

Respect for Human Rights has Improved Over Time: Modeling the Changing Standard of Accountability

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Have Levels of Political Repression Changed?

“Repression” or “Abuse of Physical Integrity Rights”

- Arrests and political imprisonment, beatings and torture, extrajudicial executions and killings, mass killings, and disappearances

“Improvements in the respect of physical integrity rights”

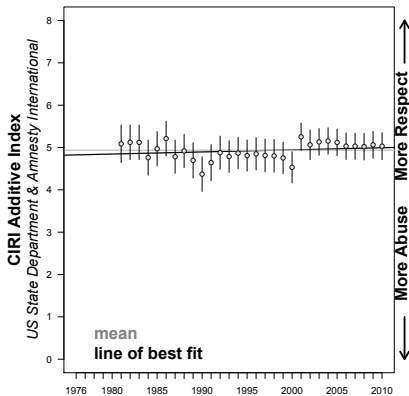
Have Levels of Political Repression Changed?

Current indicators of political repression imply that human rights practices remain stagnant.

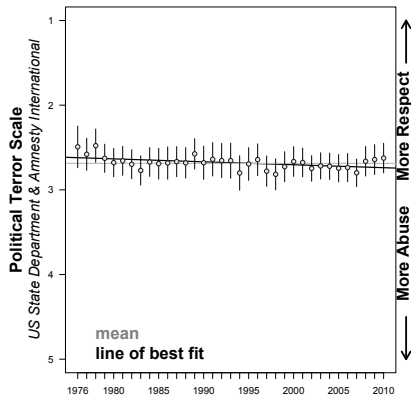
This pattern persists according to several widely used datasets despite the spread of human rights norms, better monitoring by private and public agencies, and the increasing prevalence of electoral democracy.

Contested Empirical Pattern

CIRI



PTS



My Argument

The pattern reflects a systematic change in the way reporting agencies, like Amnesty International and the US State Department, encounter and interpret information about human rights abuses.

Theory

“The Standard of Accountability”

- A set of expectations that state behavior is measured against

Theory

Mechanisms for changes in the standard of accountability:

- 1 Information
- 2 Access
- 3 Classification

Theory

That is, these are the strategies used by observers and activists to reveal, understand and ultimately change repressive practices for the better.

Theory

Information:

Gather accurate information about credible allegations of repression

Theory

Access:

Broaden the coverage of information gathering campaigns with the help of other NGOs

Theory

Classification:

Continually press governments to reform through naming and shaming campaigns, even after real reforms are implemented to reduce more egregious rights violations by those governments.

Theory

Why is this important?

Implications for Quantitative Human Rights Scholarship

Abouharb and Cingranelli (2006); Apodaca (1998); Apodaca and Stohl (1999); Armstrong (2009); Bueno De Mesquita et al. (2005); Bell, Clay and Murdie (2012); Blanton (1994); Blanton (1999); Blanton (2000); Blanton (2005); Blanton and Blanton (2007a); Blanton and Blanton (2007b); Blanton and Blanton (2009); Carey (2006); Carey (2007); Cingranelli and Filippov (2010); Cingranelli and Richards (1999a); Cingranelli and Richards (1999b); Cingranelli and Richards (2010); Davenport (2010); Davenport and Armstrong (2004); Demirel-Pegg and Moskowitz (2009); Fariss (2010); Gartner and Regan (1996); Gibney (1988); Gibney, Dalton and Vockell (1992); Gibney and Stohl (1988); Hafner-Burton (2005b); Hafner-Burton (2005a); Hafner-Burton (2008); Hafner-Burton (2013); Hafner-Burton and Ron (2009); Hafner-Burton and Tsutsui (2005); Hafner-Burton and Tsutsui (2007); Hafner-Burton, Tsutsui and Meyer (2008); Hathaway (2002); Hathaway (2003); Hathaway (2007); Hollyer and Rosendorff (2011); Keith (1999); Keith (2002); Keith and Poe (2004); Keith, Tate and Poe (2009); Kim and Sikkink (2010); Landman and Carvalho (2009); Lebovic (2005); Lebovic and Voeten (2006); Meernik, Krueger and Poe (1998); Meernik and Poe (1996); Milner, Poe and Leblang (1999); Moore and Shellman (2004); Moore and Shellman (2006); Moore and Shellman (2007); Neumayer (2003b); Neumayer (2003a); Neumayer (2005b); Neumayer (2005a); Neumayer (2005c); Poe (1991); Poe (1992); Poe and Meernik (1995); Poe et al. (1994); Poe, Rost and Carey (2006); Poe and Tate (1994); Poe, Tate and Keith (1999); Poe et al. (2000); Regan (1995); Richards and Gelleny (2007); Ron, Ramos and Rodgers (2005); Rosenblum and Salehyan (2004); Rottman, Fariss and Poe (2009); Salehyan and Rosenblum (2008); Schnakenberg and Fariss (2013); Simmons (2009); Vreeland (2008); Walker and Poe (2002); Wood (2008); Wood (2010); Wood and Gibney (2010); Zanger (2000)

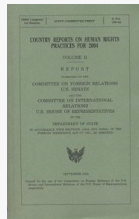
Difference in the Data

Evidence from Specific Cases (many sources)

- Truth Commission Reports
- News Reports
- Surveys
- Expert Opinion

Improvement in Respect ↗

Evidence from Country Reports (two sources)



No Change in Respect →

Difference in the Data

Event-Based Data

Quantitative counts

- Many different measures
- Many different sources
- Case specific coverage

Good for comparing the same case over time

Comparisons across cases are problematic

Reports-Based Data

Standardized ordered categories of abuse

- Common sources
- Full coverage

Good for comparing across cases in a given time period

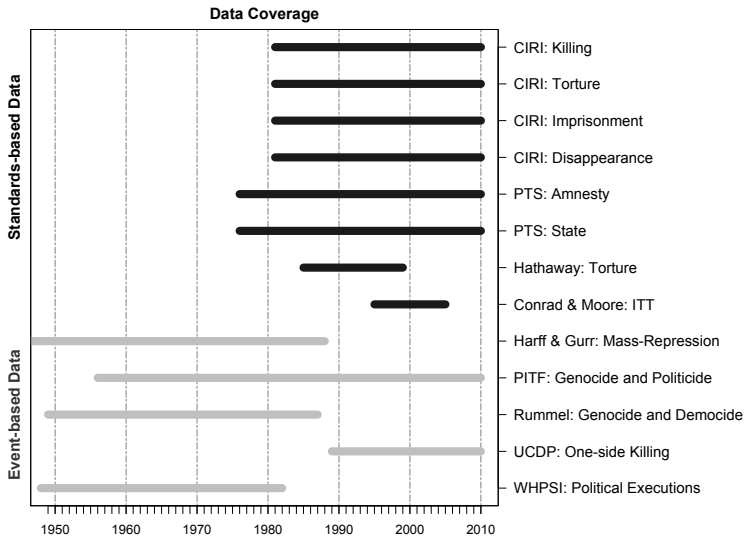
Comparisons across time are problematic

Research Design: The Latent Variable Model

Links an unobservable theoretical construct with multiple observed outcomes

- 1 intelligence with correct and incorrect test answers
- 2 ideology with “yea” and “nay” roll call votes
- 3 repression with categorical values of repression coded from human rights documents and events based sources

Research Design: Data Coverage Over Time



Research Design: Model Comparison

I compare two alternative latent variable models:

- 1 Dynamic standard of accountability
- 2 Constant standard of accountability

The standard of accountability is operationalized as the baseline probability of being coded at given level of repression

All other parameters, country-year observations and data values are the same.

From Theory to Model Parameterization

Latent Variable Estimation

Easy as regression

The dynamic standard model allows α to vary at the system level over time for certain repression variables y_j

From Theory to Model Parameterization

Latent Variable Estimation

$$y \sim \alpha + \beta * x$$

a simple model to estimate when x is observed
becomes a more complicated model when x must be estimated

x is repression

From Theory to Model Parameterization

Latent Variable Estimation

$$y \sim \alpha + \beta * \theta$$

x becomes a latent variable represented by θ when it is estimated

From Theory to Model Parameterization

Latent Variable Estimation

$$y \sim \alpha + \beta * \theta$$

↑

θ is the estimated “true” or “latent” variable

From Theory to Model Parameterization

Latent Variable Estimation

$$\begin{array}{c} y \sim \alpha + \beta * \theta \\ \uparrow \end{array}$$

y is the observed variable the coded level of repression

From Theory to Model Parameterization

Latent Variable Estimation

$$\begin{array}{ccccc} y & \sim & \alpha & + & \beta * \theta \\ \uparrow & & & & \uparrow \end{array}$$

y is caused by the “true” level of repression θ

From Theory to Model Parameterization

Latent Variable Estimation

$$y \sim \alpha + \beta * \theta$$

↑

α is the intercept or the baseline
probability of observing a given level of y

it represents the “difficulty” in being coded at certain level of
repression

From Theory to Model Parameterization

Latent Variable Estimation

$$y \sim \alpha + \beta * \theta$$

↑

β is the slope or the strength of the relationship between the “true” level of repression θ and the observed level of repression y

it represents the ability of the test to “discriminate” between the repressiveness of different country years

From Theory to Model Parameterization

Latent Variable Estimation

$$y_1 \sim \alpha_1 + \beta_1 * \theta$$

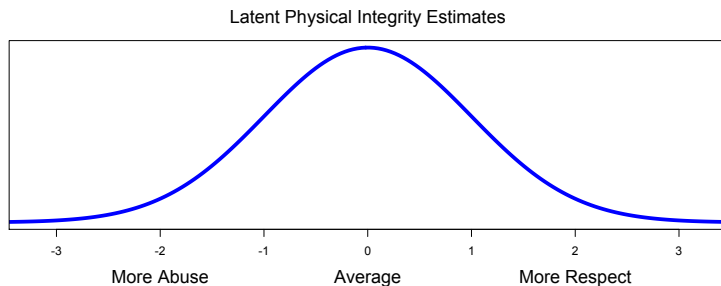
$$y_2 \sim \alpha_2 + \beta_2 * \theta$$

$$\vdots \quad \vdots \quad \vdots$$

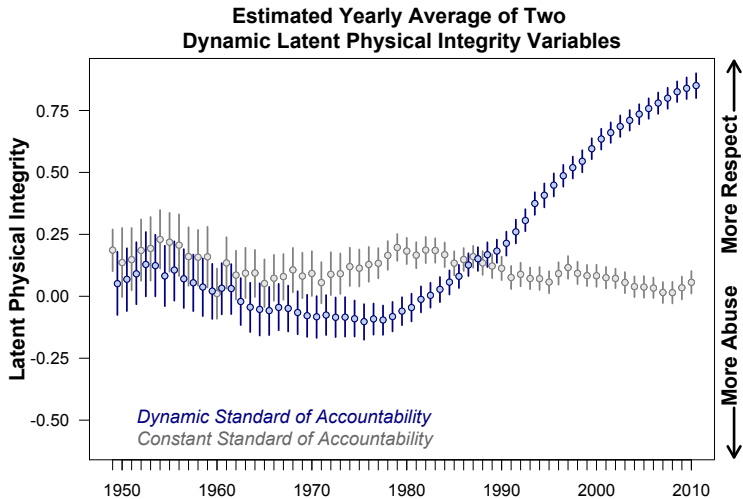
$$y_J \sim \alpha_J + \beta_J * \theta$$

θ is the same for every regression

Results: Interpreting the Latent Variable

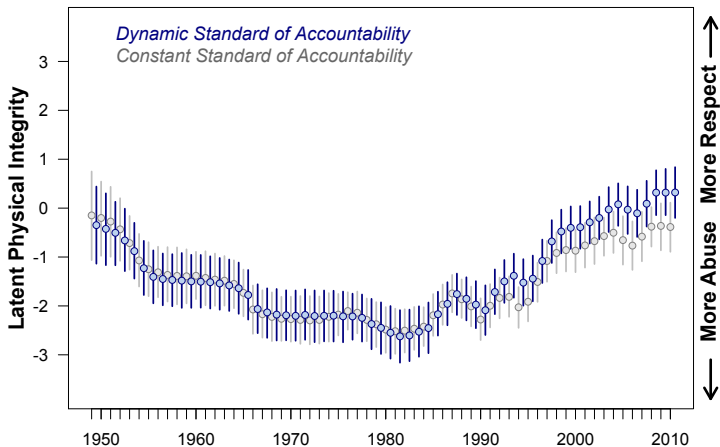


Results: Model Differences Across Time



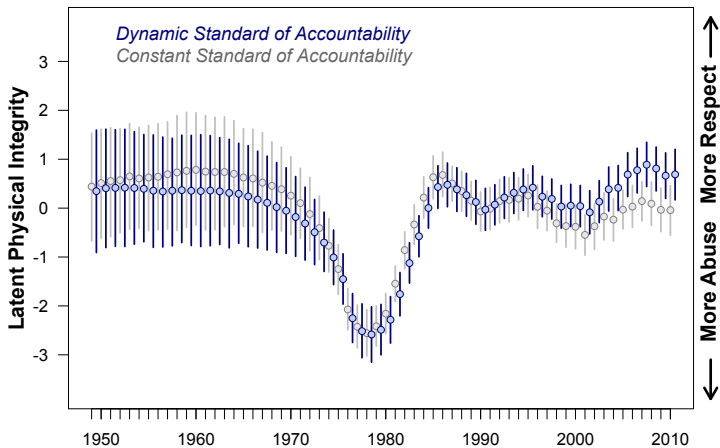
Results: Visualizing Latent Repression θ

Guatemala



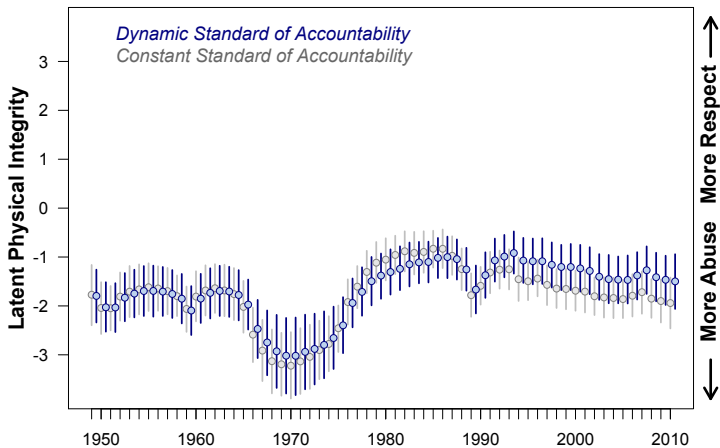
Results: Visualizing Latent Repression θ

Argentina

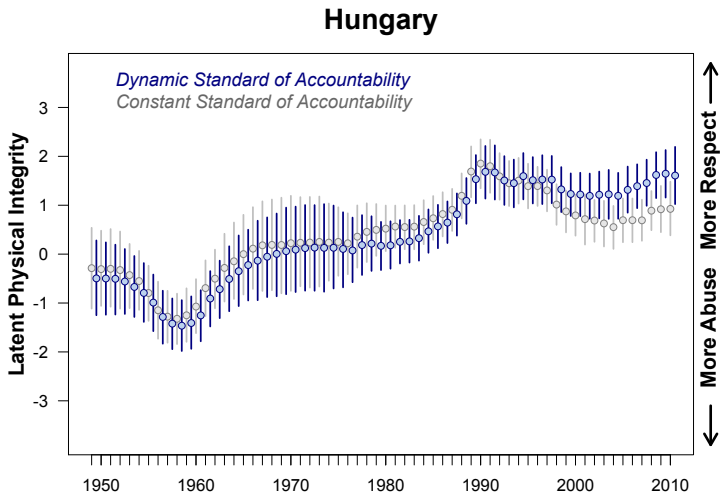


Results: Visualizing Latent Repression θ

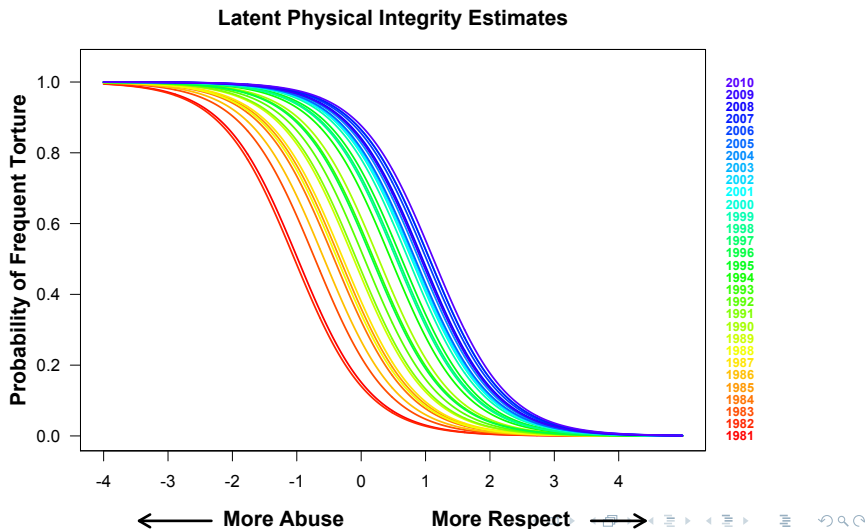
China



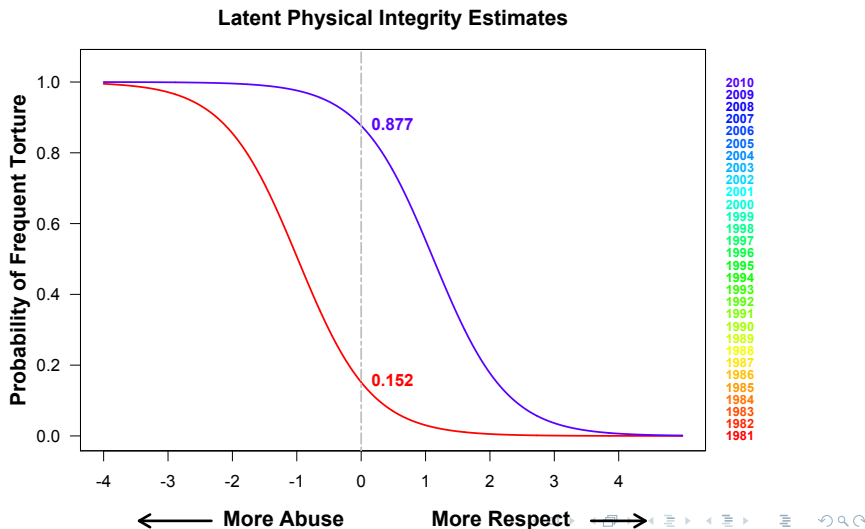
Results: Visualizing Latent Repression θ



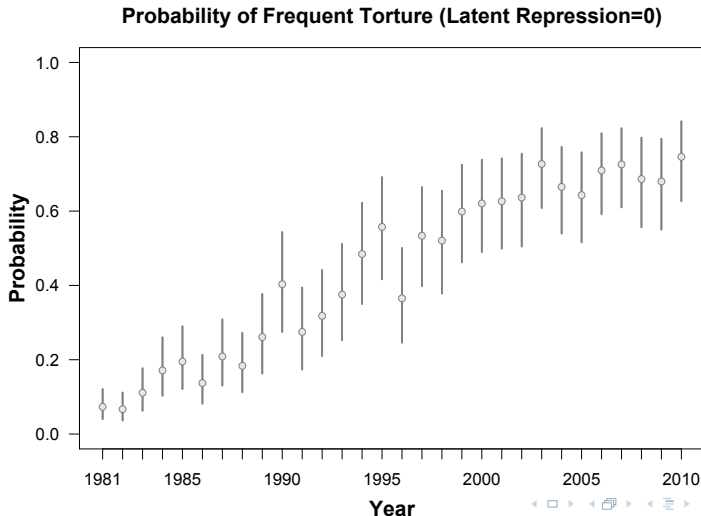
Results: The Changing Standard of Accountability



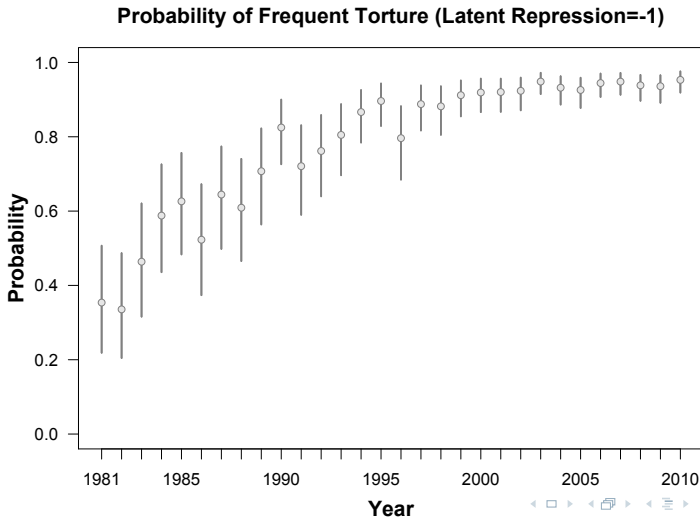
Results: The Changing Standard of Accountability



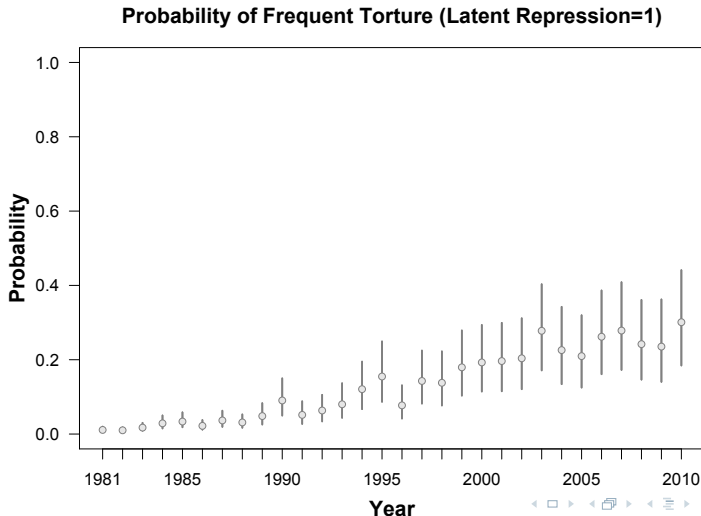
Results: The Changing Standard of Accountability



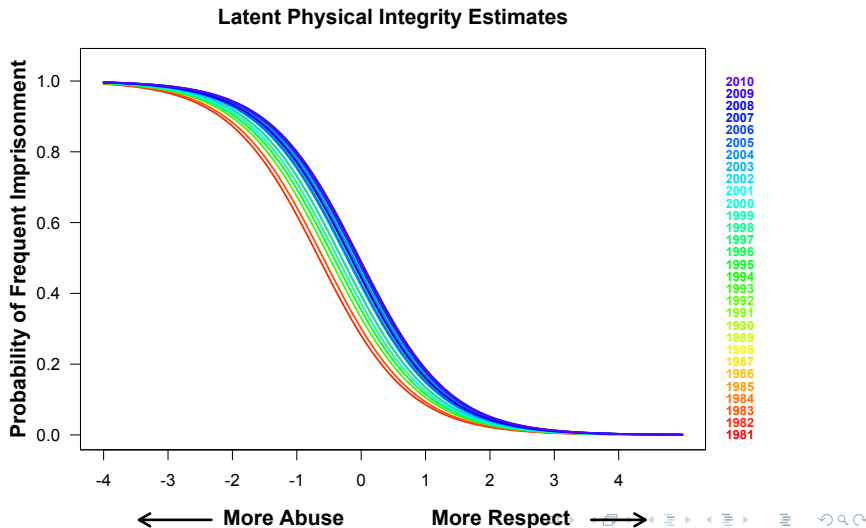
Results: The Changing Standard of Accountability



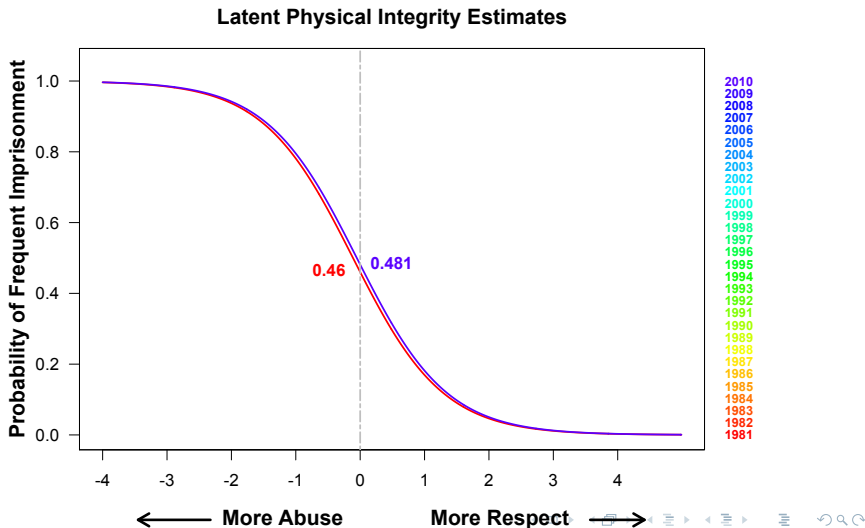
Results: The Changing Standard of Accountability



Results: The Changing Standard of Accountability

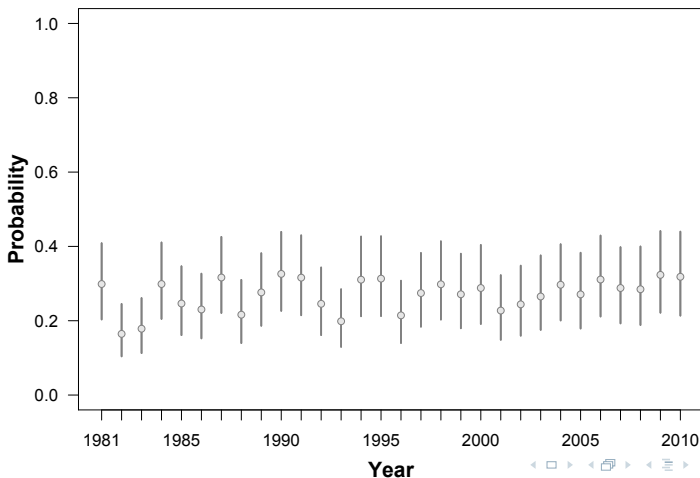


Results: The Changing Standard of Accountability

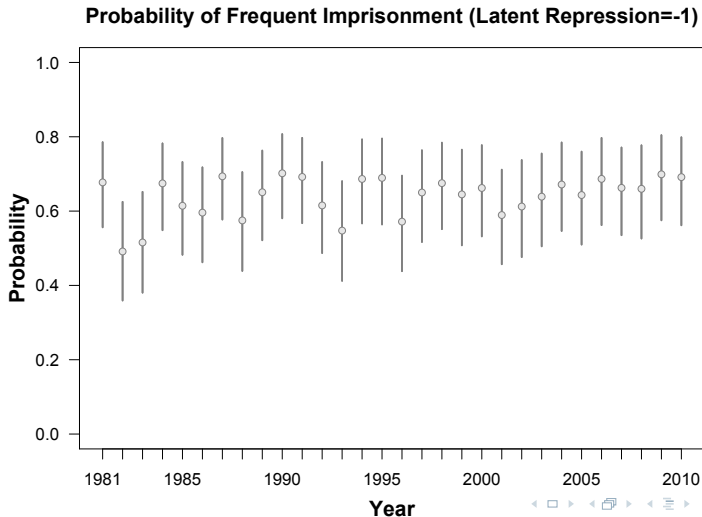


Results: The Changing Standard of Accountability

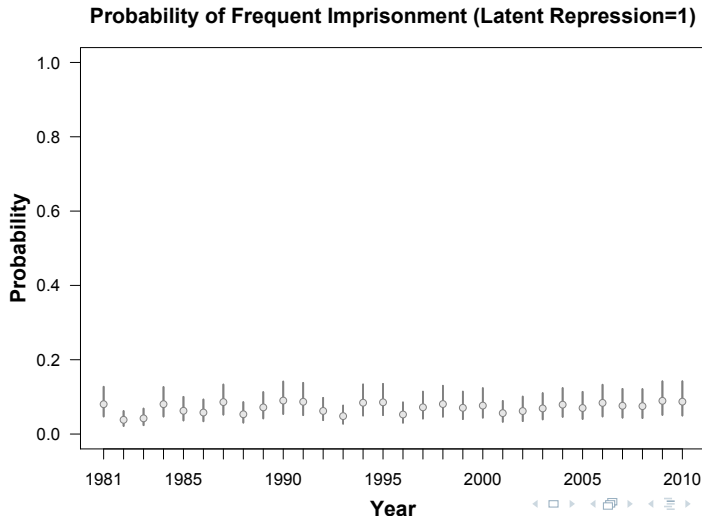
Probability of Frequent Imprisonment (Latent Repression=0)



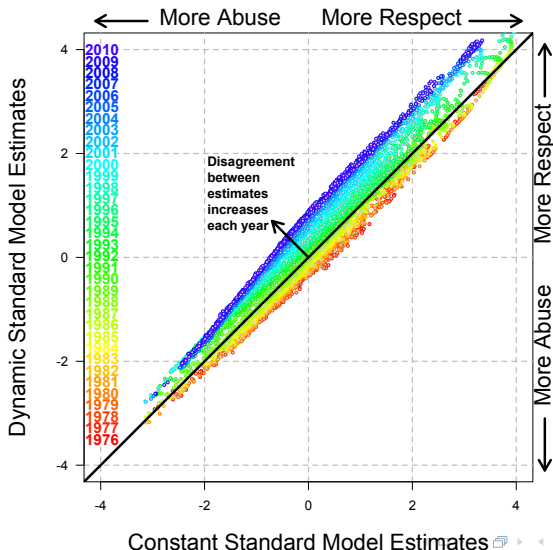
Results: The Changing Standard of Accountability



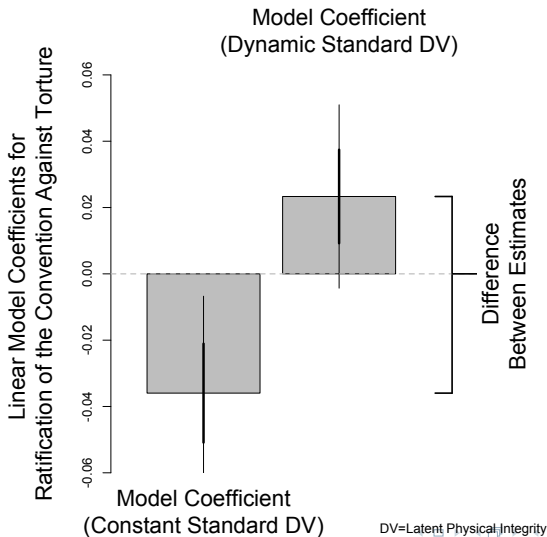
Results: The Changing Standard of Accountability



Results: The Changing Standard of Accountability



Results: The Convention Against Torture



DV=Latent Physical Integrity

Conclusion

- Improvements in the respect for physical integrity rights
- The changing standard of accountability masked this change
- A new picture of global repression levels emerges from the [dynamic standard model](#)
- This difference has implications for our understanding of the relationship between levels of repression and certain institutions

What's Next?

- Replications
- Estimate counts and rates of the different physical integrity abuses
- Test the theoretical mechanisms that influence the standard of accountability
 - Content analysis of reports (quality mechanism)
 - Experiments (subject view mechanism)
 - Micro-level data for specific countries and time periods (access mechanism)
- Extend the model to include other rights

Thank You!

Questions?

Citation

See the following paper for more details about the content presented in these slides. Fariss, Christopher J. "Respect for

Human Rights has Improved Over Time: Modeling the Changing Standard of Accountability" *American Political Science Review* 108(2):297-318 (May 2014).

Changing Standard in Case Law

There is specific evidence from case law of a rising standard of acceptable treatment, whereby more acts come to be classified as inhuman treatment or torture. For example the European Court of Human Rights, in *Selmouni v. France* (1999), “consider certain acts which were classified in the past as inhuman and degrading treatment as opposed to torture could be classified differently in future.” That is, inhuman and degrading treatment from a decade ago might be classified as torture by the court today. The court states further “that the increasingly high standard being required in the area of the protection of human rights and fundamental liberties correspondingly and inevitably requires greater firmness in assessing breaches of the fundamental values of democratic societies.” Unfortunately for scholars interested in these changes, the standard of accountability is not directly observable in the human rights reports and is therefore difficult to measure.

Research Design: Data from Event-Based Sources

Dataset Name and Variable Description	Dataset Citation and Primary Source Information
Harff and Gurr Dataset, 1946-1988 - massive repressive events (1 if country-year experienced event 0 otherwise)	Harff and Gurr (1988) historical sources ¹
Political Instability Task Force (PITF), 1956-2010 - genocide and politicide (1 if country-year experienced event 0 otherwise)	Harff (2003), Marshall, Gurr and Harff (2009) historical sources ¹ State Department Reports ² Amnesty International Reports ²
Rummel Dataset, 1949-1987 - genocide and democide (1 if country-year experienced event 0 otherwise)	Rummel (1994, 1995), Wayman and Tago (2010) New York Times ¹ , New International Yearbook ² , Facts on File ² , Britannica Book of the Year ² , Deadline Data on World Affairs ² , Kessing's Contemporary Archives ²
UCDP One-sided Violence Dataset, 1989-2010 - government killing (event count estimate) (1 if country-year experienced event 0 otherwise)	Eck and Hultman (2007), Sundberg (2009) Reuters News ¹ , BBC World Monitoring ¹ Agence France Presse ¹ , Xinhua News Agency ¹ , Dow Jones International News ¹ , UN Reports ² , Amnesty International Reports ² , Human Rights Watch Reports ² , local level NGO reports (not listed) ²
World Handbook of Political and Social Indicators WHPSI, 1948-1982 - political executions (event count estimate) (1 if country-year experienced event 0 otherwise)	Taylor and Jodice (1983) New York Times ¹ , Middle East Journal ² , Asian Recorder ² , Archiv der Genenwart ² African Diary ² , Current Digest of Soviet Press ²

1. Primary Source; 2. Secondary Source

Research Design: Data from Reports-Based Sources

Dataset Name and Variable Description	Dataset Citation and Primary Source Information
CIRI Physical Integrity Data, 1981-2010 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - political imprisonment (ordered scale, 0-2) - torture (ordered scale, 0-2) - extrajudicial killing (ordered scale, 0-2) - disappearance (ordered scale, 0-2) 	Cingranelli and Richards (1999a, 2012a,b) Amnesty International Reports ¹ and State Department Reports ² <i>Amnesty reports take precedence over State Department reports</i>
Hathaway Torture Data, 1985-1999 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - torture (ordered scale, 0-5) 	Hathaway (2002) State Department Reports ¹
III-Treatment and Torture (ITT), 1995-2005 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - torture (ordered scale, 0-5) 	Conrad and Moore (2011) Amnesty International (2006) Annual Reports ¹ , press releases ¹ , and Urgent Action Alerts ¹
PTS Political Terror Scale, 1976-2010 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Amnesty International scale (ordered scale, 1-5) - State Department scale (ordered scale, 1-5) 	Gibney, Cornett and Wood (2012) Amnesty International Reports ¹ State Department Reports ¹

1. Primary Source; 2. Secondary Source

Research Design: Two Types of Data

Event-Based Data

Quantitative counts

- Many different measures
- Many different sources
- Case specific coverage

Good for comparing the same case over time

Comparisons across cases are problematic

Reports-Based Data

Standardized ordered categories of abuse

- Common sources
- Full coverage

Good for comparing across cases in a given time period

Comparisons across time are problematic

From Theory to Model Parameterization

Table : Summary of Prior Distributions for Latent Variable and Model Level Parameter Estimates

Parameters	Constant Standard	Dynamic Standard
country-year latent variable (first year)	$\theta_{i1} \sim N(0, 1)$	$\theta_{i1} \sim N(0, 1)$
country-year latent variable (all years)	$\theta_{it} \sim N(\theta_{it-1}, \sigma)$	$\theta_{it} \sim N(\theta_{it-1}, \sigma)$
uncertainty of latent variable	$\sigma \sim U(0, 1)$	$\sigma \sim U(0, 1)$
event-based variable cut-points (constant)	$\alpha_{jk} \sim N(0, 4)$	$\alpha_{jk} \sim N(0, 4)$
standards-based variable cut-points (constant)	$\alpha_{jk} \sim N(0, 4)$	— — — — —
standards-based variable cut-points (first year)	— — — — —	$\alpha_{1jk} \sim N(0, 4)$
standards-based variable cut-points (all years)	— — — — —	$\alpha_{tjk} \sim N(\alpha_{t-1,jk}, 4)$
slope	$\beta_j \sim \text{Gamma}(4, 3)$	$\beta_j \sim \text{Gamma}(4, 3)$

Predictive Validity Tests

Dependent Variable	Lagged Repression Variables		
	Y_{t-1}	<i>Constant Standard</i> $_{t-1}$	<i>Dynamic Standard</i> $_{t-1}$
Harff and Gurr massive repression	0.941	0.961 [0.957, 0.964]	0.981 [0.978, 0.984]
PITF genocide and politicide	0.933	0.947 [0.943, 0.950]	0.975 [0.973, 0.978]
Rummel genocide and democide	0.967	0.956 [0.954, 0.958]	0.974 [0.972, 0.976]
UCDP killing	0.786	0.890 [0.886, 0.895]	0.918 [0.913, 0.922]
WHPSI executions	0.661	0.761 [0.751, 0.770]	0.779 [0.769, 0.788]

Deviance Information Criterion

The model with the smallest DIC is expected to have the greatest out of sample predictive power (Spiegelhalter et al., 2002).

DIC	Constant	Dynamic
Mean deviance	52492	50587
penalty	2535	3119
Penalized deviance	55027	53706

Posterior Predictive Checks

Assess the quality of the model by direct comparison of model predictions between the two competing models.

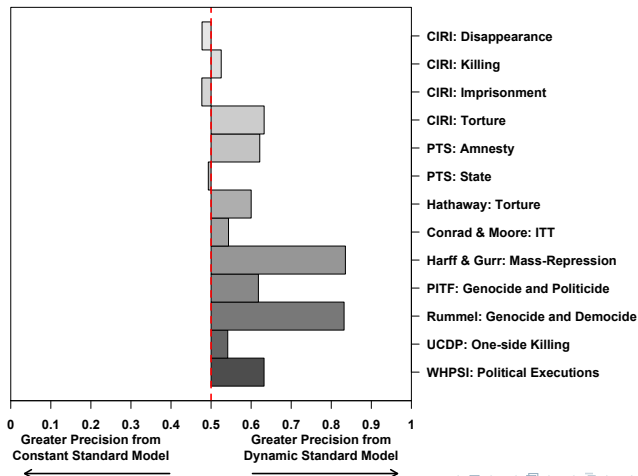
Predict each of the j items for every country-year y_{itj}

$$S_{itj} = \sum_d (y_{itj} - \hat{y}_{itj}^{(d)})^2$$

$d = 1, \dots, 2000$, posterior replications or predictions.

Posterior Predictive Checks

Proportion of Predicted Observations
from the Dynamic Standard Model more
Precise than the Constant Standard Model



Predictive Validity Tests

Dependent Variable	Lagged Regression Variables		
	$t*Y_{t-1}$	$t*Constant$ $Standard_{t-1}$	$t*Dynamic$ $Standard_{t-1}$
CIRI Physical Integrity			
Additive Scale	13088	12944 [12865, 13032]	12222 [12142, 12315]
political imprisonment	5846	7067 [7030, 7104]	6895 [6851, 6935]
torture	6234	6095 [6049, 6143]	5792 [5744, 5846]
extrajudicial killing	6069	5867 [5820, 5913]	5570 [5515, 5620]
disappearance	4213	4187 [4151, 4227]	3995 [3953 4033]
Hathaway Torture			
torture	4241	4668 [4634, 4700]	4490 [4453, 4527]
III-Treatment and Torture			
torture	3116	3495 [3479, 3511]	3467 [3450, 3483]
Political Terror Scale			
State	8758	8296 [8211, 8384]	7428 [7321, 7530]
Amnesty	8102	8143 [8070, 8219]	7502 [7423, 7576]

Example Coding: Torture

The variable measuring torture and other cruel, inhumane, or degrading treatment or punishment is as coded as a 0 when this practice occurred frequently in a given year; a score of 1 indicates that torture was practiced occasionally; and a score of 2 indicates that torture did not occur in a given year.

Coding Score	Number of Instances
0	50 or more
1	From 1 to 49
2	Zero

Guatemala 1981

... the Guatemalan press frequently reports discoveries of bodies evidencing torture. In most instances it has not been possible to establish who the perpetrators were. In some cases there is evidence to suggest that elements within the military or security forces have been involved. In recent months, similar evidence suggests that the guerrilla groups have used torture. ...

- torture section word count=329
- total document word count=3,930

Guatemala 1991

... many bodies found throughout Guatemala bore signs of torture or postmortem mutilation. Such treatment, however, is not necessarily evidence of security force involvement: gangs and other criminals, as well as guerrillas, all use torture. There were, nevertheless, many credible reports of torture and mistreatment by security forces. There were also credible reports of the use of excessive force by police at the time of arrest and of abusive treatment by army personnel, civil defense patrols, military commissioners, and police of persons in rural areas. ...

- torture section word count=562
- total document word count=5,768

Guatemala 2001

... there were credible reports of torture, abuse, and other mistreatment by members of the PNC during the year. These complaints typically involved the use of excessive force during arrests, interrogations, or other police operations. Criminal Investigative Service (SIC) detectives continued to torture and beat detainees during interrogation to obtain forced confessions. The Government and the PNC showed decreased willingness to investigate, prosecute, or otherwise punish officers who committed abuses. ...

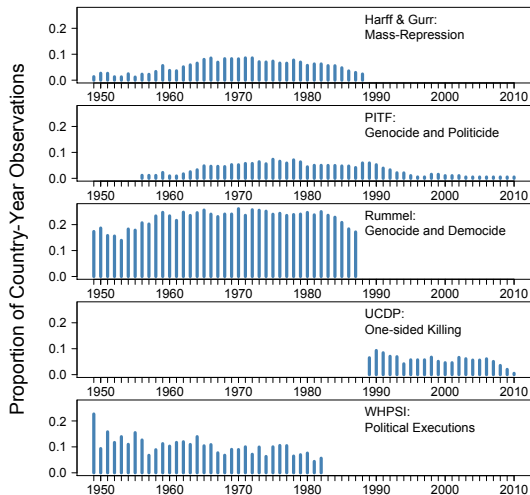
- torture section word count=3,669
- total document word count=32,064

Guatemala

Year	Torture Section	Full Document	Torture Coding
1981	329	3,930	0
1991	562	5,768	1
2001	3,669	32,064	0

“Information Paradox” (Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Clark and Sikkink, 2010)

Event Data Over Time



The Changing Standard of Accountability

Item Difficulty Cut-Points		Coefficient [95%CI]	R^2 [95%CI]
CIRI: torture	$\alpha_{t,1}$	0.1239 [0.1123, 0.1357]	0.8626 [0.7998, 0.9135]
	$\alpha_{t,2}$	0.1641 [0.1501, 0.1782]	0.8809 [0.8297, 0.9257]
CIRI: killing	$\alpha_{t,1}$	0.0695 [0.0548, 0.0841]	0.5711 [0.4142, 0.7125]
	$\alpha_{t,2}$	0.1299 [0.1168, 0.1433]	0.8459 [0.7760, 0.9005]
CIRI: imprisonment	$\alpha_{t,1}$	0.0107 [-0.0003, 0.0213]	0.0726 [0.0011, 0.2557]
	$\alpha_{t,2}$	0.0013 [-0.0093, 0.0121]	0.0040 [0.0000, 0.0478]
CIRI: disappearance	$\alpha_{t,1}$	0.0291 [0.0122, 0.0462]	0.1748 [0.0346, 0.3802]
	$\alpha_{t,2}$	0.0331 [0.0196, 0.0462]	0.3013 [0.1257, 0.5011]
PTS: Amnesty	$\alpha_{t,1}$	-0.0656 [-0.0840, -0.0481]	0.3242 [0.1883, 0.4773]
	$\alpha_{t,2}$	-0.0721 [-0.0848, -0.0588]	0.6034 [0.4693, 0.7236]
	$\alpha_{t,3}$	-0.0850 [-0.0988, -0.0715]	0.6402 [0.5233, 0.7484]
	$\alpha_{t,4}$	-0.0580 [-0.0758, -0.0406]	0.4310 [0.2469, 0.6070]
PTS: State	$\alpha_{t,1}$	-0.2224 [-0.2392, -0.2054]	0.8949 [0.8516, 0.9314]
	$\alpha_{t,2}$	-0.2087 [-0.2253, -0.1931]	0.9132 [0.8744, 0.9449]
	$\alpha_{t,3}$	-0.2050 [-0.2247, -0.1854]	0.8443 [0.7852, 0.8928]
	$\alpha_{t,4}$	-0.1141 [-0.1417, -0.0879]	0.4180 [0.2955, 0.5354]
Hathaway: torture	$\alpha_{t,1}$	-0.2278 [-0.2717, -0.1837]	0.8154 [0.6853, 0.9089]
	$\alpha_{t,2}$	-0.0618 [-0.0933, -0.0303]	0.3878 [0.1172, 0.6716]
	$\alpha_{t,3}$	-0.0809 [-0.1133, -0.0489]	0.5280 [0.2504, 0.7691]
	$\alpha_{t,4}$	-0.1198 [-0.1651, -0.0765]	0.5701 [0.3039, 0.7976]
ITT: torture	$\alpha_{t,1}$	0.0153 [-0.0245, 0.0564]	0.0166 [0.0000, 0.1589]
	$\alpha_{t,2}$	0.0249 [-0.0147, 0.0649]	0.0324 [0.0001, 0.2019]
	$\alpha_{t,3}$	0.0248 [-0.0141, 0.0633]	0.0433 [0.0001, 0.2538]
	$\alpha_{t,4}$	-0.0239 [-0.0647, 0.0152]	0.0709 [0.0003, 0.4115]
	$\alpha_{t,5}$	0.0084 [-0.0361, 0.0530]	0.0397 [0.0001, 0.3626]

The Political Terror Scale

- *Level 1:* Countries under a secure rule of law, people are not imprisoned for their view, and torture is rare or exceptional. Political murders are extremely rare.
- *Level 2:* There is a limited amount of imprisonment for nonviolent political activity. However, few persons are affected, torture and beatings are exceptional. Political murder is rare.
- *Level 3:* There is extensive political imprisonment, or a recent history of such imprisonment. Execution or other political murders and brutality may be common. Unlimited detention, with or without a trial, for political views is accepted.
- *Level 4:* The practices of level 3 are expanded to larger numbers. Murders, disappearances, and torture are a common part of life. In spite of its generality, on this level terror affects those who interest themselves in politics or ideas.
- *Level 5:* The terrors of level 4 have been expanded to the whole population. The leaders of these societies place no limits on the means or thoroughness with which they pursue personal or ideological goals.

Guatemala

Year	Torture Section	Full Document	Torture Coding
1981	329	3,930	4
1991	562	5,768	4
2001	3,669	32,064	3

Implications: Quantitative Human Rights Scholarship

Citation Count for the Top 5 Quantitative Human Rights Articles

Citations	Article
264	Poe and Tate (1994) "Repression of Human-Rights to Personal Integrity in the 1980s - A Global Analysis" <i>American Political Science Review</i> 88(4):853-872.
229	Hathaway (2002) "Do human rights treaties make a difference?" <i>Yale Law Journal</i> 111(8):1935-2042
175	Poe, Tate, and Keith (1999) "Repression of the human right to personal integrity revisited: A global cross-national study covering the years 1976-1993" <i>International Studies Quarterly</i> 43(2):291-313.
141	Hafner-Burton and Tsutsui (2005) "Human rights in a globalizing world: The paradox of empty promises" <i>American Journal of Sociology</i> 110(5): 1373-1411.
117	Davenport (1995) "Multi-Dimensional Threat Perception and State Repression: An Inquiry into Why States Apply Negative Sanctions" <i>American Journal of Political Science</i> 110(5): 1373-1411.

Source: *The Web of Science*

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