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## Human Rights Organizations as Agents of Change: When Do They Succeed and When Do They Fail?

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# HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS AS AGENTS OF CHANGE: WHEN DO THEY FAIL AND WHEN DO THEY SUCCEED?

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## ABSTRACT

Human Right Organizations [HROs] attempt to shape individuals' values on such contentious issues as the use of sleep deprivation as an interrogation technique *and* to mobilize them to act on their values. While much has been written describing this important element of their advocacy work, little systematic research has been done evaluating its efficacy. We conducted archival research to identify the three most common messaging techniques employed by AI: (1) informational frames, where the focus is to educate the reader by presenting them with core facts and statistics; (2) personal frames, where a personal narrative is told with the aim of emotionally impacting the reader; and (3) motivational frames, which emphasize the reader's agency and include a direct appeal to take action. We tested the efficacy of each framing strategy using an experimental research design in which participants were randomly assigned to the control group (shown no campaign materials) or one of the treatment groups shown a campaign against sleep deprivation featuring one of the three framing strategies. We then surveyed participants regarding their attitudes on the use of torture and their likelihood to get involved in an anti-torture initiative. Results demonstrate that the three most common messaging techniques employed by HROs – informational, personal and motivational frames – are more effective at fostering consensus mobilization than they are at action mobilization. Personal narratives appear to be the most consistently successful, increasing individuals' sense of knowledge on the issue, their emotional reaction to the issue, and as a consequence, leading them to reject the practice and participate in a campaign to demand its cessation.

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## **Introduction**

Human Right Organizations [HROs] are central to efforts around the world to harness the power of information about rights abuses to change human rights conditions. HROs work to mobilize consensus about the nature of abuses and then mobilize action to change rights behavior. They do this by attempting to shape individuals' values on such contentious issues as the use of sleep deprivation as a method of interrogation *and* mobilizing them to act on their values. While much has been written describing this process of framing – “conscious strategic efforts... to fashion shared understandings of the world and of themselves that legitimize and motivate collective action” (Keck and Sikkink 1998, 3) – as a vital element of human rights advocacy work, little systematic research has been done evaluating the efficacy of framing on opinion and mobilization (Benford and Snow 2000, 632).

In this study, we begin to address this critical gap in our understanding of how HROs mobilize opinion and action to change human rights behavior. We test the efficacy of three of the most frequently used framing strategies using an experimental research design. Our results speak to the utility of some of the most common framing techniques in fostering consensus about the nature and severity of human rights issues, and the willingness of individuals exposed to those frames to mobilize to change them.

## **Human Rights Organizations [HROs] As Agents of Change**

### *HROs and the Mobilization of Consensus and Action*

Human rights organizations [HROs] – the specific type of NGOs focused on human rights issues – gather information that states do not want to be widely available to the public. Perpetrators of human rights abuses generally prefer to avoid the spotlight so as to be able to continue these practices without public scrutiny. They also wish to avoid being labeled as norm violators, particularly if this results in suffering consequences for their actions. An HRO's power lies in the information it possesses about these abuses, and how it uses that information to mobilize consensus that an issue is a human rights issue, and to mobilize action to address that issue (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Becker 2012).

HROs mobilize consensus by spotlighting a rights abuse, and making others perceive that action as an abuse and the perpetrator as an abuser of human rights. HROs can then mobilize action to pressure those perpetrators to change their behavior, and encourage other actors to act to shame or sanction the perpetrators (Brysk 1983; Keck and Sikkink 1998; Murdie 2009; Murdie and Bhasin 2011; Becker 2012; Krain 2012; Wong 2012). Studies have shown that such efforts are effective at changing the behavior of rights violators, reducing or eliminating the use of particular human rights abuses in many instances (Brysk 1993; Keck and Sikkink 1998; Clark 2001; Hertel 2006; Murdie 2009; Becker 2012; Krain 2012; Wong 2012; Hendrix and Wong 2013).

Although much of the literature has focused on how HROs mobilize consensus and action of actors on the global stage in order to change human rights behavior, none of that is possible without micromobilization efforts. HROs mobilize individuals directly, or assist local groups in mobilizing, to pressure targets to change their human rights practices (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Murdie and Bhasin 2011). For instance, HRO campaigns spotlighting the practice

of manufacturing clothes in sweatshop conditions or with child labor have successfully convinced concerned citizens to view these issues as rights violations, and have triggered the mobilization of consumer boycotts. In turn, these actions have forced multinational corporations and host states to alter their labor practices (Elliott and Freeman 2003; Hertel 2006). Similarly, Amnesty International's Urgent Action campaigns encourage citizen-activists to identify an issue as a human rights violation, and to act on it by communicating directly with target governments to urge them to change their behavior. Governments previously able to act in the shadows are besieged with bags and bags of letters from people around the world making it clear that rights violations no longer go unseen (Wong 2012; Hendrix and Wong 2013). And HRO efforts at educating local populations about human rights and government violations of them yield greater appreciation for the human rights environment and a better understanding of governments' failures to protect such rights (Welch 1995; Davis, Murdie, and Steinmetz 2012). This then enables HROs to mobilize citizens to educate lawmakers about the nature and extent of the issues, and attempt to change the political calculus, and thus their behavior.<sup>1</sup>

Ultimately, HROs can only succeed in their efforts to improve human rights if they are able to convince citizens that a given issue is a human rights issue, and to subsequently take action to change the situation (Davis, Murdie, and Steinmetz 2012, 208). To accomplish both of these tasks, HROs engage in framing.<sup>2</sup> Thus framing is at the heart of all of the activities examined in the rich and emerging HRO literature. Yet few studies of HROs explicitly examine this crucial step. We contribute to this gap in the literature by analyzing which HRO framing strategies are most effective at aligning citizen views with that of the organization, and which are most effective at mobilizing them to act.

### *The Use of Frames to Mobilize Consensus and Action*

Frames are the rhetorical lenses or "schemata of interpretation" that help actors construct the way in which these issues are likely to be viewed or understood (Goffman 1974, 21). There are many frames through which individuals can view a given issue or situation (Benford and Snow 2000; Chong and Druckman 2007). The frame employed affects how individuals process information and serves as "the bridge between... larger social and cultural realms and everyday understandings of social interaction," (Scheufele 1999, 106; see also Domke, Shah, and

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<sup>1</sup> For example, the campaign to abolish sentences of life without parole for juvenile offenders in California

generated thousands of letters and phone calls to state Senators and Assemblymembers. This was important to show legislators that the bill – which many lawmakers considered controversial and potentially damaging to their political careers – had broad grassroots support. Active backing from their constituents would make them more likely to vote in favor of the bill and less fearful of negative political consequences (Becker 2012, 243).

<sup>2</sup> Framing and persuasion effects are dependent on the source of the message, as only credible sources have measurable effects on individual opinions (Druckman 2001). But HROs are strategic actors what face pressures and incentives to exaggerate claims and frame humanitarian situations in ways that elicit the most support rather than accurately portray rights abuse situations (Cooley and Ron 2002; Carpenter 2005). However, a recent analysis of Amnesty International's reporting on torture suggests that this particular HRO "adheres to its credibility criterion, rarely succumbing to incentives to exaggerate abuse" (Hill, Moore, and Mukherjee 2013, 219). This is welcome news for our study, which uses Amnesty International USA's archive of materials to identify most frequently used frames, and applies these frames to a type of torture, sleep deprivation.

Wackman 1998). Framing is then the process by which some actor “defines and constructs a political issue or public controversy” or otherwise constructs a particular perception of reality about that issue (Nelson and Oxley 1997, 567; see also Goffman 1974). Framing causes individuals to “develop a particular conceptualization of an issue or reorient their thinking about an issue,” (Druckman 2007, 104).

Framing is a particularly effective way for political entrepreneurs to influence individuals as they consider information about socio-political issues. Framing affects how individuals connect their values to political issues (Kinder & Sanders 1996; Nelson, Clawson, and Oxley 1997; Brewer 2002). When exposed to a particular frame, people tend to assign greater weight to the value that the frame invokes (Nelson, Clawson, and Oxley 1997). Frames have even been found to “influence how citizens explain their thoughts about an issue in their own words” (Brewer 2002, 304).

Transnational advocacy networks, like other social movements and their component organizations, must frame issues to “make them comprehensible to target audiences, to attract attention and encourage action” (Keck and Sikkink 1999, 90). Social movements and social movement organizations [SMOs] actively engage in framing of social problems to bring individuals’ views on the issues at hand in line with the views of the SMO, a process known as consensus mobilization (Klandermans 1984). Framing works to “simplify and condense aspects of the ‘world out there,’ with the end intention of mobilizing ‘potential adherents and constituents’” (Benford and Snow 1988, 198). Since consensus mobilization is a “necessary condition for movement participation”, the ability to effectively employ frames plays a significant part in action mobilization and the ability to shape public policy (Snow et al, 1986; Snow and Benford, 1992; Klandermans 1984; Gamson 1995). This is even true when the economic calculus does not favor micromobilization.<sup>3</sup> However, action mobilization is not a guaranteed outcome, and may require additional framing or mobilization efforts (Klandermans 1988).

Different frames have different impacts on the belief importance of individuals about issues, and elicit different responses from those individuals (Druckman 2001; Shen 2004). For example, the voting mobilization literature suggests that an individual is more likely to vote when he or she perceives his or her vote as likely to be instrumental in affecting the outcome, when the costs of voting are minimal, and when the psychic benefits of participation are high (Sigelman & Berry 1982; Duffy & Tavits, 2008). The latter includes complying with and reiterating social norms about participation, and gaining a sense of efficacy and importance through being able to express one’s preference, and feeling as if one’s voice has been heard (Riker and Ordeshook, 1968). In short, different frames tap into different elements that may be critical to one’s decision to participate politically, such as lowered costs of participating, greater feelings of empathy or an increased sense of efficacy and agency. It is to these themes that we now turn.

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<sup>3</sup> This is particularly true in situations where participation is seen as yielding a social good that is consistent with one’s values, such as human rights activism. To paraphrase Eldin, Gelman, and Kaplan (2007), if one cares about others, it can be rational to participate.

## **The Expected Effects of Different Types of Frames**

The first author conducted field work in the Amnesty International USA archives at Columbia University, which houses all of the institutional materials of Amnesty International USA.<sup>4</sup> This extensive archival research included gathering information on the frames employed by AI to influence citizens' attitudes and behavior in promotional and advocacy materials. A sample of over 3,000 photos of AI promotional and advocacy materials was collected and analyzed.

The most common frames employed by AI in these documents were: (1) informational frames, where the focus is to educate the reader by presenting them with core facts and statistics, and thereby lower the costs of acquiring such information needed to participate; (2) personal frames, where a personal narrative is told with the aim of emotionally impacting the reader, and creating a sense of empathy for the aggrieved; and (3) motivational frames, which emphasize the reader's agency and potential efficacy, and include a direct appeal to take action. Therefore, we focus our efforts in this study on these types of frames. Below we discuss what these frames are, how and why they are typically used, and our expectations regarding their effectiveness in mobilizing consensus and action.

### *Informational Frames*

Informational frames are frames that provide objective information or statistics. These frames rely on the assumption that by increasing an individual's knowledge about the issue, they are more likely to see the issue as problematic and want to do something about it. Indeed, studies have found that the more knowledge individuals have about human rights issues, the more likely they were to report greater interest in human rights issues, an increased desire to get involved, and a greater likelihood of engaging in human rights activism (Stellmacher et al. 2005; Cohrs et al. 2007).

Moreover, providing factual information about the issue reduces the costs associated with gathering such information, thus reducing the costs of making a decision about where one stands on an issue. This logic derives from studies of voter mobilization, where reducing costs of voting more generally (Haspel and Knotts 2005), and of gathering information about the issues or candidates specifically, has been found to increase voter mobilization (Ladner and Pianzola 2010). Information has a significant, sizeable impact on an individual's likelihood of political participation (Larcinese 2007).

HROs routinely use an informational frame to leverage their strengths in gathering and disseminating information about abuses to help inform and mobilize. As Jo Becker, a twenty-year veteran of numerous human rights campaigns, notes, “[b]y spotlighting patterns of abuse, advocates can often let facts speak for themselves” (Becker 2012, 251). Becker (2012, 16) identifies the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers' briefing booklet containing information on the scale and consequences of the problem as a crucial early step in the

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<sup>4</sup> The collection contains 107.52 linear feet of information (about 250 boxes) about the AIUSA organization and its national office from 1966-2003 (Amnesty International of the USA, Inc.: National Office Records). Types of information contained in the archives include: funding of AIUSA, development, administration, decision-making processes, finances, fundraising, and the work of the section and its membership on human rights issues (Amnesty International of the USA, Inc.: National Office Records).

campaign. It educated activists and the public at large about the issue, and was widely disseminated, eventually being translated into a dozen languages. She also notes that the campaign to abolish sentences of life without parole for juvenile offenders “backed its arguments regarding young people’s capacity for rehabilitation with recent findings from neuroscience on adolescent brain development” (Becker 2012, 228).<sup>5</sup> And Keck and Sikkink (1998, 183) report that the international women’s movement found its greatest successes by “promoting change by reporting facts.” Movement activists used that information both to shame governments into addressing human rights abuses and inspiring greater mobilization of grassroots activists.

There have only been a few studies that specifically examine the effectiveness of NGO use of informational frames in changing attitudes and behavior. An experimental study found that “by far the primary method for motivating people to change their pro-environmental behaviors has been to provide them with information that will persuade them to alter their behaviors”, but that the effects are conditional (Pelletier and Sharp 2008, 211).<sup>6</sup> And a recent study demonstrated that public opinion about state respect for human rights changes when citizens are provided with information about government rights abuses by HROs; however, absent such information, “worsening governmental abuse of human rights alone will not lead to fewer people believing their government respects human rights” (Davis, Murdie and Steinmetz 2012, 199).

Informational frames should be effective at providing requisite information necessary to change opinions and mobilize consensus, and to both reduce costs of and increase the likelihood of the mobilization of action. Thus, we hypothesize:

*H1: Exposure to informational frames during an HRO campaign will result in greater alignment between individuals’ and the HRO’s opinions regarding the campaign issue.*

*H2: Exposure to informational frames during an HRO campaign will increase individuals’ self-reported and observed willingness to mobilize around the campaign issue.*

Because informational frames gain their power via the provision of facts, we further hypothesize that:

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<sup>5</sup> Becker (2012, 241) adds that “when asked about the most effective aspect of the campaign, two family members of juvenile offenders serving life terms both had a similar response. ‘Cold hard facts’...”

<sup>6</sup> Of course there are multiple ways to frame the same information, which might affect how influential the provision of that information actually is. For instance, numerous studies have verified Kahneman and Tversky’s (1979) insight that individuals are risk averse when choices are framed in terms of losses. Meyerowitz and Chaiken (1987) showed that framing the importance of breast self-examinations (BSEs) in terms of the negative consequences of not doing them made women were more likely to engage in BSEs than when the same procedure was framed in terms of the positive effects of BSEs. Hiscox (2006) found that respondents were more affected by messages associating free trade with increased job losses than they were by messages associating it with gains for consumers, or in the absence of any framing of the issue. Thus, to simplify our research design, we hold the framing of information constant, though we acknowledge that varying the way in which information is framed would be a fascinating and important study in its own right.

*H3: Exposure to informational frames during an HRO campaign will increase individuals' self-reported and observed knowledge about the campaign issue.*

### *Personal Frames*

Personal frames are frames that focus the recipient of the information on a particular episode such as the plight of an individual, rather than on broader factual information about the injustice or rights violation.<sup>7</sup> This trades a focus on cold hard facts that may distance the person learning about the issue for the humanization of victims of the abuse or injustice, and the creation of empathy. It is an attempt by the actor employing this framing technique to personalize, dramatize and emotionalize the issue (Valkenburg et al 1999).

For instance, in one type of personal frame, an injustice frame, “movements identify the ‘victims’ of a given injustice and amplify their victimization,” (Snow and Benford 2000, 615; see also Gamson 1995). These and other types of human-interest frames help the reader of the narrative make a personal connection to an individual in the story (Scheufele 1999). The focus is on generating empathy in the reader, thereby pushing the reader to prioritize the issue and want to affect change (Carpenter 2005).<sup>8</sup> Studies of media framing seem to bear out that personal frames play a crucial role in the way individuals process information. For instance, one study found that “respondents who had just read a story framed in terms of human interest emphasized emotions and individual implications in their responses significantly more often” (Valkenburg et al. 1999, 565).

HROs employ personal frames frequently as they try to mobilize their base supporters to act. Most notably, since its founding, Amnesty International (AI) has used personal frames very effectively in their campaigns. AI’s adoption of “prisoners of conscience” allowed the HRO to humanize the plight of political prisoners by identifying spotlight cases of political prisoners and telling an evocative story about the individuals in detention and the conditions under which they were held (Benenson 1961). AI then used this personalized information about detention to mobilize volunteers to write letters directly to state officials on the detainee’s behalf (Wong 2012).

Other HROs employ this tactic as well. The International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) used emotive images of devastating injuries children sustained as a result of landmine accidents to humanize the victims and stir emotions of politicians and potential activists alike. The United Nations Association (UNA)-USA’s Adopt a Minefield Program further helped

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<sup>7</sup> Personal frames, like “episodic frames” in the literature on framing by the media, are those that focus on isolated events. This is a common convention in journalism, where news stories are told in terms of a particular individual as a way to illustrate a larger theme (Zillmann 1999). Research has found that when media stories are framed episodically they have a significant effect on viewer perceptions (see for instance: Iyengar 1991).

<sup>8</sup> Another way to accomplish this is to get the person exposed to the frame to think of themselves or their loved ones experiencing what the victim has experienced. For instance, in an interview with the first author, Dr. Carole Nagengast, Chair of AI-USA Board of Directors was asked how Amnesty International goes about convincing the skeptic to advocate for a particular human rights issue. In response, Dr. Nagengast asked that the interviewer close her eyes and imagine the person in her life most dear to her. Then she said, “Now imagine that he/she is being dragged away, beaten, hair pulled, teeth yanked, beaten with a stick, in order to give information about his/her political activity, what would you do?”

members of the public connect on a more personal level to the issue by giving individuals the opportunity to “adopt” a particular area containing landmines, learn more about the individuals and communities affected, and raise funds to remove the mines (Warkentin and Mingst 2000). And the campaign to abolish sentences of life without parole for juvenile offenders worked to humanize them by highlighting personal stories of the incarcerated juveniles (Becker 2012, 241).

This suggests that personal frames should be very effective at eliciting an emotional reaction, personalizing the issue, making it more salient, and making people feel a greater need to act. Thus, we hypothesize:

*H4: Exposure to personal frames during an HRO campaign will result in greater alignment between individuals’ and the HRO’s opinions regarding the campaign issue.*

*H5: Exposure to personal frames during an HRO campaign will increase individuals’ self-reported and observed willingness to mobilize around the campaign issue.*

Since personal frames gain their power via the evocation of an emotional reaction through identification with and humanization of the victims of rights abuses, we further hypothesize that:

*H6: Exposure to personal frames during an HRO campaign will heighten individuals’ emotional reaction to the campaign issue, particularly regarding the consequences for the central person(s) in the campaign.*

#### *Motivational Frames*

In the social movement literature, motivational frames are the most consistently recognized as affecting behavior (Snow and Benford 2000). Social movement organizations are faced with the task of convincing members that the cause they are fighting for is both obtainable and worthy of action. Motivational frames are a call to arms “intended to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support and to demobilize antagonists,” (Snow and Benford 2000, 614). They motivate individuals to act by creating feelings of agency and efficacy – suggesting that they can act, and that their actions can affect the desired outcomes (Gamson 1995). Motivational framing may also suggest that a window of political opportunity exists that makes one’s participation likely to be effective (Gamson and Meyer 1996).

When individuals think that their political participation will be pivotal to achieving the political outcome that they desire, they are more likely to participate, particularly if they have an interest in helping others (Eldin, Gelman, and Kaplan 2007; Duffy and Tavits 2008). For instance, in studies of get-out-the-vote campaigns, messages that explicitly appeal to voter efficacy, including explicit statements that “your vote can make a difference” were have a significant positive effect on voter mobilization (Green, Gerber, and Nickerson 2003). This is likely to have an effect even when a given individual’s efforts are not actually pivotal to the success of a campaign, since people tend to overestimate the importance of their own participation (Duffy and Tavits 2008). Moreover, participation may be more likely when “a small effort yields a substantial expected social gain” (Eldin, Gelman, and Kaplan 2007, 297).

There has been surprisingly little empirical study of the effectiveness of motivational frames on the behavior of citizens targeted for mobilization by HROs. However, given what we know from the voter mobilization literature, motivational frames that explicitly call on the individual to act, suggest that their participation is crucial, and that limited effort can yield a positive social good, should affect the motivation to act and the likelihood of action. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

*H7: Exposure to motivational frames during an HRO campaign will increase individuals' self-reported and observed willingness to mobilize around the campaign issue.*

However, motivational frames do not contain detailed information about the issue, nor do they present personal narratives to humanize the victims. Thus, we hypothesize:

*H8: Exposure to motivational frames during an HRO campaign will have no impact on alignment between individuals' and the HRO's opinions regarding the campaign issue (relative to other frames).*

#### *No Message*

Regardless of the framing strategy employed by the HRO, people who are exposed to a message about sleep deprivation are primed to consider it more carefully and view the information within the context of a human rights issue.<sup>9</sup> People exposed to a message that frames sleep deprivation as problematic will be more likely to change their position on the issue, claim to be more interested in acting, and more likely to engage in some form of activism against the rights violation. These effects should hold regardless of how the message is framed. Therefore, we hypothesize:

*H9: Exposure to informational, personal or motivational frames during an HRO campaign will result in greater alignment between individuals' and the HRO's opinions regarding the campaign issue (relative to no frame).*

*H10: Exposure to informational, personal or motivational frames during an HRO campaign will increase individuals' self-reported and observed willingness to mobilize around the campaign issue (relative to no frame).*

#### **Data and Methods**

To test these hypotheses, we designed an experiment wherein a fictitious human rights organization, The Human Rights Initiative, launched four campaigns on sleep deprivation. The campaigns were then distributed (or not, in the case of the control group) to participants, who, after reading the campaign ad were surveyed regarding their attitudes and potential behavior on sleep deprivation.

One thousand participants were recruited for the study through Amazon.com's Mechanical Turk, an online platform that allows "requesters" (in this case, researchers) to pay

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<sup>9</sup> For more on priming effects, see: Iyengar and Kinder (1987); Domke, Shah, and Wackman (1998).

workers (or “Mturkers”) to complete small tasks.<sup>10</sup> The job ad simply asked, “[p]lease participate in the following short opinion survey.” To avoid any selection effects (wherein potential participants would select in or out of the survey based on their preconceived notions of its contents), no mention of human rights or sleep deprivation was made. Workers were required to be at least 18 years of age and to have a completed task satisfaction rate of at least 85 percent to participate in the study.<sup>11</sup>

Participants were randomly assigned to the control group or one of four treatment groups. Those in the control group received no campaign message and were simply asked to proceed to the first page of the survey.<sup>12</sup> The informational, personal and motivational campaigns are shown in Figures 1-3 in Appendix A.<sup>13</sup> We consulted Amnesty International USA’s historical archive of advocacy materials, as well as more recent campaign materials from Amnesty International, Physicians for Human Rights, and Oxfam International to ensure that the language, style and tone of the treatments was comparable to that which individuals would actually be exposed to during an HRO campaign. We also contracted a professional graphic designer to create a logo for the Human Rights Initiative, again to add legitimacy and authenticity to our HRO campaign.<sup>14</sup>

The survey was designed to offer at least one direct and/or indirect measure of the dependent, independent and intervening variables in our theoretical model. Table 1 below describes each variable, how it was captured in the survey and how it was measured. A complete list of survey questions is presented in Appendix B. Descriptive statistics for these variables are presented in Appendix C.

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<sup>10</sup> MTurk is inexpensive relative to traditional recruitment strategies. We paid participants \$0.75 upon successful completion of the task (plus at 10 percent fee to Amazon). For a thorough discussion of the strengths of limitations of MTurk for data collection in the social sciences, please see Berinsky et al. (2010).

<sup>11</sup> As with any employment opportunity, requesters on MTurk can set the qualification parameters for workers, including age, gender, residence, education, and a satisfactory work record.

<sup>12</sup> All respondents saw the same survey questions in the same order so as to control for the effects of question order.

<sup>13</sup> Figure 2 shows the personal frame featuring a male survivor of sleep deprivation. To save space, the personal frame featuring a female survivor is not shown. With the exception of replacing “Andrew” with “Andrea” and replacing all gender-specific pronouns and familial relationships, the text of each campaign message is identical.

<sup>14</sup> The logo and group name appeared on all pages of the surveys for all participants, including the control group, so as to insure that its presence did not bias the results. We also employed only black, white and gray visuals to control for the possible effects of color on survey responses, especially those related to or affecting emotions (Valdez and Mehrabian 1994).

	Variable	Survey Question	Measurement
Dependent Variable	Consensus mobilization	Sleep deprivation is an appropriate police interrogation technique.	Ordinal scale 1-5
	Action mobilization (indirect)	How likely are you to participate in a campaign to ban sleep deprivation as a police interrogation technique?	
		How likely are you to support a campaign to ban sleep deprivation as a police interrogation technique?	
	Action mobilization (direct)	If you would like to add your name to a petition to be sent to the Attorney General, demanding the immediate end to the use of sleep deprivation during police interrogations, please click YES below.	Dichotomous
If you would like to add your name to a petition to be sent to the United Nations Special Rapporteur for Human Rights, demanding the immediate end to the use of sleep deprivation during police interrogations, please click YES below.			
Independent	No treatment	(Randomly assigned by computer)	Dichotomous
	Informational treatment		
	Personal (m) treatment		
	Personal (f) treatment		
	Mobilization treatment		
Intervening	Knowledge of issue (indirect)	I feel knowledgeable about the use of sleep deprivation as a police interrogation technique.	Ordinal scale 1-5
		I feel knowledgeable about the consequences of sleep deprivation on individuals who have experienced it.	
		I feel knowledgeable about the effectiveness of sleep deprivation as a police interrogation technique.	
	Knowledge of issue (direct)	Depriving an individual of sleep during an interrogation is an ineffective way to gain reliable information.	Ordinal scale 1-5
		Depriving an individual of sleep during interrogation has a negative impact of their long-term mental and physical well-being.	
	Emotional response to issue (indirect)	How much of an emotional reaction do you experience when thinking about the use of sleep deprivation as a police interrogation technique?	Ordinal scale 1-4
		My feelings about sleep deprivation as a police interrogation technique are at least partly because of its consequences for individuals who have experienced it.	Ordinal scale 1-5
		My feelings about sleep deprivation as a police interrogation technique are at least partly because of how effective or ineffective it is.	
Emotional response to issue (direct)	How do you feel when thinking about the use of sleep deprivation as a police interrogation technique?	Ordinal scale 1-5	
Control	Age	What is your age in years?	Ratio
	Sex	Which of the following best describes your gender?	Dichotomous
	Education	What is the highest level of education that you have completed?	Ordinal scale 1-7
	News consumption	How often do you follow world news?	Ordinal scale 1-5
	Agency	How much influence do you think you can have in shaping public policy?	Ordinal scale 1-4

**Table 1 Variables and Measurements**

A demographic profile for the control and each treatment group is presented in Table 2 below. The age, sex and education of participants are consistent with that of other studies using online survey instruments such as MTurk (Berinsky et al. 2010).

	Control	Informational	Personal (m)	Personal (f)	Motivational
Age (years)	33.10	32.09	32.25	31.14	32.40
Sex	0.579	0.574	0.603	0.545	0.590
Education	4.41	4.23	4.21	4.22	4.34
News	4.09	3.87	3.94	3.97	4.02
Agency	2.33	2.24	2.26	2.33	2.38
N	202	199	202	200	197

**Table 2 Demographic Profile of Control and Treatment Groups**

We use ordered logit to analyze our data because the dependent variables are not continuous, but rather ordinal (or dichotomous in the case of the direct measures of action mobilization). In Tables 3-5 below we present the coefficients and robust standard errors for each variable. Caution should be used when interpreting logit coefficients as they do not represent a direct measurement of the substantive impact of the independent variable on the dependent variable.<sup>15</sup>

## Results

In this section, we present the results from our analyses, testing the impact of various messaging techniques on individuals' perceptions and actions on the issue of sleep deprivation. In general, we find that the three most common messaging techniques employed by HROs – informational, personal and motivational frames – are more effective at fostering consensus mobilization than they are at action mobilization. Personal narratives appear to be the most consistently successful, increasing individuals' sense of knowledge on the issue, their emotional reaction to the issue, and as a consequence, leading them to reject the practice and participate in a campaign to demand its cessation.

Model 1 examines the effect that exposure to one of the treatments has on a participant's agreement with the use of sleep deprivation. Results (Table 3) demonstrate that exposure to any of the treatments – informational, personal, or motivational – significantly decreases one's likelihood of viewing sleep deprivation as an appropriate police interrogation technique. For example, reading a personal narrative of a male survivor of sleep deprivation results in a 1.25 unit decrease in the log odds of reporting a higher level of agreement with the use of sleep deprivation.

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<sup>15</sup> The next step in our analysis will be to calculate the change in predicted probabilities for each variable.

		<b>Model 1 <i>Appropriate</i></b>	<b>Model 2 <i>Reported Support</i></b>	<b>Model 3 <i>Reported Participation</i></b>	<b>Model 4 <i>AG Petition</i></b>	<b>Model 5 <i>UN Petition</i></b>
<b>Treatments</b>	Informational	-0.685*** (0.180)	0.415* (0.177)	0.651*** (0.182)	0.342 (0.217)	0.333 (0.216)
	Personal (m)	-1.252*** (0.195)	1.139*** (0.176)	1.254*** (0.176)	0.637** (0.215)	0.651** (0.216)
	Personal (f)	-1.059*** (0.185)	0.741*** (0.192)	0.980*** (0.183)	0.539* (0.216)	0.508* (0.218)
	Motivational	-0.457** (0.174)	0.413* (0.178)	0.556** (0.180)	0.329 (0.218)	0.284 (0.217)
<b>Controls</b>	Age	0.005 (0.005)	-0.004 (0.005)	0.007 (0.005)	0.001 (0.006)	0.001 (0.006)
	Sex	0.229 (0.122)	0.093 (0.120)	-0.165 (0.120)	0.020 (0.141)	0.085 (0.142)
	Education	0.105* (0.048)	0.012 (0.045)	0.017 (0.043)	0.087 (0.052)	0.108* (0.052)
	News	-0.082 (0.057)	0.091 (0.055)	0.041 (0.053)	0.034 (0.066)	0.047 (0.066)
	Agency	0.320*** (0.082)	0.417*** (0.079)	0.772*** (0.086)	0.653*** (0.092)	0.704*** (0.093)
<b>Model Stats</b>	N	976	976	976	978	978
	$\chi^2$ (9)	79.79***	71.24***	131.71***	68.25***	76.65***
	Log Likelihood	-1316.7466	-1411.7748	-1407.8195	-621.32497	-615.47459
<i>Notes: * = p &lt; 0.05; ** = p &lt; 0.01; *** = p &lt; 0.001</i>						

**Table 3 Ordered Logit Results, Models 1-5**

Models 2-5 examine the effect that exposure to one of the treatments has on a participant's self-reported and observed willingness to mobilize around the issue of sleep deprivation. Participants who viewed any of the treatments were more likely than those who did not to report that they would both support and participate in a campaign to ban sleep deprivation (Models 2 and 3). However, when asked to actually take action by signing a petition to be sent to the Attorney General or the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights, only those exposed to the personal frames (featuring the story of either a male or female survivor of sleep deprivation) were more likely to do so. Neither the informational frame nor the motivational frame had a significant effect on participants' actual choices as to whether or not to act (Models 4 and 5). Given the relatively low risk and low cost request ("*If you would like to add your name to a petition to be sent to..., demanding the immediate end to the use of sleep deprivation during police interrogation, please click YES below*"), we are not optimistic about the prospects of either the informational, or somewhat more unexpectedly, the motivational frames on their own to mobilize individuals around an issue area.

Table 4 displays the results from Models 6-10, which test the proposed mechanisms driving participants' beliefs and behavior regarding sleep deprivation. Results show that the informational frame is the only messaging strategy that has a consistent impact on individuals' knowledge of the issue. With its emphasis on "objective" facts and statistics, it is not surprising

that the informational frame increases participants' perceived and real knowledge of sleep deprivation, including its negative impact on victims/survivors and its overall efficacy as an interrogation technique. In comparison, neither the personal nor the motivational frames left participants feeling more informed, even though both framing strategies increased individuals' likelihood of correctly identifying sleep deprivation as deleterious for victims. The male personal frame further led participants to correctly identify sleep deprivation as an ineffective interrogation tool. Given that the female survivor's narrative was identical in every way to that of her male counterpart, with the exception of her name (changed from Andrew to Andrea), it is interesting to note that participants shown this treatment were not more likely to view sleep deprivation as ineffective.<sup>16</sup>

		<b>Model 6 Reported Knowledge, General</b>	<b>Model 7 Reported Knowledge, Consequences</b>	<b>Model 8 Reported Knowledge, Efficacy</b>	<b>Model 9 Observed Knowledge, Consequences</b>	<b>Model 10 Observed Knowledge, Efficacy</b>
<b>Treatments</b>	Informational	0.837*** (0.168)	0.738*** (0.182)	1.10*** (0.177)	0.599*** (0.167)	0.669*** (0.192)
	Personal (m)	-0.047 (0.185)	0.141 (0.194)	0.214 (0.181)	0.359* (0.173)	1.12*** (0.184)
	Personal (f)	-0.086 (0.190)	0.059 (0.188)	0.201 (0.192)	0.257 (0.190)	1.15*** (0.191)
	Motivational	-0.036 (0.180)	0.064 (0.195)	0.066 (0.185)	0.052 (0.146)	0.620** (0.180)
<b>Controls</b>	Age	-0.002 (0.006)	-0.012* (0.006)	-0.005 (0.006)	-0.005 (0.005)	-0.013* (0.005)
	Sex	0.384** (0.126)	0.079 (0.125)	0.255* (0.123)	-0.049 (0.121)	-0.124 (0.122)
	Education	0.076 (0.046)	0.030 (0.047)	0.051 (0.046)	-0.045 (0.044)	-0.018 (0.045)
	News	0.192** (0.060)	0.179** (0.057)	0.198** (0.058)	0.068 (0.054)	0.082 (0.057)
	Agency	0.630*** (0.083)	0.498*** (0.087)	0.587*** (0.082)	0.251** (0.074)	0.186* (0.084)
<b>Model Stats</b>	N	973	975	974	976	973
	$\chi^2$ (9)	128.46***	65.88***	114.68***	32.89***	63.05***
	Log Likelihood	-1305.4749	-1270.0103	-1327.7784	-1483.9213	-1219.7539
<i>Notes: * = p &lt; 0.05; ** = p &lt; 0.01; *** = p &lt; 0.001</i>						

**Table 4, Ordered Logit Results, Models 6-10**

Where informational frames attempt to change people's minds and behavior through education, personal frames do so by appealing to their base emotions. The results presented in Table 5 (Models 11-14) demonstrate that personal frames do, in fact, elicit emotional responses from viewers. Individuals exposed to personal narratives of suffering are more likely than those who are not to feel "bad" or "very bad" when thinking about sleep deprivation, feelings that were

<sup>16</sup> Another future step in our analysis will be to more carefully consider gendered effects.

driven mostly by their understanding of the suffering it caused to victims. The informational frame also prompted an emotional reaction from participants, although not necessarily a negative emotional reaction.

		<b>Model 11 Emotional Response, General</b>	<b>Model 12 Emotional Response, Type</b>	<b>Model 13 Emotional Response, Consequences</b>	<b>Model 14 Emotional Response, Efficacy</b>
<b>Treatments</b>	Informational	0.447* (0.192)	-0.248 (0.182)	0.660*** (0.187)	0.764*** (0.173)
	Personal (m)	0.977*** (0.195)	-1.08*** (0.187)	0.808*** (0.181)	0.514** (0.189)
	Personal (f)	1.02*** (0.195)	-0.985*** (0.196)	0.746*** (0.195)	0.352 (0.184)
	Motivational	0.280 (0.189)	-0.204 (0.183)	0.367* (0.186)	0.321 (0.187)
<b>Controls</b>	Age	-0.012* (0.006)	0.001 (0.006)	-0.009 (0.006)	-0.011* (0.005)
	Sex	-0.186 (0.128)	0.349** (0.128)	0.061 (0.128)	-0.160 (0.122)
	Education	0.022 (0.044)	0.061 (0.047)	0.052 (0.044)	0.071 (0.045)
	News	0.170** (0.059)	-0.124* (0.057)	0.153** (0.059)	0.046 (0.057)
	Agency	0.485*** (0.081)	0.258** (0.089)	0.087 (0.080)	0.185* (0.079)
<b>Model Stats</b>	N	974	974	974	976
	$\chi^2(9)$	97.72***	74.18***	36.71***	37.51***
	Log Likelihood	-1114.501	-1239.4266	-1262.4138	-1313.8588
<i>Notes: * = p &lt; 0.05; ** = p &lt; 0.01; *** = p &lt; 0.001</i>					

**Table 5, Ordered Logit Results, Models 11-14**

Some of the most interesting and counterintuitive results relate to the control variables included in the models. The age and sex of participants generally do not appear to have a significant effect on their attitudes and actions regarding sleep deprivation (see Models 1-5). However, men are more likely to report increased understanding of sleep deprivation (Models 6 and 8) than are women, and are more likely to report feeling “good” or “very good” about sleep deprivation (Model 12). In addition, increased age lessened participants’ reported and observed knowledge of the consequences of sleep deprivation (Models 7 and 9), but also heightened participants’ emotional response to the issue (Models 11 and 14). Perhaps most surprising, both higher levels of education and higher levels of perceived agency *increased* participants’ approval of the use of sleep deprivation as an interrogation technique (Model 1). Given their attitudes on the appropriateness of sleep deprivation, it is even more paradoxical that these same individuals were more likely to participate in or support a campaign to ban the practice (Models 2-5).

## **Conclusion**

This study provides the first systematic test of the efficacy of the three most common framing techniques employed by HROs – informational, personal and motivational. Our results demonstrate that the three most common messaging techniques employed by HROs –

informational, personal and motivational frames – are more effective at fostering consensus mobilization than they are at action mobilization. Personal narratives appear to be the most consistently successful, increasing individuals’ sense of knowledge on the issue, their emotional reaction to the issue, and as a consequence, leading them to reject the practice and participate in a campaign to demand its cessation.

The results of this study suggest that HROs’ efforts to affect individuals’ attitudes on behavior on human rights issues are not uniformly successful, but rather depend greatly on the framing or messaging strategy employed. To the extent that these micromobilization efforts – consensus and action mobilization – are critical to their ability to influence state or perpetrator behavior, the results of our study would suggest that HROs should emphasize personal narratives that provoke emotional reactions from the target audience. Stirring emotions of empathy, sadness and even anger appear more effective than simple issue education at encouraging individuals to see sleep deprivation as a human rights violation and to participate in a movement to ban its practice.

Our preliminary analysis of the data from our experiment has revealed some interesting initial results regarding which frames have independent effects, and via which mechanisms. However, we have not yet examined the magnitude of these effects. Therefore our next priority will be to use the ordered logit coefficients to generate predicted probabilities of consensus and action mobilization given exposure to different frames.

We also intend to further explore the extent to which framing effects are gendered. For instance, we plan to match respondents and (hypothetical) victim gender to see if people are more receptive to their like group. We also plan to more thoroughly tease out explanations for the differences in effects of the male and female personal frames. This is especially important given that research has shown both that HROs often intentionally utilize misleading “gender essentialisms” in their advocacy efforts, and that those choices have important, and sometimes perverse, consequences (Carpenter 2005).

Finally, this study has examined three specific frames, each use separately and exclusively. In reality, many HROs employ a much wider repertoire of frames, as well as many of these frames in combination. For instance, an HRO appeal might humanize the situation (personal frame), and then call the reader to act (motivational frame). A more extensive analysis of the range of HRO frames, how these frames interact, and which combinations of frames are most effective at yielding consensus and action mobilization, seems warranted.

## Appendix A: Treatments



the  
human rights  
initiative

*Please read the following message from Human Rights Initiative about sleep deprivation. After that we'll ask you a few questions.*

Sleep deprivation is used increasingly as a regular interrogation technique. Detainees are often kept awake by dumping cold water on their bodies, restraining them in a forced standing position, or playing loud music in their cells. Sleep deprivation can have a variety of physiological or mental effects including high blood pressure, debilitating headaches, depression, hallucinations, social anxiety disorder, and impaired cognitive functioning. Despite its increased use, sleep deprivation is an ineffective means of obtaining reliable information, in part because it makes detainees more suggestible to leading questions when being interrogated, and more likely to change their answers later. The Human Rights Initiative recently investigated 27 cases of sleep deprivation during interrogation; police officials reported acquiring reliable information that led to an arrest and conviction in less than 5% of these cases.

**Figure 1 Informational Frame Text**



the  
human rights  
initiative

*Please read the following message from Human Rights Initiative about sleep deprivation. After that we'll ask you a few questions.*

Meet Andrew. Andrew is a 37-year old husband and father of two. Until recently, Andrew worked as a math teacher at his local high school. On his way home from work on February 11, Andrew was stopped by two police officers and taken to the local police station. There, he was interrogated about his suspected involvement in an armed robbery. Andrew was detained at the police station for three days, during which time he was kept awake by dumping cold water on his body, restraining him in a forced standing position, and playing loud music in his cell. Despite knowing nothing about the robbery, Andrew was pressured into falsely accusing his brother of involvement in the crime, an accusation that he later withdrew. Since being released, Andrew has suffered from high blood pressure, debilitating headaches, depression and hallucinations. He has reported having difficulty relating to his wife and children, and focusing on work.

**Figure 2 Personal Frame (Male) Text**



the  
human rights  
initiative

*Please read the following message from Human Rights Initiative about sleep deprivation. After that we'll ask you a few questions.*

Sleep deprivation is an inhumane and ineffective interrogation technique that must be stopped. The Human Rights Initiative is working to ban this practice that is increasingly used by police officers to gather information. However, we can't do it without YOU! Our members and supporters have had great success in previous human rights campaigns, and all because they dared to stand up and be heard. Help us now as we work together to ban sleep deprivation during police interrogation. Lend your voice to the millions of others who are outraged by the use of sleep deprivation during interrogations. YOU can make a difference.

**Figure 3 Motivational Frame Text**

## Appendix B: Survey

1. I feel knowledgeable about the use of sleep deprivation as a police interrogation technique.  
*Strongly Agree / Agree / Neither Agree nor Disagree / Disagree / Strongly Disagree*
2. Depriving an individual of sleep during interrogation is an ineffective way to gain reliable information.  
*Strongly Agree / Agree / Neither Agree nor Disagree / Disagree / Strongly Disagree*
3. I feel knowledgeable about the consequences of sleep deprivation on individuals who have experienced it.  
*Strongly Agree / Agree / Neither Agree nor Disagree / Disagree / Strongly Disagree*
4. Depriving an individual of sleep during interrogation has a negative impact on their long-term mental and physical wellbeing.  
*Strongly Agree / Agree / Neither Agree nor Disagree / Disagree / Strongly Disagree*
5. I feel knowledgeable about the effectiveness of sleep deprivation as a police interrogation technique.  
*Strongly Agree / Agree / Neither Agree nor Disagree / Disagree / Strongly Disagree*
6. Sleep deprivation is an appropriate police interrogation technique.  
*Strongly Agree / Agree / Neither Agree nor Disagree / Disagree / Strongly Disagree*
7. How much of an emotional reaction do you experience when thinking about the use of sleep deprivation as a police interrogation technique?  
*A lot / Some / Little / None*
8. How do you feel when thinking about the use of sleep deprivation?  
*Very Good / Good / Neither Good nor Bad / Bad / Very Bad*
9. My feelings about sleep deprivation as a police interrogation technique are at least partly because of its consequences for individuals who have experienced it.  
*Strongly Agree / Agree / Neither Agree nor Disagree / Disagree / Strongly Disagree*
10. My feelings about sleep deprivation as a police interrogation technique are at least partly because of how effective or ineffective it is.  
*Strongly Agree / Agree / Neither Agree nor Disagree / Disagree / Strongly Disagree*
11. How likely are you to participate in a campaign to ban sleep deprivation as a police interrogation technique?  
*Very Likely / Likely / Neither Likely nor Unlikely / Unlikely / Very Unlikely*

12. How likely are you to support a campaign to ban sleep deprivation as a police interrogation technique?  
*Very Likely / Likely / Neither Likely nor Unlikely / Unlikely / Very Unlikely*
13. What is your age in years?
14. Which of the following best describes your gender?  
*Male / Female / Transgender / Other (please indicate below)*
15. What is the highest level of education that you have completed?  
*Some high school / High school graduate / Some technical school or college / Technical school or associate graduate / College degree (example: BS, BA) / Graduate degree (example: MA, MS, PhD, EdD) / Professional degree (example: MD, DDS, DVM)*
16. How often do you follow world news?  
*Never / Rarely / Several Times a Month / Once a Week / Daily*
17. How much influence do you think you can have in shaping public policy?  
*A lot / Some / Little / None*
18. If you would like to add your name to a petition to be sent to the Attorney General, demanding the immediate end to the use of sleep deprivation during police interrogations, please click YES.  
*Yes / No*
19. If you would like to add your name to a petition to be sent to the United Nations Special Rapporteur for Human Rights, demanding the immediate end to the use of sleep deprivation during police interrogations, please click YES.  
*Yes / No*

### Appendix C: Descriptive Statistics

	<b>Variables</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Dev.</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>
<b>Dependent Variables</b>	Appropriate?	3.851	1.129	1	5
	Reported Support	2.516	1.157	1	5
	Reported Participation	2.985	1.152	1	5
	AG Petition	0.400	0.490	0	1
	UN Petition	0.401	0.490	0	1
<b>Intervening Variables</b>	Reported Knowledge, General	2.905	1.113	1	5
	Reported Knowledge, Consequences	2.602	1.036	1	5
	Reported Knowledge, Efficacy	2.938	1.080	1	5
	Observed Knowledge, Consequences	2.078	0.934	1	5
	Observed Knowledge, Efficacy	2.573	1.240	1	5
	Emotional Response, General	2.052	0.836	1	4
	Emotional Response, Type	3.862	0.962	1	5
	Emotional Response, Consequences	2.365	0.979	1	5
	Emotional Response, Efficacy	2.530	1.003	1	5
<b>Treatment Groups</b>	Control Group	0.202	0.402	0	1
	Informational	0.199	0.399	0	1
	Personal (m)	0.202	0.402	0	1
	Personal (f)	0.200	0.400	0	1
	Motivational	0.197	0.398	0	1
<b>Control Variables</b>	Age (years)	32.198	11.318	18	76
	Sex	1.435	0.518	1	4
	Education	4.279	1.340	1	7
	News	3.976	1.111	1	5
	Agency	2.694	0.799	1	4

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