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PUBLIC OPINION ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION: REGIME, INFORMATION  
AND POLITICAL CUES

ОБЩЕСТВЕННОЕ МНЕНИЕ О СИТУАЦИИ С ПРАВАМИ ЧЕЛОВЕКА: РЕЖИМ,  
ИНФОРМАЦИЯ И ПОЛИТИЧЕСКИЕ СИГНАЛЫ

АДАМ ҚҰҚЫҒЫ ЖАҒДАЙЫНА ҚАТЫСТЫ ҚОҒАМДЫҚ ПІКІР: РЕЖИМ, АҚПАРАТ  
ЖӘНЕ СЯСИ СИГНАЛДАР

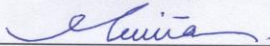
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by

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## **Abstract**

In this research project, I intend to address the question of how the public views their country's human rights situation and what factors potentially shape this judgment. While many in the academia explain why and how governments engage in human rights abuse, few works explore people's on-the-ground perceptions of the human rights situation in their country context. Studying this phenomenon, however, may illuminate why strong demands for democracy are vocalised in some settings but generally absent in others, despite similar levels of human rights abuse. In this thesis, I test a new theory of human rights perception formation, which takes into account the informational context associated with a given regime type. I move away from the traditional division of states into democracies and non-democracies and apply a different information-based regime typology to argue that perceptions about human rights are heavily influenced by the evaluation of government performance, which in turn depends on the regime-produced informational context.

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## **1 Introduction**

No country is immune to human rights abuse. Despite the general perception that only rogue, staunchly autocratic states which commit human rights violations, many democratic polities, as well, engage in abusive human rights practices. Millions of people around the world have had their basic human rights being violated or disrespected. Previously, the literature on human rights abuse assumed by default that perceptions of the human rights situation in a given country is a function of the levels of repression, and therefore, demand no further exploration.

While many people suffer from injustice, not all can articulate how their rights are violated and whether they are being disrespected in the first place. It might be the case that people's perceptions of the domestic human rights situation can convey important information about the human rights behavior of the state. In this research project, I intend to address the question of how the public views their country's human rights situation and what factors potentially shape this judgment.

Although a vast literature attempts to explain why and how governments engage in human rights abuse and in what ways citizens react to such abuses, few works explore people's on-the-ground perceptions of the human rights situation in their country context. Studying this phenomenon, however, has significant potential to yield valuable insights about how demands for democracy arise. More precisely, a focus on public perception may illuminate why strong demands for democracy are vocalized in some settings but generally absent in others, despite similar levels of human rights abuse. More broadly, such an approach may shed light on the stunted processes of democratic transition all over the world and help explain why the demands for democratization are stifled in some non-democratic polities. It might also be useful to further apply the findings to established democracies, since the findings demonstrate what factors shape the perceptions and, thus, indirectly provide a picture of what factors have the capacity to motivate people to engage in political action. Since widespread belief that the

human rights abuse committed by governments may force a change in leadership in democratic and non-democratic states alike, it is important to investigate what determines this belief.

In this thesis, I test a new theory of human rights perception formation, which takes into account the informational context associated with a given regime type. I move away from the traditional division of states into democracies and non-democracies and apply a new regime framework to advance my propositions. The innovation of this research is in the combination of both macro- and micro-level factors that act in a tandem to explain pattern of judgment formation. I argue that perceptions about human rights are heavily influenced by the evaluation of government performance, which in turn depends on the informational context which is derivative of the political regime. In this study, I find support to the proposition that confidence in government is strongly associated with people's perceptions regarding human rights situation. The impact of the regime is more ambiguous, as its true effect may be overshadowed by other considerations respondents had when they answered the question, which will be discussed further

The thesis proceeds in the following manner: first, I review the recent comparative literature that has addressed the research question at hand or is relevant to it. In the next section I introduce the theoretical framework designed to answer the question, focusing on the political setting and the associated informational environment (itself an outcome of specific regime strategies and tactics). Third, I discuss the research design, specific variables, model specification and other relevant issues; then, the last sections focus on the presentation of key findings and the discussion of the results. I conclude with a brief recap.

## **2 Literature review**

This work sets out to explain the differences in the perceptions regarding the extent of respect for human rights in various polities. At the cornerstone of this thesis is the mechanism that explains formation of political attitudes, so it is intrinsically important to review the extant literature on this topic. Within this topic, there are two narrower dimensions that are central: 1) attitudes towards democracy and 2) perceptions about the level of democracy and respect for human rights in a country. The second dimension – perceptions about the level of democraticness and respect for human rights– is almost ignored in the literature. The literature on this aspect is very limited and provides no explanation for the differences across regimes. Those that do try to address the differences across regimes adopt a simplistic democracy-autocracy dichotomy that might overlook important patterns in public perceptions regarding human rights. I intend to fill in this gap in our knowledge through this project by employing a different regime typology. This literature review will address several fields that might prove particularly relevant to the topic of interest: firstly, I will discuss the literature on public opinion formation in general, and then I will review the literature which discusses, most importantly, formation of human rights perceptions, and I will also touch upon a broader field of attitudes towards democracy and performance of democratic institutions.

In general, public opinion is formed under the influence of numerous factors. Glynn et al. (2016), for instance, suggest that media and elite discourse play a prominent role in public opinion formation. According to their theory, uninformed individuals rely heavily on the media sources and politicians they favor to construct their own opinion regarding certain events or outcomes. Noelle-Neumann (1976) propose a “spiral of silence” theory, where public opinion expressed by individuals is always in line with the ideas dominating the discourse, while the less popular opinion is silenced. Scholars such as Festinger (1957), Anderson (1976), Eagly and Chaiken (1993), Morwitz and Pluzinski (1996) and Glynn et al. (2016) cite the role of individual cognition in public opinion, positing that cognitive consistency theories (e.g. balance

theory, congruity theory, cognitive dissonance theory) explains how individual opinions are formed.

The literature on the formation of political attitudes is diverse and encompasses numerous theories that help explain how certain public preferences regarding policies or political processes come to life. For instance, Zaller and Feldman (1992) suggest that citizens around the world lack political knowledge at a level sufficient to form an informed opinion about policies and political issues. Many scholars have since developed their theory by stating that political opinion is usually informed by a variety of sources, where each source is weighted differently. For instance, Anderson (1998) argues that the public usually employ proxies to construct opinions. On the example of the European integration processes the author explains how domestic political attitudes, along with the economic factors, have a strong influence on the responses of citizens surveyed in the Eurobarometer. Druckman (2004) finds that many individuals lack stable and coherent preferences because of limited political knowledge and because of that they might be very susceptible to momentary influences (e.g. wording of the question), but opinions of the individuals which were either exposed to the opposite information or have higher political expertise will be less likely to fall into this trap.

The malleability of political attitudes has been repeatedly demonstrated in the literature on a variety of issues. For instance, people's judgments about political institutions are also influenced by other, at times even non-political, factors. For example, opinions about the performance of political institutions are updated and are very sensitive to endogenously-formed factors, such as state of affairs and the business cycle (Grosjean et al. 2013). Grosjean and colleagues (2013) propose a "learning hypothesis," which posits that if people living in a democratic setting with a liberalized market system experience an economic shock or crisis, they are more likely to withdraw their support for the extant system, while if the same happens

to the people in a non-democratic setting, they are more likely to support and desire democracy and capitalism.

Most importantly, there is a need to review those few articles that examine the evaluations of the level of respect of human rights. As was previously mentioned above, this area, as narrow as it is, is quite understudied. Those scholarly works that have been produced somewhat superficial explanations, which fail to account for the structural factors that are needed for better understanding.

The common idea found in these articles is that perceptions of the public regarding the human rights situation within a state are usually in line with the levels of government repression. Barsh (1993) states that the levels of state repression and repressive practices usually coincide with people's perceptions about them. He proceeds to explain that the public is likely to recognize human rights violations, if they happen, and perceive them as such. Moore (2000) echoes this point, as he assumes that general public can observe repressive behavior and, thus, acts in response to it. Anderson et al. (2002) test the relationship between the levels of government repression and citizens' perceptions of human rights situation in eighteen Central and East European countries. They find that there is a significant relationship between the two variables. In addition, they demonstrate that that other political and economic indicators are also included in the consideration, but they are of secondary importance in judgment construction and do not overshadow the prominence of state brutality.

In a later piece, Anderson et al. (2005) find that citizens with higher level of education are more critical of their government's human rights practices, if the former is repressive, thereby correcting for a misleading assumption about the uniformity of political environment found in their earlier paper. What is also interesting about Anderson et al.'s (2005) paper is that they find support for the cultural relativist view on human rights: they admit that the effect of actual human rights practices on the judgments about human rights situation is not as strong

as it is expected to be in the whole sample, which hints at the idea that the traditional Western idea of universal human rights is not upheld in states with a repressive past or is shared by only certain groups of population (Anderson et al. 2005, 793). Conversely, Carlson and Listhaug (2007) tried to see whether public perceptions on human rights situation can be expected with the help of geographical and cultural variables. In their article, they find no support for this proposition and suggest that general public's idea about human rights is pretty much in line with what the human rights experts see, thereby implying that human rights concept is more or less universal.

The universality of the ideas on human rights is also a contested argument. In a seminal paper, Amartya Sen (2005) has posited that the idea of human rights, the concept per se is viewed by many as “being intellectually frail — lacking in foundation and perhaps even in coherence and cogency”, which is why almost all countries in the world admit the importance of human rights, yet hold different understanding of it. For instance, Chew (1994) in her essay describes that the Singaporean notion of human rights is significantly different from the principles, values and ideals proclaimed in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. The cultural argument, as Chew presents it, attributes this difference in understanding to historical and political idiosyncrasies of the state, as Asian states like Singapore have a model of development different from that of Western states. The proposition that there is a dichotomy between Western and non-Western human rights ideas also resulted in less attention allotted to human rights perceptions.

However, this small pool of the literature fails to explain the main puzzle: the reality shows a different situation, in which citizens in some states are overly positive about the extent of human rights respect in their states, while in others citizens are, on the opposite, more pessimistic about their human rights conditions. In this review of the literature, I suggest that the literature produced on this topic might be too simplistic about political systems of states or

unconcerned in general and, as a result, does not consider important differences between various polity types. In this thesis, I intend to remedy this oversight by proposing an alternative theoretical mechanism which will account for these differences.

The literature on the evaluation of democratic institutions might prove particularly insightful in the context of this research question, since democracy and respect for human rights usually go hand in hand. The literature on public opinion demonstrates that attitudes towards the government, political regime and human rights are often very closely associated (Anderson and Tverdova 2003; Anderson et al. 2005; Carlson and Listhaug 2007).

Unsurprisingly, the evaluation of democratic institutions and perceptions about the extent of democracy are strongly correlated with the perceptions about political corruption. This has been supported by Choi and Woo (2012), who demonstrate using the example of South Korea that if the perceptions about levels of political corruption are high, then the evaluations of democratic institutions and democracy in general is poor, given that the economic situation within a state is unstable. If, however, the national economy is in a good shape, then the prominence of political corruption as a structural problem has a limited effect on the evaluation of democracy and its extent. This finding hints again at the close association between the evaluation of democratic institutions and the economic situation. A number of scholars cited economic conditions as being strongly related to the ideas and attitudes towards democracy across all contexts. For instance, the study by Chen and Lu (2011) finds that in China economic and social well-being is negatively related to support for democratic values. The study by Karp et al. (2003) suggests that the evaluation given to the democratic performance of the European Union is dependent on the economic calculation of costs and benefits associated with the membership. Moreover, Junisbai and Junisbai (2018, 7) find that in non-democratic regimes, such as Kazakhstan, democracy is instrumental for economic purposes and economic development.



Conversely, a study by Chu et al. (2008) finds that citizens of the majority of new democracies are able to draw a line between the political and economic byproducts of a democratic regime and, moreover, support for democracy is determined primarily by political outcomes, rather than economic performance. Similarly, Bratton and Mattes (2001) find that citizens of Ghana, South Africa and Zambia strongly support democracy in their respective countries, but are not satisfied with the governments in power. The fact that there is public discontent with the achievements that the current regime brings, but the citizens still favor democracy as a form of governance lends support to the idea that economic considerations play a secondary role, while democracy per se is what matters.

Another group of scholars assign more weight to political factors in terms of the influence on support of democracy. For instance, Evans and Whitefield (1995) mention “second generation” factors, such as effective delivery of political institutions and representativeness of a political system, may increase positive perceptions about the performance of a democratic regime. Therefore, they admit, the very experience of democracy may boost support for it. Junisbai and Junisbai (2019, 9) elaborate on this assumption, as they find in the example of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan that support for democracy is weaker in the former than in latter because the former’s experience with democracy has been messy at best and has resulted in a country-wide political turmoil.

Another strand of literature pays close attention to social trust within a society. For instance, Zmerli and Newton (2008) find a strong relationship between the social trust and satisfaction with the performance of democracy. The relationship has been found in 23 European states and the US. The study also demonstrates a significant correlation between social trust and confidence in governmental institutions.

More generally, the formation of attitudes on democracy has been analyzed from various perspectives and with consideration of various groups of factors. The attitudes towards

democracy and human rights differ in many ways and may be dependent on various factors, including political culture (Fuchs-Schundeln and Schundeln 2015), cultural factors, history, personal characteristics such as age, gender, marital status and education (Baviskar and Malone 2004), etc. (Canache 2006). As with the idea of human rights, Baviskar and Malone (2004) also find support for the idea that understanding of the concept of democracy differs, which in turn might lead to the differences in attitudes.

In the framework of the research question at hand, since the research question emphasizes the differences between the regimes in the sample, it might be useful to look at the pool of literature that examines the factors influencing public opinion in non-democracies specifically. Many scholars argue, based on the example of the Middle East, that Islam has a negative influence on attitudes toward democracy (Tessler 2002). This echoes Chew's argument about the cultural and historical predisposition of Singapore to a different, less liberal idea of human rights. Other scholars studying the Middle East, however, find that economic development and education may boost support for democracy even in presence of strong religious predispositions (Ciftci 2011).

Another interesting inference drawn by the scholars studying support for democratic regimes is that there is a general concern regarding the beliefs formed by citizens in non-democratic settings. Political scientists and sociologists have raised doubts about whether individuals from countries which have a history of a prolonged autocratic rule can in fact form a coherent system of beliefs informing their political preferences and attitudes (Miller, Hesli and Reisinger 1997, 160). As the authors posit, "majority of the citizens in the aggregate may support the various democratic principles, but these various norms and beliefs may not form a coherent democratic ideology" (Miller, Hesli and Reisinger 1997, 160).

A number of other scholars echo similar concerns that citizens in developing countries which have recently stepped the way of democratization lack substance in their support for

democracy. This concept might have positive connotations for the majority, but the real knowledge of what democracy is and what its essential features are is absent (Schaffer 2000; Canache 2006; Schedler and Sarsfield 2007). For example, Schaffer (2000) demonstrates that Senegalese understanding of democracy is far from the traditional Western conception, despite the country allegedly moving towards democracy. Schedler and Sarsfield (2007) also suggest that there might be a “vacuous conception of democracy” held by the larger public, who, accepting that democracy is something positive, are likely to profess their alleged preference for democracy without truly understanding what democracy is.

Apart from the “vacuous conception of democracy”, citizens from authoritarian settings are also likely to adhere to conceptions of democracy, which are incompatible with liberal-democratic ideas or which have an authoritarian tint (Schelder and Sarsfield 2007). Junisbai and Junisbai (2019) also suggest that people in the states that have never experienced direct democracy may have a limited understanding of key democratic institutions, and therefore, their support for democracy is inconclusive. In an earlier paper, Junisbai and Junisbai (2018) find that the understanding of key tenets of democracy among Kazakhstani youth is indeed heterogeneous. While most respondents in the study agreed that democracy is preferable and democratic elections are clearly important, support for narrower conceptions of democracy (e.g. democracy requires questioning the actions of a leader) is lukewarm at best (Junisbai and Junisbai 2018, 7).

Dalton, Shin and Joun (2007), in contrast, are more optimistic in this regard. Their findings are threefold. First, people from young democracies can articulate what democracy is; second, citizens from young democracies think of democracy in terms of intrinsic characteristics, such as rights and freedoms. Third, contrary to the literature cited above, many residents even in the poorest nations assign the economic benefits of a democracy a minor role.

Numerous studies have been focused on democratic attitudes specifically in Russia (Carnaghan 2001; Gerber and Mendelson 2002; Carnaghan 2007; Hale 2011; Carnaghan 2012), since it represents an interesting case, what some refer to as a “hybrid regime.” Many studies identify a distinct conception of democracy or a negative perception of democracy in Russia. For instance, Carnaghan (2007) suggest that Russians have negative perceptions of democracy because of the political and economic turmoil observed during Yeltsin’s democratic rule. Carnaghan (2012) also cites a dislike for democracy among Russians, which results in passiveness and limited participation in political matters. Gerber and Mendelson (2002) who focused on the human rights abuse in Chechnya also find little support for civil liberties and conclude that support for human rights, an intrinsic component of a democratic regime, is similarly limited. The study by Carnaghan (2012) echoes concern about the flawed conception of democracy. Finally, Hale (2011), on the opposite end of the spectrum, finds support for democracy, but the democracy he discusses is a specific form which social scientists call “delegative democracy.” This, again, might indicate a non-conventional conception of democracy in Russia.

As this literature review demonstrates, much has been produced on the topic of political attitudes; however, all of them only tangentially touch upon the question of human rights perceptions. Studies addressing the question of interest have produced contradictory results, implying that there is more to this question than has been previously identified. The literature also demonstrates that interest in the formation of human rights perceptions may have been overlooked as self-explanatory or obvious. However, reality might tell a different story, which is what I want to investigate in this research project.

### **3 Theoretical framework**

Public opinion and public attitudes are often viewed as being crystallized and fully formed, ready to be elicited from memory and expressed at request. Such notions of public

opinion imply that there is a “file” created for every given issue in one’s head. While it might be the case with certain issues, more often, especially in the field of political knowledge, public attitudes prove to be very sensitive to exogenous factors, such as wording of the question or the mood of opinion holder. Moreover, it needs to be mentioned that respondents - informants of public opinion - do not always have a predetermined attitude on all asked questions (Zaller and Feldman 1992, 579), but rather may form an opinion on-the-go. As Taber et al. (2001, 200) put it:

In contrast with the traditional “file drawer” view of memory and attitudes, many theorists now argue that the formation and expression of beliefs about people, places and things is a constructive process (Martin and Tesser, 1992), that there is no single attitude toward an object, but rather multiple considerations whereby the expression of an attitude is dependent on the most salient schematas then available in conscious memory (Boynton and Lodge 1992; Feldman 1995; Zaller 1992; Zanna 1990).

This deviation from the traditional “file drawer” view implies that sometimes the opinion that people construct from a large database in their mind may be contradictory, unstable at times, irrational, and affect-laden. Therefore, one may infer that public opinion can be viewed as an outcome of the interaction between individual cognition and the external environment. This implies that how people collect information and the choice of the information and knowledge they deem valuable and important is determined by a variety of factors. It is especially true in regard to political issues: given that the majority of citizens does not have sufficient political knowledge, time, or interest and motivation to construct an informed opinion, their political stance is often constructed from the pieces of information that are readily available. These easily accessible pieces of information in turn come from a variety of sources: the preferred media source, a highly visible political figure or a spin doctor for a party that a person affiliates herself with (Taber et al. 2001, 201).

This view of public opinion construction demonstrates that the informational environment a person finds herself in is highly influential for the construction of a political

attitude. Since formation of political attitudes is a process, one may expect that there is a build-up of information occurring before an opinion is formulated. Different pieces of information are weighted differently. What is more interesting is that certain pieces of information serve as a basis for other or future judgments. In other words, new information pieces are integrated into a gradually forming impression, where bits that were, consciously or subconsciously, acquired earlier may serve as anchors for new information, even though it might be completely unrelated (Taber et al. 2001, 205).

In relation to the research question at hand, the informational environment thus becomes a determining factor that helps explain how political judgments on the extent of respect for human rights are shaped within different states. Strong government propaganda, occurring along with hard censorship, for example, may create an informational bubble, where citizens are exposed to a lopsided image, based on which they have to form their opinions in the absence of other viable alternatives. In other settings, a more comprehensive informational outlook may be observed, where the public has access to various sources of information and can assess a situation or an issue from different angles.

Informational context is a derivative of the political system and might vary, depending on the type of polity, or key regime features dominating in the system. Therefore, it might be necessary to draw a divisive line between different regime types. For the purposes of my argument, I employ one of the assumptions from the formal model of autocratic rule: information asymmetry. I posit that the access to information in non-democratic settings is problematic, as information is limited or asymmetric (Gehlbach et al. 2016, 566). In democracies, conversely, information flows are widely accessible and generally unobstructed.

Regimes, their institutional peculiarities, and the informational environment associated with them might influence judgments about the level of human rights respect in two distinct ways. I refer to these as “objective” and “subjective” influences. While the “objective”

pathway is more concerned with the actual human rights violations committed by a state authority and more objective measures or manifestations of respect for human rights that might inform the public (Poe, Tate & Keith 1999; Davenport 1999; Anderson et al. 2002; Carlson and Listhaug 2007), the “subjective” pathway is informed by insights from political psychology. Combined, these two pathways provide a more complex image of how public judgments come into life in various political settings.

### *3.1 Objective information: regime type and respect for human rights*

Regime type informs, or at least is strongly associated with, people’s perceptions about the level of respect for human rights that the government demonstrates towards its people. It is logical to expect that people’s judgments about their government’s behavior should be determined by the government behavior per se.

As the literature review has demonstrated, numerous comparative studies that set out to explore the issue of perceptions about the human rights situation found that democratic polities are less likely to violate physical integrity rights than non-democratic states (Poe & Tate 1994; Poe, Tate & Keith 1999; Davenport 1999; Anderson et al. 2002; Carlson and Listhaug 2007). The mechanism behind this phenomenon is quite simple, as the following paragraphs show.

Democracy is believed to be more respectful towards human rights because of its very structure: in democracies, there are numerous channels through which the power of the government is transferred to the public. The public in turn is believed to monitor and keep accountable government actions, thus ensuring greater respect for human rights. When government fails to do so, the public employs these same mechanisms to bring officials to justice. Independent media sources also help publicize government wrongdoing, thereby inviting mass action in response to human rights violations. The very definition of democracy and its institutions, “the extent to which the political power of the elite is minimized and that of the non-elite is maximized” (Bollen 1980, 372), implies the distribution of power, where

one body serves as a check on another body, thereby limiting possibilities of abuse. In addition, democracies are less willing to resort to violent resolution of conflict because of the presence of various channels through which a conflict can be resolved. Finally, the process of socialization plays an important role, as citizens in democratic polities become more likely to favor a non-violent way of conflict resolution (Poe, Tate and Keith 1999, 293).

In autocracies, on the other hand, few to no mechanisms are in place to keep leaders in check and restrain abuse. More generally, non-democratic regimes lack accountability that is present in strong democracies and which is instrumental for ensuring human rights respect (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2005). Concentration of power allows for extensive human rights abuse that can readily go unpunished. The willingness to use repression is also higher, because the public being dissatisfied with the rule may stir dissent, to which the government is likely to respond with coercion to avoid a direct threat to the rule. Repression, thus, increases the viability of a non-democratic leader's rule, as restrictions on individuals' rights and freedoms that are employed by the non-democratic ruler significantly decrease the probability of both violent and regular "exits" from power, such as coups, revolutions and resignations and step-downs (Escriba-Folch 2013). Since repression (and the fear it generates) is central to power maintenance, leaders are more likely to resort to it, which in turn explains why more human rights abuse occurs in non-democratic settings.

Applying the concept of regime-type (democracy versus non-democracy) as a key informant about the state of human rights in a given state, I hypothesize that:

H<sub>1</sub>: The citizens in *less* democratic states will espouse *more* negative views about their country's human rights situation.



### *3.2 Subjective judgment: evaluation of government's performance and perceived respect for human rights*

In sharp contrast to objective factors, described above, the mechanism undergirding subjective judgment formation may be more complex. I suggest that public opinion regarding the level of respect for human rights demonstrated by the government depends heavily on the availability of political information to the general public, which in turn is determined by the type of polity. Structural or systematic peculiarities of each polity type may insulate individuals from, or conversely, expose them to, specific information or experiences.

The intuition behind this supposition is simple: to evaluate the extent of human rights respect, citizens must be aware of the human rights situation in the first place. Without information about human rights violations or grievances, a person cannot give a rational evaluation (Anderson et al. 2002, 441). Therefore, information is key for understanding the relationship between human rights violations and perceptions of human rights conditions. Exploring this relationship might explain the differences in perceptions about the level of respect for human rights in a given country. In other words, I propose a mechanism which explains why in some countries people are overly optimistic and positive about the extent of respect for human rights despite human rights abuse, while in others the citizens' evaluation is perfectly aligned with the real situation.

To make this argument, I rely in part on the theoretical framework proposed by Guriev and Treisman (2018). In their approach, states can be roughly divided into three types of political systems: democracy, informational autocracy, and overt dictatorship. In any polity, there is the political leadership and non-leaders (or citizens). The leader can be either "competent" or "incompetent," good or bad (Guriev and Treisman 2018, 5). I assume that an incompetent leader, along with a plethora of other shortcomings, is also abusive and commits human rights violations, while a competent leader is not. Therefore, if the public considers a leader "competent" or good, then its evaluation of the level of human rights is going to be high.

Conversely, if the public views the incumbent to be “incompetent” or “bad,” then it is more likely to negatively evaluate the level of human rights respect.

While a leader is always aware of her type, the general public may be either informed or uninformed. It needs to be noted that the juxtaposition of “informed-uninformed” does not indicate the level of political knowledge possessed by all citizens in a polity. Rather, it serves to indicate the extent of the accessibility of information in a setting. I will elaborate on this difference at later point in this section.

Another assumption, borrowed from Gurr (1970), that I employ is that those who have been the victims of human rights abuse possess complete knowledge of the violations. In the following sub-sections I will explain how an outside observer can observe whether the public believes the leader is “competent” or not, and how this evaluation manifests itself in relation to perceptions about the human rights situation in various political settings.

### 3.2.1 Confidence

As the previous section has demonstrated, the public can construct its opinion about whether the leader is good or bad, “competent” or “incompetent”. Intuitively, these concepts within public opinion are tightly associated with the confidence in the government. If one is sure a leader is “competent”, then one is more inclined to say that she is confident in the leader and the government. In a way, confidence in the government is a judgment which is based on the governmental performance evaluation. Thus, for the purpose of this study, I apply the institutional performance model, which views the actual performance of governmental institutions as a key explanation for citizen’s confidence in them (Newton and Norris 2000, 7). As the literature demonstrates - and I intend to follow the lead – confidence in government is strongly correlated with the evaluation of its performance (Newton and Norris 2000, 12). The theoretical association between satisfaction with government and confidence in it has been repeatedly empirically supported and emphasized in numerous works (Newton and Norris

2000). Three elements, such as trust in government, political confidence, and support for the government, have been used synonymously and interchangeably in the literature (Miller and Listhaug 1990, 358) and can be used to denote whether the public believes the leader is a “competent” type or not, since this is directly related to the fact that it can observe how the government is performing. I build upon this model of government confidence, since, as Newton and Norris (2000, 12) put it, “Political trust and confidence are more or less randomly distributed among various personality and social types in a given country because, after all, government policies and performance affect everyone, even if they do not necessarily affect everyone equally. Few people can escape at least some of the consequences of national economic failure, foreign policy disasters, government corruption, or increased taxes. In this sense, “the rain falls on the just and unjust alike,” so disillusionment or, alternatively, satisfaction with government is likely to be widespread among people.”

It needs to be noted, however, that in various polities this confidence judgment may contain different cognitions about the performance of the government. In a democratic setting, for instance, the judgment about whether an individual is confident in the government or not may be also take into account whether this individual believes his or her interests are properly represented in domestic deliberations. For instance, in the study of survey data from Sweden, Norway and the US, strongholds of Western democracy, confidence in the government was found to be explained through the public’s cognitive judgment about the extent of representation, which in turn stemmed from the party system within a state (Miller and Listhaug 1990, 357). In those non-democratic settings, where there is a shortage of information about human rights violations, conversely, the judgment about the performance of the government may consist only of the public’s evaluation of the economic situation or situation with the provision of services within a state. Whatever considerations are included in the understanding of confidence, it immediately translates into a more positive perception about

the government performance across all its aspects, since, as public opinion research demonstrates, individuals do not have to possess profound knowledge on a topic to have an opinion about it (Zaller 1992). In this regard, close proxies or related judgments are enough for a new judgment to be formed.

Given this theoretical assumption, I propose the following hypothesis:

H<sub>2</sub>: Citizens who are *more* confident in their government will espouse *more positive* views about their country's human rights situation.

### 3.2.2 Democracy

Audience costs are generated when there are mechanisms in place that give the public the capacity to learn about the wrongful actions taken by the leader and to punish him for committing them (Potter and Baum 2014, 167). These mechanisms are as a rule found in democracies, as the previous section demonstrates. For instance, as Potter and Baum (2014, 167) describe using the example of an international conflict, independent media sources might help citizens learn about “foreign policy blunders,” leading to strong public opposition and a change in government policy. In a similar fashion, strong opposition against the incumbent leadership may reveal high-level wrongdoings and abuses, forcing the leadership to correct course or step down. Therefore, in democracies, the public is informed and, thus, can directly observe the type of the leader and, in particular, determine whether the latter is “incompetent.” If the leader is judged incompetent, the public can “remove the leader by revolting or voting against him in an election” (Guriev and Treisman 2018, 5). More generally, since the public is informed, “it observes the leader's type and always keeps the competent leader and removes the incompetent one” (Guriev and Treisman 2018, 11) through in-built domestic channels for doing so. Neither a competent nor an incompetent leader is likely to use repression; for an incompetent leader it is too costly, while a competent leader experiences no threat from the public to resort to it.

Based on these theoretical assumptions, the process of judgment formation in democracies seems straightforward. In the presence of perfect information, a more general evaluation of government performance in terms of economy, service provision and basic freedoms, translates immediately into the judgment on the level of human rights observed by a citizen in a country. Since an average citizen can easily observe what and how the government is doing, perceptions about the human rights situation within a state are also considered when constructing an opinion regarding confidence in the government.

Even if human rights violations occur in a democratic setting, a victim of these actions faces no formal constraint to spreading this information and making it available to the larger public. In the presence of perfect information, as is the case in democracies, citizens do not have to rely on heuristics or other beliefs to make their evaluation of the regime.

However, since citizens in democracies are exposed to all kinds of information and rhetoric, including both pro- and anti-government, they may foster some conflicting beliefs. As Zaller states, "In an environment that carries roughly evenly balanced communications on both sides of issues, people are likely to internalize many contradictory arguments, which is to say, they are likely to form considerations that induce them both to favor and to oppose the same issues" (1992, 59). Jamieson (in Walsh 1996, 285 and Moy, Pfau and Kahlor 1999, 138) finds, for instance, that the media has the capacity to undermine confidence in governmental institutions because it is often structured as "attack and counterattack, including dismissal of the status quo." It might also be the case that in presence of perfect information, independent media outlets may criticize the government without obstruction, thereby creating a somewhat "vilified" image of the incumbent, which might undermine popular support of a democratic government. Moreover, a global trend is observed where citizens of democracies become less and less satisfied with the democratic institutions (Foa and Mounk 2016, 16; Foa and Mounk 2017). Such "deconsolidation" also has the capacity to bring confidence in the government

and, hence, public performance evaluation down. This in turn may result in a more pessimistic perception of the level of respect for human rights.

These two points give rise to the following hypotheses:

H<sub>3</sub>: Citizens in democratic states will espouse *less positive* views about their country's human rights situation.

### 3.2.3 Informational autocracy

There has been observed a gradual shift in how scholars view autocracies. Nowadays, a new type of non-democracy emerges that Guriev and Treisman (2018) labeled informational autocracies. While it is traditionally expected from autocrats to resort to extensive violence and repression to stay in power, this new type of autocracies is more inclined to turn to information manipulation as a means of preserving their position. If they do employ violent tactics, they are likely to attempt to conceal this fact or deny responsibility. Overt violence can damage the image of an autocrat, thereby threatening his rule with the possibility of protests, which is why it is preferred to avoid it. The most prominent members of the opposition are co-opted or bribed, while all visible attempts to silence the opposition allegedly are justified by law (e.g. fabrication of a non-political crime). This condition implies that those who have been the target of repressive tactics and human rights abuse and who, thus, know the type of the leader and have perfect information regarding the human rights situation, are eliminated from the discussion and are prevented from sharing this information with the help of censorship or other means.

The key characteristic of such regimes is that leaders in this setting are willing to lead the public to believe that they are benevolent. Thus, rather than building the rule on fear and intimidation, they try to gain popular support by emphasizing their performance (Guriev and Treisman 2018, 1) and in this regard, they “mimic democracy.” Maintaining high levels of confidence by upholding the rhetoric of performance, thus, dampens demands from the public,

thereby eliminating the need for more massive political repression. Moreover, in contradistinction to the traditional notion of an autocracy, the importance of ideology is reduced: in their rhetoric, they sometimes insist on being democratic, although with certain unique cultural qualifications (Guriev and Treisman 2018, 23). Such states have also been increasingly observed to adopt democratic institutions: there is usually a puppet opposition party and international monitors are invited to regularly held elections (Guriev and Treisman 2018, 25).

The process of public opinion formation in such a setting is as follows: just as in democracies, there is a leader and the larger public, but the public here is divided into two categories: the informed, who are mostly elites in the sense that they are close to the incumbent and have the knowledge of information manipulation, and the uninformed, who remain unaware of the informational tactics. In autocracies, the leader and the elites know for certain the type of the leader, human rights violations and the regime per se that they inhabit. At the same time, due to information manipulation, propaganda and censorship, the masses may be oblivious to them: they are ill-informed due to misrepresentation of information and build their opinions on human rights situation based on other proxies such as, for example, economic performance. Without overt repression, it is unclear to the public whether the leader is good or bad. However, the leader is unlikely to resort to violence because he is willing to preserve his power.

In this model of autocratic behavior, the key element that explains public opinion formation is the gap in political information that exists between the larger public and informed elites. Elites, who are co-opted by the regime, join the leader to send, via controlled media sources, positive signals about the leader's competence, while censorship which is covertly imposed by the leader prevents accurate signals from reaching the public.

In such a setting, the public, which has no access to information, must rely on their other perceptions to construct an opinion. Since the leader's propaganda emphasizes economic performance, stability and provision of public services, this might serve as a cue or a proxy for government performance. As Kahan (2013, 407) puts it, "It is well established that members of the public rely on heuristics or mental short-cuts that can generate systematic biases in their perceptions [...]. They also tend to seek out and assess evidence in biased patterns that reinforce the positions that they, or those who share their ideological predispositions, already hold." Indeed, according to the theory proposed by Guriev and Treisman (2018, 12), unaware citizens are likely to support the leader and be confident about him, if economically they are better off.<sup>1</sup> This also implies that if the citizens are satisfied with the economic situation, then they are more likely to view a leader as "competent" or good.

Sometimes, even if the public receives information that runs afoul of the image created by the leader through information manipulation, they may not update their opinions. Since it is practically impossible to imagine a situation of complete informational isolation from the outside world, foreign media or other outside actors, such as NGOs, may reveal the true situation. If they do, the information they reveal will be of less value to the citizens. As Redlawsk (2002, 1023) describes it, "Simply put, when new information is encountered, the affect associated with relevant existing knowledge interacts with affect toward the new information to form a virtually instantaneous assessment of the new information. The result of this process can be bias toward maintaining existing affect even in the face of disconfirming information."

The explanation presented above gives rise to the following hypothesis:

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<sup>1</sup> Guriev and Treisman (2018, 12) argue that "inattentive citizens always stick to the same (separating) strategy: remove if  $C = Y^L$  and support if  $C = Y^H$ ", which means that if citizens a higher level of consumption,  $C$ , they are unlikely to revolt against him. In my modification of their theory, I do not distinguish between the level of "attentiveness", as I merely assume that citizens can be informed and uninformed.



H4: Citizens in informational autocracies will espouse *more positive* views about their country's human rights situation.

#### 3.3.4 Overt dictatorship

In an overt dictatorship, the setting is also similar: there is a leader and the public. The main strategy that helps a leader stay in power in this setting is the use of repression. Since the leader uses repression and does not try to hide it, as is the case in informational autocracies, he cannot conceal his true type and the public is perfectly aware of the human rights violations and state brutality. This type of rule is based on intimidation, not on popular support for the incumbent.

Since the public lives in the environment of fear, they can make an informed judgment regarding their level of the human rights situation. Because human rights abuse is widespread, extensive and overt, the public is perfectly aware of the human rights conditions. For simplicity I assume that in a setting like this, because of the extent of human rights abuse, the whole population is a target of repressive policies, and therefore the citizens have full knowledge.

If this is the case, the perceptions of the public regarding the human rights situation within a country will be directly related to the human rights behavior of the leader. Therefore, the third hypothesis is as follows:

H5: Citizens in overt dictatorships will espouse *more negative* views about their country's human rights situation.

Yet, it might also be the case that in presence of overt repression, the public, in fear of persecution or other repercussions, might be less willing to disclose their true opinions and is likely to overstate their judgment about human rights situation within the state.

#### **4 Regime typology: case studies**

This section briefly outlines the expectations proposed by this model on the exemplary cases of each regime: the Netherlands as a democratic regime, Kazakhstan as an informational autocracy, and China as an overt dictatorship. These three countries are chosen because they were included in the 6<sup>th</sup> wave of the World Values Survey which I rely on in this piece and all of the questions of interest were asked from the respondents in these states. As the following sections will demonstrate, these countries align well with the characteristics pertaining to each regime proposed by Guriev and Treisman (2018). While with democracy it is more or less clear, the distinction that needs to be made between these two types of non-democracies – informational autocracies and overt dictatorship – requires an explanation. Guriev and Treisman (2018) employed the ten political killings threshold to distinguish between the two. In other words, if the government led by the leader has committed less than ten political killing within a year or there are less than 100 political prisoners at any given time, then the leader is an informational autocrat. If, however, a higher number of political killings or political prisoners has been observed over this period, then the country is categorized as an overt dictatorship.

The key distinction among these polities that I intend to focus on is the informational context. The following examples will demonstrate how the informational context and rhetoric which is a tool for information manipulation differ across three types of political settings.

##### *4.1 The Netherlands*

An exemplary case of democracy is easy to identify, since there is usually no debate on the notion of a strong democratic polity. The example of a strong democracy discussed here is the Netherlands. According to Freedom House (2018), the Netherlands is a “parliamentary democracy with a strong record of safeguarding political rights and civil liberties.” The role of the monarch is nominal; although he appoints the prime minister, he does so only after

competitive and fair elections are held. As the US State Department (2017) reports, “The most significant human rights issues included anti-Semitic incidents and violence against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) persons. Authorities generally investigated, and where appropriate prosecuted, such cases. Authorities in the kingdom investigated, prosecuted, and punished officials who committed violations.” No political killings or instances of politically motivated imprisonment has been observed or documented.

The informational context in the Netherlands is fully consistent with the original theory: information flows face no constraint. For instance, according to the reports by Freedom House, free and independent media are in no way challenged by the government. As evidence of this claim, the Freedom House (2018) brings the case of the Dutch Association of Journalists, which vociferously condemned the Intelligence and Security Services Act, since it was viewed as compromising to the source protection responsibility of the journalists, and initiated a campaign for a referendum on this law. In line with Guriev and Treisman’s (2018) predictions, the public in democracies may access and share any information about their government without fear of persecution or punishment, therefore they are able to observe whether the leader is a “competent” or “incompetent” type. The elections are administered regularly every four years by the Electoral Council, an impartial body designated to carry them out, and as the US State Department concludes, recent elections have been free and fair (US State Department 2017). Again, as Guriev and Treisman (2018) expect, this demonstrates that the public in the Netherlands can remove the leader from the office through peaceful and legitimate ways in case if the incumbent is deemed “incompetent”.

Regarding the confidence scores and the judgment about human rights situation, the average response to the question “How much confidence do you have in the government (in your nation’s capital)?” among the Dutch survey participants is 2, which refers to “Not very

much”, while the majority of the Dutch citizens believe that there is “Fairly much respect” for human rights in their state. The graphs below visualize these statistics.

The responses provided by the Dutch citizens are in line with the theoretical argument: people in established democracies may indeed underestimate the extent of the respect for human rights and tend to be on a somewhat pessimistic side, when it comes to the evaluation of the government performance.

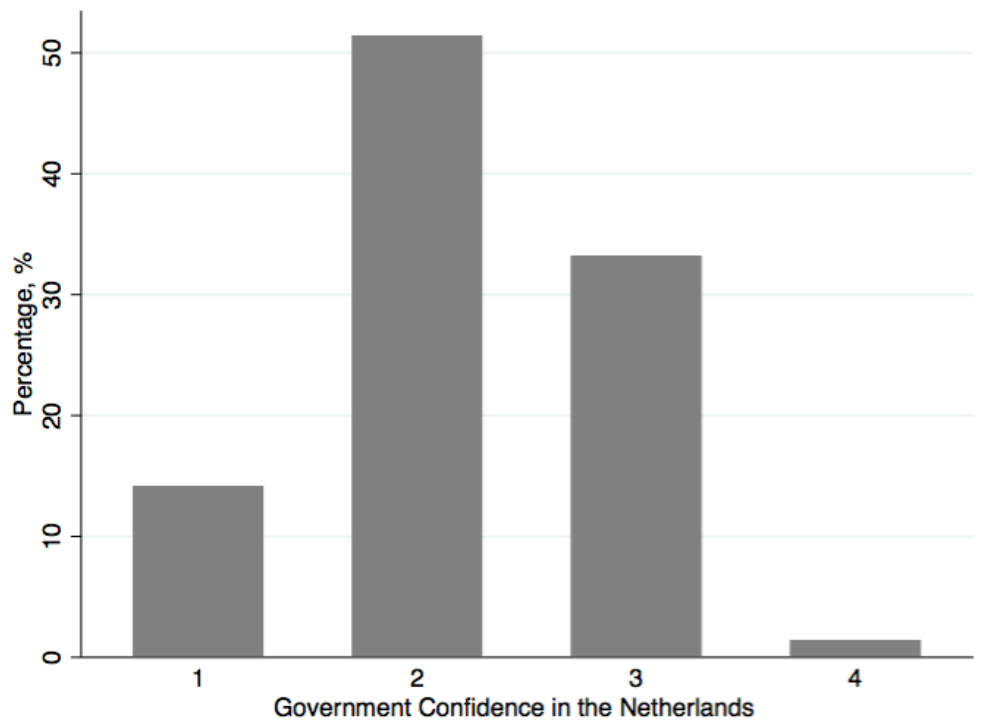


Figure 1. Percentage of people at each level of government confidence in the Netherlands.

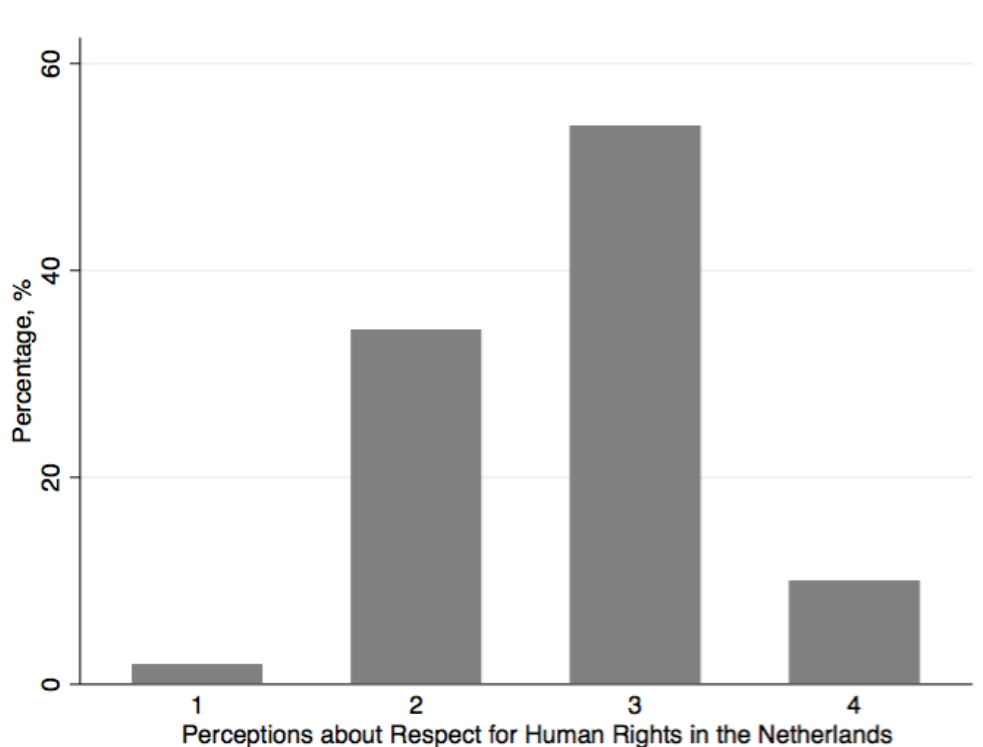


Figure 2. Percentage of people at each level of perceived level of respect for human rights in the Netherlands.

#### 4.2 Kazakhstan

Guriev and Treisman (2018) categorize Kazakhstan as an informational autocracy and its recent president, Nursultan Nazarbayev, as an informational autocrat. Nursultan Nazarbayev has been at the helm of the country since it has acquired its independence in 1991 and until March 2019. One of the longest tenured leaders in the world, Nazarbayev still enjoys uncontested strength in the government, as the constitution, which has been amended several times, allowed the former president to exert substantial control over all branches of government and still allows him to influence current decision-making. Moreover, the term limits have been removed for Nazarbayev on the basis of him being the first president (Freedom House 2011). Although after March 2019 he is no longer a president of the country, he has accumulated most of the power at his hands by initiating and leading changes necessary to retain his leadership prior to his retirement.

Freedom House describes Kazakhstan as “Not Free” and states that “Parliamentary and

presidential elections are not free or fair, and all major parties exhibit political loyalty to the president. The authorities have consistently marginalized or imprisoned genuine opposition figures. The dominant media outlets are either in state hands or owned by government-friendly businessmen. Freedoms of speech and assembly remain restricted, and corruption is endemic” (Freedom House 2018).

Informational autocrats tend to “blend in” with their democratic counterparts by putting a greater emphasis on economic performance indicators and the provision of basic services rather than invoking fear and terror. In this regard, Kazakhstan and its president fit perfectly, as Kazakhstan’s leader is “the leader in discourse on service provision” (Guriev and Treisman 2018, 29). For instance, the authors provide an analysis of president’s speeches aimed at the general public and find that they contain a lot of words associated with economic performance and provision of services, while do not mention almost anything on violence. The number of words related to economic performance in Nazarbayev’s speeches was very close to the number of the same words in IMF briefings on the World Economic Outlook, while the number of words related to the provision of services was close to the number of words in the budget speeches of finance ministers in strong democracies (Guriev and Treisman 2018, 13). Indeed, if one looks at the State of the Nation Address speeches, one may notice how in every speech the opening statement emphasizes the “growing,” “dynamic” economy, increasing GDP, high inflows of foreign direct investment, provision of public benefits, improvements in life conditions, innovation, stability and many other concomitant elements of a booming state development (Akorda 2012-2018).

The authors also state that opposition figures in such settings are usually charged with fabricated, non-political crimes. This is also true of Kazakhstan’s domestic developments. For instance, the editor of the opposition newspaper Tribuna, Zhanbolat Mamay, has been arrested in 2017 on charges of money laundering and being complicit in the criminal actions of Mukhtar

Abylazarov, a former Kazakhstani banker charged with embezzlement who is now on the run and leads his own opposition movement (Freedom House 2018). Later that year, another independent journalist, Ramazan Yesergepov, was stabbed while he was travelling to Astana to meet with foreign diplomats and discuss Mamay's case. In 2009, Yesergepov has also been detained and sentenced to prison time on charges of "collecting information that contains state secrets" (Committee to Protect Journalists 2009).

In terms of "mimicking democracy," Kazakhstan is also an exemplar case of informational autocracy. The first article of the Constitutions of the Republic of Kazakhstan stipulates:

1. The Republic of Kazakhstan proclaims itself as a *democratic*, secular, legal and social state whose highest values are a person, his life, rights, and freedoms.
2. The fundamental principles of the activity of the Republic are public concord and political stability; economic development for the benefit of all the nation; Kazakhstani patriotism and resolution of the most critical issues of State affairs by *democratic* methods including voting by national referendum or in Parliament,

while one of the key duties of the President is to:

take measures [...] including the imposition of a state of emergency on the entire territory and in particular areas of Kazakhstan, and immediately inform the Parliament of the use of the Armed Forces in case of a serious and immediate threat to the *democratic* institutions of the Republic, its independence and territorial integrity, political stability, security of its citizens and the disruption of normal functioning of the Constitutional bodies of the state, after official consultations with the Prime Minister and Chairpersons of the Parliamentary Chambers of the Republic (Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan, emphasis added).

Moreover, Kazakhstan regularly holds elections, which international monitors are as a rule invited to as observers. In 2015, international OSCE monitors described the presidential elections as characterized by "serious procedural deficiencies and irregularities", compromised impartiality of election commissions, lack of competitiveness, vague regulations and limited transparency (OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report 2015). 2016 parliamentary elections were described by Western observers as "falling short of democratic standards" (Reuters 2016).

However, despite all the recounted human rights violations, the level of support for the government remains quite high. For instance, as the data from the World Values Survey dataset shows, the average response to the question “How much confidence you have in the government?” is about 3, which means “Quite a lot.” Moreover, in response to the question “How much respect is there for individual human rights nowadays in this country?”, the majority of respondents assigns the human rights situation within a state a score of 3, which means “Fairly much respect”. This is demonstrated on the graphs below.

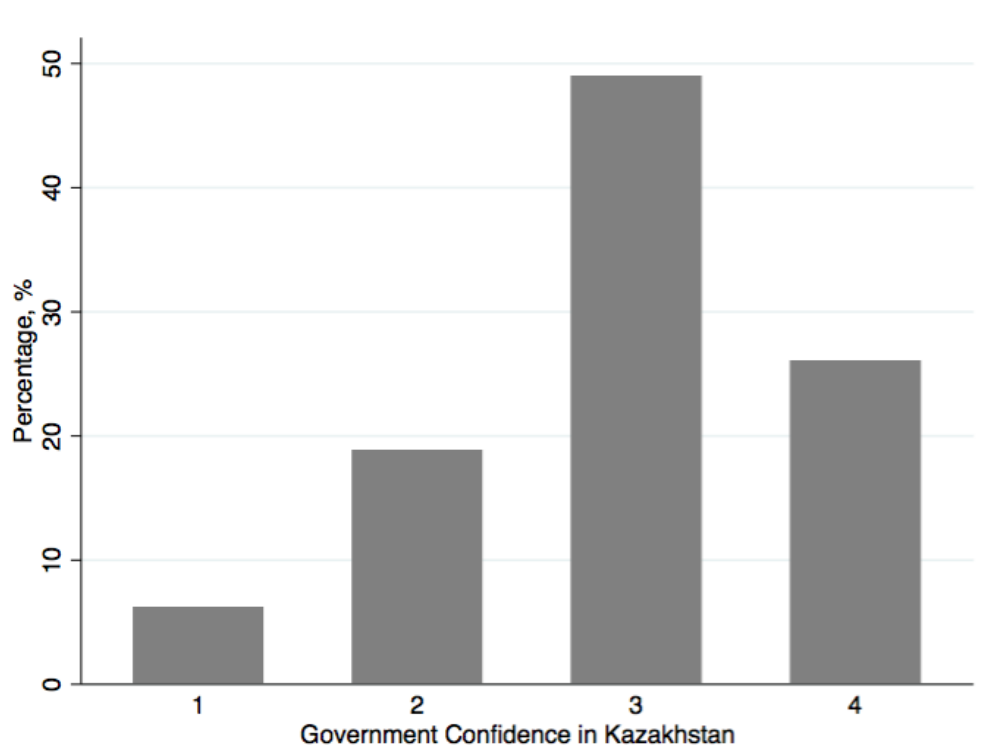


Figure 3. Percentage of people at each level of government confidence in Kazakhstan.



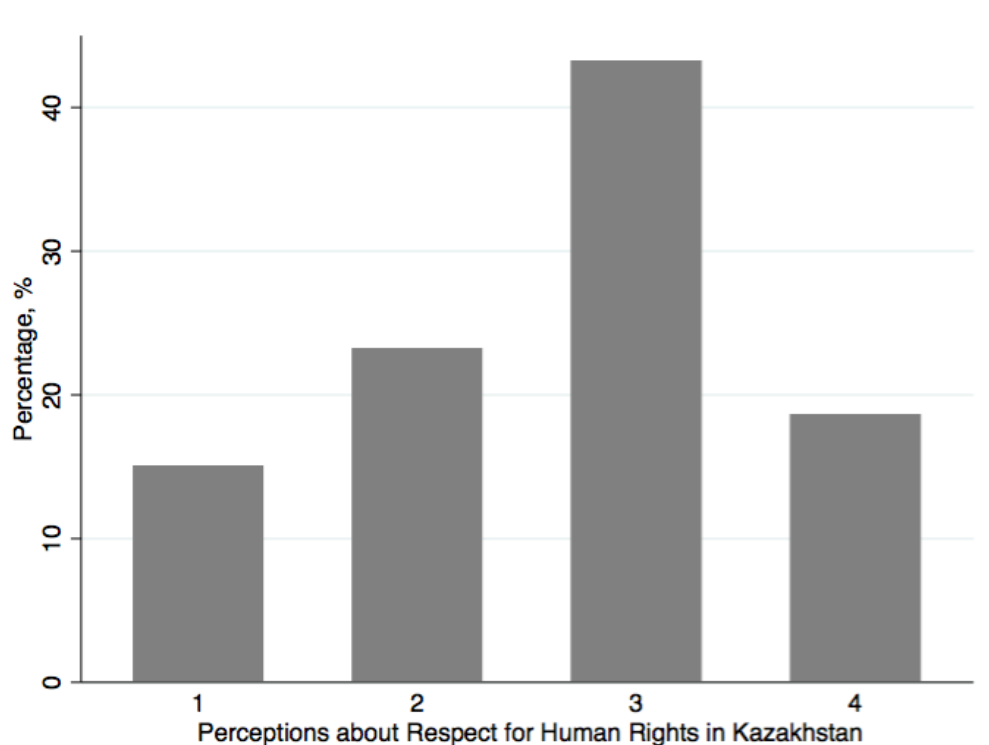


Figure 4. Percentage of people at each level of perceived level of respect for human rights in Kazakhstan

#### 4.3 China

China has a long history of repressive governments. Guriev and Treisman (2018) list the leadership of Mao Zedong (1949-1976) as a clear example of an overt dictatorship. In overt dictatorships, the government engages in state terror and indoctrination to ensure devotion to the regime, which perfectly characterized China during Mao Zedong's rule.

As an example of rule by fear, which is an intrinsic characteristic of such a regime, Guriev and Treisman (2018) recount that during the Cultural Revolution public torture has been routinely executed in front of thousands of people to instill fear and compliance. Mao Zedong used to say "Why should we fear a bit of shock? We want to be shocking" (quoted in Guriev and Treisman 2018, 21), so such overt manifestation of repressive behavior has been a tactic at hands of a skillful dictator. Yet, despite decades have passed, now too China can be categorized as an overt dictatorship. Freedom House describes China as "increasingly repressive", where the "ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is tightening its control over

the media, online speech, religious groups, and civil society associations while undermining already modest rule-of-law reforms” and “The CCP leader and state president, Xi Jinping, is consolidating personal power to a degree not seen in China for decades” (Freedom House 2018).

What also distinguishes this type of polity from an informational autocracy is that countries like these do not attempt to come off as democratic; neither do they attempt to conceal the human rights abuse they commit. In this regard, although it does not overtly publicize the extent of the political repressions, the Chinese government continues its political motivated campaign and persecutes, detains and tortures millions of individuals (Human Rights Watch 2019). Public executions or trials still take place in modern China, as, for example, in 2017, in the wake of government crackdown on drug criminals ten people were publicly sentenced to death and led away for the execution on a sports stadium (The Guardian 2017).

Moreover, the Chinese Constitution, despite numerous references to democracy, proclaims China as “people’s democratic *dictatorship*” (Constitution of the People’s Republic of China, emphasis added). Any manifestation of political dissent is heavily suppressed. As the human rights report on China produced by the State Department cites, the most significant and frequent human rights violations, among many others, are “arbitrary or unlawful deprivation of life and executions without due process; extralegal measures such as forced disappearances, including extraterritorial ones; torture and coerced confessions of prisoners; arbitrary detention, including strict house arrest and administrative detention, and illegal detentions at unofficial holding facilities known as “black jails””, and punitive psychiatry (US Department of State 2017). The report also mentions that “There were numerous reports that the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings” (US Department of State 2017). Most recent and resonant case has been of Liu Xiaobo, a Nobel laureate, one of the many political prisoners in China, who has been sentenced to 11 years in prison on charges of

“inciting subversion of state power” and who has been denied medical treatment while in jail (The Guardian 2017).

Moreover, the Political Prisoner Database produced by the Congressional Executive Commission on China demonstrates that as of October 2018, there were 1,424 known instances of politically motivated imprisonment in China. This list created by the Commission did not even include the cases of Tibetan or Uighur detentions in its calculations and it is noted in the report states that the number may be even higher (Congressional Executive Commission on China 2018) In this regard, China fits the criteria applied by Guriev and Treisman (2018): the government or government-authorized bodies have committed more than ten political killings in one year and there are more than 100 political prisoners at a time.

In terms of elections states like China do not mimic democracy as well. China holds no direct or competitive elections whatsoever: the party and its leader, Xi Jinping, basically choose the government and dominates all branches of government. All important positions in the government are occupied by people appointed by the Party.

In terms of government rhetoric, although the government emphasizes economic milestones achieved by the country and service provision, such as, for instance, improving social security system, reducing poverty and increasing access to education (CGTN 2018, China Daily 2018), greater attention is allotted to the Chinese ideology. For instance, Xi Jinping in his speech during the event celebrating 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of “the country’s reform and opening-up” has repeatedly emphasized that China makes huge “leap” forward to promote “socialism with Chinese characteristics”, how “national rejuvenation” is the overarching goal of the Party and how it is necessary for China to popularize Marxism with necessary adjustments to the modern-day context (China Daily 2018).

The responses to the two questions of interest in China present an interesting pattern: if these responses are true, the Chinese citizens are highly confident of their government and

believe that the government respect human rights, as the graphs below show. Yet, the picture is not as rose-colored, as the most probable reason behind this pattern is the intimidation and overt repression that a government engages in as a punishment for criticizing the government. While these statistics do not fit well into the hypothesized framework, these responses are expected and not surprising. As the argument allows above, government repression may distort the picture of public opinion.

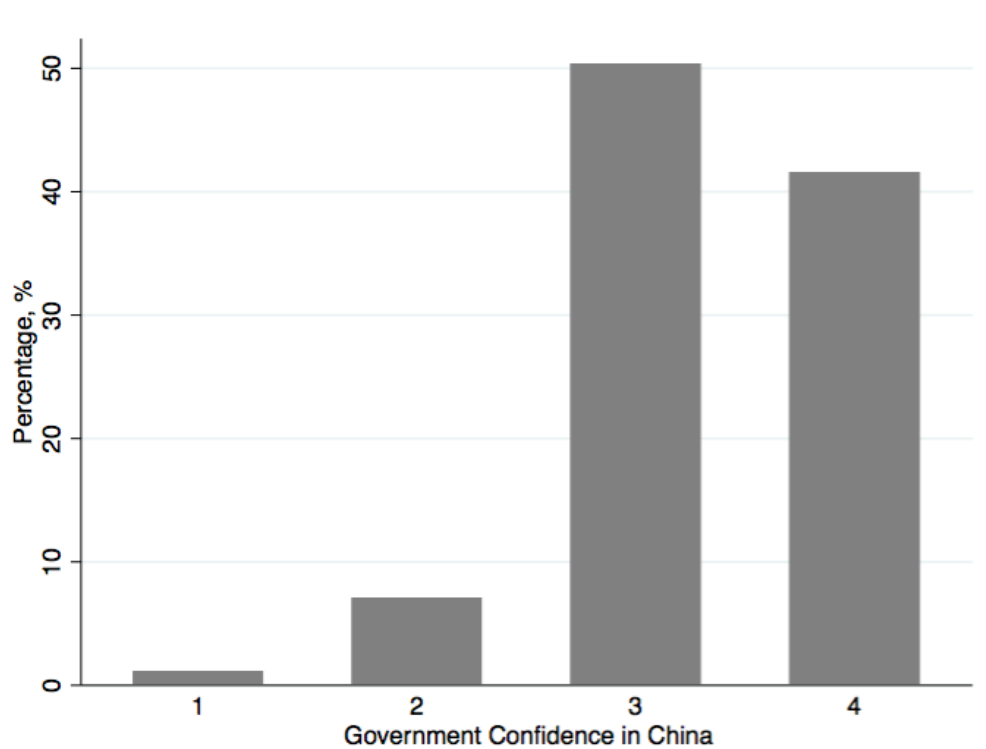


Figure 5. Percentage of people at each level of government confidence in China.

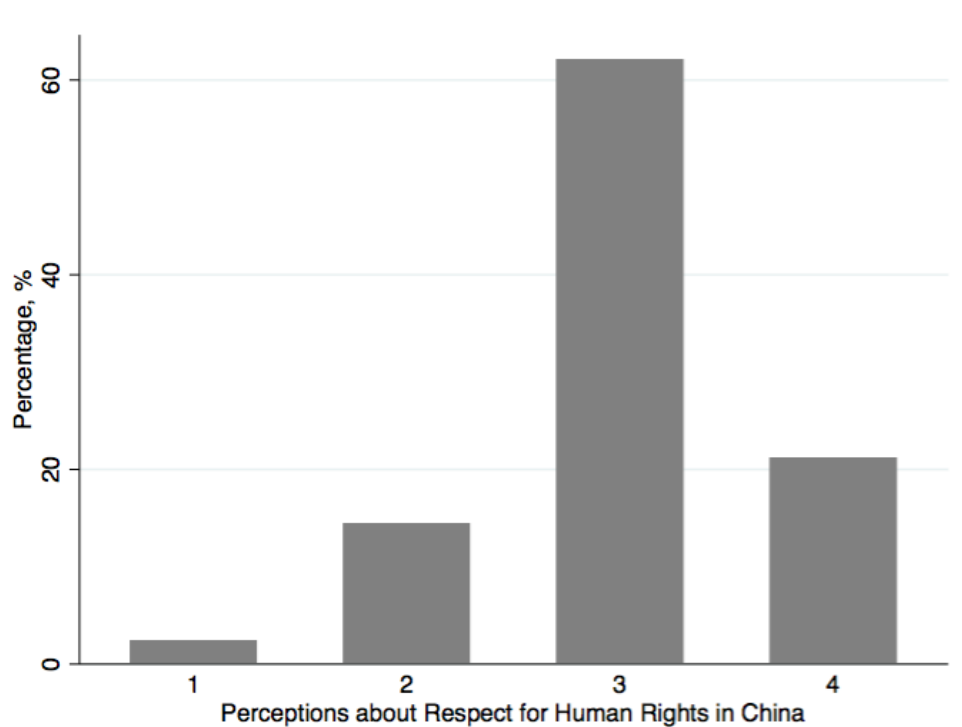


Figure 6. Percentage of people at each level of perceived level of respect for human rights in China.

## 5 Research Design

### 5.1 Data and Measures

To test my hypotheses, I use publicly available data from the World Values Survey. I use the survey data from the latest wave available, Wave 6, which surveys respondents of sixty countries between 2010 and 2014. The WVS is an appropriate source to study the research question because it encompasses various topics and offers 25 questions on political culture, political regimes, political attitudes and other characteristics of a polity and structure. This block of questions, along with other thematic sub-sections, enables an analysis deep enough to find a plausible explanation.

Since the survey does not include all the countries in the world, it is necessary to give a brief overview of the composition of the sample. There are 34 democratic countries (countries which are assigned a score of more than 5 in the Polity IV dataset) and 23 non-democratic states (countries which are assigned a score of less than 6 in the Polity IV dataset). The sampling, surveying and weighting procedures in various countries have slight differences,

which reflect the cultural and political peculiarities of each state. Data on government confidence, perceptions about human rights situation, perceptions about economic situation and financial satisfaction of the household, demographic characteristics come from this source and is based on a random national sample, the size of which depends on the size of the country population. Total sample size accounts for approximately eighty-nine thousand respondents not younger than 18 years. Data is completely anonymous and archived information does not allow to trace respondents in any way.

I also use a variety of additional sources, such as World Bank Data, the Political Terror Scale dataset, Polity IV dataset, data from Transparency International, the Political Instability Task Force Worldwide Atrocities Dataset, and data from Freedom House. The purposes of these datasets will be delineated in later sections.

Since the country surveys were conducted in different years, the data for other country-level variables has been collected respectively. For instance, GDP per capita variable for the respondents from Kazakhstan reflects the GDP level observed in 2011, since this is the year when the survey respondents were collected in this state. The summary statistics for all variables used in this study are provided below:

Variable	Mean	sd	Min	Max
<i>HR Respect</i>	2.602736	.8740782	1	4
<i>Government Confidence</i>	2.379963	.9495865	1	4
<i>Regime type</i>	1.560415	.7366163	1	3
<i>Gender</i>	1.514129	.4998036	1	2
<i>Age</i>	41.50723	16.41902	16	99
<i>Education</i>	5.605194	2.396202	1	9
<i>Corruption</i>	43.23443	20.61409	15	95
<i>HDI</i>	.7339491	.122811	0.478	0.929
<i>GDP per capita</i>	14352.58	16486.83	679.9	67864.6
<i>Financial satisfaction</i>	5.884946	2.474318	1	10
<i>Polity IV score</i>	4.883664	5.457087	-7	10
<i>Freedom House score</i>	3.362543	1.802608	1	6.5
<i>PTS score</i>	2.748996	1.129878	1	5

Table 1. Summary statistics of the dependent and independent variables

### 5.1.1 Dependent variable

Testing my hypotheses requires some measure of individual attitudes regarding respect for human rights in a given country. I take advantage of responses to questions about human rights included in the World Values Survey. To test my hypotheses, I code a categorical variable Human Rights respect (*hrrespect*) using the answers to the following question: “How much respect is there for individual human rights nowadays in this country?” The range of possible answers to this question is from 1 to 4, where 1 means “A great deal of respect for human rights” and 4 means “No respect at all.” For ease of interpretation, I recode and invert these values so that they reflect a more logical ascending, rather than descending, order, where a greater number denotes a higher level of respect for human rights.

### 5.1.2 Independent variables

There are two key independent variables in this study: confidence in the government and regime, as explained by Guriev and Treisman (2018). The following sub-sections will give a more detailed description of operationalization of these two variables.

#### 5.1.2.1 Confidence in government

As the theoretical argument presented above posits, scholars who study confidence in the government believe that it as a rule serves as an informal evaluation of the government performance. It is expected that the levels of confidence would vary across individuals and are determined by a plethora of different factors. What is more important is that this perception about the confidence in the government may also inform other judgments.

To determine how confidence in incumbent government affects one’s perception of human rights situations, I make use of answers to the following question from the WVS Questionnaire:

“I am going to name a number of organizations. For each one, could you tell me

how much confidence you have in them: is it a great deal of confidence, quite a lot of confidence, not very much confidence or none at all?  
 V115. The government (in your nation's capital)"

The answers to this question in the survey have values from 1 to 4, "A great deal of confidence" to "None at all," respectively. I test whether one's confidence in the government coupled with the regime which a respondent finds herself in affects one's estimate of a level of respect for human rights within a state. I recode this variable, Government Confidence (*govconfidence*), so that it represents a more logical relationship where higher values represent higher levels of confidence.

#### 5.1.2.2. Regime

Regime type is known to influence perceptions of the human rights situation. In addition, the political setting might inform the judgment about human rights situation, but in a distinct way: informational environment presented and shaped by the government or independent actors, if any, has the capacity to influence people's judgment. Therefore, in this study, the focus is made on the informational context within each polity – a cross-regime distinction that has been described above in the theoretical framework - and the variable is designed consistently.

To test the effect of the regime on the people's judgments about the human rights situation, I create an ordinal variable, regime type according to Guriev and Treisman's typology (*gtregime*). As the theoretical framework, which I apply in my argument, suggests, there are three possible political settings which differ in terms of the informational context: democracy, informational autocracy and overt dictatorship. I assign the value of 1 to the variable *gtregime*, if a state is a democracy (a state scoring more than 5, according to the Polity IV dataset), 2 if a state is an informational autocracy and 3 if a state is an overt dictatorship. The following distinction between the two latter types is suggested by Guriev and Treisman



and was briefly mentioned above: a non-democratic country can be categorized as an informational autocracy if there have been less than 10 politically motivated killings perpetrated by the government or its agents, or if there are less than 100 political prisoners at any time of the rule of the leader. Otherwise, the country is categorized as an overt dictatorship. As flawed as this categorization strategy may seem, this rough rule of thumb allows to see the difference in the levels of repression, which is the main observable indicator of the mentioned regime peculiarities. Of course, an analysis of leaders' informational strategies would create a more sophisticated categorization, however, at this point implementing such criteria seems infeasible. The data on the number of political killings is taken from the Political Instability Task Force Worldwide Atrocities dataset, which provides quantitative data on the deliberate politically motivated killings of civilians perpetrated by state, non-state or other agents. This dataset covers the time period from 1995 to 2012 and is based on NGOs and news reports

For robustness check, I also collect data from several other sources that create a regime score: Political Terror Scale, Polity IV dataset and Freedom House. These variables are named *pts*, *polity* and *fhscore* respectively and come directly from the abovementioned dataset with no modifications. In two of these measures, *political terror scale* and *freedom house score*, the higher values correspond to higher levels of government repression and human rights abuse. In *polity*, higher values indicate more democracy.

### 5.1.3 Control variables

Apart from the key variables described above, there are a number of other factors that have been identified as alternative explanations in the literature. I include these as controls, which can be divided into two groups: country-level and individual-level.

#### 5.1.3.1 Country-level controls

The first group of measures is intended to account for the country's economic situation. Economic indicators are crucial for at least two reasons. First, the level of economic

development is strongly associated with human rights violations. Poorer states, as reflected by lowed GDP per capita, on average tend to be more abusive in terms of human rights (Poe, Tate and Keith 1999, Carlson and Listhaug 2007). Second, the literature on public opinion formation also demonstrates economic development's strong effect on the political opinions and attitudes (Welzel, Inglehart and Klingemann 2003; Carlson and Listhaug 2007). Those who live in a state which is more economically developed are more likely to have a higher estimate of government's performance across all actors. Also, some scholars studying support for democracy suggest that in non-democratic polities, citizens who belong to the middle class may be discouraged from manifesting support towards the democratic government (Chen and Lu 2011). If any of these propositions holds, this variable is necessary to be included in the model, since it is related to either confidence in the government or perceptions about the level of respect for human rights.

I follow the lead of other scholars exploring this relationship and use the GDP per capita data from the World Bank for my variable *gdpcapita*. Since the levels of GDP per capita seem skewed to the lower side and are not normally distributed, I also include a variable *lngdp*, which is log of GDP per capita from the original variable. As another economic situation indicator, I also include the Human Development Index, *hdi*, to capture a broader definition of economic and life situation, as this index accounts for various aspects that may demonstrate the quality of life within a state. I expect that its effect on the human rights situation perceptions will be in line with the GDP per capita variable.

Another country-level variable that I include in the model is *corruption*, the corruption index, as produced by the Transparency International. The logic behind inclusion of this variable is simple: in countries with higher levels of political corruption, the citizens are more likely to have more negative attitudes towards government performance. The evidence for this relationship has been repeatedly found in the literature (Anderson and Tverdova 2003; Chang

and Chu 2006; Salinas and Booth 2011) and, therefore, since it provides alternative explanations for the level of government confidence and, hence, public judgment about human rights, it is necessary to incorporate it.

#### 5.1.3.2 Individual-level controls

Individual perceptions in any regime type are likely to vary significantly, even in the same country and at the same point in time. This variation stems from several factors, including life experience, personal characteristics, personality traits and other idiosyncrasies. In this regard, I intend to include those individual-level measures that were previously identified in the literature as having a particularly strong effect on the formation of mass attitudes. For instance, Anderson et al. (2005) hypothesize that higher levels of education directly translate into more pessimistic and negative evaluation of the human rights situation within a state. Similar relationship has been mentioned and supported by other scholars (Salinas and Booth 2011; Carlson and Listhaug 2007). Alternatively, some scholars believe that education positively influences the levels of political trust, which shows that the results found in the literature are mixed and inconclusive (Listhaug and Wiberg 1995; Dalton 2004). On one hand, higher level of education may result in more political awareness and therefore a more knowledgeable opinion about human rights abuse. However, on the other hand, more educated persons are more likely to be more well-off, which is likely to lead to a more positive perception about the government in general. Also, since political trust and confidence may inform the opinion about human rights practices, education levels may indirectly affect the later as well. To measure and control for the effect of this variable, *education*, I utilize the answers to the following question on education from the World Values Survey:

“V248. What is the highest educational level that you have attained? [NOTE: if respondent indicates to be a student, code highest level s/he expects to complete]: 1 – No formal education; 2 – Incomplete primary school; 3 – Complete primary school; 4 – Incomplete secondary school: technical/vocational type; 5 - Complete secondary school: technical/vocational type; 6 – Incomplete secondary: university-preparatory type; 7 – Complete secondary: university-preparatory type; 8 – Some

university-level education, without degree; 9 – University-level education, with degree’

Another individual-level variable that I include is the level of satisfaction with the family income, *financial satisfaction*. To account for this, I use the responses to the WVS question “How satisfied are you with the financial situation of the household?” where the answers range from 1, which means “Completely dissatisfied”, to 10, which means “Completely satisfied”. This variable might be useful, since although I have already included country-level characteristic of an economic situation, as it has been mentioned above, individual perceptions are sometimes more complex than the objective measure and may not be informed by the nation-wide reality. Personal satisfaction in turn may be a strong determinant of the evaluation of the government that one may hold.

I also include other demographic characteristics, such as *gender* and *age*, into the model. The variable *gender* takes the value of 1, if the person identifies himself as a male, and 2 if a person identifies herself as a female. As per the *age* variable, it simply uses the responses of individuals to the question about their age. These variables need to be included since there is a persistent trend in the world, as evidenced by research and literature, which attributes the differences in public opinion to these two characteristics. The difference in public opinion formation between the two genders may stem from the cultural and structural specifics found within each state (Inglehart and Norris 2003, 89; Carlson and Listhaug 2007, 473). In terms of people’s perceptions about human rights situation, one possible explanation behind these gender differences might be the fact that discrimination of women may be observed in varying degrees in every state of the world. For instance, Peter and Wolper (1995, 2) state that women are more likely to suffer from the gender-based human rights violations.

Regarding the *age* variable, it is also quite logical and expected: as a result of socio-economic and political changes, the representatives of different generations may base their political attitudes on different factors and hold their opinions to different standards. Following

the example of Carlson and Listhaug (2007, 474), I also view this variable as important to control for.

### *5.2 Model specification*

The unit of analysis is the individual. The data have a nested structure with several levels with countries at the top and individuals at the bottom of the hierarchy. In other words, the data represent a cluster of units (individuals), with units sampled randomly for the survey from a population within a cluster (country). Individuals within one such cluster (country) may differ with respect to socio-economic class, gender, political involvement, etc., and at the same time are subject to the same macro-environment factors on the level of a country, such as an economic prosperity, culture and religion, mentality, etc. This necessitates the use of mixed effects (multilevel) ordered logistic model, which is an extension of ordered logistic regression (Ye and Lord 2014). Ordered probit regression is found to deliver similar results to that of logistic, but the latter allows a more intuitive interpretation of coefficients due to its link function (Peng et al. 2002).

Pooled ordinary least squares model might be an inappropriate choice for the models, as it assumes constant variance of error terms, which includes unobserved factors from both levels of observations (country-level and individual-level). This may result in bias in the coefficients of interests, as variance of unobserved effects on both levels may not be constant (across countries and across individuals). Moreover, it carries a threat of incorrect estimation of standard errors for the coefficients (Skrondal and Rabe-Hesketh 2003). Mixed effects (multi-level) model allows to account for these variances by modeling a random effect on the country level that affects all individuals within this country, effectively taking into account cross-country heterogeneity (Skrondal and Rabe-Hesketh 2003). This allows to account for the differences in the understanding of the concept of human rights that citizens from the different parts of the world may foster.

The models for proposed hypotheses are the following:

Model 1:

$$hrrespect_{ij}^* = \beta_{0j} + \beta_{01}(govconfidence)_{ij} + \beta_{02}(age)_{ij} + \beta_{03}(education)_{ij} + \beta_{04}(sex)_{ij} + \beta_{05}(finsatisfaction)_{ij} + \varepsilon_{ij}$$

$$\text{where } \beta_{0j} = \alpha_{00} + \alpha_{01}(gtregime)_j + \alpha_{02}(lngdp)_j + \alpha_{03}(corruption)_j + \varepsilon_{0j}$$

Models 2-4 are basically the same model as Model 1, but they focus on each regime type separately: Model 2 includes only those countries which are democracies, Model 3 covers those states which are categorized as informational autocracies, and Model 4 includes only overt dictatorships.

Models 5 and 6 test the impact of another measure of the regime, instead of regime typology proposed by Guriev and Treisman (2018): Polity IV score and Freedom House score.

Model 5:

$$hrrespect_{ij}^* = \beta_{0j} + \beta_{01}(govconfidence)_{ij} + \beta_{02}(age)_{ij} + \beta_{03}(education)_{ij} + \beta_{04}(sex)_{ij} + \beta_{05}(finsatisfaction)_{ij} + \varepsilon_{ij}$$

$$\text{where } \beta_{0j} = \alpha_{00} + \alpha_{01}(polity)_j + \alpha_{02}(lngdp)_j + \alpha_{03}(corruption)_j + \varepsilon_{0j}$$

Model 6:

$$hrrespect_{ij}^* = \beta_{0j} + \beta_{01}(govconfidence)_{ij} + \beta_{02}(age)_{ij} + \beta_{03}(education)_{ij} + \beta_{04}(sex)_{ij} + \beta_{05}(finsatisfaction)_{ij} + \varepsilon_{ij}$$

$$\text{where } \beta_{0j} = \alpha_{00} + \alpha_{01}(fhscore)_j + \alpha_{02}(lngdp)_j + \alpha_{03}(corruption)_j + \varepsilon_{0j}$$

When interpreting the results of a mixed effects model, it is important to distinguish top and bottom level factors. Coefficients on country-level factors, such as GDP per capita (*lngdp*) or corruption, estimate the impact on the likelihood that any individual within a given country will perceive his/her country as more democratic or as demonstrating greater respect for human rights. Coefficients on individual-level factors, on the contrary, estimate how individual

factors, such as marital or financial status, affect one's perception of democratic-ness of one's country. The coefficient of interest in this piece, for instance, is an individual-level coefficient. Star superscript in each model specification denotes logit transformation on the dependent variable.

## 6 Results

The results obtained by the multilevel analysis can be found in Table 1. Model 1 includes all variables. In Models 2 through 4, the regime is held constant at democracy (Model 2:  $g_{tregime}=1$ , *democracies (D)*), informational autocracy (Model 3:  $g_{tregime} = 2$ , *informational autocracy (IA)*), and overt dictatorship (Model 4:  $g_{tregime} = 3$ , *overt dictatorship (OD)*). Models 5 and 6 test the impact of an expert-based regime measure (e.g. Polity IV score, Freedom House score) on the public perception about human rights situation within a state. From the table, one may observe that the perceptions about the human rights situation are heavily influenced by the confidence measure: the coefficient on this variable is statistically significant and its magnitude is always high. Consistent with the Hypothesis 2, this effect is consistently positive and substantial across all models. Even when other country-level variables are controlled for, or other expert-based measures of the regime are included, the effect retains its impact as a highly significant predictor of human rights perceptions held by the public.

Further analysis of the Government Confidence variable shows that it is indeed strongly associated with human rights perceptions, irrespective of regime type. The following graphs visualize the effect of this relationship depending on the regime of a state. Figure 7 graphically demonstrates the relationship between the measure of public confidence in the government and the public perception about the human rights situation if all countries are included in the sample. Each increment in public confidence adds approximately between four to six percent on average to the probability that the estimate of the human rights situation within a state will

	Model 1	Model 2 (D)	Model 3 (IA)	Model 4 (OD)	Model 5	Model 6
<i>government confidence</i>	0.502*** (0.008)	0.519*** (0.011)	0.550*** (0.016)	0.345*** (0.020)	0.499*** (0.008)	0.503*** (0.008)
<i>regime type</i>	0.033 (0.142)					
<i>age</i>	-0.001* (0.0004)	-0.001** (0.001)	0.0004 (0.001)	0.000* (0.001)	-0.001* (0.0004)	-0.001*** (0.0004)
<i>gender</i>	-0.042*** (0.013)	-0.105*** (0.017)	0.081*** (0.027)	-0.013 (0.036)	-0.037*** (0.014)	-0.041*** (0.013)
<i>education</i>	0.010*** (0.003)	0.028*** (0.004)	-0.006 (0.007)	0.023*** (0.008)	0.008** (0.003)	0.009*** (0.003)
<i>financial satisfaction</i>	0.086*** (0.003)	0.078*** (0.004)	0.086*** (0.006)	0.118*** (0.008)	0.088*** (0.003)	0.087*** (0.003)
<i>corruption</i>	0.026*** (0.007)	0.035*** (0.009)	0.013 (0.012)	0.043** (0.021)	0.034*** (0.006)	0.036*** (0.007)
<i>log GDP per capita</i>	-0.267** (0.112)	-0.480*** (0.164)	0.165 (0.183)	-0.485** (0.249)	-0.251** (0.110)	-0.192* (0.113)
<i>Polity</i>					-0.062*** (0.016)	
<i>Freedom House score</i>						0.182*** (0.065)

Standard errors are presented in parentheses. p \* < 0.1, p \*\* < 0.05, p \*\*\* < 0.01

Table 2. Results of the mixed effects ordered logistic regression of human rights perceptions.

be high. The increase in the public confidence from 0 to 4 is likely to lead to more than 15% increase in probability of assigning a high estimate of 4 to the human rights situation within a state on average.

Figure 8 represents a similar relationship between confidence in the government and the probability that the public will have a positive opinion about the human rights situation, however to create this graph only democratic countries were included in the model. As seen in the graph, the increase in the level of public confidence in the government by one translates into approximately 5% increase in the probability of assigning the human rights situation the value of 4.



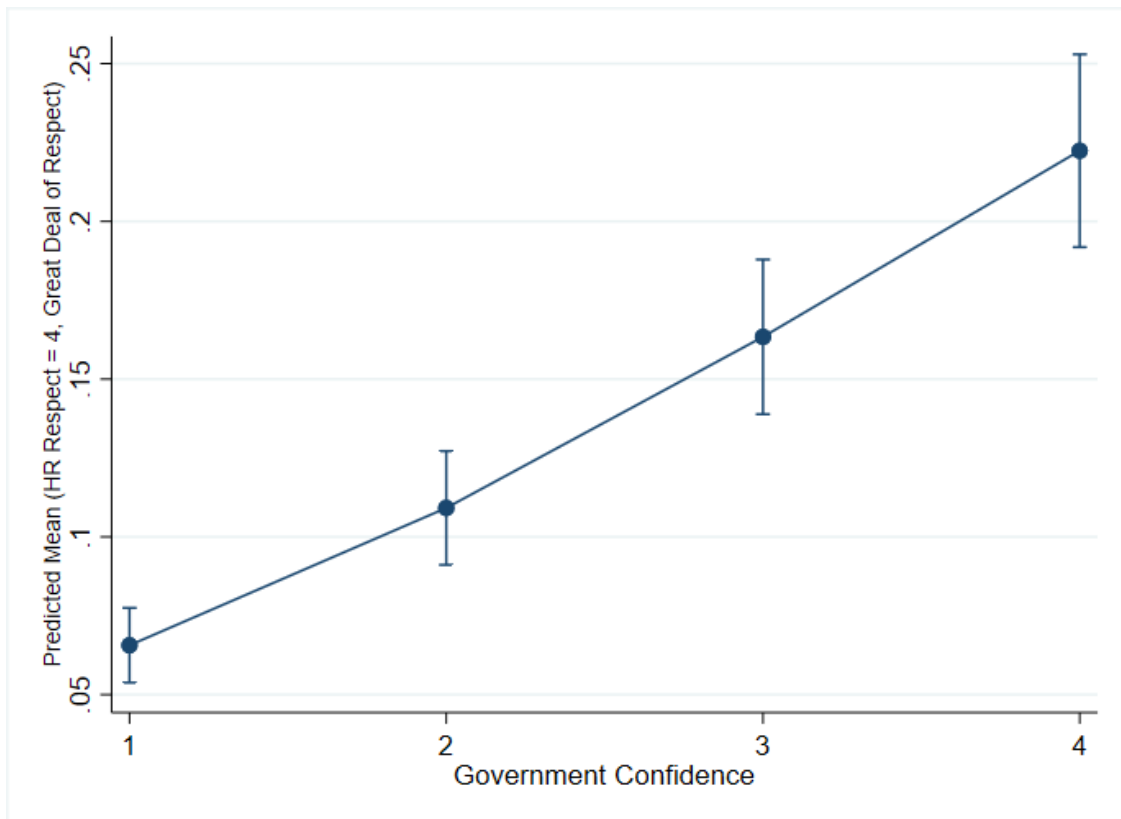


Figure 7. Predicted probability of positive evaluation by level of government confidence across all regimes.

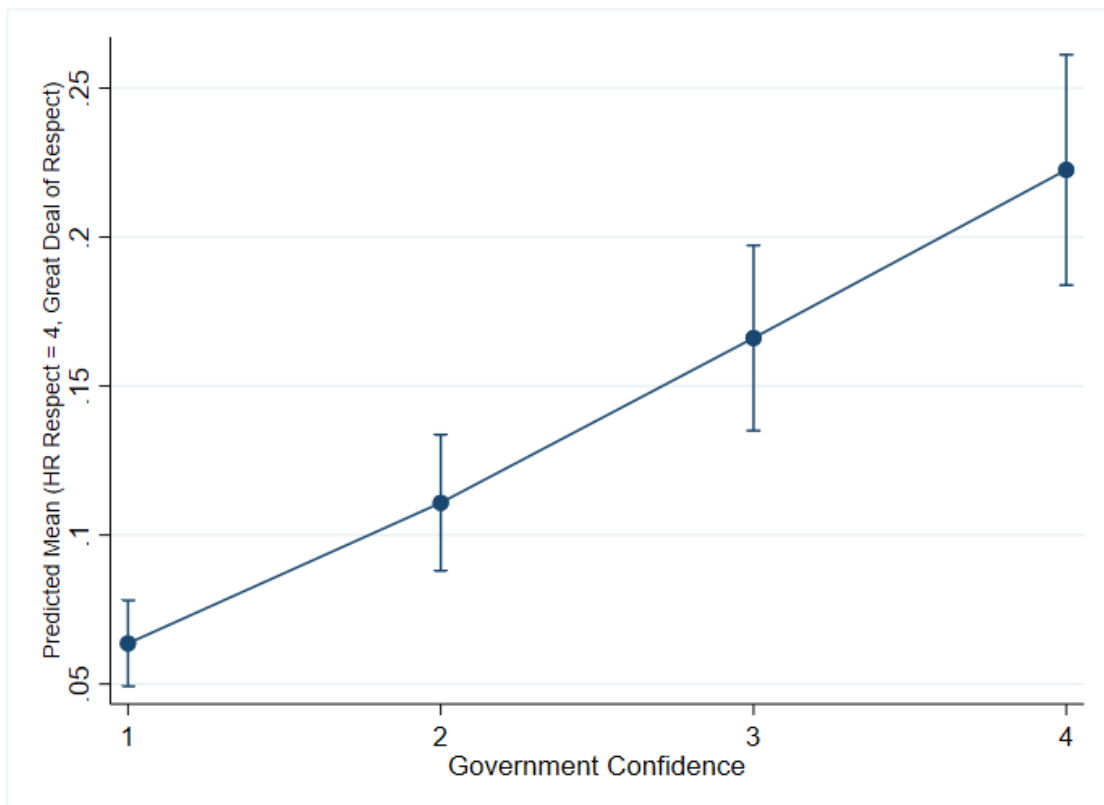


Figure 8. Predicted probability of positive evaluation by level of government confidence in democracies.

Figure 9 covers only countries that were categorized as informational autocracies. Note that the slope of the line has changed slightly. Each 1-point increase in the level of public confidence leads to a greater increase in the probability that a public will hold a highly positive view of the current human rights situation. An increase in the level of confidence from 3 to 4 is likely to lead to almost 10% increase in the probability that a respondent will assign the highest score of 4 to the human rights situation within her state. Increase in the levels of confidence from 0 to 4 leads to more than 18% increase in the probability that the public will hold a high estimate of a human rights situation.

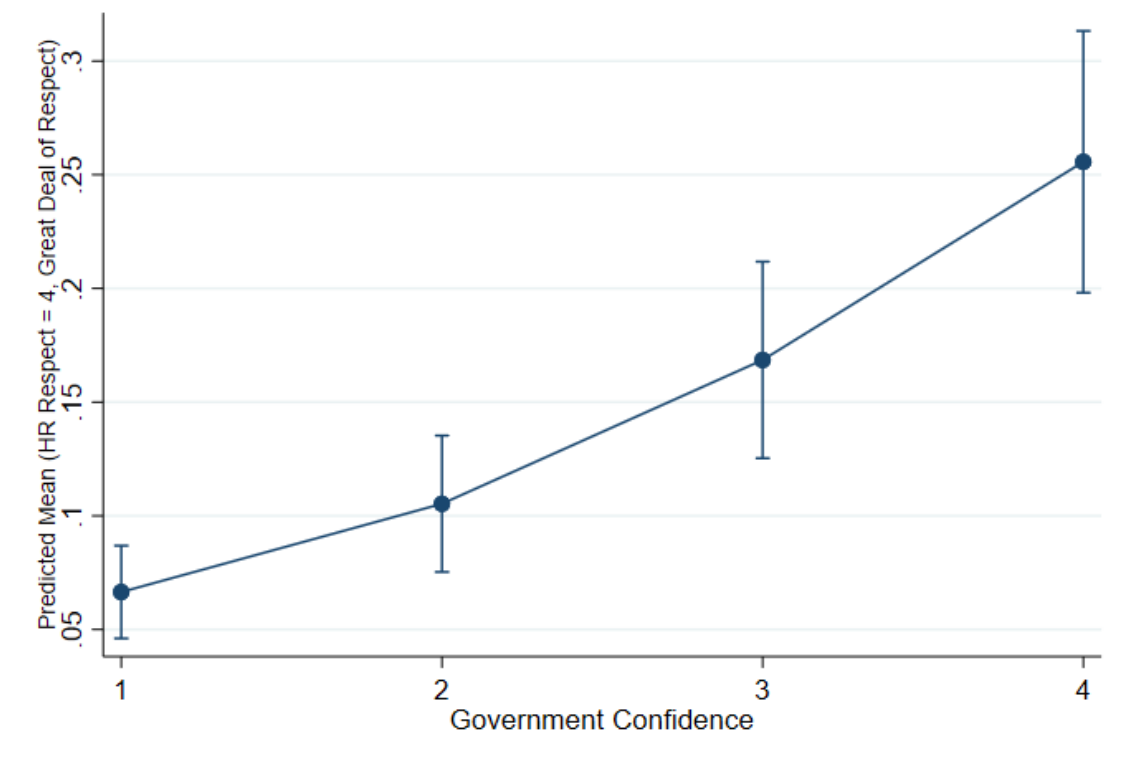


Figure 9. Predicted probability of positive evaluation by level of government confidence in informational autocracies.

Figure 10 focuses on countries which were categorized as overt dictatorships. In this political setting, an increase in public confidence results in the smallest change in the probability of positive evaluation of the human rights situation, as compared to other regime types. In this case, as opposed to informational autocracies, change to the highest level of public confidence translates into the lowest change in the probability: approximately 2%. More

generally, an increase from no confidence to the highest level of confidence possible is observed to result only in 8% increase in the probability of a positive evaluation of the human rights situation in the country. While the hypothesis about the effect of overt dictatorship regime type on human rights perceptions did not find support in this study, this finding lends at least partial support to this proposition, since it demonstrates that the confidence in the government in such polities does not translate into substantially higher estimate of the extent of respect for human rights.

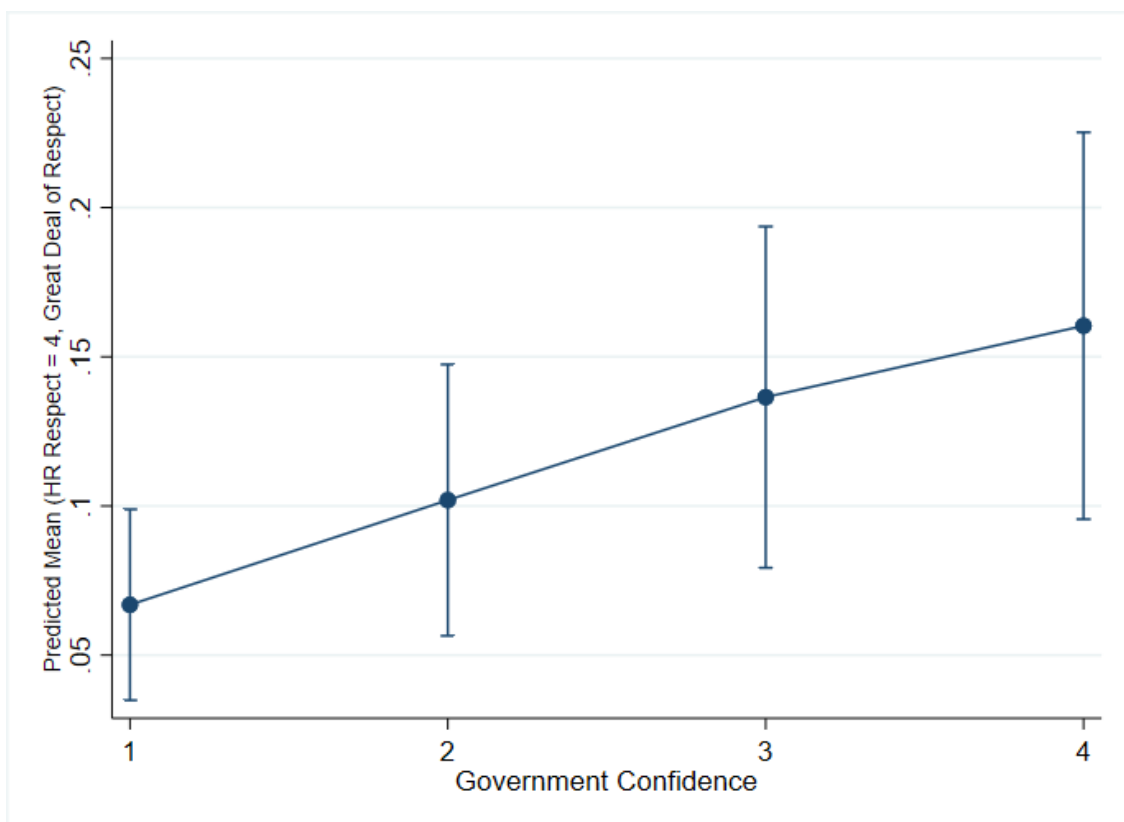


Figure 10. Predicted probability of positive evaluation by level of government confidence in overt dictatorships.

Individual-level variables for *education*, *sex* and *finsatisfaction* are consistently statistically significant. It can be said that all micro-level variables have an impact, except for the variable *age*, which gives inconclusive results. However, the magnitude of almost all individual-level variables is small, except for the variable *finsatisfaction*, the effect of which is much higher than that of other individual-level factors. The country-level variables, *lngdp* and

*corruption*, are statistically significant and their effect is relatively high. Yet, the coefficient on *lngdp* also provides mixed results: it has a negative sign in almost all models, which is runs afoul of the findings from previous literature. The corruption variable also needs to be noted: it retains statistical significance across all models, except for the model focusing on informational autocracies only, though its magnitude is not high. The fact that it is not statistically significant in the IA model again hints at the idea that informational context does matter: in a setting, where human rights violations are accurately concealed, and effective government performance rhetoric and image are broadcasted from the tribunes, screens and media, corruption indices lose their visibility and influence.

Models 5 and 6 demonstrate that the effect of the expert-based measures, such as Polity IV (*polity*) and Freedom House (*fhscore*) has a somewhat mixed effect on the perceptions about human rights. The signs are not in line with the previous literature, as the coefficient on *polity* has a negative sign, while the coefficient on the variable *fhscore*, has a positive sign.

## **7 Discussion**

The results obviate the need to pursue additional research. Only one hypothesis receives solid support from the data at hand: Confidence in the government consistently and significantly influences public perceptions of the human rights situation. As the graphs demonstrate, the impact of confidence in government is the highest in informational autocracies. This is in line with the theoretical argument that I propose: in informational autocracies, people usually have limited knowledge about human rights violations, because the governments use resources to conceal their wrongdoings. Moreover, due to limited knowledge, the public has to rely on other cues to construct their human rights opinion. In overt dictatorships, the effect of confidence in government is not pronounced, which is also predicted by the theory: as much as the public can be confident in the government and whatever this confidence rests upon, they are still aware of government repression, which is why their

perception of the human rights situation is less susceptible to outside influences or cues. This also explains the sudden drop in the size of the coefficient on the *confidence* variable, which can be observed in Table 1. In democracies, the strength of the relationship between public confidence in the government and the probability of a positive judgment about level of respect for human rights is lower than in informational autocracies, but higher than in overt dictatorships. This might be explained by the fact that the perceptions of the public are generally in line with reality, because otherwise the leader is likely to be removed from the office and, as a rule, no information manipulation takes place. However, the coefficient on the variable *gtregime* is not statistically significant, even though the signs on these coefficients are in line with the theoretical argument. I plan to further explore this line of research at a later stage.

The other results also yield several interesting patterns. For instance, the variables *lngdp*, *polity* and *fhscore* are particularly puzzling. First, the variable which concerns the GDP per capita has a negative sign. This might imply that people in richer countries are less likely to believe that their government respects human rights. This, however, would cast doubt on the previous literature that almost universally argues that higher levels of economic development lead to fewer human rights violations and greater satisfaction with government on average. Moreover, this explanation directly contradicts my other finding: the level of satisfaction with the financial situation of the household, *finsatisfaction*, is strongly correlated with public perception of the human rights situation. As the results table shows, its effect is statistically significant across all models, and the effect of this variable is relatively high.

Expert-based measures of the regime, such as *polity* and *fhscore*, also contradict the literature. Coefficients on both these variables imply that countries where democratic institutions are weaker and more human rights violations occur are more likely to give a higher estimate of the human rights situation within their states. Of course, it might be the case that

people in such countries are giving a higher estimate merely because they are afraid of the repercussions that an honest answer might entail. Yet, I believe that relegating such phenomenon to fear and intimidation exclusively may overlook an interesting pattern that exists, and there should be a more sophisticated argument involved.

### *7.1 Limitations*

The concern repeated in the literature before has been that results are based on a single question from a survey. Indeed, this project assumes that the dependent variable is built upon one question: “How much respect is there for individual human rights nowadays in this country?”. One way could be to follow the example of Carlson and Listhaug (2007) and to incorporate additional dependent variables. In their work, Carlson and Listhaug (2007, 470) broke human rights down into categories and drew a line between various types of human rights (e.g. civil, political, welfare, etc.). In order to do this, they have employed the block of question from the Gallup survey, where the respondents had to answer six questions related to human rights mentioned in the Universal Declaration for Human Rights. From the answers obtained in this survey, the authors have compiled a new dependent variable by taking the average of the respondents’ answers to each question. This measure can indeed help provide a more sophisticated analysis of human rights perceptions, as it will indicate which categories possibly have greater weight in the general unified perception. Thus, this modification can be implemented at later stages of research.

Also, it needs to be noted that an “informational autocracy” is an ideal type. Therefore, some countries which were categorized as such on the basis of the number of political killings only, may not manifest all the characteristics of this regime type. An ideal strategy in such circumstances would be to analyze the informational tactics of each non-democratic leader and to adjust the breakdown based on these tactics instead, however, at this point of research this has been an insurmountable task.

## 8 Conclusion

This research project explores the factors that influence perceptions that people hold about the human rights situation in their countries. While this piece falls into the broader field of public opinion research, it also puts political differences in the limelight. Previously, the literature which set out to explore this topic, suggested that there is a direct link between the levels of repression and the public opinion. However, as the reality and this piece of research as well demonstrate, the relationship is not that simple.

I have incorporated findings from prior studies to provide a more comprehensive perspective on how perceptions about human rights practices of the government are formed. I have argued here that it is the informational context within the state, which is determined by the regime, is what determines the public evaluation of government performance. This evaluation in turn may or may not inform public opinion. I sought to uncover whether there is a more sophisticated categorization of regimes, rather than democracy-non-democracy dichotomy, and how this new categorization may shape public opinion. In order to do this, I have utilized the answers from the World Values Survey and a variety of other datasets to corroborate the data from WVS.

Multi-level analysis demonstrates that, indeed, confidence in government is a strong correlate of human rights perceptions, and there are differences in the effect of this measure, depending on the type of the regime and the informational context associated with it. To see this, I also run a separate test for the influence of confidence within each particular political setting and the results support my theoretical argument, at least partially. Stronger support for this argument would imply that it is not the culture that shapes human rights perceptions as has been frequently argued, but rather the information manipulation which varies from country to country.

In general, trends in human rights perceptions uncovered here align with theoretical

expectations derived from Guriev and Treisman's framework. Although I have not yet examined and established the causal relationship between confidence, regime and human rights perceptions, I hope this can be tackled further with this project. This research project has also uncovered several interesting patterns which I hope to consider at later stages. Another direction in which this study may evolve is to consider the subtypes of democratic states as well. While in my thesis I have focused only on subtypes of non-democracies, it might also be the case that similar subtypes exist within democracies as well. The division within democracies may go along various lines: there are differences in partisan systems, representativeness, stability and consolidation of democracies that might contribute to democratization research program, if analyzed further.

As mentioned in the introduction, the implications behind this research project may prove particularly relevant for regime and democratization literature, since provides insight into why in some non-democratic states the public does not advocate greater human rights respect and does not demand that the government stops human rights abuse. My approach also uncovers the political psychology mechanisms of public opinion formation. As the literature suggests, public opinion may come as uninformed and built upon other cues. Since in this project public confidence in the government served as a crucial cue, a later stage of research may incorporate the dissection of the confidence measure, which might help see which of the factors is weighted the strongest in this consideration. Given that human rights violations all over the world are on the rise, further research on human rights perceptions should incorporate all available explanations and elements to build a more comprehensive theory of why the public turns a blind eye to human rights abuse.



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