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CHAPTER 4

Targeting Civilians

Measuring the intensity of violence against civilians and the level of human rights abuses around the world is both difficult and important. It is difficult because governments and non-state armed groups rarely publicize the violence and other abuses they perpetrate against the innocent—indeed, they often seek to conceal them. It is important because unless national, regional, and global trends in violence against civilians and other core human rights abuses can be tracked, policy-makers have no way of knowing whether things are getting better or getting worse, or whether policies designed to protect civilians are having any impact.

For some, killing civilians is legitimate when resisting occupation.

It is, as we noted in the *Human Security Brief 2006*, odd to say the least that when the Secretary-General of the United Nations reports to the Security Council each year on the UN's protection of civilians mandate, he has no comprehensive data on which to base his analysis and recommendations.

In this chapter we examine the most recent findings of two datasets that address issues central to the protection of civilians' agenda. One tracks organized political violence against civilians around the world; the other measures core human

rights abuses. Together with the new findings on terrorism that are discussed in Chapter 1, these datasets are helping to close the knowledge gaps in this politically contentious field.

One-Sided Violence

"Terrorism" and "genocide" are both terms used to describe the organized killing of civilians, but each is controversial. At the UN, where the General Assembly has repeatedly failed to agree on a definition of terrorism, there are two main sources of controversy. First, while some believe killing civilians may be acceptable when a people is "resisting occupation," others totally reject the idea. Second, there is no consensus on whether the label "terrorist" should be applied to governments as well as to non-state groups. Were such a comprehensive definition to be accepted, it would have embarrassing consequences for a number of liberal democracies whose governments pursued policies that deliberately targeted civilians in mass bombing raids in World War II.

"Genocide" can also be an intensely contested term, as Turkey's decades-long efforts to reject any attempt to use the term to describe the mass killing of Armenians between 1915 and 1917 attest. More recently there has been a fractious debate over whether the intentional killing of civilians in Darfur constitutes genocide.

Uppsala University's Conflict Data Program (UCDP) avoids both the controversy and politicization associated with the terms "terrorism" and "genocide" by adopting a nonemotive term—"one-sided violence." UCDP describes one-sided

violence as the intentional use of armed force against civilians by a government or formally organized group that results in at least 25 deaths within a calendar year.¹³⁸ Civilians killed in bombing raids against military targets, or the crossfire of combat are counted in the battle-death tolls, not as victims of one-sided violence.

The 25 deaths that must be perpetrated for a campaign of one-sided violence to be recorded by UCDP can occur at anytime within the calendar year. So both a mass killing of 25 or more civilians in a single day, and a series of 25 individual killings spread over the course of a year, constitute a campaign of one-sided violence.

The data indicate that the targeting of civilians is increasing.

A single country can experience more than one campaign of one-sided violence in a calendar year, just as it can experience more than one conflict.¹³⁹ In 2006, for example, India and Iraq each experienced four campaigns of one-sided violence; Sudan had three; and Sri Lanka and Nepal each had two. Before UCDP created the one-sided violence dataset at the request of the Human Security Report Project, no government, international organization, or research institution had collected data on intentional violence against civilians by both non-state armed groups and governments.¹⁴⁰

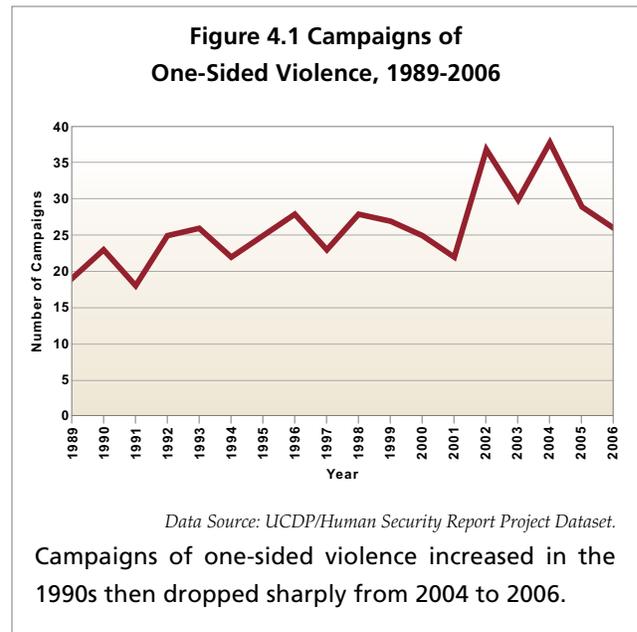
What the Trend Data Reveal

Although not necessarily associated with warfare, one-sided violence most commonly occurs in countries experiencing conflict. In fact, in 2006 only three out of the 16 countries that experienced one-sided violence were *not* embroiled in conflict.

Given this association, we might expect that as armed conflicts declined from the early 1990s, campaigns of one-sided violence would have declined as well. This did not happen. Throughout most of the 1990s, the number of campaigns of one-sided violence trended upwards. It is not clear why this should have been the case, but the data clearly lend support to the widely held view that the targeting of civilians has become increasingly prevalent.

The number of campaigns of one-sided violence around the world rose from 19 in 1989, to a high of 38 in 2004. In fact, in 2004 there were more campaigns of one-sided violence than there were state-based armed conflicts. However, as Figure 4.1 shows, after 2004 things changed—the number

of campaigns of one-sided violence began to decrease and by 2006 had dropped to 26—a 32 percent decline.



The Regional Picture

Figure 4.2 illustrates the extent of the changes in the incidence of campaigns of one-sided violence *within* the world's regions from 2002 to 2006. Four of the six regions have seen net declines since 2002, one has seen an increase, and one experienced no change.¹⁴¹

Sub-Saharan Africa has seen by far the most dramatic reduction in the number of campaigns of one-sided violence. In 2002 some 40 percent of all campaigns of one-sided violence were in sub-Saharan Africa. By 2006 the region's share had shrunk to just 19 percent. In Central and South Asia the reverse was true. While the number of campaigns fluctuated over the period, there were nearly twice as many campaigns in 2006 as in 2002. The biggest increase was between 2005 and 2006 when the number of campaigns in the region went from four to nine. Most of this increase was accounted for by new campaigns in India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka.

As Figure 4.2 shows, there was no net change in the number of campaigns of one-sided violence in the Middle East and North Africa between 2002 and 2006. However, in the intervening years, the number had increased by 50 percent (from 8 to 12) before declining sharply again in 2006.

In 2006 Europe was free of one-sided violence for the second year in a row. Although this region has experienced relatively few campaigns of one-sided violence since 1989,

Figure 4.2 Campaigns of One-Sided Violence per Region, 2002-2006

Region	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	Change
Americas	2	1	3	4	1	-1
Central & South Asia	5	3	6	4	9	4
East & Southeast Asia & Oceania	6	4	4	2	3	-3
Europe	1	1	3	0	0	-1
Middle East & North Africa	8	11	11	12	8	0
Sub-Saharan Africa	15	10	11	7	5	-10
Total	37	30	38	29	26	-11

Data Source: UCDP/Human Security Report Project Dataset.

There was a threefold decline in campaigns of one-sided violence in sub-Saharan Africa between 2002 and 2006; in Central and South Asia the numbers increased by 44 percent over the same period.

some of them have been particularly deadly. The slaughter of 7,500 Muslim civilians by Serb forces in Srebrenica in 1995, for example, killed almost as many people as all of the campaigns of one-sided violence in the Americas during 1989 to 2006.¹⁴²

Deaths from One-Sided Violence

While we can be reasonably confident about the data on the number of campaigns of one-sided violence, the fatality data are more problematic. As noted earlier, those who kill civilians rarely publicize their actions, so many deaths go unreported, and determining the identity of the perpetrators can be very difficult. Knowing who the killers are is important because UCDP will not record a fatality unless it can identify the perpetrators. Without information about the identity of the perpetrators, it is impossible, for example, to distinguish between deaths from political violence and those from criminal violence, or whether the deaths were caused by government or non-state groups.

These coding challenges are compounded by the fact that governments and rebels can—and do—intimidate, and sometimes kill, those who seek to report the truth about the killings of civilians.

The uncertainties that complicate the coding process are evident in the often much wider variation between UCDP's low and high death toll estimates for one-sided violence than for deaths from armed conflict. For these reasons, and because the challenges of simply counting the civilian deaths in Darfur, Iraq, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) are so great, the one-sided violence fatality counts need to be treated with considerable caution. They can indicate broad trends but not much more.

Keeping these reservations in mind, the data suggest that while the number of campaigns of one-sided violence increased unevenly into the new millennium, their death toll has been trending downwards since the catastrophic slaughter in Rwanda in 1994. There was, however, a very slight increase in the reported global fatality toll between 2005 and 2006, though there were no large-scale campaigns—those that kill 1,000 or more people—during this period. The last such campaign was perpetrated by the Sudanese government in 2004.¹⁴³

Those who kill civilians rarely publicize their action. So, many deaths go unreported.

It is also instructive to look at the regional trends in death tolls. In three regions of the world—Europe, sub-Saharan Africa, and the Middle East and North Africa—there was little or no change in the death toll from one-sided violence between 2005 and 2006, while in the other three regions—the Americas, Central and South Asia, and East and Southeast Asia and Oceania—the changes were quite marked.

Europe, as mentioned earlier, was free of one-sided violence in 2005 and 2006, while in both sub-Saharan Africa, and the Middle East and North Africa, there was a slight decline in the number of reported deaths over the same period.

In the Americas, deaths from one-sided violence dropped by 71 percent between 2005 and 2006, driven by a sharp decline in deaths in Colombia. By contrast, the death toll in

Central and South Asia almost doubled, increasing by 91 percent. Much of the change in this latter region can be accounted for by increased death tolls in India and Sri Lanka. East and Southeast Asia and Oceania suffered a 48 percent increase in the civilian death toll from one-sided violence due primarily to escalating violence in Myanmar and Laos. However, it should be borne in mind that these fatality tolls are relatively small and that the estimates have a wide margin of error.

The decline in the number of campaigns of one-sided violence over the past two years, and the longer-term—though uneven—decline in fatality numbers are encouraging. But until we have a much better understanding of what causes violence against civilians to start, as well as to stop, it would be imprudent to assume that the downward trend will necessarily be sustained.

Human Rights Abuse

No international organization, least of all the UN's new Human Rights Council, has a mandate to collect comprehensive data on human rights abuses. Such an exercise would be far too controversial. So, once again the international community finds itself confronting a critically important human security issue without any official data to determine whether or not its policies are having an impact.

Attempts to measure core human rights abuses confront even greater challenges than measuring political violence against civilians. In tracking trends in one-sided violence, there is a simple, accessible, and objective measure that researchers can rely on—fatalities. There is no equivalent single measure that can be used to track core human rights abuses, given that violations can range from torture and extrajudicial executions, to imprisonment without trial and political censorship. One way around this problem is to create a scale or index that provides measures of different levels of human rights violations. Such an index can then be used to assess each country's performance in protecting—or violating—human rights.

There are two modestly resourced academic research projects that compile such indices—the Political Terror Scale (PTS) is compiled by researchers at the University of North Carolina, Asheville,¹⁴⁴ while the Physical Integrity Rights Index is produced by the CIRI Human Rights Data Project network.¹⁴⁵ Both compile their data from the annual reports on human rights published by Amnesty International and by the US State Department. The findings of these indices can provide the national, regional, and global data needed to track human rights violations around the world. The analysis of trends in human rights violations that follows draws on the PTS data.

PTS data coders review the reports on individual countries for the year in question and assign each country two scores: one based on the Amnesty International report, and the other based on the State Department report. The scores range between 1 and 5—with level 5 signifying the highest incidence of rights abuse and level 1 the lowest. The five different levels are described as follows:

Level 1: Countries under a secure rule of law, people are not imprisoned for their views, and torture is rare or exceptional. Political murders are extremely rare.

Level 2: There is a limited amount of imprisonment for nonviolent political activity. However, few persons are affected, and torture and beatings are exceptional. Political murder is rare.

Level 3: There is extensive political imprisonment, or a recent history of such imprisonment. Execution or other political murders and brutality may be common. Unlimited detention, with or without a trial, for political views is accepted.

Level 4: Civil and political violations have expanded to large numbers of the population. Murders, disappearances, and torture are a common part of life. In spite of its generality, on this level terror affects those who interest themselves in politics or ideas.

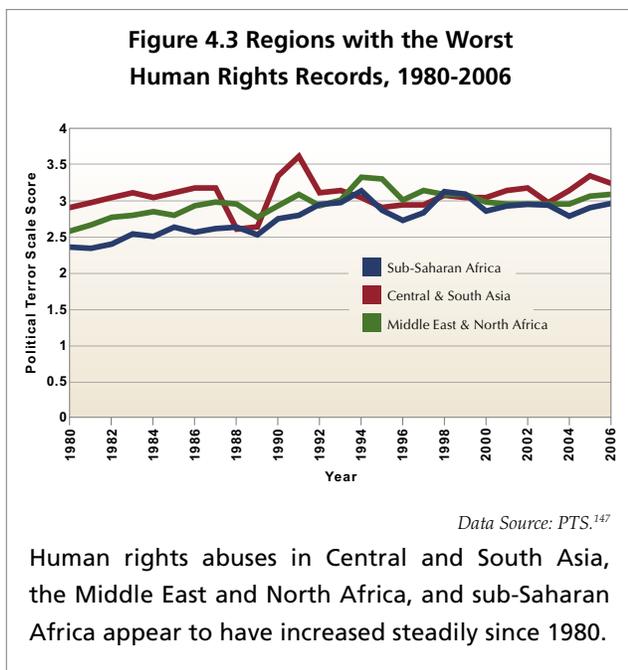
Level 5: Terror has expanded to the whole population. The leaders of these societies place no limits on the means or thoroughness with which they pursue personal or ideological goals.¹⁴⁶

There is no single measure that can be reliably used to track core human rights abuses.

A level 4 score approximates an incidence of human rights abuse that is twice as serious as a level 2 score; a level 1 score indicates a level of abuse that is approximately half that of a level 2 score, and so forth. Such assumptions enable researchers to sum the scores for each country each year and then divide by two to arrive at a composite score. The composite scores in a region can then be added and the total divided by the number of countries in the region to get the average score for the region for the year in question. By repeating this exercise for every year, researchers can obtain trend data that help determine whether respect for human rights in a region is improving—or deteriorating.

Regions with the Worst Records of Human Rights Abuse

The three regions in the world with the highest incidence of human rights abuses are Central and South Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, and sub-Saharan Africa. The trend data plotted in Figure 4.3 indicate that each region has experienced a net increase in human rights violations from 1980 to 2006. There have been improvements in all of the regions during some of these years, but they have been relatively short-lived.



Central and South Asia had the worst human rights record in 2006. Many of the changes in this region between 1980 and 2006 are associated with the breakup of the Soviet Union and its aftermath. The Middle East and North Africa saw a steady increase in the aggregate level of rights violations until the mid-1990s, when the trend levelled off. In sub-Saharan Africa there was an uneven net increase in rights violations until the end of the 1990s and then a modest decline from 1998 to 2006.

The trends revealed in Figure 4.3 are, of course, averages of quite disparate country scores. By definition, some countries in a region will always suffer more human rights abuses than the average, while others will suffer fewer. In sub-Saharan Africa, for example, the extremes are the DRC, with a PTS score of 4.5 in 2006, and Cape Verde and Comoros, both of which had the best-possible score in 2006—1.0.

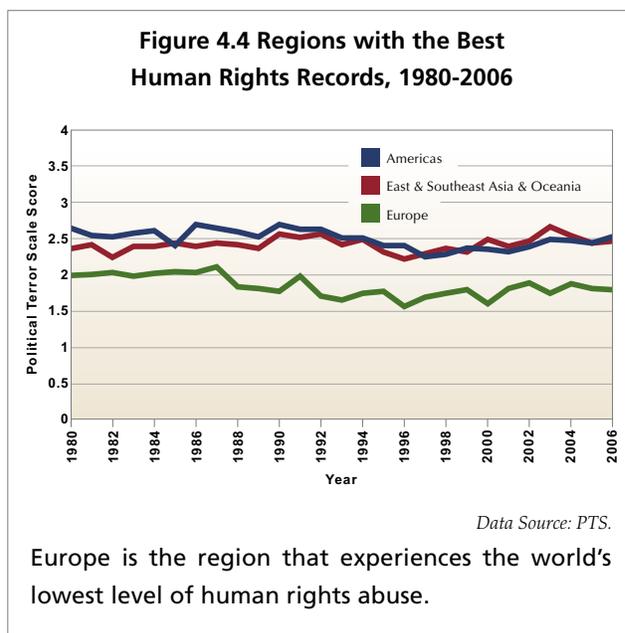
Although the aggregation of individual country scores into a single regional score can hide intraregional differences,

comparing regional trends over time has real utility. Only with regional trend data is it possible to detect changes that are invisible when the country data are examined individually.

Regions with the Best Human Rights Records

Over the past 26 years, three regions have performed relatively well on the PTS—East and Southeast Asia and Oceania, the Americas, and Europe. As Figure 4.4 shows, the Americas experienced a net improvement in respect for human rights in the 1990s, but this was partially reversed in the new millennium. Part of the post-9/11 deterioration in human rights is due to restrictions on some rights associated with the US-led War on Terror. In East and Southeast Asia and Oceania there was an improvement from the end of the Cold War to the mid-1990s—then a deterioration.

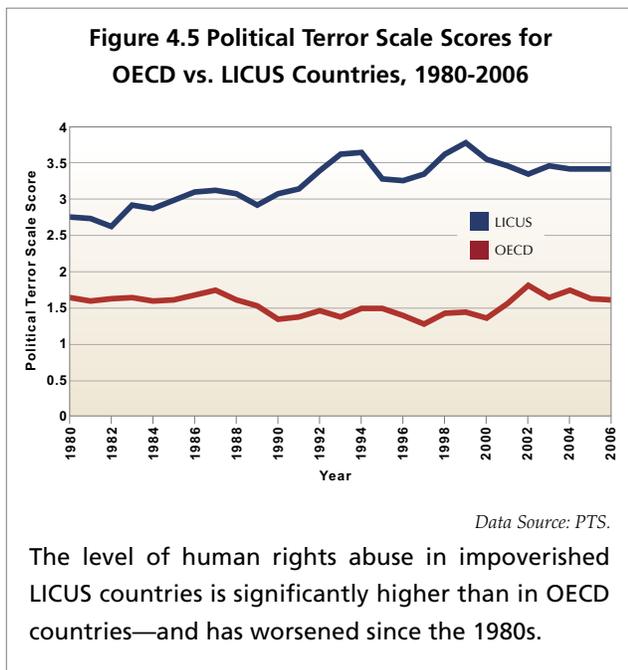
Europe, the region with the highest average income level, has consistently been the best performer on the PTS, but even here some of the gains of the 1990s had been reversed by 2006.



Poor versus Rich Countries

The world's richest countries are almost all members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Meanwhile, the world's weakest and poorest states belong to a category that the World Bank calls, "Low Income Countries Under Stress" (LICUS).¹⁴⁸

Figure 4.5 shows the PTS score for LICUS states growing significantly, but unevenly, worse from 1980 to 1999, improving to 2002, and then levelling out. Overall, the score has gone



from 2.8 in 1980, to 3.4 in 2006—indicating a serious deterioration in the respect for core human rights.

The trend for OECD countries reveals little by way of change. There was some improvement in the aggregate PTS score in this category from 1987 to 1990 as a result of changes occurring in Eastern Europe in the 1990s. There is little change from then until 2001, when the aggregate level of rights violations increased in the wake of 9/11.

Global Trends

The global trend data reveal surprisingly little change over the last 25 years. If we look at the beginning and end points in Figure 4.6, the somewhat depressing news is that human rights abuses around the world appear to have worsened slightly over the past quarter of a century, but what is most striking about the graph is how little net change has occurred—changes at the regional level effectively cancel each other out when the data is aggregated to the global level.

The Drivers of Change

What drives the changes in rights violations revealed in the regional trend data is far from clear. There is, as the comparison between OECD and LICUS states indicates, a strong association between income and respect for human rights. People in rich countries suffer far fewer rights violations than do those in poor countries.

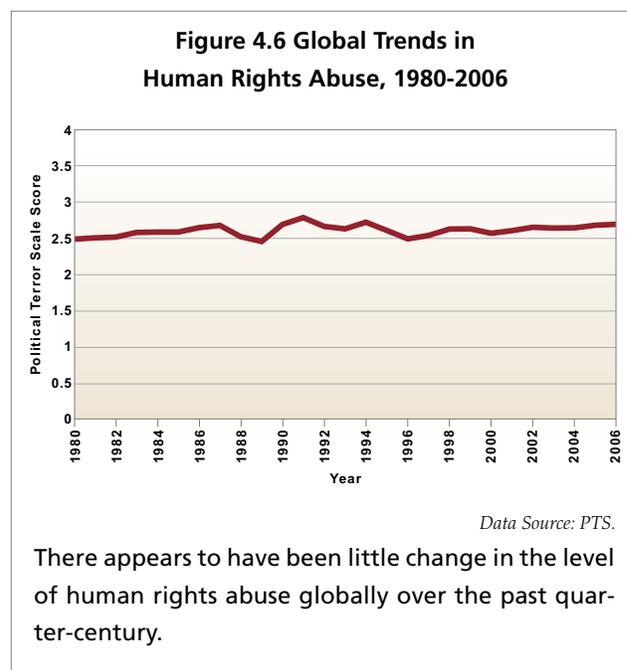
In the developing world, GDP has increased substantially between 1980 and 2000. We might therefore have expected to

see a decrease in human rights violations in these countries over this period. However, in two of the three worst performing regions of the world, the opposite has happened. Incomes rose, but so too did rights violations. Little research has been devoted to the question of why this should be the case, but part of the answer may be that it is not until income levels reach a certain threshold that respect for human rights increases and becomes entrenched.

A second puzzle relates to the relationship between democracies and human rights. Inclusive democracies have better human rights records than either autocracies or “anocracies”—the latter being states whose governance mechanisms are a mix of democratic and authoritarian elements.¹⁴⁹

But in the period from 1980 to 2006, the number of democracies in the world more than doubled—from 41 to 94.¹⁵⁰ In the case of sub-Saharan Africa, the number of democracies increased *sixfold* from the end of the 1980s to 2006, but respect for human rights as measured by the PTS went down substantially. The question is why?

Part of the explanation here may be that the increase in the number of democracies in this period was accompanied by an even greater increase in the number of anocracies in the region.¹⁵¹ In fact, the number of anocracies in sub-Saharan Africa increased more than *tenfold* between 1988 and 2006. So, any increased respect for human rights associated with the new democracies may have been negated, in part at least, by the higher levels of human rights abuses associated with the new anocracies.¹⁵²



A third puzzle is that the significant decline in the number of conflicts around the world following the end of the Cold War has not been associated with a decline in human rights abuses. Countries embroiled in, or recently emerging from, armed conflict tend to be characterized by higher levels of human rights violations. Indeed, all but one of the nine countries in Figure 4.7, which lists the countries with the worst human rights records in 2006, were involved in armed conflicts in that year.¹⁵³ In two of the three worst performing regions in the world, the number of armed conflicts declined while the level of human rights violations increased.

Figure 4.7 The World's Worst Human Rights Abusers, 2006

Country	PTS Score
Iraq	5
Sudan	5
Afghanistan	5
Sri Lanka	5
Colombia	4.5
Democratic Republic of the Congo	4.5
Myanmar	4.5
Nepal	4.5
Central African Republic	4.5

Data Source: PTS.

All but one of the worst human rights abusers were involved in an armed conflict in 2006.

There is a dearth of quantitative research on the relationship between human rights abuse and conflict. However, two possible explanations merit investigation. Political repression, which is in part what the PTS index measures, may, under some conditions, be effective in deterring outbreaks of armed conflict—and stopping those conflicts that cannot be deterred. In the Middle East and North Africa, during the 1980s and 1990s, high levels of political repression were associated with declining number of armed conflicts. When states believe that repression works, they are more likely to employ it, especially when the government in question perceives itself to be under serious internal threat.

Finally, we note that it is possible that changes in human rights coding and reporting practices over the past quarter of a century are part of the reason why the PTS scale shows no net decline in the level of human rights violations around

the world between 1980 and 2006. There are three reasons to believe that these changes may have had a significant impact:

- There has been a dramatic increase in the reporting of human rights abuses over the past two decades—both by the media and the vastly increased number of NGOs working in the field.¹⁵⁴ Had the information on rights violations that is available today been available in the 1980s, the scores that Amnesty International and the US State Department reported for this period could well have been higher—meaning that the revised data could well have revealed an improving global trend in the respect for human rights over the past quarter-century.
- As noted in the *Human Security Report 2005*, the scholars who run the PTS project believe that coding practices may have undergone a subtle change over the years—with coders today scoring abuses more severely than in the 1980s. If this is true, the abuses of the past are more serious than the data suggest; those of the present, relatively less so. If this bias were to be corrected, it is again possible that the global trend data would show human rights violations declining around the world from 1980 to 2006.
- Political bias may have distorted past findings. It has been claimed that in the 1980s the US State Department tended to score the human rights violations of right-wing authoritarian regimes more leniently than those of left-leaning governments.¹⁵⁵

The combined impact of these three factors suggests that the level of human rights abuses may have been higher in the 1980s than the PTS trend data indicate. If this is indeed the case, then there would likely have been a net decline in human rights abuses over the past quarter-century, not the small increase that the data currently indicate.

Under-reporting and other issues impacting the reliability of historical data are by no means unique to attempts to monitor human rights violations. They have impeded the collection of data on deaths from one-sided violence, internally displaced persons, and coups d'état, to name but a few.

The good news is that human rights reporting is far more extensive and consistent than it once was, and the political bias that may have distorted the trend data during the Cold War years no longer exists. In other words, the monitoring of human rights abuses is more reliable now than it was in the 1980s.

However, the inconclusive nature of our discussion of what drives human rights violations points to the many uncertainties and knowledge gaps that still exist in this field. It also points to an important future research agenda.