

Declarations of Independence and the Law of Nations

David Armitage, Harvard University

Abstract:

Declarations of independence—documents in which new or restored sovereignties are announced to the international community—are among the most enduring and widespread instruments of international law. Over the past two and a half centuries, hundreds of such declarations have appeared from every continent except Antarctica and more than half of the member states of the United Nations possess at least one such foundational document. This chapter argues for the distinctiveness of these declarations' origins in the Americas: that is, North, Central and South America and the Caribbean. It concludes that more than any other instruments of international law, declarations of independence deserve to be seen as 'American' in this enlarged sense, even as they have gone global in the decades since their invention after 1776.