A Human Rights Network Influences Countries’ Torture Policies

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Motivation
- Countries repress their citizens despite widespread acceptance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the other international human rights treaties; yet, research does not directly assess the complex interdependent relationships among the rights that these treaties contain.
- This study utilizes a novel network analytic method (Hidalgo et al., 2007) to analyze how the complex relationships between rights violations develop as states encroach on the liberties of individuals.
- The human rights network links 13 human rights variables (Cingranelli and Richards, 1999) to reveal the most likely path to torture.

Network Concepts
- Proximity between human rights:
  - Measures how close one right is to another in the human rights network
  - Conceptualized as
    \[ \phi_{ij} = P(i = 1 | j = 1) - P(i = 1 | j = 0) \] (1)
  - The human rights network is a system-wide characteristic, therefore proximity values vary across years but not across countries in a given year.

Statistical Model
- The logistic regression model for the probability of observing a violation of torture by country \( k \) in time \( t \):
  \[ P(y_{kt} = 1 | \theta) = \frac{1}{1 + e^{-\theta}} \] (3)
  \[ \theta = \alpha + \beta_k \phi_{k,t-1} + \beta_\omega \phi_{k,t-1} + \beta_\phi \phi_{k,t-2} + \gamma M_{t-1} + \epsilon_k \] (2)
- Since the connectedness variable positions a country in the human rights network, values for \( \phi_k \) are unique for each country in each year.

Results
- Connectedness of a country-year to a particular right:
  - Measures the total network influence on each right within the network
  - The connectedness around right \( i \) for a given country-year is conceptualized as
    \[ \phi_i = \sum_j \phi_{ij} \] (2)
- The expected value and 99% confidence intervals for the probability of extreme violations of torture at each level of connectedness. Moving from one standard deviation less than the mean connectedness score to one standard deviation greater than the mean results in a 93% increase in the probability of extreme violations of torture, suggesting that torture violations are strongly influenced by the human rights network.

Implications
- States that broadly violate other human rights are more likely to start torturing and less likely to quit.
- The network model of rights violations shows that previously-ignored, complex interdependencies can help us to predict which states are most likely to start torturing their citizens.
- Future research should therefore examine network influences on other human rights practices.

References