

Democracy and Human Rights: A Tortuous Relationship  
A Quantitative Analysis of Repression in Strong Democracies

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## Abstract

One of the most robust empirical observations in the human rights literature is that democratic regimes are associated with greater respect for personal integrity rights, such as freedom from torture, arbitrary arrest and detention, and extrajudicial execution. However, even strong democracies sometimes engage in serious violations of personal integrity rights. In this study, I identified factors that contribute to repression in strong democracies. The core findings from my statistical analysis of 24 strong democracies from 1990 to 2007 are that involvement in war, internal dissident activity, poor economic performance, and larger non-native populations are associated with statistically significant increases in repression. Higher levels of international integration were associated with a slight improvement in the respect for personal integrity rights. Freedom of the press and economic development did not have statistically significant impacts.

## Introduction

Over the past few decades human rights issues have gained more attention in academic, advocacy, and policy circles. One question that is central to this work is: why do states commit violations of personal integrity rights such as acts of torture, arbitrary detention, and summary executions? One of the most robust empirical observations in the human rights literature is that democratic regimes are associated with greater respect for personal integrity rights. However, even strong democracies<sup>1</sup> are not immune from periods of serious violations of personal integrity rights.<sup>2</sup> This begs the question: what explains the periods when even those states that are least likely to violate personal integrity rights engage in repression? In this paper, I seek to answer this question and identify factors that contribute to repression in strong democracies. The core

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this paper I consider a country a strong democracy if it regularly achieves a 10 on the Polity IV scale. Polity measures democracy from -10 to 10 with high values representing democratic institutions and low values autocratic ones. All values 6 or above qualify as democratic though a country is not considered a “full democracy” until it scores a 10.

<sup>2</sup> Personal integrity rights include freedom from unlawful imprisonment, freedom from torture and cruel and inhumane treatment, freedom from unlawful physical harm, and the right to a fair trial.

findings from my statistical analysis of 24 countries from 1990 to 2007 are that even strong democracies are not invulnerable when faced with perceived threats to national security or calls for regime change. Involvement in war, internal dissident activity, poor economic performance, and larger non-native populations are associated with statistically significant increases in repression. Conversely, higher levels of international integration were associated with a slight improvement in the respect for personal integrity rights. Higher levels of freedom of the press and economic development were not associated with an improvement in respect for personal integrity rights.

My paper proceeds in five sections as follows: In the first section, I briefly review the relevant literature and identify variables that warrant inclusion in my statistical analysis. In section two, I describe my methodology and the results of my regression. In section three, I present brief case studies of the four worst performing states in my dataset. In the section four, I discuss some limitations of my study and offer a strategy for future research to address those limitations. In the final section, I propose some policy implications and offer a few concluding remarks.

## **Section One: A Review of the Literature**

### **The Importance of Democracy**

The body of literature on human rights includes a broad array of theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches; its principal agenda is to understand what factors contribute to violations of personal integrity rights.<sup>3</sup> The result is a comprehensive approach to explaining the

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<sup>3</sup>In this paper I make use of the definition of “repression” put forth by Davenport and Armstrong (2004). They define repression as “coercive and/or violent behavior employed by political authorities for the purpose of controlling the behavior of the population.” I use the terms “violations of personal integrity rights” and “repression” interchangeably throughout this paper.

factors that contribute to poor human rights practices. In particular, this literature has focused on explaining cross-national variation in repression. From this, a major finding has emerged, namely, that democratic regimes are associated with better human rights policies. The empirical evidence for this finding is quite strong and a large number of studies support the notion that democracies are less likely to violate human rights than authoritarian governments (Henderson 1991; Poe and Tate 1994; Davenport 1995; Poe, Tate, and Keith 1999; Zanger 2000; Harff 2003).

Several alternate causal mechanisms are proposed to explain this finding. Joseph Young (2009) argues that norms such as nonviolent conflict resolution (including voting) and the institutions of formal political participation reduce the likelihood that competing actors will resort to violence. Others argue that democratic institutions are associated with less repression because they serve to create political consequences for the policymaker. Since the masses can participate in the political system, repression can alienate potential political support (Henderson 1991; Poe and Tate 1994; Davenport 1999). A policymaker's perception of the consequence of repression as compared to the perceived benefits is important. The type of political system and the level of openness in the political culture have an effect on the definition of the cost-benefit assessment that policymakers make (Poe et. al. 1999), and the socialization process inherent in democratic politics guides citizens and policymakers to prefer nonviolent means to resolving conflicts, which is a key tenet of the democratic peace literature (Kant 1996).

However, the relationship between respect for human rights and democracy does not appear to be linear. Christian Davenport and David Armstrong (2004) argue that while it is generally the case that democratic systems inhibit the willingness and capacity of policymakers

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to violate human rights the constraining effect of democracy is not perceptible until the highest level of democracy is reached. That is, below a certain level of democracy there is little improvement in human rights. States ranked on the Polity IV scale at a “7” or below are shown to have no improvement on personal integrity rights. States ranked at either an “8” or “9” were shown to have a small degree of improvement in human right practices. While states ranked at a “10” (the highest level of democracy) were associated with a strong curtailing of state repression. Bruce Bueno De Mesquita , George W. Downs, Alastair Smith and Ferayal Marie Cherif (2005) support the threshold argument explaining that it takes a “full-fledged” democracy with a multiparty system before a significant improvement in human rights practices is achieved.

Another line of argument is that there is an inverted “U” shape in the relationship between regime type and repression. Helen Fein (1995) argues that weakly democratic regimes are actually more inclined to engage in repression than strongly authoritarian ones. Her “more murder in the middle” argument supports the notion that one should not expect to find an improvement in human rights until the government becomes strongly democratic. Finally, the literature demonstrates that nascent democracies may be more likely to violate rights during the transition period from an authoritarian regime (Mansfield and Synder 1995; Synder 2000). Hence, although there is some disagreement regarding the shape of the relationship between regime type and repression there is general agreement that the pacifying impact of democratic institutions seems to be limited to those democracies that are robust, what I refer to as strong democracies.

A note on the definition of democracy, Fareed Zakaria (2003) argues that it is important to use a minimalist definition of democracy that focuses on the characteristics of elections and executive constraints because it would be “analytically useless” to explain respect for human

rights with a maximalist definition that already encompasses human rights concerns. Hence, the minimalist definition put forth by the Polity project is the most appropriate for my analysis. A high level of democracy (one that achieves a score of 10) is defined as a regime that has, “institutionalized procedures for open, competitive, and deliberative political participation; chooses and replaces chief executives in open, competitive elections; and imposes substantial checks and balances on the powers of the chief executive” (Marshall and Cole 2009:9).

### **Causes of Repression**

The existing literature on the causes of repression is immensely instructive and provides a list of variables useful for explaining policies of systematic human rights violations in democratic regimes. These variables include the presence of a perceived threat to national security, ideology, state capacity, a free press, and integration into the international community (Henderson 1991; Poe and Tate 1994; Davenport 1995; Fein 1995; Poe, Tate, and Keith 1999; Zanger 2000; Davenport and Armstrong 2004; Young 2009). I will briefly summarize the arguments of some of the studies most relevant to the study of strong democracies. It is important to note that this is far from an exhaustive list of the variables that have been examined in past studies on government respect for human rights. Other variables include the ratification of human rights treaties, British cultural influence, and coercive capacity of the state. However, these variables were deemed unsuitable for the current study either because they lack a significant variation when the dataset is limited to strong democracies (human rights treaty ratification and coercive capacity of the state) or they failed to achieve statistical significance in past studies (British cultural influence).

## I. Times of Threat or Conflict:

Myriad studies of human rights support the notion that an increase in the perception of threats to national security contributes to higher levels of repression (Gurr 1986; Poe and Tate 1994; Davenport 1995; Gartner and Reagan 1996; Poe et al. 1999). However, scholars vary in what developments contribute the most to perceptions of threat. Poe et al. (1999) argue that the main factor policymakers will take into account when deciding whether or not to engage in repression is their perception of their regime's political strength compared to a domestic threat, especially threats to the existence of their regime. Involvement in international war was also found to be associated with greater repression. Poe explains that international war may affect levels of repression is by decreasing the strength of the regime in the minds of policymakers, thereby decreasing their strength to threat calculations because of the resources spent on the war effort or because of losses in manpower and capital in connection with that war effort. Sonia Cardenas (2004) points out that armed groups need not pose an existential threat to a regime in any objective measure of military capability. She argues that states have always closely guarded their status as the sole actor that can legitimately use force within their territory. Hence, any group that challenges government authority through violent means will be treated as a threat to national security.

Other theorists provide useful explanations of the way threats to national security can undermine democratic principles. Axel Dreher, Martin Gassebner, and Lars-H Siemers (2010) provide additional empirical evidence that threats to national security contribute to repression. They found that terrorism diminished governments' respect for personal integrity rights. Moreover, they argue that during times of external threat citizens demonstrate a willingness to accept restrictions on freedoms in exchange for an increase in security. Oren Gross (2003) argues

that times of crisis pose the greatest danger to constitutional principles because of the temptation to disregard constitutional freedoms in the hope of making the state more secure. He points out that violent emergencies tend to bring a “rush to legislate” in which new offenses may be added to the criminal code while the power of law enforcement agencies is expanded. Especially problematic, Gross argues, is that during such times the judiciary, which is typically a main guarantor of human rights and civil liberties, may take a highly deferential attitude when asked to review new legislation because they, like political leaders and the general public, like to win wars and are sensitive to criticism that they are blocking steps necessary to increase national security. Thus, a main check on the likely overreaction of political leaders is apt to fail exactly when it is most needed.

Importantly, perceptions of job insecurity by policymakers can rise not only from involvement in armed conflict or internal dissident activity but also from downturns in the economy. Researchers investigating the response of embattled leaders have put forward the “scapegoating hypothesis” which posits that policymakers sometimes try to protect their positions of power by blaming an ethnic minority for their own policy failures. John Bowen (1996) posits that elites are particularly prone to attempt to shift blame to minority groups during economic crises, when experiencing reform pressures/opposition to proposed reforms, or when experiencing other threats to their power. Jaroslav Tir and Michael Jasinski (2008) propose that use of force against targeted minorities should be infrequent and of relatively short duration. Prolonged or frequent uses of force against an ethnic group in an attempt to create a lasting rally could create additional problems including stimulating armed resistance from the targeted group that could outlast any rally effect. Hence, policymakers are expected to use scapegoating only when his or her leadership is under acute scrutiny.



The above literature suggests that threats to a regime's legitimacy can originate from the more traditionally considered threats to national security that result from involvement in war or internal dissident activity, but threat can also result from poor economic performance. I will analyze the impact of involvement in war, internal dissident activity, and poor economic performance on repression. The hypothesis is as follows:

**Hypothesis 1:** *Regimes that feel threatened will be more likely to engage in repression.*

## II. Ideology:

In light of the constraints on policy makers inherent in democratic countries several theorists point to the importance of the availability of suitable targets on the use of repression. For example, some diversionary war theorists argue that policymakers facing opposition to their regime may be inclined to target groups not well integrated into the rest of society, such as an unpopular ethnic minority, for diversionary action (Levy 1998). This is especially likely since most states may lack the ability to target another state effectively (Tir and Jasinski 2008). In fact, they note that with the exception of the United States few states wield the capability to target other states as traditional diversionary theorists expect. Tir and Jasinski propose that by violently targeting disliked and relatively powerless and unpopular domestic groups such as ethnic minorities the leader may be able to elicit public support for his/her rule. Although they specifically focus on military targeting of ethnic minorities they concede that the diversionary logic can manifest itself in other forms of repression such as violations of personal integrity rights that do not reach the level of warfare.

The existence of out-groups may be particularly important in democracies since they must rely on since the masses can participate in the political system widespread repression can

potentially alienate needed political support. The most likely targets are those already politically or economically marginalized and with a history of conflict with other groups in the country. Empirical evidence of out-group targeting is provided by Christopher Einolf (2007). He found that violation of personal integrity rights, specifically torture, follows predictable patterns. Governments most often torture non-citizens, and other groups that are not considered full members of society such as illegal immigrants. When torture is used against citizens it is most often against members of racial, ethnic, or religious minorities, as well as those charged with serious crimes such as treason or terrorism.

Other theorists provide additional insights into which groups might constitute appropriate targets from the perspective of the repressive regime. Helen Fein (1993) explains that certain groups which occupy a lower status in society are viewed as “outside the universe of obligation” of protection and thus are the most at risk for repression. She explains that personal integrity rights violations against individuals outside the universe of obligation will not be socially recognized as a crime. Hence, it is not necessary to use dehumanizing language to gain support for/acquiescence to repression that targets those on the margins of society. Similarly, Ted Gurr (2000) posits that the most probable targets would be those that are economically or politically marginalized as well as those that are unpopular due to a history of disputes with other groups.

Equally troubling is the tendency of societies under threat to rely on an “us vs them” heuristics which creates the illusion that the “other” is a well-defined entity easily distinguished from the “us.” This type of thinking contributes to public acceptance of the government’s attempts to expand its powers to detain indefinitely, interrogate, deport, and myriad other emergency measures to deal with threats to national security. The “us vs them” dichotomy serves to reassure members of the majority group that their rights will not be violated (Gross 2003).

These arguments suggest another hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 2:** *States with a larger non-native born population should be more likely to engage in repression.*<sup>4</sup>

### III. State Capacity/Wealth:

Other theorists point to the importance of economic development. The effect of development can be conceived of in two ways. First, the state's capacity relative to other powerful actors in society is important. In particular, the state's ability to generate revenue through its ability to tax citizens is crucial (Young 2009). Margaret Levi (1988) puts forth a model of state strength which is concerned with the state's ability to maximize revenue in light of three main constraints: the job insecurity of policymakers, transaction costs associated with revenue extraction, and the relative bargaining power of the state relative to other powerful actors. Young posits that when faced with dissidents the state must either use coercion or provide some economic concessions. Hence, weaker states, in terms of their ability to wield resources, are less able to induce acquiescence through some program of economic reform or growth. Second, the overall level of economic development is important. As Henderson (1991) explains is logical to assume that a higher level of economic development will leave people more satisfied and hence, less repression will be needed by the elites. Poe and Tate (1994) and Poe et al. (1999) also found support that higher levels of economic development, as measured by per capita GDP, are associated with fewer violations of personal integrity rights.

From this I propose my third hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 3:** *Lower levels of economic development will be associated with higher incidents of repression.*

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<sup>4</sup>Although stock of non-native population is not a perfect measure of unpopular minorities or out-groups, I employ it as a proxy because data on a more direct measure of the ideology thesis such as public opinion polls on racial and ethnic minorities are not available for all countries and all years of my study.

#### IV. Civil Society/International Integration:

Theorists grouped broadly into the constructivist school, argue that states are increasingly concerned with their image and standing in the international community. As such, they are willing to become members of important intergovernmental organizations. In a sense, a paradigm shift has occurred in how states conceive of their interests. Many states have broadened their understanding of their interests beyond the classic realist conception of a zero-sum game in terms of hard military power and as a result are increasingly willing to invite some level of interference into their sovereignty through membership in intergovernmental organizations and the ratification of treaties, many of which include monitoring bodies. In essence, some states aspire to belong to “a normative community of states” to borrow the term from Martha Finnemore (1996).

The “spiral model” put forth by Thomas Risse, Stephen C. Ropp, and Kathryn Sikkink (1999) asserts that states are compelled to make certain initial guarantees of human rights through transnational pressure. Importantly, these states often make these initial concessions for purely self-interested reasons such as an increase in international legitimacy. However, as pressure mounts and monitoring increases the state may undertake more concrete changes. Eventually, as human rights norms become internalized and compliance becomes relatively consistent. Additionally, Poe et al. (1999) found evidence that campaigns by international human rights organizations led regimes to perceive an increase in the costs associated with repression, causing them to be more moderate in their actions than they would be without scrutiny.

In their study on human rights treaty ratification and human rights compliance, Emilie Hafner-Burton and Kiyoteru Tsutsui (2005) found that while treaty ratification was a poor indicator of state behavior a strong civil society as measured by membership in international

non-governmental organizations was associated with better human rights practices. They argue that domestic groups can reach out to international actors to highlight human rights violations of their states and pressure their governments into compliance with human rights norms. They also argue the increasing legitimacy of human rights norms and universal jurisdiction has made it difficult for national governments to dismiss accusations of human rights violations as interference in their sovereignty. Moreover, domestic actors in states well integrated into the international community are likely to have increased awareness of the mechanisms for publicizing human rights violations.

This suggests the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 4:** *States with weaker civil society/less international integration will be more likely to engage in repression.*

#### V. Freedom of the Press:

In her 2009 study on the relationship between freedom of the press and respect for human rights violations Whitten-Woodring found that media freedom is associated with greater respect for human rights in states that are most democratic while in states that are less democratic or autocratic higher media freedom is associated with less respect for human rights. Similarly, Ungar (1989-1990) argues that a free press is instrumental in keeping policy makers honest. The very existence of a robust media that is free from government control serves to undermine the government's ability to conduct covert activities that violate societal norms, such as respect for human rights. This suggests my final hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 5:** *States with more restrictions on press freedom will be more likely to engage in repression.*

## Section Two: Methodology and Regression Results

### Research Design

My dataset includes 24 countries from 1990 to 2007. This time period was selected to allow for the inclusion of the maximum number of countries and based on data availability. The countries selected for inclusion were selected based on their scoring a 10 on the Polity IV scale for the entirety of the 18 years. See Figure 1 below for a complete list of countries in my study.

**Figure 1**

Countries that Scored a 10 on the Polity IV Scale all years 1990 through 2007

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Australia	Hungary	Spain
Austria	Ireland	Sweden
Canada	Italy	Switzerland
Costa Rica	Japan	United Kingdom
Cyprus	Mauritius	United States
Denmark	Netherlands	Uruguay
Finland	New Zealand	
Germany	Norway	
Greece	Portugal	

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### Dependent Variable

As the measure of human rights violations I used data from the Political Terror Scale (PTS). This indicator provides information about the magnitude and severity of political imprisonment, execution, disappearances, and torture, yielding an ordered index of personal integrity abuse or political terror based on coding from U.S. State Department reports and Amnesty International country reports. The scale is coded from “1” (zero to very low levels of

human rights violations) to “5” (widespread use of repression). The descriptive statistics for each country’s PTS score are provided in the Appendix in Table A1.

### **Independent Variables**

My intent was not to create an exhaustive list of potential explanations of violations of personal integrity rights. Instead, the purpose of this study is to identify which variables have the greatest potential explanatory power. Thus, to test my proposed hypotheses the following variables were included in my model.

#### **I. Involvement in War (International or Civil):**

I used the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP)/International Peace Research Institute, Oslo (PRIO) data. The UCDP/PRIO dataset sets a low threshold for war at 25 battle related deaths per year. I coded this variable as a dummy (0 for no involvement in war and 1 for involvement in either category of war). I decided combining civil and international war was theoretically sound for the purposes of my paper because what I am most interested in studying is the impact of perceived threat on the part of the decision makers and both types of war have been demonstrated in past literature to have this impact.

#### **II. Violent Dissident Activity:**

For my measure of internal dissident activity I used the Banks Cross National Time Series Data Archive. The dataset contains data on assassinations (of government leaders), anti-government riots, anti-government protests, and internal armed resistance which they call guerrilla warfare including incidents of bombings etc. I combined them into an internal violent dissident activity variable and weight them in accordance with the coders for the Banks dataset: Assassinations (25), Strikes (20), Guerrilla Warfare (100), and Anti-Government Demonstrations

(10). I lagged this variable by one year because it is likely that indicators of widespread repression reflected in the PTS will take some time to materialize, especially in response to a sudden violent event. Hence, a time lag of one year is needed to accurately reflect the effects of internal dissident activity on a state's use of repression.

### III. Economic Performance:

As a proxy for economic performance I utilized data on the percentage of the population aged 15 and above that are employed from the World Bank. Theoretically, higher unemployment (i.e. a lower percentage of the adult population that is employed) will reflect negatively on policymakers.

### IV. State Capacity/Wealth:

Per capita gross domestic product data available from the World Bank served as a proxy variable for state capacity. In keeping with past studies I rely on per capita GDP as the best available measure of the economic resources readily available for revenue extraction. I am interested in a measure of the resources most directly available to the government. Since the governments of wealthier countries wield more resources they should, theoretically at least, be able to leverage those resources to placate internal dissidents rather than engaging in repression. Additionally, wealthier countries have been shown to have better human rights records than less-developed ones.

### V. Civil Society/International Integration:

I used the number of intergovernmental organizations (IGO) of which a state is a member as measure of the state's integration into the international community. This measure will be drawn from the Correlates of War 2 International Governmental Organizations Data Set.



## VI. Freedom of the Press:

My measure of freedom of the press drew upon the annual report produced by Freedom House. The report provides numerical rankings and rates each country's media as "Free," "Partly Free," or "Not Free." Countries scoring 0 to 30 are regarded as having "Free" media; 31 to 60, "Partly Free" media; and 61 to 100, "Not Free" media.

## VII. Stock of Nonnative Born Population:

This variable was compiled from data available from the United Nations, International Labor Organization, and International Organization for Migration.<sup>5</sup>

## Regression Model

I will use the Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression technique<sup>6</sup> and combined the identified variables into the following equation:

$$Y_{tj} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_{1tj} + \beta_2 X_{2tj} + \beta_3 X_{3tj} + \beta_4 X_{4tj} + \beta_5 X_{5t} + \beta_6 X_{6tj} + \beta_7 X_{7t} + \varepsilon_{tj}$$

Y = Violations of Personal Integrity Rights (HRV)

X<sub>1</sub> = Involvement in International War or Civil War (WAR)

X<sub>2</sub> = Internal Dissident Activity (DISS)

X<sub>3</sub> = Percentage of the Population that is Unemployed (EMPLOY)

X<sub>4</sub> = State Capacity (per capita GDP) (GDP)

X<sub>5</sub> = Civil Society as measured by IGO Participation (IGO)

X<sub>6</sub> = Freedom of the Press (PRESS)

X<sub>7</sub> = Stock of Nonnative Born Population (NN POP)

tj = Country j at time

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<sup>5</sup> Where estimates of the stock of non-native born population differed for a given year I treated the United Nations estimate as authoritative.

<sup>6</sup> I rely on OLS because as A.H. Studenmund (2006) points out it is the most widely used regression technique which is so standard that its estimates are often presented as a point of reference even when others techniques are used.

See Table 1 below for a summary of each hypotheses and the corresponding variable and data source. See Table A2 in the Appendix for summary statistics of all my independent variables.

**Table 1**  
Summary of Hypotheses, Variables and Data Sources

<b>Hypothesis</b>	<b>Variable</b>	<b>Data Source</b>	<b>Expected Sign</b>
1. Regimes that feel threatened will be more likely to engage in repression.	a) Involvement in international or civil war (WAR)	a) UCDP/PRIO dataset	a) Positive
	b) Internal dissident activity lagged by one year (DISSLAG)	b) Banks Cross National Time Series Data Archive	b) Positive
	c) Economic performance as measured by unemployment (EMPLOY)	c) World Bank	c) Positive
2. States with a larger non-native born population should be more likely to engage in repression.	Stock of non-native born population as a percentage of total population (NNPOP)	United Nations, International Labor Organization, and International Organization for Migration	Positive
3. Lower levels of economic development will be associated with higher incidents of repression.	Per-capita gross domestic product (GDP)	World Bank	Negative
4. States with weaker civil society/less international integration will be more likely to engage in repression.	Number of intergovernmental organizations of which the state is a member (IGO)	Correlates of War 2 International Governmental Organizations Data Set.	Negative
5. States with more restrictions on press freedom will be more likely to engage in repression.	Numerical score of freedom of the press (PRESS)	Freedom House	Negative

## Results

The following results utilize Ordinary Least Squares with fixed effects.<sup>7</sup> Involvement in civil or international war was highly significant statistically (at the 99 percent confidence interval) and substantively important. A state's involvement in war (WAR) was associated with a large increase in repression providing support for the threat hypothesis. This was by far the most substantively significant result in my model. The one year lag of internal dissident activity (DISSLAG) is statistically significant (at the 95 percent confidence interval), but substantively the effect is small. Internal dissent contributed to a marginal increase in the use of repression by a state. Again, this provides some support for the threat hypothesis. The rate of adult unemployment (EMPLOY) was positively correlated with repression and statistically significant (at the 95 percent confidence interval) as expected. This result provides support for the notion that economic performance (an important factor in government popularity) can impact a state's use of repression. These results provide support for the threat and scapegoating theses. When leaders feel threatened either by involvement in war, internal dissent, or poor economic performance they are more likely to engage in repression as expected by hypothesis 1.

Non-native born population (NN POP) was consistent with hypothesis 2. It was significant both statistically (at the 99 percent confidence interval) and substantively, i.e. increases in the percentage of the population that are born outside the country are correlated with an increase in human rights violations. This provides some support for the ideology hypothesis that asserts that readily available out-groups are prime targets for scapegoating and repression because the government is unlikely to face large scale negative political consequences if it limits violations of personal integrity rights to groups already marginalized in broader society.

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<sup>7</sup> Fixed effects was chosen because it is useful for controlling unobserved heterogeneity that may be correlated with some of the independent variables.

Economic development as a proxy for state capacity (GDP) was statistically and substantively insignificant and thus failed to provide support for hypothesis 3. This result may be an indication that per capita GDP is not a good proxy for state capacity, or given the fact that, unlike past studies, my dataset was primarily composed of wealthy states, it may indicate that above a certain level of economic development the impact of a marginal increase or decrease in per capita GDP is no longer has substantive impact on the use of repression.

Integration into the international community (IGO) failed to confirm hypothesis 4. It was statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence interval and moderately important substantively, but in the opposite direction hypothesized. This unexpected result may be a function of increased monitoring and publicizing of internal state activities, including violations of human rights, that accompanies membership in intergovernmental organizations. It may also be indicative of the fact that the most powerful states in the international system may be the least susceptible to international pressure. It may also be related the fact that even strong democracies appear willing to engage in repression during times of threat. As a result, the most influential members of IGOs may be sympathetic to the justifications of their strongly democratic counterparts in anticipation that when they are faced with their own threats they will enjoy at least taciturn support from like-minded states.

Freedom of the press (PRESS) was insignificant both statistically and substantively, failing to supply support for hypothesis 5. This result may be related to the diminished watchdog role the media plays in times of threat and may reflect a failure on the part of the media to highlight abuse of groups in society not considered worthy of interest or protection. See Table 2 for the specific coefficient estimates for each variable.

**Table 2**  
Ordinary Least Squares Regression with Fixed Effects Standard Errors

Independent Variable	Coefficient Estimates
Involvement in War (WAR)	0.380* (0.104)
Internal Dissident Activity (DISSLAG)	0.002** (0.001)
Unemployment Rate (EMPLOY)	0.090** (0.021)
State Capacity (GDP)	0.000 (0.000)
International Integration (IGO)	0.018** (0.009)
Freedom of the Press (PRESS)	-0.003 (0.008)
Non-Native Population (NNPOP)	0.100* (0.024)
Observations	312
No. of Countries	24
R <sup>2</sup>	0.22

Fixed Effects Standard Errors are in parenthesis below the Coefficient Estimates

\*Significant at 1%. \*\*Significant at 5%.

### Robustness Checks

To check the robustness of my findings I estimated four additional models. See Table A3 in the Appendix for specific coefficients of each of the robustness checks. In the first robustness check (RB1), I substituted the Cingrinelli and Richards (CIRI)<sup>8</sup> scale in place of the Political Terror Scale as my dependent variable. For involvement in war the results were consistent with my original model as war was shown to have a strongly positive correlation with repression.

<sup>8</sup> I utilized the cumulative CIRI scale of violations of personal integrity rights including torture and cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment, arbitrary detention, and summary execution. The CIRI scale is coded from the same source material as the PTS (Annual Amnesty International and U.S. State Department Human Rights Reports). The scale is coded 1-8 with an 8 being the best score and a 1 representing widespread use of repression. These scales are similar substantively as they are coding for the same types of violations and utilize the same source material. However, because the CIRI scale is an 8 point scale it provides additional variation within the dependent variable than the 5 point scale utilized by the PTS. However, as discussed later in the limitations section of this paper this specificity when attempting to quantify violations of personal integrity rights is to some degree arbitrary.

However, the other variables that were significant in my original model failed to reach statistical significance in this model. In the second robustness check (RB2), I modified my original regression technique slightly and clustered my standard errors by country instead of using fixed effects. Here my results were generally consistent with my original model for all variables except international integration (IGO) which lost its statistical significance.

In the third robustness check (RB3), I replaced the UCDP/PRIO dataset with the correlates of war (COW) dataset as my measure of involvement in war. In this model involvement in war failed to reach statistical significance. At first glance, this may seem to invalidate my the results of my original model, however, the loss of statistical significance may be a function of the very high threshold the COW dataset uses before it codes a country as involved in war. The COW dataset only includes those countries that are participating in the “bulk of the fighting.” The bulk of the fighting standard does not seem to be controlled for population. Thus, for the war in Afghanistan beginning in 2001 the only countries from my dataset listed as participants were the United States, Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom. However, many other countries in my dataset have contributed significant numbers of troops. In fact, Denmark has had the highest casualty rate of any NATO country per capita as well as deployed the largest number of troops per capita (Aroon, 2008). In terms of threat to the regime, involvement in an increasingly unpopular war and a relatively high casualty rate may be a better indicator of stress on a regime’s legitimacy than simply an objective measure of participation in the bulk of the fighting (Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler 2005). As a final robustness check (RB4), I removed the one year lag from the internal dissident activity variable. In this model, internal dissident activity changed signs unexpectedly implying a negative relationship between repression and internal dissident activity, which is opposite of hypothesis 1. However, it did not

reach statistical significance. In this model international integration (IGO) also lost statistical significance. Interestingly, economic development (GDP) achieved the hypothesized negative relationship with repression for the first time in any of my models, but still failed to reach statistical significance. All of the other results were consistent with my original model.

### **Section Three: Case Studies**

What follows are brief case studies of the countries that scored a “3” at any time during the period under study. A “3” is the worst score any country achieved. These countries include Spain in 2002, the United Kingdom in 2005, Greece in 2006, and the United States from 2004 – 2007. In general, each case study provides some level of qualitative support for the results of my regression. All four countries had some level of internal dissident activity or were involved in international war. This provides support for the threat hypotheses. Similarly, in all cases policymakers were facing internal opposition to and criticism of their policies. In the European context this constituted a significant threat of removal from office. Moreover, in all four cases repression targeted out-groups such as illegal immigrants, ethnic or religious minorities, or terrorism suspects. This provides support for the ideology and scapegoating hypotheses. Interestingly, in all cases there was, to at least some degree, adversarial media coverage of unpopular policies. However, the press tended not to focus on repression that was occurring and thus failed to have the expected significant pacifying effect on the government.

#### **Spain 2002**

According to reports by international human rights NGOs and there U.S. State Department security forces abused detainees and mistreated non-citizens and illegal immigrants,

and government investigations of such abuses were lengthy and punishments were light. For example, Human Rights Watch (2002) reported that police abused undocumented Moroccan migrant children. According to the report police regularly abused children in overcrowded residential centers. Moreover, discrimination and occasional violence by police against Roma and immigrants were reported. There were also reports that police abused persons during political demonstrations. Interestingly, according to the U.S. State Department public opinion polls taken that year indicated that racism and xenophobia were widespread and resulted in discrimination and violence against minorities.

Interestingly, during the year the government of Prime Minister José Maria Aznar was facing increasing unpopularity and unrest. Strikes, political demonstrations and student sit-ins occurred often (“Warnings for Aznar” 2002). Particularly unpopular was Aznar’s support for the impending U.S. led invasion of Iraq. The majority of the Spanish population, including many members of Anzar’s own party, was against the war (Chomsky 2003). The largest street demonstrations ever seen in the country resulted from the government's support for the invasion. Additionally, the global economic downturn of 2002 impacted some of Spain’s most important industries including tourism. The sharp drop in tourism slowed GDP growth to the lowest level in nearly a decade. To add to the pressures on Anzar’s administration crime rates and housing prices continued to rise fomenting further public criticism of Anzar. In terms of violent dissident activity the terrorist group ETA continued its campaign of shootings and bombings, killing four persons during the year (U.S. State Department Country Report 2002). Eta’s violent activities sparked additional protest marches. Protesters expressed anger both over Eta’s actions but also politicians’ “squabbles” and their failure to prevent attacks (“No end and not much hope” 2002).



The large amount of civil unrest that the Aznar Administration faced in 2002 provides support for the threat and scapegoating hypotheses.

### **United Kingdom 2005**

There were complaints that individual members of the police occasionally abused detainees in their custody. Members of the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) killed Jean Charles de Menezes on July 22, the day after failed bombing attempts in London and two weeks after the July 7 terrorist attacks in which 56 persons died. The police subsequently stated that de Menezes was not a suspect in the terrorist attacks and was killed after he was misidentified as a suspect in the bombings (U.S State Department Report 2005). In response to the London bombings the government policy on detention (internment) shifted. In response to the bombing Prime Minister Tony Blair announced that "the rules of the game are changing." He then proposed new security measures including deportation, extending the use of control orders, internment, and refusing asylum automatically to "anyone who has participated in terrorism or has anything to do with it anywhere" (Norton-Taylor 2005).

In response to past terrorist incidents such as the Omagh bombing in 1998 Blair did not support internment, but after the bombing in 2005 his stance shifted. Jessie Blackbourn offers a compelling explanation of the government's fundamental shift in attitude toward detention between 1998 and 2005. She explains that the contrast resulted from the divergent ways in which the threat of terrorism was interpreted in the given years. In 1998 Northern Ireland had just entered a promising peace process and terrorist attacks had been on declining. Thus, while the Omagh bombing, which killed 29 people and injured 220 was the worst individual incident of terrorism in Northern Ireland, it was seen as the tailing off of a long period of violence in

Northern Irish history. In 2005, in contrast, the threat of violence from international actors was seen as a growing trend and a “potentially infinite” threat (Blackbourn). The government use of repression in response to a terrorist attack is consistent with the threat hypothesis.

### **Greece 2006**

Several human rights abuses were reported: abuse by security forces, particularly of illegal immigrants and Roma. For example, in September, coastguardsmen intercepted 40 people trying to reach the island of Chios by boat. The coast guard officers allegedly took the individuals on board, handcuffed them, and pushed them back into the water. Six bodies were recovered on the Turkish coast, 31 others were rescued from the water by the Turkish authorities, and three were reported missing (Amnesty International Report 2007). IGOs and human rights NGOs repeatedly alleged that illegal immigrants and refugees were subjected to violence by border guards and coast guard officers when caught entering the country illegally or when attempting to enter bordering EU countries. The Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) reported that the rights of individuals in police detention centers were not respected in practice and that there continued to be widespread use of violence against detainees (European Committee for the Prevention of Torture 2006).

A study conducted during the year found that police were more likely to abuse Roma than other groups, and immigrants, including Albanians, also accused police of abuse. Additionally, 28 Pakistani residents in the country reported that they were abducted in July, hooded, held for several days, and interrogated by individuals who claimed to be police officers. One of the men also alleged that he was beaten (U.S. State Department 2007). The National Commission for Human Rights, which operates independently of the government,

reported that the Roma were the most discriminated against and marginalized social group in the country (Hellenic Republic National Commission for Human Rights 2006). Interestingly, an analysis of media reports by the U.S. State Department found the media blamed Albanians and immigrants for a reported rise in crime in recent years and allegations of cruel, inhumane, and degrading treatment made by Albanians against the police were often ignored. This provides some evidence for my explanation as to why even freedom of the press is not a sufficient watchdog against repression of out-groups.

During this year the government Prime Minister Konstantinos Alexandrou Karamanlis was also dealing with widespread internal discontent. Unemployment rose during the year and his attempts to reform the economy sparked strikes by Greek unions including sanitation and transportation workers (“Greek islands ‘cut off’ by strikes” 2006). Students and professors participated in large-scale demonstrations against Karamanlis’s attempts to reform the Greek education system as well. In this instance protests turned violent and students had to be dispersed by police with tear gas (“Greek student protests turn violent.” 2006). Again, I found support for the threat and scapegoating hypotheses.

### **The United States 2004-2007**

It is important to point out that the repression score of the United States did not reflect its worsening human rights record until 2004, when information about the previously secret activities of the Bush Administration became public. However, almost immediately after the attacks of September 11, 2001 lawyers within the Bush Administration began examining U.S. law to identify areas that would allow for the expansion of executive power and undermine legal

protections to terrorist suspects. Hence, my analysis of this case will include a few relevant events that occurred prior to 2004.

David Forsythe (2006) outlines the steps by which the administration began to unravel protections for human rights in U.S. policy. He identified efforts to undermine law that prohibited coercive interrogations as the first step in the process. Next, members of the Office of Legal Counsel drafted memos that redefined what constituted torture in such narrow terms that the administration was granted expansive powers to engage in previously prohibited interrogation techniques, including water-boarding, temperature manipulation, denial of sleep and adequate food, stress positions that included forcing detainees to stand for hours on end, among others. The infamous “torture memos” narrowed the definition so much that virtually anything short of something causing organ failure did not constitute torture.

The Administration also decided to engage in the practice of forced disappearances, i.e. kidnapping and transporting detainees to secret prisons while not acknowledging detaining them, thus preventing, in a practical sense, any law applying to them. According to the Jane Mayer (2008) some of these “ghost detainees” were held in eight locations abroad, with two locations said to be in Eastern Europe. The U.S. also expanded the program of extraordinary rendition so that, suspected terrorists were rendered or deported, without legal process, to foreign jurisdictions such as Egypt, known for harsh interrogation practices. In addition to renditions and the opening of “black sites” the Bush Administration expanded Guantanamo Bay prison camp to house many of the “high value” detainees captured in Afghanistan and elsewhere.

Estimates of the number of people subjected to torture and cruel/inhumane treatment are difficult to obtain due to the high levels of secrecy under which the Bush Administration, CIA and military operate. However, more concrete numbers are available for some detention

facilities. Since the beginning of the war on terror 775 detainees have been brought to Guantánamo. Of these, approximately 420 have been released without charge. The current number of detainees stands at 169 as of April of this year ("Two Guantanamo Uighur prisoners" 2012). The Bagram Theater Internment Facility in Afghanistan housed an estimated 500 detainees at any given time ("Bagram: US base in Afghanistan" 2007). According to Human Rights First the Abu Ghraib prison facility in Iraq held more the 7,000 detainees at its peak in early 2004. All told, over 83,000 people have been held in U.S. custody in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Guantanamo Bay. This number does not include individuals subjected to extraordinary rendition. That number is estimated to be between 100-150 individuals. According to Lawrence Wilkerson, former chief of staff to Colin Powell, over 100 detainees have died in U.S. custody, with up to 27 of these deaths declared homicides. According to Human Rights First only 12 of these deaths have led to any punishment of U.S. personnel, despite over 600 criminal investigations into detainee mistreatment have taken place.

Examination of the rhetoric leading up to and occurring during the period of human rights violation provide mixed support for Fein's notion of victims can be conceptualized as "others" and therefore "outside the universe of obligation." The Bush Administration was quick to label terrorism suspects as "evil enemies" who targeted the U.S. because they hate freedom and democracy. However, in other speeches President Bush engaged in classic dehumanizing metaphors. For example, in his 2002 State of the Union Address President Bush referred to terrorists as "parasites" who threaten the survival of their countries as well as the U.S. (Jackson 2007). Yet, far and away the majority of the rhetoric coming from the administration focused on the dangerous "other" that the terrorists represent. For example, in an October 2001 speech President Bush states, "By their *cruelty*, the terrorists have chosen to live on *the hunted margin*

*of mankind. By their hatred, they have divorced themselves from the values that define civilization itself.*”

Further support for the ideology thesis is indicated by how readily the media and American public were willing to accept this narrative. James Castonguay (2004) argues that forces to “other” Arabs and Muslims had long been at work in the U.S. especially in film and television, “Hollywood had already done its ideological work in this regard by showing racist, essentialist, and Orientalist representations of Arabs and Islam for decades.” He explains that even fictional representations serve to underlie and narrow the cultural popular narratives about “other” cultures in the U.S. Available historical data suggest that a negative image of Arabs existed before the September 11 attacks. A March 1993 Gallup poll showed that just 39% of Americans had a favorable opinion of Arabs, while 32% had an unfavorable opinion and 29% had no opinion. An ABC News poll, conducted during the Persian Gulf crisis in February 1991, found that 43% of Americans said they had a high opinion of Arabs while 41% said they had a low opinion (Jones 2001).

The U.S. case provides strong evidence to support the threat hypothesis. Fear of another impending attack was widespread among the American public and the pressure on the government to prevent another attack was substantial. The percentage of Americans expressing worry over being a victim of terrorism reached an all-time high of 59% in October 2001 (Mendes 2009). As such, preventing another attack became the Administration’s *raison d’être*. Mayer points out that Vice President Cheney seemed to take the task personally and began demanding to see all available raw intelligence on additional threats to America every day (Mayer 2005).

#### **Section Four: Limitations and Areas for Future Study**

Below I outline a few methodological and substantive limitations of my study and then propose a strategy for a future study to address some of the substantive limitations of the human rights literature thus far.

A significant limitation of my study resulted from the limited availability of some key data. Data availability was an important factor in the selection of some of the independent variables such as civil society/international integration and state capacity/economic development. Hence, the failure of these variables to perform as expected may be more a function of the weakness of the proxy variable to represent the impact of the real world variable than the weakness of the theory itself.

Moreover, the measure of my dependent variable is in some ways problematic. Any attempt to quantify something like violations of personal integrity rights has inherent difficulties. For example, critics of the PTS argue that it is inappropriate to treat repression as a unidimensional concept (Mitchell and McCormick 1988). They argue that different forms of repression such as torture and politically motivated murder may result from differing intentions on the part of the repressive regime. Therefore, it is invalid to assume that inferences about the causes of repression can be drawn from a scale that treats all violations of personal integrity rights substantively equivalent. The CIRI scale contains a disaggregated score for different types of personal integrity rights violations (in addition to addition to the cumulative 1-8 score) in an effort to address this aspect of the PTS. However, if a researcher is interested, as I was, in explaining the overall situation of personal integrity rights in a country a disaggregated score that includes only torture, for example, will provide incomplete results. Another problematic aspect of the PTS and for that matter the CIRI scale is that the distinction between intermediate levels

of repression is not well specified. Although in both cases the coders attempt to account for how widespread repression has become in a given country the source material (annual Amnesty International and U.S. State Department reports) lack the specificity to provide more than general impressions. Hence, the difference between a score of “2” or “3” on the PTS for example is difficult to interpret. Finally, given that most governments commit repression secretly the casual relationship of independent variables may be obscured due to the aberrant and unpredictable time it takes between when repression actually begins and when it is discovered. Despite these limitations, to the best of my knowledge a better source of data on repression than either the PTS or CIRI scale does not exist.

One important limitation of any quantitative study is that a determination of a causal relationship or in some cases even the direction of a relationship between independent and dependent variables is not able to be determined. Hence, in my study it is impossible to determine conclusively if my statistically significant variables are causing repression. As Oskar N.T. Thoms and James Ron (2007) suggest there is some evidence that human rights violations cause internal dissident activity for example. Hence, one must be careful to draw too strong of conclusions from quantitative results that lack grounding in a qualitative analysis of events and, if possible, an analysis of the motivations of actors involved.

Another and related limitation is that treating states as unitary actors obscures the dynamic and to some degree unique set of circumstances playing out in each case. Importantly, many studies of repression, this one included, do little to shed light on why some leaders choose to repress while others do not when faced with quantitatively similar circumstances. The political psychology literature about decision makers in crisis provide a more nuanced understanding of human right violations, in part, because it does not treat states as unitary actors.



Instead, this body of literature focuses on the policymakers themselves treating them as a variable to be studied (Farham 1992; Shannon 2000; Mintz 2004; Keller 2005). Hence, an important limitation of this study is that my level of analysis is above the level at which the decision to repress is made. Because it was beyond the scope of my study to analyze each policymaker individually I propose that incorporating some of the political psychology literature outlined below is an area ripe for further study. A study modeled on that of Jonathan Keller (2005) that quantitatively examines the characteristics policy makers and their perceptions of human rights norms and national security threats could fill an important gap in the literature on human rights.

Jonathan Keller (2005) argues that it is a fallacy to assume political constraints to foreign policy behavior affect all leaders in similar and straightforward ways. He argues that this strong structural argument incorrectly assumes that policy makers recognize and behave in accordance with constraints in unambiguous ways. He suggests that policymakers should actually be understood on a continuum of those most apt to internalize constraints “constraint respecters” to those most likely to view constraints as barriers to be overcome “constraint challengers.” Hence, democratic norms should not be conceived of as direct constraints in all situations, at best, they are “potential constraints” and in cases of strong constraint challengers are unlikely to influence policy decisions. His quantitative study of 147 foreign policy crises and 39 heads of state from various countries provided strong support for this thesis.

Keller conducted content analysis of spontaneous statements of policymakers given during interviews and press conferences. Leaders' scores on relevant characteristics were used to create an index of leaders' expected propensity to challenge pacifying constraints in the pursuit of aggressive foreign policy actions. Importantly, for my analysis of the perception of threat on

human rights violations, he found constraint respecters rely on violence as the “preeminent crisis management technique” in only 11.4% of cases, while constraint challengers responded to crises with violence in 67.6% of cases. Hence, it is likely that the particular policy-makers in office will influence whether or not repression is treated as a viable policy option.

Other theorists criticize the reliability of the rational actor, expected utility model that dominates international relations and suggest that a more appropriate analysis of leaders’ decision-making would incorporate “poliheuristic-choice” theory. Poliheuristic choice posits that decision-makers rely on a two-stage decision making process that limits available alternatives through the use of one or more heuristics (cognitive shortcuts) (Shannon 2000; Mintz 2004). This implies that individual policy makers are important but so to are the particular advisors with whom executives surround themselves. The framing of political costs of various options presented to the executive by advisors can theoretically play a major role in the decision to repress. Similarly, prospect theory also provides insight into why even democratic leaders are willing to violate human rights norms during times of threat. Prospect theory predicts that when an issue as framed as a loss people will overvalue it; in defense policy this could lead decision makers to approve the use of repression in order to prevent a terrorist attack, for example, which would be a loss on the part the state security apparatus (Farnham 1992).

Vaughn Shannon (2000) further argues that norm violation results from a conflict between leaders’ perceived national interests and a given norm. The conflict provides motivation for policy makers to perceive a situation in a way that would free them from the norm’s constraints. The fact that policy makers engage in subjective interpretation which is highly dependent on the situation allows even strong supporters of the abstract norm in theory to justify violation in practice. He argues that whether or not a norm is violated depends on how grave the

threat to national security is understood to be by the leader and how well defined and rigid or universal the conflicting norm. In short, the less specific and universally adopted the norm the easier it is to violate. His analysis is important for understanding how elites can frame a situation to justify their policy preferences.

## **Section Five: Policy Implications and Conclusion**

### **Policy Implications**

Given that it is well documented that democracies are most apt at fulfilling their roles as the guarantors of rights and that the majority of the world's population does not live under stable democratic governments, some may find it more pressing to examine what causes human rights violations in other places. This is certainly a legitimate point. I argue, however, that because the international human rights system is, by design, primarily a voluntary system based largely on norm collusion rather than strong enforcement mechanisms it is of the utmost importance that powerful states actively promote compliance with international human rights law, or at the very least, respect human rights and lead by example. Jack Donnelly (2003:135) explains,

“the global human rights regime involves widely accepted substantive norms, authoritative multilateral standard-setting procedures, considerable promotional activity, but very limited international implementation... there is no international enforcement.

Such normative strength and procedural weakness is not accidental...”

Despite the growth of an international human rights regime, to use Donnelly's term, the notion of state sovereignty continues to be of central importance to the international system. The application of military force on behalf of human rights is relatively rare and of questionable

efficacy (Slater and Nardin 1986). Thus, the adoption and internalization of human rights norms by states provides the most promise for lasting improvement in human rights practices.

Similarly, Eric Neumayer (2005) argues that the global human rights regimes are weak relative to international trade regimes which can depend upon market forces to drive states to comply. Consequently, without powerful states taking a strong interest in the effectiveness of human rights regimes there is little cost for parties with a poor human rights record to ratify a treaty as a symbolic gesture while maintaining a poor record. In another study, Sonia Cardenas (2004) points out that the claim made by “rationalist” approaches to understanding human rights is that the power of the state exerting pressure on behalf of human rights norms relative to the target state is of primary importance. Thus, compliance will be greatest when a hegemonic state is seeking to influence a state that is weak internationally. Therefore, the promotion of a universal minimum standard for human rights is greatly impacted by whether or not the most powerful states in the system are committed to respecting said rights. This is particularly significant for my study given that the majority of the most powerful states today are democracies and as I have shown they are, especially in times of threat susceptible to regressive human rights practices.

Other research has shown that when major players in the international system suspend support for or actively violate human rights, the situation in other states can be negatively impacted (Burgerman 2001). For example, Kathryn Sikkink (2004), in her study of U.S. foreign policy and repression in Latin America, argues that “the highest ethical (and legal) obligation is for the United States to ensure its own agents do not engage in, facilitate, or encourage human rights violations at home or abroad.” Her work makes clear that when a hegemon like the U.S. failed to live up to this obligation by giving “green lights” to repress, through either direct

military support or behind the scenes diplomatic encouragement, to regimes engaging in human rights violations, including Chile and Argentina in the 1970s, the human rights situation worsened. More recently, in the wake of September 11<sup>th</sup>, the Bush Administration decided to reverse the policy of the 1990s denying military aid to Indonesia in response to the military's atrocious human rights record and participation in massacres in East Timor. Fearing that members of al Qaeda could take refuge in Indonesia, the Bush Administration agreed to enter into a partnership with a military that only a few years prior was responsible for targeting civilians on a massive scale (Carothers 2003). The message this sends not only to the Indonesia military but also to repressive regimes in the region is very troubling.

In another vein, given the ever present threat of failing or failed states to human rights and international security and stability, Jeremy Weinstein (2005) points out that there is a growing consensus that major powers, especially the United States, must take a more active role in state building. Weinstein's analysis of past multilateral interventions into failing states makes a convincing case against the international community's preference for impartial intervention. He, very convincingly, argues that cease-fires and negotiated settlements of this type rarely lead to lasting peace; without a decisive victory by one side belligerents are able to reconstitute their forces and reignite hostilities once the peacekeeping force is removed. Instead, he advocates for the international community to refrain from intervening in the hope that "autonomous recovery" (recovery through the decisive victory of one side without international intervention) will occur. If it is deemed absolutely necessary that an intervention occur, the international community must "disband with the 'delusion of impartial intervention' and intervene decisively on behalf of legitimate, competent military forces already on their way to victory" (Weinstein:29).

If his findings are to be taken seriously by policy makers it is imperative that major powers develop stronger norms for the protection of human rights during times of conflict. If, as the literature I cover in the next section demonstrates, during times of threat/conflict states, even major powers, have proven themselves willing to engage in repression how can they be expected to succeed in effectively promoting human rights in failing states whose regimes are, by definition, under threat? Additionally, the arguments of Carothers and Sikkink call into question whether one should assume that major powers can be trusted to identify and support “competent, legitimate military actors,” help them win, and constrain them to prevent them from descending into authoritarian rule as Weinstein calls for. Without stronger human rights practices during times of conflict it seems just as likely (if not more so) that major powers will instead choose to support any regime that promises to cooperate in promoting the immediate security interests of the powerful state, regardless of their human rights commitment.

Moreover, given that my findings support the notion that democracy does not lead to an immediate improvement in respect for personal integrity rights efforts to promote democracy as a means to improve human rights must be evaluated carefully. Finally, an important insight from my results is the finding that repression inducing threats to a regime are not limited to violent activities that place pressure on the government. In fact, poor economic performance can have a significant impact on repression as well, especially on repression targeting social out-groups as predicted by the scapegoating hypothesis. Hence, policymakers concerned about human rights as well as human rights advocates should be more diligent during time of economic downturn as well as times of conflict. Particular attention must be paid to unpopular minority groups that may face the most acute risk during harsh economic times. In addition, the failure of a free press to have the expected pacifying effect indicates that one should not assume a free press will restrain

policy makers intent on engaging in repression, especially if the press has demonstrated a willingness to accept or even advance a scapegoating narrative in the past.

## **Conclusion**

My study examined the factors that contributed to repression in strong democracies, considering data for 24 countries from 1990 through 2007. My study's findings are, for the most part, consistent with past studies of the causes of repression. However, I depart from the majority of studies by focusing only on strong democracies, rather than all democracies or other regime types. My analysis of available data provided support for my key expectation, that times of threat would be associated with repression. The results of this study indicate that while it is true that democratic norms are important constraints on policy makers, democracy is far from a panacea against repression. Factors such threats to regime legitimacy resulting from involvement in war or internal dissident activity and the presence of easily targeted out-group are shown to undermine democratic norms against repression.

Moreover, it is important to treat any quantitative results with a nuanced interpretation. For example, times of threat may illicit different responses and differing perceptions of interest in different democratic regimes. In a broad sense the removal from office does not have the same connotations as it does in autocratic regimes where elites may be facing violent removal. In democracies, the threats to national security as they relate to policy makers take the form of negative electoral outcomes if constituencies perceive their government is failing to protect them. Democratic leaders have proven themselves adept at using national security threats to justify or excuse repression, particularly against out-groups. My results further indicate that one should not underestimate the potential power of the rally around the flag effect. In times of

violence such as war this effect may pacify the rest of the citizenry and media opposition to repressive policies. This rally effect is exactly what policymakers are seeking when they attempt to scapegoat minorities in an effort to divert attention away from policy failures.

Finally, as political psychology scholars argue the characteristics of elites themselves play a role in how policy makers react to threats in ways for which a simple democratic versus non-democratic dichotomy cannot account. Hence, a systematic analysis of the characteristics of leaders who authorize or create repressive policies is an area in need of further study.



## Appendix

**Table A1**  
Descriptive Statistics of Dependent Variable Organized by Mean PTS Score

<b>Country</b>	<b>Mean PTS</b>	<b>Min (Best)</b>	<b>Max (Worst)</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>	<b>Mean** CIRI</b>
Denmark	1.00	1	1	0.00	7.83
Finland	1.00	1	1	0.00	7.78
Netherlands	1.00	1	1	0.00	8.00
New Zealand	1.00	1	1	0.00	7.67
Norway	1.00	1	1	0.00	7.94
Sweden	1.00	1	1	0.00	7.61
Costa Rica	1.05	1	2	0.24	6.94
Canada	1.06	1	2	0.24	7.22
Ireland	1.06	1	2	0.24	7.50
Australia	1.17	1	2	0.38	7.06
Japan	1.22	1	2	0.43	7.17
Austria	1.28	1	2	0.46	7.44
Switzerland	1.28	1	2	0.45	7.44
Germany	1.33	1	2	0.24	7.56
Portugal	1.33	1	2	0.49	6.94
Italy	1.44	1	2	0.51	6.61
Uruguay	1.44	1	2	0.51	6.78
Mauritius	1.52	1	2	0.51	6.44
Cyprus	1.56	1	2	0.51	6.67
United Kingdom*	1.58	1	3	0.62	6.56
Hungary	1.61	1	2	0.50	7.28
United States*	1.72	1	3	0.83	6.22
Greece*	1.83	1	3	0.51	6.17
Spain*	1.83	1	3	0.51	6.28

\*Included in Case Study Section

\*\* Mean CIRI score is included as a basis of comparison.

**Table A2**  
Descriptive Statistics of Independent Variables

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
Involvement in War*	0.31	0 (no)	1 (yes)	0.46
Dissident Activity**	12.52	0	220	32.22
Unemployment	7.32	0.2	23.9	3.59
GDP	23143.11	2276	82294	13148.18
IGO	85.74	46	113	16.49
Press Freedom	17.17	5	38	6.88
Non-Native Population	9.03	0.8	25.1	6.15

\*Dummy. \*\*Weighted

**Table A3**  
Robustness Checks

	<b>RB 1</b>	<b>RB 2</b>	<b>RB 3</b>	<b>RB 4</b>
Involvement in War	0.323* (0.118)	0.310* (0.098)	0.034 (0.040)	0.301* (0.028)
Internal Dissident Activity	0.001 (0.001)	0.002** (0.001)	0.002** (0.001)	-0.002** (0.001)
Unemployment Rate	0.016 (0.024)	0.060** (0.022)	0.022** (0.010)	0.061** (0.020)
State Capacity /Economic Development	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	-0.000 (0.000)
International Integration	-0.0152 (0.0145)	0.017 (0.014)	0.018** (0.009)	0.010 (0.001)
Freedom of the Press	-0.000 (0.0128)	-0.003 (0.011)	-0.000 (0.008)	0.000 (0.008)
Non-Native Population	0.0310 (0.0455)	0.100** (0.041)	0.083* (0.027)	0.068** (0.028)
Observations	312	312	312	312
No. of Countries	24	24	24	24
R <sup>2</sup>	0.07	0.22	0.13	0.18

\*Significant at 1%. \*\*Significant at 5%.

RB 1: OLS with fixed effects substituting CIRI for PTS as measure of repression

RB 2: OLS with standard errors clustered by country.

RB 3: OLS with fixed effects substituting COW for UCDP/PRIO as measure of involvement in war.

RB 4: OLS with fixed effects removing one year lag for internal dissident activity.

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