2025 Annual Report

Global RIghts Project

Trends in human rights practices worldwide

CENTER FOR NONVIOLENCE AND PEACE STUDIES

THE UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND
COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

CIRIGHTS In partnership with CIRIGHTS, the world's largest quantitative human rights dataset.

Meet the Team

Roya Izadi, PhD.

Associate director of the Center for Nonviolence and Peace Studies and director of the Security Forces, Rights, & Society Lab at the Center.

Skip Mark, PhD.

Director of the Center for Nonviolence and Peace Studies, and co-director of the CIRIGHTS Data Project.

Thupten Tendhar, PhD.

Director of the Nonviolence Summer Institute at the Center for Nonviolence and Peace Studies.

Student Team Members:

Ava Palma is a senior at the University of Rhode Island, majoring in political science and Italian. She has worked as a research assistant at URI for almost two years through the Political Science Department, the Center for Nonviolence and Peace Studies, and the SFRS Lab. She has worked on various projects at URI concerning civil-military relations, trust in police around the world, societal militarization, and anti-Americanism. She is the recipient of the David Warren Scholars with High Distinction Award for Sustained Excellence in Political Science in 2025 and was a College of Arts and Sciences fellow in summer 2025. Currently, she is interning as an undergraduate researcher at the Gender and Security Sector Lab at Cornell University.

Amanda Queiroz is a master's student in international relations at the University of Rhode Island, with a concentration in global peace studies. As a graduate research assistant, she works with Roya Izadi and the URI Center for Nonviolence and Peace Studies, contributing to scholarship on civil-military relations. Amanda also serves as an intern with the World Affairs Council of Rhode Island (WACRI), where she supports the U.S. Department of State's International Visitors Leadership Program (IVLP), facilitating cross-cultural exchange and citizen international diplomacy initiatives. Following her graduation, Amanda will embark on a Fulbright English Teaching Assistantship in Uruguay, where she will foster educational and cultural exchange while deepening her commitment to international collaboration and understanding.

Isabella Pizzo is the graduate assistant for the Center of Nonviolence and Peace Studies. She is studying international relations with a concentration in global peace studies. She is the recipient of the David Warren Scholars with High Distinction Award for Sustained Excellence in Political Science in 2023 as well as the University Academic Excellence Award for International Studies and Italian in 2025. She graduated summa cum laude with her bachelor's in political science, Italian, and international studies in May 2025.

Zahra Kahn graduated in May 2025 with a double major in political Science and psychology. She worked with the center in a few different capacities throughout her undergrad, mostly contributing research for the CIRIGHT's Data Project. While working on CIRIGHT's, she researched women's social rights, human trafficking, and economic discrimination around the world. She also helped to create a coding mechanism for measuring global refugee rights practices for this project. She received the 2025 Human Rights Award from the CNVP, as well as the University Academic Excellence Award for Political Science in 2025.

Emma Arcieri graduated from the MA program in International Affairs this past spring.

Alex Bolland is a junior molecular neuroscience and sociology student at the University of Rhode Island. For the Global Rights Project, she worked on a large-scale dataset examining patterns of digital repression across 195 countries. Her role involved reading and systematically coding U.S. State Department Human Rights Reports to identify instances where governments used technology to restrict expression, communication, or access to information. Her work contributed to the broader effort of mapping global trends in digital repression, highlighting how technology has increasingly become a tool of control in the modern era.

Brianna Knight is an MA student in international relations, concentrating in nonviolence and peace studies, and a graduate teaching assistant in the Political Science Department. She holds a B.A. in Political Science and Economics, where her research examined American political economy and the global rise of populism. Her current research interests include Middle Eastern politics, societal militarization, and the dynamics of regime change.

Zach Hurwitz graduated summa cum laude from the University of Rhode Island with a triple major in international studies and diplomacy, French, and political science. He is currently continuing his studies at the University of Rhode Island, pursuing a master's degree in international relations with a concentration in diplomacy.

James Tomb is studying film media and entrepreneurship at the University of Rhode Island and currently serves as the CNVP's social media and website manager. Prior experience as a website manager and digital assistant for Fairfield Enterprises honed his abilities in amplifying social media outreach, producing engaging promotional videos, and optimizing website traffic to enhance the company's online presence.
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Tiffany Morel graduated with a master's in international affairs from the University of Rhode Island Department of Political Science in 2025. She served as the graduate assistant at the Center for Nonviolence and Peace Studies during the 2024-2025 academic year. Tiffany also worked as a research fellow on the CIRIGHTS project and as a teaching assistant for PSC 360 - Human Rights Research.

Introduction

The 2025 Global RIghts Project report focuses on research that faculty and students have conducted on a variety of human rights, civil-military relations, and security issues. It will discuss the research, survey, and data collection projects that members of the University of Rhode Island's Center for Nonviolence and Peace Studies (CNVP) have conducted over the past year.

In the summer of 2025, the Security Forces, Rights, & Society (SFRS) Lab was established by Roya Izadi within the Center for Nonviolence and Peace Studies . The SFRS conducts research on security forces and their broader role within society, as well as empirical rights and accountability. The lab is designed to operate as a student-centered research lab that provides hands-on training and opportunities for URI students to engage in original data collection, data analysis, and survey design and implementation. The SFRS Lab's inaugural project is the Societal Militarization Project, which examines how military institutions expand their influence into civilian domains by taking on domestic roles that fall outside of standard military affairs. Alongside data collection, the SFRS Lab is also conducting interview research with security forces around the world, and the Lab plans on conducting public opinion surveys on Societal Militarization across several countries.

In 2025, Roya Izadi and Skip Mark conducted a survey in the United States, titled the U.S. Human Rights Survey, which gathered data on several factors that affect how people in the United States view certain human rights and the degree to which they believe various enforcement mechanisms should be employed to protect them. The survey was administered to 3,333 Americans and examined a variety of variables that impact how people view certain human rights.

In 2024, Roya Izadi and Skip Mark conducted a survey in Iran that explored several empirical questions about views towards security forces and democracy. To address the gap in research on public attitudes toward security institutions, particularly in autocratic regimes, Izadi, Skip, and Laura Huber developed and administered a survey experiment to Iranian citizens. The survey experiment examined public perceptions and attitudes toward Iran's various security forces. Furthermore, as a part of the Iranian survey initiative, Roya Izadi, Skip Mark, and Amanda Queiroz conducted a pre-registered survey experiment in Iran to examine how authoritarian regimes use narratives of failed uprisings to shape citizens' political attitudes. The project introduced a framing strategy that invoked failed democratization efforts abroad to warn that democratization will lead to state collapse, foreign intervention, and prolonged violence at home. The survey sought to explore whether such framing would effectively deter dissent by decreasing participants' willingness to protest and increasing tolerance for repression. Furthermore, Roya Izadi asked a series of questions about the domestic roles of the Iranian military as well as attitudes toward military participation in the economy and politics.

Recent work conducted by Skip Mark, David Cingranelli, and several undergraduate students sought to develop a measure of state-level atrocities, resulting in an article entitled "A Brutality-Based Approach to Identifying State-Led Atrocities" in the *Journal of Conflict Resolution*. They examined several existing measures of atrocities and found that all the different datasets disagreed on which states were engaging in atrocity crimes. As a result, they sought to develop a measure better equipped to capture the scale of atrocities worldwide.

As a part of Skip Mark and David Cingranelli's project establishing a measure of atrocities, they identified and developed a theory to predict mass atrocities, including war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide. Their recent work, published in the *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis*, is entitled "The Human Rights Sequence Theory of Atrocity: A Comparative Analysis." In their paper, they were able to show that genocide and other mass atrocities can be predicted long before they occur by observing the pattern of human rights violations that occur before mass atrocities.

The 2025 GRIP report includes several student spotlights that highlight work by URI students. Alex Boland conducted research on digital repression as a University of Rhode Island Social Science Institute for Research, Education, and Policy fellow. Digital repression refers to governments or authorities using technology and digital platforms to control expression and communication. Zhara Khan, Tiffany Morel, and Emma Arcieri, worked with Skip Mark and Baekkwan Park to develop a coding methodology designed to train a supervised AI model to replicate how a research assistant would code CIRIGHTS scores using human rights reports. The project focused on physical integrity rights, which encompass four internationally recognized human rights abuses, including extrajudicial killings, disappearances, torture, and political imprisonment. Amanda Queiroz and Ava Palma highlight the research projects involving the survey arm of the center, as well as the SFRS Lab's data collection.

Executive Summary

The 2025 GRIP report presents several important findings from research projects conducted over the past year.

Security Forces, Rights, & Society Lab

The SFRS Labs data collection on societal militarization revealed that post-COVID-19, societal militarization is a rising global trend. Militaries around the world have become increasingly involved

in domestic roles across all areas of society, including law enforcement, education, social programs, religion, and media control.

Americans still trust the military more than other major institutions, but that trust varies widely by where people live and their political views. A 2025 survey conducted during military deployments at the U.S.-Mexico border found a striking pattern: Democrats who live around more immigrants tend to trust the military less when it's used for immigration enforcement, seeing it as political overreach. Republicans with similar exposure to immigrant communities show the opposite reaction—they trust the military more, viewing these missions as necessary for security. This divide matters because when the military becomes involved in domestic issues like border security, it can become caught up in partisan politics, thereby threatening its reputation as a neutral institution.

Survey Initiatives in Iran

A survey of 2,667 individuals in Iran examined public attitudes toward security forces in Iran. It revealed that respondents expressed significantly more negative views of the security forces, primarily associated with internal repression. Furthermore, conservative attire significantly shapes perceptions: while conservative respondents prefer officers signaling ideological conformity, those supportive of women's rights strongly reject them.

A survey experiment examined the impact of failed social movements abroad on attitudes toward movements within Iran. It found that, contrary to the logic of authoritarian deterrence, exposure to failed uprisings did not suppress support for protest or increase acceptance of repression. Respondents were more likely to blame government repression in the face of a social movement.

U.S. Human Rights Survey

A survey of 3,333 Americans found that only 1,152 respondents provided a correct definition of human rights, while 1,431 provided partial answers, 750 provided incorrect answers, 103 provided nonserious answers, and 22 provided uncertain answers.

The survey revealed that, across the board, regardless of an individual's level of religiosity, trust in the military, political party affiliation, or ideological affiliation, citizens and authorized immigrants consistently received higher levels of support for the enforcement and protection of their rights than unauthorized immigrants or refugees.

Democrats and independents were significantly more supportive of antislavery rights, while republicans tend to be slightly more supportive of labor exploitation rights than democrats and independents.

Courts received the most significant amount of support for addressing rights violations compared to the president, Congress, or the police. Liberals overwhelmingly favored courts as an enforcement mechanism, while conservatives showed greater support for both military and presidential enforcement.

Identifying State-Led Atrocities

Combining the brutality-based atrocity measure with the latest CIRIGHTS data revealed that atrocities have increased over time, which is in direct contrast with findings by others that genocide is becoming less common.

This study revealed that 2022 saw the most atrocities in the last 40 years.

The study identifies 20 countries that have committed atrocities for 16 or more years between 2000 and 2022.

Predicting Mass Atrocities

Statistical tests revealed that the human rights which are hardest to protect are the right to a fair trial, torture, collective bargaining, an independent judiciary, and the right to unionize. The rights that were the easiest to protect were freedom from disappearances, freedom of foreign movement, women's economic rights, freedom of domestic movement, and women's social rights.

These tests found that the "easier" rights all come before widespread extrajudicial killings. They found that of the countries with widespread extrajudicial killing in a year, the CIRIGHTS data shows that 99 percent of them engage in torture, 99 percent engage in violations of the right to a fair trial, and 97 percent violate collective bargaining rights, which shows that rights violations occur in a predictable sequence from hardest to protect to easiest to protect.

Research found that several countries are at a high risk of committing mass atrocities, including Bangladesh, Brazil, Burundi, China, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, and more.

Digital Repression

Data gathered on digital repression found that governments around the world utilize many of the same tactics to suppress access to information.

Governments will use surveillance or legal pressure to discourage journalists and citizens from criticizing the state.

The information gathered presents three main findings: Governments often justify repression by using the language of security or morality. Digital repression is becoming increasingly hybrid, meaning that physical coercion, such as arrests or raids, often occurs alongside digital control. Lastly, repression adapts to new technology.

Physical Integrity Rights Violations

State agents are more likely to commit human rights violations against individuals or groups suspected of violence. Examples of this were found in Central and South America, as violations of physical integrity were typically linked to organized crime.

In countries experiencing civil conflict, state agents often excuse human rights standards when dealing with suspected members of opposition groups. Examples of this were found in the Central African Republic in 2023, when security forces committed 33 instances of extrajudicial killings.

Data found that throughout the world, prisoners were disproportionately targeted for violations of their physical integrity rights. Torture was frequently reported among those in detention or under arrest.

Security Forces, Rights & Society (SFRS) Lab

By Ava Palma

SFRS Lab Introduction

In the summer of 2025, Roya Izadi established the Security Forces, Rights & Society (SFRS) Lab within the URI Center for Nonviolence and Peace Studies (CNVP). The SFRS Lab serves as the institutional home for research on security forces and their broader roles within society, as well as for empirical studies of human rights and accountability. It is designed as a student-centered research hub that provides hands-on training and opportunities for students to engage in original data collection and analysis. The lab's inaugural project is the Societal Militarization Project, which examines how military institutions expand their influence into civilian domains.

Currently, the SFRS Labs' largest project is the Societal Militarization Project. Alongside the SFRS Lab's data collection arm, the lab plans on conducting public opinion surveys in multiple countries to gather opinions on societal militarization. The first of these surveys is a public opinion survey in Iran, conducted by Roya Izadi, which asked respondents about the role of the Iranian military in the economy and politics. In another survey in

the United States, Roya Izadi asked U.S. respondents about the use of the military domestically and individuals' opinions on the role of the U.S. military in politics. The SFRS Lab is also conducting interview research with security forces around the world. The first of these interviews was conducted in July 2025, when Roya Izadi interviewed 19 leadership members of the AFL (Armed Forces of Liberia). The interviews covered several areas of societal militarization as AFL members discussed the military's role in border security, internal security-related tasks, disaster response, public health initiatives, public health emergency response, and the AFL's support for infrastructure projects. For example, in an interview about the AFL's health initiatives and outreach, a senior officer stated, "everybody can go to the hospital, whether you're military, you're civilian, you can access services at the 14th Military Hospital." Interviews were also held with several senior members of different AFL Brigades. For example, in an interview with a member of Brigade GTD, an AFL discussed the role of the military in guarding critical infrastructure in the country, they stated, "I believe that the AFL, assist, provide, send, it is part of their national duty to protect critical infrastructure, like key points. And those are vulnerable key points, like LEC, water and sewer facilities." Interviews conducted with AFL officials shed light on different reasons as to why militaries become involved in domestic tasks ranging from security tasks to social programs, or public health coverage.

> The SFRS Lab plans to continue expanding its data collection, interview, and survey research arms in the future to continue its research on societal militarization around the world.

What is Societal Militarization

The Western conception of civil–military relations place the military at the center of external security. From classical American theorists such as Samuel Huntington to later sociological scholarship in much of Europe and the United States, the prevailing view holds that the primary function of the modern professional military is the organized use of force and the strategic application of violence against external adversaries (Huntington 1957, Finer 1974, Welch 1976, Brooks 2019). However, militaries around the world are increasingly involved in tasks that fall outside this scope (Izadi 2022, Bayer et al. 2023). From responding to domestic emergencies to assuming law enforcement roles, directing public health initiatives and social programs, to leading public infrastructure projects, militaries are increasingly assuming roles that extend beyond the traditional framework set forth by scholars of civil-military relations.

For example, in Mexico, the military has expanded its domestic responsibilities to overseeing infrastructure projects such as railways and airports, managing airport and customs operations, leading tourist initiatives, building banks, and guarding private infrastructure, among a variety of other tasks (Bergand and Polo 2023). In Colombia, the

government has utilized military forces to combat criminal organizations for decades and to maintain internal security by deploying the armed forces to cities with high crime rates, such as Cali and Medellin (Rosen and Cutrona 2021). In Liberia, following the establishment of a new constitution and the rebuilding of the army, the military has been involved in several domestic roles, including operating clinics in remote villages, leading public infrastructure projects, and border security. In the United States, the military has been deployed in several states to quell protest and counter crime. In much of Europe, militaries were deployed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic to administer vaccines, establish checkpoints, run tests, distribute supplies, enforce lockdowns, etc. (Gibson-Fall 2021). In France, Operation SENTINELLE was launched in 2015 to combat terrorism. The government deployed 10,000 soldiers across the country to "defend and protect the French people" with armed forces guarding churches, schools, tourist attractions, train stations, and airports (Ministry of the Armed Forces,). In Italy, the government launched the military operation "Strade Sicure" in 2008 to combat crime across the country. The operation has included the control of migrant reception centers and street patrols across the country (Perkowski, 2025). All of these examples represent a global trend: the increasing involvement of the military in domestic roles, which are tasks that extend well beyond the purview of the traditional scope of the military.

Importance of Understanding Societal Militarization

Understanding societal militarization is important for several reasons. First, we lack a systematic understanding of the militaries' evolving roles within societies and their broader effects on socioeconomic outcomes. If we rely on the Western frameworks on how civil-military relations should be structured, we might conclude that militarization poses substantial risks. There are many reasons to favor arguments around this perspective. For example, by involving the military in state' domestic affairs, governments may inadvertently alter public perception of the military. If civilians see the military as the agent of law and order, they are more likely to expect the military to intervene should there be a crisis. Political leaders then can leverage the military for their own benefit. Acceptance of using the military to address domestic challenges, particularly in policing and protest control, poses risks to civilian oversight as well as human rights, as it normalizes the use of armed forces in politically charged contexts and places a security institution trained for armed combat in charge of managing civilian populations and enforcing domestic order (Kenwick and Maxey 2022).

On the other hand, if we view militarization through the lens of countries' development efforts, we might consider militarization as a state-building strategy, one that expands the military's role beyond defense into areas such as infrastructure development, disaster response, education, and public service delivery. In contexts where civilian institutions

are weak or under-resourced, militaries often become key implementers of state capacity, providing stability and administrative reach where civilian agencies cannot. From this perspective, militarization may reflect an adaptive response to governance gaps. For example, military economic involvement can reduce the likelihood of mutinies by creating jobs and directing additional resources to the rank and file in countries with lower state capacity or military budget (Izadi and Pruett 2025). However, this can create other problems such as rent-seeking and corruption as well as likelihood of military takeovers (Izadi 2025). We cannot empirically study these rival explanations without a systematic documentation of these roles. The SFRS Lab aims to fill this gap through a systematic data collection effort on societal militarization. This research is especially urgent in light of the growing prevalence of societal militarization in the last decade.

What is the Societal Militarization Project

Despite the growing trend of militaries becoming involved in domestic affairs, most existing scholarship remains narrow in scope. Existing research has highlighted the military's increasing participation in domestic law enforcement (Blair and Weintraub 2023; Flores-Macías and Zarkin 2021; Pion-Berlin and Carreras 2017), judicial decisions (Isaias 2015), education (Naftali 2021), and other roles. Despite these contributions, cross-national empirical research remains limited on why societal militarization occurs and the extent to which militaries have become embedded within civilian spheres across diverse political, economic, social, and regional contexts.

The project on societal militarization will be the first to establish a cross-national dataset cataloguing instances of military involvement in domestic affairs from 1970 to 2024 in all countries with an existing military. The project captures 15 different domestic roles, including policing, security-oriented tasks, education, the economy, the judicial system, social programs, and others. Alongside cataloging the various roles the military is involved in, this project will also capture how many of these tasks are mandated to the military, along with the intensity of these tasks. Moreover, this project attempts to explain why societal militarization occurs, focusing on several different variables to explain the growing trend in militaries' expanding their involvement in domestic roles. The SFRS Lab has collected data from several countries that demonstrate the longhistory and wide extent of military involvement in domestic roles.

For example, data collected in Liberia highlighted the extent to which the military had become involved in domestic roles following the restructuring in 2008. The Liberian military, per its national defense policy, has been involved in various border security operations to "dismantle criminal networks" operating in border regions. Furthermore, the military, as a part of these operations, was deployed to patrol various districts and

villages across Liberia. Our research shows that not only was the Liberian military involved in security operations, but it also played a major part in constructing public infrastructure across Liberia. Through the First Engineering Company, the Liberian military has been involved in a number of infrastructure projects such as bridge rehabilitations, bridge construction, road construction, and the construction of various buildings ranging from temporary clinics, Ebola treatment centers, hospitals, and more. As required by its mandate, the Liberian military is also involved in guarding critical infrastructure across the country alongside high-profile personnel.

Interviews conducted with Liberian officials further revealed the extent of the Liberian military's role in domestic spheres as various military officials discussed the role of the military in Liberian society and why the armed forces are involved in domestic roles. During an interview with an officer from the First Brigade of the Liberian Military, the officer stated that the reason the Liberian military was involved in strengthening the government through public service actions was to "build a mutual trust between the citizens and the army." Furthermore, when explaining why the military is deployed to handle civil unrest, an officer from the First Brigade stated, "In case of any civil unrest, the citizens tend to listen to personnel of the AFL (Armed Forces of Liberia) more than the police." Members of the Liberian military further explained the role of the military in several other domestic roles alongside security-oriented tasks, including public works projects, social programs, and medical outreach efforts.

Data gathered on Poland found that the Polish military was involved in a number of domestic roles throughout the period of time the data spans. In the 1980s, the Polish military was deployed several times in response to protests and strikes occurring across the country. The military was deployed to quell protests, alongside enforcing curfews and patrolling streets. More recently, the Polish military has been involved in a number of border security operations and has been deployed across the country to guard critical infrastructure.

Conclusions

The Societal Militarization Project is the first of its kind to capture cross-national data on the domestic roles militaries across the world have adopted. The project also has far-reaching impacts for future policymakers. By providing detailed insight into the reasons why militarization occurs and its various forms, it provides policymakers with the ability to design policies intended to strengthen civilian oversight of the military. Moreover, it provides policymakers with the risks and benefits associated with instrumentalizing the military as a state-building tool. Furthermore, this project is the first of its kind to look

into under-researched areas of militarization, expanding public knowledge of the issue and the ever-expanding influence of the military into civilian spheres.

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Public Trust in the Military (SFRS Lab)

By Breana Knight

Public trust in the U.S. military remains higher than in any other major institution. Yet this trust is not evenly distributed across the population. As the military's presence in domestic policy issues increases—particularly through deployments related to immigration enforcement—Americans are interpreting its role in new and divergent ways. These dynamics present challenges for civil-military relations and for policymakers who rely on public confidence to support the military's activities at home.

This project draws on a nationwide survey conducted in June–July 2025, during a period when active-duty soldiers and National Guard units were deployed to Los Angeles and the U.S.-Mexico border in support of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). These deployments offered a rare opportunity to examine how everyday social experiences—especially exposure to immigrants—interact with partisan identities to shape trust in the U.S. military.

Key Findings

Analysis of the survey data reveals clear and contrasting patterns across political groups:

- Democrats with greater exposure to immigrants report lower trust in the U.S. military. Personal ties to immigrant communities appear to heighten concerns about military involvement in domestic enforcement operations and perceptions that such missions reflect politicized uses of force.
- Republicans with greater exposure to immigrants report higher trust in the military. These respondents are more likely to view the military's domestic deployments as necessary to maintain security and order.
- Independents fall between these poles, showing moderate sensitivity to immigrant exposure but less pronounced partisan structuring.

These findings suggest that the social contexts in which Americans live—who their neighbors, coworkers, and community members are—shape how they interpret the military's domestic role. The same experiences can reinforce trust for some groups while eroding it for others.

Why This Matters

The growing political divide in military trust has implications for civil-military relations, democratic oversight, and the future of domestic missions. As the military is periodically tasked with domestic roles such as border security, crowd-control operations, and support to civil authorities, public reactions may become increasingly uneven across communities.

Policy Implications

These findings highlight the need to treat any use of active-duty forces inside the United States as a measure of last resort, consistent with statutory limits and long-standing civil–military norms. Because domestic missions—especially those connected to immigration—risk entangling the military in polarized political debates, civilian leaders must safeguard the institution's political neutrality and communicate clearly about the legal authorities and constraints governing such deployments. Policymakers should additionally anticipate that communities with high immigrant–native contact may react differently to domestic military activity and carefully evaluate whether such missions are necessary and appropriate. Strengthening civilian agencies and investing in non-military alternatives remains essential for reducing reliance on the armed forces in domestic roles.

Ultimately, this work's findings underscore that trust in the U.S. military is shaped not only by institutional performance but also by Americans' lived experiences and the partisan narratives through which those experiences are interpreted. Understanding these dynamics is essential as civilian and military leaders navigate the complex boundary between domestic security demands and the principles that underpin healthy civil-military relations.

CNVP Spotlight on Survey Initiative in Iran

By Amanda Queiroz

In 2024, Roya Izadi and Skip Mark conducted a national survey in Iran that explored several empirical questions about views towards the security forces and democracy. Below, we highlight the major findings of this survey.

Conceptualization of Security and Security Forces

Security, in its absolute sense, represents freedom from all threats and vulnerabilities. This fundamental concept has served as a cornerstone of statecraft throughout history, with governments around the world consistently prioritizing it as both a core value and primary objective of the state. The pursuit of security manifests itself tangibly through state institutions: military forces, police departments, and other security apparatus that serve as both symbolic representations of state power and practical instruments for threat mitigation (De Bruin 2019). However, the state's perceived strength and legitimacy of its security rely, in part, on the legitimacy of the security forces that embody it.

Importance of Security Forces and Role of Public Perception

As stated above, security forces serve as both symbolic representations and tangible institutions of state-sanctioned safety. While these forces fulfill a critical function in maintaining public order and protection, their operational legitimacy is fundamentally dependent upon public trust and perceptions of these forces. Public perception of security forces can be shaped by numerous factors. Existing scholarship has examined legitimacy and attitudes through lenses of militarization, gender, and race. For example, research demonstrates how female security personnel are often perceived as inferior, a perception reinforced through institutional practices such as combat exclusions and disproportionately high rates of sexual harassment within security organizations (Sadler et. al, 2017; Young & Nauta, 2013). However, the generalizability of these studies remains limited by their focus on Western democracies, failing to account for how these dynamics, and additional cultural, political, and socioeconomic factors, may manifest differently across diverse governmental and societal structures.

Security Forces in Autocratic Regimes and the Public's Attitude

While previous literature has extensively examined security institutions within Western democracies and the political behaviors that influence public support across both democratic and autocratic systems, there remains a significant gap in understanding public attitudes toward security institutions specifically within autocratic regimes. Understanding this gap requires examining the distinct roles security forces play in democratic versus autocratic settings. Beyond traditional police forces in democratic systems seen in both autocratic and democratic systems, autocratic systems often use specialized security institutions responsible for diverse functions including internal repression, external defense, and domestic surveillance. Despite the differences, these forces still depend on civilian cooperation and remain sensitive to public perceptions of their legitimacy. To address this research gap, Roya Izadi, Laura Huber, and Skip Mark, developed and administered a comprehensive survey to Iranian citizens, examining public perceptions and attitudes toward Iran's various security forces, such as regular police, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), morality police, anti-riot police, Basij, and the conventional military (Izadi, Huber, and Mark 2025). The survey employed a methodological approach that randomly assigned digitally created photographs of each security personnel group that varied by gender and clothing style to signal level of religiosity, allowing researchers to isolate the effects of these demographic and cultural factors on public perception.

The results reveal a clear pattern in public attitudes: respondents expressed significantly more negative views toward the IRGC, morality police, anti-riot police, and Basij, which are security forces primarily associated with internal repression, compared to the conventional military and regular police, which garnered relatively more positive responses from participants. More specifically, the IRGC was seen as more corrupt and violent than any of the other security forces. Regarding gender dynamics, participants consistently rated female security personnel as less capable than their male counterparts across all scenarios and security forces. This bias persisted even in domestic violence situations, where feminine traits like empathy may be expected to provide advantages, suggesting that perceptions of male authority override gender-specific advantages in certain contexts. While gender differences produced large statistical effects, religious attire showed smaller but significant impacts on perceptions. Security personnel wearing traditional religious clothing (such as chadors or beards) were consistently viewed as more trustworthy among more liberal respondents than those in secular attire, regardless of gender.

Takeaways

The research presented above demonstrates that security forces are not a unitary actor in the public mind. Citizens form judgments by combining what a unit does with the likelihood that its personnel will act against them. The unit function and the perceived action of the personnel produce different evaluations between forces. This level of public awareness has implications for regime stability and governance effectiveness. When citizens can distinguish between the legitimacy of different security institutions and individual officers, it creates vulnerabilities for more authoritarian leaning regimes that rely heavily on repressive apparatus. In other words, indicating that even in a nondemocratic context, authoritarian security forces are still bound to an audience cost. However, governments can strategically manipulate their legitimacy by aligning their institutions with prevailing social and cultural norms. In the Iranian context, respondents demonstrated higher levels of trust for male security officers and those with similar ideological affiliations, regardless of their specific institutional affiliation.

Views Toward Democracy

Roya Izadi, Skip Mark, and Amanda Queiroz conducted a preregistered survey experiment to examine how authoritarian regimes use narratives of failed uprisings to

shape citizens' political attitudes. The project introduces the concept of "Syrianization," a framing strategy in which leaders invoke Syria's civil war to warn that democratization efforts inevitably lead to state collapse, foreign intervention, and prolonged violence. This research explores whether such framing effectively deters dissent by decreasing willingness to protest and increasing tolerance for repression.

Conceptualization

Authoritarian leaders often attempt to prevent the diffusion of pro-democracy movements by manipulating how citizens interpret events abroad. The logic of Syrianization rests on fear: if citizens view uprisings as dangerous and destabilizing, they may choose order over reform and accept harsher state control. This study builds on theories of diffusion, framing, and authoritarian learning by asking whether exposure to narratives of failed democratization, such as those in Syria and Egypt, actually discourages citizens from mobilizing or shifts their attitudes toward repression.

To test this, participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: a Syria vignette (failed democratization through civil war), an Egypt vignette (initial success followed by authoritarian reversal), or a control condition with no vignette. Respondents were then asked about their willingness to join future protests, acceptance of government repression, tolerance for protester violence, preferences for reform or revolution, trade-offs between freedom and security, and the importance they placed on living in a democracy.

Findings

Contrary to the logic of authoritarian deterrence, exposure to failed uprisings did not suppress support for protest or increase acceptance of repression. Respondents who read about Syria or Egypt expressed similar, and in some cases slightly higher, willingness to join future protests compared to the control group. The most robust effect ran counter to expectations: both vignettes significantly reduced agreement that the government has the right to repress protesters, even through the use of force. Democratic aspirations also remained strong across all groups, with the majority of participants favoring gradual reform over revolutionary change or preserving the status quo. Support for protester violence remained uniformly low, suggesting that failure frames do not make dissent more militant but also fail to delegitimize it. When disaggregated by ideology, reformists were consistently more supportive of protest and less tolerant of repression than conservatives; yet, across both groups, narratives of failure neither strengthened regime legitimacy nor weakened democratic values.

Takeaways

The findings demonstrate that authoritarian "fear appeals" based on failed uprisings are unreliable and can even backfire. Invoking Syria's civil war or Egypt's reversal as warnings did not dampen protest willingness or increase acceptance of coercion; instead, such narratives weakened the perceived legitimacy of repression. These results suggest that while autocrats may seek to deter dissent by highlighting the chaos of failed revolutions, citizens interpret these messages in more complex ways—sometimes as signs of regime insecurity rather than inevitability. The study advances research on diffusion, repression, and authoritarian control by showing that negative demonstrations of failure are not consistently persuasive tools of deterrence and may, in some cases, erode the very foundations of state legitimacy.

Other Outcomes of the Survey

The survey for this report primarily focuses on public attitudes toward security forces in Iran based on gender and religiosity, as well as several additional research questions. One section investigated how external threats influence individual-level nuclear preferences. Peyman Asadzade (2025) analyzed this data in "External Threat and Nuclear Preferences: Micro-Level Insights from the Iran–Israel Confrontation," finding a significant rise in support for nuclear weapons following a confrontation and an increased perceived need for deterrence. The survey data has also contributed to research on regional political dynamics.

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Human Rights in the American Mind

By Amanda Quieroz and Ava Palma

Conceptualization of Human Rights

What are human rights? According to the United Nations, "human rights are rights inherent to all human beings, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status. Human rights include the right to life and liberty, freedom from slavery and torture, freedom of opinion and expression, the right to work and education, and many more." These rights are codified in international law through the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948. Despite this formal definition, the conceptualization of human rights varies significantly from country to country, culture to culture, and even within a single country. This variation stems from the inherently abstract nature of human rights as a concept, compounded by the fact that individuals' worldviews and perspectives are shaped by their unique experiences with socialization. The challenge of defining such fundamental yet intangible concepts inevitably lead to several different interpretations.

Importance of Understanding Human Rights

Understanding what constitutes human rights is essential for identifying violations against individuals and conceptualizing human rights abuses more broadly. However, given the variation in how human rights are defined (not by international law, but by person by person) perceptions of what constitutes violations, and their severity will inevitably differ across individuals and communities. This variation drives scholarly research to understand what shapes one's definition of human rights and what determines the perceived severity of human rights violations. The U.S. Human Rights Survey conducted by Skip Mark and Roya Izadi in 2025 examines factors such as political affiliation, trust in the military, level of religiosity, and other variables that impact how people view certain human rights and the degree to which they believe various enforcement mechanisms should be employed to protect these rights.

What Do People Think About Human Rights

Table 1: Human Rights Knowledge Assessment

Human Rights Knowledge	Percent of Cases	No. of Cases	Average Certainty
Correct	34.2	1152	88.6
Partial	39.8	1341	78.5
Wrong	22.3	750	75
Nonserious	3.1	103	99.9
Uncertain	0.6	22	100

In a human rights survey administered to 3,333 Americans in 2025, the variation of definitions was evident. When participants were asked the open-ended question: "In your own words what does the term 'human rights' mean?" The answers varied. Some common themes seen from respondents include respect, dignity, and basic freedoms given to all human beings; other respondents simply did not know, and others indicated in some way that human rights are not universal, demonstrating that even within a country, the definition remains inconsistent.

We used a large language model to help grade these answers by sorting each answer into one of five categories: correct, partial, wrong, nonserious, and uncertain. Correct answers included a recognition that rights apply to all human beings, a focus on dignity, or a broad conception of many rights. Partial answers often looked at people being treated fairly or access to a single right. Wrong answers included being civil or kind or doing things that you want to do. There were a few nonserious answers where it was clear they did not intend to answer the question and a small number of people who said they did not know.

The large language model found that 34.2 percent, or 1152 responses, were correct definitions of human rights. Correct responses included phrases such as: "Human rights are the basic freedoms and protections that every person is entitled to just because they are human," or "Human rights are fundamental freedoms and entitlements inherent to all humans."

Partial responses accounted for 39.8 percent of the cases, totaling 1,241 responses. Partial responses included phrases such as: "That all people should be treated equally," or "It

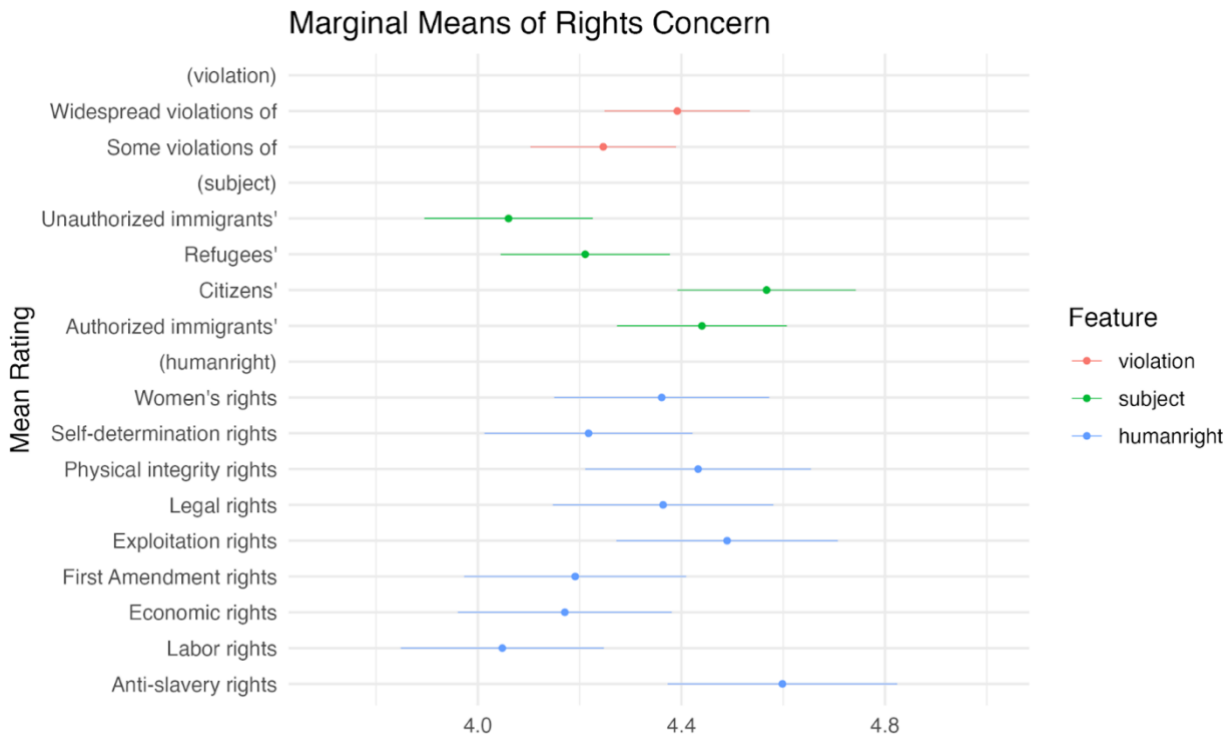
means to be able to have free speech." Following, correct and partial responses, wrong responses made up 22.3 percent of the responses, with a total of 750 cases.

Wrong responses included phrases like, "Being very civil," or "The ability to do what I want, so long as I harm no one else by force or fraud." Nonserious answers accounted for 3.1 percent of responses, totaling 103 cases.

Nonserious responses included phrases such as, "Nothing" or "srqwqeqweqew." Uncertain responses accounted for the smallest portion of the cases, with 0.6 percent of responses falling into this category.

There were a total of 22 uncertain responses, which included phrases such as "I don't know anymore" or "I don't know how to answer this question properly."

What Shapes Public Attitudes and Support for Human Rights?



The survey results highlight various patterns. Across the board, despite one's level of religiosity, trust in military, political party affiliation, or ideological affiliation (liberal or conservative), authorized immigrants consistently received higher levels of support for enforcement and protection of their rights compared to unauthorized immigrants or refugees. This disparity suggests that citizenship may serve as an implicit marker of worthiness of basic human rights protections in the mind of the American public, which raises questions about respondents' knowledge of foundational documents such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. There is the question of whether a lack of familiarity with international human rights standards correlates with reduced support for noncitizen rights or if it simply signals that for the general American public, there is the belief that there are inherent rights granted to citizens that noncitizens cannot or should not benefit from. When examining political affiliation, democrats and independents are significantly more supportive of anti-slavery rights, while republicans tend to be slightly more supportive of labor exploitation rights (child labor, adequate living wage, overtime pay, safe working conditions) than democrats and Independents. This is interesting, considering that these categories share substantial overlap in labor protections. This brings into question how American individuals differentiate and define slavery and labor exploitation. Even when examining the overall average marginal effect of the survey, collective labor rights generally have a lower margin and range of support than anti-slavery and labor exploitation rights, despite these categories overlapping.

Regarding enforcement mechanisms, the American public demonstrates a nuanced understanding of institutional roles in human rights protection, with courts receiving significantly higher support as enforcement agents compared to the president or police. This preference for judicial enforcement reflects an appreciation for the appropriate legal framework for protecting human rights. However, political affiliation creates differentiating patterns in this institutional trust, with liberals overwhelmingly favoring courts as enforcement mechanisms, while conservatives show greater support for both military and presidential enforcement, aligning with preferences for centralized executive authority. Personal characteristics also influence the prioritization of certain rights: individuals with higher religiosity prioritize labor rights and self-determination more strongly, while those with high military trust prioritize legal, economic, and anti-slavery rights more strongly. These findings suggest that beyond political affiliation, personal values regarding institutional authority and religious conviction significantly shape how individuals conceptualize and prioritize both the substance of human rights and the appropriate mechanisms for their protection.

Policy Recommendations

One finding consistently shown throughout the survey is the strong support for courts as the primary enforcement mechanism for human rights. Despite some groups showing slightly stronger support for other institutions, such as police and presidential enforcement, the data reveal that Americans, even with variation in their support for specific human rights, understand and appreciate the fundamental role of the judicial system in protecting these rights. One of the main findings of this survey was that, generally, the rights of unauthorized immigrants and refugees are valued less, which could reflect the Trump administration, growing frustration with immigration, or a weak economy.

The results of this survey reflect the current polarization in the United States and the significant policy shifts implemented by the Trump administration since January 2025. Within the first six months of the current administration, dramatic changes have been enacted regarding immigration policy, with the administration and conservative-identifying individuals consistently arguing that undocumented immigrants pose economic, social, and cultural threats to American communities. These policy changes have included expanded deportation operations, restrictions on asylum processes, and efforts to limit birthright citizenship.

Meanwhile, Democratic-led states and municipalities have mounted substantial legal resistance, filing numerous court challenges to block federal immigration enforcement actions and protect sanctuary city policies. State attorneys general have pursued

injunctions against ICE operations, while local governments have implemented measures to shield immigrant communities from federal enforcement. This legal pushback has created a complex patchwork of conflicting federal and state policies across the country.

However, despite democrats and liberal organizations and states pushing back against the recent immigration policies and actions, the data from the survey demonstrates a troubling contradiction in public opinion. Even though democrats and liberal-identifying individuals were more likely to support the rights of an immigrant or refugee, despite their legal status, compared to their counterparts, on average Americans consistently assign lower priority to enforcing and protecting the rights of unauthorized immigrants and refugees compared to authorized immigrants. This highlights that despite the backlash that the public sees on local news networks and the media, public attitudes toward different categories of immigrants remain hierarchical.

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CIRIGHTS Spotlight: Identifying State-Led Atrocities

By Skip Mark

2025 marks the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) at the 2005 United Nations World Summit. All governments affirmed their responsibility to protect civilians from atrocity crimes, which include genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing. The R2P principle also calls on the international community to act promptly to redress atrocities when national governments fail to do so. This marked a major milestone in International Relations as the United Nations expanded the justifications for intervening in domestic politics when leaders fail to protect the rights of civilians.

Identifying countries that engage in atrocities is the first step in invoking the R2P principle. Before we can evaluate whether international intervention is needed or whether governments are taking action to redress atrocities in their own country, we need to know whether an atrocity has occurred. Unfortunately, there is no legally agreed-upon definition of atrocity in international law.

In recent work, Skip Mark and David Cingranelli worked alongside several undergraduate students to develop a measure of state-led atrocities, which was published in an article entitled "A Brutality-Based Approach to Identifying State-Led Atrocities" in the *Journal of Conflict Resolution*. We examined several existing measures of atrocities, such as the Targeted Mass Killing (TMK) dataset, the Political Instability Task Force (PITF) Genocide/Politicide data, and the Holocaust Memorial Museums Early Warning Project, and found that they all disagreed on which states were engaging in atrocity crimes in any given year. So we sought to develop a measure that better captured the scale of atrocities around the world.

We define a brutality-based atrocity as occurring in a country if there is widespread killing of civilians by the state or by nonstate actors working in concert with the state that leads to 50 or more deaths and is accompanied by the widespread violation of one additional physical integrity right: torture, political imprisonment, or enforced disappearance in a calendar year. The definition includes widespread killing, similar to the other measurement projects, but also recognizes that killings rarely happen without other rights violations occurring simultaneously.

Most measures of atrocity (TMK, PITF, and the Early Warning Project, for example) have a requirement to prove intent. The TMK dataset, for example, looks for evidence that the killers intended to "destroy or existentially intimidate" the members of an ethnic, religious, or political group. The intent criterion opens the door to subjectivity and political influence. Governments that can hide their intent or obscure the facts can avoid being captured in these datasets. It also often takes years to investigate and prove intent, which can delay timely intervention.

Proving intent from a brutality-based perspective is irrelevant and purposefully distracting. If 1,000 people are killed, it is an atrocity. Whether the killers intended to destroy the group in whole or in part is a separate matter from whether there was large-scale killing and repression of civilians. An atrocity occurs when there is widespread killing and widespread violations of another physical integrity right. This allows the measure to capture far more events that do not meet the intent threshold but are nonetheless atrocities. Intent becomes a secondary question much the same way as whether an individual is charged with first- or second-degree murder, depending on whether prosecutors can prove intent.

Table 1: Atrocities Identified by Different Projects in 2017

Brutality-Based Atrocity	Targeted Mass Killing	Political Instability Task Force	Early Warning Project
Ethiopia	Ethiopia	—	Ethiopia
Iraq	—	Iraq	Iraq
Myanmar	Myanmar	—	Myanmar
South Sudan	South Sudan	—	South Sudan
DR Congo	DR Congo	—	—
Nigeria	—	—	Nigeria
North Korea	—	—	North Korea
Philippines	—	—	Philippines
Sudan	—	—	Sudan
Syria	—	—	Syria
Venezuela	—	Venezuela	—

Countries only included on the Brutality-Based list: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Burundi, Cameroon, China, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Egypt, India, Iran, Israel, Kenya, Libya, Pakistan, Russia, Rwanda, South Africa, and Yemen.

One example of the way intent shapes which states are committing atrocities is shown in the table above. The table explores which countries are scored as having committed an atrocity in 2017. The first thing to note is that the three other projects do not all agree on any case for the year. However, the brutality-based atrocity measure captures every case with the exception of the Central African Republic, where the atrocities are carried out by nonstate actors. Since the brutality-based measure only looks at state-led atrocities, it captures every case in the other three datasets. Beyond the cases in the other three

datasets, it adds additional countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Burundi, Cameroon, China, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Egypt, India, Iran, Israel, Kenya, Libya, Pakistan, Russia, Rwanda, South Africa, and Yemen. The brutality-based atrocity list is therefore much larger and suggests that atrocities are far more common than most other projects would lead us to believe.

Using the brutality-based atrocity measure, we can learn a great deal about what atrocities look like over the past 40 years. The graphs are updated through 2022 using the latest CIRIGHTS data. I updated the graph in the article to 2022. One notable trend is that atrocities have increased over time. This is directly contrary to findings by others that genocide is becoming less common. A second interesting finding is that 2022 saw the most atrocities in the last 40 years. Given events of the past few years, it is likely that this elevated level of atrocity has continued.

One way to interpret this, as well as the previous table, is that leaders may be getting smarter in the ways they carry out atrocities. Muddying the water to make it harder to prove intent and committing human rights violations with the maximum amount of violence that would allow them to avoid international censure

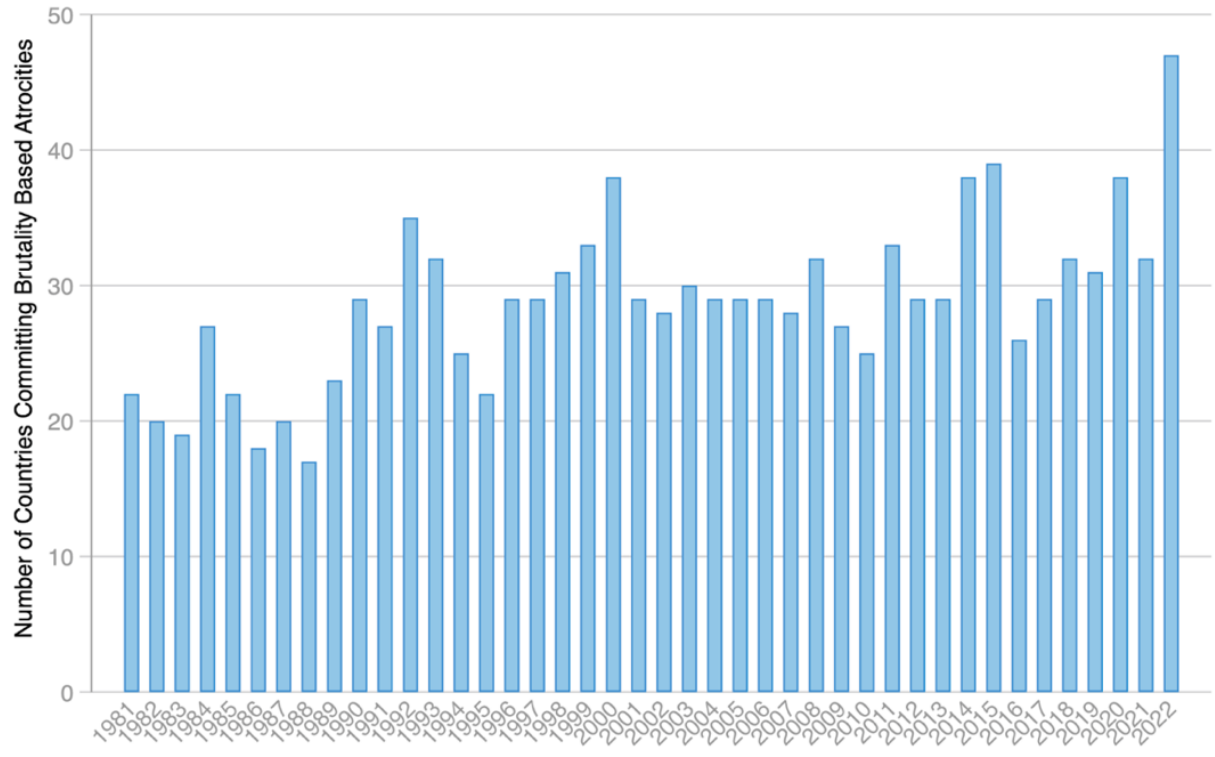

Table 2: Country Atrocity Years 2000-2022

Yemen	16
Dominican Republic	17
South Africa	17
Iraq	18
Brazil	18
Philippines	18
Burundi	19
Kenya	19
Nigeria	20
Colombia	20
China	20
Israel	20
DR Congo	21
Sudan	21
Iran	21
North Korea	21
Bangladesh	22
Pakistan	22
Venezuela	22
India	22

CIRIGHTS Spotlight: Predicting Mass Atrocities

By Skip Mark

The previous section outlined a way to identify atrocities, this section identifies a theory of predicting mass atrocities including war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide. Recent work by Skip Mark and David Cingranelli, entitled "The Human Rights Sequence Theory of Atrocity: A Comparative Analysis," published in the *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis* this year, outlines a theoretical framework for predicting mass atrocities. We were able to show that we can predict genocide and other mass atrocities long before they occur by observing the pattern of human rights violations that lead up to mass atrocities.

The article uses CIRIGHTS data including the brutality-based atrocity measure (see the previous section) to identify states at risk of mass atrocities: genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. We argue that mass atrocities are the result of strategic decisions made by country leaders. Leaders weigh the costs of violating human rights (international sanctions, citizen disapproval and dissent, naming-and-shaming campaigns, electoral loss) with the benefits (leader survival, suppressing protests and dissent, territorial control, marginalization of societal groups). Leaders use the least costly rights violations first and escalate only when that is not enough to achieve their goals.

Leaders never start with genocide or mass killing. Instead, human rights violations occur in a predictable sequence with genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity occurring at the end of a long chain of human rights violations that often go unnoticed. Atrocities always involve multiple human rights violations including state violence (killing, torture, disappearance, political imprisonment), restrictions on civil liberties (free speech, the right to protect, democratic governance), and restrictions on labor rights (unions and collective bargaining).

The Myanmar government's genocide of the Rohingya Muslims was declared a genocide by various United Nations agencies in 2017. Yet serious human rights violations were documented by the US State Department Human Rights Reports, Amnesty International, and other organizations since 2005. For more than a decade before the genocide, there were arbitrary arrests, political persecution, violence against minority groups, sexual violence against Rohingya women and girls by government agents, among other rights violations. These rights violations should have prompted atrocity prevention efforts by

the United Nations and others long before the Rohingya people became the victims of a genocide. Yet, the failure to intervene before things escalated underscores the need to treat systemic human rights violations as early indicators of atrocity risk.

We outline a human rights sequence theory of atrocity, which argues that the order in which human rights are violated is predictable. If we know the order of violations, we can examine any country's human rights practices and assess the likelihood that it will commit a mass atrocity in the future. Testing this theory required data on a large number of human rights measured over a long period of time. We used the CIRIGHTS dataset, which measures more than two dozen human rights for every country in the world for several decades.

We used a statistical method called Mokken Scaling Analysis. This is analogous to ordering the questions on a test from easiest (what is 2 + 2) to hardest (prove the Pythagorean theorem). It assumes that if you do well on the most difficult questions, you are likely to do well on the easier ones. So, someone who can prove the Pythagorean theorem would be able to solve a moderately difficult and an easy question. If the scale works, then we can take any individual's score. For example, on a test with 10 questions ordered from easiest to hardest, if they score a 7, we can be reasonably sure they got the first seven questions right and the last three wrong. This will not be 100% right in every case (they may guess correctly or write the wrong answer by mistake), but if the scale works, it is useful for knowing which questions were answered correctly or incorrectly with a single score.

For our purposes, we applied this technique to human rights. All of the rights were ordered from least to most difficult to protect. In this case, "least difficult" means rights that are protected by most countries around the world, and "most difficult" means rights that most countries violate. Leaders often violate the right to unionize, so this would be considered "difficult," while most leaders do not disappear civilians, making disappearances less difficult.

We used statistical tests to ensure that the rights we included actually aligned with our sequence theory: that higher scores on the scale indicated they were more likely to have protected the rights that came before and less likely to protect the rights that came after, and that this difficulty applies universally across countries. Our Mokken Scale ended up with a set of 15 human rights that met these conditions.

The rights which were hardest to protect were the right to a fair trial, torture, collective bargaining, and independent judiciary, and the right to unionize. The rights that were easiest to protect were freedom from disappearances, freedom of foreign movement,

women's economic rights, freedom of domestic movement, and women's social rights. These "easier" rights all come before widespread extrajudicial killing.

Table 3: The Sequence of Human Rights Violations 1994-2022

	Human Right	Difficulty
Most difficult	Right to a Fair Trial	0.44
	Torture	0.41
	Collective bargaining	0.40
	Independence of the judiciary	0.37
	Right to unionize	0.31
	Free speech	0.29
	Freedom of association	0.26
	Political imprisonment	0.25
	Electoral self-determination	0.25
	EXTRA-JUDICIAL KILLING	**0.18**
	Women's social rights	0.18
	Freedom of domestic movement	0.15
	Women's economic rights	0.13
	Freedom of foreign movement	0.12
Easiest to protect	Disappearance	0.08

We can look at a country and see which of these rights they are doing well on and which rights are being violated, and evaluate their risk of mass atrocity. So if we see a decline in specific rights in a country, we can assess the risk that the next right will be violated. When we are looking at mass atrocities, we will see widespread violations of extrajudicial killings.

One way we can easily test whether this makes sense is to take an "easy" right and see how countries do on the more difficult rights. Let's look at all countries with widespread extrajudicial killing in a year. The CIRIGHTS data shows that 99% of them engage in torture, 99% engage in violations of the right to a fair trial, and 97% violate collective bargaining rights. So the more difficult rights are almost always violated after the easier ones are violated. As you move down the list and get closer to the "easy" rights, the rate of violations decreases, but it remains informative. Independence of the judiciary (88% violation rate), right to unionize (92% violation rate), free speech (92% violation rate), freedom of association (83% violation rate), political imprisonment (85% violation rate), and electoral self-determination (78% violation rate).

Table 4: Brutality-based Atrocities Precede Genocide

Genocide Case Onset	Brutality-based atrocity years
Rwanda 1994	1991, 1992, 1993, 1994 (three-year warning)
Serbia and Montenegro 1998	1993, 1998 (fail, no warning)
Sri Lanka 2008	2006, 2007, 2008 (two-year warning)
Central African Republic 2013	2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013 (five-year warning)
Iraq 2014	2010, 2012, 2013, 2014 (two-year warning)
Venezuela 2017-2018	2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017 (five-year warning)
Myanmar 2017	2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017 (five-year warning)

Using the human rights sequence theory, we were able to show that before a country shows up as having a brutality-based atrocity (widespread extrajudicial killings and widespread violations of torture, disappearance, or political imprisonment), it violates many of the rights that are more difficult than extrajudicial killing. On the other hand, states not engaging in torture, that respect the right to a fair trial, and respect collective bargaining rights have never engaged in a brutality-based atrocity. Therefore, protecting these rights can help prevent atrocities.

In the article, we outline how labor unions in countries with the right to unionize and bargain collectively have mobilized against repressive governments to hold them accountable. In Chile, Augusto Pinochet's first hurdle to engaging in genocide came from labor unions within the country as well as transnational labor solidarity campaigns, such as the Scottish trade unionists' refusal to service Chilean military aircraft that were being used to bomb civilians. We argue that collective labor rights, both within a country and around the world, are an effective way to prevent mass atrocities, and the global decline in labor rights protection may be one reason we are seeing an uptick in atrocities.

Table 4 is reproduced from the article. We set out to test whether countries that engaged in genocide showed up as repeatedly having a brutality-based atrocity (which is the end of the Mokken Scale) in the years before the genocide began. We find that for all but one case, Serbia and Montenegro, our indicator turned on several years before a genocide took place. In the case of Serbia and Montenegro, our data saw widespread violations of disappearances, torture, and political imprisonment. They would have placed it towards the end of the scale in the high-risk category. We argued that countries that have several years of brutality-based atrocities in a row are at risk for mass atrocities.

We can look at the current CIRIGHTS dataset and identify countries that have engaged in brutality-based atrocities four or five times in the last five years of the dataset to identify countries at risk of mass atrocities.

Countries at high risk of committing mass atrocities:

Bangladesh, Brazil, Burundi, China, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, India, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Kenya, Libya, Nicaragua, North Korea, Pakistan, Philippines, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria, USA, Venezuela, and Yemen.

Recent events in the United States including crackdowns on women's rights, attacks on diversity and minority protections, the widespread use of Immigration Customs and Enforcement (ICE) to engage in repression, sending the military to police cities, attacks on free speech, restrictions on the right to protest, attacks on education, low protection of collective labor rights, violations of due process and the right to a fair trial all put the United States at high risk of mass atrocities in coming years. If we put this together with the recent shift in foreign policy away from human rights, for example, withdrawing the United States from the United Nations Human Rights Council, refusing to engage with the United Nations Periodic Review, dismantling and politicizing the State Department human rights reports, extrajudicial killings in recent military strikes on civilian boats in the Caribbean, and cuts to humanitarian aid and assistance, there is good reason to worry.

This is not to say that once a country heads towards mass atrocity, it cannot reverse course. The judiciary in the United States will play an important role in limiting the ability of the government to commit mass atrocities. As will efforts by other countries, activists, opposition party members, unions, citizens, and state and local governments. The important thing is to recognize the risk and act accordingly to prevent things from escalating further. Few believe their country is headed towards mass atrocity until it begins, often denying it is occurring long after it has already begun. Recognizing the risk now and taking action to prevent escalation may help the United States avoid escalation.

Student Spotlight: Digital Repression

By Alex Boland

Defining Digital Repression

Digital repression refers to the use of technology and digital platforms by governments or authorities to control, monitor, or punish expression and communication. This includes censorship, surveillance, propaganda, and coercion that suppress dissent and limit free access to information. It can occur through direct interference, such as blocking media outlets or detaining journalists, or through more subtle means like pressuring journalists to self-censor or spreading manipulated information. Over the last two decades, digital repression has evolved alongside the growth of the internet and mobile technologies, becoming both more pervasive and more complex.

Data Project and Methods

The data for this project came from country human rights reports that describe press freedom, government interference, and technological control over information. The coding process involved identifying specific tactics, which included physical coercion, informational coercion, physical channeling, and informational channeling, and marking where they occurred in practice. Each report was examined for government actions such as surveillance, censorship, arrests, or propaganda. Every instance was coded only if the action involved the use or control of a digital or informational channel rather than physical repression alone. This approach allowed for a systematic comparison across countries and over time.

Key Findings

The data reveal that while digital repression takes different forms, similar tactics appear worldwide. Many governments use surveillance or legal pressure to discourage journalists and citizens from criticizing the state. In Pakistan, for example, physical and informational tactics appeared together. The government used digital surveillance to monitor politicians, journalists, and citizens, even after the Supreme Court ordered limits on wiretapping. Laws such as the Anti-Terrorist Act and the Defamation Ordinance enabled authorities to arrest journalists, censor publications, and punish the spread of materials deemed offensive. These patterns show both physical coercion, through arrests and intimidation, and informational channeling, as the government spread propaganda through its control of national media networks and the Associated Press of Pakistan.

By contrast, New Zealand demonstrates a near absence of digital repression. Its government respected prohibitions on arbitrary interference with privacy, and freedom of speech and press were upheld in practice. An independent judiciary and transparent political institutions safeguarded both online and offline expression. The contrast between New Zealand and countries like Pakistan highlights how strong democratic structures can prevent digital repression by ensuring oversight, accountability, and independent journalism.

Kuwait presents a more complex example. While citizens enjoyed some degree of free expression, the government maintained tight control over electronic media and the internet. Authorities monitored online activity, restricted certain websites, and used defamation and national security laws to intimidate critics. This represents a blend of informational coercion and physical coercion. The state sought to shape the online narrative by both punishing dissenters and promoting official perspectives.

Across all three countries, the pattern is clear. Where political power is concentrated, digital repression often expands. Governments employ overlapping tactics such as

propaganda and surveillance to reinforce control while maintaining a façade of legality. In countries with independent media and courts, however, these tactics are limited by public transparency and rule of law.

Broader Trends and Takeaways

First

Governments often justify repression using the language of security or morality. In Pakistan, authorities cited the need to prevent blasphemy or terrorism to legitimize censorship and surveillance. In Kuwait, online restrictions were justified under national unity and religious respect. This framing disguises repression as protection.

Second

Digital repression is increasingly hybrid. Physical coercion, such as arrests or raids on journalists, often occurs alongside digital control. Shutting down a newspaper or blocking a broadcast is now paired with online monitoring, website restrictions, or state-sponsored narratives. Governments understand that controlling both digital and traditional media amplifies their reach and limits resistance.

Third

Repression adapts to new technologies. Two decades ago, most censorship focused on print or radio. Today, the same logic extends to social media algorithms, online news sites, and encrypted communication. In authoritarian or semi-authoritarian contexts, internet access may expand, but speech remains constrained through legal penalties, digital surveillance, and manipulation of online platforms.

Changes Over the Last 20 Years

Since the early 2000s, digital repression has shifted from overt censorship to more covert, technical strategies. Many countries no longer need to shut down entire networks; instead, they can use data collection, targeted surveillance, or state-aligned influencers to shape discourse. The rise of social media has made it easier for governments to track dissent in real time while simultaneously spreading state narratives. At the same time, independent journalism has migrated online, where it remains vulnerable to cyberattacks, account suspensions, and misinformation campaigns.

Student Spotlight: Machine Coding Physical Integrity Rights

By Zahra Khan

The CIRIGHT's Data Project utilizes content analysis carried out by trained research assistants to generate human rights scores. While this approach to human rights research is effective, new advances in machine learning provide an opportunity to explore how AI models can be used to generate human rights scores. With support from Baekkwan Park, who has extensive experience using machine learning algorithms in political science research, we developed a coding methodology designed to train an AI model to replicate how a research assistant would typically code certain rights. If implemented into our standard methodology, this would allow us to generate CIRIGHT scores instantly and indicate which cases may require secondary analysis. This would allow research assistants to prioritize the codes of 'tricky' cases and streamline the overall coding process.

Physical Integrity Rights

This pilot project focused on physical integrity rights, which encompass four internationally recognized human rights abuses: extrajudicial killings, disappearances, torture, and political imprisonment. These are some of the most extreme forms of human rights abuse, and as such are consistently reported on in the United States State Department Country Human Rights Reports. Within the CIRIGHT's project, each of these rights are scored on a 0-2 scale, with 0 indicating widespread abuses, 1 indicating occasional abuses, and 2 indicating no reported abuses.

Extrajudicial killings refer to killings of citizens by government officials without due process of law. This includes deaths that result from deliberate, illegal, and excessive use of lethal force by police, security forces, or other state agents, as well as deaths resulting from torture. Torture is defined by the CIRIGHT's project as the purposeful infliction of extreme mental or physical pain by government agents. Intent is important in these cases - if state agents intentionally use extreme mistreatment to punish or coerce detainees, prisoners, or other citizens, then it is coded as torture. For example, solitary confinement was coded as an instance of torture when it was used as a form of punishment for prisoners or lasted excessively long.

Disappearances are defined as cases in which: 1) people have disappeared, 2) state agents are likely responsible, and 3) political motivation is likely. The result and length of a disappearance is not relevant to a score - a disappearance perpetrated by state agents for any length of time counts towards a country's score. The final right examined was political imprisonment, defined as the incarceration of individuals by government officials for their speech, nonviolent opposition to government policies or leaders, religious beliefs, or nonviolent religious practices.

Machine Coding Methodology

The goal for this project was to create a way to teach an AI model how a research assistant would typically code for physical integrity rights. Rather than synthesizing the information in a human rights report to create a score, the focus shifted to pulling out which specific sentences in that report were relevant to determining a score. For a random sample of countries from 2017 to 2023, each sentence in the Country Human Rights Report's physical integrity sections was scored based on relevance, doubt, redress, automatic zeros, automatic twos, non-state perpetrators, and past events.

Relevance, the central measurement at hand, captures whether or not a sentence contributed directly to determining a score. This was the most important measure as it taught the AI model which sentences to 'look at' when producing a score. Doubt is also important, and it indicated whether or not a research assistant was unsure of the relevance of a sentence. At times, details included in the reports are murky or do not fall neatly into the coding criteria. In these 'tricky' cases, research assistants typically work together to determine what the best score for a country would be.

Redress captures whether or not the report mentions government action to prosecute perpetrators of abuse, as such cases may prevent a country from being downgraded. Similarly, if an abuse was perpetrated by non–state actors or occurred outside of the report year, then it did not count towards the overall score for that right. As such, it was necessary to mark redress, nonstate perpetrators, and past events so the machine model could learn to discount them.

Ex. Angola, sec. 1.A. USSD Human Rights Report 2017

Sentence #	Text
0	There were reports that the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings.

1	On December 7, human rights activist and journalist Rafael Marques de Morais released a report, The Field of Death: National Criminal Investigation Service (SIC) officers engaged in a campaign of extrajudicial killings of young men in Luanda from April 2016 through November 2017.
2	According to Marques, many of the victims were accused of petty criminality or otherwise labeled as undesirable by residents of their respective communities.
3	The report alleged the national police at times coordinated with SIC officers in the killings.
4	On December 11, the public prosecutor announced the creation of a commission of inquiry to investigate the allegations.
5	Fifteen months after the August 2016 killing of 14-year-old Rufino Antonio during an Angolan Armed Forces (FAA) demolition operation of allegedly unauthorized housing, authorities arrested and charged an FAA soldier with Rufino’s death.
6	The trial of the FAA soldier continued at year’s end.
7	At year’s end the Supreme Court had not rendered a decision on the appeal of the 28-year sentence imposed in April 2016 on Jose Kalupeteka, leader of the Light of the World religious sect, for the 2015 clashes between members of his group and police that left 13 civilians and nine police officers dead, according to official figures.

For example, extrajudicial killings are always scored using section 1.A. of the Country Human Rights Report. In the above excerpt from Angola's 2017 Human Rights Report, sentences 0 and 1 were marked as 'relevant', as a researcher could determine an overall score of 1 for extrajudicial killings using only these two sentences. Since at least some of the abuses reported in sentence 1 occurred outside of the report year, it was also marked as 'past'. Sentence 5 was marked as 'redress' since authorities arrested and charged the perpetrator of the killing, and was therefore not marked as 'relevant'. Sentence 7 was also marked as 'nonstate' and therefore not 'relevant'. This way, the machine algorithm would recognize that details in a human rights report like those included in sentences 2-7 could be 'ignored' as they would not result in a country's score being either downgraded or upgraded.

By translating the interpretive process of human coders into data points, we can 'teach' machine learning algorithms how to replicate a human's coding process. If the model can quickly produce initial scores and flag ambiguous cases, then research assistants can focus on those 'tricky' cases. This examination of physical integrity rights over the course of several years also revealed interesting trends that are discussed further below.

State and Nonstate Violence

For the purposes of the CIRIGHT's project, a country's score is only reduced for human rights abuses perpetrated by state agents. State agents may include government officials, police, prison guards, and security forces. However, nonstate agents,such as non-state armed groups or terrorist groups, can influence a state's overall human rights record. In many cases, state agents are more likely to commit human rights violations against individuals or groups suspected of violence.

In Central and South America, for example, violations of physical integrity rights were typically tied to organized crime. Aggressive government policies targeting these criminal organizations frequently resulted in abuses against suspected gang members human rights. While there were no reports of politically motivated killings in El Salvador (2018) and Honduras (2018), there were multiple reports of security forces involved in extrajudicial killings of suspected gang members.

Similarly, in countries experiencing civil conflict, state agents often forgo human rights standards when dealing with suspected members of opposition groups. In the Central African Republic (2023), security forces committed 33 instances of extrajudicial killings of civilians suspected of being affiliated with armed groups, and most reported incidents of torture by state agents occurred during security operations against armed groups. In one particularly severe incident, soldiers beat 12 civilians with hammers in retaliation for allegedly supporting armed groups.

In each of these examples, nonstate actors were often responsible for severe human rights abuses themselves. However, when state forces respond with similar violence, it can be observed to ultimately deepen instability, erode rule of law, and undermine overall respect for human rights.

Human Rights and Incarceration

Throughout the world, prisoners and detainees were disproportionately targeted for violations of their physical integrity rights. Torture, in particular, was frequently reported among those in detention or under arrest. In Belarus (2023), police regularly beat and tortured people during detention and arrest procedures, often to extract confessions. Risk was compounded by sexual identity, as LGBTQI+ individuals reported receiving threats of sexual abuse and discriminatory speech while in detention. Political prisoners were also specifically targeted. Reports from a couple Belarusian prison facilities indicated that political prisoners held in dehumanizing conditions that amounted to torture, including

being intentionally confined in overcrowded cells with individuals suffering from communicable diseases, fleas, and lice.

Many states use of solitary confinement in prisons could also be qualified as torture. Prisons in Gabon (2023), for example, routinely kept prisoners and detainees in solitary confinement for excessively long periods of time, sometimes exceeding several months. Political prisoners specifically were once again targeted in Egypt (2020), and were subjected to prolonged or indefinite solitary confinement.

Cultures of impunity within prison systems may have further perpetuated these abuses. In many countries where violations occurred, perpetrators rarely experienced investigation or prosecution. In Belarus (2023), despite extensive reports of torture and routine mistreatment of prisoners, internal investigations into abuse rarely resulted in punishment. In 2020, many countries, including Eritrea, Eswatini, Fiji, Guatemala, Hungary, Mali, and Moldova, reported impunity as being a serious problem preventing redress for instances of torture.

There is a clear intersection between respect for physical integrity rights, conditions of incarceration, and the strength of legal frameworks that regulate detention practices. These trends underline the importance of both laws that meet international standards and committed enforcement by state agents to safeguard the rights and dignity of prisoners and detainees.

Integrating machine-learning methods into human rights research opens many doors for future research efforts. By translating how research assistants interpret and code human rights reports into data, the CIRIGHTS Project can increase efficiency and consistency, while still maintaining human oversight for 'tricky' cases. Beyond methodological insights, our research on physical integrity rights from 2017-2023 reveal enduring global challenges from state responses to non-state violence to systemic abuses within prisons. Continued dedicated reporting on human rights abuses and commitment to upholding and enforcing international human rights standards is essential in combatting these forms of suppression.

International Summer Nonviolence Institute

By Thupten Tendhar

The URI Center for Nonviolence and Peace Studies hosted its 26th annual International Nonviolence Summer Institute from July 14 to 25, 2025. The institute offered one week of intensive training for the Level 1 Certification in Nonviolence Training of Trainers, followed by a second week of training for the Level 2 Nonviolence Leadership Training. The URI Center for Nonviolence and Peace Studies collaborated with the Nonviolence Institute in Providence and the Nonviolent Schools Rhode Island to offer the training.

It was a diverse group of inspiring people representing nine countries, namely (1) Afghanistan, (2) Bangladesh, (3) Colombia, (4) Cuba, (5) Ghana, (6) India, (7) Italy, (8) the United States, and (9) Tibet.

The U.S. participants came from11 states: (1) Connecticut, (2) Florida, (3) Hawaii, (4) Indiana, (5) Illinois, (6) Maine, (7) Minnesota, (8) New Jersey, (9) New York, (10) Rhode Island, and (11) Utah. Among the participants were high school seniors, schoolteachers, school psychologists, United Nations Development Programme officers, police officers, college students from various higher educational institutes (including URI), data scientists, peace advocates, clergy, multiple college faculties, and a provost and dean of a U.S. college.

Level 1 Training

The Level 1 training introduced participants to the Kingian nonviolence and conflict reconciliation course as well as a teach-back practice. Participants explored key concepts and essential background information about nonviolence, including core values, conflict analysis, nonviolent historical movements, dynamics of social change, Six Principles on

Nonviolence, Six Steps of Nonviolent Activism, and critical essays written by Martin Luther King Jr. Certified nonviolence trainers from the three organizations facilitated the experiential learning through instructional methods, interactive small-group activities, and various training exercises. Some evening discussions and dialogue opportunities also complement the daytime sessions. The Level 1 participants demonstrated their mastery of the contents and teaching skills through an extensive written assessment and a teach-back demonstration.

The center held the Level 1 certification ceremony on Friday, July 19, at 1:30 p.m. outside the Multicultural Student Services Center. URI Center for Nonviolence and Peace Studies Director Skip Mark, Vice Provost for Global Initiatives Kristin Johnson, Vice President and Chief Diversity Officer Markeisha Miner, international students, scholars, and Immigration Services Director Melissa De Jesus, former political science dept. hair Marc Hutchison and Meg Frost from the Center for Nonviolence and Peace Studies delivered their congratulatory remarks at the closing ceremony.

Level 2 Training

The Level 2 course offers an in-depth study of Kingian nonviolence methodology, including a review of the Level 1 curriculum, leadership characteristics, historical and organizational analysis, social action research, human rights issues, and community organizing strategies. The emphasis is on leadership development and continued involvement in nonviolent education and training efforts. The training format included seminars, small group discussions, individual study, and team activities.

The Level 2 Certification ceremony was held on Friday, July 26, at 1:30 p..m in the Memorial Union lobby due to extreme weather conditions. URI Center for Nonviolence and Peace Studies Director Skip Mark, Vice Provost for Global Initiatives Kristin Johnson, Political Science Dept. Chair Ping Xu and Center for Nonviolence and Peace Studies Research Director Meg Frost delivered their congratulatory remarks at the closing ceremony. Some United States and international participants also shared their comments at the gathering.

The ceremony concluded with a group photo, a group singing of "We Shall Overcome," and hugs exchanged for their achievements and friendships. The new graduates left the campus with great hope, high motivation, and a challenge, ready to promote peace, harmony, and nonviolence within themselves, their communities, and throughout the globe.

Looking Forward

There will be another institute in the summer of 2026. You can find information on the Center for Nonviolence and Peace Studies website at the start of the new year.

Center for Nonviolence and Peace Studies

University of Rhode Island

THE
UNIVERSITY
OF RHODE ISLAND
COLLEGE OF
ARTS AND SCIENCES

Center for Nonviolence and Peace Studies
Multicultural Student Services Center, Room 202
74 Lower College Road, Kingston, RI 02881
401.874.2875

nonviolence@etal.uri.edu