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What is This?

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Dursun Peksen

Abstract

Despite the central role the media play in the domestic and foreign policy-making processes, very little research examines the influence of international factors on media openness. This article investigates the impact of coercive diplomacy (in the form of economic sanctions) on press freedom. It is argued that foreign economic coercion will likely deteriorate press freedom by (1) restricting a sanctioned country's interactions with the outside world, thereby allowing the target regime to have greater control over the free flows of information, and (2) inflicting significant economic damage on the sustainability and development of independent media outlets. Using time-series, cross-national empirical data over a large number of countries for the period 1980–2000, the findings confirm economic sanctions' negative effect on media openness. Extensive sanctions, in particular, have a greater negative impact on press freedom than more selective sanctions. Furthermore, multilateral sanctions will likely have a greater corrosive impact on media openness than unilateral sanctions.

Keywords

foreign policy analysis, economic sanctions, press freedom, coercive diplomacy, international politics

Introduction

A free press is considered vital in promoting political transparency (Besley et al., 2002; Brunetti and Weder, 2003; Lindstedt and Naurin, 2010), economic development (Coyne and Leeson, 2004; Norris, 2004; Sen, 1999; World Bank, 2002), peaceful interstate relations (Choi and James, 2007; Van Belle, 2000), and democracy (Gunther and Mughan, 2000; Keane, 1991; Lichtenberg, 1987; O'Neil, 1998).[1] Accordingly, freedom of the press (a relative lack of governmental restraint of the media and free flows of news and information by local or international sources) is viewed as an important institutional factor that influences economic prosperity and political stability. Despite the recognized significance of the independent media as a central actor in politics, our understanding of the possible

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impact that international factors might have on press freedom is limited. There is an abundance of research that examines the complex relationship between the press and political elites (for example, Brody, 1992; Cook, 1998; Lewis, 2001), the media's role in shaping public opinion on international events (for example, Baum, 2003; Bennett and Paletz, 1994), and the effect of news coverage on foreign policy decisions (for example, Rioux and Van Belle, 2005; Robinson, 1999). Yet, these studies generally overlook the question of whether the use of various foreign policy tools has any major impact on the freedom of the mass media. Given the importance placed on the mass media and the beneficial consequences of a free press for political transparency and economic prosperity, it is important that we fully understand the impact foreign policy tools have on media openness.

This article examines the question of whether coercive diplomacy (in the form of economic sanctions) affects media freedom in target countries. Economic coercion is an ubiquitous feature of international politics used to achieve a variety of foreign policy goals. Some of those major goals include the impairment of the target country's military potential, the destabilization of hostile regimes, the settlement of expropriation claims and trade disputes, the prevention of drug trafficking, retaliation for diplomatic crises, the punishment of rogue states harboring terrorist groups, and the promotion of democracy and human rights. Although the USA is the major sanctioning country with well in excess of 30 sanctions in the 1990s alone, several other countries, such as China, India, western European countries, the Soviet Union and Russia, the members of the Arab League, Malaysia, South Africa, and Turkey, use economic coercion in their foreign policies (Hufbauer et al., 2008). Hence, economic sanctions are used by democratic regimes as well as non-democracies in pursuing their foreign policy goals.[2]

Despite being advocated as a 'nonviolent' policy tool, economic coercion often exacts significant humanitarian, economic, and political costs in the sanctioned countries (for example, Allen, 2008; Cortright and Lopez, 1995; Gibbons, 1999; Marinov, 2005; Peksen, 2009; Weiss, 1999). Focusing on the negative externalities that economic sanctions have on socioeconomic and political stability in the target, this article investigates whether economic sanctions affect the level of press freedom in target countries. Specifically, I argue that economic coercion inadvertently deteriorates press freedom by (1) isolating the sanctioned countries from external economic and political influences, thereby creating conditions for more governmental control over the mass media, and (2) inflicting significant economic damage on independent media outlets. Utilizing time-series, cross-national empirical data over a large number of countries for the period 1980–2000, the data analysis shows that economic sanctions will likely decrease the level of media openness in target countries. According to the results, comprehensive sanctions that cut almost all economic ties between the target and sender countries appear to have a greater negative impact on press freedom than more selective or limited sanctions. Furthermore, multilateral sanctions imposed under the auspices of international organizations (IOs) or by multiple countries without any IO involvement have a greater corrosive impact on the media than unilateral sanctions.

The rest of the article proceeds as follows. The second section briefly discusses the consequences of economic sanctions. This section is followed by a theoretical account of the connection between sanctions and media independence. The next sections then introduce the research design and report the findings from the data analysis. The article concludes by discussing the implications of the study for policy circles and scholarly research on foreign policy analysis.

The unintended consequences of economic sanctions

A significant portion of the literature on economic sanctions has been devoted to understanding whether and when economic sanctions might work (for example, Drezner, 1998, 2000, 2003;

Drury, 1998, 2005; Hufbauer et al., 1990; Kaempfer and Lowenberg, 1992; Kirshner, 1997; Martin, 1992; Morgan and Schwebach, 1997). Scholars generally recognize that sanctions rarely induce a behavioral change in the target in the direction desired by sender countries (for example, Hufbauer et al., 1990; Pape, 1997). A strand of the sanctions literature has also shown that economic coercion might inflict serious, inadvertent humanitarian and political costs on the target. Researchers show that sanctions can lead to civilian pain by disrupting the economic, demographic, health, and governance capacity of target countries (for example, Allen, 2008; Andreas, 2005; Cortright and Lopez, 1995; Gibbons, 1999; Marinov, 2005; Peksen, 2009; Weiss, 1999; Weiss et al., 1997).

Sanctions could also lead to serious political consequences that were not originally intended by sender countries, such as worsening the level of human rights and democratic freedoms in the sanctioned countries (Drury and Li, 2006; Gibbons, 1999; Weiss, 1999). As economic sanctions disrupt the economic and political stability of the target, the foreign economic pressures might also become a major threat to the tenure of the target's political leadership (Marinov, 2005). Recent studies further improve our understanding of the possible political consequences of sanctions by claiming that economic sanctions increase the likelihood of political violence (Allen, 2008) and the violation of the basic human rights of citizens in sanctioned countries (Peksen, 2009; Wood, 2008; see also Gibbons, 1999). None of these studies, however, addresses the effect of foreign economic coercion on press freedom. Drawing insight from the literature on the consequences of sanctions, in the following section I show how sanctions cause significant inadvertent damage to press freedom in target countries.

Theoretical framework

Sanctioning countries initially apply foreign economic pressure against a target state hoping that economic disruption caused by the coercion will imperil the legitimacy and authority of the target regime. The aim of applying sanctions is to force the target state to give in to the demands of the sender countries (Galtung, 1967; Kirshner, 1997). The literature on the consequences of economic coercion, however, shows that sanctions hardly harm the economic and political capacity of the targeted regimes, while significantly impairing the socioeconomic and political well-being of average civilians (for example, Cortright et al., 2001; Gibbons, 1999; Weiss, 1999; Weiss et al., 1997). Therefore, economic coercion will be unlikely to disturb the repressive capacity and legitimacy of the target political leadership, and hence will not promote more freedoms, including greater freedoms of association, speech, and communication, especially in less-democratic systems. On the contrary, a focus on the unintended political repercussions and economic disruption caused by the coercion suggests that sanctions are likely to worsen the level of press freedom in the sanctioned countries by (1) increasing governmental restrictions and repression against the media following the growing economic and political isolation of the target regimes and (2) reducing the economic viability and development of independent media outlets. Below, I detail each aspect of this argument on how sanctions deteriorate press freedom.[3]

Growing international isolation of the target and press freedom

Foreign economic pressure and the growing exclusion of the target countries will likely create new incentives for the political leadership to commit state censorship and resort to media repression. Since economic sanctions aim at reducing the economic flows (that is, the international movement of capital, goods, services, and labor) and diplomatic ties between the sender and target countries (Hufbauer et al., 1997), the sanctioned regimes perceive the foreign economic pressures from

external actors as a threat to their regime survival (Drury and Li, 2006; Galtung, 1967; Morgan and Schwebach, 1997). Specifically, as the target regime's diplomatic relations strain with the international community and sanctions might cause serious socioeconomic and political costs within the target, economic coercion might invite more criticism by the independent media and opposition groups of the government's handling of relations with the outside world. The mounting criticism of the leadership by the groups outside the government will subsequently harm the legitimacy and support of the political leadership among citizens (Allen, 2008; Marinov, 2005). It has been shown by earlier research on sanctions that targeted regimes will likely resort to political repression to undermine opposition movements and avoid erosion of their own authority over societies under the shadow of economic sanctions (Peksen, 2009).

Along with restrictions on political freedoms, given the role that the independent media play in the dissemination of diverse news and opinions to the public, private and independent media enterprises become the obvious targets of repression, ranging from state censorship to actual physical repression in the form of arbitrary imprisonment, torture, and assassination by government forces (Hosp, 2003; Wintrobe, 1998). Specifically, media repression by the government is common during such international crises as foreign sanctions because controlling information and limiting the exposure of the public to diverse and alternative news is crucial for political elites to shape public opinion and maintain the status quo (Gunther and Mughan, 2000; Keane, 1991; Wintrobe, 1998). In addition to the repression of domestic media groups, the international ban on economic and political exchanges imposed on the target also motivates the target leadership to reduce the extent of the flows of news from international sources into the target country and cut free and open communication between local and international news organizations (Brunn and Leinback, 1991; Devin and Dashti-Gibson, 1997: 180–2; Gibbons, 1999; Price, 2002). Hence, as the target political leadership is isolated in the face of external threats and becomes more repressive, the ability of independent media outlets to operate freely without governmental restraints will decline. As a result, economic sanctions will encourage the target government to impose restrictions over the coverage and dissemination of public information that limit the exposure of the public to diverse and alternative news (Brunn and Leinback, 1991; Gibbons, 1999: 39–41; Price, 2002).

To illustrate this mechanism, I briefly turn to two case studies: multilateral sanctions against the Former Yugoslavia (1992–2001) and US sanctions against Iran since the early 1980s. The purpose of multilateral sanctions against Yugoslavia was to cease ethnic violence and punish the Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic's aggressive nationalism (Cortright and Lopez, 2000; Devin and Dashti-Gibson, 1997; Hufbauer et al., 2008). Devin and Dashti-Gibson (1997: 180) report that the sanctions created conditions for the political leadership to employ repression against the media. They specifically suggest that the international ban on cultural, economic, and educational exchanges imposed on the Former Yugoslavia by sanctioning countries isolated the target regime and restricted the ability of independent media outlets to communicate with the outside world. Meanwhile, the international isolation allowed Milosevic's regime to consolidate its power, committing repression against the media and imposing restrictions over the flows and coverage of public information. According to the Freedom House's (2006) *Freedom of the Press* report, the level of press freedom shifted from being 'partially free' in 1991 to 'not free' in 1992 and the lack of press freedom persisted during the entire episode of the sanctions against Yugoslavia (1992–2001). Overall, with the growing isolation of society and consolidation of the coercive power of the Serbian regime under economic sanctions, the media had very limited independence and was used by Milosevic for nationalist propaganda until he was forced to resign following the disputed presidential elections in September 2000 and amid growing domestic and international pressures.

Similarly, comprehensive US sanctions against Iran since the early 1980s contributed to the lack of media openness. The theocratic regime in Iran emphasizes control of the press as an essential tool to weaken domestic opposition groups and maintain its authority over Iranian society in the face of foreign diplomatic and economic pressures (Abdo, 2003; Khiabany and Sreberny, 2001). Specifically, the use of repressive measures against the media helps the political leadership promote the regime's ideology and policies in handling relations with the outside world. The Iranian regime resorts to several strategies for the media repression, including applying strict state censorship over the coverage and publication of public information, cancelling the licenses of pro-reform, independent media groups, and limiting foreign broadcasts into Iran (Samii, 1999). Consequently, economic sanctions contribute to the lack of press freedom by creating incentives for the Iranian regime to commit media repression to maintain the status quo and shape public opinion on domestic and international issues.

Unintended, disproportionate economic cost and the media

The second major impact that economic coercion has on press freedom is related to the economic cost of sanctions on the development and sustainability of independent media outlets. Sanctions inflict considerable economic damage in the targeted countries by disrupting the regular functioning of the target economy's relations with the outside world and restricting the target's access to scarce external economic resources that are essential to maintain normal living conditions (for example, Cortright and Lopez, 1995, 2000; Cortright et al., 2001; Galtung, 1967; Gibbons, 1999; Haas, 1997; Lopez and Cortright, 1997; Weiss, 1999; Weiss et al., 1997). More importantly, economic coercion is especially detrimental to those groups outside the target regime's supporter base because political elites manipulate economic coercion to escape the cost of sanctions. Specifically, since the target regime controls access to and redistribution of scarce resources, it redirects the economy so that it will have sufficient access to these scarce resources, while citizens disproportionately bear the cost (Rowe, 2000; Weiss et al., 1997; Weiss, 1999).

Due to the disproportionate economic cost of sanctions on groups outside 'the winning coalition' of the political leadership (for example, Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2003; Cortright and Lopez, 1995; Gibbons, 1999; Weiss, 1999; Wintrobe, 1990, 1998), independent media organizations (newspapers and broadcasts alike) will be among the first groups to bear the economic burden of sanctions (Devin and Dashti-Gibson, 1997: 180–1; Gibbons, 1999: 39–41). Economic hardship especially undermines the economic stability and operations of privately run media outlets, which will lead to the exit of some news outlets from the media industry. Economic damage caused by sanctions in the targeted countries not only threatens the sustainability of the existing media outlets, but also hinders the entry of new private and independent media organizations to the media industry, which thereby increases the concentration of media ownership (that is, media consolidation). Advocates of public choice theory suggest that concentrated media ownership controlled by the government-owned media or by a small group of private interests is a serious challenge to media independence (Baker, 2002, 2007; Besley and Burgess, 2002; Djankov et al., 2003). According to this view, competition among private and independent media groups is key for the supply of diverse news and opinions to the public. In addition, the existence of a wider spectrum of private and free media outlets in the media industry is essential to produce more balanced and accurate news and public information. Hence, an increase in media consolidation caused by the economic disruption of sanctions further undermines press freedom by restricting the availability of various media venues to disseminate diverse views and more balanced information.

The independent media organizations that survive economic sanctions, on the other hand, become more dependent on state subsidies to sustain their operations and remain vulnerable to advertising boycotts and other forms of market coercion by the state (Rockwell and Janus, 2002: 332–3). Growing intervention in the public press is detrimental for media independence because governments use financial subsidies as an instrument to influence news coverage indirectly and to ensure the dissemination of biased information reflecting the government's position (Baker, 2007; Keane, 1991; Murschetz, 1998; Rockwell and Janus, 2002). Consequently, growing dependence on state subsidies because of the economic hardship caused by sanctions harms the ability of the media to maintain relative autonomy from the government and continue to serve as a forum for a wide spectrum of interests and opinions.

In the case of US sanctions against Haiti (during 1991–94), for instance, Gibbons (1999) points out that the comprehensive fuel embargo and other trade restrictions imposed on Haitian society inflicted significant damage on the economic sustainability and operations of the few remaining independent radio stations and newspapers. In her detailed study of the sanctions against Haiti, she suggests that the growing economic burden of the fuel embargo and the subsequent electricity blackouts in Haiti forced the privately run radio stations either 'to cease operations or drastically reduce their broadcasting hours as the cost of fuel to run generators soared to unaffordable levels' (Gibbons, 1999: 40). In addition, access to energy and other economic costs of the sanctions deteriorated to such an extent that the Haitian private newspapers would appear only three days a week, thus posing a direct a challenge to freedom of information in Haiti (Gibbons, 1999: 39–41).

Research design

To examine the hypothesis that economic coercion deteriorates the level of press freedom in the targeted countries, I use a time-series, cross-sectional dataset composed of 147 countries for the period 1980–2000. The temporal domain and number of countries included in the models are determined by the availability of data for press freedom (available since 1980) and economic sanctions from existing data sources. While the data analysis primarily utilizes a global sample to test the hypothesis, I also run additional models that include only developing countries. The use of a restricted sample aims at undermining any possible bias resulting from the inclusion of economically advanced countries in the data analysis. That is, because of developed countries' greater economic wealth and stability, some analysts may claim that developed countries are unlikely to suffer from economic sanctions as much as developing countries, since the latter have a much weaker economic capacity to cope with foreign economic pressures. Although there is no established convention for distinguishing developed and developing states, scholars often use income per capita to determine the economic development level of a country. For statistical convenience, this study uses the IMF's designation of 'developing' and 'developed' economies, which utilizes the income level of countries as the basis of coding. The IMF's (2008) World Economic Outlook database identifies 32 economies as advanced or developed, while other economies are listed as developing economies.[4]

Dependent variable

I use the 'status of press freedom' variable of Freedom House's (2006) *Freedom of the Press* survey, which provides numerical data on a comparative basis for more than 180 countries since 1980. The status of press freedom variable is a three-category ordinal variable with the values 2 ('Free'),

1 ('Partly Free'), or 0 ('Not Free'), where higher values indicate more press freedom.[5] There are three areas (the political, economic, and legal environments) that the Freedom House survey primarily examines in each country to assign the comparative numerical data.[6] The status of press freedom variable considers the extent to which each country allows free flows of news and information in the media without governmental restrictions as well as measuring the level of media independence based on the degree to which information and news diversity is available from either national or international sources (Freedom House, 2006).

The Freedom House (2006) data show significant variance in press freedom across countries. While democracies are more prone to greater press freedom (Gunther and Mughan, 2000; Keane, 1991), several democratic regimes (for example, Greece, Croatia, France, and Finland) have suffered from the lack of a free press in their recent histories. Likewise, we observe that several authoritarian or less democratic states allow a free press (for example, Bolivia, Gambia, and Thailand) or a partially free press (for example, Egypt, Ghana, Turkey, and Mexico), confirming the variance in press freedom across different political regimes.

Independent variables

Economic sanctions refer to government-led trade and financial coercion, such as export restrictions, investment bans, asset freezes, reduction or suspension of military aid, and restrictions on limited dual-use technologies. The data on economic sanctions are from Hufbauer et al. (2008), the most widely used data source on economic sanctions.[7] The data analysis focuses only on imposed economic sanctions. The compiled data include both unilateral sanctions initiated by individual countries such as the USA as well as multilateral sanctions imposed by multiple countries with or without the involvement of the United Nations (UN) or regional intergovernmental organizations such as the European Union (EU) and the Organization of African Unity (OAU).

In order to examine the inadvertent impact of economic sanctions on press freedom, the first variable (that is, economic sanctions) is a dichotomous variable that accounts for the role of coercion in general. It takes a value of 1 if a country is under any type of sanctions in a given year and 0 otherwise. In addition to the simple dummy variable to account for the presence of sanctions in a country, we also run additional models to investigate whether the severity and the number of actors involved in the imposition of sanctions play a significant role in the level of media openness.

Accounting for the comprehensiveness of coercion is essential given that the extent of economic and political hardship that sanctions inflict on the target vary especially between comprehensive or extensive sanctions and limited or selective sanctions. More specifically, the literature on the unintended consequences of sanctions finds convincing evidence suggesting that extensive sanctions that impose comprehensive economic pressure, as in the cases of Cuba, Iraq, and Yugoslavia, will result in greater economic and political suffering than more selective sanctions (Cortright and Lopez, 2000; Gibbons, 1999; Hufbauer et al., 1997; Weiss, 1999; Weiss et al., 1997). Although selective sanctions that impose partial financial or trade-related limitations will also result in economic disruption and political repercussions, their negative impact is expected to be moderate due to less economic pain being inflicted on the target. Therefore, we anticipate that the expected negative impact of economic coercion on press freedom will be greater in those countries under extensive sanctions than in those facing limited sanctions.

To examine the role of the severity of sanctions, we created two additional dichotomous variables: extensive sanctions and limited sanctions (Hufbauer and Oegg, 2003; Hufbauer et al., 1997; Yang et al., 2004). The extensive sanctions variable takes a value of 1 if a country is under

comprehensive sanctions and 0 otherwise. Similarly, the limited sanctions variable is coded as 1 where a country is facing partial economic sanctions and 0 otherwise.[8] Comprehensive or extensive sanctions refer to imposed sanctions that restrict (almost) all major trade and financial relations between the target and imposer countries (Hufbauer and Oegg, 2003; Hufbauer et al., 1997; Yang et al., 2004). Selective or partial sanctions include all limited economic restrictions, such as investment bans or asset freezes and partial export restrictions, the reduction or suspension of arms exports or limited dual-use technologies, constraints on military and other sorts of aid, and travel restrictions (Hufbauer et al., 1997).

I also examine whether multilateral sanctions imposed by multiple countries with or without the involvement of intergovernmental organizations have a greater negative impact on press freedom than unilateral sanctions that are imposed by individual countries without any involvement of international institutions. We expect that multilateral sanctions will be more detrimental to media openness because multiple countries are putting pressure on target countries, which leads to greater economic damage and greater exclusion of the target from global economic and political forces (Cortright and Lopez, 1995; Heine-Ellison, 2001). It should subsequently cause more governmental control and restrictions over the flow and diversity of news coverage.

Hence, the multilateral sanctions and unilateral sanctions variables examine whether the number of imposers involved in the coercion has any major differential impact on the target's media freedom. The multilateral sanctions variable is a dummy variable that takes a value of 1 if a country is under sanctions imposed by the UN or major regional organizations or a group of countries without any international organization involvement (such as the sanctions against Zaire between 1990 and 1997 by Belgium, France, and the USA) and 0 otherwise; the unilateral sanctions variable, on the other hand, takes a value of 1 only if the target faces sanctions imposed by individual countries without any involvement of international organizations, such as the US sanctions against Cameroon (1992–98) and the Russian sanctions against Kazakhstan (1993–96).

Control variables

A battery of control variables is also included in the analysis to control for other major significant factors in predicting the level of media openness. The democracy variable controls for the impact of the regime type on press freedom. We expect that countries ruled by democratic regimes will have greater press freedom since democracies respect political rights and civil liberties, including respect for freedom of expression and freedom of association. Furthermore, the legal rules established to protect the independence of the media will be strictly applied since democratic leaders are constrained by the rule of law in those countries (for example, Gunther and Mughan, 2000). The regime variable is the Polity IV dataset's Polity2 index, which is constructed by subtracting the 10-point democracy index that identifies the democratic characteristics of a polity from the 10-point autocracy index that measures its autocratic features (Marshall and Jaggers, 2002). Therefore, the democracy score ranges from –10 (most autocratic) to 10 (most democratic). The natural log of gross domestic product (GDP) per capita is included to control for the effect of economic developmental differences across countries. The level of economic development controls for the argument that economic wealth is essential for the emergence of a strong middle class to create more demand for freedoms and responsive government (Barro, 1999; Epstein et al., 2006; Lipset, 1959). Furthermore, economic development also contributes to the emergence of new media organizations

and helps existing media outlets maintain their operations with less dependence on state subsidies, thereby avoiding the concentration of media ownership in a few hands (Baker, 2002).

In order to account for the level of economic openness, the natural log of international trade is used in the analysis, which accounts for the sum of exports as a percentage of GDP in a given year (Baldwin, 2006). Economic openness is associated with higher flows of free information and transnational exchanges. It will reduce information costs and increase citizens' exposure to diverse views and information. Hence, as countries become more globalized, the ability of the government to exert control over information will decline and local and international media outlets will have more access to news and information (for example, Brunn and Leinback, 1991; Keck and Sikkink, 1998). The data for trade flows and GDP per capita are from Barbieri et al. (2008) and the *World Development Indicators* (World Bank, 2004), respectively. We also control for the impact of education on the media. We expect that a well-educated and politically more attentive public will be in a better position to enhance press freedom by staying informed and seeking alternative sources of information. Furthermore, educated people tend to support liberal and democratic values and put greater pressure on political leaders to become accountable toward the public (for example, Geddes, 1999; Lipset, 1959; Przeworski et al., 2000). The education variable is the natural log of the attainment of secondary school education measured as a percentage of the total population (female and male) aged 25 and over. The data for this variable is from Barro and Lee (2001).

Methodological issues

There are a few major methodological issues that require clarification before reporting the data findings. Diagnostic tests reveal that both dependent variables have a significant, strong autoregressive process, a common issue when time-series, cross-sectional data are utilized (Beck and Katz, 1995). Following the common practice in the literature, I correct this by including in each model the past press freedom variable (a one-year lag of the dependent variable) that controls for autocorrelation. Theoretically, lagging the dependent variable is also necessary to control for the fact that the previous year's level of press freedom in a country is a significant predictor of the current year's media freedom, given that change in the level of media openness is likely a slow process in most countries.

Because the dependent variable utilized in the analysis is an ordinal variable, all the models are reported using ordered logit regression (Long, 1997). The use of a probit estimator did not produce substantially different results. Finally, the Huber/White sandwich estimator of variance clustered on the country code is included in each model in order to obtain robust standard errors, which assumes nonindependence within clusters. All data were estimated with Stata 9.0.

Findings

Table 1 reports the findings from the data analysis. The first three models utilize a global sample. I also repeat the analysis using a sample that only includes developing countries (Models 4, 5, and 6). For both analyses in the table, the first model examines the impact of economic sanctions in general on press freedom, while the second and third models explore whether the severity and the number of actors involved in the imposition process affect the level of press freedom in the sanctioned countries, respectively. The results in Table 1 show that economic sanctions in general

Table 1. Logit Models for the Impact of Economic Sanctions on Press Freedom

	Global sample			Developing countries only		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Economic sanctions (all)	−0.943*** (0.272)			−0.932*** (0.268)		
Extensive sanctions		−1.699***(0.376)			−1.704*** (0.372)	
Limited sanctions		−0.845*** (0.297)			−0.831*** (0.291)	
Multilateral sanctions			−0.897*** (0.328)			−0.913*** (0.320)
Unilateral sanctions			−0.687*** (0.258)			−0.662*** (0.256)
Democracy	0.196*** (0.016)	0.195*** (0.016)	0.196*** (0.016)	0.193*** (0.016)	0.192*** (0.016)	0.193*** (0.016)
GDP per capita (logged)	0.334*** (0.079)	0.332*** (0.079)	0.341*** (0.078)	0.304*** (0.092)	0.300*** (0.092)	0.307*** (0.091)
Trade (logged)	−0.864 (0.737)	−0.914 (0.742)	−0.781 (0.739)	−0.862 (0.762)	−0.909 (0.768)	−0.761 (0.763)
Education (logged)	0.033 (0.109)	0.039 (0.110)	0.009 (0.106)	0.031 (0.109)	0.039 (0.110)	0.008 (0.110)
Past press freedom	4.199*** (0.165)	4.193*** (0.166)	4.199*** (0.165)	4.028*** (0.162)	4.021*** (0.163)	4.026*** (0.162)
Log-pseudo likelihood	−678.74	−677.69	−678.78	−636.75	−635.62	−636.77
Chi-square	888.51	895.81	902.68	785.23	792.08	800.65
Pseudo r^2	0.74	0.74	0.74	0.68	0.68	0.68
N	2401	2401	2401	1925	1925	1925

Notes: *** Significant at 1 percent, ** significant at 5 percent, * significant at 10 percent. Robust standard errors adjusted for clustering over a country appear in parentheses. The dependent variable is the status of press freedom (Freedom House, 2006).

cause significant damage to press freedom in the sanctioned countries. As argued above, economic sanctions cause a significant, negative impact on the media because coercion deteriorates the economic sustainability of media organizations and creates conditions for the target leadership to employ more repression and restraints against the media.

The results for the severity of economic sanctions (Models 2 and 5) demonstrate that both extensive and limited sanctions have a statistically significant inadvertent corrosive impact on press freedom. The models that look at the possible differential impact of unilateral and multilateral sanctions also confirm that both types of sanctions will cause significant damage to the media's independence and sustainability under foreign economic pressures. Overall, the results show that economic sanctions as a commonly used and coercive diplomatic tool cause severe externalities by worsening the level of media freedom in target countries. The results hold even when a restricted sample of developing countries is used for the empirical analysis.

Among the control variables in Table 1, the GDP per capita, democracy, and past press freedom variables are statistically significant across the models, while the international trade and education variables fail to show any statistically significant association with the dependent variable. Hence, we observe that countries with better economic conditions, more democratic regimes, and higher press freedom in their recent histories will likely have greater press freedom.

How large is the impact of economic sanctions on the predicted probability of press freedom in the targeted countries? Using the first three models of Table 1, I estimate how much the predicted probability of 'no press freedom', which is the third category of the dependent variable, increases in a country moving from being under no economic coercion to becoming a target of economic coercion, while holding all other variables at their mean values.[9] Based on the results (shown in Table 2), moving from no sanctions to any type of economic sanction will increase the predicted probability of no press freedom by 132 percent.

The predicted probabilities of no press freedom under extensive and limited sanctions clearly show why the severity of the coercion is a key factor in understanding the extent to which foreign economic coercion may become very detrimental to the freedom of independent media outlets. That is, while extensive sanctions increase the predicted probability of no press freedom in a country by more than 322 percent, the impact of limited sanctions appears to be more modest. They cause a 138 percent increase in the predicted probability of no press freedom. These findings confirm the assertion that extensive sanctions pose a greater threat to press freedom than limited sanctions due to the greater economic damage of extensive sanctions on the sustainability and development of media organizations. According to the results in Table 2, moving

Table 2. The Predicted Probability of a 'Not Free' Press in Sanctioned Countries

	No sanction	Sanction	Absolute change
	Initial value	New value	New Value (% Δ)
Economic sanctions	0.065	0.151	0.086 (132%)
Extensive sanctions	0.065	0.274	0.209 (322%)
Limited sanctions	0.065	0.139	0.074 (138%)
Multilateral sanctions	0.066	0.147	0.081 (127%)
Unilateral sanctions	0.066	0.122	0.056 (85%)

from no sanction to multilateral sanctions will cause a greater increase (127 percent) in the predicted probability of no press freedom than sanctions imposed unilaterally by individual countries (85 percent). The difference in the substantive impact of multilateral and unilateral sanctions verifies that multilateral sanctions inflict more damage on the operation of the media because multiple countries cooperate to isolate the target from international economic and political exchanges, which creates more opportunities for the regime to apply restrictions over the flow of public information and coverage of news.

Robustness check

To check the robustness of findings to the selection of the dependent variable, I also use Van Belle's (1997) global press freedom data, which provides numerical data for a longer period (1948–95). In this article, I limit the analysis to the 1970–95 time period, for which more consistent and reliable data is available for developing countries in particular. Van Belle's media openness variable was originally based on a five-category coding scheme: the 'press is non-existent or too limited to code' (coded 0); the 'press is clearly free and the news media are capable of functioning as an arena of political competition' (coded 1); 'press freedom is compromised by corruption or unofficial influence, but the news media are still capable of functioning as an arena of political competition' (coded 2); the 'press is not controlled by the government, but it is not capable of functioning as an arena of political competition or debate' (coded 3); and the 'press is directly controlled by the government or strictly censored' (coded 4) (Van Belle, 1997: 408). Scholars who use this measure tend to use it as a dichotomous variable by merging categories 1 and 2 as 'Free Press' and the other three categories (0, 3, and 4) as 'Restricted Press' (see, for example, Choi and James, 2007; Van Belle, 2000). I follow their lead and use the media openness variable as a dichotomous variable that takes a value of 1 for categories 1 and 2 ('Free Press') or of 0 for categories 3 and 4 ('Restricted Press').[10]

As in the models using the status of press freedom variable in Table 1, the findings in Table 3 confirm that economic sanctions in general will significantly damage the level of press freedom in those countries under coercion. Furthermore, the level of the suggested corrosive impact varies depending on the severity of the coercion and the involvement of international organizations during the imposition of sanctions. This robustness check provides further evidence suggesting that the corrosive impact of economic coercion on media independence is robust to data specifications.

It is worth noting here that in some sanction cases the use of foreign economic pressure may have no major impact on the level of media openness, as in China's trade sanctions against France (1992–94). This unique outcome can be attributed to two factors. First, the target country (France) in this sanction case is a consolidated democracy with a long history of freedoms of association, speech, and communication. As the results from the data analysis above suggest, democracies are likely to have higher levels of media openness and freedom. Hence, external economic pressures appear to be less corrosive on the media in democratic states. Second, because the target in this sanction case is an economically developed country, foreign economic pressure inflicted very minimal costs on its economy. It consequently did not cause any major economic disruption over the development and sustainability of independent media outlets. Therefore, we expect that the suggested cost of sanctions on the media will be more significant in non-democracies with weak economic capacity to handle foreign economic coercion.

Table 3. Logit Models for the Impact of Economic Sanctions on Press Freedom

	Global sample			Developing countries only		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Economic sanctions (all)	−1.704*** (0.613)			−1.667*** (0.608)		
Extensive sanctions		−3.575*** (0.682)			−3.379*** (0.703)	
Limited sanctions		−1.292** (0.641)			−1.273** (0.631)	
Multilateral sanctions			−1.385** (0.634)			−1.351** (0.638)
Unilateral sanctions			−1.718** (0.748)			−1.689** (0.747)
Democracy	0.176*** (0.029)	0.173*** (0.029)	0.177*** (0.029)	0.167*** (0.027)	0.163*** (0.028)	0.169*** (0.027)
GDP per capita (logged)	−0.095 (0.153)	−0.099 (0.154)	−0.091 (0.153)	−0.121 (0.170)	−0.140 (0.172)	−0.109 (0.170)
Trade (logged)	−0.529 (1.061)	−0.563 (1.046)	−0.532 (1.055)	−0.626 (1.078)	−0.613 (1.043)	−0.647 (1.082)
Education (logged)	−0.019 (0.230)	−0.038 (0.227)	−0.024 (0.229)	−0.072 (0.207)	−0.082 (0.206)	−0.079 (0.206)
Past press freedom	7.428*** (0.387)	7.480*** (0.393)	7.416*** (0.390)	6.995*** (0.369)	7.045*** (0.375)	6.981*** (0.372)
Log-pseudo likelihood	−188.51	−186.91	−188.18	−174.29	−172.89	−173.94
Chi-square	496.38	508.37	510.45	458.31	454.91	474.02
Pseudo r^2	0.89	0.89	0.89	0.85	0.85	0.85
N	2668	2668	2668	2089	2089	2089

Notes: *** Significant at 1 percent; ** significant at 5 percent; * significant at 10 percent. Robust standard errors adjusted for clustering over a country appear in parentheses. The dependent variable is media openness (Van Belle, 1997).

Conclusion

This article offers the first comprehensive examination of the impact that coercive foreign policy tools (in the form of economic sanctions) have on press freedom in target countries. The findings offer strong empirical evidence that economic sanctions will likely inflict significant damage on media independence. The results also provide support for the assertion that extensive sanctions cause greater damage to press freedom than limited sanctions. Because extensive sanctions pose a greater economic challenge for the sustainability of independent media outlets, there will be more dependence on state subsidies and more concentrated media ownership, which results in reduced exposure of the public to diverse news and opinions. In addition, the findings demonstrate that multilateral sanctions lead to more deterioration of press freedom than unilateral sanctions. It is evident that multilateral sanctions significantly restrict the economic and political exchanges of the target with the outside world, which allows the political leadership to have stricter control over flows of public information and the operations of local and international media sources.

The findings of this study have significant implications for various strands of the literature. First, addressing the inadvertent impact of foreign economic coercion on media openness, this study contributes to the literature on the foreign policy and media nexus. As opposed to the extant literature's dominant focus on the domestic political aspects of media–government relations and how the media might influence foreign policy decisions, it is shown that economic coercion, as one of the most frequently used foreign policy tools, deteriorates media–government relations and worsens the level of press freedom in target countries. The findings also speak to the scholarship devoted to the consequences of economic statecraft. A strand of the literature on the consequences of sanctions addresses the effect of sanctions on political survival, human rights violations, and domestic violence. The findings of this article complement this line of research by highlighting the unintended negative impact of such coercion on press freedom.

The frequent use of sanctions as a foreign policy tool suggests that economic coercion is a popular policy instrument of international politics. Although policy-makers often utilize this nonviolent policy tool as an alternative to other policy tools (for example, diplomacy, foreign economic assistance, and military force), our understanding of whether economic coercion causes any inadvertent consequences for targeted countries remains limited. While policy-makers are well aware of the low success rate and possible humanitarian consequences of sanctions, there have been very few studies that look at the unintended political consequences of economic coercion. Hence, the research findings of this study offer some guidance to policy-makers about the possible inadvertent impact of sanctions in target countries by theoretically and empirically demonstrating that economic coercion leads to greater media repression.

These findings suggest that economic sanctions will likely hurt independent media outlets, the very groups that sanctions should avoid targeting to help achieve democratic freedoms, government accountability, and economic stability in countries under sanctions. Simply put, we expect that applying economic pressure to the target will inadvertently help the political leadership consolidate its oppressive power and create feasible conditions in which to use that capacity against independent groups and organizations. Consequently, due to the collateral damage to press freedom caused by sanctions, policy-makers should also consider the negative externalities caused by coercion as well as debating whether sanctions succeed in achieving their intended goals.

Economic sanctions, especially extensive sanctions, often hit the entire target economy without any or with very few discriminatory measures to lessen the possible corrosive impact of sanctions on average citizens. Therefore, 'targeted' sanctions, such as freezing financial assets, the reduction

or suspension of military arms sales, and travel bans on officials, might be a better strategy for policy-makers to put direct pressure on the target leadership and lessen the cost of coercion on the target society. Hence, such sanctions will have a minimal negative economic impact on media outlets.

To avoid the negative externalities of coercive diplomacy, policy-makers, especially in western capitals, should also consider alternative courses of action for dealing with hostile regimes, such as engagement via diplomatic communications and offering economic incentives (foreign aid and low-interest loans). These engagement strategies will be less likely to inflict disproportionate costs on particular social groups or strain relations between the target political leadership and sender countries. Such policies may also have a higher success rate than sanctions in inducing behavioral change in target countries, by creating incentives for the target leaders to take affirmative steps toward the demands of external powers.

While this study offers theoretically guided and quantitative evidence, future research should utilize case studies to track more thoroughly the causal chain between economic sanctions and media independence. In addition to the two major aspects of sanctions highlighted in this research (the severity of coercion and the number of actors involved in the imposition process), further studies could advance our understanding of how and when economic sanctions are more likely to be detrimental to press freedom by investigating some additional questions, such as whether the economic disparity between the sender and target countries plays a major role in the extent of the negative impact that sanctions might have on press freedoms. Several ongoing and important sanction cases, such as US sanctions against Burma since 1987 or the Israeli embargo on Palestine since the early 2000s, offer scholars further opportunities to study the possible political consequences of economic sanctions for target nations.

Future research should also explore whether other foreign policy tools might affect press freedom. Several international factors, such as foreign aid, foreign military intervention, and economic globalization, significantly affect the domestic political and economic stability of countries, especially in the developing world. Hence, these external factors might also influence media–government relations and the overall political and legal environment under which the media operate. More attention to international factors in addition to the domestic determinants of media openness is imperative since no country is immune from international developments.

Acknowledgments

Notes

1. Some others, however, have questioned the positive contribution of the media to democracy by pointing out the potential negative impact of journalists' cynicism, the coverage of insignificant issues such as personalities and the character of political actors instead of substantive political matters, and concentrated media ownership on the development of democratic political culture and participatory democracy (for example, Bennett, 1988; Fallows, 1996; McChesney, 1999). A strand of the literature also highlights the difficulties with the conceptualization and operationalization of press freedom (for example, Becker et al., 2007; Lowenstein, 1970; Price, 2002; Weaver, 1977) and democracy (for example, Bollen, 1980; Bollen and Paxton, 2000; Munck and Verkuilen, 2002) as measurable variables.

2. Hafner-Burton and Montgomery's (2008) work on the determinants of sanction decisions also finds that there is no 'economic peace' between democracies, especially when the US sanction cases are controlled

for (see also Cox and Drury, 2006; Lektzian and Souva, 2003). Hence, they suggest that democracies impose sanctions against other democracies as well as non-democratic regimes.

3. It is worth noting here that this article deals only with 'imposed' sanctions. It is plausible that the targeted countries may in some cases allow press freedom or political liberalization prior to the imposition of sanctions (that is, at the threat stage of sanctions) to avoid the economic and other costs of the actual sanctions. In other words, economic coercion might have a positive impact on press freedom in the threat stage. Yet, once levied, we expect that sanctions are likely to deteriorate the level of media openness. Future research should explore the possibility that the threat of sanctions may have a different impact on press freedom than the imposed sanctions.

4. The developed economies include Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hong Kong SAR, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, South Korea, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Singapore, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan Province of China, the United Kingdom, and the USA. The data analysis does not include Hong Kong and Taiwan since they are not fully independent countries.

5. In addition to the three-category status variable, Freedom House also rates the level of press freedom on a 100-point scale. I am unable to use the latter for this study because the data on the 100-point scale are available only after 1996. Furthermore, for the years before 1989, Freedom House separately codes the level of freedom in print and broadcast media, instead of reporting one score for overall media independence. For those years, the lowest score of the two was taken to code the status of press freedom variable.

6. In assessing the impact of the *political environment* on press freedom, Freedom House evaluates the degree of political control over the content of news media, including 'the editorial independence of both state-owned and privately owned media; access to information and sources; official censorship and self-censorship; the vibrancy of the media and the diversity of news available within each country; the ability of both foreign and local reporters to cover the news freely and without harassment; and the intimidation of journalists by the state or other actors, including arbitrary detention and imprisonment, violent assaults, and other threats'. In determining the influence of the *economic environment* for the media, Freedom House evaluates 'the structure of media ownership; transparency and concentration of ownership; the costs of establishing media as well as of production and distribution; the selective withholding of advertising or subsidies by the state or other actors; the impact of corruption and bribery on content; and the extent to which the economic situation in a country impacts the development and sustainability of the media'. Finally, to determine the impact of the *legal environment* on the media, the survey examines the laws and regulations that could influence media content and the government's inclination to use these laws and legal institutions to restrict the media's ability to operate, including 'the positive impact of legal and constitutional guarantees for freedom of expression; the potentially negative aspects of security legislation, the penal code, and other criminal statutes; penalties for libel and defamation; the existence of and ability to use freedom of information legislation; the independence of the judiciary and of official media regulatory bodies; registration requirements for both media outlets and journalists; and the ability of journalists' groups to operate freely' (Freedom House, 2006: 3).

7. The list of sanction cases is available at http://www.petersoninstitute.org/research/topics/sanctions/sanctions-timeline.cfm (last accessed on 6 October 2009).

8. Some target countries faced multiple economic sanctions in a given year. In those circumstances, the sanction episode with more severe consequences was considered as the basis for coding the sanction variables. In order to ensure that those incidences did not bias the results, we ran additional models, dropping those countries from the analysis; there was no major difference in the results.

9. I use SPost Stata ado files by Long and Freese (2001) for the post-estimation interpretation of regression models for categorical outcomes. In the other categories of 'Free' and 'Partly Free' of the dependent variable, the predicted value changes are consistent with the hypothesis. That is, economic sanctions significantly reduce the occurrence of a free or partly free press in a country, while increasing the predicted probability of no press freedom.

10. Van Belle suggests that the categorical coding of the data 'does not produce a five-point interval scale and the degree to which it can be used as an ordinal scale is unclear' (2000: 140). I exclude the first category (0), since the coding scheme suggests that there was limited information to determine the level of press freedom for those countries under this category. The removal of these data points did not substantially change any of the findings reported below.

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