



NEST DISTINGUISHED SPEAKER SERIES

Friday, January 12, 2024

2:00 - 3:30 pm

SSC 6210

Refreshments to be provided

The Global Resonance of Human Rights: What Google Trends Can Tell Us

Are human rights passé? Over the last decade many commentators have speculated that the human rights discourse has lost salience, that the human rights movement is in a crisis of legitimacy, and that the human rights regime no longer empowers those it aims to protect, especially in the Global South. There is one problem. Most claims about waning demand for human rights are based on impressions, not systematic evidence. Is the human rights discourse actually becoming less resonant worldwide? Dancy answers this question using a relatively new resource: worldwide Google Trends data. After collecting and analyzing recent search data from 109 countries in five different language groups, he finds little to no evidence that people are becoming less interested in human rights. The language is just as popular as it was a decade ago. In fact, today people search for information on human rights far more than they search for other political concepts like social justice, inequality, or national security. Even further, this research uncovers something that no one expected: human rights interest is far more pronounced in the Global South than in the Global North. In this talk, Dancy will confront high-level debates over whether human rights “endism” is real and ponder whether the human rights discourse still animates counterhegemonic modes of resistance.

Geoffrey Dancy: Is an Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science at University of Toronto who studies human rights, international law, and efforts to prevent political violence. A former director of the Transitional Justice Research Collaborative (TJRC), he has over 15 years of experience collecting and analyzing data on transitional justice. He has also interned at the International Center for Transitional Justice and conducted field research in Northern Ireland, Israel, Sri Lanka, Kenya, and Colombia. His work on human rights law and the impact of the anti-impunity institutions like the International Criminal Court, domestic human rights prosecutions and truth commissions has been published in a variety of outlets, including the American Political Science Review, American Journal of International Law, International Organization, International Studies Quarterly, and Comparative Political Studies. Dancy holds an M.A. in International Studies from the University of North Texas and a Ph.D in International Relations from the University of Minnesota.

