

Transnational Information Politics: NGO Human Rights Reporting, 1986-2000

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Abstract

What shapes the transnational activist agenda? Do NGOs with a global mandate focus on the world's most pressing problems, or is their reporting also affected by additional considerations? To address these questions, we study the determinants of country reporting by an exemplary transnational actor, Amnesty International, during 1986-2000. We find that while human rights conditions are associated with the volume of their country reporting, other factors also matter, including previous reporting efforts, state power, U.S. military assistance, and a country's media profile. Drawing on interviews with Amnesty and Human Rights Watch staff, we interpret our findings as evidence of Amnesty International's social movement-style "information politics." The group produces more written work on some countries than others to maximize advocacy opportunities, shape international standards, promote greater awareness, and raise its profile. This approach has both strengths and weaknesses, which we consider after extending our analysis to other transnational sectors.

TRANSNATIONAL INFORMATION POLITICS: NGO HUMAN RIGHTS REPORTING, 1986-2000

In the global North, transnational non-governmental organizations (NGOs) enjoy strong public reputations as neutral experts providing vital information on pressing issues. As Price (2003: 589) observes, NGOs “depend for their legitimacy upon their reputation as providers of objective expertise,” lending them an influential voice in world affairs.¹ Recent surveys demonstrate the strength of NGO reputations, revealing that Amnesty International, the World Wildlife Fund, Greenpeace and Oxfam are highly trusted “independent sources of credible news” by elite American and Western European respondents. The latter are particularly enthusiastic, viewing NGOs as more trustworthy than private corporations (Edelman, 2003: 3).

At the same time, however, scholars of transnational advocacy also claim that NGOs are savvy interest groups who maximize opportunities and scarce resources through innovative, social movement-style tactics (cf. Sell and Prakash, 2004). Keck and Sikkink (1998) offer an influential and detailed analysis of NGO “information politics,” explaining that activists “seek out resources” and “conduct public relations” (6-7); “generate information quickly ... [and] effectively” (10); deploy information in “innovative ways” within “hospitable venues” (17); and use “symbolic” and “leverage” politics. Their interpretation of this is positive, viewing information politics as a worthwhile tool in the struggle for global justice. Bob (2002), by contrast, offers a more somber analysis, arguing that the advocacy skills information politics require can marginalize poorly represented regions or causes. He bitingly describes global civil society as a “Darwinian marketplace

where legions of desperate groups vie for scarce attention, sympathy, and money,” forcing NGOs to engage in competitive, market-like behavior (37). As a result, Bob claims, urgent problems often receive scant attention, skewing global public sympathy towards regions or issues endowed with better or more plentiful advocates.

Thus while these two accounts offer radically different evaluations of transnational civil society, they agree on the central role of information politics.² For both, funding, media interest, and public sympathy are limited commodities, forcing NGOs to act strategically to boost popular support and seize advocacy opportunities. While Keck and Sikkink downplay the negative aspects of the strategies they describe, Bob’s focus on the latter renders him harshly critical. Neither systematically tests their arguments across time and space, however, drawing instead on qualitative analyses of individual organizations and campaigns.

To gain a broader sense of information politics, we systematically study the volume of country reporting by Amnesty International, an exemplary transnational actor. We regress Amnesty’s catalogued background reports and press releases on human rights abuses in 148 countries from 1986 to 2000 on a range of potential influences, including human rights conditions, organizational incrementalism, state power, foreign aid, civil society, and media prominence. We interpret our findings with the help of practitioner interviews. We recognize that the volume of country reporting is only one possible measure of information politics, but believe it lends us valuable insight into an important aspect of transnational work. Before presenting our hypotheses, data, and methods, we briefly describe the transnational human rights sector and Amnesty’s leading role within it.

II. TRANSNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISM

In a recent review of the literature, Cmiel (2004: 117) notes, “few political agendas have seen such a rapid and dramatic growth as that of ‘human rights.’” Human rights language is increasingly used in debates over military intervention, foreign aid, and globalization, and as the volume of human rights talk grows, so too have the number of human rights NGOs. In 1996, researchers discovered 295 registered human rights groups worldwide, almost half of which were formed after 1979 (Smith et al, 1998: 386).

These groups enjoy special pride of place within the transnational sector, as their notions of universal human dignity can provide legal, moral and philosophical foundations for other causes. Gender theorists use human rights to advocate for women’s issues; moral philosophers do the same to promote global economic reform; corporate critics use human rights standards to legitimize their work; and foreign aid, relief and development workers use human rights to justify project proposals (cf. Duffield, 2001; Jochnik, 1999; Nussbaum, 1999; Pogge, 2003; Rieff, 2002; Uvin 2004). Even some Marxists refer to human rights principles when advocating for global activism (Burawoy et al., 2002).

As such, these scholars join a growing group of intellectuals advocating human rights standards in evaluations of global democratization, justice and reform (cf. Habermas, 1998; Ignatieff, 1999). Although human rights rhetoric and work has critics (cf. Chandler, 2002; Ignatieff, 1999; Mutua, 1996, 2001, 2002; Rieff, 2002), scholars can demonstrate its ability to occasionally promote positive policy change (Clark, 2001; Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Korey, 1998; Lutz and Sikkink, 2000; Risse et al., 1999; Ron, 1997; Thomas, 2001).

It is at the level of global rhetoric, standards and symbolism, however, that human rights have registered their clearest achievements (Clark, 2001; Ignatieff, 1999; Uvin,

2004: 50-55). Chandler (2002) notes the movement's iconic status in the global North, a claim supported by polling data indicating that 86 percent of Americans currently favor "promoting and defending human rights in other countries" (Gallup 2003). Cladis (2001: xxviii) argues that the "cluster of beliefs and practices, symbols and institutions that support the dignity and rights of the individual" comprise liberal democracy's contemporary "civil religion." He suggests that membership in the modern, secular, liberal-democratic community is partly defined through shared human rights symbols, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, or public rituals, including highly publicized trials of human rights offenders.

There is little doubt that Amnesty International's role in all this is substantial. The group has the longest history and broadest name recognition in the field, won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1977, and is believed by many to set standards for the movement as a whole.³ It was an early pioneer in international NGO advocacy efforts, and has made important contributions to the international normative system (Clark, 2001). As a result, its methods of information gathering; "naming and shaming" abusers; elite advocacy; and grass roots mobilization, have informed the work of many other NGOs.⁴ Over 400 paid and volunteer staff work in its London International Secretariat, and according to annual reports and financial audits, the Secretariat's budget grew from \$22.114 million in 1992, to \$34.840 million in 2001. According to one estimate, Amnesty's global network of members, sympathizers and subscribers includes 1.5 million persons living in 150 countries and territories, and 81 national offices.⁵ Former Amnesty employees are spread throughout the broader transnational world, diffusing the group's principles, tactics, and worldviews.

Among academics, Amnesty is viewed as a reliable source of information, and its reports provide the raw material for many cross-national studies (cf., Poe et al., 2001). Public trust in Amnesty's reputation is similarly high, with polls revealing that its "brand trust" tops that of other leading NGOs (Edelman, 2003). Preserving this reputation is a top Amnesty priority; the group's 2004 strategic plan, for example, seeks to "instigate a brand management program to protect and enhance the integrity of the Amnesty International name" (Amnesty International, 2004: 16).

Amnesty's credibility comes in part from the fact that it is not political in the conventional sense, having "no political affiliation, endors[ing] no political party," and "accept[ing] no funds from governments or any political party."⁶ Our research clearly suggests, however, that like other transnational NGOs, Amnesty engages in the social movement tactics described by Keck and Sikkink (1998). More specifically, Amnesty uses its research to maximize international public awareness of violations; mobilize grass roots and elite support; promote educational, advocacy and media opportunities; and raise funds. Although Amnesty officials are committed to exposing abuses wherever they occur, they acknowledge that human rights conditions are not the sole factor shaping their reporting. According to the group's former Secretary General, "the severity of the human rights violations in a country ... trigger[s] our reaction," but so do "windows of opportunity" that help Amnesty "influence the agenda" (Sane, 1998). Information politics is implicitly discussed in the organization's strategic plan, which emphasizes both quality research and the "timely... delivery" of information tailored "to the needs of specific target groups and end-users" (Amnesty International, 2004: 13-14). As one Amnesty manager explained, the group is "an activist movement, not just for research and documentation."⁷ To be effective,

activists must deploy information strategically. By systematically studying Amnesty's written reporting over time, we show how this works in practice.

III. HYPOTHESES AND DATA

We regress catalogued background reports and press releases published by Amnesty from 1986 to 2000 on measures of human rights abuse, state power, foreign aid, civil society, and media prominence. We collected information on over 190 countries, but missing data cut our sample to 148, all but four of which were recognized U.N. members in 2002. Most of our data begin in 1980, but we run models from 1986 due to a lack of systematic civil society data prior to that date. We structure our data in country-year format.⁸

Dependent Variables

Our dependent variables consist of *Amnesty International background reports* and *press releases* condemning abuses within a specific country in a given year.⁹ We coded 10,075 background reports and 3,208 press releases appearing in the *Amnesty International Cumulative Guide 1962-2000* during the 1986-2000 period (Amnesty International, 2000). We employed three coders (two on background reports, and one on news releases), and conducted regular coding meetings and numerous Cronbach Alpha tests to ensure consistency. Coders regularly attained scores of .80 and higher. When inter-coder disputes arose, an arbitrator helped resolve discrepancies through consensus. Coders searched catalogued titles by "type" of publication and the "country" they were filed under. Graph 1 presents the annual publication numbers for both written products, demonstrating

Amnesty's increased reliance on press releases during the 1990s, an issue we explore in greater depth below.

[INSERT GRAPH 1 ABOUT HERE]

Our dependent variables comprise 71 percent of Amnesty's catalogued work during 1986-2000, but we recognize that some of the group's efforts do not appear in the *Cumulative Guide*, including Urgent Action alerts and unwritten advocacy efforts. Nonetheless, our data is broad and provides a reasonable basis for systematic analysis.

Press releases and background reports differ in some ways, and we expect variation in their influences. The lengthier background reports are sent to human rights professionals, U.N. officials, academics and feature journalists, while shorter press releases aim more at the general public and non-specialized media. Background reports require in-country research, while press releases do not. We expect press releases to be more reliant on information politics than background reports because they seek to shape and contribute to breaking events.¹⁰

Independent Variables

C Head: Lag Term

Autocorrelation is common to most time series models since many variables are path dependent (Baltagi, 1995; Ostrom, 1990; Kennedy, 1998). Gross Domestic Product (GDP), for example, is sticky, changing only incrementally over time. We address this by including a *lag term* for the previous year's country reporting. This also helps test for the

incrementalism common to many large organizations (Jones et. al., 1998; Wildavsky, 1964). We anticipate incrementalism for a variety of reasons specific to human rights work, which involves the long-term cultivation of personal contacts with organizations, dissidents and activists, often under precarious political conditions. Country-level human rights expertise is costly, requiring language skills, cultural awareness, and frequent travel. For these reasons, we expect that

H1: Amnesty’s previous reporting has a statistically significant effect on its current reporting.

C Head: Human rights abuse

Until 2001, Amnesty’s mandate focused on violations of civil and political rights, and its activities on this count are the basis of its strong reputation.¹¹ We use five measures of a country’s propensity to violate these rights, including two political terror scores based on Amnesty and U.S. State Department annual reports; a political openness score; the presence of an armed conflict; and the percent of population killed in conflict.

Political Terror Scores (PTS) are estimates of a states’ propensity to violate its citizens’ personal integrity rights, including freedom from torture, arbitrary detention, and extrajudicial killing (Poe, 2004).¹² Scores are created by scholars making numerical assessments of Amnesty and U.S. State Department annual reports. A score of one denotes a “least repressive” country, while a score of five denotes the “most repressive.” We expect increased terror scores to be associated with increased Amnesty output.

Our second indicator of potential abuse is the *Polity IV* score, which estimates a country’s degree of political openness (Marshall and Jaggers, 2002).¹³ By combining this

measure with PTS data, we distinguish between state behavior and regime type (Apodaca, 2001; Hafner-Burton and Tsutsui, 2004). Our expectations for this indicator are mixed. On the one hand, increased political openness should reduce the volume of Amnesty reporting, since political participation is itself a basic human right (Sen, 2000), and scholars associate it with reduced political terror scores (Davenport, 1999; Henderson, 1991; Mitchell and McCormick, 1998; Poe and Tate, 1994; Poe et. al., 1999). Political openness might also have the opposite effect, however. Politically open countries have more protests, journalists and NGOs, all of which stimulate political and moral debate. Intermediate levels of democracy and the process of democratization itself are associated with greater risk of violent conflict, moreover, and this could trigger greater levels of abuse (Hegre et. al., 2001; Ron, 2001; Snyder, 2000). We thus anticipate only that Polity IV's effect will be significant, but remain agnostic as to its direction.

Our third and fourth measures of human rights conditions are conflict related, including an *armed conflict* dummy variable and the *percent of population directly killed in armed conflict*,¹⁴ both of which we expect to increase Amnesty output. Although Amnesty is best known for its work with political prisoners, armed conflict is relevant for its association with personal integrity violations (Poe et. al., 1999; Rasler, 1986), and because Amnesty began reporting on war-related abuses in 1993.¹⁵ We draw these measures from Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) annual reports and Sivard's *World Military and Social Expenditures*, merging data from each by country-year and taking the highest available annual estimate (SIPRI, 2002; Sivard, 1996). Since Sivard's data is not organized by country-year, we divided her overall estimates evenly over the conflict's duration. To obtain the percentage of population killed in war, we

divided estimated annual conflict deaths by mid-year U.S. Census International Data Base (IDB) estimates (2002).

To summarize, we believe that

H2: higher political terror scores increase Amnesty reporting.

H3: Polity IV scores have a significant effect on Amnesty reporting.

H4: armed conflict increases Amnesty reporting.

H5: higher population percentages killed in armed conflict increase Amnesty reporting.

We now turn to possible indicators of information politics, which are separate from measures of human rights abuse. We anticipate that some will be statistically significant across publication types, but that others will be relevant only to press releases, given the latter's specific goal of engaging with journalists, breaking events, and the general public.

C Head: State power

Our first indicator of information politics is state power. Controlling for levels of abuse, we expect Amnesty to report more heavily on violations within powerful states because they have greater potential effects on international norms (Goldstein, Kahler, Keohane, and Slaughter, 2000; Nadelman, 1990), and because they are more visible to media, international organizations, and global audiences. If an NGO wants to build support for a new international convention; garner more attention; or boost its fund-raising potential, it makes sense to focus on abuses by high profile, powerful countries such as the U.S., or China, rather than on violations occurring in Botswana or Burkina Faso.

We measure state power in three ways: size of national economy (wealth), size of military, and size of population. Wealth is a major determinant of power and prominence, and thus should increase Amnesty reporting. Wealth may also have an opposite effect, however, given its association with improved human rights conditions and reduced chances of civil war (Fearon and Laitin, 2003; Henderson, 1991; Mitchell and McCormick, 1998; Poe and Tate, 1994; Poe et. al., 1999). Given these conflicting explanations, we expect only that wealth will have a statistically significant impact on Amnesty reporting. We measure wealth by a country's *Gross Domestic Product (GDP)*, obtained from the World Bank's *World Development Indicators* (World Bank, 2002).

Our second state power measure is the size of a country's military, which we expect to increase Amnesty output. Militarily powerful countries have greater geopolitical prominence, attracting greater Amnesty attention, and may also be associated with more human rights abuse, given the armed forces' key role in repression. Data on the number of *military personnel* in a given country-year come from the *Correlates of War 2 National Military Capabilities 3.0* dataset (Singer et al., 1972).

Our third measure of state power is *population* size, which we also anticipate will increase Amnesty reporting. Heavily populated countries command greater international attention, and abusive governments in populous states are likely to have greater overall effects on human welfare. In addition, scholars note an association between repression and population size, hypothesizing that this stems from resource strains (Henderson, 1991; McCormick and Mitchell, 1997). We use mid-year population estimates of the U.S. Census International Data Base (IDB) (2002).

To summarize our expectations for state power, we anticipate that

H6: GDP has a statistically significant effect on Amnesty reporting.

H7: larger militaries increase Amnesty reporting.

H8: larger populations increase Amnesty reporting.

C Head: Foreign aid

Our second indicator of information politics is foreign aid, the effects of which on human rights reporting have been hotly debated by politicians and commentators. This was especially true during the Reagan administration, when conservatives claimed human rights groups focused unduly on U.S. allies (Abrams, 1984; Kirkpatrick, 1979). We believe increased foreign aid will prompt greater Amnesty reporting for several reasons. First, media and public attention is more easily focused on abuses by governments receiving taxpayer dollars, prompting human rights groups to call for legislation linking aid to recipient human rights behavior (Uvin, 2004: 56-82). Keck and Sikkink (1998: 23-24) term this “leverage politics.” In addition, scholars find an association between U.S. aid and levels of government repression (Shoultz, 1981; Stohl et al., 1984; Carleton and Stohl, 1985; Regan, 1995).

Our first foreign aid measure is *U.S. military aid* (grants and loans), obtained from the U.S. Agency for International Development’s (USAID) online publication, *U.S. Overseas Loans and Grants* (the Greenbook) (2004). Our second measure is *Official Development Assistance (ODA)*, which we take from the World Bank’s *World Development Indicators*. ODA includes loans and grants by official agencies to promote economic development and welfare in developing countries, and includes most forms of US economic assistance.¹⁶ Like Knack (2004) and Neumayer (2003), we use ODA

because it is a broader estimate of Northern aid flows than U.S aid alone. To summarize, we anticipate that

H9: greater U.S. military aid increases Amnesty reporting.

H10: greater ODA increases Amnesty reporting.

C Head: Civil Society

Our third indicator of information politics is civil society, which we expect to increase Amnesty reporting. This may seem counter-intuitive at first glance, since larger civil societies emerge in countries with greater political freedoms and, presumably, reduced repression. We believe the opposite to be true, however, since qualitative scholarship repeatedly finds that international NGOs' engage with a region, issue or country after local groups first mobilize and advocate for change (Bob, 2002; Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Ron, 1997; Sikkink, 1993)

Our measure of civil society is *number of NGOs* based in a country in a given year and registered with the Union of International Associations (UIA). Unlike other scholars relying on sporadically published UIA yearbooks (cf. Beckfield, 2003; Hafner-Burton and Tsuiti, forthcoming), we obtained yearly estimates directly from the organization itself (Union of International Associations, 2004). Thus, our panels are not unbalanced by missing years, and we were not obliged to impute missing data. Some of the NGOs registered in a given country focus on domestic issues, while others have an international focus. To summarize, we anticipate that

H11: more NGOs increase Amnesty reporting.

C Head: Media prominence

Our final indicator of information politics is the extent to which human rights abuses in a country are already being covered in international media sources. We anticipate that greater media exposure will be associated with heavier volumes of Amnesty reporting. This hypothesis was motivated in part by social movement scholars observing that activists rely on the media to promote their claims and build support (Gamson and Wolfsfeld, 1993). Transnational activists act similarly, as detailed in Dale's (1996) account of Greenpeace. Amnesty's recent strategic plan states that "communication is ... itself a strategic priority," explaining that "communicating our message effectively" is an "overarching priority," advising use of the "television, the Internet and other media" (Amnesty International 2004, 16). Logically, it should be easier to attract media interest to human rights abuses occurring in countries the media already cares about. Funding is also relevant; Amnesty's strategic plan notes that financial growth is a key objective, and instructs staffers to use "AI's excellent reputation to increase our overall share of charitable giving" (Amnesty International, 2004: 20). Increased media visibility, after all, is a time-tested fund-raising technique.¹⁷

To test the media's effect on Amnesty reporting, we coded all articles mentioning the term "human rights" in the *Economist* (international edition) and *Newsweek* (U.S. edition), 1986- 2000. We chose weeklies over dailies for feasibility's sake. During the 1990's alone, for example, the *New York Times* published 14,898 articles with the term "human rights," compared to only 1,776 and 973 in the *Economist* and *Newsweek*, respectively. Previous research recommends using data from more than one publication (Mueller, 1997; Swank, 2000), prompting our use of weekly publications.

We chose the international edition of the *Economist* because it, like Amnesty, is a U.K.-based organization with a broad international readership. In 2002, its circulation was 880,000, with just under half in North America; 20 percent were in continental Europe; 15 percent in the U.K.; and 10 percent in Asia (*Economist*, 2004). According to surveys, *Economist* readers tend to be financially well off, influential, and internationally aware.¹⁸ We believe the *Economist* to be a good indicator of general international affairs interest by elite Northern publics.

The U.S. edition of *Newsweek* differs from the *Economist* in some key respects, providing some balance. It is U.S.-based, giving us insight into the American media's human rights agenda; its North American audience is 19.5 million, far higher than the *Economist's*; but its readers are also less economically advantaged (*Newsweek*, 2003).¹⁹ *Newsweek*, in other words, is less elite and cosmopolitan than the *Economist*. Cumulatively, these two publications are useful indicators of the Northern media's broad international agenda.

Articles from both the *Economist* and *Newsweek* were obtained from the Lexis-Nexis database with the keywords, "human rights." We employed five coders to track specific human rights abuses mentioned in the articles, and conducted regular coding meetings and Cronbach Alpha tests, all of which were above critical levels. Unlike studies merely counting the number of hits from keyword searches, our coders performed a content analysis of articles that both mentioned "human rights" and discussed specific abuses in individual countries.²⁰ Observations linked to the U.S., for example, were triggered because of abuses occurring *within* that country, and not due to American support for repressive governments elsewhere. When an article covered more than one country or

abuse, we coded only the first country mentioned. Although this reduces our sample, it boosts inter-coder consistency and provides a consistent measure of the general level of coverage for given countries. In total, this subset includes 1,027 articles mentioning specific human rights abuses in the *Economist*, and 810 in *Newsweek*. We combined these measures and took the country-year average to avoid colinearity, producing a broad measure of media influence, *average media coverage*. To summarize, we anticipate that

H12: greater media coverage of abuses increases Amnesty reporting.

Table 1 includes a list of our variables and their operationalization. Note that our approach examines exogenous influences on Amnesty behavior, rather than influences internal to the organization itself.

[INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

III B. METHODS

Our statistical models use Generalized Estimating Equations (GEE) negative binomial regression with an independent correlation structure and robust standard errors. We use this method for several reasons. First, GEE was specifically developed for researchers using highly correlated panel data.²¹ (Hardin and Hilbe, 2003; Zorn, 2001) Secondly, our dependent variables consist of yearly counts that violate regression assumptions, which are addressed by negative binomial techniques (Cameron and Trivedi, 1986).²² And, compared to other relevant models GEE provides more conservative estimates. Because ordinary least square models showed signs of heteroskedasticity and

first-order autocorrelation, we transformed some variables to their natural logs and used robust standard errors (Beck and Katz, 1995). We use a lagged dependent variable (H1) to correct for serial correlation.

We interpret our statistical findings with the help of 68 interviews with staff at Amnesty and Human Rights Watch, and three lengthy discussions of our results with senior management in both.²³

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Before presenting our regression findings, we use tabular data to explore the link between Amnesty's reporting and actual human rights conditions. Table 2 lists the 10 most-reported on countries by Amnesty during 1986-2000, with separate columns for background reports and press releases; Table 3 lists the countries with the highest average Amnesty political terror scores; and Table 4 lists countries with the deadliest armed conflicts.

[INSERT TABLES 2-4 ABOUT HERE]

As Table 2 suggests, the severity of human rights conditions is a factor in Amnesty's reporting. For example, both Colombia and Peru experienced "dirty wars" during the 1980s and early 1990s, and both are on Amnesty's "top ten" for background reports. There is a similar logic for Rwanda, which endured genocide, and Sri Lanka, which suffered from civil war; both were prominent in Amnesty's press release category. Tables 3 and 4 demonstrate, however, that other countries endured high levels of repression and conflict during 1986-2000, but nonetheless do not appear on Amnesty's most-reported lists. Thus

while many countries on the “most repressive” list (Table 3) were also “most reported on,” (Table 2), others were not, such as Afghanistan, Somalia, Myanmar, Brazil, Burundi and the DRC. Amongst countries enduring the worst armed conflicts (Table 4), only one, Rwanda, was also heavily targeted by Amnesty. This partial overlap justifies our statistical inquiry, suggesting that information politics of some sort do in fact matter.

A quick perusal of the countries appearing on Table 2 also provides preliminary support for our hypotheses. China and Indonesia may be heavily reported on in part for the severity of their abuses, but as powerful and heavily populated states, they may also have been targeted for their symbolic value. The USSR (and, later, Russia) has a deeply troubling record, but is also a high-profile country with powerful demonstration effects, and this may have also attracted Amnesty’s attention. State power may have also played a role in promoting the U.S. and U.K. to “most heavily reported on” status, while foreign aid and media interest may partially explain Amnesty’s focus on Turkey and Israel.

Although this information is suggestive, statistical modeling can help highlight specific factors associated with higher volumes of Amnesty reporting, controlling for actual human rights conditions. Table 5 reports our regression findings, which allow us to examine multiple variables across 148 countries. Models 1 and 2 provide estimations for background reports, and Models 3 and 4 do the same for press releases.

[INSERT TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE]

As expected, the previous year’s background reports and press releases affect reporting in the following year (H1), suggesting that Amnesty is influenced by

incrementalism, and illustrating autocorrelation within our model. This is not surprising given the nature of human rights work and broader scholarly findings on large organizations. One Amnesty manager said that our finding on this count demonstrated “persistence, not incrementalism,”²⁴ while another explained that Amnesty tries not to turn away from a country it works on because this could be interpreted by the government that its behavior is no longer abusive.²⁵ Incrementalism, in other words, is rooted in Amnesty’s organizational procedures for various reasons.

Next, we examine the effects of our four human rights indicators. As expected, increased repression of personal integrity rights prompted greater Amnesty output across publication types (H2). Our table shows this to be true when we use the Amnesty-based Political Terror Score (Models 1 and 3) as well as U.S. State Department scores (Models 2 and 4). As Amnesty’s reputation for credibility suggests, its written work is indeed influenced by real world human rights conditions.

The effects of our three other human rights indicators are less clear. Polity IV scores had no statistically significant effect, confounding our expectations (H3). This may be due to the conflicting justifications mentioned above: higher democracy scores are associated with lower levels of government repression, but they also prompt greater political debate and information flows – and possibly violence, under some conditions – and these may spark more Amnesty reporting. These conflicting trends may cancel each other out. The armed conflict dummy variable was not statistically significant for either of Amnesty’s publication (H4). The percent of population killed in armed conflict (H5) is significant, however; as expected, it is associated with an increase in Amnesty’s reporting.

Overall, our findings for hypotheses two through five provide evidence to support the notion that Amnesty’s country reporting is significantly associated with worldwide human rights conditions. We now turn to hypotheses dealing with information politics; as Tables 2-4 and our qualitative evidence suggest, human rights conditions are not the only significant factors associated with Amnesty reporting.

We begin with the effects of state power, which we anticipated would increase the volume of Amnesty reporting. To recall, we measured power by the size of a country’s wealth, its military, and its population, and expected all to have significant effects, with the latter two increasing Amnesty reporting (H6-8). We find that state power matters, but that the relevant measure differs across publication types. Wealth is not associated with significant increases in background reports, but it is associated with a significant increase in the volume of Amnesty press releases (H6). The size of a country’s military, by contrast, has a positive and significant effect on background reports (in Model 2, which uses the U.S. State Department Political Terror Score), but not on press releases (H7). And across publication types, population size is not statistically significant (H8). Taken together, these findings lend some credence to the notion that Amnesty focuses more heavily on powerful states.

Practitioners provided a range of explanations for this finding. One U.S.-specific explanation was advanced by Amnesty’s former Secretary General, who noted that “for many countries and a large number of people, the United States is a model,” and that as a result, Amnesty should make a special effort to expose its failings (Sane, 1998). In New York, an Amnesty manager extended the analysis to all powerful countries, explaining that “large countries influence small countries... ‘The fish stinks from the head,’ and we need to

make the richer countries respect human rights first.”²⁶ These considerations were shared by a Human Rights Watch manager, who said Northern governments “have a stronger demonstration effect for the rest of the world. For example, U.S. conduct in Guantanamo lowers the bar for everyone far more than comparable Chinese or Egyptian practice, [justifying] greater attention to U.S. domestic practice.”²⁷ A third explained that the “big players...owe the world more...that you are applying the same standards that you are applying to others within yourself.”²⁸

NGO practitioners also said they focused on abuses by the wealthy and powerful to counter claims of bias.²⁹ As an Amnesty worker explained, “as the Cold War ended, there was an increasing sense that Amnesty’s credibility in the global South needed to be boosted,” leading to “more discussion of [human rights abuses] in the North.” Part of this attention drew on real concerns with the death penalty, prisoner abuse and the ill-treatment of illegal immigrants, but part stemmed also from a desire to build credibility with Southern critics.³⁰ Another Amnesty activist reported that “part of the real credibility of” organizations such as Amnesty is its ability to say that “yes, we work on [Western European countries] equally,” and not just on non-European or Muslim countries.³¹ Amnesty employees expressed similar views in other discussions, and our findings provide partial support for these claims.

Our second indicator of information politics was foreign aid. Here, regression offers mixed support for our hypothesis that aid increases the volume of Amnesty reporting. U.S. military aid had a positive effect and was statistically significant for background reports, but not press releases (H9), while ODA had a negative effect on background reports, and no significant effect on press releases (H10). Both results should

be interpreted with caution because different statistical techniques yield different conclusions.³² Even so, the relationship between U.S. military aid and reporting is in tune with practitioner views, including a Human Rights Watch manager who said, “research agendas are set in part by a prediction of an NGO's ability to make a difference, and that possibility increases if there is Western government complicity.”³³

Our third indicator of information politics is civil society, which we measured by number of NGOs registered in a given country. Here, our expectations were confounded. We hypothesized that Amnesty reporting would increase for countries with greater numbers of NGOs, drawing on the work of Bob (2002), Ron (1997), Sikkink (1993), and Keck and Sikkink (1998), all of whom claim that strong local advocates attract greater transnational attention (H11). We do not find statistical support for this hypothesis across publications.

Our final indicator of information politics was media prominence. Social movement scholarship (Gamson and Wolfsfeld, 1993) suggested that increased media attention to a country's human rights abuses would also increase Amnesty country reporting (H12), but we find that media has a positive and statistically significant impact only on press releases. One reason for this mixed result may be the two publications' differing objectives; background reports are aimed at academic and practitioner audiences, while press releases are offered chiefly to the media. Another reason may lie in the roughness of our media measure, calibrated to examine abuses in the first country mentioned in an article, rather than all countries mentioned. Also, the media may discuss abuses in terms other than "human rights," relying instead on words such as “repression,” “torture,” “imprisonment” and “killing.” If articles used these terms and did not include the

words “human rights,” they would not appear in our data. These qualifications all suggest that we interpret our findings with caution. Nonetheless, our models demonstrate partial support for our hypothesis that Amnesty reports more heavily on countries whose abuses are already in the media’s eye. We also note that alternative statistical techniques yield significant results for backgrounders as well.³⁴

Importantly, our regression models do not show that causality runs from the media to Amnesty press releases, and that it is possible for Amnesty to affect media coverage, rather than the inverse. Given Amnesty’s strong reputation and global network, it is likely that many journalists would write articles on human rights violations as a result of Amnesty’s work. In 2000, for example, the *New York Times* mentioned Amnesty 120 times, suggesting the group is a credible news source for this publication.³⁵ To explore this possibility, we conducted Vector Auto Regression analysis (VAR) on a micro country-month dataset of Amnesty and media reporting.³⁶ Our efforts provide evidence of reciprocal causality between Amnesty press releases and the media. Controlling for their own past reporting, press releases and the media had statistically significant influences on one another.

According to the Amnesty staff members we interviewed, the tight link between news releases and the media is integral to their work. Although the goal of their press work is to influence the media’s agenda and promote coverage of lesser known conflicts, they are also keenly aware of the media’s current interests, and often respond accordingly. One former director of Amnesty’s Canada section, for example, recalled that his first task each morning was to read the newswire to prepare for potential queries.³⁷ In London, staffers emphasized the need for being aware of breaking events. As one explained, “it is important

that we are ... in touch with the rhythm of the world.”³⁸ Another described Amnesty’s link to the media as a strategic necessity, but noted, “at the same time, you are also trying to get out the information on other countries with low-key press attention.”³⁹ Similar sentiments were expressed at Human Rights Watch, where a senior manager said that their job was to shape public debates, often “seizing moments of public attention -- usually whatever is in the news -- to make human rights points.”⁴⁰ Fund-raising is also at stake, some said, since an organizational presence on high-visibility countries bolsters charitable support. One manager said this was done strategically; the group raises funds by reporting on abuses in high profile countries, and then spends a portion of those monies on less visible regions.⁴¹

Several staffers even expressed concern that Amnesty has become overly sensitive to media tastes. “Our [public awareness-raising] success in the late 1980s and early 1990s put human rights in the public eye,” one employee explained, but then, “we responded,” noting, “we created the beast.”⁴² A second staffer worried that “perhaps ... we are not conscious enough of swimming with the tide,”⁴³ while a third said, “Amnesty is more and more following the media circus,” claiming that in Afghanistan, Amnesty’s efforts decreased when the Western media presence dissipated.⁴⁴

Our media finding is of special interest because of the organization’s move to a more press-friendly orientation in 1993/4, when, as Graph 1 indicated, Amnesty began publishing more press releases while reducing its background reports. The shift was prompted by internal criticism arguing that “Amnesty needs to be relevant, acting on issues that are in the public eye.”⁴⁵ As an Amnesty practitioner recalled, critics claimed that Amnesty produced too many long reports on “countries that no one had ever heard of and they fell flat.” Another Amnesty staffer recalled that the organization’s leadership

requested “shorter, punchier reports.”⁴⁶ The reciprocal relationship between Amnesty news releases and the media, coupled with the rising prominence of news releases in Amnesty’s portfolio, makes this variable appear increasingly important.

To summarize, we find that Amnesty reporting is affected by information politics, with state power having positive effects on both publication types, in addition to incrementalism, political terror scores, and armed conflict. U.S. military aid was associated with an increase in background reports, moreover, and the rate of Amnesty’s press releases was associated with greater international media attention. As our VAR analysis and practitioner interviews suggest, there is evidence of reciprocal causality between the media and Amnesty press releases. The media’s effect on Amnesty’s work, moreover, appears to have grown stronger during the 1990s, as reflected in our interviews and in the increased rate of Amnesty press releases over the decade (Graph 1). Information politics are thus important across publication types, but they played out in different ways, with varying levels of intensity.

V. COMPARATIVE INSIGHTS

Although each NGO and transnational policy domain should have its own dynamics, our findings are likely relevant beyond the specific case of Amnesty International. For example, consider the catalogued country reports of Human Rights Watch, the world’s second largest human rights group. From 1991 to 2000,⁴⁷ the ten countries it reported on most frequently, in order of importance, were: the U.S., Turkey, Indonesia/ East Timor, China, the USSR/Russian Federation, India, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia/ Montenegro), Sudan, Israel/ Palestinian Occupied Territories, and

Myanmar. Of these, all save two (Sudan and Myanmar), are also on Amnesty's "most discussed" lists (Table 2), suggesting similarities in the two groups' agendas. Tabular data also indicate overlap between Human Rights Watch's country reporting and that of the Northern media, since six of the ten countries most reported on by Human Rights Watch in the 1990s also made the *Economist's* and *Newsweek's* "most covered" lists during that time.⁴⁸ Consistent data for Human Rights Watch publications are not available, however, frustrating attempts at more systematic statistical tests.⁴⁹

We find intriguing parallels between international human rights activism and humanitarian war relief. As both Cooley and Ron (2002) and de Waal (1997) argue, the interests of Northern publics, donors and media have strong effects on the work of relief groups. According to DeYoung (1999), "strategically important trouble spots...attract international largesse, particularly when television cameras are on hand to broadcast the need and document the good deeds." As a U.N. spokesperson explained, "if a crisis has high visibility, there's a much greater likelihood that people will pay attention to it ... [and] ... give money" (cited in Walt, 1999). By emphasizing the effect of the media on NGO finances and activities, these writers echo the stark analysis of scholars such as Bob (2002) and de Waal (1997), disputing the positive interpretation advanced by Keck and Sikkink (1998) or Price (2003).

There are also important differences between relief and human rights NGOs, however. Unlike Amnesty International or Human Rights Watch, the largest humanitarian aid agencies receive substantial funding from Northern governments and multi-lateral donors. Since donor contracts typically specify the country where the money is to be spent, humanitarian workers have little ability to shape their own geographic agendas. Amnesty

and Human Rights Watch, by contrast, accept no government funds, facing fewer direct geographic pressures. More importantly, perhaps, our models indicate that media is only one of several factors influencing Amnesty's reporting.

Another interesting difference is the quality of states these two NGO types are drawn to. Our models show that human rights groups work more on powerful countries, but humanitarian NGOs devote more efforts to weak or failed states (Duffield, 2001; Luttwak, 1999). This difference likely stems from the specifics of human rights and humanitarian work. As NGO practitioners noted, they are most able to shape international human rights standards when they target abuses by powerful states. But strong states can also deny entry to foreign humanitarian workers, who typically require large field deployments. Thus, while both transnational actors are influenced by factors other than human need, the specific nature of those influences can differ. While media exposure has broadly similar effects, the impact of state capacity varies.

More generally, the occasionally tenuous link between the intensity of human suffering, on the one hand, and its public portrayal by concerned activists, on the other, has long been observed by sociologists studying crime, substance abuse, and other pressing social problems.⁵⁰ As Blumer (1971: 302) observed long ago, public recognition of social problems "is a highly selective process," with "many harmful social conditions and arrangements" failing to get sufficient attention. Spector and Kitsuse's (1977) classic work went a step further, arguing that social problems "claims making" was a separate phenomenon that should be studied in isolation from the problem's real world manifestations. And like Bob's (2002) complaints about the restricted nature of global civil society, Hilgartner and Bosk's (1988: 57) seminal work argues that the "fates of potential

problems are governed not only by their objective natures, but by a highly selective process in which they compete with one another for public attention.” In a sense, our findings replicate these sociological observations at the international level. Transnational activists resemble social problems “claims makers,” and the intensity of their work on a given issue or country may not necessarily reflect its real-world prevalence.

VI. CONCLUSION

In her ethically engaged but rigorous exploration of the Holocaust, Fein (1979: 33) coined the term “universe of obligation,” defined as the community of persons deemed worthy of consideration and protection. “Injuries to or violations of rights of persons within the universe,” she explained, are considered “offenses against the collective conscience” of society, spurring protest, resistance and claims for legal redress. Persons excluded from the universe, conversely, are left to fend for themselves, often with horrendous results.

Many cosmopolitan scholars, policymakers and activists hope to extend the universe of obligation and make it truly global, promoting respect for human rights and other transnational causes such as gender equality, economic development, political freedom, and environmental protection. But which actors are the most effective carriers of these hopes? Powerful states sign treaties and declarations, but their records are spotty at best, with selfishness, domestic politics and “failures of imagination” blocking interventions against genocide, ethnic cleansing and poverty (cf. Pogge, 2003; Power, 2002B; Western, 2002). Some pin their hopes on the UN and its associated agencies, but as

the spectacularly failed U.N. missions to Rwanda and elsewhere demonstrate, multi-lateral institutions have severe limitations of their own (cf. Barnett, 2003).

Sensitive to the shortcomings of both states and international agencies, many place greater faith in the abilities of private, transnational organizations (cf. Clark, 2001; Florini, 1999; Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Khagram et al., 2002; Mathews, 1997; Price, 2003; Wapner 1996). Unencumbered by partisan interests or politics, transnational activists seem to have fewer material constraints, greater moral imagination, deeper ethical commitments, and more freedom of maneuver. To many, these groups appear to be the archetypical global moral agents, able like no other to construct a robust and fully cosmopolitan universe of obligation.

Close examinations of leading transnational NGOs reveals a more complex picture. Global activists have made considerable achievements, but they also operate with limited resources against enormous odds, forcing them to pursue pragmatic and politically savvy strategies. Our case study of one of the world's leading transnational actors, Amnesty International, offers a rare analysis of the organization's work over time and space. By studying the volume of Amnesty's written work on 148 countries over a 15-year period, we provide a unique and systematic study of the practical considerations shaping this major transnational NGO's agenda.

We find that to be effective, Amnesty engages in what Keck and Sikkink (1998) term "information politics," reporting more heavily on human rights abuses in some countries than others. Actual human rights conditions have statistically significant effects on the volume of Amnesty's written work, but other considerations, including incrementalism and state power also matter. In addition, the organization's background

reports are influenced by U.S. military aid, and its press releases are involved in a reciprocal relationship with major Northern media sources. Thus, while Amnesty's universe of obligation includes all of humanity, our analysis of Amnesty's written work suggests that considerations of efficacy and visibility force the group, like other transnational NGOs, to devote more attention to some areas than others. Our interviews suggest this process may not be a conscious one for all Amnesty staffers but that for some, it occurs gradually and implicitly over time.

There is little doubt that information politics is enormously useful. Intense NGO reporting on U.S. violations of international law in Guantanamo Bay, for example, may strengthen global laws against illegal incarceration, while a focus on the U.S. war in Iraq, the trial of former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet, or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, promote public awareness of the laws of war, accountability for past abuses, and the treatment of occupied populations. Human rights groups can make a real difference when they focus on powerful or high visibility countries, and they can later use that momentum to protest violations elsewhere.

The challenge for Amnesty and its counterparts, however, is to ensure that strategic considerations do not play too large a role, and to avoid contributing to the Darwinian dynamics described in Bob's (2002) stark portrayal of global civil society. In this respect, our findings raise some important questions. Consider, for example, Amnesty's focus on countries that are wealthy or otherwise powerful. Although strong states do set international standards, intense reporting on their abuses may ultimately contribute to the marginalization of abuses in smaller, poorer, or weaker countries. Possibly, Amnesty's recent inclusion of economic and social rights into their mandate, as

well as its new concern with capacity building, will prompt more reporting on poor countries. The incrementalism revealed in our analysis, however, may also frustrate such attempts.

Strategic links to the global media also pose challenges for Amnesty and transnational civil society as a whole. Amnesty's press releases rightly respond to breaking events to ensure the organization's relevance and utility to the media, but this strategy, if taken to excess, may reinforce existing biases about "important" and "peripheral" regions. As an Amnesty executive observed, "You can work all you like on Mauritania, but the press couldn't give a rat's ass about Mauritania. You don't put a press release out on that."⁵¹ Given these constraints, Amnesty's media-savvy strategy may produce over-emphasis on some areas, to the detriment of others. A particularly acute version of this dynamic appears to be under way in the transnational humanitarian sector, skewing aid flows towards press-heavy conflicts. As Bob (2002) warns, these dynamics may create a stratified system of global sympathy in which the most heavily reported on countries benefit from increasing levels of coverage, while needy but under-reported on regions earn an increasingly smaller share of global concern.

Over the last decade, scholars have established NGOs as important global actors, showing that they can, under some conditions, lead to progressive social change. As a result, it is vital that we analyze the strengths and weaknesses of NGO strategies. Researchers rightly celebrate the tactical skills of transnational NGOs, but we should also acknowledge that pragmatic strategizing can have both positive and negative effects. Information politics may be necessary, but by failing to systematically probe their benefits

and their costs, we miss a valuable opportunity to stimulate useful debate within the transnational sector.

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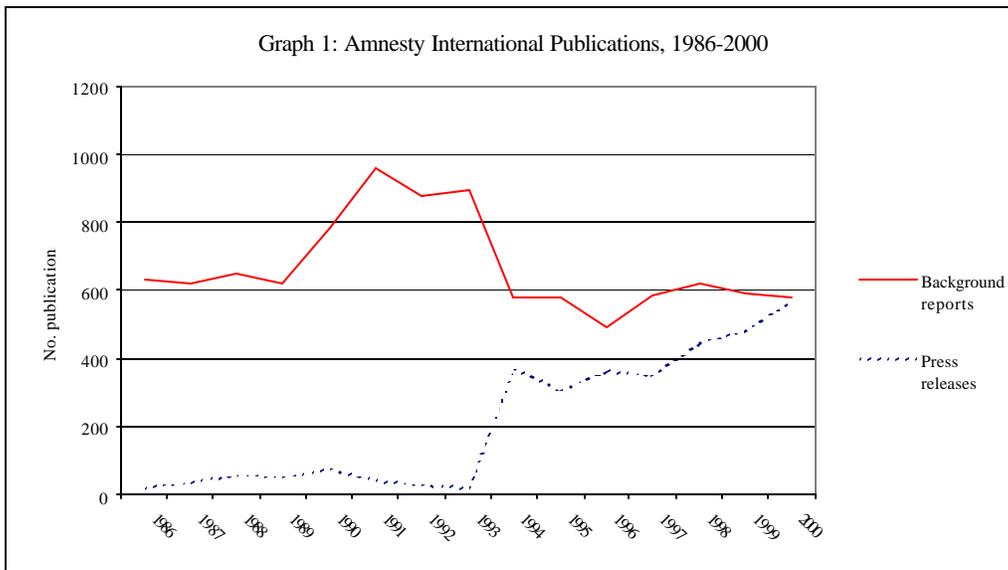


Table 1: Variables and Operationalization			
Variable	Operationalization	Source	Hypotheses
Country	Includes all U.N. countries, with the addition of Czechoslovakia, Switzerland, U.S.S.R., Yugoslavia. 51 cases deleted due to missing data	United Nations member list 2002	
Year	Year from Western calendar (Common Era)	1986-2000	
Dependent Variables			
Number of Amnesty International background reports	Amnesty International "background reports" documented for a given country and year, coded by country catalogued under	Amnesty International <i>Cumulative Guide 1962-2000</i>	
Number of Amnesty International press releases	Amnesty International "press releases" documented for a given country and year, coded by country catalogued under	Amnesty International <i>Cumulative Guide 1962-2000</i>	
Independent Variables			
Lag of number of Amnesty International background reports	Time minus 1 year of Amnesty International "background reports" documented for a given country and year, coded by country catalogued under	Amnesty International <i>Cumulative Guide 1962-2000</i>	+
Lag of number of Amnesty International press releases	Time minus 1 year of Amnesty International "press releases" documented for a given country and year, coded by country catalogued under	Amnesty International <i>Cumulative Guide 1962-2000</i>	+
Amnesty political terror score	1-5 scale. 1 least oppressive, 5 most.	Poe's <i>Political Terror Scale</i>	+
U.S. State Department political terror score	1-5 scale. 1 least oppressive, 5 most.	Poe's <i>Political Terror Scale</i>	+
Polity IV score	-10-10 scale. -10 least open and most repressive	Polity IV Project: <i>Political Regime Characteristics and Transitions, 1800-2002</i>	+/-
Armed conflict	1 if country engaged in armed conflict, 0 if not	Based on Stockholm International Peace Research Institute and Ruth Sivard's <i>World Military and Social Expenditures</i>	+
Percent of population killed in armed conflict	Total number of deaths related to international or civil war. Highest estimate of death, by country and year from SIPRI and Sivard. Sivard death counts were divided by number of years of conflict and spread evenly over the entire period	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute and Ruth Sivard's <i>World Military and Social Expenditures</i>	+
GDP in \$U.S. millions	Gross Domestic Product in \$U.S., logged	World Bank, <i>World Development Indicators</i>	+/-
Number of military personnel in thousands	Military personnel by country, logged	<i>Correlates of War 2 National Military Capabilities</i>	+
Population in millions	National population for a given year, total mid-year estimates, logged	U.S. Census, International Database	+
U.S. military assistance in \$U.S. millions	Total U.S. military assistance including grants and loans, logged	USAID, U.S. Overseas Loans and Grants (Online U.S. Greenbook)	+
Official Development Assistance in \$U.S. millions	Official Development Assistance in \$U.S., logged	World Bank, <i>World Development Indicators</i>	+
UIA number of NGOs	Number of Non Governmental Organizations registered with the Union of International Associations. Because of the terms of data release, this variable is not included in the dataset published with the appendix	Union of International Associations	+
Average media coverage	<i>Economist</i> and <i>Newsweek</i> stories covering human rights abuses, added together and divided two, by country and year	<i>The Economist (International edition)</i> and <i>Newsweek</i> (U.S. edition)	+

Background Reports (N=10,075)				Press Releases (N=3,208)			
Rank	Country	# Reports	% Total	Rank	Country	# Releases	% Total
1	Turkey	394	3.91	1	U.S.A.	136	4.24
2	U.S.S.R. & Russia	374	3.71	2	Israel & O.T.	128	3.99
3	China	357	3.54	3	Indonesia & E. Timor	119	3.71
4	U.S.A.	349	3.46	3	Turkey	119	3.71
5	Israel & O.T.	323	3.21	4	China	115	3.58
6	S. Korea	305	3.03	5	Serbia & Montenegro (FRY)	104	3.24
7	Indonesia & E. Timor	253	2.51	6	U.K.	103	3.21
8	Colombia	197	1.96	7	India	85	2.65
9	Peru	192	1.91	8	U.S.S.R. & Russia	80	2.49
10	India	178	1.77	9	Rwanda	64	2.00
				10	Sri Lanka	59	1.84

Source: Compiled from *Amnesty International Cumulative Guide, 1962-2000*

Rank	Country	AI Score
1	N. Korea	5
2	Colombia	4.87
2	Iraq	4.87
3	Sri Lanka	4.53
4	Afghanistan	4.47
4	Somalia	4.47
5	Myanmar	4.4
5	Sudan	4.4
6	S. Africa	4.27
7	Angola	4.2
7	Peru	4.2
8	Ethiopia	4.13
8	India	4.13
9	Burundi	4.07
9	Iran	4.07
9	Rwanda	4.07
9	Turkey	4.07
10	Bosnia & Herzegovina	4
10	Brazil	4
10	Congo/Kinshasa (DRC)	4

Source: *Poe, Political Terror Scale*

Rank	Country	# Casualties (thousands)	% Total
1	Sudan	1261.5	19.30
2	Rwanda	1004.5	15.37
3	Afghanistan	760	11.63
4	Mozambique	675	10.33
6	Angola	429	6.56
5	Somalia	356.2	5.45
7	Bosnia & Herzegovina	297.25	4.55
8	Ethiopia	211.84	3.24
9	Kuwait	200	3.06
10	Burundi	194.65	2.98

Source: based on merged data from Ruth Sivard, *World Military and Social Expenditures* and Stockholm International Peace Research Institute *Annual Reports*. Indirect deaths not included.

Table 5: Factors Influencing Amnesty International Publications 1986-2000, Negative Binomial Population Average Models

	Background reports		Press releases	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Lag term	0.0924*** (0.007)	0.0905*** (0.007)	0.1372*** (0.0132)	0.1406*** (0.0132)
Amnesty political terror score	0.2227*** (0.0378)	-- --	0.5883*** (0.0579)	-- --
U.S. State department political terror score	-- --	0.2314*** (0.0406)	-- --	0.5472*** (0.0577)
Polity IV	-0.0056 (0.0074)	-0.0044 (0.0075)	0.0093 (0.0086)	0.0105 (0.0087)
Armed conflict (dummy)	0.0777 (0.0844)	0.0629 (0.0876)	-0.1786 (0.1224)	-0.1009 (0.1367)
% killed in armed conflict	0.0487*** (0.0148)	0.0391** (0.0126)	0.0961*** (0.0278)	0.0857** (0.0393)
GDP, \$U.S. millions (log)	0.0373 (0.0427)	0.0518 (0.0444)	0.1273** (0.0517)	0.1665** (0.0566)
Size of national military, thousands (log)	0.0792 (0.0492)	0.0867* (0.0501)	0.0031 (0.0594)	0.0186 (0.065)
Population, millions (log)	0.0607 (0.0704)	0.0364 (0.0687)	0.004 (0.0778)	-0.0689 (0.085)
U.S. military aid, \$U.S. millions (log)	0.0384* (0.0235)	0.0521** (0.0247)	-0.0055 (0.036)	0.0221 (0.0359)
ODA, \$U.S. millions (log)	-0.0516* (0.0286)	-0.0472* (0.0281)	-0.03 (0.0383)	-0.0044 (0.0422)
UIA number of NGOs	0.00005 (0.00004)	0.0001 (0.00004)	0.0001 (0.0001)	0.0001 (0.0001)
Average media coverage	0.0083 (0.0233)	0.0146 (0.023)	0.2117*** (0.0438)	0.2272*** (0.0413)
Constant	-0.5305 (0.3724)	-0.6676* (0.3898)	-3.1076*** (0.4354)	-3.3586*** (0.4674)
Prob > Chi2	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Wald	710.54	712.95	1091.90	1063.73

Robust standard errors reported in parentheses

* Significant at the 0.10 level

** Significant at the 0.05 level

*** Significant at the 0.01 level

Endnotes

¹ Barnett and Finnemore (1999; forthcoming) make similar claims for international organizations (IGOs).

² On the right, critics fear NGOs' unchecked promotion of liberal values (cf. Bond, 2000 and NGO Watch, < www.ngowatch.org> (2004, November 25). On the left, critics worry that NGOs promote capitalism, frustrate popular movements, or bolster Western hegemony (cf. Chandler, 2002; Hamami 1995; Hayden, 2002; Mutua, 1996, 2001, 2002; Pasha and Blaney, 1998; Petras, 1997).

³ For histories of Amnesty, see Buchanan, 2002; Clark, 2001; Cmiel, 1999; Korey, 1998; Power, 2002A.

⁴ For human rights NGO tactics generally, see Wiseberg, 1992.

⁵ Supporter and membership figures:

<http://www.amnestyusa.org/about/about_amnesty.html> (2004, November 25). National chapter information: <<http://www.amnesty.org.nz/Publicdo.nsf/All/NT00005E66>>(2004, November 25).

⁶ Statement:

<<http://www.amnesty.org.nz/Publicdo.nsf/bf25ab0f47ba5dd785256499006b15a4/608f0c26f1cf56c5cc256a9a000f5269!OpenDocument>> (2004, November 25).

⁷ Respondent #1, interview, London, July 2, 2004.

⁸ This format is commonly used in cross national studies of political repression (cf. Poe and Tate, 1994; Henderson, 1991, 1993; McCormick and Mitchell, 1997; and Stohl et al., 1984).

⁹ Other catalogued documents include miscellaneous publications, annual report entries, and newsletters entries.

¹⁰ Amnesty Secretariat discussion, London, July 26, 2004.

¹¹ In 2001, Amnesty expanded its mandate to include economic and social rights (Amnesty International, 2004: 10), and developed its war reporting in 2003 (Amnesty Secretariat discussion, London, July 26, 2004).

¹² See Apodaca, 2001; Carleton and Stohl, 1985; McCormick and Mitchell, 1997; Poe and Tate, 1994; Poe et al., 1999, 2001; Shoultz, 1981; and Stohl et al., 1984. We thank Steven Poe for making available his latest political terror scores.

¹³ We find similar results with Freedom House political openness data, which Banks (1986), among others, critiques for its conservative bias and sudden shifts.

¹⁴ Excluding indirect deaths.

¹⁵ Amnesty-USA discussion, New York, May 4, 2004.

¹⁶ To further test the impact of economic aid, we also ran models using U.S. economic aid in place of ODA, and these revealed similar findings. We chose not to include both measures in the same model because ODA includes U.S. economic aid, and the two are highly correlated. See http://www.isanet.org/data_archive.html for details.

¹⁷ See Cmiel (1999: 1244).

¹⁸ In 2004, *Economist* readers had a median personal income of \$154,000; 95 percent were college educated; 44 percent were company directors; 62 percent took three or more international trips per year; and 70 percent had lived abroad at least once (*Economist*, 2004).

¹⁹ In 2003, North American *Newsweek* readers had a median personal income of \$41, 662; 44 percent were college graduates; and six percent were “top management” (*Newsweek*, 2004).

²⁰ We omitted from our data media articles that mentioned "human rights" but that did not specify particular abuses in specific countries.

²¹ Correlation analysis and VIF statistics show this was particularly problematic for state power and foreign aid variables. GDP, population, size of military, and ODA, in order of severity, were the variables presenting the greatest problems. See http://www.isanet.org/data_archive.html/.

²² While Poisson regression is well suited for count data, it assumes that the variance equals the mean. Otherwise, the data are overdispersed, creating inflated parameter estimates and lower standard errors. To compensate, we use negative-binomial regression, which does not rely on this assumption (King 1989; Long, 1997). For comparison with other statistical methods, see: http://www.isanet.org/data_archive.html.

²³ Rodgers conducted 43 interviews with current and former staffers at Amnesty International’s London Secretariat in 2003 and 2004, and a further 25 with staffers at Human Rights Watch in New York during 2003. At Amnesty, Rodger’s access was gained through the organization’s directors, who solicited staff participation; at Human Rights Watch, she conducted a representative sample unofficially, but with the directors’ knowledge. Ron exchanged emails on preliminary statistical findings with senior staff at Human Rights Watch in early 2004, and presented these findings, along with Ramos, to approximately 30 staff at the New York headquarters of Human Rights Watch on February 6, 2004. The Human Rights Watch audience included most of the organization’s senior

management. On May 4, 2004, Ron presented findings to 10 managers and staff at the New York headquarters of Amnesty International –USA, and on July 26, 2004, Ron and Ramos did the same with nine managers and one staffperson at Amnesty’s International London Secretariat. To insure that informants felt at ease expressing their views, we provide anonymity to all.

²⁴ Respondent #10, Amnesty Secretariat discussion, London, July 26, 2004.

²⁵ Respondent #6, Amnesty Secretariat discussion, London, July 26, 2004.

²⁶ Respondent #2, Amnesty-USA discussion, New York, May 4, 2004. Similar views were expressed during the Amnesty Secretariat discussion, London, July 26, 2004.

²⁷ Respondent #3, 2003, December 19 [Personal email].

²⁸ Respondent #11, Amnesty Secretariat discussion, London, July 26, 2004.

²⁹ Hernandez-Truyol, 2002; Mutua, 2001, 2002; Petras, 1997.

³⁰ Respondent #4, Amnesty-USA discussion, New York, May 4, 2004.

³¹ Respondent #5, interview, London, October 9, 2003.

³² Some models, moreover, find ODA having positive effects on press releases. See http://www.isanet.org/data_archive.html

³³ Respondent #3, 2003, December 19 [Personal email].

³⁴ See http://www.isanet.org/data_archive.html

³⁵ Obtained through a Lexis-Nexis keyword search, “Amnesty International.”

³⁶ This is a multivariate extension of Granger’s (1969) causal inference for temporal ordering, and is commonly used in the communications and agenda-setting literatures (cf. Edwards III and Wood, 1999: 2; Simms, 1980). We did not include other controls because

they are unavailable in country-month format. With missing data from controls no longer a concern, our micro dataset included an expanded selection of 199 countries.

³⁷ Respondent #12, interview, Ottawa, August 3, 2004.

³⁸ Respondent #6, interview, London, July 4, 2004.

³⁹ Respondent #7, interview, London, July 4, 2004.

⁴⁰ Respondent #3, 2003, December 19 [Personal email].

⁴¹ Respondent #4, Amnesty-USA discussion, New York, May 4, 2004.

⁴² Respondent #8, Amnesty-USA discussion, New York, May 4, 2004.

⁴³ Respondent #13, Amnesty Secretariat discussion, London, July 26, 2004.

⁴⁴ Respondent #14, interview, London, October 2, 2003.

⁴⁵ Respondent #4, Amnesty-USA discussion, New York, May 4, 2004.

⁴⁶ Respondent #9, Amnesty-USA discussion, New York, May 4, 2004.

⁴⁷ Human Rights Watch developed a fully global capacity only in the early 1990s, following the creation of a Middle East division.

⁴⁸ For the *Economist*, the five overlap countries were the China, Indonesia and East Timor, Turkey, the US, and USSR and Russian Federation. For *Newsweek*, the overlaps were China, the US, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Indonesia and East Timor, and the USSR and Russian Federation.

⁴⁹ Human Rights Watch's shorter reports and press releases are not consistently catalogued before 1997.

⁵⁰ Overviews include Best (2002) and Schneider (1985).

⁵¹ Respondent #1, interview, London, July 2, 2004.