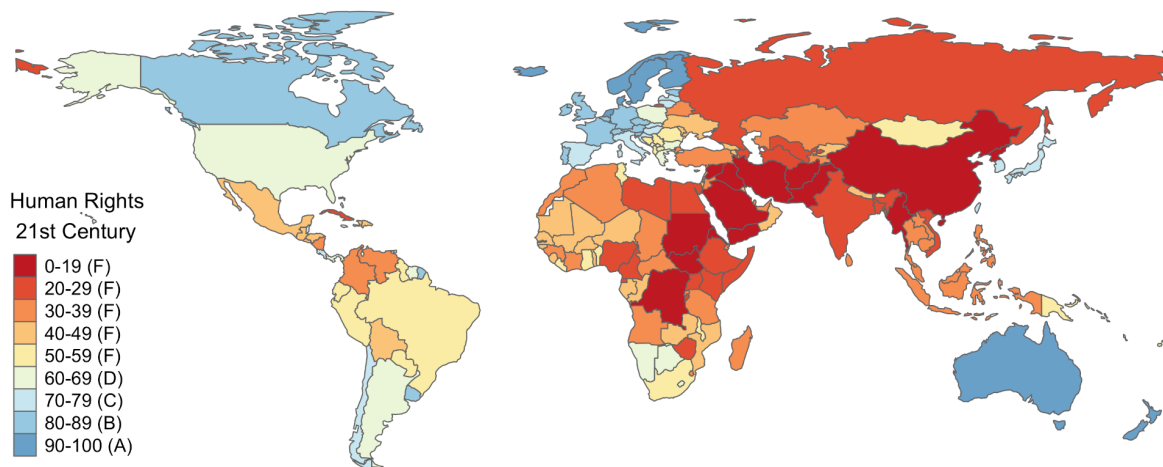


Global RIghts Project

2024 Report

Dr. Ashlea Rundlett, Dr. Roya Izadi, Dr. Meg Frost, Dr. Skip Mark

Center for Nonviolence and Peace Studies
University of Rhode Island



Executive Summary

This report¹ introduces the 2024 Global RIghts Project (GRIP) grades, which assess each country in the world on its overall human rights practices. GRIP grades are based on the extent to which governments respect a suite of 24 physical integrity, empowerment, worker, and justice rights rights (see page 5 for a full list of rights that comprise GRIP grades). Numerical measures for each right come from the CIRIGHTS dataset.

Based on statistics and data from 2022, Iceland has the best human rights in the world, receiving an overall grade of 97.9 (“A”). Iran and Afghanistan have the worst rights, with grades of 0 and 2.1, respectively (“F”). The table below lists the ten best and worst countries in the world for human rights in the 2024 ranking.

Table 1. GRIP Grades: Best and Worst Human Rights in 2024

Best Human Rights - 2024 Ranking (Top 10)	Worst Human Rights - 2024 Ranking (Bottom 10)
Iceland: 97.9 (A)	Iran: 0 (F)
Estonia: 96.5 (A)	Afghanistan: 2.1 (F)
Denmark: 94.4 (A)	North Korea: 4.9 (F)
Finland: 94.4 (A)	Yemen: 5.6 (F)
Monaco: 94.4 (A)	South Sudan: 9 (F)
San Marino: 94.4 (A)	Syria: 9.7 (F)
Luxembourg: 91 (A-)	Myanmar: 10.4 (F)
Norway: 91 (A-)	Egypt: 12.5 (F)
Croatia: 89.6 (A-)	Iraq: 12.5 (F)
Sweden: 89.6 (A-)	China, Equatorial Guinea, Libya (tie): 13.2 (F)

¹ All authors contributed significantly to the production of the data and authorship of the report. Therefore, the author order for this report was determined by a random number generator.

Democracy is one of the strongest predictors of human rights around the globe. Our data suggest that the more democratic a country is, the better its human rights practices are (on average). Despite the overall trend, some democracies have poor human rights records (such as India in 2023 with a score of “F”). Some autocracies have good human rights records (such as Monaco in 2023 with an “A-”).

Population is also a strong predictor of human rights respect. The larger a country’s population, the worse its human rights record tends to be (on average). Except for Japan and the U.S. (which both score a “D” in our 2024 rankings), the most populous countries score an “F” in overall respect for human rights.

We also take a closer look at which rights are the most and least protected measured from 1999 to the present day, broken down by category:

- Physical integrity rights
- Empowerment rights
- Worker rights
- Justice rights

It can be challenging to compare global respect for human rights, because various human rights sources use different definitions and measurement approaches, leading to inconsistencies. The CIRIGHTS data project measures each right using the same methodology, so we can compare respect for these rights directly. The breakdown can be viewed on page 18.

Spotlights

Data spotlights are researched and written by URI undergraduate and graduate students and provide detail into, and case studies of, significant global human rights issues. In this report, we include spotlights touching upon the following rights:

- Human and child trafficking
- Digital repression
- Economic discrimination
- Refugee rights
- Anti-American sentiment

Global Rights Project - GRIP Grades 2024

The Global Rights Project is an initiative based at the University of Rhode Island that uses CIRIGHTS data to produce global rankings of countries' respect for human rights. We started the initiative to combat several issues in human rights data and measurement, including inconsistencies across human rights data projects in how human rights are measured, a lack of comprehensive measures of all human rights, and human rights researchers' tendency to focus on "negative" rights as opposed to "positive" rights. Considering these issues in tandem, we then rank countries based on their overall respect for human rights.

There are nearly 200 internationally recognized sovereign countries, each violating human rights to some degree or another. Yet, answering which country has the highest respect for human rights is tricky, since we have few measures to capture a broad range of human rights. We would need information for all states and for a large set of human rights.

If you Google "Which country has the highest respect for human rights?" (and exclude CIRIGHTS), you may come across a list of countries that care the most about human rights², or countries with the most freedom³, or the human rights index by the Varieties of Democracy Project (V-Dem), which explores eight rights.⁴ Yet, none of these are measures of who has the *best* human rights overall. At most, they tell us which countries excel on a few specific measures.

Most human rights projects focus on civil and political rights, to the exclusion of most economic, social, and cultural rights. This misses half the picture of human rights and may make states with strong economic rights but weak civil and political rights look worse than they are. It also allows countries with strong civil and political rights but widespread violations of economic, social, and cultural rights to avoid being called out for human rights violations. Most human rights datasets also ignore small-population countries, constituting more than a quarter of the world's countries. These countries tend to have better human rights on average, and by ignoring them, we are missing a large opportunity to learn about their successes and failures.

² U.S. News rankings of countries that care the most about human rights according to global surveys: [These Countries Care About Human Rights | U.S. News](#).

³ The World Population Freedom Index:

<https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/freedom-index-by-country>

or the Cato Institute <https://www.cato.org/human-freedom-index/2023>

or Freedom House's Freedom in the World Ranking: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world>.

⁴ The index includes torture, political killings, forced labor, property rights, and freedom of movement, religion, expression, and association.

Human rights data have, for the most part, been narrowly focused on physical integrity rights or the use of violence by the state.⁵ This means that most datasets outright ignore empowerment, worker, and justice rights. While focusing on physical integrity rights has allowed us to learn a great deal about the causes and consequences of state-sponsored violence, it has also meant that we have learned less about respect for many other human rights.

CIRIGHTS aims to measure all internationally recognized human rights. **This is the closest a project has come to measuring government respect for human rights in comparative perspective across a host of human rights, and makes it the world’s largest human rights dataset.**

Using the CIRIGHTS dataset, the GRIP Project has ranked every country in the world based on respect for 24 different human rights, and we release those rankings in this report. We identify patterns around the world, between different rights, and we include several spotlights on some of the rights that we score at URI. In contrast to the collection of CIRIGHTS data, which relies on collaborations between URI and other universities, including the University of Connecticut and Binghamton University, the GRIP Project and this report are written entirely by faculty and students at URI. Our hope is that this report becomes a useful resource for those interested in human rights, educators, journalists, and policy makers. At the end of this report, hopefully, you will have an answer – or *several* perhaps-nuanced answers – to “who has the best human rights” and insight into what human rights look like around the world.

Scoring human rights data takes time. The reports we use are often released in the Spring and cover the previous calendar year. It takes us a year to score, check, double check, triple check the scores, and then clean the data before releasing it to the public free of cost. By the time we put out a new version of our scores, they are two years behind the current year. Our 2024 rankings and scores in this report cover the year 2022. With the release of this report, we have also released CIRIGHTS version 3, which includes the newest scores. These data are available free of charge at cirights.com.

⁵ Physical integrity rights refer to extrajudicial killings, torture, political imprisonment, and disappearances.

Global Human Rights Grades

The Global Rights Project evaluates government practices for 24 human rights listed in the table below. We have split the rights into four categories: physical integrity rights, empowerment rights, worker rights, and justice rights. Within each category, there are several human rights. Each right is scored on a 0-2 scale, with 0 indicating widespread violations of that right and 2 indicating full respect for that right (more precisely, it indicates we have no evidence that the right was violated given the information contained in human rights reports).⁶ Our grades are based on the US academic grading scheme: A (93-100 points); A- (90-92); B+ (87-89); B (83-86); B- (80-82); C+ (77-79); C (73-76); C- (70-72); D (60-69); and F (0-59). Countries are graded each year between 2005 and 2021.

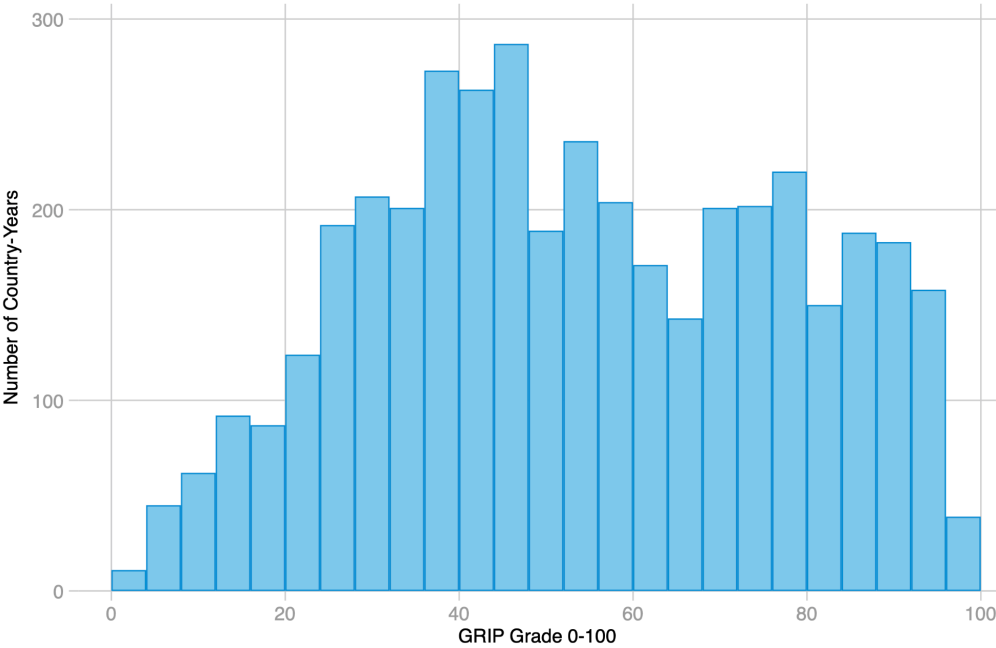
Table 2. The Rights We Score by Category

Physical Integrity	Empowerment	Worker Rights	Justice Rights
Disappearances	Assembly and Association	Unionization	Independent Judiciary
Extrajudicial Killings	Foreign Movement	Collective Bargaining	Fair Trial
Political Imprisonment	Domestic Movement	Working Hours	NGO Freedom
Torture	Free Speech and Press	Forced Labor	
Atrocities	Self-Determination	Child labor	
	Religious Freedom	Minimum Wage	
	Women's Economic Rights	Safe Working Conditions	
	Women's Political Rights		
	Women's Social Rights		

The histogram on the following page shows the distribution of human rights scores for 195 countries' scores in the 21st century. We can treat this as how well the world is doing on human rights protection. If the scores are clustered at the higher end of the histogram, we might say that human rights are strong globally. If they are clustered at the lower end, we might say human rights are weak globally. We will begin by looking at overall trends before exploring our list of best and worst human rights countries in the world. Finally, we share the regional rankings.

⁶ A few rights are scored on a 0-3 scale with a THREE being no evidence of violations, TWO being rare instances of violations, ONE indicating occasional violations and ZERO indicating widespread violations. These rights include women's political, social, and economic rights, NGO freedom, and the right to a fair trial. We rescale these to range from 0-2 for the purposes of this report by multiplying the score by 2 and dividing by 3.

Figure 1. Global Rights Project Grades in the 21st Century



As Figure 1 indicates, most countries receive a failing grade on human rights respect. The median global score is 52, and the mean score is 54. Most countries are clustered around 50. Fortunately, there are very few countries with almost no human rights respect. However, the bottom 10% of cases are a score 24 or lower. Similarly, there are very few countries that score an A: only 4% of scores would be categorized as an A (93 or higher).

Comparing 2024 to the rest of the 21st century:

What does the world’s respect for human rights look like through this lens?

- Human rights grades for the 21st century
- F (less than 60) 58% of countries
 - D (60-69) 11% of countries
 - C (70-79) 12% of countries
 - B (80-89) 12% of countries
 - A (90-100) 7% of countries

Human rights grades for 2024 rankings⁷

⁷ Due to rounding, these sum to 101 percent.

- F (less than 60) 62% of countries
- D (60-69) 11% of countries
- C (70-79) 10% of countries
- B (80-89) 13% of countries
- A (90-100) 5% of countries

Governments around the world are failing to protect human rights. This is as true today as it has been throughout the 21st century. Only 19% of countries score in the “A” or “B” range in the 21st century, while 58% score an “F”. The distribution of human rights scores has remained largely stable over the past 17 years, suggesting that human rights have not significantly improved or declined in recent times.

This is worrying for human rights defenders, but it is not surprising. We have cause for concern in the 21st century, and these findings suggest a pressing need to strengthen human rights. The current tools used to improve human rights and hold leaders accountable are not working, and new approaches will be necessary to improve human rights globally.

Best and Worst Human Rights in the World - 2024 Rankings

Our 2024 grades compare 195 countries. Iceland has the best human rights in the world, scoring 97.9 out of 100. Estonia has the second best rights with a score of 96.5. Denmark, Finland, Monaco, and San Marino are tied for third with a 94.4 out of 100. On the opposite end of the spectrum, North Korea has the third-worst score at 2.8 out of 100. Afghanistan scores a 2.1 out of 100, while Iran scores a 0.

Table 3. GRIP Grades: Best and Worst Human Rights in 2024

Best Human Rights - 2024 Ranking (Top 10)	Worst Human Rights - 2024 Ranking (Bottom 10)
Iceland: 97.9 (A)	Afghanistan: 0 (F)
Estonia: 96.5 (A)	Iran: 2.1 (F)
Denmark: 94.4 (A)	North Korea: 4.9 (F)
Finland: 94.4 (A)	Yemen: 5.6 (F)
Monaco: 94.4 (A)	South Sudan: 9 (F)
San Marino: 94.4 (A)	Syria: 9.7 (F)
Luxembourg: 91 (A-)	Myanmar: 10.4 (F)
Norway: 91 (A-)	Egypt: 12.5 (F)
Croatia: 89.6 (A-)	Iraq: 12.5 (F)
Sweden: 89.6 (A-)	China, Equatorial Guinea, Libya (tie): 13.2 (F)

*score rounded up to a new grade

This table is also included on page 2 of this report in the Executive Summary.

All of the top human rights performers come from Europe, are wealthy, and all but one are democracies. All of the bottom ranked countries come from Africa, Asia, and the Middle East and their wealth varies from very poor (Yemen) to wealthy (China), and all are non-democracies. This suggests human rights may cluster geographically and wealthy countries tend to have better human rights though there are exceptions.

These rankings paint an alarming picture of the success of the international human rights regime. There are only 10 countries in our 2024 rankings that receive an “A” or “A-”. This is only 5% of the countries in the world, compared to the 62% of countries receiving a failing score.

This list also suggests that regime type matters for the occurrence of human rights abuses globally: Most of the countries with the best respect for human rights are democracies.⁸ In contrast, all of the countries with the lowest respect for human rights are non-democracies. This reflects one of the strongest findings in the human rights literature: Democratic countries tend to have better respect for human rights (all else equal) compared to non-democratic countries. Of course, there are exceptions: Monaco is an example of a non-democracy that tends to have high levels of human rights respect, while India is a democracy with very low respect for human rights (scoring a 41).

⁸ The exception here is Monaco, which is a constitutional monarchy.

Averaging Respect for Human Rights in the 21st Century

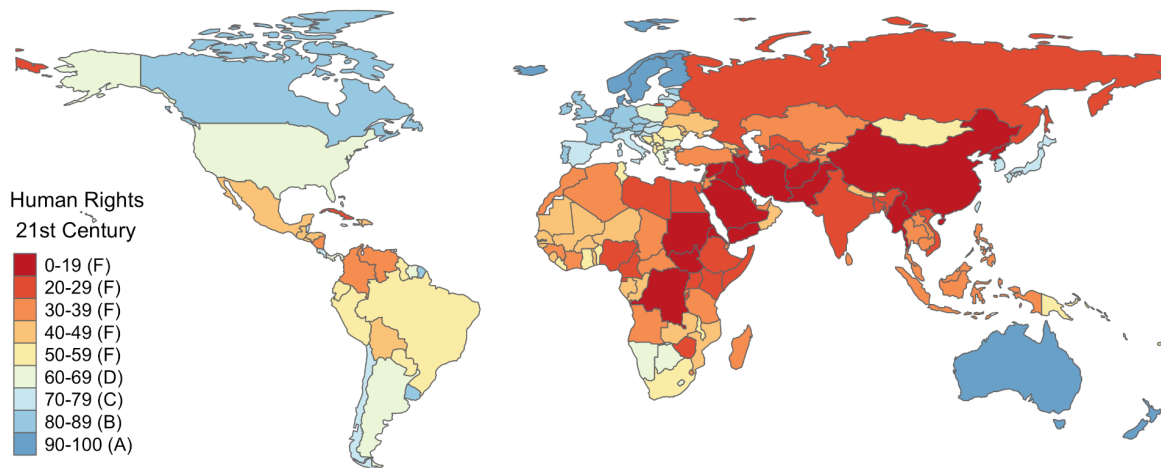
Which countries have *most consistently* scored highly on our human rights indicators? Scores tend to vary due to global events (such as COVID), economic crises, which party is in power, and domestic conflict. A better indicator of who has the best human rights may be the country that has consistently scored highly throughout the 21st century.

Table 4. Best Average Respect for Human Rights in the 21st Century

Best Average Human Rights	Worst Average Human Rights
Finland: 94.3 (A)	Iran: 6.1 (F)
Norway: 94.1 (A)	North Korea: 8.4 (F)
Denmark: 94 (A)	Myanmar: 13.2 (F)
Iceland: 93.9 (A)	South Sudan: 13.4 (F)
San Marino: 93.3 (A)	Democratic Republic of Congo: 14.5 (F)
Luxembourg: 92.8 (A)*	China: 14.6 (F)
Netherlands: 92.8 (A)*	Sudan: 15.2 (F)
Sweden: 92.6 (A)*	Iraq: 15.4 (F)
New Zealand: 91.9 (A-)	Pakistan: 15.6 (F)
Australia: 91.8 (A-)	Yemen: 17.1 (F)

* score rounded up to a new grade

Figure 2. Mapping Average Human Rights Respect in the 21st Century



The map of our Global Rights (GRIP) Grades shows what scores look like around the world in the 21st century. The closer the map is to blue, the better a country's human rights are, while the closer the map is to red, the worse its human rights are. Given that most of the world receives a failing grade, we have altered the colors to see differences among failing countries by sorting these into five separate categories. Dark red is associated with (0-19), while yellow is associated with (50-59), both a score of "F". Those with a light green color (like the United States) receive a "D". Light blue (70-80), blue (80-90), and dark blue (90-100) correspond to a "C", "B", and "A", respectively.

Respect for human rights tends to cluster geographically. As Figure 2 indicates, Western Europe is almost all blue, while the Middle East, Africa, and Asia tend to be mostly orange and red. If a country has neighbors who respect human rights, they are more likely to respect human rights as well. Conversely, when located near other countries that violate human rights, a country is more likely to violate rights also. The differences between regions are much larger than the differences within regions. This suggests that when evaluating the human rights practices of a country, we may want to look at how their neighbors are doing as a point of comparison.

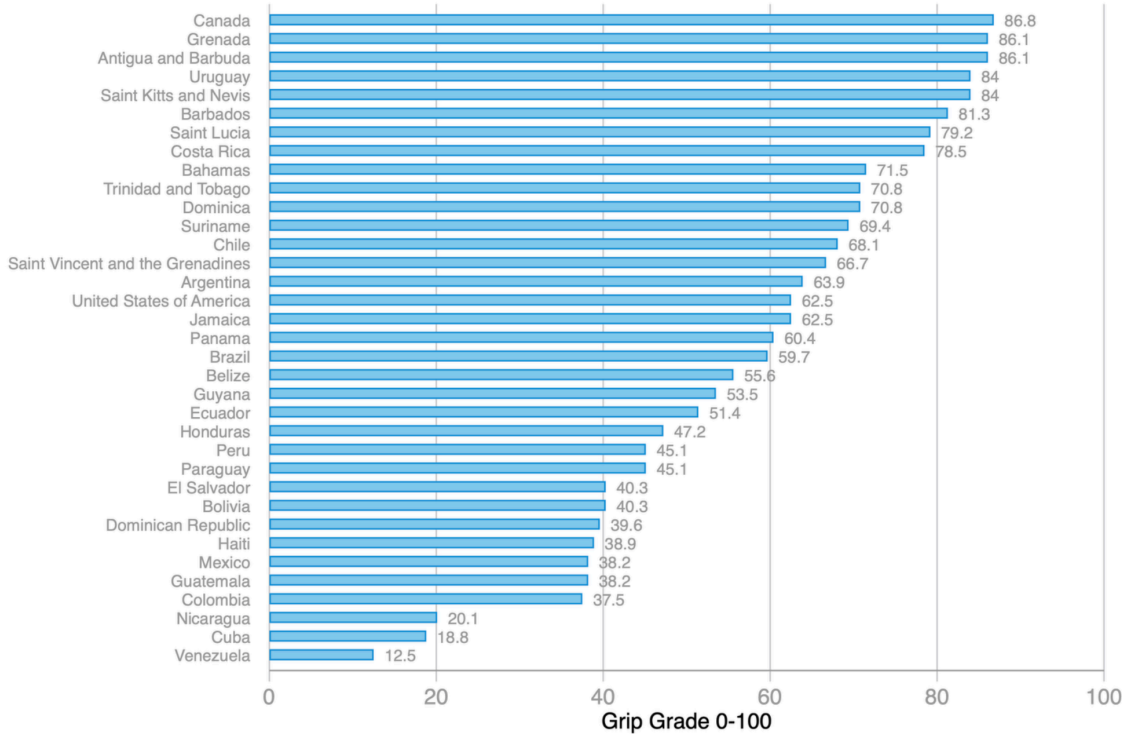
More research is needed to understand how significant a role geography and neighborhood play in human rights protection, and what kinds of improvements we could expect from a country surrounded by countries that do not respect human rights. In addition, more work is needed to explain how geography affects human rights and whether lessons from one region of the world can (or cannot) be applied to another region.

Given the importance of geography in predicting human rights respect, it is worth exploring each region of the world. Understanding which countries are outperforming their peers and which countries are underperforming compared to their peers can provide valuable information about what causes human rights to decline or improve. It can also help us begin to think about the role that geography plays. Below, we use the United Nations regional classification system to explore five regions of the world: the Americas, Asia and the Middle East, Europe, Oceania, and Africa. The scores in these graphs refer to our 2024 global ranking.

Americas

The Americas have a large amount of variation in human rights respect. While no country in the Americas receives an “A”, the top performers are Canada (86.8), Grenada (86.1), and Antigua and Barbuda (86.1). The bottom performers are Venezuela (12.5), Cuba (18.8), and Nicaragua (20.1). Notably, the United States, arguably the wealthiest, most powerful country in the world, earns a “D” (62.5). The average score for the region is a 57.6, which ranks it above Asia/Middle East and Africa, but below Oceania and Europe. The highest score in the region during the 21st century is Canada in 2017 with a 97.9, and the lowest score is Venezuela in 2022 with a 12.5.

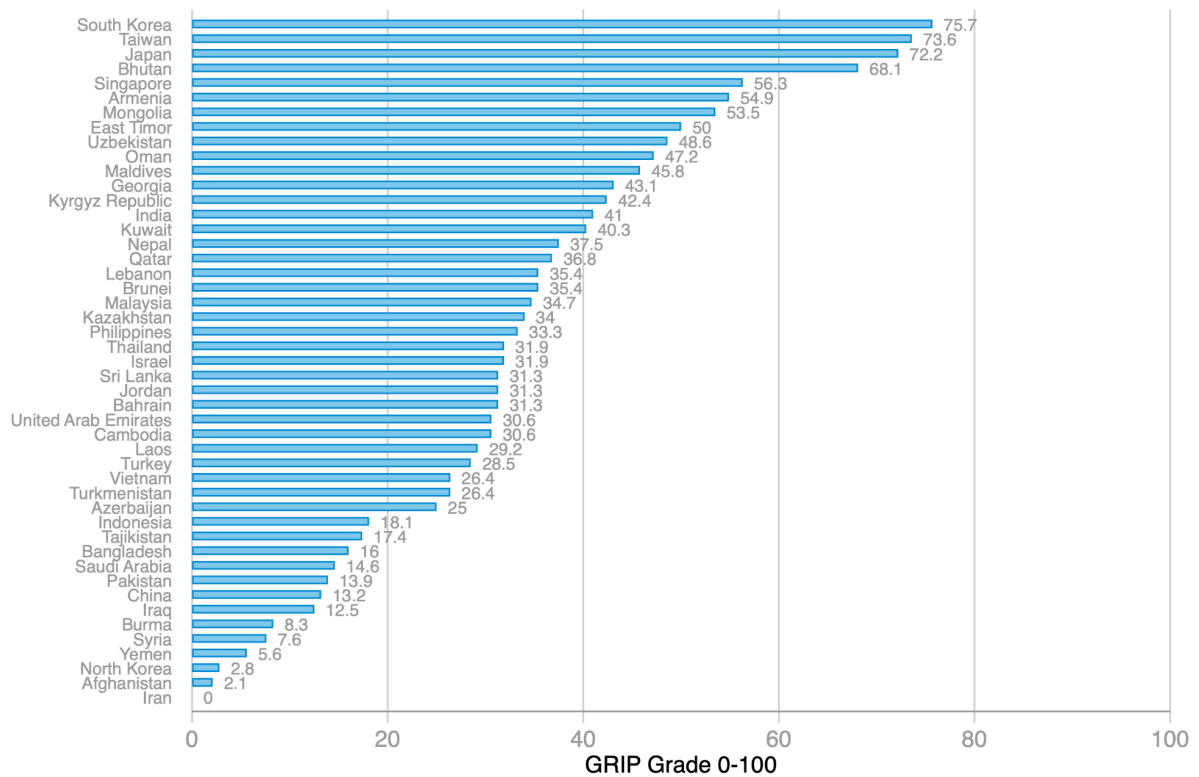
Figure 3. Human Rights in the Americas - 2024 Rankings



Asia and the Middle East

Asia and the Middle East is the lowest scoring region in the world. The top performing countries are South Korea (75.7), Taiwan (73.6), Japan (72.2), and Bhutan (68.1). The bottom performers are Iran (0), Afghanistan (2.1), North Korea (2.8) and Yemen (5.6). No country scores above a “C” in the region for the 2024 rankings. All of the bottom performing countries are also the lowest scoring countries in the world, suggesting that this region has greater challenges to rights protection than other regions. China, which is one of the most powerful and wealthy countries in the world, scores a 13.2, which is significantly worse than most countries in the region. The average human rights score in the region is 32.9. The highest score in the region during the 21st century is Japan in 2006 and 2016 with an 86.8, and the lowest score is Iran in 2021 and 2022 with a zero.

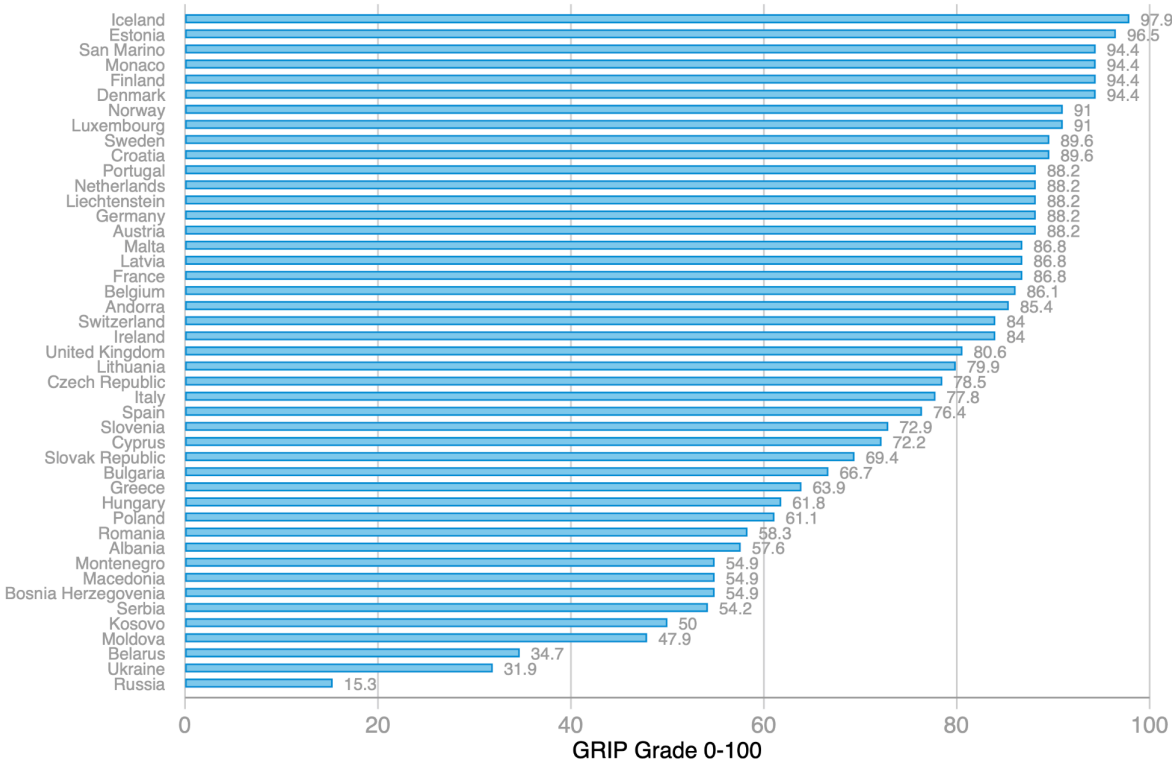
Figure 4. Human Rights in Asia and the Middle East - 2024 Rankings



Europe

Europe has the highest average human rights score in the world, with the highest number of top-scorers for 2024, and an average score of 74.4. The top performers are Iceland (97.9) and Estonia (96.5), and tied for third are San Marino, Monaco, Finland, and Norway (94.4). All of these scores are among the top ten in the world for 2024. The lowest performers are Russia (15.3), Ukraine (31.9), Belarus (34.7). Historically, the region has the most former “perfect scorers”, receiving grades of 100: Finland (in 2000), Denmark (in 2013) and Norway (in 2009). Russia has the lowest score in the region over time, having scored an 8.3 in 2015. There is a notable gap between the scores of Western European countries and those in Eastern Europe, with most of the lower scorers in Eastern Europe. Europe, as a result, has the greatest variation in human rights scores in the world (with a standard deviation of 18.8).

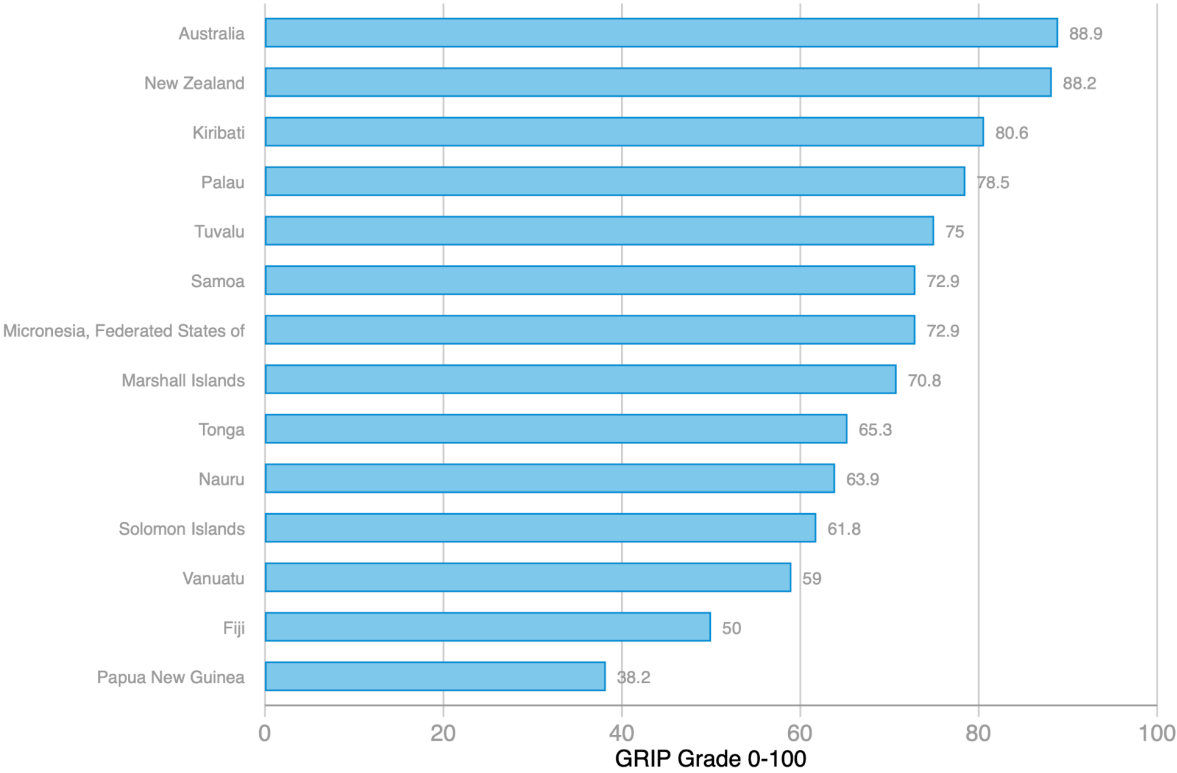
Figure 5. Human Rights in Europe - 2024 Rankings



Oceania

Oceania has a relatively high average level of respect for human rights, scoring 69 out of 100, and the lowest variation in scores in the world (with a standard deviation of 14). Oceania is the smallest of the regions designated by the UN. The top performers in Oceania are Australia (88.9), New Zealand (88.2), and Kiribati (80.6). The worst performing countries are Papua New Guinea (38.2), Fiji (50), and Vanuatu (59). In terms of human rights respect, Oceania comes in second to Europe but scores higher, *on average*, than any other region. Historically, the highest score in the region is a 96.5 in Australia (in 2010 and 2015) and New Zealand (in 2009). The lowest score in the region came from Fiji, which scored a 34 (in 2009).

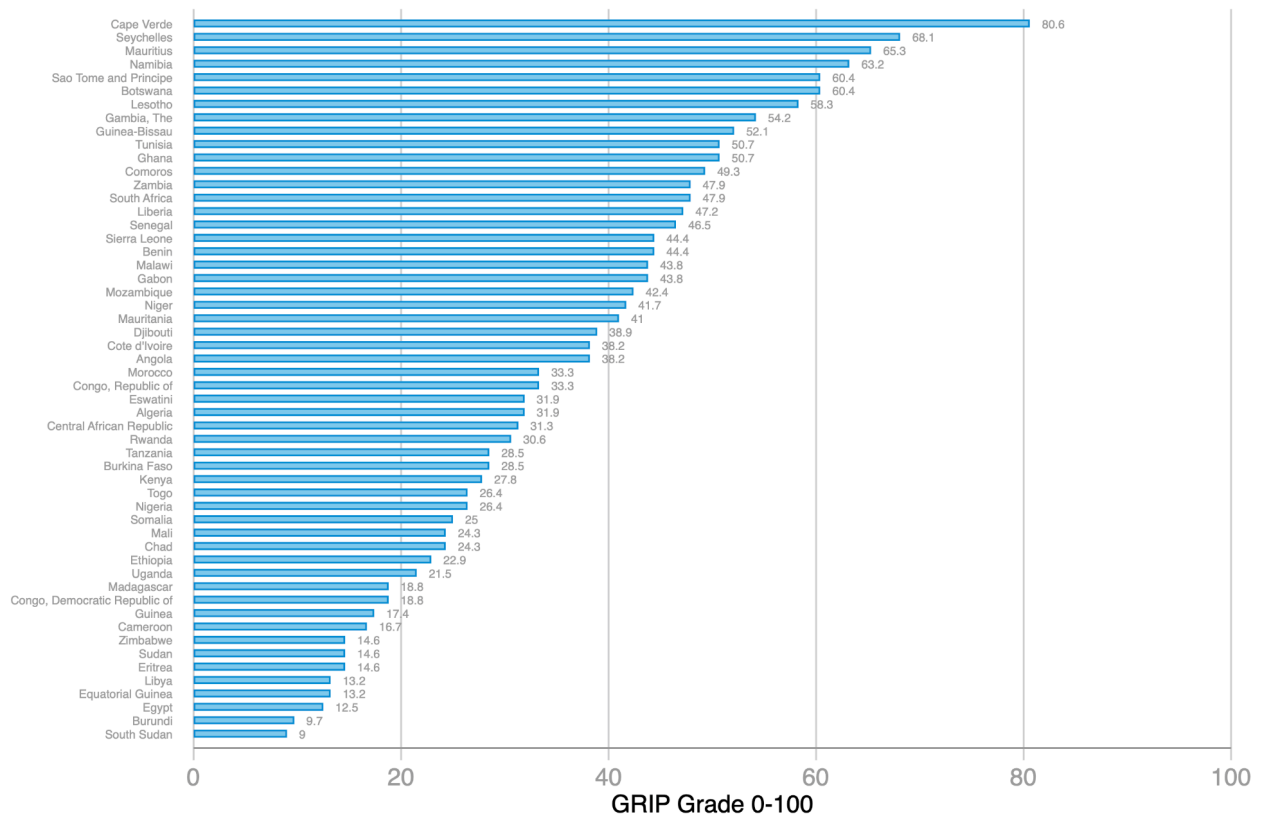
Figure 6. Human Rights in Oceania 2024 Rankings



Africa

Africa is the second-lowest-scoring region in 2024, with an average of 35.9 out of 100. That said, human rights vary significantly among African countries. The top performing countries are Cape Verde (80.6), Seychelles (68.1), and Mauritius (65.3). The bottom performers are South Sudan (9), Burundi (9.7), and Egypt (12.5). Cape Verde is an outlier in the region, scoring a full ten points higher than the next country. This suggests that Cape Verde might be a worthwhile case to study, if we want to understand how countries can excel in a region where their peers perform much worse. The highest score in the region during the 21st century is Cape Verde (in 2021) with an 86.8, and the lowest score is South Sudan (in 2017) with a 4.2.

Figure 7. Human Rights in Africa - 2024 Rankings



Which Human Rights Are Most/Least Protected?

By examining data on a large number of human rights for every country in the world, the last section shows what overall human rights levels look like globally, and which countries are doing the best and worst. However, this exercise tells us little about *which rights* most countries protect and which rights most countries violate. **Given that so few countries in the world earn an “A” on our scale for human rights respect, it is worth investigating whether we can identify patterns that may help us explain the low scores globally.**

By identifying the rights that are most protected, we may learn from past efforts that have successfully protected some rights around the world. By identifying the rights that are least protected, we can highlight areas where the international human rights regime is falling short collectively, and which countries and regions are faring the worst. These rights abuses indicate current policy failure within the human rights regime and areas where improvements will likely have the largest effect. It may also highlight blind spots in the international monitoring regime and serve as a call to action for more measurement of these rights.

Most and Least Protected Rights Globally

One way to examine which human rights are the most protected globally is to look at the average level of respect for each of the 24 rights in our index. This gives insight into the rights universally respected and those commonly violated. While a global average does not pinpoint which countries are violating these rights, we will explore some of the specific rights to identify countries we can learn from (those that protect even the most challenging rights) as well as countries where interventions are needed (those violating the most protected rights).

It can be difficult to compare global respect for human rights because various human rights sources use different definitions and measurement approaches, leading to inconsistencies. CIRIGHTS measures each right using the same methodology, so we can compare these rights directly.

Table 5 examines the average respect for each right between 2000 and today. All of the rights are measured on an ordinal scale with higher values indicating greater respect. We take the global mean for the most recent year with available data (covering our 2024 rankings). For ease of interpretation, as some rights are measured on a 0-1, 0-2, and 0-3 scale, we have standardized all scores to range from 0-1 and then multiplied the score by 100. A score of 100% would mean every country in the world fully respects that right. A score of 0% would indicate that every country in the world has widespread

violations of that right. A score below 50% indicates that global respect is closer to no respect than full respect. Therefore, if a right was originally measured on a scale of 0-2 and has an average of 1.4, we convert it to 70% (by dividing 1.4 by 2, and multiplying it by 100).

We have color coded the table such that:

Physical integrity rights

Empowerment rights

Worker rights

Justice rights

Table 5. Global Average Rights Protection in the 21st Century

	Rights Rank	Global Mean
Disappearances	1	85.1%
Brutality Based Atrocities	2	83.3%
Foreign Movement	3	75.1%
Domestic Movement	4	74.0%
Women's Political Rights	5	67.1%
Extrajudicial Killings	6	65.8%
Political Imprisonment	7	65.0%
Electoral Self-determination	8	60.9%
Religious Freedom	9	59.4%
NGO Freedom	10	56.9%
Freedom of Association & Assembly	11	55.7%
Women's Social Rights	12	51.5%
Freedom of Speech	13	48.3%
Independent Judiciary	14	48.8%
Forced Labor	15	47.8%
Union Rights	16	46.3%
Women's Economic Rights	17	43.3%
Reasonable Limitations of Work Hours	18	41.2%
Torture	19	40.1%
Child Labor	20	39.2%
Collective Bargaining	21	38.4%
Safe Working Conditions	22	38.3%
Minimum Wage	23	38.1%
Right to a Fair Trial	24	34.7%

Patterns in Rights Protection

Globally, physical integrity rights are the most protected category, followed by empowerment rights and justice rights. Worker rights are the least respected. In terms of specific rights, the least respected human right is the right to a fair trial.

As table 5 shows, five rights emerge with 66% or greater of global protection, all of which are either physical integrity rights or empowerment rights. On the other hand, there are twelve rights with less than 50% protection, most of which are worker rights. Torture is a notable exception here, with 40.1% protection, as all other physical integrity rights are highly protected.

Therefore, in 2024, we can cautiously observe that the most protected rights in the world are protection from brutality-based atrocity, freedom from enforced disappearances, freedom of foreign movement, freedom from political imprisonment, women’s political rights, freedom of domestic movement, and freedom from extrajudicial killings.

Examining Variation in Respect for Rights

Human rights scholars sometimes categorize rights into different groups. This can be helpful for understanding why some rights – or groups of rights – are more protected than others. In the table on the following page, we summarize the average level of respect for each of the four groups of rights. Worker rights are the least protected rights globally, while physical integrity rights are the most protected. This difference does not stem from the number of rights within each group, but appears to be influenced by the nature of the rights themselves and the demands they place on governments.

Table 6. Average Rights Protection Grouped by Category of Human Rights

Rights Category	Average Respect (2024 rankings)	Number of Rights	Number of Democracies that Honor	Number of Non-Democracies that Honor
Physical Integrity Rights	67%	5	80	50
Empowerment Rights	59%	9	70	40
Justice Rights	47%	3	60	30
Worker Rights	41%	7	50	25

In explaining variation for human rights respect, one academic theory focuses on international human rights treaty ratification. Where states have ratified legally binding international treaties we should see greater respect for the rights contained in those treaties. This often requires states to change domestic laws to be in line with the treaty. Domestic laws protecting rights are a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for the protection of rights as many states have strong legal protections of human rights but many violations in practice.⁹ States can also avoid altering domestic laws by making a “reservation” to a treaty, whereby they opt out of certain legal requirements. As a result, a state can sign a human rights treaty but change very little about their domestic laws. Leaders may also ratify a treaty to give the appearance of commitment to improving human rights, without changing domestic laws or improving their practices as a way of avoiding criticism for their human rights abuses.¹⁰ The most ratified human rights treaty globally is the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which only the United States has failed to ratify of all the world’s countries; yet, child labor is one of the most violated rights. Treaties, therefore, do not offer us much insight into the pattern of rights protection we identify above.

A competing theory considers that early scholarly work and human rights campaigns focused on some rights more than others. This created three different generations of rights: first, second, and third generation rights, with each successive generation receiving less attention than the previous generation. Prioritizing some rights over others has created a hierarchy of rights that directly contradicts the

⁹ Cingranelli, Mark, and Sadykova-Dumond 2023.

¹⁰ Bell, Clay, and Murdie 2019.

principle of all rights being equal, potentially leading to variation in protection for different rights. This theory finds some support in the findings above.

Table 7. The Three “Generations” of Human Rights in Theory and Practice

First-Generation Rights	Second-Generation Rights	Third-Generation Rights
Civil Rights	Social Rights	Right to Development
Political Rights	Economic Rights	Right to Peace
	Cultural Rights	Right to a Healthy Environment

CIRIGHTS is one of a handful of projects that measure economic, social, and cultural rights for many countries over multiple years. This allows scholars to identify the causes and consequences of economic, social, and cultural rights violations using case studies and statistical analyses. Many of the economic, social, and cultural rights included in CIRIGHTS are those where states can put in place laws to protect those rights.

Significant challenges remain in measuring and defining the rights to food, water, housing, healthcare, and education. Who is responsible for providing these rights: the state or the free market? How can an individual prove they are hungry or thirsty, and who is responsible for giving them food and water? Second-generation rights get around these hard requirements by asking states to “progressively realize” rights using the maximum available resources. Put plainly, states should ensure more people enjoy these rights every year. This does allow us to explore economic rights protection, as we can measure whether states are improving or not. If more people have access to water this year than last, this is some evidence that the right is being protected.

We have more data for a global sample of countries measuring civil and political rights than we do for economic, social, and cultural rights. This means that human rights violations are more likely to be identified, documented, and publicized for violations of civil and political rights. Leaders face greater costs for violating these rights; therefore, they are more likely to protect them. The tools to hold leaders accountable for human rights violations require some degree of proof that rights are being violated. As it currently stands, there is far more data on some rights than others, and this has made it easier to employ the tools of the international community to protect first-generation rights compared to second-generation rights.

When examining physical integrity rights (disappearances, killings, political imprisonment, and torture), torture emerges as an outlier. While the other three rank high in terms of global respect, torture remains widespread around the world: about 75% of countries engaged in torture for our most recent years' worth of data. This challenges the theory outlined above, as torture is one of the most scrutinized rights in the world. It suggests that even with an international treaty (the Convention Against Torture), and strong campaigns aimed at ending torture, states are still engaging in torture regularly. This theory offers a partial explanation as to why second-generation rights are significantly less protected than civil and political rights. Additionally, where empowerment rights incorporate second-generation rights, we see a clear trend in which rights are more or less likely to be protected.

Next, we turn to the human rights spotlights. These introduce some of the rights we have discussed above, as well as other rights for which we are collecting and coding data at the Center for Nonviolence and Peace Studies and with our institutional collaborators.

Human Rights Spotlights

The goal of this section is to give some context to the data we generate and showcase trends and patterns that can help us explore the causes and consequences of rights violations and conflict. Together, these writings underline the urgent need for international cooperation and effective policy measures to address violations and promote human dignity and equality on a global scale.

These spotlights explore rights and data projects that are taking place at URI which are not included in the grades discussed above and some of which are separate from the CIRIGHTS project. These are meant to show some of the other research taking place and highlight the amazing work of our students and faculty.

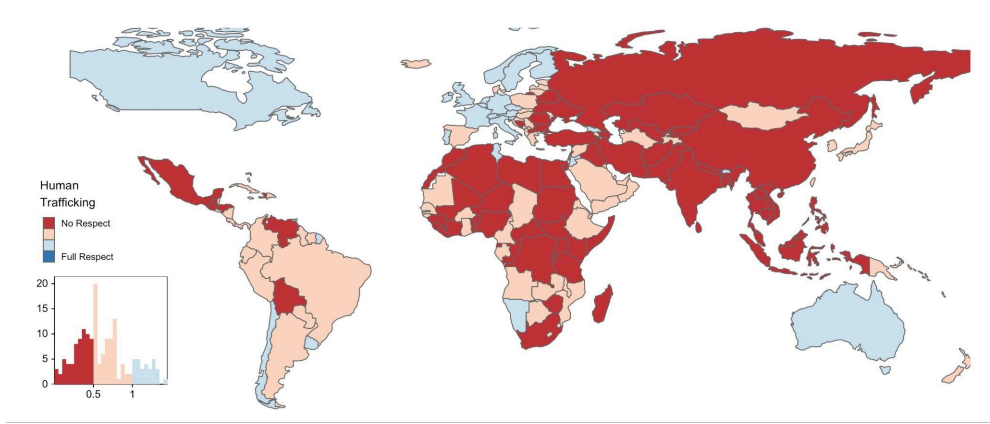
Spotlight: Human Trafficking

By Zahra Khan

Human trafficking is widely recognized as a severe violation of human rights and is the least respected human rights in the CIRIGHTS dataset. According to the CIRIGHTS project, human trafficking encompasses the recruitment, abduction, transport, harboring, or sale of individuals using force, fraud, or coercion for exploitation across borders. This definition aligns with international human rights

frameworks, which emphasize trafficking as a violation of personal autonomy and dignity by subjecting individuals to abusive and exploitative conditions. Scholars categorize trafficking into several forms, notably labor and sex trafficking, each driven by different economic and social factors but sharing a common denial of individual freedoms and rights. Trafficking deprives victims of their autonomy, violates their rights, and inflicts long-term harm, both physically and psychologically, which underscores the gravity of this global issue. The map below shows respect for human trafficking in practice during the 21st century.

Figure 8. Average Respect for Protection Against Human Trafficking in the 21st Century



Why Trafficking Matters to Global Politics

Human trafficking has profound implications for global politics, as it contributes to destabilizing regions, exploits vulnerable populations, and sustains organized crime. Human rights researchers emphasize that trafficking often intersects with other crimes, such as drug trafficking and money laundering, undermining social and economic stability and eroding rule of law in affected areas. States that fail to address trafficking contribute to global insecurity, as the spread of human trafficking fuels social instability, creates a dependency on exploitative labor, and perpetuates poverty. Moreover, global inaction can reinforce structural inequalities by allowing traffickers to target vulnerable groups, including migrants, minorities, and economically disadvantaged individuals.

Causes and Effects of Human Trafficking Violations

Numerous factors contribute to the persistence of human trafficking worldwide. First, the transnational nature of trafficking complicates law enforcement and leads many states to treat it as an organized crime issue. As a result, policies often focus on punishing traffickers, rather than supporting victims, creating a legal environment that fails to prevent re-trafficking. Second, many countries lack the necessary infrastructure to implement effective anti-trafficking measures, from victim identification

protocols to shelters for survivors. Third, structural issues such as poverty, discrimination, and lack of legal protections in certain countries leave vulnerable populations more susceptible to trafficking. These challenges are compounded by resource constraints, which prevent states from establishing comprehensive anti-trafficking strategies and further impede victim assistance.

Trends in Human Trafficking: CIRIGHTS Data Analysis

Using CIRIGHTS data, we analyze global trends in human trafficking protection from 2021 onward, examining cross-national scores assigned based on country efforts in prevention, prosecution, and victim support. The CIRIGHTS project evaluates countries with a 0-2 scale based on annual data from the U.S. Department of State's Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report, which measures compliance with anti-trafficking standards. A score of 0 indicates pervasive trafficking violations or complicity, while 2 reflects strong legislative and enforcement efforts.

In 2021, CIRIGHTS data showed that over half of assessed countries scored below 2, suggesting significant global shortcomings in preventing and prosecuting trafficking crimes. Only 3 out of 82 countries achieved the highest score, indicating a strong commitment to prosecuting traffickers, protecting victims, and implementing robust anti-trafficking legislation.

Case Studies of Country Scores

Examining specific cases reveals the challenges in effectively combating human trafficking. For instance, in **Colombia (2021)**, child sex trafficking persisted despite laws prohibiting the trafficking of children. Prosecutors often charged traffickers under lesser offenses like prostitution, resulting in lighter sentences and inadequate victim protection. This prosecutorial practice contributed to a climate of impunity, where trafficking crimes went largely unpunished, and children remained vulnerable to exploitation.

Similarly, **Nepal** exhibited weak legal protections in 2021. The country's trafficking laws narrowly defined trafficking as the buying or selling of persons for prostitution, excluding the coercion or force commonly used by traffickers. The result was a legal gap that allowed traffickers, including government officials complicit in trafficking schemes, to avoid punishment, while victims received inadequate support. In Nepal, children were often recruited under false promises and exploited in unregistered "orphanages" for labor and other abusive practices, highlighting the consequences of insufficient legislation and community complicity.

Barriers to Trafficking Prevention: Infrastructure and Resources

A significant challenge in combating trafficking is the lack of infrastructure and resources, which

impacts victim identification, law enforcement, and victim assistance. For instance, in **Belgium (2021)**, law enforcement agents often confused child trafficking with other crimes, leading to improper classification and leaving many child victims without necessary support. Similarly, **Côte d'Ivoire (2021)** reported insufficient protocols for screening at-risk individuals, such as border agents who lacked the training to identify potential trafficking victims, often resulting in the dismissal of trafficking indicators and contributing to unrecognized exploitation.

Another concerning example is **South Korea (2021)**, where victim assistance programs were inadequately tailored for diverse demographics. Assistance often excluded men, children, and disabled individuals, leaving these vulnerable groups at higher risk of re-trafficking. A lack of shelters or rehabilitation services for male victims, for instance, mirrored issues observed in **Mali (2021)**, where victim support programs disproportionately focused on women and girls, neglecting male victims who also experienced exploitation.

Implications and Future Directions for Anti-Trafficking Policies

Human trafficking remains a pervasive challenge, exacerbated by the lack of international coordination, resource shortages, and infrastructural limitations in many countries. As CIRIGHTS data underscores, global anti-trafficking efforts require a concerted approach focused on both prosecution and victim support. The prioritization of offender prosecution often comes at the cost of meaningful victim assistance, which risks re-trafficking due to the absence of protective measures for survivors.

States must emphasize comprehensive training for officials, especially in victim identification and support. Moreover, standardized international protocols for victim assistance and cross-border cooperation are essential to addressing trafficking effectively. Increased funding for anti-trafficking resources, from victim shelters to educational campaigns, can help create sustainable frameworks that protect vulnerable populations and hold traffickers accountable.

By strengthening both legal protections and support systems for trafficking victims, the international community can work towards dismantling the structures that perpetuate human trafficking. Only through enhanced collaboration, resource allocation, and enforcement of protective laws can we hope to mitigate trafficking's impact on individuals and society as a whole.

Spotlight: Child Trafficking

By Kristine Moore and Megumi Sinniah

Human trafficking, especially of children, is a widespread and serious global issue. This spotlight focuses specifically on child trafficking, which is criminalized under international conventions like the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Palermo Protocol. This section will examine three types of child trafficking, child sex trafficking, labor trafficking, and child soldiering, using data from the 2022 generated by the CIRIGHTS project.

Conceptual Definition and Global Importance

As outlined in the previous Spotlight, human trafficking, including child trafficking, is defined as acts involving the recruitment, abduction, harboring, or sale of individuals, using force or deception, resulting in forced labor or servitude-like conditions.¹¹ As a violation of fundamental human rights, trafficking undermines national and global security, destabilizes economies, and hinders social development. It remains a critical issue for international relations and human rights protection, demanding global collaboration to combat and prevent its spread.

Causes and Effects of Child Trafficking

Studies indicate that poverty, lack of education, conflict, economic discrimination, and weak legal frameworks contribute to high rates of child trafficking. Trafficking not only violates individual freedoms but also perpetuates cycles of violence, poverty, and exploitation. Children are particularly vulnerable to trafficking due to their dependence on caregivers and limited legal protection in many regions, often leading to long-term psychological and physical harm.

Global Trends in Child Trafficking (2022)

Using the CIRIGHTS scoring guide, countries are scored based on three levels of child trafficking violations:

- 1 = widespread
- 2 = some
- 3 = few/none

¹¹ U.N. Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons 2000.

A score of 1 indicates minimal government intervention or complicity in trafficking, while a score of 3 reflects comprehensive anti-trafficking measures, including prosecution, victim support, and training for officials.

According to the CIRIGHTS data, significant disparities exist in global responses to child trafficking. Only 11 out of 123 assessed countries received a score of 3 for child sex trafficking, indicating effective measures in place. However, 66 countries scored a 1, showing severe gaps in protection and enforcement. Patterns of prevalence and enforcement vary, with some regions consistently underperforming. For instance, countries in Sub-Saharan Africa and parts of Latin America and the Caribbean show higher rates of trafficking, often exacerbated by weak governance and regional instability.

Child Sex Trafficking

Under international law, child sex trafficking includes the recruitment or transport of a minor for commercial sex acts. Scores highlight a lack of effective measures in most countries, with only 11 achieving the highest score (meaning that they are adequately protecting children from trafficking). Examples of country scores in the data:

- **Paraguay (Score of 1):** Paraguay faces significant challenges, with reported complicity of border agents in trafficking, especially in areas near Brazil. Despite certifying hotels for compliance with anti-trafficking standards, Paraguay has yet to address child sex tourism effectively, leading to continued exploitation along the Paraguay River and the Tri-Border area.
- **Jordan (Score of 2):** While Jordan has instituted an anti-vagrancy campaign targeting vulnerable children, limited governmental action on child sex tourism persists. Authorities referred 1,000 vulnerable children to shelters in 2021, but ongoing issues with regional trafficking patterns impact Jordan's effectiveness. In contrast to Paraguay, no significant corruption or bribe-taking by Jordanian officials has been reported.

These examples underscore the global variance in combating child sex trafficking and the need for sustained international cooperation and accountability.

Child Labor Trafficking

Child labor trafficking includes exploitative employment below the legal age, unpaid hazardous work, and involvement in illicit activities. Data from the 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report indicates that

out of 79 countries evaluated, only 18 received a high score of 3 for addressing child labor trafficking, with the majority showing widespread violations.

- **Nicaragua (Score of 1):** Governmental complicity in trafficking in Nicaragua is a serious issue. Officials failed to investigate or punish corrupt officers involved in trafficking, demonstrating how government actions—or lack thereof—can perpetuate exploitation.
- **Austria (Score of 1):** Despite its economic development, Austria scores low on child labor trafficking due to incidents of government officers, including police and immigration officials, facilitating labor trafficking. This highlights that child labor trafficking can be pervasive even in high-income nations.

Child labor trafficking is prominent in regions like Central Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Middle East, where domestic markets exploit children in agriculture, mining, and industrial labor. These trends show a need for stronger governance, both regionally and globally, to tackle child labor trafficking effectively.

Child Soldiering

Though less common, child soldiering remains a severe form of trafficking where children are forced into combat roles. Of the 79 countries assessed, 21 have recorded instances of child soldiering, with only 2 receiving the highest score for effective prevention.

- **Nigeria (Score of 1):** The Nigerian government has not prosecuted the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) for forcibly recruiting children, and there are reports of trafficking in government-run camps, revealing a disturbing pattern of complicity.
- **Afghanistan and Pakistan (Score of 1 each):** These countries exhibit regional trafficking dynamics, where armed groups forcibly enlist children. The governments of both countries have been implicated in providing material support to these groups, underscoring how regional conflicts can exacerbate child soldiering.

Child soldiering occurs mainly in areas experiencing conflict. Future efforts should focus on demilitarization and the rehabilitation of affected children as well as preventing and ending intra-state and inter-state conflict.

Spotlight: Digital Repression

By Graham Shirley, Isabelle Dibner, Megumi Sinniah¹²

Definition and Importance of Digital Repression

Digital repression refers to the use of digital tools by state or non-state actors to monitor, control, manipulate, or coerce individuals and groups, often aiming to suppress dissent and maintain power. This concept includes practices like surveillance, censorship, disinformation, and online harassment. Academic literature highlights that digital repression poses severe threats to human rights, particularly freedoms of speech, press, and expression, which are fundamental to democratic societies and open communication. By enabling governments to suppress dissent, restrict access to information, and silence political opposition, digital repression undermines accountability and democratic processes and can entrench authoritarianism.

The rapid development of digital technologies has intensified the threat of digital repression and has become a global issue. Authoritarian regimes, in particular, employ digital tools to enforce control and silence opposition, effectively eroding human rights protections and democratic norms. However, these practices are not confined to authoritarian states; democratic countries have adopted forms of digital repression, shown in cases where they leverage social media or digital surveillance to pursue political aims. The UN and other international bodies, recognizing the global implications, have urged nations to regulate AI and other digital technologies transparently to safeguard human rights while fostering technological advancements.

Consequences of Digital Repression

Digital repression is often correlated with regime type, with authoritarian governments most likely to employ these tools to consolidate power and control public opinion. In authoritarian settings, digital tools facilitate coercion and monitoring of political opposition, often through censorship and internet shutdowns. For example, Russia has increasingly used digital platforms to suppress dissent related to anti-Russian and pro-Ukrainian sentiment. In democracies, digital repression might appear as censorship or selective enforcement on social media, as demonstrated in India, where social media was allegedly used to support political figures in spreading misinformation and silencing critics.

The international market for surveillance technology further exacerbates digital repression. Democratic nations, such as the United States and Israel, are leading exporters of spyware and other surveillance

¹² We are grateful to Meridith LaVelle, doctoral candidate at the University of Georgia and leading expert on digital repression, who lended several of the conceptualizations and operationalizations contained in this Spotlight from her dissertation work. We also thank her for her continued collaboration with our student and faculty researchers to produce the Digital Repression Data as a co-director of this data initiative.

tools, inadvertently equipping repressive regimes with the means to stifle opposition. The diffusion of commercial technology, driven by the open technology policies of democracies, has enabled widespread adoption of spyware and monitoring tools globally, raising concerns over human rights violations facilitated by international trade in surveillance equipment.

Trends in Digital Repression Based on CIRIGHTS Data

Using CIRIGHTS data and the 2022 U.S. Department of State Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, we analyzed digital repression trends across four main categories: physical coercion, physical channeling, information coercion, and information channeling.

1. Physical Coercion

Physical coercion, which includes arrests, legal threats, and surveillance, emerged as the most common form of digital repression. States often target activists, journalists, and political opposition through arrests and intimidation, as in Russia and Mexico. In Russia, anti-Russian and pro-Ukraine sentiments were met with repression. Similarly, in Mexico, both governmental and private actors have pressured social media platforms to remove content by threatening legal consequences, illustrating the ways digital repression can infringe upon freedom of expression.

2. Physical Channeling

Physical channeling involves institutional restrictions that limit free speech, often through state-sanctioned policies or platforms designed to monitor grievances. Laws restricting opposition or censoring journalists are common. For instance, China's social credit system indirectly coerces citizens into self-censorship by tracking behaviors and associating them with privileges, creating a culture of repression unique to China but illustrative of how digital repression can limit public discourse.

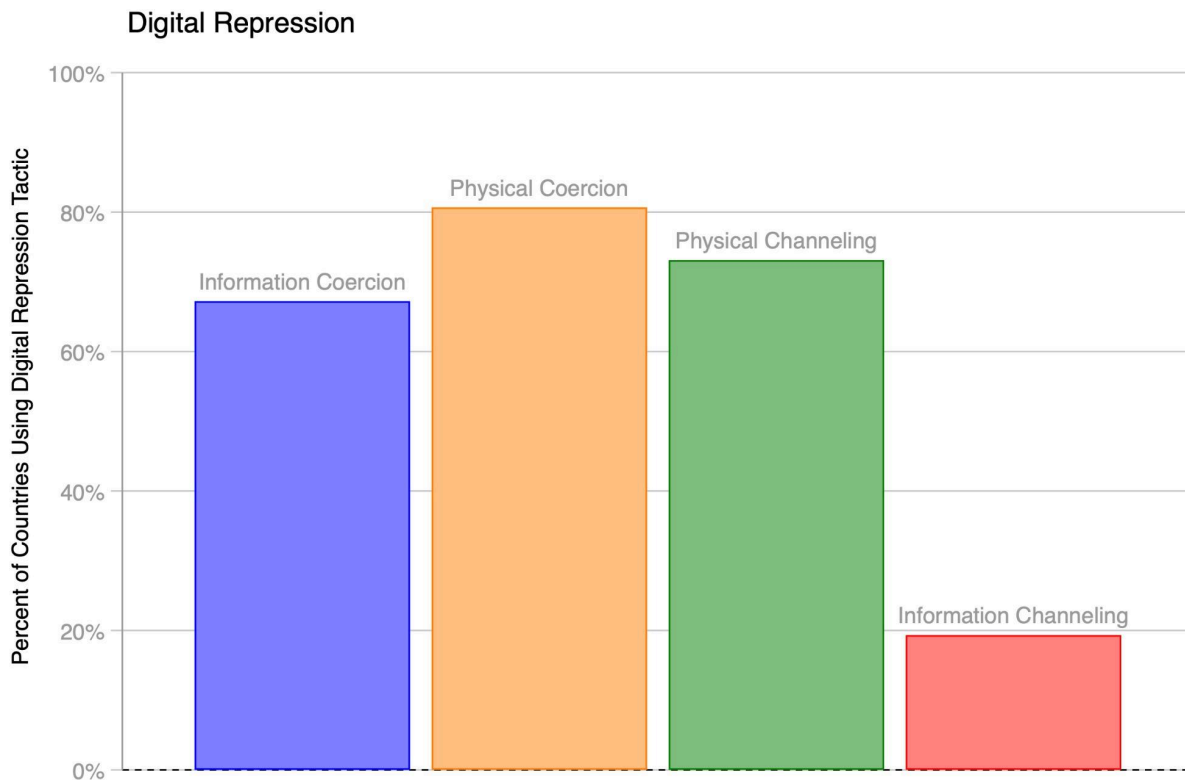
3. Information Coercion

While less common than physical coercion, information coercion through harassment is still a prevalent tactic of digital repression. States frequently block communication apps and services to hinder the flow of information, especially in countries with restrictive regimes. In Burma (Myanmar), the military government has restricted mobile data access in multiple regions and blocked social media platforms to stifle opposition voices. Similarly, South Sudan's government actively monitors and harasses civil society members who criticize the administration, highlighting the reach and impact of information coercion on civic engagement.

4. Information Channeling

Information channeling, often involving disinformation and propaganda, was identified as the least frequent but still notable form of digital repression. In authoritarian countries, such as Iran, the government controls information flow by pre-approving publications to ensure conformity with state narratives. This selective dissemination of information aims to mold public perception, often targeting the general population to maintain ideological control.

Figure 9. Visualizing the Use of Global Digital Repression Around the World



Analysis of CIRIGHTS data reveals that while digital repression occurs globally, authoritarian and repressive regimes consistently exhibit higher levels across all categories. For instance, government entities, including intelligence agencies and law enforcement, are often the primary actors of repression, with activists, journalists, and political dissenters as frequent targets. Digital repression methods, such as harassment and online censorship, have become prevalent challenges to fundamental human rights worldwide.

Implications and Future Outlook

The CIRIGHTS analysis underscores that digital repression remains a dynamic threat to civil liberties. Countries with authoritarian tendencies persistently leverage digital repression to consolidate power and control information. As digital technologies evolve, there is a critical need for global cooperation to develop regulations that balance technological innovation with human rights protection. Without international efforts to curb these practices, digital repression may continue to rise, further undermining democracy and freedoms globally.

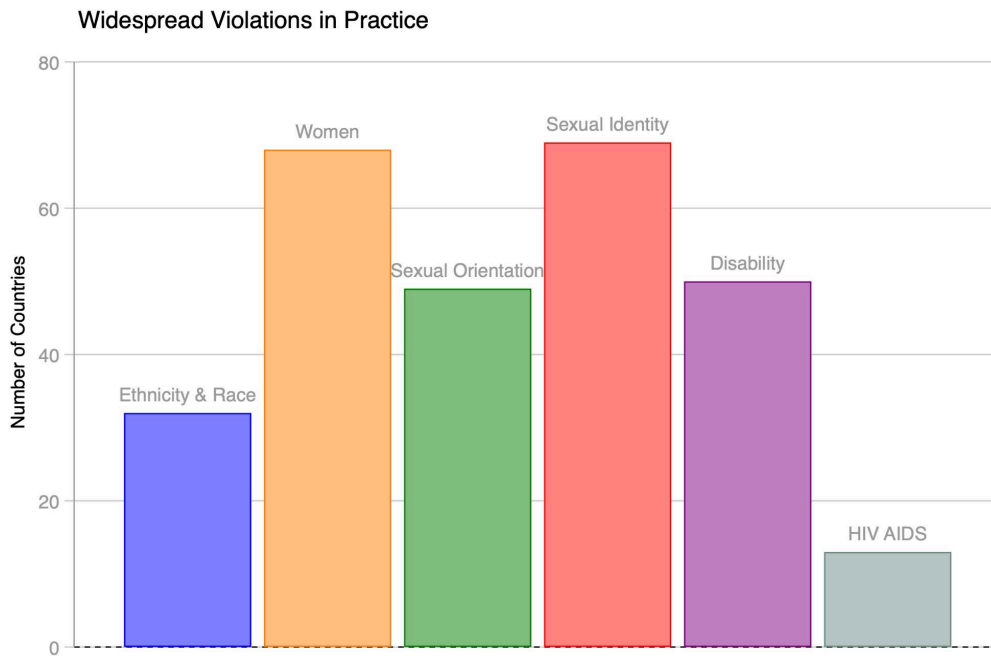
Given the rapid pace of digital innovation, the outlook for combating digital repression will depend on a combination of technological transparency, international policy, and public awareness. Proactive measures from democratic nations, alongside monitoring from international bodies, are essential to preserving digital rights in an increasingly interconnected world.

Spotlight: Economic Discrimination

By Iolanda di Giorgio and Zahra Khan

Economic discrimination refers to any distinction, exclusion, or preference that unfairly disadvantages individuals based on characteristics such as race, gender identity, nationality, ethnicity, sexual orientation, HIV/AIDS status, or disability. This form of discrimination can manifest directly and indirectly. Direct economic discrimination exists when laws, rules, or practices explicitly cite particular grounds, such as those mentioned above, to deny equal opportunities for employment, vocational training, or other economic activities. Indirect economic discrimination occurs when seemingly neutral rules or practices disproportionately impact specific groups, leading to unequal economic outcomes. We have recently added discrimination to the CIRIGHTS dataset to capture employment discrimination based on several identity categories: women, ethnicity/race, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, and HIV/AIDS.

Figure 10. Economic Discrimination Worldwide in 2024



Discrimination Against Women

Economic discrimination against women is prevalent worldwide, manifesting in wage gaps, restricted job roles, and discriminatory treatment related to pregnancy. In Finland, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health reported that women earn only 84% of what men earn across various sectors.

Pregnancy-related discrimination also persists. In countries like Bosnia, employers frequently ask women about family plans, often illegally requiring assurances against pregnancy (per the 2022 US State department country report on human rights). Sexual harassment compounds these, as women often face pressure to exchange sexual favors for job security, as reported in Madagascar and Kenya.

Transgender women, especially, face discrimination that limits economic opportunities. Although some countries have anti-discrimination laws, protections often do not extend to gender identity. In Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, and Eswatini, transgender individuals face similar barriers to employment. In Switzerland, the unemployment rate among transgender individuals is nearly five times that of the general population, with many forced to conceal their identity to secure employment .

Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Despite legal protections, LGBTQI+ individuals encounter severe economic discrimination globally. In Australia, religious schools are permitted to dismiss LGBTQI+ staff, expel students, or refuse

enrollment to children of same-sex parents. This exemplifies how cultural and religious values can influence policies that allow discriminatory practices. In Uganda, the Anti-Homosexuality Act has led to increased harassment and job loss for LGBTQI+ individuals who are "outed" by others.

Discrimination leads to disproportionately high levels of unemployment, poverty, and reliance on commercial sex work. In Brazil, nearly 90% of transgender women engage in sex work due to limited employment options. Similar patterns are observed in Thailand, Zimbabwe, and Honduras. Economic exclusion also heightens LGBTQI+ individuals' risk of violence and health issues, as they often avoid medical care to protect their identity.

Ethnic and Racial Discrimination

Ethnic minorities, including Roma, African descendants, and Indigenous groups, face systemic economic discrimination. In Bosnia, 80% of Roma remain unemployed despite anti-discrimination laws. Romani women face compounded discrimination, with many left illiterate and economically marginalized in Montenegro. Government apathy exacerbates these challenges, as seen in Belarus, which has been taken to combat Roma discrimination.

Similarly, individuals of African descent experience high unemployment and social exclusion. In Iraq, nearly 80% of this population remains jobless, largely due to ethnic prejudice. In Venezuela, Peru, and Panama, Indigenous people are paid less and relegated to unsanitary work conditions, which undermines their socioeconomic advancement.

Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities

Persons with disabilities face unique challenges, including employer reluctance to provide reasonable accommodations and an overall lack of accessible infrastructure. Despite quota laws aimed at promoting employment for persons with disabilities, many employers opt to pay fines rather than comply. In Kazakhstan, public buildings often lack wheelchair access, and workplaces are ill-equipped to support disabled employees. Such barriers contribute to disproportionately high unemployment rates for persons with disabilities and limit their socioeconomic mobility.

Implications and Future Outlook

The data on economic discrimination indicate persistent, widespread disparities across various demographics. Authoritarian and repressive regimes exhibit high rates of employment discrimination, but even in democratic societies, marginalized groups face significant barriers to economic inclusion. CIRIGHTS' findings highlight the urgent need for enhanced legal protections, stronger enforcement mechanisms, and increased awareness to reduce economic discrimination worldwide.

Advancements in technology may offer new avenues for economic participation; however, as digital economies grow, it is crucial to ensure inclusive access and avoid deepening existing inequalities. If current trends persist, marginalized groups will continue to experience disproportionate economic hardship, reinforcing cycles of poverty and exclusion. Moving forward, international organizations, including the United Nations, should prioritize economic rights as central to achieving broader human rights goals, fostering inclusive growth, and addressing the global impacts of economic discrimination.

Through policy reform and increased enforcement of anti-discrimination laws, a more equitable global workforce can emerge, allowing historically marginalized populations to achieve economic independence and societal equality.

Refugee Rights

By Zahra Khan

Conceptual Definition of Refugee Rights¹³

Refugee rights are foundational protections established to safeguard individuals who have fled their home countries due to persecution, war, or violence. The 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees outline key protections, including the right to non-refoulement (protection from forced return to danger), the right to seek asylum, and rights to essential services such as healthcare, education, and employment. These rights reflect international standards designed to ensure refugees can live with dignity and safety in their host countries while awaiting durable solutions to their displacement.

Importance of Refugee Rights in Global Politics

In global politics, refugee rights are pivotal as they address the humanitarian needs of some of the world's most vulnerable populations. The international community's approach to refugee rights influences both regional stability and international relations, as hosting countries may struggle with resource strains, while neighboring nations face pressures to uphold refugee protections amid internal or cross-border tensions. Ensuring that countries meet these obligations is crucial, as a failure to do so can lead to human rights violations, societal instability, and the perpetuation of conflict.

¹³ We sincerely thank Katherine Felt, who developed the initial set of scoring rules for refugee rights and agreed to let us incorporate them into the CIRIGHTS project. Felt, Katherine Emma. "Nowhere to run: measuring how refugee flows and rights shape civil conflict." PhD diss., State University of New York at Binghamton, 2018.

Causes and Effects of Refugee Rights Violations

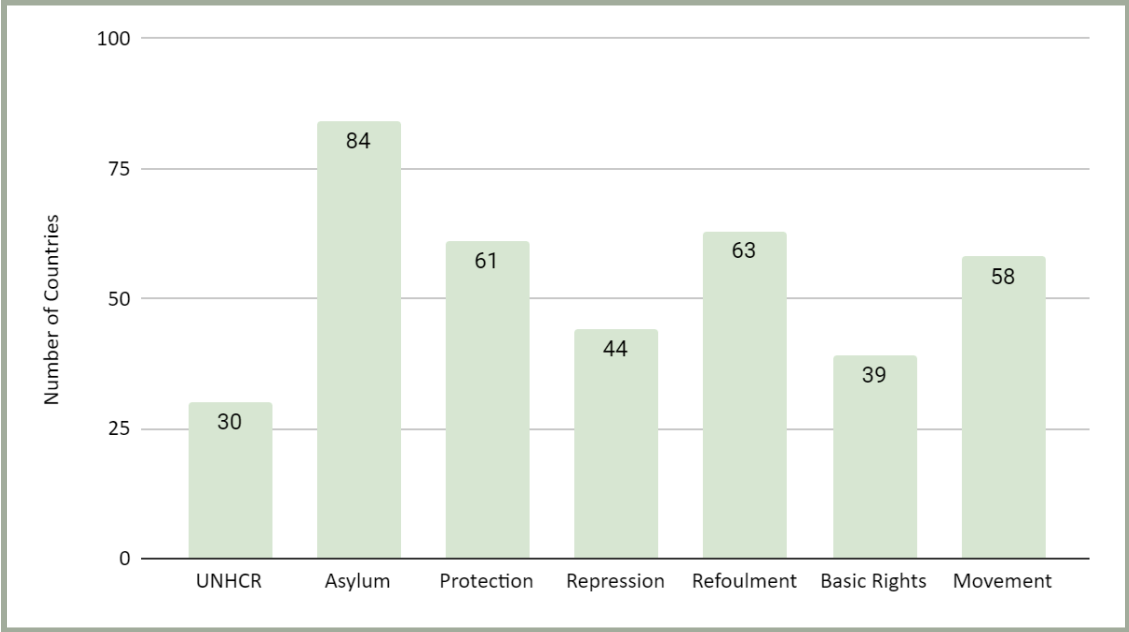
Violations of refugee rights often stem from factors such as inadequate legal frameworks, resource limitations, and societal discrimination within host countries. For instance, discriminatory policies targeting specific ethnic or national groups within refugee populations can lead to varying levels of access to rights. Additionally, economic strain and social biases can influence host governments to restrict refugees' access to basic services and movement, creating conditions of vulnerability and dependency. When rights are not upheld, refugees are at greater risk of physical harm, psychological trauma, and exploitation, impacting not only their well-being but also the host society's social cohesion.

CIRIGHTS Data on Global Trends in Refugee Rights

The CIRIGHTS Data Project's recent dataset on Refugee Rights evaluates these rights across all countries. We examine legal protections, cooperation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and adherence to international standards. The data reveal global disparities in refugee rights, with some nations fully upholding these standards while others impose restrictive policies that hinder refugees' access to essential protections.

Figure 11 below shows the number of countries violating refugee rights. UNHCR, Asylum, Protection, Refoulement (forced return), and Movement are dichotomous with a score of 0, indicating a violation and a score of 1 indicating respect. Repression and Basic Rights are measured on a 0, 1, or 2 scale, and the graph indicates the number of countries with a 0.

Figure 11. Global Prevalence of Refugee Rights Violations



Definition and Scope of CIRIGHTS Refugee Rights Variables

The CIRIGHTS dataset includes several variables designed to measure the extent of refugee rights protection within each country. These variables are:

- **UNHCR Cooperation:** Measures state collaboration with the UNHCR to facilitate refugee protection.
- **Access to Asylum:** Indicates whether countries provide asylum access consistent with international standards.
- **Legal System for Protection:** Evaluates the presence of legal frameworks supporting asylum seekers.
- **Refoulement:** Assesses whether governments engage in refoulement, or forced return of refugees to areas of danger.
- **Government Repression:** Reflects state-level abuse against refugees, using a scale to capture degrees of government violence, detention, or harassment.
- **Basic Rights:** Measures access to services like healthcare, education, employment, and housing.
- **Freedom of Movement:** Indicates whether refugees can move freely within the host country.

Data Highlights and Regional Variations

Analysis of CIRIGHTS data from 2022 shows promising cooperation with the UNHCR, with 85% of countries fully complying. However, 43% of countries do not meet international standards for asylum access, and 31% lack adequate legal systems for refugee protection. Notably, countries with restrictive measures like “safe country of origin” policies or bilateral agreements often fail to meet these standards.

For example, Greece’s (2022) designation of Turkey as a “safe third country” allows it to reject asylum seekers traveling through Turkey, despite Turkey’s poor refugee protections. Similarly, the UK’s proposed “Rwanda Asylum Plan” faced international criticism for potentially breaching refugee protections under the 1951 Convention.

Causes and Consequences of Restricted Asylum Access

“Safe country” designations and bilateral agreements can undermine refugee protections. Countries such as Spain, with agreements allowing rapid deportations to Morocco and Algeria, and Belize, deporting Cuban refugees without due process, illustrate how these policies can endanger refugees and violate international law. Such policies frequently result in refugees’ exposure to further harm or even life-threatening situations.

Refugee rights violations are often compounded by government repression and discriminatory treatment. In countries like Japan, where refugees face indefinite detention, and in South Africa, where officials reportedly demand bribes, systemic issues further marginalize refugees. Notably, many refugees, especially women and children, face exploitation, trafficking, and gender-based violence, with state collusion exacerbating these risks in countries like Libya and Bangladesh.

Socio-Economic and Ethnic Disparities in Refugee Treatment

Data reveal that refugee treatment often varies by ethnicity and nationality. For instance, in Turkey, Ukrainian refugees are granted full access to services, whereas Syrian and Afghan refugees face severe restrictions and violent repression. This pattern of differential treatment is echoed in countries like Denmark, where Ukrainian refugees receive more rights protections than Syrians. Societal biases against certain ethnic groups frequently influence these disparities, affecting access to employment, education, and other basic rights.

Refugee Rights and Host Society Dynamics

In many countries, refugees encounter barriers to education and employment due to bureaucratic challenges or restrictive policies. For instance, refugees in Germany face registration delays that hinder access to schooling, while North Macedonia's slow issuance of identity documents limits service access for refugees. In Malawi, refugee restrictions within the Dzaleka camp, originally intended for 10,000 people but now housing over 55,000, exemplify the severe limitations on freedom of movement and self-sufficiency many refugees face.

Policy Implications and Recommendations

The analysis underscores the need for global policy reforms to strengthen refugee protections. Key recommendations include enforcing non-refoulement standards, ensuring effective asylum access, and providing equitable basic rights for refugees within host countries. Strengthening international oversight to ensure compliance with the 1951 Refugee Convention could improve conditions for millions of refugees worldwide. Additionally, addressing ethnic and national biases in refugee policies is essential for fostering more inclusive and fair host communities.

Spotlight: Anti-American Events Across the Globe¹⁴

By Ava Palma and Caitlyn Mutteru

Conceptual Definition of Anti-Americanism

Anti-Americanism¹⁵ broadly refers to the negative attitudes and behaviors directed at the United States and its citizens. It encompasses unfavorable perceptions of United-States-American people, government, and culture, often rooted in the belief that there is something fundamentally problematic about the United States itself. This concept is widely discussed in the academic literature, which examines the social, political, and historical contexts that give rise to anti-American sentiment across various regions and countries. For example, some studies identify anti-Americanism in Europe as a cultural phenomenon that historically masked its opposition in political terms, while in the Middle East, it has been linked to perceptions of Western conspiracies against Arab and Muslim nations.

Importance of Understanding Anti-Americanism

Understanding anti-Americanism is crucial due to its significant political, economic, and human consequences. Anti-American attitudes and behaviors can strain diplomatic relations, influence foreign policy decisions, and impact the security of U.S. nationals abroad. Targeted actions against American businesses and tourists, for instance, can have substantial economic implications, deterring tourism and reducing investment. Additionally, hostile actions against U.S. military and diplomatic facilities carry political costs for host nations, potentially undermining their own domestic and foreign policy stability.

Causes and Effects of Anti-Americanism

Anti-American sentiment arises from a complex interplay of cultural, political, and socio-economic factors. In Europe, historical fears of U.S. cultural dominance and modernization post-World War I contributed to widespread skepticism and resistance toward American influence. In the Middle East, anti-Americanism is often a reaction to U.S. foreign policy, particularly interventions and support for regimes viewed unfavorably in the region.

Anti-American behavior is frequently motivated by grievances tied to U.S. military and economic aid, which can exacerbate existing social and economic disparities. Studies indicate that U.S. military aid, in particular, may foster resentment among those marginalized by exclusionary policies in their own countries. Such resentment may escalate into anti-American terrorism, with U.S. foreign assistance

¹⁴ See Asadzade, Peyman, Behzad Attarzadeh, Roya Izadi, Skip Mark, and Almira Sadykova. "Significant Incidents against Americans Abroad: Introducing a New Dataset." *International Interactions* 50, no. 1 (2024): 188-207.

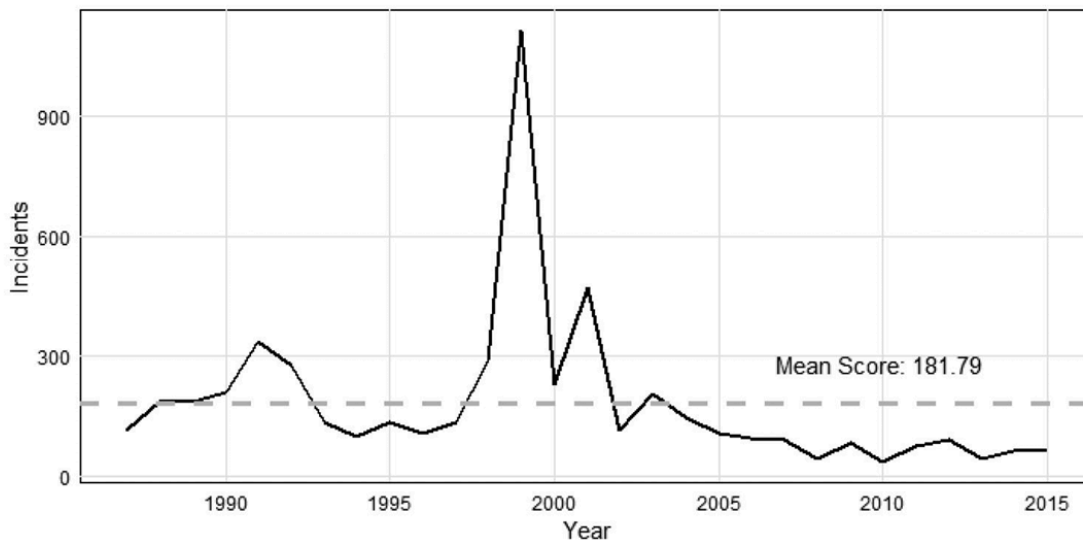
¹⁵ We realize and appreciate that "American" refers to all countries of the Americas; however, for clarity and ease of communication, we refer to anti-Americanism in terms of anti-US Americanism here.

seen as reinforcing an unjust political status quo. Understanding this connection between U.S. aid and anti-American behavior is essential for assessing the impacts of foreign aid on both U.S. and global security.

Empirical Evidence from the SIAAA Dataset

To measure anti-American behavior, the Significant Incidents Against Americans Abroad (SIAAA) dataset, collected by Peyman Asadzade, Behzad Attarzadeh, Roya Izadi, Skip Mark, and Almira Sadykova, provides systematic cross-national data on antagonistic actions directed toward American nationals, entities, and interests. Covering 1987-2015, the dataset records 5,272 incidents globally, categorizing them into political, business, military, and civilian-oriented anti-American actions. The dataset includes information on incident types—ranging from violent demonstrations to bombings and kidnappings—as well as actor ideology, location, and specific targets (e.g., U.S. military bases, diplomats, businesses).

Figure 12. Frequency of Anti-American Incidents Worldwide, 1987-2015



According to SIAAA data, the most common forms of anti-American incidents are political in nature (43.1%), followed by business-related (34.4%), with military (9.6%) and private individual incidents (12.9%) accounting for smaller shares. Among incident types, bombings, non-violent demonstrations, and facility attacks are the most frequent, while kidnappings and hijackings are rare. This dataset provides valuable insights into the intensity and nature of anti-American behavior across different contexts and time periods.

Global Trends in Anti-American Incidents

The SIAAA dataset reveals fluctuations in anti-American incidents over time, influenced by both regional politics and U.S. foreign policy. A peak in incidents occurred between 1987 and 1992, likely due to rising support for socialist and leftist movements in the wake of the Cold War. However, after 1992, incidents declined as the Soviet Union dissolved and the global influence of socialist ideologies waned.⁷ Another increase in incidents emerged from 1998 to 2004, correlating with U.S. military interventions in Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, and Iraq, which were seen as aggressive and intrusive by various regional actors. Post-2005, anti-American incidents declined as the U.S. adopted a more diplomatic approach to foreign policy, shifting focus away from direct military engagement. The data suggests that anti-American incidents tend to escalate with increased U.S. involvement in foreign conflicts and decline when American foreign policy shifts to less interventionist strategies.

Analysis and Future Implications

Anti-American incidents appear closely tied to U.S. actions abroad, with increased incidents likely during periods of heightened U.S. geopolitical involvement. Recent global developments post-2015—such as the U.S.'s support for Ukraine in the Russo-Ukrainian war, its stance on the Israel-Palestine conflict, and its involvement in Yemen's civil war and tensions between China and Taiwan—suggest a potential rise in anti-American incidents in the near future. The persistence of anti-American sentiment underscores the importance of nuanced and strategic foreign policy to mitigate the risk of backlash and ensure the security of American nationals and interests abroad.

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