

The Latin Bias: Regions, the Anglo-American Media, and Human Rights¹

EMILIE HAFNER-BURTON

University of California, San Diego

AND

JAMES RON

University of Minnesota and Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas

Media attention is unevenly allocated across global human rights problems, prompting anger, frustration, and recrimination in the international system. This article demonstrates that from 1981 to 2000, three leading Anglo-American media sources disproportionately covered Latin American abuses, in human rights terms, as compared to other world regions. This “Latin Human Rights Bias” runs counter to broader trends within the Anglo-American general coverage of foreign news, where Latin America’s share of reporting is far smaller. The Bias is partially explained by the region’s proximity to the United States (US), its relevance to US policy debates, and by path dependency. A significant portion of the Latin Bias remains unexplained, however, despite our best attempts to rigorously model explanations offered by leading Western journalists. These findings suggest that geographic regions are an important factor in the media’s perception of global human rights problems and that both human rights policymakers and scholars may be inappropriately drawing general lessons from regionally specific and biased patterns. We conclude with suggestions for future research.

Scholars have long recognized that public attention is unevenly distributed across similarly pressing problems, and these inequities are particularly obvious when it comes to abuses of human rights.² Gross violations linked to the repression of Nepal’s Maoist insurgency, for example, attract substantial international attention, but similarly troubling events in India have provoked less interest.³ And while authoritarians such as Zimbabwe’s Mugabe are broadly synonymous with political evil, other brutal rulers, including Ethiopia’s Col. Haile Mariam Mengistu, are known to only a select few.⁴ Neglected victims, “over-reported” abusers, journalists, and human rights activists are acutely aware of these imbalances, generating frequent complaints about the global human rights system’s biases. Although the English-speaking world’s attention has focused of late on Middle East reporting imbalances, the issue is global (Ron and Ramos 2009).

Scholars note that these imbalances are both reflected in, and caused by, transnational advocates and journalists (Bob 2005; Franklin 2008). At the most general level, scholars have long noted that the media and activists often scrutinize one another closely, adjusting their behavior in response to the other’s actions (Hilgartner and Bosk 1988). Patterns of global attention to human rights violations are affected by these and other factors, including the quality of transnational linkages to affected areas and populations (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Bob 2005); economic and political conditions for activist mobilization (Ron et al. 2005; Ramos et al. 2007); real-world conditions (Wanta and Foote 1994; Kim and Barnett 1996; Fan and Ostini 1999; Tedesco 2001); and synergistic opportunities between transnational networks (Carpenter 2007a,b).

This article analyzes the Anglo-American media’s allocation of human rights attention across world regions during 1981–2000. Our analysis demonstrates that Latin American violations attracted more human rights attention than similar or worse abuses elsewhere. We dub this the “Latin Human Rights Bias,” a portion of which we are able to statistically explain by reference to the region’s physical proximity to the United States (US), US policy salience, and by media path dependency.

Consistent with recent published work, our outcome variables are country reporting of abuses, in human rights terms, by two leading weeklies, *Newsweek* and the *Economist* (Ron et al. 2005; Ramos et al. 2007; Hafner-Burton 2008) and one leading daily, the *New York Times* (Cole 2010). Activists fight abuses by naming and shaming perpetrators globally, hoping that media exposure will compel third parties to intervene. This process is often known as the “boomerang effect,” a concept that has contributed

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² The literature on inequities in global human rights attention includes Bob (2005); Carpenter (2007a,b); Fan and Ostini (1999); Heinze and Rosa (2010); Ovsiovitch (1993); Ramos, Ron, and Thoms (2007); and Ron, Ramos, and Rodgers (2005). Academics have made similar claims about domestic social problems (Hilgartner and Bosk 1988) and US public policy (Kingdon 2002).

³ A search of the *New York Times* archive performed on December 16, 2011, for example, yielded 54 hits for the search string: “Maoists” [and] “human rights” [and] “Nepal” from the beginning of 1981. The same search string with the keyword “India,” by contrast, yielded only 31 hits.

⁴ A search of the *New York Times* archive performed on December 16, 2011, yielded 419 hits for the search string “Mengistu” [and] “Ethiopia” from the beginning of 1981. The string “Mugabe” [and] “Zimbabwe,” by contrast, yielded 1,947 hits.

greatly to our understanding of global norm enforcement (Keck and Sikkink 1998).

To illustrate, consider El Salvador's bloody El Mozote massacre (Danner 1994). In 1981, Salvadoran troops killed hundreds of civilians while pursuing leftist guerrillas in a contested rural area. Local activists and church members spread word of the massacre to the US-based activists and sympathizers, and these fed the information to prominent US journalists. The *New York Times* and *Washington Post* sent journalists to investigate the slaughter, and their stories eventually triggered intense US policy debates over the Reagan administration's ties to the Salvadoran government and military. News of the atrocity, in other words, traveled from the site of abuse to the United States via local and US-based activists, as well as US-based journalists; that news was then processed and returned to its point of origin in the form of American policy debates and international political pressure.

Since previous research has demonstrated the relationship between abuse severity and media reporting, we would expect the size and quality of El Mozote's horrors to have boosted media coverage. Yet since research has also shown that transnational connections matter, reporting should also have been elevated by the quality and strength of ties between Salvadoran activists and their international allies. And since the availability of local media, freedom of expression, and other local mobilizing conditions also matter, the global media's coverage of events should have been elevated by El Salvador's domestic communications infrastructure, along with its partial tolerance of basic political freedoms.

These factors do not tell the whole story, however, since our evidence demonstrates a statistically discernible preference for human rights stories originating in Latin America. This Latin Bias, in turn, may well have been a factor in the media's intense coverage of the El Mozote events.

To illustrate, compare the Anglo-American media's attention to human rights abuses in Guatemala and Ethiopia. Although both countries suffered wide-ranging violations in similar time periods, the media consistently paid more attention to abuses in Latin America's Guatemala. Thus, while *Newsweek's* and the *Economist's* combined reporting on Guatemala's abuses totaled 54 stories from 1981 to 2000, these same 2 weeklies published only four stories on Ethiopian human rights problems during that entire period. Actual human rights conditions in the two countries were not fundamentally different, however. Government forces in Guatemala killed close to 200,000 people in a brutal counter-insurgency campaign during the 1970s and 1980s (Commission for Historical Clarification 1999), and Ethiopian forces exacted a similarly bloody toll at roughly the same time during the country's "Red Terror" and subsequent repression (Tiruneh 1993). In both countries, moreover, repression subsided in the 1990s. Remarkably, the media's disinterest in Ethiopian human rights conditions continued even after the post-war government appointed a special prosecutor to investigate crimes by the country's fugitive former dictator, Col. Haile Mariam Mengistu, along with hundreds of his former colleagues. In 1996, Col. Mengistu and dozens of others were convicted *in absentia* by an Ethiopian court, but escaped arrest by living in Zimbabwe (Kebede Tiba 2007). Yet even these dramatic, cross-border legal events attracted little attention from our leading Anglo-American media sources.

Since few readers will be surprised to learn that human rights reporting is not objective, why should scholars care about the Latin Bias? First, the media's human rights reporting informs policy and scholarly attention, providing both researchers and policymakers with information about events (Woolley 2000; Davenport and Ball 2002). We cannot fully comprehend global human rights boomerangs—that is, how activists spread information through the media—without considering how journalists perceive human rights problems differently across regions. Media reporting also informs governmental accounts of human rights abuses, and these, in turn, influence policies of aid, trade, and diplomacy.

Second, the Latin Bias resembles a tendency within earlier scholarly work to theorize the prospects and patterns of human rights reform based on only a handful of prominent Latin American cases (Hafner-Burton and Ron 2009). Our discovery of a similar trend within the Anglo-American media suggests that *both* academics and journalists may have incorrectly extrapolated global lessons from regionally specific experiences.

Third, the Latin Human Rights Bias contradicts the media's regional hierarchy of interest when it comes to general news coverage. In the American media, for example, Western Europe and the Middle East typically secure the most overall foreign media coverage, followed by Asia, Latin America, and Africa.⁵ Latin America tends to be in the middle or bottom of the Anglo-American media's general hierarchy of interest, swapping places across time and studies with Asia and the Middle East. This suggests that the media's coverage may differ across topic and region and that human rights, terrorism, development, climate change, and other issues may have different regional media effects.⁶

Finally, our research highlights the broader importance of paying greater attention to the politics of discourse and elite perception in international relations' study of regions. The historical evidence suggests that Western elites view regions differently and that these differences are based on entrenched stereotypes as well as recent events (Said 1979; Adas 1989; Mutua 2001; Hemmer and Katzenstein 2002).

We begin by validating three common explanations of human rights media coverage, and then demonstrate that three major Anglo-American media sources devoted more human rights attention to Latin America from 1981 to 2000. Next, we recount our discussion of this finding with experienced journalists, and systematically explore their explanations. We find robust support for explanations based on physical proximity to the United States, American policy relevance, and path dependency; limited support for explanations based on the Catholic Church's country strength; and no support whatsoever for the influence of democratization. Since our models explain only a portion of the Bias, we conclude with tentative hypotheses whose substantiation would require a different research design.

⁵ Paik (1999)'s analysis of the *Wall Street Journal*, 1990–92, shows that Western Europe earned the lion's share of coverage (37%), followed by Asia (24%), Middle East (13%), Eastern Europe (12%), Latin America and the Caribbean (12%), and Africa (3%). Weaver, Porter, and Evans' (1984) analysis of network foreign affairs newscasts found that the Middle East led with 25.5%, followed by Western Europe (25%), Asia (21%), Eastern Europe (7.8%), Africa (6.6%), and Latin America (4.7%). Chang, Pollick, and Lee's (1992) survey of US newspaper editors found that they preferred covering Europe, followed by the Middle East, Far East, Central America, South America, South East Asia, and Africa. Larson's (1982) analysis of network foreign news coverage, 1976–79, found Western Europe and Middle East tied for first place, followed by Eastern Europe, Latin America, Asia, and Africa.

⁶ Thanks to Brian Phillips and Carolina Garriga, Centro de Investigacion y Docencia Economicas, Mexico City, for this observation.

Modeling Common Explanations: Atrocities, Transnational Activists, and Local Mobilization Capacity

Scholars expect the media to devote more attention to rights violations in countries with (i) higher rates of repression and autocracy, (ii) greater links to transnational NGOs and activists, and (iii) better resources and mobilization opportunities for local activists. We begin our analysis by building a model that reflects these three common expectations.

Dependent Variable

Consistent with prior scholarship, our primary dependent variable, *Media Coverage*, draws on data from Ramos et al. (2007), who modified and updated data from Ron et al. (2005). These scholars coded *Economist* and *Newsweek* articles from 1981 to 2000 with the keywords “human rights” and a specific violation.⁷ When an article discussed more than one country or abuse, coders took note of only the first of each. The data include 1,242 articles published in the international edition of the *Economist*, and 1,059 published in the US edition of *Newsweek*.

The *Economist* is a European-based publication with a broad but elite global readership. In 2002, its circulation was 880,000. Just under half of its readers were in North America, 20% were in continental Europe, 15% were in the U.K., and 10% were in Asia.⁸ *Economist* readers are comparatively wealthy, influential, and aware of international events and issues.⁹ Although *Newsweek* has a much larger North American audience (19.5 million), its readers are both poorer and less cosmopolitan.¹⁰ Taken together, these publications are useful indicators of the Anglo-American and perhaps even the entire Western world’s media reporting patterns. As Ramos et al. (2007:386–88) demonstrate, the *Economist* and *Newsweek* follow similar rates of “human rights” usage to other leading Western media, including *Le Monde*, the *New York Times*, the *Guardian*, and the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*.

To correct for possible biases, we created our dependent variable, *Media Coverage*, by adding the *Economist* and *Newsweek* values for each country-year. To avoid inappropriate generalizations, we restrict our claims here to the Anglo-American media.

Independent Variables

Severity of Abuses

To investigate whether the media publish more stories on instances of substantial repression, we use the *CIRI* measure of *Physical Integrity* collected by Cingranelli and Richards.¹¹

⁷ The Ramos et al. (2007) procedure for identifying and coding *Economist* and *Newsweek* articles has both strengths and weaknesses. Strict inclusion of only those articles with the term “human rights” omits other accounts of repression and under-estimates overall Western media coverage of abuse, but provides a consistent estimate of the media’s deployment of human rights language. Another tradeoff is the data’s focus on quantity rather than quality of coverage; although it provides a reliable indicator of flow, it does not capture the article’s tone or nuance. This is a classic validity–reliability tradeoff.

⁸ *Economist* 2004.

⁹ In 2004, *Economist* readers had a median personal income of \$154,000 USD; 95% were college educated; 44% were company directors; 62% took three or more international trips per year; and 70% had lived abroad at least once (*Economist* 2004).

¹⁰ *Newsweek* 2004. In 2003, North America’s *Newsweek* readers had a median personal income of \$41,662; 44% were college graduates; and 6% were “top management.”

¹¹ Data obtained via the web from <http://ciri.binghamton.edu/>; 1980 data unavailable.

These scholars culled their data from the US State Department and Amnesty International’s annual reports and used it to estimate a state’s propensity to engage in human rights abuses such as torture, arbitrary detention, forced disappearance, and extrajudicial execution. *CIRI* scores range from zero, or “most repressive,” to eight, or “least repressive.” In our models, lower *Physical Integrity* scores signify worse human rights conditions and should therefore be associated with higher *Media Coverage*. We use a second proxy for human rights abuse—logged *Number of Battle Deaths*, collected by Lacina and Gleditsch (2005) version 1.0—with the expectation that bloodier conflicts will be associated with more *Media Coverage*. We include this variable because Poe, Tate, and Keith (1999) note that military conflicts are positively associated with human rights abuses, and logically, more severe conflicts should be associated with more severe abuses and thus with greater media coverage. Support for this claim comes from historical treatments of World War II’s Eastern Front, which argue that the savagery of German–Russian combat contributed to the intensity of German atrocities against civilians (Browning 1993; Bartov 2001).

To investigate whether the Anglo-American media report more on abuses by autocratic regimes, we use revised *Polity IV* scores ranging from –10, or most autocratic, to 10, or most democratic (Marshall, Gurr, Davenport, and Jaggers 2002; Marshall and Jaggers 2010). *Polity IV* is an index of the competitiveness of a country’s chief executive selection, openness to social groups, level of institutional constraints placed on the executive’s authority, competitiveness of political participation, and the degree to which binding rules govern political participation. We expect *Polity IV* to be inversely associated with *Media Coverage*, since the more autocratic the regime, the more likely the Anglo-American media are to report on its abuses, given the regime’s violation of international democracy norms.

Transnational Activism

To verify whether higher rates of transnational activist engagement are associated with more *Media Coverage*, we use Hafner-Burton and Tsutsui’s (2005) data, *Number of INGO Ties*, which measure the log of the number of ties to international NGOs (INGOs) in a given country. More INGO ties should be associated with increased *Media Coverage*. We also measure the attention of transnational activists with data from Ron et al. (2005) on the number of *Amnesty International Press Releases* filed in a given country-year.¹² We expect more press releases to be associated with greater *Media Coverage*, as this is an explicit part of Amnesty’s strategy in circulating press releases.

Local Activist Resources and Opportunities

We use a variety of indicators to test whether the media devote more attention to human rights issues represented by local activists with more resources and opportunities. First, we measure local resource endowments with *Gross Domestic Product per capita*, obtained from the World Bank’s *World Development Indicators*. We expect countries with greater levels of development to also have wealthier, better-educated, better resourced, and more technologically savvy activists. Thus, higher *GDP per capita* should be associated with greater rates of *Media Coverage*.

We measure opportunities for local activists to spread information by estimating freedom of speech and press

¹² These data are *not* coded from the same source as *CIRI* measures.

based on CIRI data.¹³ The CIRI variable *Free Speech* is coded 2 if there is no level of government censorship and/or ownership of the media, 1 if there is some level, and 0 if censorship is complete. We expect free speech to be positively associated with *Media Coverage*, since a free press facilitates flows of information from local activists to outsiders. Information-rich environments generate more media attention, even though that information's availability also suggests that levels of political repression are lower.

We also include two commonly used control variables: *Size of Military*, drawn from the Correlates of War II Project's *National Military Capabilities 3.0*, and *Size of Population*, drawn from the US Census International Data Base (IDB) mid-year estimates. Following Ramos et al. (2007), we expect both to be positively associated with *Media Coverage*, since more powerful and populous states are also likely to receive more media coverage due to their international prominence. We log both because of extreme outliers at the lower and upper ends of their distributions. Finally, we include a dummy variable, *Post-Cold War*, which assumes a value of zero for 1980–1989 and a value of one for 1990–2000. As human rights have gained greater salience in the post-Cold War period, we expect media coverage of abuse to have increased in the 1990s, due in part to human rights' entrance into mainstream international discourse.

Estimation

Our data are structured in country-year format and cover 142 countries from 1981 to 2000. We use negative binomial regression because our dependent variable consists of over-dispersed averages of yearly counts.¹⁴ We use generalized estimating equations of population-averaged models because our panel data are highly correlated.¹⁵ We lag all independent variables by 1 year, on the assumption that their effects take time to be felt. We also conduct robustness tests without this lag, however. We adjust standard errors for clustering on countries repeatedly observed in our country-year data matrix. This approach is consistent with previous published research using similar data (Ron et al. 2005; Ramos et al. 2007).

The results show support for all three explanations. The *Economist* and *Newsweek*, with some minor variations between the two sources,¹⁶ are statistically more likely to report on human rights abuses in countries where the most terrible violations of physical integrity rights have occurred and where regimes are more autocratic (explanation #1). Journalists from these sources are also more likely to report on abuses in countries with strong ties to INGOs, and that receive more attention from transnational activists (explanation #2). Finally, they are more likely to report on abuses in countries with higher *per capita* incomes, where local activists have the resources and opportunities to mobilize (explanation #3). Local restrictions on free speech, however, do not appear to influence the levels of Anglo-American media reporting.

To interpret Table 1's coefficients, we calculate percent change in *Media Coverage* for a unit increase in the independent variables. For every point increase in *Physical*

Integrity, the media's expected mean reporting decreases by 22.8%, holding all other variables constant. For every unit increase in the log *Number of INGO ties* and *Amnesty International Press Releases*, the media's expected mean reporting increases by 39.4% and 3.6%, respectively. The expected mean changes for *Gross Domestic Product per capita* are 20%.

The Latin Human Rights Bias

In this section, we demonstrate that from 1981 to 2000, three leading Anglo-American media sources systematically reported more on human rights abuses in Latin America than in other regions, even when we account for abuse severity and the resources and actions of activists. As noted above, this runs counter to findings about the Anglo-American media's general foreign news coverage, where Latin America tends not to attract much attention.

We construct six regional groupings, based chiefly on the United Nation's (U.N.) regional classification: *Powerful West*, with 28 countries; *Asia*, with 34 countries, including Afghanistan and Pakistan; *Latin America*, 33 countries; the *Middle East and North Africa*, 21 countries; *Sub-Saharan Africa*, 46 countries; and the (former) *Soviet Bloc and Central Asia*, 31 countries.¹⁷ In our statistical analysis, we treat each region as a dummy variable for a given country-year.

These regional groupings are based on spatial contiguity and generally conform to the U.N.'s regional classification, with one key exception—the *Powerful West*—a category we include for theoretical reasons. When human rights activists seek international attention, they typically target the media, policymakers, and activists from these countries. The *Powerful West* thus includes the advanced industrialized countries of North America and Western Europe, along with three highly developed Asian countries—Japan, Australia, and New Zealand—which we include because of their active overseas assistance programs, high *per capita* GDPs, cultural affinities with the West (in the case of Australia and New Zealand), and active membership in Westernized, liberal-democratic group of nations referred to by many observers as the “international community.”

We begin with simple descriptive statistics to demonstrate regional unevenness in the Anglo-American media's coverage of human rights. Figure 1 demonstrates yearly media coverage totals for each of our six regions. Recall that these data consist of articles using the term “human rights” when referring to a specific country and violation or abuse.

Compared to most other regions, media coverage of abuses within the *Powerful West* is low throughout most of the period under discussion. This is unsurprising, perhaps, given that personal integrity violations within Western countries are less severe than elsewhere. There was a sharp uptick in media coverage of abuses within the *Powerful West* toward the end of the 1990s, however. Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, and the Middle East all display a generally similar pattern of lower coverage during the 1980s and increasing coverage throughout the rest of the 1990s. In part, this reflects the growth in general usage of the human rights idiom, but there are also important regional differences. The number of articles devoted to human rights abuses in Asia, for example, outstrips the number of articles covering abuses in Africa and the Middle East, and most of this is due to rising interest in Chi-

¹³ <http://ciri.binghamton.edu/>; 1980 data not available.

¹⁴ Cameron and Trivedi (1986), King (1989), Long (1997).

¹⁵ Zorn (2001), Hardin and Hilbe (2003).

¹⁶ The coefficients on battle deaths, INGOs, the size of the military, and the post-Cold War are significant only for the *Economist*.

¹⁷ Note that in the analysis, some countries fall out due to missing data.

TABLE 1. Determinants of Media Coverage, 1981–2000: Testing Three Common Answers

	<i>Combined</i>	<i>Economist</i>	<i>Newsweek</i>
Lagged dependent variable	0.203 (0.03)***	0.314 (0.03)***	0.255 (0.05)***
Number of battle deaths	0.024 (0.03)	0.037 (0.03)	0.002 (0.04)
Number of INGO ties	0.334 (0.17)~	0.379 (0.18)*	0.216 (0.25)
Amnesty International press releases	0.035 (0.01)**	0.024 (0.01)*	0.058 (0.01)***
Polity IV	-0.040 (0.01)**	-0.045 (0.01)***	-0.043 (0.02)*
GDP <i>per capita</i>	0.191 (0.08)*	0.166 (0.08)*	0.284 (0.12)*
Population size	0.163 (0.13)	0.126 (0.12)	0.229 (0.19)
Size of military	0.172 (0.12)	0.202 (0.10)*	0.156 (0.18)
Post-Cold War	0.253 (0.13)*	0.469 (0.13)***	-0.088 (0.18)
Physical integrity	-0.258 (0.04)***	-0.222 (0.05)***	-0.325 (0.05)***
Free speech	0.181 (0.14)	0.185 (0.14)	0.241 (0.20)
Constant	-5.040 (0.78)***	-5.891 (0.81)***	-5.577 (1.05)***
Number of observations	2334	2334	2334
Number of countries	142	142	142
χ^2	666.09***	603.97***	609.86***

(Notes. Standard errors in parentheses.

Significance levels: ~ $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.)

<i>Percent Change</i>	<i>Combined</i>	<i>Economist</i>	<i>Newsweek</i>
<i>listcoef</i> command using pooled model with cluster standard errors			
Physical integrity	-22.8	-19.9	-28.7
Number of INGO ties	39.4	45.9	28.0
Amnesty International press releases	3.6	2.4	6.2
GDP <i>per capita</i>	20.0	18.0	27.3
Polity IV	-3.7	-4.4	-3.4

nese human rights abuses. Human rights coverage of events in Latin America and the former Soviet bloc, moreover, follows a U-shaped pattern: higher rates of coverage in the 1980s, a dip around the end of the Cold War, and then a return to previous levels in the latter part of the 1990s. Notably, all world regions experienced a substantial uptick in human rights coverage toward the end of the 1990s, demonstrating the idiom’s growing prevalence in the international system.

Next, we move to multivariate analysis and focus our discussion on the regional coefficients. Table 2 includes five of our six regional dummy variables, using the sixth, *Latin America*, as the reference category. The results offer preliminary evidence of a Latin Human Rights Bias, since human rights abuses in *Latin American* countries are covered more heavily than abuses in *Asia*, the *Middle East and North Africa*, and the (former) *Soviet Bloc and Central Asia*; only media coverage in *Sub-Saharan Africa* is statistically equivalent to *Latin America*’s coverage in these models (however, as we explain below, of the 88 models that we used to check the robustness of these results reported in Table 2, the coefficients for *Sub-Saharan Africa* are negative in all and statistically significant in 42%). The Bias is present even when the abuses are equally terrible, regimes are equally autocratic, transnational ties are similarly dense, and country conditions are equally conducive to local mobilization. This finding holds true both for our combined reporting measure, *Media Coverage*, and for reporting by our two individual data sources, the *Economist* and *Newsweek*.

To interpret the magnitude of Table 2’s effects, we calculate percent change in *Media Coverage* for a unit increase in the independent variables. We find that the media’s preference for stories of abuse in Latin America is substantial. Compared to *Latin America*, an abuse’s geographic location in a country situated within *Asia*

decreases the *Economist*’s expected number of articles by 46.9%, and *Newsweek*’s by 58.5%, holding all other variables constant. The same is true for abuses in countries located in the *Powerful West* (-62.2% and -58%), in the *Middle East and North Africa* (-50.2% and -83.1%), and in the (former) *Soviet Bloc and Central Asia* (-42.2% and -57.5%).

To ensure that our findings are not artifacts of *Newsweek* and the *Economist* reporting styles, we also ran models with Cole’s (2010) data, which consist of counts of New York Times articles in which the term “human rights” appeared within 10 words of a country’s name. These data cover 135 countries at 5-year intervals from 1980 to 2000 and are both similar and different from the Ramos et al.’s (2007) data. Cole’s (2010) information is based on a daily rather than a weekly source, but he did not make use of content coding and has far fewer cases. The results of our analysis appear in column four of Table 2 and are similar to our findings with the Ramos et al.’s (2007) data from the *Economist* and *Newsweek*. The New York Times reported more heavily on abuses in *Latin America* in comparison with every other world region including *Sub-Saharan Africa*.

To establish the robustness of these results¹⁸ with different specifications for panel data, we also ran statistical models using AR1 correlation structures, third-order time polynomials, and random effects. We also removed the lag structure. All results are robust across these alternatives. Of the six regions, *Latin America* is the only one to consistently attract more media attention.

To establish whether these results are driven by other explanations for media coverage, we ran a series of additional tests. For example, to investigate the possibility that greater availability of information prompts greater report-

¹⁸ Our robustness checks are reported in the Appendix.

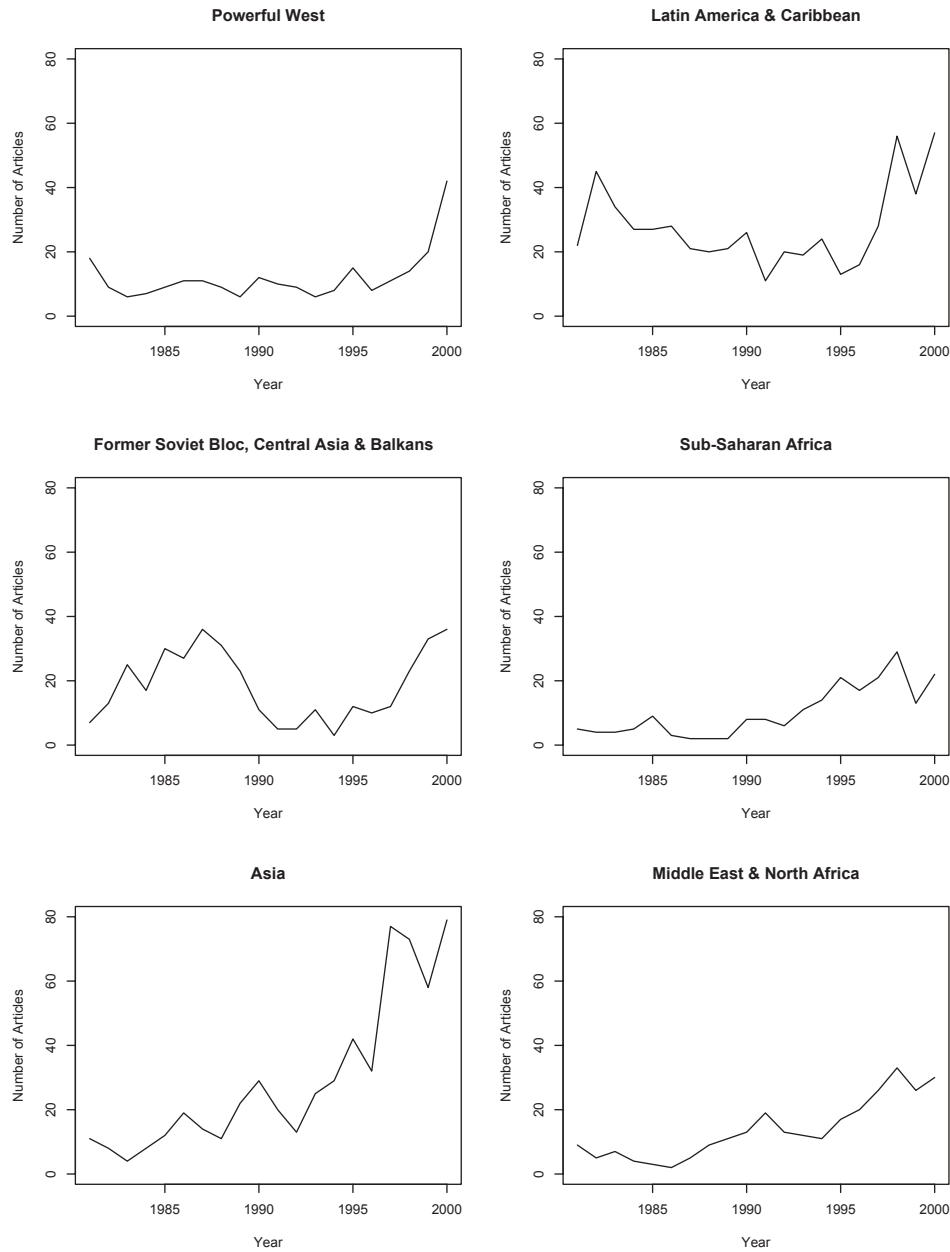


FIG 1. Media Coverage of Human Rights in the *Economist* and *Newsweek*, by Region, 1981–2000

ing on human rights abuses—a phenomenon known as the “information paradox”—we ran models with an alternative to the CIRI *Free Speech* variable: *Press Freedom*, based on Freedom House data.¹⁹ These data are categorized into three groups: *Not Free*, *Partly Free*, and *Free*. Since *Press Freedom* and *Free Speech* are highly correlated, we do not include both in the same model. Our results are consistent. We then explored another facet of the information paradox, accounting for the possibility that countries with better local communications infrastructures receive more press coverage. To do this, we included the variables *Phones Per Capita*, *Radios Per Capita*, *Televisions Per Capita*, and *Daily Newspapers Per Capita*, all taken from Arthur

¹⁹ “Freedom of the Press” data, available at FreedomHouse.org. Some theorists note that when information about abuses in a given area is more readily available, human rights reporting levels increase. This “information paradox” leads to false assumptions about rising levels of abuse.

Banks’ Cross-National Time Series Data Archive.²⁰ Again, our results are consistent.

In another series of robustness tests, we explored other ways to measure human rights abuse. We disaggregated *Physical Integrity* into its four components: *Murder*, *Torture*, *Disappearance*, and *Political Imprisonment*, and also used CIRI’s *Empowerment Index*, which includes six individual human rights indicators: *Freedom of Association*, *Freedom of Movement*, *Freedom of Speech*, *Electoral Self-Determination*, *Freedom of Religion*, and *Workers’ Rights*.²¹ We use this CIRI index in two ways: first, as a single number, minus the effects of Freedom of Speech (because we already include that variable elsewhere in our models), and second, as a disaggregated series of variables listed separately. Our findings are remarkably consistent. In each model,

²⁰ <http://www.databanksinternational.com>.

²¹ <http://ciri.binghamton.edu/>.

TABLE 2. Determinants of Media Coverage, 1981–2000: Geographic Preferences

	<i>Combined</i>	<i>Economist</i>	<i>Newsweek</i>	<i>NYT</i>
Lagged dependent variable	0.170 (0.03)***	0.291 (0.03)***	0.176 (0.04)***	0.021 (0.00)***
Number of battle deaths	0.050 (0.02)*	0.060 (0.02)*	0.036 (0.04)	0.039 (0.03)
Number of INGO ties	0.354 (0.19)~	0.409 (0.19)*	0.198 (0.28)	0.217 (0.16)
Amnesty International press releases	0.049 (0.01)***	0.032 (0.01)**	0.075 (0.01)***	0.024 (0.02)
Polity IV	-0.054 (0.02)***	-0.053 (0.01)***	-0.067 (0.02)**	-0.047 (0.02)*
GDP <i>per capita</i>	0.217 (0.10)*	0.195 (0.09)*	0.315 (0.16)*	0.360 (0.12)**
Population size	0.154 (0.14)	0.125 (0.13)	0.138 (0.20)	0.284 (0.16)~
Size of military	0.264 (0.13)*	0.279 (0.11)*	0.319 (0.21)	0.125 (0.16)
Post-Cold War	0.362 (0.13)**	0.534 (0.13)***	0.091 (0.20)	0.192 (0.17)
Asia	-0.753 (0.30)*	-0.632 (0.27)*	-0.878 (0.44)*	-0.840 (0.31)**
Powerful West	-0.973 (0.41)*	-0.973 (0.42)*	-0.868 (0.60)	-0.668 (0.35)~
Middle East & North Africa	-1.003 (0.28)***	-0.698 (0.26)**	-1.779 (0.43)***	-1.215 (0.40)**
Sub-Saharan Africa	-0.629 (0.41)	-0.406 (0.33)	-0.947 (0.64)	-1.013 (0.44)*
Former Soviet Bloc, Balkans, & Central Asia	-0.673 (0.28)*	-0.547 (0.28)~	-0.857 (0.42)*	-0.755 (0.33)*
Physical integrity	-0.180 (0.04)***	-0.143 (0.04)**	-0.246 (0.06)***	-0.267 (0.05)***
Free speech	0.075 (0.12)	0.115 (0.12)	0.041 (0.19)	-0.043 (0.15)
Constant	-5.417 (1.23)***	-6.456 (1.14)***	-5.600 (1.82)**	-2.802 (1.19)*
Number of observations	2334	2334	2334	492
Interaction: free*physical integrity	142	142	142	138
χ^2	743.59***	698.50***	787.81***	1270.61***

(Notes. Standard errors in parentheses.

Significance levels: ~ $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.)

<i>Percent Change</i>	<i>Combined</i>	<i>Economist</i>	<i>Newsweek</i>	<i>NYT</i>
Asia	-52.9	-46.9	-58.5	-56.8
Powerful West	-62.2	-62.2	-58.0	-48.7
Middle East & North Africa	-63.3	-50.2	-83.1	-70.3
Sub-Saharan Africa	-46.7	-33.3	-61.2	-63.7
Former Soviet Bloc, Balkans, & Central Asia	-49.0	-42.2	-57.5	-53.0
<i>listcoef</i> command using pooled model with cluster standard errors				
Asia	-53.1	-46.9	-57.6	-56.8
Powerful West	-63.3	-62.2	-62.0	-49.0
Middle East & North Africa	-63.2	-50.2	-80.9	-70.6
Sub-Saharan Africa	-47.9	-33.4	-62.5	-64.2
Former Soviet Bloc, Balkans, & Central Asia	-48.4	-42.1	-57.3	-52.8

Newsweek and the *Economist* devoted disproportionate attention to human rights violations in Latin American countries. We then ran models with Cole's (2010) New York Times data, and these also strongly confirm our findings, including when compared to *Sub-Saharan Africa*.

To ensure that these findings are not artifacts of our regional classification, we replaced our six U.N.-based regional categories with the "civilization" categories conceived of by Huntington (1996), and put to statistical use by Beckfield (2003). These include what Huntington calls the African, Buddhist, Hindu, Islamic, Japanese, Latin American, Orthodox, Sino, and Western "civilizations." Our reference category is Huntington's "Latin American civilization." The results are broadly consistent with our previous findings. The Western media report more on abuses in the Latin American civilization than on those in African ($p < .10$), Hindu ($p < .01$), Islamic ($p < .001$), Orthodox ($p < .01$), or Sino ($p < .01$) civilizations. These results are presented in the Appendix.

To explore whether a few countries are driving our findings, Figure 2 illustrates the variation in the intensity of media coverage by country, with the more prominent labels representing greater coverage. We included dummy variables for the top 10 most shamed countries in the world by the Anglo-American media during the period of our study, including the top four shamed in Latin America. Those countries include, in order of magnitude of press coverage, China (with 250 reports),

the Soviet Union/Russia (with 154), the United States (with 105), El Salvador (with 94), Indonesia (with 89), the U.K. (with 76), Chile (with 68), Turkey (with 62), Guatemala (with 54), and Argentina (with 53). Although our results changed slightly, we still found evidence of a Latin Bias.²²

Our statistical analyses all support the claim that three key Anglo-American news sources—the *Economist*, *Newsweek*, and the New York Times—have a clear geographic bias when reporting on human rights abuses worldwide. They publish more stories on human rights violations in Latin America and comparatively neglect equal or worse abuses in other world regions. Why?

Practitioner Explanations

To explore the Latin Human Rights Bias' origins, we emailed a questionnaire outlining our statistical results to a purposefully selected sample of 24 leading journalists, seeking the kind of interpretive input that key informants can best provide (Tansey 2007).²³ We selected our respondents for their knowledge of, and experience with,

²² Controlling for the top 10, Latin American countries received more coverage by the *Economist* than countries in the Powerful West; they received more coverage by *Newsweek* than countries in the Powerful West and the Middle East, and North Africa; and they received more coverage by the New York Times than countries in Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa and the Former Soviet Bloc, Balkans, and Central Asia.

²³ These emails were sent between February and April 2009.

TABLE 3. Determinants of Media Coverage, 1981–2000: US Foreign Policy Interests

	<i>Economic Aid</i>	<i>Military Aid</i>	<i>Proximity</i>	<i>Exports</i>	<i>Imports</i>	<i>PTAs</i>	<i>UN</i>	<i>All</i>
Lagged dependent variable	0.171 (0.03)***	0.169 (0.03)***	0.158 (0.03)***	0.156 (0.03)***	0.157 (0.03)***	0.165 (0.03)***	0.138 (0.03)***	0.134 (0.02)***
Number of battle deaths	0.048 (0.03)~	0.049 (0.02)*	0.054 (0.03)*	0.055 (0.03)*	0.055 (0.03)*	0.051 (0.02)*	0.056 (0.02)*	0.058 (0.03)*
Number of INGO ties	0.332 (0.20)~	0.305 (0.18)~	0.475 (0.20)*	0.482 (0.20)*	0.474 (0.20)*	0.387 (0.19)*	0.686 (0.18)***	0.681 (0.18)***
Amnesty International press releases	0.047 (0.01)***	0.047 (0.01)***	0.047 (0.01)***	0.054 (0.01)***	0.053 (0.01)***	0.045 (0.01)***	0.040 (0.01)**	0.040 (0.01)**
Polity IV	-0.056 (0.02)***	-0.057 (0.02)***	-0.055 (0.02)***	-0.056 (0.02)***	-0.056 (0.02)***	-0.053 (0.02)***	-0.068 (0.01)***	-0.067 (0.01)***
GDP <i>per capita</i>	0.244 (0.10)*	0.241 (0.10)*	0.184 (0.10)~	0.163 (0.15)	0.118 (0.15)	0.172 (0.11)	0.050 (0.08)	-0.007 (0.16)
Population size	0.156 (0.14)	0.193 (0.14)	0.108 (0.15)	0.101 (0.17)	0.065 (0.17)	0.133 (0.15)	0.159 (0.15)	0.181 (0.17)
Size of military	0.270 (0.13)*	0.241 (0.13)~	0.240 (0.13)~	0.228 (0.12)~	0.232 (0.12)~	0.256 (0.13)*	0.173 (0.13)	0.149 (0.12)
Post-Cold War	0.371 (0.14)**	0.417 (0.14)**	0.352 (0.14)*	0.359 (0.14)*	0.350 (0.14)*	0.309 (0.14)*	0.290 (0.13)*	0.273 (0.14)~
Asia	-0.761 (0.30)*	-0.826 (0.30)**	-0.548 (0.32)~	-0.689 (0.30)*	-0.678 (0.30)*	-0.791 (0.29)**	-0.814 (0.29)**	-1.045 (0.37)**
Powerful West	-0.923 (0.44)*	-0.929 (0.42)*	-1.067 (0.46)*	-1.087 (0.49)*	-1.033 (0.51)*	-0.950 (0.42)*	-1.541 (0.39)***	-1.535 (0.44)***
Middle East & North Africa	-1.048 (0.27)***	-1.165 (0.27)***	-0.902 (0.29)**	-0.983 (0.29)***	-0.955 (0.29)***	-0.976 (0.27)***	-1.071 (0.25)***	-1.170 (0.28)***
Sub-Saharan Africa	-0.627 (0.40)	-0.655 (0.41)	-0.564 (0.40)	-0.704 (0.42)~	-0.675 (0.41)	-0.659 (0.42)	-1.135 (0.34)**	-1.294 (0.35)***
Former Soviet Bloc, Balkans, & Central Asia	-0.682 (0.28)*	-0.688 (0.28)*	-0.582 (0.29)*	-0.647 (0.29)*	-0.590 (0.32)~	-0.641 (0.28)*	-1.189 (0.30)***	-1.241 (0.34)***
Physical integrity	-0.178 (0.04)***	-0.181 (0.04)***	-0.184 (0.05)***	-0.183 (0.05)***	-0.184 (0.05)***	-0.181 (0.05)***	-0.154 (0.05)***	-0.155 (0.05)***
Free speech	0.058 (0.12)	0.057 (0.12)	0.044 (0.12)	0.038 (0.12)	0.029 (0.12)	0.057 (0.13)	-0.030 (0.12)	-0.033 (0.11)
US Economic Aid	0.033 (0.05)							-0.040 (0.05)
US Military Aid		0.062 (0.04)						0.041 (0.04)
Geodesic Proximity			-0.122 (0.06)*					0.090 (0.26)
US Exports				0.007 (0.06)	0.046 (0.08)			0.015 (0.06)
US Imports						0.231 (0.16)		-0.023 (0.08)
US PTAs							1.072 (0.21)***	0.264 (0.18)
UN Voting Affinity with the United States								1.105 (0.20)***
Constant	-5.568 (1.15)***	-5.315 (1.18)***	-4.622 (1.39)***	-5.522 (1.40)***	-5.291 (1.37)***	-5.161 (1.24)***	-5.470 (1.08)***	-5.590 (2.47)*
Number of observations	2334	2334	2334	2315	2315	2334	2281	2281
Number of countries	142	142	142	141	141	142	140	140
χ^2	756.21***	765.68***	1031.40***	760.37***	761.90***	723.84***	825.38***	869.48***

(Notes. Standard errors in parentheses.)

Significance levels: ~ $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.)*Percent Change*

	<i>All</i>
Asia	-64.8
Powerful West	-78.4
Middle East & North Africa	-69.0
Sub-Saharan Africa	-72.6
Former Soviet Bloc, Balkans, & Central Asia	-71.1
<i>listcoef</i> command using pooled model with cluster standard errors	
Asia	-64.8
Powerful West	-78.8
Middle East & North Africa	-69.1
Sub-Saharan Africa	-72.8
Former Soviet Bloc, Balkans, & Central Asia	-71.1

ciations should be positive, save for *Geodisc Proximity*, which should be inversely related to *Media Coverage*.

These expectations are partially born out in the statistical analysis. As Table 3 indicates, *Media Coverage* is negatively associated with *Geodisc Proximity* to Washington D.C., and positively associated with *UN Voting Affinity*. Inclusion of these US policy and proximity variables does not eliminate statistical traces of the Latin Bias; however, since the Anglo-American media still reported more frequently on countries in *Latin America* than in *Asia* (−64.8%), the *Powerful West* (−78.4%), the *Middle East and North Africa* (−69%) and the *Soviet Bloc and Central Asia* (−71.7%), as well as *Sub-Saharan Africa* in 58% of the full set of models, we estimated to gauge the robustness of these findings. These results are robust across alternative specifications. US policy and proximity variables explain a portion of the Latin Bias.

Democratization

Another Latin America-based *Newsweek* correspondent emphasized the importance of regional democratization in the 1980s and early 1990s, which provided “a channel of protest that found a wider audience, one that was perhaps unavailable to Asians and Africans, where human rights abuses were surely just as serious if not worse.”²⁹ This argument also resonates with existing scholarship. As Jagers and Gurr (1995:477) note, the democratic “third wave” in the developing and former communist world first began in Latin America during the late 1970s, escalated sharply during the 1980s, and then leveled off in the 1990s. The next region to experience democratic change was the Middle East, which began far more modestly in the 1980s, and achieved much lower rates of democratic openness during the 1990s. Eurasia, Asia, and the Pacific followed suit, and then Africa in the 1990s. By the mid-1990s, only the Eurasian region had outperformed Latin America’s rate of democratic opening. As Remmer (1992–3) argues, Latin America’s political shift during the 1980s was deeper, more widespread, and more comprehensive than in any other period of the region’s history.³⁰

The scholarly literature is similarly supportive of the notion that democratization should attract greater international media attention. Democratization is a “dramatic performance,” Whitehead (1999) argues, aimed at multiple domestic and international audiences. More often than not, he claims, observers portray democratization as a gripping tale of heroes and villains, tragedy, and triumph. As witnessed mostly recently in the Arab Spring,³¹ democratization is often an intense media attraction. The emotion, the demands for liberty, the dramatic protests, the government repression, the deal making, and the demands for post-authoritarian justice are all an immense draw (Shelly 2001). Violations of human rights, along with impassioned calls for greater human rights respect, are often integral to this drama.

As is true for human rights, however, international coverage of democratization efforts is not distributed equally across time and space. Pro-democracy protests and brutal

repression in Kwangju, South Korea, for example, attracted little international coverage in May 1980, especially when compared to press coverage of Beijing’s pro-democracy protests 9 years later. Still, it stands to reason that a temporal and spatial clustering of democratization dramas should have provoked the same kind of intense media coverage of Latin America that Eastern Europe experienced in 1989, or the Arab Spring in 2011. These processes are likely intensified by the multiplication of information sources, easing of press restrictions, and the enhanced physical mobility associated with democratic opening.

Above, we modeled the relationship between autocracy and democracy and global reporting patterns with *Polity IV*. To further explore the role of regime type and regime change, Table 4 again includes variables from the *Polity IV* data set, whose scale ranges from −10 (most autocratic) to 10 (most democratic). This time, however, we follow the standard set by Mansfield and Snyder (2002) and break the *Polity IV* scale into three dummy variables: democracy (7 or above), anocracy (between −6 and −6), and autocracy (−7 or below).

To model the importance of democratization, rather than static levels of democracy, Table 4 also includes tests of partial and full regime transitions. Following Mansfield and Snyder (2002), we define *Partial Transitions* as a shift over two consecutive years to anocracy, and *Full Transitions* as a shift over two consecutive years to either autocracy or democracy. We also create variables to identify autocracies and democracies that remained stable over two consecutive years: *Stable Autocracy* and *Stable Democracy*.

Table 4 first replicates the findings in column one of Table 2 and then includes the regime stability and transition variables. We find little evidence that *Media Coverage* is associated either with regime type or with transition (other than in stable autocracies, where media coverage is less). In all these models, the Latin American Bias remains present (including in 37% of the full set of models we estimated to gauge the robustness of these findings in *Sub-Saharan Africa*), suggesting that democratization provides little explanation. This finding requires further investigation; it is possible, for example, that some of the other variables that we included in our regressions accounted for the most salient elements of the democratization process.

Catholic Church

Several of our respondents claimed that the Catholic Church boosted the media’s human rights reporting, since Church clergy and lay personnel often served as transnational conduits for human rights information. A Rio-based correspondent, for example, said that Catholic liberation theologians helped transformed parts of the Latin American Church into “champion(s) of civilians and ... critic(s) of governments,”³² while a current *Newsweek* correspondent said that “...much of the human rights reporting and even more of the general consciousness raising [in Latin America] ... was done by the Catholic Church. Several of the religious orders, most famously the Jesuits and the Maryknolls, were involved...”³³

The scholarly literature offers support for the notion that a stronger, better organized and more densely pres-

²⁹ Email communication, February 26, 2009.

³⁰ Although formal democratic systems are now widespread in Latin America, some scholars are less than enthusiastic about this democracy’s quality (e.g., Pearce 2010 or Roberts 1998).

³¹ A search of the New York Times archive on December 15, 2011, for example, revealed 4200 hits for the search term “Arab Spring” during the past 12 months alone.

³² Email communication, February 26, 2009.

³³ Email communication, April 20, 2009.

TABLE 4. Determinants of Media Coverage, 1981–2000: Regime Transitions

	<i>Regime Stability</i>	<i>Full Transitions</i>	<i>Partial Transitions</i>
Lagged dependent variable	0.147 (0.03)***	0.158 (0.03)***	0.158 (0.03)***
Number of battle deaths	0.039 (0.02)	0.044 (0.03)~	0.044 (0.03)~
Number of INGO ties	0.308 (0.22)	0.413 (0.23)~	0.388 (0.22)~
Amnesty International press releases	0.054 (0.01)***	0.052 (0.01)***	0.053 (0.01)***
Polity IV	-0.069 (0.02)***	-0.052 (0.02)**	-0.048 (0.02)**
GDP <i>per capita</i>	0.222 (0.10)*	0.187 (0.10)~	0.195 (0.10)~
Population size	0.211 (0.14)	0.126 (0.15)	0.133 (0.15)
Size of military	0.255 (0.13)~	0.289 (0.14)*	0.288 (0.14)*
Post–Cold War	0.280 (0.14)*	0.324 (0.14)*	0.314 (0.14)*
Asia	-0.766 (0.31)*	-0.732 (0.31)*	-0.740 (0.31)*
Powerful West	-0.870 (0.44)*	-0.967 (0.43)*	-0.995 (0.42)*
Middle East & North Africa	-0.923 (0.31)**	-0.983 (0.29)***	-0.976 (0.29)***
Sub-Saharan Africa	-0.758 (0.45)~	-0.619 (0.43)	-0.640 (0.44)
Former Soviet Bloc, Balkans, & Central Asia	-0.760 (0.28)**	-0.711 (0.29)*	-0.731 (0.29)*
Physical integrity	-0.161 (0.04)***	-0.179 (0.04)***	-0.178 (0.04)***
Free speech	0.004 (0.13)	0.078 (0.13)	0.072 (0.13)
Stable Democracy	-0.197 (0.22)		
Stable Autocracy	-0.889 (0.23)***		
Full Democratic Transition		0.147 (0.24)	
Full Autocratic Transition		0.457 (0.45)	
Partial Democratic Transition			0.362 (0.25)
Partial Autocratic Transition			0.707 (0.49)
Constant	-4.942 (1.36)***	-5.586 (1.37)***	-5.504 (1.37)***
Number of observations	2205	2205	2205
Number of countries	142	142	142
χ^2	886.42***	826.04***	754.21***

(Notes. Standard errors in parentheses.

Significance levels: ~ $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.)

<i>Percent Change</i>	<i>Regime Stability</i>	<i>Full Transitions</i>	<i>Partial Transitions</i>
Asia	-53.5	-51.9	-52.3
Powerful West	-58.1	-62.0	-63.0
Middle East & North Africa	-60.3	-62.6	-62.3
Sub-Saharan Africa	-53.1	-46.2	-47.3
Former Soviet Bloc, Balkans, & Central Asia	-53.2	-50.9	-51.8
<i>listcoef</i> command using pooled model with cluster standard errors			
Asia	-54.2	-52.0	-52.4
Powerful West	-59.0	-63.0	-63.9
Middle East & North Africa	-60.3	-62.5	-62.3
Sub-Saharan Africa	-54.3	-47.6	-48.5
Former Soviet Bloc, Balkans, & Central Asia	-53.0	-50.4	-51.4

ent Church should lead to better transnational flows of human rights information and more media reporting on abuses (Smith 1979, 1991; Dipboye 1982; Mainwaring and Wilde 1989; Cleary 1990; Engler 2000; Levine 2010; Mantilla 2010). To explore this possibility, we built a unique data set of Church strength based on the *Statistical Yearbook of the Church*, published annually by the Vatican's *Secretaria Status Rationarium Generale Ecclesiae* of the *Libreria Editrice Vaticana*.³⁴

Table 5 begins by replicating our basic findings from Table 2 and then includes a number of Catholic variables. As a basic control, we begin with the number of *Baptized Catholics* (logged) in each country and then include a series of variables that cumulatively describe the Church's country-level institutional strength: number of *Pastoral Centers*, *Metrosees*, and *Bishops* (logged); size of *Workforce*, defined as number of priests and lay staff of various designations; *Catholic Training*, defined by the Yearbook as

“centers for the formation of the priesthood,” including secondary schools, residences, and seminaries; and *K-12 Catholic schools*. A larger Catholic country infrastructure should produce more information on human rights abuses, since Catholic institutions serve as important nodes for the collection and distribution of information. We also include number of *Welfare Institutions*, defined as “hospitals ... dispensaries, leprosaria, homes for the old, the chronically ill, invalids and the handicapped, orphanages, nurseries, matrimonial advice centers, other.” This data should measure general Catholic infrastructure as well the engagement of progressive Catholic forces, since liberation theologians emphasized reaching out, mobilizing, and aiding Latin America's poor.

Although the Anglo-American media were indeed more likely to report on abuses in countries with a strong Catholic *K-12* educational system, none of our other Catholic indicators were statistically significant, and these results are robust across alternative specifications. The most likely explanation is that the Catholic Church was not *uniformly* critical of human rights abuses in the Latin American region (Smith 1979; Mantilla 2010). Thus,

³⁴ We thank Mary Gautier of Georgetown University's Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate for referring us to this source. Froehle and Gautier (2003) present descriptive statistics from the *Yearbook's* 2000 volume.

TABLE 5. Determinants of Media Coverage, 1981–2000: Catholic Church

	Baptized	Pastoral	Metrosees	Bishops	Workforce	Training	K-12	Welfare	All
Lagged dependent variable	0.266 (0.02)***	0.266 (0.02)***	0.267 (0.02)***	0.170 (0.03)***	0.266 (0.02)***	0.265 (0.02)***	0.260 (0.02)***	0.266 (0.02)***	0.243 (0.02)***
Number of battle deaths	0.041 (0.02)~	0.041 (0.02)~	0.039 (0.02)~	0.050 (0.02)*	0.041 (0.02)~	0.044 (0.02)~	0.044 (0.02)*	0.041 (0.02)~	0.059 (0.02)***
Number of INGO ties	0.394 (0.19)*	0.409 (0.20)*	0.377 (0.19)*	0.355 (0.20)~	0.408 (0.20)*	0.411 (0.20)*	0.273 (0.17)	0.410 (0.20)*	0.236 (0.19)
Annexes International press releases	0.034 (0.01)**	0.034 (0.01)**	0.033 (0.01)**	0.049 (0.01)***	0.035 (0.01)**	0.034 (0.01)*	0.037 (0.01)**	0.035 (0.01)**	0.037 (0.01)**
Policy IV	-0.053 (0.01)***	-0.053 (0.02)***	-0.052 (0.01)***	-0.053 (0.02)***	-0.052 (0.02)***	-0.051 (0.02)***	-0.053 (0.01)***	-0.051 (0.02)***	-0.051 (0.01)***
GDP per capita	0.188 (0.09)*	0.177 (0.09)~	0.207 (0.09)*	0.217 (0.10)*	0.181 (0.09)~	0.189 (0.09)*	0.201 (0.10)*	0.172 (0.10)~	0.260 (0.10)*
Population size	0.161 (0.13)	0.167 (0.13)	0.224 (0.14)	0.156 (0.14)	0.158 (0.14)	0.205 (0.15)	0.083 (0.13)	0.170 (0.14)	0.198 (0.14)
Size of military	0.259 (0.12)*	0.262 (0.13)*	0.254 (0.12)*	0.265 (0.13)*	0.264 (0.13)*	0.262 (0.12)*	0.274 (0.12)*	0.258 (0.13)*	0.328 (0.12)**
Post-Cold War	0.379 (0.13)**	0.371 (0.13)**	0.367 (0.13)**	0.362 (0.14)**	0.368 (0.13)**	0.370 (0.13)**	0.422 (0.13)**	0.375 (0.13)**	0.460 (0.14)**
Asia	-0.721 (0.27)**	-0.705 (0.28)*	-0.756 (0.28)**	-0.758 (0.30)*	-0.688 (0.28)*	-0.781 (0.29)**	-0.546 (0.27)*	-0.735 (0.28)**	-0.903 (0.32)**
Powerful West	-1.013 (0.40)*	-0.996 (0.39)**	-1.004 (0.39)**	-0.974 (0.41)*	-0.971 (0.39)*	-1.098 (0.38)**	-0.894 (0.38)*	-1.014 (0.39)**	-1.353 (0.38)**
Middle East & North Africa	-1.046 (0.32)**	-1.046 (0.32)**	-1.092 (0.28)***	-1.012 (0.31)**	-1.011 (0.33)**	-1.193 (0.40)**	-0.682 (0.29)*	-1.047 (0.37)**	-1.355 (0.37)**
Sub-Saharan Africa	-0.633 (0.39)	-0.605 (0.40)	-0.639 (0.39)~	-0.631 (0.42)	-0.613 (0.40)	-0.649 (0.40)	-0.571 (0.40)	-0.637 (0.40)	-0.761 (0.41)~
Former Soviet Bloc, Balkans, & Central Asia	-0.663 (0.28)*	-0.675 (0.28)*	-0.711 (0.28)*	-0.680 (0.30)*	-0.662 (0.29)*	-0.815 (0.33)*	-0.200 (0.34)	-0.757 (0.36)*	-0.348 (0.42)
Physical integrity	-0.167 (0.04)***	-0.165 (0.04)***	-0.171 (0.05)***	-0.180 (0.04)***	-0.165 (0.04)***	-0.167 (0.04)***	-0.164 (0.04)***	-0.168 (0.04)***	-0.181 (0.04)***
Free Speech	0.059 (0.12)	0.058 (0.12)	0.056 (0.12)	0.076 (0.13)	0.062 (0.12)	0.069 (0.12)	0.037 (0.13)	0.070 (0.12)	0.079 (0.13)
Baptized Catholics	-0.026 (0.04)								-0.001 (0.08)
Pastoral Centers		-0.036 (0.04)	-0.145 (0.09)	-0.004 (0.07)					0.038 (0.12)
Metrosees									-0.158 (0.20)
Bishops									0.124 (0.24)
Workforce									-0.030 (0.13)
Clerical Training Centers									-0.298 (0.15)*
K-12									0.289 (0.07)***
Welfare Institutions									-0.126 (0.10)
Constant	-5.376 (1.21)***	-5.376 (1.21)***	-5.527 (1.17)***	-5.419 (1.23)***	-5.399 (1.22)***	-5.504 (1.20)***	-5.354 (1.20)***	-5.358 (1.22)***	-5.707 (1.12)***
Number of observations	2282	2282	2282	2333	2284	2282	2282	2280	2279
Number of countries	141	141	141	142	141	141	141	141	141
χ^2	935.11***	921.66***	949.45***	757.70***	924.00***	962.30***	929.51***	912.00***	1084.14***

(Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. Significance levels: ~ $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.)

Percent Change	All
Asia	-59.5
Powerful West	-74.2
Middle East & North Africa	-74.2
Sub-Saharan Africa	-53.3
Former Soviet Bloc, Balkans, & Central Asia	-29.4
Asia	-59.8
Powerful West	-74.4
Middle East & North Africa	-74.2
Sub-Saharan Africa	-53.8
Former Soviet Bloc, Balkans, & Central Asia	-29.1

while parts of the Church may have served as local collectors and transnational disseminators of human rights information, other, more conservative, portions did not fulfill this role.

Path Dependency

Another respondent provided a path-dependent explanation for Latin America's high media profile. According to this longtime *Newsweek* reporter and former foreign editor, "it takes a long time for human rights issues to die—for Pinochet to get prosecuted at last, for example. There's a lot of cleaning up to do after decades of extreme repression."³⁵ Thus, Latin America's early activism and transitional justice movement set in motion legal, institutional, and normative processes that played out well into the 1990s, continuing to attract media attention.

This claim finds support in the general literature on path dependency and "first mover" advantages, (Lieberman and Montgomery 1988; Pierson 2000), as well as in historical discussions of Latin America's pioneering role in the global cascade of post-authoritarian and post-conflict truth seeking (Sikkink and Walling 2007; Thoms, Ron, and Paris 2010). It is bolstered more generally by discussions of Latin America's early role creating modern human rights NGOs (Ball 2000), especially in key countries such as Argentina (Bouvard 1994; Brysk, 1994; Sikkink 2008).

Latin America's leading role in the global human rights movement is no historical accident; notions of individual human rights have a distinguished pedigree in the region, due in large part to Latin America's early experience with European-style states (Holsti 1996) and its dominant postcolonial ideology of Liberalism, rather than the Marxism common to other (and much later) postcolonial areas (Colburn 1994; Ball 2000; Carroza 2003).

To examine how previous reporting relates to current reporting, we begin in Table 6 by lagging our dependent variable, *Media Coverage*, in yearly increments of up to 10 years. This allows us to examine whether the amount of media coverage in prior years relates to current coverage of abuses. Then, we calculate the running sum of all media reports published in previous years, starting in 1981, to examine whether the total volume of previous media attention (rather than the lag) relates to the media's current coverage.

Table 6 offers some evidence of path dependency. Countries that received *Media Coverage* in the past are also more likely to receive it in the future, controlling for the level of human rights abuse and other situational factors. Path dependency, in other words, does help explain a portion of the Latin Bias.

To summarize our empirical findings: First, we demonstrated that the Anglo-American media reported more often on human rights abuses in Latin America from 1981 to 2000, regardless of abuse severity, regime type, strength of transnational activists, or mobilization opportunities for local activists. Next, we relayed our findings to senior journalists with international experience, whose practitioner-based explanations resonated with much of the existing scholarship. We then gathered data to systematically test their suggestions and found that some of their hypotheses were confirmed: The region's physical proximity to the United States, relevance to American

policy debates, and path dependency all had statistically significant and positive associations with *Media Coverage*. Only one of our Catholic variables, *Catholic K-12*, however, was statistically significant, and our findings did not support the practitioners' democratization hypotheses. We then ended our empirical investigation with models including several combinations of the key variables from Tables 2–6. In these models (reported in the appendix), all regional coefficients, including those on *Sub-Saharan Africa*, were negative and statistically significantly different from *Latin America*.

Within-Region Variation

Although the Anglo-American media's human rights attention was disproportionately focused on Latin America, it was not allocated evenly within the Latin region. As Figure 3 demonstrates, a minority of countries received far more coverage than others. Still, it is striking to note just how many large or middle-sized Latin American countries did attract substantial human rights coverage during our study period. Of the 33 countries in the Latin American and Caribbean region, 20, or 60% of the total, received at least one human rights mention in either the *Economist* or *Newsweek*. More importantly, nine of these countries (27% of the total) received substantial coverage of 40 articles or more: El Salvador, Chile, Guatemala, Argentina, Colombia, Cuba, Mexico, Haiti, and Nicaragua. The countries that received no mention at all were, for the most part, the microstates and islands of the Caribbean, such as St. Lucia or St. Kitts. Thus, while the Anglo-American media's attention was unevenly allocated within the region, it was not dramatically skewed toward a very small number of countries.

Although this is not the place for a full within-region analysis, we can briefly draw on our global findings to advance plausible explanations for the leading role of Latin America's top human rights media contenders. First, all of the region's nine human rights media leaders experienced substantial internal unrest and violence during the study period, accompanied by widespread human rights abuses. Our US policy variables, moreover, likely explain much of their attraction to the Anglo-American media. Top-ranked El Salvador, for example, was a major focus of the Reagan administration's anti-Communist strategy in the 1980s, sparking intense debates over US responsibility for El Salvador government abuses (Danner 1994). As part of that same Reagan-era strategy, the United States was heavily involved in Nicaragua, another top media leader, through its patronage of the Contra rebels. US policy concerns must have also been partly responsible for Chile's media prominence, since the US government heavily supported that country's 1973 coup (Kornbluh 2003), and the US-supported regime remained in power throughout the 1980s. Cuba, of course, has always been a leading US policy concern for reasons of anti-Communism, immigration, and domestic politics, while Haiti has been, on occasion, intensely policy relevant due to its potential for exporting refugees. In 1994–1995, moreover, US forces intervened in that country militarily.

Another of our global findings, path dependency, also seems relevant. Although the civil war in El Salvador ended in the early 1990s, the war's aftermath was accompanied by intense international engagement with the country's wartime and post-war human rights problems. The U.N.'s peacekeeping mission to El Salvador, UNSAL (1992–95), for example, was charged with reporting

³⁵ Email communication, April 20, 2009.

TABLE 6. Determinants of Media Coverage, 1981–2000: Path Dependency

	2-year Lag	5-year Lag	10-year Lag	Running Sum
Number of battle deaths	0.053 (0.02)*	0.028 (0.02)	-0.005 (0.02)	0.053 (0.03)*
Number of INGO ties	0.409 (0.24)~	0.429 (0.30)	0.413 (0.38)	0.352 (0.22)
Amnesty International press releases	0.076 (0.01)***	0.094 (0.01)***	0.105 (0.01)***	0.067 (0.01)***
Polity IV	-0.061 (0.02)***	-0.074 (0.02)***	-0.073 (0.01)***	-0.065 (0.02)***
GDP <i>per capita</i>	0.202 (0.11)~	0.184 (0.10)~	0.120 (0.10)	0.219 (0.10)*
Population size	0.133 (0.15)	0.190 (0.15)	0.241 (0.17)	0.139 (0.15)
Size of military	0.268 (0.13)*	0.199 (0.13)	0.200 (0.15)	0.243 (0.13)~
Post-Cold War	0.340 (0.14)*	0.261 (0.14)~		0.227 (0.15)
Asia	-0.775 (0.31)*	-0.745 (0.31)*	-0.878 (0.35)*	-0.713 (0.29)*
Powerful West	-0.913 (0.42)*	-0.851 (0.41)*	-0.738 (0.47)	-0.769 (0.40)~
Middle East & North Africa	-1.089 (0.28)***	-1.036 (0.30)***	-0.925 (0.28)***	-1.071 (0.27)***
Sub-Saharan Africa	-0.726 (0.44)	-0.871 (0.41)*	-0.728 (0.43)~	-0.693 (0.40)~
Former Soviet Bloc, Balkans, & Central Asia	-0.748 (0.29)*	-0.797 (0.29)**	-1.094 (0.44)*	-0.909 (0.34)**
Physical integrity	-0.191 (0.04)***	-0.211 (0.04)***	-0.251 (0.05)***	-0.208 (0.04)***
Free speech	0.072 (0.13)	0.084 (0.14)	0.093 (0.15)	0.050 (0.13)
2-year lagged DV	0.143 (0.02)***			
5-year lagged DV		0.142 (0.03)***		
10-year lagged DV			0.084 (0.03)**	
Lagged summed DV				0.020 (0.00)***
Constant	-5.502 (1.41)***	-5.139 (1.58)**	-4.275 (2.17)*	-5.058 (1.30)***
Number of observations	2209	1815	1170	2334
Number of countries	142	142	123	142
χ^2	779.93***	813.17***	819.93***	762.49***

(Notes. Standard errors in parentheses.

Significance levels: ~ $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.)

Percent Change	2-years Lag	5-years Lag	10-years Lag	Running Sum
Asia	-53.9	-52.5	-58.4	-51.0
Powerful West	-59.9	-57.3	-52.2	-53.7
Middle East & North Africa	-66.3	-64.5	-60.4	-65.7
Sub-Saharan Africa	-51.6	-58.2	-51.7	-50.0
Former Soviet Bloc, Balkans, & Central Asia	-52.7	-54.9	-66.5	-59.7
<i>listcoef</i> command using pooled model with cluster standard errors				
Asia	-53.8	-52.1	-58.5	-50.4
Powerful West	-60.7	-57.6	-52.2	-54.3
Middle East & North Africa	-66.2	-64.2	-60.4	-65.0
Sub-Saharan Africa	-52.5	-58.4	-51.7	-49.8
Former Soviet Bloc, Balkans, & Central Asia	-51.9	-54.0	-66.5	-56.0

on post-war human rights concerns, and as part of the 1992 peace accords, the UN established a truth commission to investigate war-time violations.³⁶ And while Chilean strongman Augusto Pinochet relinquished power in 1990, his 17-year rule continued to provoke intense international legal and media interest. In 1998, a Spanish judge indicted Pinochet for human rights abuses, prompting a 2-year London house arrest and a firestorm of international and Latin American legal and human rights interest.

Among the countries that did not receive substantial attention, the majority were small countries or islands that did not experience gross human rights abuses and had little American policy relevance. One outlier is Uruguay, whose 1976–1985 military rule involved the imprisonment of thousands of political prisoners under “appalling conditions,” according to Human Rights Watch.³⁷ The country was never a pillar of US foreign

policy concern, however, and its post-authoritarian justice procedures were delayed until the new millennium, thus falling outside our study period.

An Agenda for Future Research

This paper established a bias in the Anglo-American media’s global coverage of human rights from 1981 to 2000, and this finding raises several questions for further research. One is whether this Latin Bias has endured after 9/11. Logically, Middle Eastern human rights abuses should have assumed greater importance after this date, and the Anglo-American media’s concerns with Latin American human rights abuses should be comparatively diminished. Neither 9/11, the subsequent Iraqi and Afghan invasions, nor the Global War on Terror had a significant Latin American policy angle. To investigate, scholars could extend the existing *Newsweek*, *Economist*, and New York Times data past the year 2000.

Scholars could also extend our knowledge to other media sources. It would be useful, for example, to code other leading Anglo-American media sources, while also broadening out to major Western media outside the Anglo-American world. Although Ramos et al. (2007) demonstrated that the *Economist’s* and *Newsweek’s* human

³⁶ The United Nations Observer Group in El Salvador (ONUSAL) and its human rights verification efforts were integral to the country’s peace accords signed in Mexico City in January 1992, as was the U.N.’s Truth Commission for El Salvador, which published its findings in March 1993.

³⁷ Human Rights Watch, “Uruguay: Ex-President Faces Prosecution for Military-Era Abuses,” May 19, 2005, available online at <http://www.hrw.org/news/2005/05/19/uruguay-ex-president-faces-prosecution-military-era-abuses>. Last accessed on December 17, 2011.

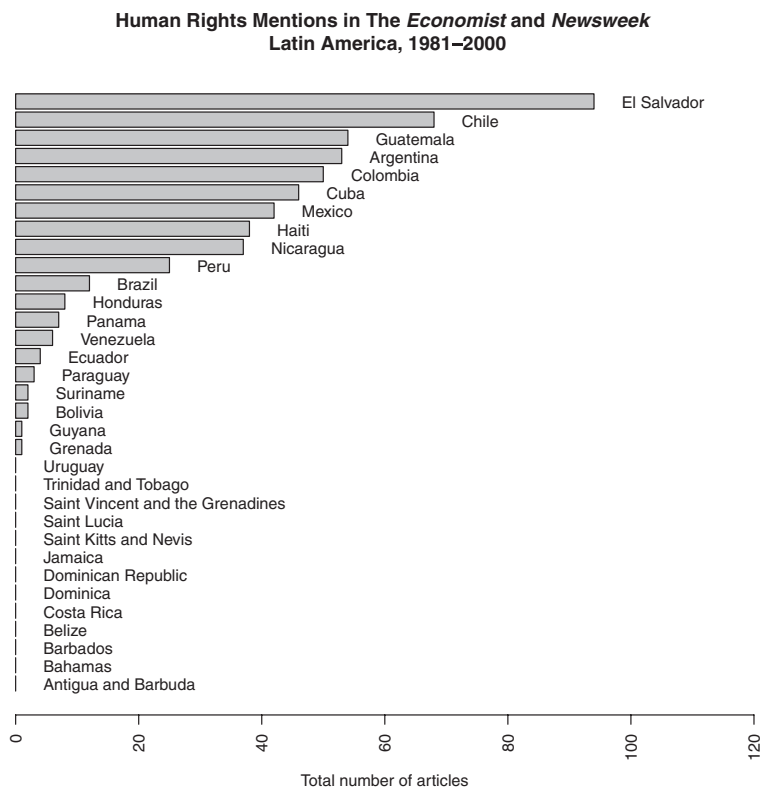


FIG 3. Human Rights Mentions in the *Economist* and *Newsweek* Latin America, 1981–2000

rights trends resembled those of other leading Western sources, scholars could code French, German, Scandinavian, and Spanish newspapers to gain a more complete picture of the Western media's human rights agenda. We also know very little about the Japanese media's human rights preoccupations.

To truly explore the global human rights agenda, however, scholars could go much further and begin coding the leading media sources of non-Western countries and emerging powers. Our knowledge of the global human rights agenda in these non-Western settings is extremely limited.³⁸ There is much to learn about the structure and determinants of the media's human rights reporting agendas in non-Western powers and about how these outlets perceive and respond to human rights problems worldwide. Political elites, intellectuals, and some social movement activists increasingly make use of the human rights idiom, but we know comparatively little about its deployment in individual, non-Western country settings.

A related project could track domestic usage of human rights terminology by political elites, social movement activists, local NGOs, and the local media across world regions. After all, the Anglo-American media's preference for Latin American human rights stories may well have been driven by greater local usage of rights-based terminology.³⁹ If true, journalists at the *Economist*, *Newsweek*, and *New York Times* may have simply been reflecting greater Latin American reliance on the rights idiom. To date, however, we have no measures of domestic human

rights usage by significant local actors. There is, however, intriguing preliminary evidence that the human rights idiom is used with greater frequency and local legitimacy in Latin America than in other world regions. Ball (2000), for example, showed that the developing world's first human rights NGOs appeared in Latin America during the 1970s and spread only years later to other world regions. Cole (2006), for his part, showed that Latin Americans were more likely than other developing world regions to use UN human rights mechanisms, while legal scholars have demonstrated that Latin America's regional human rights system is both stronger and more locally legitimate than that of Africa (Weston, Lukes, and Hnatt 1987).⁴⁰ The Middle East and Asia, for their part, have no formal regional human rights systems. And scholars of Latin America have long emphasized the importance of domestic human rights groups in processes of democratization, security sector, and legal reform. Carroza (2003) places these different pieces of evidence in historical perspective, demonstrating Latin America's long engagement with liberalism, individual liberties, and human rights.

In Africa, by contrast, scholars and activists argue precisely the opposite, claiming that the structure and style of the contemporary human rights discourse is often alien to the continent's popular struggles and idioms of social protest (Mutua 1994; Odinkalu 1999). Some African human rights practitioners, moreover, appear badly out of sync with popular sentiments, social movements, and social justice efforts. Englund's (2006) ethnography of human rights organizations in Malawi, for example, argues that rights-based NGOs are indifferent to the concerns of ordinary citizens, while Okafor's (2006) survey of Nigerian human rights groups makes a similarly powerful

³⁸ The literature on human rights in the non-Western media rarely explores coverage of human rights abuses in other countries. Instead, it tends to focus on the domestic media's portrayal of domestic human rights issues. See, for example, Gordon and Berkovitch (2007) and Sorensen (2011).

³⁹ Thanks to Carlos Heredia, Centro de Investigacion y Docencia Economicas, Mexico City, and to Janice Gallagher, Cornell University, for this suggestion.

⁴⁰ But see Okafor (2007) for recent improvements to the African regional human rights system.

claim. Similar arguments have been raised about the Middle East, albeit with less robust data (Dwyer 1991; An-Na'im 2000; Hicks 2002).

To date, however, no empirically rigorous research project has put these tantalizing snippets together into a coherent whole, collecting the kind of data necessary to persuasively argue that Latin America's media, politicians, social movement activists, and NGO professionals rely more heavily on human rights language than their counterparts elsewhere. We know even less about the timing of these trends; thus, while it may be true that Latin Americans were more likely in the 1970s or 1980s to use human rights language, this may no longer be the case. World polity diffusion being what it is (Meyer, Boli, Thomas, and Ramirez 1997), other regions may well have converged on Latin America's human rights-intensive style.

Conclusions

Three key Anglo-American media sources—the *Economist*, *Newsweek*, and the *New York Times*—were regionally biased in their human rights reporting from 1981 to 2000. They reported more heavily on abuses in Latin America, even when human rights violations elsewhere were equally or more severe. And while we can establish the empirical existence of the Latin Human Rights Bias beyond all reasonable doubt, we are able to explain it only in part.

The Latin Bias has implications for human rights scholarship and policymaking. Although regionally balanced human rights studies exist (e.g., Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink 1999), much of the discipline's earliest and most influential investigations were based on a handful of Latin American cases (Hafner-Burton and Ron 2009). With the exception of Carlson and Listhaug (2007) or Cole (2006), few scholars have systematically probed Huntington's (1996) claim that modern human rights policies are regionally constrained. Our study, however, makes a strong case for more regionally attuned human rights scholarship.

The Latin Bias also has implications for scholars relying on media-based event data (Woolley 2000; Davenport and Ball 2002). If global data sets on human rights and related issues suffer from regional biases, their use in scholarship and policymaking is rendered more complex.

Similarly, our findings suggest the global media are segmented into distinct issue areas, each with its own regional biases. The Anglo-American media's preference for Latin American human rights *news* differs substantially from its regional preferences for general news. It is thus misleading to claim that the media, "in general," prefer one region to another; instead, we require more nuanced explorations. The Middle East, for example, may lead when it comes to media coverage of terrorism, while Africa may lead on poverty.

Finally, the Latin Bias lends empirical support to general claims about Western elites' tendency to interpret similar events differently across region. Until now, most regionally inclined scholars have focused on "hard" phenomenon such as security and trade (Solingen 1998, 2007; Mansfield and Milner 1999; Katzenstein 2005), rather than on "softer" factors such as perception.⁴¹ The anecdotal evidence for regional variation in Western perceptions is strong, however; when combined with our

findings on human rights, the case for greater scrutiny is strengthened.

Consider, for example, Sub-Saharan Africa's reputation in Western eyes as a zone of chaos, poverty, and corruption. According to some scholars, these perceptions are both inaccurate and harmful, undermining foreign investment, motivating ill-advised aid, and justifying all manner of misguided interventions (Mutua 2001; Moyo 2009). Others claim that similarly pernicious stereotypes have generated ill-advised policies in the Middle East (Said 1979), the Balkans (Bakic-Hayden 1995), and Israel (Khazzoom 2003). Yet despite the importance of these claims, few scholars have systematically explored their existence.

This article thus breaks new ground by expanding our understanding of transnational human rights processes and by supplying a strong, *prima facie* case for more systematic scholarship on regional variations in Western attitudes and interpretations. We hope our findings spur other scholars, including both those interested in human rights and in other areas of international research, to probe in greater depth the roles of geographic region and the impressions they make on policy elites.

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⁴¹ Hemmer and Katzenstein (2002) is a notable exception.

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