

Do Children's Rights Improve Children's Welfare?

Purpose: This paper makes two important contributions. First, it introduces the Children's Rights Index (CRI). We believe the CRI is the first international measure of children's rights; we provide scores for over 180 countries. Second, this paper seeks to examine impacts of rights on children's welfare.

Major issues and problems: The U.N. Committee on the Rights of the Child continues to urge governments to implement all components of the U.N. Convention. Yet is not clear what impacts rights will have on children's welfare. Critics complain that the U.N. process may weaken national values and practices that can improve children's welfare and circumstances. Do rights alone improve wellbeing? Are other factors necessary ingredients for rights to make improvements in children's welfare?

Systematic, international research on children's rights continues to be needed. Important studies on children's rights exist, but these studies often focus on countries recognized for their human rights problems. Researchers need to compare as many countries as possible to examine relationships between children's rights and their welfare and mitigating roles other factors may play, including demographic structures, economic strength, and legal-political systems.

Study method: This paper has two components. It first presents descriptive information on children's rights. After presenting total CRI scores, this paper *maps* levels of civil, political, social and economic rights of children across the world. Two kinds of civil, political, social, and economic rights, for a total of eight separate rights, are each coded 1 to 4, with 1 = no right to 4 = full right, resulting in a range of possible scores of 8 to 32 for the CRI.

The second component employs ordinary least squares regression analysis and Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) to consider impacts of children's rights relative to cultural diversity, legal institutions, political systems, country wealth, and demographic structures on children's health, educational, and legal outcomes. QCA is especially useful for examining *combinations* of structures, interests, and resources associated with some theories of policy innovation and outcomes.

Major findings: High levels of children's rights appear to benefit children of all ages. In countries where children's rights are strong, lower proportions of children are born with low birth weights. Where children's rights are high, those countries are more likely to have banned corporal punishment. In addition to studying other indicators of children's welfare, we anticipate this paper's major findings will focus on how social structures mediate impacts of children's rights on children's health, educational, and legal outcomes.

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