

International Economic Sanctions and Conflict Prevention in Self-determination Disputes

David E. Cunningham, University of Maryland & Peace Research Institute Oslo

Madeline Fleishman, University of Maryland

Peter B. White, Auburn University

Word Count: 11,097

Can international sanctions prevent civil war? Despite the increased scholarly and policy focus on conflict prevention, we lack an understanding of the impact of a commonly used tool of the international community—economic sanctions. In this article, we argue that the impact of economic sanctions depends on whether they are threatened or imposed. The threat of sanctions leads states to decrease repression and increase accommodation, thus decreasing the likelihood of civil war. The imposition of sanctions, however, incentivizes the state to increase repression and also makes the state a more attractive target for dissidents. Both dynamics make civil war more likely in the short term. Over time, however, states can adapt to the new economic reality created by a sanctions regime, and the risk of civil war escalation will decrease. We test implications of this argument through a quantitative analysis focusing on a set of potential civil wars—self-determination disputes—and find support for our arguments.

Note: Authors listed in alphabetical order, equal authorship implied

Can international sanctions prevent civil war? Since the end of the Cold War, international economic sanctions have become an increasingly used tool to compel and deter a range of state behavior (Morgan, Bapat, and Kobayashi 2014). There has been extensive scholarly attention paid to questions of sanctions' effect on regime stability, human rights practices, and conflict duration. The focus of the literature is on changing actor's behavior—much less understood, however, is the capacity of international sanctions to prevent or deter the behavior of actors, particularly in the context of intra-state conflict.

Conflict prevention is an often-stated goal of the international community. While much effort is expended in resolving or reducing conflict violence, there is an understanding that it is better to prevent armed violence from emerging in the first place. In the post-Cold War era, successive United Nations Secretary Generals have emphasized conflict prevention as the objective of the international community rather than reaction and amelioration.¹ While this discussion has tended to focus on “preventive diplomacy” and mediation, sanctions represent another important tool, short of armed intervention, for conflict prevention.

In this article, we address the question of whether international sanctions can prevent civil war by examining the impact of both threatened and imposed economic sanctions on all self-determination (SD) disputes active from 1960 to 2005. Disputes over self-determination are a common cause of civil war, but many of these disputes never experience armed violence. In addition, within the disputes that do see civil war, there are generally periods without armed conflict. As such, we argue that we can see

¹ See, for example, Ban Ki-Moon. 2011. “Preventative diplomacy: Delivering results.” United Nations. https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/SGReport_PreventiveDiplomacy_S2011552%28english%29_1.pdf; UN News. 8/21/2006. “Annan maps out ways to bolster UN ability to prevent armed conflict, save lives.” <https://news.un.org/en/story/2006/08/189612-annan-maps-out-ways-bolster-un-ability-prevent-armed-conflict-save-lives>.

self-determination disputes as a set of potential civil wars and examine whether sanctions play a role in preventing the emergence of civil war in these disputes.

We present a theoretical argument examining how the threat and imposition of sanctions affect decision-making by states and organizations representing self-determination disputes. Economic sanctions are primarily targeted against the state, and we argue that when sanctions are threatened against the state this threat can lead states to be less repressive and more conciliatory toward dissidents in the country, including self-determination groups. This shift in state behavior toward groups makes civil war less likely. When sanctions are imposed, however, they inflict direct costs on states which can affect their military capacity. States may respond by increasing repression of dissidents before the costs of sanctions begin to affect their military capacity and limit their ability to do so. This increased repression can make civil war more likely. In addition, the anticipated impact of sanctions on the state's military capacity can change the balance of power and makes the state a more attractive target for organizations representing self-determination disputes. These dynamics mean that imposed sanctions can actually increase the risk of civil war in the short-term. Over time, however, states adapt to the economic realities of sanctions regimes and the costs for states diminish, meaning that the increased risk of civil war from imposed sanctions is a short-term effect.

We test implications of this argument through a statistical analysis using the Threat and Imposition of Economic Sanctions (TIES) dataset to identify instances of threats and imposition of sanctions targeted against the state and using data from Cunningham (2013) to measure the occurrence of civil war in self-determination disputes, as well as factors affecting the likelihood of civil war in these disputes. We find that when sanctions are threatened against the state in one year, the likelihood of civil war onset in self-determination disputes in that country in the next declines, while when sanctions are imposed, the likelihood of civil war onset in the subsequent year increases. When we

examine the effect of sanctions over time, we find that this increase goes away after the first year, and imposed sanctions actually decrease the risk of civil war in subsequent years.

In further statistical analyses, we examine the theoretical mechanisms through which sanctions affect civil war in self-determination disputes. These analyses show that governments are more likely to grant concessions to SD groups following the threat of sanctions. We also find some evidence that governmental repression declines following the threat of sanctions, suggesting that threatened sanctions can modify state behavior towards dissident groups. When we examine the behavior of organizations in self-determination disputes, we find that they are more likely to use violence following the imposition of sanctions. These additional analyses illustrate important effects of international sanctions and provide support for the theoretical mechanisms advanced.

The argument and analysis in this paper shows that international economic sanctions can be an important tool for conflict prevention. Importantly, because we examine the effect of threats of sanctions against the country generally but that do not target the SD dispute in particular, we find that prevention can work more broadly than we would if we just looked specifically at actions targeted at disputes. The finding that the imposition of sanctions can increase the risk of armed conflict in the short term is also important, because it suggests that periods following the imposition of sanctions generally are important times to think about conflict management and prevention more generally. We conclude with more discussion of these implications and a roadmap for further research on the relationship between sanctions and civil war.

Sanctions and State Behavior

A large literature examines whether and how economic sanctions affect the behavior of target states. Pape (1997) questions whether sanctions can be effective given that modern states generally have the ability to weather significant economic disruption. However, other studies demonstrate that sanctions

can be effective, but that the impact of sanctions may be conditional on other factors, such as the behavior the sanctions are intended to prevent or change, or the other types of pressure with which they are combined (Elliott 1998; Lektzian and Regan 2016). And even if the imposition of sanctions does not exert a strong impact on state behavior, the threat of their imposition can—i.e., the most effective sanctions are those that are never put into effect because the threat of them is enough to change or deter target behavior (Drezner 2003).

With regards to intra-state conflict more specifically, Marinov (2005) shows that sanctions can be effective in destabilizing state leaders and governments. However, this destabilization and economic hardship can lead autocrats to turn more to repression (Wood 2008; Peksen 2009). Sanctions can make protest more likely, eliciting a coercive response by the state, or make the state less able to control its security forces via a reduction in state capacity, increasing overall repression (Liou, Murdie, and Peksen 2021). In response to economic sanctions, there is evidence that the response of the target state depends on regime-type—with some states responding with more targeted transfers to their core supporters while others turn more to repression (Escribà-Folch 2012), which can exacerbate intra-state conflict and increase the likelihood of armed conflict. Ultimately, personalist regimes may be the most vulnerable to sanctions, because they are the most dependent on foreign revenue streams (Escribà-Folch and Wright 2010).

Sanctions can encourage anti-government protests by signaling international support for protesters (Grauvogel, Licht, and von Soest 2017). However, while sanctions may increase both violent and non-violent anti-government mobilization, this is only the case in anocracies—with autocracies being able to prevent mobilization given their repressive capacity (Allen 2008). There is, however, the potential for moral hazard. While not referring to sanctions specifically, international intervention—or the prospect of it—may incentivize rebellion in contexts where it is likely to be violently repressed (Kuperman 2005). Sanctions specifically may also contribute to increased

mobilization as the worsening economic conditions or perceived regime vulnerability increase dissent (Liou, Murdie, and Peksen 2021).

The threat and imposition of economic sanctions tends to increase the intensity of ongoing civil war—except for sanctions which specifically target the importing of military material; these tend to reduce the capacity of conflict actors to wage war (Hultman and Peksen 2017). Relatedly, with regards to inter-state conflict, sanctions which reduce the military capabilities of combatants can reduce the likelihood of conflict by reducing the incentive for preventive war presented by one side increasing in power relative to the other (McCormack and Pascoe 2017). If access to military material is blocked for both sides, it will be more difficult for one side to increase its military capabilities relative to the other, reducing the declining side’s incentive for preventive war. Large-scale economic embargoes also have been shown to reduce the length of ongoing civil wars (Escribà-Folch 2010)—though this stands in potential conflict with the findings that suggest that economic sanctions can lead non-democratic regimes to turn more to repression (Wood 2008; Peksen 2009).

Beardsley, Cunningham, and White (2017) do examine the impact of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions authorizing international sanctions on conflict prevention—finding that these resolutions exert an indirect conflict prevention effect on the likelihood that self-determination disputes escalate to civil war.² Yet, sanctions authorized by UNSC resolutions represent a limited subset of possible sanctions—those that are able to pass through the UNSC—including the possible veto of any one of the five permanent members of the council.³ We lack an understanding of how

² E.g., UNSC resolutions authorizing sanctions against a country for reasons other than those directly pertinent to a self-determination dispute make it less likely that self-determination disputes in that country escalate to high levels of violence (Beardsley, Cunningham, and White 2017).

³³ I.e., any sanction authorized by a UNSC resolution is one that was not vetoed by either China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, or the United States. Intra-state disputes in which the government is a P5 member or ally would be systematically less likely to see UNSC attention.

sanctions issued by organizations other than the UN or by individual states might affect the propensity of intra-state disputes to escalate to violence.

The literature on economic sanctions has given us a sense for how their threat and imposition can affect the violence of ongoing civil war and the stability and propensity to repress of autocrats more generally, but we lack an understanding of how sanctions imposed on relatively non-violent intra-state conflicts affect their propensity to escalate to broader violence. In part this may be hampered by a general lack of understanding in the literature on how international efforts more generally can prevent armed conflict. There is an extensive literature on international efforts to manage or end ongoing intra-state conflicts (e.g., Fortna 2008; Hultman, Kathman, and Shannon 2013; Walter 1999), yet—with few exceptions (Beardsley, Cunningham, and White 2017)—we have a weak understanding of international efforts to prevent civil conflict from erupting in the first place. In the next section we discuss how economic sanctions—when applied to a set of intra-state disputes that could see large-scale violence—affects the likelihood these disputes remain relatively peaceful or escalate to civil war.

Sanctions and preventing civil war in self-determination disputes

Self-determination (SD) disputes take place between a government and organizations representing a SD group that seek greater control over the territory that the group's members inhabit. Some SD groups make demands for secession, but many do not. In some cases, groups demand autonomy within a federal system, language rights, or control over education policy within their territory.

Disputes over self-determination are a common cause of civil war, and several long-running violent conflicts such as those involving the Kurds in Turkey, Somalis in Ethiopia, and Moro in the Philippines arise from these disputes. Many self-determination disputes, meanwhile, do not escalate to civil war, and those that do frequently have periods where they are not in armed conflict

(Cunningham 2013). Given that self-determination disputes represent incompatibilities that can remain quiescent, be characterized by non-violent mobilization, or see widespread violence, we see these disputes as a set of potential civil wars, and we consider how sanctions impact the likelihood of escalation to large-scale violence.

The sanctions that we examine are not typically targeted directly at the behavior of states in self-determination disputes. When we began this project, we coded whether each sanction included in the TIES data was directly targeted at SD disputes, and found that this is quite rare, particularly in cases where the SD dispute was not experiencing armed conflict. However, because sanctions generally target the government and because state capacity is fungible across the different disputes that the state faces—e.g., if state capacity to repress is affected generally, this should apply across all intra-state disputes in which repression might be applied—we argue that sanctions will affect the dynamics of SD disputes even if they are not targeted specifically at those disputes. Sanctions are threatened or imposed by outside actors to convince governments to change their behavior, or to deter actions—such as repression or an escalation to violence. We argue that these sanctions can impact the behavior of states and SD groups generally and examine theoretically both the impact of the threat and imposition of sanctions on the dynamics of SD disputes.

The onset of civil war in self-determination disputes

Before examining how sanctions affect civil war onset, we begin with a stylized discussion of the process leading up to the outbreak of violent conflict in these disputes. SD disputes involve an incompatibility between the government and organizations representing the SD group over to what degree each will exercise control over SD group members and the territory they inhabit. A desire for secession is the extreme example of this, but even groups that do not demand secession frequently desire greater economic or political autonomy than the government wants to give them.

Organizations representing SD groups typically have a menu of options available to them to try to achieve their goals, and most of these options are not violent Cunningham, Dahl, and Frugé (2017). In democracies and competitive autocracies, group members can engage in political competition to try to advance their goals through legislation. In some cases, organizations representing SD groups negotiate directly with governments, as in the negotiations leading up to the 1998 Good Friday Agreement in the UK-Northern Ireland dispute. Organizations in SD groups frequently use nonviolent tactics—such as protests, demonstrations, sit-ins, and strikes—to persuade potential supporters of their cause and to pressure governments to make concessions to them. In addition, groups make appeals to international actors to support their cause. International support is frequently key to groups—particularly secessionists—achieving their aims, as seen in cases like East Timor and South Sudan.

Civil war occurs in these disputes when governments and/or SD groups decide to use violence to achieve their goals. Organizations representing SD groups may choose to use violence to pressure governments because they see nonviolent means as unavailable or as unlikely to succeed. Governments often respond to SD demands or tactics with violent repression, which can also lead to disputes escalating to armed conflict. In some cases, governments both negotiate with and fight an SD group at the same time, in an effort to make more limited concessions and to defeat more hardline organizations within the SD group (Cunningham 2014).

We follow Fearon (1995) and Cunningham (2014) and take a bargaining approach, viewing civil war in SD disputes as arising from bargaining failure. In this approach, organizations representing SD groups and governments evaluate the costs and benefits of fighting vs. not fighting. Because violent conflict is always costly, there should be a range of agreements that both governments and these organizations prefer to fighting. A large literature on these disputes has identified a number of factors such as the number of factions in the group (Cunningham 2013), the number of SD groups in

the country (Walter 2006), the presence of ethnic kin (Jenne 2007), and others as impacting the decisions that SD groups and states make regarding whether or not to use violence in these disputes. In general, from the bargaining approach, we can view armed conflict as occurring under two main conditions—when states and SD groups see the costs and benefits of violence relative to compromise as being more advantageous, and when they are unable to reach compromise settlements that avoid the costs of violence that do exist.

The threat of sanctions and civil war onset in self-determination disputes

When international actors threaten states with sanctions, they seek to manipulate the costs and benefits of some perceived action. Sanctions are used to change a variety of state behaviors, but in general they signal that there is international dissatisfaction with the state's behavior and potential costs will result from this dissatisfaction. If sanction threats are credible, governments know that, if the sanctions are imposed, then they will bear costs from not changing their behavior, and they will have to assess whether they are willing to bear these costs. In some cases, they will be sufficiently committed to their action that they will accept these costs, and the threat of sanctions will be insufficient to deter the desired behavior. However, for governments deciding how to interact with their populations (including self-determination groups), a shift in the expected costliness of repression can lead them to lessen repression and increase accommodation, at least in the short-term. The literature on human rights shows that, depending on factors such as type of repression affected and regime type, even relatively low-cost actions (such as naming and shaming), can lead to reductions in repression and improved human rights protection (Hendrix and Wong 2013; Hafner-Burton 2008).

An example of governments shifting their behavior in response to the threat of sanctions can be seen in the response of the new government following a 2014 coup in Burkina Faso. Quickly after the military took power, the African Union threatened sanctions against the new regime if it did not step

down in favor of a transitional civilian regime within a two-week deadline. This sanction threat was combined with mediation efforts by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). A transitional government was established within two weeks of the coup (Mullenbach 2023). While this transitional government was ultimately unsuccessful in establishing durable civilian rule, the threat of sanctions by the AU combined with mediation efforts by ECOWAS likely averted mass repression in the aftermath of the seizure of power by the military and created space for non-violent conflict resolution.

We anticipate, then, that governments will look for ways to avoid the costs of threatened sanctions by reducing the likelihood that the threat is actually followed by the imposition of sanctions. They can do this by reducing their use of repression and being more accommodating of dissidents, at least in the short-term. This reduction in repression and increase in accommodation, meanwhile, means that organizations representing self-determination disputes are less likely to escalate violence. This change in government behavior corresponds to a reduction in the likelihood that the self-determination dispute escalates to civil war. This leads to a series of empirical implications that we will test:

- *Hypothesis 1: Civil war onset will be less likely in SD disputes following a threat of international sanctions.*
- *Hypothesis 2: Governments will increase accommodation of SD groups following a threat of international sanctions.*
- *Hypothesis 3: Governments will reduce repression following a threat of international sanctions.*

Imposed sanctions and civil war onset in self-determination disputes

Threatened sanctions are designed to signal to the government that not changing its behavior will become costly. When international actors follow through and impose sanctions on the government, these costs become real. At the same time, however, the imposition of sanctions suggests that the

threat itself has failed at deterring this behavior, and so the cases where we observe imposed sanctions are ones where the government either miscalculated the credibility of the threat or was sufficiently resolved to bear the anticipated costs of the sanction.

We argue that the imposition of sanctions can lead both governments and organizations representing SD disputes to escalate in the short-term, making bargaining more likely to break down, and thus increasing the likelihood of civil war. Governmental increases in repression are driven by two mechanisms. First, sanctions impose immediate costs on governments, but the impact of these costs on the state's military and repressive capacity takes time to develop. As such, governments may increase repression following the implementation of sanctions, out of fears that their capacity to effectively stymie opposition movements will diminish over time. The imposition of sanctions may cause governments to perceive that they have a limited window in which to effectively repress dissidents—including self-determination movements.

This dynamic is likely to have been at play in the Tigray conflict in Ethiopia in October 2021. In September 2021, the United States issued broad sanctions applying to a range of combatants in the separatist Tigray region of Ethiopia—including the Ethiopian government.⁴ While these sanctions were intended to compel the combatants to seek a lasting ceasefire, within three weeks of the sanctions being imposed, the government launched a massive series of air strikes and ground offensives against separatists that increased the level of violence in the conflict in comparison to prior months. These included air strikes on the capital of the separatist region that resulted in civilian deaths.⁵ Concerns about the imminent impact of sanctions intended to hinder the country's military capacity may have

⁴ Executive Office of the President. 9/17/2021. "Imposing Sanctions on Certain Persons With Respect to the Humanitarian and Human Rights Crisis in Ethiopia." *Federal Register*. <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2021/09/21/2021-20508/imposing-sanctions-on-certain-persons-with-respect-to-the-humanitarian-and-human-rights-crisis-in>.

⁵ BBC News. 10/18/2021. "Tigray: Ethiopian government admits Mekelle airstrike." <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-58958022>.

contributed to a perception on the government side that it faced a narrow window in which to launch an effective offensive. Indeed the 2021 offensive was likely intended specifically to create “facts on the ground,” such as captured territory, which would allow the government to more effectively push back against international efforts to compel a more conciliatory policy on the government’s part.⁶

This first mechanism explains why governments have incentives to increase repression in the aftermath of sanctions. The second mechanism is that even if governments do not want to increase repression following sanctions, they may be unable to avoid doing so. When sanctions are imposed the most immediate impact on state capacity is in the government’s ability to monitor and control armed agents. These agents are those in the position to commit repression, and the reduction in capacity can lead to a principal-agent problem in which armed agents are more free to engage in repression without concern for consequences (Liou, Murdie and Peksen 2021).

Both of these mechanisms can result in increases in governmental repression of dissidents, including those representing SD groups, following governmental repression. In addition, the imposition of sanctions can create short-term economic advantages for dissident groups. When sanctions are imposed on developing countries, these sanctions often lead to the growth of the black market, as people seek to buy goods that they otherwise cannot and as firms seek to continue their economic activity despite the challenges created by the sanctions regime (Early and Peksen 2019). Dissident groups are often well positioned to profit from this growth of the black market, as they often operate in it outside of state control even in periods without civil war. This can increase the capacity of dissident groups—such as organizations representing SD movements—leading them to escalate the demands they make on the state and their use of violence.

⁶ Ahmed Aboudouh. 10/15/2021. “Fears for humanitarian crisis engulfing Tigray as Abiy Ahmed launches make or break war.” *The Independent*.
<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/ethiopia-tigray-war-humanitarian-population-b1938975.html>.

All three of these mechanisms make bargaining between governments and dissidents more likely to break down following the imposition of sanctions. The anticipated impact of imposed sanctions on state capacity will eventually shift the bargaining range in favor of the dissidents—as the imposed sanctions reduce the state’s ability to impose costs on potential rebels. The government then has an incentive to increase repression or prosecute a war while it still has the capacity to do so (Powell 2006). This increased repression can lead organizations representing SD groups to escalate the conflict as well. If sanctions also serve to lessen government control over repression and fragment the security sector, then achieving a successful bargained outcome to the political dispute becomes more difficult as more and more armed actors nominally under, but effectively autonomous from, government control—increase the number of veto points to a peaceful solution to the incompatibility and potential spoilers (e.g., Cunningham 2011). As such, bargaining between states and SD groups in the aftermath of imposed sanctions is more likely to break down, leading to an increased risk of civil war.

This discussion leads to several empirical implications. The first, main, hypothesis is the opposite of our expectation regarding sanction threats and follows from both the arguments about state and group behavior following the imposition of sanctions:

- *Hypothesis 4: Civil war onset will be more likely in SD disputes following an imposition of international sanctions.*

The next hypotheses refer to the behavior of governments and organizations in SD disputes that lead to the increased likelihood of civil war:

- *Hypothesis 5: Governments will increase repression following the imposition of international sanctions.*
- *Hypothesis 6: Organizations representing SD movements will increase their use of violence following the imposition of international sanctions.*

While we expect sanctions to lead to increases of state repression and SD groups to escalate violence in the short-term after they are imposed, we expect these effects to diminish over time. As

the cumulative costs of sanctions grow, the government's military capacity will diminish, decreasing its ability to repress dissidents. These costs also provide an incentive for governments to adjust their behavior enough to get the sanctions lifted, which can include being less repressive and more accommodating. If sanctions lead to a loss of control of repressive agents by the state (Liou, Murdie, and Peksen 2021), over time that control may be reestablished and excess repression may be curtailed.

At the same time, as sanctions regimes develop, governments often work to increase their participation in and control over the black market. This can somewhat counteract the costs of sanctions to governments and also diminishes the economic benefit that dissident groups such as organizations representing SD movements can gain from the black market. This dynamic can mean the increased likelihood of civil war following the imposition of sanctions is a short-term effect, and that it diminishes (or even reverses) over time.

Hypothesis 7: The positive effect of imposed sanctions on civil war onset will diminish over time.

Threatened and Imposed Sanctions in Self-determination disputes

We conduct a series of statistical analyses of the effect of threatened and imposed sanctions on the dynamics of self-determination disputes. In all analyses, we examine active self-determination groups from 1960 to 2005. These data comes from the Strategies of Resistance Data Project (SRDP) (Cunningham, Dahl, and Frugé 2020), which is based on coding from Cunningham (2013). Cunningham (2013) drew her list of self-determination groups from the CIDCM Peace and Conflict Report, and SD groups by her definition include all ethno-nationalist groups with organizations making demands for greater local control, up to and including (but not limited to) secession. Using these data we are able to analyze 142 SD groups in times of both armed conflict and peace from 76 different countries. SD dispute-years when the SD group is not active (meaning that there are no organizations making claims on the state related to self-determination)—as indicated in Cunningham

(2013)—drop from the sample. Our unit of analysis is the SD dispute-year—of which there are 4,008 in the SRDP.

To measure the threat and imposition of sanctions on countries in which self-determination disputes take place, we use the Threat and Imposition of Economic Sanctions (TIES) dataset (Morgan, Bapat, and Kobayashi 2014). The TIES data identify all instances in which one more countries either limit or cease altogether their economic activity with a target state in order to convince the state to change its behavior. Decisions that reduce economic activity for purely economic reasons are not included, but actions which are intended to result in changes in policy—such as trade or environmental policy—are included in the TIES data.

The TIES data records important information regarding each sanction episode. One critical piece of information is the issue area that each sanction episode is related to, ranging from political practices to trade. For our argument we believe that the sanctions need to reliably pressure the state to change its behavior outside of economic policy areas. Based on our earlier investigation into the substance of each sanction episode,⁷ we determined that sanctions relating to the environment and trade practices were very far removed from the actions of the government regarding SD groups as they focused on issues such as incorrect fishing practices or anti-dumping issues. To better model our theorized mechanisms, the episodes coded as pertaining to environmental or trade issues are removed from our main independent variables. We include all other sanctions, and in additional analyses we include all sanctions and present the results in the Appendix.

Our argument specifies the impact of threatened and imposed sanctions, which we model as a binary indicator of whether there was any threat or imposition in that year. The TIES data is formatted to present each episode targeted at a specific country, so each SD group in a particular country will

⁷ In a previous iteration, we reviewed each sanction by match the date, sender, and target to determine if it related to a SD group and its main purpose.

have the same binary measures for threat and imposition of sanctions for each year. In our sample, there are 76 unique states and 60 of them received a sanction threat between 1960 and 2005, while 36 states faced imposed sanctions. This equals to 454 SD-years in which there is a threatened sanction and 285 SD-years where a sanction is imposed, out of our total sample of 4,008 SD-years. Table A3 in the Appendix presents a list of the timing of threatened and imposed sanctions against countries with SD disputes in our data.

Analyses of Armed Conflict Onset

Our first analyses test Hypotheses 1 and 4, about the impact of sanctions (both threatened and imposed) on armed conflict onset. Our dependent variable in these models is a dichotomous measure of whether or not an SD group-government dyad sees the onset of a new internal armed conflict in the given year. Armed conflict onset is defined as a year when at least twenty-five battle-related fatalities occur after at least three prior years of peace, and this is coded from the UCDP-PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset (ACD) (Gleditsch et al. 2002; Pettersson and Öberg 2020). In our data there are 91 internal armed conflict onsets across the 142 SD disputes. Twenty-six disputes experience more than one conflict onset, and 85 disputes never experience armed conflict in our sample based on the ACD coding.

The analysis does not distinguish between conflict onsets that are brand new or reoccurring,⁸ but years when an active conflict is ongoing for the SD group—e.g., years of ongoing conflict continuing after the onset of a conflict episode—are excluded, so as to examine the effect of our independent variables on the beginning of a new conflict episode rather than its continuance. In order

⁸ A conflict is considered a new conflict when violence occurs over three years after the last violent episode, as defined by UCDP and SRDP control data.

to address the potential endogeneity of sanctions and armed conflict, we lag the measure of threatened and imposed sanctions (as well as the control variables we include) by one year.

We control for several other factors that have been shown to affect the likelihood of civil war onset in self-determination disputes and could potentially impact sanctions behavior as well. At the state level, we control for democracy. Our measure is dichotomous, and is coded “1” for all countries with a Polity score greater than 6 (Marshall, Jaggers, and Gurr 2002). We include variables measuring the country’s gross domestic product per capita, and population (both log-transformed and from (World Bank 2022)). Democracy, economic development, and population have been shown to be consistently associated with civil war onset, and each could affect whether international actors target the state with sanctions. Using the UCDP/PRIO armed conflict dataset (Gleditsch et al. 2002), we also control for civil conflict in a neighboring state as that could produce spillover effects and bring attention to the region.⁹ Similarly, we control for other civil wars occurring within the country, as a civil conflict with one SD group could prompt civil conflict with another, and government behavior in another civil war could attract international attention, including sanctions. Additionally, we include a control for whether the SD group-years are in the Cold War (years prior to 1991), as the dynamics of sanctions and civil war change following the Cold War and the change in the context of super-power competition.

We also include a series of control variables from Cunningham (2013) that are measured at the SD group-level. These include the number of SD group factions (logged) and whether the SD group has previously been granted concessions, which have both been shown to play a role in conflict onset (Cunningham 2013). We also include measures of whether a group has ethnic kin in neighboring

⁹ Following White, Cunningham, and Beardsley (2018), we define a neighboring civil war as one that occurs in a country whose capital city is within 900 kilometers of the capital of the country in which the SD dispute occurs.

states and whether the movement has used violent tactics in the year prior to civil war. We control for the number of total SD groups in the state, which Toft (2003) and Walter (2006) have argued affect the incentives that states have to fight or accommodate ethnic groups (Cunningham 2013). Finally, in line with Carter and Signorino (2010), we include a cubic polynomial of time since the last civil war onset to account for duration dependence. Following Beardsley, Cunningham, and White (2017), to avoid left censoring of our data for groups that existed before 1960 we begin the risk-time polynomials in 1946, or the end of armed conflict episodes after 1946, or the date the movement was founded if after 1946.

We test the effect of threatened and imposed sanctions on armed conflict onset in self-determination disputes using logistic regression. The model, presented in Table 1, includes robust standard errors clustered at the SD group level and does not include sanctions that were threatened or imposed in response to trade and environmental concerns.

Table 1: Predicting Civil War Onset in All SD Years

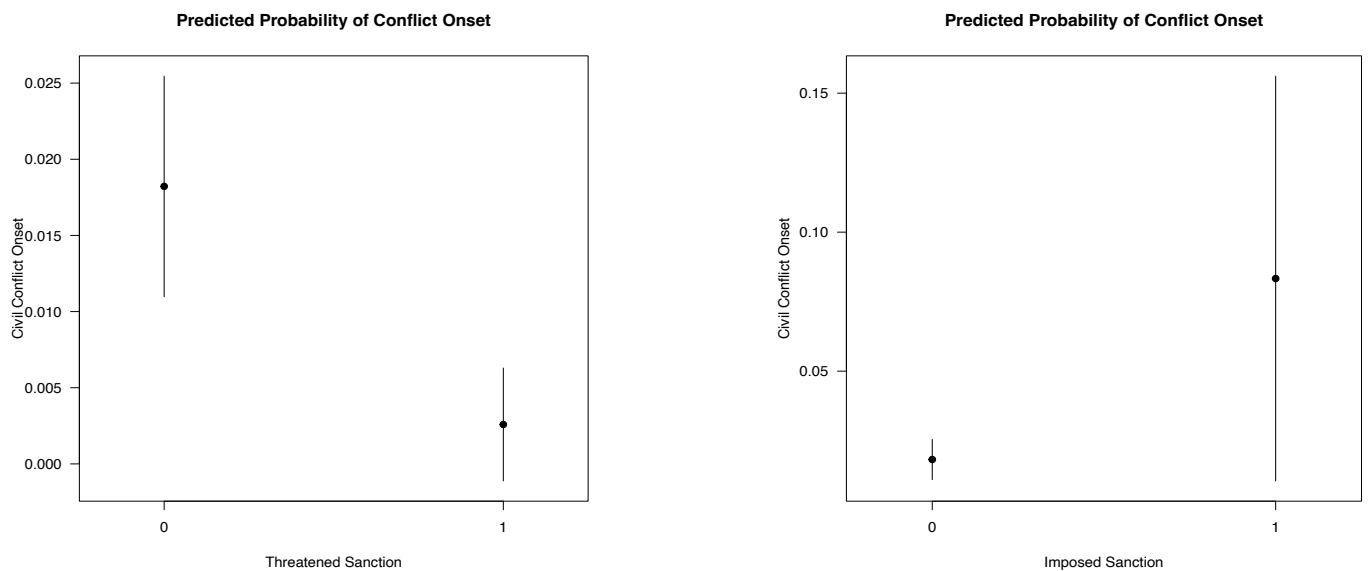
	Civil War Onset
Threat of Sanctions	-1.968*** (0.727)
Imposition of Sanctions	1.589*** (0.428)
Democracy	-0.856** (0.415)
Log GDP	-0.238** (0.107)
Log Population	0.127 (0.109)
Neighboring Conflict	-0.437** (0.211)
Other Civil War in Country	-0.145 (0.311)
Cold War	0.489 (0.318)
Log Factions	0.983*** (0.194)
Prev. Concessions	0.079 (0.293)
Kin	0.219 (0.290)
Violent Tactics Used	1.380*** (0.407)
Num of Groups	0.004 (0.045)
Constant	-5.076*** (1.965)
Observations	2,185
Log Likelihood	-230.928
Akaike Inf. Crit.	495.856

Note: All independent variables lagged by 1 year besides Risk-time (removed for ease of interpretation) and Cold War. The dependent variable represents civil war onset. ***p < 0.01; **p < 0.05 (two-tailed tests); robust standard errors in parentheses clustered on SD group.

The model in Table 1 shows a pattern consistent with the expectations of Hypotheses 1 and 4. The sign on the sanctions threat variable is negative and statistically significant, suggesting that civil war onset is less likely in self-determination disputes in years following those in which sanctions were threatened. The opposite pattern holds with the imposed sanctions variable, suggesting that civil war onset is more likely in disputes in the year following the imposition of sanctions. These patterns are consistent with the theoretical argument presented above.

These variables have a large substantive effect as well. We have calculated the predicted probabilities of the onset of armed conflict in self-determination disputes when there are threatened and imposed sanctions, setting other right-hand side variables to their observed values in line with Hanmer and Kalkan (2013). We plot these predictions in Figure 1. Threatened sanctions reduce the likelihood of civil conflict onset in self-determination disputes on average from around a 2% chance to 0.07% chance of onset. On the other hand, imposed sanctions approximately quadruple the likelihood of armed conflict onset from 2% to almost 9%. The imposed sanctions range of predicted probabilities is quite large further illustrating the rarity of these events.

Figure 1: Armed conflict onset in self-determination disputes and economic sanctions



The control variables included in Table 1 show limited significance. A state being classified as a democracy and having a higher GDP are statistically significant and shown to be associated with reducing the likelihood of civil conflict onset, consistent with the literature on civil war onset. Interestingly, a greater country-level population is positive but not significant at conventional levels, which is somewhat surprising given that population is typically a strong positive predictor of civil war. This may be a reflection of the omission of years of ongoing civil war and the fact that our analyses examines only civil wars over territory, excluding center-seeking disputes (governmental incompatibilities). A larger number of factions in the SD movement, and violent tactics being used by the SD group in the year prior are highly significant and are associated with increasing the likelihood of conflict onset, which aligns with Cunningham (2013). One interesting result is the reduction in the likelihood of armed conflict onset when there is a neighboring conflict in the full model. This variable is significant but leads to a reduction in the likelihood of civil war onset. This may reflect the increased attention that the international community may pay to potential conflicts that face a high risk of escalation due to “contagion” from neighboring conflicts. Even short of sanctions, international efforts including diplomacy, for example may flow to potential conflicts that are near other ongoing conflicts (White, Cunningham, and Beardsley 2018). Similarly, another civil war in the country is negative but insignificant. But in turn, there being ethnic kin in a neighboring country is insignificant, as well as the number of groups in a country. Being in the Cold War is slightly significant at predicting an increase in the likelihood of civil war onset. Previous concessions could reduce the likelihood of conflict, but it is insignificant at conventional levels.

Threatened and Imposed Sanctions and State Repression/Accommodation

The analysis in Table 1 provides strong support for the overall pattern between the threat and imposition of sanctions and armed conflict onset predicted by our theory. The next series of statistical

analyses probe the theoretical mechanisms behind that pattern. We argued that threatened sanctions lead states to increase accommodation (Hypothesis 2) and reduce repression (Hypothesis 3) in the hopes that shifting their behavior will lead to international actors not actually imposing the sanctions. With regards to imposed sanctions, however, we argued that states will increase their use of repression in the aftermath of the sanctions (Hypothesis 5). We test these hypotheses in two different analyses, the first examining state accommodation and the second state repression.

Governmental Accommodation

To measure accommodation, we relied on the newest update of the Strategies of Resistance Data Project (SRDP), which includes information on every instance in which governments have accommodated the demands of organizations representing self-determination groups (Cunningham, Dahl, and Fruge 2020). Accommodation involves the government making concessions to give greater power to the self-determination movement. This can include granting greater representation in the national-level government, giving greater authority to the local-level government over some policy areas (such as taxation, policing, or language policy), or policy or legal changes that provide greater identity protection for the group. These concessions can be the result of direct or indirect negotiations between the government and organizations representing SD groups, but they can also be made unilaterally by governments.

Accommodations can vary in how extensive they are and the SRDP data allows for a more fine-grained interpretation of the levels of accommodation. We use two different variables to measure governmental accommodation of SD groups. The first is a binary indicator of whether any accommodation relating to that SD group and their interests occurs in a given year, excluding

monetary donations to the region and land transfers.¹⁰ Even with this broad definition, incidences of accommodation are quite rare, happening in only 133 of 4,008 SD-years. The second measure only includes accommodation which is endorsed by the central government and codified through legislation. This represents a more binding concession because the accommodation is guaranteed as law, and it occurs in 68 SD-years. Table 2 reports the results of analyses of each of these measures of accommodation.

In these models, our control variables remain the same as in our analysis in Table 1. Cunningham (2014) argues that many of the same factors that affect concessions can also affect civil war, and thus we include the same control variables in both models. The state-level characteristics like democracy, GDP per capita, and population describe the state's capacity to give groups concessions, while the SD-group controls affect the incentives the state has to accommodate given the number of groups and their divisions. In this model, to appropriately model the dependence of future accommodations on recent concessions we re-code our previous concession variable to only include concessions granted in the previous three years.

¹⁰ Direct monetary transfers are excluded from the coding of the SRDP accommodations data because they do not relate to a group's identity and do not represent a longer-lasting shift in favor of group demands. We choose to exclude land transfers because it is broadly defined to include a wide set of outcomes, ranging from fishing rights being granted to the wholesale transfer of land to a self-determination group.

Table 2: State Accommodation of SD Groups

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Accommodations (excluding land transfers)	Accommodations codified by law
Previous Concessions	0.056 (0.371)	0.250 (0.380)
Threat of Sanctions	0.751* (0.413)	0.816* (0.454)
Imposed Sanctions	-0.328 (0.616)	0.087 (0.754)
Democracy	0.156 (0.398)	0.566 (0.587)
Log GDP	0.188 (0.157)	0.286 (0.193)
Log Population	0.011 (0.155)	-0.030 (0.186)
Neighboring Conflict	0.055 (0.228)	0.208 (0.281)
Other Civil War in Country	0.539 (0.356)	0.204 (0.469)
Cold War	-0.224 (0.399)	-0.078 (0.419)
Kin	-0.030 (0.384)	0.017 (0.462)
Log Factions	0.399* (0.236)	0.333 (0.258)
Violent Tactics Used	0.643* (0.370)	0.297 (0.444)
Num of Grps	-0.011 (0.054)	-0.160** (0.073)
Constant	-5.993* (3.377)	-5.738 (3.688)
Observations	2,012	2,012
Log Likelihood	-233.581	-197.902
Akaike Inf. Crit.	501.162	429.804

All independent variables lagged by 1 year. ***p < 0.01; **p < 0.05 (two-tailed tests); robust standard errors in parentheses clustered on SD group.

The models in Table 2 show that states generally increase accommodation of SD groups in the year following a sanction threat. The coefficient on the sanction threat variable is positive and statistically significant in both Model 1, which includes all concessions (excluding monetary and land transfers) and in Model 2 where concessions are limited to those endorsed by the central government and codified through legislation. These patterns are consistent with the predictions of Hypothesis 2.

We did not have a prediction about the effect of the imposition of sanctions on accommodation of SD groups, and we do not find a statistically significant result here. The coefficient on the variable is positive, but far from statistical significance.

Governmental Repression

Turning to our tests of Hypothesis 3, we are unaware of cross-national data on the use of repression at the SD dispute level. Without these data, we are unable to conduct a parallel test to that in Table 2, examining how threats and impositions of sanctions impact governmental repression targeted specifically at SD groups. Instead, we examine the effect of both threatened and imposed sanctions on the overall levels of repression at the country level.

To measure repression we use the latent measure of human rights generated by Fariss (2014). His measure takes into account multiple types of governmental repression—including torture, imprisonment and disappearance, and killing. The measure is drawn from a range of data sources and corrects for changes in reporting practices for human rights violations over time.

We include two measures of governmental repression from Fariss' (2014) data. The first is an overall measure of human rights protection, and the second focuses only on the most egregious human rights violations—mass killing and one-sided violence. The control variables we include follow from Hill and Jones' (2014) analyses of determinants of human rights violations—we exclude potential control variables that relate to institutions that might be changed in response to sanctions, such as an

independent judiciary as well as economic conditions that might change as a results of sanctions. We omit these controls so as to avoid controlling for intermediate processes between sanctions threat or imposition and repression. We follow Fariss’ recommendation and employ Ordinary Least Squares regression given the continuous latent measure and interact the lag of the latent measure with a year counter in order to control for temporal dependence and changes in reporting practices over time. So as to parallel our main analyses of civil war onset, we exclude country-years in which there is an ongoing civil war. Table 3 provides the results of two models for each of the dependent variables. The first and third models are more limited, and the second and fourth models include additional control variables.

Table 3: Sanctions and state-level repression

	Latent HR		Latent OSV	
Threat of sanctions	0.035*	0.020	-2.174*	-2.465+
	(0.014)	(0.022)	(0.919)	(1.364)
Imposition of sanctions	0.013	0.020	0.965	0.286
	(0.011)	(0.018)	(1.522)	(1.798)
Common law system		-0.018		-3.053*
		(0.012)		(1.395)
Executive constraints (Polity)		0.017**		-1.764**
		(0.003)		(0.673)
Population (log)		-0.011**		1.513**
		(0.003)		(0.559)
Lagged DV	0.998**	0.967**	-0.098	-0.095+
	(0.003)	(0.009)	(0.063)	(0.056)
Year counter	0.001**	0.001*	-0.438+	-0.436
	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.242)	(0.274)
Year counter * Lagged DV	-0.001**	-0.000	0.006+	0.006+
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.004)	(0.003)
Constant	0.016**	-0.034**	14.355*	19.103*
	(0.003)	(0.011)	(5.790)	(8.863)
Observations	7,549	3,696	2,744	2,099

Robust standard errors in parentheses clustered on SD group

** p<0.01, * p<0.05, + p<0.1 (two-tailed)

These analyses provide support for H3—across three of the four models, threatened sanctions in the prior year are both positively associated with better human rights practices in general and

negatively associated with one-sided violence by the state. In the fourth, threatened sanctions are positively associated with better human rights practices but the indicator fails to reach conventional levels of statistical significance—which may stem from the more than halving of the sample size with the inclusion of control variables and years in which there are government transitions or interregnums being dropped from the analysis due to missingness with the Polity Executive Constraints variable.

Generally, we take these results as providing support for our theoretical expectation that states decrease repression of opposition groups—including potential self-determination movements—in response to external pressure. However, contrary to H5, we do not find evidence that imposed sanctions at the country level increase repression—there is no statistically significant association between imposed sanctions and either general human rights practices or one-sided violence across any of the four models. The lack of a significant relationship may reflect the fact that while states do not increase repression in response to imposed sanctions, they do not discontinue existing repression. Rather, they “stay the course” in their treatment of dissidents and opposition movements.

Sanctions and SD Group Behavior

The analyses of governmental accommodation and repression presented in Tables 2 and 3 provide strong statistical support for our theoretical argument that threatened sanctions make civil war less likely in part by leading governments to be more accommodating and less repressive. However, we do not find evidence for an increase in repression following the imposition of sanctions that might explain the increased likelihood of civil war in those cases. Our theoretical argument has an additional mechanism for the link between sanction imposition and civil war onset, a change in the behavior of SD groups. We argued that imposed sanctions will lead to an increased risk of civil war because organizations representing SD groups will increase their use of violence following the sanctions (Hypothesis 6).

To test this expectation, we draw on data from the SRDP (Cunningham et al. 2017) on the use of various tactics by organizations in self-determination disputes. The SRDP data are organizational level data, and present dichotomous indicators of whether each organization used a range of violent and nonviolent tactics each year. The data on violence include whether the organization engaged in attacks against the state, targeted another organization representing the same SD group, or committed violence against civilians (with separate measures of whether these civilians were SD group members or not). We use these data to measure the use of violence by organizations in SD groups.

Because the SRDP data are at the organization level, and our data is SD dispute-year, we need to aggregate information on the use of violence from organizations within disputes to the dispute-year. We create a variable which is a count of the number of organizations representing the self-determination movement using violence targeted against the state in a given year. We use that as our dependent variable and include a lagged measure of violence against the state in the previous year. In this way, the analysis examines how sanctions (as well as the other variables in the model) impact the level of violence used by SD groups against the state in the next year, controlling for the baseline level from the previous year. In our sample the sum of organizations in a movement using violence against the state in a given year ranges from 0 groups to 15 groups using violence.

Table 4 presents the results of an ordinary least squares regression with the sum of organizations in an SD movement using violence against the state as the dependent variable. The model includes the measures of threatened and imposed sanctions, as well as the control variables included in the models of civil war onset. The analysis in Table 4 shows that, as predicted by Hypothesis 6, when sanctions are imposed on the state, the use of violence by organizations in self-determination movements goes up. The coefficient on the imposed sanctions variable is positive, and

statistically significant, meaning that a greater number of organizations use violence against the state in each self-determination movement in the year following the imposition of sanctions.

Table 4: Predicting Violent Behavior

	Sum of Groups Using Violence
Lag of Groups Using Violence	0.498*** (0.044)
Threatened Sanctions	-0.086*** (0.029)
Imposed Sanctions	0.083* (0.048)
Democracy	-0.038 (0.035)
Log GDP	0.007 (0.014)
Log Population	0.023** (0.011)
Neighboring Civil Conflict	0.008 (0.021)
Other Civil War in Country	-0.038 (0.032)
Cold War	-0.039 (0.029)
Kin	0.048 (0.039)
Log Factions	0.130*** (0.029)
Previous Concessions	-0.008 (0.033)
Number of Groups	0.005 (0.004)
Constant	-0.413* (0.225)
Observations	1,777

All independent variables lagged by 1 year. ***p < 0.01; **p < 0.05 (two-tailed tests); robust standard errors in parentheses clustered on SD group.

Interestingly, the sign on the threatened sanctions variable is negative. We did not have a theoretical expectation about the effect of threatened sanctions on the use of violence by self-determination groups, and we see at least two potential explanations for this relationship. First, as we saw in Table 1, the likelihood of civil war onset goes down following threatened sanctions, and we

could be observing fewer organizations using violence in cases in which there is not civil war. Second, if states improve their behavior following sanction threats (in terms of accommodation and repression), as we see in Tables 2 and 3, then organizations in SD movements may be responding to this better behavior by reducing violence. Because many of these effects happen in the same year, it is difficult to explore them through the statistical analysis as it is structured here.

The effect of threatened and imposed sanctions over time

The final set of statistical analyses that we run examine the effect of imposed sanctions over time (Hypothesis 7). In Table 5, we present a series of models that are the same as the model in Table 1, but adding measures of whether sanctions were imposed two, three, four, or five years previously. The results for the threat and imposition of sanctions in the previous year are consistent across these five models, showing that the effect of sanctions in the following year is not driven by sanctions behavior before. The patterns for the imposition lags are very interesting. The two, three, and four-year lags all show a sign switch as compared to the one-year lag, the imposition of a sanction two, three, or four years earlier is now negatively associated with civil war onset. The coefficients are relatively large, but they only reach statistical significance for the four-year lag in models 4 and 5.

Table 5: Predicting Civil War Onset in All SD Years with Lags

	Civil War Onset			
Threat-lag 1	-1.951*** (0.726)	-1.974*** (0.725)	-1.958*** (0.711)	-1.951*** (0.690)
Imposition-lag 1	1.559** (0.424)	1.612** (0.428)	1.578** (0.422)	1.542** (0.424)
Imposition-lag 2	-0.154 (0.462)	-0.230 (0.477)	-0.265 (0.517)	-0.302 (0.521)
Imposition-lag 3		-0.965 (0.726)	-1.062 (0.740)	-1.083 (0.744)
Imposition-lag 4			-1.891* (1.085)	-1.894* (1.082)
Imposition-lag 5				0.008 (0.475)
Constant	-5.036*** (1.944)	-6.928*** (2.120)	-7.789*** (2.174)	-7.695*** (2.299)
Controls Included	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	2,112	2,033	1,959	1,884
Log Likelihood	-229.695	-209.478	-196.377	-194.791
Akaike Inf. Crit.	495.389	456.956	432.754	431.582

All independent variables lagged. The dependent variable represents civil war onset. *** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed tests); robust standard errors in parentheses clustered on SD group.

These results are consistent with our expectation in Hypothesis 7, and may indicate that, while the imposition of sanctions incentivizes governments to increase repression and dissidents to increase violence in the short-term, these incentives diminish over time. While imposing sanctions may increase the risk of civil war, this may be a short-term effect, and they may actually play more of a preventive role over time.¹¹

¹¹ One thing to keep in mind here is that, because we exclude years of ongoing civil war, the analyses with the longer lags only includes cases where civil war did not start one year after the imposed sanction and then continue after that. As such, the analyses in Table 5 examine the impact of lagged sanctions in a sub-set of cases where long-running civil wars did not break out immediately following the imposition of those sanctions. This suggests, at a minimum, that the positive effect of sanctions on civil war onset found in Table 1 is a short-term effect.

Additional analyses

We conducted additional analyses to further examine the relationship between sanctions and civil war onset. Table A1 in the appendix presents a model where the measures of the threat and imposition of sanctions include all of the sanctions episodes from the TIES dataset, including those regarding trade and the environment (which are excluded from the versions of the independent variables used in the main analyses). In the model in Table A1, we do not find the effect of threatened sanctions on reducing civil war onset. This suggests that sanctions related to trade and environmental disputes do not play a role in conflict prevention, and that the sub-set of sanctions we include are those where the threat can lead to a reduction in civil war onset. Table A1 does show an effect of imposed sanctions that is consistent with that in Table 1—the imposed sanctions variable is positive and statistically significant for civil war onset.

In Table A2 in the appendix, we examine whether the threat and imposition of sanctions influence each other. We include three measures of sanctions indicating whether sanctions were only threatened but not imposed, threatened and then imposed, or imposed without having been threatened. We find that sanctions that are imposed without a preceding period of threat are positively and significantly associated with SD civil war onset, but that sanctions preceded by a threat and then imposed do not exert a significant effect (negative and insignificant at conventional levels). This suggests that the apparent positive effect of country-level sanctions on the onset of civil war in SD disputes is driven by those implemented quickly without a preceding threat.¹² This may be because sanctions that are imposed quickly on the government without a period of threat or warning rapidly destabilize intra-state bargaining. The imminent reduction in state capacity brought on by rapidly

¹² These analyses include all country-level sanctions that relate to issues other than trade or the environment—a more expansive set of sanctions that does not exclude any directed at the country produce similar results (Table A1).

imposed sanctions may exacerbate the dynamics whereby a dissident group perceives a weakened government. On the other hand, rapidly imposed sanctions may create an incentive for the state to become more repressive due to the imminent loss in state capacity brought on by rapidly imposed sanctions. If they anticipate a narrow window before the sanctions truly begin to “bite,” they may escalate repression in the short-term. Imposed sanctions that are preceded by threats may allow more time for the state and dissidents to adjust their expectations regarding the relative strength of the state.

Conclusion

Sanctions are a tool that international actors frequently use to try to convince governments (and, in some cases, non-state actors) to change their behavior. In this article, we examine whether sanctions can be a tool of conflict prevention by focusing on self-determination disputes. The results of our analysis provide important insight into the role that these economic tools can play, as well as of the potential for conflict prevention more generally. Following the literature on sanctions efficacy, we differentiate between threatened and imposed sanctions at the country level and find that while threatened sanctions are associated with a decreased likelihood that self-determination disputes escalate to civil war, sanctions that are carried out have a positive association with the escalation of these disputes to armed conflict.

The evident ameliorative impact of threatened sanctions is consistent with the finding in Beardsley, Cunningham and White (2017) that UNSC resolutions authorizing sanctions can lead to a decreased likelihood of civil war in SD disputes in those countries, and suggests that economic actions can have a broader preventive impact than the specific target of those sanctions. In essence, governments may improve their behavior generally in response to the threat of sanctions, not only in the specific area to which the sanctions threat is targeted. The finding that governments both

decrease country-level repression and increase accommodation of SD groups following sanction threats show the positive impacts that sanction threats can have on state behavior.

The finding on imposed sanctions suggests, however, that when these threats fail and sanctions are imposed they can actually promote escalation. This finding is in line with our theoretical expectations, and also with that of Hultman and Peksen (2017) that imposed sanctions increase the severity of ongoing armed conflicts and findings that imposed sanctions are associated with greater repression and worsening human rights abuses (Liou, Murdie, and Peksen 2021), and suggests that sanctioning countries can have unintended consequences of violence escalation in intra-state disputes. While we do not find that states increase repression following imposed sanctions, we do find that organizations in SD groups are more likely to use violence once sanctions are imposed, which can help to explain why civil war is more likely in these disputes.

Even so, however, further statistical analyses show that imposed sanctions can decrease the likelihood of civil war over time. We see this as evidence that sanctions can still play a role in prevention, but also that the period immediately around the imposition of sanctions is likely to be a particularly volatile one for SD (and potentially other) disputes in the country. This could mean that, when sanctions are imposed, international actors should also consider other preventive tools such as mediation and peacekeeping to try to lessen the potential for escalation around these sanctions. Further research examining the interaction between economic sanctions, diplomatic, and military tools would enhance our understanding of the role that these various tools can play in prevention.

In addition, further research could help to shed light on what type of sanction regimes have the biggest effect on state and SD group behavior. In our analyses in this article, we largely treat the threat and imposition of sanctions as dichotomous, and examine how they broadly affect civil war onset, state repression and accommodation, and SD group behavior. Sanctions vary substantially in

how widespread they are and who imposes them, and further research on variation across sanctions would provide more insight into their effectiveness.

The incredible range and sophistication of economic sanctions utilized following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 shows that sanctions will continue to be tools used by international actors. While those sanctions did not lead to a quick end to the war, they have and are likely to continue to shape the course of the war and the international response to it, as well as to impact decision-making by other actors outside of Russia. Studying how sanctions influence the behavior of states and non-state actors will add to understanding of whether and how violent conflicts can be prevented.

References

- Allen, Susan Hannah. 2008. "The Domestic Political Costs of Economic Sanctions." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 52 (6): 916–44.
- Beardsley, Kyle, David E. Cunningham, and Peter B. White. 2017. "Resolving Civil Wars before They Start: The UN Security Council and Conflict Prevention in Self-Determination Disputes." *British Journal of Political Science* 47 (3): 675–97.
- Carter, David B., and Curtis S. Signorino. 2010. "Back to the Future: Modeling Time Dependence in Binary Data." *Political Analysis* 18 (3).
- Cunningham, David E. 2011. *Barriers to Peace in Civil War*. Cambridge University Press.
- Cunningham, Kathleen Gallagher. 2013. "Actor Fragmentation and Civil War Bargaining: How Internal Divisions Generate Civil Conflict." *American Journal of Political Science* 57 (3): 659–72.
- . 2014. *Inside the Politics of Self-Determination*. Oxford University Press.
- Cunningham, Kathleen Gallagher, Marianne Dahl, and Anne Frugé. 2017. "Strategies of Resistance: Diversification and Diffusion." *American Journal of Political Science* 61 (3): 591–605.
- . 2020. "Introducing the Strategies of Resistance Data Project." *Journal of Peace Research* 57 (3): 482–91.
- Drezner, Daniel W. 2003. "How Smart Are Smart Sanctions?" Blackwell Publishing Oxford, UK.
- Elliott, Kimberly Ann. 1998. "The Sanctions Glass: Half Full or Completely Empty?" *International Security* 23 (1): 50–65.
- Escribà-Folch, Abel. 2010. "Economic Sanctions and the Duration of Civil Conflicts." *Journal of Peace Research* 47 (2): 129–41.
- . 2012. "Authoritarian Responses to Foreign Pressure: Spending, Repression, and Sanctions." *Comparative Political Studies* 45 (6): 683–713.

- Escribà-Folch, Abel, and Joseph Wright. 2010. "Dealing with Tyranny: International Sanctions and the Survival of Authoritarian Rulers." *International Studies Quarterly* 54 (2): 335–59.
- Fariss, Christopher J. 2014. "Respect for Human Rights Has Improved Over Time: Modeling the Changing Standard of Accountability." *American Political Science Review* 108 (2): 297–318.
- Fearon, James D. 1995. "Rationalist Explanations for War." *International Organization* 49 (3): 379–414.
- Fortna, Virginia Page. 2008. *Does Peacekeeping Work?: Shaping Belligerents' Choices after Civil War. Does Peacekeeping Work?* Princeton University Press.
- Gleditsch, Nils Petter, Peter Wallensteen, Mikael Eriksson, Margareta Sollenberg, and Håvard Strand. 2002. "Armed Conflict 1946-2001: A New Dataset." *Journal of Peace Research* 39 (5): 615–37.
- Grauvogel, Julia, Amanda A. Licht, and Christian von Soest. 2017. "Sanctions and Signals: How International Sanction Threats Trigger Domestic Protest in Targeted Regimes." *International Studies Quarterly* 61 (1): 86–97.
- Hafner-Burton, Emilie M. 2008. "Sticks and Stones: Naming and Shaming the Human Rights Enforcement Problem." *International Organization* 62 (4): 689–716.
- Hanmer, Michael J., and Kerem Ozan Kalkan. 2013. "Behind the Curve: Clarifying the Best Approach to Calculating Predicted Probabilities and Marginal Effects from Limited Dependent Variable Models." *American Journal of Political Science* 57 (1): 263–77.
- Hendrix, Cullen S., and Wendy H. Wong. 2013. "When Is the Pen Truly Mighty? Regime Type and the Efficacy of Naming and Shaming in Curbing Human Rights Abuses." *British Journal of Political Science* 43 (3): 651–72.
- Hill, Daniel W., and Zachary M. Jones. 2014. "An Empirical Evaluation of Explanations for State Repression." *American Political Science Review* 108 (3): 661–87.

- Hultman, Lisa, Jacob Kathman, and Megan Shannon. 2013. "United Nations Peacekeeping and Civilian Protection in Civil War." *American Journal of Political Science* 57 (4): 875–91.
- Hultman, Lisa, and Dursun Peksen. 2017. "Successful or Counterproductive Coercion? The Effect of International Sanctions on Conflict Intensity." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 61 (6): 1315–39.
- Jenne, Erin K. 2007. *Ethnic Bargaining: The Paradox of Minority Empowerment*. Cornell University Press.
- Kuperman, Alan J. 2005. "Suicidal Rebellions and the Moral Hazard of Humanitarian Intervention." *Ethnopolitics* 4 (2): 149–73.
- Lektzian, David, and Patrick M. Regan. 2016. "Economic Sanctions, Military Interventions, and Civil Conflict Outcomes." *Journal of Peace Research* 53 (4): 554–68.
- Liou, Ryan Yu-Lin, Amanda Murdie, and Dursun Peksen. 2021. "Revisiting the Causal Links between Economic Sanctions and Human Rights Violations." *Political Research Quarterly* 74 (4): 808–21.
- Marinov, Nikolay. 2005. "Do Economic Sanctions Destabilize Country Leaders?" *American Journal of Political Science* 49 (3): 564–76.
- Marshall, Monty G., Keith Jagers, and Ted Robert Gurr. 2002. *Polity IV Project*. Center for International Development and Conflict Management at the ...
- McCormack, Daniel, and Henry Pascoe. 2017. "Sanctions and Preventive War." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 61 (8): 1711–39.
- Morgan, T. Clifton, Navin Bapat, and Yoshiharu Kobayashi. 2014. "Threat and Imposition of Economic Sanctions 1945–2005: Updating the TIES Dataset." *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 31 (5): 541–58.
- Mullenbach, Mark. 2023. "Dynamic Analysis of Dispute Management (DADM) Project." Conway, AR: Department of Political Science, University of Central Arkansas.
<https://uca.edu/politicalscience/dadm-project/>.

- Pape, Robert A. 1997. "Why Economic Sanctions Do Not Work." *International Security* 22 (2): 90–136.
- Peksen, Dursun. 2009. "Better or Worse? The Effect of Economic Sanctions on Human Rights." *Journal of Peace Research* 46 (1): 59–77.
- Pettersson, Therése, and Magnus Öberg. 2020. "Organized Violence, 1989–2019." *Journal of Peace Research* 57 (4): 597–613.
- Powell, Robert. 2006. "War as a Commitment Problem." *International Organization* 60 (01).
- Walter, Barbara. 1999. "Designing Transitions from Civil War: Demobilization, Democratization, and Commitments to Peace." *International Security* 24 (1): 127–55.
- Walter, Barbara F. 2006. "Building Reputation: Why Governments Fight Some Separatists but Not Others." *American Journal of Political Science* 50 (2): 313–30.
- White, Peter B, David E Cunningham, and Kyle Beardsley. 2018. "Where, When, and How Does the UN Work to Prevent Civil War in Self-Determination Disputes?" *Journal of Peace Research* 55 (3): 380–94. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343317744826>.
- Wood, Reed M. 2008. "'A Hand upon the Throat of the Nation': Economic Sanctions and State Repression, 1976–2001." *International Studies Quarterly* 52 (3): 489–513.
- World Bank. 2022. "World Development Indicators." Washington, DC: World Bank.