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Research Article

Threat by Example: Economic Sanctions and Global Respect for Human Rights

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Abstract

Are economic sanctions an effective tool for the improvement of global human rights practices? Imposed economic sanctions seem to lead to increased target state repression. However, governments still impose sanctions for the expressed reason of the target's poor human rights practices. If sanctions are detrimental to the enjoyment of human rights, why do governments continue to use them in response to state repression? I argue that sanction activity may improve human rights practices in (1) states threatened with human rights–based economic sanctions and (2) nontarget states whose perceived cost of repression is increased by the example set by target states in their human rights and foreign policy peer groups. Using data on 159 countries from 1981–2005, I demonstrate that, while imposed sanctions are related to worsened human rights practices in target states, threatened human rights sanctions are related to increases in government respect for human rights in both target states and others whose human rights practices and foreign policies are similar to those of target states.

Keywords: economic sanctions, human rights, physical integrity, spatial diffusion

Introduction

Are economic sanctions an effective tool for reducing government human rights violations? There is good reason to be skeptical. Previous research (Peksen 2009; Wood 2008) has determined that imposed economic sanctions lead to an increase in repression in targeted states, even when the aim of those sanctions is to improve human rights practices. Other researchers have concluded that economic sanctions rarely achieve success in the form of a significant policy change in the target state (Pape 1997; Pape 1998). As such, the cost of such sanctions to civilians in target states may outweigh the sanctions' efficacy (Weiss 1999). Yet, political leaders still opt to use economic sanctions. According to the Threats and Imposition of Economic Sanctions (TIES) dataset (Morgan, Bapat, and Kobayashi 2014; Morgan et al. 2014), states have used economic sanctions seventy-two times since 1980 for the expressed reason of curbing poor human rights practices by target states. If sanctions are ineffective and potentially detrimental to human rights fulfillment, why do political actors continue to use them in attempts to *improve* government respect for human rights?

One potential explanation is that states that are targeted with sanction impositions are not the only actors whose policies and behavior the sanctioning state hopes to affect (Baldwin 1985). Political leaders often point to sanctions as a means of not only affecting the policies of target states but also for demonstrating to other governments the potential costs of following the target's example and the sanctioning state's willingness to punish such actions. For instance, in a 1964 statement of the objectives of US sanctions against Cuba, Secretary of State Dean Rusk claimed that, while sanctions were unlikely to lead to Castro's removal from power, they could serve "to demonstrate to the peoples of the American Republics that communism has no future in the Western Hemisphere" (US Senate 1964, as quoted in

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Baldwin 1985, 176). Leaders have expressed similar goals with respect to human rights sanctions. Following US President Barack Obama's September 2010 signing of an executive order imposing targeted human rights sanctions on members of the Iranian government, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton (2010) said:

> In signing this Executive Order, the President sends the message that the United States stands up for the universal rights of all people . . . we will hold abusive governments and individuals accountable for their actions . . . it is not only about the people of Iran who are suffering, but it expresses solidarity with victims of these kinds of actions around the world.

Likewise, amid arguments that human rights sanctions against Myanmar's military government are doing more harm than good, Aung San Suu Kyi's opposition party, the National League for Democracy, stated its support for the sanctions in these terms: "Targeted sanctions serve as a warning that acts contrary to basic norms of justice and human rights cannot be committed with impunity" (Mydans 2011).

Such statements suggest that leaders threatening and imposing sanctions do not only aim to affect the policies of directly targeted states but also mean to warn other states that engage in the policies and behaviors for which the target state is being sanctioned. The idea that foreign policy actors may care a great deal about how their actions are interpreted by third parties is fairly common across international relations scholarship. For instance, Jervis (1970, 7) claims that "states have often cared about specific issues less for their intrinsic value than for the conclusions they felt others would draw from the way they dealt with them." On these bases, Baldwin (1985, 17) criticizes much of the literature that examines the usefulness of economic statecraft, generally, and economic sanctions, in particular:

> Not all targets are equally important, but none is intrinsically unimportant . . . The particular state with which trade is embargoed may or may not be the primary target of the influence attempt. When one chooses to "make an example" out of someone, the usual implication is that other targets matter more than the immediate one. The teacher who chooses to "make an example" out of a misbehaving student is often more interested in the deterrent effects on the other children than in the effects on the particular recipient of the punishment.

However, while such ideas are common in academic literature and political discourse, quantitative studies have not yet attempted to determine the effect that the sanctioning process has on the actions of nontargeted states. As such, this article uses data on human rights practices to test the proposition that human rights sanction activity, while detrimental to respect for human rights in states where sanctions are imposed, improves respect for human rights in states that are either directly threatened with sanctions or indirectly threatened due to their similarity to the target state. As others have argued previously (e.g., Morgan and Miers 2001; Drezner 2003; Lacy and Niou 2004), I expect that if a state's leaders believe that the cost of economic sanctions will be high enough to lead them to change their human rights practices after imposition, and that the sender state will follow through on their threat, they are likely to acquiesce to the sender's demands and improve their human rights practices at the time sanctions are threatened (i.e., before suffering the associated costs). Further, beyond these direct effects, self-interested government decision-makers observe human rights sanction threats and impositions against other countries, draw information about their own risk of sanctions based on their state's similarity to the target, and attempt to avoid suffering the relevant target states' fate by increasing their own respect for human rights.

Using data on the threat and imposition of human rights sanctions (Morgan et al. 2014) and spatial econometric techniques for modeling the interdependence of outcomes between states, I find that the threat of human rights sanctions has a significant positive effect on the practices of states directly targeted with those threats. The threat of sanctions also has a positive effect on states that engage in similar or worse human practices than, and have alliance portfolios that are similar to, the target state. In general, this study shows that human rights sanction activity can be a viable tool for improving the human rights practices of some states, but their use also requires that the sanctioning state engage in actions that may harm those in other targeted states. In short, sanction activity may yield increases in respect for human rights at the global level, but that increase likely comes at the expense of those that live in states where human rights sanctions are imposed.

The Direct Efficacy of Human Rights Sanctions

Are economic sanctions an effective means of improving government respect for human rights in targeted states? There are many reasons to suspect not. Previous studies have found that, in general, sanctions have high human costs in targeted states (Weiss 1999). Furthermore,

Wood (2008) finds that economic sanctions generally lead to increased repression in targeted states. Peksen (2009) demonstrates that Wood's (2008) findings hold even for sanctions imposed explicitly to change a target's human rights practices. Indeed, there is strong theoretical logic to explain these findings. According to Poe's (2004) model of government repression, government decision-makers act to maximize the ratio of their political strength to the degree of threat they face. Sanctions are likely to weaken leaders' relative power positions, making them increasingly likely to resort to violence to maintain their position. In particular, leaders will try to shift the costs of sanctions to citizens outside of the winning coalition that keeps them in power. Repression thus serves the dual purpose of forcing the citizenry to accept these costs and discouraging defection among the members of the winning coalition if the costs associated with sanctions start to affect the rewards allocated to the elite (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003; Wood 2008).

However, there are also weaknesses in these previous studies. The logic presented above implies that government leaders would prefer to increase repression rather than give in to the policy demands of the actors issuing sanctions, even when the policy change on the table involves reducing government repression (Wood 2008). However, there are likely instances in which the cost of giving in to the policy demands of those issuing sanctions is much less than the cost of imposed sanctions. When threatened with sanctions, most leaders should be able to recognize these instances and should thus make concessions to the sender state at the threat stage, that is, prior to the actual imposition of sanctions. Wood (2008) and Peksen (2009) focus only on the effects of imposed sanctions, excluding the possibility that threatened sanctions could yield better results concerning human rights practices. Therefore, while we may have good reason to expect that imposed human rights sanctions will negatively affect government respect for human rights in targeted states, it is still possible that the overall sanctioning process, which includes threatened sanctions, could function to produce improved human rights practices.

According to a model developed by Morgan and Miers (2001, 23), sanction impositions would never be observed in a world of complete and perfect information because the "target or the sanctioner would back down before the costs of sanctions were borne since both players can anticipate the ultimate outcome." Indeed, previous evidence strongly suggests that sanctions are costly events that government leaders prefer to avoid. Sanctions are likely to decrease government strength while increasing grievances within the public (Wood 2008). Allen (2008) demonstrates that the imposition of economic sanctions is correlated with increased numbers of anti-government demonstrations and riots, particularly under anocratic and democratic regimes. Marinov (2005) further finds that the imposition of economic sanctions significantly increases the likelihood that the target state's leadership will be removed from power. In the most vulnerable target states (i.e., those that are most dependent on resources derived from their relationship with the sanction sender), the imposition of sanctions is likely an outcome that leaders seeking to maintain their political survival would rather avoid.

Building on this reasoning, Drezner (2003) demonstrates that a reliance on data that only focuses on imposed sanctions causes much of the literature on sanction efficacy to suffer from a selection bias. Most studies fail to account for those cases in which sanctions were threatened but never imposed due to concessions from the target state. In a world of complete information, effective sanctions would never advance past the threat stage, as sanctioning states would only threaten sanctions against those states that would comply with such a threat. Consequently, all target states would comply with the demands of the sender state, rather than suffer through the actual imposition of sanctions. Using data on threatened and imposed sanctions around issues of trade, labor standards, and environmental protection, Drezner (2003) shows that threats in each of these categories succeed at much higher rates than do imposed sanctions. Indeed, threats are more effective when it comes to yielding policy changes in the target state. Along similar lines, Lacy and Niou (2004) develop a game-theoretic model of sanctioning that allows for both two-sided incomplete information and threats to be important, providing a strong theoretical argument for why threats are likely to be more effective than imposed sanctions. In most cases, states will successfully predict the outcome of the sanctioning process and thus the process will either (1) end at the threat stage with an irresolute sender, (2) end at the threat stage with concessions from the target, or (3) result in sanctions being imposed, even if the sender knows they will be unsuccessful. In the latter outcome, the sanctioning state may still yield utility in the form of signaling its resoluteness. By making an example of a state that refuses to yield to threatened sanctions, sanctioning states can ensure that other states take their threats seriously in the future (Baldwin 1985).

As such, it is possible that *threatened* human rights sanctions can indeed be a useful tool for improving government respect for human rights in target states, as long as such threats are taken seriously. In keeping with this argument, and in line with the literature on economic sanctions and human rights, I posit:

H1: *The threat of human rights sanctions, absent imposition of those sanctions, is positively associated with respect for human rights in the targeted state.*

H2: *The imposition of human rights sanctions is negatively associated with respect for human rights in the targeted state.*

I also take Hypothesis 1's contention seriously and go a step further to argue that threatened and imposed sanctions can serve as implicit threats to states that are similar to the target state. As such, I contend that similar states will respond to observed threats and impositions by altering their own human rights practices in an effort to avoid being sanctioned themselves. In what follows, I lay out the logic underpinning this expectation, focusing first on how states may learn more about themselves from the experiences of other states. I then move on to explore why state leaders would like to avoid human rights sanction activity and how they determine which threats and impositions serve as implicit threats.

Global Human Rights Sanction Activity & Local Human Rights Practices

Do government leaders "learn" more about their country and their current position by observing events in other states (e.g., Crescenzi 2007)? And does such a learning process occur with regard to foreign human rights sanction activity, suggesting that the imposition or threat of sanctions in other states positively affects respect for human rights in nontarget states? In this section, I argue that such a process does occur, presenting my general theoretical understanding of this process before proceeding to discuss how it may be directly applied to the topic of human rights sanctions.

I begin by assuming that government leaders are rational actors primarily concerned with securing their own power and positions in government (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003; Poe 2004). Consequently, when political leaders perceive that the level of threat to their political positions is either high or increasing, or that their own strength relative to such threat is low or decreasing, they should be expected to act to stem the tide. There are several policies and actions available to leaders to reduce the level of threat they are currently facing, but repression is almost always one of those possibilities.

That said, the feasibility and effectiveness of repression vary across contexts. Indeed, Poe (2004) points out that any factor that increases the costs or reduces the benefits associated with repression relative to those associated with other policy options should reduce the likelihood of government repression as alternative policies become more attractive. However, to make a rational decision based on the relative costs and benefits of various available policy options, one must have access to reliable information about those costs and benefits. In reality, government leaders rarely, if ever, have complete information about the threats they face (Walter 2009) or about the various policy options at their disposal. Thus, if government leaders are rational actors, "assumed to make optimal use of available information," (Simmons, Dobbin, and Garrett 2006, 797), leaders should constantly update their beliefs about the levels of threat that they face and about the viability and effectiveness of their various policy options as new information becomes available.

Information pertinent to leaders' concerns can come from a number of sources, including internal events, expert advice, or international organizations. Here, I focus on another likely source: events in other states. When leaders observe foreign events that they can relate to their own domestic situations, they update their beliefs on the basis of what they observe. However, information from an event in another state is not equally relevant across states (Crescenzi 2007). Thus, in order to truly make optimal use of the information provided by observing a foreign event, leaders should be expected to weight the information gathered from different events according to the degree to which that information is relevant for their own interests.

I argue that conditions that make an event in one state relevant to an observing leader in another state can be captured through similarities between the two states. For instance, a separatist conflict likely tells a contiguous state's leaders a great deal more about their potential level of threat than it does leaders of a state located on another continent (Buhaug and Gleditsch 2008). Similarly, if a state leader sees another country with similar human rights practices sanctioned for its use of repression, the observing leader should draw greater lessons from the sanctioned state's experience than should some other leader whose government demonstrates much higher respect for human rights. In essence, in order for an event in one state to affect the human rights practices of another, the event (1) must seem likely to be replicated in the observer's country because the two states have similar attributes associated with the event in question and (2) must be either highly desirable or highly undesirable from the perspective of maximizing the leader's strength and/or minimizing the internal threat he or she faces. If an event occurs in a state that is incomparable to the observing state, or if the event gives no information pertinent to

the government's attempts to maintain power, it should have little effect on government leaders' decisions as they relate to the protection of human rights.

As demonstrated in the previous section, sanction impositions can be quite costly for the leaders of targeted states, by way of increasing citizen grievances (Wood 2008), anti-government demonstrations and riots (Allen 2008) and also possibly aggravating risks that the leaders themselves will be removed from power (Marinov 2005). Therefore, when government leaders believe their state faces a heightened risk of human rights–imposed sanctions, repression becomes much more costly, and other methods of maximizing government strength or reducing internal threats become much more attractive. Further, in this article, I also consider that threats may also be quite useful when it comes to conveying information to nontarget states who would like to avoid the costs of both threatened and imposed sanctions.

Threatened sanctions can indeed be costly, particularly if they are public. Leaders that give in to the public threat of sanctions are made to look weak on the international stage, as well as to any internal opposition that may be challenging their hold on power (e.g., Jervis 1970; Baldwin 1985). Furthermore, the policy changes necessary to avoid the threat of sanctions altogether are likely to be smaller than the changes that a sender state would demand from the target after a threat of sanctions is initiated. That is, if a government can show some progress in its respect for human rights, its current trajectory may be enough to avoid human rights sanction threats, particularly compared with states whose level of respect remains poor and either static or worsening. Thus, if a government is going to be threatened with human rights sanctions to which it will acquiesce, it would do better to avoid the threats altogether by preemptively improving its human rights practices. As such, it is reasonable to expect that states would like to avoid threatened human rights sanctions if at all possible.

When it comes to improving human rights in nontarget states, we might even expect the threat of sanctions to outperform their actual imposition, just as expected in the case of target states. According to Lacy and Niou (2004), one of the primary uses of sanction impositions for sender states is to demonstrate to nontargets the sender's resoluteness so that future sanction threats will be taken seriously. However, the United States and Canada have been among the senders of approximately 76 percent of all human rights sanction activity since 1980 (Morgan et al. 2014). As such, while the threat of sanctions demonstrates the interest of these two powerful states in improving the human rights practices of foreign governments, their imposition provides little additional information about the senders, as previous human rights sanction activity has already demonstrated the high degree to which the Unite States and Canada are resolute. Furthermore, because imposed sanctions are costly to the sender as well as to the target (e.g., Morgan and Bapat 2003), it could be that each imposition actually reduces the chance of another contemporaneous imposition elsewhere. Assuming that states will only sanction a limited pool of targets at any one time, threats serve to put those potential targets on notice, while impositions simply reduce the probability of any nontargeted state being targeted in the near future. Thus, while sanction threats provide observing nontargets with information about their likelihood of being targeted, impositions may simply tell observers that the likelihood of being a target has been reduced.

The logic above is based on the idea that states attempt to avoid human rights sanction activity when the risk of being targeted is high. However, how is a state to determine if it is at an increased risk of human rights sanctions? As stated above, I suggest that government leaders believe they are at a higher risk of human rights sanctions if they are similar to a targeted state along dimensions related to the outcome of interest. For human rights sanctions, the relevant dimensions are likely to be found in the previous work on the determinants of economic sanctions. Therefore, government leaders should perceive a heightened risk of human rights sanctions when such sanctions are threatened or imposed against states that (1) demonstrate a level of respect for physical integrity rights that is similar to or greater than the respect for such rights in their state (Murdie and Peksen 2013) and/or (2) share a similar relationship and similar expectations of conflict with the sanctioning state (Drezner 1999). Murdie and Peksen (2013) demonstrate that states with poor human rights practices are indeed at higher risk for imposed human rights sanctions. Since the expressed reason for applying human rights sanctions is the poor human rights performance of the target state, human rights–based sanction activity against human rights violators should not threaten governments that demonstrate much higher levels of respect than a state that is the target of sanctions. On the other hand, sanction activity may send a very clear message to states with human rights practices that are similar to or worse than those of the target state, given that a sanctioning state has declared their practices unacceptable. As such, I propose the following hypothesis:

H3: *Human rights sanction activity is positively associated with government respect for physical integrity rights*

in states whose respect for human rights is similar to or worse than that of the target state.

Furthermore, previous research has determined that the relationship between the potential sanctioning state and the potential target state is an important factor in determining whether or not sanctions will be used (Drezner 1999; Drury 2001). Indeed, while sanctions against allies may be more effective in producing concessions, it appears that states are more willing to impose sanctions on adversaries rather than allies (Drezner 1999). Thus, states that benefit from cooperative relationships with the sender state should not find sanction activity threatening if it targets states that have conflictual relationships with the sender. Likewise, if a state is willing to sanction a close ally, it is probably willing to sanction other allies. As such, leaders may view sanctions imposed on a state with a similar alliance portfolio as implicitly threatening.

Even if government leaders are unaware of the connection between alliance structures and the likelihood of being targeted for sanctions, they may still react to human rights–based sanction activity against states that they view as belonging to the same international peer group. There is a large literature that demonstrates that information interpretation and perception often depend on what one sees as their own reference group (e.g., Dawson and Chatman 2001; Frank 1985; Hyman and Singer 1968). As such, when one observes members of one's own reference group suffering adverse outcomes for their behavior, the observer is much more likely to engage in self-evaluation to avoid that outcome. In this vein, and considering findings linking conflict expectations and sanction imposition, I posit:

H4: *Human rights sanction activity is positively associated with government respect for physical integrity rights in states whose alliance portfolios are similar to that of the target state.*

On the whole, the theoretical framework elaborated above suggests that the relationship between human rights–based sanction activity and human rights practices is significantly more complicated than captured in the extant literature (e.g., Wood 2008; Peksen 2009). While the imposition of such sanctions is still likely to negatively affect government respect for human rights in targeted states, it is quite possible that, due to the costs associated with being targeted with sanctions, the threat of human rights sanctions may lead to improved practices in target states. Further, third-party states may see human rights sanction activity as implicitly threatening when they have similar human rights practices and similar foreign policies to target states. This should lead non-targeted states to change their behavior by demonstrating higher respect for human rights. The next section describes the method I use to test these observable implications and discusses the results of my empirical analysis.

Research Design

In order to appropriately test the above hypotheses, I use data on human rights sanction activities and weight them according to state similarities in human rights practices and alliance portfolios. I then use these sanction data, alongside other factors known to affect government respect for human rights, to test my hypotheses on a set of 159 countries from 1981 until 2005.[1] In this section, I describe the variables, weighting methods, and models used in the analyses before moving on to a discussion of the results.

Dependent Variable: Government Respect for Physical Integrity Rights

While the theoretical mechanism delineated above may apply to several types of human rights practices, this paper focuses on *government respect for physical integrity rights*. Physical integrity rights are "the entitlements individuals have in international law to be free from arbitrary physical harm and coercion by their government" (Cingranelli and Richards 1999, 407). Government respect for these rights is operationalized here using the Physical Integrity Rights Index, obtained from the CIRI Human Rights Data Project (Cingranelli, Richards, and Clay 2014). The Physical Integrity Rights Index measures the degree to which governments violate their citizens' rights not to be subjected to torture, extrajudicial execution, political imprisonment, and disappearance. The index ranges from 0 to 8, where greater values indicate greater government respect for physical integrity.[2]

Independent Variables: Human Rights Sanction Events

Testing the aforementioned hypotheses requires measuring not only human rights sanction threats and impositions against target states but also the relevance of such activity to government leaders observing from foreign

1 Descriptive statistics are included in Table A1 in the online appendix.

2 Robustness tests conducted using the Political Terror Scale (Gibney et al. 2016) produce similar results. These results are included in the online appendix, Table A2.

states. I do this by first obtaining sanction data from the Threat and Imposition of Sanctions (TIES) data set (Morgan et al. 2014; Morgan et al. 2014). Using the information contained in the TIES data set, I define a "human rights sanction event" as any sanction activity that includes category 8, that is, "Improve Human Rights," in the "Issue" fields. This field lists the reasons that a sender state has issued the threat or imposition of a sanction. Using this information together with data recording the start and end dates of the sanction activity, as well as the target state, I create six dichotomous variables. Three variables capture when human rights sanctions are directly threatened, but not imposed, against a particular target state in a given year: *threatened human rights (HR) sanction starts*, coded 1 if a human rights sanction threat was initiated in a given year; *threatened HR sanction ongoing*, coded 1 if a human rights sanction threat started, ended, or continued throughout the year; and *threatened HR sanction ends*, coded 1 if a human rights sanction threat ended without being imposed. All other years are coded 0 if no human rights sanction threats targeted the state in question. Likewise, three other dichotomous variables, *imposed HR sanction starts*, *imposed HR sanction ongoing*, and *imposed HR sanction ends*, are coded 0 if there was no sanction imposition in the given country-year and 1 if human rights sanctions were imposed in that year, following the same pattern as that laid out in the threat categories above.

Hypotheses 3 and 4 require additional measures that can test for the effects of sanction activities (threats and impositions) on nontarget states. That is, the independent variables of interest in this study must account not only for the occurrence of human rights sanction events but also for the degree to which the information provided by such events is relevant to leaders in other states. As such, I use a spatial weighting method to take into account the similarity between states according to attributes related to the sanction event of interest (Beck, Gleditsch, and Beardsley 2006). In order to create these "relevance"-weighted measures, I construct connectivity matrices to weight each sanction event in state j according to the degree to which it is relevant to leaders in state i, on the basis of the states' similarity (s) regarding some attribute. That is,

$$\mathbf{w}_{ij} = s_{ij},$$

where s_{ij} represents the measured similarity between countries i and j. Thus, by multiplying $\mathbf{w}$ by the data vector of either the ongoing threatened HR sanction or imposed HR sanction variable, one can calculate a relevance-weighted count of that independent variable for every state, based on the degree to which states are similar along some attribute. For example, if state i is identical to states r and q on some attribute, such that $s = 1$ in both cases, but shares no similarity with any other states, then the value of the relevance-weighted version of variable x for state i would equal $x_r + x_q$.

According to the hypotheses presented above, the nontarget states that are likely to be affected by human rights sanction activity are determined by (1) the degree to which their human rights practices resemble, or are worse than, the target state's practices; and (2) their similarity to the target state vis-à-vis relations with the sanctioning state, that is, the degree to which the two states share similar alliance portfolios. In order to test for the significance of the first requirement (based on Hypothesis 3), I create a spatial-weighting matrix, $\boldsymbol{w}^{HR}$. This matrix is defined such that $\boldsymbol{w}_{ij}^{HR}$ equals 1 if the result of subtracting country i's physical integrity rights index score from country j's score is greater than or equal to -2 in a given year; $\boldsymbol{w}_{ij}^{HR}$ equals 0 otherwise. This results in a matrix in which every country with human rights practices ranging anywhere from two points worse to several points better than the referent country i is assigned a weight of 1, while all other countries are given a weight equal to 0. In this way, $\boldsymbol{w}^{HR}$ is analogous to a geographic contiguity matrix; all states with similar or better human rights practices are treated as contiguous to the referent. The notation $\boldsymbol{w}^{HR}$ is multiplied by the variables that account for ongoing threatened HR sanction and ongoing imposed HR sanction to create measures of *HR relevant threats* and *HR relevant sanctions*. These two variables serve as counts of the number of states that both were targeted with these sanction activities and had similar or better human rights practices than the referent in a given year.

To measure the degree to which a nontarget state shares a similar alliance portfolio with the target, I rely on the alliance portfolio "S"-score described by Signorino and Ritter (1999). These data were obtained using alliance data from the Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions Project (ATOP) (Leeds and Ritter 2002; Leeds 2005) and Sweeney and Keshk's (2005) method for calculating S-scores. The resulting scores measure the degree to which two states' alliance portfolios are similar and varies from -1 (very low similarity) to 1 (very high similarity). In this case, I add 1 to all scores in order to ensure that all values are non-negative and divide them by 2, creating similarity scores that range from 0 to 1. I then convert these dyadic data into a matrix. The resulting matrix, $\boldsymbol{w}^{Alliance}$, assigns every state a non-negative weight according to the degree to which its alliance portfolio is similar to the referent state's portfolio. This matrix is then multiplied by the data on ongoing threatened

HR sanctions and imposed HR sanctions to create measures of *alliance relevant threats* and *alliance relevant sanctions*. These variables serve as alliance portfolio similarity-weighted counts of the number of countries experiencing ongoing sanction events in a given year.

Finally, it may be that sanction activity against foreign states will only affect human rights practices when multiple conditions of relevance hold, for example, when the conditions of human rights similarity and alliance portfolio similarity are simultaneously met. To test for this possibility, I create a matrix that is the Hadamard product of two of the aforementioned matrices, $\boldsymbol{w}^{HR}$ and $\boldsymbol{w}^{Alliance}$. The resulting weights matrix calculates the degree to which state j meets both the human rights and alliance portfolio conditions in relation to state i. In creating this matrix, I multiply each cell of each matrix by its corresponding cell in the other matrix, creating a product that has the same dimensions as the two matrices used to produce it. That is,

$$\boldsymbol{w}^{HR,Alliance} = \left(\boldsymbol{w}^{HR} \circ \boldsymbol{w}^{Alliance}\right) = \left(\boldsymbol{w}_{ij}^{HR}\right)\left(\boldsymbol{w}_{ij}^{Alliance}\right),$$

such that cell (i, j) of the Hadamard product matrix, $\boldsymbol{w}^{HR,Alliance}$, is calculated by multiplying the contents of cell (i, j) in the human rights matrix by the contents of cell (i, j) in the alliance matrix. The resulting Hadamard product-matrix is then multiplied by the data on ongoing threatened HR sanctions and imposed HR sanctions to create measures of *HR-alliance relevant threats* and *HR-alliance relevant sanctions*. As such, these measures are best conceptualized as counts of the number of countries with similar or better human rights practices, weighted according to the targeted states' alliance portfolio similarity to the referent state, that have been targeted with these sanction events in a given year. All sanction variables are lagged one-year to separate the aftermath of the sanction events from the practices that preceded the sanction activity.

Control Variables & Methods of Analysis

My empirical analysis also controls for other determinants of government respect for human rights that have been found to be important in previous research and whose inclusion is necessary to isolate the effect of sanction activity. In previous studies, democracies have been found to demonstrate greater respect for physical integrity rights than nondemocracies (Davenport and Armstrong 2004; Poe, Tate, and Keith 1999). Thus, in the following analyses, I control for *regime type* using the Polity IV Project's Revised Combined Polity Score (Marshall and Jaggers 2009), which varies from -10 (most autocratic) to 10 (most democratic).

Previous work also shows that higher levels of *economic development* are related to greater respect for physical integrity rights (Poe and Tate 1994; Richards, Gelleny, and Sacko 2001). To control for the level of economic development, I utilize the natural logarithm of the state's gross domestic product (GDP) per capita, adjusted for purchasing power parity. States with greater populations also tend to have lower respect for physical integrity rights (Henderson 1993; Poe et al. 1999). As such, I also control for the natural logarithm of the state's *population*. Data on both economic development and population come from the Penn World Table 6.3 (Heston, Summers, and Aten 2009).

Previous studies on respect for physical integrity rights also control for civil conflict, as intrastate conflict is consistently found to be negatively associated with government respect for human rights (e.g., Hill and Jones 2014; Poe and Tate 1994; Richards, Webb, and Clay 2015). As such, I include a dichotomous control for *civil conflict*, which is coded as 1 if a state has an ongoing civil conflict, defined as a conflict that has reached twenty-five or more battle deaths during the year in question. These data come from Version 4–2014 of the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset (Allansson, Melander, and Themnér 2017; Gleditsch et al. 2002).

Finally, the analytical models also control for temporal and spatial autocorrelation that other studies find influence states' human rights practices (e.g., Greig, Lantrip, and Poe 2006; Poe et al. 1999). I include a one-year *temporal lag* of the dependent variable as well as a contiguity-based *spatial lag* of the dependent variable in several models. The temporal lag is equal to the state's physical integrity rights index score in the previous year. I calculate the spatial lag by determining the weighted average level of respect for physical integrity rights in nearby states in the current year. Following Greig et al. (2006) and Richards et al. (2015), I do this by multiplying the vector of physical integrity rights index scores by a row-standardized contiguity matrix, defined as

$$\boldsymbol{w}_{ij} = \frac{1/(1+d_{ij})}{\sum_{j=1}^{n} 1/(1+d_{ij})},$$

where d_{ij} equals the minimum distance between the borders of states i and j if $i \neq j$ and the distance between them is less than or equal to 950 km; otherwise, $\boldsymbol{w}_{ij}$ equals 0. By including both temporal and spatial lags, some of the regressions in this study utilize the spatio-temporal autoregressive (STAR) model (Hays, Kachi, and Franzese 2010).[3] In models that exclude the spatial lag, I use

3 The results of the STAR model are calculated using spatial maximum likelihood (S-ML) methods, via the spreg

Table 1. Direct human rights sanction activity & government respect for physical integrity

	(1) OLS	(2) Fixed effects	(3) STAR
HR Sanction Threat Starts	0.744**	0.685**	0.722*
	(0.372)	(0.315)	(0.370)
HR Sanction Threat Ongoing	−0.443	−0.368	−0.419
	(0.317)	(0.234)	(0.313)
HR Sanction Threat Ends	0.236	0.258	0.265
	(0.371)	(0.261)	(0.370)
HR Sanction Imposition Starts	−0.360	−0.403	−0.366
	(0.279)	(0.245)	(0.284)
HR Sanction Imposition Ongoing	−0.290***	−0.444**	−0.331***
	(0.102)	(0.177)	(0.102)
HR Sanction Imposition Ends	0.468*	0.338	0.494*
	(0.269)	(0.233)	(0.268)
Regime Type	0.0327***	0.0385***	0.0317***
	(0.00336)	(0.00833)	(0.00334)
Population (ln)	−0.137***	−0.868***	−0.141***
	(0.0157)	(0.202)	(0.0157)
Economic Development (ln(GDP))	0.136***	−0.159	0.107***
	(0.0222)	(0.111)	(0.0224)
Civil Conflict	−0.996***	−1.236***	−1.005***
	(0.0751)	(0.150)	(0.0746)
Temporal Lag	0.644***	0.410***	0.625***
	(0.0133)	(0.0250)	(0.0136)
Spatial Lag			0.0853***
			(0.0115)
Constant	1.930***	12.38***	1.971***
	(0.239)	(1.986)	(0.238)
Observations	3,201	3,201	3,201
Sigma			1.156***
			(0.0162)

Robust standard errors in parentheses.
Two-tailed tests: *** $P < 0.01$, ** $P < 0.05$, * $P < 0.1$.

ordinary least squares regression both with and without country-level fixed effects.

Results & Discussion

Tables 1 and 2 provide the results of six different models predicting government respect for physical integrity rights. The control variables perform as expected when significant. Civil conflict and population are negatively associated with government respect for physical integrity rights, while regime type, economic development, and the temporal lag are positively related with government respect for physical integrity rights. Furthermore, the spatial lag, which captures the weighted average of respect for physical integrity rights in nearby states, is also consistently significant and positively related to government respect for human rights in Models 3 through 6. The analysis thus provides strong support for the contention that there is significant spatial interdependence in states' human rights practices (Greig et al. 2006; Richards et al. 2015).

These analyses also provide strong evidence that human rights sanction activities have significant effects on human rights practices in both directly targeted states and states that share crucial similarities with the target

package in Stata 14 (MacMillan, Franzese, and Hays 2009; Franzese and Hays 2008). The weights matrix was developed using the Cshapes package in R (Weidmann and Gleditsch 2010; Weidmann, Kuse, and Gledistsch 2010) and the **spatwmat** command in Stata (Pisati 2001). For more information on the STAR model and why its calculation via spatial maximum likelihood is appropriate, see Franzese and Hays (2007).

Table 2. Direct & relevant human rights sanction activity & government respect for physical integrity STAR models

	(4) Human rights	(5) Alliance	(6) HR-alliance
HR Sanction Threat Starts	0.651*	0.675*	0.676*
	(0.370)	(0.368)	(0.370)
HR Sanction Threat Ongoing	−0.370	−0.390	−0.377
	(0.319)	(0.316)	(0.318)
HR Sanction Threat Ends	0.243	0.260	0.251
	(0.367)	(0.366)	(0.368)
HR Sanction Imposition Starts	−0.387	−0.381	−0.390
	(0.286)	(0.285)	(0.286)
HR Sanction Imposition Ongoing	−0.325***	−0.330***	−0.328***
	(0.103)	(0.103)	(0.103)
HR Sanction Imposition Ends	0.496*	0.495*	0.500*
	(0.266)	(0.265)	(0.267)
Relevant Threats	0.0486**	0.0477**	0.0768*
	(0.0242)	(0.0229)	(0.0410)
Relevant Impositions	0.00234	−0.0114	0.000795
	(0.0136)	(0.0115)	(0.0185)
Regime Type	0.0318***	0.0318***	0.0318***
	(0.00336)	(0.00335)	(0.00335)
Population (ln)	−0.140***	−0.140***	−0.140***
	(0.0157)	(0.0157)	(0.0157)
Economic Development (ln(GDP))	0.106***	0.106***	0.105***
	(0.0224)	(0.0224)	(0.0224)
Civil Conflict	−1.010***	−1.010***	−1.011***
	(0.0746)	(0.0746)	(0.0748)
Temporal Lag	0.645***	0.625***	0.642***
	(0.0232)	(0.0136)	(0.0205)
Spatial Lag	0.0848***	0.0853***	0.0849***
	(0.0115)	(0.0115)	(0.0115)
Constant	1.833***	1.964***	1.860***
	(0.276)	(0.254)	(0.265)
Observations	3,200	3,200	3,200
Sigma	1.155***	1.155***	1.155***
	(0.0162)	(0.0162)	(0.0162)

Robust standard errors in parentheses.
Two-tailed tests; $^{***}P < 0.01$, $^{**}P < 0.05$, $^{*}P < 0.1$.

state. Models 1 through 3 in Table 1 focus primarily on the direct effects of human rights sanction activity, while Models 4 through 6 in Table 2 add the measures of relevant sanction activity targeting other states. Across all six models, the variable accounting for the start of human rights sanction threats is significant and positively associated with government respect for physical integrity rights in the following year. The ongoing occurrence of sanction impositions, on the other hand, is negatively associated with respect for physical integrity rights. However, this negative effect likely dissipates in the year following the end of that imposition, as the variable representing imposition end is significant and positively associated with respect for physical integrity in five out of the six models.

Figure 1 presents the predicted level of government respect for physical integrity rights across various types of sanction activities based on Model 2, which includes country fixed-effects. These predictions and their associated confidence intervals were calculated using the delta method as employed by the *margins* command in Stata 14, while keeping all other variables at their respective means and modes. Focusing on Hypothesis 1, the direct threat of human rights–based economic sanctions only produces a significant improvement in the predicted level

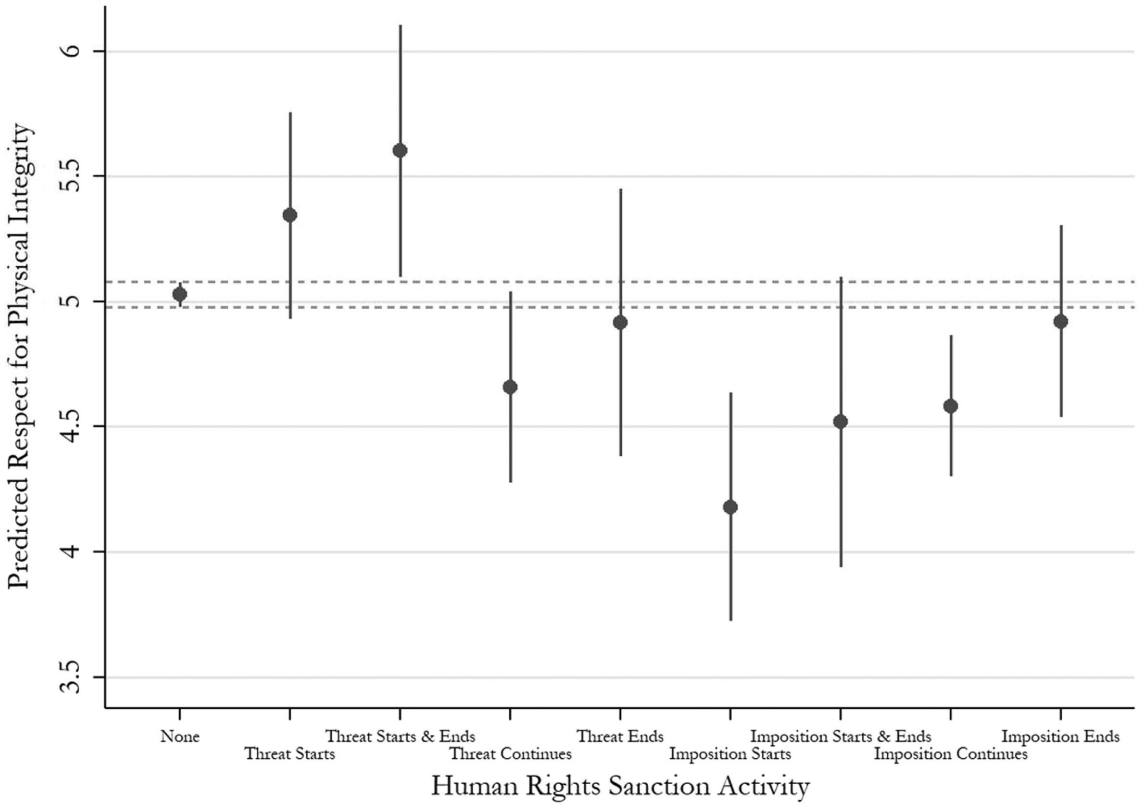

Figure 1. Predicted respect for physical integrity rights across direct economic sanction activities

of respect for physical integrity rights if that threat begins and ends, with no imposition, in the same year. Sanction threats that do not end in their first year, continue after that year, and end in later years produce no statistically significant effects. Moving to Hypothesis 2, imposed human rights–based economic sanctions appear to significantly decrease government respect for physical integrity rights until the year immediately following their end, at which time predicted respect for physical integrity is not significantly different than expected in a state undergoing no sanction activity.

These findings are largely supportive of theoretical expectations and empirical findings in the existing literature. Based on the formal models developed by Morgan and Miers (2001) and Lacy and Niou (2004), governments that are likely to acquiesce to a demand for improved human rights practices in the form of a sanction threat will probably do so relatively early on in the threat stage of that sanction event. States that allow the threat to continue unanswered likely believe that the threatened sanction cannot impose sufficient costs to make a change in practices worthwhile. Alternatively, these states may doubt the sender's resolve to impose the sanctions. As a result, the majority of states upon which human rights–based economic sanctions are imposed have already demonstrated their unwillingness to improve their practices in response to the sanction. Instead, these states choose to bear the expected costs of sanctions, potentially including increased grievances (Wood 2008), heightened anti-government action (Allen 2008), and an increased probability of leader removal (Marinov 2005). These pressures, combined with reduced economic resources and an unwillingness to change human rights practices in response to sanctions, typically lead the government to resort to increased repression (Peksen 2009; Wood 2008).

In order to test for the indirect effects of human rights–based economic sanction activity suggested in Hypotheses 3 and 4, Models 4 through 6 in Table 2 each use different weighted versions of the ongoing human rights threats and impositions variables. Model 4 finds partial support for Hypothesis 3. In particular, it appears

that ongoing threats of human rights sanctions against states with similar or better human rights practices than the referent state are related to higher respect for physical integrity in the referent in the following year. Likewise, Model 5 finds support for Hypothesis 4, via a slightly smaller, but still significant and positive, coefficient on the measure of human rights sanction threats weighted for the target's alliance portfolio similarity to the referent state. Finally, Model 6 also provides support for Hypotheses 3 and 4: the use of alliance portfolio similarity to weight the count of threats against states with similar or better human rights practices than the referent further increases the substantive size of the estimated coefficient.

That said, the relevance-weighted measures of human rights sanction impositions never achieve statistical significance in any of the models. Combined with the previous discussion of the direct effect of threats on target states, the findings presented here provide support for the expectation that the threat of human rights sanctions is potentially a more effective tool for improving global respect for human rights than the actual imposition of such sanctions. Thus, while sanction threats provide nontargeted observers with information about their likelihood of being targeted, impositions seem to provide little additional relevant information to nontarget states. However, given that human rights sanctions are primarily imposed by the United States, which has served as the primary sender of 63 percent of human rights–based economic sanctions since 1981 (Morgan et al. 2014; Morgan et al. 2014), this finding may not hold for economic sanctions imposed over issues other than human rights. If the pool of sanction sender states over other issues is more diverse than that observed with regard to human rights, potential targets may in fact learn a great deal about the sender state based on its willingness to impose a sanction following a threat in those other issue areas. Future research should focus on other types of sanction activity to determine if this is indeed the case.

These findings raise a larger question: if imposed human rights sanctions diminish respect for human rights in target states, but threatened human rights sanctions increase respect for human rights in targets as well as states that are similar to targets, what does this mean for the utility of human rights sanctions as a method for improving human rights practices worldwide? To address this question, I combine the estimates from Model 4 with two examples of human rights–based sanction activity from my data to calculate the predicted effects of those activities on worldwide human rights practices.[4] Due to the use of the STAR model, the calculation of effects is not as simple as the straightforward interpretation of the coefficients, which in this case represent pretemporal, prespatial impetuses (Franzese and Hays 2007). Thus, to determine the effect that sanction activity has on human rights practices, one must take into account not only the direct effect that any change in an independent variable would have on the dependent variable but also how those changes in the dependent variable filter back through the system via the spatial lag.

Due to the operationalization of the sanction threat and imposition variables, any increase in those variables is short-lived, lasting only until the sanction is removed. As such, the long-run steady state effects of such a short-term increase are not very meaningful. However, new sanction activity was introduced in most years in the analysis, highlighting the importance of demonstrating the potential short-run effects of such sanction activity. I therefore calculate the first-year (1997) postspatial response effects of two new human rights–based sanction activities seen in 1996, that is, a human rights sanctions threat against China that began and ended in the same year and an imposed human rights sanction against Burundi that began and was still ongoing at year's end (Morgan et al. 2014; Morgan et al. 2014). I employ the delta method described by Franzese and Hays (2007) to calculate standard errors for each of these effects.[5]

Figure 2 shows the estimated global effects in 1997 of the human rights sanctions imposed against Burundi in 1996. The estimated effect of this sanction activity is quite small outside of Burundi. Given that relevant foreign sanction impositions were not statistically significant in any of the models above, the negative externalities of Burundi's economic sanctions are expected to be limited to only those states in its immediate vicinity. However, the estimated effect of the imposed sanctions on Burundi itself is quite large, equating to a loss of slightly more than three-quarters of a point on the nine-point physical integrity rights index.

Figure 3 shows the estimated global effects in 1997 of the human rights sanction threat made against China in 1996. Compared to the substantial direct negative effect

4 Model 4 is chosen to simplify effect estimation, as a single human rights threat actually results in an equal one-unit increase in the HR Relevant Threats variable for every state connected to the threatened state. When alliance portfolio similarity is taken into account alongside human rights, the sixty states to which China's sanction threat is deemed relevant each have a different increase in the HR Relevant Threats variable on the basis of their alliance portfolio similarity to China.

5 There was also a separate human rights–based sanction threat against Burundi earlier in 1996, but I have chosen to only focus on the Burundi imposition and the China threat to simplify the comparison of effects.

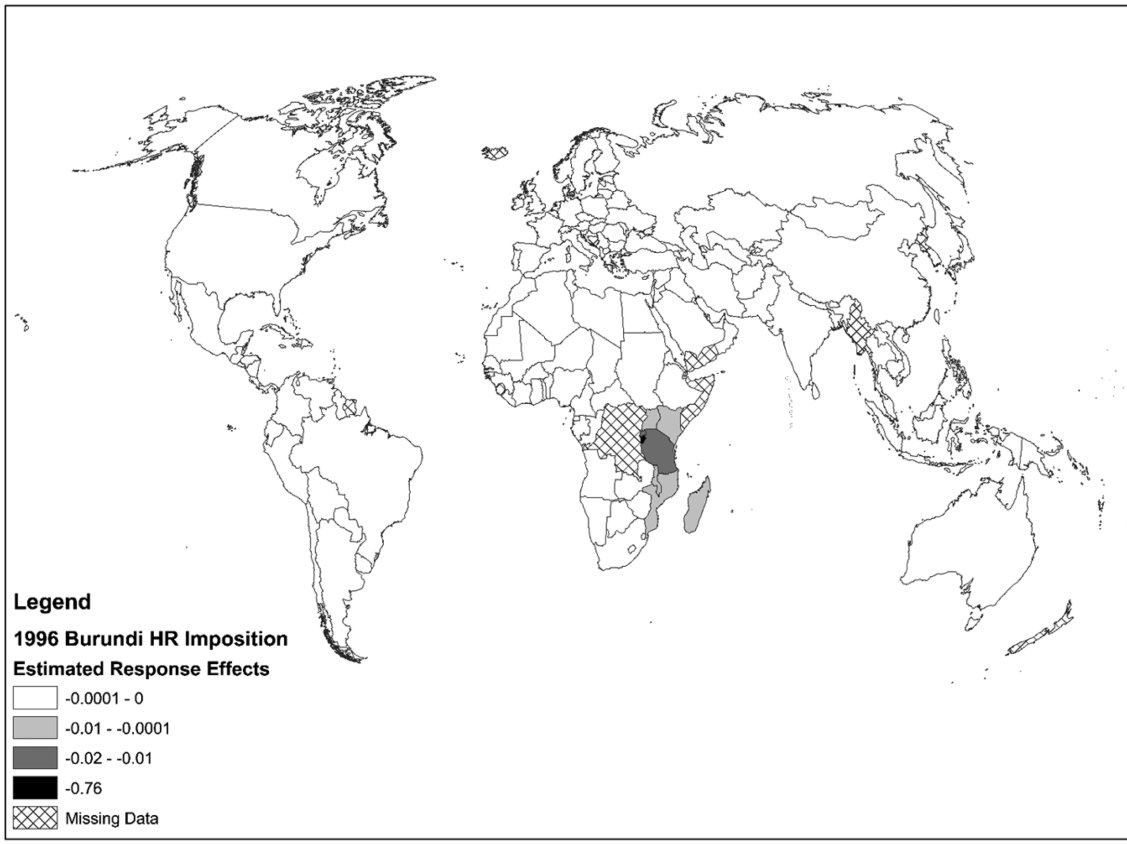

Figure 2. Estimated response effects to the 1996 human rights sanctions imposition in Burundi

that the sanction imposition was estimated to have on Burundi, the direct positive effect of the sanctions threat against China is only about two-thirds as large, amounting to an increase of slightly more than half of a point on the nine-point physical integrity rights scale. On the other hand, relative to the spatial effects of Burundi's imposition on nontargeted states, the estimated response effects of nontargeted states to the threat against China are larger and more widespread, owing primarily to the size and significance of the relevant threats variable. However, while the model predicts that many more states' human rights practices will be affected by the sanction threat against China than by the imposition against Burundi, no individual state in Figure 3 receives a positive effect on their human rights practices comparable to the negative effect estimated for Burundi in Figure 2.

That said, the estimated total effect of 1996 sanctions activity on global respect for physical integrity rights is positive and significant, as shown in Table 3. Indeed, Table 3 drives home the point that, while the effect of the imposition of sanctions against Burundi is estimated to have had a negative and significant effect on global respect for human rights, this effect is not large enough to overcome the positive effect that the threat of human rights sanctions against China is estimated to have had on a much larger number of states. Thus, the model suggests that human rights sanction activity in 1996 had a net positive effect on global human rights practices in 1997. It is, however, important to note that these estimates are based on a single model and on certain assumptions about the spatial interdependence of human rights. Other specifications may yield slightly different estimates, though it is unlikely that the sign on the net effect would change.

Conclusion

Are human rights sanctions a viable tool for increasing government respect for human rights? This study

Figure 3. Estimated response effects to the 1996 human rights sanction threat against China

Table 3. Estimated effects of 1996 HR sanction activity on 1997 global respect for physical integrity

		90% confidence interval	
	Estimated effect	Lower bound	Upper bound
1996 Burundi HR Imposition (Direct)	−0.796	−1.01	−0.580
1996 China HR Threat (Direct)	0.716	0.356	1.07
1996 China HR Threat (Relevant)	3.23	3.22	3.24

presents a mixed picture. On one hand, it appears that the threat of human rights sanctions may have positive effects on respect for physical integrity rights in directly targeted states, as well as on those that have similar alliance portfolios and/or similar or worse human rights practices relative to the target state. On the other hand, states that are directly targeted with imposed human rights sanctions often experience large reductions in government respect for physical integrity rights. To complicate matters, it is likely that the positive effect of human rights–based sanction threats is the result of states' fear of eventually suffering from impositions themselves (e.g., Baldwin 1985; Lacy and Niou 2004). Thus, the only way to ensure that sanction threats still have a positive effect on states' human rights practices is for such sanctions to be publicly imposed from time to time, in order to ensure that sanction threats are still taken seriously. Finally, while it seems that human rights sanction threats often have larger positive global effects than the negative global effects attributed to human rights sanction impositions, no single state experiences a positive effect from sanction threats that is as large as the local negative effect suffered

by those that live in states targeted with imposed human rights sanctions. Therefore, if a government decides to use human rights sanctions to improve *global* human rights practices, it must be willing to inflict large *local* decreases in the level of government respect for physical integrity rights in states targeted with imposed human rights sanctions.

Still, there is good reason to remain circumspect regarding the effects of economic sanctions. Many questions remain unanswered. First, this paper is agnostic as to whether economic sanctions can serve to drive changes in behavior on issues beyond human rights. Further work should seek to determine if the effects discussed in this article hold across other issue areas. Second, while this article represents one of the first quantitative studies demonstrating the effect that sanction activity can have on threatened states, and the first to demonstrate effects on nontarget states, it focuses narrowly on human rights sanction activity. Robustness tests in the online appendix show that taking into consideration the complete pool of sanctions, rather than only human rights sanctions, causes the significant positive effect of sanction threats on human rights to vanish. However, in keeping with the findings of Wood (2008) and Peksen (2009), the negative effect of impositions largely remains. Given that many economic sanctions are imposed for reasons having little or nothing to do with human rights, this may be unsurprising. Nonetheless, it is important to note that the observable positive effects of economic sanction activity appear to be limited to threats based on the human rights practices of the targeted state. On the other hand, the negative human rights effects of sanction impositions have no such limitation; all kinds of economic sanction impositions appear to have the potential to reduce respect for human rights.

Nevertheless, this study demonstrates that economic sanctions may be more viable tools for improving government respect for human rights than previous studies, focusing solely on the effect of impositions on targeted states, have found (e.g., Peksen 2009; Wood 2008). While it is clear that the decision to use economic sanctions for the improvement of human rights practices likely involves trading off small, but globally diffuse, gains for smaller, but perhaps more concentrated, losses, few tools are available to international actors seeking to improve human rights practices worldwide. While most states have ratified international treaties requiring that they respect the rights of their citizens (OHCHR 2017), there are few effective enforcement mechanisms in place when it comes to forcing repressive states to respect human rights. Provided that further research continues to corroborate the findings of this study, economic sanctions may serve as one of the few effective tools that states can employ to improve government respect for human rights globally. However, the question of whether it is ethical to use such a tool, whose effectiveness depends on periodically engaging in action that will lead to worsened respect for human rights in some locations, remains crucial.

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