

Transnational Repression: International Cooperation in Silencing Dissent

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Abstract

Why do some states assist other countries to reach across national borders and repress their diaspora and exile communities, while others do not? Transnational repression involves host countries (many of whom are established democracies) working closely with origin states (autocracies) to transfer individuals into their custody and silence dissent. We argue that international cooperation on transnational repression relies on a host country's domestic rule of law and economic ties to the origin state. To measure international cooperation on transnational repression, we present new data containing 608 direct physical cases of transnational repression from 2014-2020 involving 160 unique country-dyads (79 host countries and 31 origin states). We test our argument using a dataset of 210,714 directed dyad-years and find preliminary support for our theoretical argument. Autocracies are better able to elicit cooperation on human rights violations from states that have a weaker rule of law and shared economic interests. Our findings contribute to the debate in international relations literature on economic civil-liberties trade-offs and have policy implications for civil society activists that seek to prevent governments from committing future human rights abuses on foreign nationals living abroad.