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The Democratizing Effects of Democracy Related Sanctions During and After the Cold War

Philip Warncke

Abstract

Against persistent pessimism surrounding the study of international sanctions, relatively novel scholarship argues that sanctions can positively impact targeted authoritarian regimes' level of democratic compliance – provided that such sanctions explicitly aim to improve democratic standards (i.e. democracy sanctions). Recent research also assumes that this is a rather new phenomenon as sanctions only became an effective democracy promotion tool after the end of the Cold War. This study relaxes the latter assumption in that it considers similar sanction episodes dating as far back as 1956. Based on panel data on all authoritarian states between 1946 and 2012, the results reaffirm that democracy sanctions lead to increased odds for positive democratic change. Furthermore, the study finds that instead of harming target states' economies, these sanctions impact key domestic determinants of democratization, namely the occurrence of anti-government protests and incumbent regime crisis. Democracy sanctions also generate interaction effects with these factors as their democratizing impact becomes significantly more pronounced when they concur with protests and regime crisis. The theoretical implications of the findings are discussed alongside possible avenues for future research.

Keywords: democracy, democratization, sanctions, Cold War, authoritarian regimes, protests, regime crisis.

Introduction

Sanctions are among the most widely used foreign policy instruments used by Western democracies to achieve democratic improvements within authoritarian countries (Cortright & Lopez 2000, Hufbauer et al. 2007). Since the end of the Cold War, promoting democracy, human rights, and compliance

with the rule of law has become by far the most likely reason the European Union and the United States implement sanctions against third states (Portella & von Soest 2012). However, the use of sanctions, especially as a democracy promotion tool, has long been controversial. A vast academic literature suggests that sanctions are counterproductive when used against dictators and, even worse, lead to detrimental humanitarian costs for the wider population.

A recent study by von Soest and Wahman (2015a) considers only such sanctions that are specifically applied to punish authoritarian abuse, hereafter democracy sanctions. Against previous pessimism regarding sanctions' ability to further democratization, their results show that democracy sanctions can exert a positive effect on the likelihood for future democratic improvements. One of the reasons these authors obtain results contradicting previous studies is that democracy sanctions qualitatively differ from most other sanction types. Democracies rarely punish dictatorships with comprehensive trade embargoes as response to fraudulent elections, for example. In such instances, Western states are more likely to use targeted measures aiming to punish a small section of the ruling elites – and such measures rarely invoke collateral damage on the wider population.

This study aims to further the understanding of how democracy related sanctions affect changes in democracy levels within targeted autocracies. While von Soest and Wahman suggest that sanctions destabilize authoritarian regimes by inflicting short-term economic pain, the present analysis contradicts this hypothesis. Instead, the results show that democracy sanctions do not significantly affect the health of target states' economies. These sanctions, however, do lead to an increased likelihood for the occurrence of popular anti-government demonstrations – which in turn robustly correlate with future democratic improvements. Furthermore, the results indicate that democracy sanctions not only increase the odds for the occurrence of government crisis scenarios (such as elite splits and government breakdowns), sanctions also work to condition the outcome of such events. With sanctions in place, authoritarian governments are far more likely to experience democratic improvements.

Another contribution of this study is that it extends the observation period to consider democracy related sanction regimes dating as far back as 1946. Interestingly, the results remain stable between 1946 and 1989, which sheds new light on the hitherto neglected debate surrounding the efficiency of Western democracy promotion during the Cold War (Pee 2015).

The remainder of the article discusses the relationship between sanctions and democratization, presents the research aim and hypothesis, and outlines the data and methodologies used. The empirical results and their theoretical relevance are followed by a short conclusion.

Sanctions and Democratization

There are few countries that have been as thoroughly, persistently, and futilely sanctioned as the Castro regime in Cuba and the Kims in North Korea; yet economic coercion against Saddam Hussein, Manuel Noriega, Raoul Cédras, Muammar Gadhafi, and Robert Mugabe stand just as exemplary for the failure of sanctions to invoke behavioural change among dictators (Bahrami & Parsi 2012, Weiss 1999). A host of scholars has therefore contended that economic sanctions are particularly poor democracy promotion tools (Allen 2005, Allen 2008, Collins & Bowdoin 1999, Drezner 1999, Galtung 1967, Licht 2011, Pape 1997, Wintrobe 1990). As Bahrami and Parsi (2012) note, none of the ten most comprehensively sanctioned authoritarian countries between 1955 and 2010¹ have successfully democratized to date.

Several large-n studies support this intuition. Assessing the effects of all major sanction episodes against dictatorships between 1972 and 2000, Peksen and Drury (2010) for instance observe a sharp decline in the respect for human rights and democracy levels in autocracies following sanction implementation. Supplementary studies have found that sanctions also worsen the level of respect for civil liberties and the physical integrity of citizens as dictators are forced to revert to increased repression if economic hardship succeeds in destabilizing their rentier system (Escribà-Folch & Wright 2010, Lopez & Cortright 1997, Marinov 2005, Peksen 2009, Wood 2008). Even worse, an abundance of case studies show that sanctions can cause significant collateral damage to civilian populations, such as increasing poverty and violence, as well as declining living standards and life expectancy (Allen & Lektzian 2013, Cortright & Lopez 1995, Lopez & Cortright 1997, Weiss 1999).

Furthermore, there is ample ground to believe that while sanctions might be effective at pressuring democratically elected governments, economic pressure is less efficient against authoritarian targets (Gibbons & Garfield 1999, Kaempfer et al. 2004, Weiss 1999). Brooks (2002), for instance, argues that trade restrictions are counterproductive in authoritarian states as they strengthen constituencies allied with the regime while weakening the middle class (see also Gibbons & Garfield 1999, Rowe 1993). As a welcome means of free propaganda, sanctions can also help the regime to reinforce pre-existing anti-Western and anti-democratic legitimization narratives (Grauvogel & von Soest 2014, Miyagawa 1992: 84-86). As such, sanctions have frequently been used as pretext to justify violations of basic human rights including an increase in extrajudicial killings and violent crackdowns of opposition protests (Grauvogel & von Soest 2014).

It is therefore unsurprising that scholars of international relations have long viewed sanctions with scepticism (e.g. Pape 1997). This, however,

¹ Cuba, Iran, Iraq, Liberia, Libya, North Korea, Sudan, Syria, Vietnam, and Zimbabwe.

stands in stark contrast to policy-makers' continued faith in sanctions as effective, yet non-violent alternative to warfare. While economic embargoes have been used throughout recorded history, sanctions have increasingly become the standard response of Western democracies to rogue behaviour by authoritarian states since the end of WWII (Cortright & Lopez 2000). Punishing dictatorships for democratic misconduct, such as holding fraudulent elections, repressing opposition groups, or committing gross human rights violations, is now by far the most commonly stated reason Western democracies initiate new sanction regimes (von Soest & Wahman 2015a). Between 1990 and 2006 alone, the EU and the US issued democracy related sanctions against 47 countries, alongside several thousand individuals and entities accused of human rights abuse (Morgan et al. 2014).

If sanctions are rarely efficient at promoting democratization as the above literature suggests, why would Western states attach such high priority to them? To resolve this paradox, it is crucial to understand that democracy sanctions are by design very distinct from other types of sanction regimes. First and foremost, in contrast to security, drug trafficking, and trade related sanctions, democracy sanctions rarely ever consist of comprehensive economic embargoes (Hufbauer et al. 2007). Far more common are partial trade restrictions that prohibit the import/export of specific goods known to benefit members of the target states' political elite (Morgan et al. 2014). For example, Western states have responded to fraudulent elections by cutting trade with state owned oil companies (Venezuela), restrictions against wine exporters (South Africa), or diamond traders (Liberia) as a response to government sponsored political violence (Morgan et al. 2014). Most democracy sanctions consist of freezing foreign accounts and travel restrictions against members of authoritarian elites. In many cases, however, Western states also threaten to withhold the payments for prestigious development projects (Morgan et al. 2014). These threats can also include the withdrawal of military assistance, training, and arms deals, as exemplified by sanctions against the Pinochet Junta and El Salvador in 1986 (Angell & Pollack 1990).

The distinct nature of democracy related sanctions then suggests that they affect authoritarian states in different ways than traditional, more comprehensive trade embargoes. In their reassessment of sanctions effects on democracy levels, von Soest and Wahman (2015a) therefore distinguish between democracy related and other types of sanctions. Against the verdict of most previous empirical studies, their results demonstrate that democracy sanctions are actually robustly correlated with democratic improvements (von Soest and Wahman 2015a).

Western military and development aid sanctions, they argue, at least partially contributed to (temporal) democratic liberalizations in countries including Thailand (1993), Guatemala (1993), Nicaragua (1992), Peru (2000) and Malawi (2002) (von Soest and Wahman 2015a). In these cases, the threat of Western aid withdrawal drove a wedge between ruling authoritarian elites

over the prospects of political reform – at the end of which a pro-democracy fraction proved to be dominant. While there are clear examples of failures of democracy sanctions, especially in countries where political elites are hostile to western democracies, sanctioning pressure is considerably more difficult to resist for dictators formally aligned with the West. This is why sanctions against Pinochet, Park, and various Apartheid-governments in South Africa proved to be more effective than those against countries such as Iran, Simbabwe, and Cuba, for example (Cortright & Lopez 2000, Galtung 1967).

Democracy Sanctions During and After the Cold War

However, von Soest and Wahman's study leaves two distinct shortcomings: an unjustified temporal curtailment and a lack in exploring the causal chain through which democracy sanctions affect the likelihood for democratic reforms. The present study aims to redress both these deficiencies. Firstly, von Soest and Wahman (2015a) assume that democracy related sanctions only became a meaningful tool of democracy promotion after the Cold War had ceased. This temporal curtailment runs the risk of ignoring a substantial part of the democratization processes during democracy's "long third wave" starting with the ousting of President Salazar in Portugal in 1974 (Huntington 1991). It further turns a blind eye to the many attempted yet ultimately unsuccessful democratization attempts in Latin America, the Caribbean, and parts of Africa during the 1950's and 60's.

The present study relaxes the assumption that sanctions-induced democratizing pressure only became a relevant factor with the shifting international climate from 1989 onward and extends the universe of sanction scenarios in which concerns for human rights and democracy were of primary importance – even at the height of the Cold War. Such cases include the comprehensive disinvest campaign against Apartheid South Africa (1984-1989), US sanctions against South Korea (1980 and 1987), as well as economic coercion imposed on the military juntas of Argentina (1982), Bolivia (1981), Guatemala (1983), Panama (1986-88), and Peru (1962) (Morgan et al. 2014). In fact, democracy related sanctions reach back until 1956 when the US, as well as almost all Western European states, cut economic ties to Hungary as a response to the violent crackdown of the Hungarian Revolution (Morgan et al. 2014). Furthermore, the abovementioned sanction regimes do not fundamentally differ from typical post-Cold War examples in that they comprise of targeted trade restrictions and aid withdrawal. Thus, there is no inherent reason pre-1990 democracy sanctions should have exerted different effects on authoritarian regimes than their post-1990 counterparts.

Based on the above discussion, hypothesis H1 tests whether democracy related sanctions also exert a positive effect on future democracy levels in targeted authoritarian states.

H1: Democracy related sanctions positively impact democracy levels in targeted authoritarian states during and after the Cold War (1946-1989).

The Causal Effects of Democracy Sanctions

Secondly, while von Soest and Wahman's study (2015a) demonstrates that democracy sanctions can be conducive to democratic change, it only makes limited claims as to why this is the case. Although the authors demonstrate that sanctions have shown to increase the likelihood of authoritarian regime change, this does not necessarily imply that future regimes are more democratic than previous ones (Goemans et al. 2009). What is more, the authors assume that sanctions induce short term economic hardship, which in turn destabilizes power coalitions between incumbent authoritarian elites. As mentioned above, however, democracy sanctions rarely have the potential to offset substantial economic decline. By design, they instead aim to punish only small fractions among incumbent political elites through financial asset freeze, travel bans and the threat to withdraw strategic or military assistance. Moreover, even if sanctions include the withdrawal of development aid projects, it seems questionable why this would lead to substantial economic decline (at least compared to comprehensive trade embargoes). As Shin et al. (2016) demonstrate, if economic sanctions do not entirely foreclose trade, they do not lead to measurable changes in targeted states GDP. It is therefore unlikely that democracy sanctions invoke substantial economic hardship upon targeted countries. Hypothesis H2 tests this assumption empirically:

H2: Democracy related sanctions do not systematically affect the economic well-being of targeted authoritarian states.

Based on the literature on civic protest and democratic transition (Bellin 2012, Collier & Mahoney 1997, Teorell 2010), this study instead suggests that democracy sanctions increase the likelihood and salience of popular, anti-government demonstrations, which in turn contribute to positive democratic change in targeted states. As Grauvogel et al. (2017) show, sanctions generally increase the likelihood of street protests, even among non-democracies. For anti-government protests in authoritarian regimes, there is safety only in numbers – so the question of where and when to mobilize against the regime is essential for opposition movements survival (Teorell 2010). Grauvogel et al. (2017) then conclude that sanctions can function as crucial rallying signals for domestic opposition groups, helping them to coordinate protests across the country.

Moreover, democracy related sanctions can signal the international weakness of incumbent autocrats. To domestic opposition groups, Western sanctions can be interpreted as a sign that ruling dictators have lost international support and prestige – especially if incumbent regimes previously

enjoyed close ties to Western senders. In 1987, for instance, the US Congress made an open threat to withdraw military aid to the Chilean army should Pinochet unconstitutionally extend his tenure as president for another eight years (Morgan et al. 2014). To parts of the opposition, this proved to be a crucial signal that Pinochet had lost most of its Western support, indicating the regimes' domestic weakness, as well as international support for democratic change (Angell & Pollack 1990). Western media coverage further ensured that the no-campaign of 1988 proceeded largely absent violent government repression.

Hypothesis H3 therefore aims to test whether democracy related sanctions increase the likelihood of popular anti-government mobilization and its effectiveness at generating positive democratic change:

H3: Democracy related sanctions both increase the number and political salience of anti-government demonstrations in targeted authoritarian states.

Finally, this study investigates if democracy related sanctions affect the chances of splits within authoritarian regime elites, and whether these splits increase the odds for positive democratic change. Based on democratic transition theory (O'Donnell & Schmitter 1986), democratization is often preceded by protracted dissent within incumbent authoritarian regime elites, typically merging into substantial government crisis. A negotiated transition to democracy then occurs when a moderate fraction splits from the regime and instead allies itself a moderate fraction among the democratic opposition, ensuring its political survival under democracy (O'Donnell & Schmitter 1986).

The above example of the Chilean transition to democracy further reveals the sanctions threat left the ruling military Junta deeply divided about the prospects of Pinochet's continued rule. As a substantial fraction within the military benefited from cordial US relations, the moderate fraction among his generals urged Pinochet prior to the referendum of 1988 to propose that a civilian candidate should instead run on behalf of their interests (Angell & Pollack 1990). This inner elite split then proved to be crucial at Pinochet's acceptance of defeat in the referendum, ruling out that the military would stand united behind him should he try to violently stay in power (Angell & Pollack 1990). Hypothesis H4 tests this theory empirically for the entire universe of cases.

H4: Democracy related sanctions impact the occurrence of elite splits and incumbent government crisis

Research Design and Methodology

This study uses a series of panel data regression models to evaluate the above hypotheses. The sample includes data on all non-democratic states from 1946 – 2012 (as defined in Boix et al. 2013). The models analyzing H1 use the expected change in authoritarian states' level of compliance with democratic procedures as dependent variable. H2-4 are tested with a series of models on sanctions' impact on key variables likely to induce positive democratic change. In each of these models, the main independent variable is a binary assessment of whether an authoritarian state was under the threat and/or actual implementation of democracy related sanctions during a given year. Additionally, variables modelling the interaction effects between sanctions and key explanatory variables are used to test hypotheses H2-4.

Measuring Changes in Democracy

To assess the level of compliance with democratic standards among authoritarian states, it is crucial to regard democracy as a continuous measure rather than a dichotomous one. With this approach, this study follows the conceptual logic of Adcock and Collier (2000), as well as Elkins (2000) and earlier studies on democratic transitions (O'Donnell & Schmitter 1986) in that change towards more democratic forms of governance often proceeds gradually, over an extended timeframe (Teorell 2010). In contrast, dichotomous measurements of regime type solely observe full transitions from authoritarianism towards democracy and are therefore blind to incremental improvements (and deteriorations). As von Soest and Wahman (2015a) note, sanctions may not achieve full-fledged democratic transitions but contribute towards gradual liberalization processes that are only observable when treating levels of compliance with democracy as a continuous measure.

Unfortunately, there are only two indicators providing graded data on democracy for all countries during and after the Cold War: Polity IV – compiled by Marshall et al. (2014) – and the Political Rights and Civil Liberties indices – generated by Freedom House.² While each of these indicators suffers from the crucial weakness of inadequate data aggregation procedures – particularly in treating ordinal and binary data as if it was continuous (Munck & Verkuilen 2002) – there are several reasons for relying solely on the Polity IV index. Firstly, the Polity index offers an extended timespan (starting 1800) compared to Freedom House (starting 1976), making the former more suitable to studying the Cold War period. Secondly, the Freedom House indices have been extensively criticized for political bias (Giannone

² At the time of the analysis, the V-Dem indicators were yet published. Subsequent tests show that the main results hold true for V-Dem's liberal democracy index (Coppedge et al. 2016).

2014, Steiner 2016), conceptual redundancy, and conflation (Munck & Verkuilen 2002). Thirdly, the Freedom House measures are unit rooted, creating the problem of autocorrelation in panel data analysis (Munck & Verkuilen 2002).

These are the reasons why this study solely relies on the Polity IV index. Far from being perfect, this index' key weakness is its conceptional minimalism, focusing mainly on the institutional and procedural dimension of democracy (Munck & Verkuilen 2002). While it delivers comprehensive and genuinely reliable data on the level of competitiveness and openness of political participation, the executive recruitment process, and constraints on executive, it neglects much of the conceptual complexity of democracy (Munck & Verkuilen 2002).

This points to a crucial shortcoming in the present study: Change in democracy, here, can only be measured from the bird's-eye perspective, which might not offer meaningful results to those who insist on a broader conceptualization of democracy. Nevertheless, it does not seem fully implausible that changes in the Polity index reflect changes in the institutional and the social qualities of democracy, given that the Polity indicator itself generally correlates well with other more encompassing democracy indicators (Hadenius & Teorell 2007, Munck & Verkuilen 2002).

To reflect the expected annual change between any two consecutive years, the change in Polity IV variable was calculated as the difference between the Polity value for each upcoming year (t+1) and the current year (t). This ensures that each independent variable value for year t is associated with the expected change in the dependent variable between t+1 and t.

Table 1 summarizes descriptive statistics for the democracy change variable. Although the variable ranged considerably (from -18 to 16), it generally remained constant at zero, as shown for the mode value (4,271 times value 0).

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Democracy Change

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Mode	Std. Deviation	Skewed-ness	Kurtosis
Change in Polity IV	5,634	-18	16	0.09833	0 (4,271 observ.)	1.7823	.083042	26.95081

The high zero frequency is unsurprising given that authoritarian regimes generally remain stable. Nevertheless, this had crucial implications for the statistical tools used in this study. The low levels of variance meant that linear regression models could not generate substantially strong correlations and high R² values.

Data on Democracy Related Sanctions During and After the Cold War

The main independent variable is whether an authoritarian country has been under the threat or actual implementation of democracy related sanctions. Democracy related sanctions are defined here as all coercive, but non-violent diplomatic means that partially or comprehensively restrict trade, flow of capital, personal travel, provision of military equipment, and access to foreign assets with the distinct objective to punish democratic misconduct (i.e. fraudulent elections, military coups, democracy related human right violations) or to achieve general democratic or human rights improvements in the targeted state (Hufbauer et al. 2007). For the post-Cold War period, the data on all democracy related sanction episodes was obtained from the GIGA institute sanctions database (Portella & von Soest 2012).

For the Cold-War years, reliable data on democracy related sanctions is more difficult to obtain. This is primarily because the data on sanction episodes in the Hufbauer et al. (2007) dataset and the comprehensive Threat and Implementation of Economic Sanctions (TIES) database configured by Morgan et al. (2009) do not offer a clear-cut democracy promotion objective code for sanction episodes before 1990. Therefore, this study deliberately expands the definition of democracy sanctions used in von Soest & Wahman (2015a) to also encompass all cases in which sanctions objectives were human rights related. For the Portella & von Soest dataset (2012), this is a relatively straight-forward extension since human rights and democracy related objectives within this dataset converge in more than 90 percent of the cases. To obtain data on Cold-War democracy related sanctions episodes, two proxy-measures were used that most closely resemble democracy sanctions as defined in the Portella & von Soest dataset. One examines whether the sanctioning objective is coded as an improvement to human rights. More specifically, cases in which “sanctions are threatened in order to induce the target state to end repressive laws, policies, or actions. Sanctions may also be taken in an effort to compel the target state to respect individual rights” (Portella & von Soest 2012: 3).

The other proxy is used for cases identified as regime destabilization sanctions, in particular when “sanctions are threatened/imposed alone or with other measures for the purposes of overthrowing a regime in power” (Portella & von Soest 2012: 3). In the historical context of the Cold War, it is important to differentiate between sanctions genuinely aimed at improving democratic and human rights standards in targeted autocracies and those strategically applied to destabilize countries because of the power dynamics of the East-West conflict. To approximate such a distinction, the following additional criteria were applied to define democracy related sanction scenarios:

1. The sending state must have been a fully consolidated democracy and the target state a non-democracy³ at the onset time of the sanction scenario. This restriction ensures that regime destabilization sanctions against democratic governments, such as those against the Allende-government in Chile in from 1971-3, are not mistaken as democracy related sanctions.
2. The sanctioned country must neither have been aligned with the Eastern bloc, nor had a leftist government seen as a threat to Western states' interests. This qualification distinguishes between regime destabilizing sanctions based on Western states' geo-strategic and economic interests and democratizing intends. It ensures that only sanctions aiming to destabilize pro-Western and non-aligned autocracies are considered, instead of capturing all cases of Western sanctions against right-wing and military dictatorships during the Cold War.
3. There must not have been an additional, conflicting sanctioning reason, such as military aggression, non-proliferation, support of terrorism, drug trafficking, or trade disputes (as coded in TIES dataset (2009). This confinement was made to isolate the democratizing effect of democracy related sanctions more effectively.

With democracy related sanctions thusly defined, a binary explanatory sanctions variable was coded for each country-year under the threat and/or actual implementation of such sanctions. For the period of observation, the dataset captures a total of 99 democracy-related sanction episodes, of which 52 took place during and 47 after the Cold War. In total, the democracy-related sanctions variable encompasses 495 authoritarian country-years under sanctions – 157 during and 338 after the Cold War. This indicates that democracy-related sanctions were, on average, more frequently applied after the Cold War. Also, individual sanctions episodes had a significantly longer duration after the Cold War, whereas short term sanctions are more common during the Cold War.

Domestic Determinants of Democratization

Based on the democratic transition literature, this section tests whether sanctions affect three variables known as domestic determinants of democratization: short term economic stress, popular anti-government movements, and incumbent regime crisis.

Again, while von Soest and Wahman (2015a) assume that democracy-related sanctions destabilize authoritarian regimes through short and intense

³ Democracy and non-democracy as defined in Boix et al. (2013).

economic stress, it is not clear whether this specific type of sanction significantly affects economic growth rates at all. By design, most democracy-related sanctions consist of more elite-targeted measures such as restrictions like financial asset freezes and travel bans that should not necessarily translate into wider economic hardship. To test this relationship, the study includes an economic downturn variable based on the World Bank's data on economic growth (The World Bank 2016).

To find alternative causal explanations, this study tests whether democracy sanctions increase the number of street protests against the incumbent regime, thereby fueling the capacity of domestic opposition groups to invoke democratic change (Collier & Mahoney 1997, Teorell 2010). Data on the protest variable was obtained from the Cross-National Time-Series Data Archive (CNTS) compiled by Banks and Wilson (2013). The dataset includes every country-year's number of anti-government protest events exceeding one hundred people.

Finally, to test the above suggested causal link between government crisis and sanctions, a binary measure for incumbent regimes under severe political instability based on the CNTS dataset (Banks & Wilson 2013) was added. The idea here is that sanctions invoke splits within the ruling elite – perhaps within a pro- and anti-Western camp – making the regime more vulnerable to domestic democratizing pressure (Geddes 1999, O'Donnell & Schmitter 1986).

Control Variables

Each model uses a battery of control variables to account for the alternative explanations outlined above. The logged value for GDP per capita - taken from the World Bank (2016) - accounts for the claim that a transition to democracy is more likely to occur in richer countries. The log of country population, also taken from the World Bank (2016), controls for smaller countries' increased vulnerability to the impacts of economic sanctions (Hufbauer et al. 2007) and for the increased chances to democratization in smaller countries (Boix 2003).

Furthermore, two binary variables control for the distorting effects of US military and covert operations (Easterly et al. 2008, Meernik 1996). These variables are coded 1 for all country years in which the United States lead a military intervention within a given state. Another variable does the same for secret operations, such as assistance to overthrowing an incumbent government. The data on such events is taken from Grossman (2014).

Country-years under civil war are controlled for because of both their deteriorating effects on levels of democracy (Poe et al. 1999) and their potential to draw attention to sanction senders (von Soest & Wahman 2015b). The data on civil wars was compiled from the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset (Pettersen & Wallensteen 2015).

Two additional controls are included in the hopes of mitigating the effects of biased sanction target selection (von Soest & Wahman 2015b). Firstly, all models using change in the Polity IV indicator as dependent variable include a country's initial polity score as control for the biased effect of countries which recently saw deteriorations in democracy levels due to coups or fraudulent elections (von Soest & Wahman 2015b). This variable further serves as shield against autocorrelation in these models and mitigates the effect of state repressiveness to democratic change (Bellin 2012). Also, adding the initial polity scores controls for the fact that countries on the lower end of the scheme have a higher potential to move towards the democratic end of the continuum than countries with higher initial scores.

Secondly, the models use a binary variable for those countries who have been sanctioned at least once during the period of observation. The hope is that this rudimentary measure somewhat evens the effects of biased sanction target selection in that it controls for the possibility that Western senders systematically avoid those countries in which democratic change is least likely to occur (von Soest & Wahman 2015b).

Finally, to account for Hufbauer et. al.'s (2007) assertion that the nature of democracy-related sanctions significantly changed after the Cold War, the initial models also include binary control variable for all country-years past 1989. Table 2 below summarizes the study variables.

Analysis and Discussion

Democratizing Effects of Democracy Sanctions During and After the Cold War

Model 1, displayed in table 2 below, covers the years between 1946 and 2012, most extensively using only those variables with data available for the entire period. Model 2 includes key econometric control variables and thus reflects the relationship between democracy related sanctions and change in democracy more holistically. Unfortunately, this truncates the observation period to 1961 to 2012 since there is no reliable economic data available before 1960.

Table 2: The Effects of Sanctions on Change in Level of Democracy (OLS Panel Regression Models)

Model	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Democracy	0.557***	0.548***	0.551*	0.926**	0.544***
Sanctions	(0.127)	(0.135)	(0.312)	(0.447)	(0.154)
GDP-Change		-0.00814*		-0.0159*	0.000736
		(0.00429)		(0.00813)	(0.00506)
Government crisis	-0.0904	-0.0673	-0.250**	-0.204	0.0259
	(0.107)	(0.172)	(0.115)	(0.223)	(0.224)

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Popular protest	0.0589 (0.0382)	0.0654 (0.0535)	0.122*** (0.0447)	0.0824 (0.0583)	0.104 (0.0779)
US military intervention	0.307 (0.230)	0.503 (0.448)	-0.0137 (0.158)	0.0524 (0.511)	1.383** (0.657)
US command operation	-0.0909 (0.356)	0.0966 (0.630)	-0.431 (0.460)	-0.469 (0.830)	1.528*** (0.432)
Post-Cold War	0.264* (0.141)	0.229 (0.314)			
Civil war	0.0586 (0.131)	0.0415 (0.120)	0.183 (0.213)	-0.0164 (0.273)	-0.162 (0.193)
LN GDP per capita		0.127 (0.103)		.3163639 (.2058)	.279912* (.1604)
LN Population total		-0.112 (0.426)		1.136*** (0.272)	-1.136* (0.630)
Oil revenue		-0.00121 (0.00378)		-0.00937 (0.00969)	0.00237 (0.00488)
Ever been sanctioned	-0.152 (0.684)	-1.070* (0.551)	-1.460*** (0.467)	-1.860** (0.788)	
Initial Polity IV score	0.0332*** (0.0103)	0.0521*** (0.0136)	0.0361** (0.0142)	0.0562** (0.0214)	0.0926*** (0.0267)
Constant	-0.405 (0.297)	0.758 (6.128)	0.267 (0.297)	-17.47*** (4.560)	16.89 (9.958)
Number of observations	4,953	3,041	3,235	1,684	1,451
Country fixed effects	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Number of countries	129	105	112	86	93
Time span	1948-2012	1962-2012	1948-1989	1962-1989	1990-2012

All models: Discoll-Kraay standard errors in parentheses; ***p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1; Maximum time-lag: 3 years. Dependent variable in each model is the expected annual change in the Polity IV index (Polity IV at time t+1, minus Polity IV at time t)

It is remarkable that both models demonstrate that there is a statistically robust, positive relationship between democracy-related sanctions and change in the levels of democracy, lending support to hypothesis H1. To further assess the robustness of the relationship during the Cold War period, Models 3 and 4 solely focus on the Cold War years within the sample. Model 3 is solely based on the variables with data ranging back to 1948, whereas Model 4 uses the econometric control variables assessing the period between 1961 and 1989. Although less significant⁴, Models 3 and 4 further confirm that democracy-related sanctions are associated with positive democratizing effects, which further strengthens hypothesis H1. Model 5 reassesses the

⁴ This might be caused by truncating the sample. Panel data models disproportionately punish smaller samples in that they inflate the standard error. This is due to the added country specific dummy variables, reducing the degrees of freedom.

relationship for the post-Cold War period, confirming the basic findings of von Soest and Wahman's (2015a) study.

While democracy sanctions seem to be positively associated with future democratic improvements, models 1 to 4 show that this was also true during the Cold War years, thereby contradicting previously held assumptions about the democratizing effects of Western foreign policy at the height of the East-West confrontation (Easterly et al. 2008, Meernik 1996). The corrosive effects of Western foreign policy in the context of the Cold War – including military interventions against communist-aligned countries, aid for right-wing dictatorships, and crucial assistance with coups against democratically elected governments – are rather well documented and understood (Easterly et al. 2008, Meernik 1996). However, scholarship has thus far largely neglected the study of foreign policy tools deliberately applied to instigate positive democratic change in authoritarian regimes throughout this period (Pee 2015). The results suggest that whenever geostrategic interests during the Cold War confrontation were secondary, sanctions punishing authoritarian abuse and democratic misconduct may have contributed to positive democratic change.

Several sanction episodes against Latin American countries during the Cold War, including Bolivia (1981), Argentina (1882), Brazil (1984), and Panama (1988), as well as the short-lived but substantial political liberalizations in Peru (1962) and Guatemala (1984-86), underscore this hypothesis. These results suggest that future studies on democratic transition episodes should reflect that these events unfolded against the backdrop of comprehensive Western democracy-related sanctions (according to the TIES dataset).

Democracy Sanctions and Domestic Determinants of Democratization

Economic Downturn

Hypotheses H2-4 are assessed through models 6 to 8. Model 6 uses lagged change in GDP as dependent and all previously used explanatory factors as independent variables. The results indicate that democracy related sanctions are not associated with changes in the target states' GDP, lending support to Hypothesis H2. This is in line with previous research on sanctions' overall economic impact (Shin et al. 2016) and suggests that this specific type of sanction is less likely to cause gross humanitarian hardship and other, damaging collateral effects. More importantly though, democracy related sanctions do not increase the odds for positive democratic change by inflicting short-term economic stress, as von Soest and Wahman (2015a) suggest.

Table 3: The Effects of Sanctions on Change in Level of Democracy (OLS Panel Regression Models)

Model	(6)	(7)	(8)
Democracy Sanctions	0.381 (0.529)	0.408*** (0.134)	0.346*** (0.115)
GDP-Change (LDV)	0.241*** (0.0653)	-0.0152** (0.00694)	-0.0142*** (0.00415)
Popular Protest (LDV)	0.0205 (0.0768)	0.0339** (0.0134)	0.0163 (0.0211)
Government Crisis (LDV)	-1.699** (0.742)	0.612*** (0.114)	0.708*** (0.114)
US military intervention	-2.908 (2.582)	-0.0754 (0.290)	0.131 (0.203)
US command operation	-1.074 (1.186)	1.012*** (0.317)	-0.00779 (0.200)
LN population total	-1.645 (1.248)	0.407*** (0.0601)	0.0929** (0.0410)
LN GDP per capita	0.687 (0.697)	0.137** (0.0593)	-0.0964*** (0.0328)
Oil revenue	0.0101 (0.0128)	-0.00308 (0.00355)	0.00123 (0.00264)
Civil War	-0.294 (0.290)	0.101 (0.124)	0.109 (0.102)
Initial Polity IV score	-0.0142 (0.0292)	-0.000740 (0.00891)	-0.0142** (0.00662)
Constant	24.72 (15.37)	-9.089*** (1.089)	-2.095*** (0.698)
Number of observations	2,931	2,864	2,983
Country fixed effects	YES	Conditional	YES
Number of countries	104	96	105
Time span	1962-2012	1962-2012	1962-2012

All models: Standard errors in parenthesis; *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

Model 6: Fixed-effects OLS regression using Driscoll-Kraay standard errors. Dependent variable is expected change in GDP at time $t+1$; GDP change at year t used as lagged dependent variable.

Model 7: Conditional fixed effects negative binomial regression. Dependent variable is expected number of anti-government protests at time $t+1$. Government protests at year t used as lagged dependent variable.

Model 8: Population averaged panel logistic regression using semi-robust standard errors, adjusted for country fixed effects. Dependent variable is the likelihood of occurrence of government crisis in year $t+1$. Government crisis at year t is used as lagged dependent variable.

Popular Mobilization

Model 7 is based on a negative binomial panel regression to reflect the count nature of anti-government protest. The dependent variable is the lagged count of anti-government demonstrations; all previously used variables are used as explanatory variables. Remarkably, democracy related sanctions seem to fuel anti-government protests in targeted authoritarian states – a finding sharply contrasting with Allen’s (2008) study. This suggests that while sanctions overall exert a negative effect on popular mobilization in targeted states, the specific instruments used in democracy related sanction episodes might work to further public anti-government resentment (Kaempfer et al. 2004).

This finding has the potential to shed new light on the debate on the international diffusion of democracy, particularly with regards to the democratizing effects of Western linkage versus leverage. While Levitsky and Way (2006) assume that Western linkage is ultimately more important in determining international democratizing pressure’s success, the present results demonstrate that democracy related sanctions as instruments of Western leverage can influence the likelihood of opposition activism among the population of the targeted authoritarian states. Thus far, such effects are thought to have only materialized when there was a significant degree of linkage between the West and a non-democratic third state (Levitsky and Way 2006). Building on this assumption, one possible explanation is that sanctions are particularly conducive when applied to authoritarian regimes politically aligned to or economically dependent upon Western states. The introduction of sanctions to those states might signal to popular opposition groups that the incumbent regime lost international sponsorship and is therefore particularly weakened (Wood 2008).

The hypothesis that Western sanctions senders have increased linkage to target states was first explored by von Soest and Wahmans’ (2015b) study on biased target selection. For instance, Western sanction targeting is more likely where democratic erosion events – such as coups or fraudulent elections – are broadcasted in Western media. However, Western media is more likely to broadcast such events if there is increased cultural, economic, and political linkage to the target country (von Soest & Wahman 2015b). To test this assertion, supplementary research is needed to better differentiate among cases of differing degrees of Western linkage and leverage in autocracies.

Regime Crisis

Regression model 8 is based on a conditional fixed-effects panel logistic regression with the lagged occurrence of government crisis as dependent variable. The results show a strong positive association between democracy-

related sanctions and autocratic regime crisis. As suggested by Marinov (2005), democracy-related sanctions can work to destabilize governments, thereby opening the door for leadership exit and regime change as part of democratic transition processes (von Soest & Wahman 2015a).

This finding may be further explained by the above hypothesis that leverage instruments particularly hurt autocratic regimes allied to the West. To autocratic regime elites, democracy-related sanctions can be interpreted as signals that a dictatorship previously thought to be worth supporting has fallen out of favor. This might initiate splits within the authoritarian regime elite about how to proceed without the West's support; these splits would subsequently lead to full blown government crisis (O'Donnell & Schmitter 1986). Ultimately, this was the fate of several autocracies that Western states promptly denied support after decades of economic, political, and military assistance at the end of the Cold War, such as South Africa, South Korea, and Taiwan (Huntington 1991, Levitsky & Way 2006).

Taken together, models 6 to 8 suggest that sanctions are more conducive to political rather than economic crisis in targeted authoritarian states. The potential democratizing effects of such political crisis events are analyzed below.

Testing Interaction Effects

Sanctions and Economic Downturn

Models 9 to 11 assess whether democracy-related sanctions generate unique, combined effects if they coincide with the domestic drivers of democratization variables. To isolate such combined effects, each model controls for the respective variable's individual effect while testing the combined (multiplied) indicator. To reduce multicollinearity, the main explanatory and combined effect variables have been centered.

Model 9 demonstrates that there is no significant interaction effect between democracy related sanctions and changes in GDP towards the democracy index. It can thus be concluded that democracy related sanctions neither systematically hurt the target state's economy, nor affect democratization during economic crisis in the target state.

Table 4: The Effects of Sanctions on Change in Level of Democracy (OLS Panel Regression Models)

Model	(9)	(10)	(11)
Sanctions*GDP-change	-0.0152 (0.0106)		
Sanctions*Popular protest		0.261** (0.114)	
Sanctions*Government crisis			2.242*** (0.785)
Democracy sanctions (centered)	0.544*** (0.135)	0.454*** (0.132)	0.427*** (0.125)
GDP-change (centered)	-0.00641 (0.00415)	-0.00787* (0.00436)	-0.00774* (0.00396)
Government crisis (centered)	-0.0670 (0.171)	-0.0955 (0.169)	-0.181 (0.180)
Popular protest (centered)	0.0651 (0.0530)	0.0331 (0.0341)	0.0515 (0.0470)
US military intervention	0.494 (0.451)	0.547 (0.463)	0.544 (0.466)
US command operation	0.0998 (0.634)	0.0860 (0.631)	0.00354 (0.657)
Post-Cold War	0.232 (0.313)	0.232 (0.314)	0.273 (0.298)
Civil war	0.0463 (0.121)	0.0477 (0.120)	0.0390 (0.121)
LN GDP per capita	0.126 (0.102)	0.130 (0.101)	0.122 (0.103)
LN Population total	-0.111 (0.424)	-0.0709 (0.433)	-0.0978 (0.423)
Oil revenue	-0.00130 (0.00377)	-0.00166 (0.00362)	-0.00200 (0.00345)
Ever been sanctioned	-1.093* (0.552)	-2.980** (1.135)	-0.601 (0.500)
Initial Polity IV-score	0.0521*** (0.0135)	0.0516*** (0.0135)	0.0488*** (0.0139)
Constant	0.791 (6.110)	0.981 (6.268)	0.408 (6.103)
Number of observations	3,041	3,041	3,041
Country fixed-effects	YES	YES	YES
Number of countries	105	105	105
Time span	1962-2012	1962-2012	1962-2012

All models: Discoll-Kraay standard errors in parentheses; *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1; Maximum time-lag: 3 years. Dependent variable is the expected annual change in the Polity IV index (Polity IV at time t+1, minus Polity IV at time t)

Sanctions and popular mobilization

By contrast, the results of model 10 suggest that there is a strong combined effect between democracy-related sanctions and popular anti-government protests. This finding indicates that protests are more conducive at inducing positive democratic change if sanctions are used as an additional democratization pressure from the outside. Sanctions may also send crucial signals to protesters, indicating that Western states are not willing to support repression by the incumbent regime. This in turn increases safety for protesters, giving them further incentive to mobilize. Additional research is needed to confirm such signaling qualities of democracy related sanctions for participants of anti-government protests.

Sanctions and Regime Crisis

Lastly, model 11 shows a robust interaction effect between democracy-related sanctions and incumbent regime crisis. The results suggest that sanctions function as outcome conditioners for regime crisis scenarios. Whereas regime crisis show an insignificant, negative effect on future levels of democracy, the combined term between crisis and sanctions is strongly associated with higher levels of democracy.

Two distinct explanations might account for this conditioning effect: The first assumes that authoritarian elites have two options during a government crisis: violently restrain internal and popular opposition takeovers, or allow for at least some degree of democratic competition. If faced with potential or implemented democracy sanctions, the anticipated additional costs of a violent crack-down on a population leaves incumbent elites in a weaker bargaining position against both domestic and international actors. They might believe that maintaining or regaining international legitimacy could stabilize the regime and thereby improve the chances of staying in power. In this regard, even the dangers associated with democratic competition seem preferable to the potential of the dual effect of domestic and international cost of repression. Conversely, an absence of international punishment may reduce the perceived costs of violent repression during a government crisis. This might be why government crises lead to an average decrease in expected democracy levels if sanctions are absent.

A second explanation is based on Przeworski's (1992) formalization of democratic transition processes. Accordingly, an authoritarian government crisis can result in a split between the ruling elite's hardliners and moderates. Democratic transition may occur when the moderates convince the hardliners to allow for some limited liberalization. The threat or implementation of democracy sanctions may increase the bargaining power of the moderates as their proposed liberalization policies would provide relief from both domestic and international democratizing pressures. Sanctions would thus ulti-

mately allow moderates to push their liberalizing agenda. In the absence of sanctions, hardliners would see little to no expected immediate international costs to ordering the repression of popular democracy movements.

Conclusion

Against previous pessimism surrounding the efficiency of sanctions, this article confirms more recent findings in that democracy related sanctions are associated with future higher levels of democracy in targeted authoritarian states. Crucially, the present study argues against previously held assumptions about the corrosive effect of Western states foreign policy towards democracy in that it demonstrates that such sanctions show a positive democratizing effect for the whole period during and after the Cold War. More recently, research on the Cold War has shifted towards considering Western states' democratizing efforts in the shadow of the East-West confrontation. The results of this study suggest that where Western states were less constrained by geo-strategic and economic interests, democracy promotion was part of their foreign policy agenda and at least somewhat successful in the use of democracy-related sanctions. Future research should focus more on the role of such sanctions in the democratic transition episodes, especially in Latin America starting in the 1980's, which unfolded against the backdrop of international political and economic pressure.

In further exploring the causal link between democracy-related sanctions and positive change in targeted autocracies, this study finds strong associations between sanctions and the occurrence of popular anti-government protests and incumbent regime crisis. These findings point to the importance of further studying the effects of Western leverage and linkage, particularly as to whether sanctions against previous Western ties to autocratic regimes function as catalysts for the mobilization against and dissolution of such regimes.

This possibility is more credible because sanctions show robust interaction effects with the above factors. Popular mobilization seems to be more efficient in bringing about positive democratic change if it is accompanied by international sanctioning pressure. Working to condition the outcome of regime crisis, sanctions seem to support democratic transition during regime crisis scenarios. Without sanctions, the outcome seems more uncertain.

A crucial limitation in the present study is that it does not consider levels of compliance with democratic standards more holistically as suggested by several authors pointing to a broader conceptualization of democracy. Because it is solely based on the Polity IV indicator, it runs the risk of being biased towards the institutional and procedural aspects, neglecting the wider social changes associated with democratization. Future studies, especially of qualitative-historical nature, are needed to better evaluate the role of democ-

racy-related sanctions during democratic transition processes, especially regarding the quality of the change they induce.

Also, while the statistical associations found are generally robust, the democratizing effect of sanctions should not be overstated in substantial terms. On average, change towards more democracy was found to be marginally larger in country-years under sanctions than in those without. Democracy related sanctions should therefore not mistakenly be interpreted as major drivers of democratization processes. Such processes are at essence complex, multidimensional, diverse, and still largely determined by domestic variables. Sanctions are no more than a single piece in a complex puzzle.

- I reflect -

A key shortcoming of this study stems from the selection process in sanction application. Sending states choose their targets with a wide set of criteria including expected sanction success, the target states' economic and military strength, whether the target state is an ally, and pressure from the sending state's domestic audience.

Unfortunately, this bias distorts any assessment of sanction effects. To make unbiased causal claims, researchers instead need to test randomly assigned treatment variables. Consider a medical trial testing efficacy of a new treatment: If the treatment is deliberately assigned to only healthier participants, the results will be skewed in favour of the treatment just because the treatment group was healthier to begin with. Now, if states deliberately pick easy targets for sanctions – the effects of sanctions are likely overestimated.

To mitigate the effects of selection bias, researchers therefore try to control for factors that determine the selection of targets in the first place. For instance, if target selection is more likely for countries with declining economies and active protest movements, researchers can discount the effects of these factors from their assessment of sanctions' efficacy. However, it is impossible to account for all relevant selection factors, especially as many are variable, volatile, and only indirectly observed. Thus, similar selection factors can lead to diverging application and impact of sanctions.

Thailand's sanction history illustrates this phenomenon. While both democratic and autocratic regimes have collapsed in the country's recent past, western states varied in their responses. Western governments first applied sanctions in 1991 against the crumbling military dictatorship of General Suchinda, considerably expanding the existing sanction regime in 1992 when the military junta fired on unarmed civilian protesters during the Black May uprising. Within months, the military junta stepped aside and made room for civilian leadership.

In 2003, Thailand's democratically elected government was again targeted, this time in response to Thaksin Shinawatra's ruthless anti-drug campaign. Paradoxically, Western states refused to apply sanctions after the military coups of 2006 and 2014 which ended the country's brief periods of democracy. Despite widespread public demands to

sanction these military juntas, US and EU officials merely condemned each coup verbally.

Why would Western senders tolerate one type of democratic abuse, yet punish another? In each of the above cases, authoritarian seizure and human rights abuse proved to be a trigger moment, yet only some events yielded western sanctions. A key problem is that sanction application is a political choice made by a secluded group of senior foreign policy officials, and social scientists rarely have access to such decision-making circles. Moreover, these officials are anything but uniform; they vary in their personal preferences, ideological convictions, political agendas, and surrounding institutional settings. Thus, not only does the sanction selection process unfold in an esoteric sphere, but this difficulty is compounded by the fact that decision-making differs within administrations, between countries, and across time. When, where, and why sanction targets are selected can thus only be observed indirectly. Unfortunately, this further complicates the quest for an unbiased assessment of sanction effects.

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