

Do Global Publics View Human Rights Organizations as

Handmaidens of U.S. Empire?

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Abstract: 145 words

Scholars, policymakers and commentators are divided over the nature of the relationship between human rights organizations (HROs) and the U.S. government. Some view the two as closely aligned, others view HROs as principled geopolitical neutrals, while yet others views HROs as opposed to U.S. government policy. How do global publics view this relationship, however? Drawing on 9,380 face-to-face interviews with members of the public in Latin America, North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, and India, our *Human Rights Perception Polls* find no evidence that people perceive HROs as aligned with the U.S. government. Instead, they either perceive HROs as oppositional to the U.S., or as geopolitical neutrals. Our public opinion data does not shed direct light on the *actual* state of HRO-U.S. government relations, but our findings do demonstrate that ordinary people, across world regions, do not perceive human rights groups as “handmaidens” of U.S. foreign policy.

I. Introduction

In spring 2014, a group of prominent commentators slammed the New-York based Human Rights Watch (HRW) for allegedly maintaining a “revolving door” with the United States (U.S.) government.¹ Exhibit A, the critics said, was Tom Malinowski, a senior staffer who joined HRW in 2001 after seven years with the U.S. government, and then returned to federal service in 2013 as director of the State Department’s Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor.² This and similar cases, the critics said, made HRW appear overly cozy with the global hegemon. Given “the impact of global perceptions on HRW’s ability to carry out its work,” the critics wrote, even “the appearance of [this kind of] impropriety” undermined the organization’s credibility. HRW leaders vigorously disputed the charge,³ but readily acknowledge that “the stigma of ‘western imposition’” often impedes their advocacy efforts as well as those of other international human rights organizations (IHROs).⁴

To bolster their aura of geopolitical neutrality, HRW has ramped up criticism of U.S. policies, opened new offices outside North America, and hired more international staff.⁵ Other IHROs are doing the same, including Amnesty International, whose “moving closer to the ground” strategy is relocating portions of its International Secretariat from London to cities in the global South, and ActionAid, a rights-based development assistance agency that moved its headquarters from London to Johannesburg in 2001.⁶ Major private human rights funders,

¹ Open letter to HRW, dated May 12, 2014, signed by two Nobel Peace laureates, a former United Nations (U.N.) Assistant Secretary General, and many others. <http://www.alternet.org/world/nobel-peace-laureates-human-rights-watch-close-your-revolving-door-us-government?paging=off#bookmark>. See also (Bhatt, 2013).

² See http://www.opensecrets.org/revolving/rev_summary.php?id=78011.

³ Kenneth Roth, “Letter to Nobel Laureates,” undated, available online at <http://www.hrw.org/node/126019>.

⁴ (Levine, 2014; Roth & Hicks, 2013; Stroup, 2012, pp. 143-144).

⁵ (Levine, 2014; Ken Roth & Hicks, 2013).

⁶ (Moorehead & Clark, 2015; Shetty, 2015).

including the Open Society Foundation and Ford Foundation, have eagerly supported these efforts, investing substantial funds in promoting IHROs' real and perceived distance from the global centers of Western political, cultural, and economic power.⁷

The critics' broadside against HRW's alleged closeness to the U.S. government is only one of many such exchanges in a decades-old debate: whose geopolitical interests do human rights groups *really* serve? Human rights organizations often chastise governments and non-state actors for violations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and its associated treaties, using the "naming and shaming" techniques for which they have become famous (Hafner-Burton, 2008; Ron, Ramos, & Rodgers, 2005). When they do this, however, are they acting as geopolitically impartial neutrals advancing universal rules, as many international relations theorists believe (Keck & Sikkink, 1998; Price, 2003)? Or, perhaps, are they tacitly furthering the geopolitical interests of the U.S., which—some claim—uses human rights language to delegitimize its political rivals, justify its military interventions, and render the world safe for its hegemony (Chandler, 2005; Hopgood, 2013; Mutua, 2001)? Or, as still others claim, are HROs engaged in a form of global "soft balancing" (Friedman & Long, 2015; Pape, 2005), siding with all manner of "counter-hegemonic" forces such as post-colonial intellectuals, anti-globalization activists, recalcitrant states, and other opponents of U.S. primacy (Davenport, 2005; Rajagopal, 2006; Sousa Santos & Rodriguez-Garavita, 2005)?

Importantly, all sides in this debate implicitly assume that global public opinion is on their side, since to believe otherwise is to suggest HROs have somehow deceived vast numbers or ordinary people worldwide. Until now, however, there has been little systematic investigation of global publics' *actual* perceptions towards HROs' relations with the U.S. government. Pollsters regularly ask publics for their views of the U.S., noting all manner of reputational

⁷ (Ford Foundation, 2013; Strom, 2010).

challenges following the 2003 invasion of Iraq, particularly in Islamic-majority countries.⁸ A few have also asked publics for their evaluations of human rights principles and organizations.⁹ Until now, however, none have *simultaneously* asked about attitudes towards HROs and the U.S. government. As a result, we do not know if, when and how public attitudes towards the one are associated with attitudes towards the other.

Similarly, we have little data on whether publics view *international* and *local* HROs in the same way. Do publics paint both types with the same brush, or do they distinguish between them? Do publics regard *local* HROs (LHROs) as closer to domestic constituencies and interests, more “grassroots” and “of the people”? *International* HROs (IHROs) have understandably been the focus of most international relations scholarship,¹⁰ but scholars increasingly recognize that *local* HROs are equally, if not more, vital to global rights diffusion.¹¹ These rights-inclined members of domestic civil society convey information about norms, abuses, and potential remedies worldwide; provide local context for global audiences; and translate—linguistically, conceptually, and culturally—universal rights into local idiom. Often, LHROs are the most tangible interface between international human rights norms, domestic publics, and individual

⁸ For theoretical approaches to anti-Americanism, (Katzenstein & Keohane, 2007); global trends and analysis, (Chiozza, 2009); Latin America, (Baker & Cupery, 2013); the Middle East, (Blaydes & Linzer, 2012).

⁹ For attitudes towards human rights, (Koo, Cheong, & Ramirez, 2015; WorldPublicOpinion.org, 2008). For attitudes towards HROs see (Ron & Crow, 2015; Scheindlin, 2015). None of these ask about HROs *and* the U.S., however.

¹⁰ (Carpenter, 2014; Hopgood, 2006; Keck & Sikkink, 1998; Murdie & Bhasin, 2011; Price, 2003; Ron et al., 2005; Stroup, 2012; Wapner, 1996; Wong, 2012).

¹¹ (Berkovitch & Gordon, 2008; Bob, 2005; Henderson, 2003; Hertel, 2006; Keck & Sikkink, 1998; Merry, 2006; Murdie, 2014; Simmons, 2009).

governments; LHROs are a key site where the “rubber” of international norms meets the “road” of domestic politics.¹²

To investigate the public’s understanding of HROs’ relationship with the U.S. government, we administered our *Human Rights Perceptions Poll* to 9,380 persons through face-to-face interviews in six countries located in Latin America, North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, and South Asia. We also interviewed a purposive sample of 128 human rights activists and key informants from 60 countries in the global South, asking for their thoughts on how domestic publics viewed them and their work. In our surveys of the general public, we sampled national or sub-national publics, asking about trust in HROs and in the U.S. government. In India, Morocco, and Nigeria, we surveyed adults living in and around major financial and political centers (Mumbai, Rabat/Casablanca, and Lagos); in Colombia, Ecuador, and Mexico, the surveys are nationally representative.

Our evidence offers no support for the notion that publics regard HROs as allies, tacit or otherwise, of the U.S. government. In four of six locales (and when we pool all countries into a single sample), public trust in local HROs is negatively and significantly associated with trust in the U.S. government. The same is true for international HROs in our three Latin American cases, and in the overall, pooled sample. In none of our cases across world regions is public trust in HROs positively associated with public trust in the U.S. government. This suggests that publics either view HROs as geopolitical neutrals, or as counter-hegemonic “soft balancers” against U.S. primacy. These findings, we believe, drive one nail into the coffin of scholarly skepticism towards HROs on grounds of perceived geopolitical bias. Though our data shed no light on the actual state of relations between HROs and the U.S. government – to investigate that dynamic,

¹² IR scholarship on LHROs includes (Berkovitch & Gordon, 2008; Bob, 2005; Hertel, 2006; Sundstrom, 2006).

we require a different research method – our polls do show that publics do not perceive HROs and the U.S. government as political allies.

We begin by demonstrating the statistical association between public *trust* in HROs and *mistrust* in the U.S. government in Latin America. This is a “most likely” case, as HROs working in and on Latin America have historically opposed U.S.-supported state repression by right wing authoritarians (Cleary, 1997; Sikkink, 2007). If people *anywhere* are likely to view HROs as neutral or opposed to U.S. primacy, they will do so here. Controlling for other relevant factors, we find exactly that: public mistrust in the U.S. government in Colombia, Ecuador and Mexico is associated with greater *trust* in both international and local HROs.

Extending our investigation to other world regions offers a more demanding test, given their broader variety of cultural, religious, historical, and geostrategic conditions. Still, even outside Latin America we found no positive associations between public trust in the U.S. government and in HROs (though we observed a negative relationship only in Morocco). HRW’s critics may, or may not, be correct in alleging the New York-based organization’s policies and strategies are overly connected with those of the U.S. government. As far the general public in our six areas of investigation are concerned, however, HROs have little reason for concern, as most people do not perceive them as U.S. allies.

Proponents of U.S. soft power, however, *should* be concerned (Nye, 2004). If one believes the U.S. government is indeed a global rights promoter, it should be discomfiting to learn that this view is *not* widely shared by ordinary people worldwide.

II. The U.S. government and HROs: Three Interpretations of a Relationship

Scholars offer at least three different interpretations of HROs’ relations with the U.S. government and its foreign policy. The first views HROs as “handmaidens” of American empire,

collaborating, for better or for worse, with Washington and its allies. The second views HROs as anti-imperial “bulwarks,” opposing Washington’s geopolitical designs and hegemony. The third views HROs as principled neutrals across all manner of global struggles, adhering to universal principles and processes, rather than partisan political positions.

HROs as handmaidens of empire: Critics view HROs’ alleged closeness to Washington with distaste; advocates, with approval. Both sides agree, however, that the U.S. and HROs enjoy warm strategic and tactical relations. One scholar dates this alleged close relationship to the early 1990s, when U.S. policymakers realized “the utility of human rights rhetoric for legitimating foreign policy,” and HRO leaders decided “the chance to use a liberal hegemon to enshrine global norms was too good to miss” (Hopgood 2013, pp. 99-102).¹³ Others trace it to the immediate post-Vietnam war period, when Washington policymakers resolved to replace anti-communism with human rights as their justification of choice for global interventions.¹⁴ Still others say the U.S. began emphasizing human rights in its foreign policy to paper over domestic inequities and debates (Chandler, 2005), while still others point to America’s principled opposition to Soviet Bloc repression (Thomas 2001).

The critical variant of this interpretation believes HROs violate their own ethical code of neutrality in pursued of narrow, self-seeking, organizational gain. HROs use their close relationship with the U.S. to amass policy influence, secure financial donations, and insinuate themselves into the center of global political debates.¹⁵ U.S. agencies, in turn, use HROs to pummel geopolitical rivals, boost Washington’s political image, and make the world safe for U.S. political, cultural, and economic hegemony.

¹³ Hopgood’s analysis focuses on IHROs, rather than LHROs.

¹⁴ (Peck, 2011; Rajagopal, 2006).

¹⁵ (De Sousa Santos & Rodríguez-Garavito, 2006).

Concerns of this sort are particularly prevalent among world leaders opposed to U.S. policy. Former Venezuela leader Hugo Chavez, for example, complained in 2010 that liberal NGOs in his country were “financed with millions and millions of dollars from the Yankee empire” which had tasked them with political destabilization (AP, 2010). Ecuador’s leader Rafael Correa, similarly, has “repeatedly accused domestic NGOs” of “being agents of U.S. influence,” labeling U.S. support for local civil society as “the ‘strategy of empires’” (Carothers and Brechenmacher 2014, p.11). Russia’s Vladimir Putin has made similar arguments (Herszenhorn & Barry, 2012),¹⁶ as have leaders in Egypt (Hubbard, 2013), Pakistan (Haider, 2014), and India (Aurora, 2015). Many of these concerns focus on U.S. financial aid to locally operating NGOs, the most politically salient of which are often domestic HROs (Dupuy, Ron and Prakash 2015, 2016).

Our interviews with human rights workers from 60 countries indicate that many local rights activists receive similar criticism. One respondent from Yemen, for example, told us that people in his country “often say the concept [of human rights] is directly imported from America, because America wants to colonize us.”¹⁷ A Jordanian rights worker funded by the US Agency for International Development (USAID) told us people regularly asked him, “Why are they giving you money? Since when are the Americans interested in helping us?”¹⁸ In Indonesia, a third said, people distrust “human rights: because they view it as “neo-imperialism.”¹⁹

Other commentators view the alleged U.S.-HRO collaboration with enthusiasm. Proponents of U.S. “soft power,” for example, believe that Washington’s support for HROs is good both for the world *and* for America (Nye, 2004). The U.S. is a global human rights steward,

¹⁶ (Henderson, 2011; Herszenhorn & Barry, 2011).

¹⁷ GB-16-2006

¹⁸ SP-01-2008.

¹⁹ JR-05-2007.

in this view, promoting respect for universal norms through its support for international treaties, free trade, open markets, civil society, and democratization (Hafner-Burton, 2013). The U.S. may intervene militarily worldwide, but it does so for good reason, and in a manner respectful of international rights norms (Kahl, 2007). In fact, scholars say, close U.S.-HRO relations are part of a much broader alliance between Washington and the country's liberal NGO sector, whose work for global humanitarian assistance, democratization, and civil society has long been a bedrock of its transnationally oriented civil society (Stroup, 2012).

HROs as bulwarks against the U.S.: A second interpretation views HROs as generally arrayed *against* U.S. interests and efforts, and while some view this putative tension enthusiastically, others view it with dismay. The notion that HROs are somehow “counter-hegemonic” actors on a global scale has a particularly long history in Latin America, where rights groups long battled U.S.-backed authoritarians (Sikkink, 2007). Critical legal scholars also argue that rights activists often stand alongside social movements resisting the global tide of neoliberalism imposed by Washington and its allies (Rajagopal, 2006; Santos & Rodriguez-Garavito, 2006). HROs, in this view, struggle *with* popular activists *against* multinational corporations, mining interests, and U.S.-allied states, all of which are backed by the State Department, Pentagon, and U.S.-controlled international agencies such as the International Monetary Fund.

Other scholars agree HROs are in conflict with the U.S. government, but view this tension with concern, rather than approval. Davenport (2005, p.114), for example, views INGOs (and, presumably, HROs) as promoters of a “new diplomacy” that seeks to “alter the world’s political power structure ... [to] present real threats to American sovereignty and values.” Liberal non-state actors, he argues, tie U.S. power in knots through constraining institutions such as the International Criminal Court, while others complain that U.S. geopolitical rivals use international

norms, institutions, and law (including human rights, presumably), to thwart U.S. policy. This is “soft balancing” (Pape, 2005), a non-military form of anti-American and anti-hegemonic resistance. Members of the second Bush administration were particularly prone to such views, given harsh HRO criticisms of their global security policies and the U.S.-led “war on terror” (Berger, 2011).

HROs as Geopolitical Neutrals: A third group of commentators identifies HROs as geopolitical neutrals, a view long advocated by international HROs themselves. During the Cold War, for example, the London-based Amnesty International sought to select prisoners of conscience in equal measure from the Soviet, Western, and non-aligned blocs, and required volunteers to advocate against abuses in countries *other* than their own. Today, Amnesty still swears independence from “any government, political ideology, economic interest or religion,”²⁰ as does its New York-based counterpart, HRW.²¹ During the Cold War, the latter expressed this commitment through the near-simultaneous creation of a Helsinki division focused on abuses by the Soviet Union and its allies, and an Americas division concerned with violations by U.S.-backed allies in Latin America.²²

Indeed, some scholars claim that NGOs (and HROs) are globally influential precisely *because* of this neutrality.²³ Richard Falk, for example, says NGOs carry weight in world politics because they hold states responsible to *all* of humanity, freeing themselves “from the interests, biases, and habitual attitudes of any particular place or nation ...”²⁴ Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, similarly, argue that “the power of the human rights idea (in the 1970s and 1980s) was

²⁰ <http://www.amnesty.org/en/who-we-are>, last accessed on October 17, 2014.

²¹ <http://www.hrw.org/about>, last accessed on October 7, 2014.

²² Stroup, 2012.

²³ Keck & Sikkink, 1998; Murdie, 2014; Price, 2003; Wapner 1996.

²⁴ Quoted in Wapner, 1996, p.144.

partly the result of [HROs'] ... principled neutrality,"²⁵ while Richard Price writes that NGOs have created human rights-friendly norms *despite* stiff U.S. government opposition.²⁶ NGOs and HROs differ from transnational diaspora and solidarity groups, in this view, because they are loyal to *universal principles*, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and *universal institutions and processes*, such as the United Nations and the International Criminal Court.²⁷ Partisan support for the interests of geographically, politically, ideologically, or ethnically specific groups, these scholars say, is rare among HROs, dedicated as these groups are to principled, universal, and non-discriminatory standards.

We have thus identified three distinct interpretations of the relationship between HROs and U.S. government. One views HROs as siding *with* official Washington, for better or for worse; the other views HROs as arrayed *against* the U.S. and its allies; while the third views HROs as geopolitically impartial. To which of these views do global publics subscribe?

In six countries and four world regions, we find no evidence that ordinary people perceive HROs as allied to the U.S. government. Instead, most view HROs as either counter-hegemonic or geopolitically neutral.

Will Publics Distinguish Between International and Domestic Groups?

Before turning to our evidence, consider this question: do publics distinguish between local and international HROs? Although most international relations theorists focus on transnational NGOs, there is reason to believe publics view both domestic and global groups similarly. The “gatekeeper” theory of transnational civil society, for example, argues that

²⁵ Keck and Sikkink 1998, p. 90.

²⁶ (Price, 2003). See also Murdie 2014, chapter 2.

²⁷ Of course, international relations scholars do recognize that IHROs may have unacknowledged and unintended reporting biases due to structural factors (Cole, 2010; Hafner-Burton & Ron, 2013).

international NGOs are indispensable conduits for local groups seeking global attention and resources. In return for granting transnational access, however, international NGOs oblige the local groups to conform with a handful of globally sanctioned discourses, many of which are human rights-related (Bob, 2005; Carpenter, 2014). The international groups set the discursive agenda, and local organizations adapt accordingly. If true, publics should perceive both international and domestic HROs similarly.

Scholars also note that both domestic and international HROs are funded by similar sources; private foundations in the U.S. and Europe, bilateral Western aid agencies, and international organizations, such as the U.N.²⁸ These shared patterns of resource mobilization should lead to institutional and organizational isomorphism, prompting publics to view local and international HROs as essentially alike.²⁹ The “world society” school of scholarship, moreover, suggests that all HROs draw on similar narratives of modernity, equality, liberalism, and individualism, secularized versions of a Christian worldview (Beck, Drori, & Meyer, 2012; Meyer, Boli, Thomas, & Ramirez, 1997). Once again, this shared cultural heritage should push international and domestic HROs to behave, and be perceived, similarly.

Finally, rights leaders of all kinds insist that local and international groups work closely together. HRW executive director Ken Roth, for example, writes that “[T]he global human rights movement has long been a partnership between international groups and their national and local counterparts.” (Roth, 2014) Ford Foundation human rights officer Louis Bickford, similarly, says

²⁸ For the dependence of local HROs on international donors, see (Berkovitch & Gordon, 2008; Okafor, 2006; Ron, Pandya, & Crow, 2016). For the dominance of U.S. and, to a lesser extent European, foundations in private human rights giving, see (Lawrence & Dobson, 2013). For the integration of human rights considerations into the civil society, democratization and development packages of major development assistance agencies, see Kinornay, Ron and Carpenter, 2012.

²⁹ For the notion of institutional isomorphism, see (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991)

international and local HROs are “converging towards the global middle” (Bickford, 2014). These collaborations should, in theory, prompt global publics to view international and domestic HROs similarly.

Yet other scholars suggest publics may regard local groups more positively, because the locals are more connected to domestic ideas, people, and narratives (De Sousa Santos & Rodríguez-Garavito, 2006; Rajagopal, 2006). Nationalism, moreover, remains a potent global cultural force (Inglehart & Baker, 2000), and this should prompt publics to view locally based groups as more trustworthy and likeable than their foreign-based counterparts. If so, publics may view LHROs, as more independent of the U.S. than IHROs.

In sum, there are good reasons to suspect that publics could view local and international HROs as *either* similar *or* as different with respect to their relations with the U.S. government.

III. Case Selection

To investigate, we collected original public opinion data in six countries and four world regions, using a case selection strategy guided first by the scope conditions necessary to produce significant findings, and then, secondly, by a hybrid “most different systems” (MDS) research design (Przeworski & Teune, 1970). First, we examine three cases from Latin America, a region “most likely” to manifest strong associations between public attitudes toward the U.S. and HROs, given its long history of U.S. military and political engagement. Within that region, however, we chose three countries whose governments have very different stances towards the U.S. government: Colombia, Ecuador, and Mexico. If we observe a similar relationship between public support for the U.S. government and HROs in countries where public trust in the U.S. government is lower (Ecuador), middling (Mexico), and higher (Colombia), our confidence in the generalizability of this relationship should be higher.

Next, we combined these within-region cases with cross-regional variation, maximizing key differences across cases located in four distinct world regions. Again, observing similar relationships between attitudes toward the U.S. government and in LHROs in vastly different countries constitutes *prima facie* evidence for broader generalizability.

Scope Conditions

To conduct meaningful public opinion surveys on HRO-U.S. government relations, we focus on countries with 1) significant human rights problems; 2) relatively open political and media environments, 3) populations aware of, and willing to talk about, human rights problems, and 4) a substantial, non-governmental, human rights community. Minus sufficient freedom and information to develop informed opinions, surveys on public attitudes towards HROs and the U.S. might not be meaningful. Moreover, conducting human rights polls in highly repressive environments could put both surveyors and respondents at risk.

All six countries in our study—Colombia, Ecuador, India, Mexico, Morocco and Nigeria—satisfy these basic scope conditions. On the one hand, human rights conditions in all six were poor. As Table 1 (“Repression”) shows, in 2011 all six scored between 0 and 4 on CIRI’s “physical integrity rights index,”³⁰ a measure ranging from 0 (“no respect at all”) to 8 (“full respect”) that assesses government respect for the right not to be tortured, disappeared, killed, or arbitrarily imprisoned.

³⁰ CIRI Human Rights Data Project: <http://www.humanrightsdata.com/p/data-documentation.html>; the last year available is 2011.

Table 1. Scope Conditions for Case Selection: Sizeable LHRO Populations, Human Rights Problems, Freedom of Expression

Case	Total No. LHROs	Regime (-10-10; -10=least open)	Repression (0-8; 0=most repressive)	Empowerment (0-14; 0=least empowered)	Media Freedom (0-100; 100=least free)
Colombia	—	7	4	10	53
Ecuador	—	5	4	9	58
India	57 total Mumbai (30 interviewed)	9	0	7	37
Morocco	56 total Rabat & Casablanca (30 interviewed)	-4	4	5	68
Mexico	75 total Mexico City & San Cristobal (45 interviewed)	8	3	8	61
Nigeria	64 total Lagos (30 interviewed)	4	2	7	51
Source:	Authors' research <i>in situ</i>	Polity IV	CIRI Physical Integrity Index	CIRI New Empowerment Rights Index	Freedom House

On the other hand, all countries had sufficiently open political systems and freedom of press to permit relatively open discussion of human rights abuses. On one widely used measure of “regime openness,” the Polity IV scale (-10, “least politically open,” to +10, “most politically open”),³¹ our countries ranged from -4 (Morocco) to 9 (India) in the years the surveys were

³¹ Polity IV dataset: <http://www.systemicpeace.org/inscrdata.html>.

taken (see Table 1). Morocco was an outlier due to its monarchical political system, but the actual state of political discourse in 2012, according to Moroccan HROs, was such that they *could* speak openly about most things, save for the political fate of the Western Sahara, and the king's role in Moroccan politics.

These countries' "media freedom" scores on Freedom House's scale of 0 ("most free") to 100, ("least free") ranged from 68 (Morocco) to 37 (India).³² Similarly, the CIRI New Empowerment Rights Index, which measures government respect for freedom of speech, assembly, labor rights, and religion (0, "no respect," to 14, "full respect"), our countries range from 5 (Morocco) to 10 (Colombia).

Given these relatively open political environments, publics in all six countries spoke candidly about domestic human rights conditions. When asked, "How much respect is there for individual human rights in [your country]," many respondents told us (and the World Values Survey team) that there was either "none at all" or "not much." More precisely, the percentage of respondents supplying one of those answers ranges from a high of 80% in Mumbai and its rural environs, to 78% in Colombia; 59% in Lagos and rural environs; 51% in Mexico; 47% in Rabat/Casablanca and rural environs; and 38% in Ecuador.³³

Finally, all six countries were home to substantial non-governmental rights communities. Research teams have identified 50 local HROs in Mexico City, 56 in Rabat and Casablanca, 57 in Mumbai, and 64 in Lagos, as well as significant numbers in Colombia or Ecuador.³⁴

³² Freedom House data: <https://freedomhouse.org>.

³³ Question asked in Mumbai and Rabat/Casablanca in 2012, and in Lagos in 2014. World Values Survey data for Colombia (2012), Ecuador (2013) and Mexico (2012) available at <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSONline.jsp>.

³⁴ For the first four countries, see Ron, Golden, Crow and Pandya (forthcoming). For Colombian LHROs, see "Derechos Humanos Equipo Nizkor" (<http://www.derechos.org/nizkor/colombia/ong.html>); "Rendir Cuentas";

All six cases, in other words, satisfy our scope conditions: they have severe human rights problems, moderately open political and media environments, public awareness of human rights concerns, coupled with a willingness to discuss those openly, and substantial, non-governmental, HRO communities.

Beyond these similarities, however, we varied our cases across and within region, and by government relations with the U.S.; dominant language and religion; and colonial history. By adopting this aspect of the “least similar” research design, we highlight the importance of similar findings in different contexts (Gerring, 2007). Since our findings are remarkably consistent *in spite* of these differences, we believe that our findings are, likely, generalizable beyond the cases we examine, and perhaps even beyond the countries that meet our scope conditions. And yet even if our findings apply only to scope condition countries, that is still a lot; by our count, 119 countries are relatively democratic (scoring 0 or higher on Polity IV in 2012), 105 suffer serious rights abuses (5 or lower on CIRI Physical Integrity Index), and 62 meet both conditions.

Within-Region Variation

We began by sampling three countries within Latin America, a region with long experience of rights-based politics and U.S. intervention (Hafner-Burton & Ron, 2013; Sikkink, 2007). Latin America has also enjoyed unique U.S. government ties due to geographic proximity, trade, and intense U.S. military, political, and economic engagement (McPherson, 2006). We expect Latin American publics will be especially *disinclined* towards viewing HROs as U.S. government allies,

http://rendircuentas.org/2011/01/colombia_nac1/; and in the military manual, “Know Our Enemy” (“*Conozcamos a nuestro enemigo*”); <http://www.monografias.com/trabajos/derhumcol/derhumcol.shtml>. For Ecuador, see “Derechos Humanos Equipo Nizkor” and the “Confederación Ecuatoriana de OSC” (<http://www.confederacionecuatorianaosc.org>).

Yet there are differences in the way Latin American governments are situated vis-à-vis the U.S. Diplomatic and military relations range from the very close (Colombia), to the ambivalent (Mexico), to the antagonistic (Ecuador). Though elites play important roles in shaping public opinion (Druckman & Nelson, 2003), official relations with the U.S. are not a proxy for general attitudes toward the U.S. Our Latin American cases, though, exhibit important variation on this score as well. Colombia averages .51 on our 0 (no trust) to 1 (maximum trust) scale in Colombia; Mexico, .47; and Ecuador, .44 (see Figure 1). These differences are significant statistically (at 95%), and important substantively. Theoretically, public trust in the U.S. is bounded by 0 and 1, but the effective range in our samples is much smaller: a low of .24 in Morocco to .59 in Nigeria. The difference between Colombia and Ecuador, .07, is about 20% of that effective range.

The differences between the Latin American countries, then, have a Goldilocks quality to them: not too small to reveal contrasts among national publics, but not too large to refute our assertion of broad cultural and historical similarities between the countries. By sampling populations in all three countries, we pose a stronger test of hypotheses about the publics' views of HRO/U.S. government relations. If publics in these three countries hold similar views *despite* varying government-to-government relations, this strengthens our finding's generalizability, at least for Latin America.

Cross-Case Variations

World region: World regions are important units of analysis (Katzenstein, 2005). To vary on this , we draw our three additional other cases from separate world regions: South Asia, North Africa, and Sub-Saharan Africa. If we discover cross-regional similarities, we have *prima facie*

evidence of a potentially global trend. *Official Relations with the U.S.:* Public attitudes are influenced by elite opinion, especially on international affairs (Druckman & Nelson, 2003). To obtain variation, we sampled from countries whose governments have different relations with the U.S. As noted above, this strategy is particularly important in Latin America, where we otherwise expect strong region-wide trends. The U.S. has been “a longtime ally” of Bogotá with “a substantial investment in Plan Colombia,” and an aid package of over \$8 billion, 2002-2012, to combat drugs (Line, 2012), including \$644 million in 2012 alone.³⁵ Colombia enjoys a special relationship with America, rivaling that of the U.K.

In Ecuador, by contrast, President Rafael Correa’s government has consistently criticized the U.S. since coming to power in 2007. “U.S. economic and military power has been among Correa’s favorite targets” (Shifter, 2014), and Ecuador’s 2012 U.S. aid package was a paltry \$26 million. Mexico is situated between these two extremes, with “an almost reflexive bristle” towards the U.S. as well as close economic, diplomatic, and security ties (O’Neil, 2013). In 2012, Mexico received \$209.4 million in U.S. aid, a third of Colombia’s, but much larger than Ecuador’s. Many Mexican migrants live in the U.S. (11.6 million), and U.S.-Mexico migration is one of the oldest and most voluminous regular flows worldwide.³⁶ Thus while Mexico’s relationship with the U.S. government is not nearly as close as Colombia’s, it is warmer than Ecuador’s.

Governments in our other three cases have less intense U.S. ties, but none are indifferent. Until the Cold War’s end, India’s stance towards Washington was frosty, but diplomatic, economic and military ties grew closer in the early 1990s (Mohan, 2006), and in 2008, the two struck a landmark nuclear agreement (Chacko, 2014). Morocco has been a consistent U.S. ally,

³⁵ USAID data available at <https://eads.usaid.gov/gbk/data/greenbook.cfm>.

³⁶ <http://www.statista.com/statistics/272994/largest-migration-flows-between-countries>

first against Communism and then against radical Islam (Zoubir & Benabdallah-Gambier, 2005); in return, Washington offers Rabat copious diplomatic support. Nigerian relations with the U.S. improved after the transition to civilian rule in 1999, and today, it is one of the largest African recipients of U.S. aid (\$336 million in 2012). Its military, moreover, routinely cooperates with U.S. forces in the fight against Islamist militants. Although Washington's relations with Abuja are not nearly as warm as with Bogotá or Delhi, they are better than with Quito.. Our cases, in other words, run the gamut of U.S. relations, ranging from strong opponents (Ecuador) to close allies (Colombia), with the bulk in between. In contrast to Latin America, moreover, public opinion and official relations diverge at least in Morocco, where citizens are highly skeptical of the U.S. government (trust of .24) and India, where public opinion does not yet reflect the thaw in Indo-American relations (trust of .42).

Religion, Colonial History, and Language: Our cases also vary by religion, colonial history, and language.³⁷ Our three Latin American cases are largely Catholic and Spanish-speaking, but Rabat and Casablanca are overwhelmingly Sunni Muslim and Arabic-speaking, with a substantial French-speaking minority (45% of our sample). Lagos is split between (mostly Evangelical) Christians (65% of our sample) and Sunni Muslims (34%), and its residents speak a variety of languages, including, for roughly 84% percent, the English of its former British rulers. Mumbai and its rural surroundings are largely Hindu (77% of our sample, weighted to local population totals), with smaller Muslim (13%) and Christian (2%) minorities. Dominant languages include Marathi (88%), Hindi (87%), and Gujarati (10%), with a smattering of English (3%).³⁸

³⁷ All three are key macro social science variables.

³⁸ Percentages sum to more than 100% because many in Mumbai are multilingual.

All six of our cases thus conform to our basic scope conditions, while otherwise varying on potential explanatory factors. As a result, any cross-case findings are particularly noteworthy. Furthermore, our Latin American cases allow us to probe the public's assessment of the U.S. government and HROs in a region where U.S. political influence is likely to intensify this relationship. Having three cases from the same region, moreover, allows us to control for cultural similarities such as religion and language. But since the Latin American countries also differ in their relationships with Washington, they incorporate elements of a “most similar systems” (MSS) design, in which cases are similar on all factors save one key variable. Our case selection thus includes a Latin American “most similar” sample nested within a larger, cross-regional, “most different” sample.

IV. Data

Our *Human Rights Perception Polls* include nationally representative face-to-face surveys in Mexico ($N=2,398$), Colombia ($N=1,698$), and Ecuador ($N=1,499$), along with regionally representative face-to-face surveys in Rabat and Casablanca and their rural environs within a 70 km radius ($N=1,100$); in Mumbai and the rural areas of the surrounding Maharashtra State ($N=1,680$); and in Lagos and the surrounding rural areas of Oyo and Ogun States ($N=1,000$). We oversampled Christians and Buddhists in Mumbai, and rural residents in India, Morocco, and Nigeria. We conducted the Ecuadoran and Mexican (2012) and Colombian (2013) surveys through the *Americas and the World* project, based at CIDE in Mexico City, and conducted the Rabat/Casablanca (2012), Mumbai (late 2012-early 2013) and Lagos (2014) surveys directly with private polling companies. At least one of us worked directly, on site, with enumerators to train, pilot, and design the sample.

In three cases, our reliance on sub-regional rather than national surveys limits our claims to those cities and their rural environs. These major city-and-surrounding-area surveys are useful sites for investigation, however, because they are the countries' most influential political and/or financial centers. As such, they are key sites for human rights lobbying, activism, public education, popular mobilization, and fund raising. If HROs seek public support *anywhere* in these three countries, their initial and most important points of entry are likely to include the strategically important cities Mumbai, Rabat, Casablanca, and Lagos.

Dependent Variable: Trust in International and Local HROs

Only a handful of polls have asked publics for their attitudes towards, and trust in, domestic and international rights organizations. The Edelman global consulting firm, for example, has occasionally asked a convenience sample of Internet users and undefined "opinion leaders" for their trust in NGOs, including Amnesty International.³⁹ In Israel, a 2011 poll of roughly 600 Jewish Israelis found that 41% were favorably inclined towards HROs, although support declined sharply for groups involved with Palestinian rights.⁴⁰ In Kenya, a 2015 Freedom House poll found that roughly half the sample trusted human rights organizations (Freedom House, 2015). The World Values Survey (WVS) asked representative samples in roughly 60 countries for their "confidence in charitable or humanitarian organizations," and found that about 60%, on average, had either "a great deal" or "quite a lot."⁴¹ The WVS did not ask specifically about HROs, however.

³⁹ See <http://www.edelman.com/insights/intellectual-property/2015-edelman-trust-barometer/trust-and-innovation-edelman-trust-barometer/executive-summary/>.

⁴⁰ For "human rights groups in general." When asked about LHROs working on Palestinian issues, public support among Israeli Jews dropped to 20% (Scheidlin, 2015).

⁴¹ Question V145 in Round 5, and question V124 in Round 6. See <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/>.

Cross-national survey researchers have ample experience, however, in probing public attitudes towards, and trust in, other important organizations and institutions (Citrin & Luks, 2001; Newton & Norris, 2000; Torcal, Munoz, & Bonnet, 2011). Following the widely used, cross-nationally validated format, we asked respondents to rate their trust in a variety of institutions on an ordinal, 4-pt. scale. The question’s wording was, “Please tell me, how much trust do you place in each of the following institutions, groups, or persons; a lot, some, a little, or none?” Each respondent was asked to rate roughly 15 institutions (where the order was randomized) including “the U.S. government,” the “[respondent’s country] human rights organizations,” and “international human rights organizations.”⁴²

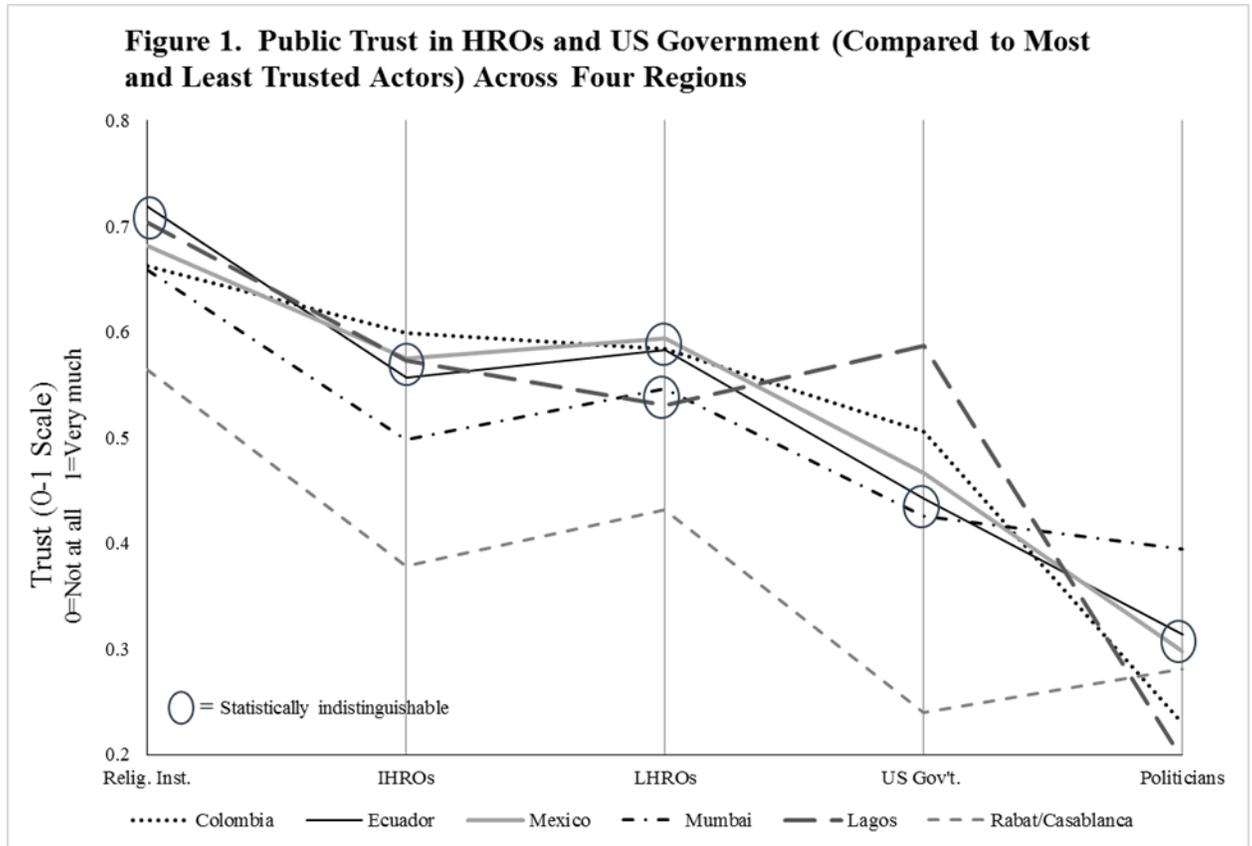
Figure 1 shows average trust in both local and international HROs, the U.S. government, and the most and least trusted actor in each country. Except where encircled by ovals, all differences between point estimates are statistically significant at the 95% level. Treating the ordinal response categories as equidistant (or “linear”)⁴³ and rescaling from 0 to 1, average trust in local rights groups (LHROs) is highest in the three Latin American countries, in a statistical dead heat around .59 (Mexico) or .58 (Colombia and Ecuador)—all above the scale’s midpoint of .5. It is lowest in Rabat/Casablanca and their rural environs, at .43 (below the midpoint). Mumbai (.55) and Lagos (.53), along with their rural environs, are tied in the middle. Average trust in LHROs across all six surveys is .55, with each sample weighted equally.

⁴² For exact question wordings, see Online Appendix A.

⁴³ In Mexico in 2012, we asked half the sample to evaluate their trust on a 1-7 scale, and the other half on 1-4. We combined these items and projected them onto a 0-1 scale. The means of the items, though statistically distinguishable (a difference of about .08 in each case), are reasonably similar. More important, the combined results are substantially the same as those yielded by both the 4- and 7-pt. scales in separate estimates. Thus, to use all available information and increase statistical power (and since it is not clear which of the two scales is “right”), we combined and rescaled the items in the manner just described. We also rescaled the dependent variables in all other countries (all on the 4-pt. scale) to make them comparable to Mexico.

The means for trust in international rights groups (IHROs) are similar, with the three Latin American countries, plus Lagos and its rural environs, topping the charts. Trust in these groups in Colombia is .60, slightly higher than in Mexico, Lagos (.57), and Ecuador (.56). Mumbai and its rural environs (.50) and Rabat/Casablanca and their rural environs (.39) round out the group. Overall, average public trust in international human rights groups is .54, with each sample weighted equally.

Overall, Figure 1 shows that public trust in HROs is comparatively high, closer to the broadly trusted religious institutions (with country averages ranging from .56 to .70, and an overall average of .66) than to the universally despised domestic politicians (range of .19 to .31, overall average of .29). Trust in LHROs and IHROs is similar, with the local groups enjoying slightly more trust, on average, than the internationals. Latin American trust levels tend to cluster together, while trust in Morocco, across a range of institutions, is lower than elsewhere.



If trust in HROs is a meaningful measure, it should be broadly concordant with data from other surveys, and internally consistent with our other trust measures. Happily, this is the case. In Round 6 of the World Values Survey, public confidence in “charitable organizations” (rescaled 0-1) averaged .58 for the same six countries, slightly higher than our .56 for LHROs, and .55 for IHROs. “Charitable organizations” are distinct from HROs, of course, and some of the WVS surveys were carried out before ours. Still, the closeness of our figures to those of a similar item on the well-known WVS gives us confidence. In addition, our questions on trust in local and international HROs correlate highly with our other trust questions, with “item-rest” correlations (i.e., between a given item and a summated scale of all the remaining items) of .50 and .52, respectively. Indeed, internal consistency among all the 15 trust items common to the six countries surveyed is high (Chronbach $\alpha = .85$, average inter-item correlation of .28). The

evidence clearly supports the existence of a single, latent trust variable; an exploratory factor analysis revealed a single factor that explained 90% of the variance. That is, respondents' trust tends to be of a piece: one tends to trust, or distrust, institutions *in toto*. This also jibes with patterns in the WVS data: a single, latent disposition to trust undergirds the nine WVS manifest indicators that also appear in our *Human Rights Perception Poll* surveys, where a single factor explains 94% of the variance.

Trust in local and international rights groups, then, clearly fit well with other trust items in our polls, and with the overall survey research tradition. But do people really know enough about human rights advocates and organizations to have reasonable opinions about them? Relatedly, given the diversity of organizations and policy areas, can researchers say anything worthwhile about so abstract a concept as “trust in HROs”? Again, we argue yes on both scores. People need not be experts on - or even especially knowledgeable about - a topic to have a meaningful opinion. That we can systematically predict trust in both international and local HROs across different national contexts is revealing. Similar levels of trust across the culturally similar Latin American countries (Figure 1) further buttress our confidence in the data.

Further, our “trust in HRO” questions were neither difficult to ask, nor difficult to understand. Members of our research team helped pilot the survey in all countries save Colombia and Ecuador, and saw no noticeable hesitations after these questions. We verified through back translation that conveying the word “trust” in other languages was unproblematic; the meaning is similar enough across cultures to allow for generalizations. Item response rates were in line with other items; across all countries, 92% of respondents had a substantive answer for trust in LHROSs and 87% for IHROs. This was not quite the 98% who responded for trust in the police, but more than those who responded regarding trust in multi-national corporations (82%).

Given that the term “human rights organizations” encompasses a broad variety of types and topics, is asking about trust in these groups *in general* meaningful? Which organizations and issues do people have in mind when they think about HROs? Survey researchers have long grappled with similar questions in related fields. They have concluded, for the most part, that generalizing about abstractions such as “trust” is indeed useful. In comparative democratization, for example, scholars have long debated the utility of the concept “satisfaction with democracy.”⁴⁴ One prominent interpretation, however, is that satisfaction with democracy is a “summary measure” into which the specific components of democracy—politicians, policy outcomes, institutions, democratic principles—enter to a greater or lesser extent.⁴⁵ Parallel arguments apply to other overarching concepts, including “feeling thermometers”⁴⁶ and “presidential approval” ratings in U.S. electoral studies.⁴⁷ Both are multivalent concepts, yet both have empirically definable content and meaningful statistical associations, including causal ones, with important electoral and policy outcomes. Reasoning analogously, trust in HROs is also a general evaluation of the human rights sector, a sort of “weighted average” of different organizations and policy domains.

Independent Variable: Trust in the U.S. Government

Our main independent variable measures “trust in the U.S. government,” asked as part of the same trust battery that included questions on “trust in HROs” (local and international). Extant scholarship on public attitudes toward the U.S. demonstrates global ambivalence. In general, publics admire American values, political institutions, technology, and cultural products—“what

⁴⁴ (Anderson & Guillory, 1997)

⁴⁵ (Crow, 2010)

⁴⁶ (Iyengar, 1980; Nelson, 2008)

⁴⁷ (Gronke & Newman, 2003)

America is”—but are often sharply critical of its policies toward other countries—“what America does” (Katzenstein & Keohane, 2007). Views toward U.S. foreign policy often fluctuate, moreover; for example, they dropped precipitously after the 2003 invasion of Iraq, especially in Muslim countries (Chiozza, 2009a). Attitudes towards the U.S. government also vary across countries and across national subgroups, making it more accurate to speak of “anti-Americanisms,” in the plural (Katzenstein & Keohane, 2007).

Ways of asking about attitudes toward the U.S. are just as variegated, ranging from general questions that elicit “favorable” or “unfavorable” opinions about the “United States” (e.g., the Pew Global Survey), to detailed batteries inquiring about specific U.S. characteristics and policies (e.g., the Zogby Arab Opinion Polls). Given our desire to isolate attitudes towards U.S. policy from broader attitudes about the U.S., as well as our disinterest in attitudes towards *specific* policies, we chart a middle course between Pew and Zogby, asking about respondent “trust in the U.S. government.”⁴⁸

Figure 1 shows average public trust in the U.S. government across all our six samples: .46 overall, with each sample weighted equally, ranging from a low of .24 in Rabat/Casablanca, to a high of .58 in Lagos. All our arguments about the validity of our indicator of trust in HROs are applicable, *a fortiori*, to trust in the U.S. government. The item was easy to understand (item response rate above 94%); it correlates well with other items in the trust battery; and it is systematically associated with other correlates. The question, then, is whether, and how, “trust in the U.S. government” is related to “trust in HROs,” controlling for other factors.

⁴⁸ This resembles the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) item: “I would now like to ask you how much you trust the governments of several countries [original emphasis].”

Hypotheses

If publics subscribe to the first interpretation of HRO-U.S. relations, they view HROs either as “imperial handmaidens” or, more positively, as geopolitical allies of a benevolent U.S. government. Given this, we would expect to find that:

H1: “Trust in HROs” is positively associated with “trust in the U.S. government.”

When publics view HROs as allied with the U.S. government, those who trust the U.S. as a force for global good in the world should also trust HROs. Conversely, those who distrust the U.S. government should also distrust HROs, whom they see as “handmaidens” of a global empire spearheaded by Washington and its henchmen. Whether people are opposed to U.S. hegemony or view it as beneficial, the alignment hypothesis will be reflected in a positive relationship between trust in the U.S. government and in HROs.

Theoretically, however, it could also be possible for someone to believe that HROs are geopolitically neutral—and trust them for that reason—while at the same time trusting the U.S. government. Thus, H1, were it to hold, does not provide conclusive proof of the alignment hypothesis, but merely suggests that publics *may* believe that HROs and the U.S. government are working together. For this reason, we argue that H1 is a necessary but insufficient condition for the HRO-U.S. alignment hypothesis. What H1 would show, though, is that publics *reject* the notion that HROs are fundamentally opposed to the U.S. government.

If publics *do* endorse the notion of HROs as opposed to the U.S. government—either because HROs are counter-hegemonic “soft balancers” or saboteurs of a U.S.-led policy of human rights stewardship—we would expect to find that:

H2. “Trust in HROs” is negatively associated with “trust in the U.S. government.”

Here, publics either *trust* HROs because they are working to prevent U.S. domination, or *mistrust* HROs because they undermine U.S. efforts to make the world more rights-respecting.

As with H1, however, H2 could *also* obtain if publics believe HROs are honest brokers. In this case, people might trust HROs because they believe these organizations make independent judgments in accordance with the facts. Some of these people, moreover, might also *mistrust* the U.S. government. In this case, these people would trust HROs but mistrust the U.S. government for its perceived pursuit of selfish interests. Though H2 is compatible with both opposition and neutrality, it is *not* compatible with alignment. What H2 would show, therefore, is that publics *reject* the notion that HROs are allied with the U.S. government.

In future research, we may ask a question to allow us to distinguish more sharply between geopolitical neutrality, alliance, and opposition: “What, in your view, is the relationship between HROs and the U.S. government? Oppositional, allied, or neutral?” We note, however, that many experts counsel *against* asking such direct questions because they are potentially leading, supplying respondents with answers they may never have pondered. These experts recommend instead that researchers infer relations by analyzing responses to separate questions (Weisberg, Krosnick, & Bowen, 1996: 168). In addition, a question (such as the one above) about the nature of the HRO–U.S. government relationship is cognitively burdensome. People may have a sense of their trust in HROs and, separately, in the U.S. government, but find a request to explicitly assess relations between the two confusing.

Finally, we expect that the powerful forces of economic and cultural convergence sweeping the global human rights sector will lead most people to view international and local HROs in the same way when it comes to their relations with the U.S. government:

H3. The direction of the association between “trust in HROs” and “trust in the U.S. government” will be identical for both local and international groups.

Control Variables

Other factors also shape public trust in HROs, including individuals' tendency to be more or less trusting overall. Since trust in some institutions often predicts trust in others (Listhaug, 1984), regressing the "raw" scores of trust in HROs on those of trust in the U.S. government may also capture an individual's tendency to trust *all* institutions. To isolate the specific effect of trust in the U.S. government, we average each respondent's trust over all the institutions and actors in the trust battery, and include an individual's "average trust" as a separate regressor. This purges evaluations of specific institutions from individuals' overall predisposition to trust.

We further control for factors indicated by scholarship and common sense. Our first group of controls estimates the effect of trust in national and international political institutions, including the country's chief executive and politicians, as well as the U.N. This helps us distinguish between attitudes toward political authority writ large, and towards the U.S. government specifically. Furthermore, prior research demonstrates that attitudes toward domestic political authority are negatively related to trust in local HROs (Ron and Crow, 2015).

Our second group of controls gauge respondent experience with rights language and organizations, including: 1) *exposure*, or how often respondents hear the phrase, "human rights" ("daily," "frequently," "sometimes," "rarely," or "never"); 2) *contact*, or whether the respondent has ever met a "human rights worker" (yes/no); and 3) *participation*, or whether respondents have "participated in the activities of a human rights organization" (yes/no). Exposure, contact, and participation are predictors of trust in local HROs (Ron and Crow, 2015), and are generally considered relevant to opinion formation and trust-building through social capital-creation (Mondak, Carmines, Huckfeldt, Mitchell, & Schraufnagel, 2007). Those who follow politics may

also be more familiar with the rights sector and its issues, and this may shape their attitudes toward HROs.⁴⁹

Our third group of controls relate to political partisanship, party identification and party participation. Partisanship is important because citizens often use party preferences as “information shortcuts,” taking “cues” from party leaders to evaluate candidates and form positions on issues (Popkin, 1991)—including, conceivably, human rights. We classified respondents into those who identify with the party in power, or with an opposition party (no party affiliation was reference category). We also asked whether respondents had “participated in the activities of a political party” (yes/no) to measure intensity of partisanship. Since political parties often take positions on human rights and the U.S., party identification is a potentially important source of attitudes toward HROs and the U.S. Opposition parties, in particular, may see HROs as allies against sitting governments (Dupuy, Ron, & Prakash, 2016).

A fourth group of control variables deals with religion, an increasingly salient factor in contemporary social science⁵⁰ Some suggest *membership in specific religions* render participants favorable or inimical to rights—e.g., the legacies of liberation theology might predispose Catholics favorably towards rights or liberal democracy (Trejo, 2009), while Muslims may reject HROs for reasons of geopolitics, theology, or social mores (Inglehart & Norris, 2003).⁵¹ Others suggest that religious opposition to gender equality, reproductive rights, and LGBTQ individuals are common to all religious traditions, but vary by the *intensity* of religious sentiment. We

⁴⁹ In the three Latin American countries we also controlled for a political knowledge index, using a series of factual questions about politics not available for India, Nigeria, and Morocco. We do this in separate models and report the results below. In our three Latin American countries, the political knowledge index is positively (though weakly) associated with human rights exposure (Spearman’s $\rho = .12$), contact ($\rho = .05$), and participation ($\rho = .03$).

⁵⁰ (Snyder, 2014; Toft, Philpott, & Shah, 2011).

⁵¹ Others suggest Islam and human rights are reconcilable (An-Naim, 2012).

control for religious identity by asking respondents to self-identify in those terms, and control for religious intensity by asking respondents how important religion is their lives, using a scale of 0, or “not important at all,” to 10, or “very important”.

IV. Findings

Table 2 summarizes regression results for local and international HROs, respectively. The first column pools results over all respondents, weighting each country evenly so that sample size doesn’t skew the results. Table 3 presents the regression findings for our key independent variables, and Tables A1 and A2, in the online appendix, present the full regression tables, with all control variables.

Table 2. Trust in U.S. Government's Association with Trust in Local and International Human Rights Organizations							
	Pooled	Colombia	Ecuador	Mexico	Mumbai	Rabat & Casablanca	Lagos
LHROS	negative	negative	negative	negative	n.f.	negative	n.f.
IHROS	negative	negative	negative	negative	n.f.	n.f.	n.f.

"negative" = negative relationship between IV and trust in HROs (e.g., more trust in U.S. gov't. in Colombia is associated with less trust in LHROS)

"n.f." = no finding (statistically insignificant)

$p \leq .10$

Across six countries and four world regions, respondents clearly *do not* view HROs as U.S. allies, rejecting H1. Instead, in Morocco and the three Latin American countries, and for all respondents combined, respondents regard LHROs as either opposed to U.S. policy, or as geopolitically neutral (H2). Similarly, in Colombia, Ecuador, and Mexico, and in the pooled model, respondents regard IHROs as oppositional or neutral. That is, in these instances, when the public’s trust in the U.S. government is lowest, trust in HROs is highest. Conversely, when

people *do* trust the U.S. government in these locales, public trust in HROs is at its lowest. In short, in nine of 14 regressions (64%; 6 countries plus the pooled regression \times 2 DVs), the results are statistically and substantively significant, either not supporting, or rejecting outright, the claim that publics view HROs as aligned with the U.S.

The evidence also offers some support for the notion that publics view international and local HROs similarly when it comes to relations with the U.S. (H3). The relationship between trust in the U.S. and HROs is negative for both international and national HROs in all three Latin American countries, and in the pooled model. In no case is there evidence that the U.S.-LHRO relationship is *opposed* to the U.S.-IHRO relationship.

Figures 2 and 3 present the results graphically, with pooled results represented by the thick black line. In both, the dependent and independent variables are scaled 0-1, meaning that regression coefficients give the effect on trust in HROs as a percentage of the DVs' range, produced by moving from the minimum to maximum IV values.

Figure 2. Predicted Values of Trust in LHROs at Different Levels Levels of Trust in U.S. Gov't.

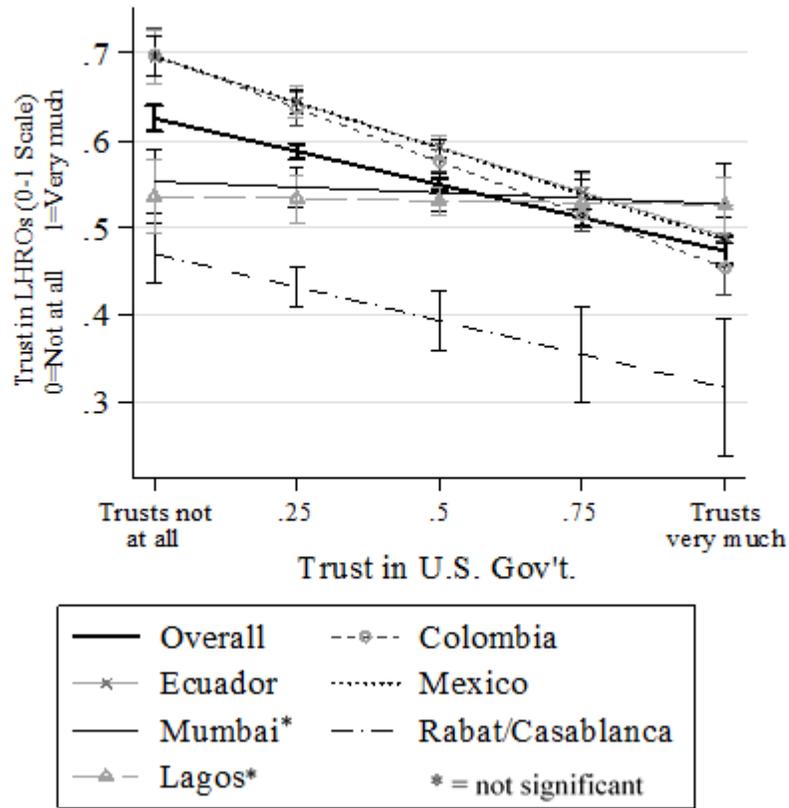


Figure 2 illustrates the relationship between trust in the U.S. government and trust in LHROs. We see clear evidence of a “Latin American effect”: coefficients (given in the first column of each country in Table 3) and absolute levels of trust across the three countries are remarkably similar. In Colombia, represented by the short-dashed line with hollow circles, moving from “no trust” to trust the U.S. government “very much) is associated with a drop in trust in LHROs, on average, by .24 points (from .70 to .46); in Ecuador (solid gray line with x’s), by .21 (from .70 to .49); and in Mexico (dotted line), by .21 (from .70 to .49), all significant at $p = .000$. In Morocco (dashed-dotted line), the association is also substantial, but trust in LHROs is much lower overall. Moving from least to most trust in the U.S. government is associated

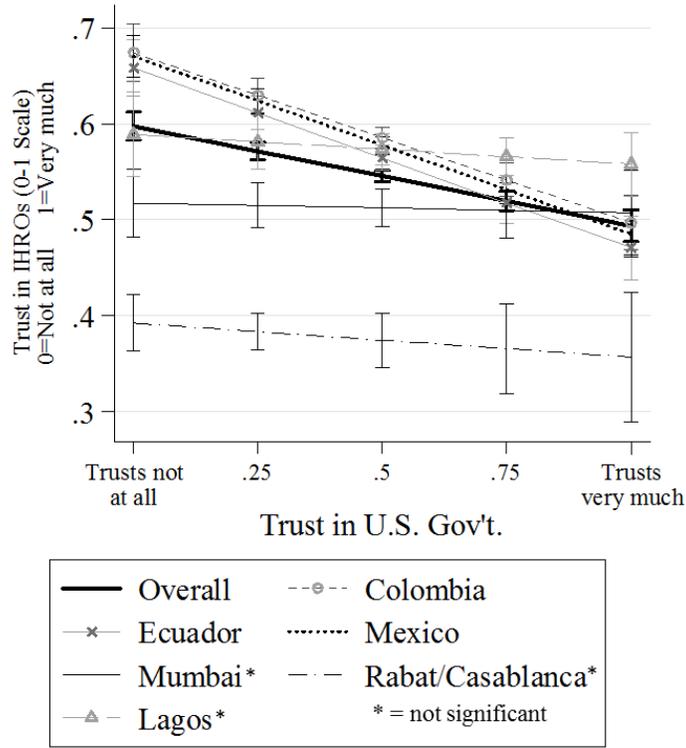
with .15 in reduced trust in LHROs, from .47 to .32 ($p = .003$). Over all countries, trust goes down by .15 points, from .62 to .47 ($p = .000$).

Table 3. OLS Regression of Trust in Local and International HROs on Trust in U.S. Gov't, Political Trust, and HR Exposure (p -values in Italics)

Independent Variables	Pooled		Colombia		Ecuador		Mexico		Mumbai		Rabat/Casablanca		Lagos	
	LHROs	IHROs	LHROs	IHROs	LHROs	IHROs	LHROs	IHROs	LHROs	IHROs	LHROs	IHROs	LHROs	IHROs
Trust in U.S. Gov't	-0.152 *** <i>0.000</i>	-0.104 *** <i>0.000</i>	-0.243 *** <i>0.000</i>	-0.177 *** <i>0.000</i>	-0.206 *** <i>0.000</i>	-0.188 *** <i>0.000</i>	-0.210 *** <i>0.000</i>	-0.185 *** <i>0.000</i>	-0.025 <i>0.500</i>	-0.010 <i>0.775</i>	-0.153 ** <i>0.003</i>	-0.036 <i>0.421</i>	-0.010 <i>0.780</i>	-0.031 <i>0.397</i>
Average Trust (Individual)	1.399 *** <i>0.000</i>	1.534 *** <i>0.000</i>	1.566 *** <i>0.000</i>	1.591 *** <i>0.000</i>	1.442 *** <i>0.000</i>	1.745 *** <i>0.000</i>	1.435 *** <i>0.000</i>	1.785 *** <i>0.000</i>	1.079 *** <i>0.000</i>	1.192 *** <i>0.000</i>	1.497 *** <i>0.000</i>	1.593 *** <i>0.000</i>	1.222 *** <i>0.000</i>	1.399 *** <i>0.000</i>
Trust in Exec.	-0.048 *** <i>0.000</i>	#### <i>####</i>	-0.043 <i>0.136</i>	-0.136 *** <i>0.000</i>	-0.116 *** <i>0.000</i>	-0.190 *** <i>0.000</i>	-0.094 *** <i>0.000</i>	-0.217 *** <i>0.000</i>	0.035 <i>0.324</i>	-0.075 *** <i>0.026</i>	-0.026 <i>0.537</i>	-0.235 *** <i>0.000</i>	-0.041 <i>0.189</i>	-0.078 *** <i>0.018</i>
Trust in UN	-0.027 <i>0.105</i>	-0.001 <i>0.959</i>	-0.048 <i>0.663</i>	-0.013 <i>0.663</i>	0.046 <i>0.154</i>	-0.002 <i>0.939</i>	0.023 <i>0.324</i>	-0.049 *** <i>0.029</i>	-0.077 † <i>0.053</i>	-0.051 <i>0.186</i>	-0.175 ** <i>0.001</i>	0.075 <i>0.101</i>	-0.008 <i>0.816</i>	-0.024 <i>0.542</i>
Trust in Politicians	-0.122 *** <i>0.000</i>	-0.220 *** <i>0.000</i>	-0.165 *** <i>0.000</i>	-0.219 *** <i>0.000</i>	-0.123 *** <i>0.000</i>	-0.216 *** <i>0.000</i>	-0.155 *** <i>0.000</i>	-0.306 *** <i>0.000</i>	-0.116 ** <i>0.002</i>	-0.067 † <i>0.061</i>	-0.072 <i>0.151</i>	-0.227 *** <i>0.000</i>	-0.043 <i>0.204</i>	-0.229 *** <i>0.000</i>
How Often Hears "HR"	0.008 ** <i>0.010</i>	0.010 ** <i>0.002</i>	0.008 <i>0.253</i>	0.009 <i>0.159</i>	0.017 *** <i>0.019</i>	0.022 ** <i>0.001</i>	0.003 <i>0.490</i>	0.006 <i>0.203</i>	0.011 <i>0.352</i>	-0.014 <i>0.193</i>	-0.007 <i>0.545</i>	0.012 <i>0.204</i>	0.015 <i>0.116</i>	-0.001 <i>0.941</i>
Has Met HR Worker	0.039 *** <i>0.000</i>	0.019 † <i>0.051</i>	0.087 *** <i>0.000</i>	0.054 *** <i>0.001</i>	-0.017 <i>0.515</i>	-0.011 <i>0.664</i>	0.000 <i>0.997</i>	0.008 <i>0.584</i>	0.144 ** <i>0.006</i>	0.112 *** <i>0.022</i>	0.043 <i>0.222</i>	-0.004 <i>0.902</i>	0.039 † <i>0.100</i>	-0.014 <i>0.591</i>
Has Part. in HR Org.	0.050 ** <i>0.002</i>	0.015 <i>0.338</i>	0.022 <i>0.480</i>	0.024 <i>0.401</i>	0.088 *** <i>0.025</i>	-0.002 <i>0.961</i>	0.030 <i>0.281</i>	-0.002 <i>0.932</i>	0.024 <i>0.552</i>	-0.038 <i>0.323</i>	-0.015 <i>0.854</i>	0.038 <i>0.586</i>	0.069 *** <i>0.022</i>	0.015 <i>0.623</i>
N	6285	6124	1225	1210	1117	1105	1921	1857	702	668	512	484	808	800
R-Squared	0.423	0.473	0.507	0.555	0.443	0.530	0.458	0.540	0.249	0.224	0.457	0.539	0.385	0.371
Adj. R-Squared	0.420	0.470	0.498	0.547	0.430	0.520	0.451	0.533	0.219	0.192	0.434	0.519	0.365	0.351
RMSE	0.229	0.218	0.216	0.201	0.227	0.216	0.217	0.202	0.267	0.250	0.252	0.211	0.206	0.218

Figure 3 depicts our findings for international HROs. Trusting the U.S. government is associated with a reduction of .18 trust points for IHROs in Colombia (from .67 to .49, $p = .028$), .19 in Ecuador (from .66 to .47, $p = .000$), and .19 in Mexico (from .67 to .48, $p = .000$). Pooling all data yields a decrease of $-.10$ (from .60 to .50, $p = .000$).

Figure 3. Predicted Values of Trust in IHROs at Different Levels
Levels of Trust in U.S. Gov't.



Trust in National Political Actors

The results for some control variables (see Tables A1 and A2 in online appendix) bear comment. In all cases, individual trust averages are extremely strong predictors of trust in HROs and account for much of the relatively high R^2 's. In general, trust in domestic and international political authorities (the country's chief executive, its national politicians, and the U.N.) correlated negatively with trust in HROs, because the public either perceives rights groups as *opposed to* or independent of political authorities in general. Also, greater exposure to rights concepts, and greater contact with and participation in rights organizations, predict greater trust in HROs. If these measures of familiarity with the rights sector also contain a component of political knowledge, this doesn't appear to exercise an independent effect on trust in HROs. In

Latin America, we included a political knowledge index (a summated scale of 11 factual questions about acronyms, geography, and political officeholders) explicitly in separate models, and found that political knowledge neither alters the effect of attitudes toward the U.S., nor exercises an independent effect on trust in HROs.

Other Controls

Other control variables, also portrayed in the online appendices Tables A1 and A2, had more sporadic effects. Participation in party politics and identification with a political party was associated with slightly less trust in HROs in some cases, while Protestantism and non-belief were occasionally associated with more trust in HROs. Greater education and income were associated, in some Latin American countries, with less trust in LHROs. Women trust LHROs (but not IHROs) more than men, while age and rural residence were negatively associated with trust in HROs in a few countries.

Conclusion

Many believe international NGOs and their influential subset, international human rights organizations (IHROs), have an impact on world politics because of their independence from powerful states and special interests. This impartiality enables IHROs to engage in information politics, name and shame violators, and serve as moral commentators in global affairs. Others, however, suggest HROs enjoy a close relationship with the U.S., and while some consider this salutary, others say this represents U.S. government cooptation and abuse of human rights language and groups. Still others say HROs are opposed to the U.S. government, either because they are salutary counterweights *against* U.S. global hegemony or spoilers undermining a benign, U.S.-led world order.

Implicit in these claims are assumptions about global public *attitudes*. If HROs are indeed “honest brokers,” and if this reputation is indeed important for their power, many members of the public are likely to see them this way. And if HROs are either pro- or anti-U.S., publics should also perceive this. To suggest otherwise implies that HROs consistently, successfully mislead the general public worldwide.

To investigate the relationship between public attitudes towards HROs and the U.S. government, we surveyed 9,380 people in six countries and four world regions, using face-to-face interview techniques. Overall, we find no evidence that the public regards either local or international HROs as collaborators of the U.S. government. In fact, across world regions, publics are more likely to *reject* this notion. The more members of the public *mistrust* the U.S. government, the more they *trust* HROs. This is particularly true for domestic HROs, but is also true for international groups, in some cases. In none of our models were attitudes toward the U.S. positively associated with the public’s trust in either international or local HROs. Thus even if HROs *are* tacitly collaborating with the U.S.—and we make no claim that they are—we find no evidence that publics recognize this alleged fact. Though publics do *not* believe that HROs are allies of the U.S. government and its aims, our evidence is insufficiently nuanced to determine whether publics regard HROs as active opponents of the U.S. government (“counter-hegemon”) or as principled neutrals (“honest brokers”).

Why does it matter what publics think of HROs? For practitioners, the issue is intensely salient. Allegations of pro-U.S. bias abound, and HRO leaders fend off those claims with vigor. The leaders know that if their opponents successfully paint them as “American agents,” their very credibility will be impugned. Distinguishing themselves from special interests is the bread-and-butter of most human rights groups, and distinguishing themselves from the U.S.

government in an era of American geopolitical primacy is utterly crucial for their sense of self, as well as their potential for political influence.

Several caveats are in order for practitioners, however. First, our findings are based only on public perceptions toward HROs *in general*, not specific organizations or topics. More detailed probing may reveal variation. Second, the *general* public's views may differ from those of specific networks, communities, or elites. Human rights workers have frequent contact with bureaucrats, politicians, and journalists, many of whom may assess HROs differently than the general public.

Our findings are also important for human rights scholars who believe HROs are influential either because publics recognize and respect their geopolitical neutrality, or because HROs stand with the masses against U.S. hegemony. The evidence suggests that in many cases, and especially in Latin America, one or both of these views are true. Second, human rights scholars should be pleased to learn of a new way to empirically engage the long-standing debate over the HRO community's alleged "pro-" or "anti-" American status. To be sure, our data cannot tell us whether HROs really do lean toward or against Washington; they can, however, demonstrate the public generally does *not* see HROs as pro-American (at least in our six cases). There is no evidence that when respondents (mis)trust the U.S. government, they similarly (mis)trust HROs.

For scholars who believe HROs are either geopolitically neutral or "counter-hegemonic," our findings should prove gratifying. The evidence suggests that many share their views, especially for local HROs, perhaps because these are closer to ordinary people than their international counterparts.

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