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Do Human Rights Matter?

An Analysis of Presidential Human Rights Rhetoric from 1993-2014

My research examines how and why American presidents speak about human rights issues around the world, using rhetoric about human rights from the Clinton, George W. Bush, and Obama administrations. I theorized that rhetorical attention to human rights issues would be dependent on the strategic value of the region where the abuses take place, and that the president would shy away from criticizing countries where high numbers of U.S. military personnel were stationed. Using descriptive statistics and a measure of bivariate correlation, I found compelling evidence that presidential human rights attention was influenced by regional location, but only weak evidence to tie presidential speech to the presence of military personnel.

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International human rights norms first began to emerge with the creation of the United Nations in 1945, as the victorious Allies confronted the horrors of the Holocaust in Europe (Sikkink 2004, 6). Three years later, the U.N. General Assembly passed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the core foundational document of international human rights. Simply put, human rights are rights that all humans have by virtue of being human and are the most crucial rights of which a violation can ever be justified. They range from political and civil rights, like freedom from torture, to economic and social ones like the right to education (Donnelly 2003, 10). Because all humans have the same claim to human rights, they apply everyone no matter what sovereign state they reside in or what actions they have taken in the past. Over time, human rights have been incorporated into the foreign policy of the United States as well as many other nations.

When examining U.S. human rights policy it's crucial to note that the U.S. conception of human rights differs slightly from the principles laid out in the Universal Declaration. While Americans accept the notion of inalienable human rights, they have largely interpreted human rights through the lens of their traditional cultural norms and values. As a result, economic, social, and cultural rights are considered less important than political and civil ones in the United States (Donnelly 2007, 25). The former set of rights are also often thought of as positive rights, a guarantee to something, whereas the latter set of rights can be considered negative rights, or protection from something. This uniquely American strain of human rights manifests itself domestically and internationally. It influences which rights the U.S. government grants its citizens, and what kinds of human rights violations abroad the United States considers less serious, if violations at all. The difference between the American and international conceptions of human rights is important when investigating U.S. human rights policy.

Although the United States government has institutionalized human rights concerns into their foreign policy-making process since the 1970s, there are many critics of U.S. human rights policy. They accuse America of not making a large enough effort to stand up for human rights abroad, or using human rights issues as a way to achieve other political interests (Mertus 2004, 227). While human rights issues do have some impact on U.S. policy, many critics claim the U.S. prioritizes many other issues like national security and economic growth at the expense of human rights around the world. As a result, research concerning the extent to which human rights concerns are on the U.S. foreign policy agenda is important to gauging these criticisms.

To investigate how the United States prioritizes human rights, I'm conducting research into how and why American presidents speak about human rights issues around the world, using rhetoric about human rights from the Clinton, George W. Bush, and Obama administrations. The research question I'm investigating is: what factors cause U.S. presidents to rhetorically address some human rights concerns around the world and ignore others? Through this research question, I hope to explore how the agenda of the executive branch responds to human rights concerns by examining the content of presidential speeches. Not only does presidential rhetoric serve this function, it can also have powerful effects over other political actors, making it a tool the president can use to hinder human rights abuses.

In order to explore my research question, I will be testing three hypotheses:

H1: Because presidents act as the chief diplomat, they are less likely to criticize a country's human rights record than they are to evaluate it positively or mention it neutrally

H2: Human rights abuses located in regions of political importance to the U.S. will be more likely to be addressed, whereas abuses in less important regions will be addressed less frequently than their severity

would suggest. During the time period studied, Asia and the Middle East were areas of political importance, while Africa received much less political attention.

H3: The presence of U.S. military personnel in a country will lessen the chance that they are criticized.

The theory underlying the first hypothesis is that presidential human rights rhetoric is a tool often used to accomplish other goals in international politics than just improving human rights conditions. Human rights speeches might be designed to reinforce the criticism of adversaries, complement allies, or achieve some other political objective. If this is true, one would expect the president to concentrate his attention in the regions of the most importance to the United States. Across the Clinton, Bush, and Obama administrations, both the Middle East and Asia have commanded significant U.S. attention. In contrast, African issues have rarely concerned the U.S. during the time period studied.

The second hypothesis is based around the president's role as a diplomat and representative of America to other nations. Critical human rights rhetoric risks creating enemies in the international sphere and weakening diplomatic relationships. Therefore, the president would be reluctant to criticize the human rights of other countries unless that he was committed to upholding human rights over other, practical considerations. Much available literature suggests human rights is of secondary concern to the United States, so it should be unlikely the president would jeopardize more pressing concerns for the sake of human rights.

The third hypothesis is also justified by considering human rights as a secondary concern of the United States, compared to national security which is of the utmost importance. Troop deployment abroad serves as a good indicator of where America's military priorities lie, and the U.S. may be less likely to criticize countries who are needed as valuable military allies around the world.

My literature review focuses on two broad areas of scholarly literature related to my topic. The first concerns presidential speech and the power it carries. It demonstrates the effects presidential rhetoric has, and helps justify my focus on it. The review also covers existing literature on the topic of how the United States deals with human rights concerns around the world. I will then explore my research question by quantitatively testing my hypotheses in order to see how my data relates to existing research, and what the implications of my findings are.

My research will contribute to the existing scholarly literature by measuring U.S. attention to human rights using presidential rhetoric. This is a valuable addition to the existing literature because presidential rhetoric is influential on the domestic agenda, and also stands as a clear indicator of the U.S. agenda to those abroad. It's a powerful tool to put pressure on abusive regimes by publicizing their rights violations. Presidential rhetoric also carries advantages over more traditional measures of human rights attention that measure foreign aid allocation because it's a more flexible indicator of attention, allowing rhetorical research to more accurately capture the entire influence human rights has on the American agenda. From an international perspective, the U.S. is the most appropriate state for which to conduct this study, due to the nature of the power it held during the years studied, 1993-2014. As a global hegemonic power, no other country had as much influence as the United States to to advance human rights principles. The emphasis the U.S. gave upholding human rights should be instructive of the values and difficulties of fighting for international human rights norms in the modern nation-state system.

Presidential Rhetoric as an Agenda-Setting Tool

There is no previous research measuring presidential rhetorical attention to human rights, but scholars have contributed a plethora of valuable research related to the topic. Presidential

rhetoric has been studied as a powerful agenda-setting tool as well as for its power to pressure and influence the decisions of other actors. The available scholarship speaks to the power of presidential rhetoric, and justifies its use as a valuable way to measure attention to human rights. There has also been a large amount of research examining the importance the United States gives to human rights concerns compared to other pressing issues. Previous research has focused on attention to human rights in congressional speeches, as well as how U.S. foreign policy responds to human rights by examining the role human rights plays in determining U.S. arms exports and foreign aid allocation. Taken together, these areas of research grant insight into the value of studying presidential rhetoric, and offer a picture of how the president will respond to human rights issues around the globe.

Presidential rhetoric has long been studied for its effect on domestic politics. The importance of presidential rhetoric is often identified through its use as an agenda-setting tool, influencing what issues receive attention and how much attention they receive. Scholars have traditionally contended that the president has strong influence over the agenda, often thought to be the single most important actor when it comes to agenda-setting (Baumgartner and Jones 1993; Kingdom 2003). This power is portrayed as especially strong in foreign policy-making, because the public agenda is less firmly set on these matters and other branches of government typically give more deference to the president in matters of foreign policy (Peake 2001, 69). This suggests that the president has a strong influence on the position of human rights issues on the agenda, because it's a foreign policy issue which isn't frequently on the public agenda. There are many institutional reasons why the president is such a dominant player when it comes to agenda-setting. A president's veto and nomination power, the relative unity of the executive branch

compared to other branches, and the president's inherent command of public attention all contribute to their influence over the agenda (Kingdon 2003, 24-25).

A 2001 study by Jeffrey Peake examined the success of presidential agenda-setting on both the media and Congress for foreign policy issues. His findings supported the notion that the president is able to significantly influence the agendas of both groups, although he acknowledged that the president's influence wasn't quite as strong as traditional models of agenda-setting contend. He noted that the president is constrained by outside issues, and is much more effective at agenda-setting when dealing with low-salience issues (Peake 2001, 83-84). Rutledge and Price built upon previous research on presidential agenda-setting by exploring the relationship between the agenda-setting abilities of the president and Congress between 1956 and 2005, using a sample of 6 policy domains. The agenda-setting of the president had a statistically significant effect on the congressional agenda over each of the policy domains in their research, and that the only one of the policy areas in which Congress impacted the presidency in return was in international affairs. However, the president also had the largest impact over the congressional agenda on international affairs, suggesting this area is the most easily influenced. Based upon these results, Rutledge and Price concluded that their research supported the general consensus that the president has strong agenda-setting power, and that Congress is typically responsive to the president (Rutledge and Price 2014, 460). Their findings lend support to the importance of presidential human rights rhetoric as an agenda-setting tool.

In the same vein, Edwards III and Wood (1999) conducted a study on the agenda-setting relationship between the president, Congress, and the media with a sample of five important policy domains, encompassing both domestic and foreign policy. The study used a time-series design to examine the agenda-setting relationship on a weekly level over 10 years, creating a

valuable large-n experiment. Their findings emphasized the degree that outside events shaped the agenda of all three institutions, although the president and the media did have a role in shaping the agenda as well (Edwards III & Wood 1999, 342). They concluded that the president didn't influence the other actors on issues of foreign policy like he did with domestic issues, in contrast with the findings of Peake (2001). While this study supports the idea that there is some agenda-setting power in presidential rhetoric, it emphasizes that the president doesn't have great power over the agenda.

When trying to determine the actual agenda-setting ability of the president, it is essential to analyze what is on the president's agenda in the first place. Anrade and Young (1996) studied what influences the presidential agenda when it comes specifically to foreign policy, and found that the president's agenda was heavily influenced by outside factors. This conclusion supported a view of presidential agenda power as weaker than conventional wisdom suggests, especially as a result of the role outside events have in determining the agenda for all institutions, in agreement with Edwards III & Wood (1999). Because presidents don't use their agenda-setting power in a vacuum apart from other actors and concerns, their agenda-setting ability is substantially restricted.

While other competing forces have enough influence that the final agenda of American politics is not mostly the reflection of any one actor's priorities, the established research reinforces the view that the president has a very important influence over the agenda compared to other political actors. Because of the status of the president, his speeches are often highly covered by the media, which broadcasts them to the public in addition to other political actors. Because of this media attention, presidents can directly insert the issues they care about into the national dialogue, making presidential speeches a key tool for shaping the national agenda. The

use of human rights rhetoric in these speeches therefore can have a significant impact on what portion of the political agenda is devoted to human rights topics, and is a clear indicator of the executive branch's own agenda, which has significant implications on U.S. foreign policy.

Presidential Rhetoric as “Naming and Shaming”

Another reason that presidential rhetoric is important is because of its “naming and shaming” power. Naming and shaming is a strategy used to enforce human rights norms, in which international actors publicize a country's human rights violations in order to shame them into changing their practices (Hafner-Burton 2012, 689). Scholarly literature on the effectiveness of this technique is mixed, and often focuses on nongovernmental organizations and the media rather than political actors like the president. However, the strategy of naming and shaming is certainly applicable to presidential rhetoric as well, and it would be reasonable to think shaming from the president of the United States of America would carry more weight than if it was coming from an NGO.

The first global statistical analysis of the effects of naming and shaming was conducted in 2012, using data on the human rights conditions of 145 countries from 1975 to 2000. It covered naming and shaming efforts by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), the media, and the UN. The findings of this study supported the position that shamed governments may reduce some human rights violations, especially by increasing visible political rights, but may even increase the violations of other rights as a response. These results pointed to the conclusion that naming and shaming does have a real impact, but that it isn't a simple remedy for human rights abuses (Hafner-Burton 2012, 707).

Matthew Krain conducted a study which examined the impact of naming and shaming by NGOs, International Organizations (IOs), and the media between 1976 and 2008 on political killings and genocides. He found that naming and shaming by all three groups had significant beneficial effects on ongoing atrocities. However, he also analyzed the naming and shaming data against the overall human rights conditions of countries, and found no significant influence, suggesting that this tool isn't effective for combatting all forms of human rights violations (Krain 2012, 588). While the available literature is mixed on the strengths of the effects on naming and shaming, it appears to have some effect on human rights abuses. Plus, given that the available research relied on the efforts of NGO's and the media, the effects of presidential naming and shaming should theoretically be stronger.

U.S. Human Rights Policy & Attention

Shifting to measures of U.S. attention to human rights, the lone study on rhetorical attention to human rights examined Congressional floor speeches about human rights abuses abroad. Cutrone and Fordham examined the amount of speeches related to human rights from both the House and Senate from 1995-1998. They found no statistically significant predictors for human rights speeches in the Senate, so most of their analysis was conducted using data from the House. They concluded that the primary reason members brought up human rights concerns was to protect the economic interests of their constituents, as measured through imports and exports. However, they found that members didn't raise spurious human rights concerns, but that Congressional speeches highlighted existing concerns that served economic interests. Members of Congress were also influenced to address human rights concern by higher levels of cosmopolitanism within their districts. While presidential constituencies are different, this may support a theory that Democratic presidents would be more likely to voice human rights

concerns, given their more diverse base. Notably, while members of Congress were significantly influenced by these realist factors, many members of Congress gave a significant amount of attention to human rights despite the fact they didn't appear to be motivated by any other concerns. This finding suggests that there were some members who were genuinely committed to human rights principles (Cutrone & Fordham 2010, 652-653).

Although the Cutrone & Fordham study's focus on rhetoric is valuable, there are key differences between speeches on the floor of Congress and presidential speeches. Congressional floor speeches are typically short and usually not heavily publicized, in sharp contrast to presidential speeches which are sometimes heard around the world. Members of Congress often speak about topics requested by supporters or constituents on the floor. Presidential rhetoric is more proactive and consequential, making it a much stronger indicator of government attention than Congressional floor speeches. Because of this, presidential rhetoric has a much higher chance of having an actual effect on the human rights situation addressed.

An area of human rights attention with more research concerns the relationship between American foreign policy action and human rights concerns. The most frequently studied topic has been the relationship between U.S. foreign aid and the recipient country's human rights record. Lars Schoultz conducted the first study on foreign assistance in 1981, in which he used questionnaires sent to human rights experts to estimate the human rights situations of 23 Latin American countries. He compared those human rights evaluations to U.S. aid allocation from 1962-1977, with a special emphasis on the last three years of that time period. He concluded that by the mid-1970s, there was a clear pattern of U.S. aid distribution to Latin American countries with more repressive governments (Schoultz 1981, 167). Cingranelli and Pasquarello (1985) conducted an important study that introduced the separation of bilateral foreign assistance into

two distinct phases, the gate-keeping stage and the allocation stage. The distinction of these phases offered a methodological improvement over previous foreign assistance studies. At the gate-keeping stage, decisions are made about whether or not to provide foreign assistance to a country, whereas previous studies had only used the second stage, which accounts for the total amount of aid a country received. They found that a recipient's nation's human rights record was not important during the gate-keeping stage, but had a significant effect during the allocation stage. In total, researchers quantitatively studying the relationship between U.S. foreign assistance and human rights during the 80s found little evidence to support a relationship between human rights and foreign aid. However, there were significant methodological problems highlighted in these usually simple, bivariate studies (Poe 1990, 500).

Studies on foreign aid continue to be conducted, utilizing stronger statistical techniques to reach their conclusions. Using data from between 1983 and 1991, research by Steven Poe and colleagues offered substantial improvements in methodology, measuring human rights abuses using a combination of ordinal human rights variables constructed by the State Department and human rights groups as well as using multivariate analysis (Poe et al. 1994, 546-547). The results of this study indicated that human rights weren't the preeminent factor in determining aid, but still had a significant effect on both military and economic aid. These factors suggested that human rights were an area of concern when allocating aid, but were simply less important than other competing concerns. However, the human rights variable only became significant when they removed the repressive El Salvador from the dataset, giving support to the hypothesis that national security concerns are given more weight than human rights ones (Poe et al. 1994, 557).

A 1999 study by Clair Apodaca and Michael Stohl significantly expanded the time period studied, 1976-1995, and also the number of countries, 140, enabling the study to draw

conclusions beyond Latin America and the Cold War era. They found that recipient human rights played a factor in U.S. economic aid at both stages, though national security interests played a larger role, similar to the findings of Poe et al. (1994). They also concluded human rights had no overall effect on U.S. military aid throughout the years studied (Apodaca & Stohl 1999, 194-195).

Tijen Demirel-Pegg and James Moskowitz expanded on previous research even further, using data from a time period between 1977 and 2004, which contained data from the post-Cold War period and data for a few years post-9/11. They found clear differences between Cold War and post-Cold war models. Human rights wasn't significant at the gate-keeping or allocation stage in the Cold War model, but was significant at both stages afterward. Their findings provide support for the hypothesis that U.S. foreign policy experienced a more liberal shift after the Cold War, and their small sample size of years post-9/11 indicated no change in this trend (Demirel-Pegg & Moskowitz 2009, 190-192). This finding suggests that the Cold War era model of foreign aid allocation is distinct from the one for the post-Cold War era and post-9/11 era, which is the time period studied here. If their finding is correct, it limits the value of the majority of foreign aid studies which centered on the Cold War years. The available literature on the relationship between bilateral foreign assistance human rights has generated a general consensus that human rights is a secondary concern of U.S. policymakers in the allocation of foreign aid, and that it is most impactful at the gate-keeping stage (Demirel-Pegg & Moskowitz 2009, 185).

Shannon Blanton (2000) also conducted a study on the effects of recipient human rights for U.S. arms exports. She similarly divided the sale of arms into the gate-keeping and allocation stages. At the gate-keeping stage she found that both a country's human rights record and whether it was a democracy were significant predictors of whether it was sold arms, although the

presence of at least 100 U.S. troops was the strongest predictor of whether the United States was willing to sell a country arms. However, human rights was not a significant predictor of the amount of arms countries received at the allocation stage. Blanton concluded the reason for this was that countries must “pass a threshold of acceptability” on human rights issues for the U.S. to be willing to sell them arms, but after that point human rights is no longer important (Blanton 2000, 129). Blanton’s findings lend more support to the conclusion that the United States does consider human rights principles to be important, although these principles do compete with others, like national security.

Blanton’s “threshold of acceptability” concept seems largely consistent with the established foreign aid research as well, in which recipient human rights were found to be the most impactful at the gate-keeping stage (Demirel-Pegg & Moskowitz 2009, 185). It’s also logical. Whether out of principle or pragmatism, it makes sense that the United States wouldn’t sell arms (or give much aid) to countries which would likely to use these resources to repress their own people. But after that, once the United States has eliminated countries deemed too repressive to arm, there would be no reason for the acceptable countries’ human rights records to matter further, and instead other considerations would take over. When applied to presidential rhetoric, the threshold of acceptability concept suggests that the president won’t spend any time talking about countries whose human rights records pass this threshold, unless the president is praising them. I believe this concept is the correct way to think about presidential rhetoric, and it will be used to inform this study going forward.

There are both positives and negatives to using rhetoric to measure U.S. attention to human rights as opposed to concrete U.S. action like changes to foreign aid allocation or arms exports. The allocation of foreign aid is a highly complex and bureaucratic process, with the

responsibility ultimately lying with several congressional committees. On top of that, the foreign aid relationships of the United States reflect years of commitment. As a result, there is usually little change in foreign aid from year to year, and the best predictor of a country's foreign aid total is the aid it received a year before (Apodaca & Stohl 1999). Compared to presidential rhetoric, which allows the president to highlight human rights situations soon after they develop, foreign aid is not very reactive due to the significant bureaucratic hurdles necessary to adjust it in response to human rights abuses. However, because it does take significant political resources to adjust, a shift in foreign aid is a much stronger indicator of agenda attention to a particular human rights situation. There are also more likely to be significant consequences as a result of revoking millions of dollars in aid to country than simply from presidential criticism. So, presidential rhetoric is a much more flexible response to human rights concerns and can catch smaller shifts in the agenda, while foreign aid allocation serves as a more powerful indicator of agenda priority because of the necessary investment in political capital to change it significantly. Due to the unfortunately large number of human rights abuses around the world at one time and the secondary importance of human rights to the United States, a measure like rhetoric which captures smaller variation in human rights attention is very valuable. Relying on measures that only indicate large agenda shifts can cause research to miss the smaller changes that some human rights abuses would cause.

Research Design

The first stage of my analysis will be to explore the general trends in the data using some basic descriptive statistics. The long-term scope of the speeches analyzed (1993-2014) offers a valuable look into how presidents use human rights rhetoric, and this can be explored through descriptive techniques. My dataset draws on a large sample of speeches concerning the human

rights of other countries and the human rights policy of the United States (n= 820). As the first examination of presidential human rights rhetoric, these findings will represent the first overview of the subject which is extremely valuable by itself. The descriptive analysis will be used to examine rhetorical trends by president, country, region, and tone. The trends in tone will be used to test H2.

In addition, bivariate analysis will be used on a pool of panel data created from the 30 countries which received the most attention over the time period studied. Several explanatory variables, described below, were also included in the dataset. The advantage of using panel data for this study is that it allows the examination of how the data behaves over both space and time, as opposed to just one of the two in traditional time-series or cross-sectional analysis. The bivariate correlation analysis will be used to measure the relationships between the variables. This will allow me to test H3 using the relationship between military presence and presidential attention. However, just using simple bivariate correlations raises some issues when using panel data. One area of concern is that it doesn't adjust for fixed effects. In a fixed-effect regression model, fixed effect estimators would be used to control for the possible unique influence the different observations (countries) would have on the analysis. It also fails to take issues of autocorrelation into account. Autocorrelation is the correlation of a variable with other measures of itself at earlier and later time periods. This is an issue for several variables included in this analysis, including human rights scores and aid values. For these variables, the strongest predictor of any value is that variable's value for the previous year. This is because for the most part, human rights scores don't quickly change from a 1 to a 5 or vice-versa. The same concept is true for foreign aid levels. Because simple measures of bivariate correlation can't account for autocorrelation, there are some validity concerns with the analysis of the panel data.

Creation of a Regional Human Rights Measure

In order to test H2, human rights abuses were broken down by region and compared to the amount of rhetorical attention each region received. All presidential speech which was neutral or negative in tone was used as a measure of attention, divided by region of the subject country. Positive rhetoric was excluded, because it's not logical to assume positive rhetoric would be used as a response to human rights abuses. Neutral rhetoric was included because it does represent an instance of the president addressing the human rights of a nation, and it isn't a positive assessment of a country's human rights. In theory, the president would have little reason to mask a positive remark in neutrality, but might often do this with criticism in politically delicate situations. As a result, neutrality should theoretically often be used as a tool to sensitively criticize abuses, while rarely being used in a way that could be interpreted as positive.

The human rights situation in each region was determined in line with the threshold of acceptability concept proposed by Blanton (2000) and demonstrated by the overall findings of the significance of human rights at the gate-keeping stage of foreign aid allocation (Demirel-Pegg & Moskowitz 2009, 185). All countries given a score on the Political Terror Scale were included in this measure, separated by region. The distinct regions considered were: Asia, Africa, Europe, Latin America, the Middle East, and Oceania. Each year a country scored either a 4 or 5 on the PTS it was recorded as a potential candidate for president human rights criticism. The total number of potential candidates in each region between 1993 and 2014 was used as a measure of the severity of human rights abuses in that region. Using years in which countries scored a 4 or 5 generated a higher amount of candidates (n=774) than the total number of presidential human rights mentions of foreign countries (n=428), so there was no reason to expand the measure using countries which scored 3 or lower. PTS scores generated by the State

Department were used because they were able to provide a more consistent number of scores for a greater amount of countries than Amnesty International.

Variables

Presidential rhetorical attention to human rights was measured by conducting a content-analysis of speeches available through *The Public Papers of the Presidents*. A content analysis was carried out for a sample of all speeches given by Presidents Clinton, George W. Bush, and Obama through 1993-2014. The sample was created with the goal of trying to capture as many speeches which contained human rights rhetoric as possible, using a variety of search terms designed to encompass the terminology presidents were likely to use when speaking about human rights. The search terms used were “human rights”, “democracy promotion”, “religious freedom”, “torture”, “press freedom”, “political freedom”, “universal values”, and “universal rights”. Slight variations of these terms were searched for as well, such as “freedom of the press”. After each term generated a list of speeches which contained the search term, coders went through each speech individually and coded for human rights mentions. While this sample probably didn’t capture every single speech involving human rights from this time period it certainly captured the vast majority, enough to have a valid sample. ¹

The sample also didn’t encompass all possible categories of speeches listed on the *Public Papers* archive. Speeches categorized as “letter”, “message”, “proclamation”, and “executive order” were all left out, along with any other speech which wasn’t comprised of presidential rhetoric spoken in person by the president or released by their office in the form of the statement.

¹ The presidential speech data was collected as part of a larger, ongoing research project conducting by Professor Roger Rose on presidential human rights rhetoric.

All question and answer sessions or other presidential speech prompted by others was left out as well, in order to only capture rhetoric which represented the true agenda of the president.

Many variables were derived from this sample of speeches. Several simple informational variables were coded for: the year the speech was given, the date the speech was given, the president who gave the speech, the location the speech was given, and the type of speech given. There were also several variables created through the analysis of the human rights rhetoric used in each speech: the country(s) mentioned, how many lines of the speech were dedicated to human rights, the amount of the speech dedicated to human rights (coded as full, significant, or minor), the specific human right subject of speech, and the tone of the human rights mention (positive, negative, or neutral). Together, these variables capture the key features of the speeches analyzed and create a picture of presidential human rights rhetoric, allowing for a test of the hypotheses.

Alongside the coded data collected from the content analysis of the *Public Papers of the Presidents*, a number of other variables were collected from outside sources and included the analysis of the 30 country panel data. The variables used were all thought to be valuable explanatory variables when analyzing the attention a president devotes to human rights in their speeches. One important set of variables collected was the human rights scores of the countries mentioned in the presidential speeches. This data is important as a measure of the actual human rights situations in the countries mentioned. As a result, it allows a comparison of the actual severity of human rights abuses around the world with the amount of time a president actually devotes to them.

The human rights scores were taken from three sources that all compute human rights scores on a Political Terror Scale between 1 and 5, with 1 representing the least possible

repressive regime and 5 representing a regime with incredibly severe violations. Scores were taken from measurements produced by the State Department, Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch, where coders from each source produce analogous scales. The State Department scores and Amnesty International scores were included in the pooled dataset, along with a measure of the average PTS score that took the average of the two scores. The reasoning behind the choice to compute the average between the State Department and Amnesty International scores for a given year was that one score represented a governmental perspective and one represented the perspective of a human rights NGO, each with their own potential biases. Averaging the two scores lessens the potential that their particular biases could affect the scores certain countries received. The scores highly correlate with each other, but there is still some difference between them, enough to justify this measure. Amnesty International did not release a set of scores for the year 2013, so scores created by the human rights NGO Human Rights Watch were used in its place. The Political Terror Scale dataset was downloaded from the website politicalterror.org.

It was also important to include the economic relationship between the United States and the subject country. Much of the available literature on human rights concluded that human rights concerns were one of many competing priorities for the United States, and the economic interests of the country are one of the most important priorities for the president. It's possible the president might prioritize economic concerns over human rights ones. This kind of behavior was demonstrated in Cutrone & Fordham's (2014) study of congressional attention to human rights, where members of the House in districts that competed with foreign imports were more likely to bring up human rights concerns than members representing constituencies with less concern about the impact of foreign imports. It stands to reason that the president would be less

concerned about these micro-level economic concerns, but still may be motivated by larger-scale economic concerns, particularly with a country like China. To measure economic relationship, both the amounts of imported and exported goods between the U.S. and the subject country per year are used. Both of these measurements are lagged by one year. The sum of imports and exports was also taken in order to construct a variable representing the total economic relationship. This data was collected from the Foreign Trade section of the U.S. Census Bureau website.

The amount of military assistance the United States sends to a subject country is also included. Military assistance is also a potential indicator of U.S. national security interest. The United States gives high levels of aid to countries whose military strength is of high importance, like Egypt and Israel. The yearly statistics for military assistance were collected using the Foreign Aid Explorer tool on the USAID website. The number of American military personnel stationed in a country is also accounted for- as it was used by Apodoca and Stohl (1990) and Blanton (2000). In order for the United States to station active military personnel in a country, especially a large amount, they must be on good terms with the country they're stationed in. Military personnel data is available by year, and taken from the Defense Manpower Data Center, an office of the Department of Defense.

Creation of the Panel Dataset

The panel dataset was created by including the 30 countries whose human rights was mentioned the most by the three presidents included in my analysis. In order to observe the variation of human rights attention, the mentions for each country in the pool were accounted for in each separate year from 1993-2014. For the years in which a country's human rights record wasn't mentioned, the country just received a "0". The addition of years in which a country

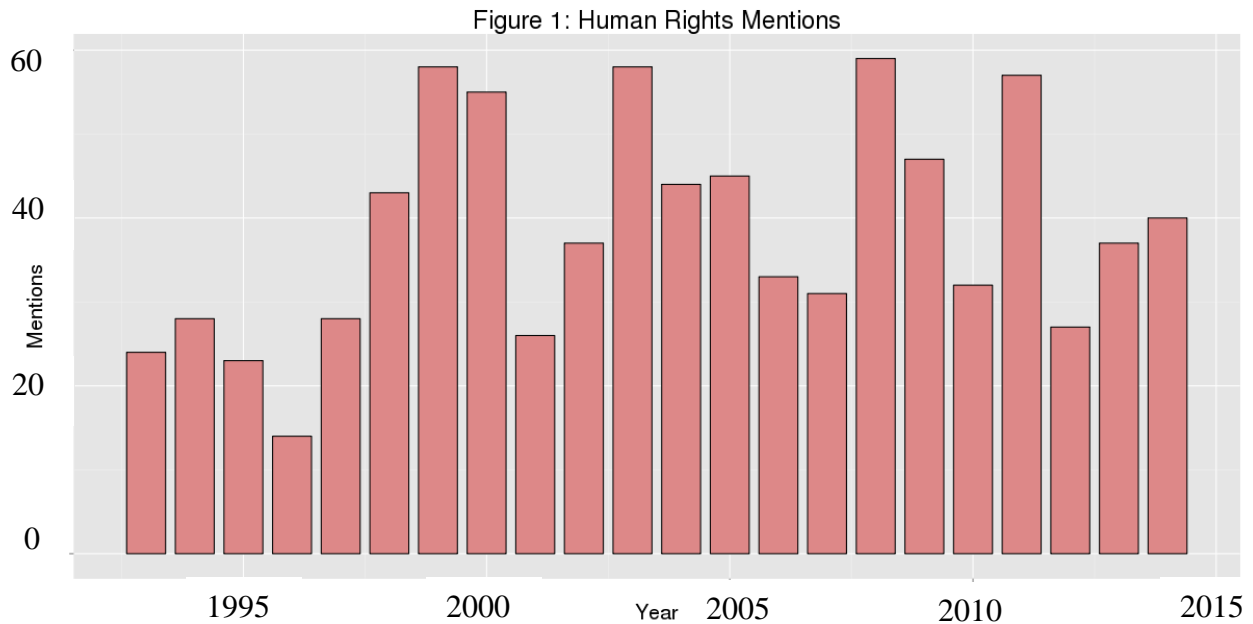
wasn't actually mentioned in the pool allows the variation of mentions to be recorded and analyzed with the explanatory variables in the dataset. This also results in a large-n of 660 cases to be examined. Each variable discussed in the previous section was used as an explanatory variable in the panel dataset.

Results

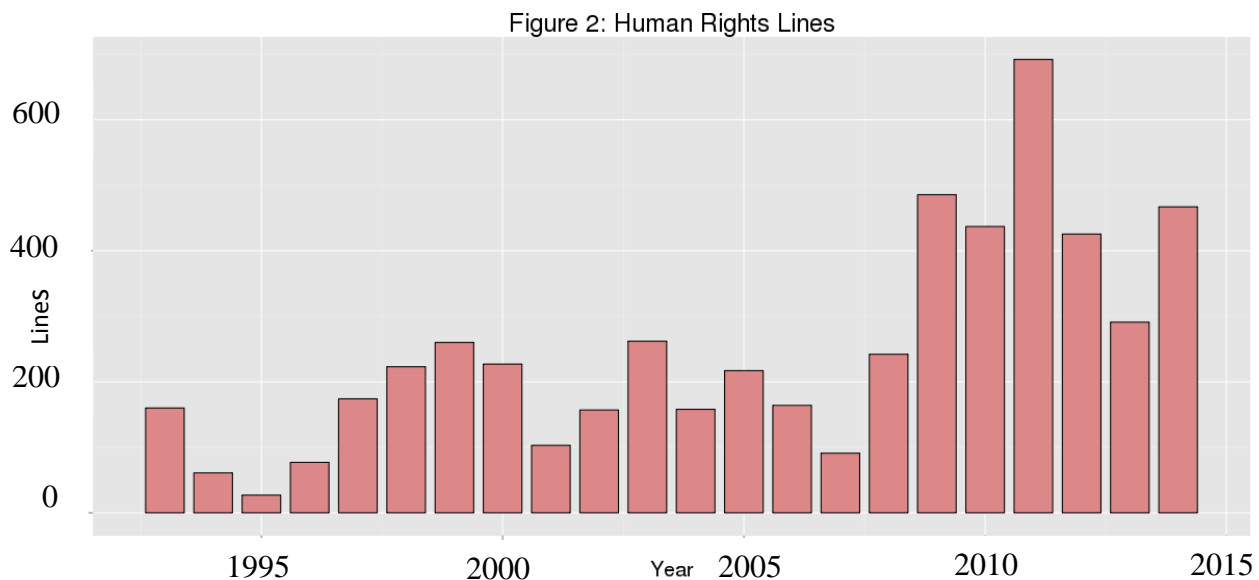
A general look at the use of human rights rhetoric by all three presidents shows a fairly consistent use across the three administrations through 1993-2014, as shown in Figure 1. This chart shows the number of human rights mentions (separate mentions of the human rights situation in any country) by year. Mentions is one of two measures of rhetorical attention examined, with the other being the amount of lines devoted to the human rights issues that were brought up. Mentions is a good measure of rhetorical attention because it represents the number of instances the president thought it was necessary to bring up human rights concerns in his speeches. While many mentions vary substantially in length, even a one-line mention is valuable because it shows an effort by the president to insert human rights into a discussion. The variation in mentions per year shows a slightly lower amount of attention by the Clinton administration, but the difference isn't extreme.

A simple paired t-test was conducted at the 0.95 level to test for the statistical significance in the variation between the three administrations over the years studied. President Clinton had the most distinct number of average mentions, so his administration was used as a reference point. The results of the t-test showed no statistically significant difference between Clinton and Bush (p-value of 0.3) or Clinton and Obama (p-value of 0.4). So while there was some variation, none of the three presidents brought up a substantially different number of

human rights concerns.



Presidential attention can also be measured using the amount of lines each president devoted to human rights issues. While there wasn't significant variation in the amount of mentions by each president, it's possible there would be larger variation in the amount of time each president devotes to those mentions. This is an important distinction to draw when considering presidential rhetoric as an extension of the president's agenda and as an influencer of the public agenda. A mention of a few lines or less can easily be seen as a short acknowledgement rather than an attempt to introduce a topic into the forefront of public debate. The variation in lines by year is shown in Figure 2. Although all three presidents had a similar amount of mentions, this chart shows that Obama devoted more time to discussing the human rights issues he raised.



A t-test at the 0.95 level confirmed that the amount of lines per year Obama spoke was significantly higher than Clinton (p-value of 0.001) or Bush (p-value of $<.001$). There was no statistically significant variation between Presidents Bush and Clinton. Obama had a slightly lower number of coded speeches per year than Bush, so this trend wasn't the result of a greater volume of speeches. There are a couple possible explanations for the higher amount of human rights lines in President Obama's speeches. One is that he focused a larger amount of his attention to human rights concerns than his two predecessors. This could be the result of a strong personal commitment to human rights, or because the events of his first six years demanded a more intensive response. An event like the Arab Spring certainly resulted in an increase in human rights concerns as citizens rose up to demand their human rights and many governments responded with increasing repression. A larger amount of similar crises could have caused Obama to dwell more on human rights. It's also possible that Obama devoted a similar amount of his speeches to human rights, yet simply gave longer speeches. Obama has received praise for his eloquent speaking style, particularly compared to George W. Bush, so it's possible Obama's

speeches were just longer on average. Further content analysis of speeches from all three presidents could be used to further explore this possibility.²

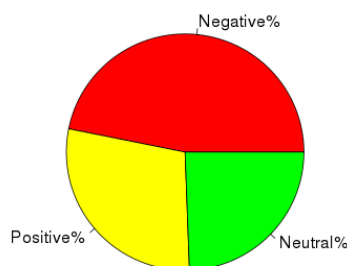
An interesting difference between Obama and his two predecessors is that he didn't focus as frequently on a single country as they did. 33% of the time President Clinton mentioned the human rights conditions of a foreign country he was talking about China. Similarly, 33% of President Bush's mentions were of Iraq. Over an eight-year administration, a third of all mentions being devoted to one country is a significant commitment, especially given the large amount of human rights abuses available for criticism. Such a high focus on a single country reflects the importance both countries had on the agendas of Clinton and Bush. The fact that such a large part of their human rights attention was devoted to states for reasons other than just human rights undermines some of their credibility when it comes to the topic. Their intense focus on certain countries makes their attention to human rights seem insincere, just a tool used to push other parts of their agenda. In contrast, the most frequently mentioned country by President Obama was Myanmar, which only made up 13% of his total mentions.

When presidents bring up the human rights conditions in other countries, a key characteristic of those mentions is tone. When they were coded, mentions were coded as positive, neutral, or negative. Hypothesis 1 predicted that presidents were less likely to use negative rhetoric than positive or neutral rhetoric. Figure 3 displays all presidential rhetoric focusing on the human rights of other countries, divided proportionally by tone. There is weak support for H1. 47% percent of the total mentions concerning other countries were coded as negative, compared to 29% positive and 24% neutral. It's also important to note that all

² One thing to note is that the data still hasn't gone through a final intercoder reliability check, and it's possible that the lines of Obama's speeches weren't coded reliably with the rest of the speeches.

presidential mentions of United States human rights policy were left out, which represent 27% of total speeches. The nature of these mentions is different than those for foreign countries, so they were left out. However, the vast majority of them were positive in tone and when considered

Figure 3: Presidential Tone



with the other data they contribute to a picture of presidential rhetoric that looks much more positive. Although hypothesis 1 is supported, it was expected to describe a stronger feature of presidential rhetoric. I theorize that the reason for this is that the president usually chooses to give complements to nations on issues other than human rights, resulting in fewer positive evaluations given than would be expected from the president's role as diplomat-in-chief.

The number of mentions can be further divided to gain insight into patterns of presidential human rights rhetoric. The ten most frequently mentioned countries are displayed in Table 1, along with several features of their mentions. The most obvious takeaway from Table 1 is the dominance of two countries: China and Iraq. With 99 and 80 mentions respectively, they outpace the next closest country, Myanmar. The concentration of presidential attention gives evidence that there are many factors besides just human rights considerations that contribute to overall presidential attention to human rights. Given the large amount of human rights abuses around the world, there shouldn't be a reason two countries held such an oversized share of attention unless it was heavily influenced by other factors. These factors are readily apparent, the United States fought a long war in Iraq and China has been challenging the status of the U.S. as the most powerful nation. The attention to China and Iraq gives support to claims that the United States uses human rights as a proxy issue to fight for other concerns. Because these two countries

have had such a huge presence in presidential speeches about human rights, it's worthwhile to go into a little more detail to examine speech about both of them.

Country	# of Mentions	# of Lines	Avg PTS Score	% Negative Tone	Years Mentioned	% of Total Mentions*
China	99	447.5	3.89	30%	20	16.5%
Iraq	80	363.0	4.82	51%	8	13.3%
Myanmar	44	386.5	4.34	70%	18	7.3%
Cuba	41	263.0	2.93	73%	17	6.8%
Iran	25	173.5	3.72	100%	10	4.2%
Syria	24	208.5	3.59	100%	8	4.0%
Sudan	19	126.5	4.86	95%	9	3.2%
Russia	19	82.0	3.98	16%	14	3.2%
Colombia	15	82.5	4.59	7%	9	2.5%
Vietnam	15	44.0	2.55	20%	8	2.5%

* For the years 1993-2014

China was mentioned in 20 out of the 22 years studied, making it the most consistently mentioned country as well as the country with the most total mentions. Given that the years studied comprise three different administrations, it shows remarkable consistency in the human rights attention of U.S. presidents, although the Clinton administration did contribute 66% of all mentions of China. Across the time period studied, China has always been a prime target of presidential attention. It's also surprising to note that only 30% of China's mentions were actually negative in tone. The lack of direct U.S. criticism is surprising given their high average score on the Political Terror Scale (3.89) and their often adversarial relationship with the

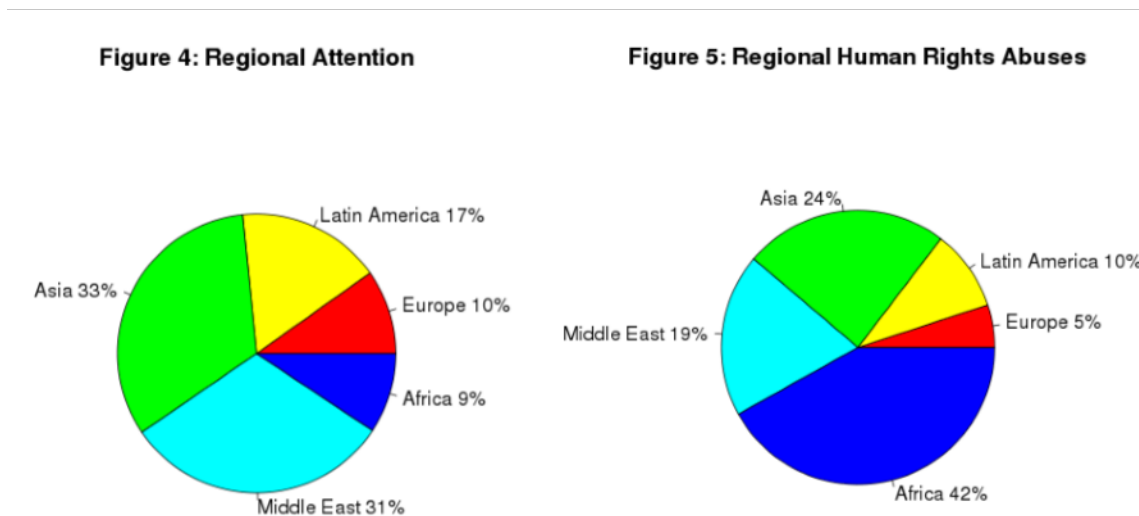
United States. However, the lack of negative mentions didn't result in a lot of positive ones. 59% of their total mentions were neutral, which was only comparable to the 58% of neutral mentions Russia received. The reliance on neutral tone suggests that U.S. presidents did make an effort to bring up human rights problems, but were reluctant to directly attack China despite its human rights problems. It might not also be a coincidence that Russia was the only other country to receive a large amount of neutral mentions. It shares several characteristics with China. For example, both have strained relationships with the U.S. and are influential countries with human rights troubles. It's reasonable to think that presidents would shy away from direct criticism of such powerful countries and opt instead for remarks that are neutral, at least at face value.

The case of Iraq is very distinct from China, and presidential attention to Iraq largely hinged on the Iraq War. As shown in Table 1, Iraq had a large amount of mentions, but these mentions were only from 8 of the years studied, tied for the least consistent focus of any of the 10 most frequently mentioned countries. It only received one mention before 2002, when the Bush administration began prepping for the invasion of Iraq in 2003. This was despite Iraq receiving the worst possible score of 5 on the PTS by the State Department every year between 1993 and 2001. This provides strong evidence that the human rights attention Iraq received was due to attention stemming from the Iraq War, rather than genuine concern for human rights. A large part of this rhetoric was likely used to justify the invasion. It also received relatively little attention after the prime of the war, with 89% of its mentions coming from the Bush administration. Like China, Iraq's mentions weren't too negatively skewed. Rather than diplomatic concerns, the lack of negative attention was due in large part to the course of the war, when a new Iraqi government was ushered in with U.S. support following the fall of Saddam

Hussein's government. As U.S. involvement in Iraq drew on, and the Iraqi government transitioned from foe to ally, President Bush adjusted his tone accordingly.

Besides the dominance of China and Iraq, there were a few interesting features of the most mentioned countries that are worth highlighting. When considering the severity of included countries human rights violations, Cuba stands out as a country that doesn't belong. It was the fourth most discussed country during this time period and a large majority of its mentions were negative, yet its average PTS score of 2.93 doesn't indicate an incredibly high level of human rights abuses. While the Cuban government is certainly repressive in many respects, its violations are much less severe than most of the other countries in Table 1, and many other countries not included in the table. Cuba has a long and complicated relationship with the United States, in addition to being geographically close, and these factors may go a long way in explaining the attention it received. The case of Cuba, like those of China and Iraq, gives clear evidence that political factors for the United States have strong influence over where and how the president raises human rights concerns. With this in mind, it's also important to note that most of the frequently mentioned countries were deserving of the attention they received judging from their PTS scores. This demonstrates that the president does prioritize actual, severe human rights abuses even if he only addresses a portion of the ones going on in the world. Presidents would also seem to have very little to gain politically from publicizing abuses in Myanmar and Sudan, yet they did so anyway, providing evidence that the attention to these countries was due mainly to actual human rights concerns.

In order to test H2, mentions were analyzed by region. Figure 4 shows what percentage of neutral and negative presidential speech was devoted to each of the major regions listed.



Presidential rhetoric that focused on the United States was not included in this analysis, which received more attention than any one region with 27% of total mentions. Although it's not relevant for this test, it still sheds valuable light on the role of presidential rhetoric. A significant amount of presidential human rights rhetoric is devoted to explaining and justifying the policies and positions of the United States. The message is received by both a domestic and international audience. As the figurehead of the United States, particularly when it comes to international affairs, the responsibility falls on the president to state and defend the positions of the United States.

Region	Severe HR Abusers	Mentions	Residual Mentions	% Residual	% Residual without Africa
Europe	39	31	9.43	30.42%	-8.16%
Latin America	74	59	18.08	30.64%	-7.83%
Asia	187	148	44.59	30.13%	-8.62%
Middle East	149	148	65.61	44.33%	13.58%
Africa	324	42	-137.16	-326.57%	-

The number of years each country in all five regions had a poor enough human rights record to be a candidate for presidential attention is given in Figure 5. The region of Oceania had

two possible candidates, not enough justify inclusion in the chart. A cursory visual comparison of the figures reveals a huge difference between the amount of attention Africa got and the amount of severe human rights abuses in African countries. All of the other regions tested received a larger amount of attention than would be predicted by the measure of human rights abuses, yet Africa received less than a quarter of what was expected. On the other hand, the Middle East received quite a bit more attention than what would be expected if attention was based solely on the level of human rights violations.

The difference between expected and actual mentions for each region is shown again in Table 2. In addition to the information provided in Figures 4 and 5, it also contains the value of the residual mentions for each region in order to quantify the difference between mentions received and the number of mentions expected if attention was proportioned based on human rights abuses. Again, the feature of the data which draws the most attention is the incredibly large residual value of Africa. Over the time period studied, Africa received 326.57% less mentions than its human rights conditions merited. This is incredibly clear evidence that human rights abuses in Africa received much less attention than those in other regions. Across the three administrations studied, Africa didn't have as large of an economic relationship with the United States, nor was it a region where there were substantial national security concerns. This is the most likely explanation of why Africa received so little attention despite having the most severe human rights abuses of the regions examined. Regional analysis offers strong support for H2.

Because Africa had such a huge influence on the residuals, it was also taken out allow for a better sense of how consistent attention to the other regions was with their level of human rights abuses. With this removed, all regions received less attention than expected besides the Middle East, which received 13.58% more than expected. This gives some evidence that the

Middle East does receive an oversized share of presidential attention. The Middle East has been central to American national security policy in the post-9/11 era, so this gives more evidence that regional human rights attention was influenced by American foreign policy concerns. However, with Africa removed, the residuals show that presidential attention has been remarkably consistent with the level of regional human rights abuses. For Europe and Latin America, the residual values only signify less than a five mention difference, and even the Middle East only received 20 more mentions than expected. Over the 22-year period covered, these differences in mentions aren't large. Besides Africa, it would be reasonable to conclude that presidential rhetorical attention has been fairly responsive to the severity of human rights abuses in each region.

Table 3 shows the bivariate correlations between all of the variables contained in the panel dataset. Using the mentions and lines variables as measures of presidential attention, it allows for an examination of the basic correlation between the variables. The first relationship to note is the significant correlation between PTS Score and the measures of presidential attention. Higher PTS values indicate higher levels of human rights abuses, so this relationship gives evidence that presidents are indeed influenced to speak more about human rights abuses as they grow more severe. However, because this is only a bivariate measure of association and doesn't hold other variables constant, all of these correlations should be considered with some skepticism.

Table 3: Panel Data Correlations

		Mentions	Lines	Negative	PTS Score	Econ Relationship	Military Ast	Personnel
Mentions	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	1 660						
Lines	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.835** .000 660	1 660					
Negative	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.825** .000 660	.713** .000 660	1 660				
PTS Score	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.219** .000 644	.206** .000 644	.198** .000 644	1 644			
Econ Relationship	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.069 .075 660	.033 .402 660	.035 .369 660	.060 .130 644	1 660		
Military Ast	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.017 .664 660	.006 .872 660	-.036 .358 660	.195** .000 644	-.040 .306 660	1 660	
Personnel	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.323** .000 652	.225** .000 652	.192** .000 652	.199** .000 636	-.028 .477 652	.615** .000 652	1 652

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The total economic relationship between the United States and the subject country showed no significant correlation with levels of presidential attention. This suggests that economic ties between the United States and the subject country have little influence over how the president speaks about its human rights. Similarly, military assistance showed no significant correlation with mentions or lines. This was one possible measure of national security interest.

Military personnel, however, does show a statistically significant relationship with both mentions and lines. This positive relationship indicates that the president is more likely to address the human rights of countries in which higher numbers of U.S. troops are stationed. Military personnel also has a strong positive correlation with the number of negative mentions, indicating that this attention isn't just a feature of a positive focus on the human rights of these countries. This provides evidence to contradict H3: that higher levels of U.S. troop presence would lessen the chance a country is criticized. In fact, the bivariate correlations give evidence that the opposite relationship exists.

In order to dig a little deeper into H3, the correlation analysis was rerun without 3 of the 30 countries included in the panel dataset: Iraq, Afghanistan, and Cuba. The United States had large amounts of troops in both Iraq and Afghanistan as a result of long-term war in both countries during the time period studied. Because of the wars, the two countries had a very large amount of troops compared to the others in the dataset, and as a result they were extremely influential. The presence of wartime troops doesn't reflect the same relationship that the United States would need to have with a government in order to station troops overseas in peacetime, so these countries were not only outliers but problematic from a theoretical standpoint. Cuba was excluded for similar reasons; there is a large amount of U.S. troops stationed at the Guantanamo Bay naval base. The United States has a perpetual lease on the base, and therefore doesn't rely

on the Cuban government's permission to station soldiers there. As a result, the large troop presence wouldn't be affected by negative blowback from human rights criticism.

Once these three countries were removed from the dataset, military personnel only remained a statistically significant predictor of presidential mentions, and this relationship (p-value= 0.021) was weaker than it had previously been. The impact of military personnel on lines and negative mentions actually reversed its effect and was no longer significant. Overall, this analysis shows weak evidence that the president is more likely to speak about human rights conditions in countries with more U.S. military personnel, but this effect almost entirely disappears when a few influential countries are removed.

Discussion

Comparisons of human rights rhetoric between Presidents Clinton, Bush, and Obama demonstrated some similarities and some differences. While all three presidents brought up issues of human rights at comparable levels, President Obama devoted significantly more time to the issues he brought up. Over the course of the three administrations, presidents were slightly less likely to directly criticize countries for their human rights records than they were to evaluate them positively or neutrally.

Presidential human rights rhetoric was almost always directed towards countries that were severe abusers of human rights, but the strong focus on China and Iraq showed how important other political factors are in influencing the use of human rights rhetoric. While the most frequently mentioned countries were worthy targets of criticism, presidential attention on the regional level showed a significant level of variation from what would be expected. The Middle East had a slightly higher level of attention than expected, but lack of attention to African countries was shocking and has serious implications for how presidential human rights rhetoric is

used. The absence of Africa in presidential speeches reflects the lack of American strategic interest in the region, and the willingness of presidents to ignore abuses in Africa seems to demonstrate a lack of genuine commitment to improving global human rights.

A bivariate measure of association found that the level of human rights violations in a country and the amount of U.S. military personnel were significant predictors of presidential attention. Military assistance and economic relationship were not. These results gave evidence that the countries with worse human rights abuses were more likely to be given attention and that the amount of military personnel in a country was weakly associated with increased attention.

The overarching takeaway from this research seems to be in-line with the conclusion drawn by Cutrone & Fordham (2014) about Congressional human rights speeches. The president did give attention to actual human rights abusers rather than inventing claims, but tended to target countries because of other political concerns. As a result, presidential rhetoric fails to accurately portray the level of human rights abuses around the world, especially in Africa. Concern left unaddressed by the president have a harder time making it into the national discussion, which could otherwise spur some action by the United States to combat the abuses in question. Whether these implications are acceptable is open to debate. Presidents Clinton, Bush, and Obama did focus on real human rights abuses around the world, even if their focus was often a result of other concerns. Attention to countries like Myanmar and Sudan also likely reflected genuine commitment to improving the human rights conditions there. While ideally presidential administrations and the government as a whole would prioritize human rights abuses to a larger degree, they are constrained by the nation-state system they operate within, which incentivizes self-interested actions.

Since this is the first attempt to research presidential human rights rhetoric, further research is needed into how presidents use human rights rhetoric and its effects. There are several possible explanatory variables that were not included in this experiment: human rights attention by the news media, congressional hearings on human rights, and a measure of which countries are allies of the United States. These findings could also be improved by moving beyond bivariate measures of association and analyzing the data using a more complicated regression model which can combat the methodological problems addressed in the research design section. The amount of zeroes generated in the panel dataset raises validity issues for standard OLS regression, so another model would need to be used, likely a Tobit model to correct for the zeroes. These improvements could increase the explanatory power of future research into presidential human rights rhetoric.

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