

2023

year in review

comm-
unity,
data,
hope

Human Rights Data Analysis Group

HRDAG

As I am writing this letter to you, it would be easy for all of us to feel overwhelmed by the instability and violence in the world. Fortunately, working for HRDAG allows me to find hope by focusing on positive changes in the communities where we and our partners work.

Our partners are resilient and patient and have taught us to be resilient and patient as well. We



have had a lot of projects where the outcome is not only unknown, but in many ways is unimaginable. For example, in the 1980s in Chad it was impossible to ever imagine President Hissène Habré being

held accountable. Yet in 2016 he was found guilty of committing crimes against humanity and was sentenced to life in prison.

We have learned over the past 30 years that achieving positive change is a long-term process.

We and our partners know that the only way to create the future we want is to first imagine it, then to work toward it for as long as it takes. This year we were inspired by our work with partners in Colombia and across the United States. We hope these projects help us all imagine and work toward a better future.

We remain deeply grateful to each and every one of our colleagues, partners, and supporters in this work. The world may seem overwhelming at times, but we persist in the belief that finding and telling the truth still matters.

Megan

Megan Price, Executive Director

Why community is always our starting point

We partner with local community members because it is the only way this work can succeed. Our team brings very specific technical and scientific expertise, and that expertise is most useful when it is utilized by the groups and individuals as close to the problem as possible.

Our partnerships all start with conversations. We listen to community members describe their priorities, their struggles, where they know they need help or where they don't know what to do next. We do not tell partners how to solve their problems. We listen to and value their stories as we work together to find solutions.

First and foremost, **we want to assure our partners that they are not alone.** By providing our statistical analyses, we can validate and confirm a community's traumatic experiences.

This kind of collaboration requires trust and vulnerability. We have to build authentic relationships with our partners such that our work together creates spaces where we all feel safe to ask questions, admit what we don't know, and put a name to the terrible experiences that have occurred.

This year our partners included researchers with the Truth Commission in Colombia, data scientists at the ACLU, and lawyers and investigative journalists across the United States. Each of them was challenged by an overwhelming amount of data, and the need to make

sense of that data to help their community understand the truth. ●

Partnering to publish public data and software in Colombia

After three years of close partnership with the **Colombian Truth Commission** and the **Special Jurisdiction for Peace**, HRDAG was able this year to make publicly available a crucial dataset documenting 50 years of conflict in Colombia.

Due to the sheer magnitude of the violence that occurred during that conflict, the records from this project constitute the largest dataset ever used for human rights purposes anywhere in the world. The data involved 24 million records received from 44 different sources. We shared the data using a Creative Commons license so that data scientists, researchers, civil society groups and others could explore it freely and expand what can be learned from this important resource.



A graph comparing documented and total estimated homicides is featured in the logo of the R software package

To ensure that researchers can make best use of the data, we also provided the software tools necessary to analyze the data correctly. Two HRDAG colleagues based in Colombia, Paula Amado and María Juliana Durán Fedullo, have delivered a dozen presentations to hundreds of researchers at academic

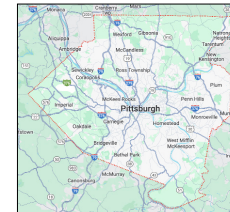
Never in Colombia has an exercise of this nature been carried out, one that uses data mining and artificial intelligence techniques to provide credible and solid data about these violations.

— **Alejandro Valencia Villa**,
a former commissioner of the
Colombian Truth Commission

institutions, civil society groups, and survivors of the conflict, to ensure that local Colombians can provide historical clarification and understanding based on these empirical records and analytical tools. ●

Questioning algorithms and implied values that lead to systemic discrimination

For two years we have worked with partners at the ACLU to evaluate the Allegheny Family Screening Tool (AFST), an algorithm currently in use in the child welfare system in Allegheny County, PA. The AFST is supposed to help social workers prioritize their caseload. Our research showed how algorithmic design choices can compound systematic discrimination, leading to both the ACLU and



the Department of Justice becoming concerned that the AFST was “forever flagging” parents with disabilities and disproportionately increasing the risk that

their children were removed to foster care. Additionally, community members have voiced concerns about racial bias and have proposed alternatives, including non-technical changes, to the county.

The HRDAG and ACLU team investigated specific design decisions, some of which the creators of the tool described as “arbitrary.” We demonstrated how these technical decisions implied ethical choices and value judgements that amplify inequality, reflecting the concerns of impacted community members. By affirming community voices, we stand with those calling for reform in Allegheny County. ●

Investigating police misconduct in the U.S. brings hope for change

This year we also continued our work with partners across the United States examining records of police behavior and misconduct. Highlights include:

- Investigating the Chicago Police's **inadequate record keeping** regarding missing persons cases, with the Invisible Institute
- Examining **patterns of police and prosecutorial misconduct** leading to exoneration cases, with the Innocence Project New Orleans
- Analyzing **arrest patterns** for a controversial specialized police unit, with Berkeley Copwatch

This is how change happens. Each of these projects, and the relationships they rely on, are cause for hope for a better future. ●

We thank this year's generous supporters

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HRDAG by the numbers

<i>HRDAG's fiscal year is July 1-June 30</i>		
	2022-23	2021-22
Beginning cash balance	\$ 621,946	\$ 314,106
Income		
Foundation grants	\$ 1,089,656	\$ 1,247,432
Revenue from contracts	69,867	246,722
Direct public support	58,730	83,637
Total income	\$ 1,218,253	\$ 1,577,792
Expenses		
Salaries and consultants	\$ 1,280,215	\$ 1,017,244
Travel and conferences	40,551	29,770
Rent, utilities, and technology	43,024	62,193
Supplies and other direct costs	29,387	14,239
Administration ¹	108,854	146,505
Total expenses	\$ 1,502,031	\$ 1,269,951
Ending cash balance ²	\$ 338,169	\$ 621,946

¹ HRDAG operates as a fiscally sponsored project of Community Partners (communitypartners.org), a nonprofit organization that helps community leaders build and sustain effective programs that benefit the public good. Administrative fees to Community Partners support their back-office services and the legal framework that allows HRDAG to focus on our mission.

² We strive to close every fiscal year with a non-zero cash balance. A portion of this balance constitutes our reserves which we maintain year-to-year for financial stability and programmatic agility. The majority of this non-zero cash balance is meant to be spent over a specific period of time and/or on a specific project. The size of this balance varies year-to-year, depending on when grant funds are received.

The HRDAG Team

This year, we are grieving the loss of one of our team members, Scott Weikart. Our hearts have been so heavy since his passing. Scott's



technical skills were amazing, and his generosity with his time and energy was legendary. When we think of the work we do, and the change we want to see in the world, we think

of Scott and how we can be more like him. We are very thankful to have learned from him and to have worked at his side.

Our current team includes executive director Dr Megan Price, director of research Dr Patrick Ball, data scientists Tarak Shah and Bailey Passmore, operations coordinator Suzanne Nathans, data processor Michelle Dukich, statistician Maria Gargiulo, and dedicated consultants, interns, and fellows.

We are based in San Francisco, and our partners are located in countries around the world.

We are supported by an active advisory board composed of Julie Broome, Elizabeth Eagen, William Isaac, Alex Hanna, Paul Wesson, and Naomi Roht-Arriaza.

The Human Rights Data Analysis Group works closely with human rights advocates to analyze and understand data. We build scientifically defensible, evidence-based arguments that have been used by truth commissions and international criminal tribunals on five continents.



Support our work
hrdag.org/donate

Automating extracting officer information from documents — specifically, the officer's name and the role the officer played in the wrongful conviction — was a key step to potentially freeing innocent people from prison, and allowed HRDAG to make a giant leap forward in a vital project.

I'm a donor to HRDAG, a tiny, cash-strapped, excellent nonprofit, and you should donate to them too.

— Cory Doctorow

HRDAG

30

years and
counting

HRDAG gratefully acknowledges our major funders, including:

