

Effect of diplomatic recognition and other diplomatic efforts on political security

A general campaign to improve human rights in selected countries had no effect. But a campaign to release named political prisoners increased the likelihood of their release. Overall, there is a moderate effect of campaigns on human rights.

Geographical region: Global

Effect size: Moderate effect ($g=0.139$)

Confidence in study findings: Low confidence (2 studies; 4 ES)

Short summary

Diplomatic recognition and other diplomatic efforts, including shaming, incentives, and advocacy campaigns, have an overall moderate effect on political security (human rights) by pressuring governments for human rights reforms. While rhetorical and financial incentives show no significant effect, targeted diplomacy significantly increases the likelihood of political prisoners' release. These efforts contribute to greater political stability, reinforcing adherence to international human rights norms and reducing state repression over time. We have low confidence in the cell findings due to a limited number of studies.

Long summary

The intervention

The studies in the cell concerned two interventions: (1) the European Neighbourhood Policy, combining public shaming and financial incentives to promote human rights reforms in 15 countries through monitoring reports, and National Action Plans, and aid allocation tied to compliance; and (2) a U.S.-led campaign using public diplomacy, including media efforts and "naming and shaming," alongside private negotiations and inducements to secure the release of female political prisoners from 13 countries.

How the intervention is expected to work

The intervention combines public shaming through critical monitoring reports and financial incentives to pressure countries into adopting human rights reforms. Shaming is expected to create reputational costs, while incentives provide tangible rewards for compliance, leveraging both rhetorical and economic influence. In addition, public diplomacy through media campaigns aims to raise international awareness and apply pressure on target governments, while private negotiations and inducements address bureaucratic barriers. Together, these strategies are designed to enhance accountability and incentivize action, with public efforts creating external pressure and private diplomacy facilitating practical solutions.

The evidence base

The cell consists of two primary studies, one using a quantitative design, spanning Europe, Asia, and Africa (e.g., Algeria, Ukraine, Tunisia). The second study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative analysis of release rates and qualitative interviews, focusing on 13 countries across various regions, including Azerbaijan, Myanmar, China, Egypt, and Venezuela.

Evidence findings

Diplomatic recognition and efforts shape political security by pressuring governments; while general incentives show limited impact, targeted diplomacy significantly improves political prisoner release rates and reforms.

Included studies

Kahn-Nisser (2018) discusses the combination of shaming and incentives as part of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) to influence human rights reforms in 15 countries across Europe, Asia, and Africa. The study focuses on using shaming (public criticism) and financial incentives as mechanisms to push for human rights (HR) reforms. These efforts aim to create policy changes in targeted countries through rhetorical pressure and economic leverage. This policy framework facilitates engagement with countries near the EU, emphasizing political, economic, and legal reforms without offering EU membership. It uses National Action Plans (NAPs), annual monitoring reports, and aid allocation tied to compliance with reforms. The study spans 15 countries in Europe, Asia, and Africa, including Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Egypt, Georgia, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Moldova, Morocco, Syria, Tunisia, and Ukraine. Study design is quantitative analysis using newly coded data. The study examines the interaction between shaming and incentives on HR policy changes. It employs regression models and Granger causality tests to evaluate the data. The sample includes 15 countries that participated in the ENP between 2001 and 2011. The outcome is the political empowerment human rights index, measuring freedoms like assembly, association, and elections. Shaming ($p > 0.05$) and incentives ($p > 0.05$) show no significant effects. The study is of medium confidence due to Robust statistical analysis using diverse models

Myrick (2021) examines the U.S.-led human rights diplomacy campaign (#Freethe20) aimed at securing the release of 20 female political prisoners from 13 countries. The intervention involved both public diplomacies, through media campaigns, and private diplomacy, including direct negotiations and inducements. Public efforts were aimed at "naming and shaming" target governments, while private diplomacy resolved bureaucratic deadlocks within the U.S. foreign policy framework. The campaign targeted political prisoners in Azerbaijan, Burma (Myanmar), China, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Iran, North Korea, Russia, Syria, Uzbekistan, Venezuela, and Vietnam. This research utilized a mixed-methods approach, including quantitative comparison of release rates between prisoners featured in the campaign and two comparison groups and qualitative interviews with government officials and analysis of media coverage. The primary focus was on 19 identifiable women featured in #Freethe20. The findings indicated that individuals in the campaign had 58% higher odds of being released compared to those not included. The result is highly statistically significant ($p < 0.01$), indicating strong evidence that being part of the campaign positively influenced the likelihood of release of female political prisoners imprisoned between 2000 and 2015. The result remains highly significant ($p < 0.01$), when accessed for female political prisoners who were imprisoned in 2015, the year when the #FREETHETHE20 campaign was launched. The study is considered high and medium confidence quantitative study.

Confidence assessment

The overall confidence of the cell is low due to a limited number of studies.

Other outcomes in the study

None