

# Torture and Social Modernization

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## Abstract

Torture is (almost) universally condemned as barbaric and ineffective, yet it persists in the modern world. What factors influence levels of support for torture? One cluster of explanations focuses on social modernization as influencing public opinion. Public opinion data on the acceptability of torture from 31 countries in 2006 and 2008 (a total of 44 country-years) are used to test three hypotheses derived from previous work on social modernization. The findings, first, show that outright majorities in 31 country-years reject the use of torture. A multiple regression shows states with high per capita income, consolidated democracy and low domestic repression have larger majorities opposed to torture. These findings broadly support the social modernization explanation for value change as it relates to torture. The implications of this study are discussed in the conclusion.

## Introduction

In a statement released by the White House on June 26, 2003—the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture—President George W. Bush declared

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The United States is committed to the world-wide elimination of torture and we are leading this fight by example. I call on all governments to join with the United States and the community of law-abiding nations in prohibiting, investigating, and prosecuting all acts of torture and in undertaking to prevent other cruel and unusual punishment. I call on all nations to speak out against torture in all its forms and to make ending torture an essential part of their diplomacy.

At about the same time of this statement, American soldiers were perpetrating acts of torture, most notably at the Abu Ghraib prison complex in Iraq, but also at other locations, including the detention facility at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba and Bagram Airfield in Afghanistan. Subsequently, the Bush administration disclosed that interrogators used a water torture technique on three detainees; one of the three, Khalid Sheikh Mohammad, was subjected to this technique 183 times. Twenty-eight other detainees were subjected to other, ‘enhanced’ techniques. Something is amiss when the United States is both a perpetrator of torture and advocate for the elimination of torture worldwide.

This episode is another example of the dictum: “in the study of torture, hell is in the details” (Rejali 2007, 63). However, at least in the American context, the debate on torture is relegated to commentators on the left and right repeating sound bites that advantage their side without studying the causes and consequences of torture. For the most part, this debate is played out among political and media elites, with no reference to or participation from the general public.

Torture is defined and expressly forbidden by the Convention Against Torture, an international treaty under the jurisdiction of the United Nations.<sup>1</sup> Article I of the treaty defines torture as

any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as

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<sup>1</sup>This convention, adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 1984, entered into force in June, 1987. 146 countries have ratified this treaty. Of the 31 countries in this study, only India (which has signed, but not ratified the treaty), Iran and Iraq are not members of CAT (the Palestinian Territories are not full members of the United Nations). Seventeen of the 31 countries in this study explicitly ban the use of torture in the constitution (the United States, Canada and Israel mention a less specific ban on cruel treatment and the like). Nine countries make no mention of torture in the constitution.

obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity. It does not include pain or suffering arising only from, inherent in or incidental to lawful sanctions.

A skeptical observer might claim that this definition of torture produced by an elite-level organization by means of some form of compromise between member states of the UN and removed from the perspective of the average citizen fails to account for the variety of behaviors and techniques that fall under the purview of this document. However, survey data from 55 countries reveals that the public perception of human rights issues matches the expert-level treatment of the same items. Furthermore, the concept of torture is an even closer match between the public and the experts (Carlson and Listhaug 2007).

There are good reasons why the opinions of the general public should be integrated into the elite-level discussions on the question of torture. First, following the framework of dynamic representation, some input, in the form of public opinion data, is required to produce policy outputs (Stimson et al 1995, Richards and Anderson 2007). Without such inputs, policymakers are left trying to estimate public sentiment through other, non-systematic means. A random sample of the public is a good starting point for policymakers intending to craft a policy that is reflective of public sentiments.

A second reason for the relevance of public opinion data is to fill a gap in what is known about the frequency of torture. Governments are reticent to record any data related to the use of torture for fear that officials could be subjected to some punitive measure should this “nonexistent” data emerge. In such cases, how people feel about a subject may be as close as scholars and policymakers can get to actual data on the use of torture.

These reasons make public opinion, the indication of where the general public stand on a given issue, all the more important for analysis. Survey questions on this topic have only recently been included in American public opinion surveys on a repeating basis.<sup>2</sup> International polling data on torture

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<sup>2</sup>Though torture appears as a valid response option in some surveys back to the Postwar

is less common than American polling on the question of torture.

Two surveys from 2006 and 2008 conducted by the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA), at the University of Maryland<sup>3</sup>, ask the public in 31 countries about their support for torture. This paper seeks to explain observed variance in support for torture across these countries. Social modernization is one explanation for value change, the idea that socioeconomic growth moves values in a society from orientations around survival needs to those of self-expressive values. It is also possible that public opinion on the question of torture is responsive to other social factors. The consolidation of democracy may be powerful enough to stop the use of torture by the state. Conversely, approval of torture may be shaped by national experience with violence. The use of domestic repression by a government, or the threat of terrorism may motivate greater support for torture.

This paper presents three modernization hypotheses that explain torture approval among the public in a wide variety of countries. While approval of torture *anywhere* is rare, countries with *high levels of per capita income*, *high levels of democratization*, and *low levels of domestic repression* exhibit higher levels of opposition to torture than other countries, *ceteris paribus*.

This paper proceeds in four steps. First, the relevant literature on the use of torture is reviewed, and linked with literatures on social modernization, democratic transition and threat perception domestic repression. Second, three hypotheses are presented. Third, the dependent and explanatory data used to test the hypotheses are addressed. Lastly, bivariate analyses and the results of a multiple regression are presented. The implications of this study are addressed in the conclusion of this paper.

## Predicting Public Support for Torture

One might expect that political scientists, given their proclivity to see the state as the central unit of analysis, would have many insights about the persistence and diffusion of torture. In fact, torture is one neglected area of research on state action. “To date, researchers have paid far more attention to the evils done against governments (and citizens) by dissidents,

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Problems Survey conducted during the Second World War, questions about the acceptability of torture first appear in surveys conducted in October, 2001.

<sup>3</sup>This author has no connection to PIPA, nor did the author have any role in the surveys used in this paper.

rebels, and terrorists than to the evils done by presidents, the police, military, secret service, national guard, and death squads against those within their territorial jurisdiction” (Davenport 2007, 1).

The study of torture has attracted more attention from sociologists. *Violence Workers* uses as its data interviews with Brazilian torturers (Huggins et al. 2002). Conroy (2000) examines the persistence of torture in Northern Ireland, Israel and Chicago. Einolf (2007) argues that torture is most often applied to liminal members of society, such as slaves, foreigners or prisoners of war. Rejali mentions the case of a security guard in San Diego who “patrolled the Gaslamp Quarter as ‘Clancy the Cop’ [and] used his new stun gun on transients” (2007, 59). Torture is one mechanism for dividing society between citizens (who cannot be tortured) and others (who may be tortured when deemed necessary).

Rejali (2007) maps the history and spread of torture techniques and arguing that, while authoritarian regimes often use scarring torture techniques more frequently, democratic regimes innovated most of the torture techniques commonly used today. The rise in non-scarring techniques is due to the rise in a global human rights monitoring regime. When the world is watching, torturers conceal their activities through techniques that are not as easily detectable. For example, Israeli interrogators changed how they treated Palestinian prisoners sometime between 1991 and 1992, but the standard, harsh treatment remained in use during the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon (Ron 1997).

The political science literature, instead, focuses on the more general class of ‘repression’ or ‘personal integrity violations’ a set of actions available to governments that are related—and often accompany—torture, but also include harassment, surveillance, arrests, and mass killing (Davenport 2007). From this literature, and research on support for human rights and related norms, we can extract three general explanations for cross-national levels of public support for torture.

## **Economic Development**

One of the most common theories of the diffusion of support for human rights and opposition to torture links these trends to the processes of social modernization and economic development. Increasing income levels have been shown to reduce violations of personal integrity rights (Poe, Tate and Keith 1999, Henderson 1991). A more informed and educated public

is a product of economic growth. Civil society groups expand in number and political impact, and often become advocates for issues of civil rights and liberties. Growing education levels should encourage feelings of political tolerance, and a cosmopolitan world view (Inglehart and Welzel 2005). Economic development typically integrates a society into the global economic system, reducing violations of human rights, such as arbitrary imprisonment (Cingranelli and Richards 1999a).

Another aspect of socio-economic modernization is a shift in the value priorities of the public. As economic development proceeds, values oriented toward quality of life and self-expression emerge. Over time, emerging self-expression values transform modernization into a process of human development, giving rise to a new type of humanist society that promotes emancipation on many fronts, what Inglehart and Welzel have called the “humanistic transformation of modernization” (2005, 47). Similarly, Inkeles and Smith find that modernization leads individuals to feel less alienated, anomic and hostile to other groups in society (1974, 296). These processes of value change lead to a public that is “relatively *intolerant* of measures that violate civil rights, personal integrity and human dignity” (Inglehart and Welzel, 126 fn. 9, emphasis in original). The high value attached to equality, personal integrity and human dignity implies a rejection of torture, as it is seen as a violation of these orienting principles.

## Democratic Consolidation

Another stream of research links opposition to torture to the development of democratic polities. The ancient Greeks thought of themselves as upright democrats, but also openly tortured slaves in the course of legal disputes. The regular timing of free and fair elections—a *sine qua non* of democratic politics—would require a ruling coalition to periodically return to the people for a new mandate to govern (Schumpeter 1976, 269-296).<sup>4</sup> If a ruling coalition adopts excessive policies, such as the use of torture, the people would have

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<sup>4</sup>Schumpeter mentions, as part of four conditions for the democratic model to be a success, that tolerance for difference of opinion is necessary. “[I]t must be possible for every would-be leader who is not lawfully excluded to present his case without producing disorder” (295). Fein (2007) lays out three arguments for the democratic peace dividend based upon the tolerance and openness of the democratic state and nine possible counterarguments to these claims (162-165) before concluding “[m]ost researchers have found a positive relation between democracy and human rights violations” (166).

an opportunity to either condone the record of the ruling coalition, or elect another coalition more in line with public sentiments.<sup>5</sup>

Cingranelli and Richards (1999a) claim that governmental respect for freedom from arbitrary arrest increased in the post-Cold War era following the spread of democratization, though other forms of state violence are less responsive to regime type. Davenport (1999; 2004) claims that democracy pacifies internal repression. Henderson (1991) finds democratic consolidation is related to less frequent violations of personal integrity rights. Poe, Tate and Keith (1999) conclude that military regimes are associated with higher rates of violations of personal dignity. Zanger (2000) critiques the explanatory power of regime type, but also finds democracy is associated with lower rates of repression. Furthermore, despite recent contrary evidence, democratic norms should lead the citizenry to support the rule of law, the protection of civil liberties, and other values that run counter to the use of torture.

However the consolidation of democracy is not a deterministic factor limiting domestic repression. Hathaway (2002) finds democracies that ratify the Convention Against Torture have a *worse* record on torture than democracies that do not ratify the Convention. Rejali (2007) also deemphasizes the importance of regime type. In his analysis, the critical intervening variable is a human rights monitoring regime. Democratic and authoritarian states use torture, but democratic states, being more open to scrutiny from a monitoring regime than authoritarian states, often innovate non-scarring torture techniques which are then adopted by authoritarian states.

A more nuanced claim argues that any democratic peace dividend is realized only when the transition process passes a certain threshold of democratization (Davenport and Armstrong 2004). This literature concludes that transitional states are the most vulnerable to torture and other repressive governmental actions. Fein (1995) calls this the ‘more murder in the middle’ hypothesis. Regan and Henderson (2002) find a curvilinear relationship between regime type and political repression; semi-democratic states have the highest rates of repression.

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<sup>5</sup>However, it is important to note that this ruling coalition is rarely monolithic. Unelected elements of the ruling coalition may have different incentives for following public opinion. The intelligence services, as one example of a state institution that may be less responsive to public opinion, may be driven by security rationalities that are ambivalent—or even, at times, contrary—to established democratic norms. However, the tradition in established democracies of supreme civilian rule would suggest even military and intelligence agencies are accountable to elected civilian leaders.

## Threat Perceptions

A third stream in the literature focuses on the actual treatment of a population by the state, as opposed to economic development and governmental structure. This literature proceeds in two ways: qualitative and comparative analyses of the cultural and social factors related to violations of personal integrity, and quantitative studies striving to model these violations in a cross-national or time-series framework (Hafner-Burton and Ron 2009).

Research on torture, and human rights violations in general, is limited by the relative scarcity of data; an undefined threat cannot be perceived. “[R]eliable and comprehensive data in the human rights area, especially in forms that lend themselves to either longitudinal or cross-national studies, are often not available due to lack of collection or to governmentally-imposed barriers. Where data are available, they will often be extremely difficult and expensive to obtain, and are likely to be fragmentary, controversial or of dubious reliability” (Goldstein 1992, 41). In the absence of reliable data, the question of torture is pursued in often an anecdotal manner, though recent scholars have sought some objective manner to model violations of personal integrity.

Consider the repercussions when the use of torture surfaced in Australia and France as two examples of qualitative research in this area. The sensation of the water torture of a woman by Australian soldiers during Vietnam caused a considerable stir in parliament and in the media, but the episode quickly faded to the point that it is virtually forgotten today (Ekins 1996). Conversely, Louise Ighilahriz sparked an uproar in French society when she came forward in 2000 in an attempt to find the doctor who rescued her after being raped and tortured by French paratroopers during the Algerian War for Independence (1954-1962).<sup>6</sup> Australian torture during the Vietnam War is largely forgotten, while images of French torture in Algeria vividly persist through time.

Attempts have also been made to empirically study violations of personal integrity rights based on characterizations of human rights violations instead of data on the violations themselves. Two such measures, the Polit-

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<sup>6</sup>See Shatz (2002) for a summary of this episode and its context. For a general history of torture in the French-Algerian War, see Lazreg (2008) or Vidal-Naquet (1963). The memoirs of the military commander (Massu 1971) and the chief of intelligence (Aussaresses 2002) also discuss the role of torture in the conflict. Horne (1977) provides a general history of the war.



ical Terror Scale (PTS) (Gibney and Dalton 1996) and Cingranelli-Richards Index (CIRI) (1999b), score countries' human rights practices according to the content of annual State Department (Innes 1992) and Amnesty International (Ron, Ramos and Rodgers 2005) country reports.<sup>7</sup>Poe, Carey and Vazquez (2001) find that, in the vast majority of cases, State Department and Amnesty International scores are equal, suggesting these measures are an unbiased assessment of human rights practices around the world.

## Hypotheses

No study has yet examined international public opinion on the question of torture directly. More importantly, from a theory-building perspective, an effort to explain what factors may influence relative rates of approval of torture is absent from the literature. This paper attempts to fill this gap by using four independent variables to explain observed levels of public support for torture in 31 countries.

Increasing economic growth is the primary driver of value change, according to Inglehart and Welzel. As income increases, allowing people to move beyond subsistence rates of survival, a process of value reorientation takes place. If support for human rights is included as part of a social modernization perspective, one could logically conclude that torture would be rejected by more affluent publics. Thus, the first hypothesis in this paper is

***Hypothesis 1:*** *Increasing per capita income is related to decreasing support for torture.*

The institutionalization of democracy is more frequently found among countries with higher levels of per capita income, but wealth is not a necessary condition for the establishment and consolidation of a liberal democratic regime. Norms such as pluralism, the rule of law, and personal integrity are respected in democratic countries more so than in authoritarian contexts, leading to the second hypothesis

***Hypothesis 2:*** *The consolidation of democracy is associated with lower support for torture.*

Public support for torture may be dependent on a particular country's past experience with violence. Approval of torture may be related to the actual use of torture by the government. In cases where domestic repression

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<sup>7</sup>The correlation between the PTS and CIRI data is 0.919. The multiple regression results below include models using both measures of domestic repression.

is common, we could expect the public to be less opposed to methods like torture. Conversely, in cases where torture is the extraordinary exception, we could expect the public to react with a mixture of shock, disgust and, ultimately, disapproval. This leads to a hypothesis based on threat perceptions

***Hypothesis 3:*** *Countries where torture and other forms of state violence are uncommon will be more opposed to the use of torture.*

After testing each individual hypothesis, a multiple regression is used to test joint effects among the independent variables. We find that higher per capita income, stable democratic norms and a lack of domestic repression are related with higher levels of public opposition to torture.

## Data

Public opinion data on approval of torture are provided by two international surveys conducted in 2006 and 2008. The 2006 survey was sponsored by the BBC and conducted by the polling firm GlobeScan with PIPA. This poll includes 27,407 respondents in 25 countries. The 2008 survey, conducted by World Public Opinion and PIPA, includes 36,990 respondents in 22 countries, 16 of which were included in the 2006 poll.<sup>8</sup> Table 1 details the coverage of these two surveys.

### **Insert Table 1 (List of Countries and Survey Details) Here**

These surveys followed a common format. Respondents were asked

“[m]ost countries have agreed to rules that prohibit torturing prisoners. Which position is closer to yours?”

- Terrorists pose such an extreme threat that governments should now be allowed to use some degree of torture if it may gain information that saves innocent lives.

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<sup>8</sup>In most cases, a national sample survey was used. However, urban populations were surveyed in both polls in eight countries. In three of these cases (Indonesia, Turkey and South Korea) different sample populations were used in the 2006 and 2008 polls. To ensure comparability across and within cases, the 2006 surveys of these three countries are not included in the bivariate tests of each hypothesis or the multiple regression. Only the 2008 survey data (using a national sample) is included in these analyses.

- Clear rules against torture should be maintained because any use of torture is immoral and will weaken international human rights standards against torture.

A follow-up question was asked to those who selected the first option, asking if they still agreed that torture should be permitted in cases that have nothing to do with terrorism. This paper only focuses on the initial question since it provides the broadest sample of respondents for a comparative analysis.<sup>9</sup>

This particular question format makes a few assumptions of the application of torture. First, torture would only be applied to terrorists, an exceptional class of criminal that is apart from good and proper citizens (Einolf 2007). This also suggests that traditional law enforcement methods are unable to cope with the unique character of terrorist acts. Second, respondents are asked to evaluate a set of techniques instead of specific methods. If the American public is any guide, approval of specific techniques tend to vary significantly (Richards and Anderson 2007). Third, the pro-torture view hinges on the protection of innocent lives, a utilitarian argument presented elsewhere (Bagaric and Clarke 2007; Yoo 2006).

The anti-torture response is similarly loaded with suppositions. First, this response includes a devotion to clear rules (and presumably punishments for violating those rules). The breakdown of order is associated with outbursts of violence (Zimbardo 2007). Second, it relies on a collective, normative understanding of torture as something the international community does not support. We would expect countries to enforce norms against torture, but if countries defect from this understanding and commit torture, the value of an international regime banning the use of torture is reduced.

**Insert Figure 1 (Approval of Torture in 31 Countries) here**

Figure 1 graphs levels of approval of torture in the 31 countries surveyed

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<sup>9</sup>This appears to be the most common format for international polling on approval of torture. In addition to the two surveys considered here, the same question format was used in a July 2006 survey of China, India and the United States that was sponsored by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs. Different survey questions on the same topic were used in a 2006 survey of public opinion in Ghana, a 2005 survey of 10 countries and a 2004 survey of the United Kingdom. These four surveys are excluded from this analysis to eliminate potential problems of inconsistent methodology.

in 2006 and 2008 in order of increasing acceptability.<sup>10</sup> A number of patterns present themselves. There appears to be considerable public opposition to the use of torture. Two countries (South Korea and Turkey) report slim majorities in favor of torture (51% in both cases). In twenty-two cases, majorities of the public are opposed to torture. Pluralities of respondents are opposed to torture in three other cases. Pro-torture pluralities are found in four cases: Thailand, India, Nigeria and Kenya.

Western European countries, including Canada and Australia, are most opposed to the use of torture. Latin American countries are, as a cohort, slightly more accepting of torture than the Western European countries, but by no means in favor of the practice. Eastern European and Middle Eastern countries appear roughly in the third tier of opposition. Asian and South-east Asian countries are in the fourth tier, comprised of publics divided on the question of torture. African countries, exhibiting pluralities in favor of torture, are found at the right-hand of Figure 1. According to these broad regional classifications, the United States and Israel appear to be separated from their peer groups.<sup>11</sup> We will see below that American opinions on torture are exceptional when considering its standing along the three tested dimensions in this analysis. The question of torture among the Israeli population is harder to disentangle. Perhaps the plurality opposed to the use of torture is responding to the 1999 ban of the use of torture by the Israeli Supreme Court or to some other aspect of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Another view comes from examining the observed change in sentiment for the cases with two observation points. 13 of the cases in Figure 1 are averages of data from the 2006 and 2008 surveys. Table 2 displays the observed change in support for torture in these 13 cases, considering the difference between torture opposition and support.<sup>12</sup> If the data is disaggregated into 44 country-years, we see that 31 cases have a majority opposed to torture (70.5%), 6 pluralities are opposed (13.6%), 2 pluralities approve of torture (4.5%) and 5 cases have majorities in support of torture (11.4%).

The observed change in sentiment appears to tilt toward opposition to

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<sup>10</sup>While neither Hong Kong nor the Palestinian Territories are countries in the Weberian sense of a monopoly on the legitimate use of force, the term is used when referring to the set of surveyed jurisdictions.

<sup>11</sup>Regional dummy variables are included in multiple regression results below.

<sup>12</sup>According to this formulation, smaller and negative numbers indicate a public increasingly indecisive and pro-torture, respectively. Larger, positive numbers indicate a public definitely opposed to torture.

torture. Four countries moved toward acceptance of torture, seven became more opposed and Poland did not move from its opposition. Majorities that were opposed to torture in Kenya and Nigeria in 2006 were replaced by majorities in favor of torture in 2008. Egypt and the United States moved closer to outright support of torture. India, the only country with a plurality in favor of torture in 2006, increased its acceptance of torture in 2008. Conversely, China, Mexico and Spain hardened their opposition to torture. Nonetheless, the magnitude of the shifts in public opinion is almost exactly split: the sum of shifts in opposition is 114 and the sum of shifts in support is 122. International news coverage of torture in Iraq and elsewhere does not significantly alter international opinions on torture.

**Insert Table 2 (Change in Support) here**

This paper tests three hypotheses to explain relative levels of approval of torture in these surveyed countries. To test these hypotheses, data from three sources were collected. First, per capita income data was collected for each country in 2006 and 2008 from the International Monetary Fund World Economic Outlook Database (April 2009). Per capita income is measured according to purchasing power parity and reported in current American dollars. Observed income levels range from about \$1,500 (Kenya) to over \$45,000 (United States).<sup>13</sup>

Second, two quantitative measures of democratization in the surveyed countries in 2006 and 2008 are included in model estimates. Freedom House rankings of political rights and civil liberties in each country in 2006 and 2008.<sup>14</sup> Traditionally the Freedom House scores run from 1 to 7, with higher values indicating less domestic freedom. For the purposes of this paper, these scores are reversed so that higher scores indicate a greater degree of institutionalization of political rights and civil liberties. Polity IV data, as an alternative to Freedom House scores, are also collected and included in analyses. Polity IV scores range from -10 to 10, where higher values indicate consolidated democracy.<sup>15</sup> The surveyed countries include a number of established and new democratic regimes as well as non-democratic regimes.

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<sup>13</sup>The average per capita income is just over \$17,000, the standard deviation is \$13,600. No income data is available for the Palestinian Territories.

<sup>14</sup>See <http://www.freedomhouse.org> for country rankings and the ranking methodology.

<sup>15</sup>See <http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/polity4.htm> for more information regarding Polity data. The correlation between these two measures, based on 42 observations is 0.89.

Third, two measures of domestic repression are included in model estimates. Data from the Political Terror Scale (PTS) is used to quantify the level of state repression in each of these countries.<sup>16</sup> Like Freedom House scores, this scale is reversed, so a score of 5 is indicative of countries “under a secure rule of law, people are not imprisoned for their views, and torture is rare or exceptional. Political murders are extremely rare” (Gibney and Dalton 1986). and decreasing PTS scores indicate an increasing level of domestic repression. An alternative measure of domestic repression is provided by Cingranelli and Richards (1999b). The Cingranelli and Richards Index includes a measure of the frequency of torture, and a more general index of repression.<sup>17</sup> The Cingranelli and Richards data covers the years 1981-2007; all available years are averaged for each country.

The surveyed countries exhibit different national experiences with torture. According to PTS data, Australia and Canada have the lowest frequency of domestic repression (on a scale to 5, these countries score 4.92 and 4.98, respectively). Conversely, torture is rife in Iraq, as evidenced in part by the discovery of torture chambers by American soldiers, most notably in 2007 in the Sadr City district of Baghdad. With the assumption that domestic repression can leave a lasting mark on state-society relations, the average of all available data for each country is used in this paper.<sup>18</sup> Lastly, dummy variables for the region of each surveyed country are included in one estimate.

## Findings

We now turn to testing the hypotheses identified above. Figure 2 graphs per capita income against the observed difference in public opinion on torture in thirty cases. The trend shows higher levels of per capita income are related with higher levels of opposition to torture, but also that opposition to torture decreases after per capita income rises above about \$31,000.<sup>19</sup> For

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<sup>16</sup>Additional information on this scale and 1976-2007 data can be found here: <http://www.politicalterrorsscale.org>.

<sup>17</sup>The correlation between the PTS data and the Cingranelli and Richards Index scores for the frequency of torture is 0.92.

<sup>18</sup>Eight cases have less than full data on this variable. There is no PTS measure of political terror in Hong Kong. Scores for Germany are from 1989-2006. Azerbaijan, Russia and Ukraine are scored based on reports from 1992-2008. Israel and the Palestinian Territories are disaggregated and scored separately, based on reports from 1994-2008.

<sup>19</sup>The goodness of fit measure increases from 0.55 in the linear model to 0.63 in the

the purposes of interpretation, the income-squared term would indicate that marginal changes in income near the median value would have a smaller impact on approval of torture than changes in income at either end of the range of observed values. The available evidence supports the first hypothesis that increasing per capita income will lead to greater support for the rejection of torture. However, the United States and South Korea are two notable outliers in this bivariate analysis.

### **Insert Figure 2 (Approval and Per Capita Income) here**

We may be surprised to see the United States, the country with the highest level of per capita income among the surveyed countries, does not have the highest level of opposition to torture. However, Inglehart and Welzel previously identified that the United States is an exceptional case when compared to other countries along a dimension from traditional to secular-rational values. “[T]he United States is not a prototype of cultural modernization for other countries to follow, as some postwar modernization writers assumed. In fact, the United States is a deviant case, having a much more traditional value system than any other postindustrial society except Ireland” (65). Therefore, we should expect the United States to fall below predicted levels—based on per capita income—of a number of indicators of sentiments, including the role of religion in daily life, roles within the family and other items included in the World Values Survey. It appears torture is no different in this regard.

South Korea is an interesting case with levels of income comparable to Western countries, but with a public narrowly in favor of torture. One possible explanation for the South Korean public’s views on torture may be the lag between the onset of economic development and the corresponding value change among the population. “Ten or fifteen years after an era of prosperity began, the age cohorts that had spent their formative years in prosperity would begin to enter the electorate. Another decade or two might pass before they begin to play elite roles” (Inglehart and Welzel, 99). If this is true, then the sentiments of students and intellectuals may be most indicative of where public sentiment in South Korea is headed in the near future. In addition to showing a willingness to protest authoritarian abuses, students in South Korea exemplify “many undemocratic elements, such as factionalism and alienation, and have in part hindered the development of democracy and democratic culture by their radicalism, inflexibility and overzealous protest...

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quadratic model.

The essential problem... is a lack of moderation, tolerance, and a willingness to compromise” (Diamond 1993, 20). These university students (who are now moving into elite social roles) have not undergone the social transformation predicted by the relatively high rates of income observed in South Korea.

The second hypothesis, that the institutionalization of democracy is associated with lower support for torture, is tested in Figure 3.<sup>20</sup> The minimum for the quadratic function is at 3.8 on the Freedom House scale, in line with previous research showing transitional regimes are most susceptible to violence (Fein 1995).

### **Insert Table 3 (Approval and Democratization) here**

There are outliers in this test as well. In countries with low Freedom House scores, such as China and Egypt, a majority of the public is opposed to the use of torture. Countries in the middle of this scale, such as Thailand, Nigeria, Turkey and India, are most in favor of torture. At the upper end of the scale only one country, South Korea, exhibits a majority in favor of torture. Though China and Hong Kong are scored differently in terms of political freedoms and civil rights (and per capita income in Hong Kong is more than 7 times larger than in China), both publics express about the same level of opposition to torture, a difference between opposition and support of 38% and 45%, respectively. The available data supports the second hypothesis that consolidated democracies are less accepting of torture.

Next, we turn to the hypothesis that domestic repression is related to lower levels of support for torture. Victimized populations remember what was done to them by their oppressors, and may be less likely to embrace similar methods toward other groups. How long populations remember their repression, however, is an open question. We saw above that the controversy of water torture by Australian soldiers during the Vietnam war was short-lived, while the French have been much more animated about torture during the war in Algeria. But its also possible that evil deeds are remembered long after the fact. Former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet spent the last two years of his life embroiled in a number of lawsuits related to the use of torture

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<sup>20</sup>Again, we see a better fit for the data when a quadratic term is included, from a  $r$  value of 0.44 to 0.63. Only the graph of Freedom House data is included here. A similar graph using the Polity data for regime type reveals a similar data cloud, but a reduced measure of goodness of fit.



and other political violence during his reign. Perhaps the difference in these cases can be explained because Australian citizens were not tortured, while the Chilean population and many Algerians were victimized by either the Pinochet dictatorship or the French paratroopers.

#### **Insert Table 4 (Approval and Threat) here**

Figure 4 shows a positive, linear correlation between the absence of domestic repression and the rejection of torture among the surveyed publics. We see Iraq, with its long history of domestic repression, as the bottom of the political terror scale, but with a public broadly rejecting torture. The Palestinian Territories, compared to Iraq, have a larger majority opposed to torture. Similar to Figure 3, we find the countries most accepting of torture in the middle of the scale. The third hypothesis is supported by the available survey data.<sup>21</sup>

Finally, we estimate a multiple regression using the differences in survey data as the dependent variable and the above-described explanatory variables. An ordinary least squares regression is used to calculate the parameters of the model. As suggested by the above bivariate correlations, we expect the linear terms to be positive for per capita income and domestic repression and negative for democratization, the quadratic terms should be negative for income and positive. The results of the regression are presented in Table 3.

#### **Insert Table 3 (Multiple Regression Results) here**

The regression results generally support the social modernization hypotheses for one set of data on regime type and domestic repression. The signs of all the variables are in the expected direction across the five models presented in Table 3. Per capita income is strongly significant in three of four models (the p value for the linear income term in (3) is less than 0.11). The two countries at the upper-end of the sample (Hong Kong and the United States) are more accepting of torture than countries with lower income; only the United States comes close to parity of opinion on the question of torture. With additional survey data on the question of torture conducted among

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<sup>21</sup>If the Cingranelli and Richards data is used in the place of the PTS data, a similar relationship is found, as expected given the high correlation between the measures of domestic repression.

high-income countries, the concave function observed here may be more accurately represented as a significant, linear relationship.

The consolidation of democracy is associated with higher levels of public opposition to torture, but only when Freedom House data is used. Polity data has no discernible effect on approval of torture. Nonetheless, as expected from the bivariate results, these regime type variables exhibit a curvilinear relationship, suggesting countries at either end of the scale of democratic consolidation are more opposed to torture than countries in the transitional phase.

The regression results also support the hypothesis related to threat perceptions, but the result is not consistent across alternate coding schemes of domestic repression. Argentina, once a participating government in the repression associated with Operation Condor in the 1970s, is, according to these data, consistently above the predicted line across the three hypotheses, supporting the claim that the legacy of the use of torture shapes how future generations think about its place in the modern world. The regional dummy variables conform with the discussion of torture approval in Figure 1.

One must be cautious when attributing causation on the basis of these data. On the one hand, we have strong theoretical reasons for thinking an increase in per capita income or democratic consolidation would lead to lower levels of support for torture. Similarly, one could claim that domestic repression would lead to changes in the level of public support for torture. But such a claim would depend on knowing the level of support for torture before a period of economic development, before a democratic regime was established, or before secret police started using extreme methods of interrogation. And, unfortunately, such data do not exist. The best we can do in this circumstance is observe that the data collected here all support the general thrust of social modernization. Publics that are more affluent, more democratic and less repressed tend to oppose the use of torture in greater numbers than other countries, *ceteris paribus*.

## Conclusion

The broad purpose of this paper is to relate two previously disconnected subjects: public opinion research and torture. As other scholars have noted, the role of intrastate violence is not well examined by political scientists. This study demonstrates that such forms of violence can be compared to other

sets of data and meaningful inferences can be made from these comparisons. Along with the substantive findings of this paper, the theoretical relationships identified have political implications for those on either side of the torture debate.

This is the first effort to explain observed variations in support of torture on a cross-national, comparative basis. Using survey data from 31 countries, this paper tests four hypotheses that claim countries with high levels of economic development and per capita income, institutionalized democratic norms and procedures, and low occurrences of state-perpetrated violence are likely to have larger majorities opposed to the use of torture than other countries along these three dimensions. These results are found to be significant when included in a multiple regression.

The social modernization framework is a useful means to measure value change in a society, and its insights are broadly applicable to the study of torture. Consider Figure 3, comparing support for torture with democratization. The stable, but authoritarian countries and the stable democracies are widely opposed to torture, but regimes in the middle of the scale are undecided or even supportive of torture. This feature of the data is reflected in previous work on the ‘murder in the middle’ hypothesis.

This study implies theoretical and timely political implications as well. In part this study offers a rebuttal to those who claim that torture should be used in times of conflict with terrorist networks. This study finds no link between the frequency of terrorist attacks and public approval of torture. Thus, the adoption of torture as a government policy in the face of terrorism may not improve the standing of the ruling coalition in the eyes of the electorate.

As a matter of identifying the relationship between observed variables, this study suggests that the subset of the public which approves of torture is, in part, a function of income and democratization. Data on public opinion of torture and the frequency of repression shows a system of dynamic representation is at work, even when focusing on the question of torture. When the use of torture is opposed by the public, governments tend to not use torture.

Nonetheless, persistent questions remain. Perhaps governments that torture do so because social dynamics incentivize repressive policies toward an out-group (e.g. torture against the Kurds in Turkey would have few, if any, electoral impacts for the government given the historical roots of Kurdish resistance to the Turkish regime). Additionally, the roots of approval of torture in transitional regimes is worthy of scholarly attention. It seems counter-intuitive to think that the publics most in favor of torture are also

those most likely to be victims of torture, but this trend is present in these data.

Recent events in the United States have contributed to an interest in torture as a particular form of violence. And this interest persists with the inauguration of the Obama administration, which appears to be willing to investigate the use of torture by the American intelligence services. Much of the attention from the media and news commentators on torture has been superficial, content to repeat self-serving anecdotes as ‘data.’ We must encourage, instead, further research and frank, enlightened discussion of the causes and consequences of torture.

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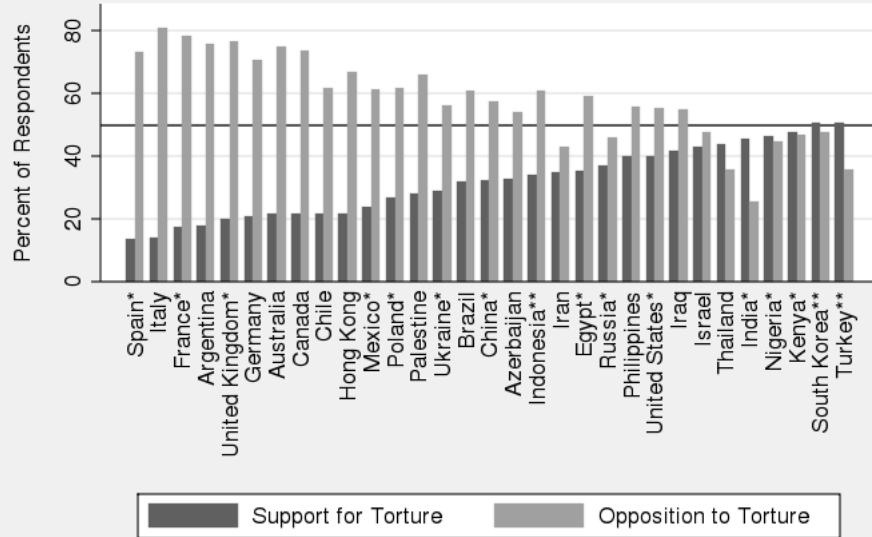
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Figure 1: Approval of Torture in 31 Countries



\* Indicates data is the mean of 2006 and 2008 polling data.

\*\* Indicates only the 2008 (using a national sample) data is graphed.



Table 1: List of Countries and Survey Details

Country	Year(s)	Sample Size	Survey Population
Argentina	2008	1479	Urban
Australia	2006	1007	National
Azerbaijan	2008	1202	National
Brazil	2006	800	Urban
Canada	2006	1007	National
Chile	2006	1000	National
China	2006 & 2008	1800 / 2011	Urban / Urban
Egypt	2006 & 2008	1000 / 1200	Urban / Urban
France	2006 & 2008	1000 / 1200	National / National
Germany	2006	1002	National
Hong Kong	2008	2040	National
India	2006 & 2008	1639 / 2141	National / National
Indonesia	2006 & 2008	1000 / 1527	Major Cities / National
Iran	2008	710	National
Iraq	2006	2000	National
Israel	2006	1008	National
Italy	2006	1004	National
Kenya	2006 & 2008	1002 / 1000	National / National
Mexico	2006 & 2008	1000 / 1700	National / National
Nigeria	2006 & 2008	1000 / 1000	National / National
Palestine	2008	1264	National
Philippines	2006	1000	Urban
Poland	2006 & 2008	1041 / 1964	National / National
Russia	2006 & 2008	1045 / 1603	National / National
South Korea	2006 & 2008	1000 / 1200	Major Cities / National
Spain	2006 & 2008	1028 / 600	National / National
Thailand	2008	4922	National
Turkey	2006 & 2008	1000 / 1742	Urban / National
Ukraine	2006 & 2008	1018 / 2063	National / National
United Kingdom	2006 & 2008	1004 / 1603	National / National
United States	2006 & 2008	1002 / 1819	National / National

Table 2: Change in Difference between Torture Opposition and Support

Country	2006 Difference (in %)	2008 Difference (in %)	Change
China	12	38	+26
Egypt	40	8	-32
France	56	66	+10
India	-9	-31	-22
Kenya	15	-17	-32
Mexico	26	49	+23
Nigeria	10	-13	-23
Poland	35	35	0
Russia	6	13	+7
Spain	49	71	+22
Ukraine	25	33	+8
United Kingdom	48	66	+18
United States	22	9	-13

Figure 2: Approval of Torture and Per Capita Income

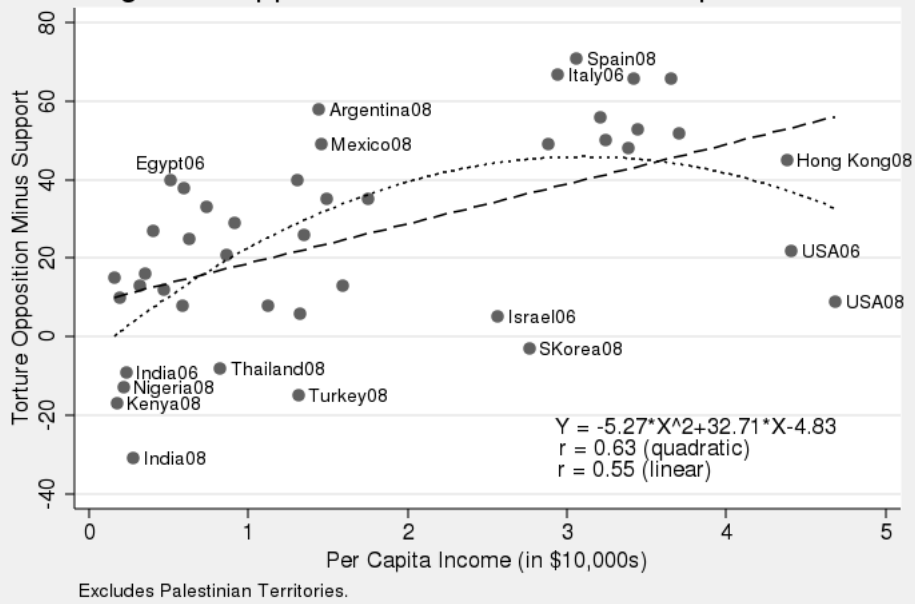


Figure 3: Approval of Torture and Democratization

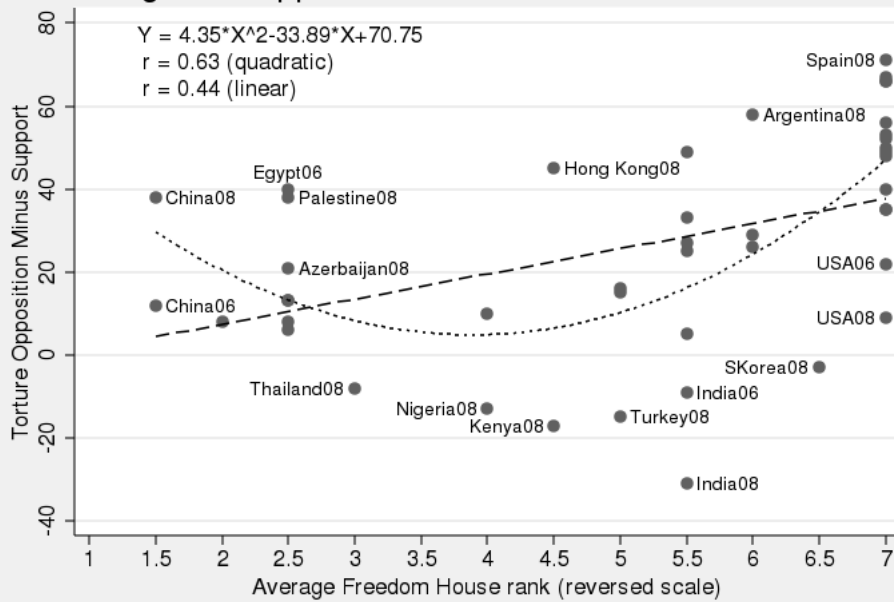


Figure 4: Torture Approval and Prevalence of Threat

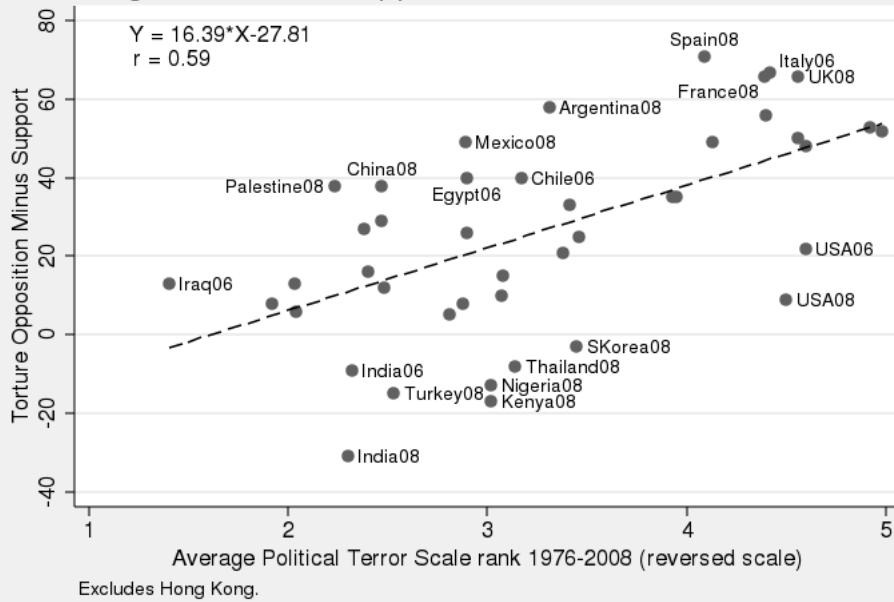


Table 3: Multiple Regression Model of Torture Approval

Torture Opposition	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Per Capita Income	17.55* (9.48)	27.56*** (9.39)	16.08 (9.90)	26.16** (10.11)	
Per Capita Income <sup>2</sup>	-5.10** (1.98)	-6.27*** (2.06)	-4.52** (2.03)	-5.70** (2.16)	
Freedom House Rank	-30.73** (12.37)		-32.67** (12.90)		
Freedom House Rank <sup>2</sup>	3.73** (1.50)		4.16** (1.55)		
Polity IV Score		-0.78 (0.94)		-0.94 (1.00)	
Polity IV Score <sup>2</sup>		0.05 (0.17)		0.16 (0.18)	
Political Terror Scale	12.99** (6.01)	17.22*** (5.76)			
CIRI Torture Score			13.70 (11.07)	23.68** (11.34)	
Europe					34.38*** (8.98)
Americas					24.93** (10.13)
Asia					3.15 (8.98)
Constant	22.86 (31.02)	-46.86*** (15.10)	41.04 (31.12)	33.54** (14.66)	10.7 (6.75)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.59	0.52	0.55	0.58	0.35
N	42	42	42	42	44

Standard errors in parentheses.

Africa and the Middle East is the excluded category in (5).

\* p < 0.1; \*\* p < .05; \*\*\* p < 0.01