination of judicial, quasi-judicial, and supervisory mechanisms.

Regional cooperation in the field of human rights complements universal forms of cooperation and in certain respects even ensures more effective protection of fundamental rights. Today, human rights represent one of the most widespread factors of interaction among national legal systems, contributing to the integration of the global and regional legal space (Jikia, 2022). This is explained by several factors: individuals have gained the opportunity to influence national systems through appeals to international human rights protection bodies, and therefore issues of human rights protection have ceased to be a matter of the exclusive jurisdiction of individual states; the number of international legal instruments that form part of the legal system of sovereign states and are therefore mandatory for application has increased. In addition, a tendency toward the unification of human rights protection mechanisms at different levels has emerged, making them increasingly accessible.

At the same time, the current stage of development of the international human rights system is characterized by the growing number of new challenges associated with the transformation of the nature of global threats. Armed conflicts, large-scale population displacement, the development of digital technologies, and increasing political polarization create situations in which traditional response mechanisms prove to be insufficiently effective. This is clearly illustrated by recent international practice. In the Syrian conflict, international institutions, including United Nations mechanisms, were limited to fact-finding missions and reporting procedures, while lacking effective instruments to prevent mass atrocities or ensure accountability for crimes committed by both state and non-state actors, including ISIS. In Ukraine, despite the activation of multiple international monitoring bodies, including UN commissions and international courts, the protection of human rights has been constrained by jurisdictional limitations and the inability to ensure immediate enforcement of international decisions in the context of ongoing hostilities.

A similar pattern can be observed in the Gaza Strip, where international human rights mechanisms have faced difficulties in ensuring compliance with international humanitarian and human rights law due to political fragmentation and the absence of effective enforcement tools (Kaltenborn and Vandenhole, 2023). In the case of Iran, particularly in response to internal protests and restrictions on fundamental freedoms, international institutions have primarily relied on reporting, sanctions mechanisms, and diplomatic pressure, which, however, have demonstrated limited capacity to induce rapid changes in state behavior. Under such conditions, international institutions are compelled to adapt their instruments of activity by combining classical legal procedures with new forms of monitoring, including digital evidence collection, independent expert missions, sanctions regimes, and enhanced coordination among international and regional actors. Nevertheless, these adaptations remain largely reactive and do not fully eliminate the structural limitations of the international human rights system in situations of high-intensity political and military conflict.

However, there is no universal body or mechanism that possesses absolute authority in the field of human rights protection. This follows from the fact that states remain the primary guarantors of human rights protection, while international intergovernmental organizations and mechanisms play a supporting role in this process. At the same time, the United Nations General Assembly or the Human Rights Council may, in principle, consider any human rights issue arising from any part of the world. The Universal Periodic Review procedure applies to all UN member states and, given its broad scope—which includes not only treaty and voluntary obligations of states but also the UN

Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and applicable norms of international humanitarian law—may also be considered comprehensive.

Thus, the institutional evolution of international human rights protection mechanisms reflects a gradual transition from a predominantly declarative system of international standards to a more complex multilevel architecture of global human rights governance. The further development of this system will largely depend on the ability of international institutions to combine normative functions with effective instruments for ensuring the implementation of adopted decisions in the context of increasing instability of the global order.

The international institutional (organizational) framework for ensuring human rights represents a multilevel system that includes various international organizations and bodies operating at both formal international levels – including judicial institutions – and informal levels involved in the process of protecting human rights. First of all, the institutional system includes the universal level of actors, primarily the United Nations, including bodies such as the United Nations Commission on Human Rights and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Regional mechanisms for the protection of human rights are also distinguished, in particular the functioning of the European Court of Human Rights.

A separate but integral place within this system is occupied by procedural mechanisms necessary for the effective protection and realization of human rights, as well as procedural guarantees. Guarantees are generally understood as a system of foundations, principles, norms, and instruments that collectively ensure the realization and protection of human rights. Human rights themselves may be understood as certain benefits and needs inherent to individuals, while guarantees create the means for their protection and realization. Practice demonstrates that human rights without mechanisms for their implementation and protection become merely declarative provisions. The existence of effective guarantees ensures the real nature of human rights, that is, the possibility of exercising the rights that have been formally established. This becomes particularly evident in situations of armed conflict, where the gap between formal legal guarantees and their practical realization significantly widens. In the context of the war in Ukraine, the introduction of martial law has led to the lawful restriction of certain rights, including limitations on freedom of movement, assembly, and expression (Barsuk, 2025). However, these restrictions are formally grounded in constitutional procedures and remain subject to legal oversight and international monitoring, which allows preserving a certain level of institutional accountability even under conditions of war.

In contrast, the situation in the Gaza Strip illustrates a different configuration, where the protection of human rights is complicated by the scale of hostilities, the humanitarian crisis, and the

fragmentation of governance structures. In such conditions, access to basic rights, including the right to life, healthcare, and security, is often undermined not only by legal restrictions but also by the physical impossibility of their realization. As a result, international human rights guarantees lose their practical effectiveness despite their formal applicability.

Under conditions of martial law, the priorities of state policy may shift toward the preservation of sovereignty and security, while for individuals the primary concern becomes survival. Consequently, certain restrictions on specific human rights and adjustments to the guarantees of their protection may be justified in order to safeguard the most fundamental rights. However, the comparative analysis of contemporary conflicts demonstrates that the legitimacy and proportionality of such restrictions, as well as the capacity to maintain minimum standards of protection, largely depend on the institutional resilience of the state and the degree of functioning legal and governance structures.

The conducted analysis, based on the comparison of universal and regional human rights mechanisms and their functioning in contemporary conflict settings, allows the institutional architecture of international human rights protection to be conceptualized as a system of interconnected levels of regulation. In particular, the analysis of recent cases, including Syria, Ukraine, and the Gaza Strip, demonstrates that the effectiveness of human rights protection depends on the interaction between normative frameworks, institutional structures, procedural instruments, and resource capacities. While universal mechanisms primarily establish legal standards and perform coordination functions, regional and national levels play a decisive role in their practical implementation and enforcement.

This multilevel configuration reveals not only the formal structure of international human rights protection but also its functional differentiation, where the capacity to respond to violations is unevenly distributed across levels and significantly influenced by the intensity of conflict and the resilience of governance systems.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study generally confirm the dominant position in contemporary scholarship that international human rights protection functions as a multilevel system of global governance shaped by the interaction between legal norms, institutions, and political processes (Risse et al., 2013; Simmons, 2009; Finnemore, 2014). However, the results also reveal a number of tensions that require further critical reflection.

In contrast to the classical institutional perspective, which emphasizes the progressive expansion and strengthening of international legal mechanisms (Alston & Crawford, 2000; Moeckli et al., 2022), the present analysis demonstrates that the growth of normative frameworks is not necessarily accompanied by a corresponding increase in enforcement capacity. This finding supports the argument advanced by Hafner-Burton (2013) and Kampourakis and Lane (2025) regarding the persistence of governance gaps that limit the effectiveness of international human rights regimes.

At the same time, the role of international judicial institutions, often considered a key tool for ensuring human rights (Alter & Helfer, 2017; Helfer & Slaughter, 2005), appears more ambivalent in the context of contemporary conflicts. While such institutions contribute to the development of legal standards and provide avenues for accountability, their practical impact remains constrained by issues of jurisdiction, enforcement, and state compliance. This observation aligns with Føllesdal's (2023) argument that international human rights bodies increasingly function as mechanisms of review rather than direct enforcement. The findings also extend existing debates on the relationship between sovereignty and international intervention. While Almakhzoumi and Alhunieti (2024) emphasize the legal complexity of peacekeeping operations as a form of intervention in internal affairs, the analysis of recent conflicts, including Syria and Ukraine, demonstrates that the absence of effective intervention mechanisms may result in large-scale and prolonged violations of human rights. This creates a paradox in which both action and inaction of international institutions may generate legal and political risks.

Furthermore, the study contributes to the growing body of literature on the transformation of human rights protection in the context of contemporary challenges. In line with Balcerzak and Kapelańska-Pręgowska (2023) and Yilma (2023), the results confirm that new forms of threats, including digital disinformation and technological developments, complicate the functioning of traditional legal mechanisms. At the same time, the analysis shows that even in more conventional contexts of armed conflict, such as in the Gaza Strip or Iran, the primary limitation remains the lack of effective enforcement tools rather than the absence of legal norms. From a broader theoretical perspective, these findings resonate with the arguments of De Almeida (2025) and Heinze (2022), who question the stability of the normative foundations of international human rights law. The observed discrepancies between formal standards and their practical implementation suggest that international human rights mechanisms operate not only as a legal system but also as a contested field shaped by political, institutional, and contextual factors.

At the same time, the study does not fully support more optimistic assumptions regarding the gradual internalization of human rights norms at the domestic level (Risse et al., 2013). While such

processes remain relevant, their effectiveness appears to be significantly weakened under conditions of armed conflict, political fragmentation, and institutional crisis. In this regard, the findings are closer to more critical approaches that emphasize structural limitations and uneven implementation of international standards (Orlenko, 2024; Dulska, 2025).

Thus, the discussion demonstrates that the evolution of international human rights protection mechanisms should be understood as a non-linear and ambiguous process, in which the expansion of the normative framework coexists with the limitation of the possibilities of its practical implementation. This suggests the need to shift the analytical focus from the formal development of legal norms to the institutional conditions of their enforcement and the capacity of international and national systems to respond to complex and rapidly changing threats.

6. Conclusions

The obtained results, derived from the comparative analysis of the functioning of international human rights mechanisms in contemporary conflict settings, make it possible to consider the institutional evolution of international human rights protection as a complex and non-linear process of transformation of the global legal system.

In particular, the analysis reveals several key patterns. First, there is a growing discrepancy between the expansion of international legal norms and the limited capacity of institutions to ensure their enforcement in situations of armed conflict. Second, the effectiveness of human rights protection increasingly depends on the interaction between universal, regional, and national levels, rather than on the existence of formal legal standards alone. Third, contemporary cases, including Syria, Ukraine, and the Gaza Strip, demonstrate that institutional responses remain largely reactive and are constrained by political fragmentation and limited coercive mechanisms.

These findings indicate that the evolution of international human rights protection mechanisms is shaped not only by legal developments but also by structural changes in the international system, including shifts in the balance between sovereignty, international accountability, and the capacity of institutions to respond to large-scale violations. This indicates the need to reconsider the focus of international human rights research from normative expansion toward institutional enforceability.

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