

The Opportunity Agenda

Bringing Human Rights Home

An increasing number of U.S. organizations and networks are promoting and applying human rights principles to domestic social justice issues. Key to the movement's success—and developing a field-wide, coordinated communications strategy—is building and sustaining public understanding and mass support for domestic human rights.

In fall 2007, The Opportunity Agenda completed an unprecedented study of American's views on human rights and released *Human Rights in the U.S.*, a report on their extensive opinion research with advocates, journalists, and the American public. The report built on a previous examination of existing public opinion research and media coverage of human rights issues in the U.S. This study identified “persuadable” audiences—segments of the American public who are open to discussing social justice issues in the context of human rights, and who define a wide array of freedoms and rights as human rights. The report identified some very promising trends.

Most people were open to viewing domestic issues as human rights, particularly those issues related to equality, discrimination, fair and humane treatment in the criminal justice system, and education. There was also some agreement that health care, a clean environment, and fair pay were human rights. Social justice advocates personally embraced the concept of human rights and some described their work in human rights terms, but were not wholly convinced of its power with the public and policymakers. Likewise, journalists were open to the idea of human rights, but could not see many opportunities to infuse human rights concepts into their news stories.

Human Rights in the U.S. has already informed the understanding and communications capacity of the field, and promises to generate change in the way the public thinks about this issue. This lays the foundation for devising a practical and effective communications strategy, and advocates are in a promising position to bring human rights home.

For an electronic copy of The Opportunity Agenda's report, *Human Rights in the U.S.*, email jrowe@opportunityagenda.org.