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International Sanctions and Constitutional Compliance*

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International Sanctions and Constitutional Compliance

Abstract

Many studies have evaluated whether sanctions improve or harm the living conditions of target populations, for example in terms of the protection of human rights. However, judging governments' responses to international sanctions based on their compliance with a universal human rights standard has been criticized as an imposition of Western values. We propose an alternative benchmark for government action that is not subject to the same criticism: whether governments comply with their own national constitutions as codified forms of the national social contract. Our analysis of 182 countries over the period 1962 to 2022 using panel DiD and event study estimators corroborates our theoretical expectation that government responses depend on the target's regime type. Whereas democracies improve their constitutional compliance under sanction pressure, autocracies start complying even less. These results suggest that sanctions can only make governments comply with their legal commitments if those governments face binding reelection constraints.

JEL Codes: F51, K38, K42, P48.

Keywords: Constitutional compliance, democracy, human rights, international sanctions.

1 Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War, sanctions have become a key instrument in international politics to influence foreign governments' decision-making. Sanctions are used to internalize international externalities (Aidt et al., 2021), to benefit national or particularistic interests in the sender country (Kaempfer & Lowenberg, 1988), and to enforce international legal norms (van Aaken & Simsek, 2021). Much of the empirical research on the effects of international sanctions has examined how sanctions affect human rights in the target country. Empirical studies have systematically found that international sanctions undermine the protection of human rights (Adam & Tsarsitalidou, 2019; Escribà-Folch, 2012; Gutmann et al., 2020; Peksen & Drury, 2009; Wood, 2008), including those sanctions imposed with the declared goal of promoting human rights protection (Steinbach et al., 2023). Some authors have argued against human rights sanctions on an even more fundamental level, which may partially explain why these sanctions are often ineffective. Wall (1998), for example, criticizes human rights sanctions for assuming a consensus on universal human rights that may not exist and for disregarding the state's right to self-determination.[1] The targets of human rights or democracy-promoting sanctions also frequently denounce them as imperialist (von Soest, 2024). And even political leaders who were not subject to international sanctions have refused to be judged by a universal human rights standard. For example, Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore's founding prime minister, famously argued that Western human rights were unsuitable for Asian societies and instead championed "Asian values".

If the legitimacy of enforcing human rights and democratic participation against target country governments is drawn into question, this suggests that sanctions may instead have to be evaluated by a normative benchmark that target states would (hypothetically) agree to. The natural benchmark for this exercise would be the target state's own social contract (Boettke, 2025; Buchanan, 1975; Buchanan & Tullock, 1965). In

[1] This concern is consistent with the empirical finding that many populations' understanding of key concepts like democracy is authoritarian rather than liberal, implying effectively a reversal of the meaning when support for democracy is declared in such populations (Kirsch & Welzel, 2019).

modern nation-states, the legally codified form of such a social contract is the constitution (Berggren, 1996). In economics, a strand of research has recently emerged that makes constitutional compliance measurable and studies its causes and consequences (Gutmann et al., 2024a; Voigt, 2021). Constitutional compliance refers to the extent to which the rules of the written constitution are implemented in practice. If the external enforcement of human rights through sanctions is questioned for lack of a consensus on universal human rights, external interference aimed at making a government comply with the national constitution cannot be subject to the same criticism, as long as the constitution itself was not externally imposed (Law, 2018). Here, we ask whether international sanctions—and particularly those imposed to prevent (further) human rights violations and promote democratic change—are harmful to constitutional compliance, as they are to human rights protection, or whether they incentivize target governments to align their actions with constitutional commitments.

To study the effects of sanctions on constitutional compliance, we combine version 3.0 of the Comparative Constitutional Compliance Database (Gutmann et al., 2024a) with indicators constructed from the Global Sanctions Database (Felbermayr et al., 2020; Kirikakha et al., 2021; Syropoulos et al., 2024). The resulting dataset covers the six decades from 1962 to 2022 for 182 potential target countries. To identify causal effects, we rely on difference-in-differences (DiD) estimators and event study designs. These identification strategies have evolved rapidly in recent years, triggered primarily by concerns about bias arising from the combination of staggered treatments and potentially heterogeneous treatment effects. To address these concerns, we use state-of-the-art estimation techniques. Specifically, we rely on the Two-Stage DiD estimator (2sDiD, see Butts & Gardner, 2022; Gardner et al., 2026) and implement event study analyses using the Local Projections Difference-in-Differences estimator (LP-DiD, see Dube et al., 2025), which adapts the local projection method developed by Jordà (2005) to DiD settings.

We find that Western sanctions and United Nations (UN) sanctions imposed against democracies indeed lead to an improvement in constitutional compliance. The effect

is even more pronounced when sanctions were imposed with the objective to promote democracy or human rights protection in the target country. An analysis of constitutional compliance in specific legal dimensions shows that basic human rights and political rights in particular are increasingly complied with. Sanctions against autocracies, however, have the opposite effect. Consistent with prior findings on the adverse effects of sanctions on human rights protection reported in the literature, we find that Western sanctions and UN sanctions imposed against autocracies cause an increasingly pronounced decline in constitutional compliance. These adverse effects on compliance with the constitution are not focused on particular legal domains. The positive effects for democracies and the adverse effects for autocracies accumulate over time and are primarily driven by longer-lasting sanction episodes. For non-Western sanctions, that is, those imposed by China or Russia, we find no effects on constitutional compliance, independent of the target regime type, sanction objective, or legal domain in question. Sanctions aimed at improving democracy or human rights do not perform better than those imposed with other declared objectives. Moreover, our findings are robust to controlling for additional macroeconomic characteristics and to replacing country fixed effects with more granular constitutional system fixed effects.[2]

Our study contributes to two strands of research at the interface of economics, law, and political science. The first literature studies the often unintended consequences of international sanctions (see Gutmann & Neuenkirch, 2025; Gutmann et al., 2023b; Gutmann, Neuenkirch, & Neumeier, 2025, for surveys of that literature). Aside from adverse effects on human rights protection, this literature has demonstrated declining income (Gutmann et al., 2023a; Neuenkirch & Neumeier, 2015), increasing inequality (Afesorgbor & Mahadevan, 2016; Neuenkirch & Neumeier, 2016), and diminished health (Gutmann et al., 2021; Rodríguez et al., 2025) as some of the collateral effects of sanctions on target country populations.

The second strand of literature deals with the determinants of government compliance with constitutions (e.g., Bologna Pavlik & Young, 2026; Gutmann et al., 2024a,

[2]Constitutional systems are distinct, time-bound constitutional frameworks that typically end with the replacement of the national constitution (Elkins et al., 2009).

2024b, 2026; Lewkowicz et al., 2025). This research has found that the process of constitution-making, the contents of the constitution, and the traits of political leaders and the political system can all be relevant for how much the government chooses to comply with the constitution. So far, only one study has linked sanctions to constitutional compliance, but without a detailed analysis or efforts to identify causal effects. Choutagunta et al. (2024) find that the first two years of a sanction episode tend to exhibit reduced levels of constitutional compliance compared to years without sanctions.[3]

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. In Section 2, we develop our theoretical predictions and derive a set of hypotheses. The data and estimation strategy used to test these hypotheses are presented in Section 3. The results of our hypothesis tests, including a set of extensions and robustness tests, are discussed in Section 4. Section 5 concludes with a summary of results and outlines some open research questions.

2 Theory

International sanctions are coercive measures used by sender countries or organizations to exert influence on the government of a target country without resorting to armed force (e.g., Aidt et al., 2021). As such, both a positive and a negative effect of sanctions on government compliance with the constitution is conceivable. On the one hand, sanctions exert pressure and are typically imposed in combination with a promise that they will be lifted if the sender's demands are met. Sanctions by the European Union (EU) and the United States (US) against Russia after its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, for example, have been linked to ending hostilities and reversing territorial violations. Sanctions are, however, also frequently used to promote human rights protection or democratic reforms. The EU, for example, has imposed sanctions

[3]Choutagunta et al. (2024) study sanctions only as one among a variety of extreme events that could temporarily diminish constitutional compliance. The focus of their sanction indicator on the first two years of a sanction episode is based on the finding by Gutmann et al. (2023a) that this is where the significant adverse income effects are concentrated.

against China for alleged abuses against Uyghurs in the Chinese province of Xinjiang. If sanctions provide strong enough incentives for target state governments to change their unconstitutional policies, they may cause significant improvements in constitutional compliance. Aside from directly exerting pressure on the national government, sanctions may also create a focal point for coordinating citizens' resistance against violations of constitutional rules (Weingast, 1997).

On the other hand, sanctions also have effects that may undermine constitutional compliance. First, sanctions deplete the government's resources used for buying loyalty from critical supporters. This may shift the political survival strategy of the incumbent, especially in autocracies, toward using more state repression to deter political challengers (see Wintrobe, 2000). If sanctions are imposed by states that are considered to be (or framed as) an external threat to the nation, target governments may benefit from a rally-around-the-flag effect (Farzanegan & Gholipour, 2026; RezaeeDaryakenari et al., 2025), where large shares of society unite behind their government. That gain in support may allow the government to get away even with otherwise unpopular violations of the constitution. Beyond the government's enhanced general ability to commit constitutional transgressions, sanctions may trigger emergency powers that allow the government to operate temporarily outside the constitutional rules that apply in normal times (Bjørnskov & Voigt, 2024). Oftentimes, such emergency powers are interpreted broadly during a political crisis and potential abuses of these powers are only determined after the end of the crisis, if at all.

Taken together, these theoretical arguments suggest that the effect of sanctions on constitutional compliance is theoretically ambiguous, as can be expressed in the following set of hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1a. *States under international sanctions experience an increase in the government's compliance with the constitution.*

Hypothesis 1b. *States under international sanctions experience a decrease in the government's compliance with the constitution.*

These predicted general effects may, however, hide differential effects of sanctions on constitutional compliance depending on the regime type of the sender and target governments. Unlike the average effects of sanctions, this effect heterogeneity is not subject to comparable theoretical ambiguity. Regarding the identity of the sanctions sender, we distinguish three (categories of) actors. These cover the vast majority of international sanctions. Western sanctions are imposed by the EU, the US, or both. UN sanctions are decided by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), specifically through resolutions adopted under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. The UNSC's 15 members vote on sanctions resolutions: five permanent members (the US, the UK, France, China, and Russia) with veto power and ten non-permanent members. A resolution passes with nine affirmative votes and no vetoes from permanent members. Finally, non-Western sanctions are those imposed by China, Russia, or both.

Beyond the identity of the sender, heterogeneity may also be captured by the stated objectives of sanctions. In particular, one can ask whether sanctions are imposed with the publicly declared goal of promoting human rights or democracy.[4] For EU and US sanctions, human rights and democracy promotion are most likely to be a relevant consideration—both have specific legal regimes for that purpose. Also UN sanctions can be imposed with the goal of stopping human rights violations, as the protection of human rights is part of the UN's mandate. While the UN is not charged with promoting democracy, it tends to pursue democracy support (e.g., through its constitutional assistance program or election monitoring) based on the argument that democratic institutions are conducive to the achievement of several of the UN's main goals: protecting human rights, fostering peace, and enabling human development. Finally, non-Western sanctions are very unlikely to consider or target human rights violations or promote democracy. China and Russia themselves are not democracies and have poor human rights records. Their sanctions tend to rather be reactive measures against Western interventions than to aim at improvements in the governance of target nations

[4]Both are imperfect measurements of how and with what intention sanctions are designed, which is why each of them will be considered in the empirical analysis as proxies for the strategic objectives of sanctions.

(Ferguson, 2025). We can summarize these theoretical considerations in the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2. *States under Western or UN sanctions experience an increase in the government's compliance with the constitution.*

At the same time, we expect no such effects for non-Western sanctions.

With respect to the targets of sanctions, we distinguish sanctions targeting autocracies from those aimed at democracies. Although sanctions against democracies are less common, they are far from a rare occurrence (see Table A3 in the Appendix). The mechanisms described above can be expected to be differently relevant depending on the regime type. In terms of the constitutional-compliance-enhancing effect of sanctions, democracies should be more susceptible to the economic and political pressure created by sanctions. As democratic governments have to stand for reelection, they face more pressure to adapt their policies in order to reduce the harm caused by sanctions to their broad political base. Nondemocratic governments have a narrower selectorate, which might either be more resilient to sanctions in the first place or which can be shielded more easily though active government measures. At the same time, autocratic governments are more dependent on repression for their political survival and the stakes of losing political office are higher for incumbent autocrats. It can, therefore, be expected that autocracies lacking public resources due to sanctions are more likely to increase the use of repression to ensure the regime's survival. In addition, autocratic governments with control over the media and public discourse have better means to cover up their violations of constitutional rules for their citizens (Treisman & Guriev, 2023). In sum, we can conclude that the constitutional-compliance-enhancing effects of sanctions are more powerful when democracies are targeted and the constitutional compliance undermining effects of sanctions are more relevant to sanctions against autocracies. In its most extreme form, this may lead to effects of sanctions that work in opposite directions:

Hypothesis 3a. *Democracies under international sanctions experience an increase in the government's compliance with the constitution.*

Hypothesis 3b. *Autocracies under international sanctions experience a decrease in the government's compliance with the constitution.*

3 Estimation Strategy and Data

3.1 Estimation Strategy

Identifying the causal effect of international sanctions on constitutional compliance requires constructing a counterfactual that is credible in a setting characterized by staggered treatment timing and potentially heterogeneous treatment effects. To address this challenge, our primary specification follows the Two-Stage Difference-in-Differences (2sDiD) estimator proposed by Gardner et al. (2026) and implemented in Butts and Gardner (2022). To analyze dynamic effects, we complement the 2sDiD approach with a Local Projections Difference-in-Differences (LP-DiD) framework developed by Dube et al. (2025), who adapt the local projection method developed by Jordà (2005) to DiD settings.

Two-Stage DiD Estimator. The 2sDiD estimator is specifically designed for settings with staggered treatment adoption and heterogeneous treatment effects across cohorts and over time. Unlike traditional two-way fixed effects estimators, it avoids the negative weighting problem and yields consistent estimates of average treatment effects. In the first stage, we rely only on observations that are not yet treated and we partial out country and year fixed effects as well as lagged political and economic controls to remove their influence. This is achieved by estimating:

$$y_{i,t} = \xi_1 X^{pol}_{i,t-1} + \xi_2 X^{econ}_{i,t-1} + \alpha_i + \tau_t + u_{i,t}. \tag{1}$$

The dependent variable $y_{i,t}$ measures the level of constitutional compliance in country i during year t. The specification includes country fixed effects (α_i) to account for time-invariant heterogeneity, year fixed effects (τ_t) to capture common global shocks and trends, and time-varying one-year lagged controls for political ($X^{pol}_{i,t-1}$) and eco-

nomic ($X^{econ}_{i,t-1}$) conditions in the target country that may confound the relationship between sanction exposure and constitutional compliance. From estimating Eq. (1), we obtain the residualized constitutional compliance score ($\tilde{y}_{i,t}$) by removing the estimated effects of the control variables as well as the unit and time fixed effects from the dependent variable. In other words, the residualized outcome corresponds to the estimated residuals from the first-stage regression ($\hat{u}_{i,t}$).

In the second stage, described by equation (2), we regress the residualized outcome from the first-stage estimation on the treatment indicators of interest, while also controlling for the political and economic covariates included in the first stage. This two-stage procedure ensures that the identifying variation in the second stage stems from appropriate comparisons between treated and not-yet-treated units and it, thus, avoids the biases that can arise from two-way fixed effects estimation of staggered DiD models (e.g., Callaway & Sant'Anna, 2021; de Chaisemartin & d'Haultfoeuille, 2020).

$$\tilde{y}_{i,t} = \sum_{s=1}^{6} \beta^{s}_{sanc} D^{s}_{sanc,i,t-1} + \delta_1 X^{pol}_{i,t-1} + \delta_2 X^{econ}_{i,t-1} + \epsilon_{i,t} \tag{2}$$

Our key explanatory variables ($D^{s}_{sanc,i,t-1}$) are six binary indicators capturing the presence of sanctions, differentiated by both the identity of the sender (Western, UN, or non-Western) and the regime type of the target country (democracy or autocracy).[5] We define Western sanctions as non-UN sanctioned coercive measures imposed by the US or the EU; non-Western sanctions are those non-UN-approved sanctions imposed by China or Russia. Each indicator equals 1 if a sanction of the respective type is active against country i in year t, and 0 otherwise. To ensure that the treatment precedes the outcome in time, all sanction variables are lagged by one year.

Treatment timing is determined by a binary indicator capturing the first exposure to *any* sanction. The six sanction indicators then serve to estimate heterogeneous treatment effects. The controls are also included in the second stage to improve estimation efficiency. Standard errors are clustered at the country level to account for within-

[5] Thus, the six dummies identify: (i) Western sanctions against democracies, (ii) UN sanctions against democracies, (iii) non-Western sanctions against democracies, (iv) Western sanctions against autocracies, (v) UN sanctions against autocracies, and (vi) non-Western sanctions against autocracies.

country dependence and heterogeneity in the error structure. For comparison, we additionally estimate a conventional two-way fixed effects DiD estimator.

Local Projections DiD Approach. To examine the dynamic effects of sanctions and assess the plausibility of the parallel trends assumption, we complement the 2sDiD estimates with a LP-DiD approach. Unlike conventional event study estimators, the LP-DiD framework directly estimates horizon-specific treatment effects and is robust to staggered treatment timing and treatment effect heterogeneity.

Due to the small number of observations for some sanction sender-target regime combinations, the estimation of horizon-specific treatment effects in the LP-DiD framework is not feasible at a disaggregated level. Hence, we apply LP-DiD only to two aggregated sanction categories. The first model evaluates the dynamic effects of sanctions imposed on democratic regimes, irrespective of the sender's identity, while the second model focuses on sanctions imposed on non-democratic regimes. In each model specification, treatment timing is defined by the first occurrence of sanctions against the respective regime type. For each horizon $h \in \{-3, -2, -1, 0, 1, \ldots, 10\}$, we estimate:

$$y_{i,t+h} = \beta_h D^s_{onset,i,t} + \sum_{s=1}^{3} \beta^s_{sanc} D^s_{sanc,i,t} + \theta_{1,h} X^{pol}_{i,t-1} + \theta_{2,h} X^{econ}_{i,t-1} + \alpha_i + \tau_t + \varepsilon_{i,t+h}, \qquad (3)$$

where $D^s_{onset,i,t}$ indicates the onset of sanctions. The coefficients β_h trace the dynamic response of constitutional compliance from three years prior to treatment to ten years after treatment. The year immediately preceding treatment ($h = -1$) serves as the reference period. To improve estimation efficiency when identifying the effect of sanctions on a specific target regime type, each specification also includes indicator variables for the other sanction categories ($D^s_{sanc,i,t}$): In the specification analyzing sanctions against democracies (autocracies), we control for (i) Western sanctions against autocracies (democracies), (ii) UN sanctions against autocracies (democracies), and (iii) non-Western sanctions against autocracies (democracies).

The estimated models allow for non-absorbing treatment, meaning that countries can exit treatment status and re-enter treatment after a period without sanctions. Observations that are sufficiently distant from previous sanction episodes (i.e., after at least three consecutive years without sanctions) are again considered part of the control group. This approach accounts for the possibility that sanction episodes may end and later resume. We rule out composition effects by fixing the set of control units across all event-time horizons. Moreover, we control for the same lagged political and economic covariates used in the 2sDiD model specification. Finally, we employ cluster-robust standard errors.

3.2 Data

Our sample comprises 8,751 country-year observations on independent states with complete data on constitutional compliance, sanctions, and control variables. This sample covers 2,106 country-years in which countries were subject to sanctions (see Table A3). It spans 182 countries and the time period from 1962 to 2022. Table A1 in the Appendix lists all countries included in the analysis. Western sanctions make up the largest share of the sanctioned country-years, accounting for 1,382 observations. UN and non-Western sanctions, for comparison, are observed in 376 and 432 country-years. Within these broader categories, some subcategories are notably rare. For example, only 59 observations involve UN sanctions against democracies, and 66 involve non-Western sanctions against autocracies. The dataset includes 116 sanction onsets against democratic targets and 105 onsets against autocratic targets (defined as the start of a sanction episode for a given target regime type, preceded by at least three consecutive non-sanctioned years). The data on sanctions is from the *Global Sanctions Data Base* (GSDB, Felbermayr et al., 2020; Kirikakha et al., 2021; Syropoulos et al., 2024), which offers comprehensive coverage of sanction episodes initiated by major actors, such as the US and the EU (classified as Western countries), Russia and China (classified as non-Western countries), and the UN.

Our dependent variable, constitutional compliance, is obtained from version 3.0 of the *Comparative Constitutional Compliance Database* (CCCD) developed by Gutmann et al. (2024a). The database combines information on 18 types of (de jure) constitutional rules from the *Comparative Constitutions Project* with information on their de facto implementation according to the *V-Dem* dataset (Elkins et al., 2009; Pemstein et al., 2025; Coppedge et al., 2025). For each of the 18 types of rules, a compliance score of 1 is assigned if a rule is both constitutionally guaranteed (de jure) and respected in practice (de facto), 0 if it is guaranteed but violated (indicating a de jure-de facto gap), and 0.5 if it is not constitutionally guaranteed. The rules are aggregated in five legal domains: (i) government accountability, (ii) compliance with basic human rights, (iii) compliance with civil rights, (iv) compliance with political rights, and (v) compliance with property rights.[6] The overall constitutional compliance index is then computed as the average of these five area-specific compliance indicators.

To account for potential time-variant, country-specific confounders that may influence constitutional compliance while being correlated with, but not caused by, the imposition of sanctions, we include a set of one-year lagged covariates. Basic socioeconomic conditions are captured through the natural logarithm of real GDP per capita and the natural logarithm of the population size (World Bank, 2025). We also control for political and institutional characteristics and events. These include a binary democracy indicator from Bjørnskov and Rode (2020), which employs a minimalist definition of democracy in terms of the existence of competitive elections for political offices. Additionally, we incorporate binary variables for successful coups (Bjørnskov & Rode, 2020) and for six different kinds of armed conflict (UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset, see Davies et al., 2022; Gleditsch et al., 2002). These conflicts are disaggregated by intensity (minor conflicts with 25–999 battle-related deaths vs wars with 1,000+ deaths) and by type (interstate vs intrastate, with the latter further differentiated based on foreign military involvement).

[6]Bivariate correlations reveal strong positive associations (between 0.61 and 0.81) among the compliance domains (ii)–(v), indicating that these four dimensions are closely related. By contrast, the government accountability dimension (i) displays substantially lower correlations with the other measures (between 0.10 and 0.22), suggesting that it represents a more distinct dimension.

Table A2 provides the definitions and data sources of all variables, while Tables A3 and A4 present key descriptive statistics. Several notable differences emerge between sanctioned and non-sanctioned country-years. On average, sanctioned countries exhibit lower constitutional compliance scores (0.50 vs 0.56) and lower income levels, while having substantially larger populations. They are also less likely to be democratic (45% vs 56%) and more likely to have experienced a successful coup in the previous year. The most pronounced differences concern conflict exposure: Sanctioned countries are more than twice as likely to experience minor conflict (21% vs 9%) and almost four times as likely to experience major conflict (8% vs 2%). These patterns are consistent with the notion that sanctions are not imposed randomly but are disproportionately directed at countries that already face political instability, violent conflict, and a weaker institutional environment. For our analysis, these differences are important because many of the factors associated with sanction targeting are also likely to affect constitutional compliance (see, e.g., Choutagunta et al., 2024). Simplistic comparisons between sanctioned and non-sanctioned countries would run the risk of conflating the effect of sanctions with that of pre-existing political and economic conditions. This highlights the need to address selection bias and motivates the conditional parallel trends assumption underlying our identification strategy.

4 Empirical Results

4.1 Baseline Results

Effects of Sanctions over Time. We start with the LP-DiD estimates to illustrate the effects of sanctions over time, irrespective of the sender's identity.[7] Figure 1 shows the point estimates and corresponding 95% confidence intervals for the two sanction indicators, covering the three years prior to a sanctions episode (−3, −2, −1), treatment onset (0), and the ten years after treatment onset (1, 2, …, 10). The level of constitutional compliance in the year immediately preceding sanction imposition (−1)

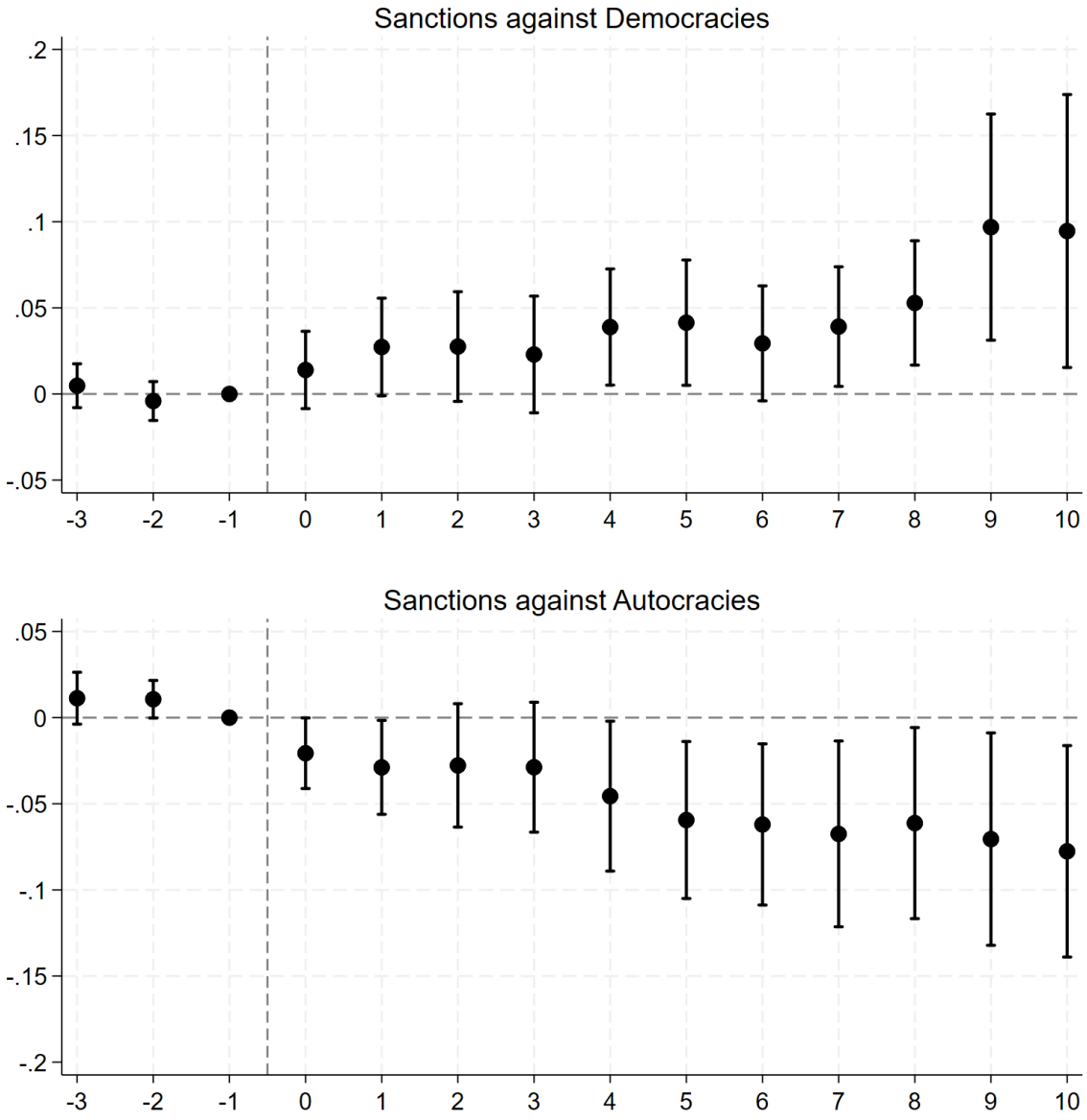
[7] As explained in Section 3.1, differentiating sanctions in this event study design further by sender would require estimating parameters based on very few treated observations.

is normalized to zero (Callaway & Sant'Anna, 2021; Miller, 2023). Consequently, all estimates are interpreted relative to this reference year, allowing for an assessment of dynamic treatment effects as well as pre-treatment trends.

The estimates indicate no evidence of a significant pre-treatment trend for democracies, supporting the conditional parallel trends assumption and suggesting that treated and control units follow similar trajectories prior to sanction onset. At the time of treatment, the coefficient becomes positive and eventually statistically significant four years after the start of a sanction episode, indicating a gradual increase in constitutional compliance. The effect grows stronger over the subsequent years, with coefficients remaining consistently positive and statistically significant thereafter (with the exception of the sixth year after treatment). Estimated significant magnitudes range from approximately +0.04 to +0.10, pointing to sustained improvements in constitutional compliance following sanction imposition. The pooled post-treatment onset estimate corroborates this finding, indicating a statistically significant average increase of about +0.07. We discuss the substantive relevance of this effect based on the 2sDiD estimated average treatment effects.

The results for autocratic regimes also do not reveal evidence of statistically significant pre-treatment differences. At the same time, the post-treatment onset estimates display a clear and persistent negative pattern. The estimated effects range between approximately −0.02 and −0.08, indicating a gradual but sustained deterioration in constitutional compliance. The post-treatment onset effects are statistically significant with the exception of the second and third year after the start of a sanction episode. The pooled post-treatment onset estimate corroborates this pattern, suggesting an average decrease of about −0.06. We discuss the substantive importance of these effects based on the estimated average treatment effects below.

Figure 1: Local Projection Difference-in-Differences



Notes: Coefficient estimates according to Eq. (3). Effects of sanctions over time (0, 1, 2, …, 10) alongside pre-trend (−3, −2, −1). Treatment is modeled as non-absorbing, allowing countries to exit and later re-enter sanction status (after at least three consecutive non-sanctioned years). Each sanction spell is treated as a separate event. Standard errors are clustered at the country level. Models include control variables (other sanction indicators, lag *log*(GDP pc), lag *log*(Population), lag Successful Coups, lag Democracy, and six lagged conflict indicators), country fixed effects, and year fixed effects. 95% confidence bands are indicated by whiskers.

Taken together, our results are consistent with Hypotheses 3a and 3b. Therefore, Hypotheses 1a and 1b do not describe the general patterns in the data and are each only partially corroborated.

Average Treatment Effects. As a next step, we analyze the average treatment effects over the duration of a sanctions episode. Put differently, we inquire which sanction senders drive the overall results against democracies and autocracies documented in Figure 1. Table 1 presents the results of our 2sDiD estimations.

Constitutional compliance improves specifically in democracies subject to UN sanctions (+0.07), equivalent to roughly 58% of a within-country standard deviation. Western sanctions have a statistically significant negative effect on constitutional compliance in autocracies, amounting to an average effect of −0.05 (about 41% of a within-country standard deviation). A slightly stronger effect is found for UN sanctions against autocracies (−0.07 or roughly 59% of a within-country standard deviation). Finally, we find no significant effects of non-Western sanctions or of Western sanctions targeting democracies.[8] Turning to the control variables, we find that the effects of sanctions are of similar magnitude to those of major interstate conflicts (−0.04) or major internal conflicts with foreign intervention (−0.08). This underscores the substantive importance of economic sanctions for constitutional compliance.[9]

The 2sDiD results confirm our findings from the LP-DiD approach that the more differentiated Hypotheses 3a and 3b are consistent with the data, whereas the more general predictions in Hypotheses 1a and 1b are refuted. Consistent with this picture, we also do not find support for Hypothesis 2, as the effects of Western and UN sanctions go in opposite directions depending on the target country's regime type. Only for UN sanctions against democracies do we find an improvement in constitutional compliance. This draws into question whether sanctions can be an effective instrument for forcing improvements in target countries' governance. Therefore, we extend our analysis in the next section to evaluate if sanctions aimed at improving democracy or human rights achieve better outcomes.

[8] However, the signs of these estimates are also consistent with that of the LP-DiD estimates.

[9] The corresponding two-way fixed effects DiD results are reported in Table A5 in the Appendix. The estimates are very similar to those in Table 1, although the point estimate and statistical significance for UN sanctions against democracies become somewhat smaller.

Table 1: Baseline Results – Two-Stage Difference-in-Differences

Dependent Variable: **Constitutional Compliance**	
Sanctions	
… lag Western against Democracies	0.0200
	(0.0200)
… lag UN against Democracies	0.0679***
	(0.0231)
… lag Non-Western against Democracies	0.0099
	(0.0138)
… lag Western against Autocracies	–0.0485**
	(0.0215)
… lag UN against Autocracies	–0.0693**
	(0.0297)
… lag Non-Western against Autocracies	–0.0478
	(0.0685)
lag *log*(GDP pc)	–0.0024**
	(0.0012)
lag *log*(Population)	0.0013**
	(0.0006)
lag Successful Coups	–0.0000
	(0.0089)
lag Democracy	0.0006
	(0.0025)
Interstate Conflicts	
… lag Minor	0.0216
	(0.0174)
… lag Major	–0.0445**
	(0.0205)
Internal Conflicts w/o Intervention	
… lag Minor	–0.0081
	(0.0078)
… lag Major	0.0100
	(0.0158)
Internal Conflicts w/ Intervention	
… lag Minor	0.0178
	(0.0209)
… lag Major	0.0808**
	(0.0347)
Observations	8,677
2nd Stage R^2 on Residualized Outcomes	0.0499
Within SD of Dependent Variable	0.1176

Notes: Coefficient estimates according to Eqs. (1)–(2). Standard errors in parentheses are clustered at the country level. Models include country fixed effects and year fixed effects. ***/**/* indicates significance at the 1%/5%/10% level.

4.2 Extensions and Robustness Tests

Effect Heterogeneity Across Sanctions Objectives. The Global Sanctions Data Base identifies nine types of justifications for imposing sanctions provided in official documentation: democracy promotion, human rights protection, regime destabilization, policy change, war prevention, war termination, territorial conflict, counter-terrorism, and others. A priori, one would expect sanctions explicitly aimed at democratization or human rights improvements to have a more positive effect on constitutional compliance than those pursuing other objectives (Steinbach et al., 2023, however, provides some cause for pessimism). To examine this heterogeneity in effects without losing too much statistical power, we disaggregate sanctions into two categories: (i) sanctions with the stated objective of promoting democracy or human rights and (ii) sanctions pursuing only other goals. Observations with sanctions that mix the objectives in the two categories are excluded from the analysis to allow for a clean comparison. For this analysis, we re-run the baseline estimations while dropping sanction cases in one of the two categories at a time.

The results of this jackknife-style extension are presented in Table 2. We find clear differences in sanction effects depending on their objectives for only one of the sanction indicators. Western sanctions against autocracies show a decline in constitutional compliance when they are explicitly aimed only at democratization or human rights objectives, but not when only other objectives are stated. UN sanctions against democracies lead to an improvement in constitutional compliance for both types of stated objectives, with the effect being marginally larger for sanctions that are explicitly aimed at democratization or human rights improvements. In contrast, the effects of UN sanctions against autocracies are negative and of similar magnitude for both types of objectives. Overall, our findings do not support that sanctions intended to improve democracy or human rights perform better in their effects on the target country's constitutional compliance, which is consistent with the findings of Steinbach et al. (2023) for the human rights effects of sanctions.

Table 2: Effect Heterogeneity for Sanction Objectives

Dependent Variable:	**Objectives**	
Constitutional Compliance	**Democrat. & HR**	**Other**
Sanctions		
… lag Western against Democracies	–0.0057	0.0259
	(0.0334)	(0.0231)
… lag UN against Democracies	0.0921***	0.0711***
	(0.0266)	(0.0193)
… lag Non-Western against Democracies	0.0068	0.0056
	(0.0102)	(0.0135)
… lag Western against Autocracies	–0.0851***	–0.0080
	(0.0146)	(0.0252)
… lag UN against Autocracies	–0.0945**	–0.1003***
	(0.0377)	(0.0265)
… lag Non-Western against Autocracies	–0.0676	0.0108
	(0.1318)	(0.0160)
Observations	7,058	7,835
2nd Stage R^2 on Residualized Outcomes	0.0419	0.0313

Notes: Selected coefficient estimates according to Eqs. (1)–(2). The LHS variable represents the constitutional compliance in target country i in year t. Standard errors in parentheses are clustered at the country level. ***/**/* indicates significance at the 1%/5%/10% level. The variation in the number of observations reflects the exclusion of sanctions by objective: when analyzing cases aimed at democratization or human rights, sanctions with other stated goals are dropped, and vice versa. Models include control variables (lag *log*(GDP pc), lag *log*(Population), lag Successful Coups, lag Democracy, and six lagged conflict indicators), country fixed effects, and year fixed effects. Estimates are available on request.

Effect Heterogeneity by Sanction Duration. Many sanction episodes are short-lived, whereas others persist for decades, which may have implications for their effects on constitutional compliance. In Figure 1, we analyzed the dynamic effects of sanctions over time, pooling short- and long-lasting episodes (with shorter episodes gradually leaving the event study sample). As an alternative way of assessing duration heterogeneity, we compare the average effects of sanctions lasting up to five years with those lasting more than five years. This is implemented as a jackknife-style analysis in which observations covered by longer sanction episodes are excluded from the sample when estimating the effects of short-lived sanctions, and vice versa. Table A6 in the Appendix reports the results of our comparison of short- and long-duration sanction episodes. The estimated effects are generally larger for sanctions lasting at least five years. In addition, statistical significance is more pronounced among the longer-

lasting episodes. This pattern suggests that the impact of sanctions on constitutional compliance accumulates over time. However, sanction duration may also proxy for sanction severity beyond what is captured by the identity of the sanction sender, as more severe sanctions are often maintained for longer periods and may exert greater pressure on targets to comply with the senders' demands.

Effect Heterogeneity Across Legal Dimensions. Given that sanctions have a significant effect on constitutional compliance, it seems important to understand whether it is compliance with particular parts of the constitution that changes. Gutmann et al. (2020), for example, find that the effects of sanctions on different human rights dimensions can not only differ, but they may even work in opposite directions. The CCCD offers five subindices of constitutional compliance (see also Table A2 in the Appendix): (i) compliance with rules for government accountability, (ii) basic human rights compliance, (iii) civil rights compliance, (iv) political rights compliance, and (v) property rights compliance. We re-run the baseline estimations, replacing the dependent variable with the five subindices, one at a time.

The results of this extension are reported in Table A7 in the Appendix.[10] First of all, all statistically significant coefficient estimates have the same sign as those for overall constitutional compliance. UN sanctions against democracies are linked to substantial improvements in compliance with basic human rights (+0.21) and political rights (+0.13) in the constitution, while no systematic effects emerge for the other three subindices. Western sanctions against autocracies are associated with declines in four of the five subindices, with the largest reductions observed for political rights and property rights (−0.07, respectively), followed by civil rights (−0.06) and rules for government accountability (−0.03). Only compliance with basic human rights, such as the right to life, freedom from torture, etc., does not decline significantly. UN sanctions against autocracies are associated with marked declines in compliance with property rights (−0.13) and constitutional rules for government accountability (−0.05), with no

[10]The variation in the number of observations across the models reflects differences in data availability for the five subindices. Restricting all estimations to a common sample leaves the results virtually unchanged.

effects on the other three subindices. Overall, these patterns suggest that the positive effects of UN sanctions on democracies are concentrated in a few domains. The same holds for the negative effects of UN sanctions against autocracies. The effects of Western sanctions against autocracies are weaker but apply to many parts of the constitution.

Additional Macroeconomic Controls. All results presented thus far exclude two potentially relevant economic control variables: official development assistance (ODA) received by the target country and its trade openness. Both variables could plausibly affect the likelihood of being sanctioned as well as the level of constitutional compliance. However, data availability is lower for both variables (see Table A4 in the Appendix), particularly when both are included simultaneously. Therefore, we present the results of our baseline 2sDiD specification including these additional controls in Table A8 in the Appendix. Column (1) replicates the baseline results from Table 1, Column (2) adds the lagged ODA indicator, Column (3) adds lagged trade openness, and Column (4) adds both variables simultaneously. Neither variable is statistically significant. And more importantly, the positive effect of UN sanctions against democracies as well as the negative effects of Western and UN sanctions against autocracies remain robust across all specifications.

Alternative Fixed Effects at the Constitutional System Level. Elkins et al. (2009) record a unique identifier for each constitutional system within a country, allowing us to replace country fixed effects with more granular constitutional system fixed effects. In this model specification, identification of treatment effects relies only on variation in constitutional compliance within a constitutional framework rather than within a country more broadly. Table A9 in the Appendix reports the results. The positive effect of UN sanctions against democracies and the negative effect of Western sanctions against autocracies remain similar in magnitude and significance to the baseline estimates (see Table 1). In contrast, the coefficient on UN sanctions against autocracies becomes statistically insignificant. This result is partly driven by the more demanding fixed-effects structure, which absorbs additional variation and reduces the effective

sample size. Nevertheless, the overall pattern remains unchanged: Western/UN sanctions improve constitutional compliance in democracies while reducing it in autocracies. Since the most important confounders in explaining constitutional compliance should be country characteristics rather than the design of the constitution itself, we consider the constitutional system fixed effects specification as a robustness check of our preferred empirical design.

Constitutional Change as the Dependent Variable. As a final exercise, we examine whether sanctions affect not only compliance with an existing constitution but also the likelihood of constitutional replacement through the adoption of a new or reinstated constitution (see, e.g., Bjørnskov & Voigt, 2026, on constitutional change following coups). Elkins et al. (2009) identify 303 such constitutional change events, of which only 78 occur under sanctions. Given the limited number of events, the statistical power with which this extension can be estimated is low. We find no robust evidence that sanctions—either in general or specifically those with the stated objective of promoting democracy or human rights—affect the likelihood of constitutional replacement.[11] These findings suggest that sanctions primarily affect the extent to which governments comply with existing constitutional rules, without systematically inducing constitutional change.

5 Conclusion

The effects of sanctions on the governance of societies are frequently evaluated by universal standards, such as internationally recognized human rights. This approach, however, invites criticism, as human rights have originated in Western nations and many governments refuse to be evaluated by this benchmark. Our study takes these concerns seriously and offers an alternative evaluation. We ask whether governments comply in practice with the commitments made in their national constitution. In other

[11] The results are available upon request.

words, governments are judged by their social contract instead of some universal—but not necessarily universally agreed upon—standard.

Our evaluation of the causal effects of international sanctions on constitutional compliance brings to light a differentiated picture. We find no general increase or decrease in compliance levels among states under sanctions. Even if we focus on Western sanctions or sanctions imposed with the declared goal of promoting human rights or democracy, we do not find a uniform effect on constitutional compliance. That is because the response by governments to sanctions depends on their regime type. In line with our theoretical expectation, we find that democracies are prone to improving constitutional compliance under sanctions. These governments are more responsive to the economic pressure on their general population, their political survival depends less on repression, and their limited control over public media makes it more difficult for them to get away with violating the constitution. Consistent with our theoretical predictions, we find exactly the opposite for nondemocratic target governments. Their compliance with the constitution decreases while they are subject to international sanctions. These effects are driven by Western and UN sanctions, whereas Chinese and Russian sanctions do not affect constitutional compliance at all. We find that democracies under UN sanctions improve particularly their compliance with basic human rights and political rights, whereas sanctioned autocracies show declining compliance across almost every legal dimension. These positive effects for democracies and adverse effects for autocracies appear to accumulate over time and are primarily driven by longer-lasting sanction episodes. Moreover, our findings are robust to controlling for additional macroeconomic characteristics and to replacing country fixed effects with more granular constitutional system fixed effects.

For policymakers, this means that sanctions are not a suitable tool for making governments comply with their legal commitments where it would be needed the most. Sanctioned autocracies, such as Cuba, Iran, or North Korea, should not be expected to comply more because international sanctions are imposed on them. At the same time, the often overlooked cases of sanctions against democracies show that improvements

in constitutional compliance are possible where governments are more dependent on broad support from their population and where violations of the constitution are difficult to cover up.

Our findings also suggest some interesting questions for future research: How do national media report potential violations of the constitution, while the state is under foreign pressure due to sanctions? Do rally-around-the-flag effects allow governments to get away with violating the constitution? In other words, do citizens exhibit less constitutional loyalty during these periods (see Gutmann, Sarel, & Voigt, 2025)? And are violations of constitutional rules under sanctions excused—by politicians or citizens—as being justified by the use of emergency powers, both if the country has a formal emergency constitution and if it does not (see Bjørnskov & Voigt, 2024)?

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Appendix

Data Description

Table A1: List of Countries

Target Countries (Number of total observations; total sanctions; democratization or human rights sanctions; non-democratization and non-human rights sanctions)

Afghanistan (22; 22; 0; 20), Albania (42; 11; 0; 11), Algeria (60; 11; 0; 0), Angola (42; 20; 0; 9), Antigua and Barbuda (42; 3; 0; 3), Argentina (48; 11; 7; 4), Armenia (28), Australia (61; 9; 0; 9), Austria (61; 10; 0; 10), Azerbaijan (32; 11; 0; 11), Bahamas (50), Bahrain (50), Bangladesh (51; 2; 0; 0), Barbados (57), Belarus (29; 23; 19; 2), Belgium (61; 9; 0; 9), Belize (42; 20; 0; 15), Benin (59; 12; 0; 12), Bhutan (52), Bolivia (58; 17; 4; 12), Bosnia and Herzegovina (28; 12; 0; 11), Botswana (57), Brazil (61; 9; 0; 9), Brunei Darussalam (48), Bulgaria (42; 13; 2; 11), Burkina Faso (42; 4; 0; 4), Burundi (56; 10; 0; 1), Cambodia (47; 34; 11; 17), Cameroon (61; 11; 9; 0), Canada (61; 20; 0; 20), Cape Verde (42), Central African Republic (51; 18; 8; 0), Chad (43; 2; 0; 2), Chile (61; 22; 6; 3), China (61; 52; 26; 18), Colombia (61; 28; 0; 28), Comoros (38), Costa Rica (61; 22; 0; 22), Croatia (32; 15; 0; 15), Cuba (52; 52; NA; 52), Cyprus (47; 36; 0; 36), Czech Republic (32; 10; 0; 10), Denmark (61; 9; 0; 9), Djibouti (9), Dominica (45; 2; 0; 2), Dominican Republic (61; 13; 0; 13), DR Congo (55; 29; 3; 5), Ecuador (54; 9; 0; 9), Egypt (61; 24; 1; 14), El Salvador (40; 8; 0; 5), Equatorial Guinea (41; 9; 9; 0), Eritrea (15; 8; 0; 8), Estonia (32; 16; 0; 16), Ethiopia (48; 12; 0; 5), Fiji (53; 22; 21; 0), Finland (61; 9; 0; 9), France (61; 32; 0; 32), Gabon (61), Gambia (53; 18; 12; 0), Georgia (31; 8; 0; 8), Germany (61; 10; 0; 10), Ghana (61; 5; 0; 5), Greece (60; 16; 6; 10), Guatemala (61; 38; 26; 10), Guinea (52; 20; 14; 0), Guinea-Bissau (50; 13; 13; 0), Guyana (57; 3; 3; 0), Haiti (59; 38; 8; 1), Honduras (61; 6; 1; 3), Hungary (61; 39; 0; 27), Iceland (61; 8; 0; 8), India (61; 44; 0; 44), Indonesia (61; 34; 18; 13), Iran (61; 42; 0; 8), Iraq (61; 43; 0; 39), Ireland (61; 25; 0; 25), Israel (61; 22; 0; 22), Italy (61; 9; 0; 9), Jamaica (56; 12; 0; 9), Japan (61), Jordan (46; 4; 0; 4), Kazakhstan (30; 2; 0; 2), Kenya (60; 13; 4; 9), Kiribati (44), Kuwait (40; 2; 0; 2), Kyrgyzstan (27; 1; 0; 1), Laos (38; 16; 0; 16), Latvia (32; 16; 7; 9), Lebanon (34; 27; 0; 11), Lesotho (57; 7; 0; 7), Liberia (61; 28; 0; 15), Libya (61; 45; 0; 33), Lithuania (31; 11; 0; 11), Luxembourg (61; 9; 0; 9), Madagascar (61; 9; 0; 0), Malawi (59; 5; 2; 3), Malaysia (61), Maldives (52), Mali (55; 8; 3; 0), Malta (52; 9; 0; 9), Marshall Islands (44), Mauritania (56; 4; 3; 0), Mauritius (55), Mexico (61; 1; 0; 1), Micronesia (45), Moldova (32; 20; 0; 20), Monaco (52), Mongolia (39), Montenegro (17; 8; 0; 8), Morocco (56), Mozambique (42; 2; 0; 2), Myanmar (61; 40; 35; 0), Namibia (33), Nauru (52), Nepal (61; 1; 1; 0), Netherlands (61; 9; 0; 9), New Zealand (61; 1; 0; 1), Nicaragua (61; 22; 0; 17), Niger (60; 7; 5; 0), Nigeria (52; 25; 0; 14), North Macedonia (32; 1; 0; 1), Norway (61; 13; 0; 5), Oman (25), Pakistan (40; 17; 2; 15), Palau (42), Panama (61; 16; 1; 12), Papua New Guinea (48), Paraguay (61; 7; 5; 0), Peru (61; 15; 3; 11), Philippines (60; 21; 0; 20), Poland (32; 10; 0; 10), Portugal (61; 18; 0; 18), Qatar (20), Romania (32; 15; 6; 9), Russia (33; 10; 0; 5), Rwanda (53; 11; 0; 2), Samoa (52), Sao Tome and Principe (48), Saudi Arabia (31; 5; 5; 0), Senegal (61), Serbia (27; 19; 8; 2), Seychelles (44), Sierra Leone (53; 20; 0; 18), Singapore (60), Slovakia (31; 9; 0; 9), Slovenia (32; 9; 0; 9), Solomon Islands (42), Somalia (50; 22; 3; 0), South Africa (61; 40; 0; 31), South Korea (61; 5; 5; 0), Spain (45; 9; 0; 9), Sri Lanka (51; 5; 3; 2), St. Lucia (45), Sudan (52; 34; 3; 0), Suriname (42; 2; 2; 0), Swaziland (18), Sweden (49; 9; 0; 9), Switzerland (24), Syria (44; 17; 0; 16), Tajikistan (29), Tanzania (46; 8; 4; 2), Thailand (29; 6; 6; 0), Timor Leste (21), Togo (52; 16; 16; 0), Trinidad and Tobago (61), Tunisia (49), Turkey (61; 16; 6; 9), Turkmenistan (16; 4; 0; 3), Tuvalu (37), Uganda (28; 2; 1; 0), Ukraine (35; 15; 0; 14), United Arab Emirates (52; 1; 0; 1), United Kingdom (61; 9; 0; 9), Uruguay (38), USA (61; 9; 0; 9), Uzbekistan (31; 11; 10; 1), Vanuatu (43), Vietnam (38; 27; 0; 17), Yemen (32; 12; 0; 3), Zambia (59; 3; 3; 0), Zimbabwe (58; 40; 35; 5).

Notes: If only one number is reported in parentheses, the respective country was never subject to sanctions in the dataset. If the objective of sanctions pursued both democratization or human rights improvements as well as other objectives (i.e., destabilizing the regime, policy change, preventing war, ending war, territorial conflict, counterterrorism, or other objectives), the corresponding observation was removed from both datasets to allow for a clear separation of effects. Therefore, the number of "democratization or human rights sanctions" and "non-democratization and non-human rights sanctions" does not necessarily add up to the number of "total sanctions."

Table A2: Definitions of Variables and Data Sources

Variable	Definition & Source
Constitutional Compliance	Measures constitutional compliance using 18 rule indicators from the Constitutional Compliance Project (de jure) and V-Dem (de facto). Compliance is coded 1 if a rule is both constitutionally guaranteed (de jure) and respected in practice (de facto), 0 if it is guaranteed but violated, and 0.5 if it is not constitutionally guaranteed. The rules are aggregated into five legal domains (Government Accountability, Basic Human Rights, Civil Rights, Political Rights, Property Rights and the Rule of Law) and an overall index is computed by taking the mean value of the five area-specific compliance indicators. *Source:* The Comparative Constitutional Compliance Database (Gutmann et al., 2024b; Elkins et al., 2009; Pemstein et al., 2025; Coppedge et al., 2025).
Government Accountability Compliance	Measures compliance with government accountability rules on a scale from 0 to 1, covering three constitutional rules concerning: elections of head of state and head of government, and meritocratic organization of the civil service. *Source:* CCCD (Gutmann et al., 2024b; Elkins et al., 2009; Pemstein et al., 2025; Coppedge et al., 2025).
Basic Human Rights Compliance	Measures compliance with basic human rights on a scale from 0 to 1, covering three constitutional rules concerning: right to life, freedom of slavery, and protection from torture. *Source:* CCCD (Gutmann et al., 2024b; Elkins et al., 2009; Pemstein et al., 2025; Coppedge et al., 2025).
Civil Rights Compliance	Measures compliance with civil rights on a scale from 0 to 1, covering four constitutional rules concerning: academic freedom, free media, free speech, free movement, and religious freedom. *Source:* CCCD (Gutmann et al., 2024b; Elkins et al., 2009; Pemstein et al., 2025; Coppedge et al., 2025).
Political Rights Compliance	Measures compliance with political rights on a scale from 0 to 1, covering three constitutional rules concerning: freedom of association, freedom of assembly, and the right to form parties. *Source:* CCCD (Gutmann et al., 2024b; Elkins et al., 2009; Pemstein et al., 2025; Coppedge et al., 2025).
Property Rights Compliance	Measures compliance with political rights on a scale from 0 to 1, covering four constitutional rules concerning: private property rights, judicial independence, equality before the law, and rule of law. *Source:* CCCD (Gutmann et al., 2024b; Elkins et al., 2009; Pemstein et al., 2025; Coppedge et al., 2025).

Table A2: Definitions of Variables and Data Sources (continued)

lag Sanctions	Binary indicators for country-years with sanctions in place, lagged by one year. *Source:* GSDB (Felbermayr et al., 2020; Kirikakha et al., 2021; Syropoulos et al., 2024).
lag *log*(GDP pc)	Natural logarithm of real GDP per capita in 2015 USD, lagged by one year. *Source:* World Development Indicators (World Bank, 2025).
lag *log*(Population)	Natural logarithm of the population size, lagged by one year. *Source:* See previous variable.
lag Successful Coups	Binary indicator for country-years in which successful coups have occurred, lagged by one year. *Source:* Bjørnskov and Rode (2020).
lag Democracy	Binary variable indicating whether a country is democratic or not, lagged by one year. *Source:* See previous variable.
lag Minor Conflict / lag Major Conflict	Armed conflicts resulting in 25 to 999 / at least 1,000 battle-related deaths in a given year, lagged by one year. *Source:* UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset (Gleditsch et al., 2002; Davies et al., 2022).
lag Interstate Conflict	Conflicts between two states, lagged by one year. *Source:* See previous variable.
lag Intrastate Conflict w/ Intervention / w/o Intervention	Conflicts between a government and rebel groups with / without military intervention by foreign governments, lagged by one year. *Source:* See previous variable.
lag Official Development Assistance	Concessional loans (net of principal repayments) and grants provided by members of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC), multilateral institutions, and non-DAC donors to promote economic development and welfare in eligible recipient countries. Includes loans with a grant element of at least 25 percent. Measured as a share of GNI. *Source:* World Development Indicators (World Bank, 2025).
lag Trade Openness	Sum of exports and imports, expressed as percentage of GDP. *Source:* See previous variable.

Table A3: Frequency of Sanctions

Panel A: 2SDiD Estimations			
Sanctions in General			
… No Sanctions	6,645		
… Sanctions	2,106 (414; 1,263)		
Sanction Senders			
… Western	1,382 (374; 774)		
… UN	376 (28; 162)		
… Non-Western	432 (17; 391)		
Sanctions against Democracies		Sanctions against Autocracies	
… Western	563 (93; 430)	… Western	819 (281; 344)
… UN	59 (11; 29)	… UN	317 (17; 133)
… Non-Western	366 (7; 349)	… Non-Western	66 (10; 42)
Panel B: LP-DiD Approach			
Sanctions against Democracies		Sanctions against Autocracies	
… Onsets	116	… Onsets	105

Notes: Frequency of observations of the different sanction indicators for which all control variables (see Table A4) are available. Total number of observations in the dataset: 8,751. Sanctions enacted by the UNSC are not counted as Western or Non-Western sanctions. However, Western and Non-Western sanctions can coincide. Numbers in parentheses represent the number of sanctions with the objective democratization or human rights improvements and the number of sanctions with alternative objectives (i.e., destabilizing the regime, policy change, preventing war, ending war, territorial conflict, counter-errorism, or other objectives). If the objective of sanctions pursued both democratization or human rights improvements as well as other objectives, the corresponding observation was removed from both datasets to allow for a clear separation of effects. Therefore, the number of "democratization or human rights sanctions" and "non-democratization and non-human rights sanctions" does not necessarily add up to the number of "total sanctions." Onsets refer to the start of sanction episodes of a given target type for which at least the previous three years were untreated.

Table A4: Descriptive Statistics

	All Observations		**No Sanctions**		**Sanctions**	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Constitutional Compliance	0.54	0.22	0.56	0.21	0.50	0.24
lag *log*(GDP pc)	8.28	1.48	8.33	1.48	8.12	1.45
lag *log*(Population)	15.50	2.10	15.20	2.13	16.47	1.66
lag ODA	0.07	0.10	0.07	0.11	0.05	0.10
lag Trade Openness	0.75	0.48	0.76	0.49	0.70	0.46
	$X = 1$		$X = 1$		$X = 1$	
lag Democracy	53.1%		55.8%		44.5%	
lag Successful Coups	1.8%		1.5%		2.5%	
lag Minor Conflict	11.7%		8.7%		21.2%	
… Interstate	0.8%		0.5%		1.5%	
… Internal w/ Intervention	1.5%		0.8%		3.6%	
… Internal w/o Intervention	9.5%		7.3%		16.2%	
lag Major Conflict	3.3%		2.0%		7.6%	
… Interstate	0.4%		0.3%		0.9%	
… Internal w/ Intervention	0.9%		0.3%		2.8%	
… Internal w/o Intervention	2.0%		1.4%		3.9%	

Notes: Mean values, standard deviations (SD), and share of non-zero observations ($X = 1$) for all LHS variables and control variables. The full dataset comprises 8,751 observations, of which 6,645 are without sanctions in place and 2,106 are with sanctions in place. Data availability is lower for ODA and trade openness, with 6,266 and 6,971 observations, respectively.

Additional Results

Table A5: Baseline Results – Two-way Fixed Effects DiD

Dependent Variable: **Constitutional Compliance**	
Sanctions	
… lag Western against Democracies	0.0178
	(0.0150)
… lag UN against Democracies	0.0405*
	(0.0231)
… lag Non-Western against Democracies	–0.0013
	(0.0126)
… lag Western against Autocracies	–0.0565***
	(0.0166)
… lag UN against Autocracies	–0.0736***
	(0.0237)
… lag Non-Western against Autocracies	–0.0323
	(0.0617)
Observations	8,751
R^2	0.8393
Within-R^2	0.2933

Notes: Coefficient estimates of conventional two-way fixed effects DiD estimation. Standard errors in parentheses are clustered at the country level. Model includes control variables (lag *log*(GDP pc), lag *log*(Population), lag Successful Coups, lag Democracy, and six lagged conflict indicators), country fixed effects, and year fixed effects. Estimates are available on request. ***/**/* indicates significance at the 1%/5%/10% level.

Table A6: Effect Heterogeneity for Sanction Duration

Dependent Variable:	**Duration**	
Constitutional Compliance	**< 5 years only**	**≥ 5 years only**
Sanctions		
… lag Western against Democracies	0.0056	0.0260
	(0.0147)	(0.0274)
… lag UN against Democracies	0.0518*	0.0848***
	(0.0290)	(0.0250)
… lag Non-Western against Democracies	0.0055	0.0111
	(0.0124)	(0.0145)
… lag Western against Autocracies	–0.0319**	–0.0576*
	(0.0135)	(0.0305)
… lag UN against Autocracies	–0.0372	–0.0828**
	(0.0254)	(0.0352)
… lag Non-Western against Autocracies	0.0130	–0.0393
	(0.0301)	(0.0719)
Observations	7,653	7,975
2nd Stage R^2 on Residualized Outcomes	0.0113	0.0551

Notes: Selected coefficient estimates according to Eqs. (1)–(2). The LHS variable represents the constitutional compliance in target country i in year t. Standard errors in parentheses are clustered at the country level. ***/**/* indicates significance at the 1%/5%/10% level. The variation in the number of observations reflects the exclusion of sanctions by the duration of sanctions: when analyzing cases lasting up to five years, longer sanction episodes are dropped, and vice versa. Models include control variables (lag *log*(GDP pc), lag *log*(Population), lag Successful Coups, lag Democracy, and six lagged conflict indicators), country fixed effects, and year fixed effects. Estimates are available on request.

Table A7: Effect Heterogeneity for Subindices of Constitutional Compliance

Dependent Variable:	**Government Accountability**	**Basic HR Compliance**	**Civil Rights Compliance**	**Political Rights Compliance**	**Property Rights Compliance**
lag Sanctions					
… Western ag. Democracies	0.0104	0.0263	0.0206	0.0373	0.0061
	(0.0144)	(0.0274)	(0.0248)	(0.0427)	(0.0222)
… UN against Democracies	0.0254	0.2108***	0.0246	0.1325*	–0.0204
	(0.0307)	(0.0522)	(0.0382)	(0.0718)	(0.0556)
… Non-Western ag. Democ.	0.0114	–0.0049	–0.0032	0.0134	0.0110
	(0.0141)	(0.0218)	(0.0175)	(0.0262)	(0.0261)
… Western ag. Autocracies	–0.0295**	–0.0068	–0.0613**	–0.0743*	–0.0658***
	(0.0144)	(0.0276)	(0.0302)	(0.0384)	(0.0235)
… UN against Autocracies	–0.0532*	–0.0869	–0.0308	–0.0687	–0.1315***
	(0.0297)	(0.0539)	(0.0328)	(0.0644)	(0.0451)
… Non-Western ag. Autoc.	–0.0633	–0.0512	–0.0688	0.0134	–0.0461
	(0.0885)	(0.0767)	(0.0763)	(0.0538)	(0.0630)
Observations	8,677	7,989	8,614	7,989	7,989
2nd Stage R^2 on Res. Out.	0.0203	0.0308	0.0315	0.0342	0.0507

Notes: Coefficient estimates according to Eqs. (1)–(2). Standard errors in parentheses are clustered at the country level. The variation in the number of observations reflects differences in data availability for the five subindices. Models include control variables (lag *log*(GDP pc), lag *log*(Population), lag Successful Coups, lag Democracy, and six lagged conflict indicators), country fixed effects, and year fixed effects. Estimates are available on request. ***/**/* indicates significance at the 1%/5%/10% level.

Table A8: Additional Control Variables – Two-Stage Difference-in-Differences

Dependent Variable: **Constitutional Compliance**	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Sanctions				
… lag Western ag. Democracies	0.0199	0.0325	0.0182	0.0330
	(0.0200)	(0.0200)	(0.0213)	(0.0201)
… lag UN against Democracies	0.0679***	0.0835***	0.0588**	0.0754**
	(0.0231)	(0.0254)	(0.0229)	(0.0308)
… lag Non-Western ag. Democ.	0.0099	0.0402	0.0013	0.0243
	(0.0138)	(0.0540)	(0.0154)	(0.0538)
… lag Western ag. Autocracies	–0.0485**	–0.0444**	–0.0581***	–0.0638***
	(0.0215)	(0.0206)	(0.0139)	(0.0154)
… lag UN against Autocracies	–0.0693**	–0.0707**	–0.0905**	–0.0783*
	(0.0297)	(0.0326)	(0.0410)	(0.0478)
… lag Non-Western ag. Autoc.	–0.0478	–0.0770	–0.0580	–0.0896
	(0.0685)	(0.0930)	(0.0709)	(0.0877)
lag ODA		0.0146		0.0011
		(0.0131)		(0.0178)
lag Trade Openness			–0.0001	0.0025
			(0.0036)	(0.0049)
lag *log*(GDP pc)	–0.0024**	–0.0008	–0.0025	–0.0017
	(0.0012)	(0.0014)	(0.0017)	(0.0025)
lag *log*(Population)	0.0013**	0.0005	0.0014*	0.0009
	(0.0006)	(0.0007)	(0.0008)	(0.0011)
lag Successful Coups	–0.0000	–0.0053	–0.0033	–0.0061
	(0.0089)	(0.0105)	(0.0105)	(0.0124)
lag Democracy	0.0006	–0.0047*	–0.0006	–0.0041
	(0.0025)	(0.0024)	(0.0026)	(0.0025)
Interstate Conflicts				
… lag Minor	0.0216	0.0160	0.0128	0.0029
	(0.0174)	(0.0228)	(0.0161)	(0.0214)
… lag Major	–0.0445**	–0.0884***	–0.0226	–0.0584**
	(0.0205)	(0.0292)	(0.0181)	(0.0250)
Internal Conflicts w/o Interv.				
… lag Minor	–0.0081	–0.0079	–0.0056	–0.0038
	(0.0078)	(0.0087)	(0.0080)	(0.0091)
… lag Major	0.0100	0.0027	0.0034	0.0023
	(0.0158)	(0.0167)	(0.0145)	(0.0161)
Internal Conflicts w/ Interv.				
… lag Minor	0.0178	0.0154	0.0208	0.0130
	(0.0209)	(0.0258)	(0.0214)	(0.0271)
… lag Major	0.0808**	0.0441	0.0768*	0.0702
	(0.0347)	(0.0331)	(0.0447)	(0.0466)
Observations	8,677	6,163	6,829	4,826
2nd Stage R^2 on Res. Out.	0.0499	0.0556	0.0616	0.0776

Notes: Coefficient estimates according to Eqs. (1)–(2). Standard errors in parentheses are clustered at the country level. The variation in the number of observations reflects differences in data availability for ODA and trade openness. Models include country fixed effects and year fixed effects. ***/**/* indicates significance at the 1%/5%/10% level.

Table A9: Constitutional System Fixed Effects – Two-Stage Difference-in-Differences

Dependent Variable: **Constitutional Compliance**	
Sanctions	
… lag Western against Democracies	0.0169
	(0.0163)
… lag UN against Democracies	0.0780**
	(0.0386)
… lag Non-Western against Democracies	0.0106
	(0.0130)
… lag Western against Autocracies	–0.0585***
	(0.0217)
… lag UN against Autocracies	–0.0076
	(0.0248)
… lag Non-Western against Autocracies	–0.0980
	(0.0751)
lag *log*(GDP pc)	–0.0017*
	(0.0009)
lag *log*(Population)	0.0010**
	(0.0005)
lag Successful Coups	–0.0111*
	(0.0064)
lag Democracy	–0.0003
	(0.0020)
Interstate Conflicts	
… lag Minor	0.0028
	(0.0071)
… lag Major	–0.0130
	(0.0133)
Internal Conflicts w/o Intervention	
… lag Minor	0.0009
	(0.0059)
… lag Major	0.0069
	(0.0104)
Internal Conflicts w/ Intervention	
… lag Minor	0.0166
	(0.0163)
… lag Major	0.0266
	(0.0245)
Observations	8,296
2nd Stage R^2 on Residualized Outcomes	0.0679

Notes: Coefficient estimates according to Eqs. (1)–(2). Standard errors in parentheses are clustered at the constitutional system level. Models include constitutional system fixed effects and year fixed effects. ***/**/* indicates significance at the 1%/5%/10% level.