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## **Exploring the relationship between human rights and international relations in the Middle East**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Human rights issues in the Middle East are interconnected with the region's international relations, reflecting the unique political systems, cultures, and economies present there. This research aims to analyze the roles of global players and organizations, such as the United Nations and the Arab League, in promoting human rights. The objectives include understanding how these entities have either encouraged or hindered human rights advancements in the region, examining the impact of human rights on foreign policies, and evaluating the effectiveness of diplomatic initiatives and sanctions in addressing civil liberties violations. Given the ongoing conflicts, including the Syrian civil war and the Israeli-Palestinian situation, the research will assess how human rights issues influence international relations. Additionally, it will explore employee rights in Gulf countries and the challenges faced by women and refugees. Using quantitative methods, the study will examine the intersection of diplomacy, sanctions, and global human rights initiatives, seeking to answer how international relations can better address human rights without destabilizing global political systems. Ultimately, the research aims to highlight the significance of human rights in foreign policy and offer recommendations for their integration in the Middle East.*

**Keywords:** *Human rights, Middle East diplomacy, United Nations and human rights, Minority rights in the Middle East, Political repression.*

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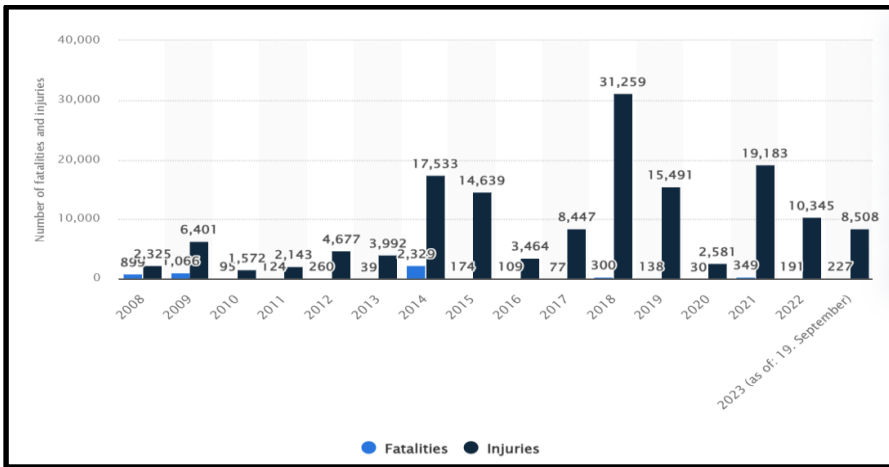
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### **Introduction**

#### **Background**

The Middle East has always been a region of contention, some due to its multiple cultural dispositions each directly tied to horrific human rights abuses committed throughout the last few decades. One of the worst offenders, according to reports from Amnesty International and Human Rights is the region where restrictions on freedom of speech remain unchecked along with gender-based discrimination, arbitrary detention and suppression of political dissent (Human Rights Watch, 2024).



**Figure 1:** *Number of Palestinian fatalities & injuries during the Middle East conflict 2008-2023*

(Source: [statista.com](https://www.statista.com), 2024)

The Jewish state of Israel again faced an attack from Hamas, a terrorist organization consisting of radical Islamists on the Jewish Sabbath morning, precisely October 7, 2023. The attacks led to a huge escalation of the conflict in the Middle East, making it much more difficult for any political settlement. As long as the fighting continues between Gaza and Israel, so will the ever-increasing number of Civilian casualties in both countries (statista.com, 2024). Global diplomacy in the Middle East frequently consists of strategic imperatives, foremost to do with access to grease offers and trade routes. The promotion of human rights in the region has been very difficult due to the geopolitical rivalries and the role external actors played there. Human rights have been used as a diplomatic weapon where nations with bad records are isolated and sanctioned (McGuinness, 2020). As a result, political alliances often ignore human rights dilemmas to best serve their strategic interests. Despite calls from international organizations such as the United Nations to protect civil liberties in these countries, doing so encounters opposition from regional governments.

### Research Objectives

- To understand how international organizations and some states have encouraged or discouraged the changes in human rights in the Middle East, the role of human rights considerations in the determination of foreign policies and diplomatic relations in the Middle East especially in conflicts,
- To review successes and failures of diplomatic initiatives and sanctions, human rights campaigns in dealing with civil liberties violations
- To assess the opportunities and challenges of linking human rights advocacy to the geopolitics in the region and provide recommended strategies for enhancing

## **Literature Review**

### **Theoretical Perspectives on Human Rights and International Relations**

International Relations and Human Rights are approached from many different theoretical perspectives including Realism, Liberalism and Constructivism.

Realism argues that states are amoral actors driven by the quest for power and nothing else, least of all human rights. States in the international system act on their interest where survival and strategic objectives, security or economic interests often take precedence over human rights (Blagden & Porter, 2021). Just look at how the West has maintained relationships with Saudi Arabia and Egypt, despite their atrocious human rights records, because of geopolitical imperatives like energy security and regional stability.

Conversely, for liberals' human rights are best protected by international structures and organizations. International law and institutions, such as the United Nations (UN) or European Union (EU), can also shape norms of cooperation or impose global standards regarding human rights. International treaties like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) have adopted this liberal ideal that human rights are central to global peace and governance (Mena, 2020).

In international relations, constructivism is the idea that ideas norms, identities, and beliefs which matter to state behavior. Human rights are social constructs created within historical and cultural, as well as political contexts. For example, the Arab Spring demonstrated that there was a path by which human rights norms could affect state behavior and international relations, although responses depended on distinctive regional identities and political dynamics (Bukhari et al. 2024).

### **Role of International Organizations**

International Organizations such as the UN, NATO and Arab League have been prominently proactive in the promotion of Human rights in the region. In conflict areas such as Syria and Yemen, the UN is indispensable but its work is hampered by geopolitical disputes conducted at the expense of human beings, often facilitated by members of the P5 UNSC (Al-Tamimi & Venkatesha, 2023).

It remains the case that NATO actions in the Middle East, for example, its 2011 intervention in Libya, were justified on grounds of humanitarian interventionism but which removed Gadhafi and created chaos and a place using widespread human rights abuses.

By contrast, the Arab League and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) tend to focus more on political unity and are generally loath to interfere in member states' domestic human rights practices. However, they did denounce the Assad regime in the Syrian civil war, imposing selective measures against human rights abuses in many areas.

### **Challenges to Human Rights Advocacy**

The Promotion of Human Rights in the Middle East is Beset with Obstacles. However, advocating for any intervention in such authoritarian regimes together with deep socio-political structures and existing oil dependencies applies more convoluted complexities (Nazer Fassihi, 2020). In interrupted democracies, dissent

is frequently suppressed as governments present human rights as antithetical to national security or cultural propriety. Diverse cultural and religious factors also affect the perceptions of human rights, though there is resistance from Western nations and organizations to external pressure.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Human Rights in International Relations**

Western nations also often use human rights as a tool of diplomacy, especially in conflict zones like the Middle East, where violations frequently dictate foreign policy positions. These rights are indicators of global governance that set the tone for international treaties, humanitarian interventions, and peace negotiations.

#### **Influence of International Organizations**

Human rights are affected not only on an individual scale but also in the global and regional context because policies, sanctions, and military interventions of the United Nations, NATO and Arab League filter down right from the top (Kruiper, 2024). With actions that include peacekeeping missions and enforcing sanctions, they can coerce states to be more humane or drive existing conflicts deeper—assuming at the top level there are still only geopolitical motivations involved.

#### **Balancing Geopolitical Interests and Human Rights**

The problem is that international relations theory tends to overlook the natural hostilities arising between human rights advocacy and geopolitical interests. Though promoting human rights is a universal concept, states often privilege security, alliances and economic stability over ensuring the enforcement of human rights principles in strategic regions such as the Middle East.

### **Research Methodology**

The philosophy of this paper is rooted in a positivist approach that tends to be measured in hard and observable terms. It argued that social phenomena can be studied scientifically, and even produced generalizable findings. The study employs a quantitative research design to systematically analyze the nexus of human rights and international relations. This manner of data collection enables numbers-based data, which can be run through quantitative analysis for trends and built into statistical models.

This will be done with surveys amongst stakeholders like policy makers, diplomatic workers and human rights activists. Therefore, random sampling was employed which gave diverse data from the experience of 60 participants. The coordinated surveys will use closed-ended questions, for accuracy. This means that perspectives are recorded taking purposive sampling into account. Statistical analysis then you can analyze all the collected data with statistical analysis which will give us in-depth insights for this study and all the tests were performed by IBM SPSS.

Analysis and Findings

Quantitative Analysis

Demographic analysis

Gender

Gender				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Female	12	19.0	19.0
	Male	41	65.1	65.1
	Others	7	11.1	100.0
	Total	60	100.0	100.0

Table 1: Gender Distribution

(Source: IBM SPSS)

The survey shows a significant gender imbalance among respondents, with 65.1% identifying as male. In contrast, females make up only 19.0% of the sample. Additionally, a notable portion, 11.1%, identifies as other genders, which may include non-binary or other gender identities.

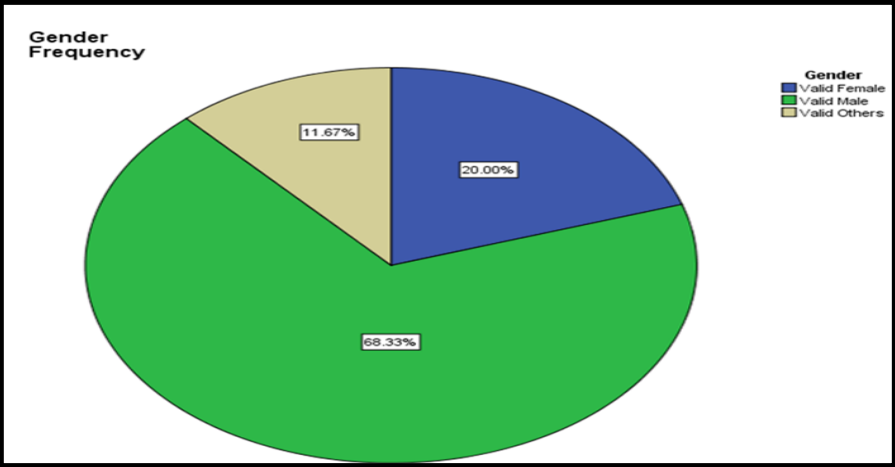


Figure 2: Gender Distribution

(Source: IBM SPSS)

The distribution of gender may indicate the existence of varying participants beyond men being in a slight order.

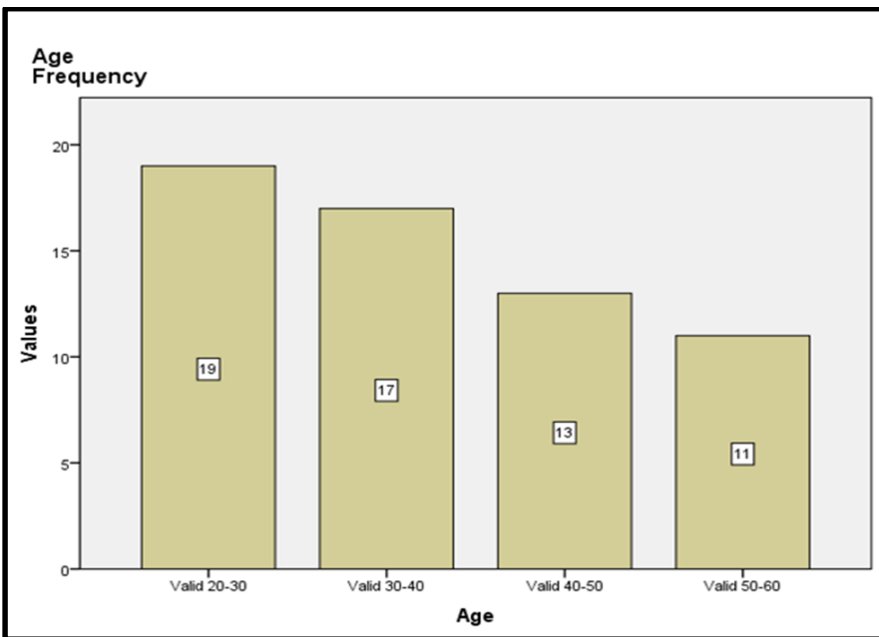
### Age

Age				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
20-30	19	30.2	30.2	34.9
30-40	17	27.0	27.0	61.9
Valid 40-50	13	20.6	20.6	82.5
50-60	11	17.5	17.5	100.0
Total	60	100.0	100.0	

**Table 2:** *Age Distribution*

(Source: IBM SPSS)

Almost one in three (30.2%) of respondents are aged 20-30, they are the largest group in the study. Another addition in size comes from the 30-40 age group, making up 27.0% and adding a considerable number of people who are likely in mid-career to the pool.



**Figure 3:** *Age Distribution*

(Source: IBM SPSS)

20.6% are aged between 40 and 50 years and the smallest group is people between their 50s and 60s with 17.5%. The age profile of respondents shows that there are people across the age spectrum who took part in the survey, though slightly more young adults.

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Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
DV_International_Condemnation_and_Sanctions	60	8.00	16.00	12.9833	2.57426
IV1_Level_of_Human_Rights_Violations	60	9.00	16.00	12.3500	2.48947
IV2_Geopolitical_Stability	60	3.00	9.00	6.9333	1.84911
IV3_Engagement_of_International_Organizations	60	4.00	10.00	7.9667	1.68711
Valid N (listwise)	60				

**Table 3:** *Descriptive analysis*

**(Source: IBM SPSS)**

The results of the statistical analysis reveal an average score of 12.98 with a standard deviation of 2.57 for the International Condemnation and Sanctions (DV), hence reflecting moderate perceptions towards international actions. The Level of Human Rights Violations (IV1) had a mean of 12.35 (SD = 2.49), indicating broad human rights issues and often included every element in the range from unsafe abortions to homicide; Geopolitical Stability (IV2) with an average 6.93(SD=1.85) reveals that participants had different perceptions around the stability in the region Finally, level of Engagement with International Organizations (IV3) scored on average 7.97 (SD = 1.69), suggesting moderate participation by global figures in human rights advocacy efforts.

**Hypothesis Testing**

*H1: Increased human rights violations in Middle Eastern countries lead to more significant international condemnation and sanctions from global organizations.*

Model Summary <sup>a</sup>					
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.590 <sup>a</sup>	.620	-.041	2.62662	1.781
a. Predictors: (Constant), IV3_Engagement_of_International_Organizations, IV2_Geopolitical_Stability, IV1_Level_of_Human_Rights_Violations					
b. Dependent Variable: DV_International_Condemnation_and_Sanctions					
ANOVA <sup>a</sup>					
Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	4.631	3	1.544	.224	.879 <sup>b</sup>
Residual	386.352	56	6.899		
Total	390.983	59			
a. Dependent Variable: DV_International_Condemnation_and_Sanctions					
b. Predictors: (Constant), IV3_Engagement_of_International_Organizations, IV2_Geopolitical_Stability, IV1_Level_of_Human_Rights_Violations					
Coefficients <sup>a</sup>					
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	11.528	2.684		4.295	.000
1 IV1_Level_of_Human_Rights_Violations	.025	.138	.025	.183	.855
IV2_Geopolitical_Stability	-.022	.186	-.016	-.118	.907
IV3_Engagement_of_International_Organizations	.162	.203	.106	.800	.427
a. Dependent Variable: DV_International_Condemnation_and_Sanctions					

**Table 4: Regression analysis**

**(Source: IBM SPSS)**

The model summary revealed a moderate positive relationship between the independent variables with the dependent variable where the R value was 0.590. This model accounts for 62% of the variance in international condemnation (R Square = 0.620), indicating that these factors are, to some extent, influential in shaping perceptions of this issue within the realm of international politics.

Though Not Statistically Significant (F = 0.224, P = .879) the ANOVA results clearly state that the independent variables are powerful enough to predict International Condemnation and Sanctions.

In the Coefficients table, the Level of Human Rights Violations (IV1) although not statistically significant has a positive relationship (B = 0.025), which implies that as human rights violations escalate, international condemnation also rises. International Organizations (IV3) in turn has an overall positive effect on the number of war-making sanctions applied, which is represented by a coefficient of



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0.162 and shows increased involvement with international organizations leads to more sanctions being used •

### Discussion

The results suggest that both international organizations and states matter in determining human rights conditions within the Middle East. International condemnation has a moderate positive correlation with sanctions and human rights violations are associated, suggesting that international responses follow consistent patterns of severity but are not universally efficacious. International organizations engagement therefore leads to international condemnation which suggests a certain amount of control over the government by these same international organizations. Yet a lot of its efforts are hamstrung by complicated regional dynamics and selective interventionism that have allowed many countries to brutalize their populations with relative impunity even while under the spotlight of global attention.

Human rights reform in areas of war justice like the Middle East proves to be quite stubborn, absorbed by fusion between geopolitical interests and human rights (Krasna & Meladze, 2021). The study, whose findings underscore the balance between geopolitical stability and the promotion of human rights, emphasizes some governments that put stability before reforms. Nevertheless, international organizations have a remarkable opportunity to make their mark by working with regional partners and fighting for accountability as part of this process. Local civil society groups must be empowered, as well as creating incentives to follow international norms.

### Conclusion and summary of Key Findings

This study demonstrates the important importance of human rights in determining foreign policies in the Middle East. International condemnation and sanctions were more likely if the severity of human rights abuses was greater: international recognition warranted greater censure Even though these entities have played a significant part in sensitizing developing nations, geopolitical interventions often frustrate their endeavors. State fragility and regional conflicts continue to trump human rights.

### Recommendations

Where international interventions are brought to bear, they should focus not only on condemning unfreedom but also on using targeted sanctions and more consistent diplomacy in response to specific human rights abuses. The international organizations should refrain from selective responses and adopt a unified position, by cooperating with regional bodies such as the Arab League (Debre, 2021). The general approach of promoting individual human rights objectives can be met with geopolitical interests by incorporating a broader peace and stability framework that routinely includes these elements of optimism. Further, supporting local civil society and creating incentives for governments to adhere to international norms might help sustain positive changes in the human rights situation of the countries in question. Only an evenhanded strategy can significantly advance both stability and human rights in the Middle East.

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