

International laws may be part of maritime piracy problem

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International piracy costs the shipping industry billions of dollars a year and leads to high-profile murders that make global headlines.

Longstanding concerns over piracy have led to numerous international laws and conventions designed to keep pirates in check – but research from North Carolina State University shows that the tangled network of laws may actually be helping pirates escape justice.

"We wanted to know why the international community is not working together and taking advantage of existing laws to address [piracy](#), even as piracy is on the rise in places like the horn of Africa," says Dr. Mark Nance, assistant professor of political science at NC State and co-author of a paper on the issue.

The researchers found that the existing framework of international laws creates uncertainty in how countries will respond to piracy, depending on which international convention a nation chooses to apply. "For example," Nance says, "a nation that captures pirates may choose to let them go, bring them home for prosecution in national courts, or take them to a third country for prosecution." This uncertainty leaves different countries with different expectations as to how they could – or should – cooperate to address piracy.

"We found that the lack of international coordination exists because there are so many international laws that apply, not because there are none," says Dr. Michael Struett, assistant professor of political science at NC State and a co-author of the paper. "If the international community

really wants to crack down on piracy, countries need to give a governing body – such as the International Maritime Organization or the United Nations – the responsibility to build international consensus around the best approach to combating piracy."

More information: The paper, "Maritime Piracy and Regime Complexes: Explaining Low Levels of Coordination," was presented March 16 at the International Studies Association annual meeting in Montreal.

Provided by North Carolina State University

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