

Effect of sanctions on access to justice, rights, and public services

Sanctions have harmful effects on press freedom and private property rights, and this is more pronounced the more comprehensive the sanctions.

Geographic region: Global

Effect size: Harmful effect ($g=-0.114$)

Confidence in study findings: Medium (2 studies with 17 effect sizes)

Short summary

Sanctions often reduce press freedom and weaken private property rights as target regimes tighten control and reallocate resources to maintain stability. Comprehensive sanctions exacerbate repression and economic insecurity, undermining institutional protections which results in harmful effects on access to justice, rights, and public services in affected countries.

Long summary

The intervention

Economic sanctions are imposed by states and international bodies to influence the policies of target governments, often aiming to promote democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. Sanctions may include trade embargoes, asset freezes, and restrictions on financial transactions. However, their impact extends beyond the intended targets, affecting the broader socio-political landscape, including press freedom and private property rights. The sanctions are implemented by entities such as the United Nations, the United States, and the European Union and can persist for extended periods, exacerbating economic and institutional pressures in the targeted countries.

How the intervention is expected to affect this outcome

Sanctions are expected to pressure governments into adopting democratic reforms and respecting human rights. However, in practice, they often lead to unintended consequences such as increased authoritarianism, suppression of dissent, and weakening of institutional protections for private property. In response to economic hardship, sanctioned regimes may tighten control over the media to prevent criticism and reallocate resources away from essential sectors to maintain political stability. These measures can restrict press freedom, limit access to unbiased information, and create an environment of economic insecurity that threatens property rights.

The evidence base

The cell contains 2 impact evaluation studies which utilized global datasets. Peksen (2010) includes 147 economies while Peksen (2014) includes 133 economies in the analysis.

Evidence findings

Economic sanctions have a detrimental effect on access to justice, rights, and public services. Sanctions lead to increased government control over the media, reducing press freedom by

limiting access to independent information and imposing restrictions on journalistic activities. The findings indicate that comprehensive sanctions exacerbate these effects more severely than targeted measures. Sanctions can also contribute to the erosion of private property rights, as governments facing economic constraints resort to arbitrary confiscation and redistribution of wealth to sustain political support and economic stability. In sanctioned states, the deterioration of property rights is more pronounced under comprehensive sanctions, which significantly weaken legal protections and encourage state-led expropriation.

Included studies

Peksen (2010) The study assesses the impact of coercive diplomacy (in the form of economic sanctions) on press freedom. It is argued that foreign economic coercion will likely deteriorate press freedom by (1) restricting a sanctioned country's interactions with the outside world, thereby allowing the target regime to have greater control over the free flows of information, and (2) inflicting significant economic damage on the sustainability and development of independent media outlets. The study has a quasi-experimental design. The study uses time-series, cross-national empirical data over a large number of countries for the period 1980–2000. The results for the severity of economic sanctions ($p < 0.01$) demonstrate that both extensive and limited sanctions have a statistically significant adverse impact on press freedom. The models that look at the possible differential impact of unilateral and multilateral sanctions also confirm that both types of sanctions will cause significant damage to the media's independence and sustainability under foreign economic pressures. The study is rated as medium confidence as it is designed as a non-experimental study design and does not fully describe the outcomes in the study. The study is rated as medium confidence as it is designed as a non-experimental study design and only partially defines the outcomes in the study.

Peksen (2014) The study assesses the extent to which economic sanctions prompt the target regime to manipulate the domestic economic conditions through arbitrary confiscation and redistribution of private property and wealth. It is argued that economic coercion is a direct threat to political survival and the coercive capacity of the target government creates incentives for politically insecure elites to engage in the policy of predation to counter the negative economic effects of the coercion on themselves and their constituency. The study has quasi-experimental design. The study uses time series cross-national data from 1960 to 2005. The sanction regimes that are comprehensive and costly tend to be more detrimental to private property rights than the limited and low-cost sanction regimes ($P < 0.01$). The study is rated as medium confidence as it is designed as a non-experimental study design and has partially defined the outcomes in the study.

Confidence assessment

Overall low: The overall confidence for this cell is low as it only includes 2 studies.

Other outcomes in this study:

None