

## **ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOR TOWARD HUMAN RIGHTS ACROSS DIFFERENT CONTEXTS: THE ROLE OF RIGHT-WING AUTHORITARIANISM, POLITICAL IDEOLOGY, AND RELIGIOSITY \***

Fathali M. MOGHADDAM and Vuk VUKSANOVIC

*McGill University, Montreal, Canada*

Revised version received March 1990

Three studies were carried out to examine attitudes and behavior toward human rights. 'Universal' human rights implies that there should be cross-situational consistency in attitudes and behavior toward human rights. An alternative interpretation is that attitudes and behavior toward human rights may shift across contexts, as a function of ideology. We reasoned that Canadian subjects would be more critical of the human rights records of Soviet and the Third World societies, and thus show stronger support for human rights in these than in Canadian society. Hypothesis two predicted that right-wing political ideology and support for human rights would be negatively correlated in contexts Canada and Third World, but not in the Soviet context; hypothesis three predicted the same pattern of associations between religiosity and support for human rights. Hypothesis four predicted that authoritarians, because of their fundamental opposition to individual liberties, would oppose human rights in all contexts. Study 1 involved 155 students expressing attitudes toward a range of human rights issues. Study 2 involved 74 Pro-Life supporters expressing attitudes on human rights, as well as on abortion. Study 3 involved a behavioral measure of support for human rights among 450 students. The findings generally supported hypotheses one and four, and provided some support for hypotheses two and three. The results seem to provide further evidence of an association between ideology and moral reasoning.

Human rights represent one of the most important challenges confronting contemporary societies. Following the 1945 Charter of the United Nations, various efforts have been made at national and international levels to identify and prevent violations of human rights (United Nations 1983a, 1983b). Despite diverse legal and political

\* We thank Franceen Neufeld and Wendy Crowley for their assistance in data collection, and Bob Altemeyer, Steven Wright, and Robert Vallerand for comments made on an earlier draft of this paper.

Requests for reprints should be addressed to Fathali M. Moghaddam, Psychology Department, McGill University, 1205 Dr. Penfield Avenue, Montreal, Canada H3A 1B1.

activities and extensive mass media coverage, violations of human rights continue in many countries and are a source of international friction (Vasak and Alston 1982). In the domain of psychology, considerable efforts have been made to promote human rights values (Rosenzweig 1988). This is reflected, for example, by the APA's Ethical Principles of Psychologists (APA 1981). A number of surveys have also been carried out on ethical issues confronting psychologists (Pope et al. 1987). The concern for human rights has led to changes in work style for both research and practicing psychologists. One testament to this is the numbers of ethical committees that oversee the work of psychologists. However, this concern for ethical issues has not been coupled with much research on attitudes and behavior in the domain of human rights.

Social psychologists could play a central role in clarifying the concept of 'universality' with respect to human rights. Most documents bearing on human rights in some way incorporate this notion of universality, and this includes historical documents that came well before the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1983). The concept of universality is incorporated in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen adopted by the French National Assembly in 1789 (*Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen*, 1983), and the Bill of Rights of the US Constitution. These legal documents specify human rights that should be enjoyed by all human beings, irrespective of who they are and where they live.

The concept of human *rights* suggests certain things that all individuals should have to the same extent. This is different from privileges, status, and other phenomena that individuals would be expected to have to different degrees. One implication is that our attitudes and behavior toward the human rights of different people should be consistent and should not change as a function of who these people are or where they live.

From a social psychological perspective, a question that arises is whether individuals do show cross-situational consistency in their attitudes and behavior toward human rights. For example, do individuals show consistency in attitudes toward such 'fundamentals' as freedom of speech when considering the issue in different parts of the world, such as a Western nation, or the Soviet Union, or the Third World. We are raising this issue in relation to the international context, because human rights is most often discussed in relation to broad international

---

divisions, such as East and West, or developed and developing countries. Although this question has not directly been the focus of research attention, the literature does suggest a number of predictions in this area.

That attitudes and behavior toward human rights will be consistent across context seems to be in line with Kohlberg's (1963, 1969, 1976) cognitive-developmental model of moral reasoning. This model postulates three broad sequences to moral reasoning: pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional or principled. Implicit in the notion of post-conventional reasoning is the idea that adherence to general moral principles, such as human rights principles, will lead to attitudes that are consistent across contexts. For example, it is implied that an individual who is at the post-conventional level of reasoning and believes in the right to freedom of expression would apply this principle to come to the same judgment about a particular case if it occurred in more than one context. Thus, the changing of the context from, for example, the Third World, to the Soviet Union, to a western country would not lead to changes in the individual's judgment. But according to Kohlberg (1976), only those individuals who have reached post-conventional reasoning can be expected to apply such general moral principles.

An alternative perspective is that most adults are capable of using post-conventional reasoning, but will only do so in cases where such reasoning leads to conclusions that are in line with their own ideology. Support for this view is provided by the research of Emler and his associates (Emler 1983; Emler and Hogan 1981; Emler et al. 1983). In one study, Emler et al. (1983) asked subjects of right, left, and moderate political orientations to complete a moral reasoning task once from their own perspective and once from the perspective of an extreme conservative and an extreme radical. They found that right-wing and moderate subjects showed significant increases in their principled-reasoning scores when they adopted the perspective of a radical. This suggests that whether or not an individual adopted principled reasoning depended on ideological factors that are independent of capacity. Emler et al. (1983) concluded that individual differences on moral reasoning are a function of political orientation rather than developmental status.

A recent study by Sparks and Durkin (1987) provides a particularly strong endorsement for the views of Emler and his associates. In this

study, supporters of left and right-wing political orientations were found to give more or less importance to principles of individual rights of freedom of movement and right to secret ballot, depending how compatible such principles were to their own political goals in a particular situation. These findings would lead us to expect that human rights principles also would be differentially applied across contexts, as a function of the individual's political orientation.

### **Study 1**

We expected that the value system dominant in Western societies would lead individuals to be critical of the Soviet Union and Third World countries. In the area of human rights specifically, communist and Third World societies are often criticized and labelled as 'backward' by Western standards. One implication is that there is a greater need to support human rights in these regions of the world, than in 'democratic' societies such as Canada. Our first hypothesis was that this value system would influence Canadian subjects to show stronger support for human rights in the Soviet and Third World contexts than in the Canadian context. Not necessarily because they value the rights differently, but because they sense a need to stress them more in these contexts.

While hypothesis one focused on differences across conditions, hypotheses two to four concerned patterns of associations between individual difference measures and support for human rights within each condition. Specifically, our second hypothesis concerned the association between political orientation and support for human rights in the contexts of Canada, the Soviet Union, and the Third World. Research on human values (Rokeach 1973) suggests that the more right-wing individuals are politically, the less supportive they would be toward human rights, at least in their own societies. However, we expected that this negative association between support for human rights and right-wing political ideology would not hold for the Soviet context, because it would be more expedient for Canadian right-wingers to support human rights in the Soviet Union. Right-wingers should support human rights in the Soviet context because for the politically-right this would represent one way of criticizing the Soviet regime.

An example of this phenomenon in the 'real world', perhaps, is the strong support shown by Mrs. Margaret Thatcher, the British prime minister, to the trade union Solidarity and workers collective rights in Poland, and the relative lack of support given by her to the miners unions and unionized workers in Britain generally. Clearly, what are 'fundamental human rights' in one context may be neglected in another context.

Our third hypothesis was that the same pattern of associations found for right-wing political ideology would emerge for individuals high on religiosity. This is because the Soviet regime historically has acted against the interests of the church and has severely restricted religious activities. Thus, religious individuals would perceive a need to show particularly strong support for human rights in the Soviet context.

But while the relationship between political orientation and support for human rights was expected to differ across contexts, our fourth hypothesis was that there is another group of individuals who by definition would be expected to show less support for human rights generally across contexts: those high on authoritarianism (Adorno et al. 1950). The rigid pattern of characteristics that are part of the authoritarian personality, such as unquestioning submission to higher authority, prejudice against minorities, and general opposition to individual freedoms, led us to hypothesize that those high on authoritarianism would show less support for human rights and remain the 'enemies of freedom' (Altemeyer 1988) in all contexts. We adopted Altemeyer's (1981) measure of Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA), one reason being that it has been developed mainly using Canadian samples.

The different predictions with respect to right-wing authoritarianism and religiosity arise from the specific issue of the treatment of religion in the Soviet Union. While there is a general tendency for authoritarianism to be associated with religiosity, in the specific context of the Soviet Union the treatment of the church by the Soviet Regime provides those high on religiosity a unique reason to perceive a need to support human rights in this context. Thus, the pull of religiosity would show a different pattern to that of authoritarianism in the Soviet condition.

### *Method*

#### *Subjects*

Subjects were 155 randomly chosen undergraduate students (64 male, 91 female) from McGill University, Montreal, Canada. They were approached on the university campus and asked whether they would be willing to complete a questionnaire.

#### *Experimental design and materials*

Subjects were shown how to complete the questionnaires, with the assurance that complete anonymity would be maintained. The measures in the questionnaires were as follows. The trait of RWA was measured by Altemeyer's (1981, pp. 219-220) scale, which demonstrated high internal consistency ( $\alpha = 0.89$ ). Attitudes toward human rights were measured by a set of questions, derived through pilot work involving discussions and open interviews with the sample population and with several legal experts, as well as a survey of major themes in important publications on human rights. The derived set of statements was assessed independently by eight members of the subject population and 21 items selected by all eight judges as dealing with human rights were included in the final set of questions. Subjects rated the extent of their agreement with the 21 statements, as well as items on the measure of RWA, on a scale of 1 (definitely disagree) to 9 (definitely agree).

There were three questionnaires, one for each condition. The questionnaires were identical, except that the context referred to was Canada in condition one, the Soviet Union in condition two, and the Third World in condition three (see table 1 for the list of items). The Alpha coefficient for this measure was 0.71. An independent groups design was adopted and the subjects were randomly assigned to one of three conditions ( $N = 50$  for each condition).

Table 1  
List of items on the human rights scale. <sup>a</sup>

---

Free speech should be granted to all members of (Canadian) society without exception (P)
Anyone who wants to emigrate from or immigrate to (Canada) should be allowed to do so (P)
The (Canadian) government should not have the right to ban books and other materials that it believes harmful to the public interest (P)
Freedom does <b>not</b> give anyone the right to teach foreign ideas in (Canadian) classrooms (N)
If a person refuses to work, even though employment is available, the Canadian people should not have to support him/her (N)
Anyone who owns important works of art in (Canada) should be forced to put them on permanent public display (N)
All forms of censorship should be done away with in (Canada) (P)
Restrictions should be imposed on the amount of land a (Canadian) resident can own (N)
Nobody should be forced to retire from a job in (Canada) because they have reached a certain age (P)
Moral standards as defined by the majority should not dictate the behavior of people in (Canada) (P)
Under no circumstances should the possession and use of drugs be permitted in (Canada) (N)
Members of particular racial or religious groups should be entitled to set up their own neighbourhoods in (Canadian) cities and prevent outsiders from living there (N)
Dangerous groups of people should not have the right to participate in (Canadian) politics (N)
Everyone in Canada should have access to free health care (P)
When a work of art reaches a point of vulgarity, it should not be publicly displayed in (Canada) (N)
Every individual should be provided with essential shelter and food, even if (Canadian) taxpayers have to pay for it (P).
Prostitution should be legalized in (Canada) (N)
Under special circumstances, the (Canadian) government is justified in arresting people whose political views are a threat to stability (N)
The masses should not participate in shaping (Canadian) government policy because most people do not know what is in their best interest (N)
In the case of war involving (Canada), conscientious objectors should be allowed to refuse military service (P)
People in (Canada) should be allowed to have as many children as they like, without restrictions (P)

---

<sup>a</sup> In the above items, the phrase in brackets was changed across conditions, and the direction of the item is indicated as being either positive (P) or negative (N) toward human rights, as interpreted by subject samples in pilot research.

Next, subjects were asked to rate the extent to which they perceived violations of human rights (in Canada/Soviet/Third World societies) to be occurring presently in each of the following three domains: freedom of expression, just treatment for law offenders, the right to a humane standard of living. A final set of questions focused on religiosity, political ideology and demographic variables, including age and sex. Religiosity was assessed by the question: how active are you in terms of religious practice? Responses were on a 1 ('not active at all') to 9 ('very active') scale. Political

ideology was measured using a scale from 1 ('left wing') to 19 ('right wing'). Reference points were provided using Canada's three major political parties: the New Democratic Party was placed at 5 on the scale, the Liberals at 10, and the Progressive Conservatives at 15.

### Results

With respect to hypothesis one, when the combined scores of subjects on the 21 items were compared across the three conditions, significant differences were found,  $F(2,142) = 7.10$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , accounting for approximately 9% of the variance. *Post-hoc* tests (Newman-Keuls) revealed support for human rights to be stronger in the Soviet Union ( $M = 121.40$ ) and Third World ( $M = 116.40$ ) conditions compared to the Canada ( $M = 109.90$ ) condition.

Table 2  
Mean attitudes toward human rights issues in three contexts.

Question	Canada		Soviet		Third World		$F(2,154)$
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Free speech	8.38	0.95	8.14	1.37	7.38	2.18	5.73 **
Immigration/emigration	4.44 <sup>a</sup>	2.44	7.74 <sup>b</sup>	1.95	5.94 <sup>c</sup>	2.44	26.47 **
Ban books/films	5.85 <sup>a</sup>	2.71	7.42 <sup>b</sup>	2.12	7.00 <sup>b</sup>	2.32	5.93 **
Foreign ideas in classrooms	6.29	2.64	6.57	2.52	6.64	2.35	0.31
Refusal to work	2.23 <sup>a</sup>	1.20	3.20 <sup>b</sup>	2.36	3.68 <sup>b</sup>	2.55	5.46 **
Works of art	7.79 <sup>a</sup>	1.52	7.64 <sup>a</sup>	2.46	6.85 <sup>b</sup>	2.30	3.96 *
Censorship	4.79 <sup>a</sup>	2.89	6.24 <sup>b</sup>	2.34	6.02 <sup>b</sup>	2.46	4.74 **
Land ownership	7.00 <sup>a</sup>	2.20	6.54 <sup>a</sup>	2.38	5.26 <sup>b</sup>	2.30	8.08 ***
Forced retirement	6.12	2.54	5.40	2.45	5.34	2.42	1.59
Unacceptable behavior	4.75	2.46	4.82	2.30	4.61	2.38	0.10
Drugs	4.65	2.73	3.92	2.49	4.96	2.53	2.19
Restricted neighborhoods	3.33 <sup>a</sup>	2.78	7.18 <sup>b</sup>	2.24	6.94 <sup>b</sup>	2.10	42.27 ***
Dangerous groups	4.33	2.70	5.32	2.29	4.79	2.52	1.91
Free health care	7.50	2.16	7.80	2.14	7.55	2.32	0.27
Vulgar art	5.87	2.53	6.30	2.54	5.74	2.71	0.66
Essential food and shelter	6.21	2.42	6.26	2.41	5.94	2.38	0.26
Prostitution	4.60	2.70	4.32	2.89	3.75	2.73	1.26
Arrest of radicals	5.29	2.75	6.30	2.54	6.04	2.36	2.17
Masses and government policy	5.37	2.28	6.24	2.39	5.77	2.64	1.64
Conscientious objector	6.63	2.50	6.00	2.61	5.83	2.38	1.46
The number of children	7.67 <sup>a</sup>	1.89	7.54 <sup>a</sup>	1.82	4.51 <sup>b</sup>	2.64	36.04 ***

Note: Within each row, means with different superscripts differ at the 0.05 level of significance according to a Neuman Keuls test.

\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

We also conducted a more detailed item analysis on the 21 questions measuring attitudes toward human rights across the three conditions using one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). Significant differences emerged on 9 items (see table 2). *Post-hoc* tests of means (Newman-Keuls) showed that support for human rights was stronger in conditions Soviet Union and Third World than in condition Canada on items concerning the banning of books and films, support for individuals refusing to work, censorship, and neighbourhood restricted to racial or religious groups. Support for human rights was stronger in conditions Canada and Soviet Union than in condition Third World on items concerning free speech, landownership, the display of privately owned works of art, and number of children. With respect to the right to immigrate and emigrate, support for human rights was stronger in condition Soviet Union than in the Third World and Canada conditions, and stronger in condition Third World than in condition Canada.

Hypotheses two and three were supported by the negative correlations of right-wing political ideology and religiosity with support for human rights in conditions Canada and Third World (table 3). This association was not significant in the Soviet condition. The Soviet correlation is lower than both those of Canada and the Third World because the nature of the Soviet regime (i.e. left-wing and anti-religion) leads those high on right-wing political ideology and religiosity to show support for human rights in this condition. Hypothesis four was fully supported by the negative correlation between RWA and support for human rights that was consistent across the three conditions.

A number of other findings are worthy of note. There were differences across the three conditions in the extent to which human rights violations were perceived in the areas of freedom of expression,  $F(2,154) = 48.11$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ; the right to a humane standard of living,  $F(2,154) = 26.62$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ; and just treatment for law offenders,  $F(2,154) = 8.36$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . Less violations of freedom of expression and just treatment for law offenders were seen in condition Canada than in the Soviet Union and Third World conditions (their respective means were 3.90 vs. 6.96 and 6.87; 4.80 vs. 5.82 and 6.51). Violations of the right to a humane standard of living were seen to be greater in condition Third World ( $M = 6.93$ ) than in the Soviet Union ( $M = 5.40$ ) and Canada ( $M = 4.33$ ) conditions, and greater in condition Soviet Union than in condition Canada.

Table 3  
Intercorrelations of right-wing authoritarianism, right-wing political ideology, religiosity and pro-human rights attitudes across three context among student sample.

Measure	Pro-human rights attitudes		
	Canada ( $N = 52$ )	Soviet ( $N = 50$ )	Third World ( $N = 53$ )
Right-wing political ideology	-0.33 *	0.07	-0.53 ***
Religious activity	-0.30 *	0.04	-0.36 *
Right-wing authoritarianism	--0.66 ***	-0.42 **	-0.52 ***

\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .



Table 4  
Intercorrelation of perceived violations in three domains and pro-human rights attitudes in three contexts.

Perceived violation	Pro-human rights attitudes		
	Canada ( <i>N</i> = 52)	Soviet ( <i>N</i> = 50)	Third World ( <i>N</i> = 53)
Freedom of expression	0.34 *	0.19	0.27
Standard of living	0.19	0.13	0.31 *
Treatment of lawbreakers	-0.04	0.30 *	0.22

\*  $p < 0.05$ .

Perceived violations of freedom of expression, the right to a humane standard of living, and just treatment for law offenders were correlated with total scores on the 21 attitude measures in each condition (see table 4). Results revealed an association between pro-human rights attitudes and: (1) perceived violations of freedom of expression in condition Canada; (2) perceived violations of just treatment for law offenders in condition Soviet Union, and perceived violations of the right to a humane standard of living in condition Third World.

Comparisons revealed no differences across conditions on the measures of RWA,  $F(2,145) = 0.75$ , n.s.; political ideology,  $F(2,143) = 0.12$ , n.s.; and religiosity,  $F(2,152) = 0.96$ , n.s. The profile that emerged of the subject sample was as we might expect from a student population in the late 1980's. The mean responses of subjects on the RWA scale items was just above the mid-point ( $M = 5.64$ ,  $SD = 1.42$ ), while they were slightly to the right of the political spectrum ( $M = 10.30$ ,  $SD = 3.17$ ) and fairly low on religiosity ( $M = 3.49$ ,  $SD = 2.43$ ).

### Discussion

Study one assessed attitudes toward human rights across three different contexts. The general trend of findings confirmed hypothesis one: Support for human rights was stronger in the Soviet and Third World conditions than in condition Canada. However, differences between Canada and Soviet conditions were not as clear as we had expected. Responses in condition Soviet Union were sometimes similar to those in condition Canada, and other times similar to those in condition Third World. Also, on all nine items of which differences across conditions reached significance, support for human rights was stronger in condition Third world than in condition Canada. Total scores underscored this trend: support for human rights was stronger in conditions Third World and Soviet Union than condition Canada.

Hypotheses two and three received consistent support: right-wing political ideology and religiosity were negatively associated with support for human rights in conditions Canada and Third World, but not in condition Soviet Union. Hypothesis four was fully confirmed: In all three conditions, those scoring higher on right-wing authoritarianism showed less support for human rights.

Several other findings are worthy of note. First, the rights of freedom of expression and just treatment for law offenders were judged to be violated less in condition Canada than in conditions Third World than Soviet Union. The right to a humane standard of living was seen to be violated more in the Third World than in Canada and the Soviet Union. A viable interpretation of these findings is that there is a greater need felt to support human rights in the Third World and the Soviet Union, because that is where the greatest violations are seen to be occurring.

Support for human rights was positively associated with perceived violation of freedom of expression in condition Canada, humane standard of living in condition Third World, and treatment of law offenders in condition Soviet Union. One interpretation of this trend assumed the presence of a hierarchy of human rights concerns in each context. Thus, those showing greater support for human rights in Canada showed a greater tendency to perceive freedom of speech violations. On the other hand, those who showed stronger support for human rights in the Third World context were concerned more with the relatively 'basic' right of a humane standard of living.

In summary, the findings of Study 1 generally confirmed our hypotheses and suggest that support for some areas of human rights changes across different contexts. Thus, if there are principles guiding human rights attitudes, they are influenced by contextual factors. However, there were aspects of study 1 that call for further investigation. In particular, the subjects in this study were university students, a population that might be relatively idealistic and involved with human rights more in an abstract rather than a practical manner. Would we find the same cross-situational shifts in attitudes toward human rights if we used a subject population that was strongly committed to a particular stand on a specific human rights issue? This question is taken up in the second study.

## **Study 2**

Our main objective in study 2 was to test the hypothesis that support for human rights would be stronger in the Soviet and Third World contexts than in the context of Canada, using a subject population that had a commitment to a particular position on a specific human rights issue. The issue we selected to focus on was that of abortion, and the subject population we chose were Pro-Life supporters. We selected to study Pro-Life supporters specifically because they couch their arguments in the terminology of human rights and present their case on the basis of the most fundamental right of all: the right to life. Abortion has become one of the most important and intensely debated human rights issues in Western societies. We reasoned that a sample of non-student adults who were in practice committed to the Pro-Life cause would stand in contrast to the subject sample in study 1.

The materials presented to subjects in study 2 dealt with human rights issues generally and abortion specifically. A first challenge was to develop measures of attitudes toward abortion that would reveal individual differences among the sample. The subjects were part of a network of Pro-Life supporters and proved so strongly committed to the Pro-Life cause that they tended to reject the abortion option in an

absolute way. However, through fairly lengthy pilot-work, we developed three scenarios that successfully led to some variance in the response of Pro-Life supporters toward abortion.

The prediction that support for human rights would be stronger in Soviet and Third World contexts (hypothesis one) also led to the expectation that Pro-Life supporters would support the Pro-Life cause more in Soviet and Third World contexts than in the Canadian context. This is because from the Pro-Life perspective, human rights are equivalent to fetus rights rather than the mother's rights of 'freedom of choice' in relation to abortion. Thus, from this perspective support for human rights is in line with support for the Pro-Life cause, and if support for human rights is stronger in Soviet and Third World contexts, so too should be support for the Pro-Life cause in these contexts.

A second objective of study 2 was to test the hypothesized associations between right-wing political ideology, religiosity, and RWA with support for human rights (hypotheses two to four in study 1), using a subject population that differed from the student sample used in study 1.

### *Method*

#### *Subjects*

Subjects were 74 Pro-Life supporters (28 male, 46 female), recruited through networks of Pro-Life groups in Montreal, Canada. Specifically, potential respondents were contacted by a confederate who was herself an active Pro-Life supporter, and asked if they would participate in the study. They were told that the study concerned attitudes toward various social issues, including abortion. The response rate was approximately 70%. To be included in the final sample, subjects had to be active as part of a Pro-Life network as well as to report fairly high agreement with the Pro-Life cause, by selecting 7 or above on a 1 (not at all) to 9 (completely) scale in response to the question: To what extent do you agree with the Pro-Life cause? The mean age of subjects was 42 (ranging from 24 to 75), 56% of them had received university education, 80% were married, and 76% had children.

#### *Experimental design and materials*

The subjects anonymously completed a questionnaire that included six scenarios, three directly on the issue of abortion and another three concerning other human rights issues. For half the subjects the scenarios dealing with abortion were presented first, and for the other half they were presented second. Each scenario involved a central character, and the three questions following each scenario used a 9-point scale to examine the subject's attitudes toward a particular human rights dilemma. For example, two questions asked subjects, (a) 'Would you vote in support of Mrs. Lambert's claim to this right?', and (b) 'Would you advise Paula to have an abortion given her particular circumstances?' The name of the characters in the scenarios and the places in which events took place were changed across the three conditions. Thus, for example, 'Mrs. Lambert' and 'Montreal' in condition Canada were changed to 'Mrs. Singh' and 'New Delhi' in condition Third World, and to 'Mrs. Borzov' and 'Moscow' on condition Soviet Union. *Scenario one* concerned the case of a television news anchor-

woman who was fired from her job for refusing to change her hairstyle and clothing to suit the demands of her employers. *Scenario two* involved the possible 'inhumane treatment' of a captured member of an underground group committed to the overthrow of the government. The *third scenario* concerned a female shoplifter who was 'forced' by circumstances to steal food to feed her three hungry children.

In the final three scenarios, the central dilemma concerned the rights of the fetus and the rights of the mother. The main character in *scenario four* was a female who had become pregnant, despite taking precautionary measures, and who faced grave medical problems and possibly death if she gave birth. The *fifth scenario* concerned a 15-year-old girl who had become pregnant after being raped, and who felt highly traumatized about the prospects of having a child. Finally, *scenario six* involved a 41-year-old woman whose fetus, she learned, had the clear signs of severe deformities and may not survive more than a few years after birth.

The nine items assessing attitudes toward the first three scenarios were combined to make a single index of pro-human rights attitudes; a single index of Pro-Life attitudes was computed using the nine items on scenarios four to six. The Alpha coefficients for these two measures were 0.84 and 0.71 in condition Canada; 0.66 and 0.93 in condition Soviet Union; and 0.80 and 0.73 in condition Third World. Except for one case where the Alpha coefficient was 0.66, these are fairly acceptable reliability coefficients for scales with nine items.

Subjects in the three conditions were matched fairly closely on age, sex, marital status, whether or not they had children, and education level. The mean age of subjects in the three conditions was 45 (Canada), 38 (Soviet Union), and 41 (Third World). The percentages of females in the three conditions were 68% (Canada), 61% (Soviet Union) and 57% (Third World). The percentage of married subjects in each condition was 80% (Canada), 86% (Soviet Union), and 79% (Third World). The percentage of subjects who had children was 76% (Canada), 86% (Soviet Union), and 72% (Third World). The percentage of subjects who had received university education in each condition was 60% (Canada), 52% (Soviet Union), and 57% (Third World).

### *Results*

Responses on the pro-human rights index (scenarios one to three) and the Pro-Life index (scenarios four to six) were compared separately across the three conditions through one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). There were significant differences on both indexes and the direction of differences provided fairly strong support for hypothesis one (table 5). *Post hoc* tests of means (Newman-Keuls) showed that on the pro-human rights index, support for human rights was stronger in the Soviet Union and Third World conditions than in the Canada condition; on the Pro-Life index support for the Pro-Life cause was stronger in condition Third World than in conditions Soviet Union and Canada. Thus, on both indexes responses in the Canada and the Third World conditions differed.

The associations of support for human rights with right-wing political ideology and RWA provided some support for hypothesis two and confirmed hypothesis four (table 6): right-wing political ideology was negatively correlated with pro-human rights attitudes in conditions Canada and Third World, but not in condition Soviet Union;

Table 5  
Mean attitudes toward human rights and pro-life in three contexts.

	Canada		Soviet		Third World		<i>F</i> (2,73)
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Support for human rights	34.13 <sup>a</sup>	14.95	54.57 <sup>b</sup>	10.08	49.21 <sup>b</sup>	14.25	12.23 <sup>**</sup>
Pro-life attitudes	67.64 <sup>a</sup>	9.78	68.52 <sup>a</sup>	11.85	73.93 <sup>b</sup>	7.34	3.31 <sup>*</sup>

Note: Within each row, means with different superscripts differ at the 0.05 level of significance according to a Neuman-Keuls test.

\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

RWA was negatively correlated with pro-human rights attitudes in all three conditions. Hypothesis three predicted that the relationship between support for human rights and religiosity would follow the same pattern as the relationship between support for human rights and right-wing political ideology. But this was not confirmed.

The mean score for subjects on religiosity was very near the maximum of nine ( $M = 8.23$ ,  $SD = 1.25$ ), their mean score on the RWA items was well above the mid-point ( $M = 7.34$ ,  $SD = 1.58$ ), and they fell to the right of the political spectrum ( $M = 12.71$ ,  $SD = 3.14$ ). There were no significant cross condition differences on measures of RWA,  $F(2,66) = 2.56$ , n.s.; political ideology,  $F(2,67) = 2.31$ , n.s.; or religiosity,  $F(2,71) = 1.33$ , n.s.

### Discussion

The primary objective of study 2 was to test the hypothesis that support for human rights would be stronger in the Soviet and Third World conditions than in condition Canada, using a subject population that was highly committed to and involved with a particular human rights issue. The subjects were strong supporters of the Pro-Life

Table 6  
Intercorrelations of right-wing authoritarianism, right-wing political ideology, religiosity and pro-human rights attitudes across three context among pro-life sample.

Measure	Pro-human rights attitudes		
	Canada ( <i>N</i> = 25)	Soviet ( <i>N</i> = 21)	Third World ( <i>N</i> = 28)
Right-wing political ideology	-0.44 <sup>*</sup>	-0.24	-0.49 <sup>**</sup>
Religious activity	-0.20	0.20	-0.21
Right-wing authoritarianism	-0.63 <sup>**</sup>	0.46 <sup>*</sup>	-0.38 <sup>*</sup>

\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

cause, and their attitudes were assessed using items on human rights generally and the Pro-Life issue specifically. The subjects were matched fairly closely across the three conditions on sex, age, education level, marital status, number of children, and there were also no differences across conditions on RWA, right-wing political ideology, and religiosity.

Responses on the three scenarios dealing with human rights issues and the three scenarios dealing with the Pro-Life cause generally confirmed hypothesis one. Support for human rights was stronger in conditions Soviet Union and Third World than in condition Canada; support for the Pro-Life cause was stronger in condition Third World than in conditions Canada and Soviet Union. Thus, Canada and Third World conditions differed on both measures, while responses in condition Soviet Union were similar to responses in condition Third World on one set of measures and similar to condition Canada on another set.

The finding that Pro-Life supporters showed stronger support for the Pro-Life cause in condition Third World than conditions Canada and Soviet Union is in line with the interpretation that from the Pro-Life perspective human rights are equivalent to fetus' rights, rather than mother's rights. From the perspective of these Pro-Life subjects, supporting the Pro-Life cause more in the Third World context was in line with supporting human rights more in this context than in the context of Canada.

With respect to the second objective of study 2, the association of right-wing political ideology and RWA with attitudes toward human rights were supportive of hypotheses two and four. These associations were negative in all cases in both studies, except for right-wing political ideology in condition Soviet Union. The hypothesized association of religiosity with support for human rights in the three conditions was not confirmed, perhaps because of the lack of variance of subjects on religiosity. The subjects scored very near the maximum on religiosity ( $M = 8.23$ ,  $SD = 1.25$ , on a 9-point scale) and the lack of variance in their responses diminished the possibility of achieving a high correlation between this measure and support for human rights.

While the general findings provide support for our hypotheses, both studies 1 and 2 involved attitudinal rather than behavioral measures of support for human rights. In the domain of human rights particularly, behavior often is of more practical importance than attitudes *per se*. Given the complex relationship between attitudes and behavior, and the different paths they sometimes follow (Ajzen and Fishbein 1977; Zanna et al. 1982), we thought it important to test our main hypothesis using a behavioral measure.

### Study 3

Our main objective in study 3 was to use a behavioral measure of support for human rights to test the prediction that individuals would show stronger support for human rights in the Third World and Soviet conditions than in condition Canada. Second, we wondered if support for human rights would vary across the conditions as a function of the particular issue in question: Freedom of expression, treatment of law offenders, and the right to a humane standard of living. Specifically, we wondered if



the more 'basic' right to a humane standard of living would receive stronger support in the Third World context, and if the 'higher-order' right of freedom of expression would receive more support in the Canada context. The challenge of testing these ideas using a behavioral measure led us to develop what we refer to as the 'call-me-back' technique.

### *Method*

#### *Subjects*

Subjects ( $N = 450$ ) were randomly chosen from lists of undergraduate students attending McGill University. They were contacted by telephone and asked if they would be willing to participate in research on human rights.

#### *Experimental design and materials*

After making contact with a subject by telephone, the interviewer explained that her objective in making this initial contact was to set up a formal telephone interview with the subject for the next evening. During the second interview, the subject would be asked to respond to a series of attitudinal questions on human rights. It was stressed that it was up to the subject to telephone back the next evening, and that by calling back to participate in the project the subject also would be showing support for human rights. Subjects were assured that their names and numbers would be wiped from the master list at the end of the initial telephone contact, and no record would be kept of the identity of those who did and those who did not phone back. In fact, this procedure was followed.

An independent groups design was used and subjects were randomly allocated to one of three conditions. The subjects were informed either that the topic under study was human rights in Canada (condition one), the Soviet Union (condition two) or the Third World (condition three). A second manipulation was that in each condition the topic under study was described as concerning human rights either with respect to freedom of expression, or treatment of law offenders, or the right to a humane standard of living. The interviewer was kept blind to the purpose of the study was not aware of the procedure or findings of studies 1 and 2.

### *Results*

Table 7 presents the frequencies of subjects who did and those who did not call back in each condition, on each of the three human rights issues.

A comparison of the total number of call-backs in each condition shows marginally significant differences, with call-backs being most frequent in the Third World condition, and least frequent in the Canada condition ( $\chi^2 = 5.94$ ,  $p < 0.06$ ). When the human rights issue was 'the right to a humane standard of living', the frequency of return calls was highest in condition Third World ( $\chi^2 = 8.48$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Marginally significant differences arose when the issue was 'freedom of expression', with the frequency of return calls being highest in condition Soviet Union ( $\chi^2 = 5.10$ ,  $p < 0.08$ ). No differences were found across conditions on the issue of treatment of law offenders.



### *Discussion*

While differences between the three conditions were only 'marginally' significant, this experiment has provided behavioral evidence that seem to be in line with the general trends we found through attitudinal measures in studies 1 and 2. Most important is the trend indicating that support for human rights generally was highest in the Third World condition, and lowest in condition Canada. This provides some support for hypothesis one through a behavioral measure. Support for human rights in the Third World was particularly high on the issue of a humane standard of living, and this follows the trend we found in study 1. However, our expectation that support for human rights would be higher in condition Canada on the issue of freedom of expression was not confirmed. Finally, the findings suggest that the 'call-me-back' technique can be a simple but effective research strategy for achieving behavioral measures.

### **General discussion**

The objective of this research was to examine cross-situational consistency in attitudes and behavior toward human rights, and in this way to explore the meaning of 'universality' of human rights. One interpretation of 'universality' as suggested by the literature (e.g., Kohlberg 1976) is that individuals will show cross-situational consistency in their attitudes and behavior toward human rights issues. However, we noted recent research findings that point to the ideological basis of moral reasoning (e.g., Elmer et al. 1983), and hypothesized that the pattern of associations between ideology and attitudes and behavior toward human rights would shift across the contexts of Canada, the Soviet Union, and the Third World.

Our first hypothesis was that Canadian subjects would show stronger support for human rights in the Soviet and Third World context than in the Canadian context. This hypothesis received fairly strong support in studies 1, 2 and 3, involving respectively the attitudes of a student sample toward a broad range of human rights issues; the attitudes of a Pro-Life sample toward human rights issues generally and the Pro-Life issue specifically; and a behavioral assessment of a student sample with respect to three basic categories of human rights. In general, the Canadian subjects seemed to perceive a stronger need to support human rights in the Soviet and Third World context. This trend would have been, we believe, even stronger if we had worked with a more internally consistent human rights scale.

We have assumed the belief that human rights receive more healthy support in Canadian than in Soviet and third World societies to be part of the dominant value system in Canada, and perhaps in all Western societies. However, the Canadian subjects did not differentiate between Canada and the Soviet Union as sharply as they differentiated between Canada and Third World societies. Perhaps this is because in the age of glasnost, perestroika, and 'democratization' in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, the Soviet human rights record is perceived more positively.

While subjects generally seemed to perceive a need to support human rights more in Soviet and Third World societies than in Canada, the association between right-wing political ideology and religiosity, and support for human rights also followed different patterns across the three conditions. Subjects who were more religious and right-wing were generally more opposed to human rights in Canadian and Third World contexts, but this association did not hold in the Soviet context. 'Real world' examples of this phenomenon might be the behavior of certain politicians. For example, Mrs. Thatcher's opposition to certain 'fundamental human rights' disappears when the issue of these rights is raised in the context of communist societies. Presumably, she feels that there is more need to protect such rights in communist societies, than there is in 'democratic' Britain. Similarly, political expediency has led successive Soviet leaders to support 'democratic rights' in South America and other parts of the Third World that are more under Western influence, but to neglect such rights in the communist states of Eastern Europe.

Our concern in this research has been with the outcomes of moral reasoning processes, and in subsequent studies it would be useful to also focus on the processes themselves. A working hypothesis might be that not only does the pattern of association between political ideology and support for human rights shift across contexts, but there is also a shift in moral-reasoning processes that left- and right-wingers go through to arrive at their respective positions. For example, the universe of individuals who fall within the category of those entitled to a 'right' might change across context. Thus, while the right-winger might perceive labor unions as a part of a universe of people entitled to take collective action in the Soviet context, they may exclude labor unions from this universe in the North American context.

In contrast, the moral reasoning processes underlying the human

rights attitudes of Right-Wing Authoritarians might show high consistency across contexts. Relative to those low on this trait, high authoritarians were consistent in showing less support for human rights across the three conditions, and it is probable that they underwent the same moral reasoning processes to arrive at these attitudes.

Finally, the findings of this study can be seen as a step toward clarifying the meaning of 'universality' with respect to attitudes and behavior in the area of human rights. The various political and legal efforts to establish universal human rights generally have been concerned with the rights people *should* enjoy, irrespective of who they are and which part of the globe they inhabit (United Nations 1983a, 1983b). A picture of universal rights in its ideal emerges from the legal literature, and the important declarations of human rights all reflect this idealism. The achievement of this ideal probably would be facilitated through a better understanding of peoples' actual attitudes and behavior toward human rights.

## References

- Adorno, T.W., Frenkel-Brunswik, D.J. Levinson and R.W. Sanford, 1950. *The authoritarian personality*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Ajzen, I. and M. Fishbein, 1977. Attitude-behavior relations: A theoretical analysis and review of empirical research. *Psychological Bulletin* 84, 888-918.
- Altemeyer, B., 1981. *Right-wing authoritarianism*. Manitoba: University of Manitoba Press.
- Altemeyer, B., 1988. *Enemies of freedom: Understanding right-wing authoritarianism*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- American Psychological Association, 1981. Ethical principles of psychologists. *American Psychologist* 39, 633-638.
- Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen [Declaration of the rights of man and of the citizen], 1983. *Grand dictionnaire encyclopédique Larousse*, Vol. 4, p. 3414. Paris: Librairie Larousse. (For the English translation, see Declaration of the rights of man and of the citizen, 1985. *The new encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th ed., Vol. 10, p. 71. Chicago, IL: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc.)
- Emler, N.P., 1983, 'Morality and politics: The ideological dimension in the theory of moral development'. In: H. Weinreich-Haste and D. Locke (eds.), *Morality in the making: Thought, action and social context*. Chichester: Wiley. pp. 47-71.
- Emler, N.P. and R. Hogan, 1981. 'Developing attitudes to law and justice: An integrative review'. In: S.S. Brehm, S.M. Kassir and F.X. Gibbons (eds.), *Developmental social psychology*. New York: Oxford University Press. pp. 298-314.
- Emler, N.P., S. Renwick and B. Malone, 1983. The relationship between moral reasoning and political orientation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 45, 1073-1080.
- Kohlberg, L., 1963. 'Moral development and identification'. In: H.W. Stevenson (ed.), *Year-book of the National Society for the Study of Education*. Part I. Child psychology. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. pp. 277-332.

- Kohlberg, L., 1969. 'Stage and sequence: The cognitive-development approach to socialization'. In: D. Goslin (ed.), *Handbook of socialization*. New York: Rand McNally. pp. 347-480.
- Kohlberg, L., 1976. 'Moral stages and moralization: The cognitive-developmental approach'. In: T. Lickona (ed.), *Moral development and behavior*. New York: Holt. pp. 31-53.
- Kohlberg, L., 1978. 'Revisions in the theory and practice of moral development'. In: W. Damon (ed.), *Moral development*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. pp. 83-87.
- Pope, K.S., B.G. Tabachnick and P. Keith-Spiegel, 1987. Ethics of practice: The beliefs and behaviors of psychologists as therapists. *American Psychologist* 42, 993-1006.
- Rokeach, M., 1973. *The nature of human values*. New York: Free Press.
- Rosenzweig, M.R., 1988. Psychology and United Nations Human Right efforts. *American Psychologists* 43, 79-86.
- Sparks, P. and K. Durkin, 1987. Moral reasoning and political orientation: The context sensitivity of individual rights and democratic principles. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 52, 931-936.
- United Nations, 1983a. *Human rights: A compilation of international instruments*. New York: Author.
- United Nations, 1983b. *United Nations action in the field of human rights*. New York: Author.
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1983. In: United Nations, *Human rights: A compilation of international*. New York: Author. pp. 1-3.
- Vasak, K. and P. Alston (eds.), 1982. *The international dimensions of human rights*, vols. 1 & 2, 2nd ed. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press; and Paris: UNESCO.
- Zanna, M.P., E.T. Higgins and C.P. Herman (eds.), 1982. *Consistency in social behavior: The Ontario Symposium*, Vol. 2. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Trois études ont été effectuées dans le but d'examiner les attitudes et les comportements envers les droits de la personne. Le terme 'droits universels' sous-entend une constance dans les attitudes et les comportements envers ces droits, dans différentes situations. Une interprétation alternative serait de voir un changement d'attitudes, dans différents contextes, en fonction d'une idéologie. Notre première hypothèse prédisait que les sujets canadiens seraient plus critiques du dossier des droits de la personne dans la société soviétique et dans le Tiers-Monde et démontreraient un plus grand support pour les droits de la personne dans ces sociétés et ceci, davantage que pour le Canada. La deuxième hypothèse prédisait une corrélation négative entre l'idéologie conservatrice et l'appui pour les droits de la personne, dans les sociétés canadiennes et dans le Tiers-Monde, mais non dans la société soviétique; la troisième hypothèse prédisait une même relation entre la religiosité et l'appui pour les droits de la personne. La quatrième hypothèse prédisait que les personnes autoritaires, à cause de leur opposition fondamentale aux libertés individuelles, seraient opposées à ces droits dans tous les contextes. La première étude impliquait 155 étudiants exprimant leurs attitudes envers une multitude de sujets reliés aux droits de la personne. La deuxième étude impliquait 74 partisans de la position 'Pro-Vie', exprimant leurs attitudes par rapport aux droits de la personne et à l'avortement. La troisième étude impliquait une mesure comportementale de l'appui pour les droits de la personne parmi 450 étudiants. Les résultats appuient, en général, la première et la quatrième hypothèse, et confirment partiellement la deuxième et la troisième hypothèse. Ces résultats semblent appuyer davantage l'association entre l'idéologie et le raisonnement moral.