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Human Rights Repression through Restrictions on Civil Society

Chapter for Innovations in Human Rights: Concepts, Data, and Measurement

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ABSTRACT   Research on human rights repression often focuses on how states use physical violence to protect legitimacy and curb challenges to state power. Such repression tends to draw ire from the international community and can be counterproductive at achieving its aims. To avoid this, states employ subtler and less violent forms of repression designed to demobilize popular advocacy and capture the benefits of civil society organizations. This chapter explores how authoritarian regimes use nonviolent administrative crackdown through anti-civil society laws to limit and co-opt domestic and international civil society. Because it looks like more standard domestic regulation, administrative crackdown attracts far less international outcry and condemnation, while accomplishing similar aims as violent repression. Anti-civil society laws can even act as a "canary in the coal mine" and signal future physical repression. This is a significant argument, suggesting that previous research may undercount repression by only looking at physical violence rather than more innocuous legal and policy-oriented avenues of repression. The author recalls their experience exploring this more hidden form of repression, discusses the challenge of collecting and harmonizing administrative data from different national jurisdictions and measuring different forms of de jure and de facto restrictions, presents key results, and outlines avenues for future research.

On December 29, 2011, Egyptian security forces raided the offices of several international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) including Freedom House, the International Republican Institute, and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation. These raids led to a year-long public trial *in absentia* for the NGO staff involved, and in June 2013, 43

NGO employees were convicted of operating unregistered organizations and accepting illegal foreign funding, and were sentenced to 1–5 years in prison (Loveluck, 2013). While these organizations technically had violated Egypt's Law 84 of 2002, which required specific registration guidelines and limited foreign funding, they had worked in legal limbo for nearly a decade with tacit state approval (Amnesty International, 2013). However, as the post-revolutionary military regime faced growing domestic pressures throughout 2011, the state decided to enforce the long-dormant regulations and shut down the NGOs.

This anti-NGO raid and subsequent trial in Cairo are part of a growing global phenomenon of closing civic space (Carothers & Brechenmacher, 2014; Chaudhry, 2022; Chaudhry & Heiss, 2022a; Dupuy et al., 2021), where states use bureaucratic regulations to repress civil society while avoiding international criticism typically associated with violent human rights abuses. In this chapter, I explore how administrative crackdown presents unique measurement challenges for human rights researchers. I first analyze how and why states repress and regulate civil society. I then review two ways civil society repression has been measured over the past decade, both as formal *de jure* legal restrictions through their actual *de facto* implementation. I then describe my attempts to merge these approaches and outline possibilities for future methodological developments in quantifying this subtler form of human rights repression.

Civil society repression and human rights

What is civil society and why do states repress it?

The first challenge in quantifying and measuring civil society repression is defining civil society itself. "Civil society" is an exceptionally broad concept that captures many dimensions of political, civic, and social activity, and which encompasses a wide range of human rights enumerated in international treaties and declarations. The idea of a civil society has long been salient, with commentators as early as De Tocqueville theorizing on the importance of groups of citizens that actively engage with their governments to advocate for reform, rights, change, and other services. It can be defined broadly as "the arena of uncoerced collective action around shared interests, purposes, and values" (Howell et al., 2008, p. 91), and includes both formal and informal organizations, as well as more amorphous phenomena like social movements and protests. Civil society need not be explicitly political or rights-focused—any sort of association, including bowling clubs, self-help groups, faith-based organizations, and labor unions, allows citizens to come in contact with each other, build social capital, and aggregate individual preferences (Putnam et al., 1994). Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) represent a specific subset of CSOs, often distinguished by narrower purposes like charity and development or specific tax designations—for instance, trade unions and professional organizations typically do not self-identify as NGOs, but as CSOs (Tomlinson, 2015, p. 124). Despite these minor definitional differences, the terms CSOs and NGOs are often used interchangeably (Salamon et al., 2004), creating additional challenges for consistent quantification.

Though less immediately threatening to political legitimacy than armed rebels, large-scale popular protests, or opposition electoral movements, civil society can pose signif-

icant challenges to governments—both democracies and autocracies—and potentially trigger repressive responses. The relationship between states and civil society varies substantially depending on regime type, political context, and the nature of civil society activities. CSO–state relations can be categorized into three general types: CSOs can reinforce, oppose, or substitute state power (Ahmed & Potter, 2006; Heiss, 2019a). First, CSOs can *strengthen and bolster* the state. In democracies, associational life "increases civic engagement, embeds norms of reciprocity into society, and helps improve democratic governance" (Heiss, 2019a, p. 561). In autocracies, CSOs can lend repressive governments legitimacy (Brass, 2016) and keep dictators in power longer, transforming NGOs into "mediators between the people's demands and the administration's offers" (Néfissa & Abd al-Fattah, 2005, p. 8). CSOs can even support the state directly through government-organized NGOs (GONGOs) and "first lady NGOs" (CSO headed by dictators' spouses) that are run directly by the regime (Cumming, 2010; Stacher, 2012).

More threatening, however, is the notion that civil society can stand *in opposition to*—or even *replace or substitute*—the state. By participating in civil society, citizens are empowered to "stand up to city hall" (Jamal, 2007, p. 4) and find avenues for coordinating collectively to pursue their community interests. CSOs can act as watchdogs against government overreach and abuse, and their activities provide avenues for anti-government mobilization (Heiss, 2019a). This oppositional role is particularly evident in human rights advocacy. For instance, domestic human rights CSOs can appeal to transnational networks of human rights NGOs, who then exert pressure on democratic governments, who in turn confront the repressive government, creating a boomerang effect that can improve and reshape human rights norms, policies, and conditions (Keck & Sikkink, 1998; Risse & Sikkink, 1999). Advocacy CSOs can also shame and pressure repressive states through international public opinion (Kelley, 2017; Murdie & Davis, 2012; Smidt et al., 2020), provide direct support for democratization efforts (Bush, 2015, 2019), and directly consult on domestic policy reforms (Heiss, 2019b). In the extreme, CSOs can even supplant the state—in Haiti, for example, international NGOs provide the majority of health and education services and have effectively divided the country into NGO "fiefdoms" (Heiss, 2019a; Schuller, 2012).

Given these threats to political stability, states work to direct, co-opt, or control CSOs to ensure regime survival, neutralize potential opposition, and reshape civil society in their favor. Regulations and repression are central to this strategy. Because NGOs and CSOs are more formally institutionalized, repressive states can limit these organizations in more targeted, nonviolent, and bureaucratic ways that avoid the potential consequences of violent crackdown (Chaudhry, 2022). Administrative crackdown—also known as NGO restrictions, anti-NGO laws, or the global crackdown on civil society (Carothers & Brechenmacher, 2014; Chaudhry, 2022; Chaudhry & Heiss, 2022a; Dupuy et al., 2021; Heiss, 2017)—allows regimes to impose legal and regulatory barriers to CSO entry, advocacy, and funding. States use administrative crackdown to repress civil society and limit its potential influence on regime references. Laws prohibiting entry make it difficult to engage in associational life and instead keep the general public oriented towards the state. Prohibitions against advocacy prevent CSOs from lobbying for improved human rights or against regime abuses. Funding laws effectively short-circuit international spiral and boomerang pressure by preventing domestic CSOs from collaborating with international partners and limiting the scope of their programs. CSO

regulations also allow states to co-opt domestic civil society, "us[ing] nonprofit regulation as a tool of political control to shore up their continued rule" (Spires, 2020, p. 573) by reshaping CSO programming, strategies, and missions to be more aligned with government preferences (Lian & Murdie, 2023; Teets, 2014).

How has civil society repression been measured?

Another challenge in quantifying civil society repression is that most instances of state repression and human rights violations are already aimed at elements of civil society. Extralegal disappearances of social movement leaders, violent dispersal of protests, and arrests of community organizers and activists are all examples of states repressing informal, nonorganizational components of civil society. These types of repression, though, are typically categorized as assaults on civil liberties and violations of physical integrity rights more broadly rather than civil society specifically. Legal restrictions on CSOs are not typically included in the most common datasets that track human rights violations. This measurement gap creates a systematic undercount of repression that overlooks how states increasingly rely on bureaucratic tools to control civil society.

Quantification is especially difficult because of the mismatch between codified *de jure* laws and the *de facto* implementation of those laws. Governments often have unenforced laws, either the vestigial remains of past legal regimes, or laws that are designed to be selectively enforced (Cartwright, 2016). NGO laws are no different. For instance, Egypt's Law 84 of 2002 contained harsh provisions that were inconsistently applied until after the 2011 Arab Spring, when enforcement intensified (Chaudhry & Heiss, 2022b). Similarly, a sponsor of Russia's 2015 Undesirable Organizations Law described it as "a weapon hanging on the wall that never fires," explicitly acknowledging its goal to deter CSOs from challenging the state by chilling civil society activity (Kozenko, 2015).

In line with this conceptual split, scholars have developed two general approaches to measure civil society repression, each addressing different aspects of the regulatory environment. The first focuses on *de jure* restrictions, cataloging and analyzing formal legal frameworks that constrain civil society activities. The second approach attempts to capture *de facto* repression, assessing how these laws are implemented in practice and their actual effects on civic space.

De jure repression

Even in the most repressive authoritarian regimes, states often use formal statutes and regulations to provide legal justification for repression. Since states tend to publish their criminal and civic legal codes in open forums, scholars often analyze these laws to determine the *de jure* legal environment for human rights. Research organizations like the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL) monitor legislative and regulatory developments related to civil society and publish detailed annual summaries of the *de jure* legal environments for dozens of countries. Other projects collect data on specific attributes of civil society laws, like the Global Register of Nonprofit Data Sources (GRNDS), which provides a standardized schema for describing nonprofit regulations (Bloodgood et al., 2023).

Researchers have used these resources to compile country-year panel datasets documenting the presence or absence of different types of anti-NGO laws. Through close

reading of ICNL summaries, UN and US State Department reports, various think tank research reports, and national constitutions, Christensen & Weinstein (2013) offer a dataset of specific types of legal barriers to entry, funding, and advocacy for NGOs in 98 countries between 1909–2012. Similarly, Dupuy et al. (2016) report data on laws restricting foreign funding for NGOs in 192 countries from 1993–2012, while Bromley et al. (2020) count foreign funding laws for 60 countries from 1994–2015. In general, research using these datasets of counts of laws has tended to focus on either the determinants of foreign funding laws (Bromley et al., 2020) or on the effect of these laws on foreign aid (Christensen & Weinstein, 2013; Dupuy et al., 2016; Dupuy & Prakash, 2018). Though Christensen & Weinstein (2013) collected data on legal barriers to entry and advocacy, their focus was primarily on funding barriers alone and they leave this data largely unexplored. Both Glasius et al. (2020) and Chaudhry (2022) have since expanded Christensen and Weinstein's data to include 96 countries through 2016 (Glasius et al., 2020) or 130 countries through 2013 (Chaudhry, 2022) and both use all three categories of legal barriers—funding, entry, and advocacy—as outcome variables to explore the determinants of formal *de jure* anti-NGO laws. Chaudhry & Heiss (2024) also use these counts of laws to examine their effect on foreign aid and whether additional new anti-NGO laws predict future human rights abuses (2022b), while Fransen & Dupuy (2024) explore the relationship between counts of laws and the size of the international NGO sector in repressive countries.

While counting anti-NGO laws has value in researching legal restriction, binary indicators fail to capture the varying scope, severity, or enforcement of different regulations. Not all restrictive laws are created equal (DeMattee, 2019)—some may impose minor administrative burdens while others effectively criminalize entire categories of civil society activity. Additionally, the emphasis on national-level legislation can obscure important subnational variation in regulatory environments, particularly in federal systems where provincial or local authorities may have significant regulatory authority. In China, for example, international NGOs must formally register with government authorities in each province they hope to work in, creating substantial provincial variation in legal enforcement (Ye & Heiss, 2025).

De facto repression
Focusing on counts of laws overlooks the selective enforcement that shapes actual civil society experiences, and data on the *de facto* implementation of laws allows researchers to explore the on-the-ground repression of CSOs. These approaches have ranged from expert assessments and public opinion surveys to counts derived from human rights reports and event data collection, with distinct methodological strengths and limits.

In the early 2000s, research on associational life under authoritarianism tended to use in-depth qualitative fieldwork and interviews (Henderson, 2002; Jamal, 2007), or broader public opinion surveys. The World Values Survey and regional projects like the Arab Barometer, Afrobarometer, and Asian Barometer all include questions about perceptions of the openness of civil society and individual participation in CSOs (Jamal, 2007). Though rich in detail, these surveys are conducted irregularly and target general samples of the population rather than CSO members specifically, thus making them unsuitable for cross-country longitudinal analysis.

Around the same time, CIVICUS launched its Civil Society Index (CSI), which used expert surveys to rate the legal environment of dozens of countries along four dimensions: the sector's structure, external environment, values, and impact (Heinrich, 2004). These were scored on a 1–3 scale and summed to create an index that measured the strength and openness of a state's civil society sector. However, CSI data was collected in 2–3 year waves in only 30–50 countries, again making it difficult to use in country-year panel data. In the 2010s, the CSI evolved into the CIVICUS Monitor (CIVICUS, 2024a), which uses expert surveys and quantitative human rights indicators to generate country scores on a scale of 1–100 with five evenly-divided categories of civic space: open, narrowed, obstructed, repressed, and closed. CIVICUS Monitor scores are based on a weighted average of common measures for freedom of association, assembly, and expression (CIVICUS, 2024b) and are thus conceptually broader than just civil society repression. However, the project has better coverage than its predecessor CSI, with annual scores for 196 countries since 2018, and could prove useful for future research on the repression of civic space more generally.

Researchers have also extracted details of civil society repression from broader human rights datasets. Among the rights measured by the CIRI Human Rights Project (Cingranelli et al., 2014) is a three-category measure of assembly and association freedom based on US State Department reports, capturing how easily citizens can participate in trade unions, cultural organizations, or domestic and international NGOs. Countries can receive one of three scores each year—severely restricted, limited, and unrestricted—based on the severity and universality of civil society restrictions within each country. CIRI data is available for nearly 200 countries annually since 1981, making it ideal for cross-sectional analysis. However, with only three possible outcomes the data is sluggish and fails to pick up on minor changes in the civil society regulatory environment (Bakke et al., 2020). Similar limitations apply to data from the Human Rights Measurement Initiative (HRMI), which uses Bayesian item response theory (IRT) models based on expert surveys to generate more granular measures of recognized civil and political human rights—including the right to assembly and association (Clay et al., 2020). The HRMI only offers data on associational rights for 47 countries from 2017–2023, but has plans for broader coverage in the future.

While CIVICUS, CIRI, and HRMI data all have potential for longer and more detailed data on the civil society legal environment, the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) project has emerged as perhaps the most comprehensive source for measuring *de facto* conditions (Coppedge et al., 2025). Using a sophisticated Bayesian IRT measurement model based on thousands of expert surveys, V-Dem provides hundreds of democracy-related indicators and indices for 202 countries from 1789–2025,[1] including several focused specifically on civil society regulations. V-Dem's Core Civil Society Index (CCSI) is a weighted average of indices related to the strictness of CSO entry and exit requirements, the openness of public participation in CSOs, and the severity of government repression that is targeted specifically at CSOs (Bernhard et al., 2015). Many studies on civil society repression now rely on V-Dem data, both the CCSI and its more specific index of civil society repression (Chaudhry et al., 2024; Springman et al., 2022).

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[1]Though model-extrapolated measures of civil society repression in the early 1800s should probably be taken with a healthily large grain of salt.

Even with V-Dem's extensive coverage, it still collapses many details of civil society repression into single values. For instance, its civil society repression measure asks if CSOs face violent deterrence, incarceration, financial liquidation, denial of social services, fines, censorship, or burdensome paperwork requirements—an exceptionally wide range of possible forms of repression. Similar to the approach of counting *de jure* anti-NGO laws, Bakke et al. (2020) collect data on a range of specific anti-NGO activities in 149 countries between 1994–2014, including ten types of more subtle anti-civil society actions like bans on travel, censorship of NGO publications, and surveillance of civil society activists. This approach provides a much richer picture of the civil society regulatory environment, but with substantially less coverage than what V-Dem offers.

Measuring *de facto* repression remains difficult. The informal nature of many restrictions, selective enforcement patterns, and the difficulty of observing self-censorship or anticipatory compliance all complicate efforts to quantify the actual environment for civil society. Moreover, most measures aggregate conditions across diverse civil society sectors, potentially obscuring how states may differentially treat service providers versus advocacy organizations or domestic versus international NGOs.

How I quantify de jure and de facto civil society repression

In my own research, I am interested in the downstream consequences of civil society repression. How do bilateral and multilateral donor agencies respond to increased civil society repression in recipient countries? How do CSOs adjust their strategies and programming when facing new laws and more restrictive environments? How do individual private donors think about civil society repression—do they care if their favorite nonprofit is kicked out of a host country? Instead of focusing on just one form of repression, I am most interested in the intersection of the two. How do CSOs and donors navigate the uncertainty inherent in the selective enforcement of formal laws? Exploring both types of civil society repression simultaneously yields fascinating insights, but to answer these questions, I need reliable measures of both *de jure* and *de facto* repression. As seen earlier, capturing both types of repression in a nuanced, cross-national, longitudinal way is difficult. To illustrate this complexity, let me explain how my collaborators and I settled on the *de jure* and *de facto* data we have used for several projects (Chaudhry & Heiss, 2022a, 2022b, 2024).

The data on barriers to CSO entry, funding, and advocacy in 98 countries initially collected by Christensen & Weinstein (2013) has proven valuable as a foundation for ongoing data collection on formal NGO laws—both Glasius et al. (2020) and Chaudhry (2022) used the same categorization of laws, while Bromley et al. (2020) use many of the same sources. Each of these data collection projects end their coverage somewhere between 2012–2016, and each cover a different set of countries and laws: Bromley et al. (2020) look at only foreign funding laws in nearly every country, while Glasius et al. (2020) and Chaudhry (2022) look at a wider range of laws in 100–130 countries.

In an attempt to create data for a full range of CSO laws in every country up through the 2020s, I collected all of the original sources used by these other projects: ICNL annual reports, USAID's NGO Sustainability Index, US State Department reports, country notes from the United States International Grantmaking project, and annual re-

ports Freedom House, Human Rights Watch, CIVICUS, NGO Monitor, and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, World Movement for Democracy, and Global Integrity. I compiled all these sources into a large, structured, searchable corpus of text, with the hope of identifying and coding laws in an automated way. Many of these data sources lend themselves to possible automatic coding—reports from ICNL, the US State Department, and CIVICUS all generally follow a similar structure, which could allow for better algorithmic discovery. I created rudimentary text classifiers to attempt to identify regulations based on Christensen and Weinstein's original typology, but these text-as-data methods were unable to reliably identify laws due to substantial cross-country variation in legal language. In recent years, I've periodically attempted to use this corpus of reports with large language models (LLMs) to automatically classify laws, but most LLM-based classifiers have been designed for tasks like spam identification and sentiment analysis (Wang et al., 2024), not more nuanced legal analysis. Though my corpus of reports is large, it is not large enough to be used for automatic coding. Thus, as with previous projects, Suparna Chaudhry and I are in the process of manually expanding *de jure* data, closely reading each report by hand.

Though more automated methods are not quite suitable for collecting *de jure* data, they might show more promise for *de facto* data. An established literature in political science uses automated coding of event data to track civil unrest, popular protests, military conflict, and human rights abuses based on millions of news reports published on the internet. Projects like GDELT or the Integrated Conflict Early Warning System (ICEWS) and it successor POLECAT (Halterman et al., 2023) use computational natural language text algorithms and dictionaries to parse text and determine *who* did *what* to *whom where* and *when*. The outputs of this kind of analysis can identify specific actors and events like "Egyptian state security forces arrested protestors", and can provide highly detailed data about the prevalence of human rights abuses. Event data has even been used to measure civil society activity—in partnership with the now-defunct Integrated Data for Events Analysis (IDEA), Murdie & Davis (2012) explore the effect of NGO activities on broader human rights by identifying all instances where international human rights NGOs shamed governments from 1992–2004. Event data could be used to categorize other types of civil society activity. Since new projects like POLECAT use open source data, dictionaries, and classifiers, I have attempted to define CSO actors and activities and generate event data similar to Bakke et al.'s (2020) types of civil society repression. However, as it stands now, the data is not designed for civil society-specific work. For instance, of the 347,439 events in POLECAT's 2021 data, only 98 identify an NGO as a recipient actor, and these tend to be large INGOs like Oxfam, Amnesty International, and Greenpeace (Scarborough et al., 2023). As with formal laws, I have been unable to automatically code *de facto* civil society repression. To produce their dataset, Bakke et al. (2020) closely read hundreds of reports from news agencies, governments, and think tanks. As this is more resource-intensive than closely reading the more limited set of reports of *de jure* restrictions, I have not attempted to extend their data beyond 2014.

Instead, for now I have satisficed in my approach to measuring both forms of civil society repression. I use a slowly-expanding version of counts of laws based on Chaudhry (2022) to capture *de jure* repression and—despite its overly broad concept of different types of repression—I use V-Dem's CCSI and its civil society repression subindex for

measuring *de facto* repression. Neither approach is perfect, but the two datasets offer the widest and most comprehensive coverage of both forms of repression in the most countries and most years. We can come close to fascinating new automated measures that could go beyond simple counts of laws or V-Dem measurement model indexes, but methodologically, we're not quite there yet.

What we know from combining de jure and de facto regulations

As mentioned earlier, I am most interested in the combination of *de jure* and *de facto* regulations. Equipped with fairly robust data on both, I have used these measures to look at (1) where and why they do not align, and (2) the effects of different forms of civil society repression on outcomes like political terror and foreign aid. Analyzing these measures simultaneously provides a far more nuanced and richer understanding of the dynamics of civil society repression.

Suparna Chaudhry and I explore whether civil society repression can act as a sort of "canary in the coal mine", or early warning signal of more violent political terror or violations of physical integrity rights and civil liberties (Chaudhry & Heiss, 2022b). We build a set of multilevel Bayesian models to predict future values of two general human rights indexes using both NGO law counts and V-Dem's CCSI. To explore the heterogeneity in *de jure* regulations, we look at both the total count of NGO laws and the counts of narrower categories of laws like barriers to advocacy, entry, and funding. We find that in general, one new anti-NGO law is associated with a negligibly greater probability of seeing higher values of political terror and a relatively insubstantial 5% decline in predicted latent human rights scores. The association with latent human rights is slightly larger if the new law is a barrier to advocacy, but in general, new laws do little to predict future repression. The *de facto* regulatory environment, on the other hand, is substantially predictive of additional human rights abuses. A one-unit increase in civil society repression is associated with a 25% decline in respect for human rights in the following year. Holding all else constant, *de facto* civil society repression is a stronger and more reliable indicator of future repression than simply the presence of laws. We illustrate this divergence further by looking at the case of Egypt, tracking its passage of anti-CSO laws alongside is levels of *de facto* civil society repression over time. Egypt's civil society environment *improved* in the years following the passage of Law 84 of 2002 until immediately prior to the 2011 uprising, which led to a worsening of human rights scores more broadly. Due to the state's discretionary enforcement power, the law and its implementation were disconnected—the introduction of the formal law in 2002 did not presage immediate changes to general human rights.

In other research (Chaudhry & Heiss, 2022a, 2024), we find that international foreign aid donors also respond differently to *de jure* and *de facto* civil society repression. Donors appear to respond forcefully to legal barriers to advocacy, with as much as a 43% drop in bilateral foreign aid in the year following a new law. However, there is less of a reaction to barriers to entry or funding—there are no substantial differences in aid levels in the following year after the passage of these types of anti-NGO laws. Donors are also less responsive to *de facto* repression and are hesitant to change aid allocations

following a decrease in the general civil society regulatory environment. It seems that donors seem to care most about more visible restrictions on advocacy—other forms of administrative crackdown might be too subtle to elicit changes in foreign aid.

The future of quantifying civil society repression

As seen in my attempts at collecting richer details about civil society repression, there is enormous potential for future work, limited mostly by time and resources. Existing approaches to measuring *de jure* and *de facto* repression have formed a strong foundation for quantitative research on the phenomenon of closing civic space, and methodological innovation and conceptual refinement can push the literature to more complex research questions in the future.

In addition to potentially working towards automated coding of regulations from government and research center reports, future work on formal laws should explore more nuance in regulatory regimes. DeMattee (2018) presents a typology of formal CSO regulations along two different dimensions: (1) the enabling environment, or whether regulations permit or restrict CSO operations, and (2) the complexity of the regulations, or the burdensomeness of following civil society laws. These dimensions apply to four specific characteristics of CSO operations—governance, formation, operations, and resources. He contends that governments pass laws and regulations that both expand or contract the allowable space for CSO work, and that introduce or reduce complexity in following those regulations. Future data collection can move beyond the entry, funding, and advocacy categories and instead examine how laws enable or add complexity to specific CSO actions. Focusing on the quality and purpose of CSO laws creates a more multidimensional picture of *de jure* regulations than simply indicating if specific laws exist.

Adding nuance to the collection of formal laws follows the work done by Bakke et al. (2020) on more detailed *de facto* civil society repression. Their data on specific types of non-regulatory repression is a helpful counterpart to the simpler—and more widely available—measures offered by V-Dem, and should be expanded into the 2020s. This requires substantial resources for either hand-coding or automatically coding event data. Future work could develop more sophisticated event data frameworks specifically designed to capture civil society-related repression. This would involve expanding the actor dictionaries in projects like POLECAT to include a broader range of civil society organizations, not just prominent international NGOs. While my initial attempts with general-purpose text classifiers and LLMs proved disappointing, models specifically focused on civil society-related corpora might yield better results. Again, all these computational projects would require substantial time and resources, but they could lead to broader coverage of *de facto* civil society environments.

As more nuanced data is collected for more countries and years, we can answer more complex questions about the interaction between *de jure* and *de facto* regulations. Do certain types of formal restrictions (i.e., entry, funding, and advocacy) or the goals of CSO regulations (i.e. adding complexity or constraining the enabling environment) consistently precede specific types of practical repression (e.g. arrests, censorship, addi-

tional paperwork, etc.)? What predicts when and why states selectively enforce formal laws? Do laws designed to enable civil society protect against *de facto* repression?

Making advancements in measuring civil society repression is not just a methodological exercise. Civic space continues to constrict globally, including in established democracies like the United States (CIVICUS, 2024a). As states refine their approaches to restricting civil society, researchers must refine their data and methods in turn to better detect the effects of this subtler type of human rights repression.

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