



# Rewarding Human Rights? Selective Aid Sanctions against Repressive States

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This article provides theoretical and empirical solutions to two connected puzzles in the study of foreign aid and human rights: Do foreign aid donors use aid sanctions to punish repressive states, and if so, why? I show that donors impose aid sanctions selectively. Aid sanctions typically occur when repressive states do not have close political ties to aid donors, when violations have negative consequences for donors and when violations are widely publicized. Using a data set of bilateral foreign aid to 118 developing countries between 1981 and 2004, I find that variation in these factors largely accounts for the differing aid sanctions that result from objectively similar rights violations by the governments of developing countries.

There has been protracted debate as to whether states withhold foreign aid from other states that violate human rights (Schultz 1981; Cingranelli and Pasquarello 1985; Carleton and Stohl 1987; McCormick and Mitchell 1988; Poe 1992; Poe, Pilatovsky, Miller and Ogundele 1994; Poe and Sirirangsi 1994; Payaslian 1996; Tomasevski 1997; Apodaca and Stohl 1999; Svensson 1999; Alesina and Dollar 2000; Lai 2003; Neumayer 2003a,b,c; Berthélemy 2006; Carey 2007; Barratt 2008; Lebovic and Voeten 2009). This article resolves the debate, showing that foreign aid donors impose aid sanctions for human rights violations, but that they do so selectively. Countries that violate human rights are typically sanctioned under three circumstances: When the violating countries do not have close political ties to aid donors, when rights violations have negative consequences for donors, and when violations are widely publicized to donors. Variation in these factors largely accounts for the differing aid sanctions that result from objectively similar rights violations by the governments of developing countries. Although these conclusions may seem obvious, they have been largely overlooked by the literature on aid sanctions.

I also show that aid sanctions are more nuanced than previously recognized. Most studies assume that rights-conscious donors punish repression by withdrawing aid of all types, but I find that donors generally apply aid sanctions by cutting aid to economic sectors while continuing to extend aid for basic social services to the poorest citizens. This observation allows me to identify previously overlooked episodes of aid sanctions.

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Identifying the circumstances under which human rights violations lead to aid sanctions does more than resolve a long-standing academic debate. Citizens of aid donors and aid recipients alike have an interest in knowing whether donor governments follow through on their

promises to sanction countries that are actively torturing, detaining, and disappearing their citizens. I find that donors are not particularly principled about applying aid sanctions but that they do apply sanctions more often than skeptics suppose. Scholars of International Relations should take interest in aid sanctions because they offer new evidence to adjudicate between competing explanations of state behavior. The patterns of aid sanctioning I identify most strongly support a rationalist understanding of state motivations. I find virtually no evidence for arguments by Constructivist scholars that states respond to human rights violations because of normative commitments to human rights protection. Donors seem willing to abandon human rights norms when their friends and allies violate human rights.

My results have little to say about the ultimate effectiveness of aid sanctions. Despite scholarly skepticism about the effectiveness of economic sanctions (Hufbauer, Schott and Elliott 1990; Pape 1997, 1998; Drury 1998; Elliott 1998), I find that between 1981 and 2004, aid donors repeatedly applied aid sanctions to punish states that violated human rights. Donors may have applied sanctions because policymakers sincerely believed that they would be effective, or sanctions may have provided an opportunity to cut back costly foreign aid while taking the moral high road. This paper examines when and how these sanctions were applied, leaving the question of effectiveness for future research.

The following section discusses the conflicting results of previous studies and develops a more complete theory of selective sanctions. I then describe the data and empirical strategies I use to evaluate the relationships between human rights and sector aid. Using a dyadic model of aid from 17 OECD donors to 118 developing countries between 1981 and 2004, I find strong evidence of selective aid sanctions. I conclude by discussing the implications of these findings for past and future research.

## Conflicting Views on the Rights–Aid Relationship

I define aid sanctioning as the withholding of foreign aid from a recipient because of a specific political action taken by that recipient. In this paper, I focus on recipient

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violation of human rights, but sanctions could be imposed for other reasons. Aid donors can both suspend ongoing disbursements and cut off future funding, but virtually all prior scholarship has focused solely on cuts to future funding because they are easier to observe.<sup>2</sup> Because of data constraints and the need to speak to past research, I also focus on cuts to future aid (and refer to these cuts as “aid sanctions” throughout), but the theory I develop applies to both future aid cuts and current aid suspensions.

A large body of scholarship explores whether aid donors respond to human rights abuses in recipient countries by withholding future aid. Some studies find strong evidence of sanctions, others find no evidence at all, and most fall between these extremes.

In response to early pessimism (Schoultz 1981), Cingraneli and Pasquarello (1985) show that human rights protection influences US aid, and Poe (1992) confirms this for US aid allocation to 40 Western Hemisphere countries from 1980 to 1984. In their analysis of the determinants of aggregated bilateral aid, Trumbull and Wall (1994) include a measure of political and civil rights which they find to be important, and Berthélemy (2006) finds that democracies receive more aid from most OECD donors.

Other studies conclude that strategic factors overwhelm human rights considerations in aid allocation. Cingraneli and Pasquarello’s finding is sensitive to the exclusion of a few outlying cases (Carleton and Stohl 1987; McCormick and Mitchell 1988), and Neumayer (2003a,b,c) provides substantial evidence that “contrary to their verbal commitment, donor countries do not consistently reward respect for human rights in their foreign aid allocation” (2003a:664). Even more damning is his finding that the apparent champions of human rights—Denmark, Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands, and Canada—do not respect human rights with their aid allocation any more than other donors. Other studies point to donors bolstering repressive regimes. Rioux and Van Belle (2005) find that French assistance flows disproportionately to countries with lower democracy levels, and Barratt (2008) is generally negative about British aid practices.

Between these extremes, many studies conclude that rights sometimes affect aid allocation but that the effects are small and not general across donors or time periods. Poe et al. (1994) and Poe and Sirirangsi (1994) examine US aid to Latin America and Africa and conclude that rights are only marginally important. Svensson (1999) and Alesina and Dollar (2000) examine bilateral aid by donor and find that the political and civil rights associated with democracy seem to lead to increased aid flows from Canada, Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, but not other donors. Carey (2007) finds that of four European donors, only Germany rewards recipient human rights protection with aid. And Lebovic and Voeten (2009) argue that multilateral aid agencies are pressured by their powerful member states to withdraw aid from states that violate human rights, but they find that the same donors are unwilling to apply additional aid sanctions bilaterally.

Aid donors may be more responsive to human rights violations in certain time periods. Lai (2003) finds that in the post-Cold War era, the US gives less aid to recipients that abuse human rights while paradoxically giving more

aid to nondemocracies. Dunning (2004) shows that aid to Africa is effective in improving human rights performance, but only after 1987. Both argue that aid previously used to contain communism has been freed up to promote development and alleviate poverty, creating a surge of funds that may be more responsive to human rights. Apodaca and Stohl (1999) suggest longitudinal inconsistencies in donor behavior that are unrelated to the Cold War, concluding that human rights mattered for US aid allocation under some administrations but not others.

### A Theory of Selective Aid Sanctions

The empirical confusion in the existing literature results primarily from two misunderstandings about aid sanctions against repressive states. Following the rhetorical claims of donors, most studies assume that donors will sanction all repressive states equally. In reality, aid sanctions are applied selectively to some human rights violators but not to others. Aid sanctions are rarely if ever applied to countries that are donor allies or have other strong political connections to donor countries. The theoretical literature has recognized that some states might avoid aid sanctions because of their connections to donors (Tomasevski 1997:21) but this insight has not informed quantitative studies of aid sanctions (for an exception, see Barratt 2008).

The second misconception of the existing studies is that donors impose blanket sanctions that reduce all types of aid. Past scholarship has overlooked sanctions episodes by failing to recognize that donors typically withdraw aid for economic sectors but continue to extend aid for basic social services and human rights protection. The remainder of this section describes these two points in more detail.

I start from a simple set of state-centered, rationalist assumptions to argue that aid donors will apply aid sanctions selectively. The literature linking human rights and foreign aid has largely avoided reference to the dominant theoretical trends of IR theory (for exceptions, see Lai 2003; Barratt 2008). Breaking with this tradition, I explicitly develop a rationalist theory of selective aid sanctions and contrast it to alternative explanations inspired by Constructivism.

Starting from the assumption that aid donors are allocating aid in ways that serve their self-interest and security, I first identify situations where aid recipients will *not* face aid sanctions when they violate human rights. Most obviously, donors rarely apply aid sanctions to states with which they have important strategic ties, such as military alliances. The reason for this is intuitive; aid is often used to buy influence abroad (Bueno de Mesquita and Smith 2009) and withdrawing aid puts these important strategic relationships in jeopardy. Less formal political ties also protect some repressive states from aid sanctions, including the willingness of developing countries to trade United Nations votes for aid (Dreher, Sturm and Vreeland 2009). States that rotate onto the UN Security Council receive roughly 60% more US aid relative to other countries, presumably because of their enhanced ability to assist US interests (Kuziemko and Werker 2006). There are even circumstances where donors might increase aid to repressive allies. Regimes often violate human rights because they face increased pressure from political opposition (Davenport 2000; Vreeland 2008) so donors friendly to the regime may increase aid flows to help the

<sup>2</sup> This is because the OECD has collected detailed information on aid commitments since the 1970s but has not, until recently, asked donors to provide adequate information on how much aid is actually disbursed.

allied regime stay in power. This leads to the first hypothesis.

**Hypothesis 1:** *States that are allies of donors or consistently vote with donors in the UN will not face aid sanctions if they violate human rights.*

Developing countries that are not allies of donor countries receive aid for a variety of reasons. Donors seek foreign policy concessions (Bueno de Mesquita and Smith 2007), even from states that are not allies. Donors may have strategic incentives to see particular states develop economically (Bermeo n.d.), and aid is driven by business interests or other interest groups (Anwar and Michaelowa 2006). The breadth of US aid giving—to over 120 countries between 1990 and 2003 (Finkel, Perez-Linan and Seligson 2007)—hints at the multiplicity of factors that give rise to aid flows. However, these varied reasons for aid giving can be quickly swamped by the political costs to donors of maintaining ties to repressive regimes. Unlike allies of donors, most states will lose at least some aid if they violate human rights.

**Hypothesis 2:** *States that are not strategically important to donors will be sanctioned if they violate human rights*

Among the set of countries that are not strategically important to donors, the harshest aid sanctions may target human rights violations that have adverse effects for donor countries. Some human rights violations have real consequences that donors would like to avoid: safety-seeking refugee flows (Apodaca 1998; Moore and Shellman 2004), regional instability, violence, and possibly even war (Salehyan and Gleditsch 2006; Salehyan 2008). When a donor—or a donor's ally—is threatened by an unstable and violence-prone neighborhood, the donor is likely to intervene with aid sanctions before more forceful intervention becomes necessary to limit harm to their ally. Regional instability and conflict caused by repression may also threaten donor interests by harming trade (Bayer and Rupert 2004) and foreign direct investment (Blanton and Blanton 2007). Human rights protection is especially important for choosing foreign direct investment sites to which large numbers of employees from the source country will be relocating, suggesting that these types of investments are particularly threatened if human rights conditions worsen.<sup>3</sup>

However, donors face cross-cutting incentives when threatening to cut aid to states where repression is causing negative externalities for donors. Aid gives donors leverage because recipient regimes need resources to maintain political control, but donors may hesitate to cut aid precisely because it could cause further instability. Aid cuts to repressive regimes could exacerbate repression in the short term as the weakened regime fights for survival by increasing violence against its citizens. Thus, donors may find themselves in a bind, unable to use the full leverage of foreign aid to stop human rights violations because deep aid cuts would cause further repression with negative externalities.

**Hypothesis 3a:** *Repressive states are most likely to face aid sanctions if their rights violations affect donors' allies.*

**Hypothesis 3b:** *Repressive states are not more likely than other states to face sanctions if their violations affect donors' allies.*

US aid sanctions against Sudan from 1988 to the present illustrate how instability and unrest coupled with human rights violations can lead to and prolong aid sanctions. Sudan was a regular recipient of US aid through the 1980s, receiving an average of 150 million in total aid per year between 1980 and 1987 (OECD 2008). However, in 1988, Sudan fell behind in debt repayment, triggering US legislation prohibiting further aid. Simultaneously, human rights violations in Sudan become more serious. On June 30, 1989, General Bashir led a coup that resulted in a military government willing to use arbitrary detention and torture. The violence and social upheaval surrounding the coup generated substantial numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons—non-Muslim internally displaced persons were subsequently harassed by the government and an estimated 300,000 died of starvation between 1988 and 1992 (Burr 1990; United States Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services 1993).

Although Sudanese human rights violations were not the initial impetus for aid reductions, they quickly became the primary justification for withholding most forms of aid. In 1989, the rationale for aid sanctions expanded to include Bashir's "military dictatorship" and, in 1993, Sudan's alleged support of international terrorism. In 1997, US President Bill Clinton further deepened aid sanctions because of "continued [Sudanese] support of international terrorism; ongoing efforts to destabilize neighboring governments; and the prevalence of human rights violations, including slavery and the denial of religious freedom..." (quoted in US Congressional Research Service 2004, CRS-9). Continued aid sanctions were the direct result of repression that contributed to regional instability.

### Alternative Explanations for Aid Sanctions

A complimentary but alternative rationalist account might focus on the domestic incentives facing politicians in donor countries as they decide whether to respond to reports of human rights violations by withholding aid. Previous research has suggested that donors are more likely to sanction human rights violations that are widely publicized. Payaslian (1996:56) finds that in at least a few cases, prolonged press scrutiny of repressive states led to continuing aid sanctions long after rights protection had improved substantially, while aid continued to flow as usual to repressive states when violations were not covered.

Media coverage may influence sanctions because news of rights violations can reach citizens who in turn influence their elected representatives. If aid recipients come under sharp criticism, elected officials in donor countries could risk electoral retribution for implicitly supporting rights violations abroad. To preempt criticism, politicians might adopt rights-oriented aid policies to assure citizens that their tax dollars are not funding repression. The ability of the public to force government to respond to human rights violations depends on public awareness (Van Belle, Rioux and Potter 2004), so aid sanctions primarily occur when violations are publicized by NGO and media coverage.

<sup>3</sup> Personal interview with Michael Edwards, former director of investment sitting at Intel, April 2006.

**Hypothesis 4:** *Repressive states face greater aid sanctions if their violations are publicized by news media.*

Another explanation of aid sanctions emphasizes donors' normative commitments to human rights protection. Constructivist scholars contend that normative commitments to principles of human rights are the primary motivation for foreign policies intended to promote human rights protection abroad (Risse, Ropp and Sikkink 1999). According to Constructivists, donors are more likely to punish repression if they hold strong human rights norms, expressed as domestic protection of human rights and embeddedness in the international human rights regime. Donnelly (1993) argues that foreign repression does not materially affect donors, leaving domestic norms and political culture as the only possible motivators for states that promote human rights abroad. Lumsdaine (1993) reaches a similar conclusion that "[a]id cannot be anything like fully accounted for on the basis of donor economic and political interests" (73).

From these arguments, we might expect the states most committed to human rights promotion to be more likely to punish repressive states by withdrawing aid. The Nordic countries and Canada have clearly taken the lead in pushing for increased international protection of human rights (Donnelly 1993), but some of these countries have been surprisingly unenthusiastic about aid sanctions. For example, Sweden has tended to "encourage democracy through dialogue... rather than using development aid as a means to press for democracy through conditionality" (Crawford 1996:17).

**Hypothesis 5:** *Donors that are more committed to human rights norms are more likely to sanction repressive states.*

#### **Donors Withdraw Some Types of Aid More Than Others**

Having developed expectations about when aid sanctions are more or less likely, I now discuss how to recognize aid sanctioning when it occurs. Previous studies have looked at aggregate aid flows, implicitly assuming that all types of aid will be withdrawn uniformly. However, donors typically prefer to cut economic aid while continuing to fund social services for the poorest citizens. Although the United States has nominally prohibited economic aid to severe human rights violators since 1975, it still provides assistance that "will directly benefit the needy people in such a country" (quoted in Crawford 1996:21). Australia notes that cutting aid for social services during sanctions "can jeopardise the welfare of the poorest" (AusAID 2010). Norway continues to extend "legal relief or moral or material assistance to the persecuted and their families," Canada limits aid sanctions to "government-to-government aid" (Tomasevski 1997:24, 26), and other donors have followed suit (Crawford 1996).

Past aid research has disaggregated aid in many ways (Mavrotas and Nunnenkamp 2007) including technical vs. nontechnical assistance (Godfrey, Sophal, Kato, Vou Piseth, Dorina, Saravy, Savora and Vannarith 2002; Knack 2004), budget support vs. project aid (Dreher, Nunnenkamp and Thiele 2008), classification by sector (Thiele, Nunnenkamp and Dreher 2007), and aid targeting short-term vs. long-term growth (Clemens, Radelet, Bhavnani and Bazzi 2012). None of the preexisting classifications fully capture the distinctions that donors claim to make

when they consider punishing rights violations. I use information provided by aid donors to develop a more rights-relevant categorization of aid flows into three types: economic aid, social aid, and human rights and democracy aid.

#### *Economic Aid*

The majority of development aid is for economic sectors: infrastructure, industrial production, general budget and program support, commodity support, debt relief, and structural adjustment programs. Typical economic aid projects have titles such as "Bujumbura Airport Ext." (France to Burundi 1980, \$14,197,823), "Commercial Debt Rescheduling" (Germany to Ethiopia 1997, \$34,119,720), and "Coffee Research and Materials" (Australia to Papua New Guinea 1991, \$249,221) (OECD 2008). Figure 1 shows that economic aid rose dramatically from 1980 to 1990 but has remained relatively constant from 1990 to 2004.

Aid sanctions primarily consist of cuts to economic aid because losing this aid is most punishing to repressive regimes. In large part, this is because economic aid is often fungible (Feizioglu, Swaroop and Zhu 1998), either given to governments as cash or replacing domestic funds and freeing up money for the recipient regime. This fungibility makes economic aid more valuable to the recipient government than other types of aid. In developing countries, losing economic aid may challenge the political survival of the recipient regime because these funds are important for satisfying key constituencies (Bueno de Mesquita and Smith 2009; Kono and Montinola 2009). Thus, if donors are attempting to change recipient behavior with aid sanctions, then withholding economic aid can put serious pressure on the recipient government to abstain from repression.

#### *Social Aid*

Social aid includes aid for health, education, water supply, reproductive policy, and other social sectors as defined by the OECD donors. Historically, social sectors have received less aid funding than the large infrastructure projects common in economic sectors, but aid for social and economic sectors has almost reached parity in recent years (see Figure 1). Typical social projects include: "Education Facilities and Training" (Japan to Jordan 2006, \$4,822), "STD Control Including HIV/AIDS" (Sweden to Zimbabwe 1988, \$2,665,700), and "Family Planning" (United States to India 1985, \$900,000) (OECD 2008).

Social aid is less likely to be cut during sanctions because it directly targets the poor. Withholding social aid would deal a double blow to citizens of oppressive regimes, reducing externally funded social services as internal repression grows more severe. Social aid is also less fungible than economic aid because it is often delivered through NGOs, making direct capture by the government more difficult (see the Supporting Information for details). This makes social aid less valuable to the recipient regime; withholding it does not give donors much political leverage.

#### *Human Rights and Democracy Aid*

Aid for human rights and democracy promotion is a small sector of development aid that has typically been

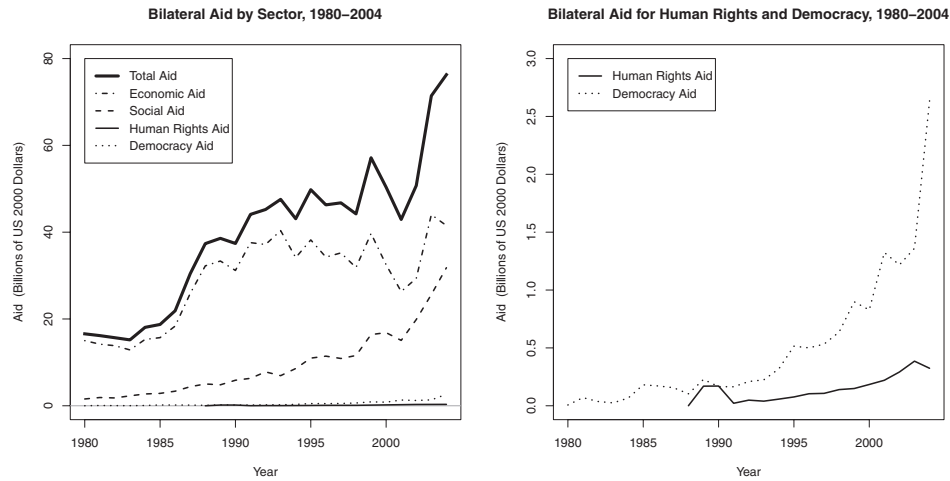


FIG. 1. Aid Flows by Sector From 17 OECD Donors. Source OECD (2008)

overlooked in studies of aid sanctions. Aid in the OECD “Human Rights” and “Democracy” categories includes, but is not limited to, “monitoring of human rights performance; support for national and regional human rights bodies; protection of ethnic, religious and cultural minorities,” and funding for elections, civil society, the free flow of information, and legal and judicial sectors (OECD 2002). Representative projects in this category include “Setting Up Preparation of Bangladesh National Human Rights Commission” (Denmark 1999, \$173,626), “Participation of Women Candidates in Election” (Denmark to Malawi 2000, \$193,743), and “Increased Accountability of Parliament to All Namibian Citizens” (US 2000, \$472,000) (OECD 2008). If aid for human rights and democracy promotion is truly intended to protect rights, repressive countries should receive more of this aid, even as they risk losing aid for other sectors. To prevent government seizure, donors often channel human rights aid through NGOs (see Supporting Information).

Historically, democracy aid has been allocated since before 1981, especially to support civil society groups. By contrast, aid specifically for human rights protection is a relatively recent (post-1990) phenomenon. Figure 1 shows historical flows of Democracy Aid and Human Rights Aid, separating them for comparison. In the analysis below, I consider them together.

**Hypothesis 6:** *Donors impose aid sanctions by cutting aid for economic sectors, but not aid for social sectors or democracy and human rights.*

The case of Sudan shows how the United States imposed aid sanctions on the Sudanese government while extending aid to victims of rights violations in Southern Sudan.

In fine-tuning the imposition of economic sanctions on Sudan, Congress made an effort to distinguish between the Government of Sudan, the people of Sudan, and areas of the country outside of control of the government, to make aid and commerce available to the general population (US Congressional Research Service 2004:CRS-11).

Congress encouraged the President to authorize “direct support of indigenous groups, agencies, or organizations”

in order to “provide emergency relief, promote economic self-sufficiency, build civil authority, provide education, [and] enhance rule of law...” (US Congressional Research Service 2004; CRS-11). This aid explicitly circumvented the Sudanese government; Congress asked the President to “increase the level of humanitarian assistance for Sudan that is provided through non-governmental organizations, including local church groups” (US House 103rd Congress 1993). In one instance, Congress authorized significant funds to the National Democratic Alliance of Sudan (an organization of Sudanese opposition parties) to “strengthen its ability to protect civilians from attacks, slave raids, and aerial bombardment by the Sudanese Government and its militia allies...” (US Congressional Research Service 2004, CRS-12). The analysis below shows that this style of response to rights violations is general across donors.

### Data and Methodology

To empirically test how and why donors punish human rights violations, I analyze sector-level dyadic aid flows from 17 OECD donors to 118 recipient countries between 1981 and 2004 (with aid data to 2006). To measure aid, I use OECD data on aid commitments measured in constant US dollars (OECD 2008).<sup>4</sup> Following the previous studies, I standardize aid by measuring it per capita. The resulting variables are highly skewed so the dependent variable in my primary specifications is  $\ln(\text{aid per 1000 persons} + 1)$ .<sup>5</sup> I separate aid into three mutually exclusive categories described above—*Economic aid*, *Social aid*, and *Human rights and Democracy aid*—using the purpose codes reported by the OECD for each aid activity.

<sup>4</sup> Some studies make use of the aggregated aid disbursement data reported by the OECD (Cingranelli and Pasquarello 1985; Alesina and Dollar 2000; Bueno de Mesquita and Smith 2009), but these data cannot be broken out into economic, social, and human rights sectors. Available figures on disbursements by sector are highly unreliable: “Analysis on CRS disbursements... is not recommended for flows before 2002, because the annual coverage is below 60%” (OECD 2009).

<sup>5</sup> The findings are robust to using a measure of aid change from 1 year to the next (see the Supporting Information).

### Key Independent Variables

I measure recipient government *Physical integrity* violations using the CIRI physical integrity index coded from US State Department and Amnesty International reports by Cingranelli and Richards (2006). This index measures government engagement in (i) torture, (ii) disappearances, (iii) extrajudicial killings, and (iv) political imprisonment. In each area, recipients receive a score of “2” for each element of the scale if no infractions have occurred, a “1” if one to forty-nine infractions have occurred, and a “0” if fifty or more violations have occurred, and the measure is then summed. I invert the scale so that higher values indicate more severe human rights violations: “8” represents “no government respect for these four rights” and “0” represents “full government respect for these four rights.”

Several types of political ties might make recipients “immune” to sanctions. First, I measure whether a recipient has a formal military alliance with a given donor in the observed year (Leeds, Ritter, Mitchell and Long 2002) and interact *Alliance* with the measure of *Physical Integrity Violations* to test whether military alliances shield aid recipients from sanctions. I expect that economic foreign aid will remain steady or even increase for allies that violate human rights, while non-allies that violate human rights will face sanctions. Donor interests also play out in the United Nations so I measure *UN voting similarity* coded by Gartzke (2006), interacted with *Physical integrity rights*. I expect that the more an aid recipient votes with donors in the UN, the less they will face sanctions for violating human rights.

I use several variables to test the hypothesis that donors are more likely to sanction repression that might generate adverse externalities for donors. One of the primary adverse effects of repression could be refugee spillovers, so I measure refugee outflows. I obtain data on the total number of refugees leaving each developing country in a given year (UNHCR 2009), take the natural log (to account for skewness), and interact this variable— $\ln(\text{Refugees})$ —with *Physical integrity violations*. If donors are more concerned about repression that leads to refugee outflows, then states that have high refugee outflows should experience harsher sanctions for violating human rights.

I also test for the adverse effects of repression more generally. Just as donors shield their allies from sanctions, I expect that they will also attempt to shield allies from regional instability, refugee flows, and other adverse effects resulting from rights violations in neighboring countries. To measure this, I code a dichotomous variable called *Ally neighbor* indicating whether a given recipient is contiguous with an ally of a given donor but is not itself an ally. By interacting this variable with *Physical integrity violations*, I can assess whether donors respond to human rights violations more strongly if their allies are threatened by the potential externalities of these violations.

I test whether media coverage of repression influences sanctions by measuring coverage of rights violations in the *New York Times*. I choose this source because of its accessibility and prominence. Specifically, I count the number of *New York Times* articles in which the phrase “human right(s)” was mentioned within 25 words of the commonly used country name of each recipient and log the resulting measure to account for skewness.<sup>6</sup> This measure is correlated with my measure of human rights viola-

tions (a correlation of  $r = 0.46$ ) but it is distinct—some abuses are over-reported relative to others.

I also test whether domestic and international human rights norms motivate donor responses to rights violations. If norms are the source of sanctions, then donors that are deeply embedded in the international human rights regime and have strong domestic human rights protection will be most likely to impose aid sanctions. To test this, I interact the proportion of the core UN human rights treaties<sup>7</sup> that each donor has ratified in a given year with recipient physical integrity violations (*Donor ratification*  $\times$  *Physical integrity violations*). Although some countries ratify these treaties apparently insincerely (Vreeland 2008), this measure corresponds well with the common wisdom about which aid donors are most friendly to human rights—the Nordic countries rank highly while Japan and the United States round out the bottom. I also measure *Donor physical integrity protection* using the CIRI physical integrity rights index (this time without reversing it, so that higher values indicate stronger human rights protection) and interact it with recipient *Physical integrity violations*. If norms of human rights promotion are the main driver of aid sanctions, I expect donors that have ratified more human rights treaties and have higher levels of domestic human rights protection to sanction rights violators more severely.

### Control Variables

Following the literature on factors affecting aid allocation, I control for indicators of recipient need, donor interest, and donor bureaucratic inertia. To account for recipient economic need, I use logged *GDP per capita* in constant US dollars (Gleditsch 2004). Studies have generally found that smaller countries receive more aid per capita (Alesina and Dollar 2000; Berthélemy and Tichit 2004), so I include the natural log of *Population* (Gleditsch 2004). To capture recipient economic importance to donors, I include the natural log of total *Trade* between each donor–recipient dyad (Gleditsch 2004). Aid also flows disproportionately from donors to their former colonies (Alesina and Dollar 2000), so I include a variable coded “1” when the recipient in a dyad is a *Former colony* of the donor in the dyad (Norris 2009).

Recipient democracy might be an alternative cause of aid flows, so I include *Democracy* using the Polity IV scale (Marshall and Jaggers 2008) that ranges from  $-10$  (pure autocracy) to  $10$  (pure democracy). Because violent conflict may affect aid allocation (Berthélemy 2006), I include an indicator of whether a recipient country is fighting a *War* as coded by the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset (Gleditsch, Wallensteen, Eriksson, Sollenberg and Strand 2002). To capture Western bias against Soviet satellites and allies during the Cold War (Lai 2003), I use a variable indicating whether a recipient is *Socialist* (data from Sachs and Warner 1995). To account for changes in aid allocation with the end of the Cold War, I include the variable *post-Cold War* and also interact it with *Physical Integrity Rights* to account for any Cold War effect on sanctioning. I also include the interaction *post-Cold*

<sup>6</sup> I also consider a refined measure using automated text coding to remove false positives, but the results are the same. See the Supporting Information for details.

<sup>7</sup> These are the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and its two optional protocols, the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Convention Against Torture (CAT), the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

*War* × *Socialist* to account for any changes in the aid relationship of OECD donors with former socialist states at the end of the Cold War. Similarly, I include an indicator for the post-2001 era because aid allocation may have changed with the advent of the US “war on terror.”

Finally, the bureaucratic inertia of the aid-allocation process may overwhelm any effect of recipient human rights violations (Carey 2007). Prior aid is a strong predictor of current aid because donors have better information about previous recipients and aid delivery mechanisms are already in place, so I include *Lagged aid*. I also control for *Global aid flows* by sector in each year to ensure that changes in aid to specific recipients are attributable to rights violations, not changes in the generosity of donors due to global economic conditions or donor domestic politics. I also include region fixed effects. In all models, I lag the independent variables by 1 year to eliminate direct temporal dependence and more accurately model the information lags faced by donors.

Because sector-level aid data are censored—aid commitments can be zero but never negative—I use multi-level Tobit models of aid allocation with random effects for dyads, which offer significant advantages over other available methods (see Alesina and Dollar 2000; Berthélemy and Tichit 2004). Much of the literature focuses on estimating “gate-keeping”—the decision to give aid—via logistic regression, followed by a linear regression estimating subsequent decisions about aid levels by donors (Cingranelli and Pasquarello 1985). However, the two-stage estimation approach will induce selection bias unless donors’ decisions to give aid are entirely independent of the amount they decide to give. A Heckman selection procedure can only correct this bias if at least one covariate in the gate-keeping model can be theoretically excluded from the levels model (Heckman 1979), which seems implausible in the case of aid. The Tobit model accounts for the censored dependent variable and implicitly measures both the gate-keeping and level stages.

The data display heteroskedasticity and serial correlation, which can be corrected using either hierarchical modeling (such as random effects) or robust, clustered standard errors (Primo, Jacobsmeier and Milyo 2007). I prefer dyad random effects because they explicitly model the underlying heterogeneity rather than treating it as a nuisance (King and Roberts n.d.), but the findings are robust to using either solution.

### Findings

I first estimate the effects of physical integrity violations on economic, social, and human rights/democracy aid. Separating aid by sector provides strong evidence that donors respond to physical integrity violations primarily by withholding economic aid. When physical integrity violations increase by one unit on the eight unit violations scale, economic aid drops by roughly 6% (Model 2:  $\hat{\beta} = -0.064$ ,  $p < .001$ ).<sup>8</sup> Increases in human rights violations have no apparent effect on aid to social sectors (Model 3:  $\hat{\beta} = -0.023$ ,  $p = .07$ ) or aid for human rights and democracy (Model 4:  $\hat{\beta} = 0.037$ ,  $p = .08$ ), confirming that donors primarily sanction repression by cutting economic aid (Table 1).

To test explanations for *why* donors sanction rights violations, I turn to the model in Table 2, with key marginal effects shown graphically in Figure 2. Because this model includes a large number of interactions, the results are difficult to read directly from the regression table. Throughout, I substantively interpret each of the key interaction terms while holding the other interaction terms constant<sup>9</sup> and assuming that the recipient country is starting with a *Physical integrity violations* score of “1” (a low level of human rights violations). In general, the results are stronger for recipients that have higher baseline levels of violations.

I find strong evidence that donors avoid sanctioning political friends and allies. Aid recipients that vote with donors in the United Nations are exempt from aid sanctions and may get more economic aid following increased violations. Aid recipients that vote with donors on virtually every UN vote can expect 9% *more* aid following a one-point increase in human rights violations ( $p < .001$ ), while recipients that only vote with donors about half of the time will, on average, face a 6% decrease in aid. On the other hand, voting against donors in the UN leads to especially deep sanctions; a recipient who votes against donors virtually all of the time can expect to lose 22% of their aid ( $p < .001$ ).

As with UN voting similarity, the coefficient on the interaction between *Alliance* and *Violations* is positive, significant, and large ( $\hat{\beta} = 0.095$ ,  $p = .032$ ), indicating that donors reduce the harshness of sanctions for their allies. The degree to which an ally will be shielded depends on the other characteristics of the ally, but often allies of donors face no sanctioning on average for human rights violations and even get increases in aid. Holding the other interactions constant, a country without an alliance is expected to lose roughly 7% of its economic aid following a one-point increase in human rights violations ( $p < .001$ ). With an alliance between recipient and donor, the same recipient can expect a slight aid *increase*. This finding is consistent with the rationalist theory developed above: When regimes are “on the ropes” and using repression to quell unrest, allied donors may increase aid to help the friendly regime survive rather than risk a less friendly regime coming to power.

Donors’ sanctions are especially severe for countries that are neighbor to a donor’s military ally, but not an ally themselves. The coefficient on the interaction between *Ally neighbor* and *Violations* is negative and significant ( $\hat{\beta} = -0.079$ ,  $p = .029$ ), meaning that sanctions get harsher for countries that share a border with one of the donor’s allies. Holding the other interactions constant, this means that a one-point increase in violations will cause a recipient to lose 14% of its aid if it borders a donor’s ally ( $p < .001$ ), rather than 7% if it does not. This offers circumstantial evidence that donors punish human rights abuses when they indirectly threaten a donor’s allies.

However, Model 5 does not provide evidence that states face harsher sanctions if their repression threatens regional instability by generating refugees. An increase in refugee flows is associated with harsher aid sanctions but the effect is statistically insignificant ( $\hat{\beta} = -0.004$ ,  $p = .29$ ). These null results do not change when I substitute alternative measures of political instability and civil unrest, such as the count of riots and demonstrations

<sup>8</sup> Because the aid variables are logged, the coefficient of physical integrity multiplied by 100 can be interpreted as an approximate percentage increase in aid per capita associated with a unit increase in *Physical Integrity Violations*.

<sup>9</sup> Specifically, I hold *Donor Ratification* and *Donor Rights Protection* constant at their respective means of 0.75 and 7.4, and *Alliance*, *Ally Neighbor*, *UN Friend*,  $\ln(\text{Refugees})$ , and  $\ln(\text{NYT Coverage})$  constant at 0.



TABLE 1. Tobit Regression Models of Aid Allocation by Sector

	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 3</i>	<i>Model 4</i> <i>Human</i> <i>Rights and</i> <i>Democracy Aid</i>
	<i>Total Aid</i>	<i>Economic Aid</i>	<i>Social Aid</i>	
Physical Integrity Violations	-0.040** (0.011)	-0.064** (0.014)	-0.023 (0.013)	0.037 (0.022)
Democracy	0.010* (0.0042)	0.027** (0.0052)	0.0027 (0.0046)	0.039** (0.0068)
Lagged Aid	0.48** (0.0077)	0.46** (0.0089)	0.49** (0.0087)	0.90** (0.021)
Global Aid Flows	0.89** (0.024)	0.80** (0.027)	1.06** (0.026)	0.76** (0.026)
ln(GDP per capita)	-0.76** (0.054)	-0.58** (0.065)	-0.82** (0.055)	-0.58** (0.061)
ln(Population)	0.12** (0.036)	0.34** (0.042)	0.13** (0.037)	0.19** (0.035)
ln(Trade)	0.051** (0.0069)	0.077** (0.0088)	0.032** (0.0077)	0.064** (0.011)
Alliance	0.38** (0.13)	0.47** (0.16)	0.12 (0.14)	0.19 (0.13)
Former Colony	0.99** (0.27)	1.35** (0.34)	1.10** (0.26)	1.44** (0.19)
Socialist	-0.68** (0.13)	-0.81** (0.15)	-0.66** (0.13)	-1.20** (0.27)
Cold War	-0.020 (0.058)	-0.022 (0.071)	-0.12 (0.066)	0.30* (0.13)
Cold War × Socialist	0.82** (0.087)	1.04** (0.11)	0.95** (0.099)	1.65** (0.28)
War	0.0052 (0.053)	-0.093 (0.066)	0.103 (0.059)	0.084 (0.093)
Donor Ratification	-0.14 (0.11)	0.046 (0.13)	-0.47** (0.11)	0.18 (0.16)
Donor Rights Protection	-0.082** (0.024)	-0.066* (0.030)	-0.059* (0.027)	0.019 (0.047)
Ally Neighbor	0.34** (0.13)	0.15 (0.15)	0.30* (0.13)	0.007 (0.13)
UN Voting Similarity	-0.12 (0.12)	-0.31* (0.15)	0.38** (0.13)	0.83** (0.17)
ln(NYT coverage)	-0.034 (0.022)	-0.11** (0.027)	0.023 (0.024)	0.19** (0.038)
ln(Refugees)	0.052** (0.0094)	0.048** (0.012)	0.031** (0.010)	0.027 (0.016)
post-2001	0.17** (0.046)	0.21** (0.057)	0.13** (0.051)	0.11 (0.074)
Constant	-13.16** (0.82)	-16.19** (0.95)	-15.86** (0.81)	-15.84** (0.81)
Observations	44,277	44,277	44,277	44,277
Left-censored observations	22,153	26,157	25,964	39,057
Number of dyads	2,366	2,366	2,366	2,366
Log-likelihood	-60525.07	-54892.91	-53300.67	-18926.19

(Note. Region fixed effects are included in the models but omitted from the table. Standard errors are in parentheses. \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$ ).

(Banks 2008) or low-level civil conflict (Gleditsch et al. 2002).

This is puzzling because it contradicts the evidence from the Sudanese case, so I estimate a serious of additional models with two changes. First, my argument about donors responding to refugee flows is contingent on whether the repressive state is a donor ally, neighbor to a donor ally, or neither. This suggests a three-way interaction effect between repression, refugee flows, and alliance status, rather than the two-way interaction in Model 5. For ease of interpretation, I implement this three-way interaction by splitting the sample into three mutually exclusive subgroups: donor allies, non-allies, and neigh-

bors of donor allies. I estimate a model of aid flows including the interaction  $\ln(\text{Refugees}) \times \text{Violations}$  on each of these subgroups. The second change is that I drop variables associated with alternative theoretical explanations because they are potentially post-treatment to either refugee flows or alliances and might induce bias. The battery of controls remains the same.

The results in Table 3 show that donors do respond to the interaction of alliances, repression, and refugee flows largely as my theory predicts. Model 6 supports the hypothesis that donors will avoid sanctioning allies: Average aid to donor allies increases even as they are generating refugee flows by repressing their citizens. Model 7



TABLE 2. A Tobit Regression Model of Economic Aid including Interaction Terms to Test Why Donors Sanction Rights Violations

<i>Dependent Variable: Economic Aid</i>			
<i>Model 5</i>			
Physical Integrity Violations	-0.197* (0.098)	Democracy	0.032** (0.0053)
Alliance	0.049 (0.22)	Lagged Aid	0.45** (0.0091)
Alliance × Violations	0.095* (0.044)	Global Aid Flows	0.80** (0.028)
Ally Neighbor	0.67** (0.22)	ln(GDP per capita)	-0.58** (0.067)
Ally Neighbor × Violations	-0.079* (0.036)	ln(Population)	0.31** (0.043)
UN Voting Similarity	-0.93** (0.23)	ln(Trade)	0.074** (0.0091)
UN Similarity × Violations	0.16** (0.047)	Former Colony	1.35** (0.31)
ln(Refugees)	0.038 (0.020)	Socialist	-0.70** (0.16)
ln(Refugees) × Violations	-0.0039 (0.0036)	Cold War	-0.0089 (0.083)
ln(NYT Coverage)	0.016 (0.053)	Cold War × Socialist	1.01** (0.11)
ln(NYT Coverage) × Violations	-0.024* (0.0094)	Cold War × Violations	0.020 (0.014)
Donor Ratification	-0.27 (0.20)	War	-0.061 (0.068)
Donor Ratification × Violations	0.070 (0.040)	post-2001	0.21** (0.057)
Donor Rights Protection	-0.10 (0.059)	Constant	-15.23** (1.05)
Donor Rights × Violations	0.011 (0.013)	Observations	41,935
		Left-censored observations	24,430
		Number of dyads	2,364
		Log-likelihood	-52521.38

(Note. Region fixed effects are included in the models but omitted from the table. Standard errors are in parentheses. \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$ ).

supports the hypothesis that states without political connections to donors face aid cuts for violating human rights, and even deeper cuts if those violations generate refugees. A state that increases violations by one unit without generating refugees faces a 6% cut, while the same state faces a 15% cut if it generates the maximum observed number of refugees.

Model 8 shows that this pattern does not hold for states that are ally neighbors. Repression by ally neighbors leads to deeper aid cuts than most other states; ally neighbors lose an average of 25% of their aid following a unit increase in violations. However, the interaction of *Violations* and *ln(Refugees)* is positive, indicating that when repression causes more refugees, the resulting sanctions are somewhat less severe. My theory predicts the opposite for this subgroup; if anything, donors should be most willing to punish repressive states that generate refugees if those refugees could spill over into a donor’s ally.

Taken together, these results confirm my expectation that political alliances will shield repressive states from aid sanctions and that states without donor alliances will generally be punished more if their repression generates negative externalities like refugee flows. However, contrary to my theoretical expectations, states that neighbor donors’ allies do not face especially deep sanctions when

their rights violations generate additional refugees. This could be due to donor fears that deep aid cuts might backfire and cause more refugees rather than less (as suggested by Hypothesis 3b), but it is unclear why this would hold for ally neighbors while the opposite is true for other aid recipients. This surprising finding may generate future refinements to the theory of selective sanctions I introduce.

Returning to Model 5 to examine alternative explanations for aid sanctions, I find evidence that aid sanctions are influenced by news coverage of human rights abuses. When violations received very high levels of press coverage, recipients lost over 15% of their economic aid rather than a mere 6% when violations were ignored by the press.

I find no evidence that human rights norms drive donors to sanction repressive states. If norms were a key reason for sanctions, we would expect donors to increase their sanctions as they become more embedded in the global human rights regime. Instead, as donors join a greater percentage of UN human rights agreements, they are slightly *less* likely to respond to repression by cutting aid. Similarly, I find that donors’ domestic protection of human rights has no effect on their willingness to sanction human rights violations. Some of this null result may be due to the lack of variation in donor human rights protection, but the lack of variation itself suggests that donor norms of rights protection cannot be a significant cause of variation in aid sanctions.<sup>10</sup>

To evaluate the sensitivity of my findings, I estimate a series of alternative models. Specifically, I test alternative measures of aid and human rights, try a number of alternative specifications, and use multiple imputation. For brevity, I have put the details in the Supporting Information. The key findings are robust to alternative specifications. The finding that aid sanctions primarily consist of decreases in economic aid, rather than social, or human rights aid, holds up in virtually every specification. Similarly, the findings that donors’ allies and UN friends are exempt from aid sanctions are quite robust. Many of the null results are robust as well; indicators of donor commitment to human rights norms repeatedly fail to correlate with increased sanctioning.

Other findings are more sensitive. In many specifications, I find that the neighbors of donor allies do not face additional sanctions when they violate human rights, although they still face the same sanctions as most other recipients. The finding that *New York Times* coverage of violations leads to more severe sanctions is also statistically insignificant in many alternative specifications, although the estimated coefficient is always in the same direction. This does not mean that the findings of the main specifications should be rejected—many of the alternative specifications are not ideal ways of modeling the data. Rather, readers should be aware that alternative modeling strategies might suggest somewhat different conclusions about neighbors of donor allies and the impact of media coverage.

### Discussion

Scholars of human rights have attempted to simplify donor responses to repression into a yes or no question:

<sup>10</sup> Because donors’ records of human rights protection may not fully capture variation in donor norms, I also estimated models that included criticism of donor human rights practices by the NGO Amnesty International (Ron, Ramos and Rodgers 2005) and found the same null result.

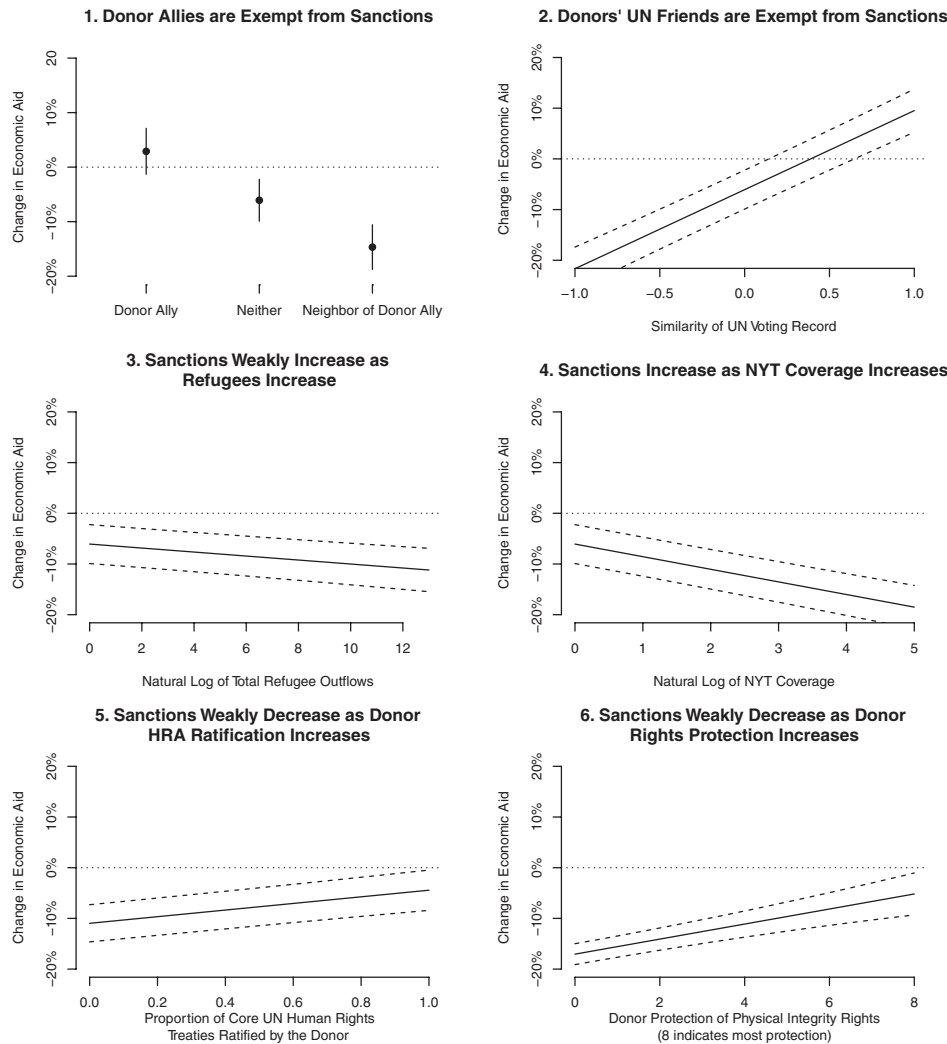


FIG. 2. Key Marginal Effects from Model 5 in Table 2. Negative values on the y-axis indicate sanctions. Coefficients and 95% confidence intervals for the marginal effects are calculated using the appropriate formulas.

TABLE 3. Tobit Regression Models of Economic Aid for Three Types of Recipients: Allies, Non-allies, and Ally Neighbors

	Model 6 <i>Economic Aid (Allies)</i>	Model 7 <i>Economic Aid (Non-allies)</i>	Model 8 <i>Economic Aid (Ally Neighbors)</i>
ln(Refugees) × Violations	0.032** (0.010)	-0.0077* (0.0037)	0.021** (0.008)
Physical Integrity Violations	-0.12 (0.08)	-0.054* (0.022)	-0.25** (0.054)
ln(Refugees)	-0.12* (0.05)	0.054* (0.023)	-0.052 (0.047)
Observations	4,692	31,546	6,347
Left-censored observations	2,569	18,571	3,720
Number of dyads	388	1,688	454

(Note. Control variables are included in the models but omitted from the table. Standard errors are in parentheses. \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$ ).

“Do donors reduce aid when repression occurs?” I find that donor responses are more nuanced—donors often slash aid for economic sectors while continuing to give aid for social sectors and human rights promotion. Donors selectively sanction some states but not others, following a generally rational logic of *realpolitik*. Donors exempt their military allies and political partners from sanctions while imposing sanctions on others, particularly if their violations cause negative externalities or receive media coverage. I find no evidence that donor norms of

human rights protection lead donors to sanction rights violations. If anything, donors with strong human rights norms are *less* likely to sanction rights violations, suggesting that norms do not shape the choice to use aid sanctions in the ways expected by most scholars.

My findings offer a new way to interpret the existing body of mixed findings linking foreign aid to human rights. If donors primarily sanction human rights violations by withholding aid to economic sectors, then the effects of rights violations on aid flows may be underesti-

mated in previous studies that only examined aggregate aid. I also show that donors sanction selectively, punishing some repressive states while turning a blind eye to similar repression by others. Previous studies may come to conflicting conclusions about the impact of rights violations on aid policy because they overlook the donor–recipient ties that lead to selective sanctioning. By exploring the nuance of donor responses, I reconcile these conflicting conclusions in the quantitative literature and bring the findings of qualitative and quantitative scholars closer together.

Having established the pattern of economic aid sanctions by OECD donors, an obvious next step is to evaluate the effectiveness of aid sanctions at improving human rights practices. My finding that donors increase aid sanctions when rights violations generate negative international externalities suggests that they believe sanctions might sometimes fix the problem. However, one of the key findings from the economic sanctions literature (largely ignored in the debates about aid and human rights) is that trade sanctions are not particularly effective (Pape 1997) and may even lead to greater repression of human rights (Wood 2008). Are aid sanctions similarly ineffective? If so, are donors naïve about the impact of sanctions? Or are aid sanctions somehow effective while trade sanctions are not? Future research will have to grapple with these questions, but my findings lay a foundation for future work by showing when and why repression results in aid sanctions.

These findings offer insights about the reasons for which states choose “moral” foreign policies and introduce new ground on which to adjudicate between the claims of several dominant approaches in International Relations theory. In line with the expectations of rationalist approaches, the evidence suggests that supposedly moral policies may be adopted for amoral reasons: to pursue state interests. Advocates of human rights have long attempted to persuade states that they will benefit materially, as well as morally, from intervening to prevent severe rights violations (Schulz 2001). It seems that aid donors have themselves adopted this view, selectively sanctioning when it serves their interests.

In contrast, I find little evidence to support Constructivist accounts that identify human rights norms as the foremost driver of rights-friendly foreign policies (Donnelly 1993) and principled ideals as the primary motivation for Western aid programs (Lumsdaine 1993). This is surprising because the arena of human rights research has long been home turf for Constructivist theories of norm diffusion (Risse et al. 1999). My findings challenge the notion that human rights promotion by powerful states is primarily caused by ideational factors and breathes new life into rationalist explanations for apparently principled behavior. But my findings also challenge the cynical assertion that human rights are irrelevant to aid allocation, or more generally, to international politics. Human rights rhetoric is not necessarily a facade to mask the pursuit of donors’ material interests. States may act out of self-interest, but those interests can be profoundly shaped by human rights.

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**Supporting Information**

Additional Supporting Information may be found in the online version of this article:

**Appendix.** Additional information to support the analysis in “Rewarding Human Rights? Selective Aid Sanctions against Repressive States.”