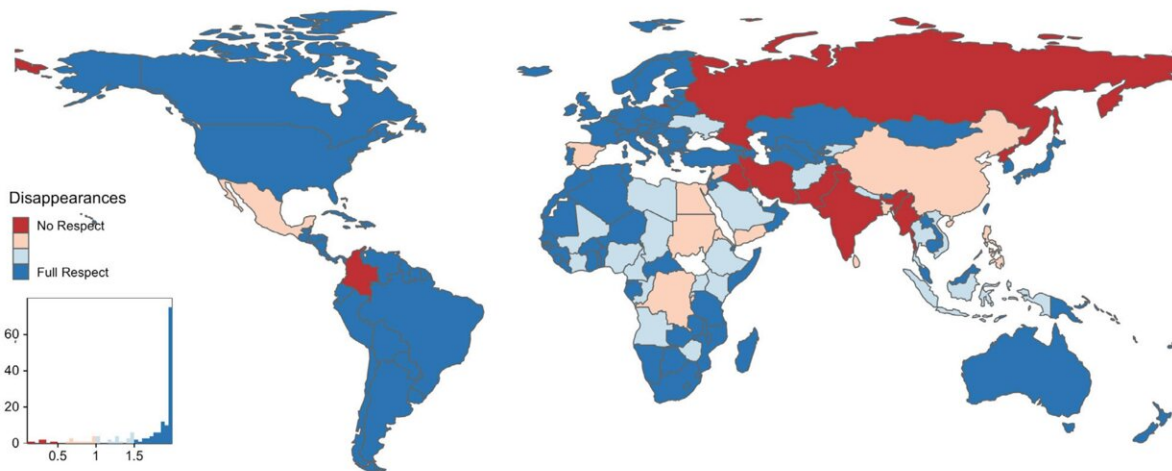# Research team launches world's largest global human rights dataset

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Credit: *CIRIGHTS 2022 Report* (2022).

A team of researchers based at the University of Rhode Island and Binghamton University has launched the world's largest quantitative dataset on global human rights.

The dataset, called CIRIGHTS, provides numerical measures for the extent to which every nation on Earth respects 72 internationally recognized human rights. Brendan Mark, director of URI's Center for Nonviolence and Peace Studies and co-director of the CIRIGHTS data project, says the dataset will provide academic researchers,

nongovernmental organizations, policymakers, and others with an objective tool to better track human rights worldwide.

"These numeric measures of human rights can help us to answer many critical questions facing the human rights community," said Mark, an assistant professor of political science. "Which countries are respecting human rights and which ones aren't? Is respect for human rights in general getting better or worse? What policy interventions are actually effective in improving human rights? By looking at the data through an objective lens, we think we can make real progress on these kinds of questions."

The full dataset is freely available on the CIRIGHTS website. The team will soon add a suite of interactive maps and data visualization tools to aid in exploring the data."One of the key aspects to this project is that everything will be freely available to whomever would like to use it," Mark said. "That could be researchers, educators, the general public —anyone with an interest in human rights around the world."

The team also plans to issue an annual report, including a Human Rights Report Card that ranks the best and worst countries for human rights.

A new 'gold standard'

The new CIRIGHTS dataset expands on a previous dataset known as the Cingranelli-Richards (CIRI) Human Rights Data Project (named for its founders, David L. Cingranelli of Binghamton University and David Richards from the University of Connecticut). CIRI was widely considered to be the gold standard in the field of quantitative human rights, Mark says, providing quantitative measures for 15 human rights worldwide from 1981 to 2011.

Beginning in summer 2022, Mark along with co-directors Cingranelli

and Mikhail Filippov, who is also from Binghamton University, launched CIRIGHTS as an effort to update and vastly expand the CIRI data. A gift from URI alumni Shannon Chandley '83 P'12 P'23 and Tom Silvia '83 P'12 P'23 helped get the project off the ground, enabling the team to hire student research assistants and data specialists.

"The expansion spearheaded by Professor Mark and his students has resulted in the biggest advance in producing public, understandable, replicable and transparent human rights scores in the last 20 years," Cingranelli said.

CIRIGHTS draws on human rights reports from the U.S. Department of State, Amnesty International, the United Nations' State of the World's Indigenous Peoples Report, and other sources. The rights recorded in the data include physical integrity rights like torture and extrajudicial killings, as well as empowerment rights like women's political rights or indigenous rights. Also included are workers' rights—fair working conditions and the right to unionize—as well as justice rights like the right to a fair trial. In total, the new dataset measures 72 internationally recognized rights.

Using a three-point scale, the researchers assign every country a score based on its respect for each right. A zero represents widespread violations of a given right, a two represents full respect, and a one is somewhere in between. The numerical scores are assigned by human scorers—often graduate or undergraduate students supervised by Mark or Cingranelli—according to a rigorous set of scoring guidelines. Multiple scorers work on each right independently, and when they disagree the team works together to resolve the differences.

"Our scoring guidelines lay out everything our scorers need to assess each right—a simple definition of the right, its grounding in international law, and examples of what violations look like," said Kate

Sylvester, a graduate student working with Mark who is helping to oversee the project. "The goal is to be as objective as we can possibly be."

The result is the largest quantitative human rights dataset ever assembled, Mark says, which will soon be freely available online. The CIRIGHTS website will include interactive maps and a suite of data visualization tools to enable students, researchers, policymakers and others to fully explore the data.

Meanwhile, the dataset provides students at URI and elsewhere opportunities for a deep dive into how human rights are assessed.

"In assembling the data, students learned first-hand how to do content analysis—turning text descriptions of events into numerical scores," Mark said. "And we hope that as students around the country access and use the data, it will deepen their understanding of how we can evaluate human rights and design interventions that work."

Pilot report

In addition to making the data freely available, the team plans to use it to compile an annual world human rights report. The document aims to capture up-to-date trends in human rights worldwide, as well as providing the Human Rights Report Card, which assigns each country an overall human rights score out of 100, based on each country's scores on all individual human rights.

For this year's pilot report, the team identified the following countries as having the highest overall level of respect for 25 human rights measures:

Canada—96/100
Sweden—96/100

New Zealand—94/100
Norway—94/100
Portugal—94/100

Countries with least respect for human rights were:

Iran—2/100
Syria—6/100
North Korea—6/100
China—10/100
Iraq—12/100

The report also identifies some broad global trends over the past decade, including significant declines in respect for certain rights.

"Our data suggest that economic rights have declined in the 21stcentury apart from the right to a minimum wage," the researchers write.

"Similarly, rights associated with the ability to criticize the government (First Amendment-type rights) have declined across the globe. Finally, rights associated with democracy such as electoral self-determination and an independent judiciary have declined. All of this is consistent with the global backsliding in democracy that we have witnessed in the 21stcentury and the rise in global inequality."

On the other hand, the report notes marked increases in respect for some rights, such as the right to a fair trial, protection from human trafficking, women's political rights, and freedom of domestic and foreign movement.

Why some rights are improving while others worsen is an open question, the researchers say.

"While we might expect all rights to rise or fall together, these findings suggest that the story of human rights protection requires a more nuanced analysis," the team writes. "There is no easy answer to this question, but the CIRIGHTS dataset gives us a place to start."

The team plans to expand the scope of the report as the dataset continues to expand. One area of future growth, the team says, is expanding the number of rights scored for the United States. Much of the current CIRIGHTS data comes from the U.S. State Department, which does not report on human rights within the U.S. That means the U.S. is not fully counted in the report card rankings.

"We hope that will change soon," Sylvester said. "As interest in the dataset increases, we would love to have scholars or organizations provide a report of rights in the U.S."

The team will also work to continue adding more rights to the dataset.

"We'd like to include every internationally recognized human right," Mark said. "That's our goal—to have a comprehensive global human rights dataset."

Ultimately, the team hopes that by revealing trends in human rights, CIRGHTS will enable policy interventions that improve people's lives worldwide. Along the way, Mark hopes that the project will inspire students at URI and elsewhere to get involved in human rights advocacy.

  More information: Report and dataset: cirights.com/

Provided by University of Rhode Island