

Rewarding Human Rights? Selective Aid Sanctions against Repressive States

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Abstract

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.

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There has been protracted debate as to whether states withhold foreign aid from other states that violate human rights (Schoultz, 1981; Cingranelli and Pasquarello, 1985; Carleton and Stohl, 1987; McCormick and Mitchell, 1988; Poe, 1992; Poe et al., 1994; Poe and Sirirangsi, 1994; Payaslian, 1996; Tomasevski, 1997; Apodaca and Stohl, 1999; Svensson, 1999; Alesina and Dollar, 2000; Neumayer, 2003*a,b,c*; Lai, 2003; 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.

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; Elliott, 1998; Pape, 1998; Drury, 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 policy-makers 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 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.¹ 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), Cingranelli and Pasquarello (1985) show that human rights protection influences U.S. aid and Poe (1992) confirms this for U.S. aid allocation to forty Western Hemisphere countries from 1980-1984. 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. Cingranelli and Pasquarello’s finding is sensitive to the exclusion of a few outlying cases (Carleton and Stohl, 1987; McCormick and Mitchell, 1988) and Neumayer (2003*a*; 2003*c*; 2003*b*) provides substantial evidence that “contrary to their verbal commitment, donor countries do not consistently reward respect for human rights in their foreign aid allocation” (2003*a*, 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.

¹This 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.

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, Pilatovsky, Miller, and Ogundele (1994) and Poe and Sirirangsi (1994) examine U.S. aid to Latin American 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 U.S. gives less aid to recipients that abuse human rights while paradoxically giving more aid to non-democracies. 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 U.S. 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 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 (Buono 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 percent 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 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.²

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

²Personal interview with Michael Edwards, former director of investment siting at Intel, April 2006.

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 U.S. 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 suggests that donors are more likely to sanction human rights violations that are widely publicized. Payaslian 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 (1996, 56).

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.

***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 U.S. 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. non-technical assistance (Godfrey et al., 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 and Bhavnani, 2012). None of the pre-existing 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 re-

lief, 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 1980-1990 but has remained relatively constant from 1990-2004.

[Figure 1 about here]

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 (Feyzioglu, 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 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, 2002b). 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” (U.S. 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 US 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 (U.S. 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...” (U.S. 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” (U.S. 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...” (U.S. 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).³ Following 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 $\ln(\text{aid per 1000 persons} + 1)$.⁴ 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.

Key Independent Variables

I measure recipient government *Physical integrity violations* using the CIRI physical integrity index coded from U.S. State Department and Amnesty International reports by Cingranelli and Richards (2006). This index measures government engagement in (a) torture, (b) disappearances, (c) extrajudicial killings, and (d) 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 et al., 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

³Some 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 this 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).

⁴The findings are robust to using a measure of aid change from one year to the next (see the Supporting Information).

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.⁵ This measure

⁵I also consider a refined measure using automated text coding to remove false positives, but the results

is correlated with my measure of human rights violations (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 treaties⁶ 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 US 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 (Berthélemy and Tichit,

are the same. See the Supporting Information for details.

⁶These 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).

2004; Alesina and Dollar, 2000) 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) which 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 et al., 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 War* \times *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 one year to eliminate direct temporal dependence and more accurately

model the information lags faced by donors.

Because sector-level aid data is censored — aid commitments can be zero but never negative — I use multilevel 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 six percent (Model 2: $\hat{\beta} = -.064$, $p < 0.001$).⁷ Increases in human rights violations have no apparent effect on aid to social sectors (Model 3: $\hat{\beta} = -.023$, $p = 0.07$) or aid for human rights and democracy (Model 4: $\hat{\beta} = 0.037$, $p = 0.08$), confirming that donors primarily sanction repression by cutting economic aid.

[Table 1 about here]

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 constant⁸ 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.

[Table 2 about here]

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 nine percent *more* aid following a one point increase in human rights violations ($p < 0.001$), while recipients that only vote with donors about half of the time will, on average, face a six percent 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 percent of their aid ($p < 0.001$).

⁷Because 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.

⁸Specifically, I hold *Donor Ratification* and *Donor Rights Protection* constant at their respective means of .75 and 7.4, and *Alliance*, *Ally Neighbor*, *UN Friend*, *ln(Refugees)*, and *ln(NYT Coverage)* constant at 0.

[Figure 2 about here]

As with UN voting similarity, the coefficient on the interaction between *Alliance* and *Violations* is positive, significant, and large ($\hat{\beta} = 0.095$, $p = 0.032$), 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 seven percent of its economic aid following a one point increase in human rights violations ($p < 0.001$). 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 ($\hat{\beta} = -0.079$, $p = 0.029$), 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 percent of its aid if it borders a donor’s ally ($p < 0.001$), rather than seven percent 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 ($\hat{\beta} = -0.004$, $p = 0.29$). 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 (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 series 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 sub-groups: donor allies, non-allies, and neighbors of donor allies. I estimate a model of aid flows including the interaction $\ln(\text{Refugees}) \times \text{Violations}$ on each of these sub-groups. 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.

[Table 3 about here]

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 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 six percent cut, while the same state faces a 15 percent 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 percent of their aid following a unit increase in violations. However, the

interaction of *Violations* and $\ln(\text{Refugees})$ is positive, indicating that when repression causes more refugees, the resulting sanctions are somewhat less severe. My theory predicts the opposite for this sub-group; 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, for the small minority of states that neighbor donors' allies, my findings contradict my theoretical prediction that refugee flows will lead to deeper aid cuts. 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 percent of their economic aid rather than a mere six percent 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.⁹

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: “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

⁹Because 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.

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 underestimated 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, Ropp and Sikkink, 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.

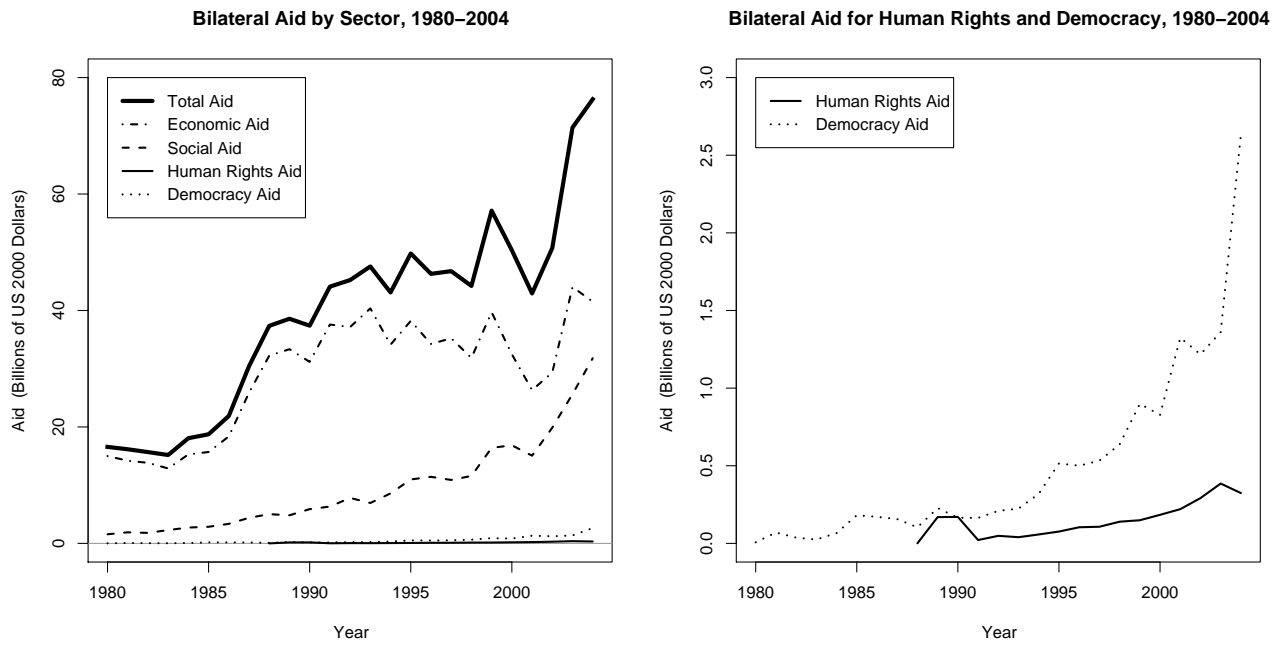


Figure 1: *Aid flows by sector from 17 OECD donors. Source OECD (2008).*

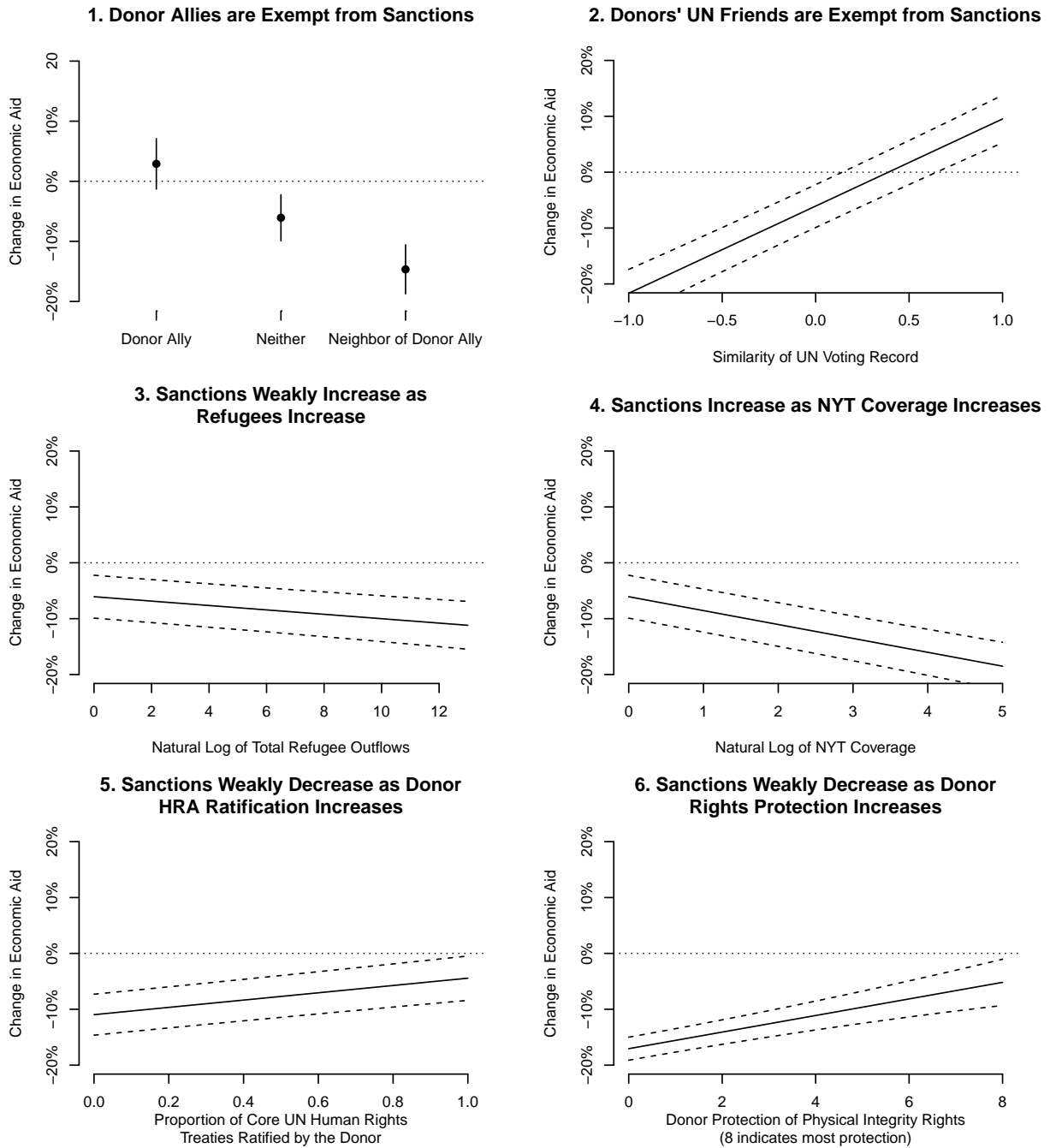


Figure 2: Panels 1-6 show the key findings from Model 5 in Table 2. Negative values on the y-axis indicate sanctions. Coefficients and 95 percent confidence intervals for the interactions are calculated using the appropriate formulas.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
	Total Aid	Economic Aid	Social Aid	Human Rights and Democracy Aid
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)	0.903** (0.021)
Global Aid Flows	0.89** (0.024)	0.803** (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)	-1.200** (0.27)
Cold War	-0.020 (0.058)	-0.022 (0.071)	-0.12 (0.066)	0.304* (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)	0.298* (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	44277	44277	44277	44277
Left-censored observations	22153	26157	25964	39057
Number of dyads	2366	2366	2366	2366
Log-likelihood	-60525.07	-54892.91	-53300.67	-18926.19

Table 1: *Region fixed effects are included in the models but omitted from the table. Standard errors in parentheses. ** $p < .01$, * $p < 0.05$.*

Dependent Variable: Economic Aid			
	Model 5		(continued)
Physical Integrity Violations	-0.197* (0.098)	Democracy	0.032** (0.0053)
Alliance	0.049 (0.22)	Lagged Aid	0.45** (0.0091)
Alliance \times Violations	0.095* (0.044)	Global Aid Flows	0.803** (0.028)
Ally Neighbor	0.67** (0.22)	ln(GDP per capita)	-0.58** (0.067)
Ally Neighbor \times 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 \times Violations	0.16** (0.047)	Former Colony	1.35** (0.31)
ln(Refugees)	0.038 (0.020)	Socialist	-0.696** (0.16)
ln(Refugees) \times Violations	-0.0039 (0.0036)	Cold War	-0.0089 (0.083)
ln(NYT Coverage)	0.016 (0.053)	Cold War \times Socialist	1.01** (0.11)
ln(NYT Coverage) \times Violations	-0.024* (0.0094)	Cold War \times Violations	0.020 (0.014)
Donor Ratification	-0.27 (0.201)	War	-0.061 (0.068)
Donor Ratification \times Violations	0.070 (0.040)	post-2001	0.21** (0.057)
Donor Rights Protection	-0.104 (0.059)	Constant	-15.23** (1.05)
Donor Rights \times Violations	0.011 (0.013)	Observations	41935
		Left-censored observations	24430
		Number of dyads	2364
		Log-likelihood	-52521.38

Table 2: *Region fixed effects are included in the model but omitted from the table. Standard errors in parentheses. ** $p < .01$, * $p < 0.05$.*

	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
	Economic Aid (Allies)	Economic Aid (Non-allies)	Economic Aid (Ally Neighbors)
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	4692	31546	6347
Left-censored observations	2569	18571	3720
Number of dyads	388	1688	454

Table 3: *Control variables are included in the models but omitted from the table. Standard errors in parentheses. ** $p < .01$, * $p < 0.05$.*

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