

Sanctions, Autocratization and Human Security

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Abstract

Authoritarianism is on the rise, and while there is increasing domestic resistance to it, there are many unanswered questions about the tools available to the international community to address it. One such tool are economic sanctions. There is a rich literature on sanctions, but much of the early literature has not differentiated between when sanctions are utilized in response to autocratization versus in response to aggression, or when they are individual targeted, sectoral or comprehensive. This chapter argues that comprehensive sanctions levied against autocratizing regimes incur huge costs on the target population, which undermine the very conditions where democracy might flourish. In particular, the international community needs to take seriously the human security (the insecurities that impoverished people face in the developing world including—physical insecurity, food insecurity, health insecurity and poverty) impact of sanctions on countries that are already impoverished. A case-by-case approach is important to ensuring that any policy directed at punishing a regime impacts those responsible without sacrificing innocent victims. That is not to say that sanctions should never be used on autocratizing countries (particularly in coordination with a strong and effective opposition and with a broad international consensus respecting the norms of international law), but they should not be implemented without ensuring that there is a humanitarian aid framework in place. Furthermore, comprehensive sanctions may not be the best tool to apply to resource rich autocratic regimes, when trying to address further autocratization. Using the case of Venezuela, we illustrate how sanctions have impacted human security. We close in support of recent shifts in the US administration to address the humanitarian crisis with sanction relief, and the importance of building civil society in sanctioned regimes.