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The construction of human rights actorhood: Findings from the Korean General Social Survey

Jeong-Woo Koo
Sungkyunkwan University

ABSTRACT
This article investigates the sources of human rights “actorhood”—the extent to which people understand, support and implement human rights—by examining a novel human rights survey that was embedded in the 2011 Korean General Social Survey. My research uses ordinary-least-squares regression analyses to explore the factors that lead to individual differences in awareness and engagement. I employ four broad theoretical frameworks to explain the determinants of human rights orientations: realism, cultural factors, psychology, and world polity. My results suggest that multiple theoretical frameworks collectively contribute to a better grasp of what shapes human rights actorhood in South Korea. In particular, global polity and psychological elements have strong effects on awareness and engagement, while human rights education, religion, and socioeconomic factors have less of an effect than we might assume. This article emphasizes the importance of human agency, suggesting that the analysis of individual human rights orientations can help to bolster both awareness of and engagement in the global human rights movement.

Introduction
In the last decade, human rights scholarship has started to address individual perceptions of and attitudes towards human rights (McFarland and Mathews 2005a; Koo et al. 2015). In addition, scholars are increasingly using surveys and survey experiments as a way of understanding the human rights orientations of individual persons (Zhou 2013; Kreps 2014; Ron and Crow 2015). Inspired by this new scholarship, this article examines the results from a novel human rights survey that was conducted in South Korea in 2011. I use the concept of human rights actorhood to capture the human capacity for understanding, supporting, and implementing human rights standards, and, in this work, I focus on two of these properties: awareness and engagement. Specifically, this research seeks to unravel the factors that lead to individual differences in levels of awareness and engagement, which are analyzed as the two dependent variables.

The human rights survey I analyze was included in the 2011 Korean General Social Survey (KGSS) as a special module, and it helps address the limitations of the existing polls on human rights. Past surveys and/or questionnaires on public opinion of human rights generally include either macrolevel explanatory variables or primarily microlevel psychological covariates, but not both (McFarland and Mathews 2005b; Koo et al. 2015). Few analyses have directly compared the relative contributions of each set of variables. Moreover, only
a few surveys have simultaneously considered the influence of both attitudinal and behavioral measures (Hertel et al. 2009).

I systematically review four explanations of what determines human rights actorhood—rationalist, cultural, psychological, and world polity—that provide clearly formulated hypotheses. I maintain that various theoretical sources—both local and global, macro and micro—collectively explain what shapes human rights actorhood. This article, first and foremost, accentuates the importance of human agency in bolstering the strength of global human rights. Understanding individual human rights orientations—and the variables that shape them—will further legitimize the human rights movement and its importance in people’s daily lives.

The rise of human rights surveys in South Korea

South Korea has inherited a strong state tradition, maintained a Confucian social order, and faces a continuing conflict with a communist North Korean neighbor—a combination of factors that make it difficult to incorporate universal human rights norms into culture and governance (Neary 2002). Nevertheless, South Korea recently took part in an unusual and comprehensive human rights survey. This unusual effort seems to have been closely associated with the adoption of several global policy measures during the first decade of the 2000s, including establishing an official human rights watchdog in 2001, embracing global citizenship ideas in school curricula, and adopting a results-based evaluation system for public policies (Moon and Koo 2011). Consequently, South Korea underwent a remarkable shift from a country with a low human rights profile in the 1980s and 1990s to one with the level of human rights observance comparable to the West by the early 2000s (Koo et al. 2012).

After the adoption of the National Human Rights Commission of Korea (NHRCK) in 2001 under the leadership of President Kim Dae Jung, a Nobel Laureate, the country experienced a breakthrough around human rights. The government received and investigated tens of thousands of individual complaints annually, in addition to reviewing laws and policies to ensure their alignment with human rights and developing national action plans on human rights (Cho 2002). In 2005, NHRCK conducted the first human rights survey, which planted the seeds for subsequent improved efforts at capturing public opinion on rights, despite the survey’s considerable limitations. The greatly refined 2011 National Human Rights Survey of South Korea (NHRSK) substantially improved upon the previous surveys by addressing multiple dimensions of human rights orientations as well as their contributing individual traits (Koo et al. 2015).

Following these initial methodological improvements, researchers made further efforts to create human rights indicators and to compile human rights statistics, with the aim of linking scientific methods and techniques to human rights monitoring and assessment. NHRCK conducted various surveys and interviews in order to monitor human rights observance for groups such as prisoners, military soldiers, school pupils, the disabled, prostitutes, migrant workers, and foreign brides. Now the language of human rights has deeply and widely penetrated the institutional, social, and even private life of South Korean people (Koo and Kim 2015).

Inspired by these initiatives, I designed a human rights survey module and integrated questions about human rights into a large nationally representative survey: The Korean General Social Survey (KGSS) conducted by the Survey Research Center (SRC) at Sungkyunkwan University in 2011. The human rights module was composed of 48 questions that asked 1,535 respondents about their awareness, attitudes, and self-reported behavior regarding human rights. The strength of this human rights survey as part of a larger social survey was that it considered a much wider array of explanatory variables concerning individual perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors.

Several notable limitations are present when considering key questions in this human rights survey. The questions designed to capture the level of knowledge or awareness may generate social desirability biases; that is, respondents may be inclined to say they know something even when they do not. Thus, these questions could inadvertently measure respondents’ willingness to look knowledgeable, rather than directly measuring their actual knowledge about human rights. Furthermore, the questions included to measure the level of behavior tend to mix the levels of participation and willingness to participate. Nonetheless, the KGSS human rights module offers some important lessons to the human rights research community.
Figure 1 shows the averaged percentages of respondents who said that they were aware of human rights situations at home and abroad and of the fact that human rights are protected in the national constitution. Thirty-seven percent of the respondents answered that they “know very well or somewhat know well” the human rights situation in Korea, but only 25 percent responded that “they know very well or somewhat know well” the human rights situations abroad. When asked how much they knew about the fact that human rights are enshrined in the national constitution, however, 49 percent of respondents answered positively. As noted above, these percentages might inflate the extent to which respondents are knowledgeable about human rights and, consequently, a more sophisticated measurement of knowledge or awareness needs to be used in the future surveys.

Figure 2 displays the extent to which respondents were engaged in or were willing to engage in rights-promoting events, such as signing petitions, posting opinions online, participating in protests, and funding civil society organizations. The findings suggest that more than half of the respondents had already participated in or were willing to participate in human rights activities. Since this question obviously conflates behavior and attitudes, it is important to consider only the behavioral component: 35 percent of the respondents had actually signed petitions. An examination of the actual engagements—excluding willingness to engage—in the four types of participation shows that engagement was actually quite low at less than 10 percent.

![Figure 1. Level of awareness of human rights: The 2011 KGSS Human Rights Module.](image1)

![Figure 2. Level of engagement in human rights: The 2011 KGSS Human Rights Module.](image2)
Theories and hypotheses

To construct my hypotheses, I examine four lines of thought that predict the differences among human rights actors: realism, cultural accounts, psychology, and world polity institutionalism. First, I consider a realist account that stresses the influence of individual self-interest and social groups. Individuals are presumed to be natural actors and to pursue their interests—maximizing benefits and minimizing costs—and, similarly, social groups are viewed as pursuing their collective interests (Ignatieff 2001; Valentino 2011). A variant of this realist view considers sociodemographic characteristics (e.g., gender, age, and race/ethnicity) as major sources of difference in human rights actorhood. The rationale is that marginalized demographic groups (e.g., women, young people, and racial/ethnic minorities) are more likely to be mistreated than majority groups and thus have a higher propensity to turn to human rights mechanisms to defend their common interests.

The other variant of the realist account focuses on the effects of individual socioeconomic status (SES) on human rights orientations. A well-known Marxist assumption is that lower income and less-educated groups, as well as those in less prestigious occupations, are economically and socially disadvantaged and often maltreated. As a result, they are conditioned (in theory) to develop a higher consciousness of alternative social values and to take action in defense of these values.

If sociodemographic and SES factors operate as social structures that assure or constrain individual or group interests, then actual discriminatory experiences serve as an obvious impetus for raising awareness of and/or motivating engagement in human rights. It is true that sociodemographic and SES traits might be correlated with individuals’ discriminatory experiences, but the experiences are important in their own right. Indeed, experiences have independent effects on the degree to which human rights are acknowledged and exercised.

Building on the arguments from the past studies that right-wing authoritarianism facilitates negative attitudes toward human rights via its emphasis on group interests and social control, many studies in human rights attitudes have considered the effects of political ideology (McFarland and Mathews 2005b). Researchers argued that the key principles of political liberalism relative to conservatism are largely in line with equity, egalitarianism, and greater freedoms embedded in human rights ideals (Moghaddam and Vuksanovic 1990). Compared with conservatives, liberals tend to regard more rights as inviolable (e.g., rights of homosexuals, migrants, and ethnic minorities). At the core of this reasoning is a rationalist understanding that disadvantaged social groups rely on the use of liberal ideologies to protect and promote their entitlements:

\[ H1: \text{Human rights awareness and engagement levels are higher for individuals who are (a) younger, (b) women, (c) lower income earners, (d) less educated, (e) individuals with lower occupational prestige, (f) individuals with discriminatory experiences, and (g) individuals with more liberal political views.} \]

Cultural accounts, as the second dominant explanation, focus on norms, rules, principles, and social relations beyond self-interest. That is, belief systems and network arrangements shape the ways in which individuals respond to human rights (Putnam 2000; Stacy 2009). Human rights actorhood in this case arises out of the shared principles and norms, reciprocity, and social relations in which individual actors are embedded. These socially constructed forces awaken and moderate interest-driven individuals. In turn, socially and culturally constructed individuals and social groups moderate the workings of autonomous, interest-driven actors.

Cultural sociologists have long examined religious belief systems and how they shape social life and bring about social change. Human rights scholars have also considered religious faith in explaining human rights orientations, and their findings appear to be mixed. Some research suggests that religious conservatism is associated with lower concern for human rights, although some studies report no relations between religiosity and concern for human rights (Moghaddam and Vuksanovic 1990). My recent work (Koo et al. 2015) compared Christian and Buddhist groups—the two largest religious populations in Korea—with nonreligious groups in Korea and found that distinct religious segments showed diverse effects depending on the particular properties of human rights actorhood (e.g., I found positive effects of Buddhism on awareness and of Christianity on engagement).
In this cultural line of thought, scholars began to explore the linkages between social capital and human rights orientations. Robert Putnam (2000) maintains that social capital is composed of three interacting elements—social networks, norms of reciprocity, and trust. The latter tends to be viewed as most essential to making social capital work because this cultural device facilitates cooperation as the bond for social networks. My previous work (Koo et al. 2015) emphasizes the importance of generalized trust (i.e., trust in other people) in the sense that it triggers the exchange of key information and the widespread delivery of human rights norms. Alongside this functional character, generalized trust nurtures regard for others, which subsequently leads to cooperation and collaboration. Studies show that greater trust propels increased civic engagement (Hyman 2002; Kapucu 2011):

\[ H2: \text{Human rights awareness and engagement levels are higher for individuals who (a) are religious (either Christians or Buddhists), (b) have greater trust in other social groups or (c) have greater trust in social institutions.} \]

The third prominent explanation for human rights behavior is psychology. Indeed, psychological investigation spearheaded the early discovery of the multidimensionality of human rights attitudes, which was an innovation in the study of human rights (Getz 1985; Moghaddam and Vuksanovic 1990; Diaz-Veizades et al. 1995). Nonetheless, the chasm between psychological and social scientific research remains striking, and few studies have considered both psychological and nonpsychological factors simultaneously. I seek to fill this empirical gap by controlling for these two sets of covariates in the same equations.

Psychologists recently called attention to postconventional moral reasoning—which accepts the ideas of social contracts and universal ethical principles—as well as dispositional (i.e., cognitive/emotional) empathy as predictors of how supportive individuals will be of human rights (McFarland and Mathews 2005a, 2005b; Pinker 2011). Building on Lawrence Kohlberg’s claim regarding the stages of moral development in which individuals might problematize their cultural morality, realize cultural relativity and engage in principled moral reasoning at the postconventional stage, scholars maintain that individuals with principled moral reasoning are more likely to be concerned with human rights. Similarly, those who view others’ circumstances with compassion and understanding seem particularly likely to be attuned to human rights norms and practices:

\[ H3: \text{Human rights awareness and engagement are greater among individuals who display (a) postconventional reasoning and (b) dispositional empathy.} \]

The fourth explanatory framework is world polity institutionalism, which perceives human rights actors’ capacities and responsibilities as embedded in wider cultural systems, rather than immediate cultural environments, as well as innate and rational human characteristics (Meyer and Jepperson 2000; Koo and Ramirez 2009; Ramirez et al. 2009; Meyer 2010). This framework attributes the rapidly enhanced standing of human persons and their human rights responsibilities to global cultural development, as well as to the choices of individuals with agency (Cole 2006; Elliott 2007; Bromley et al. 2011).

Scholars have considered a number of mechanisms through which human rights actorhood is mobilized through the operation of the world polity. My previous work emphasized the influence of global citizenship, which is largely nurtured through human rights education (Suárez et al. 2009; Kamens 2012). Expanding this logic of appropriateness, the extent to which individuals prioritize the roles of international actors (e.g., intergovernmental organizations [IGOs] and international nongovernmental organizations [INGOs]) is contingent on the degree to which individuals know human rights and act according to this universal value system. Similarly, the extent to which individuals are settled in residential areas with higher global acceptance matters in characterizing human rights actorhood:

\[ H4: \text{Human rights awareness and engagement levels are higher for individuals who (a) reside in metropolitan areas, (b) have received human rights education, (c) endorse global institutions and (d) perceive themselves as “global citizens.”} \]
**Data and methods**

The survey data for my study come from the 2011 Korean General Social Survey conducted by the Survey Research Center of Sungkyunkwan University. The 2011 KGSS included a special human rights module composed of 48 questions relating to human rights. This module was funded by the Social Science Korea (SSK) Human Rights Forum, a global human rights research cluster where I serve as the manager. Initiated in 2003 and modeled on the General Social Survey (GSS) from the United States, the KGSS is considered the most reliable social survey in South Korea (Kim and Mueller 2010). It is embedded in a nationally representative sample and conducted annually through face-to-face interviews. Since the KGSS closely replicates the GSS and seeks to fulfill requirements of International Social Studies Programs (ISSP) and the East Asian Social Survey (EASS), its top priority is to have an unbiased national sample drawn by full probability sampling procedures. The KGSS works diligently to avoid a more convenient quota sample by age and gender, as this form of sampling often leads to biases.

The 2011 KGSS survey, conducted from July to August 2011, was specifically aimed at randomly selected South Korean adults aged 18 years of age or older who live in households in South Korea. From this population, a total of 2,000 individuals were originally sampled by a three-stage stratified cluster probability sampling: the total number of sample blocks (or clusters) was 200, and then about 10 individuals were sampled from each block. From each household, researchers selected the youngest adult as a survey subject. Of the 2,000 households targeted, enumerators interviewed a final sample of 1,315. The multistage element in this sampling procedure helps to narrow down the hierarchically stratified geographic areas into a manageable number of sample blocks, thereby enhancing the sample representativeness and maximizing the efficiency of fieldwork operations. Given that many studies of human rights orientations, especially psychological studies, rely on small samples (Crowson 2004; Diaz-Veizades et al. 1995; McFarland and Mathews 2005), this sampling method gives the KGSS considerable strength.

Since the human rights module was newly added to the KGSS in 2011, comparing human rights answers across time is not feasible yet. Some research compares the KGSS results to the 2005 and 2011 human rights surveys sponsored by NHRCK, but the substantial differences in sampling procedures lead to biased results and/or comparisons. A systematic and unbiased temporal comparison can be achieved best through including standard human rights items in globally and regionally recognized social surveys, such as the GSS, ISSP, and EASS, which now rarely allocate spaces for human rights issues. The other limitations include a possibility of the presence of social desirability biases—that is, the existence of respondents claiming to be well informed about and supportive of human rights because answering positively seems like the “right” way to answer.1

**Dependent variables**

I examined two dependent variables that tap two crucial segments of human rights actorhood: awareness and engagement. The former is required to facilitate and guide the latter, and both properties might be perceived as the most consequential among all of the elements that constitute human rights orientations, including support and commitment. Awareness is required not only to take proper action but also to express opinions (support) and to commit to a particular cause (commitment), whereas engagement concerns what motivates someone to take action spurred by all of the cognitive characteristics.

I asked respondents the following questions to gauge their levels of awareness of human rights: (1) How often have you heard about the Universal Declaration of Human Rights promulgated by the UN? \((1 = \text{very often}, 2 = \text{once or twice}, 3 = \text{never})\); (2) How much do you know about the protection of basic human rights being upheld in the constitution of the Republic of Korea? \((1 = \text{very well}, 2 = \text{somewhat well}, 3 = \text{little}, 4 = \text{not at all})\); (3) How familiar are you with Korea’s human rights situation? And finally, (4) How familiar are you with human rights situations worldwide? Questions 3 and 4 were coded from \(1 = \text{very much}\) to \(4 = \text{not at all}\). For the analysis, I reversed the coding so that higher scores
would indicate higher levels of human rights awareness. I then used the mean value of the four items as the first dependent variable to capture the property of awareness.

To capture engagement—self-reported human rights activities—I asked respondents whether they and their family members had participated in or were willing to participate in such rights-promoting activities as (1) signature collection, (2) posting opinions online, (3) street demonstrations, and (4) funding civic organizations. The response categories were coded as 1 = participated, 2 = willing to participate, and 3 = neither participated nor willing to participate. I reversed and summed the scales to produce a continuous variable that measures the extent to which individuals engaged in or exhibited willingness to engage in rights-promoting activities. Importantly, this engagement variable contains both behavioral aspects and attitudinal traits. I intentionally conflated these two dimensions because “the willingness to participate” is highly relevant to interpreting (self-reported) behavior. As a comparison, consumer studies often use “willingness-to-pay questions” as relevant to consumer behavior. Hertel et al. (2009) also use willingness to pay for environmentally friendly products as a proxy for the dimension of action.2

**Independent variables**

The realist account broadly comprises four clusters of variables. The first is the sociodemographic factors of (1) age and (2) gender. Socioeconomic status, as the second cluster, is captured by (1) household income, (2) years of education, and (3) having a professional or managerial job (using a dummy variable). The third cluster centers on whether the respondents had experienced any of the eight types of discrimination (by social status, education, gender, age, religion, place of birth or residential area, physical appearance, and sexual harassment), and this discriminatory experience was measured with a dummy variable, with 1 (experience of at least one type of discrimination) or 0 (no experience) as the responses. The last cluster concerned the respondents’ political orientations and used the question “How liberal or conservative do you think are you in terms of political orientation?” The five-category scale ranged from 1 = very liberal to 5 = very conservative and was reversed to assign higher scores for those with more liberal political views.

The variables that captured the influence of culture were divided into (1) religious predictors and (2) social capital variables. The former was measured by two dummy variables for Buddhists and Christians (either Protestants or Catholics), compared to those with no religious affiliation as the reference category. The social capital predictors were respondents’ trust in (1) their fellow citizens and (2) public institutions. For trust in citizens, I asked, “Do you think you can trust the people around you or should you be cautious about them?” This was measured on a five-category scale that ranged from 1 = cautious all the time to 5 = trustful all the time. For institutional trust, I factor-analyzed the respondents’ levels of trust in 16 public social institutions and determined the common factor of respondents’ trust in the following seven institutions: large corporations, educational institutions, medical institutions, upper courts, academics, the military, and financial institutions. This common factor was used as an independent variable.

The third cluster adapted a psychological approach that attributes individual human rights traits to internal psychological characteristics such as moral reasoning, empathy, social dominance, and authoritarianism. The data availability allowed for measuring two centrally important psychological processes in this study: postconventional moral reasoning and dispositional empathy. The postconventional reasoning was constructed from the sum of the four items that asked respondents to rate the importance of considering individuals and their opinions in policymaking processes (1 = not important to 5 = very important). The specific issues were (1) equal treatment, (2) public opinion, (3) public participation, and (4) civic disobedience. In contrast, dispositional empathy was constructed by the sum of the three questions that measured respondents’ understanding of and sympathy with others’ situations, rated from 1 = little to 5 = very much for (1) people who are unhappy, (2) people who are often deceived by others, and (3) the desire to help people in need.

The last cluster of variables corresponded to the world polity account that attributes the formation of individual human rights traits to wider, global cultural scripts. The culture, in this line of thought, goes beyond the obvious boundaries of national societies and is rather embedded in cultural principles created by the global society. I considered the four variables that would capture the extent to which the respondents were connected to
the larger global society: (1) whether they lived in metropolitan vs. rural areas, (2) whether they had received any human rights education, (3) global endorsement (the extent of support of IGOs or INGOs), and (4) their perception of being “global citizens.” I first created a dummy variable to measure area of residence, assuming that individuals in metropolitan areas were more exposed to global cultures and institutions. I also created a dummy variable for human rights education, with the thinking that persons with human rights education experience were also more exposed to world cultures. The third world polity variable stemmed from the question asking respondents how they perceive the activities of such global IGOs and INGOs as the United Nations, the World Bank, and Amnesty International (the scale was reverse scored from 1 = very positive to 5 = very negative). The more positively participants perceived these global agencies the more closely linked they were to the world cultural scripts. Finally, I measured the extent of global citizenship by asking “How closely do you feel you are a global citizen?” The scale ranges from 1 = far away to 5 = very close.

Table 1 provides descriptive statistics for the dependent and independent variables used for the analyses. The correlation coefficients among these variables are provided in Appendix Table A1.

### Results

Table 2 shows the estimates from the ordinary least squares (OLS) regression models that predicted individual differences in human rights awareness and engagement. Model 1 concerned the results for awareness and Model 2 concerned those for engagement. These models control for all the variables that derive from the four theoretical lines of argument and are measured for testing the corresponding hypotheses. Model 1 accounts for 30% ($R^2 = .301$) of the variance while Model 2 accounts for 22% ($R^2 = .218$), suggesting that the data support the awareness model more than the engagement model, a finding consistent with what other researchers have found (Koo et al. 2015).

The variables derived from the realist account show mostly statistically significant effects in Models 1 and 2. Of crucial importance, however, is that the effects of the sociodemographic and SES variables were primarily in the opposite directions from the hypothesized statements. Young people and women showed lower levels of awareness than did older citizens and men, and those with lower SES were actually less likely to have heightened awareness of or to behave according to human rights. Strikingly, in the awareness model, education and occupation showed statistically positive effects, but income did not.

However, the realist account finds its robust explanatory power when considering discriminatory experiences as well as ideological orientations. The experience of discrimination as well as having a

### Table 1. Descriptive statistics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Human Rights Awareness</td>
<td>2.37</td>
<td>.592</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Rights Engagement</td>
<td>1.82</td>
<td>.487</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>1.425</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female(d)</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>.500</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income(ln)</td>
<td>5.71</td>
<td>1.025</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative/Specialized Occupation(d)</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td>.464</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>12.99</td>
<td>3.750</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiences with Discrimination(d)</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>.467</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Ideology</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>.988</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhist(d)</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.440</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian(d)</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>.471</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Trust</td>
<td>2.40</td>
<td>.723</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Trust</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>.364</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Conventional Reasoning(ln)</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td>.182</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>2.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dispositional Empathy</td>
<td>4.01</td>
<td>.675</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan(d)</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>.472</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Rights Education(d)</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>.491</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global Endorsement</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>.563</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global Citizenship</td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>.739</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. N = 944. All “d” letters in parentheses represent dummy variables; all “ln” letters represent natural log.*
The liberal political viewpoint showed statistically significant positive effects on both awareness and engagement in the anticipated directions. Participants who had experienced discrimination and who were informed by liberal political views not only knew more about human rights but were also more likely to calibrate their actions in line with human rights. That discriminatory experience has a robust effect is highly interesting since this has rarely been measured and tested in other studies. It is notable that the experience of discriminatory treatments appears to motivate respondents to have higher willingness and/or higher propensity to act. In sum, my findings supported some of the statements in Hypothesis 1, specifically that discrimination and ideology affect awareness and engagement. But others, such as the influence of socioeconomic and sociodemographic factors, require rethinking about how realist factors are linked to human rights orientations.

Table 2 shows that the independent variables linked to culture—either religion or social capital—had the least reliable effects. Neither Buddhists nor Christians showed significant effects regarding either awareness or engagement. Despite the argument that the early rise of Western Christendom laid foundations for the contemporary human rights doctrine, the findings here provide no support for this cultural assertion. In a similar vein, the claim about the role of Buddhist ethics in ascertaining human dignity is not supported by the findings. On the contrary, trust, especially trust in other social groups, showed significant positive effects on engagement. However, trust did not have a statistically significant impact on awareness. The degree of
institutional trust appeared to be largely irrelevant to human rights in general, despite its negatively significant effects on the dimension of awareness. Overall, the models support the predictions of Hypothesis 2 that generalized trust will positively affect human rights engagement, but the models did not support the predicted effects of culture/religion or institutional trust, which need further investigation.

As previous studies have suggested, psychological factors play a dominant role in predicting differences among human rights actors (Diaz-Veizades et al. 1995). Postconventional reasoning has a positive and significant effect on engagement, although its positive effect on awareness was not statistically significant. Dispositional empathy, which measures the ability to sympathize with others, shows the anticipated positive and significant effects on both properties of human rights actorhood, corroborating previous research that stressed the validity of this altruistic ethic.

Given that both psychological measures and human rights measures concern attitudinal variables to a large extent, it might be unclear as to which side serves as the cause or whether both might be caused by the third factor. Psychologists, however, have long asserted that personal values, such as reasoning and empathy, serve as important predictors of social and political attitudes, not vice versa (Rokeach 1973; Feldman 2003). Personal values concern relatively stable evaluative beliefs—rather than volatile-like opinions on social and political issues—that guide justification of attitudes and behavior (Cohrs et al. 2007). Likewise, several psychologists have sought to attribute personal value characteristics, including postconventional reasoning and dispositional empathy, to individual differences in human rights attitudes and behavior (McFarland and Mathews 2005). My findings in this study further confirm the validity of these claims. In fact, my results show that micropsychological factors are of substantial significance even in competition with other macrosociological variables. As such, the data strongly support Hypothesis 3 that human rights awareness and engagement are greater among individuals who display postconventional reasoning and dispositional empathy.

The results shown in Table 2 also reflect that the neoinstitutional, world polity variables were remarkably significant after controlling for all of the variables. In Models 1 and 2, the effects of human rights education were positively significant for awareness but not for engagement, but both global endorsement and global citizenship showed significant positive effects on both dimensions of human rights actorhood. The extent to which individuals are tailored toward or have higher affinity with global norms and institutions matters a great deal in nurturing human agency with proper human rights knowledge and behavioral traits. Geographic location, specifically whether participants resided in metropolitan areas, was not at all statistically significant, disproving the hypothesis that people in urban locations would be more attuned to human rights.

Figure 3 illustrates, all things being equal, that receiving human rights education increases human rights awareness by 15 percentage points ($\beta = .152, p = .001$); the predicted values of human rights awareness increases from 2.25 for someone who never received human rights education to 2.55 for someone who received human rights education. Figure 3 also shows that one unit increase (out of five)
in the extent of support for IGOs and/or INGOs (global endorsement) raises human rights awareness by 18 percent points ($\beta = .177$, $p = .001$); the predicted values increase from 2 for someone who showed minimum endorsement (1) to 2.61 for someone who showed maximum endorsement (5). Likewise, the closeness to global citizenship raises human rights awareness by 16 percentage points ($\beta = .163$, $p = .001$). By the same token, Figure 4 depicts that one unit increase in the extent of global endorsement raises human rights engagement by five percentage points ($\beta = .055$, $p = .05$); the predicted values increase from 1 (minimum endorsement) to 1.83 (maximum endorsement). Feeling closer to the identity of a “global citizen” by one unit increases human rights engagement by five percentage points ($\beta = .047$, $p = .05$); the predicted values of human rights engagement increase from 1.66 (minimum value or far away) to 1.96 (maximum value or very close).

It might sound somewhat puzzling that human rights education—unlike other world polity measures—affects cognitive knowledge of human rights but not the propensity/willingness to take action. It is possible that the celebrated worldwide diffusion of cosmopolitan and human rights education might not have brought about transformative learning or genuine changes in pupils’ cultural sensitivity. Rather, I found strong support for the central claims made by neoinstitutional, world polity scholars that human rights actors are the result of a wider cultural and institutional logic, more than they are the result of direct human rights education.

**Conclusion and discussion**

Michael Ignatieff emphatically asserted that the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the subsequent human rights revolution represented “a return intended to restore agency, to give individuals the civic courage to stand up” (Ignatieff 2001: 5). Despite this initial aspiration, human rights were never really divorced from state-centric understanding. As such, the focus on the individual that is notable in recent human rights scholarship is arguably a genuine return to the original human rights aspirations. This entrenchment enlarges the horizon of human rights practice and research and perhaps provides powerful clues as to how to improve human rights engagement and action.

Regression analyses revealed that the effects of the realist account are by no means clear: Partially supporting the realist hypotheses, SES factors did not negatively influence either awareness or engagement, but both discriminatory experience and liberal political outlooks positively affected these two dimensions of human rights actorhood. The cultural account measured by religious affiliations and levels of trust is also partially supported with the positively significant effects of generalized trust on engagement. It is crucial to note, however, that trust in other members of society successfully motivates individuals to engage in human rights activities.

**Figure 4.** Effects of exposure to world polity on human rights engagement.
The psychological account that traces the origins of human rights actorhood to individual human nature appeared to be centrally important, with strong effects of dispositional empathy on both properties. These striking results speak to the ongoing debate about the role of human motives, such as self-control, empathy, and moral sense in inhibiting violence or the events constraining human rights (Pinker 2011).

The neoinstitutional world polity provides some convincing explanations for individual differences in human rights actorhood, with robust positive effects of global endorsement and citizenship on both awareness and engagement, and the anticipated positive effects of human rights education on awareness. Globally attuned identity seems to matter a great deal in motivating individuals both consciously and behaviorally, consistent with the assertion made by world polity scholars on the consequential roles of global scripts on human agency. The limits of human rights education are not entirely surprising because the limited penetration of this education into classrooms and social practices has been a recent focus of research (Moon and Koo 2011).

Furthermore, my empirical analyses suggest a remarkable degree of overlap in factors that explain human rights actorhood between knowledge and action, which appears to contradict the conventional belief in a large gap between these two properties of human rights orientations. Notwithstanding the widely known thesis of decoupling between human rights instruments and actual practices, my findings show only modest support for the expected gap between cognition and action. Consider, for instance, that the effects of world polity variables were substantial enough to affect both cognition and action. Nonetheless, adding world polity variables to the full model, with engagement as the dependent variable, made only minor contributions to the model's power, and world polity factors were largely irrelevant in the engagement-only model (excluding willingness to participate). Future research needs to address the extent to which global cultural influences encourage individuals to think and behave according to human rights ideals.

The centrality of both psychological and world polity accounts in explaining human rights actorhood offers a stimulating research agenda that links innate traits to global environmental stimuli and vice versa. The activation of psychological traits might be sensitive to global environmental triggers, or globally engaging attitudes might be more likely in individuals who have empathy, postconventional reasoning, or other altruistic components of human nature. Similarly, we need further investigation into the potential interplay between education attainment and global identities to better capture how schooling relates to nurturing our virtues as universal human beings.

The human rights movement is not impregnable. In light of the many challenges to human rights and the uncertainties regarding the future of the movement, it is possible that human rights could yield to alternative utopian moral systems (Moyn 2010). The increasing cynicism propelled by refugee crises, antiterrorism campaigns, and human rights' weak enforcement power has led some people to consider alternative values, establishing a sort of hierarchy between competing human rights issues. What is needed is to make human rights viable and relevant in most people's daily lives. One central path to confronting widespread cynicism and making human rights unassailable is to empower people with ownership and awareness about their rights. Addressing human rights actors and their actions, and understanding the forces that shape the properties of this actorhood—particularly what turns knowledge into effective engagement—might be a starting point to serve this purpose.

Notes

1. I am grateful to the comments made by an anonymous reviewer about the possibility of social desirability on several question items.
2. To check the robustness of the results, I also conducted a logistic regression in which the dependent variable was solely based on the responses of “participated in” (participation was coded as 1 = yes or 0 = others). The findings appear to be very similar to what is reported in Model 2 in Table 2. The results are available from the author upon request. I also thank the anonymous reviewer for bringing this to my attention.
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Notes on contributor

Jeong-Woo Koo is an Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology at Sungkyunkwan University in Seoul, Korea, and Director of the Sungkyunkwan Center for Human Rights and Development. His research interests include human rights, international development, corporate ethics, and civil society/public sphere.

References


### Appendix

#### Table A1. Pearson correlation coefficients.

|   | 1   | 2   | 3   | 4   | 5   | 6   | 7   | 8   | 9   | 10  | 11  | 12  | 13  | 14  | 15  | 16  | 17  | 18  |
|---|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 2 | -.064 | (.050) |
| 3 | -.307 | -.096 | (.000) | (.003) |
| 4 | -.434 | -.116 | .521 | (.000) | (.000) | (.000) |
| 5 | -.043 | -.175 | .298 | .341 | (.186) | (.000) | (.000) | (.000) |
| 6 | .033 | .032 | -.044 | -.002 | -.015 | (.306) | (.329) | (.174) | (.959) | (.652) |
| 7 | -.140 | .014 | .061 | .086 | .002 | -.005 | (.000) | (.667) | (.062) | (.009) | (.945) | (.873) |
| 8 | (.168) | .028 | -.081 | -.156 | -.034 | .024 | -.016 | (.000) | (.388) | (.013) | (.000) | (.304) | (.455) | (.633) |
| 9 | .056 | .085 | .060 | .110 | .004 | .070 | -.056 | -.419 | (.086) | (.009) | (.066) | (.001) | (.899) | (.031) | (.085) | (.000) |
| 10 | -.022 | -.059 | .122 | .089 | .070 | -.090 | .043 | .049 | .004 | (.498) | (.070) | (.000) | (.006) | (.031) | (.184) | (.129) | (.898) |
| 11 | .158 | -.051 | -.069 | -.142 | -.076 | -.111 | -.053 | .029 | .054 | .153 | (.000) | (.114) | (.034) | (.000) | (.020) | (.104) | (.380) | (.099) | (.000) |
| 12 | -.043 | -.001 | .044 | .064 | .051 | .058 | .117 | -.009 | .041 | .052 | -.058 | (.186) | (.980) | (.180) | (.115) | (.077) | (.783) | (.204) | (.111) | (.077) |
| 13 | .306 | -.024 | -.037 | -.086 | -.014 | .093 | -.016 | .077 | .114 | .122 | .119 | (.000) | (.456) | (.260) | (.008) | (.662) | (.631) | (.019) | (.007) | (.000) | (.000) |
| 14 | -.094 | -.052 | .113 | .190 | .072 | -.026 | -.012 | -.039 | .049 | .075 | -.004 | .100 | .009 | (.004) | (.107) | (.000) | (.000) | (.227) | (.712) | (.228) | (.134) | (.021) | (.893) | (.002) | (.794) |
| 15 | -.190 | -.117 | .150 | .241 | .072 | -.038 | -.029 | -.043 | .021 | .096 | .041 | .026 | .023 | .075 | (.000) | (.000) | (.000) | (.026) | (.239) | (.380) | (.190) | (.511) | (.003) | (.204) | (.427) | (.485) | (.021) |
| 16 | .053 | -.138 | .017 | .013 | -.049 | -.062 | -.009 | .025 | .038 | .071 | .192 | .076 | .122 | .017 | .086 | (.103) | (.000) | (.604) | (.681) | (.131) | (.058) | (.781) | (.437) | (.240) | (.029) | (.000) | (.019) | (.000) | (.595) | (.008) |
| 17 | -.072 | -.120 | .169 | .243 | .093 | -.084 | .097 | -.053 | .081 | .146 | -.017 | .070 | .026 | .069 | .171 | (.028) | (.000) | (.604) | (.131) | (.058) | (.781) | (.437) | (.240) | (.029) | (.000) | (.019) | (.000) | (.301) | (.000) |
| 18 | -.004 | -.200 | .204 | .343 | .216 | .047 | .107 | -.004 | .068 | .099 | -.050 | .100 | .144 | .118 | .250 | .225 | .343 | (.914) | (.000) | (.000) | (.150) | (.001) | (.901) | (.037) | (.002) | (.128) | (.002) | (.000) | (.000) | (.000) | (.000) |
| 19 | -.208 | -.054 | .236 | .308 | .162 | .171 | .173 | .000 | .017 | .143 | -.032 | .143 | .117 | .065 | .128 | .083 | .176 | .279 | (.000) | (.097) | (.000) | (.000) | (.000) | (.997) | (.601) | (.000) | (.325) | (.000) | (.048) | (.000) | (.011) | (.000) |

*Note. P values in parentheses (two-tailed test), N = 944. 1 = Age; 2 = Female (d); 3 = Income (ln); 4 = Administrative/Specialized Occupation (d); 5 = Education; 6 = Experience with Discrimination (d); 7 = Political Ideology; 8 = Buddhist (d); 9 = Christian (d); 10 = General Trust; 11 = Institutional Trust; 12 = Postconventional Reasoning (ln); 13 = Dispositional Empathy; 14 = Metropolitan (d); 15 = Human Rights Education (d); 16 = Global Endorsement; 17 = Global Citizenship; 18 = Human Rights Awareness; 19 = Human Rights Engagement. All “d” letters in parentheses represent dummy variables; all “ln” letters represent natural log.*