

---

# CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES TO HUMAN RIGHTS: A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

---

Aryan Uchadia, LL.B., Bharati Vidyapeeth Deemed University, Pune

## ABSTRACT

This paper explores the contemporary challenges to human rights by focusing on key thematic areas such as violations in conflict zones, refugee rights, labor rights, artificial intelligence (AI) and its ethical implications, LGBTQ+ workplace rights, freedom of expression on social media, and women's reproductive rights. Through empirical data and analysis, this research aims to highlight the global scale of these issues and propose potential frameworks for addressing them effectively. The challenges discussed are grounded in a world perspective to emphasize how violations transcend borders and necessitate coordinated global responses while also providing recommendations to solve the challenges.

**Keywords:** Human Rights, Challenges, global, Report, Data, Case study, violations.

## **Introduction**

Human rights remain a central tenet of global justice and international law, yet numerous contemporary challenges continue to undermine these fundamental principles. With the rapid evolution of technology, economic disparities, social unrest, and protracted conflicts, human rights violations are becoming more complex and pervasive. The rise in global migration, armed conflicts, technological advances like AI, and growing inequalities have significantly impacted marginalized communities. The sub themes addressed in this paper reflect the wide spectrum of rights under siege, and the solutions proposed aim to engage governments, civil societies, and international organizations in meaningful dialogue and actions.

This paper examines seven major subthemes: human rights violations in conflict zones, the global refugee crisis, labor rights, AI and ethics, LGBTQ+ rights in the workplace, freedom of expression on social media, and women's reproductive rights. Through a review of contemporary literature and an analysis of global data,

## **Methodology**

The paper highlights the current landscape of human rights challenges and offers an empirical methodology through case studies for assessing the severity and solutions for these violations. The paper adopts a mixed-methods approach, utilizing quantitative data from human rights reports, surveys, and databases, as well as qualitative analysis through case studies from different regions.

## **1. Human Rights Violations in Conflict Zones**

### **1.1 Overview**

Conflict zones have historically been notorious for large-scale human rights abuses, including torture, extrajudicial killings, sexual violence, and forced displacement. The rise in civil wars, ethnic conflicts, and geopolitical confrontations has exacerbated these violations in countries such as Syria, Yemen, and Afghanistan. Humanitarian law, designed to protect civilians and combatants in war zones, is often disregarded by state and non-state actors.

### **1.2 Data and Case Study**

A report by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) in 2022

estimated that over 70 million people have been displaced by conflict since 2010. In Syria alone, more than 500,000 civilians have been killed since the onset of the war in 2011, and 90% of the population is now living below the poverty line. Similarly, in Yemen, an ongoing civil war has caused over 233,000 deaths, of which 131,000 were from indirect causes such as lack of food, health services, and infrastructure destruction.

### **1.3 Recommendations**

Stronger international enforcement mechanisms, such as strengthening the International Criminal Court (ICC) and increasing the presence of UN peacekeeping missions, are critical for addressing these violations. Further, advocacy for ceasefires and negotiations must be coupled with humanitarian access to the most vulnerable populations.

## **2. Populism and Authoritarianism**

### **2.1 Populism and the Erosion of Democratic Institutions**

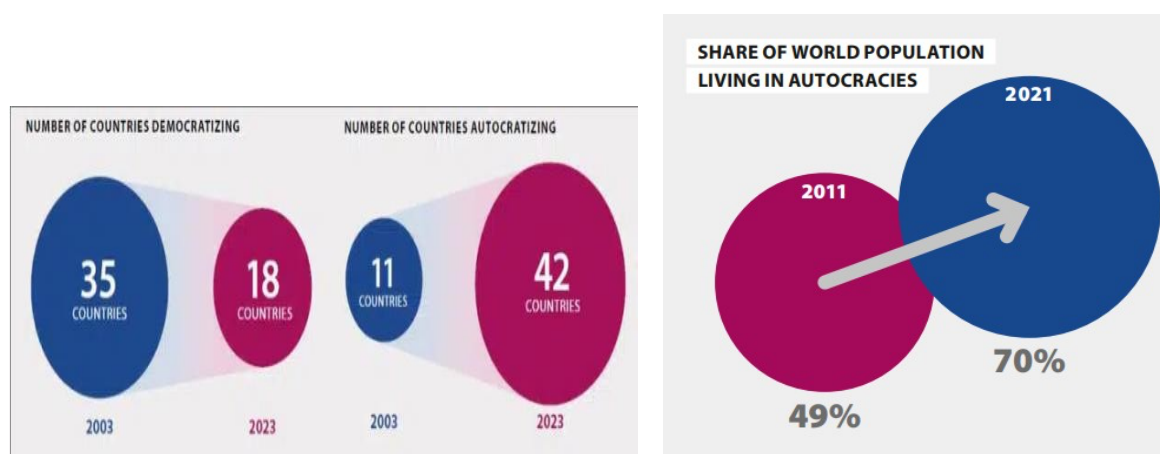
A rise in populist leaders globally has been linked to the erosion of human rights protections. Leaders in countries such as Hungary, Brazil, and the United States under Donald Trump have adopted policies that threaten the freedom of the press, judicial independence, and minority rights. Empirical data from the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Institute shows a regression in democratic values across many populist-ruled countries.

### **2.2 Case Study: Hungary and Viktor Orbán**

Since coming to power in 2010, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has enacted policies that restrict civil liberties and media freedom. The Hungarian parliament passed a controversial law in 2020 allowing the government to rule by decree during the COVID-19 pandemic, further concentrating power. According to the V-Dem Institute's "Liberal Democracy Index," Hungary's score dropped from 0.63 in 2010 to 0.41 in 2022.

### **2.3 Data on Authoritarian Trends in the world**

As shown in Figure 1, authoritarian trends in the world have intensified, with countries like Hungary, Poland, Turkey, Brazil and India experiencing declines in democracy indicators.

**Figure 1: Trends in Authoritarianism in the world (2003-2023): V-dem report 2024**

This data clears that the world is facing the rise of autocracies. The trend of authorisation and autocracies poses a humongous challenge to universal application of Human Rights in the contemporary world, authorisation leads to suppression of voices and opposition due to absolute control over power.

## 2.4 Recommendations

On an international level, collaboration between democracies to promote human rights and challenge authoritarian practices through diplomatic and economic means is essential. Finally, media literacy campaigns can help counteract the spread of disinformation, ensuring that public discourse remains grounded in facts and not manipulated by populist leaders. The rise of populism and authoritarianism globally, a multi-faceted approach is necessary. Strengthening democratic institutions and the rule of law is crucial, as these provide checks and balances against authoritarian impulses.

## 3. Refugee Rights: Addressing the Global Refugee Crisis

### 3.1 Overview

With over 103 million people displaced worldwide as of 2023, the global refugee crisis is among the most pressing humanitarian issues today. Refugees face a myriad of challenges, including statelessness, lack of access to basic services, and legal protection, and they are often caught in bureaucratic limbo. Countries like Lebanon, Turkey, and Jordan are overburdened by hosting large refugee populations, while wealthier nations have tightened immigration laws.

### 3.2 Data

According to the **UNHCR**, 85% of the world's refugees are hosted in developing countries, with Turkey hosting approximately 4 million refugees, the highest globally. The majority of refugees originate from five countries: Syria, Venezuela, Afghanistan, South Sudan, and Myanmar. In Europe, the arrival of over 1 million refugees between 2015 and 2020 led to significant political upheaval and an increase in anti-immigrant rhetoric.

### 3.3 Case Study: The Syrian Refugee Crisis

The Syrian civil war has displaced over 6 million people, with 5.5 million seeking refuge in neighboring countries. The lack of international coordination in managing the crisis has led to human rights violations, including the detainment and mistreatment of refugees in host countries such as Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan. Empirical data from the **UNHCR** shows that **only 12% of Syrian refugees in Lebanon have access to legal residency**, making them vulnerable to exploitation.

### 3.4 Recommendations

To address the refugee crisis, international cooperation must be strengthened, with wealthier nations taking a fairer share of responsibility through resettlement programs and financial aid. Legal frameworks for asylum must be made more robust to ensure that refugees are not returned to conflict zones or persecuted countries. Additionally, efforts should be made to integrate refugees into host societies through education, language training, and employment opportunities.

## 4. The Right to Work: Addressing Labor Rights and Fair Wages

### 4.1 Overview

Labor rights remain one of the most contested areas of human rights globally. Workers in many industries, particularly in developing countries, face exploitative conditions, unfair wages, child labor, and a lack of basic protections like health insurance and paid leave. The informal economy, which constitutes a significant part of labor in many nations, leaves millions without any form of job security or legal recourse.

The **International Labour Organization (ILO)** reports that 25 million people are victims of forced labor worldwide, while 152 million children are engaged in child labor. Gender inequality also plays a significant role, with women being paid on average 23% less than men globally. The pandemic exacerbated these issues, with millions of informal workers losing their livelihoods without access to government aid.

#### 4.2 Case Study 1: Garment Workers in India and Bangladesh

A notable case of labor rights violations is found in the garment industry in South Asia. In India, workers in the garment sector, particularly women, face exploitation in terms of low wages, excessive working hours, and unsafe working conditions. A similar situation exists in Bangladesh, where the 2013 **Rana Plaza disaster** revealed the dangerous conditions workers face. Rana Plaza failed to meet safety standards and led to the collapse of that building. Despite international pressure for reforms, workers continue to suffer from labor violations, as documented by the **International Labour Organization (ILO)**.

ILO suggests average work hours in a week should not exceed 40-45 hours and minimum wage should be determined by cost of basic needs of workers, however many countries still lacks such standards

##### Data:

| Country    | Minimum Wage | Average Work<br>(Weekly) | Percentage of Informal Hours<br>Workers |
|------------|--------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| India      | \$2.80/day   | 60 hours                 | 90%                                     |
| Bangladesh | \$3.00/day   | 65 hours                 | 85%                                     |

#### 4.3 Case Study 2: Child Labor in India's Mining Sector

India's mining sector, particularly in states like Jharkhand and Odisha, is notorious for using child labor. Children as young as 10 work in mica mines under hazardous conditions. A 2022 study by **Amnesty International** revealed that nearly 22,000 children are involved in mica mining, risking their health and education.

**Data:**

| Region    | Number of Child Laborers (2022) | Type of Work |
|-----------|---------------------------------|--------------|
| Jharkhand | 15,000                          | Mica Mining  |
| Odisha    | 7,000                           | Coal Mining  |

**Data on Global Child Labor**

According to **ILO**, Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest prevalence of child labor, with more than 87 million children involved. Table 6 provides global estimates of child labor by region:

| Region                | Number of Child Laborers | Percentage of Child<br>Population |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Sub-Saharan Africa    | 87 million               | 20%                               |
| South Asia            | 59 million               | 12%                               |
| Latin America         | 17 million               | 6%                                |
| East Asia and Pacific | 15 million               | 5%                                |

Efforts to eradicate child labor face significant challenges, including poverty, lack of education, and weak labor laws in many countries.

**4.4 Recommendations**

Governments should enforce labor rights through stronger labor laws and regulations that guarantee fair wages, safe working conditions, and social protections. Companies must also be held accountable for labor violations, especially in global supply chains. International standards, such as those established by the ILO, should be promoted, and labor unions

strengthened to advocate for workers' rights.

## **5. Human Rights in the Age of Artificial Intelligence: Ethical Considerations and Challenges**

### **5.1 Overview**

The rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI) presents new ethical challenges for human rights, particularly regarding privacy, employment, and equality. While AI has the potential to revolutionize industries, its unregulated use in surveillance, algorithmic decisionmaking, and automation poses risks to individual freedoms and workers' rights. India's lack of comprehensive data protection laws leaves citizens vulnerable to privacy violations such as Deep fakes and AI have also become tools of scamming and fraudulent activities and yet Indian laws are yet to recognise AI's threat to Human Rights.

### **5.2 Data**

A 2021 report by **Amnesty International** revealed that 90% of governments in the world use AI-based surveillance technologies. In China, AI-enabled facial recognition technology has been used to monitor and repress the Uyghur Muslim population. Furthermore, automation has displaced millions of workers globally, particularly in manufacturing and low-skill sectors, with estimates suggesting that by 2030, 375 million jobs may be lost to automation.

### **5.3 Recommendations**

AI regulation must prioritize human rights by creating safeguards against discrimination, ensuring transparency in algorithmic decision-making, and protecting individuals' data privacy. Governments should work with technologists and human rights experts to create robust AI frameworks that prioritize ethical use while promoting innovation.

## **6. LGBTQ+ Rights in the Workplace: Addressing Discrimination and Harassment**

### **6.1 Overview**

Although LGBTQ+ rights have seen significant progress in recent decades, workplace discrimination and harassment remain widespread. Many LGBTQ+ individuals continue to face prejudice, pay disparities, and a lack of legal protections in several countries. In some parts

of the world, LGBTQ+ identities are still criminalized, leading to exclusion from employment opportunities altogether.

## **6.2 Data**

A 2022 survey by the Human Rights Campaign found that 46% of LGBTQ+ workers in the United States have faced some form of discrimination in the workplace. Globally, 67 countries still criminalize same-sex relations, and in these jurisdictions, LGBTQ+ individuals are often excluded from legal protection under labor laws. The wage gap between LGBTQ+ workers and their heterosexual counterparts persists, with LGBTQ+ workers earning on average 11% less than their peers.

## **6.3 Recommendations**

To combat discrimination, more countries need to enact and enforce laws that explicitly protect LGBTQ+ workers from harassment and ensure equal pay. Companies should also implement diversity training programs and create inclusive workplace environments that support LGBTQ+ individuals. International standards on LGBTQ+ rights in the workplace, developed through bodies like the United Nations, should be promoted and adopted globally.

# **7. Human Rights and Social Media: Balancing Freedom of Expression with Online Harassment**

## **7.1 Overview**

Social media platforms have become a double-edged sword in the realm of human rights. While they enable freedom of expression and access to information, they have also become breeding grounds for online harassment, hate speech, and disinformation. Striking a balance between protecting free speech and curbing harmful behavior is one of the most pressing challenges facing regulators today.

## **7.2 Data**

A 2022 study by the Pew Research Center revealed that 41% of American adults have personally experienced online harassment, with LGBTQ+ individuals, women, and racial minorities being disproportionately targeted. Globally, social media has also been weaponized

to spread misinformation during elections, with 87% of all disinformation campaigns traced to online platforms according to a study by the Oxford Internet Institute.

### **7.3 Recommendations**

Social media companies must adopt more stringent content moderation policies that protect users from harassment while preserving the right to free speech. Governments should also create regulations that hold these platforms accountable for the spread of harmful content

## **8. Cultural Relativism on Universal application of Human Rights in the contemporary world.**

Cultural relativism and universalism represent two contrasting approaches to understanding human rights. Cultural relativism posits that human rights should be interpreted within the context of specific cultural, social, and historical circumstances. This perspective argues that what may be deemed a violation of rights in one culture may not hold the same weight in another. Advocates of cultural relativism emphasize the importance of respecting diverse cultural norms and practices, arguing that universal standards may impose Western values on non-Western societies.

On the other hand, universalism asserts that human rights are inherent to all individuals, regardless of cultural context. Proponents of this view argue that certain rights, such as the right to life, freedom from torture, and freedom of expression, should be upheld universally, transcending cultural boundaries. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), adopted by the United Nations in 1948, exemplifies this stance, articulating fundamental rights that all individuals are entitled to.

### **8.2 Challenges Posed by Cultural Relativism**

The debate between cultural relativism and universalism presents significant challenges in addressing human rights violations. In many cases, cultural relativism is used as a justification for practices that violate basic human rights. For instance, practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM), child marriage, and honor killings are often defended on cultural grounds, despite their harmful effects on individuals, particularly women and children. Such justifications can hinder global efforts to eradicate these practices and undermine international human rights standards.

In the context of India, the clash between cultural relativism and universalism is evident in discussions about caste discrimination, gender-based violence, and LGBTQ+ rights. While some argue for respecting traditional customs and norms, advocates for universal human rights contend that these practices violate fundamental rights and dignity.

### 8.3 Bridging the Gap: Finding Common Ground (Recommendations)

To navigate the complexities of cultural relativism and universalism, a more nuanced approach is necessary. Engaging in dialogue that respects cultural differences while advocating for fundamental human rights can lead to more effective solutions. This includes fostering partnerships with local communities to promote human rights education and advocacy tailored to cultural contexts. By involving community leaders and stakeholders in discussions about human rights, it is possible to find common ground that respects cultural identities while upholding universal principles.

In conclusion, the challenge of balancing cultural relativism and universalism remains a significant hurdle in addressing human rights violations globally. Acknowledging the importance of cultural context while advocating for universal human rights can lead to a more inclusive and effective while respecting international human rights standards. Public awareness campaigns on digital literacy and online behavior can also help reduce incidents of online abuse.

## 9. Women's Reproductive Rights: Ensuring Access to Healthcare and Autonomy Over Their Bodies

### 9.1 Overview

Women's reproductive rights are a critical aspect of gender equality and bodily autonomy. However, access to reproductive healthcare, including contraception and abortion, remains restricted in many parts of the world due to cultural, religious, and political factors. The rise of conservative movements in some countries has further jeopardized these rights.

The **Guttmacher Institute reports** that 214 million women in developing countries who want to avoid pregnancy are not using modern contraception, and 25 million unsafe abortions occur annually. In the United States, the overturning of **Roe v. Wade in 2022** significantly restricted access to abortion in several states, leaving millions of women without reproductive healthcare

options.

India has made strides in women's reproductive rights, particularly with policies aimed at improving access to contraception and maternal health care. However, these rights remain contested due to social, cultural, and religious norms. Access to safe abortion is legal under the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act (MTP Act) 1971 but remains restricted due to logistical and societal barriers.

## 9.2 Case Study: Impact of Abortion Restrictions in India

Despite the liberalization of abortion laws, women in rural India face significant barriers in accessing safe reproductive services. A study by the **Guttmacher Institute** reveals that over 50% of abortions in India are unsafe, contributing to maternal mortality rates. Socio-cultural stigmas often deter women from seeking medical advice, and access to healthcare facilities remains a challenge in remote areas.

## 9.3 Data:

| Region | Percentage of Unsafe | Maternal Mortality Rate (per 100,000 live births) |
|--------|----------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
|        | Abortions            |                                                   |
| Rural  | 60%                  | 145                                               |
| India  |                      |                                                   |
| Urban  | 30%                  | 95                                                |
| India  |                      |                                                   |

## 9.4 Recommendations

Governments must ensure that women have access to comprehensive reproductive healthcare, including contraception, safe abortion services, and maternal healthcare. International organizations should work to protect reproductive rights as fundamental human rights, and public education campaigns are essential in changing societal attitudes that restrict women's bodily autonomy.

## **10. Conclusion**

The contemporary challenges to human rights in today's world are multifaceted and demand a collective, global response. From the ongoing violations in conflict zones to the rise of AI and the rights of marginalized groups like LGBTQ+ individuals and women, the need for stronger enforcement of international human rights norms is more urgent than ever. This paper has outlined key areas of concern and offered empirical methodologies to assess and address these challenges. Through international cooperation, legal reforms, and advocacy, the global community must work to protect and uphold the human rights of all individuals in an increasingly interconnected world.

## REFERENCES

United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) (2022). Human Rights in Conflict Zones. UNHCHR Annual Report.

International Labour Organization (ILO) (2022). Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labour and Forced Marriage. Geneva: ILO Publications.

Human Rights Campaign (2022). The State of LGBTQ+ Workplace Rights. HRC Annual Survey.

Amnesty International (2021). AI Surveillance and Human Rights. Amnesty International Report.

Pew Research Center (2022). Online Harassment: Key Findings on Bullying and Abuse in Digital Spaces. Pew Research Report.

Guttmacher Institute (2021). Global Contraceptive and Abortion Statistics. Guttmacher Annual Review.

American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). (2020). *The Dangers of Facial Recognition Technology*. Available at: <https://www.aclu.org/issues/privacy-technology/surveillance-technologies>

Algorithmic Justice League. (2021). *Bias in AI: Surveillance and Facial Recognition*.

Available at: <https://www.ajl.org/ai-and-bias>

Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF). (2022). *Surveillance and the Erosion of Privacy*

*Rights*. Available at: <https://www.eff.org/issues/surveillance>

Guttmacher Institute. (2023). *State Abortion Policy Landscape: Post-Roe America*.

Available at: <https://www.guttmacher.org/united-states/abortion>

World Health Organization (WHO). (2022). *Global Reproductive Health: Unsafe Abortion Report*. Available at: <https://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications>

International Labour Organization (ILO). (2019). *Rana Plaza and the Garment Industry in Bangladesh: Progress and Challenges*. Available at: <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/safety-and-health-at-work>

Amnesty International. (2021). *Child Labor in Cobalt Mines: Democratic Republic of the*

Congo. Available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news>

UNICEF. (2022). *Children in Mining: The Global Child Labor Crisis*. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org>

International LGBTQ+ Youth & Student Organisation (IGLYO). (2023). *LGBTQ+*

*Workplace Representation: A Global Overview*. Available at: <https://www.iglyo.com/reports>

Human Rights Campaign (HRC) and Pride Circle. (2022). *Workplace Equality Index:*

*LGBTQ+ Discrimination in India*. Available at: <https://www.hrc.org/resources>

Indian Mental Health Association. (2022). *Mental Health and LGBTQ+ Individuals in the*

*Workplace: India Report*. Available at: <https://www.indianmentalhealth.org/reports>

NASSCOM. (2020). *Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives in Indian Workplaces: LGBTQ+*

*Focus*. Available at: <https://www.nasscom.org>

Global Rights Index. (2022). *Annual Report on Labor Rights Violations Globally*. Available at: <https://www.globalrightsindex.org>  
<https://www.democracywithoutborders.org/31900/democracy-declined-in-42-countries-in2023-new-v-dem-report-says/>

Donnelly, J. (2007). *Universal Human Rights in Theory and Practice*. Cornell University Press. This book discusses the theoretical foundations of universal human rights and addresses the challenges posed by cultural relativism.