

Recording Repression: Identifying Physical Integrity Rights Allegations in Annual Country Human Rights Reports*

Rebecca Cordell[†]

K. Chad Clay[‡]

Christopher J. Fariss[§]

Reed M. Wood[¶]

Thorin M. Wright^{||}

Abstract

We develop an automated method for extracting repression allegations from annual country human rights reports produced by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and the US State Department from 1999-2016. Human rights scholars continue to rely upon these texts to measure a country's respect for human rights over space and time. Two of the most frequently used sets of measures, the Political Terror Scale and the Cingranelli-Richards Human Rights Data Project use cumulative information contained in the reports to hand code the range, intensity and scope of human rights violations by country-year. We present a dictionary-based method that automates this human coding process and segments human rights reports into allegations describing disappearances, torture, killing and political imprisonment by country-year at the sentence level. We build a context specific repression dictionary using training data (approximately 15,000 allegations) collected by human coders for six pilot countries from 1999-2016 including Angola, Belarus, Mexico, Nigeria, Philippines and the UK. We validate our model using human coded data for India for the same time period. We use this dictionary to produce a binary target variable on repression and use a probability model to estimate the likelihood that the subject of a sentence contains information on repression. We also make available a dataset of repression allegations for all countries in the world from 1999-2016.

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[†] Postdoctoral Research Associate, School of Politics and Global Studies, Arizona State University, Rebecca.Cordell@asu.edu.

[‡] Associate Professor, Department of International Affairs, University of Georgia, kcclay@uga.edu.

[§] Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Michigan, cjfariss@umich.edu.

[¶] Associate Professor, School of Politics and Global Studies, Arizona State University, Reed.Wood@asu.edu.

^{||} Associate Professor, School of Politics and Global Studies, Arizona State University, Thorin.Wright@asu.edu.