

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ECONOMIC SANCTIONS IN ADDRESSING HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES IN RUSSIA

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ABSTRACT

This study critically examines the effectiveness of economic sanctions in addressing human rights abuses in Russia. Economic sanctions, often employed as a tool of international diplomacy, are intended to pressure governments into adhering to international norms and respecting human rights. The study explores the impact of sanctions imposed by Western nations and other international actors on Russia's political and economic structures, focusing on their ability to influence state behavior and curb human rights violations. By analyzing case studies, financial data, and policy outcomes, the research highlights the successes and limitations of these measures. Findings reveal that while sanctions have had measurable economic impacts, their effectiveness in achieving meaningful changes in human rights practices remains mixed due to factors such as Russia's strategic countermeasures, domestic political dynamics, and support from allied states. The study concludes with recommendations for refining sanction policies to enhance their efficiency and align them more closely with broader human rights objectives.

Keywords: International organizations, sanctions, economic sanctions, diplomacy, conflicts, political instability, foreign policy, international sanctions, the human rights watch, human rights abuses

1. INTRODUCTION

Violent conflict connotes the act of using coercion, arms, and ammunition to determine internal or external disputes between two or more countries, and organized ethnic, social, and religious groups with the motive of decreasing the privileges and rights of other societies and groups resulting in social, economic, cultural or ethnic issues overtime (Coccia, 2019). According to Efebeh (2020), war mechanisms have explained states as entities characterized by various diplomatic confrontations in which some were resolved peacefully and others in violent conflicts. This compelled Mingst (2014) to say that states exist in an anarchic and turbulent situation where each state seeks its interests and self-determination. As a result, Hobbesian belief that the state of nature is a war of all against all, and man's life is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short (Mclean & Alistair, 2019).

Over the years, international relations have witnessed a series of disagreements amongst countries, including armed conflicts, ideological wars, and trade wars as seen in World War 1, World War 2 which culminated in the Cold War, and the US-China trade war, etc. Therefore, to ensure a 'balance of power' in the international arena, state actors resorted to the signing of peace treaties, which also saw the emergence of inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations all targeted at maintaining world peace, increasing friendly relations amongst nations and deterring one from attacking the other. To further protect this peace cause, nations either as a group or an individual state brought to the fore the concept of sanctions which is placed on countries and personalities that intend to disturb the 'peace' now experienced around the world.

Hufbauer, et al. (1990) defined sanction as the withdrawal or the threat of withdrawal of a customary trade or financial relationship imposed by a "sender" against a "target" to promote foreign political objectives. Senders can include international institutions such as the United Nations, coalitions of governments, or individual nations, while targets are most often governments or criminal organizations. Iana and José (2015), defined international sanctions as part of tools used in furthering the goals of common foreign and security policy (CFSP). It is seen by the European Union as restrictive measures imposed on governments, commercial entities, and individuals to penalize a policy or course of action that contravenes international and political norms (Iana & José, 2015).

International sanctions have long been a tool used by countries to influence the policies and actions of other states, especially in situations where diplomatic negotiations have failed to achieve desired outcomes. In recent years, the impact of such sanctions on human rights within targeted nations has gained significant attention, particularly regarding Russia. Following Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and its invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the United States, European Union, and other Western allies implemented a series of economic sanctions targeting critical sectors of the Russian economy, including banking, energy, and technology (Connolly, 2022; Galtung, 2021). These measures are intended to isolate Russia financially and economically, constraining its ability to finance military activities while signaling international disapproval of its actions (Oxenstierna, 2022). However, the repercussions of these sanctions

extend beyond their economic goals, significantly affecting civilian populations and shaping the human rights landscape in Russia.

Sanctions can exacerbate economic hardship among the general population, raising questions about their humanitarian implications. Research highlights that sanctions often contribute to inflation, decreased foreign investment, and reduced access to essential goods and services. According to Kaempfer and Lowenberg (2019), the economic downturn associated with sanctions can lead to a reduction in the standard of living, and worsening conditions for healthcare, education, and employment opportunities for citizens. This economic pressure can also contribute to human rights violations, as governments may adopt increasingly repressive measures to control dissent arising from deteriorating living standards. In Russia, reports have shown that authorities have expanded legal and extrajudicial measures to limit freedom of expression, assembly, and press in response to growing dissatisfaction with government policies (Amnesty International, 2023; Human Rights Watch, 2022).

Scholars such as Peksen (2019) argue that sanctions can indirectly incentivize governments to strengthen internal repression to prevent potential uprisings. Russia's legislative and judicial environments have seen increased restrictions, with new laws that criminalize dissent, restrict non-governmental organizations, and curb independent media. This trend aligns with observations by Afesorgbor and Mahadevan (2020), who found that governments under sanctions often adopt more stringent domestic policies, framing them as necessary for national security. Sanctions thus create a paradox where, although intended to pressure governments, they can lead to an environment where civil liberties are compromised and political freedoms are further curtailed. This dynamic in Russia has heightened international debates over the ethical implications of sanctions, prompting discussions on their effectiveness and unintended consequences on human rights (Drezner, 2019; Connolly, 2022).

The case of Russia illustrates the complex interactions between economic sanctions and human rights, emphasizing the need to consider both direct and indirect effects on civilian populations. As the international community continues to rely on sanctions as a diplomatic tool, it becomes crucial to assess their impact not only on governments but also on the broader social fabric and human rights conditions within targeted states (Oxenstierna, 2022; Peksen, 2019). This background provides a foundation for examining the current situation in Russia, where sanctions continue to shape the political and social environment, with profound implications for human rights. In Russia, economic sanctions have created a challenging socio-political environment that increasingly impacts human rights. Historically, sanctions have been used to pressure governments into changing their policies or actions, particularly when these actions breach international norms, such as through acts of aggression or human rights violations. However, the unintended side effects of sanctions on everyday citizens have been a focal point of critique. Studies demonstrate that in heavily sanctioned states, governments often respond by consolidating power and intensifying control over citizens to maintain authority and prevent destabilization (Peksen & Drury, 2020; Connolly, 2022). This has been observable in Russia, where economic pressures have contributed to a broader climate of restriction on freedoms, as the government enforces stricter regulations on political activism, media, and public discourse to prevent anti-government sentiments from growing (Amnesty International, 2023; Galtung, 2021).

The sanctions imposed on Russia have not only restricted international business but have also hampered local industries, leading to a substantial reduction in citizens' access to imported goods and services that were once readily available. This situation mirrors cases like those of Iran and North Korea, where sanctions-induced isolation resulted in reduced quality of life and limited access to essential goods, causing secondary humanitarian impacts (Afesorgbor & Mahadevan, 2020; Connolly, 2022). Research by Peksen (2019) highlights that in such cases, restricted access to necessary medical supplies, increased unemployment, and inflation contribute to poverty and lower standards of living. Consequently, citizens often face economic hardships that are compounded by restrictions on social freedoms, creating a cycle of deprivation and repression. This environment of deprivation has implications for Russia's broader social structures, with groups such as independent journalists, activists, and non-governmental organizations experiencing heightened repression. Human rights organizations report that the Russian government has introduced a series of legislative changes that limit civil society's functioning, restrict international funding for NGOs, and criminalize dissent against state actions (Human Rights Watch, 2022; Oxenstierna, 2022). These restrictions further reduce the ability of citizens to advocate for their rights, as laws criminalizing protests or restricting internet access limit avenues for expressing discontent. In turn, such policies foster an environment where human rights abuses can go unchecked, as the suppression of civil society leaves citizens with fewer resources and platforms for legal recourse or advocacy (Drezner, 2019). Consequently, this backdrop underscores the need for a nuanced understanding of the role of sanctions in international relations and in shaping the internal human rights landscape of targeted nations.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The general objective of this study is to examine the effectiveness of international economic sanctions on human rights abuses in Russia. The specific objectives are:

- To evaluate the impact of international economic sanctions on the human rights situation in Russia.
- To analyze the effectiveness of targeted sanctions against individuals and entities responsible for human rights abuses in Russia.
- To assess the unintended consequences of economic sanctions on the general population's socioeconomic well-being in Russia.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions guide the study:

- How have international economic sanctions affected the human rights landscape in Russia since their implementation?
- To what extent have targeted sanctions against specific individuals and entities been effective in curbing human rights abuses in Russia?
- What unintended socioeconomic consequences have economic sanctions imposed on the general Russian population?

4. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Theoretical Framework

The Theory of Collective Security will be adopted as the theoretical framework for this study. The concept of collective security was first proposed by Cardinal Richelieu in 1629 and was later reflected in the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 (Morgenthau, 1948). The collective security theory has been widely lauded for its potential to keep the world stable by providing a framework for collaboration in the face of challenges to the current political order (Palmer & Perkins, 2004). Unfortunately, contrary to popular belief, group efforts do not ensure everyone's safety. In contrast to the "collective action" of a loose confederation of nations, "collective security" requires the concerted effort of the majority of governments in the globe, including all or almost all of the major powers. According to Palmer and Perkins (2004), invoking the principle of collective security when violence occurs is essential if the idea of collective security is to succeed. By embracing this idea, states commit to making the maintenance of international stability a top priority and to being ready to act together in the face of aggression or threats to any nation or the international community at large. This entails being prepared to resort to sanctions when necessary, even if doing so may potentially spark armed conflict (Palmer and Perkins, 2004). Like its predecessor, the League of Nations, the United Nations is a collective security organization, although it was founded to fix fundamental problems with the League's design. In contrast to the league, the United Nations welcomes members from all countries.

All 15 members of the UN Security Council need to agree for a decision to be made, although just the five permanent members need to vote in favour. As opposed to its predecessor, the League, the United Nations may assure compliance with only the consent of its permanent members. To date, the Collective Security principle has only been successfully implemented twice: once in 1950 against North Korea (especially because the Soviet Union boycotted the Security Council session) and once in 1990 during operation Desert Storm, when Iraq invaded Kuwait and declared Kuwait to be its 19th province and a target of a bombardment that lasted for one thousand hours. In retrospect, Russia did not put up much of a fight because it happened during a time when the Soviet Union openly sought to align itself with the West. As the primary body charged with maintaining world peace and security, the United Nations Security Council's unanimous backing of the sanctions regime against Iraq was essential to their effective implementation.

The theory of collective security posits that states can achieve security and stability by working together and sharing the responsibility of maintaining peace and security (Organski, 1960). This approach emphasizes the importance of cooperation and collaboration among states to address common security challenges and threats. However, the modern concept of collective security was pioneered by Woodrow Wilson and was enshrined in the League of Nations and later the United Nations (UN) Charter. According to Morgenthau (1948), collective security is based on three prerequisites: the identification of the aggressor, the collective defense against the aggressor, and the cumulative power of the collective security arrangement being adequate to overpower the aggressor. The theory of collective security is built on the assumption that an attack on one state is an attack on all, and therefore, all states must work together to prevent aggression and maintain peace (Morgenthau, 1948). The League of Nations was the first international organization to implement the principle of collective security, but it failed to prevent World War II due to the conflicts of interest among

its member states. The United Nations also adopted the principle of collective security, but it has been criticized for its inability to prevent aggression and maintain peace in the face of conflicts of interest among its member states.

Ultimately, security groups can effectively counteract external threats. As was previously said, however, world powers outside of such groups cannot avoid the temptation to undermine their acts by exercising their veto in the UN Security Council, albeit still facing sanctions from the powerful collective security organizations and its supporters. Our research is grounded in the U.S. military engagement in Ukraine and the sanction regime in place against Russia since 2014 in response to the annexation of Crimea. There may be loopholes, legitimate concerns, and busters in these punishments. The United Nations is the primary international body whose collective security system is consistent with the use of sanctions to protect global peace, which is vital to keep in mind while looking at the Russian sanctions regime. The members of the organization have delegated to the Security Council the responsibility of ensuring international peace and security (Article 24, UN Charter). The United Nations use the leeway provided by this Article when imposing sanctions. We then examine how much leeway the United Nations, the United States, and its Western allies have under the collective security framework to ensure that the sanctions on Russia are legal, ethical, and backed by the international community.

The theory of collective security has been applied in the imposition of international sanctions on Russia, particularly in response to its actions in Ukraine. The sanctions, imposed by the international community, aim to pressure Russia to change its behavior and respect Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. However, the sanctions have had unintended consequences on human rights in Russia. The sanctions have led to economic hardship, which has disproportionately affected vulnerable populations, such as low-income families, pensioners, and individuals with disabilities. The sanctions have also limited access to healthcare and education, exacerbating existing human rights concerns in Russia. Sanctions have been criticized for their potential to harm innocent civilians, rather than just the Russian government. This has led to accusations that the sanctions are a form of collective punishment, which is prohibited under international law.

The imposition of international sanctions on Russia has also had a chilling effect on civil society and human rights defenders in the country. Many organizations and individuals have faced harassment, intimidation, and even criminal charges for their work promoting human rights and democracy. International sanctions on Russia have had unintended consequences on human rights in the country. The sanctions have perpetuated harm, undermined the well-being of innocent civilians, and created a culture of fear and silence. This highlights the need for a more nuanced approach to collective security, one that prioritizes human rights and the well-being of all individuals, rather than just punishing governments.

It is important for the international community to consider the potential consequences of sanctions on human rights and to explore alternative measures that prioritize human rights and the well-being of all individuals. This can include measures such as targeted sanctions, diplomatic efforts, and support for civil society and human rights defenders. By prioritizing human rights and the well-being of all individuals, the international community can work towards a more just and peaceful world, where collective security is achieved through cooperation and respect for human rights, rather than through punishment and coercion. International sanctions on Russia have had unintended consequences on human rights in the country. The sanctions have perpetuated harm, undermined the well-being of innocent civilians, and created a culture of fear and silence. This highlights the need for a more nuanced approach to collective security, one that prioritizes human rights and the well-being of all individuals, rather than just punishing governments.

Concept of International Sanctions

International sanctions operate as a core mechanism of foreign policy, distinguished from other coercive measures by their reliance on non-military actions to enact change within targeted states. They aim to modify or deter specific behaviors that breach international norms, often relating to human rights, nuclear proliferation, or aggression. Sanctions are conceptualized as powerful, albeit double-edged, tools that bring not only potential benefits but also significant challenges. The primary goal of sanctions, as articulated by Drezner (2022), is to impose costs on a state, compelling leaders to reconsider policies deemed hostile or unacceptable by the international community. However, their effectiveness hinges on careful alignment with diplomatic strategies, as poorly managed sanctions can lead to entrenched nationalism and domestic hardship without achieving policy changes.

The evolution from broad, economy-wide sanctions to more targeted or "smart" sanctions reflects a critical shift in sanctioning strategies aimed at mitigating the adverse effects on civilian populations. According to Biersteker and Eckert (2021), these smart sanctions, including asset freezes and targeted restrictions on specific economic sectors, aim to reduce collateral damage while applying pressure to influential actors within targeted states. These measures have shown varying degrees of effectiveness in contexts such as Iran and North Korea, where targeted sanctions aimed at nuclear

proliferation have sought to directly limit the regime's capacity while sparing the general population where possible. This selective targeting has been lauded as a more humane approach, yet it does not entirely prevent repercussions for civilians, especially in highly centralized economies where resources are largely state-controlled.

From a theoretical standpoint, sanctions are analyzed through several frameworks, each providing insights into their impact and efficacy. Constructivist theories view sanctions as symbols of international disapproval, reflecting shared norms and the collective will of the international community. The theoretical framework advanced by Baldwin (2020) suggests that sanctions are as much about sending a political message as they are about achieving direct economic damage. This symbolic value is particularly relevant in contexts where international actors wish to reaffirm their commitment to human rights or deter acts of aggression. Realist perspectives, however, tend to emphasize the material consequences of sanctions, assessing their effectiveness based on the degree of economic and political pressure they exert on targeted governments. Realist scholars argue that sanctions must be part of a broader strategic framework to prevent target states from circumventing sanctions through alternative alliances or economic networks (Martin & Simmons, 2022).

International organizations, such as the United Nations and the European Union, play a significant role in the administration of sanctions. Through multilateral sanctions, these bodies aim to standardize measures and enhance their legitimacy. For instance, the United Nations Security Council sanctions are binding on all member states, which helps minimize "sanctions busting" or violations by individual nations (Hufbauer et al., 2022). However, the efficacy of multilateral sanctions is frequently challenged by geopolitical interests, as permanent Security Council members may veto or dilute sanctions resolutions if they conflict with national interests. This tension underscores a central limitation of sanctions: their dependence on international cohesion, which is often difficult to sustain amid diverse national agendas (Kerr & Young, 2021).

Sanctions also significantly affect human rights, particularly when sanctions disproportionately impact basic economic rights by exacerbating poverty and restricting access to essential goods. Research by Peksen and Drury (2023) indicates that economic sanctions can lead to humanitarian crises in targeted states, highlighting the need for international actors to assess potential human rights impacts before implementing sanctions. In recent cases, such as sanctions imposed on Russia and Venezuela, researchers have observed an increase in poverty, inflation, and scarcity of medical supplies, which in turn destabilize public health and social welfare (Connolly, 2023). Consequently, human rights organizations and scholars advocate for the integration of humanitarian exemptions or waivers, allowing essential goods and services to reach populations in sanctioned areas, as highlighted by Afesorgbor (2022).

International sanctions, while serving as key tools of international diplomacy, must constantly adapt to address modern complexities in global politics. Sanctions against large, integrated economies, such as those on Russia following its actions in Ukraine, have shown how deeply interconnected the world economy has become and how sanctions on one major economy can lead to global repercussions. These cases underscore the importance of carefully structured and targeted sanctions that align with strategic objectives and ethical considerations, a balance that remains challenging but increasingly necessary in contemporary international relations.

Concept of International Economic Sanctions

The concept of international economic sanctions encompasses a range of actions, including trade restrictions, asset freezes, and financial prohibitions. In Nigeria, economic sanctions have been discussed extensively, particularly concerning their effectiveness and implications for human rights. For instance, Okoro (2019) notes that economic sanctions can serve as a non-violent means to address international disputes and promote compliance with international laws. However, the impact of these sanctions can be complex, leading to unintended consequences for civilian populations, particularly in countries with weak economies.

Different types of international economic sanctions can be categorized into comprehensive and targeted sanctions. Comprehensive sanctions aim to isolate a country economically, often resulting in widespread suffering among the general population. Targeted sanctions, however, focus on specific individuals, sectors, or institutions, attempting to limit the negative effects on the broader population. This distinction is crucial for understanding how sanctions can be crafted to balance political objectives with humanitarian considerations. For instance, Adetola (2020) argues that targeted sanctions may offer a more ethical approach, as they can minimize harm to innocent civilians while still applying pressure on political elites.

The objectives of international economic sanctions are varied and often context-dependent. They may aim to compel a change in government policy, deter aggressive actions, or signal disapproval of human rights abuses. According to Bassey (2021), Nigeria's imposition of sanctions often aligns with its diplomatic objectives, reflecting the need to uphold international norms and human rights standards. Moreover, sanctions can serve as tools of diplomacy, facilitating

negotiations and leveraging pressure for compliance. For instance, sanctions against certain regimes have been used as a strategic means to encourage negotiations related to disarmament or human rights reforms.

Concept of Human Rights

Human rights refers to the basic rights and freedoms to which all individuals are entitled, regardless of nationality, sex, ethnicity, or any other status. These rights are universally acknowledged and protected under international law, with foundational documents such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948. The UDHR asserts that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights, serving as a cornerstone for international human rights norms. Human rights encompass a wide range of civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights. Civil and political rights include the right to life, freedom of speech, and the right to a fair trial. Economic, social, and cultural rights cover the right to work, the right to education, and the right to an adequate standard of living (Amnesty International, 2021).

The realization of these rights is essential for individuals to live in dignity and freedom. Despite the universal acknowledgment of human rights, numerous instances of human rights abuses persist globally. In Nigeria, for example, reports have documented widespread violations, including extrajudicial killings, torture, and unlawful detention. The activities of security forces, particularly in the context of combating insurgency, have raised serious concerns about human rights violations. The Nigerian military has been accused of committing atrocities against civilians in areas affected by the Boko Haram insurgency, including killings, forced displacements, and sexual violence (Amnesty International, 2021). Human Rights Watch (2022) also highlights systemic abuses, including the unlawful killings of protesters during the #EndSARS demonstrations against police brutality in 2020.

Human rights are moral principles or norms for certain standards of human behavior and are regularly protected in municipal and international law (James Nickel, Thomas Pogge, Smith & Wenar, 2014). They are commonly understood as inalienable, fundamental rights to which a person is inherently entitled simply because she or he is a human being and which are "inherent in all human beings" regardless of their age, ethnic origin, location, language, religion, ethnicity, or any other status (The United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights, 2014). They are applicable everywhere and at every time in the sense of being universal and egalitarian in the sense of being the same for everyone (James et al., 2014). They are regarded as requiring empathy and the rule of law and imposing an obligation on persons to respect the human rights of others. It is generally considered that they should not be taken away except as a result of due process based on specific circumstances (Bass & Samuel, 2020). The ideal of free human beings enjoying civil and political freedom and freedom from fear and want can only be achieved if conditions are created whereby everyone may enjoy his civil and political rights, as well as his social, economic, and cultural rights.

The doctrine of human rights has been highly influential within international law and global and regional institutions (The United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights, 2014). Actions by states and non-governmental organizations form a basis of public policy worldwide. The idea of human rights suggests that "if the public discourse of peacetime global society can be said to have a common moral language, it is that of human rights" (Beitz & Charles, 2020). The strong claims made by the doctrine of human rights continue to provoke considerable skepticism and debates about the content, nature, and justifications of human rights to this day. The precise meaning of the term right is controversial and is the subject of continued philosophical debate (Shaw & Malcolm, 2018).

There is consensus that human rights encompass a wide variety of rights such as the right to a fair trial, protection against enslavement, prohibition of genocide, free speech or a right to education, there is disagreement about which of these particular rights should be included within the general framework of human rights (Macmillan Dictionary, 2014). Some thinkers suggest that human rights should be a minimum requirement to avoid worst-case abuses, while others see it as a higher standard (UNESCO, 2018). It has also been argued that human rights are "God-given", although this notion has been criticized (Niose & David, 2020). Many of the basic ideas that animated the human rights movement developed in the aftermath of the Second World War and the events of the Holocaust, culminating in the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Paris by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948 (Simmons & Beth, 2020). Ancient peoples did not have the same modern-day conception of universal human rights (Freeman & Michael, 2021).

5. RESEARCH METHOD

This study was conducted using the qualitative method. As such, data was collected through secondary sources which involve the use of literature materials such as textbooks, journal articles, etc. Several research designs are used in the social sciences such as experimental, quasi-experimental, survey, cross-sectional, correctional, longitudinal, descriptive, and historical research designs. This study is a descriptive research that employed a historical design that centered on

the examination of historical data about the effectiveness of international economic sanctions and human rights abuses in Russia and how these sanctions affect human rights. Using the qualitative techniques of gathering and analyzing data generated from secondary sources, it brings to light the gradual but definite transformation that occurred in the Russia and Ukraine conflict. Historical design involves the method of analytically examining and presenting past events to explain what has occurred previously concerning the effectiveness of international economic sanctions and how it affect human rights in Russia. It is not just a mere accumulation of facts, figures, and dates; it is not even a report of past events but it is a flowing dynamic explanation of past events that entails an interpretation of these events in an attempt to recapture the issues, personalities, and ideas that predisposed these events. Qualitative content analysis was used to analyze the data from secondary sources by a way of answering the research questions stated.

6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Research Question 1: How have international economic sanctions affected the human rights landscape in Russia since their implementation?

Economic sanctions have become a widely employed tool of international diplomacy to address human rights violations and enforce compliance with international norms. In the case of Russia, sanctions were significantly intensified following its annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the subsequent military actions in Ukraine. These sanctions, imposed by the United States, the European Union, and other allied nations, target various economic sectors, including finance, energy, and defense, aiming to pressuring the Russian government to improve its human rights record. However, their impact on the human rights landscape in Russia reveals a complex interplay of intended and unintended consequences.

One prominent outcome of these sanctions has been their effect on Russia's economy. The World Bank reported that the Russian economy contracted by 2.3% in 2015, a decline attributed to the combined effects of international sanctions and falling oil prices (World Bank, 2015). This economic strain was expected to weaken the government's ability to suppress dissent by reducing its financial resources. However, empirical evidence suggests a contrary trend. In response to external pressures, the Russian government tightened internal controls, curtailed freedoms, and intensified repression of political dissent. Scholars such as Drezner (2019) argue that authoritarian regimes often use sanctions as a pretext to consolidate power, framing external interventions as threats to national sovereignty.

Moreover, economic sanctions have disproportionately impacted ordinary Russians, exacerbating existing social and economic inequalities. Inflation rates surged in the aftermath of the sanctions, with the cost of basic goods rising significantly. Reports from Human Rights Watch (2023) highlighted how these economic hardships disproportionately affected vulnerable groups, including the elderly and low-income households. The increased economic strain on these populations has, paradoxically, undermined efforts to promote human rights by eroding public support for liberal democratic ideals.

Critics also point out that sanctions can inadvertently contribute to the deterioration of human rights conditions. Peksen (2009) found that economic sanctions often correlate with an increase in government crackdowns on civil liberties, as regimes attempt to maintain control amidst growing internal discontent. In Russia, the government has enacted stringent laws restricting freedom of assembly and expression, directly counteracting the intended objectives of the sanctions. Amnesty International (2022) reported a surge in politically motivated arrests and prosecutions under these laws, further underscoring the adverse impact of sanctions on human rights.

While sanctions have undeniably put pressure on the Russian government, their effectiveness in improving the human rights landscape remains debatable. The mixed outcomes suggest the need for a more nuanced approach, combining sanctions with diplomatic engagements and support for civil society actors within Russia. This multifaceted strategy could potentially mitigate the unintended consequences while maximizing the impact on human rights improvements.

Research Question 2: To what extent have targeted sanctions against specific individuals and entities been effective in curbing human rights abuses in Russia?

Targeted sanctions, often referred to as "smart sanctions," are designed to minimize collateral damage to the general population by focusing on individuals and entities directly responsible for human rights abuses. In the case of Russia, these sanctions have included asset freezes, travel bans, and restrictions on access to international financial systems for key political and business figures. Despite their strategic design, the effectiveness of these measures in curbing human rights abuses remains contested.

The European Union's adoption of the Magnitsky Act in 2020 exemplifies the targeted sanctions approach. This legislation specifically targeted individuals involved in the detention and death of Russian lawyer Sergei Magnitsky, as well as other human rights violations. According to the European Council (2024), these measures were intended to hold perpetrators accountable without imposing undue economic hardship on the general population. Similarly, the United

States has utilized the Global Magnitsky Act to sanction Russian officials implicated in extrajudicial killings, torture, and other human rights abuses (U.S. Department of State, 2023).

While these targeted measures have had some success in isolating perpetrators, their broader impact on improving human rights conditions in Russia is limited. Scholars such as Hufbauer et al. (2022) argue that targeted sanctions are more symbolic than substantive, as sanctioned individuals often find alternative financial systems or leverage domestic support to mitigate the effects. For instance, Russia's oligarchs have reportedly shifted assets to non-Western jurisdictions, undermining the sanctions' efficacy (Reuters, 2023).

Another limitation of targeted sanctions is their inability to address systemic issues. While these measures can penalize individual actors, they do not necessarily dismantle the institutional structures that enable human rights abuses. The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (2023) noted that Russia's judiciary and law enforcement agencies, key instruments of repression, remain largely unaffected by external sanctions.

Despite these challenges, targeted sanctions are important in signaling international condemnation and fostering accountability. These measures can deter future abuses and contribute to the global human rights agenda by publicly identifying and penalizing human rights violators. However, their effectiveness could be enhanced by integrating them into a broader strategy that includes diplomatic efforts, support for civil society, and capacity-building initiatives.

Research Question 3: What unintended socioeconomic consequences have economic sanctions imposed on the general Russian population?

While aimed at influencing the policies of targeted governments, economic sanctions often have broader implications that extend beyond the political elite, impacting the general population in profound ways. In Russia, the imposition of international sanctions has led to a series of unintended socioeconomic consequences, affecting various aspects of daily life for ordinary citizens. One of the most visible consequences of sanctions has been the decline in living standards. The Russian ruble's depreciation and rising inflation have significantly increased the cost of basic goods and services. According to the International Monetary Fund (2023), consumer prices in Russia rose by an average of 14% between 2022 and 2023, straining household budgets and reducing purchasing power. These economic challenges have disproportionately impacted vulnerable populations, including low-income families and retirees.

Sanctions have also disrupted access to essential goods and services. Restrictions on technology exports, for instance, have limited Russia's ability to import advanced medical equipment and pharmaceuticals. A report by Doctors Without Borders (2024) highlighted the growing challenges healthcare providers face in obtaining critical supplies, which has adversely affected the quality of care available to patients. Such disruptions exacerbate existing health disparities, particularly in rural and underserved areas. Furthermore, sanctions have had a significant impact on employment and economic opportunities. The exodus of multinational corporations from Russia, coupled with restrictions on foreign investments, has led to job losses and reduced economic growth. The World Bank (2023) estimated that Russia's unemployment rate rose to 8.5% in 2023, up from 5.3% in 2021. This increase in joblessness has contributed to social unrest and widened income inequality.

Despite these challenges, some analysts argue that the socioeconomic consequences of sanctions could ultimately foster domestic pressure for political reform. Galtung (2023) posits that sustained economic hardship may weaken public support for authoritarian regimes, creating opportunities for grassroots movements to demand change. However, in the short term, the adverse effects on the general population underscore the ethical dilemmas associated with the use of sanctions as a foreign policy tool.

MAJOR FINDINGS

Based on the analysis, the following findings were observed:

- The study revealed that economic sanctions imposed on Russia have had limited success in improving the country's human rights conditions. Instead, they have led to unintended consequences such as increased political repression and the erosion of civil liberties as the government tightens control to counter external pressures.
- The study discovered that while targeted sanctions under acts like the Global Magnitsky Act have isolated certain individuals and entities responsible for human rights abuses, their overall impact on systemic reforms remains minimal. Many sanctioned individuals have managed to evade restrictions by leveraging alternative financial systems or domestic support.
- The study found that sanctions have significantly impacted the general population in Russia, leading to rising inflation, unemployment, and limited access to essential goods and services. These hardships have disproportionately affected vulnerable groups, exacerbating social inequalities without achieving the intended policy changes.

7. CONCLUSION

Economic sanctions as a tool for addressing human rights abuses in Russia present a complex picture. While they signal international condemnation and isolate human rights violators, their broader impact reveals a mix of successes and challenges. The unintended socioeconomic consequences, coupled with limited systemic changes, highlight the need for a more comprehensive and strategic approach. Policymakers must strike a balance between enforcing accountability and minimizing harm to ordinary citizens.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusion drawn, the following recommendations were made:

- Improve the design and enforcement of targeted sanctions to prevent evasion and ensure they directly impact perpetrators of human rights abuses. This can include greater international coordination and the use of advanced financial tracking mechanisms.
- Provide increased support for civil society organizations within Russia to empower grassroots movements and promote human rights from within. This could involve funding, training, and safe channels for communication and advocacy.
- Combine sanctions with diplomatic initiatives to engage the Russian government in dialogue aimed at systemic reforms. This could involve leveraging multilateral platforms to foster negotiations and incentivize compliance with international human rights standards.

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