ANTI-HUMAN TRAFFICKING POLICIES AND FREEDOM OF THE PRESS: A CROSS-COUNTRY STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Human trafficking has been called the 'dark side' of globalization. Interpol estimates that human trafficking is now the third largest transnational crime and the number of victims increases with each passing year. In an effort to combat the crime, the United Nations created the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons (Protocol) which outlines three anti-human trafficking policy dimensions. Some countries have been very successful in complying with the Protocol and fighting human traffickers while other countries struggle. It is hypothesized in this study that the degree of press freedom within a country significantly affects a country's ability to comply with the Protocol. It is argued that greater press freedom enables the media to increase public awareness of the atrocities of human trafficking, sway public opinion, and call on government officials to take action and adhere to the laws prescribed in the Protocol. This hypothesis is tested using a cross-country data set of 119 countries. The results indicate that countries that allow for greater press freedom are more successful in their compliance with the Protocol.

JEL: O57, O15

KEYWORDS: Anti-Human Trafficking Policies, Press Freedom, Cross-Country

INTRODUCTION

As a result of increased foreign competition and trade and the dissemination of information and technologies, globalization has brought many positive economic changes such as a higher quality and quantity of products and services and greater levels of human capital. Nonetheless, the process of globalization has brought a host of negative outcomes such as environmental degradation, problems associated with economic inequality and poverty, spread of terrorism and terrorist ideals, and the loss of employment in host countries. While a wealth of literature exists that explored these positive and negative outcomes, a growing body of literature has recently considered the effect of globalization on human trafficking. Advances in technologies, transportations, and the ability to share information across the globe instantaneously have connected countries and people in ways that transcend geographical distances and, as a result, have allowed for an increased illicit flow of human beings. As Cho et al. (2012) state, human trafficking can be viewed as one of the dark sides of globalization.

The United Nations (2001) defines human trafficking in persons as the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. The United Nations estimates that almost every country in the world has been affected by human trafficking and Interpol (2009) estimates that human trafficking is the third largest transnational crime. In the 2012 Trafficking of Humans Report, the U.S. Department of

State estimates that as many as 27 million men, women, and children around the world are victims of human trafficking.

Increased global awareness of the severity of this issue has led to the creation and adoption of major international treaties and laws to fight human trafficking such as the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings and the United Nation's Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (Protocol). The United Nation's Protocol outlines three distinct policy dimensions to combat human trafficking: the *prosecution* or criminalization of traffickers, the *protection* and assistance for victims of human trafficking, and the *prevention* of the crime itself. For the prosecution dimension, the Protocol calls for each state to adopt legislative and other legal measures necessary to establish participation in human trafficking as a criminal offense such that offenders can be prosecuted. In reference to the protection policies, the Protocol requires that states maintain the privacy and identity of human trafficking victims, assist victims in the prosecution of offenders, provide aid in regards to their physical, psychological, and social recovery, ensure their physical safety, and offer a legal system that allows for the possibility of obtaining compensation for damage suffered. Finally, in reference to the prevention, the Protocol calls for states to establish comprehensive policies to prevent and combat human trafficking such as creating social initiatives and mass media campaigns to combat trafficking and to strengthen educational, social, and cultural measures to discourage all forms of human exploitation, with a special focus on those groups most susceptible to human trafficking.

Despite the international efforts to combat human trafficking, the U.S. State Department reports that human trafficking is one of the fastest growing crimes in the world. Nevertheless, some countries have been more successful than others in fighting human trafficking. Thus, the question arises as to why the crime continues to grow despite significant international efforts to prevent human trafficking and, more specifically, why have some countries been more effective in combating human traffickers than others? A small body of research has recently started to explore the factors that either assist, or hinder a country's ability to fight human trafficking. To date, the country factors such as level of economic development and freedom and income distribution, among others have been found to influence a country's anti-human trafficking efforts.

Interestingly, a factor that has not yet been considered is the role that press freedom plays in a country's ability to adhere to international anti-trafficking laws and successfully fight human trafficking. The media has the power to bring news and stories of human rights violations and injustices to the attention of a population and can use this power to influence public opinion and call for action from domestic and international leaders. However, the degree to which the media can call upon leaders and influence the public on issues such as human trafficking violations is dependent on the freedoms that are afforded to the media. Thus, it is hypothesized that an unregulated, free media should positively influence a country's ability to fight human trafficking by exposing violations and calling on government officials to adhere to the anti-human trafficking laws. This study contributes to the anti-human trafficking literature by empirically testing this hypothesis using a cross-country data set of 119 countries.

The remainder of the document is organized as follows. The next section discusses the current literature and findings related to press freedom and human trafficking. The Data and Methodology section provides a greater description of the data and control variables used in this analysis in addition to summary statistics and a discussion of the methodology used to empirically test the hypothesis. The following section, Results and Discussion, presents the analysis results and discusses the empirical findings with an emphasis on the results of the hypothesis test. Finally, the section Concluding Comments provides a brief summary of the study and offers policy implications associated with the findings in addition to providing avenues for future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A recent study by Cho (2012) examines four broad determinants of human trafficking in origin and destination countries – migration, crime, vulnerability, and policy and institutional efforts. With respect to the latter, she finds that the extent of human trafficking is decreasing in institutional quality in origin countries, but finds no evidence of a link between policy and human trafficking in destination countries, indicating that "anti-trafficking measures are still not well-grounded in general law and enforcement in many countries" (p. 15-16). However, recent evidence by Bartilow (2010) and Jac-Kucharski (2012) suggests that women's representation in institutions is associated with the extent of human trafficking, since female politicians are more likely to express concern for this crime, given that most of its victims are women. While Cho (2012) also notes the need to examine policy efforts for the root causes of human trafficking, including poverty, inequality and gender discrimination, among others, our study examines whether the institutional implementation of anti-human trafficking laws is influenced by press freedom. While past research has not considered the relationship between press freedom enjoyed within a country and its adherence to anti-human trafficking laws, previous studies have explored the impact of press freedom on a variety of country-level outcomes. Specifically, Norris and Zinnbauer (2002) find that societies with widespread access to an independent free press tend to also enjoy governments with greater administrative efficiency, improved social and economic conditions, and less corruption, which suggests that such societies would also be more likely to participate in and observe anti-human trafficking treaties. Bhathangar (2000) notes that societies with greater access to unrestricted information also tend to enjoy greater transparency and accountability throughout all facets of the government. The greater transparency that is associated with access to unrestricted, free information suggests that governments are more easily held accountable for their actions and responses to criminal acts, such as human trafficking. Further, through its ability to share news on an international stage, Pal (2011) theorizes that unregulated national media can bring international exposure to a multitude of issues such as human rights violations that can lead to external, international pressure on domestic governments to act in the best interest of their citizens. In sum, it is widely accepted that nations with a free, unregulated media tend to be more economically and politically stable, enjoy greater efficiency and transparency, and experience lower levels of corruption (Ades and Di Tella, 1999; Treisman, 2000; and Wei, 2000), all of which suggest a greater capability to combat human trafficking.

An unregulated, free press can expose the atrocities associated with human trafficking on both the domestic and international stage and use this platform to call for action and to hold government officials accountable to the international anti-trafficking laws. While a free press is associated with more economically and politically stable countries with lower corruption levels and greater government efficiency, it is hypothesized that through its ability to expose crimes and call upon governments to comply with international laws, a free press should also be associated with countries that are more successful in combating human trafficking. Alternatively, a media that is highly controlled by the government is unlikely to have the ability to disseminate news that can incite conflict or show the government in a poor light. In such a society, the government typically regulates messages and images to mask potential sources of contention and hide such issues as human rights violations. A controlled press can be used as a means to share government propaganda that promotes a sense of national identity and pride and news of human trafficking occurring within the county would counter such efforts. Thus, it is hypothesized that,

H1: Greater levels of press freedom enable countries to more effectively fight human trafficking through its compliance with international anti-human trafficking laws.

This hypothesis is empirically tested using sample data from 119 countries. The data and research methods are discussed in the following section.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

<u>Anti-Human Trafficking and Press Freedom Data</u>

In order to test the hypothesis, it is necessary to have a measure of country compliance with international anti-human trafficking laws. Using the three policy dimensions, *prosecution*, *protection*, and *prevention* outlined in the United Nation's Protocol, Cho et al. (2012) have developed a new anti-human trafficking country index. The index is designed to measure a governments' compliance with the multitude of requirements for each of these three policy areas over the time period 2000-2009. For each policy dimension, Cho et al. (2012) assign each country a score on a discrete one to five scale such that a score of five represents the greatest level of compliance on the policy dimension and a score of one represents complete non-compliance. Cho et al. (2012) then aggregate these three sub-indices to create the anti-human trafficking index (*3P*) by taking the un-weighted sum of the three scores. The *3P* data is available for 175 countries and is used in this study to proxy country compliance with anti-human trafficking laws. In the 2010 *3P* data, the Netherlands, Sweden, and Italy each received the highest *3P* score of 15, indicating that these countries demonstrate the greatest level of compliance with the Protocol's three anti-human trafficking policy dimensions. Alternatively, Iran, Libya, and Somalia received a *3P* score of four, which represented the lowest score given in the 2010 data, indicating that these countries exhibited the least compliance with the anti-human trafficking policies. Japan, Nepal, Singapore, and Ukraine are examples of countries that received a score of ten, which is closer to the mean score of 9.8 from the 2010 *3P* data.

The 2009 World Press Freedom Index (PF) index, published by Reporters Without Borders (RWB) is used to measure the media and press freedoms enjoyed within a country. RWB is an international organization that aims to promote the freedom to be informed and to inform others throughout the world. The organization is based in France with offices and constituents located on all five continents. The PF index reflects the freedoms afforded to journalists and news organizations at the country level and the efforts made by leaders to respect and protect these freedoms. The index also captures the level of self-censorship and the ability of the media to investigate and criticize government and leadership.

The PF index is published annually and uses 40 criteria to assess press freedom at the country level. To create the index, RWB uses a questionnaire that is sent to its partner organizations, which consists of 15 freedom of expression organizations, a network of 130 global correspondents, journalists, researchers, jurists, and human rights activists. The questionnaire considers every kind of violation journalists and new media can face such as imprisonment, physical attacks, murder, threats, censorship, searches, harassment, financial pressures, and the confiscation of information. The PF index ranges from zero to 100 and a score of zero represents complete respect for media freedom. From the 2009 PF data, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Norway, and Sweden were recognized as having the greatest levels of press freedom, each with PF values of zero, while Eritrea, Iran, Myanmar, Turkmenistan, and North Korea were ranked at the opposite end of the PF scale.

<u>Control Variables</u>

Gartze (2005) states that economically free markets encourage cooperation across nations through their relationships developed through trade. This suggests that countries that are more economically free have stronger international relationships and are more likely to adhere to international laws and treaties. Thus, countries that enjoy greater levels of economic freedom are more connected to the global community and would be more inclined to comply with the anti-human trafficking laws outlined in the Protocol. Economic freedom is controlled for in this analysis using the Economic Freedom of the World (EFW) index published by Gwartney and Lawson (2009) and the Fraser Institute. The EFW index measures government size, legal structure and security of property rights, access to sound money, freedom to

exchange with foreigners, and regulation of credit, labor, and business, and ranges from zero to ten with higher scores indicating more economically free countries.

In empirical analysis of the predictors of human trafficking, Bales (2007) finds that the overall economic well-being and the degree of poverty significantly affect the degree of human trafficking in a country. Specifically, greater poverty and lower levels of economic well-being are found to drive human trafficking. Income inequality and the level of economic development are controlled for in this analysis to capture the overall economic well-being and poverty within a country. Income inequality is measured with the 2009 Gini coefficient developed by Corrado Gini in 1912. The Gini coefficient measures inequality of income distribution in a country and ranges from zero to one such that values closer to zero represent a more equal distribution of income and values closer to one represent an unequal distribution of wealth. In the extreme case a Gini coefficient of one indicates that one individual holds all of the income while the rest have none. The level of economic development is measured by the natural log of 2009 GDP per capita (*LnGDPPC),* which is available through the World Bank. Table 1 provides the descriptive statistics for all data used in the analysis.

Table 1: Data Summary and Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Proxy (Name, Year Reported)	Mean	St. Deviation	N
3P	Anti-Human Trafficking (Cho et al. 2012)	10.71	0.224	119
PF	World Press Freedom Index (Reporters Without Borders, 2009)	24.60	20.447	119
Gini	Income Inequality (Gini Coefficient, 2009)	41.00	0.953	119
EFW	Economic Freedom (Economic Freedom of the World, 2009)	6.70	0.076	119
LnGDPPC	Economic Development (World Bank, 2009)	8.31	0.144	119

Table 1 provides a summary of the data sources used in the analysis in addition to the descriptive statistics. The independent variables are lagged by approximately one to two years in relation to the dependent variable, 3P, as their effect on a country compliance with anti-human trafficking laws cannot be expected to occur immediately.

Table 2 provides the correlation matrix of all variables used in the analysis. As shown below, 3P is negatively and significantly correlated with PF and Gini and positively and significantly correlated with EFW and LnGDPPC. These relationships suggest that countries with greater press freedom, income equality, and economic freedom and development tend to also exhibit greater compliance with the international anti-human trafficking laws as outlined in the Protocol. Nonetheless, the correlations only suggest associations and in order to test for the causal relationship between PF and 3P as stated in H1, a regression analysis is necessary.

Table 2: Correlation Table

	3P	*PF*	*PF*	*PF*	*PF*
3P	1				
PF	-0.42777***	1			
Gini	-0.39511***	0.13689	1		
EFW	0.552225***	-0.45247***	-0.29756***	1	
LnGDPPC	0.586827***	-0.46132***	-0.37108***	0.676656***	1

Table 2 provides the correlation matrix of all of the data used in the analyses. The correlations indicate that countries with greater press freedom, income equality, and economic freedom and development tend to also exhibit greater compliance with the international anti-human trafficking laws outlined in the Protocol.

To test H1, the following regression is estimated using the data described in Table 1 for 119 countries:

$$3P = \beta_0 + \beta_1 PF + \beta_2 EFW + \beta_3 Gini + \beta_4 LGDPPC + \varepsilon$$

If the coefficient on PF, β_1, is significant and negative, this will provide empirical evidence to support H1.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As shown in Table 3, the regression results provide overall support for the model with an Adjusted R^2 of 0.4216 and a significant F at the 99 percent confidence level. White's (1980) general test for heteroscedasticity suggests that the residuals are homoscedastic and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) for each of the explanatory variables is less than 10, the VIF cutoff suggested by Field (2005). In reference to the control variables, all of the coefficient estimates are significant and have the expected signs. Specifically, the results indicate that countries that enjoy higher levels of economic freedom and development, and have a more equal distribution of income tend to comply with the international anti-human trafficking laws outlined in the Protocol.

Table 3: Estimated Regression Results

	Coefficient Estimate	Std Err	*t* Stat	*p*-value	VIF
Intercept	5.013**	2.085	2.400	0.0178	0
PF	-0.020**	0.010	-2.08	0.0401	1.336
EFW	0.668**	0.289	2.31	0.0227	1.949
Gini	-0.047***	0.018	-2.64	0.0093	1.169
LnGDPPC	0.438***	0.157	2.80	0.0061	2.081
Adj. R^2 = 0.4216	F stat = 22.51***	p <0.10*; **p <0.05; ***p<0.01			

Table 3 provides the estimated regression results. The positive and significant coefficient on PF supports H. The remaining coefficients are significant and have the expected sign.

In reference to H1, the coefficient on *PF* is significant and positive, which suggests that countries with greater press freedom tend to be more successful in adhering to the anti-human trafficking laws in the Protocol. It is argued here that an unrestricted, free media can expose human rights violations associated with trafficking to increase public awareness and use this influence to call on both domestic leaders and the international community to take action against these atrocities. Further, a free media can hold government officials accountable to international anti-trafficking laws. Alternatively, a media that is highly controlled by the government is likely to be censored such that it cannot call attention to issues that would invoke tensions and paint the government in a poor light. As shown in Table 3, the cross-country empirical results support this hypothesis.

Nonetheless, some regions of the world have historically experienced a greater degree of human trafficking than others. Specifically, some countries located in the Eastern Pacific / Southern Asia (EPSA), Latin America (LA), and the Sub-Saharan African (SSA) regions have had notably higher rates of human trafficking and, in an effort to test whether the above results are dependent on regional effects, a second regression model is estimated that includes these regional indicators. The second regression model is defined as:

$$3P = \beta_0 + \beta_1 PF + \beta_2 EFW + \beta_3 Gini + \beta_4 LGDPPC + \beta_5 EPSA + \beta_6 LA + \beta_7 SSA + \varepsilon$$

The estimated regression results are presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Estimated Regression Results with Regional Controls

	Coefficient Estimate	Std Err	t Stat	p-value	VIF
Intercept	6.200**	2.588	2.400	0.0183	0
PF	-0.022**	0.011	-2.05	0.0424	1.695
EFW	0.573*	0.312	1.840	0.0685	2.235
Gini	-0.057**	0.023	-2.430	0.0165	1.990
LnGDPPC	0.412**	0.189	2.180	0.0314	2.991
EPSA	0.379	0.587	0.650	0.5195	1.441
LA	0.550	0.675	0.810	0.4174	2.351
SSA	-0.110	0.721	-0.150	0.8795	3.630

Adj. R^2 = 0.4157 F stat = 12.97*** p <0.10*; **p <0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 4 provides the estimated regression results of the regression with the added regional controls. The signs and significance of the coefficients from the original regression remain the same and the coefficients on the regional indicators are insignificant. These results offers further support for H1 as the press freedom is still found to significantly affect 3P even with the inclusion of regional controls.

The results presented in Table 4 indicate that the signs and significance of the coefficients from the original regression remain the same and each of the estimated coefficients for the regional controls are insignificant. These results offer further support for H1 as press freedom is found to significantly affect a country's ability to adhere to international anti-human trafficking laws even when regional controls are taken into consideration. In other words, the effect of press freedom on country compliance with anti-human trafficking laws is not dependent on global regions.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

While globalization has brought the international community many positive economic outcomes, it has unfortunately also increased the flow of human trafficking and has affected almost every corner of the world. A recent example is the report by the Environmental Justice Foundation (2013) finding that human trafficking is prevalent in Thailand's fishing industry. Thailand's economy relies heavily on labor-intensive industries; however, as a result of the country's growing prosperity, "many Thai citizens have turned away from hard, manual jobs," leading to a labor shortage in many industries, such as fishing and seafood processing. According the Environmental Justice Foundation (2013), the need for migrant workers, coupled with a costly and complicated immigration system, has ratcheted up illegal human trafficking in the fishing industry, where, as DiPietro (2013) states "the trafficked workers are subject to long hours, little or no pay and physical and mental abuse up to and including murder."

In our analysis using data from 119 countries, the empirical results suggest that countries that are more economically free and developed and have greater income equality, tend to be more successful in complying with the anti-human trafficking laws outlined in the Protocol, which supports previous research. Further, the results indicate that countries that enjoy greater press freedom also tend to have a greater degree of compliance with the anti-trafficking laws. We argue that an unrestricted, free media has the ability to expose the atrocities of human trafficking to rally both the public and call upon the domestic government and the international community to take action and hold officials accountable to anti-human trafficking laws such as those described in the Protocol.

Our results have implications for the United Nations' efforts to use the media as a means to combat human trafficking. Specifically, the website for the United Nations Global Initiative to Fight Human

Trafficking (UN.GIFT) states "[t]he media has a large role to play in mobilizing public support and involvement to help prevent and combat trafficking." UN.GIFT also emphasizes that effective implementation of the three dimensions of the Protocol –prosecution, protection and prevention – requires not only the involvement of law enforcement, but a "synergy of efforts" among stakeholders, such as the media, among others. Thus, our findings can be used by U.N. policymakers to lobby for increased press freedom, particularly in those countries where human trafficking compliance is low.

While the results support previous research findings and offer evidence that press freedom can play an important role in fighting human trafficking, there are limitations of the study that should be noted. Specifically, when attempting to quantitatively measure broad country characteristics such economic freedom, income equality, economic development, and press freedom, there will undoubtedly be measurement error. As with all cross-country studies exploring such country factors, the results presented here are limited to the quality of these data measures, which are imperfect.

As researchers continue to explore methods to combat human trafficking, an avenue for future research would be to explore how policies aimed at enhancing press freedom can affect human trafficking within a country over time. Another area of research would explore the impact of developed countries' increasing consumption of outsourced goods and services on emerging economies' need for migrant workers. Does the ramp up of capacity to meet such consumption needs, facilitate human trafficking within the supply chain or does compliance with such policies such as the California Transparency in Supply Chains Act of 2010 create awareness within multinational companies to better assess risk, conduct audits and provide training to suppliers within high risk locals and reduce human trafficking? Given that human trafficking has continued to increase despite international efforts to stop the practice, researchers, policy makers, and political leaders need to devote more resources to the anti-human trafficking effort.

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