


# Sound evidence on Human Rights – podcast exploring new perspectives on advocacy and cutting-edge research.

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*On International Human Rights Day, **Todd Landman** describes the launch of a new podcast series. The podcast has a simple aim: to provide sound evidence on human rights in an accessible format. Human rights scholarship has advanced tremendously in the late 20th and early 21st century. The podcast format allows the listener to engage with human rights research differently. You will learn about why people are doing this research, what the find, and why this really matters for the world.*



There has never been a more important time to talk about human rights! And talk about it is what I plan to do, not in a lecture hall, not at a conference with other academics, but in a podcast series. Here's why, on International Human Rights Day, I am launching a podcast site with the simple aim of creating sound evidence on human rights and getting our thinking about human rights on the right track.

For the last 25 years I have worked as a political scientist focusing on human rights problems. I've examined the struggle for citizenship rights in authoritarian Brazil, Chile, Mexico and Spain; between the international law of human rights and the protection of human rights; and between different forms of inequality and the violation of human rights. I have also worked on measurement and methods for analyzing human rights performance around the world.

I've travelled to 38 different countries to take part in conferences, workshops, seminars, and training activities where I have worked with people from local, national, and international governments, international NGOs, other academics and businesses. I can certainly say I'm part of a wide network of people who are dedicated to producing sound evidence on human rights.

Out of all of this have come articles, books, and reports that set out the aims and objectives of the research, the research questions, the theories and background, what we think we might find, the data we'll use and how we'll use it, and the findings and what they mean for the advancement of human rights. Over the course of my research career in human rights, one of the things that has struck me most is the incredible passion my fellow scholars have for the subject and the amazing advances that have been made in the collection, analysis, and use of human rights evidence.

## **Evidence for inference**

Since the 1980s, social scientists have developed a variety of theories, methods, and measures for comparing, assessing, and explaining the variation in human rights performance across many countries and over time.

Methods of analysis have included quantitative approaches based on the careful assembly of different kinds of human rights and human rights-related data, including data on events and violations, scales on human rights conditions, survey data on perceptions and experiences of human rights, and socio-economic and administrative statistics relating to human rights concerns. These approaches focus on the differences (or variation) in numbers as they relate to human rights and build models to explain that variation, which are then tested using advanced statistical techniques.

Qualitative approaches have also been undertaken, such as in-depth interviewing, participant observation, action research, ethnography, and narrative analysis, where the focus is on the difference 'in kind' of human rights experiences, interpretations, stories, impressions, and feelings among those who have suffered violations

themselves or have had friends and families who have had similar experiences.

While quantitative approaches to human rights problems are primarily focussed on *explanation* of variation, qualitative approaches are primarily focused on *understanding* of human rights situations and experiences. In either case, many scholars of human rights seek to use evidence about human rights to make strong inferences that can and in many cases are used for human rights advocacy.

### **The human rights movement today**

Since the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights there has been a proliferation of international human rights law that has expanded both in *depth* (an increasing articulation and delineation of rights) and *breadth* (an increasing number of states that have ratified the international treaties). This expansion in law and general global awareness about human rights is the fruit of much hard work from human rights advocates, practitioners, scholars, lawyers, diplomats, and national leaders who have come together in a wide range of public meetings at the local, national, and international level.



Advocacy work in human rights is often highly contested, fraught with difficulty, denial and setback, but has made tremendous advances, while human rights scholarship particularly in the social sciences has advanced tremendously in the late 20th and early 21st century. There are undergraduate, postgraduate taught, and postgraduate research programmes dedicated to human rights, and scholars from these programmes go onto to do amazing things all over the world for the advance of human rights.

Much of this work is disseminated through quite traditional means: classrooms, seminar sessions, academic conferences, peer reviewed journal articles, research monographs, policy papers, and advocacy documents. All of these are excellent vehicles for communicating human rights research and human rights findings. But there is no denying that they are rather limited and do not connect with those people without an academic understanding of human rights, but who may also benefit most from our work.

### **Why podcast about human rights?**

So on December 10, with generous support from the Nuffield Foundation, I am joining forces with former BBC journalist, Christine Garrington of [Research Podcasts](#) and web developer Paul Groves to launch [The Rights Track](#), a podcast featuring a collection of interviews conducted by me with leading scholars around the world engaged in

systematic human rights research. The podcast has a simple aim: to provide sound evidence on human rights in an accessible format that gets our thinking about human rights on the right track.



# **THE RIGHTS TRACK**

*Sound evidence on human rights*

The podcast format allows you the listener to engage with human rights research differently. You hear the scholar in his or her words. You learn about why they study what they study. How they studied what they studied. What they found out from their research and why that matters for human rights.

Market research firm Edison Research announced last year that [1.7% of the time Americans spend listening to audio is devoted to podcasts](#), having noted earlier in the year that 15% of Americans – around 39m people – [said they had listened to a podcast in the last month](#).

But I don't believe podcasting is simply an American phenomenon – the UK and other parts of Europe are certainly catching on fast. The BBC [recently announced](#) record figures for podcast downloads of its programmes, explaining how they were playing a key role in bringing “brilliant programmes to an even wider audience”.

Those are just a couple of the reasons why, after experimenting with a [few podcasts for my own blog](#), I have decided to go full steam ahead and launch my own podcast series in which I am the host and in which I interview some of the most interesting people around the world about their research and work in this area.

## **Episode One**

Our first episode is an interview with Chris Fariss, Professor of Political Science of Pennsylvania State University. In it we discuss human rights are better protected today than three decades ago. Chris has developed a new way of looking at how respect for human rights has changed over time, and how current measures can into account a rising 'standard of accountability' about human rights. Chris is strongly of the view, supported by his new analysis of existing measures of human rights, that the protection of civil and political rights has actually improved over the last thirty years. This might surprise some of our listeners, but his explanation is compelling, and well worth the listen.

Our next two guests will discuss who tortures and why and whether or not NGOs matter for advancing human rights. While each has used different research methods, they are both curious and passionate about the state of human rights in the world.

So, on this International Human Rights Day, this passionate human rights researcher is delighted to launch The Rights Track. Through podcasting I hope you get a different perspective on human rights and learn from the cutting edge of today's research in the field. You will learn about why people are doing this research, how they carry out their research, what the find, and why what they find really matters for the world.

*Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of the LSE Impact blog, nor of the London School of Economics. Please review our [Comments Policy](#) if you have any concerns on posting a comment below.*

## About the Author

**Professor Todd Landman** is Professor of Political Science and Pro-Vice-Chancellor of the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Nottingham. He was previously Professor of Government (2009-2015) and Executive Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Essex (2013-2015), and has held a variety of academic and leadership roles at the University of Essex since 1993, before joining the University of Nottingham on 1st September 2015. He is author of numerous books and articles on development, democracy and human rights, as well as comparative political methodology. He has carried out a large number of international consultancies for governments, NGOs, and inter-governmental agencies.

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