

Review

Social Capital and the Success of Sanctions

This paper considers the role of social capital in sanction effectiveness. The authors posit that social capital could influence the target population in two ways, opposition effects and rally effects. They test these competing forces by combining the TIES data with the WVS data and they find that social capital decreases the likelihood of sanctions effectiveness.

While I think the authors have an interesting finding, I don't think this paper is ready for prime time. The authors don't make much of a case for the contribution of the paper and the theory section is underdeveloped.

There are a number of things I think the authors can do to improve the quality of the manuscript. I have organized my comments into 5 sections: The Framing of the Paper, The Literature Review, The Theory, The Research Design, and The Results.

Framing

The Question

The current question is a little broad. We have asked, "What determines the success of economic sanctions?" many times. This question is the subject of almost half the papers written about economic sanctions, so this broad question doesn't really help you frame what the paper is about. You should consider making the question more specific to the content of the paper.

The Motivating Example

I don't know that the North Korea case is the best motivating example for this paper. I suppose there may be a lot of trust in the government, to the extent that we believe that the populace has been completely brainwashed, but I don't know that this is the kind of social capital that you are really studying in the paper. Does NK show up in the WVS? I assume the answer is no. A more interesting case would be an episode that stalled and the public rallied around the government. A comparison of two cases could go a long way in this respect as well.

Literature Review

Where my sanctions at?

The authors do an admirable job reviewing existing research on social capital but that isn't the literature the author needs to be reviewing. Instead the author should be reviewing existing research about the effectiveness of economic sanctions and make a case, like the case made in the abstract, that we have looked at the role that formal institutions have on the effectiveness of economic sanctions but we have not considered the role of social capital in sanction effectiveness. The content that is in the current literature review should be shortened and included in the theory section where the author explains the role of social capital in sanction disputes.

Sanction Effectiveness

We have learned a lot about the effectiveness of economic sanctions since 2007. The findings from Hufbauer et al. aren't really the state of the debate any more. They fail to consider the role of sanction threats. The authors should use the findings from this paper (Bapat, Navin A., Tobias Heinrich, Yoshiharu Kobayashi, and T. Clifton Morgan. "Determinants of sanctions effectiveness: Sensitivity analysis using new data." *International Interactions* 39, no. 1 (2013): 79-98.) as a starting point and try to build the case from there.

Theory

The Dueling Influences of Social Capital

I don't love the current theoretical frame for the paper. It feels a bit contrived and both arguments are a little underdeveloped. It feels like the authors are more persuaded by the argument that social capital decreases the likelihood that sanctions will succeed, so the authors should focus on make this argument rather than setting it up as one of two competing perspectives. Normally competing perspectives is reserved for cases where there are existing perspectives that lead to competing expectations. The authors aren't citing previous work here, they are the first people theorizing about it. As such, I think a better frame for the paper would be one that just built out the argument that social capital decreased the likelihood of sanctions effectiveness.

Research Design

Presentation of Data and Variables

In the current draft the authors discuss the data and variables separately. I wonder if there is a way to combine these two subsections to conserve space. You might be able to cram the details of the WVS waves into 2 or 3 sentences as you walk the reader through the variables. Also, your method "subsection" doesn't need to be a subsection, it is a single sentence. Useful exercise: Have you ever seen anything like this in published work? In this case the answer is no. There is no reason to put that sentence in a different subsection.

Defining Success

The authors define success as partial acquiescence by the target, total acquiescence by the target, or negotiated settlement. This is defensible but I imagine that it could raise some eyebrows. Negotiated Settlement can mean a lot of things, it doesn't necessarily mean that the sanctions were successful. What happens to the results if NS is removed? The authors should also put some citations here to demonstrate that this is the conventional coding of "success" and "failure."

Measuring Social Capital

The authors take the country means for the countries in the WVS as a measure for social capital. Again, the authors should put some citations here to demonstrate that this is the convention, though I am curious about this aggregation method. Are these measures normally distributed? If not, would we get different information about country-level trust if we used the median or mode?

Formal and Informal Institutions

My initial reaction to the paper was that you were probably just picking up variation caused by democracy. People living in democratic states trust the government more and we know that sanctions against democracies are less likely to succeed. Of course, the authors include the polity score and the measures of social capital are all statistically significant. This leaves me in a funny place. I believe your finding but I don't believe your explanation of the finding.

In the next round of revisions, the authors should make the case for a negative relationship between social capital and the effectiveness of sanctions and should consider discussing the correlations of the polity variable with the measures of trust. The case the authors should be making is about the failure of existing research to consider informal institutions. This makes me curious about the differences between the measures. Are the correlations low, medium, or high? What do we make of the remaining variation in Polity and the Social Capital variables? In reworking the theory, the authors should also be thinking through these variables. That bit of detective work could be of interest to the reader and could be something the authors could use to frame their argument.

Results

Presentation of Results

Could the predicted probability plots be combined? An array or a single plot would save you some space.

Formatting of Draft for Review

If the paper gets accepted, all of this stuff gets worked out in the end but it is not likely to be accepted if the presentation of the material is super messy. Two major thoughts. First, put the appendix after the tables and figures for the main draft. Second, try and make sure the tables aren't spilling across multiple pages.

Model Fit

Use the AIC and the BIC instead of the Pseudo R-Squared and the Log-Likelihood. People are more familiar with information criteria.