

# Human Rights Surveys in International Relations Scholarship

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# The Elephant in the Room



- *Why are surveys necessary for the study of human rights in IR?*
  - surveys are costly, time consuming, involve actually being in the field - messy
  - We already have a lot of great studies on human rights - both case studies and quantitative research - that hasn't had to use large-scale surveys

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# Answer

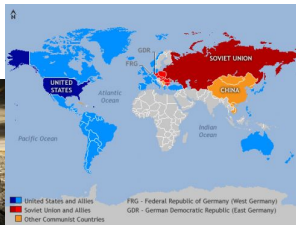
Increased knowledge from surveys is *essential* for the further academic study of human rights, especially in IR

- ① Theory development
- ② Testing of empirical implications of existing theory
- ③ Connect the study of human rights to the larger framework of IR
- ④ *Hopefully* - help improve evidence-based advocacy and -  
*ultimately* - human rights conditions on the ground

Setting the Stage - International Relations  
#1 Theory Development  
#2 Testing Hypotheses  
#3 Connect to Larger Literature in IR  
#4 Connections to Advocacy

Just Look at States  
Look Within States  
Individuals

# International Relations - Historically, things between states



## Some Unpacking - Looking Within States

- (Late 1950s)- how things within a country influence interstate relations (ie *does democracy influence war?*)
- (Late 1970s)- how interstate relations influence things within a country (ie *does international law influence a government's use of torture?*)



## Further Unpacking - Individuals

- Individual opinions underpin **all** of what we think about as International Relations scholars
  - Of course, the extent a certain individual matters (when, where, and how) for a political decision influenced by political structures
  - growing understanding (resurgence?) in all of IR that we need to better understand the **individual** and what he/she thinks and values and how their opinions can change
    - important for everything we do as social scientists!



# Public Opinion - Often Assumed, Very Necessary to Know for Theory Building

- knowing what individuals actually think about events, policies, laws, leaders, organizations, etc - **essential** for building theories of international relations that draw on the public's opinion in explaining a political outcome
  - understanding the public's preferences -key for building a theoretical understanding of how they will/will not influence political outcomes





## Example from Human Rights IR - Treaties

- Let's say we are trying to build a theory for how international law could work to improve human rights conditions



- We know this is a phenomena where we are going to have to “unpack” the black box of states - focus on individuals (activists, non activists) and what their preferences are in states where treaties have been ratified

## Example: Building a Theory on Treaties



- Correctly building this theory - much easier if we have some baseline descriptive knowledge of what people think of the effectiveness of human rights treaties
  - if people do think treaties are effective - could make it easier for them to act in support of human rights in repressive states
  - if people don't think treaties are effective - may have to focus on other causal pathways in building a theory for how international law could work

# Sometimes, We Have Beautiful Theories That Are Difficult to Test Without Survey Data

- Portions of Keck and Sikkink (1998) - Boomerang Model for Advocacy - *very difficult* to test without survey data
  - Hypothesis: Information from NGOs will change people's opinions about human rights conditions in their own country.

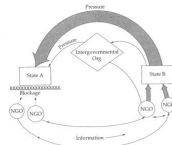


Figure 1. Boomerang pattern. State A blocks aid to organizations within its ally-state network, whose members pressure their own states and (if relevant) a third-party organization, which in turn pressures them. A.

# Can Then Help with Further Theory Building



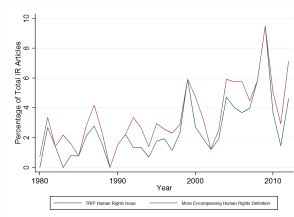
Please read the following message from Human Rights Initiative about sleep deprivation. After that we'll ask you a few questions.

Meet Andrew. Andrew is a 37-year-old husband and father of two. Until recently, Andrew worked as a math teacher at his local high school. On his way home from work on February 11, Andrew was stopped by two police officers and taken to the local police station. There, he was interrogated about his suspected involvement in an armed robbery. Andrew was detained at the police station for three days, during which time he was kept awake by dumping cold water on his body, restraining him in a forced standing position, and playing loud music in his cell. Despite knowing nothing about the robbery, Andrew was pressured into falsely accusing his brother of involvement in the crime, an accusation that he later withdrew. Since being released, Andrew has suffered from high blood pressure, debilitating headaches, depression, and hallucinations. He has reported having difficulty relating to his wife and children, and focusing on work.

- Survey data can even help in further building theory - which **types** of information from NGOs will be most effective at changing opinions and getting action (McEntire, Leiby, and Krain 2015 *APSR*)

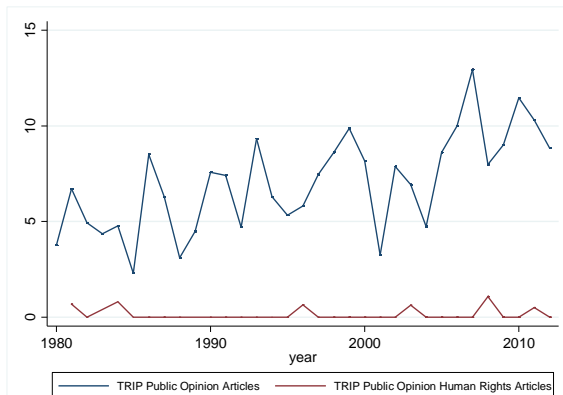
## Where does human rights fit in?

- early literature on human rights often seen as being unscientific - *“inspired by activist involvement rather than the sobriety of scientific inference”* (Hafner-Burton 2014, 282)
- now: growing use of **all** methodological approaches, much better attention in top IR journals



# Take Public Opinion Seriously

- Growing focus in IR - theories/empirical studies on experiments and survey research to capture public opinion
  - not seen in the HR literature



# Goals of Science

- If one of the goals of science is understanding the world in order to improve humanity, more public opinion research can help make the world a better place
  - better theory on human rights outcomes
  - better empirical research on implications of these theories
  - better connection to overall literature on interstate relations
  - added bonus: survey experiments, assessment of advocacy = clear link to human right advocates



# Summary

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I'm excited to learn about the state-of-the-art in the next two days!