

State Department Sabotages Country Reports on Human Rights Practices

October 1, 2025

Introduction

Each year, the State Department is required¹ to send the Speaker of the House and Senate Committee on Foreign Relations its Country Reports on Human Rights Practices (Country Reports) by February 25 and publish them on its website a few weeks thereafter.² One purpose of these reports is to identify countries with gross human rights violations and deny them development³ and security assistance⁴ from the United States. The Country Reports also play a key role in the adjudication of claims for protection from persecution or torture. By statute and regulation, asylum officers (AOs) and immigration judges (IJs) deciding these claims rely on the Country Reports as a source of information.⁵

Analysis

Reporting on topics such as coercive population control, child labor, religious freedom, and extrajudicial killings is required by law.⁶ Historically, the Country Reports have also covered civil and political rights in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and other treaties to which the United States is a party, and other human rights-related topics that are of interest to Congress.⁷ While the Country Reports cannot cover all human rights violations in a given country, and human rights experts have scrutinized them over the years, they have generally been regarded as credible, neutral, and reliable.⁸ These insights are documented in an expert witness declaration available to attorneys who register cases with CGRS.⁹

Under the second Trump administration, the State Department delayed publication of the 2024 Country Reports until August 12, 2025 to align the reports with its ideology and Executive Orders.¹⁰ The administration heavily edited and omitted information from all reports on topics such as violence against women, violence and discrimination against LGBTQ+ people, and restrictions on civil liberties. It also heavily manipulated information in reports on a series of countries for which it provided a “special” review, in particular countries with leaders the Trump administration views favorably such as El Salvador and Hungary.¹¹

Deliberate omissions and mischaracterizations of human rights violations in the Country Reports serve the administration’s aim of undermining access to asylum and related protections in the United States. It is also consistent with other recent actions the administration has taken to undermine the objectivity of data gathered and presented by government agencies.¹² Combined with recent

“guidance”¹³ to immigration courts on denying asylum applications without full hearings, Board of Immigration Appeals decisions authorizing the same,¹⁴ and the Attorney General reinstating restrictive asylum caselaw from the first Trump administration,¹⁵ IJs and AOs may rely on the Trump administration’s new Country Reports to summarily deny applicants’ claims.

The risks posed by biased, unreliable Country Reports are not merely theoretical. IJs have used Country Reports’ omissions and alleged inconsistency with asylum applicants’ testimony to decide that asylum applicants are not credible and/or do not face a risk of serious harm if returned to their country of origin—denying meritorious claims and ordering removal to countries where people face the threat of serious harm or death. For example, in a recent case, an IJ denied an asylum claim after finding that the applicant could safely relocate within their country, in part because the Country Reports did not mention violence against similarly situated people nationwide, even though other reliable evidence in the record did.¹⁶

The Trump administration’s efforts to undermine the integrity of the Country Reports threatens to systematize these miscarriages of justice by injecting incomplete or misleading information into legal processes that require careful consideration of objective facts, informed by professional, unbiased research on relevant country conditions.

Call to Action

Congress must address this abuse of power. We call on Congress to:

- Demand that Secretary Rubio direct the restoration of the reporting processes in place prior to Trump’s return to office;
- Conduct oversight of the State Department to ascertain how the reports were prepared and any interference by political appointees;
- Conduct oversight of the Departments of Justice and Homeland Security to determine how the Country Reports are being used by IJs and AOs, and publicize any changes or additions to official guidance;
- Hold hearings to learn from country conditions experts, immigration practitioners, and former officials about best practices to ensure the integrity and reliability of Country Reports; and
- Make clear in public statements that Trump administration officials responsible for compromising the integrity of the Country Reports will be held accountable.

For questions, please contact CGRS Senior Policy Counsel Matt Joseph at josephmatt@uclawsf.edu.

¹ 22 U.S.C. § 2151n(d).

² COUNTRY REPORTS ON HUMAN RIGHTS PRACTICES, U.S. DEP'T OF STATE, <https://www.state.gov/reports-bureau-of-democracy-human-rights-and-labor/country-reports-on-human-rights-practices>.

³ 22 U.S.C. § 2151n.

⁴ 22 U.S.C. § 2304.

⁵ See INA § 240(c)(4)(C), 8 U.S.C. § 1229a(c)(4)(C); INA § 208(b)(1)(B)(iii), 8 U.S.C. § 1158(b)(1)(B)(iii); 8 C.F.R. § 208.12(a); and 8 C.F.R. § 1208.12(a).

⁶ 22 U.S.C. § 2151n(d); 22 U.S.C. § 2304(b).

⁷ See Declaration of Scott W. Busby (Aug. 28, 2025), available in CGRS's [Technical Assistance Library](#).

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ Attorneys who register cases in CGRS's [Technical Assistance Library](#) receive access to a wide range of materials, including practice advisories, sample briefs and motions, expert declarations, country conditions research, and other resources that can help attorneys and advocates better understand and navigate the complex legal landscape of asylum and related forms of protection.

¹⁰ See Graham Smith, *The State Department is changing its mind about what it calls human rights*, NATIONAL PUBLIC RADIO (Apr. 18, 2025), <https://www.npr.org/2025/04/18/nx-s1-5357511/state-department-human-rights-report-cuts>; Adam Taylor et al., *U.S. plans to ease human rights criticism of El Salvador, Israel, Russia*, WASH. POST (Aug. 6, 2025), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2025/08/06/trump-human-rights-el-salvador-israel-russia>.

¹¹ *US: Rights Report Mixes Facts, Deception, Political Spin*, HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH (Aug. 12, 2025), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/08/12/us-rights-report-mixes-facts-deception-political-spin>.

¹² See, e.g., Ben Casselman and Tony Romm, *Trump, Claiming Weak Jobs Numbers Were 'Rigged,' Fires Labor Official*, N.Y. TIMES (Aug. 1, 2025), <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/08/01/business/economy/trump-bls-firing-jobs-report.html>.

¹³ Sirce E. Owen, EOIR, Policy Memorandum 25-28: Pretermission of Legally Insufficient Applications for Asylum (Apr. 11, 2025), <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/media/1396411/dl?inline>.

¹⁴ *Matter of H-A-A-V-*, 29 I&N Dec. 233 (BIA 2025).

¹⁵ *Matter of S-S-F-M-*, 29 I&N Dec. 207 (BIA 2025); *Matter of R-E-R-M- & J-D-R-M-*, 29 I&N Dec. 202 (BIA 2025).

¹⁶ *Singh v. Garland*, 118 F.4th 1150 (9th Cir. 2024).