

Economic sanctions on Syria are described by experts as some of the "most complicated and far-reaching sanctions regimes ever imposed".

They have resulted in devastating consequences for the civilian population. Explain how the use of sanctions increases human rights violations in targeted countries.

Foreign policy sanctions can lead to unintended human rights violations in countries like Syria, Nigeria and Sudan. While sanctions are meant to influence governments to change their behaviour and respect human rights, they can actually have consequences that cause harm and lead to human rights abuses.

In Syria, the economic sanctions have made worse the humanitarian crisis and human rights violations. Since the beginning of the Syrian war in 2011, a number of countries and international organisations have imposed sanctions on the Syrian government and the Bashar al-Assad regime for its violent repression of peaceful protests and large-scale violations of human rights. These sanctions have affected trade, financial transactions and the delivery of humanitarian aid throughout the region, leading to economic hardship and the deterioration of the living conditions of many innocent people. The United Nations have reported that more than 13 million people are in need of humanitarian aid in Syria, with millions suffering from food insecurity, lack of healthcare and poor access to water and sanitation. Women, children and the elderly are particularly affected, with reports of rising malnutrition, diseases and avoidable deaths. In addition, the sanctions have enabled the Syrian government to consolidate its control over the nation and continue to violate human rights through arbitrary arrests, torture and the targeted killing of political dissidents and human rights activists. For example in 2023 the authorities arrested a political activist called Lama Abbas without an arrest warrant.

Nigeria has faced targeted sanctions in response to a range of human rights violations, including the clampdown on protests and the government's failure to address large-scale corruption. For example, the Nigerian government's response to protests in October 2020 calling for the end of police brutality by the notorious Special Anti-Robbery Squad resulted in international condemnation and also resulted in sanctions imposed by the US and other countries. The sanctions targeted individuals and resulted in human rights violations, such as the freezing of assets and travel bans. However, these sanctions have actually had little effect on addressing the main causes of Nigeria's human rights violations, as the government continues to suppress opposition and clampdown on protests by civilians, using excessive force and arbitrary detentions. Amnesty International has reported the security forces continue to engage in killings and enforced disappearance of protesters and activists. For example in 2023 a 17 year old student died in hospital following torture during interrogation after he was picked up by police in Yola.

Sudan was affected by the United States and other countries economic sanctions during the 1990's and early 2000's, leading to its isolation and decline. Consequently, people experienced hardships while rights violations increased. Even though Sudan underwent a change of government in 2019 resulting in some of these sanctions being lifted, the country still faces an uphill struggle because their consequences have never completely been overcome on its economy as well as social structure. The United Nations has raised concerns over human rights problems in Sudan, including limits on freedom of expression, assembly and association. Currently the conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces and Rapid Support Forces has resulted in almost 18 million facing hunger and acts of sexual violence and the recruitment of child soldiers. This failure by the government to address these issues and bring those responsible for them to book created an atmosphere of impunity which prevents progress towards sustainable peace and reconciliation in the nation.

In conclusion, the use of sanctions in Syria, Nigeria, and Sudan illustrate how this may unintentionally create human rights abuses and intensify civilian suffering. Although meant to advance human rights and democracy, frequently the actual effects show that policymakers need to think about potential dangers and compromises involved with such a move. Therefore, there is a need for policy makers to shift towards a more forward-looking and all-inclusive strategy in dealing with issues of human rights abuse that lays emphasis on protecting human rights, provision of humanitarian aid and advocacy for peaceful and inclusive political processes.

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