



Editor's Foreword

Norm Contestation, Identity and Cultural Dynamics in Contemporary International Order

Yoga Suharman

Editor in Chief, Nation State: Journal of International Studies

We live in an era of normative flux. The once stable of international norms that were largely embedded in liberal and Western traditions, now face challenges under unprecedented scrutiny. Power is decentralizing, voices are multiplying and the foundations of global governance are being subjected to rigorous and often fiercely re-examined, questioned, resisted, reshaped and reimagined by many different actors.

This special issue of Nation State: Journal of International Studies, volume 8 issue number 2 for December 2025 is dedicated at exploring the multifaceted of normative contestation that redefines contemporary international order. Guided by the norm contestation whether proactive or reactive, we seek to move beyond perspective of global norms as monolithic or linearly diffused. Instead, we situate them within a dynamic and contentious political space, where meaning is never fixed and compliance to the universal norms is never guaranteed.

The contributions from the authors within this volume respond to our call to connect this norm contestation to question of identity, culture, symbolic power and interest. A particular focus is placed on the calls for recognition emanating from postcolonial view and the Global South. The articles investigate a spectrum of engagement: from outright rejection rooted in alternative worldviews, to strategic adoption, to critical engagement aimed at reforming from within, and to the alteration of the existing international norms. These reflect the historical experience, present realities and future aspiration of those long situated at the margins of dominant power structures.

What emerges collectively from this scholarship is the international order is more than an arena for material competition. It is also a battleground of normative-ideational nexus, where meanings are negotiated, legitimacy is contested and the rules of the game are perpetually in play. Diverse actors, empowered by new forms of agency, now insist on attaching their own interpretations to what is presented as universal standard.

Based on this, the article by Andra Khagum Muhammad, Jusmalia Oktaviani, and Anggun Dwi Panorama titled “Beyond Wavering: Post-Colonial Resistance and Norm Contestation in ASEAN’s Response to Myanmar’s Coup” illustrates how collective memory of colonialism shape the regional organization behaviour toward the concept of democracy, sovereignty and intervention, thereby

generating dynamics of norm contestation between the principle of non-intervention and the pressure to protect human rights. Similarly, the article from Atin Prabandari, Balya A. Segara, and Emma Seruni Ketaren titled “Indonesia’s Contested Norms, Selective Humanitarianism and ASEAN Refugee Governance” reframing refugee governance in Indonesia and ASEAN’s as an arena of norm contestation, rather than merely as issues of institutional design or capacity constraints. Another contribution by Sherly Tricia Ningsih challenges the universality of gender equality promoted by the West, contrasting it with the local identity and cultural practice of Uang Japuik in West Sumatra, which questions Western-imagined gender equality.

Furthermore, Naqsabandiyah’s article, “Dragon Tames the Mekong: China’s Normative Power in Transboundary Water Management”, explores China’s motivation in shaping the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation framework using norm subsidiarity as an alternative to existing norms on river governance. Veda & Surwandono (2025), in “The Relevance of Indonesia’s Ratification of the International Convention Against the Taking of Hostages”, highlight the hostage-taking of Indonesian citizens positioned as an arena of contestation between protection norms and national sovereignty.

Another article by Muhammad Alif Rifky, Anggia Dewi Utami and Wawan Budi Darmawan examines Indonesia’s migrant labor governance through One Channel System (OCS). Altough not directly addressing norm contestation, it raises a critical point that overly centralized regulations reduce worker agence creates compliance burdens and pushes migrants back to informal routes. The normative implication of OCS asserts Indonesia’s regulatory sovereignty, but it succes depend heavily on alignment with worker-centered protection.

The seventh article by Dini Septyana Rahayu explains norm shifts promoted by BRICS, which is positioned as a collective actor driving normative transformation in the global political economy by advancing principles of inclusivity, egalitarianism, democracy and multilateralism. In final article by Destha Ravalino and Seftina Kuswardini examine how Bangladesh’s choice reflects a contestation between liberal market discipline norms promoted by the International Monetary Fund and context-sensitive development norms advanced by the New Development Bank.

We hope that this collection will enrich theoretical and conceptual tools available to understand how normative-ideational nexus influence contemporary international order.