

## **Venezuelan Adults' Views on the Indivisibility of Human Rights: A Preliminary Study**

Ana Gabriela Guédez\* and Etienne Mullet

*Institute of Advanced Studies (EPHE), Paris, France*

The present study examined the extent to which people living in Venezuela consider that human rights are indivisible rights. Eighty unpaid participants living in Caracas, Barquisimeto, and Maracaibo were presented with 36 cards showing a story of a few lines, which described the socio-political situation in a fictitious state, and a response scale. Each story had four critical items of information: (a) the degree in which the State offers social protection to the citizens (not at all, intermediate or complete), (b) the level of respect for Civil liberties in the country (no respect, intermediate, full respect), (c) the level of Equality between citizens (inequality of rights vs. equality of right), and (d) the level of Respect for the private life of the citizens (no respect for private life vs. full respect for private life). The question was “To what extent do you consider that the human rights are respected in this country”? The participants considered that (a) enjoying one basic right (e.g., enjoying freedom of speech) was better than enjoying no right at all, and that enjoying two basic rights was better than enjoying just one, and so on, (b) enjoying any right at an intermediate level was not very different than not enjoying this right, although it was better than not enjoying this right at all, and (c) only the complete enjoyment of all basic rights (Right to Privacy, Civil Liberties, Equality, and Social Protection) can be considered as full enjoyment of human rights. In addition, it was found that the impact of the social protection factor was considerably weaker than the impact of the other factors, which can be explained by the economic level of development of the Venezuelan society.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly at the end of 1948. It consisted of 30 articles that affirmed the representatives' belief “in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women” (United Nations, 2013). Some of these articles are well

---

\* Address correspondence to Dr. Guédez, e-mail: [anagabrielaquede@ gmail.com](mailto:anagabrielaquede@ gmail.com)

known to most people in the Western world and elsewhere. The first article states that “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood”. This article frequently serves as a basis for classroom discussions in all parts of Europe.

The UDHR was not the first attempt to codify human rights; it can be considered as the heirs of previous declarations, among them the *Magna Carta* issued in 1215, the Manden Charter proclaimed in the Kurukan Fuga during the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the *Habeas Corpus* Act issued in 1679, the Virginia Declaration of Rights issued in 1771, and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen issued in 1789. René Cassin who wrote the final version of the UDHR considered that it was structured in six main themes: (a) basic principles (see the quotation above), (b) articles referring to the individual (e.g., “No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile”), (c) articles referring to inter-individual relationships (e.g., “Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses”), (d) articles about public rights (e.g., “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion”), (e) articles about economic and social rights (e.g., “Everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay”), and (f) articles referring to international law and order (e.g., “Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized”).

Diaz-Veizades, Widaman, Little, and Gibbs (1995) further examined the psychological structure of the 30 articles. They created the Human Rights Questionnaire that comprised 116 items derived from them. They showed that US College students levels of endorsement of these items structured themselves in four relatively independent factors: Social security (e.g., “Everyone has the right to an adequate standard of living”), Civilian constraint (e.g., “There are times when people should be kept from expressing their opinion”), Equality (e.g., “Women and men should have equal rights in divorce”), and Privacy (e.g., “A person’s home is his castle and should not be interfered with by others”). They showed that participants tended to strongly endorse the Social security, Equality and Privacy items (means higher than 6 out of 7), but were ambivalent regarding the Civilian constraint items (mean of 4). This structure was replicated on samples from other countries (Crowson, 2004, Pirttila, Kassea, & Sakki, 2009), although the number of factors and their content varied from one country to another.

Recent studies have focused on the variables that impact people’s level of support for human rights. It has been repeatedly shown that support

was negatively correlated with level of Right-Wing Authoritarian attitude (Cohrs, Maes, Moschner, & Kielman, 2007; Swami, Nader, Pietschnig, Tran, & Voracek, 2012). It has also been shown that even a short-term education program can positively influence support for human rights among students (Stellmacher & Sommer, 2008). When compared with nation-centered concerns, however, concerns for human rights tended to fade. They consistently rank below people's concerns for employment or national security; endorsement of human rights must be carefully distinguished from commitment to human rights (McFarland & Mathews, 2005).

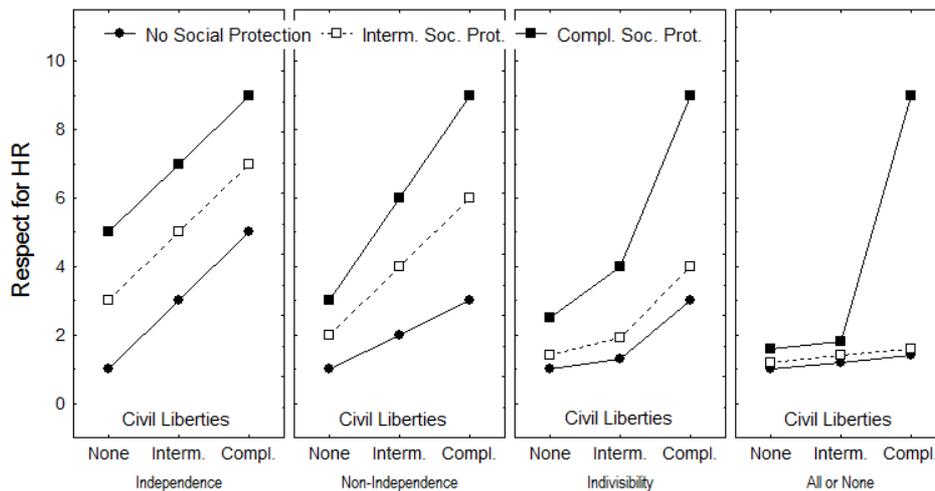
### **The Present Study**

Using the methodology of Information Integration Theory (Anderson, 2008), the present study examined an aspect of human rights that has been left practically untouched in previous studies: the indivisibility of human rights. From the beginning, the UNDHR included a great variety of rights because its writers postulated that these rights cannot successfully exist but in combination the one to the others. "The ideal of free human beings enjoying civil and political freedom and freedom from fear and want can only be achieved if conditions are created whereby everyone may enjoy his civil and political rights, as well as his social, economic and cultural rights". (Preamble of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights, 1966). In other words, the authors of the UNDHR considered that the right to privacy and the right to express one's opinion cannot be fully experienced apart from a context offering social protection and gender equality. Conversely, they considered that race equality and economic security cannot be fully appreciated apart from a context offering personal rights. Our main research question was: "Do people perceive human rights as a simple collection of more or less independent rights or as a bundle of interdependent and related rights?"

In the present study, participants were presented with short reports about fictitious countries and asked to judge the extent to which human rights were, overall, respected in each country. The reports included four kind of information: (a) the level to which citizens in this country were offered social protection, (b) the level of respect for civil liberties in the country, (c) whether equality between citizens was the norm, and (d) whether private life was respected.

An example may help understand the rationale of the study. Suppose participants consider that these basic rights are independent. Suppose they are presented with nine reports that vary regarding the level of social

protection and the level of respect for civil liberties. In this case, participants' overall assessment of respect for human rights should be an additive function of the two factors considered. Figure 1 (left panel) graphically expresses the pattern of responses that is expected if such a conceptualization of human rights is effective. The more liberty of expression is warranted (curves are ascending), and the more social protection is offered to citizens (curves are separated), the more human rights should be considered as respected. More importantly, curves are parallel, which attests of the independence of the two effects in participant's conceptualizations.



**Figure 1. Theoretical patterns of results that would be observed under four different views: the independent view (left panel), the not-independent view (second panel), the inseparable view (third panel), and the all-or-none view (right panel). In each panel, (a) the mean respect for human rights judgments are on the y-axis, (b) the three levels of respect for civil liberties are on the x-axis, and (c) the three curves correspond to the three levels of social protection.**

Suppose now that participants are convinced that the preamble of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights is correct to the point that they consider human rights as an all or none matter. In this second case,

the pattern formed by their judgments should express this view; that is, it should be of a completely different kind, as illustrated in Figure 1 (right panel). In this panel, the only combination of rights that has been rated high is the one that corresponds to the highest level of both basic rights (full civil liberties associated with complete social protection). In all the other cases, ratings are low, and not very different the one from the other.

The other two panels illustrate intermediate situations. The second panel illustrates a situation in which the effect of a particular basic right depends on the context formed by the other rights. We can call it the case of Non-Independence. The third panel shows features that are intermediate between the second panel and the right panel. Only one point has received a high rating. Curves are not regularly ascending; that is, an intermediate level of civil liberties tended to be assimilated to absence of liberties. Curves are not regularly separated; that is, an intermediate level of social protection tended to be assimilated to absence of protection. We can call this case Indivisibility. It differs from the All or None case in that the presence of one right is considered as better than the absence of any right.

## METHOD

**Participants.** Eighty unpaid persons participated in the present study. All of them were born in Venezuela. Some participants were known by the experimenter, by a member of her family or by her circle of friends. This first round of participants, after having worked with the experimenter, helped her to contact other people. Owing to the many problems in daily life in Venezuela, it was thought that direct contact and mutual assurance will help to convince people to participate in the study. Therefore, 20 (26%) participants were recruited in Caracas (Venezuela's capital city), 30 (37%) in Barquisimeto, and 30 (37%) in Maracaibo. The participation rate was very high with only one person refusing to participate because of lack of time.

The sample was constituted by 53 females and 27 male participants. Their mean age was 35 years ( $SD = 16.34$ , range = 18-81 years). Twenty-nine participants (36%) had a middle/high school degree, 39 (49%) had a college degree, and 12 (15%) had a post-graduation degree. Forty-four participants (55%) were single, 3 (4%) were cohabitating, 28 (35%) were married, and 5 (6%) were divorced; 42 participants (52%) declared themselves as regular attendees to the church or the temple, 31 (39%) declared themselves as believers in God but not regular attendees, and 7 (9%) as not believers in God. Participants' religious background was

Catholic (71%), Atheist (9%), Evangelical (4%), *Santeria* (1%), Buddhist (1%), or Christian (14%). Although directly asking for political orientation was not feasible, we tried to include in the study participants who were favorable to the present political regime and participants who were not.

**Material.** The material consisted of 36 cards showing a story of a few lines and a response scale. Each story has four critical items of information, in the following order: (a) the degree in which the State offers social protection to the citizens (not at all, intermediate or complete), (b) the level of respect for Civil liberties in the country (no respect, intermediate, full respect), (c) the level of Equality between citizens (inequality of rights vs. equality of right), and (d) the level of Respect for the private life of the citizens (no respect for private life vs. full respect for private life). The 36 stories were obtained by the orthogonal crossing of the four factors:  $3 \times 3 \times 2 \times 2 = 36$ . The language used was Spanish.

The following question and the response scale were under each story: “To what extent do you consider that the human rights are respected in this country?” The response scale was an 11 point scale with “Not at all” at the left extreme and “Completely” at the right extreme. Each country was attributed a different (fictitious) name. An example is shown in Appendix A.

**Procedure.** Each participant was tested individually in his/her own home. Testing had two phases (Anderson, 2008). In the familiarization phase the experimenter explained the participants what was expected from them, in other words, that they were about to read a number of stories describing a country regarding four political aspects (see above). For each scenario they were expected to indicate the extent to which they think that, overall, human rights were respected in this country. Participants were then presented with 12 vignettes that were taken randomly from the complete set. After they had read the vignettes the experimenter reminded them the four items of information, and the participants made their ratings. Participants were allowed to go back to see their responses, compare them and make any changes.

In the experimental phase, the whole set of 36 vignettes were given to the participants, in random order. As in the previous session, participants made their ratings at their own pace but they were no longer allowed to go back, compare responses and make alterations. It took 35 to 45 minutes to complete the whole task.

## RESULTS

Each rating made by each participant in the experimental phase was converted into a numerical value expressing the distance between the point on the response scale and the left anchor serving as an origin. These numerical values were then subjected to graphical and statistical analyses. The mean and standard deviation for each vignette are shown in Table 1. An ANOVA was conducted on the raw data with a design of Respect for Private Life x Equality x Civil Liberty x Social Protection, 2 x 2 x 3 x 3. Main results are shown in Table 2.

For the participants the overall level of respect for human rights was considered higher (a) when private life was respected in the country ( $M = 4.03$ ) than when it was not ( $M = 2.09$ ), (b) when equality of rights between citizens was instituted ( $M = 4.11$ ) than when it was not ( $M = 2.00$ ). Also, the overall level of respect for human rights was considered higher when civil liberties were present ( $M = 4.58$ ) than when they were absent ( $M = 1.98$ ). Post-hoc analyses using the Tukey honestly significant difference test showed that the mean value observed when civil liberties were not fully present ( $M = 2.62$ ) differed significantly from both other means,  $p < .001$ . Finally, the overall level of respect for human rights was considered higher when social protection of the population was instituted ( $M = 3.81$ ) than when it was not ( $M = 2.27$ ). Post-hoc analyses showed that the mean value observed when social protection was intermediate ( $M = 3.09$ ) differed significantly from both other means,  $p < .001$ .

Several two-way and three-way interactions were significant, and the higher-order interaction was significant. As can be observed in Figure 2, curves are roughly parallel in the left panels and clearly diverging in the right panels, which expressed the Privacy x Civil Liberties x Equality x Social Protection interaction. The patterns shown in Figure 1 are highly reminiscent of the one shown in the third panel of Figure 1.

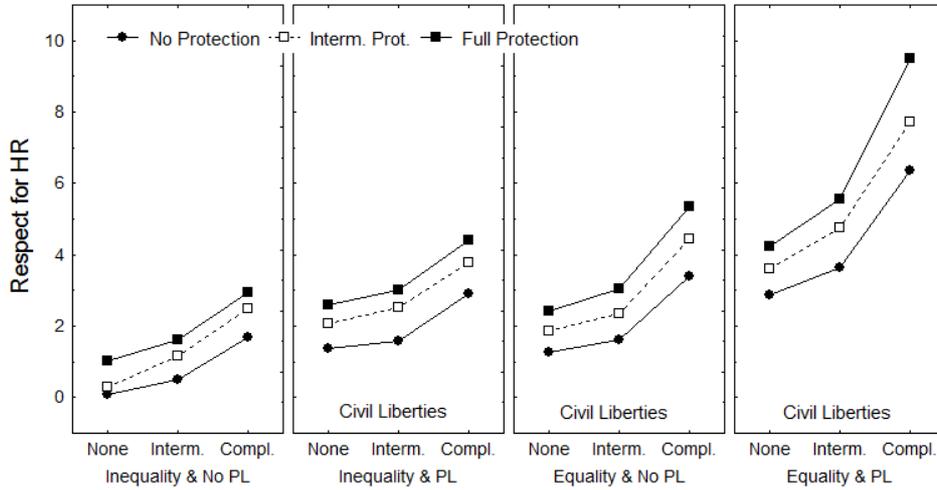
Close examination of Table 2 shows that the trilinear component of the Respect for Private Life x Civil Liberty x Social Protection interaction was not significant at the conventional level of .05. This interaction is shown in Figure 3. In the right panel, curves are more diverging than in the left panel. As a result, the non-significance of this interaction may possibly be attributed to lack of statistical power.

**Table 1.** Means and standard deviations observed for each vignette.

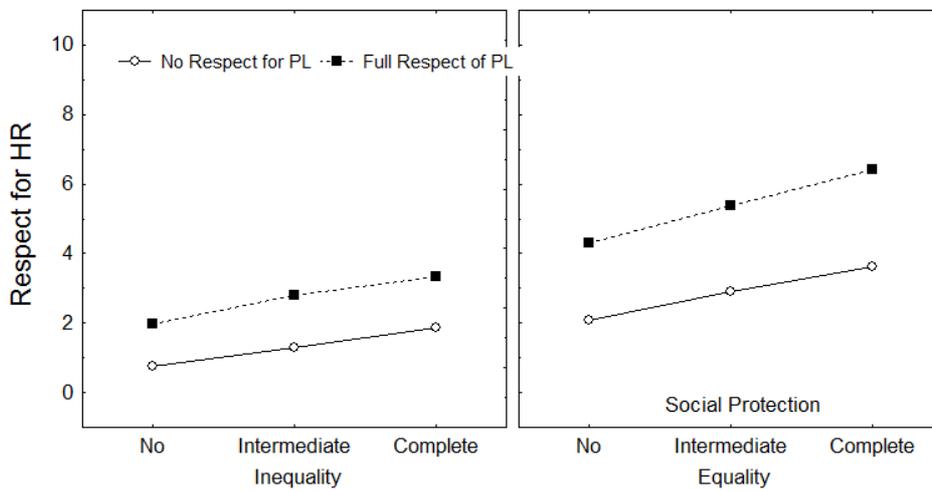
Private Life	Equality	Civil Liberties	Social Protection	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
No respect	No	No respect	No	0.10	0.38
No respect	No	No respect	Intermediate	0.33	0.52
No respect	No	No respect	Complete	1.04	0.95
No respect	No	Intermediate	No	0.54	0.83
No respect	No	Intermediate	Intermediate	1.19	1.02
No respect	No	Intermediate	Complete	1.66	1.33
No respect	No	Full respect	No	1.71	1.24
No respect	No	Full respect	Intermediate	2.51	1.50
No respect	No	Full respect	Complete	2.99	1.71
No respect	Yes	No respect	No	1.30	1.12
No respect	Yes	No respect	Intermediate	1.90	1.44
No respect	Yes	No respect	Complete	2.45	1.81
No respect	Yes	Intermediate	No	1.64	1.38
No respect	Yes	Intermediate	Intermediate	2.38	1.63
No respect	Yes	Intermediate	Complete	3.08	1.74
No respect	Yes	Full respect	No	3.36	1.85
No respect	Yes	Full respect	Intermediate	4.45	2.03
No respect	Yes	Full respect	Complete	5.35	2.16
Full respect	No	No respect	No	1.40	1.33
Full respect	No	No respect	Intermediate	2.10	1.67
Full respect	No	No respect	Complete	2.60	1.80
Full respect	No	Intermediate	No	1.61	1.53
Full respect	No	Intermediate	Intermediate	2.53	1.74
Full respect	No	Intermediate	Complete	3.01	1.79
Full respect	No	Full respect	No	2.90	1.77
Full respect	No	Full respect	Intermediate	3.80	1.92
Full respect	No	Full respect	Complete	4.43	1.91
Full respect	Yes	No respect	No	2.91	1.75
Full respect	Yes	No respect	Intermediate	3.66	2.06
Full respect	Yes	No respect	Complete	4.28	2.33
Full respect	Yes	Intermediate	No	3.61	1.83
Full respect	Yes	Intermediate	Intermediate	4.78	2.15
Full respect	Yes	Intermediate	Complete	5.55	2.29
Full respect	Yes	Full respect	No	6.35	2.06
Full respect	Yes	Full respect	Intermediate	7.69	1.94
Full respect	Yes	Full respect	Complete	9.48	1.11

**Table 2. Main results of the ANOVA.**

Factor	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Eta</i> <sup>2</sup> <sub>p</sub>	
Private Life (P)	1	2 682.36	296.55	.001	.79	
Equality (E)	1	3 164.56	654.35	.001	.89	
Civil Liberty (L)	2	1 743.68	606.16	.001	.89	
Social Protection (S)	2	564.45	261.51	.001	.77	
P x E	1	218.33	54.08	.001	.41	
P x L	2	38.74	15.96	.001	.17	
	Bilinear	1	69.12	22.09	.001	.29
E x L	2	179.50	71.70	.001	.48	
	Bilinear	1	314.34	80.17	.001	.57
P x S	2	11.65	17.31	.001	.18	
	Bilinear	1	22.82	25.57	.001	.19
E x S	2	20.88	36.61	.001	.32	
	Bilinear	1	41.35	63.16	.001	.42
L x S	4	13.51	24.25	.001	.24	
	Bilinear	1	51.04	53.65	.001	.41
P x E x L	2	57.05	34.63	.001	.31	
	Trilinear	1	113.55	59.91	.001	.38
P x E x S	2	2.25	3.04	.05	.04	
	Trilinear	1	3.21	3.30	.10	.04
P x L x S	4	2.18	3.86	.001	.05	
	Trilinear	1	4.33	4.31	.05	.05
E x L x S	4	6.00	10.79	.001	.12	
	Trilinear	1	19.25	23.19	.001	.23
P x E x L x S	4	1.45	2.46	.05	.03	
	Quadrilinear	1	4.57	5.62	.02	.07



**Figure 2.** Patterns of results observed on the whole sample. In each panel, (a) the mean respect for human rights judgments are on the y-axis, (b) the three levels of respect for civil liberties are on the x-axis, and (c) the three curves correspond to the three levels of social protection. Each panel corresponds to a combination of equality and respect for private life.



**Figure 3.** Patterns of results observed regarding the Privacy x Equality x Social Protection interaction. In each panel, (a) the mean respect for human rights judgments are on the y-axis, (b) the three levels of social protection are on the x-axis, and (c) the two curves correspond to the two levels of respect for private life.

## DISCUSSION

This preliminary study examined the extent to which laypersons consider that human rights are indivisible. It was found that such a study, based on a scenario technique, was feasible: Laypersons were able to take into account the information in terms of basic rights that described each country, and to integrate it in a coherent way in their judgments. Their judgment model can, tentatively, be written:

Judged Respect for HR = Privacy x Civil Liberties x Equality x Social Protection

In addition, it was found that the impact of the social protection factor was weaker than the impact of the other factors. It explained about 10% of the explained variance whereas the other factors explained each about 30%.

From this limited set of data, it can provisionally be concluded that laypersons in Venezuela consider that (a) enjoying one basic right (e.g., enjoying freedom of speech) is better than enjoying no right at all, and that enjoying two basic rights is better than enjoying just one, and so on, (b) enjoying any right at an intermediate level (e.g., enjoying some social protection) is not very different than not enjoying this right, although it is better than not enjoying this right at all, and (c) only the complete enjoyment of all basic rights (Right to Privacy, Civil Liberties, Equality, and Social Protection) can be considered as enjoyment of human rights. Laypersons in Venezuela endorse, to a reasonable extent, the view that human rights cannot be divided. They did not consider, however, that enjoying imperfect rights is of no value at all.

The seemingly lower impact of social protection as compared with other basic rights may be explained by the fact that in relatively poor countries, some rights are easier to “implement” than others. Even in a very poor country, equality between genders or equality between ethnic groups can be instituted by law, even if not easily realized. Even in a very poor country, the state and the police can respect the right of all people to privacy, at least to a large extent. In contrast, building a system of social protection supposes adequate funding, which many states cannot afford or cannot fully afford. This may explain why, from the viewpoint of people living in a country that is rich but still developing, this basic right is not considered as fundamental in the same way as the others.

The relatively lower impact of social protection may, alternatively, be explained by the fact that owing to the current political situation in Venezuela, most participants may have attributed more importance to the basic rights that the political regimen has threatened more, namely liberty of

expression, private property, and entrepreneurship than to the ones it has focused on. For example, President Hugo Chávez ordered the closure of a major television station whose political views were opposed from the governmental views (Requena, 2008).

Future studies, using much larger samples of participants, and additional measurements should examine whether different views regarding human rights co-exist among the Venezuelan society. Future studies should examine the effect on people's judgments of various classical variables in political psychology: political orientation (from left to right), authoritarianism, and political cynicism. Does the impact of the civil liberty factor vary as a function of people's level of authoritarianism or as a function of political orientation? Future studies could also compare laypersons for different countries' views. Do people from "collectivistic" countries differ from people from "individualistic" countries regarding the weight they give to privacy or to equality?.

## REFERENCES

- Anderson, N. H. (2008). *Unified social cognition*. New York, NY: Psychology Press.
- Cohrs, J. C., Maes, J., Kielmann, S., & Moschner, B. (2007). Determinants of human rights attitudes and behavior: A comparison and integration of psychological perspectives. *Political Psychology, 28*, 441–469.
- Crowson, H. M. (2004) Human Rights attitudes: Dimensionality and psychological Correlates. *Ethics & Behavior, 14*, 235–253.
- Diaz-Veizades, J., Widaman, K. F., Little, T. D., & Gibbs, K.W. (1995). The measurement and structure of human rights attitudes. *The Journal of Social Psychology, 135*, 313–328.
- McFarland, S., & Matthews, M. (2005). Who cares about human rights? *Political Psychology, 26*, 365–385.
- Pirttilä-Backman, A.-M., Kassea, R., & Sakki, I. (2009). Human and peoples' rights: Social representations among Cameroonian students. *International Journal of Psychology, 44*, 459–467.
- Requena, J. (2008). Venezuelan students are campaigning for freedom. *Nature, 451*, 373–498.
- Stellmacher, J. & Sommer, G. (2008). Human rights education, an evaluation of university seminars. *Social Psychology. Special Issue: Social Psychology and Peace, 59*, 70–80.
- Swami, V., Nader, I. W., Pietschnig, P., Stieger, S., Tran, U. S., & Voracek, M. (2012). Personality and individual difference correlates of attitudes toward human rights and civil liberties. *Personality and Individual Differences, 53*, 443–447.
- United Nations Development Programme (1996). *Human development report*. New York: United Nations Development Programme.

## APPENDIX A

Birania guarantees the social protection of the citizens. The State ensures that all citizens have enough incomes to enjoy a decent way of life and the means to maintain themselves in good health. Working conditions are protected. People with handicaps receive adequate support.

Civil liberties are guaranteed. All the people have the right to freely express their opinions in any circumstance. The media are free. The citizens cannot be arrested without a good reason, and those arrested are entitled to legal aid.

Equality between citizens is formally guaranteed. Men and women have the same rights. Social minorities are not a target of any particular discrimination. Religion liberty is guaranteed. All citizens, according to their means, are entitled to own a property. In business the rule is to pay all workers in an equally way.

Finally, private life is fully respected. There is not wiretapping. The mail is not spied. A person's home cannot be violated without a good reason.

Nobody has the right to intrude on people's sexual life.

*To what extent do you think that, in this country, human rights are respected?*

*Not at all* o-----o-----o-----o-----o-----o-----o-----o-----o-----o *Completely*