

The Reputational Consequences of IO Membership Suspension for Democratic Backsliding

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Abstract: When a state backslides democratically, international organizations (IOs) may suspend their membership. Indeed, suspension after democratic backsliding is the most common type of IO suspension. But do membership suspensions from IOs have consequences for backsliding states in terms of their reputations or actually returning to democratic standards? We argue that IO membership suspension after democratic backsliding has reputational consequences because it stigmatizes violator states and imposes punishment costs on suspendees. Since IOs are credible commitment devices that can provide a seal of approval when states join, suspension can act as a seal of disapproval when states democratically backslide and break their IO commitments. This may diminish states' reputations. We therefore argue that suspension after political backsliding acts as a multilateral diplomatic sanction to help IO member states impose a punishment cost to negotiate domestic institutional change. We test our hypotheses using a comprehensive dataset of suspensions for democratic backsliding across all states and IOs between 1914 and 2022 and find empirical support for our argument. Using two-stage models that separately model the drivers of suspensions and their effects, we show that IO suspension after democratic backsliding has reputational consequences, as indicated by worsened political risk scores, drops in investor confidence for the suspended state, and follow-on sanctions by other IOs. These reputational consequences are stronger for democracies and anocracies, for economically weaker states, and are driven by densely democratic IOs where the importance of maintaining credible commitments is stronger. Our findings stand in contrast to scholarship which implies that suspensions—and sanctions more broadly—may be costless. Nevertheless, non-compliance with IO rules remains a core challenge in international cooperation given that suspension alone has no effect on domestic political institutions including the country's level of democracy, time to next election, and chance of civil war outbreak.

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An important way in which states commit to upholding democracy is by tying their hands internationally. States can enter into international agreements, such as membership in international organizations (IOs) whose charters feature domestic democratic standards.³ Nonetheless, even after committing to IO standards of democracy, many states backslide.⁴ Some international organizations sanction democratic backsliders by suspending the state's membership.⁵ For example, in 2021 the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) suspended Guinea because of a military coup d'état that ousted Guinea's first freely elected president, Alpha Condé. ECOWAS said on behalf of its 15-member states that Guinea's membership would not be reinstated until it returned to constitutional order and the military released Condé.

Do these IO membership suspensions after political backsliding have reputational consequences for violator states? And do states change their domestic institutions in response to IO suspensions, perhaps to regain IO membership?

We argue that suspension is a negotiating strategy to push violator states toward domestic institutional change. By stigmatizing a violator state with suspension, IO member states aim to impose punishment costs on suspendees, which can result in stigma management, reputational consequences, follow-on sanctions, and possibly domestic institutional change.

First, IO suspension imposes a punishment cost against which target states push back. Suspension stigmatizes the democratic backslider by labelling it as a violator, separating it from the in-group, and subjecting it to status loss. But just as with economic sanctions, suspended states often counter multilateral diplomatic sanctions by pushing back. Suspendees often engage in stigma management to reframe the backsliding narrative and discredit the IO to dampen the effects of suspension. That states engage in this stigma management indicates that suspensions are indeed costly.

Second, we argue that reputational consequences can arise from suspension. That is because the 'naming and shaming' that comes from the member state's chosen community makes it reputationally costly to be ousted. We derive this expectation from two arguments: that IOs are credible commitment devices and that they provide a seal of approval when states join, which improves states' reputations (in terms of political risk scores or investor confidence). Conversely, *breaking* their IO commitments and receiving a seal of *disapproval* from IOs should diminish states' reputations. We also expect the reputational effects of IO suspensions to be heterogeneous by regime type and economic power: democratic and anocratic states should be more likely to face reputational costs from suspension, as should economically weak states that rely on the international community for support. Reputational effects should also vary by the type of IO sending the signal; a suspension from a densely democratic IO is the most likely to affect a state's credibility.

³ Mansfield and Pevehouse 2006; 2008; Martin 2017; Pevehouse 2002a; 2002b; 2005; Poast and Urpelainen 2013.

⁴ Börzel 2020.

⁵ von Borzyskowski and Vabulas 2019.

Third and relatedly, we argue that suspension can impose reputational consequences by facilitating other IO sanctions. Since suspensions come from a state's self-chosen community, they are a strong signal of peer disapproval and may empower other international actors to further punish the violator state. IO suspensions may legitimize other organizations to invoke their own, potentially costlier punishments, including economic sanctions, creating a layered penalty for violator states.

Fourth and last, we argue that domestic behavior change in response to suspension is likely negligible. This is because reputational consequences alone may not be sufficient to get a state to adjust their domestic political institutions. Suspension is not likely to induce a state to fundamentally overhaul its political institutions because the benefits of violating rules are likely high.

To test our hypotheses, we provide descriptive examples of stigma management as well as multivariate analyses of suspension effects on reputation, follow-on sanctions, and institutional change. In terms of data, we draw on our comprehensive collection of suspensions from all states and IOs between 1945 and 2022, subset to suspensions *after democratic backsliding* (which are the most common type of suspensions). For research design, we emphasize the difficulty in systematically assessing the effects of IO suspensions given their timing. Suspensions usually occur close to egregious events or in combination with other international actions, so it is sometimes difficult to tease out the singular effect of suspensions in isolation. We address this by including control variables for democratic backsliding (to distinguish it from suspension as a response to backsliding) and by using two-stage models (modeling separately suspension drivers and suspension effects). The empirical results support our arguments.

Our paper contributes to literature on IO effects and sanctions. Our argument that suspension after democratic backsliding has reputational consequences stands in contrast to literature which implies that suspension should be costless. In particular, realists argue that IOs have little effect on states, which implies that membership suspension should not have consequences. We also contribute to the sanctions literature by expanding the scope of analysis from the usual focus on the material effects of economic sanctions⁶ to the reputational consequences of multilateral diplomatic sanctions (IO suspensions) which have been largely neglected. By quantifying some ways that suspensions can punish violators in a reputational sense, we enrich and complement our current understanding of sanctions.

1. Theory

Membership suspension from an international organization occurs when a stipulated share of an IO's member states temporarily remove some or all of a violator state's membership benefits, including its ability to vote, attend meetings, or otherwise participate in IO decisions. 37 percent of international organizations have charter clauses on suspension, delineating the conditions under which remaining member states can suspend one of their own from the organization.⁷ Nonetheless, IOs can and do suspend states when suspension rules have *not* been specified in the IO charter.

⁶ Peksen 2019. For an exception, see von Borzyskowski and Portela 2023.

⁷ von Borzyskowski and Vabulas 2019.

Since 1939, IOs have suspended member states 104 times.⁸ Over 50 percent of these IO suspensions have occurred *due to democratic backsliding*, which includes events such as a coups d'état, serious election irregularities, and human rights violations. Suspensions for democratic backsliding increased after 1990 when states and international organizations increasingly paid attention to states' democracy and human rights conditions.

Why do IOs suspend states for democratic backsliding? IOs suspending states for democratic backsliding usually aim to get the violator state back on track. We conceptualize suspension as a multilateral reputational punishment strategy to try to negotiate domestic institutional change in the violator state. Suspension is intended to impose costs on the target state. When suspended, states lose influence in the organization, including their right to speak, participate in collective decisions, and vote for policies.⁹ Suspended states also lose the information-providing opportunity of regular face-to-face high-level meetings.¹⁰ These benefits of membership are often what motivate states to join IOs in the first place. While these benefits differ across IOs, we know that states are advantaged by membership or they would not have joined, nor adhered to costly accession criteria in the first place.¹¹

These costs make suspension a punishment strategy and a tool for negotiation. Snidal (1985: 938) argues that the “threat of exclusion, if credible, may be an important device for ensuring that states behave cooperatively.” Similarly, Pevehouse (2002:522) argues that “regional IOs can apply pressure in a variety of ways [including] expulsion from the organization.” IO suspension acts as a brinkmanship strategy to exert concessions from violator states.¹² Suspension threatens states with an ultimatum: a decrease in the value of the status quo of international cooperation unless democratic backsliding is remedied. Suspension is thus a means to negotiate domestic institutional change. IO exit helps the sender signal their resolve to drive a harder bargain. It also has potency as a punishment strategy because of how other policies may unravel. One suspension may lead other actors (including further IOs) to punish violator states.

We argue that IO suspension can generate negative reputational consequences, based on the fact that states receive reputational benefits when they *join* IOs. IO theory has routinely referred to IO membership as a mechanism that makes a state's commitments “credible.”¹³ This is because joining an IO imposes *ex ante* costs while reneging on those commitments can impose *ex post*

⁸ von Borzyskowski and Vabulas 2024.

⁹ Helfer 2005; Slapin 2009; Pevehouse 2002.

¹⁰ Haftel 2007.

¹¹ Allee and Scalera 2012; Dreher and Voigt 2011; Dreher, Mikosch, and Voigt 2015; Mansfield and Pevehouse 2008.

¹² Brinkmanship is a term coined by Schelling (1966) for a strategy of escalating threats in bargaining so far as to risk active conflict, and thus incentivizing the opponent to back down. In grappling with potential withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation, Pretorius and Sauer (2022) similarly argue that exit can be a political option for non-nuclear weapon states to exercise some kind of leverage over other member states.

¹³ Fearon 1997; Mansfield and Pevehouse 2006; 2008; Martin 2017; Pevehouse 2002a; 2002b; 2005; Poast and Urpelainen 2013.

costs. The *ex post* aspect has been largely assumed so far and rarely been tested¹⁴ but is the key mechanism for IOs to work as credible commitments once states are members. IO *accession* has been linked to an increase in investors' confidence in doing business in that country.¹⁵ IO accession acts as a signaling device to provide a "seal of approval" of the country's policies, which allows investors' expectations to converge. Just as membership in an IO can enhance a state's reputation,¹⁶ suspension from an IO can hurt a state's reputation by removing its status (membership) and putting it in an out-group. In short, we argue that membership suspension creates a seal of disapproval. Suspension may be reputationally harmful because it can cast doubt on the country's credibility to honor *other* commitments.

Suspension may also generate reputational consequences because it is a social cost – a form of peer punishment that originates from a state's self-selected community. Suspension can sanction a backslider by acting as a clear signal from a peer group that the suspended state has violated an IO commitment (i.e. democratic standards). IO suspension can delegitimize violator states by casting them out of a club, the mirror of IO accession which can legitimate states into a community of belonging. This makes suspension difficult to reject – in contrast to punishments that come from 'the outside' which can be discounted as illegitimate meddling. This is because state governments enter IOs voluntarily, pay membership dues, and value their standing in the group.

Based on Adler-Nissen's work on stigmatization,¹⁷ we argue that IO suspension *labels* the suspended state as it undergoes *separation* and *status loss* which can affect its reputation. Suspension *labels* a country as no longer being a member state that adheres to IO rules (i.e. upholding democratic standards). The label of suspension can operate like performance indicators or international blacklists: investors and private markets may stereotype the county as having risky assets.¹⁸ Sharman (2011), for example, shows that "blacklisting creates pressure to comply primarily by damaging the reputation of those countries listed among the international finance industry and secondarily through creating fears of capital flight."¹⁹

Suspended states also undergo *separation*, parting 'us' from 'them.'²⁰ IO suspension separates the violator state from other members²¹ which matters because states—just like other actors—like to identify as and benefit from being members of "in groups." Membership suspension creates a binary 'in' versus 'out' logic.²² This generates a clear signal of separation to domestic and

¹⁴ For an exception, see von Borzyskowski and Vabulas 2019.

¹⁵ Baccini and Urpelainen 2014; Dreher and Voigt 2011; Gray 2009; Tomashevskiy and Kono 2015.

¹⁶ Gray 2009.

¹⁷ Adler-Nissen 2014; Adler-Nissen and Zarakol 2021.

¹⁸ Kelley 2017; Kelley and Simmons 2019, 2021; Morse 2019; Sharman 2009; Wilf 2016.

¹⁹ Sharman 2011:99.

²⁰ Adler-Nissen 2014.

²¹ Abrams and Hogg 1988; Larson and Shevchenko 2014; Paul, Larson and Wohlforth 2014; Tajfel 1978, 1982; Tajfel et al 1979.

²² Technically, there is more gradation in suspension than appears at first glance. Fieldwork at the African Union and Organisation de la Francophonie revealed that they can differentially

international actors.²³ Just as membership in international institutions is a visible and public act that can be easily interpreted,²⁴ IO suspension works in reverse to provide clarity about how to interpret the state's divergence from IO rules about upholding democratic standards.

Suspended states also experience *status loss*, the third component of stigmatization. Dafoe, Renshon, and Huth (2014) define status as a function of community recognition, and joint membership in organizations is a visible signal of such recognition.²⁵ In sum, taking both the work on credible commitments and stigmatization into account, we theorize that suspension for democratic backsliding should have reputational consequences for the violator state.

We therefore conceptualize IO suspensions as multilateral diplomatic sanction that *names* a state's violation (democratic backsliding) and *shame* the state. Diplomatic sanctions are characterized by political disengagement and are seen as a means of isolating and delegitimizing regimes. Examples of other kinds of diplomatic sanctions are cessation of formal diplomatic contact such as recalling an ambassador or closing an embassy.²⁶

What do we know about the effects of sanctions? Given that there is almost no research on the effects of *multilateral diplomatic sanctions* to date, we build on research on the effects of multilateral *economic* sanctions²⁷ (such as financial asset freezes and trade/aid cuts) to theorize the potential consequences of suspensions. Do economic sanctions harm target states' economies²⁸ trigger domestic institutional change?²⁹ Economists tend to examine the consequences of sanctions in terms of economic damage. Broadly, they have found that economic sanctions are associated with reductions in trade, foreign direct investment, growth, poverty, and political stability in the sanctioned state.³⁰

Political scientists, on the other hand, tend to examine the consequences in terms of whether sanctions achieve declared political objectives (i.e. whether they lead to state changes in behavior or institutions). This research has shown that economic sanctions are only effective in about 25 percent of cases;³¹ as sanctions have become more targeted in recent years, their effectiveness has

prevent states from attending meetings, talk in meetings, vote in meetings, allow nationals work at the IO (or getting their contracts renewed), and having no IO programs in the state. The point is that the public (broadly defined) usually perceives suspension in binary terms.

²³ Swedlund 2017.

²⁴ Gray 2009.

²⁵ Davis 2023.

²⁶ Biersteker, Eckert, and Tourinho 2016; Christopher 1994; Klotz 1999; Lektzian and Regan 2016; Maller 2010; Morgan, Bapat, and Kobayashi 2014; Nooruddin 2002; von Soest and Wahman 2015; Krain 2014.

²⁶ Morgan et al. 2023.

²⁷ Galtung 1967; Nincic and Wallenstein 1983; Doxey 1987; Nossal 1989.

²⁸ Neuenkirch and Neumeier 2015.

²⁹ Drezner 2011.

³⁰ Morgan et al. 2023.

³¹ Morgan et al. 2023. This may *seem* low but is higher than the alternative of no sanction. Also, the costs of economic sanctions may be substantially lower than the costs of alternative policies

improved. The effects can be long-lasting but also heterogeneous depending on whether they are imposed unilaterally or multilaterally.³² *Multilateral* economic sanctions are more likely to be successful than unilateral sanctions, especially when an international organization is involved.³³ Research also shows that sanctions are also associated with increased poverty,³⁴ human rights violations, repression,³⁵ and consolidated authoritarian rule.³⁶ In general, economic sanctions are not perceived as particularly successful policy tools.³⁷ One explanation for the limited consequences of economic sanctions is that states use mitigation strategies. The economic sanctions literature shows that target states mitigate the adverse effects of sanctions by redirecting their international trade and investment flows toward third countries, shielding certain economic agents, forming alliances with “friendly” third countries, and retaliating against their sanctioners.³⁸

These findings contextualize our understanding and make us circumspect about the potential consequences of suspension as a multilateral *diplomatic* sanction. For example, since suspension means losing the right to vote and be present at IO meetings, but not usually cutting of trade ties, we would not expect strong material consequences on trade, growth, and GDP (which have been the primary focus in the economist literature). Instead, we focus on reputational consequences.

2. Hypotheses

Building on the notion that IO suspension imposes punishment costs, we should see suspended states push back to try to mitigate these costs. We argue that suspended states try to anticipate and react to the punishment costs of suspension through “stigma management” techniques.³⁹ Suspended states can reject or counter the stigma of suspension by rhetorically casting the decision as ill-informed or the IO as unfair or biased. Suspended states can also preemptively (or immediately) withdraw from the IO, which is an effort to save face by reframing their exit as voluntary. Such reactions by suspended states would suggest that suspension is indeed costly – otherwise states would not be incentivized to react.

H1: Suspended states should try to manage the stigma of IO suspensions.

In addition, we argue that the punishment costs of suspension can lead to reputational consequences. Suspension should have reputational consequences because as outlined above, it *labels* the leaving state, *separates* it, and triggers *status loss*⁴⁰ which can affect its reputation. We build this argument from two strands of literature: on IOs as credible commitment devices and IO

like overt military interventions, meaning that the consequences of sanctions might be high relative to the costs (Sedelmeier 2017; Peksen 2019).

³² Morgan et al. 2023.

³³ Martin 1992; Bapat and Morgan 2009; Early 2021.

³⁴ Neuenkirch and Neumeier 2015.

³⁵ Wood 2008.

³⁶ Peksen and Drury 2010.

³⁷ Morgan et al. 2023.

³⁸ Morgan et al. 2023.

³⁹ Adler-Nissen 2014.

⁴⁰ Dafoe, Renshon, and Huth 2014.

accession as a seal of approval. If IO accession brings positive reputational consequences—through the avenue of credible commitments and the seal of approval – then IO suspension (forced removal) should bring negative reputational consequences. Suspension should serve as a sign that a state has not upheld its commitments and signal a “seal of disapproval” about the state’s policies.

We expect that the reputational consequences of suspension operate similar to scorecard diplomacy,⁴¹ naming and shaming, or blacklisting.⁴² Research shows that naming and shaming violator states damages the reputation of these states in the eyes of international political actors (other states, IOs, and investors) because it denotes those states as being violators of rights and norms.⁴³ Similarly, being labeled as a bad actor on a blacklist like the Financial Action Task Force (FATF’s) “noncomplier list” can damage a state’s reputation. This can signal that the state poses a higher risk to customers around the world, leading financial institutions to restrict their services and drive up the price of doing business.⁴⁴ For example, after being excluded from several international organizations during apartheid rule, Klotz (1999) shows that South Africa’s global and regional reputation was curtailed.

Since entering into IOs has been shown to improve political risk scores and investor confidence, suspension should cause a reduction. That is, suspension should cause market actors (including international investors) who often rely on labels to assess the state’s reputation to downgrade their perception of the state’s political risk. Thus, being suspended should result in worsened political risk scores and investor confidence, key metrics reflecting a state’s reputation.

H2: IO suspension should diminish the violator state’s reputation.

Yet not all states face reputational consequences in the same way.⁴⁵ Generally, states vary in how malleable their reputations are. When it comes to political backsliding and suspensions, we expect that states’ regime type should matter, as should their economic development. First, we expect that reputational consequences are stronger for democracies (versus autocracies) because democratic foreign leaders face higher audience costs⁴⁶ from backing down from commitments during crises. Showing that the state has violated an international commitment (by breaking IO rules enough to warrant IO suspension) might work in the same way. Democracies also tend to accrue higher credibility advantages when they *join* international institutions.⁴⁷ On the other hand, autocrats’ signatures of treaties are sometimes considered insincere, meaning their reputations may not be as affected by exit.⁴⁸ If that is true, then democracies should also lose more credibility (than

⁴¹ Kelley 2017; Kelley and Simmons 2019, 2021.

⁴² Morse 2019; Sharman 2009, 2011; Tomz 2007; Wilf 2016.

⁴³ On transnational advocacy networks naming and shaming human rights abusers, see Hafner-Burton 2008; Krain 2012.

⁴⁴ Morse 2019.

⁴⁵ Jervis, Yarhi-Milo, and Casler 2019; Tomz 2012.

⁴⁶ Fearon 1994. To be sure, scholars recognize that different types of authoritarian governments also face audience costs, perhaps in different ways (Weeks 2008).

⁴⁷ Beaulieu, Cox, and Saiegh 2012; Jensen 2008.

⁴⁸ Smith-Cannoy 2012; Hafner-Burton and Tsutsui 2007; Hathaway 2002; Hafner-Burton, Tsutsui, and Meyer 2008.

autocracies) when they are suspended. Emerging democracies or anocracies (states between democracies and autocracies) – which have more malleable reputations – should be particularly affected.

Second, we expect that reputational consequences are stronger for economically weak states. This builds from the “naïve theory” of sanctions⁴⁹ which posits that the weaker the economy, the greater the harm to the leader’s legitimacy.⁵⁰ This is because states that are weak in terms of resources may have few choices or alternative options when it comes to coping with sanctions.⁵¹ We extend this economic logic to that of reputations. States with less economic power may be less able to provide goods to appease or buy off others to prop up the state’s reputation. Sanctions should thus have deeper consequences when they occur on weaker economies. Scholarship also shows that circumventing sanctions – whether they be economic or diplomatic – requires some international weight which can be gained through economic strength or political allies.⁵²

H2a: IO suspension should diminish the violator state’s reputation particularly when the state is more democratic or economically weaker.

The reputational consequences of suspension are also likely to vary based on the membership composition of the IO itself. For example, much of the literature on credible commitments argues that an IO’s ability to tie states’ hands to domestic reforms depends on the democratic density of the IO.⁵³ The democratic density of the IO can also affect its perceived legitimacy in world politics.⁵⁴ Further, research on stigmatization shows that international shaming is not likely to have the desired effects on norm compliance unless the moral authority of the stigmatizer is accepted.⁵⁵ We therefore expect that IOs without issue area-related legitimacy are unlikely to generate reputational consequences from suspension. Of suspensions that do occur, those that are from IOs with higher reputations (in the case of political backsliding, that would be democratically dense IOs) are likely to have higher reputational consequences.

H2b: The reputational consequences of IO suspension should be stronger from democratically dense IOs.

An interesting alternative hypothesis is that suspension from *less* democratically dense IOs has stronger effects. Here, the logic would be that if an IO with few democracies thinks the state’s political backsliding is sufficiently egregious to warrant suspension, it must be truly bad. Here, then, the signal of suspension cannot just be considered “cheap talk” and thus the reputational consequences might be stronger. We assess this possibility empirically.

⁴⁹ Galtung 1967; Peksen 2019.

⁵⁰ Dashti-Gibson, Davis, and Radcliff 1997; Drury 1998; Hufbauer et al. 2007; Bapat et al. 2013.

⁵¹ Adler-Nissen 2014, 154.

⁵² Adler-Nissen 2014, 172. For instance, Cuba’s independent value system was first backed by the Soviet Union and is now supported by several left-wing Latin American governments.

⁵³ Pevehouse 2005, 2003, 2002a, 2002b.

⁵⁴ Scharpf 1999; Dellmuth, Scholte, and Tallberg 2019.

⁵⁵ Adler-Nissen 2014, 171.

Reputational consequences can also arise from other sources than international investors – for example from other states or other IOs which apply their own, subsequent sanctions. We argue that IO suspensions may also facilitate *other* sanctions. IO suspension can provide a clear signal that the state’s (self-chosen) community (IO) regards the state’s behavior as noncompliant, undesirable, and worthy of punishment. Suspension signals to other actors that they may then legitimately sanction the violator states and suspension may thus empower others to also punish the violator state. Research has shown that regional economic sanctions can facilitate UNSC sanctions: sanctions-skeptic members are more likely to back UN sanctions when neighboring states are united in their condemnation.⁵⁶ Alone, suspension may sometimes *appear* to be merely finger wagging, but delegitimation that extends to other international actors may increase the punishment costs. We therefore expect that suspension (as diplomatic sanction, and similar to economic sanctions) can trigger other IOs to act, generating a layered punishment. This leads to the third hypothesis:

H3: Suspended states should be more likely to be subsequently targeted with sanctions by other IOs.

Despite these reputational consequences, we expect that IO suspension after political backsliding has limited effect on domestic institutional change. IO suspensions often aim for a change in domestic institutions of the violator state after political backsliding. IO suspension texts usually stipulate what the violation is and what is needed for re-admission. For suspensions due to political backsliding, this includes presenting timetables for elections, giving power to a transitional government, promising to revise the constitution, or passing domestic legislation.⁵⁷

However, domestic change is often difficult to achieve due to IO suspension alone. This is because state actors may gain large personal or electoral benefits from violating IO rules. Even substantial consequences may therefore not change a state’s calculus on violations. Further, since reputational consequences are the main mechanism at work of diplomatic sanctions, these consequences probably do not have “material teeth” akin to economic sanctions to incentivize change. As a result, some violator states may halt or change their egregious behavior to regain their membership privileges, but we expect that the most likely domestic institutional changes are rudimentary actions to gain readmittance without fundamental domestic reform.

This expectation is in line with work on reputational damage via naming and shaming and its effects on state behavior. Hafner-Burton (2008) notes a distinction between a state’s “reluctant change of conduct” and an “authentic change of heart:” target states may improve with some shallow actions but trade-off improvements in one area for worsening in other areas, and do not engage in comprehensive reform.⁵⁸ Overall, though, states that are suspended should be somewhat more likely to change their domestic institutions and behavior versus states that are not suspended for the same rule violations. This leads to the fourth hypothesis:

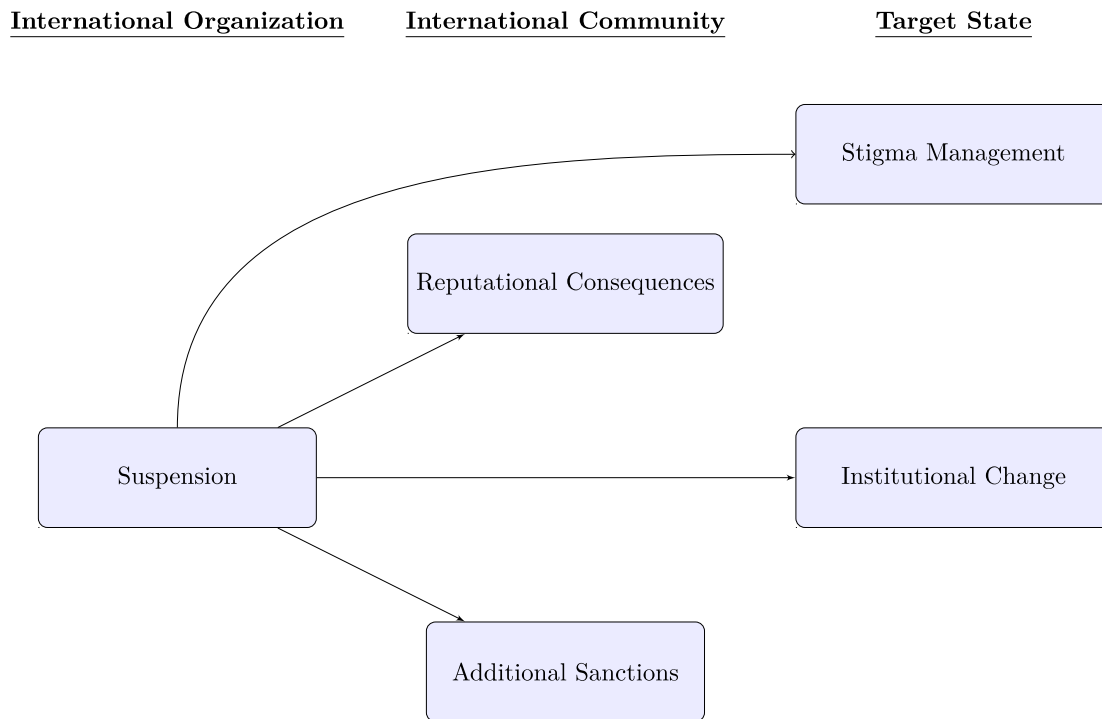
⁵⁶ von Borzyskowski and Portela 2023.

⁵⁷ See for example Van de Walle (2002) or Schedler (2002) on the menu of manipulation that authoritarian governments might use to appear democratic.

⁵⁸ Hafner-Burton 2008. See also Hendrix and Wong 2013 who highlight that naming and shaming human rights violators only works in some circumstances.

H4: IO suspension should somewhat increase the chance that a violator state halts or changes its egregious behavior; target state efforts likely focus on highly visible actions but not fundamental changes.

Figure 1: How IO Suspension can lead to Reputational Consequences and Domestic Institutional Change



In contrast to these hypotheses about suspension being costly and somewhat consequential (a punishment tool to negotiate change), some may expect that suspension is *not* costly for states. This alternative hypothesis comes from realist counterarguments to the importance of international organizations and literature on the effects of norm contestation.

First, a body of realist research challenges whether IOs have effects on world politics, arguing that IOs simply reflect the distributions of power and preferences among states.⁵⁹ They argue that IOs do not do anything that states would not have done in their absence. The extension of this realist logic is that if IOs have no independent effect on world politics, then non-membership in these IOs or their multilateral diplomatic sanctions should not have any effect on states either.

Second, another strand of research highlights an “increase in norm contestation” and violations of IO rules.⁶⁰ This body of work wonders whether an increasing array of states’ norm contestations

⁵⁹ Mearsheimer 1994.

⁶⁰ Rakner 2018.

(e.g., political backsliding while a member of an IO with rules on democracy) weakens international standards:⁶¹ if states keep challenging IO rules, they wonder if the rules still matter.⁶² In this line of thinking, rule violations are prolific, implying that clamping down on them through suspension may be unlikely to have an effect. We test the consequences empirically further below.

3. Descriptive Examples of States' Stigma Management in response to Suspension

We begin by addressing Hypothesis 1 that suspended states often react to the punishment costs of IO suspensions. Here we use descriptive case examples to show stigma management in two forms: withdrawing pre-emptively to save face and countering rhetorically to degrade the label of suspension.

3.1 Examples of State Stigma Management via Face-Saving Withdrawals

States often counter the punishment costs of suspension by withdrawing from the IO. States can do this either *pre-emptively* when they think suspension is imminent (perhaps because IO member states have threatened action) or immediately *after* suspension to reframe the label.

For example, on 21 April 1967, a military junta toppled the Greek government in a coup d'état. The colonels abolished democracy which violated the Council of Europe's charter. In September 1967, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and the Netherlands challenged the human rights abuses in Greece through an interstate application to the Committee of Ministers. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe appointed the former Dutch Foreign Minister, Max van der Stoel, as a rapporteur to investigate the situation. In January 1968, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe met to debate the situation in Greece. They decided to "recommend to the Committee of Ministers, at the latest in the spring of 1969, the suspension or expulsion of Greece from the Council of Europe if by then an acceptable parliamentary democracy has not been restored in that country, or to do so even before that time if it appears that the undertakings given by the Greek regime have not been respected."⁶³ That deadline passed, but the Committee's April case report which ruled that Greece had violated the IO's rules⁶⁴ was leaked. Greece withdrew from the Council of Europe before the Council could vote. Afterwards, the Council of Ministers released a resolution that they would no longer need to suspend Greece since they had already preemptively withdrawn.⁶⁵ After the fall of the junta, Greece re-joined the Council of Europe on 28 November 1974.

Another case of pre-emptive withdrawal after a suspension threat is the Maldives in October 2016. The Commonwealth had warned the Maldives that it would face suspension if it failed to show progress on democracy. The Maldives had experienced backsliding in freedom of speech, the

⁶¹ Heller, Kahl, and Pisoiu 2012, 283; Kelemen 2017; McKeown 2009; Panke and Petersohn 2012, 721; Staton, Reenock, and Holsinger 2022.

⁶² Deitelhoff and Zimmermann 2019.

⁶³ Council of Europe 1968.

⁶⁴ Council of Europe 1969.

⁶⁵ Committee of Ministers 1969.

detention of opponents, and the independence of the judiciary. The Maldives responded by withdrawing from the Commonwealth, accusing it of interfering in domestic affairs and “unfair and unjust” treatment.⁶⁶ It went on to say that “Regrettably, the Commonwealth has not recognized progress and achievements that the Maldives accomplished in cultivating a culture of democracy in the country and in building and strengthening democratic institutions.” It also accused the Commonwealth of overstepping its mandate, saying the IO had “sought to become an active participant in the domestic political discourse in the Maldives, which is contrary to the principles of the charters of the UN and the Commonwealth.”⁶⁷

A third case—with interesting layers of suspension, withdrawal, and eventual full expulsion—started on 25 February 2022. After Russia invaded Ukraine, the Council of Europe (CoE) suspended Russia from its rights of representation in the Committee of Ministers and in the Parliamentary Assembly.⁶⁸ Russia tried to save face and formally withdrew on 15 March to preempt a possible expulsion.⁶⁹ This withdrawal benefitted the Putin regime as Russian citizens could no longer file cases with the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR). Notably, Russians were previously the most frequent filers of cases. In announcing the withdrawal, the Russian Foreign Ministry blamed NATO and EU member states for “abusing their majority” in the organization to turn it “into an instrument of anti-Russian policy, abandoning equal dialogue and all the principles on which this pan-European structure was founded.”⁷⁰ It further added that “Those who are forcing us to take this step will bear all the responsibility for the destruction of the common humanitarian and legal space on the continent and for the consequences for the Council of Europe itself, which without Russia will lose its pan-European coordinates.”⁷¹ These comments tried to cast the blame on the IO, rather than its own actions, framing it as a biased and dysfunctional institution to diminish the stigma of the suspension.

In addition to these cases of (threatened) suspension triggering voluntary withdrawal of the violator state, suspension has also caused threats of withdrawal. These show a similar face-saving logic. In 2013, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) threatened to suspend Zimbabwe if its President Robert Mugabe did not postpone elections to allow time for reforms to the electoral roll and to limit the military’s role in politics.⁷² In response, Mugabe tried to counter the stigma that SADC could impose by accusing it of being an ineffective organization, making it seem as though SADC was the bad actor and not him. At an election rally on July 5, he said “Let it be known that we are in SADC voluntarily. If SADC decides to do stupid things, let it be known that we can withdraw from SADC.”⁷³ In other words, instead of waiting to be suspended, Zimbabwe *threatened* to withdraw, trying to communicate that the state did not need nor want its membership in the SADC.

⁶⁶ BBC 2016.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Council of Europe 2022a.

⁶⁹ Council of Europe 2022b.

⁷⁰ Euronews 2022.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² News24 2013.

⁷³ Ibid.

Further, on 17 May 2022, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs prepared a list of international organizations (beyond the Council of Europe) that could face withdrawal via Russia's parliament vote. Among the organizations listed were the WTO and WHO. Russia's parliament tried to save face on Russia's violations, saying "we have work to revise our international obligations, treaties that today bring no benefit, but instead directly harm our country."⁷⁴ Further, "the next step is to withdraw from the WTO and the WHO, which have neglected all obligations towards our country." What is different in this case, however, is that immediately after the threat to withdraw, Russia became silent. It appears Russia does not intend to follow through on these threats of withdrawal. These cases differ from the Council of Europe where Putin mostly experienced costs from membership like ECtHR case rulings against the regime, versus benefits from IOs like the WTO. Russia perhaps realized that withdrawing from the WTO would have substantial material consequences for Russia, furthering its isolation and reducing its benefits among regional trading partners.⁷⁵ If it withdrew, Russia would be unable to participate in the formation of global trade rules, the multilateral trade dispute settlement mechanism (in which it is currently very active), and could lose its status as a strong market economy.⁷⁶ This is a prime example of *selection* (states strategically weighing costs and benefits of leaving), which mutes the measurable consequences of actual exit.

3.2 Examples of State Stigma Management via Rhetoric

The second way that states can pushback against the punishment costs of suspension (H1) is by rejecting or countering stigma rhetorically. We document the two main forms this behavior takes: complaining about IO interference in sovereign domestic affairs; and painting the IO as biased, unfair, and badly informed about local context. Some examples of these strategies already surfaced in the above section from Zimbabwe, Maldives, and Russia. Below we describe a few additional instances from other regions of the world that exemplify two of the types noted by Adler-Nissen (2014): counter-stigmatization and stigma rejection.

- Counter-stigmatization: Cuba was suspended from the OAS in 1962 over its "incompatible" adherence to Marxism-Leninism.⁷⁷ In response to the suspension, Cuba said "it has no interest in rejoining the group" which Fidel Castro described as a "Trojan horse" for American interference in the region.⁷⁸
- Counter-stigmatization: Venezuela was suspended from Mercosur in 2016 for violating the group's democratic principles. Mercosur said that President Nicolas Maduro had not incorporated key rules on trade and human rights into national law, and he had caused widespread food shortages, looting, and human rights abuses. Venezuela's Foreign Minister countered the stigma by describing the suspension as a coup attempt and rejected the notion that Venezuela had failed to conform to the trade group's rules. Further, she

⁷⁴ Aarup and Furlong 2022.

⁷⁵ European Pravda 2022.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ BBC 2009.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

stated that “Venezuela does not recognize the null action carried out under the law of the jungle taken by the officials who are destroying Mercosur.”⁷⁹

- Stigma rejection: Pakistan was suspended from the Commonwealth in 1999 for democratic backsliding after Pervez Musharraf seized power in a military coup d’état. The head of Pakistan's secret service described the suspension as “very unfair to the people of Pakistan and rather short-sighted and heavily biased towards India.”⁸⁰
- Stigma rejection: Honduras was suspended from the OAS in 2009 after a coup d’état toppled President Manuel Zelaya. Ahead of the expected suspension, the interim government remained defiant and said it would renounce the OAS charter.⁸¹ It rallied supporters on the streets of the capital and other cities in a sign of support. The caretaker president said that “It is better to pay this high price... than live undignified and bow our heads to the demands of foreign governments.”⁸²

These and other examples of state pushback against suspension indicate that suspension is indeed costly – otherwise states would not expend effort to counter this policy. We thus interpret this as empirical support for Hypothesis 1.

4. Multivariate Tests

In this section, we test Hypotheses 2-4 about the consequences of suspension using multivariate regression analyses. Since we are interested in consequences of exit for states, our unit of analysis is the state-year. While our exit data for the independent variable (suspension) covers 1939-2022, two of the three reputational outcomes (risk scores, investor confidence) are only available from 1984 to 2017, shortening the temporal scope of analyses.

Our key independent variable is *IO suspension* which is coded 1 for the state-year in which suspension happens and 0 otherwise. For example, Mauritania was suspended from the OIF in 2008-2009. In this case, *suspension* is coded 1 only in 2008 and 0 otherwise. We use our IO Exit dataset, analyzing IO suspensions following political backsliding from all 534 IO and all states. The IO Exit database sources information from IO websites and news reports using the Factiva international news database. Factiva accesses more than 33,000 sources and has consistent coverage over time. We relied mainly on news reports to track IO suspension because organizations do not otherwise have a uniform way of reporting suspensions. Membership suspension is public and is announced in formal press releases or in diplomatic meetings that are also covered by the media. The IO Exit database thus analyzes news coverage, using the full list of 534 IOs to provide a comprehensive account. We supplemented our search of news reporting with research on IO websites and by submitting email inquiries to IO staff. We also used secondary sources including archives, previously published books, and the internet more broadly to search

⁷⁹ Al Jazeera 2016.

⁸⁰ Tran 1999.

⁸¹ Wolf 2009.

⁸² Ibid.

for exit cases. As a result, the IO Exit dataset includes information that is uniform across organizations. There are 104 cases where IOs suspended states in 1939-2022.⁸³ At the state-year level of analysis, that translates to about 1 percent. Several states get suspended from several organizations in the same year for the same violation. We do not lag this variable because suspension is unlikely to still have an effect on outcomes a year later. As an alternative measure we use suspension duration in the analyses, which yields very similar results.

Assessing the consequences of suspension is challenging as we need to distinguish the effects of suspension from the effects of political backsliding that precedes them. A state's reputation may already be on the decline before suspension happens. Efficient markets⁸⁴ may factor in the political risk of downward trending behavior. Bad behavior alone (a coup d'état, for example), might shake the country's economic stability, affecting the country's political and economic risk *even without a suspension*. We do not want to attribute the effect of the coup d'état to the effect of IO suspension. Instead, we aim to test whether actors (including the private sector) react specifically to the IO suspension above and beyond reactions to the rule violation itself. That is, we seek to estimate the marginal effect of suspension on outcomes, beyond the underlying violation.

We address this inference challenge in two ways. First, we control for variables that capture common state violations which trigger suspensions. Here, we focus on political backsliding, which is the largest group of suspension cases and has a reasonably coherent and measurable set of violations underlying them. Second, we estimate two-stage models. Here, the second stage predicts the effect of suspension on outcomes, while the first stage considers which states experience political backsliding – and thus qualify for suspension – in the first place. The first stage model uses the drivers of suspension to get better estimates of the consequences of suspension.

We proceed in three steps, assessing suspension consequences on 1) investor confidence and political risk scores; 2) subsequent sanctions by other international actors; and 3) target state domestic institutional change. To preview the results, our empirical analyses show that suspended states often suffer reputational consequences, as indicated by worsened political risk scores and drops in investor confidence. In examining heterogeneity, we find as predicted that most of the reputational effects occur for democracies and anocracies while autocracies are less likely to face reputational pain. In terms of economic strength, most of the reputational costs accrue to weaker states. We find strong evidence that suspensions facilitate subsequent economic sanctions by other actors: suspended states are more likely to be subsequently sanctioned by the United Nations and other regional organizations. We find no quantitative evidence of significant domestic institutional behavior change in the target state as a result of suspension.

4.1 Multivariate Analyses on Reputational Consequences: Investor Confidence and Political Risk Scores

⁸³ We do not include suspensions for financial arrears which are out of scope for analysis.

⁸⁴ Malkiel 1989.

The outcome variables are measures of reputation in line with previous work on this topic.⁸⁵ We use two indicators: political risk and investment profile. Both are operationalized through international investor confidence and sourced from Political Risk Services' (PRS) International Country Risk Guide (ICRG). Note that political risk ratings are only available since 1984 and not for all states; some states do not finance themselves in international bond markets and are thus not rated.

The first reputational measure, *political risk*, is an aggregate index that ranges from 0 to 100 points. It is based on 12 weighted variables covering political, economic, and social attributes including government stability (12 points), socioeconomic conditions (12 points), investment profile (12 points), internal and external conflict (each 12 points), corruption (6 points), military in politics (6 points), religious and ethnic tensions (each 6 points), law and order (6 points), democratic accountability (6 points), and bureaucracy quality (4 points). The higher the political risk score, the more secure/less risky is the country.

The second reputational measure, *investment profile*, is one of the components of this aggregate index. This measures risk to investment with three sub-components: contract viability/expropriation, profits repatriation, and payment delays. Again, higher scores imply that on balance, the state's investment environment is more secure (i.e., less risky).

We also include control variables that might confound the relationship between suspension and its consequences including country fixed effects and the lagged dependent variable of each outcome. This allows us to focus on over-time changes in a given state and then average estimates across states. We also follow previous studies that examine factors that explain our outcome variable, *political risk scores* and *investment profile*.⁸⁶ We therefore control for the *lagged political risk score* along with a measure for the country's level of *law and order*, *GDP growth*, and (logged) *GDP per capita* and *trade share*. All control variables are lagged by one year to mitigate endogeneity. All descriptive statistics are in Appendix Table A1.

A major challenge to inference (as noted above) is distinguishing the effect of suspension from the effect of the violating behavior. That is, the underlying state behavior that causes the IO suspension may also cause a change in dependent variables (like investor confidence) directly by itself. Distinguishing the effect of state violations from the effect of IO suspensions for these violations can be challenging because suspension (if it happens) usually follows shortly after backsliding.

To address this inference challenge, we account for the most common IO violations (for which some states are suspended). Based on previous research,⁸⁷ common reasons for suspension include political backsliding in the form of human rights violations and regressions in democracy, as well as wars (intra-state and inter-state). To capture political backsliding, we measure (1) reductions in

⁸⁵ Gray 2009; Dreher and Voigt 2011; Dreher, Mikosch and Voigt 2015; Baccini and Urpelainen 2014; Tomashevskiy and Kono 2015.

⁸⁶ These controls follow Dreher and Voigt 2011; Cosset and Roy 1991. Inflation and interest rates have higher missingness (lowering the sample size), so we only use them in robustness check, yielding similar results.

⁸⁷ von Borzyskowski and Vabulas 2019.

human rights and (2) nondemocratic events in the form of coups d'états, reductions in democracy scores, and serious election irregularities. *Political backsliding* is a binary indicator coded 1 if any of the following apply: a one-point or larger worsening in human rights scores compared to the previous year, a two-point or larger worsening in Polity2 scores compared to the previous year,⁸⁸ a successful coup d'état,⁸⁹ or serious election irregularities (government harassment of the opposition and low election quality).⁹⁰ The variable *Political backsliding* is coded 1 when one or more political regressions occurred, and 0 otherwise. To capture intra- and inter-state wars, we code *Wars* as 1 when the target country experienced a *civil war* or an *international conflict* in the previous year,⁹¹ and 0 otherwise. *IO Violation* is an aggregate indicator that captures if either *Political Backsliding* or *Wars* is coded 1.

For model estimation, we use OLS with country fixed effects and robust standard errors clustered on the state to account for the lack of independence of observations within the same state. Since we include lagged dependent variables for the respective outcome variables, we interpret estimates as changes in the outcomes. As a robustness check, we also adopt a stricter measure of suspension, analyzing only suspensions from regional organizations (with a clear geographic community of belonging). Here we remove all cases of suspension from organizations that were global (WB, IMF, UPU, WMO, ICAO, LoN, Intl Hydrographic Org) or transregional (Commonwealth, OIF). These results are in Appendix Table A2. The results are slightly stronger but substantively identical to the main analysis.

Results are in Table 1 and support Hypothesis 1 on reputational consequences since suspension is associated with a drop in political risk scores and investor confidence. The coefficients on *suspension* in columns 1-2 are negative and statistically significant, indicating that suspension is associated with reduced state reputation. In terms of the substantive size, IO suspension is associated with a 2.7-point lower political risk score, meaning a riskier environment. That is 18 percent of a standard deviation change in the PRS outcome, a substantively notable change. The consequences for investment profiles are similar. Here, suspension is associated with a 0.28-point drop in the outcome, which represents a 12 percent of a standard deviation change in the outcome.

⁸⁸ Political terror scale data range from 1 to 5 (Gibney et al. 2021); Polity2 data ranges from -10 to +10 (Marshall and Gurr 2018).

⁸⁹ Marshall and Marshall 2022.

⁹⁰ Hyde and Marinov 2011 (Nelda6); Coppedge et al. 2022.

⁹¹ Themner and Wallensteen 2012; Palmer et al. 2015.

Table 1: Reputational Consequences of Suspensions for States (1984-2017)

	(1) Political risk	(2) Investment profile
Suspension	-2.754 (0.623)***	-0.288 (0.129)**
ICRG Political risk score, lagged	0.853 (0.011)***	
ICRG Investment profile, lagged		0.851 (0.010)***
ICRG Law and order, lagged	0.184 (0.101)*	0.087 (0.021)***
GDP growth in percent, lagged	0.033 (0.018)*	0.013 (0.004)***
GDP pc logged, lagged	-0.465 (0.212)**	0.230 (0.059)***
Trade as share of GDP, lagged	0.005 (0.003)*	0.002 (0.001)***
Political Backsliding	0.095 (0.165)	-0.074 (0.040)*
Wars	0.047 (0.481)	-0.011 (0.092)
Observations	4101	4101
R2	0.963	0.887
Country fixed effects	✓	✓

Notes: OLS regressions with robust standard errors.

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

To check the robustness of these results and better account for the sample selection issue, we use Heckman models. In the first stage, we use common predictors of political backsliding.⁹² Here, the aggregate measure *IO violation* is the outcome in the first stage (sample selection), and then conditional on that sample we estimate in stage 2 the effect of suspension on reputational and material outcomes. In the second stage, we replicate models from above (Table 1). The findings (see Appendix Tables A3 and A4) are fairly consistent with the main analysis. Results show that states suffer reputational consequence in terms of more political risk, but investment profile is not significantly affected (though still negative).

We next investigate heterogeneity in effects for different types of states, replicating the main analyses (Table 1). As noted in Hypotheses 2a and 2b, reputational consequences should be stronger for states which are more democratic or economically weaker. We investigate this by segmenting the data by regime type (democracies, anocracies, autocracies) and by economic

⁹² von Borzyskowski and Vabulas 2019.

strength with states above the median value of (logged) GDP per capita categorized as “stronger economies” and states below the median value of (logged) GDP per capita categorized as “weaker economies.”

The results of these heterogeneity tests are in Figures 2a and b (with detailed estimates in Appendix Table A5a and A5b). They show that Hypothesis 2a is largely supported. Figure 2a splits observations into three regime types; significant coefficients ($p < 0.05$) are indicated in red). Results indicate that suspension consequences for political risk (but not investor confidence) manifest in anocracies but not autocracies or democracies. This is consistent with the notion that autocracies have little reputation to lose when it comes to political stability and investment stability (in-transparency and lack of checks and balances means policy change may be sudden). Democracies have much to lose in terms of reputation but their reputations are less malleable even with transgressions. Anocracies are middling regimes with the highest uncertainty where a suspension may be most impactful.

Figure 2a: Reputational Consequences of Suspensions for States – by Regime Type

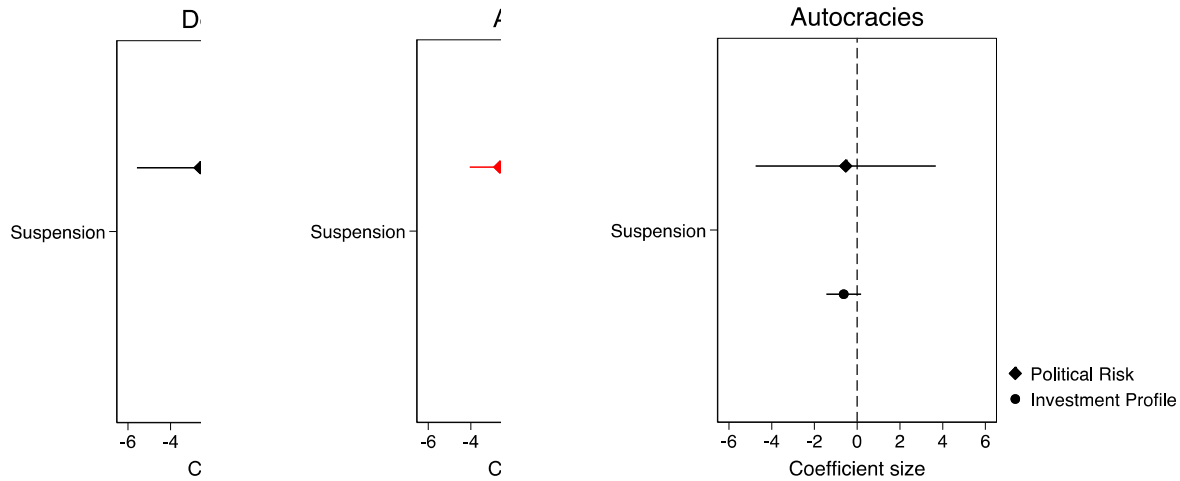
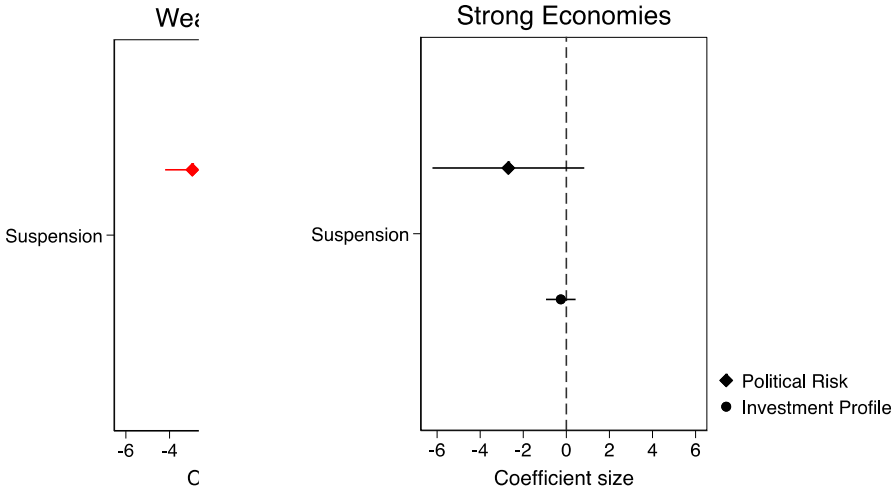


Figure 2b replicates Figure 2a but splits the data by economic strength, splitting the dataset by the median value of logged GDP per capita. Results indicate that suspension consequences are stronger for economically *weaker* states, as expected. These states experience a worsening of political risk scores and investment profiles from suspension. There is no evidence of reputational consequences for economically stronger states, probably because their reputations are likely less malleable even with transgressions.

Figure 2b: Reputational Consequences of Suspensions for States – by Economic Strength

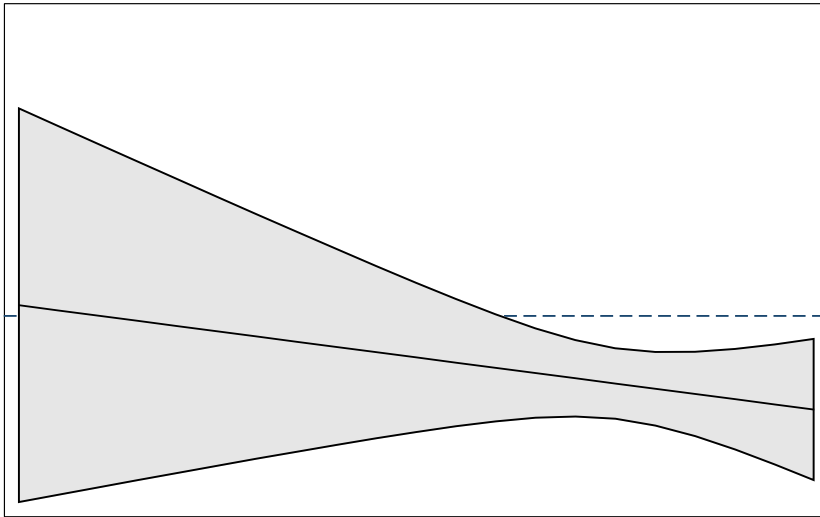


To test heterogeneity across IOs and specifically Hypothesis 2b that the reputational consequences of IO suspension are stronger from democratically dense IOs, we replicate Table 1 and interact the suspension variable with a measure of *IO democratic density*. This variable captures the highest democratic density among all of a given state’s IGO memberships in the given year. Following prior research,⁹³ we average the regime score of each IGO that state m is a member of in year t (excluding the violator state), and then select the highest IGO score for each member state-year. For years in which the state is suspended, we record the democratic density from of the organization from which the state is being suspended. If the state is being suspended from more than one IO in the same year, we take the highest democratic density score.

These results indicate that the reputational consequences of IO suspension are stronger from democratically dense IOs in the case of the aggregate political risk outcome, but not in the case of the specific investor confidence outcome. In the latter, the interaction is also negative but not statistically significant. This is mixed support for Hypothesis 2b. In Figure 3 we show the results for the political risk score. The marginal average effect of suspension increases the more democratically dense the IO is. At low levels of democratic density (when the IO is dominated by autocratic states), suspension for political backsliding has no effect on political risk scores. But the marginal effect becomes negative, larger in magnitude, and statistically significant the more the IO is dominated by democratic states.

⁹³ The calculation follows Pevehouse (2002a; 2002b) and uses polity2 data (Marshall et al. 2011).

Figure 3: Average marginal effect of suspension on political risk scores, by IO democratic density



4.2 Multivariate Analyses on Reputational Consequences: Subsequent IO Sanctions

Moving on from the direct effects on the suspended state, we now test Hypothesis 3 regarding how *other actors* in the international community react to suspensions. We focus on how IO suspensions facilitate subsequent sanctions by the United Nations Security Council and other regional organizations. Our theory stipulates that IO suspension serves as a clear signal to other actors for several reasons. First, suspension is binary in nature and thus helps simplify some of the noise that might complicate a contextual understanding of the violation. Second, suspension signals that the violator's own peer community has already determined that its behavior was non-compliant. This may empower outside actors to also punish the violator. IO suspensions may particularly help larger or more heterogeneous organizations overcome collective action challenges by providing cover.⁹⁴

A wide array of actors has imposed economic and other sanctions over the last few decades, ranging from individual countries to regional organizations all the way up to the United Nations Security Council.⁹⁵ We capture these different types of senders with two dependent variables. The first, *UN sanctions*, is a binary indicator for whether the UNSC imposed sanctions on a state in that year. We measure UNSC sanctions because it is the IO that is perceived as a relatively neutral institution due to its heterogeneous member preferences.⁹⁶ Nonetheless, the UNSC is selective in

⁹⁴ Drezner 2000: 83; Lebovic and Voeten 2006, 2009; Martin 1993, 1992; Murdie and Davis 2012.

⁹⁵ Bapat and Morgan 2009; Biersteker, Eckert, and Tourinho 2016; Donno 2010; Hufbauer and Oegg 2000; Maller 2010; Martin 1993; Morgan, Bapat, and Kobayashi 2014; Nooruddin 2002; Nossal 1989; von Soest and Wahman 2015; Lektzian and Regan 2016.

⁹⁶ Thompson 2006.

which conflicts it intervenes.⁹⁷ We measure onset, i.e. the first year of UNSC sanctions imposition. We measure UN sanction onset because we are interested in whether the UN is more likely to sanction a suspended country, not how long the UN sanction lasts.

Thus, we code *UN sanction* 1 when the UNSC imposed a sanction against state *s* in year *t*. It is coded 0 in the years before the imposition of UN sanctions, and missing in the years after UN sanctions onset while UN sanctions are ongoing. For example, the UN imposed sanctions on Libya in 1992 and lifted them in 2003. Thus, the variable *UN sanction* onset is coded 0 for the observations Libya 1980-1991, 1 for Libya 1992, missing for Libya 1993-2003, and 0 for Libya 2004-2010. To construct this variable, we source data from UNSC documents.⁹⁸ Between 1977 and 2022, the UNSC applied 31 sanctions against 26 countries. All UNSC sanctions are listed in Appendix Table A6 with years of UN sanctions imposition and prior RO actions.

The timing of suspensions versus subsequent other sanctions is critical to our argument. Thus, this variable, *UN sanction*, is coded 1 only when UN sanctions clearly come *after* suspensions or when no suspensions occur in the same year or later. We do not code UN sanctions when these precede suspensions, as that would generate an endogenous correlation.

Similar to UN sanctions we also code *non-UN sanctions*, which include economic sanctions by both regional organizations or individual countries.⁹⁹ We measure non-UN sanctions because of the importance of regional sanctions¹⁰⁰ particularly because the peer basis provides a legitimacy bonus¹⁰¹ and this has been shown to have a powerful influence on global action.¹⁰² It is also a binary indicator, coded in the same way as UN sanctions.

For assessing the effect of suspensions on triggering subsequent sanctions by the UNSC and other actors, we also code a complementary independent variable, *suspension duration*. We use this as a complement in two models because other actors in the international community may not react in the immediate year of suspension – it may take collective organizations a few weeks or months to come together, discuss, and decide on a way forward. Thus, *suspension duration* is coded 1 as long as the suspension is ongoing and 0 otherwise. For example, Mauritania was suspended from the OIF in 2008-2009. In this case, *suspension* is coded 1 only in 2008; and *suspension duration* is coded 1 in 2008 and 2009, and 0 otherwise.

We also include control variables specific to the drivers of UN and other sanctions that may confound the relationship or also influence our dependent variable. While many states “qualify” for UNSC sanctions, only a few get targeted with sanctions. The conventional explanations of UNSC sanctions (selectivity) note that conflict intensity, P5 interests, and vulnerability are drivers

⁹⁷ Beardsley and Schmidt 2012.

⁹⁸ UNSC Resolutions; UNSC Terminated Sanctions Regimes; UNSC Sanctions and Other Committees. In line with the standard in this field (Graduate Institute 2018), we define each sanctions episode as a set of restrictions imposed by a sender in pursuit of identical objectives.

⁹⁹ We source data from Hufbauer et al. (2007; 2012).

¹⁰⁰ Whitehead 2021.

¹⁰¹ Hellquist and Palestini 2021.

¹⁰² von Borzyskowski and Portela 2023.

of selectivity. One explanation is that UNSC target selection is driven by the lethality of an armed conflict and the degree to which it threatens international peace and security.¹⁰³ To capture conflict severity, we include *civil war intensity* in the target country, *civil war contagion* from the target to another country, and *international conflict intensity* that the target country was engaged in.¹⁰⁴ The other explanation points to the geopolitical interests of UNSC members, and in particular the permanent members (P5), which can override severity considerations in sanctions imposition.¹⁰⁵ To capture P5 interests, we include the variable *P5 ally*.¹⁰⁶ In addition to controlling for the two traditional explanations of UN sanctions, we also account for target vulnerability. Sanctions are often imposed strategically on economically weak countries. To capture vulnerability, we include measures of *GDP per capita*, *GDP growth*, and *aid dependence*.¹⁰⁷ We also control for *democracy* because sanctions are typically more effective on democracies (because their larger selectorates are more likely to pressure leaders to change) and thus all things equal, democracies are more likely to be sanctioned in the first place.¹⁰⁸ All control variables are lagged by one year to mitigate endogeneity.

For model estimation we again use OLS with country fixed effects and robust standard errors clustered on state to account for the lack of independence of observations within the same state. For robustness, we replicate these models with rare events logit¹⁰⁹ to account for the rarity of sanctions imposition, and sample selection models to account for the non-random targeting of certain countries. These checks do not affect the substantive interpretation of results.

The results are in Table 2 and support Hypothesis 3 regarding further sanctions by the international community. The estimates in Table 2 show that the coefficients are consistently positive and highly statistically significant, regardless of whether *suspension* onset or *suspension duration* is used as a predictor. That is, both imposing a suspension and having a suspension in place is associated with later sanctions by other actors, including UNSC sanctions as well as regional sanctions. Some examples of this link between IO suspensions and subsequent UNSC sanctions (listed in chronological order) include:

- South Africa in 1977 preceded by UPU suspension
- Iraq in 1990 preceded by UASC suspension
- Liberia in 1992 preceded by ECOWAS suspension
- Yugoslavia in 1998 preceded by OSCE suspension
- Libya in 2011 preceded by LOAS suspension
- Guinea-Bissau in May 2012 preceded by April ECOWAS, AU, OIF suspension
- Central African Republic in 2013 preceded by AU and OIF suspension.

IO suspension facilitates subsequent sanctions by other actors, such as the UN Security Council and other regional organizations. IO suspension serves as a clear signal of stigmatization by peers;

¹⁰³ Beardsley and Schmidt 2012.

¹⁰⁴ Themner and Wallenstein 2012, Black 2013; Palmer et al. 2015.

¹⁰⁵ Chesterman and Pouligny 2003; Tostensen and Bull 2002.

¹⁰⁶ Leeds 2005.

¹⁰⁷ IMF 2015; World Bank 2015.

¹⁰⁸ Allen 2005, 2008; Brooks 2002; Drezner 2011: 104; Kaempfer, Lowenberg, and Mertens 2004; Lektzian and Souva 2007; Major 2012; Peksen 2019.

¹⁰⁹ King and Zeng 2001.

this legitimates further action in the international community and increases the collective response (and costs) on violators.

Table 2: Consequences of IO Suspensions for Subsequent Sanctions, 1939/1946-2014

	UNSC sanctions		Non-UN sanctions	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Suspension	0.090 (0.045)**		0.447 (0.070)***	
Suspension duration		0.046 (0.016)***		0.562 (0.034)***
Civil war intensity	0.007 (0.003)**	0.008 (0.003)***	0.052 (0.013)***	0.062 (0.012)***
Civil war contagion	-0.014 (0.006)**	-0.015 (0.007)**	0.129 (0.068)*	0.108 (0.062)*
Int'l conflict intensity	0.002 (0.001)	0.002 (0.001)	0.025 (0.005)***	0.020 (0.005)***
P5 ally	0.007 (0.004)*	0.008 (0.004)**	0.048 (0.019)**	0.061 (0.019)***
GDP growth in percent	-0.000 (0.000)	-0.000 (0.000)	-0.001 (0.001)	-0.001 (0.001)
GDP pc logged	-0.008 (0.003)***	-0.009 (0.003)***	0.025 (0.014)*	0.026 (0.013)**
ODA as share of GDP	-0.000 (0.000)	-0.000 (0.000)	0.004 (0.001)***	0.003 (0.001)***
Democracy	0.000 (0.000)**	0.000 (0.000)**	-0.004 (0.001)***	-0.004 (0.001)***
Political Backsliding	-0.001 (0.002)	-0.001 (0.002)	0.047 (0.012)***	0.043 (0.012)***
Observations	5305	5305	5189	5189
R2	0.073	0.071	0.383	0.427
Country fixed effects	✓	✓	✓	✓

Notes: OLS regressions with robust standard errors. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

4.3 Multivariate Analyses on Target State's Domestic Change

In this section, we test whether suspension makes it more likely that a violator state halts or changes its egregious behavior. Recall that Hypothesis 4 was that IO suspension should increase the chance that a violator state halts or marginally changes its egregious behavior but that efforts likely focus on shallow actions, not fundamental changes. Unfortunately, no comprehensive data exist across states and years for some of the shallow actions we may expect, such as installing a transitional government, lifting curfews/emergency rule, promising to revise the constitution, or passing domestic legislation. We are therefore not able to systematically test these changes in quantitative ways.

We are, however, able to test whether fundamental reforms take place, noting that we are skeptical that suspension could overhaul domestic institutions. Because our focus is on suspension after political backsliding, we measure four outcomes here: *democracy* (coded -10 to +10 using polity2 data), *human rights* (coded 1-5 using PTS data, with higher values meaning worse repression), *years until next election* (VDem data, logged), and *civil war intensity* (coded 0/1/2 using Prio data). For each outcome, we also include the lagged dependent variable to account for the recent status, along with control variables. The control variables are common aspects from the relevant literature and the same measures we used for predicting political backsliding (the first stage in the Heckman models above): *natural resources* (oil and gas per capita), *GDP per capita* and *GDP growth*, *age of democracy*, and *number of parties*. All control variables are lagged by a year. The explanatory variable is *suspension duration* (not suspension imposition) since our reading of cases suggests that it not realistic for domestic institutional changes to happen within a short time. We do not use country fixed effects here, so the comparison is across states and years.

The findings in Table 3 show that intended domestic changes (as measured here) do not manifest. Having suspension in place is associated with worse human rights (higher PTS scores mean worse human rights standards). This may be a consequence of suspension but more likely reflects the worsening domestic situation in states after the first backsliding event. The other three outcomes are not affected. In other words, suspension does not seem to have notable effects on domestic political institutions, not even shortening the time until the next election.

Table 3: Consequences of Suspensions on Domestic Institutions

	(1) Democracy	(2) Human rights	(3) Years until next election	(4) Civil war
Suspension duration	-0.250 (0.377)	0.304 (0.091)***	-0.110 (0.131)	0.031 (0.096)
GDP growth in percent, lagged	-0.025 (0.016)	0.013 (0.004)***	0.010 (0.006)	-0.006 (0.004)
GDP pc logged, lagged	0.192 (0.136)	-0.017 (0.023)	-0.019 (0.039)	-0.018 (0.030)
Democracy	0.855 (0.032)***			
Human rights, lagged		0.706 (0.026)***		
Years since last election, lagged and logged			-0.103 (0.049)**	
Civil war intensity				0.372 (0.049)***
Stage 1: IO Violation				
GDP growth in percent, lagged	-0.011 (0.003)***	-0.011 (0.003)***	-0.013 (0.004)***	-0.016 (0.005)***
Democracy	-0.032 (0.005)***	-0.033 (0.004)***	0.001 (0.006)	-0.023 (0.007)***
GDP pc logged, lagged	-0.157 (0.019)***	-0.178 (0.019)***	-0.128 (0.025)***	-0.293 (0.032)***
Oil and gas per capita, logged	0.008 (0.004)*	0.015 (0.004)***	0.002 (0.005)	0.040 (0.007)***
Age of democracy, logged	0.024 (0.024)	0.025 (0.021)	-0.058 (0.029)**	0.026 (0.038)
Number of parties, logged	-0.030 (0.058)	0.013 (0.055)	-0.163 (0.076)**	0.060 (0.090)
System	-0.120 (0.030)***	-0.096 (0.029)***	-0.121 (0.038)***	0.008 (0.047)
Observations	5639	5617	5051	4921

Notes: Heckman models with robust standard errors. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

5. Conclusion

In this chapter, we theorize and document the consequences of suspension for states. We argue that suspension is costly for states. We provide examples of state stigma management as evidence that the punishment is indeed costly – otherwise states would not make the effort to mitigate this multilateral diplomatic sanction. We also theorize the consequences of suspension in terms of reputation consequences, follow-on sanctions, and domestic institutional changes. Four key empirical results support our arguments.

First, suspended states engage in stigma management to counter the punishment costs of suspension. Suspended states rhetorically reject and counter suspension as being unfair or biased foreign interference. Many suspended states also withdraw from the IO pre-emptively in an effort to save face. This suggests that suspension is a costly punishment for the suspended state, else they would not engage in these tactics.

Second, the multivariate analyses show that suspension has reputational consequences as indicated by worsened political risk scores and drops in investor confidence. These reputational consequences are stronger for anocracies and for economically weaker states. Reputational consequences are also driven by densely democratic IOs where the importance of maintaining credible commitments is stronger.

Third, suspensions after democratic backsliding facilitate other types of IO sanctions. Suspended states are more likely to be subsequently sanctioned by the United Nations and other regional organizations. Suspension can thus have reputational consequences by acting as a catalyst for other international actors, creating a layered penalty for democratic backsliding.

Fourth, we do not find, however, that suspended states are more likely to change domestic political institutions such as their level of democracy, time to next election, and chance of civil war outbreak. The limited array of domestic changes are instead quite shallow and not fundamental democratic or liberal institutional reforms. IOs' "defense" of norms through suspension only goes so far; re-entry without institutional or behavior change (such as in the case of Syria's suspension from the Arab League in 2011-2023) suggests that sometimes political considerations outweigh the need for states to follow IO rules.

Another case illustrates some of these dynamics. Returning to the case of Guinea (mentioned in the introduction), the ECOWAS suspension acted as a clear signal of disapproval from regional peers and created punishment costs including lost voting rights and access to meetings. Guinea tried to counter the stigmatization of IO suspension by presenting the coup as a welcome resistance to an armed plot, and said they refused to be dictated to by outsiders. Nonetheless, ECOWAS's suspension created reputational consequences and facilitated other sanctions: the African Union and the Organisation de la Francophonie also suspended Guinea¹¹⁰ and the UN Secretary General also condemned Guinea at ECOWAS' request. Still, Guinea only made some rudimentary domestic institutional reforms, including presenting a charter for transitioning to civilian rule. Deeper domestic institutional changes have not occurred. At the time of writing (2024), Guinea remains suspended, along with several other African states during a period of increased democratic backsliding.

The results suggest that suspensions act as multilateral diplomatic sanctions by imposing reputational consequences on target states. Suspensions are consequential in bringing about economic sanctions by other actors in the international community as well as reputational downgrades by investors. These reputational consequences of suspension confirm the need for scholars to assess *more than the material consequences* of economic sanctions on a state and also

¹¹⁰ Sputnik 2021.

include the effects that multilateral *diplomatic* sanctions can have on democratically backsliding states.¹¹¹

¹¹¹ Klotz (1999) makes a similar case in her work on South Africa's diplomatic sanctions during apartheid rule.

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