

Development, Dependence, Population Pressure, and Human Rights: The Cross-National Evidence

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Abstract

Why does the provision of human rights vary across countries of the world-system? Three alternative macrosocial narratives address this question: modernization theory, dependency theory, and human ecology theory. Cross-national researchers have examined one or two of these theories, but no researcher has examined all three theories simultaneously with recent data. This paper reports results of such a study. Human rights performance for 77 countries in 1991 was modeled as a function of economic development, economic dependence, population growth, and several control variables. Regression results suggest strong support for the modernization and human ecology narratives, but little support for the dependency narrative. Implications of the results are briefly discussed.

Keywords: *Human Rights, Population Pressure, Economic Dependence, and Economic Development*

Introduction

Why does human rights performance (understood in terms of civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights) vary so dramatically across countries of the world-system? Three alternative macrosocial narratives of this phenomenon seem to exist: modernization theory, dependency theory, and human ecology theory. Modernization theorists contend that industrialization and the attendant economic development foster respect for human rights (e.g., Lipset 1959, 1994). Dependency theorists argue that economic dependence restricts human rights performance (e.g., Chase-Dunn 1989). Proponents of human ecology theory maintain that population pressure reduces human rights performance (e.g., Catton 1980).

Cross-national researchers of human rights performance have examined one or two of these three theories, but they have failed to examine all three theories simultaneously with recent data (see, e.g., Henderson 1982, 1991, 1993, 1996; McCormick and Mitchell 1997; Meyer 1996; Mitchell and McCormick, 1988; Park 1987; Poe and Tate 1994; Pritchard 1989). This paper reports the results of such a study. A human rights index (consisting of forty indicators of civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights outlined in major United Nations' treaties on human rights) for 77 countries in 1991 was modeled as a function of economic development, economic dependence, population growth, and several control variables.

Alternative Theoretical Perspectives

Modernization

Modernization theorists contend that industrialization and the ensuing economic development promote the provision of human rights (Lipset 1959, 1994; Marks and Diamond 1992). This is the case because industrialization reduces inequalities and increases political stability, thereby reducing the need for elites to repress the economically excluded. In other words, the increased income, education, and occupational diversity accompanying industrialization reduce class antagonisms and foster tolerance and social interdependence. Results of existing cross-national research indicate a robust positive relationship between industrialization (and alternative measures of economic development) and diverse measures of human rights performance, including the integrity of the person, civil and political liberties, and socioeconomic rights (Bollen and Jackman 1985, 1995; Burkhart and Lewis-Beck 1994; Crenshaw 1995; Diamond 1992; Firebaugh and Beck 1994; Henderson 1991, 1993; Lipset et al. 1993; Londregan and Poole 1996; Mitchell and McCormick 1988; Moon 1991; Muller 1995a, 1995b; Park 1987; Pritchard 1989; Ragin and Bradshaw 1992; but see

McCormick and Mitchell 1997; Poe and Tate 1994; Przeworski and Limongi 1997).

Dependency

The proponents of dependency theory contend that the asymmetrical power relations between countries of the world economic system reduce the development potential of the peripheral countries (see, e.g., Amin 1974; Chase-Dunn 1989; Frank 1979). Dependent relations produce distorted patterns of development and inequality in the peripheral countries, resulting in instability and conflict. The resulting instability and conflict give rise to elite efforts to repress and control the economically excluded in ways that violate basic human rights. Despite substantial differences among proponents of the dependency perspective (Packenham 1992), they would concur that dependence reduces the provision of human rights.

Findings of existing comparative research on the link between various measures of dependence and human rights performance are mixed. Existing case study research provides some support for a negative link between dependence and human rights performance (O'Donnell 1979; Rueschemeyer et al. 1992). The existing quantitative cross-national research provides little support for the hypothesized negative link between dependence and various forms of human rights performance, including civil and political liberties and socioeconomic rights (Bollen 1983; Crenshaw 1995; Diamond 1992; Firebaugh and Beck 1994; Frey and Al-Mansour 1995; Henderson 1996; Lipset et al. 1993; Meyer 1996; Mitchell and McCormick 1988; Moon 1991; Muller 1995a; but see Ragin and Bradshaw 1992).

Human Ecology

According to proponents of human ecology theory, population pressure is a major driving force of many societal problems (e.g., Catton 1980; Ehrlich and Ehrlich 1990; Hardin 1993; Harrison 1993). The link between population growth and human rights performance is not well developed, but rapid population growth is thought to increase demands on limited resources and increase the risk of conflict. The situation is stabilized through various political means, including exclusion, repression, and related strategies that violate basic human rights (Henderson 1993; Homer-Dixon et al. 1993).

Despite the existence of a highly contentious debate about the effects of population pressure (whether negative, positive, or minimal) on various forms of human well-being (see, e.g., Catton 1980; Cohen 1995; Commoner 1990; Ehrlich and Ehrlich 1990; Hardin 1993; Harrison 1993; Homer-Dixon 1995; Schnaiberg 1980:59-112; Simon 1996), surprisingly little empirical research has examined the link between population pressure and human rights performance.

Findings of several case studies (examining the link between rapid population growth, inequality, conflict, and authoritarian regimes in the less developed countries) suggest a negative relationship between rapid population growth and human rights provision (Goldstone 1991; Homer-Dixon et al. 1993; Howard and Homer-Dixon 1995). Most of the cross-national research on civil and political liberties, political repression, and socioeconomic rights indicates a negative link between population pressure and alternative forms of human rights performance (Frey and Al-Mansour 1995; Henderson 1993; McCormick and Mitchell 1997; Moon 1991; Williamson 1987; but see Poe and Tate 1994).

Data and Method

Sample

The unit of analysis is the nation state. Seventy-seven countries with populations of one million or more for which there were complete data on all variables were included in the study. Although few command economy countries were included, estimates are based on a fairly representative sampling of the less developed and developed countries. Countries are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Sample of Countries

1. Afghanistan	26. India	51. Peru	76. Zaire
2. Algeria	27. Indonesia	52. Philippines	77. Zambia
3. Angola	28. Iran	53. Portugal	
4. Argentina	29. Iraq	54. Romania	
5. Australia	30. Ireland	55. Rwanda	
6. Austria	31. Israel	56. Saudi Arabia	
7. Belgium	32. Italy	57. Sierra Leone	
8. Benin	33. Jamaica	58. Singapore	
9. Bolivia	34. Japan	59. South Africa	
10. Brazil	35. Jordan	60. Spain	
11. Cameroon	36. Kenya	61. Sri Lanka	
12. Canada	37. South Korea	62. Sudan	
13. Chile	38. Libya	63. Sweden	
14. Colombia	39. Malaysia	64. Switzerland	
15. Denmark	40. Mexico	65. Syria	
16. Dom. Republic	41. Morocco	66. Thailand	
17. Ecuador	42. Mozambique	67. Togo	
18. Egypt	43. Netherlands	68. Trinidad	
19. El Salvador	44. New Zealand	69. Tunisia	
20. Finland	45. Nicaragua	70. Turkey	
21. France	46. Norway	71. Uganda	
22. Germany	47. Pakistan	72. United Kingdom	
23. Greece	48. Panama	73. Uruguay	
24. Guatemala	49. P. New Guinea	74. United States	
25. Honduras	50. Paraguay	75. Venezuela	

Dependent Variable

Human rights performance is a difficult concept to define, but we find the following definition by Humana (1992, 4) to be as good as most: "the laws, customs, and practices that have evolved . . . to protect ordinary people, minorities, groups, and races from oppressive rulers and governments." Others have defined human rights performance more broadly to include the provision of political and civil rights, integrity of the person, and socioeconomic rights (see, e.g., Bollen 1986; Howard 1995; Nickel 1987; Sachs 1996). Efforts to measure the human rights performance of individual countries have been criticized for being politically and ethically biased (Barsh 1993; Howard 1995, 1-20; Perry 1997), but we maintain like many others (Howard 1995) that it is possible to measure human rights performance in a defensible fashion. This claim is based on the fact that there are internationally recognized human rights. Most countries, for instance, have signed United Nations' (UN) human rights documents outlawing the violation of various economic, social, political, civil, and cultural rights (Buergeth 1997; Howard 1995; Humana 1992).

Gupta et al.'s (1994) revised version of the Humana (1992) Index of Human Rights was used in estimates. Humana's index is based on a differential weighting of the 40 items listed in Table 2. The 40 items were chosen by Humana (1992, 4) to reflect important elements of three major UN human rights instruments: the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR) adopted in 1948, the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) adopted in 1966, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) adopted in 1966. Humana (1992, 5-7) weighted items 7-13 more heavily than the other 33 items because he deemed them more important.¹ Humana's index has been used by several researchers (United Nations 1991), but it has been criticized (Barsh 1993; Gupta et al. 1994). Gupta et al. (1994:141) contend that the differential weighting of items 7-13 is "arbitrary." They created a revised index based on the relative weighting of each of the 40 items listed in Table 2 according to the results of a discriminant analysis (Gupta et al., 1994, 140-148).² Data for the index in 1991 were taken from Gupta et al. (1994, 159-161).

Independent Variables

Three independent variables were included as major predictor variables. Each variable represents a major driving force identified by proponents of the three alternative theoretical narratives. The variables are economic development, dependence, and population growth.

Economic development. Economic development was measured as the real gross domestic product per capita (GDP)

Table 2. Forty Indicators Used in the Construction of the Human Rights Index

Freedom to

1. Travel in own country
2. Travel outside own country
3. Peacefully associate and assemble
4. Teach ideas and receive information
5. Monitor human rights violations
6. Publish and educate in ethnic language

Freedom from

7. Serfdom, slavery, forced or child labor
8. Extrajudicial killings or "disappearances"
9. Torture or coercion by the state
10. Compulsory work permits or conscription of labor
11. Capital punishment by the state
12. Court sentences of corporal punishment
13. Indefinite detention without charge
14. Compulsory membership of state organizations or parties
15. Compulsory religion or state ideology in schools
16. Deliberate state policies to control artistic works
17. Political censorship of press
18. Censorship of mail or telephone tapping

Freedom for or Rights to

19. Peaceful political opposition
20. Multiparty elections by secret and universal ballot
21. Political and legal equality for women
22. Social and economic equality for women
23. Social and economic equality for ethnic minorities
24. Independent newspapers
25. Independent book publishing
26. Independent radio and television networks
27. All courts to total independence
28. Independent trade unions

Legal Rights

29. From deprivation of nationality
30. To be considered innocent until proved guilty
31. To free legal aid when necessary and counsel of own choice
32. From civilian trials in secret
33. To be brought promptly before a judge or court
34. From police searches of home without a warrant
35. From arbitrary seizure of personal property

Personal Rights

36. To interracial, interreligious, or civil marriage
37. Equality of sexes during marriage and for divorce proceedings
38. To practice any religion
39. To use contraceptive pills and devices
40. To noninterference by state in strictly private affairs

SOURCE: Humana (1992)

in 1991. Several alternative measures of economic development (including the ratio of industrial employment to the total labor force, energy consumption per capita, gross national product per capita, and proportion of the agricultural labor force to the total labor force) were used to make estimates, but these estimates did not vary substantially from GDP/capita estimates so they are not reported. Data were col-

lected from the United Nations (1994, 129-131). The variable was logged to correct for a skewed distribution.

Economic dependence. Dependence has been measured in various ways, including investment dependence, trade dependence, debt dependence, aid dependence, and world system position (e.g., Bollen 1983; Bornschieer and Chase-Dunn 1985; Crenshaw 1995; Dixon and Boswell 1996a, 1996b; Ehrhardt-Martinez 1998; Firebaugh 1992, 1996; Henderson 1996; Muller 1995a; Ragin and Bradshaw 1992). Investment dependence was used as the primary measure of dependence. Two measures of trade dependence were also used in a series of auxiliary analyses to test the robustness of the effects of dependence. The three measures of dependence were lagged by several decades because several cross-national researchers have argued that the adverse effects of dependence take time to manifest themselves (Bornschieer and Chase-Dunn 1985; Kentor 1998).

Bornschieer and Chase-Dunn's (1985) controversial transnational corporation penetration (PEN) measure (see Bornschieer and Chase-Dunn 1993; Dixon and Boswell 1996a, 1996b; Firebaugh 1992, 1996; Firebaugh and Beck 1994; Kentor 1998) was used to measure investment dependence. This measure is the book value of TNC investments in millions of 1967 dollars, divided by the square root of the product of two terms: population size in millions and the domestic stock of capital in billions of US dollars. Data for 1967 were taken from Bornschieer and Chase-Dunn (1985, 156-159).

Trade dependence is the degree of a country's participation in the world economy. Two measures of trade dependence were used: export commodity concentration (COMM) and degree of external trade (TRADE). Export commodity concentration was measured as the sum over 56 export commodity groupings of the squares of the proportions of total exports accounted for by each grouping (Taylor and Jodice 1983, 232). Degree of external trade dependence was measured as total trade (the sum of exports and imports) divided by the GNP (Taylor and Jodice 1983, 228). Data for 1975 were taken from Taylor and Jodice (1983, Tables 6.7 and 6.9). Trade as a percent of GNP (TRADE) was logged to correct for a skewed distribution.

Population pressure. Population growth (POP) was measured as the percent change in population between 1980 and 1990. Data were taken from the World Bank (1992a, 1992b) and the World Resources Institute (1994). The variable was logged to correct for a skewed distribution.

Control Variables

Several additional variables were included as controls: British colony status (BRIT), protestant influence (PROT), militarization (MIL), and income inequality (INEQ). These

variables were chosen because researchers report that they covary with various measures of human rights performance (Bollen and Jackman 1985, 1995; Crenshaw 1995; Henderson 1982; Moon 1991; Muller 1995a, 1995b; Park 1987; Poe and Tate 1994). Specifically, British colony status and protestant influence have been found to covary with human rights in a positive fashion, militarization has been found to covary with human rights performance in a negative fashion, and income inequality has been reported by several researchers (but disputed by others) to have a negative effect on human rights performance. Countries were coded 1 if they were former British colonies and 0 otherwise. The percent of the population protestant in 1980 was used to measure protestant influence. The number of armed forces per 1,000 population in 1991 was used to measure militarization. The proportion of a nation's total income received by the top 20 percent of households in 1970 was used to measure income inequality. (This variable was included in several auxiliary analyses based on 61 cases because data were not available for the full sample of 77 cases.) The most current data available for the control variables were gathered from various sources (Barrett 1982; Whitaker 1995:779-1065; World Resources Institute 1994:260-261, Table 15.3).

Method of Analysis

Ordinary least squares (OLS) regression was used to estimate the effects of the independent and control variables on human rights performance. Reweighted least squares (RLS) estimates were made to assess the stability of the OLS estimates. RLS is an alternative to OLS regression that yields estimates that are not affected by unusual cases in either the residuals or carriers (Dietz et al. 1991).

Results

Results of six separate tests of the three hypotheses derived from the modernization, dependency, and human ecology narratives are presented in Table 3. Model 1 represents a test of the core model. The remaining models represent auxiliary tests undertaken to assess the stability of estimates: models 3-6 are based on the alternative measures of dependence, and models 2, 4, and 6 include income inequality as a control variable.

Economic development had a strong positive effect on human rights performance for all 6 models. The effect of this variable declined somewhat when income inequality was included in models 2, 4, and 6, but economic development remained a strong predictor of human rights performance for all 6 models. Estimates were not seriously degraded by collinearity, because variance inflation factors (VIFs) were never greater than 2.78.

Table 3. Results of the Regression of the Adjusted Version of Humana's (1992) Human Rights Index on Selected Independent and Control Variables

Predictor Variables	Model					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
GDP91	3.357* (0.649)	2.606* (0.813)	3.481* (0.594)	2.939* (0.770)	3.477* (0.620)	2.932* (0.776)
POP80-90	-1.390* (0.561)	-1.761* (0.764)	-.624 (0.567)	-1.565* (0.773)	-1.229* (0.540)	-1.778* (0.769)
PEN67	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	—	—	—	—
COMM75	—	—	-5.560* (2.004)	-3.223 (2.174)	—	—
TRADE75	—	—	—	—	-1.054 (0.899)	-0.922 (0.884)
PROT80	0.370 (0.214)	0.385 (0.237)	0.327 (0.204)	0.369 (0.237)	0.423 (0.216)	0.432 (0.241)
BRIT	-0.850 (1.067)	-0.886 (1.208)	-0.799 (1.006)	-0.454 (1.154)	-0.602 (1.054)	-0.337 (1.170)
MIL91	-2.559* (0.652)	1.384 (0.861)	-2.541* (0.610)	-1.581 (0.843)	-2.470* (0.657)	-1.345 (0.884)
INEQ70	—	0.051 (0.089)	—	0.122 (0.082)	—	0.107 (0.082)
Constant	34.398*	43.593*	36.975*	38.261*	38.866*	42.679*
Adjusted R2	.555	.553	.595	.557	.559	.547
N	77	61	77	61	77	61

Note: Unstandardized coefficients reported and standard errors reported in parentheses.

* $p < .05$.

Dependence had an inconsistent effect on human rights performance. TNC penetration (PEN) had little effect. Commodity concentration (COMM) had a negative effect on human rights in both tests (models 3 and 4) and it had a significant effect in one of these tests (model 3). Trade concentration had a negative, but nonsignificant effect on human rights in both tests (models 5 and 6). Collinearity did not degrade estimates, for VIFs never exceeded 1.40.

Population pressure had a strong negative effect on human rights performance. It had a significant effect in 5 of the 6 tests. Unlike the pattern reported for economic development, inclusion of income inequality as a control variable in models 2, 4, and 6 increased the strength of the effect of population pressure. In fact, in every case the beta coefficient increased by 50 percent or more. The highest VIF was 3.44, suggesting that estimates were not seriously degraded by collinearity.

The effects of the control variables on human rights performance deviated somewhat from expectations. Protestant influence had a consistent positive effect on human rights

performance, but all 6 tests were statistically insignificant at conventional levels. Former British colony status had a negative but nonsignificant effect on human rights in each of the 6 tests. Militarization had a negative effect on human rights in each of the 6 tests and this effect was significant for 3 tests. Income inequality had little effect on human rights performance for all 3 tests.

The indirect effects of the three measures of dependence were also examined in a series of path analyses not reported here. None of the three measures of dependence had an important indirect effect on human rights through economic development, population pressure, income inequality, or militarization. Estimates of a number of other path models did not contradict findings reported in Table 3.

Reweighted least squares regression (RLS) estimates of the 6 models were also made to see if the estimates were unduly affected by unusual observations in the residuals and carriers. RLS estimates did not vary substantially from the OLS estimates. Additional estimates based on the 57 less developed countries of the sample did not deviate substantially from the OLS and RLS estimates for the full sample of countries. In sum, estimates were not unduly affected by outliers or sample composition.

Discussion

We began this discussion with a question: Why does human rights performance vary across countries of the world-system? Our tentative answer to this complex question is quite simple: economic development promotes human rights performance, population growth reduces human rights performance, and economic dependence has ambiguous effects on human rights performance. With the exception of militarization, other characteristics of countries (including protestant influence, former British colony status, and income inequality) have little or no impact on human rights performance. The weight of the existing cross-national evidence (including our own and that of others cited above) suggests strong support for the modernization and human ecology theoretical narratives, but little support for the dependency narrative.

The link between economic development and human rights performance is fairly well articulated within the modernization narrative (Diamond 1992; Lipset 1959, 1994), but the link between population pressure and human rights performance is not very well developed within the human ecology narrative (Catton 1980; Hardin 1993). Several unresolved questions exist. How does population pressure reduce human rights performance? Does population pressure lead to resource scarcity and conflict? If so, under what conditions? Are resource scarcity and conflict stabilized through exclu-

sion, repression, and related strategies that violate basic human rights? Until these questions are adequately addressed, the human ecology narrative represents an incomplete response to the question of why human rights performance varies so dramatically across countries of the world-system.

Endnotes

1. The maximum value of the index (before conversion to a percentage score) is 162 or $(33 \times 3) + (7 \times 3 \times 3)$, where items 1-6 and 14-40 in Table 2 are assigned scores ranging from 0 to 3 and items 7-13 are assigned scores ranging from 0 to 3 and weighted by 3 (Humana 1992, 6). Humana (1992, 5) assigned scores of 0-3 to each of the 40 indicators according to the following criteria: 0 = "constant pattern of violations of freedoms, rights or guarantees...of the indicator..."; 1 = "frequent violations of the freedom, rights, or guarantees of the...indicator..."; 2 = "occasional breaches of respect for the freedoms, rights, or guarantees...of the indicator..."; and 3 = "unqualified respect for the freedoms, rights, or guarantees of the...indicator..." (Humana 1992, 5). Data were obtained from a diverse set of organizations and publications, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, *The Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *The Economist*, U.S. Department of State Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, and the like (Humana 1992, xx, 5).
2. For a detailed discussion of how the index was created, see Gupta et al. (1994, 144-149). We recoded Gupta et al.'s index to tap human rights provision (rather than human rights abuse) by subtracting the calculated discriminant score for each country from 100. Estimates based on the original Humana (1992) index do not differ substantially from estimates based on the Gupta et al. (1994) adjusted index reported above.

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