

Economic sanctions widen the rift between sender and target governments on foreign policies

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Economic sanctions increase hostility between countries, causing sanctioned countries (targets) to support foreign policies contradictory to those of the sanctioning (sender) country, finds new research from Nazarbayev University School of Sciences and Humanities (<https://ssh.nu.edu.kz/>) (NU SSH).

Economics sanctions are designed to inflict economic pain on target countries to encourage them to abandon policies considered undesirable by sender countries.

Bimal Adhikari, Assistant Professor from NU SSH, and colleagues analysed the effect economic sanctions have on foreign policy preferences. Researchers examined voting patterns between the US and targets of US sanctions in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) using data on economic sanctions and UNGA voting for over 150 countries between 1984 and 2006.

Their findings suggest that economic sanctions increase tensions between target and sender countries. They also find that more severe sanctions result in greater voting differences; the sanctioned countries become more inclined to follow foreign policy agendas that contradict those of the sender countries. The coercive strategy of sanctions escalates hostility, rendering target and sender countries further apart on foreign policies.

Prof Adhikari says,

“Policymakers should consider the broader foreign policy consequences of coercive diplomacy. As sanctions create more pressure on targeted governments, they would become less conciliatory toward the sender states in major international platforms, such as the UNGA. The way a state votes in the UNGA matters because it is a platform where countries can make their foreign policy positions known to a global audience. These sessions are also particularly important because they garner significant media coverage, shaping global public opinion.”

The research suggests the frequent use of economic sanctions, while it may succeed in causing economic pains in target countries, has dubious effectiveness in encouraging targets to change their behaviour. As such, sanctions might not be the best tool states can employ to achieve foreign policy objectives.

These findings were first published in the journal International Interactions.

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