



Rivers and reciprocity: perceptions and policy on international watercourses

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The paper analyses geopolitical dimensions of the 1997 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses (UNWC) using quantitative data on transboundary flows and qualitative data on basin State location within a watercourse. The UNWC has had a long and difficult history. A tendency for downstream support for, and upstream ambivalence/opposition to, the UNWC is identified. It appears not widely recognized that adverse effects can be caused by any State on other States, regardless of their upstream or downstream location. Thus downstream States consider that their actions cannot harm upstream States, and upstream States consider that the UNWC provides them with greater obligations than downstream States. Clarification of the UNWC with the principle of reciprocal obligations on all States, both upstream and downstream, will remove any ambiguity, correct misperceptions, have clear policy implications for all States, promote UNWC engagement of upstream States, and contribute to long-term global water security.