Data 22700
Data Visualization and Communication
Trimble
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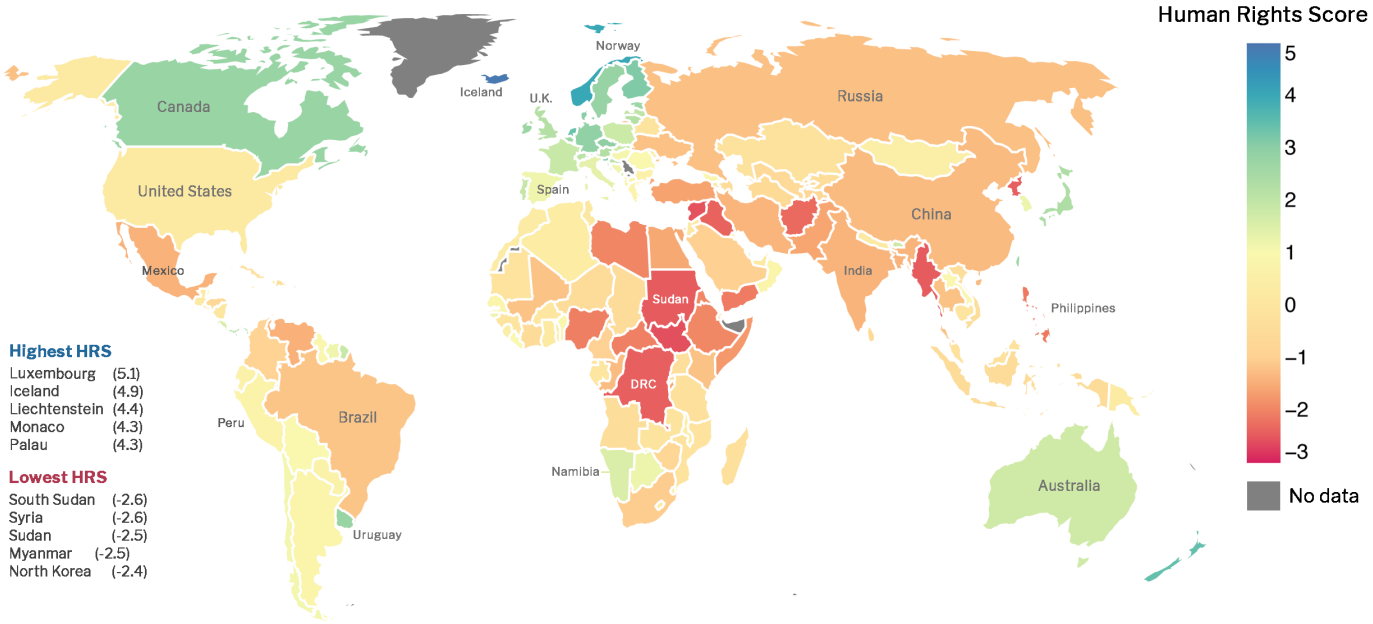
Homework 4: Geographic Visualization

How does the protection of human rights vary across different countries in the world, and how have protections changed over the last several decades?

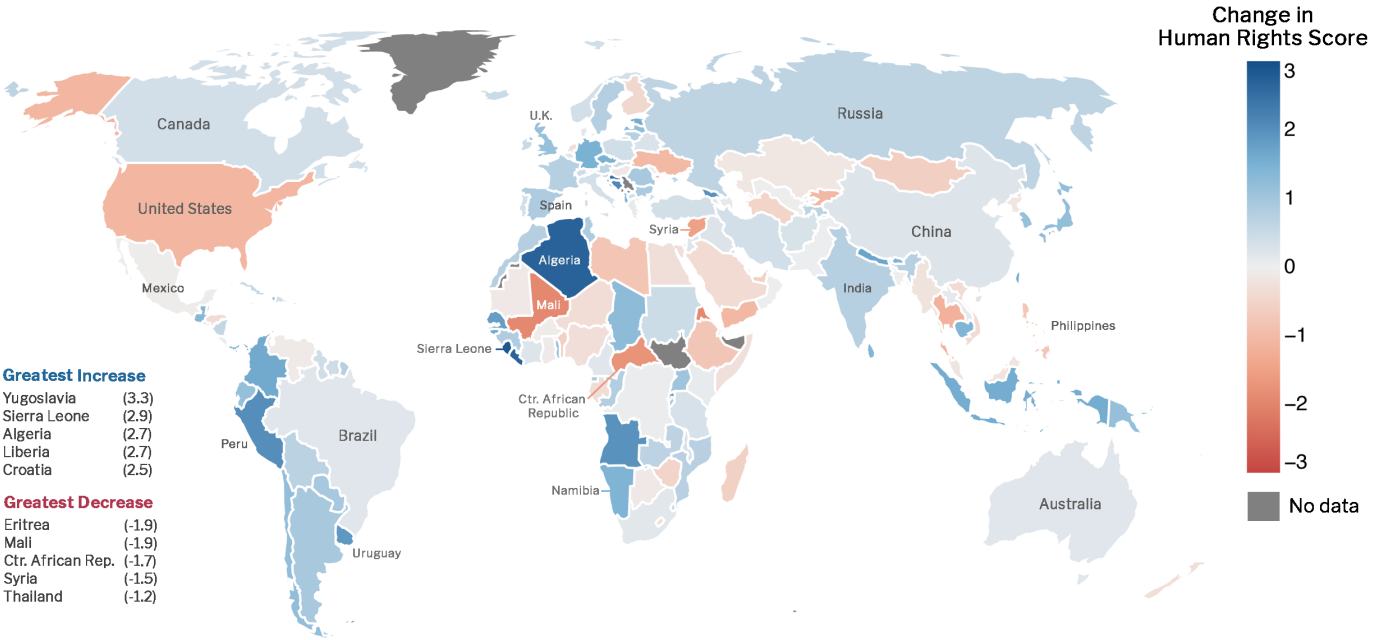
Human Rights Across the World (2017)

The Human Rights Score provides a measure of the protection of the physical integrity of citizens, with higher values signaling stronger protection.



Trends in Human Rights Across the World (1997 - 2017)

Changes reflect the difference in Human Rights Scores between 1997 and 2017, with higher values signaling increases in the protection of citizens' physical integrity



Caption: As illuminated in the top figure, most countries had Human Rights Scores (HRS) close to or below zero in 2017, with the majority of low-protection countries in Africa, and the highest concentration of high-protection countries in Western Europe and Scandinavia. While South Sudan, Syria, and Myanmar, among others, expectedly displayed low levels of protection for citizen's physical integrity, North Korea was the fifth worst country for HR protection, despite its notorious reputation. Meanwhile, the U.S. had a HRS of 0.2, far lower than expected given the country's reputation for peace-keeping and democracy. Notably, the second figure reveals that human rights protections in the U.S. declined over the period, even as most countries in the world progressed, indicated by positive changes in their HRS. Nearly every country in South America improved, as did most in Europe, Asia, and Africa. Altogether, recent data on the state of global human rights reveal low levels of protection across most of the world, with some countries displaying surprising results relative to their reputations for oppression or humanitarian intervention. However, whether due to the march of progress, regime change, or random factors, the majority of countries have advanced in protecting citizens' physical integrity over the last several decades, especially in areas considered 'developing' regions of the world, such as Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Data Sources: Schnakenberg and Fariss (2014); Fariss (2019). Note: Scores were produced from an econometric model that combines metrics from nine other sources.

In my first choropleth map, I shaded each country based on their HRS in 2017, using a diverging scale to delineate between positive (good) and negative (actively bad) human rights protections, with warm shades and reds depicting negative scores and cool tones (blues and greens) indicating positive scores, leveraging common color associations relating to 'good' and 'bad.' I opted to use an unclassed color scale to capture greater variation in the data, since the choropleths mainly serve to offer viewers a general impression of the state of human rights protections. I also used grey to shade countries where data was not available for completeness. Text labels were added to the chart in Photoshop to identify countries of interest (i.e. those that had extreme scores or were well-known reference points viewers could use to identify surrounding countries). My color scale ranges from -3 to 5, as the lowest HRS were all above -3; since -3 represented the worst human rights protections, I wanted countries with the worst scores to be shaded in the darkest shade of red to indicate magnitude that would've been lost had I expanded the scale to -5. I also outlined each country in white to delineate boundaries between countries. Finally, I added text showing the rankings of the top 5 counties with the highest and lowest scores, respectively, to provide more granular information that might be difficult to extract from merely looking at the maps, especially for small, high/low-scoring countries. I applied the same design principles to the second choropleth, with the exception of using a diverging color scale with only two major tones (red to blue) to more differentiate between magnitudes of percent increases and decreases. For more granular information, I also made an interactive plot with a slider bar showing the year-by-year HRS scores between 1997 and 2017, though it lacks the polish of the static visualizations.