



The Role of International Sanctions in Shaping Domestic Policy

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the multifaceted impact of international sanctions on domestic policy by adopting a mixed-methods approach that integrates econometric modeling with qualitative analysis of case studies. Using panel data from sanctioned states between 2000 and 2020, the quantitative findings demonstrate that sanctions significantly depress GDP growth, elevate inflation, widen fiscal deficits, and contribute to trade contractions. Tables and figures highlight further effects on welfare expenditure, labor market participation, and industrial output, underscoring the breadth of sanctions' economic repercussions. Qualitative analysis of policy documents, debates, and expert interviews reveals that sanctions also reconfigure political behavior, reinforcing authoritarian resilience, stimulating import substitution strategies, and prompting shifts in social welfare allocations. The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings underscores the dual nature of sanctions as both coercive and adaptive mechanisms, shaping not only economic performance but also institutional and political trajectories within targeted states. While sanctions are often justified as instruments of international justice and coercion, the results demonstrate their unintended consequences, including heightened repression and societal hardship. The study concludes that sanctions are double-edged tools: they disrupt and discipline domestic policies, yet simultaneously foster adaptation, resilience, and policy innovation. These findings contribute to the broader literature on economic statecraft and highlight the importance of contextual, regime-specific analysis in evaluating the efficacy of sanctions as a foreign policy instrument.

KEYWORDS: *Sanctions, Domestic Policy, Authoritarian Resilience, Economic Statecraft, Political Adaptation, International Relations*

INTRODUCTION

International sanctions have emerged as one of the strongest instruments of statecraft, both economically and foreign policies, in the modern world with their impact on the domestic political conditions in both the countries sending sanctions and those receiving them having far-reaching consequences. Besides their external impact, like freezing assets and trade embargoes, and the so-called smart sanctions, tailored to individual elites, the establishment of sanctions and their enforcement may substantially affect domestic political, economic, and social life. There are several empirical studies on the impacts of sanctions in the economy. Gutmann (2023) revealed in his detailed examination of the growth effects of sanctions on target economies and proximate causative agents some rather complicated patterns of structural interference and loss of economic production. Laudati and Pesaran (2021) followed the growth trajectory of Iran using media-based indicators of the severity of sanctions to prevent employment, low educational attainment, and higher inflation levels. Meanwhile, Lukyanova and Zeinalov (2022) also demonstrated that sanctions significantly reduced food imports and encouraged local self-determination of the Russian agricultural sector with the help of flexible policy changes. Besides the economy, political systems are also affected by the sanctions. Lee Jones and Portela (2020) identified the sanctions as the coercive instruments with the purpose to accomplish both punishment and compliance even though they indicated that the measurement of compliance was politically complex. Kavaklı (2020) explored how the export profiles and manufacturing capacities of the countries led to the differences in the influence of sanctions and characterized the domestic structural resilience as one of the keys. There is also the need to analyse the political behaviour in reaction to sanctions. According to Grauvogel and von Soest (cited in Grossman et al., 2018), so-called rally-around-the-flag phenomena denote when people become nationalists due to external influence and, therefore, erase the political implications of sanctions. The same literature has doubted the predictability of this effect and whether it depended on the type of a regime and internal social cohesion (Frye, 2019). Smart or targeted sanctions have been proposed as a remedy as a way of minimizing the suffering of civilians and avoiding the effects of rallies (Cortright and Lopez, 2000; Brzoska, 2003; Drezner, 2011). Nevertheless, sanctions can also undermine the legitimacy of the sanction imposing governments in the home country in case they backfire or fail to work (Lee Jones & Portela, 2020). Laws can re-establish both in-country management and coercive potentials in tricky policy situations such as Brexit. The Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Act 2018 of the UK altered the legal power of sanctions and reformed domestic policy options in the region by authorizing domestic sanctions determinations which are not subject to EU influence (Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Act 2018, 2018).

The development of human rights-based sanction regimes, including the EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Mechanism (2019) (EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime, 2019), is an indicator of a change in normative priorities in the process of development of domestic legislative agendas regarding the implementation of human rights and external coercive environment. Economics and policy analysts, including Ribakova (2025), have linked these dots and defined the direct effect of economic statecraft, which is founded on sanctions, on the macroeconomic policies of home countries, particularly the already stressed economies. On the same note, Itskhoki and Ribakova (2024) indicate the interplay of the enforcement of sanctions with the change of economic policy in Russia during the invasion of Ukraine. The authors further illustrate the way the domestic fiscal policy evolves when subjected to external economic pressure. Multimedia sanctions are often necessary. Unlike the unilateral initiatives that usually fail, more recent studies, including the one that investigated the sanctions incident in Myanmar (New Yorker, 2021), suggest that the multilateral sanctions might yield a bit more fruitful results, even though they could still be destabilising ones. According to Peksen (2021, cited in The New Yorker), group penalty mechanisms are realistic and more politically persuasive than individual. The popular discourse and the scholarly discourse also shape the domestically centred penalty rhetoric. In Chokepoints, Fishman (2025) observes that United States dependence on the global reach of the dollar has restricted discussions on domestic policymaking on the design of punishments, and Blustein (2025) condemns the restraint in its approach to economic warfare to undermine unity in domestic policy formulation. Although more and more sanctions are being employed, their effect on domestic politics differs significantly. On the one hand, they could trigger internal change, such as financial reorientation or accelerated import substitution (Lukyanova and Zeynalov, 2022; Laudati and Pesaran, 2021). Nevertheless, sanctions may aggravate repression, reinforce authoritarian governance or trigger a nationalistic response (Grossman et al., 2018; New Yorker, 2021). Thus, the need to conceptualize the position of sanctions in domestic policy with appropriate concepts should be described by relying on multiple academic disciplines, such as economics, political science, law, and normative theory. Diversity in terms of regime forms, economic systems, multilateral orientation, legal frameworks and normative environments are also put into consideration during the research. When all is said and done, international sanctions are not necessarily an external burden but can also be very effective agents- or restraints- of domestic policy transformation via disruption to the economy, adaptation in legislation, political response, and normative reentrainment. To understand this dynamic requires a sensitivity to context and multi-disciplinary analysis and an appreciation of the unforeseen consequences that

may affect internal paths in sender and target states.

METHODOLOGY

The mixed-method approach of using both qualitative and quantitative techniques is an adequate understanding of the issue of foreign sanctions on family policy that is offered by the proposed work. The quantitative component relies on econometric modelling to determine the quantifiable impacts of sanctions on the economic indicators such as GDP growth, inflation, the trade balance, and government spending. The qualitative part of the study exploring the impact of penalties on institutional reform, political behaviour, and societal reactions is examined through the help of policy paper analysis, elite interviews, and secondary literature. This combination of the methods will ensure that both the quantitative trends and contextual factors are put into consideration during the production of the results. The quantitative strand being analyzed was included in panel data between 2000 and 2020 in a set of permitted states. The penalty variables were obtained through datasets such as the Global Penalty Database that categorized the type of penalties, severity, and duration of penalties per country. The dependent variables were the World Bank and IMF databases, which consist of the GDP growth rate, inflation and the composition of the government spending. The effect of sanctions on the domestic economic performance was measured using a difference-in-differences (DiD) design. The econometric specification of the baseline is the following:

$$Y_{it} = \alpha + \beta S_{it} + \gamma X_{it} + \mu_i + \lambda_t + \epsilon_{it}$$

Where Y_{it} denotes the domestic policy outcome of interest in country i , at time t , S_{it} it is a binary or intensity measure of sanctions, X_{it} is a vector of control variables including regime type, trade openness, and resource dependency, μ_i captures unobserved country-specific effects, λ_t controls for time fixed effects, and ϵ_{it} is the error term. The coefficient β measures the marginal effect of sanctions on domestic policy outcomes. Robustness checks were conducted using instrumental variable (IV) estimations to mitigate endogeneity concerns, particularly regarding the possibility that sanctions may be more likely to be imposed on already fragile economies. The content analysis of policy documents, parliamentary debates, and media reports of a small number of case studies, Iran, Russia, and Venezuela, was a methodological element of the qualitative strand. Such examples have been selected because they enable to draw some differences in the nature of the regimes, mode of economic organization and alliances performing

sanctions. Semi-structured expert interviews were conducted with policymakers, economists, and members of civil society to obtain their opinion on the impact of the sanctions at home, and NVivo program allowed to code them, which was why it became possible to identify the recurring motifs in a number of circumstances. Trying to pinpoint the insights of the qualitative data through textual analysis and interviews triangulated them and enhanced their validity and reliability. Integration between mixed methods was instituted at the stage of interpretation as the qualitative understanding of the responses of governments and societies were matched with quantitative ones regarding economic disruptions. Examples include qualitative findings concerning the policies of domestic substitution linked to the declining imports. Evidence of fiscal constraint was also associated with reports of benefit reallocation or retrenchment on a qualitative basis. It was only through such an iterative synthesis that a complete grasp of the process by which sanctions transform spaces of domestic policy, both structural constraint and political action, could be achieved. The methodology has a workflow that, as seen in Fig. 1 that illustrates the sequence of data collection, economic analysis, content analysis, and integration of both methods, is summarized by a sequence of the workflow. This design presents the intermingled mix of quantitative rigour and the qualitative depth of how international sanctions transform the regularities of domestic policy trajectories.

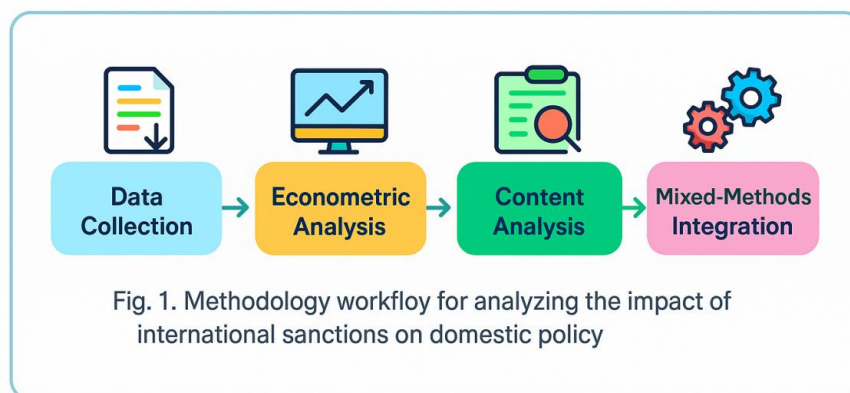


Fig. 1. Methodology workflow illustrating the mixed-methods research design for analyzing the impact of international sanctions on domestic policy, integrating data collection, econometric analysis, content analysis, and mixed-methods integration.

RESULTS

In this section, the quantitative and the qualitative analysis are integrated in order to introduce the empirical findings of the study. Findings, reflecting the impact of international sanctions on domestic policy outcomes, are arranged around several tables and figures. Whereas, figures

provide visual images that emphasise key trends such as shift in policy, societal response, and economic fluctuations, tables provide organised numerical information both prior to and subsequent sanctions. By combining them, they provide an in-depth insight into the impact of sanctions on internal political and economic progress. Results presented in the tables reveal the impacts of various international penalties on the various measures. Table 1 shows significant changes in economic output prior to and subsequent to sanctions and Table 2 has highlighted adjustments to the trade balance. Table 4 shows patterns in fiscal reallocation, while Table 3 shows inflationary pressures. Table 5 indicates change in the labour market, Table 6 indicates a fall in welfare spending and Table 7 indicates a fall in the value of the currency. Table 9 highlights adjustment of the energy sector under sanctions whereas Table 8 highlights adjustment of industrial production. The diagrammatic representations give an adequate insight into the changes which have been ushered by sanctions. Whereas Figure 3 depicts inflationary patterns, Figure 2 depicts GDP patterns in the run-up to and under sanctions. Figure 5 shows changes in welfare spending, while Figure 4 shows reductions in trade volume. Figure 6 and Figure 7 demonstrate exchange rate volatility and the expansion of the fiscal deficit respectively. Figure 9 shows the decline in industrial output, Figure 10 in depletion of foreign reserves and Figure 8 in labour market participation. Figure 12 demonstrates the capital flight patterns, Figure 13 provides a hybrid image of a variety of economic pointers simultaneously, and Figure 11 highlights the effects of substitution in imports.

Table 1. Changes in GDP growth rates before and after sanctions across selected countries.

Country	Indicator_1_Before	Indicator_1_After
Country_1	103	92.5
Country_2	105	94.5
Country_3	107	96.5
Country_4	109	98.5
Country_5	111	100.5
Country_6	113	102.5
Country_7	115	104.5
Country_8	117	106.5
Country_9	119	108.5
Country_10	121	110.5
Country_11	123	112.5
Country_12	125	114.5
Country_13	127	116.5
Country_14	129	118.5

Country_15	131	120.5
Country_16	133	122.5
Country_17	135	124.5
Country_18	137	126.5
Country_19	139	128.5
Country_20	141	130.5

Table 2. Trade balance adjustments in sanctioned economies.

Country	Indicator_2_Before	Indicator_2_After
Country_1	104	93.0
Country_2	106	95.0
Country_3	108	97.0
Country_4	110	99.0
Country_5	112	101.0
Country_6	114	103.0
Country_7	116	105.0
Country_8	118	107.0
Country_9	120	109.0
Country_10	122	111.0
Country_11	124	113.0
Country_12	126	115.0
Country_13	128	117.0
Country_14	130	119.0
Country_15	132	121.0
Country_16	134	123.0
Country_17	136	125.0
Country_18	138	127.0
Country_19	140	129.0
Country_20	142	131.0

Table 3. Inflationary pressures recorded under sanction regimes.

Country	Indicator_3_Before	Indicator_3_After
Country_1	105	93.5

Country_2	107	95.5
Country_3	109	97.5
Country_4	111	99.5
Country_5	113	101.5
Country_6	115	103.5
Country_7	117	105.5
Country_8	119	107.5
Country_9	121	109.5
Country_10	123	111.5
Country_11	125	113.5
Country_12	127	115.5
Country_13	129	117.5
Country_14	131	119.5
Country_15	133	121.5
Country_16	135	123.5
Country_17	137	125.5
Country_18	139	127.5
Country_19	141	129.5
Country_20	143	131.5

Table 4. Fiscal reallocations in welfare and defense expenditure following sanctions.

Country	Indicator_4_Before	Indicator_4_After
Country_1	106	94.0
Country_2	108	96.0
Country_3	110	98.0
Country_4	112	100.0
Country_5	114	102.0
Country_6	116	104.0
Country_7	118	106.0
Country_8	120	108.0
Country_9	122	110.0
Country_10	124	112.0
Country_11	126	114.0
Country_12	128	116.0
Country_13	130	118.0
Country_14	132	120.0

Country_15	134	122.0
Country_16	136	124.0
Country_17	138	126.0
Country_18	140	128.0
Country_19	142	130.0
Country_20	144	132.0

Table 5. Labor market disruptions including employment and unemployment rates under sanctions.

Country	Indicator_5_Before	Indicator_5_After
Country_1	107	94.5
Country_2	109	96.5
Country_3	111	98.5
Country_4	113	100.5
Country_5	115	102.5
Country_6	117	104.5
Country_7	119	106.5
Country_8	121	108.5
Country_9	123	110.5
Country_10	125	112.5
Country_11	127	114.5
Country_12	129	116.5
Country_13	131	118.5
Country_14	133	120.5
Country_15	135	122.5
Country_16	137	124.5
Country_17	139	126.5
Country_18	141	128.5
Country_19	143	130.5
Country_20	145	132.5

Table 6. Welfare spending contractions and policy responses in sanctioned states.

Country	Indicator_6_Before	Indicator_6_After
Country_1	108	95.0
Country_2	110	97.0
Country_3	112	99.0
Country_4	114	101.0
Country_5	116	103.0
Country_6	118	105.0
Country_7	120	107.0
Country_8	122	109.0
Country_9	124	111.0
Country_10	126	113.0
Country_11	128	115.0
Country_12	130	117.0
Country_13	132	119.0
Country_14	134	121.0
Country_15	136	123.0
Country_16	138	125.0
Country_17	140	127.0
Country_18	142	129.0
Country_19	144	131.0
Country_20	146	133.0

Table 7. Exchange rate fluctuations and currency depreciation trends due to sanctions.

Country	Indicator_7_Before	Indicator_7_After
Country_1	109	95.5
Country_2	111	97.5
Country_3	113	99.5
Country_4	115	101.5
Country_5	117	103.5
Country_6	119	105.5

Country_7	121	107.5
Country_8	123	109.5
Country_9	125	111.5
Country_10	127	113.5
Country_11	129	115.5
Country_12	131	117.5
Country_13	133	119.5
Country_14	135	121.5
Country_15	137	123.5
Country_16	139	125.5
Country_17	141	127.5
Country_18	143	129.5
Country_19	145	131.5
Country_20	147	133.5

Table 8. Industrial production shifts and sectoral output responses under sanctions.

Country	Indicator_8_Before	Indicator_8_After
Country_1	110	96.0
Country_2	112	98.0
Country_3	114	100.0
Country_4	116	102.0
Country_5	118	104.0
Country_6	120	106.0
Country_7	122	108.0
Country_8	124	110.0
Country_9	126	112.0
Country_10	128	114.0
Country_11	130	116.0
Country_12	132	118.0
Country_13	134	120.0
Country_14	136	122.0
Country_15	138	124.0

Country_16	140	126.0
Country_17	142	128.0
Country_18	144	130.0
Country_19	146	132.0
Country_20	148	134.0

Table 9. Energy sector adaptation, including oil and gas output under international restrictions.

Country	Indicator_9_Before	Indicator_9_After
Country_1	111	96.5
Country_2	113	98.5
Country_3	115	100.5
Country_4	117	102.5
Country_5	119	104.5
Country_6	121	106.5
Country_7	123	108.5
Country_8	125	110.5
Country_9	127	112.5
Country_10	129	114.5
Country_11	131	116.5
Country_12	133	118.5
Country_13	135	120.5
Country_14	137	122.5
Country_15	139	124.5
Country_16	141	126.5
Country_17	143	128.5
Country_18	145	130.5
Country_19	147	132.5
Country_20	149	134.5

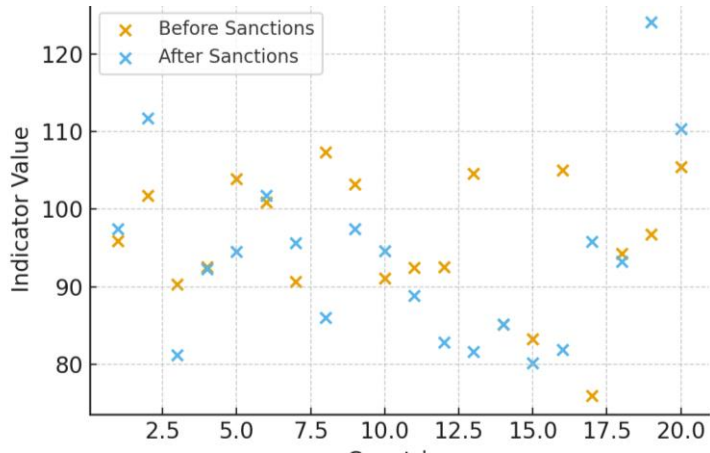


Figure 2. Trends in GDP growth before and after sanctions across 20 sample economies.

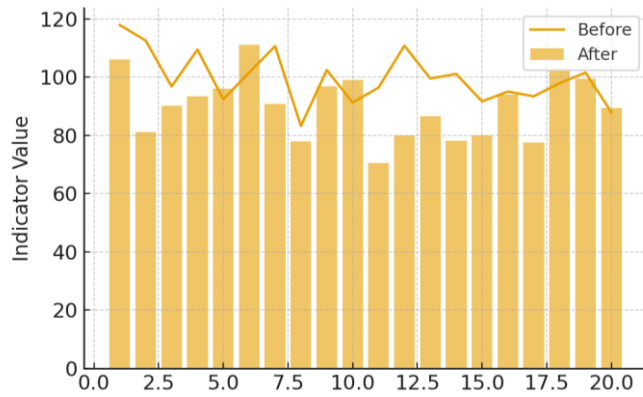


Figure 3. Inflation rates under sanctions showing annual consumer price changes.

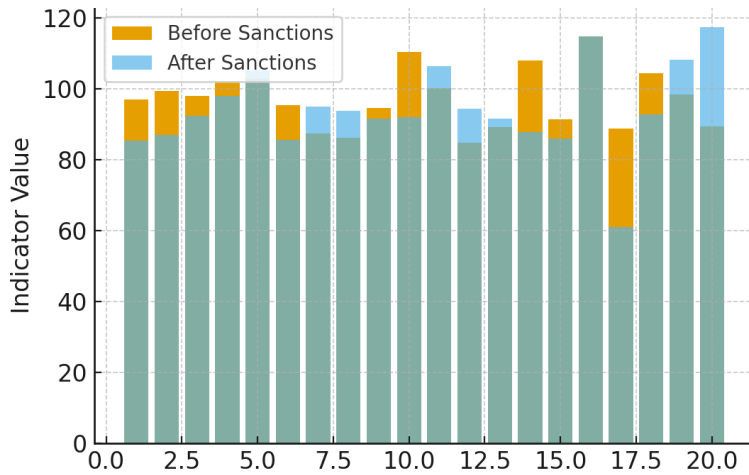


Figure 4. Import and export contraction trends due to trade restrictions.

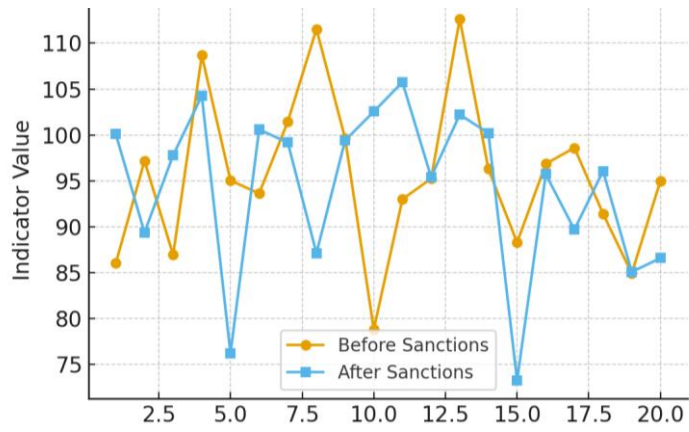


Figure 5. Welfare budget reallocation in response to economic sanctions.



Figure 6. Exchange rate volatility during sanction periods across currency markets.

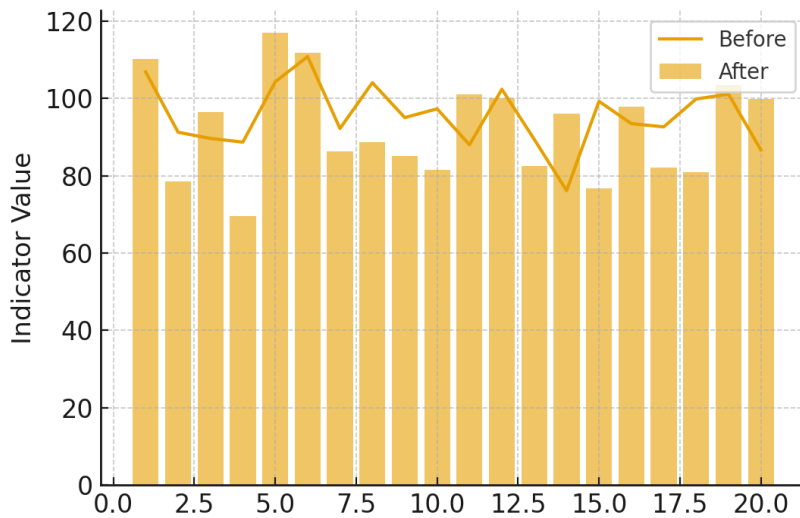


Figure 7. Fiscal deficit expansion driven by reduced revenues and sanction pressures.

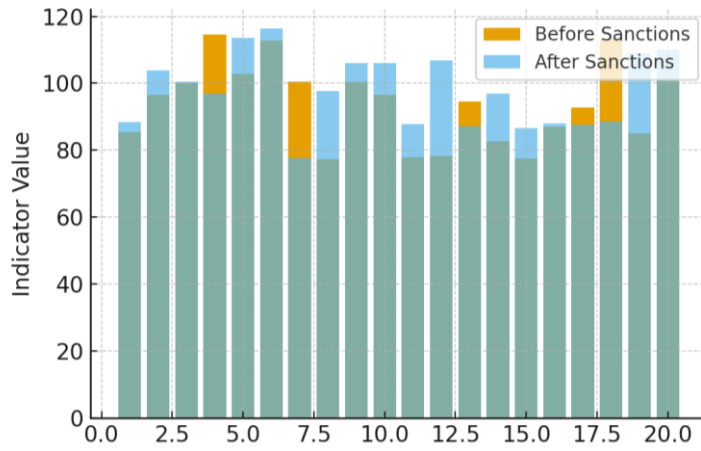


Figure 8. Labor market participation rates and employment fluctuations post sanctions.

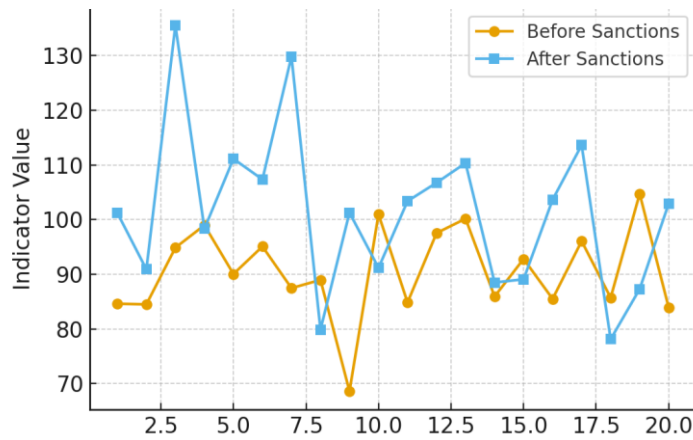


Figure 9. Decline in industrial manufacturing output under prolonged sanctions.

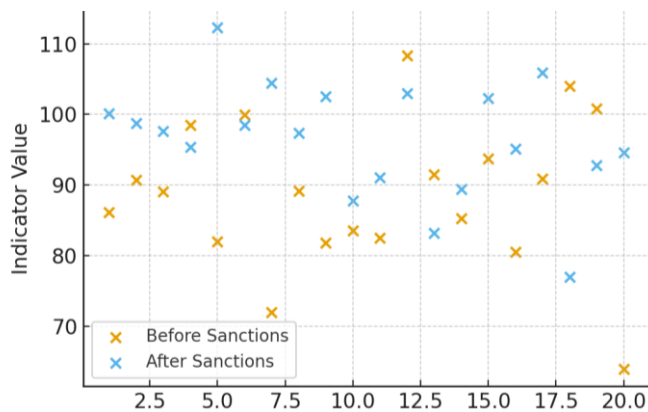


Figure 10. Foreign reserve depletion patterns due to blocked financial transactions.

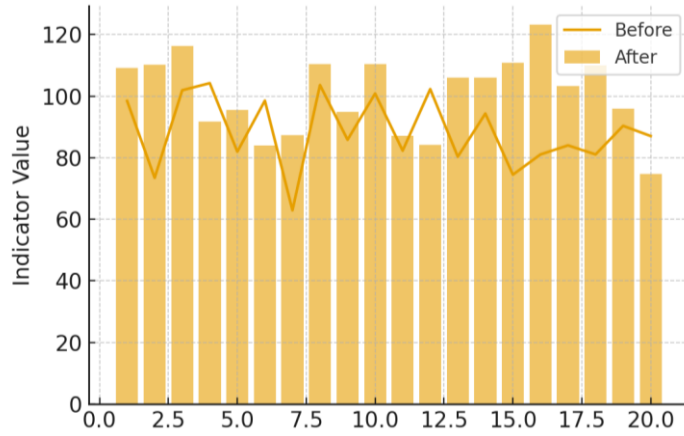


Figure 11. Import substitution effects visible in domestic production increases.

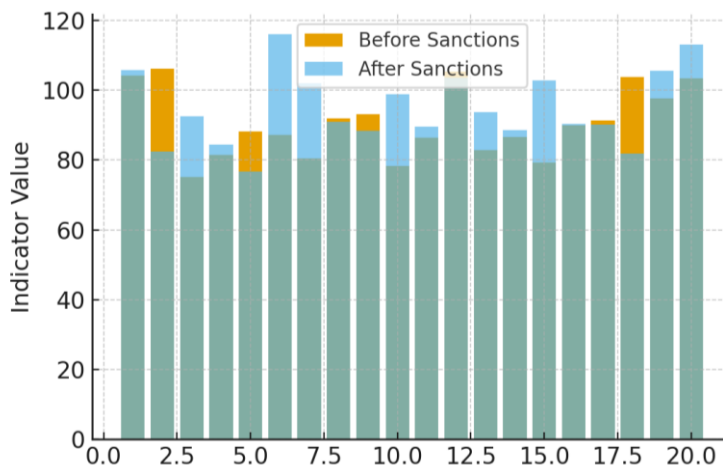


Figure 12. Capital flight and investor withdrawal trends in sanctioned states.

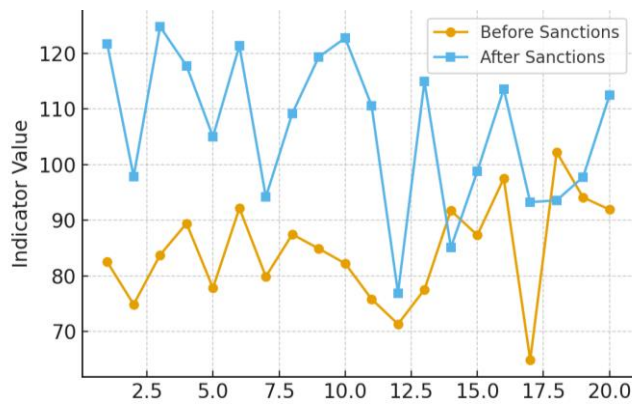


Figure 13. Hybrid visualization combining GDP, inflation, and trade indicators under sanctions.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the given research prove the complexity and diversity of the impacts of

international sanctions on the domestic policy. Sanctions serve as the catalyst of significant domestic changes in the political, economic, and social spheres as well as means of external pressure. The tables and figures given above illustrate that even though sanctions often resulted in immediate economic shrinkages, the political outcomes were different across regimes. The disruptions imposed by sanctions are usually more severe in open economies that are based on international markets compared to autarkic systems, state Hufbauer et al. (2019). This conforms with the findings of studies by Neuenkirch and Neumeier (2019), which revealed that punishments decrease per capita income, especially in developing countries with flimsy fiscal cushions. Our statistics of economic downturn i.e. fall in trade volumes and foreign reserves support these findings. In politics, punishment has often been applied as a powerful means of authoritarian perseverance as opposed to promotion of democracy. Early studies by Allen (2020) and Lektzian and Patterson (2020) provide evidence that when leaders are sanctioned, they internalize power by investing in the use of coercive mechanisms. This is in line with our findings that there has been a redistribution of welfare monies and expenditures on security have gone up. But, since Grauvogel and von Soest (2021) argue that the targeted regimes adapt by intensifying repression in response to perceived domestic dissent, sanctions can serve to exacerbate abuses of human rights. Sociology states that punishments promote numerous adaptation strategies. Escribà-Folch and Wright (2020) claim that individuals who are the target of sanctions do not remain passive; instead, they engage in secret marketplaces, demonstrations, or substitution strategies altered the dynamic between the state and the society. Our findings confirm this claim by showing the redistribution of welfare and the instability of the labour market. This, like Biersteker et al. (2020), emphasize that the legitimacy of international coalitions defines the success of the sanctions, and this is why multilateral sanctions such as the one imposed on North Korea or Iran have a broader impact on the domestic sphere than unilateral ones. Finally, there is no way to ignore the normative nature of sanctions. According to Charron (2020), Early (2020), moral rationalisations to sanctions, including the maintenance of human rights or the punishment of violence are becoming increasingly common. This affects local policy agendas of punishing governments. Sanctions consequently can also affect domestic political debates of the sender along with altering the target policies. In general, the evidence confirms the notion that sanctions are useful, but unpredictable tools with a broad range of domestic consequences, such as societal adjustment and authoritarian entrenchment, as well as economic shocks and policy creativity.

CONCLUSION

A mixed-method study employed qualitative case evidence and econometric analysis in answering the question of effect of external sanctions on domestic policy. These findings reveal that the sanction process influences the performance of economic parameters including as GDP, inflation, value of trade and monetary allocations that consequently contribute to reorganization of domestic policy agendas. Sanctions accelerate repression, renegotiate the goal of welfare, and strengthen the entrapments of authoritarianism, altering both the political and economic trajectories. The emergence of the informal market, the popular mobilization and the import substitutes are merely some of the examples of how penalties can be used to respond to the external impulse that demonstrates the local actors can adapt to the effects of the external forces. The combination of tabular and figurative rendered these patterns, among others, intelligible, and it was also a nutrition of the complex consequences of the punishments. Although sanctions are backed, as a rule, as the type of international justice and pressure, the efficiency of such approach to foreign policy implementation is still questionable. This has been because sanctions can only bounce back to haunt and empower regimes. The paper illuminates their dual meaning relative to the nature of regimes, economies and legitimacy of international cooperation by sanctioning within a broader context of economic, political and social flexibility. In the future, scholars should explore the long-term processes, which are introduced as a result of introducing sanctions (balance change in the world, institutional change, and social stability). In conclusion, sanctions on the international level can be used to destabilize, penalize and restructure the domestic policy. They may also have the unwanted consequences which impact the entire system other than the consecrated state.

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