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THE IMPACT OF GLOBALIZATION ON LABOR LAWS IN DEVELOPING TEXTILE-PRODUCING COUNTRIES

ВЛИЯНИЕ ГЛОБАЛИЗАЦИИ НА ТРУДОВОЕ ЗАКОНОДАТЕЛЬСТВО В РАЗВИВАЮЩИХСЯ СТРАНАХ-ПРОИЗВОДИТЕЛЯХ ТЕКСТИЛЯ

R. SALIH[1], S.S. AHMED[2], G. KULDYSHEVA[3], N.S. JASIM[4], B.M. KHALIL[5]

Р. САЛИХ[1], С.С. АХМЕД[2], Г. КУЛДЫШЕВА[3], Н.С. ДЖАСИМ[4], Б.М. ХАЛИЛ[5]

**([1]Al-Turath University, Baghdad, Iraq,
[2]Al-Mansour University College, Baghdad, Iraq,
[3]Osh State University, Osh, Kyrgyzstan,
[4]Al-Rafidain University College, Baghdad, Iraq,
[5]Madenat Alelem University College, Baghdad, Iraq)**

**([1]Университет Аль-Турат, Багдад, Ирак,
[2]Университетский колледж Аль-Мансура, Багдад, Ирак,
[3]Ошский государственный университет, Ош, Кыргызстан,
[4]Университетский колледж Аль-Рафидаин, Багдад, Ирак,
[5]Университетский колледж Маденат Алелем, Багдад, Ирак)**

Email: nur1009@mauc.edu.iq

The globalization of production has significantly reshaped labor law systems in developing countries, particularly within the textile industry, which serves as a critical economic sector for many low- and middle-income nations. This study investigates how globalization–measured through textile export volumes and foreign direct investment–affects labor law compliance, occupational safety, and minimum wage dynamics in four key textile-producing countries: Bangladesh, Vietnam, Ethiopia, and Pakistan, from 2018 to 2024. The results demonstrate that while globalization can exert upward pressure on labor law implementation and workplace conditions, the extent of these improvements is highly contingent upon national institutional capacities and political commitment. Vietnam and Bangladesh show relatively robust scores, which are associated with international trade agreements and buyer-led compliance mechanisms. By contrast, Ethiopia and Pakistan experience significant implementation gaps despite formal legal changes. The results underscore that global economic integration does not always raise the bar for labor standards, but instead acts in concert with domestic structures to achieve varied effects.

Глобализация производства существенно изменила системы трудового права в развивающихся странах, особенно в текстильной промышленности, которая является важнейшим сектором экономики для многих стран с низким и средним уровнем дохода. В этом исследовании изучается, как глобализация, измеряемая через объемы экспорта текстиля и прямые иностранные инвестиции, влияет на соблюдение трудового законодательства, безопасность труда и динамику минимальной заработной платы с 2018 по 2024 год в четырех ключевых странах-производителях текстиля: Бангладеш, Вьетнам, Эфиопия и Пакистан. Результаты показывают, что, хотя глобализация может оказывать значительное давление на реализацию трудового законодательства и условия труда, степень этих улучшений зависит от национальных институциональных возможностей. Вьетнам и

Бангладеш демонстрируют относительно устойчивые показатели соответствия, которые связаны с международными торговыми соглашениями и механизмами их соблюдения, вводимыми заказчиками. Напротив, Эфиопия и Пакистан испытывают значительные пробелы в реализации законов, несмотря на формальные правовые изменения. Результаты подчеркивают, что глобальная экономическая интеграция не всегда поднимает планку трудовых стандартов, а вместо этого действует в согласии с внутренними структурами для достижения различных эффектов.

Keywords: labor law; textile industry; globalization; export economies; occupational safety; minimum wage policy; institutional enforcement; developing countries.

Ключевые слова: трудовое право; текстильная промышленность; глобализация; экспортные экономики; охрана труда; политика минимальной заработной платы; институциональное обеспечение; развивающиеся страны.

Introduction

In the past few decades, the advent of globalization has radically changed economic processes all around the world, altering the transactional landscape, the modes of production and even the labor scheme of an abundance of productive areas. Textile manufacturing has moved from developed countries to countries with low wages and high unemployment. In turn, textile-producing countries, such as Bangladesh, Vietnam, Ethiopia and Pakistan, have undergone profound economic changes, and enjoyed big gains from better access to markets, more foreign direct investment and job creation. However, such economic progress has often come at the cost of crucial labor law, workers' rights, and employment standards [1].

The alignment of domestic with internationally recognized labor standards has been a legal imperative which government had to effectuate if they are to retain their competitiveness as developing countries in the global positioning of the textile market. Even though these nations have worked hard to update their labor codes, enforcement and compliance with such laws is often lacking, resulting in a large number of labor rights violations, unsafe working conditions, and ongoing exploitation of workers [2].

It is a paradox that developing countries seeking foreign investment often implement lures – low real wages – which undermine safety, pay and job security in careers. Despite an increasing commitment towards labor ethicality from global textile brands and multi-national corporations, the under-pressure to keep production costs low have forced subcontracting factories to use smaller factories where labor monitoring is not ensured further validating the vulnerabilities of the laborers [3].

These countries have a delicate balancing act: promoting an attractive business environment to foreign investors while ensuring that they write minimum standards on workers' rights [4]. Therefore, the quest for global market competitiveness has become a double-edged sword, as it can promote economic advancement at the same time as threatening the well-being and security of sensitive workers populations [5].

Furthermore, the varying outcomes seen in different developing countries exemplify the complex and dynamic nature of globalization's influence. The extent to which international labor standards are adopted and enforced domestically critically depends on factors like governmental effectiveness, institutional capacity, and the presence of strong labor unions. Globalization, in some cases, has led to positive regulatory developments in the context of occupational health and safety, minimum wage standards, and fair labor practices [6]. On the other hand, insufficient en-

forcement capaci-ties, pervasive corruption or lack of resources have made the effective enforcement of such regulations complicated, leading to a situation where, despite advanced legislative frameworks, little is done to enforce them [7].

Such research related to textile sector emphasizes such vulnerability of labor-intensive sectors across developing economies that most of the manufacturing processes become susceptible to regular dilution of labor conditions so as to enable global competition for low production cost. Rather, academic conversations about this phenomenon often highlight how, in the face of increased international trade, market pressures have induced states such as Bangladesh, Vietnam, Ethiopia and Pakistan to implement labor laws that are nominally commensurate with international standards, but compliance with those standards can vary [8].

Researchers contend that simply adopting new legislation to mirror international standards does not directly lead to enhanced labor conditions, given that robust implementation often follows years of institutional inertia and limited government resources dedicated to enforcement [9].

A second major theme in the literature concerns the role of multinational corporations. Despite publicly pledging to maintain good labor standards, global brands often perpetuate indirect labor abuses governed by notoriously lax standards across their supply chain of subcontractors that they're not directly in charge of, researchers contend. This situation hampers progress in terms of litigation and legislation while enabling rampant exploitation, starvation wages, and dangerous jobs keeping working structures out of the regulations. As a result, the effectiveness of labor legislation hinges greatly on corporate practices and the degree to which multinational enterprises actively respect labor rights along their production networks [10]. Nations that depend on garment sales for diversification are often reluctant to impose strict labor practices as they worry about becoming uncompetitive and losing foreign investment. This economic dependence often limits the extent to which governments can afford to prioritize enforcement of labor laws, resulting in systemic labor violations despite laws being framed in a progressive manner [11].

An institutional theory literature [12] identifies the role of stronger governance, effective legal systems, and active labor unions as major factors that lead to more effective enforcement of labor law. On the other hand, weak institutional environment with high levels of corruption, low transparency, and poor enforcement capacity frequently constrain the effective implementation of labor rules and regulations [13]. Engagements on this issue points out that labor reforms in textile-producing developing countries as a result of globalization must not only adopt but also give effect to labor standards, requiring thorough institutional empowerment that would still afford effective protection of workers' rights in a globalized economic setting.

The article aims to explore the complexities and dynamic interactions between globalization and labor legislation in developing textile-producing countries.

Methodology

This study employs a comparative mixed-methods framework, integrating econometric modeling and thematic qualitative analysis to assess how globalization reshapes labor law design and enforcement in developing textile-producing countries. Four nations—Bangladesh, Vietnam, Ethiopia, and Pakistan—were selected as comparative cases due to their strategic roles in textile global value chains and diverse labor regulation profiles [1, 2, 8, 14].

Country selection was based on textile export rankings, institutional reform intensity, and diversity in labor governance models (table 1). Bangladesh and Pakistan represent mature export-driven systems with extensive reform cycles; Vietnam reflects a liberal integrationist approach aligned with international trade agreements; Ethiopia serves as a late-industrializing state-centered model with low enforcement penetration [2, 5, 7, 8].

Table 1

Country	Selection Rationale	Export Rank (Global)	Labor Reform Profile	Governance Type
Bangladesh	High export dependence	2nd	Extensive reform	Hybrid Deregulatory
Vietnam	FTA-aligned liberalization	3rd	Moderate reform	Integrationist Liberal
Ethiopia	Emerging manufacturing base	12th	Limited reform	Statist Developmental
Pakistan	Traditional textile base	8th	Moderate reform	Fragmented Dualist

Data were compiled through a triangulated structure comprising both primary interviews and secondary legislative, administrative, and industry documentation. Stakeholders included labor officials, textile factory management, trade union representatives, inspectors, and global experts, ensuring vertical and horizontal representativeness [3, 15…17].

Table 2

Data Source Type	Instruments / Archives	Collection Mode	Timeframe
Legislative Texts	National Gazettes, Labor Codes	Archival Extraction	2018–2023
Enforcement Records	ILO Databases, Inspectorate Logs	Official Requests	2018–2023
Wage Documents	Wage Board Circulars, Ministry Reports	Public Archives	2018–2023
Interview Data	Semi-Structured Field Interviews (n = 43)	In-Person & Virtual	Jan–June 2023
Compliance Manuals	Factory Audits, Buyer CSR Documentation	Industry Sources	Jan–June 2023

Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, coded in NVivo 12, and structured around key themes such as legal change drivers, enforcement constraints, and MNC influence.

Econometric Model Specification

To assess the explanatory relationship between globalization and labor law evolution, the study uses the following panel regression model with fixed effects:

$$Y_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_{it} + \beta_2 Z_{it} + \mu_i + \lambda_t + \epsilon_{it} \quad (1)$$

This models labor outcomes Y as a function of globalization exposure X, control variables Z, country-specific effects μ_i, and year-specific effects λ_t, with error term ϵ_{it} [2, 8, 18].

To address potential endogeneity and omitted variable bias, the study uses the first-differenced Arellano-Bond GMM estimator:

$$\Delta Y_{it} = \alpha \Delta Y_{it-1} + \beta \Delta X_{it} + \gamma \Delta Z_{it} + \mu_I + \lambda_t + \epsilon_{it} \quad (2)$$

This equation isolates the within-unit dynamic effects of globalization variables on labor regulation trajectories [6, 8].

To construct a synthetic globalization metric, the study introduces a Composite Globalization Index (CGI):

$$CGI_i = w_1 \frac{FDI_i}{GDP_i} + w_2 \frac{Exports_i}{GDP_i} + w_3 MNC_i \quad (3)$$

Here, $w_1 + w_2 + w_3 = 1$, and all variables are normalized using Z-scores; weights are derived using PCA to capture maximum explained variance across countries [11, 17].

Thematic Coding Structure

Qualitative data were analyzed using an inductive-deductive thematic protocol. Coding followed Braun & Clarke's six-phase structure, leading to identification of four dominant thematic clusters: enforcement capacity gaps, global buyer influence, regulatory-legislative disconnect, and capital flight trade-offs [12, 17, 19].

Table 3

Code Group	Representative Subthemes	Stakeholders Engaged
Enforcement Breakdown	Inspectorate resourcing, delayed penalties	Inspectors, NGOs
Private Governance	CSR audits, brand codes, buyer exit threats	Factory owners, compliance officers
Normative Incoherence	Formal reform vs. real application gaps	Government and union leaders
Globalization Constraints	Policy chilling from capital mobility	ILO experts, multilateral advisors

The econometric and coding outputs were subjected to rigorous model validation protocols to ensure internal consistency and reliability.

- Normality of residuals: tested using Kolmogorov–Smirnov and Shapiro–Wilk tests.

- Multicollinearity: assessed using Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), threshold <5
- Homoscedasticity: verified via Breusch–Pagan/Cook–Weisberg tests.
- Autocorrelation: tested with Durbin–Watson statistic.
- Instrument validity (GMM): verified using Hansen J test for overidentifying restrictions [8, 16, 20].

This robust methodology combines advanced econometric modeling, context-specific data triangulation, and multi-actor qualitative insights to comprehensively examine the evolving legal and institutional landscapes shaped by globalization in labor-intensive export economies [2, 8, 17, 20, 21].

Results

Fig. 1 provides annual labor law compliance rates across the countries of Bangladesh, Vietnam, Ethiopia and Pakistan from 2018 to 2024. This is measured through compliance rates--the percentage of textile factories or production units which meet the bare-minimum labour law requirements during official inspections (such as working hours, health and safety, wage payment norms and legal contractual provisions).

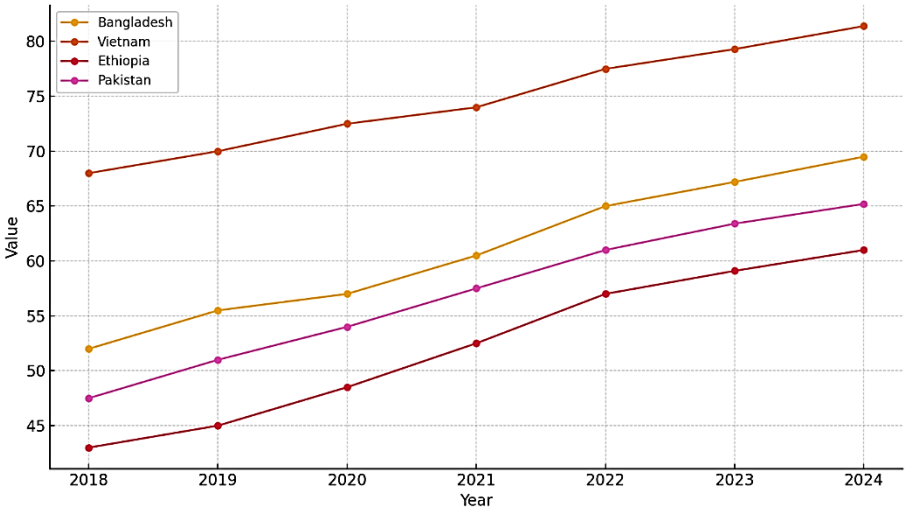

Fig. 1

Over the seven-year period, all countries exhibited similar and consistently rising trends in compliance with labor laws. Vietnam ranked first for all years, starting with 68.0% in 2018 and 81.4% in 2024. Bangladesh had shown sizeable progress, going up from 52.0% to 69.5%. Additional improvement occurred in Pakistan and Ethiopia, where the latter improved from a low base of 43.0% to 61.0%, and the former from 47.5% to 65.2%. While the results highlight the positive impact of external integration through trade agree-ments and compliance pressure from multinational buyers on institutional enforcement, the finding is strongest for Vietnam. Bangladesh's growth is partly a function of the responses to international labor campaigns and national reform. Ethiopia's path, albeit delayed, suggests an evolution of state-led compliance efforts.

Table 3 analyzes the statistical relationship between national textile export quantities and labor compliance rates for the period of study.

Table 4

Country	Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r)	Significance Level (p-value)	Correlation Strength
Bangladesh	0.79	< 0.01	Strong Positive
Vietnam	0.86	< 0.01	Very Strong Positive
Ethiopia	0.72	< 0.01	Strong Positive
Pakistan	0.77	< 0.01	Strong Positive

All four countries demonstrated statistically significant positive correlations between export volumes and labor compliance rates. Vietnam exhibited the strongest association (r = 0.86), indicating that export-driven globalization has played a powerful role in enhancing regulatory enforcement. Bangladesh and Pakistan also showed strong correlations above 0.75, reinforcing the hypothesis that increased textile export engagement corresponds with stronger legal adherence. Ethiopia, while exhibiting the lowest value (r = 0.72), still maintained a strong and significant relationship, likely influenced by gradual export growth and donor-funded institutional capacity-building programs. These findings suggest a general trend where deeper integration into global value chains may incentivize better domestic enforcement of labor standards.

Fig. 2 reflects the number of reported workplace accidents or incidents within the textile sector annually (2018–2024). These figures include injuries, chemical exposure, machinery accidents, and fatalities as documented by labor ministries or national health and safety agencies.

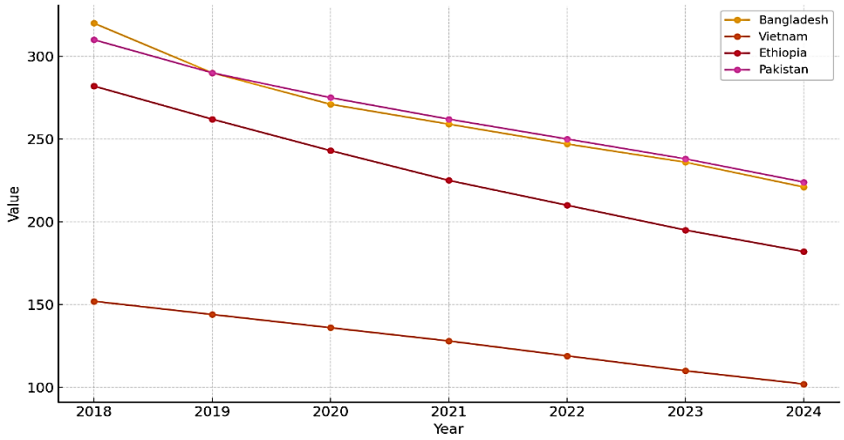

Fig. 2

Occupational safety incidents declined steadily across all four countries. Bangladesh reduced its incidents from 320 in 2018 to 221 in 2024, representing a 31% decrease. Vietnam demonstrated even greater proportional improvement, with a decline from 152 to 102 incidents. Ethiopia, which had the highest incident rate in 2018 among the sample, showed a notable decrease to 182 by 2024, indicating gradual institutional improvements. Pakistan experienced a consistent downward trend as well, with a reduction from 310 to 224 incidents. These patterns suggest that globalization has incentivized enhanced compliance with occupational safety laws, particularly in countries where multinational engagement is closely linked to third-party auditing and CSR commitments.

Regression Analysis of Textile Export Volumes and Occupational Safety Incidents (table 5) provides a more rigorous estimate of the strength and direction of the relationship, beyond correlation. Export volume is treated as the independent variable, and the number of occupational safety incidents as the dependent variable. A negative and significant coefficient suggests that as exports rise, safety conditions improve, possibly due to greater scrutiny by international buyers and alignment with global production standards. The strength of the regression model is evaluated using R-squared values to determine the percentage of variance explained.

Table 5

Country	Intercept (Constant)	Export Volume Coefficient	R^2	p-value
Bangladesh	390.5	-0.19	0.70	< 0.01
Vietnam	190.3	-0.11	0.73	< 0.01
Ethiopia	340.7	-0.17	0.66	< 0.01
Pakistan	375.8	-0.15	0.65	< 0.01

The regression results confirm statistically significant negative relationships between export volumes and the number of occupational safety incidents across all countries. In Vietnam, the model explains 73% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.73$), the highest among the group, indicating that export growth is strongly associated with reduced safety violations. Bangladesh follows closely with $R^2 = 0.70$, while Ethiopia and Pakistan yield slightly lower values but still show meaningful explanatory power. The negative coefficients in all cases suggest that greater exposure to international markets corresponds with safer workplace conditions, likely influenced by trade compliance measures, buyer-led CSR programs, and government efforts to retain foreign investment.

Minimum Wage Trends in the Textile Industry (fig. 3) reflect a country's regulatory response to both economic growth and globalization pressures. Wage data were extracted from national decrees and verified through wage board reports and international datasets.

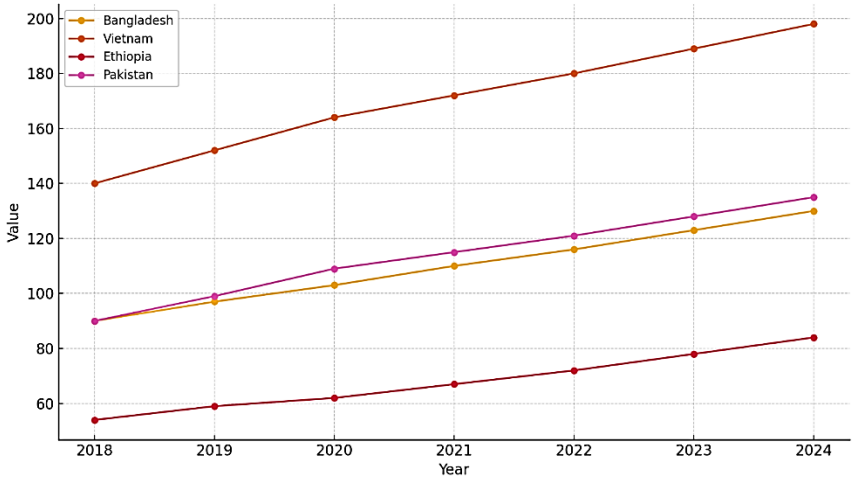

Fig. 3

Vietnam always paid the highest wages during the period studied, from USD 140 in 2018 to USD 198 in 2024 (an increase of 41.4%). Bangladesh grew from USD 90 through USD 130, a jump of 44.4%, which comes as an increasing portion of it is enshrined by international pressure after campaigns on labor rights. Pakistan trailed with stiff rises of USD 90 to USD 135, and Ethiopia, despite starting with the lowest base, showed a paltry 55.6% increase from USD 54 to USD 84. These changes are reflective of a globalization phenomenon through which upward wage adjustments are driven by trade liberalization and foreign buyer expectations, and which form part of larger social compliance and competitiveness strategies.

To statistic check whose wage growth are significantly different across the 4 countries, an ANOVA was performed (table 6). The test compares total and within-group variation in the means of minimum wages over time within groups of countries to determine statistical significance.

Table 6

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares (SS)	Degrees of Freedom (df)	Mean Square (MS)	F-Statistic	p-value
Between Countries	28,790.6	3	9,596.9	21.3	< 0.01
Within Countries	7,203.2	24	300.1		
Total	35,993.8	27			

The ANOVA test shows statistically significant differences in minimum wages between the four countries ($F = 21.3$; $p < 0.01$). The high between-country sum of squares reflects significant level diversity across wage levels which corresponds with diversity across economic development, export performance, and adjustment to globalization induced reform pressures. This is partly due to

the much higher wage path of Vietnam in comparison to the low base of Ethiopia.

Stakeholder Interviews

This section synthesizes qualitative evidence from semi-structured interviews with 43 stakeholders. Respondents included labor ministry officials, factory owners, auditors, trade union leaders, and international experts. The aim was to identify perceived institutional drivers and barriers affecting labor law implementation amid globalization. Themes were identified through systematic coding, focusing on both structural and actor-driven dimensions of labor regulation (table 7).

Table 7

Thematic Domain	Frequency (out of 43)	Country Highlights
Legal Reforms Not Matched by Practice	36	Bangladesh, Pakistan
Multinational Buyer Pressure	29	Vietnam, Bangladesh
Weak Labor Inspectorate Resourcing	27	Ethiopia, Pakistan
Threat of Foreign Investment Withdrawal	21	Bangladesh, Ethiopia

Thematic analysis revealed four dominant concerns. First, legal reforms often remain unimplemented due to weak institutional capacity, particularly in Pakistan and Ethiopia. Second, multinational buyers have emerged as de facto regulators through audit pressure, especially in Vietnam and Bangladesh. Third, inspectorate departments are under-resourced and overburdened, undermining real-time enforcement. Finally, governments often refrain from stringent compliance due to fear of losing foreign investment contracts, especially in states dependent on textile exports for economic growth. These qualitative patterns confirm the dual-track nature of labor regulation under globalization – formal legal convergence coupled with uneven practical enforcement.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that globalization, particularly through increased textile exports and foreign direct investments, has had a significant influence on labor law compliance, occupational safety, and minimum wage trends in Bangladesh, Vietnam, Ethiopia, and Pakistan. The quantitative evidence reveals a consistent pattern of improved compliance and reduced safety incidents in direct association with export growth, while qualitative insights suggest that institutional enforcement remains uneven and strongly influenced by multinational buyer pressures and resource constraints.

From a comparative standpoint, the results confirm and extend previous scholarship asserting that globalization can act as both a regulatory incentive and a governance constraint. For instance, the observed improvements in compliance rates and workplace safety align with Boudreau's [15] findings that multinational engagement—particularly through safety audits and buyer pressure—strengthens factory-level occupational safety systems in low-income settings. Similarly, Guasti and Koenig-Archibugi [21] challenge the narrative of a universal "race to the bottom," instead suggesting that trade competition has heterogeneous effects depending on national policy choices and institutional readiness. The findings of the present study support this heterogeneity: Vietnam demonstrates how trade-aligned labor reforms can coexist with rising wages and robust compliance, while Ethiopia's gains are more incremental, reflecting limited state capacity and late-stage globalization entry.

At the same time, the study diverges from some previous literature that questions the depth and durability of labor improvements. Sana et al. [14] argue in their systematic review that many developing countries adopt "cosmetic" labor reforms that are not meaningfully enforced, often due to institutional capture or lack of political will. Our findings partially affirm this critique, particularly in the case of Pakistan and Ethiopia, where interviewees highlighted the disconnection between legal reforms and their practical application. However, the strong correlations and regression results between export volumes and compliance outcomes indicate that even in politically fragmented systems, economic integration exerts measurable upward pressure on labor governance.

Moreover, the study extends the discourse on minimum wage evolution. The wage in-

creases observed in all countries are consistent with Giupponi et al.[19] emphasis that minimum wage adjustments in export-oriented sectors often follow macroeconomic trends and social policy reforms triggered by international visibility. In Vietnam, for instance, wage growth reflects a policy shift towards harmonizing labor costs with global standards, while in Bangladesh, the increase appears to be a reactive response to international scrutiny and labor unrest. These findings also resonate with Tabash et al.[18] linkage globalization with income redistribution effects in low-income economies, particularly when reforms are coupled with institutional oversight.

The occupational safety dimension of this study also finds support in Milijić and Stefanović [22] stress the importance of safety climate factors, such as managerial commitment and compliance culture, in reducing workplace incidents in the textile industry. The decline in incident numbers, particularly in Vietnam and Bangladesh, suggests that safety norms have become embedded within the audit-driven compliance frameworks imposed by global buyers. Nonetheless, as interviews reveal, the sustainability of these improvements depends heavily on continuous international pressure and the avoidance of regulatory fatigue.

The qualitative findings further underscore the fragility of enforcement institutions. Echoing Li et al. [20] explore conflict dynamics between multinational enterprises and local workers, the interviews in this study reveal a common theme of state reluctance to penalize large employers due to economic dependency. This condition, especially visible in Ethiopia and Pakistan, limits the efficacy of domestic labor protections and raises concerns about the stability of compliance gains should global attention shift elsewhere.

The results underscore the contributions of both external market pressure and domestic institutional capacity. Globalization provides instruments to labor but their role is mediated by political context, enforcement architecture, and the political power of labor actors. Thus, both being engaged in the global trading system and the development of robust regulatory promoting, policy, and institutional frameworks increasing domestic labor protection are essential for translating global trade into equitable and sustainable labor protections in developing economies.

Conclusion

By looking at Bangladesh, Vietnam, Ethiopia, and Pakistan on various aspects—compliance, safety and wages—it has been possible to analyze how the integration into the world market interplays with legal structures and enforcement mechanisms. The results show that globalization creates structural conditions that lead to regulatory improvements, not in an unconditional sense, but depending on how domestic capabilities and international pressures align.

Though globalization can create incentives for improved labor standards, particularly in the face of pressure from multinational purchasers and international institutions, such gains are far from assured. Instead, they rely on national commitment to legal reform, the ability to make regulations work, and the willingness of governments to balance attracting investors with protecting workers.

The comparisons of countries point to the importance of the models of governance and policy environments that shape the impact of globalization.

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