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## Economic Sanctions and the Survival of Autocratic Regimes

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Economic Sanctions and the Survival of Autocratic Regimes

Senior Project Submitted to  
The Division of Social Studies  
of Bard College

by  
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## **I: Introduction**

The past decades have seen a steep rise in the use of economic sanctions as a tool of foreign policy. Yet, despite this popularity, there remains a significant debate surrounding their effectiveness that has led some critics to question whether they have any value at all. In addition to these doubts, there is also uncertainty as to the actual processes behind how sanctions accomplish or fail their objectives, often stemming from differences between views of sanctions through the lenses of international or domestic politics.

This paper seeks to organize much of the existing literature by incorporating economic variables pertaining to the imposition of sanctions into domestic models of the behavior of autocratic regimes. The conclusions of both the cited literature and this paper centers around the argument that sanctions succeed by creating political conditions conducive to opposition groups and that, by raising the risk that the regime will lose power, sanctioners are able to extract concessions in exchange for the termination of sanctions. While, even with this shared perspective there are still debates surrounding effectiveness as well as significant gaps in the literature, there is enough reason to believe that sanctions have the potential to be an effective tool both now and in the future.

## **II: Economic Sanctions - Implementation and Effectiveness**

In both the literature and in common usage, the term sanctions is used in meaningfully different ways. The below section describes the definition being used throughout this paper as well as discussing the various types of sanctions that can be implemented, opinions in the literature as to their effectiveness, and a brief explanation of why sanctions might be used instead of other policies. In so doing, this section will lay the groundwork for dissecting and analyzing the effects of sanctions throughout the rest of the paper.

## What are Sanctions?

Before exploring the effects of sanctions, we must first describe exactly what we are referring to. While precise definitions differ across sources, this paper adopts those used by David Baldwin in his foundational book on the subject, *Economic Statecraft*. By his definition, sanctions are defined by three criteria —means, effects, and motivations. Sanctions refer to any action that involves the restriction of economic ties between two states in order to create economic distress in the targeted state all for the purpose of extracting political concessions.

Importantly, this definition excludes two types of actions sometimes associated or included with other definitions of sanctions. The first, economic warfare, is excluded because it uses direct acts of violence to inflict economic distress. Even if suspending steel imports and bombing a steel factory were to have the same effect on the target's economy and were imposed for the same reason, the different means involved are significant enough to warrant excluding the former from our definition. The second exclusion involves cases where economic restrictions are used towards economic justifications. While restricting trade in an attempt to make the target alter their tariff levels or to protect domestic industries from foreign competition, two common examples, may involve the same economic means and effects, the justification is not political in nature and is therefore better analyzed through an economic lens. In excluding these cases, we are left only with sanctions that weaponize the economic ties between states in an attempt to secure political, rather than economic, gains.

To be considered a sanction, several other criteria must be met. First, there must be two parties involved; a sanctioner and a target. The sanctioner is the country or countries responsible for initiating economic restrictions while the target is the country against whom economic restrictions are being imposed. The sanctioner does so by unilaterally limiting

economic interactions between itself and the target and makes the continuation of these restrictions conditional on the actions of the target. If the target concedes to the demands of the sanctioner, the sanctions will be terminated and economic ties will be restored.

### **Types of Sanctions**

While all sanctions must follow the above criteria, they can still be differentiated on the basis of the economic and political means involved. First, sanctions may be defined on the basis of what economic ties are being restricted. One common type of sanctions involves increasing restrictions on the flow of goods and services between the sanctioner and target. This can involve either increasing tariffs on imports from the target, prohibitions on the export of some or all products to the target, or both at the same time. Such sanctions have significant variations in their intensity, ranging from restrictions on a single good or category of goods, restrictions on one or more industries, and, at their greatest extent, suspension of all trade between the countries involved.

Financial flows are also common targets of sanctions. Such means can include restrictions on investment in the target economy and restricting the target's ability to invest in the sanctioner's economy, freezing the assets of the target economy that are under the sanctioner's control, and restricting the target's access to the sanctioner's financial system. Like the previous example, the scope of these sanctions can vary significantly and can in fact be even more precise. Restrictions on the withdrawal of assets and access to financial systems can be directed against specific firms and individuals that have drawn the ire of the sanctioner. In addition, such restrictions can always be scaled up to targeting entire industries, categories of persons, or the country as a whole.

Finally, sanctions can also involve the suspension of government-to-government transfers. By suspending foreign aid or refusing to repay debts owed to the target, governments may impose the sanctions in a more direct manner. While the intensity varies, there is little room for choice here as the degree is likely to be bound by conditions prior to the sanctions being imposed. A sanctioner that does not offer foreign aid beforehand cannot threaten to withhold it nor can they refuse to repay debts that they have not previously incurred. While true, to an extent at least, for all of the above methods —trade cannot be suspended if there is not trade already— this is especially the case here as, unlike with other forms of economic interactions, relatively few countries offer or receive foreign aid and few countries hold enough of one another's debts to wield it effectively.

In addition to the economic methods used, sanctions can also be defined by other political characteristics. Firstly, there is the number of sanctioners involved. While a sanction can have only one target, any number of countries can cooperate against a single target. Unilateral Sanctions involve just one sanctioner imposing restrictions against a single target. Multilateral Sanctions, by contrast, can involve any number of sanctioners cooperating against the target. In addition to countries, sanctions can also involve intergovernmental organizations. While their position is rather different from sanctioners —IGOs very rarely possess the clout to coerce governments unilaterally— they can still play a significant role by lending credibility to the sanction, coordinating the responses of multiple sanctioners(Drezner 2000), or restricting the target's access to services offered by the IGO.

Sanctions can also be differentiated by their scope. As mentioned when discussing the various economic methods that can be employed, the degree and scope of the sanctions can vary significantly. Sanctions that direct their efforts towards specific persons, entities, or industries are called Targeted Sanctions, sometimes referred to as 'Smart' Sanctions on

account of their precision. Alternatively, sanctions that are broader in scope, placing restrictions on entire economies, are called Comprehensive Sanctions.

### **Effectiveness of Sanctions**

With our definition of sanctions covered, the next item to cover is how sanctions have performed in actual cases. Currently, the literature on whether or not sanctions are effective is inconclusive with significant schisms stemming from different definitions, criteria for success, and the inclusion of supplementary actions.

If we are to take a basic look at sanctions and define success solely on whether they inflict harm on the target, there would be little room for debate. Sanctions are widely agreed to reduce GDP(Hufbauer et al. 2007), trigger episodes of inflation and currency crises(Peksen and Son 2015), and create negative humanitarian outcomes (Wood 2008). In theory, the presence of such harm should translate to effectiveness as a target who is harmed by sanctions should be willing to make concessions to see the sanctions ended and the harm reversed. Whether the harm inflicted actually leads to concessions, however, is a subject of much debate.

Broadly stated, a sanction can be considered successful if the concessions offered by the target in exchange for the termination of sanctions roughly match the initial demands of the sanctioner. Likewise, if the sanctions are suspended before any concessions are offered, the sanctions can be categorized as unsuccessful. There may also be intermediate cases where concessions are offered but only partly fulfill initial demands. For these cases, the decision to categorize them as a success, a failure, or indeterminate will likely vary on a case by case basis or by the subjective judgment of whoever is doing the categorizing.

Of those who have done such work, the dataset used by Hufbauer, Schott, Elliot, and Oegg is both foundational and one of the more generous descriptions. In their book, *Economic*



*Sanctions Reconsidered*, the authors find the rate of success in the cases they found to be approximately 35%. Robert Pape (1997), by contrast, used the same dataset as Hufbauer et al. and found a success rate of only 5%, claiming that the vast majority of cases that they had coded as 'successful' were not a result of the sanctions themselves but rather supplementary methods such as threatening and/or initiating violence against the target. Such successes, therefore, are not a testament to the effectiveness of sanctions but rather their weakness as they were rarely able to succeed without escalating to non-economic forms of coercion. Further work has followed this in suggesting that sanctions are more useful when used as a supplement to military intervention rather than as an independent method (Lektzian and Regan 2016).

Looking for more detail in judging effectiveness, more recent data on sanctions have attempted to define success and failure on a spectrum rather than a binary. The Threat and Imposition of Economic Sanctions (TIES) dataset by Morgan, Bapat, and Kobayashi for example give sanctions a 1-10 score for both the sanctioner and target. The score, determined by both the value of the concession and the harm inflicted, is determined separately for each party as each country may value the concession differently or have been disproportionately harmed by the sanctions. Morgan et al. find that, depending on the definition of success used, the success rate of sanctions is somewhere between 40.8% and 27.2% (56.3% and 37.5% if ongoing sanctions and those where no data was available are excluded). Under the most restrictive definition where the Target conceded to some or all of the Sender's demands, the success rate is 27.2% (37.5% if ongoing/indeterminate are excluded). When any negotiated settlement is considered a success, the success rate rises to 40.8% (56.3%). Finally, when the sanction is considered successful if the 1-10 score for the sanctioner exceeds that of the target, indicating that the sanctioner is now relatively better off, the success rate is 32.2% (or 44%).

While these numbers vary significantly, they seem to suggest that sanctions are not a silver bullet for resolving political differences. Even with the most generous criterion of success, they are only effective slightly over half of cases while at their worst they can be successful in just 5% of cases. While few authors are as critical as Pape, there still seems to be some agreement that sanctions are only successful in a minority of cases.

### **Limitations of the Data**

Of course, numbers alone are far from definitive when it comes to such subjective forms of analysis. Without the wider context for how the numbers are collected, how they're analyzed, and what the alternatives are, the success rate alone is of limited use. On that front, it is important to present the holes in the existing data and how they may affect our judgments.

First, there may be a significant sampling bias at play. Cases where sanctions were threatened but never implemented are likely underrepresented in the sample because of the difficulty of detecting them (Drezner 2003). Leaders could potentially convey information through channels unavailable to outside observers or make their threats implied rather than stated outright. Because a targeted leader would rather avoid being sanctioned, they may be willing to make the necessary concessions thanks to the threat alone, meaning what would have been a successful case of sanctions would go unnoticed by existing data. If true, this would mean that the observed success rate is systematically lower than the actual success rate.

In addition, potential targets may adjust their policies ahead of time to avoid being threatened. Knowing that taking a certain action would risk sanctions being imposed, the target may choose to avoid that action as the implied threat of sanctions was enough to cause a shift in policy, even if that shift goes unobserved. Like the previous example, this would imply observed cases of sanctions are systematically less effective than actual cases.

Finally, while less an issue in large-n datasets, the relative weight given to cases may impact judgments as to their success. Because the most well known and widely studied cases of sanctions tend to be those with very salient issues at stake —often demanding complete regime change or termination of nuclear weapons programs— the degree to which issue salience impacts outcomes will likely skew perceptions in that direction. In such cases, the importance of the issue tends to decrease the success of sanctions as the target will be less likely to concede, especially when doing so would endanger the continued security and survival of the regime, while the sanctioner, requiring more resources in order to gain the desired concessions, will be more likely to give in. Knowing this, cases with the greatest recognition —generally on account of their greater issue salience— are also those most likely to fail, possibly overstating the ineffectiveness of sanctions in both the public eye and in case studies using recognizable examples of sanctions (Baldwin 1985).

Another added difficulty of evaluating the sanctions is the role of supplementary methods. Sanctions are rarely employed on their own, often being paired with diplomatic efforts to isolate the target or with military threats(Lektzian and Sprecher 2007). Of course, when such methods are used it becomes difficult to disentangle the effects of one method from those of another. A leader may have offered concessions in exchange for the end of sanctions, but it may have also been triggered by diplomatic isolation or a fear of armed conflict rather than the sanctions themselves. This would suggest that the success of sanctions, if not properly detached from supplementary methods, are likely to have their successes exaggerated.

The last difficulty in observing the effect of sanctions is the temporal aspect of their imposition. While data is available for many of the initial conditions and end results of sanctions, many of the actual processes that occur within the targeted economy have been neglected by the existing literature(Peksen 2019). How targets adapt to sanctions and how senders adjust the

sanctions in turn are both crucial elements but they are less understood than the conditions at the beginning and end of sanction. While it is hard to say whether having this information would make sanctions appear more or less successful, it at least suggests that there may be significant uncertainty in either direction.

### **In Defense of Failures**

While neither success rate is impressive at a first glance nor do the many analytical shortcomings inspire confidence, it is important that we judge sanctions by their relative effectiveness and efficiency rather than just their absolute likelihood of success. The effectiveness of alternate methods and the tradeoff between resources needed and results gained is important to look at. A sanction with a 30% success rate, while far from reliable, may still be considered useful if the best alternative has only a 20% chance of success. Additionally, the relative cost of each method must be considered. Even in cases where sanctions are less effective than other methods, they may still be more efficient thanks to lower costs. A military intervention, for example, may have a greater chance of attaining its goal but could also require far more resources to accomplish. From this perspective, even sanctions that aren't likely to succeed could still be worth pursuing when other considerations are taken into account.

### **Why use Sanctions?**

With so many obvious drawbacks and uncertainties, it might surprise many that sanctions are actually a very common instrument of statecraft and have actually grown in popularity in recent decades (Morgan et al. 2014). When the particular benefits that sanctions have over alternative methods are explained, this present and rising popularity begins to make much more sense.

Unlike other common tools in foreign policy, sanctions are relatively inexpensive to implement. Compared to the expenses of military interventions, which require both high costs for implementation and large investments before it even becomes a viable option, sanctions can be implemented at a relatively low cost and that cost can be easily scaled depending on the scope involved. With that, sanctioners have a variety of options at their disposal regarding cost and can tailor their policy to a degree impossible for other methods. Additionally, the sanctioner tends to bear relatively little of the cost as, for most methods, the economic harm is mostly inflicted on domestic consumers and exporters. While this is still potentially damaging, both for political and economic reasons, the harm is likely to be spread over a large number of people (in which case the harm may be too little for each person to care about individually) or concentrated amongst a small group with economic ties to the target (who are less likely to pose a political threat given their size).

While some methods may still be cheaper —diplomatic statements for example— sanctions do have the benefit of expressing the same sentiments but in a way that more firmly signals the sanctioner's intent. Precisely because diplomacy is inexpensive, it is liable to be viewed more as 'cheap talk' than as a realistic threat to the target. While still inexpensive, sanctions can signal the same intent as diplomacy but, by incurring some tangible costs, the sanctioner can make their threat much more believable to the target (Drezner 2003). By signalling intent, sanctions may also serve as a stepping stone towards further escalation if demands are not met. Either by warming the public up to the idea of escalated conflict, giving the target the opportunity to concede before a costly war is declared, or allowing time to coordinate with allies in the potential conflict, sanctions can ease the movement towards further escalation. While the possibility of escalation might exaggerate the success of sanctions,

confounding it with the success of the potential escalation, this is a concern for the evaluation of sanctions as a method, not for evaluating their popularity.

Finally, just as sanctions are less costly than war in financial terms, they may also be cheaper in political terms. Preferring small economic harm over the risk of injury or death or the increased taxes and lowered standards of living needed to finance war, domestic populations may very likely prefer sanctions over more forceful methods and may be willing to reward leaders that share those preferences. Additionally, populations may be willing to reward their own governments if they target countries and leaders that are disliked. With sanctions providing governments an opportunity to signal their opposition to an unpopular foreign country or leader, perhaps even using sanctions as a symbolic act rather than a genuine effort to change policy (Lindsay 1986), they may be able to generate political capital in excess of what they required for the implementation of sanctions as evidenced by the rise in presidential approval ratings when sanctions are imposed (Whang 2011). This is further supported by the fact that democracies are more likely to initiate sanctions compared to nondemocratic regimes (Cox and Drury 2006), suggesting that public support may be a motivating factor, and that democracies disproportionately target nondemocracies when they do initiate sanctions (Goenner 2007).

Of course, the desirability of sanctions for a leader is not always in harmony with their ability to fulfill the stated goals of the sanctions. As stated above, either by acting as a stepping stone towards some larger political objective (war, for example) or to improve the standing of the leader in the sanctioning country (by choosing an unpopular target) the actual motivation behind the sanctions might not align with the actual concessions it purports to gain. If the true purpose behind such sanctions is actually some unstated goal, judging the success of sanctions by their ability to fulfill the stated goal is clearly inaccurate. Of course, there is little way to remedy this flaw as, in cases where the true objective of sanctions differs from the stated goal, the general

public and therefore those collecting the data will only know the stated purpose and therefore lack the ability to analyze it on more accurate terms. In this way, the attractive aspects of sanctions as a policy option may actually cause sanctions to be seen as less effective than they actually are.

### **III: Autocracies - Behavior and Responses**

The below section describes one common model of regime behavior as a foundation for analyzing how leaders gain and maintain their power. Afterwards, the impact of sanctions is applied to the model so as to illustrate how regimes are expected to respond. These responses are then broken down by specific types of autocratic regimes. In so doing, this section both describes the literature regarding the behavior of autocratic regimes and merges it with the literature on economic sanctions in order to illustrate how the findings from each one can complement one another and generate testable hypotheses for how regimes will respond to and be affected by sanctions.

#### **Modeling Regime Behavior**

The success and failure of sanctions is not a result of the economic harm they inflict but rather the political shifts they engender in the targeted regime. While economic harm doubtless plays a role in bringing about these shifts, it is only the means by which the real goal is achieved, not the goal itself. Judging sanctions on their capacity to inflict harm misses the fact that the type of harm inflicted can vary significantly in its ability to create political changes in the targeted regime. To fully understand this, it is important that we look towards the domestic structures and motivations of leaders to understand how the imposition of sanctions affects these shifts.

In describing the motivations of leaders and the way in which power is organized, this paper draws heavily from the Selectorate Theory as proposed by Bueno de Mesquita, Smith, Siverson, and Morrow in *The Logic of Political Survival*. By their model, the key goal of any leader is to maximize their own power. While far from the only goal leaders may have, maintaining power must always be a priority as, without power, the leader cannot fulfill any of their other objectives. The methods needed to stay in power will vary significantly between political systems but Bueno de Mesquita et al. argue that, regardless of whether maintaining power means winning reelection, warding off coups, or preventing revolutions, the central methods by which leaders try to maintain power are consistent across all political systems.

Even while the mechanics of maintaining power vary, many of the core considerations stay the same. Leaders stay in power because of coalitions of interest groups that support the leader in exchange for various benefits. Without soldiers and police, a leader would be vulnerable to insurrection. Without bureaucrats and administrators, a leader could not enforce their policies or accumulate resources. Without investors and businesses, there might not be enough resources to be extracted and distributed. No matter what priorities a leader has, they must share their power with other groups both in and out of government to remain in power and extract the benefits that incumbency offers.

Should a leader ignore the interests of all other groups in their country, these groups would have ample reason to unite to overthrow the leader, replacing them with one more amenable to their interests. While not every interest needs to be represented, a leader needs to be backed by a 'winning coalition' that has a plurality of power (as ill defined as such a term may be in this context) lest a challenger organize a new coalition and oust the incumbent. Since any interest group is sure to benefit from having a leader amenable to their interests, they can be assumed to pursue such a course so long as there are no obstacles to doing so.



While Bueno de Mesquita et al. mostly pay attention to the patronage offered by the leader towards members of their coalition, this paper also incorporates the potential to spend resources on repression instead as laid out by Ronald Wintrobe in *The Political Economy of Dictatorship*. By Wintrobe's account, leaders divide their resources between patronage—in which they offer benefits to those within the coalition—as well as repression—involving limiting the ability of those outside the coalition from organizing against the leader's coalition. Both can be pursued at the same time with the exact distribution determined by the priorities and advantages of the regime in question.

The first option, patronage, involves keeping groups already loyal to the regime from switching their allegiance. Patronage can include brazen methods such as bribery, to more innocuous benefits such as political appointments, favorable policies, preferential treatment, and positive lip service. Depending on how broad the coalition is, patronage could even be extended towards creating public welfare systems, charities, or investing in public goods.

The alternative option, repression, involves spending resources in a way that reduces the ability of those outside the coalition from mounting a challenge to the incumbent leader. Such approaches can include expropriation to reduce the resources available to the challengers, limiting their ability to communicate and organize with other disaffected groups, using propaganda to make them appear a less valuable ally for other groups to court, or outright dismantling of the other groups through deportations, imprisonment, and other heavy-handed measures. Rather than strengthening the incumbent coalition outright, these measures work by weakening other groups, thereby putting the leadership in a better relative position even if no absolute gains have been made.

A regime's choice regarding how to divide its spending between these two options depends mostly on the political system and institutions that the leader is beholden to

(Escriba-Folch 2012). Democracies, for example, are unable to effectively wield repression as a tool of statecraft thanks to checks on the government's power. They instead rely on patronage, especially on the provision of public goods and other policies that deliver widespread benefits. Because of the large number of interest groups present in democracies (each voter could be an interest group if you define it broadly enough), individually bribing every supporter would be both expensive and logistically difficult to implement, especially when other policies (secret ballots for instance) might make it impossible to accurately identify who is and isn't a supporter. Rather, democratic leaders garner support by providing public goods (security, infrastructure, welfare spending) that appeal to large portions of the electorate. While many of the benefits may go to non-supporters, such spending usually has a disproportionate impact on the groups the leader is trying to sway, thereby securing their support in future elections either for that leader in question or those of the same political party.

Autocracies, by contrast, have fewer constraints on their ability to utilize repression and typically have much smaller coalitions, making more direct forms of patronage a viable option. With more options at their disposal, autocracies tend to show a much greater variance in their methods and priorities for spending. On that front, the type of spending that does occur is dependent more on the exact subcategory of autocracy the country belongs to.

Military regimes tend to spend highly on repression since their power structure is concentrated in the very entity executing that repression. Whereas empowering the military can be a potent risk for other autocrats —military leaders are probably the most common instigators of coups— the risk is significantly reduced when the leader is a part of the military. As such, repression is a much more desirable method and, within that category, spending normally takes the form of heavy-handed use of force.

Single-Party regimes, while hardly averse to repression, tend to be much less prone to it than their military peers. Rather, the survival of Single-Party regimes relies more on their ability to wield patronage. While repression still occurs through hostile propaganda and silencing of dissidents, going further is risky because it empowers the military relative to the party. Patronage becomes a much more desirable option as it improves the ability of the regime to fulfill its other priorities. Since such regimes rely on the creation of institutions for long-term survival (a strong party, ideological conformity, etc) creating reliable and friendly elements within the population can be much more useful than the whack-a-mole strategy of constant repression (Wintrobe 2012). To create institutions for long-term survival, regime friendly propaganda and creation of economic inducements for loyalty (bribes, government contracts & jobs, economic growth) can be much more compelling forms of control.

Finally, Personalist regimes tend to be the most mixed in their spending priorities. Lacking both the institutional framework of Single-Party regimes and the direct control of the military found in Military regimes, Personalist regimes stay in power primarily through short-term arrangements centered around a charismatic leader rather than long-term commitments between the whole coalition (Escriba-Folch 2012). Opponents will be repressed and bribes and other inducements will be given to supporters as needed to handle the regime's immediate concerns.

### **How Sanctions Change Spending**

The balance of spending between patronage and repression is rarely constant and instead changes based on the exact conditions faced by the regime. A growing opposition may entail greater spending on repression to limit their strength or it may lead to increased patronage so as to expand the coalition or shore up the loyalty of those already within it.

Sanctions, by causing a shock in the target economy, are likely to generate such shifts in both the resources available to the target regime and, by extension, the balance of power within the targeted country.

The first and most obvious way sanctions will impact the spending of the regime is by limiting the total amount of resources available. Because sanctions are widely recognized to harm the economy of their targets, it is likely that the regime will be able to draw fewer resources from the now reduced economy. Ultimately, this leaves fewer resources available for spending on both patronage and repression, putting the regime in a more dangerous position so long as everything else is held equal. The regime may opt to either reduce its total spending, thereby reducing its ability to foster a desirable political atmosphere. Alternatively, the regime may seek to maintain (or even increase) its level of spending by tapping into new sources of revenue or trimming spending from their previous budgets that may have helped the opposition(Oechslin 2014). Of course, the fact that they did not access such resources before implies that there were costs to doing so. Utilizing these new sources (confiscation of property, raising taxes, black market profiteering) may be preferable to reducing spending, but is still worse than the pre-sanctions status quo as it can potentially aggravate existing enemies and create new ones.

In addition to an absolute decline in resources, there is also the possibility of relative losses. While sanctions harm the economy as a whole, the distribution of harm is not always equal. If the regime and its supporters are disproportionately harmed by sanctions compared to the regime's opponents, the resulting balance of resources could render the opposition a stronger force than the regime, making the current winning coalition unviable and heightening the risk that the leader will be ousted. Even if the balance does not tip entirely, a relatively stronger opposition might be able to leverage its improved position towards resisting repression,

buying off new supporters, and eventually shifting the balance of power even further in its direction.

Besides simply harming the absolute and relative amount of resources, sanctions can also change spending by adjusting the price of patronage and repression (Kaempfer et al. 2004). If sanctions were to disproportionately harm opponents of the regime, thereby reducing the amount of resources they have available to threaten the leader's survival, or if they trigger a 'rally around the flag' effect in the country, repression may become cheaper. Since the targets of the repression will have fewer resources to protect themselves and the population may be less critical of the regime's actions thanks to foreign threats, repression may become a more cost effective option and actually increase security as a result of sanctions. Alternatively, sanctions that disproportionately harm the regime's finances or make it less popular may increase the cost of repressions. Since those targeted will be relatively better funded than they were before sanctions, it will take more resources to achieve the same level of repression and, with greater unpopularity, opponents of the regime may be more emboldened to speak out and less responsive to threats thereby requiring more resources to maintain the pre-sanctions level of opposition.

The cost of patronage may also be responsive to the impact of sanctions. If sanctions were to disproportionately harm dissidents and create a 'rally around the flag effect' it may make it cheaper for the regime to gain support. Because opponents may be more receptive to positive inducements in their resource-deprived state and the population at large may become less critical of regime-friendly propaganda, the cost of securing loyalty might fall as a result of sanctions. Likewise, sanctions that disproportionately harm the regime and reduce its popularity may increase the costs of patronage. Since opponents now have more resources at their disposal to buy loyalty, the incumbent regime may need to offer additional resources to keep its

coalition intact, either leading to fewer interest groups induced to loyalty or a decline in spending in repression to make up for the increased patronage costs.

With the shift in both the resources available to the regime and the cost effectiveness of these resources, regimes will typically adjust their spending priorities in response to these changes to reach their security-maximizing point. How the balance of spending changes and the amount of security it buys are mostly dependent on who is most impacted by the sanctions, the effect the sanctions have on the regime's popularity, and the regime's ability to generate the resources to fund their objectives.

### **From Sanctions to Negotiations**

Sanctions manage to achieve their aims because they can leverage the increased risk of losing power as a result of the damage to the regime's spending against the potential losses of acquiescing to the sanctioner's policy demands. By threatening the survival of the regime, sanctions hope to make acquiescence to the sanctioner's demands preferable to the risks of continued sanctions. Fearing that they will be ousted from power—and literature does suggest that this is a realistic fear (Marinov 2005)—leaders will consider whether the demands of the sanctioner are worth the tradeoff of continuing the sanctions. If the demands are costlier to the regime than the sanctions themselves, they will refuse to comply. Likewise, if the sanctions are costlier than the demands, the regime will accept the terms in exchange for the termination of sanctions (Kirshner 1997). Should they continue to refuse, they run the risk of being ousted from power as their successors secure an end to the sanctions instead (McGillivray and Stam 2004). Importantly, the cost of compliance includes not only the cost of the demand itself but also the costs associated with compliance—losing face, signalling weakness and vulnerability—

meaning that even when the concession itself is not valuable, merely revealing a willingness to concede can still harm the regime's prospects for survival.

Of course, concessions will only be given by the target when they are actually disadvantaged by the sanctions. In the best case scenario for the sanctioner, the resources of the regime will fall at a greater rate than the resources of their opponents. This should weaken the regime's domestic position and render them more amenable to negotiation. Likewise, sanctions are likely to work when the cost of both patronage and repression have increased, thereby making the regime's lack of resources an even greater problem as it reduces the total amount of security that can be purchased. Faced with greater threats thanks to the empowerment of the regime's foes and the reduction in the regime's capacity to cope with them, sanctions should make the regime more willing to come to an agreement or, if negotiation fails, sanctions may increase the chances that a new regime—one more amenable to the interests of the sanctioner—will come to power and offer the desired concessions.

Sanctions can also fail and the reasons why they may do so are the mirror image of why they would succeed. First, a fall in the resources available to the regime's opponents relative to the regime itself may place the regime in a greater position than they were before sanctions were imposed. Secondly, the cost of patronage and repression may fall as a result of sanctions, making the resources available to the regime capable of buying more security than what was possible before. With a strengthened security position thanks to the change in resources, sanctions may actually become a net positive for some leaders and thus they will be unlikely to concede to any demands. In such a case, the sanctions may even be counterproductive as the target now has the security to take objectionable actions that may have been unfeasible in the security situation prior to sanctions.

#### **IV: Opposition Groups - Undermining the Autocrat**

Taking the same approach as the above section, this section seeks to describe how opposition groups fit into the model. Rather than cover how they are passively affected by sanctions and the regime's response to them, this section describes the actions actually taken by opposition groups so as to maximize their potential benefit or minimize potential losses from the sanctions. In so doing, this section adds additional depth to the above model and shows the importance of parties besides the sanctioner and target regime.

##### **Actions by the Opposition**

Of course, opposition groups are not passive bystanders to this affair. Rather, they also participate in this system as well, only their scope for action is limited by the institutional constraints. Just as the regime may put resources towards repression, opponents may put resources towards resisting that repression through private forces, sabotage, and other measures designed to weaken the regime. Likewise for patronage, opponents may try to 'outbid' the regime for the loyalty of interest groups, whether through tangible gains or through promises of rewards once the opposition is put into power (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003). If the regime does not spend enough on repression, they may find that the opposition has inflicted too much harm through sabotage or that they were able to organize and communicate effectively due to the lack of restrictions. Likewise, underspending on patronage may lead to allies being bought off, either joining the opposition directly or plotting the regime's collapse from the inside.

##### **Limitations for the Opposition**

It seems odd that autocracies, despite relying on small coalitions for maintaining power, manage to so effectively maintain control. If their coalition has only a plurality of power, the



opposition should, with the resources at their disposal, be able to assemble a slightly larger coalition to resist them. In turn, the same should occur with new opposition groups until coalitions are as large as possible. Yet, this is rarely the case. The core issue here is one of coordination. As mentioned earlier, leaders manage to remain in power by having a coalition with the plurality of power. It is this distinction between a plurality and a majority frames the issue. Even if the sum power of all groups outside the coalition exceeded that of the coalition, it would not be sufficient unless they were able to pool their resources together in a concerted effort. Both because of the objectives of the groups involved and the intentional actions of the regime, opposition groups are not often able to assemble the coalition needed to do so.

The first reason is simply a matter of sharing interests. While multiple parties may share goals in some respects (removing the current regime, for example) their other goals might conflict in a way that renders a coalition between them impossible. They may have contradictory objectives such that, even if they were able to come to an agreement, the fear that one would betray the other in order to fulfill their objectives may render such an arrangement unfeasible. Alternatively, one party may prefer the status quo over the potential leadership of certain other groups, believing that such groups may be more harmful for their goals than the current regime is.

The second possibility is that the regime, through the use of repression, can intentionally restrict the opposition's ability to mobilize. By censoring criticism of the regime, opposition groups may be unable to identify potential partners and, even if they are identified, there is always a risk that it may simply be a trap set by the regime seeking to identify and punish potential opponents. By restricting the capacity for opposition groups to identify, organize, and act, the regime can create a collective action problem within the opposition. No single group wants to act, thereby risking harm to itself, unless it can be assured that other groups are

prepared to act as well. By restricting communication, each group cannot be certain that they will have enough support if they make the first move and thus, even if such support does exist, no group will be willing to take the action required (Olson 1971).

In addition to the risk of a failed bid for power, opposition groups must also consider the potential benefits of putting aside their issues and joining the coalition. Just as repression can increase the risks of resistance, patronage can decrease the potential benefits. While toppling the current regime and emerging as a figure in the new coalition can be highly lucrative, it can also be highly dangerous. If patronage is generous enough, it may render the costs of opposition too high to justify the benefits relative to giving in.

While deposing autocrats might be difficult under normal circumstances, the imposition of sanctions can change the political calculus rather significantly. As mentioned in the previous section, sanctions have the potential of reducing the resources available to the regime for patronage and repression as well as decreasing the effectiveness of either method. In such a scenario, the regime will be less able to repress the opposition, thereby increasing the chances that opposition groups may manage to resolve the collective action problem, or they may be less able to buy support, essentially making opposition a more cost-effective option for some groups. Either way, sanctions do have the potential to not only weaken the incumbent regime but also to strengthen its opponents and provide them with the opportunities to exercise their newfound strength.

### **Blowback and Counterproductive Sanctions**

Just as sanctions can weaken the regime, tilting the balance of power in favor of the opposition, the opposite can also occur. If sanctions disproportionately harm the opposition, either through a relative decline in available resources or through reducing the regime's costs of

implementing repression and patronage, the sanctioner could potentially create a situation where their objectives are not only unfulfilled but they are actually less likely to be achieved than under the status quo. With the opposition weakened, the sanctioner has little available to bargain and is unlikely to emerge successful, either continuing the sanction for an indefinite period of time, thereby causing economic harm to both themselves and the Target, or withdrawing the sanctions, effectively giving the Target both the prestige of victory as well as a more secure political situation at home.

Such harm can come through many means. One such possibility is that, even if the regime is disproportionately harmed in financial terms, this might not perfectly translate to capacity to wield power. A decline in the resources available to the opposition, even if relatively less than the decline faced by the incumbent coalition, might actually leave the opposition destitute in absolute terms, reducing their ability to resist. In such conditions, opposition groups might be left in a position where they are worse off than before sanctions were initiated and might be forced to take patronage from the regime, effectively securing the incumbent's grip on power.

Besides the impact on power politics, there is also the matter of humanitarian costs for the country as a whole. Sanctions, thanks to the economic damage they create, can leave significant portions of the population destitute, along with all the negative consequences that may come of that. Research shows that sanctions reduce health outcomes in targeted countries, for example, both as access to medicine is reduced and regimes, in response to sanctions, divert spending away from health and towards more salient issues. Successful or not, sanctions can often come with a price tag expressed, not in dollars, but in human lives. Regardless of whether the sanctions are worth it in the end, it is still important that such costs be considered.

Additionally, even successful sanctions might cause negative effects by pushing the regime towards riskier and/or more dangerous behaviors. Fearing the loss of power, the regime may be willing to take actions that, under normal circumstances would have been too harmful to justify the benefits yet, with the new demands imposed by sanctions, are now worth the price even as the actual humanitarian costs escalate. Confiscation of property is one common way that regimes substitute lost revenue during sanctions, leading to significant harm to those affected. Additionally, regimes may escalate repression during sanctions in an attempt to maintain control, often worsening conditions for those being repressed.

Finally, if the sanctions end up being counterproductive, empowering the regime instead of weakening it, this may give the regime the power to inflict even greater harm on the population (Peksen 2017). Further suspension of rights, decreased spending on public goods, and other restrictions may easily result from the weakened opposition leaving the population worse off than if the autocrat had never been challenged and sanctions never imposed.

## **V: Strategies and Suggestions for Sanctions Policy**

With the model being used fully fleshed out, this section expands on the discussion of sanctions from Section II, focusing more specifically on the key variables that the literature cites as reasons for the success and failure of sanctions. These variables are described, when possible, in the context of the model above. In so doing, this section offers explanations and arguments as to why sanctions may or may not work under certain contexts and shows where gaps in data and in theory need to be addressed.

## **Vulnerability to Sanctions**

While the general framework of regimes has already been outlined above, it is important to note that, by virtue of their different spending priorities and costs of repression/patronage, not all regimes are equally impacted by sanctions. Even beyond regime type, other variables such as the relationship between the sanctioner and target and economic variables within the Target state are also relevant.

When it comes to regime type, it matters both whether the country is an autocracy but also what type of autocracy it is. Of the three types of autocracies that the literature often distinguished between —Personalist, Single-Party, and Military regimes— most agree that Personalist regimes are the most susceptible to sanctions while Single-Party and Military regimes are less impacted (Peksen 2019, Allen 2008, Escriba-Folch and Wright 2010). Because they lack strong institutions, Personalist regimes have far fewer avenues available when responding to sanctions. Often lacking a powerful state apparatus, Personalist leaders tend to rely more heavily on easy to collect sources of revenue such as import duties and can be swayed more easily by external enticements such as foreign aid (Escriba-Folch 2010). Because of this, the imposition of sanctions harms their finances much more than for other regime types and, lacking a strong state, they have less ability to compensate for those losses elsewhere. Single-Party and Military regimes don't share these vulnerabilities and are therefore much less susceptible. Even with less susceptibility on average, that does not necessarily mean immunity with Allen arguing that autocracies, by nature of their closed political systems, can more easily hide their weaknesses and send false signals making the results of sanctions far more difficult to predict in autocratic systems. It is therefore important to keep in mind that non-personalist autocracies may still be valid targets, only that the results will be more difficult to predict ahead of time.

In addition to broader political structures, the short term conditions also matter. If mass unrest is supposed to be the main avenue through which sanctions function, then they should, as Major (2012) finds, be more effective when implemented at a time when opposition to the regime is already visible. Unlike democracies where such public displays are normal, open airing of discontent in autocracies instead suggests that the opposition is in a relatively strong position (Dorsch and Maarek 2018) and that, by nudging the regime further by using sanctions, success is much more likely than during normal circumstances.

In addition to regime type, the economic structures of the target also matter. One key consideration is the economic foundations of the regime being targeted. As Rogowski (1987) argues, the effectiveness of sanctions is determined by the relative scarcity of the regime's resources on the world market compared to within the country. If the regime relies on resources that are relatively scarce in global terms, meaning they will be more expensive when sold abroad than at home, restricting trade will have a much greater effect on their available resources since they will be unable to maintain their income through domestic revenue. On the contrary, if the regime is dependent on goods that are relatively abundant, either they will not be coerced since they can still earn sufficient revenue through domestic sales or sanctions will not occur anyway since the regime, seeking to maximize its economic well-being, will have already restricted trade on its own terms. This process also works in reverse when it comes to the opposition. When opposition groups control resources that are relatively scarce on world markets, sanctions are likely to hurt their position thanks to the loss of resources, while they may stand to gain if their resources are relatively common, forcing domestic groups to now purchase those resources at a premium (Lektzian and Patterson 2015).

In addition to the scarcity of their resources, the institutions securing those resources are also critical. Peksen and Son (2015) note that sanctions, in addition to their fiscal costs, also

have a significant impact on the target's financial system, heightening the risk of inflation and possibly currency crises. With such risks, the strengths of a country's financial institutions may be a significant factor as they are under normal circumstances however further research is necessary to see whether this holds true when exposed to sanctions.

In addition to domestic factors, international factors might also play a role. The importance of ties between the sanctioner and target before sanctions, both economic and political, are likely to have an impact on the success of sanctions. When the sanctioner is a major trading partner of the target before sanctions are initiated, the probability that sanctions will succeed increases thanks to an increased cost of resistance to the sanctions prompted by the costs of securing new trading partners (McLean and Whang 2010). Additionally, even if the sanctioner is not a close trading partner, they can still obtain a similar effect by securing the cooperation of countries that are close trading partners with the Target. Alternatively, others have suggested that this effect is contingent on the availability of alternative trading partners and that, in many cases, close trade relationships are not enough. In cases where the Target is able to easily substitute their trade with the sanctioner by trading with a third party, prospects for success are slim. As a result, sanctions tend to be more effective when they also reduce the target's access to third party markets (Peksen and Peterson 2016). Importantly, one key method of doing so may be getting other countries on board with a multilateral sanction as it both restrains their willingness and ability to make up for the lost trade with the sanctioner as well as increasing the amount of trade that the target would need to make up for. In addition, there is also a concern that other countries may engage in 'sanctions busting' by filling whatever niche the sanctioner left behind however the literature disagrees as to whether sanctions busting is likely to come from allies, who may be easier to form multilateral sanctions with (Early 2009) or if

network effects reduce trade between allies and Targets even when they are unilateral in nature (Yang et al. 2009).

Political relationships are also a key concern in this regard. There is a general agreement that, because of the value of positive relationships and the expectation of low conflict, sanctions will actually be more effective against allies than enemies. Because countries anticipate frequent conflicts with their adversaries, they will both prepare for sanctions ahead of time and, when sanctions are initiated, they will be less likely to make concessions as they fear whatever they surrender will simply be used against them the next time conflict occurs (Drezner 1999). Rather, sanctions will be most effective when targeting countries which do not anticipate future conflicts, i.e. allies and the warmer the relationship, the greater chance that the target will give in to the sanctioner's demand (Jing et al. 2003). Because such countries will be unwilling to sever relations, the Target may surrender even when they know that they could resist sanctions whereas opponents may continue resistance even when they know that the sanctioner will not give in (Whang 2010).

Finally, regarding the targeting of specific factions within the Target country, there is some debate as to which groups should be attacked. While most suggest that damage against the regime should be maximized while damage against the opposition should be minimized, there is an additional view stating that sanctions should be directed against those that belong to neither group—that is, sanctions should inflict harm on the innocent bystanders (Major and McGann 2005). As they argue, sanctions will be most effective when they bring the most resources to the opposition. Instead of doing so by reducing the resources of the regime, they instead suggest that, by hurting the bystanders, they will join the opposition so as to pressure the leadership to change whatever policy prompted the sanctions. So long as the influx of resources that comes from adding new groups to the opposition exceeds the economic harm



inflicted on existing members, targeting bystanders should actually have a greater marginal effect than targeting the regime. Importantly, this can also translate to far more humanitarian harm and thus warrants special care if one truly believes this is the most effective course of action.

### **Types of Sanctions**

When deciding what type of sanction is most useful, the answer depends a great deal on the strengths and weaknesses of the countries involved. Government-to-government transfers are perhaps the most obvious example of this as their success is highly dependent on how much is already being transferred. Unless there is some exceptional case where a government is giving the other resources so as to weaponize it in the future—a rather unorthodox plan—this factor can be taken as exogenous and is therefore of little use to crafting sanctions policies.

Also of importance is the debate between unilateral and multilateral sanctions. While most agree that multilateral sanctions are more effective at harming the target economy, the ties to concessions are still reasonable, but much more debatable. With the sometimes high cost of getting other countries on board with a sanctions attempt (Martin 1992), there is a possibility that multilateral sanctions might not be worth the cost. Furthermore, as Drezner (2000) argues, multilateral sanctions are prone to falling apart as some countries, while willing to join the sanctions, may prove less willing once sanctions have actually been implemented. Seeing potential fractures within the sanctioning alliance, the target may instead choose to wait, anticipating that either the sanction will fall apart or that it will weaken enough to come to a more favorable compromise. The key caveat is when an IGO is also involved and is able to provide a framework for sanctions capable of punishing whatever countries shirk their responsibilities,

making the case not for multilateral sanctions in general but only ones backed by a powerful IGO.

When deciding the best method, the biggest debate in the literature is in deciding between targeted or comprehensive sanctions. Proponents of the former argue that, because of the precision they can offer, targeted sanctions can more effectively target those with influence over government policy and minimize harm to other parties. Thanks to this, targeted sanctions offer a relatively inexpensive, humanitarian, and precise method of applying pressure. This is supported even more by suggestions that the size of the sanction does not actually impact the Target's decision to concede (Tsebelis 1990), thereby making targeted sanctions just a cheaper way of obtaining the same result. The principal rebuttal to this is that targeted sanctions, by being so narrow in their application, can put too much faith in just one avenue of influence. As Drezner (2011) points out, targeted sanctions rely entirely on elite dissatisfaction to generate the desired concessions whereas comprehensive sanctions, while more costly, can provide several ways that concessions can be granted such as through mass unrest, regime change, and more.

### **Minimizing Blowback**

One of the last key concerns when implementing sanctions is how to manage the damage they may inflict to humanitarian outcomes. Faced with reduced resources and increased political threats, leaders often respond to sanctions by taking action against their own populations. Leaders may pursue predatory policies aimed at confiscating the resources of real and potential threats (Peksen 2017), increase spending on repression to keep dissidents in check (Wood 2008), and even without the leader's involvement, sanctions may lead to other negative health consequences as a result of economic damage to the general public (Allen and Lektzian 2012).

While the humanitarian effects of sanctions are well documented, there is not much detail on how they can be avoided other than to refrain from sanctions entirely. Allen and Letzkian at least suggest the use of targeted sanctions as an alternative since their economic impact is far lower and more concentrated however on that front there is a concern that, by avoiding harm to the general public, sanctions may undermine themselves by failing to generate the opposition necessary to actually create a change in policy as Major and McGann argued in their piece on targeting bystanders.

Just like any method, there will always be some negative effects. The point in identifying the potential harm is not to suggest that sanctions are inherently bad and should not be used, rather it is more suggestive that the potential for harm should be known when deciding whether to implement sanctions. If the benefits from the sanctions are worth the potential humanitarian costs, then an argument for sanctions can still be made. Additionally, there is even the possibility that sanctions can be ultimately beneficial for humanitarian goals if the concessions demanded are designed as such. When it comes to sanctions aimed at promoting democracy, von Soest and Wahman (2015) suggest that such sanctions tend to increase levels of democracy within the target. Even if the humanitarian costs previously mentioned are entirely accurate, cases like those von Soest and Wahman observe show that that damage may still be justifiable in some cases.

Ultimately, the humanitarian harm is less an excuse for avoiding sanctions altogether and more a way of showing that there is more at play than the sanctions succeeding or failing. Regardless of the outcome, there will be harm to innocent parties and the consideration here is to figure out when such harm is worth the benefits sanctions may offer.

## **VI: Destabilizing Sanctions - An Illustration**

The below section draws examples from the Threat and Imposition of Economic Sanctions (TIES) dataset covering sanctions specifically aimed at destabilizing the target regime. In so doing, this section provides real-world context for these sanctions and tries to show where the data supports and conflicts with the theories presented in earlier sections. In addition, this section describes gaps in the data that limit the extent to which theory can be fully illustrated and suggests avenues for improvement.

### **Available Data**

While earlier discussion has been devoted to the destabilizing effects of sanctions, there is also a need to consider destabilization as the stated goal. In such cases, the importance of the above suggestions are likely to be of much greater importance as destabilization becomes the express purpose behind the sanctions rather than a means to some more benign goal and thus an understanding of the internal dynamics of the regime and the effect sanctions will have on it cannot be neglected.

All data below comes from the Threat and Imposition of Economic Sanctions (TIES) dataset version 4.0, compiled by Morgan, Bapat, and Kobayashi. The dataset covers over 1,400 cases of sanctions all initiated between 1945 and 2005. Of these cases, I have limited this paper to looking at just the 54 cases where 'Destabilize Regime' was coded as the reason for the sanctions to be imposed.

In each case, there are a handful of relevant variables. Each one is primarily defined by the sending country (or countries), a single target state, a date range, and the issues under dispute. The 'Sender' variable includes up to 5 countries deemed most responsible for imposing sanctions and, where one sender is considered the main force behind the sanctions, that

country is coded as the 'Primary Sender.' The 'Target State' variable, by contrast, can include only one country. 'Date' is simply the timespan between the initiation of sanctions and, unless they're ongoing, the termination of sanctions. Finally, the 'Issue' variable includes up to three reasons the sender(s) initiated the sanctions in question as selected from a list of 15 possible motives.

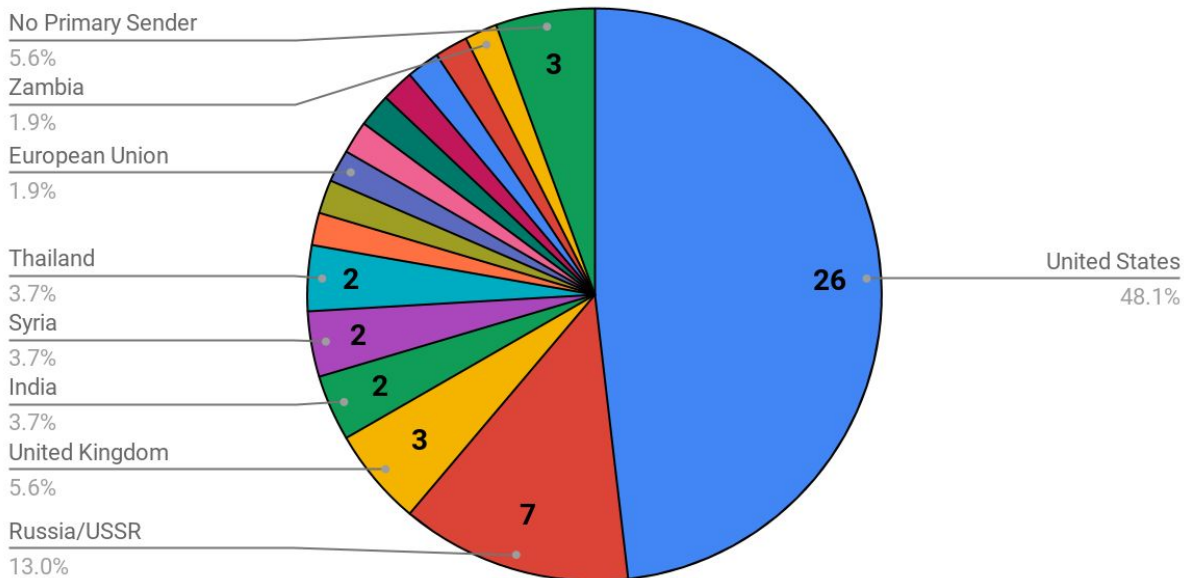
In collecting the data, Morgan et al. used keyword searches in a number of major news archives then manually coded each case for the variables mentioned, among others. Multiple people coded each case individually with their results checked against one another to ensure agreement. While large, there are likely cases not included. Only English-language indexes are used, including those of the New York Times and the London Times. It may be possible that the TIES dataset contains a greater share of cases from Anglophone countries. It may also underestimate the share of cases involving small countries, as their sanctions may be less likely to be reported. Finally, this may exclude cases where sanctions were implemented covertly or simply without much fanfare.

### **Senders**

Of the 54 cases included, the United States was the primary sender for the largest proportion making up 26 cases or just under half. Russia/USSR was in a very distant second with a total of 7 cases, while the remaining 24 cases were divided amongst 14 other countries (including three cases where there was no primary sender). For secondary senders, the numbers were much more evenly divided. A total of 25 cases involved at least one secondary sender for a total of 63 secondary senders in the dataset. Of these 63, the United Kingdom had the most at 10, followed by the United States (8), France and Germany (5 each), Russia/USSR, Canada, and Australia (3 each), and 21 other countries making up the other 23 cases.

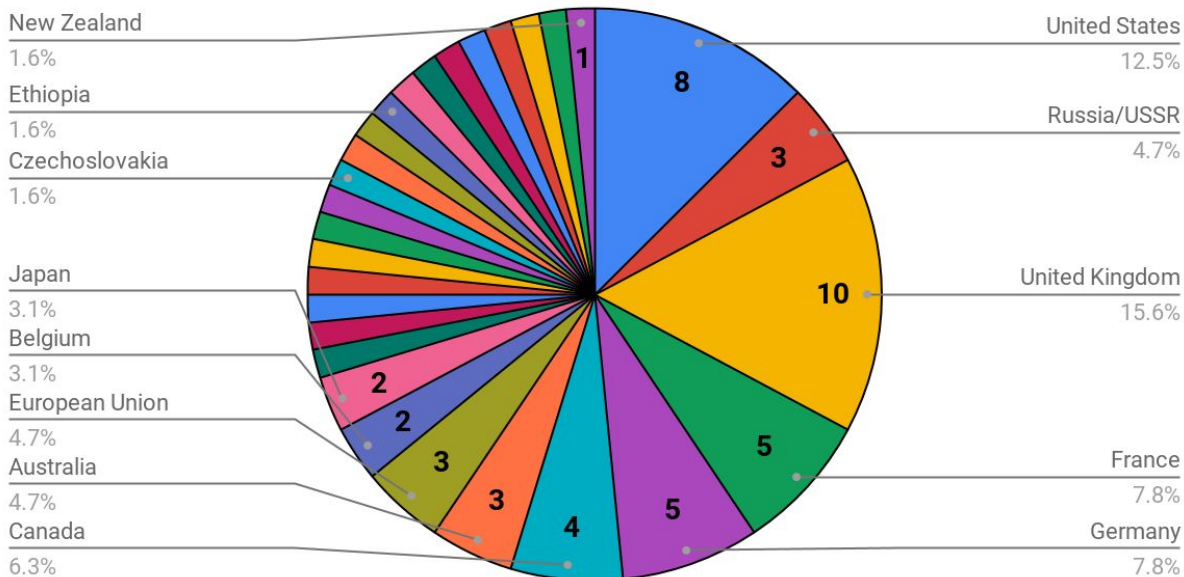
### Share of Sanctions Cases (Primary Sender)

(n=54)



### Share of Sanctions Cases (Secondary Senders)

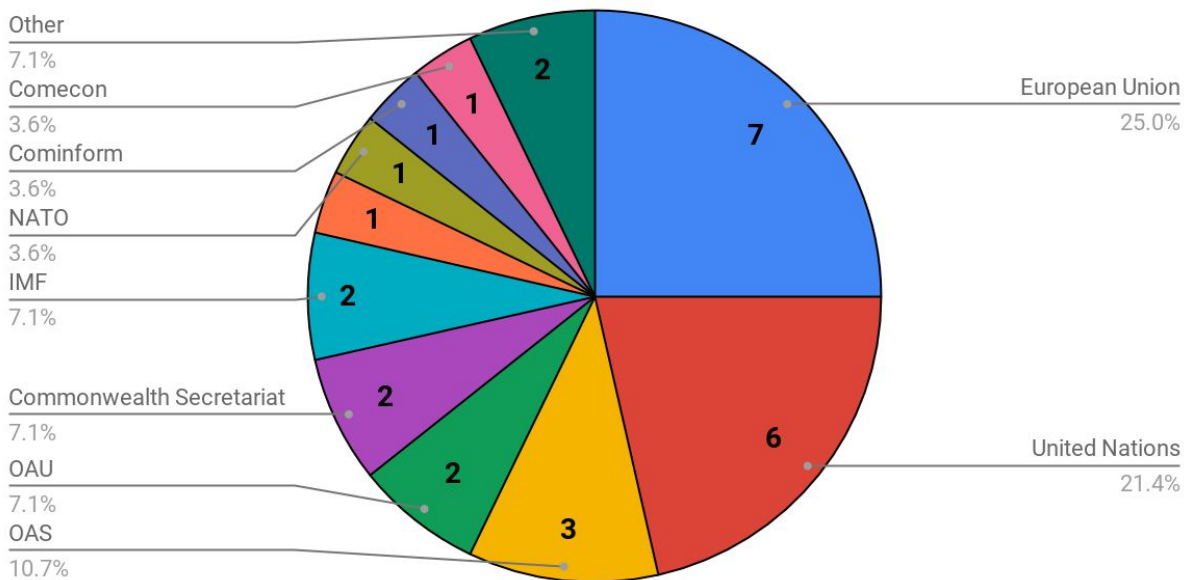
(n=63)



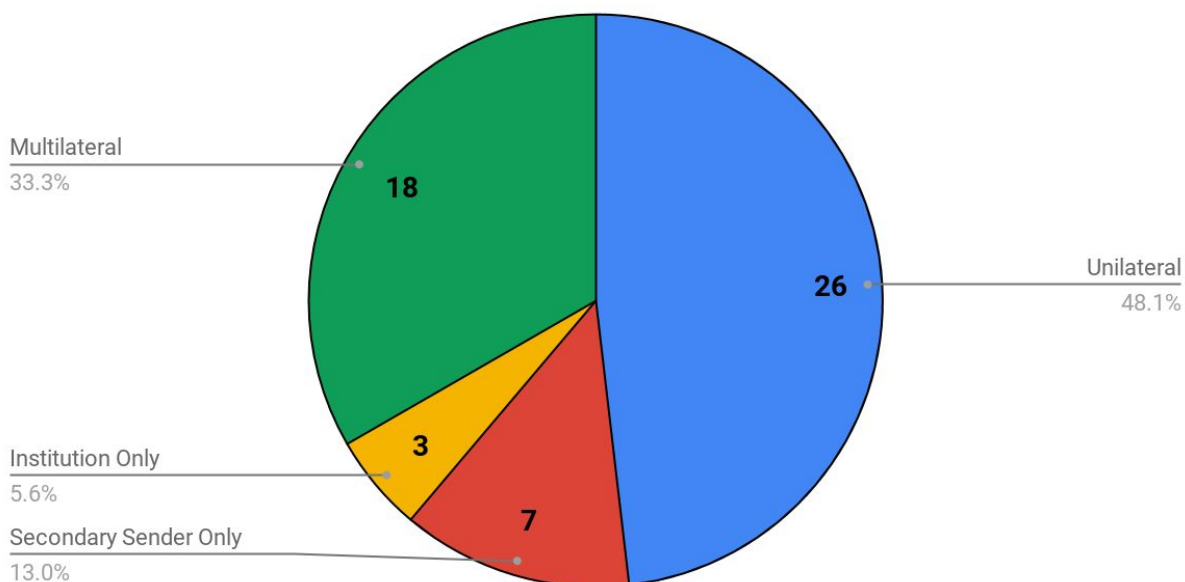
In addition to the countries involved, IGOs also played a significant role. 21 cases involved IGOs with the European Union (7) and United Nations (6) making up the greatest share. The rest were divided up amongst various economic institutions, regional organizations, military alliances, and others. Cases where IGOs played a role tended to be the same cases where secondary senders were also involved. Of the 21 cases above, 18 also included secondary senders. Likewise, just 7 of the 25 cases involving secondary senders did not also include IGOs. Overall, cases where secondary senders, IGOs, or both were involved make up 28 of the 54 sanctions while wholly unilateral sanctions make up the remaining 26.

### Share of Sanctions Cases (Institutions)

(n=28)



## Share of Cases involving Institutions and Secondary Senders (n=54)



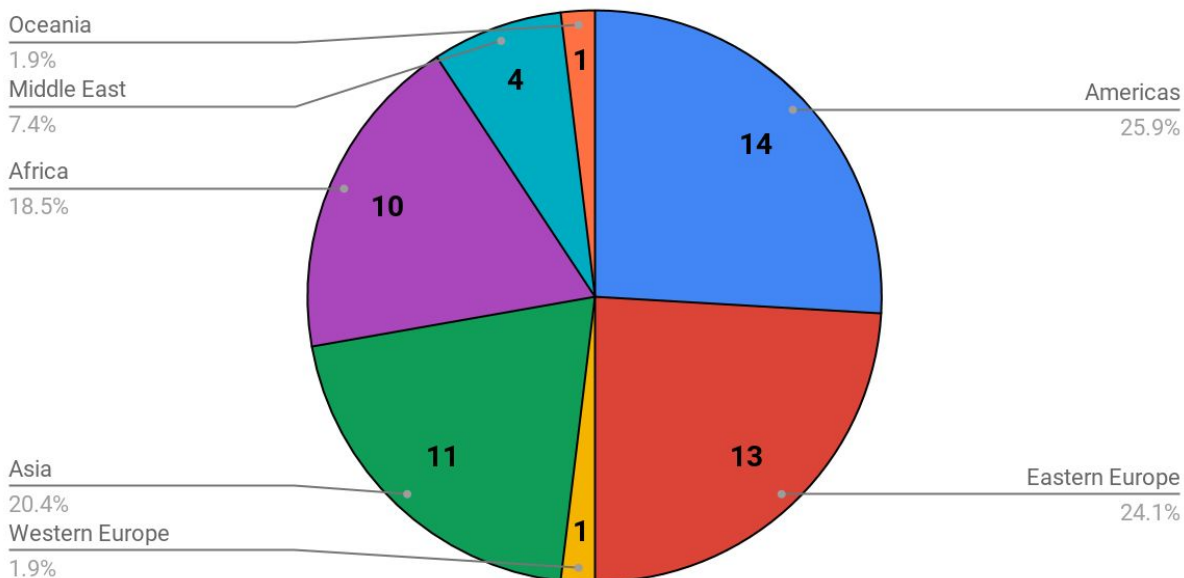
### Targets

The countries targeted by sanctions vary significantly by their geographic location but are very consistent in their regime type. Targets were evenly spread across the Americas (14), Eastern Europe (13), Asia (11), and Africa (10), along with a small handful of cases spread amongst other regions. When looking at regime type, only 5 of the 54 targets were democracies and all of these incidents were clustered in the early 1990s with the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia trying to coerce their breakaway nations into rejoining their respective unions. \



## Sanctions Targets by Region

(n=54)

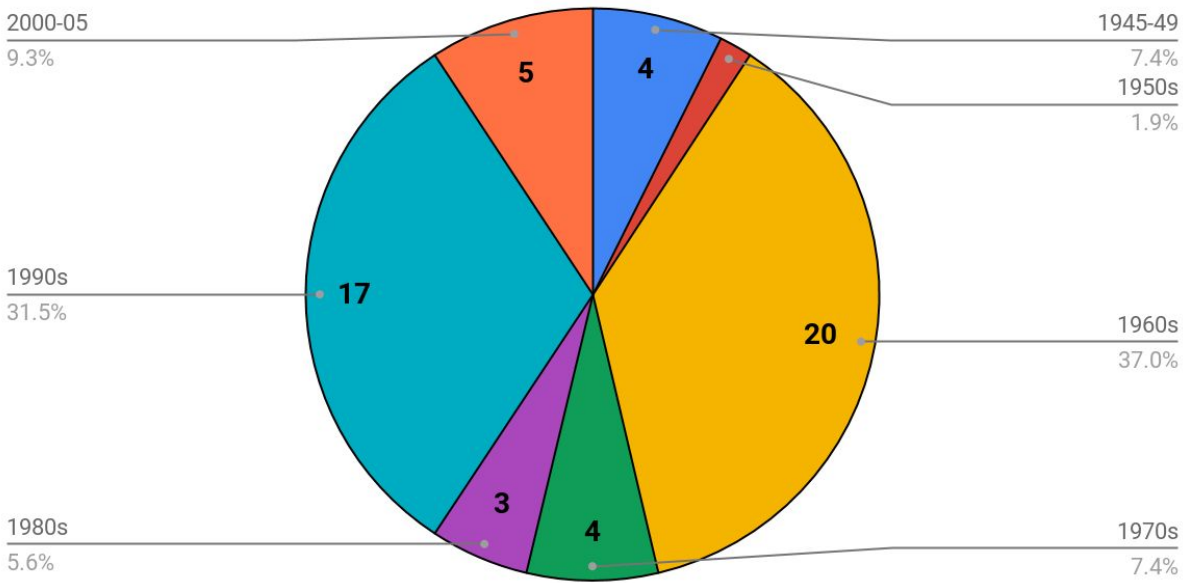


## Temporality

Regarding the temporal distribution of sanctions, there are two figures to consider. The first is when the sanctions were first imposed on the target and the latter is how long they lasted before being withdrawn. For the first figure, there is heavy clustering of sanctions in the 1960s and 1990s (37% and 32% respectively), while other decades involve only a small handful of cases each. For the second figure, sanctions tended to be resolved within a few years of their imposition but, if not resolved quickly, they tend to extend for very long stretches of time. Of the 49 cases with defined end dates, 30 were resolved within the first 2 years, a further 7 were resolved from 2 to 4 years, and the remaining 12 ranged from 4 to 19 years until they were finally terminated.

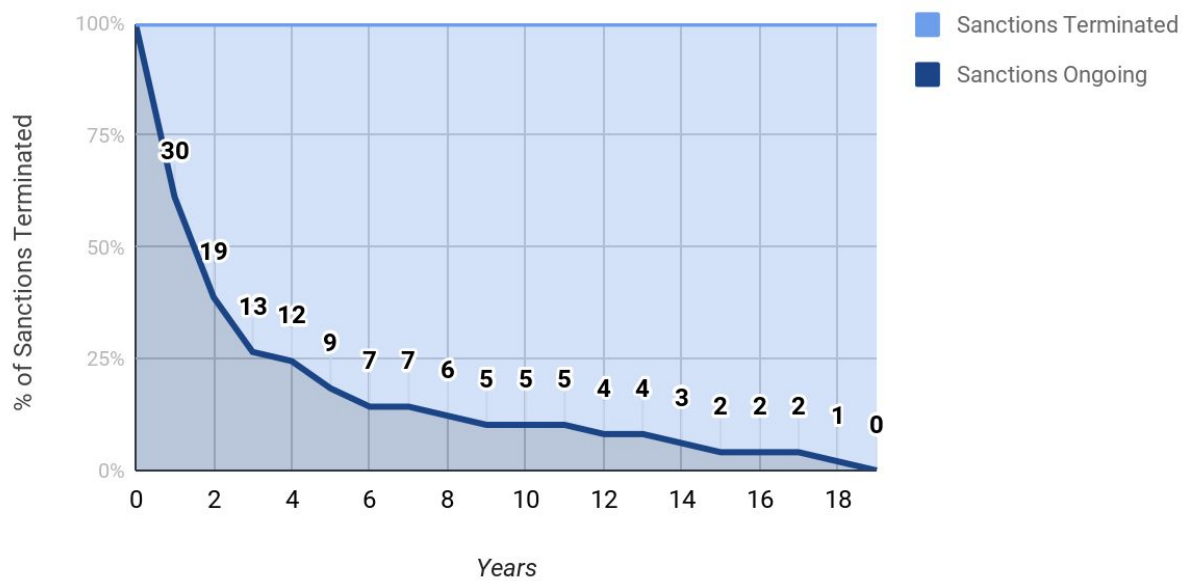
### Share of Sanctions by Decade

(n=54)



### Length of Sanctions

(n=49)



## Outcomes

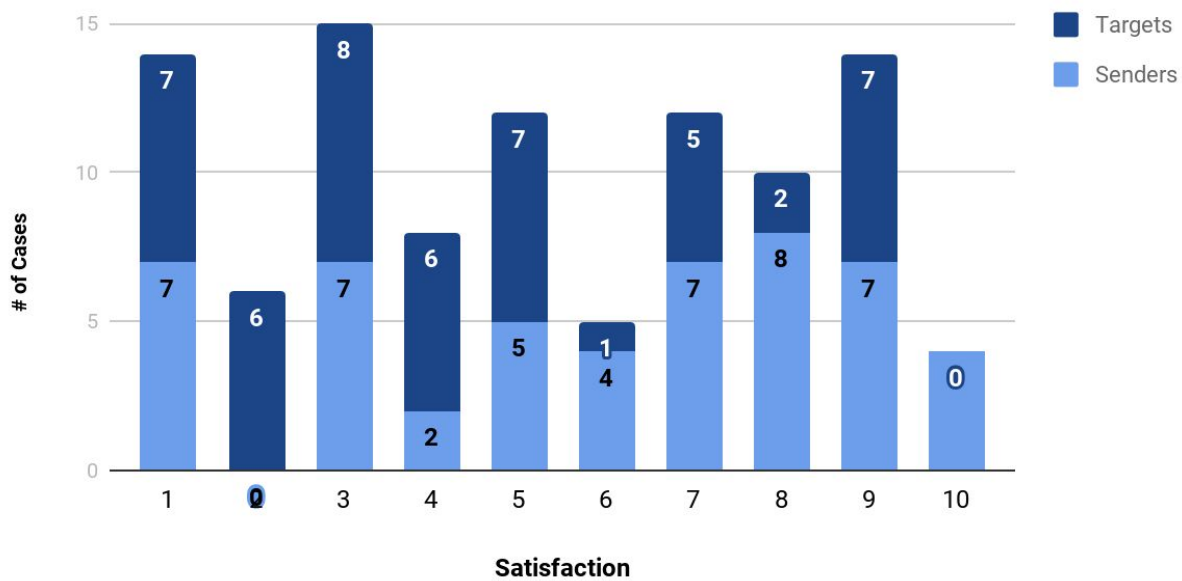
The TIES dataset describes outcomes through three different scales. The first relates to the method by which sanctions ended. The other two are a subjective score for how much both the sender and target of sanctions gained/lost through the exchange.

Regarding the first scale, each case is coded 1-10 with 1-5 representing cases resolved after sanctions were threatened but before they were implemented, while 6-10 represents cases resolved after imposition. These numbers correspond to one another in their outcome so a 1 and a 6 both mean the same result (Partial acquiescence by the target) and differ only in when this resolution took place. By this measure, most sanctions episodes did not end until after their implementation (82%). When sanctions ended, they were most likely to do so through either total capitulation by the target (The target gives in to all demands unconditionally) at 31% of cases or total capitulation of the sender (The sender retracts sanctions without receiving any concessions) at 35%. Partial acquiescence by the target, stalemate, and negotiated settlements were the remaining outcomes which, while less than the other two, still represented a significant portion of the outcomes.

The other two scales describe the sender's and target's satisfaction with the result of sanctions, taking account both how the outcome aligned with their pre-sanctions wishes and how many resources were expended to reach a conclusion. Overall, senders tend to be more satisfied with the results of sanctions than targets (Average score of 5.9 versus 4.4) but their scores are unevenly dispersed with most scores concentrated in both very low (1-3) and medium-high (7-9). For targets, the scores are more evenly spread throughout the 1-5 range.

## Satisfaction with Sanctions Results

(n=49)



## Disaggregating Results

Before offering analyses of these cases in general, we have to sort out any correlations between variables such that we do not create an inaccurate picture. On that front, there are a few areas where many of the variables involved tend to be clustered with one another in a way that might paint an inaccurate picture of sanctions if not disclosed.

Firstly, there are significant relationships between the countries involved in sanctions and the date they were implemented. While the US has been fairly consistent throughout the period (representing roughly half of the sanctions in any given decade), the United Kingdom and Russia/USSR are very clustered. Of Russia/USSR's 10 sanctions (including those for which it was a secondary sender), 6 of them took place in the 1990s. Likewise for the United Kingdom, 6 of their 13 sanctions were in the 1990s and another 4 were in the 2000s. Since no other senders were involved with a notable number of sanctions there is not enough information to draw any meaningful relationship on the country-wide level.

In addition to temporality, the sender also appears to have a significant effect on the outcome of sanctions. The United States had an average score of 6.25, slightly above the score of 5.5 of all other senders when the US is excluded. Furthermore, US sanctions have become more successful in more recent decades with its average score of 4.4 in the 1960s rising to a 7.1 in the 1990s. Russia, on the other hand, has an average score of just 3.6 although the concentration of their scores in the early 1990s (right as the Soviet Union was collapsing) could merely suggest that this was a product of the time and does not reflect capacity in other time periods.

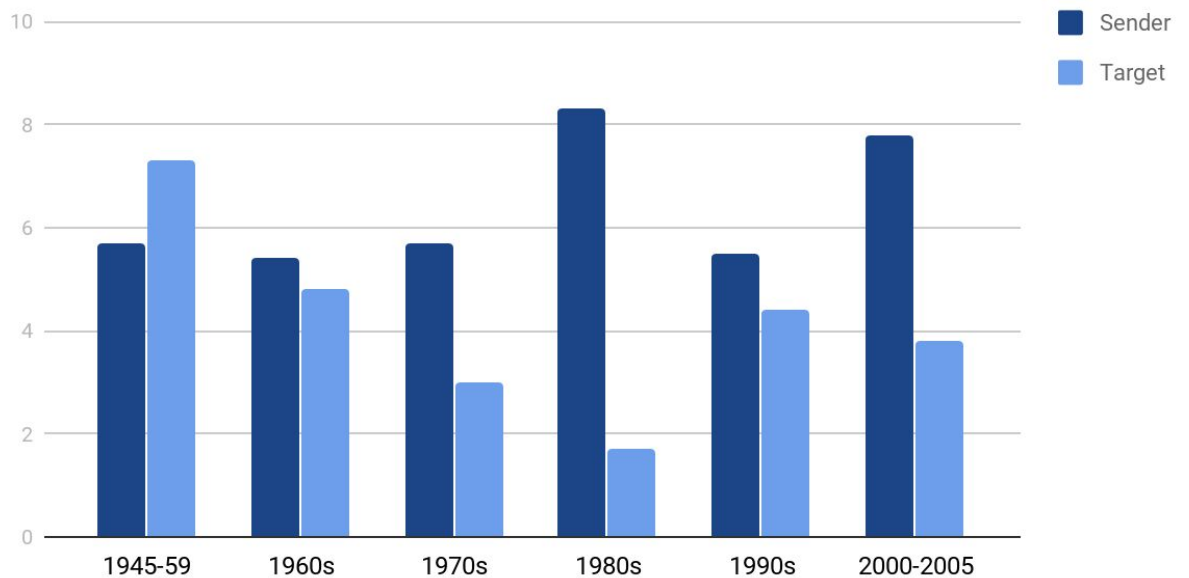
Paralleling the rise of US successes in the 1990s is the simultaneous rise of multilateral sanctions. Of the 25 cases where multiple senders were involved in sanctions, 12 were in the 1990s and 5 in the 2000s representing 71% and 100% of those decade's sanctions

respectively. The same is true of IGOs with 9 of their 20 cases clustered in the 1990s and 3 in the 2000s. With the rise in both the frequency of multilateral sanctions, the success of US sanctions, and the growing popularity of sanctions all taking place in the 1990s, this is probably the area where disaggregation is most needed and will be discussed further below.

Finally, the remaining correlations, while still deserving mention, appear much less significant. Regarding the targets of sanctions, there is a relationship between the decade sanctions took place and the region they were likely to target with Asia and Latin America being common targets in the 1960s and Eastern Europe in the 1990s. This does not appear to have had an impact on outcomes with success rates in the decade where the regions were common targets differing little from rates in other time periods. Rather, this is likely a product of Cold War conflicts where Asia and Latin America were both major foci of US attention as well as Eastern Europe in the 1990s. The sanctions against Eastern Europe were the only ones in which there was a significant difference however this probably has more to do with either regime type or the sender. Of the 11 sanctions directed against Eastern European countries, 4 of them were assigned a score of 1 for the sender (a category only 3 other sanctions of the 45 remaining cases fell into) however all of these 4 were directed against democracies breaking away from communist rule and were imposed by the USSR and Yugoslavia. This could either suggest democracies are better suited to resisting sanctions, that communist countries in general are poor at implementing sanctions, or that Russia and/or Yugoslavia in particular are bad at sanctions. Without more cases, which we are unable to get, it is difficult to draw any firm conclusions.

## Average Score for Sanctions by Decade

(n=49)



### VII: Commentary and Conclusions

This section concludes the paper by briefly describing the general conclusions reached above, areas of relative strength and weakness in the existing data and theory, and describes areas where further research is recommended.

#### Commentary

Overall, the sample of sanctions explicitly meant to destabilize regimes show some justification for promoting sanctions as a useful tool however it is far from conclusive. It is only in the most recent portions of the dataset (1990s and 2000s) and for specific subsets of sanctions (those carried out multilaterally and/or by the United States) that sanctions appear to have odds noticeably better than a coin flip.

While further exploration of the data is obviously needed, there is unfortunately less to go off of than what might be desired. Sanctions have risen in popularity in recent decades and with that have evolved considerably in their methods and the institutional framework for instituting them. With 2005 as the cutoff point, the TIES dataset lacks some of the most informative cases available in terms of recency and available information and thus do not offer a particularly good platform for further work. Even with more recent samples, other issues are present separate from those of TIES specifically.

Of the issues present, perhaps the most significant are the absence of data on other variables, the subjectivity of assigned scores, and a poor understanding of the lifespan of sanctions. Regarding the first, potentially relevant variables such as the target's regime type, economic structures (ie development, economy system, institutions, etc), and exposure to sanctions are mostly missing in a compiled format. While such data may be available from other sources, it is not necessarily defined in a way that is relevant to the factors concerned here. Secondly is the subjective nature of the scoring system. While assigning scores of preference to the senders and targets may offer a general idea of whether sanctions are effective, they tell us little about how they actually failed or succeeded. Better, perhaps, would be assigning scores based on the outcome that occurred such as a 10 denoting immediate removal from power, 9 for ongoing transitions of power, and other potential outcomes. Doing so would offer a better understanding of not only whether sanctions work but also in what ways they work. Finally, there is little understanding in the existing literature and data about the lifespan of sanctions. While the cumulative effects are compiled, how the intensity and distribution of the sanction's effects varied over time is unknown for most cases for lack of information. As many sanctions take several years before ending and can go through significant shifts as a result of learning and adjustment (van Bergeijk and van Marrewijk 1995), the lack of information surrounding how they



change over time greatly limits out potential to understand how sanctions actually operate (Peksen 2019).

## **Conclusion**

This paper has sought to explain the effects of sanctions both as it pertains to the characteristics of the sanctions themselves as well as how they interact with the domestic politics of the targeter regime. In doing so, this paper has come to the conclusion that, while there is good reason to suggest that sanctions can work, there are significant obstacles that ultimately limit their real world effectiveness. These obstacles include many that can be overcome through improved methods of implementation such as targeting politically sensitive groups and avoiding inadvertently improving the regime's position by making security relatively cheaper, as well as those that have little recourse such as sampling biases thanks to 'behind closed door' cases and fully accounting for sanctions that are implemented for reasons other than their stated purpose.

It is my hope that further research on the subject, especially when it comes to improvements in data collection and in explaining the role of domestic economic variables on the outcome of sanctions may refine the study and use of sanctions further. Even with the current flaws, however, there is still room to use sanctions and they should not be dismissed without reason. Overall, while there is sufficient reason for concern, sanctions still exhibit plenty of promise both now and in the future, and should be considered, even with their flaws, a valuable tool in any political arsenal.

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