Illiberal Human Rights Norms in Trade and the Effectiveness of Western Conditionalities

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Abstract

Can international organizations effectively promote liberal norms amid the proliferation of competing illiberal norms and organization? The European Union (EU) is a leading organization that promotes human rights norms abroad, particularly through conditionalities in preferential trade agreements, as the largest trading bloc in the world. In this paper, using novel data on all EU trading partners between 1991 and 2019, I argue that states are more likely to resist these normative conditionalities when they are deeply embedded in regional trade agreements (RTAs) with human rights-violating members. These RTAs reinforce countervailing illiberal human rights institutions—authoritarian laws and norms that adopt relativist approaches to human rights and sovereignty—loosely tied to economic integration as non-conditionalities. This nexus of trade and illiberal human rights norms undermines Western trade-human rights linkages as mirror images, lowering the cost of noncompliance by providing attractive economic alternatives and collective bargaining power while also reducing domestic and international reputational costs through the institutionalization of illiberal norms. My findings indicate that high levels of embeddedness reduce the effectiveness of EU human rights conditionalities and increase the likelihood of trade negotiation failures. However, this embeddedness does not negate their effectiveness during negotiations, and EU agreements improve human rights outcomes in countries with low embeddedness. This suggests that the EU's normative influence through trade agreements is short-lived and marginal but existent. This study sheds light on the current status of changing liberal international order and offers new insights into the effectiveness of trade-human rights linkages.

Keywords: human rights, European Union, international trade, international organizations, illiberal norms

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1. Introduction

From the early 2000s, scholars have examined the role of international organizations in shaping the liberal international order (LIO), promoting democracy, and diffusing normative values such as human rights through liberalization and international cooperation (Simmons et al., 2006). These organizations established models for how states and institutions should operate, offering standards for liberalization, democracy, good governance, and human rights (Hafner-Burton, 2005a; Petersmann, 2002; Pevehouse, 2002).

More recently, however, scholarship has increasingly focused on the decline of the LIO. This decline is attributed both to the rise of populist and protectionist movements in the Global North—once its strongest advocates—and to the growing influence of revisionist states seeking to reshape the system (Lake et al., 2021; Barnett, 2021; Lobell and Ernstsen, 2021; Steinberg, 2021). Scholars have begun to examine how international organizations composed of non-democratic members reinforce authoritarian governance (Cottiero and Haggard, 2021). Today, the number of international organizations dominated by illiberal members rivals that of those with democratic majorities (Ginsburg, 2020; Debre, 2021; Libman and Obydenkova, 2018b,a), and continues to grow. Given this shifting geopolitical landscape, an essential question arises: Can international organizations still promote liberal norms through cooperation?

One key mechanism through which international organizations have promoted liberal norms is through economic dependence, by linking them trade. The practice of attaching human rights conditionalities to trade agreements has been a common, though contested, strategy employed by Western actors. [1] The European Union (EU) stands out as a leading promoter of human rights within the LIO framework. It actively includes human rights conditionalities—separate from labor standards—in nearly all its preferential trade agreements. With significant market power, the EU can enforce a "take-it-or-leave-it" stance with many developing countries (Ethier, 1998; Meunier and Nicolaïdis, 2005). For most states, access to the EU market is economically indispensable. Yet, whether this leverage still translates into effective norm promotion remains uncertain.

This paper contends that the effectiveness of Western-led human rights–trade linkages is conditioned by the international institutional contexts in which states are embedded. I argue that "illiberal" regional trade agreements—those characterized by a high density of human rights-violating member states—can undermine EU conditionalities by providing economic and normative alternatives. Illiberal norms attached to trade agreements create a countervailing linkage that weakens the EU's human rights–trade nexus. This dynamic allows states to reject universal liberal norms and instead reproduce alternative un-

[1] These conditionalities appear both in unilateral mechanisms, such as the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP), and in bilateral or regional preferential trade agreements. Earlier studies suggested that such linkages were effective, particularly in developing countries (Hafner-Burton, 2005a; Petersmann, 2002). However, their legitimacy and effectiveness remain contested. Critics argue that clauses are often unenforced or subject to selection effects that limit their impact (Spilker and Böhmelt, 2013; Donno and Neureiter, 2018).

derstandings of human rights that emphasize cultural relativism and sovereignty. These illiberal norms are institutionalized both formally (as "authoritarian human rights law") and informally, and are loosely tied to trade agreements as rhetorical shields rather than as enforceable conditions. The resonance and institutionalization of illiberal norms help reduce the cost of non-compliance, reducing both international and domestic reputational costs. And the no-strings-attached approach of these RTAs offers states more attractive economic alternatives to EU trade, also reducing the cost of non-compliance.

This study tests the effectiveness of EU trade agreements and human rights conditionalities in improving human rights outcomes in partner countries. Using novel data on states' embeddedness in regional trade agreements (RTAs) dominated by human rights abusers (1991–2019), the analysis estimates heterogeneous treatment effects when countries enter EU trade agreements. I employ causal inference methods, including synthetic difference-in-differences, supplemented with qualitative evidence. It examines both *ex-ante* and *ex-post* treaty compliance, accounting for selection effects often neglected in studies of international organizations.

The findings indicate that states highly embedded in illiberal IOs are less likely to accept EU conditionalities and norm promotion, and EU trade agreements are less likely to improve human rights after ratification. Compliance, however, is more likely during negotiations, when states adapt behavior to conclude agreements with the EU. I further find that lower dependence on the EU can increase the undermining effect of embeddedness.

My study contributes to several literatures. First, it speaks to research on the declining liberal international order (LIO) in human rights, showing how illiberal members and norms institutionalized in economic networks challenge EU-led norm promotion. It advances the literature on democratic erosion and the role of international organizations (Meyerrose, 2020; Cottiero and Haggard, 2021; Meyerrose, 2024), and offers a novel contribution to the sanctions and conditionality literature by foregrounding the international institutional context. The study also addresses the effectiveness of IOs and issue linkages—my findings suggest that illiberal international organizations are an important explanatory variable for the outcomes of issue linkage and IO effectiveness.

Further, this study draws on sociological institutionalist theories of norms, enriching research on authoritarian norm diffusion (Tansey, 2016; Ziegler, 2016). It also adds to the regime complexity literature (Alter and Meunier, 2009; Hafner-Burton, 2009) and studies of norm contestation (Börzel and Zürn, 2021; Risse and Babayan, 2015). Importantly, it redirects attention to norm receivers, whose agency is often overlooked in analyses of the human rights-trade nexus. Finally, my paper makes empirical contributions through original data constructed to measure embeddedness into illiberal RTAs—providing a tool that can also be leveraged for future research.

2. Effectiveness and Acceptance of Issue Linkages

For decades, EU trade agreements have included "Essential Elements" as human rights clauses, often positioned prominently at the beginning of treaties, signaling their central importance (Horng, 2003). These norms emphasize negative rights aligned with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), distinct from labor clauses. The EU integrates human rights into both bilateral agreements and unilateral measures (e.g., Generalized System of Preferences GSP and GSP+). This paper focuses specifically on human rights conditions within preferential trade agreements (PTAs) such as Free Trade Agreements (FTAs), Partnership and Cooperation Agreements, and Customs Unions. These agreements better illustrate the bargaining dynamics and interests involved, providing clearer insights into treaty effectiveness than unilateral measures primarily aimed at human rights promotion.

Studies of the EU's human rights and trade nexus highlight the inconsistency in conditionality application regarding both stringency and enforcement (Mckenzie and Meissner, 2017b; Sicurelli, 2015; Bartels, 2013). Some clauses are extremely stringent, allowing immediate withdrawal upon violation without formal dispute settlement processes. The EU's institutional interests and relative power influence the selection of trade partners and conditionality stringency (Meissner, 2016; Jung, 2024). However, Jung (2024) notes that despite differing institutional preferences, the EU generally favors stringent conditionalities regardless of partners' human rights situations. In contrast, partner countries consistently prefer weaker clauses, perceiving conditionalities as disguised protectionism (Postnikov and McKenzie, 2022), offensive, and infringing upon sovereignty (Zwagemakers, 2012). Even states with high human rights standards, such as Canada and Australia, resist these conditionalities, considering them irrelevant or insulting (Leino-Sandberg et al., 2005).[2] Latin American states have also criticized EU human rights norms in trade agreements due to perceived narrowness and arbitrary application (Franca-Filho et al., 2014).

Despite widespread opposition, variation in partners' resistance to issue linkages remains understudied. Nessel and Orbie (2022) argue that partners' preferences are equally important as EU interests in trade negotiations. Extant literature highlights that recipients' compliance depends on calculations of anticipated gains and losses, primarily increased trade flows and investments (Donno and Neureiter, 2018; Schimmelfennig, 2007; Noutcheva, 2006; Hafner-Burton et al., 2015; Moravcsik, 1995; Girod and Tobin, 2016). Domestic factors such as regime type, veto players, state capacity, political stability, and influential interest groups also shape compliance (Drazen, 2002; Joyce, 2006; Mayer and Mourmouras, 2002; Montinola, 2010; Wright, 2009).[3]

Compliance is often linked to enforcement likelihood: strategic importance reduces enforcement and

[2]Free trade agreements with these countries have been held up for decades due to disagreement on human rights clauses.

[3]The EU's strategic behavior and varying human rights promotion efforts, influenced by institutional politics and geopolitical interests, are acknowledged and controlled for in the analysis (Jung, 2024; Mckenzie and Meissner, 2017a).

thus compliance (Dreher, 2009; Kilby, 2009; Stone, 2004; Vreeland, 2006). However, there are very few documented cases of EU human rights conditionality enforcement, mainly limited to Partnership and Cooperation Agreements with African countries several decades ago. The EU hesitates to enforce sanctions due to potential trade benefits (Spilker and Böhmelt, 2013), reluctance to lose influence, and concerns about isolating civilians and legitimizing repressive regimes (Fierro, 2003; Smith, 2001).

If compliance were solely economically driven, lower compliance in EU-dependent countries in Africa and central Asia is puzzling, since these states depend heavily on EU trade. Given the EU's global economic significance, this paper investigates how states calculate conformity with human rights-trade linkages within varying international institutional contexts.

Another crucial issue is the selection effect in treaty compliance studies (Jung, 2024; Spilker and Böhmelt, 2013; Downs et al., 1996). Negotiations frequently stall or fail due to human rights disagreements, either from EU opposition to partner conditions or partner resistance to EU conditionalities (Zwagemakers, 2012; Kuznar and Menkes, 2022). Thus, compliance may occur before treaty signing as partners undertake due diligence to meet EU standards pre-agreement (Kim, 2012; Baccini and Urpelainen, 2014a).

This paper assesses both ex-ante and ex-post effectiveness and acceptance of norms. Typically, the EU proposes norms/conditionalities, while partners attempt to weaken or resist them (Stokke, 2006). Acceptance may lead to improved human rights either pre- or post-signing, whereas rejection can prompt EU compromises or negotiation deadlocks and failures. This paper thus evaluates both partners' rejection of EU norms (negotiation holdup/failure) and compliance effectiveness at different treaty stages.

3. Illiberal Human Rights-Trade Nexus

This study examines how "illiberal" international human rights norms link with trade liberalization as alternativs, and how these may compete with the liberal norms promoted by the EU through issue linkages. This represents a mirror image of liberal norm diffusion and promotion through trade relations (Cao et al., 2013; Greenhill et al., 2009; Greenhill, 2010; Hafner-Burton, 2005b). I define "illiberal RTAs" as regional trade agreements composed primarily of human rights-abusing states.

I argue that influential RTAs and human-rights-violating trade partners can collectively create a countervailing, illiberal trade-human rights linkage that can, in some cases, be more influential than EU conditionalities when embeddedness in such organizations is high. Assuming that states act based on cost-benefit calculations (Donno and Neureiter, 2018), deeper embeddedness reduces incentives for Western norm compliance by lowering the cost of resistance and increasing the cost of compliance. Trade relations with illiberal actors offer material alternatives and sometimes may penalize states that accept EU norms. This dynamic reinforces alternative understandings of human rights within these trade institutions, reducing both domestic and international reputational costs of non-compliance.

Indeed, the membership status of states in international organizations can independently shape their preferences (Egel and Obermeier, 2023; Goodman and Jinks, 2013). Research shows that IO membership composition significantly affects policy outcomes and international cooperation (Tallberg et al., 2016; Hafner-Burton and Schneider, 2019; Greenhill and Lupu, 2017). Economic IOs and ties have played a crucial role in promoting liberal norms (Cao et al., 2013; Greenhill et al., 2009; Simmons et al., 2006; Simmons and Elkins, 2004), especially in developing countries competing for capital and export markets (Simmons and Elkins, 2004; Dobbin et al., 2007).

Recent IO membership literature has explored the effects of authoritarian international organizations on the Liberal International Order (Libman and Obydenkova, 2018a,b; Stoddard, 2017; Cottiero and Haggard, 2021). Cottiero and Haggard (2021) find that membership in authoritarian regional international organizations (RIOs) hinders democratization and fosters authoritarian consolidation by offering resources and support that reduce reliance on Western financial institutions and trade. These blocs may also develop their own international legal frameworks to entrench authoritarian governance (Ginsburg, 2020). Cooperation among autocracies also serves pragmatic goals, such as shielding regimes from Western pressure and avoiding deeper cooperation commitments (Hafner-Burton et al., 2024; Weyland, 2019).

In trade, autocratic preferential trade agreements (PTAs) have significantly increased in the last decade, with institutional depth comparable to North-North agreements (Postnikov and Gamso, 2025). These agreements, constituting about 28% of all PTAs, are structured to avoid extensive reforms and exclude politically sensitive clauses, unlike North-South agreements (Baccini and Urpelainen, 2014b). However, they still emphasize trade liberalization and investment to sustain autocratic regimes (Richter, 2013). Figure 1 shows the dense network of regional trade agreements among only human rights-violating states (below-median human rights scores (Fariss et al., 2019)).[4]. While states such as Turkey, South Africa, and Peru have high centrality with multiple connections with human rights abusers, they also have multiple trade agreements with liberal countries.

The PTA network is indeed complex, encompassing diverse regime types and policy goals. Overlapping institutions influence state compliance and norm enforcement (Davis, 2009). Rule ambiguity emerges when preferences clash, enabling states to select rules that suit their interests (Alter and Meunier, 2009). In environments with contradictory human rights commitments, liberal and illiberal norms are directly contested within overlapping trade networks.

[4]Node sizes indicate centrality, and the top 20 most connected states are marked in blue

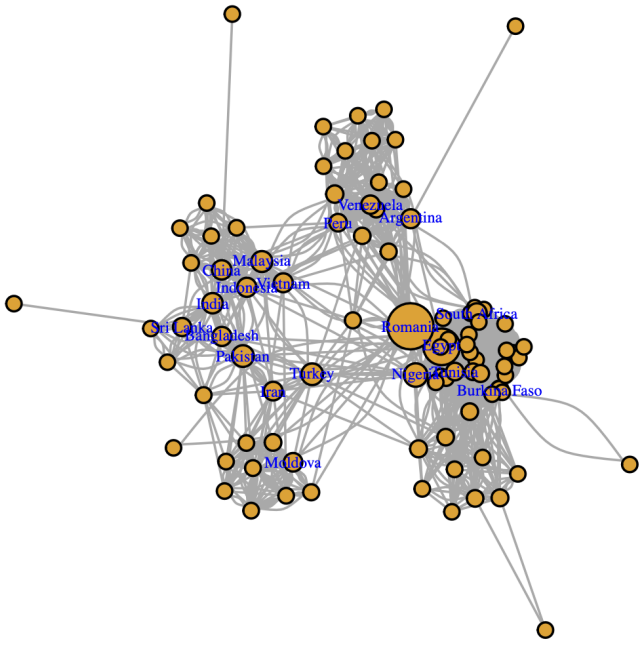


Figure 1: Network of RTAs between Human Rights Abusers

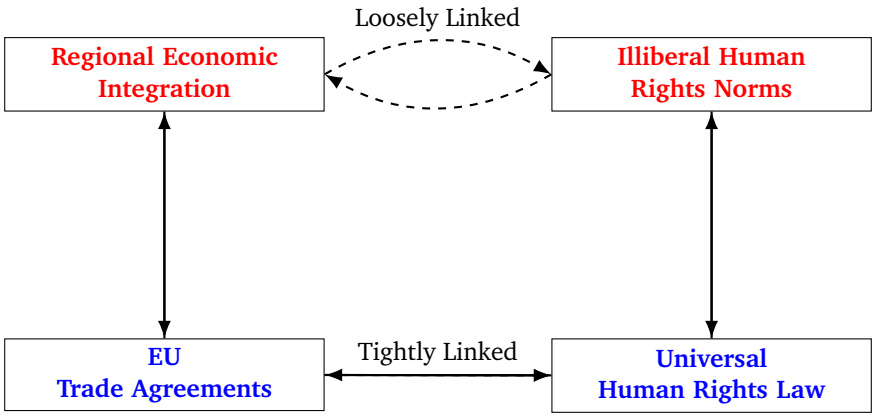


Figure 2: Human Rights- Trade Linkage in the EU and Illiberal RTAs

Hence, I argue that this contestation between trade networks originates from countervailing illiberal human rights and RTA linkages, which function as mirror images of EU-led issue linkages. Figure 2 illustrates this dynamic. Regional Trade Agreements (RTAs)—defined as "treaties between two or more governments that define trade rules for all signatories" (World Bank, 2018)—include bilateral trade relations and, conceptually, are often seen as antithetical to multilateralism. While human rights norms in EU trade agreements are enforceable conditionalities tied to universal human rights law, illiberal norms are loosely linked to RTAs as non-conditionalities. These illiberal human rights norms consist of both formal laws and informal norms that reject the universality of human rights, emphasizing sovereignty

and relativist approaches. This illiberal norms–trade nexus mirrors the EU's issue linkage strategy and can weaken the impact of EU conditionalities, as illustrated by the following hypotheses:

H1: EU trade agreements are less likely to be accepted when partner countries are more embedded in RTAs with multiple human rights violators.

H2: EU trade agreements are less likely to be effective—both ex ante and ex post—in improving human rights when partner countries are more deeply embedded in RTAs with multiple human rights violators.

Reducing Economic Costs of Non-Compliance and the Rejection of EU Norms

Regional trade agreements aimed primarily at economic integration are crucial to understanding how states calculate the material costs and benefits of norm compliance. RTAs differ from other international organizations by providing immediate, tangible economic benefits and domestic impacts. Exporting countries often emulate the norms and standards of their primary destination markets—a dynamic influencing both EU external relations and competing illiberal RTAs (Greenhill, 2010). Studies show that compliance and emulation depend on trade volume and market importance (Kahn-Nisser, 2019), and that more outside options reduce the effectiveness of conditionalities in trade agreements (Gray and Slapin, 2013). A countervailing illiberal trade–human rights linkage can thus incentivize resistance to EU norms by lowering the economic cost of non-compliance.

These RTAs offer economic support through trade divergence. The Global North's shift toward protectionism has pushed smaller, West-dependent countries to diversify or regionalize trade (Barros Leal Farias, 2020). Studies further show that outside options and overlapping IOs can shrink the bargaining range and minimize the impact of existing IOs and their conditionalities (Gray and Slapin, 2013; Clark, 2022; Lipscy, 2009). For instance, Clark (2022) highlights how Indonesia lessened its IMF conditionality burdens after joining the Chiang Mai Initiative.

While the EU remains a top trade destination for many countries, leading outside options will likely come from large emerging economies. China, in particular, has emerged as a major alternative to EU trade, offering foreign aid and trade partnerships without the EU's human rights conditionalities. China adopts a development-first approach to human rights and upholds a sovereignty-focused, non-interventionist framework. It actively aligns with other authoritarian regimes, forming what it calls a "Like-Minded Group (LMG)" to promote its alternative human rights vision (Vatanka, 2019; Chen, 2019). With the signing of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), China now rivals the EU in trade influence—holding 24 FTAs in Asia, compared to the EU's 16 (of which only 4 are in effect). In ASEAN, China extended tariff cuts and economic concessions following the regional financial crisis (Ba, 2003; Meissner, 2018), and its investments in Africa have both promoted development and strengthened authoritarian regimes (Webster, 2012).

However, the rise in Chinese exports alone has not significantly impacted human rights, and some argue that China's economic power is overstated (Kahn-Nisser, 2019). China is an important player, but the broader landscape of multiple outside options provided by various RTAs—such as those involving

Russia, Turkiye, or oil-rich Gulf states—better explains the weakening of EU leverage. Countries like the UAE and Turkiye have gained influence in Sub-Saharan Africa, the MENA region, and the Balkans as alternative donors and trade partners (Muğurtay, 2022).

What makes these options particularly attractive to domestic leaders is the absence of conditionalities. Illiberal states deliver trade benefits swiftly and without demands for human rights improvements, in stark contrast to the EU's approach (Condon, 2012; Fachqoul and Defraigne, 2015). Many governments are already reluctant to accept human rights conditions (Watkins, 2022). China, for example, explicitly argues that civil and political rights should not take precedence over economic and social rights, earning the label of a "rogue" donor (Condon, 2012).

These powers also exert coercive pressure—using "sticks" to dissuade EU alignment. For example, during Ukraine's negotiations for a Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement with the EU, Russia pressured other members of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) to impose customs duties on Ukraine—threatening punishment for states that did not comply. Russia's regional integration efforts are widely seen as attempts to sustain authoritarianism and prevent EU influence (Libman and Obydenkova, 2018a; Börzel, 2017). EU sanctions have had little effect in such regions due to their economic reliance on Russia (Yildiz, 2022). From Russia's perspective, democratization in its periphery is a threat to regime stability (Risse and Babayan, 2015). Illiberal regionalism thus raises the costs of EU norm compliance and diminishes issue linkage effectiveness (Yildiz, 2022).

Another mechanism is economic collective bargaining. Like the EU, illiberal RTAs allow member states to pool influence. Smaller states, sharing cultural or ideological views on human rights, may jointly bargain against stricter conditionalities (Björkdahl, 2008; Long, 2017). EU trade deals often involve regional organizations like the Southern African Development Community (SADC), giving weaker states a platform to voice unified positions. Even when these negotiations fail, states may cite other agreements—such as Vietnam referencing the EU-Singapore FTA's weak human rights provisions—to push for similar treatment (Molthof, 2012). Deep, integrated trade networks thus enable collective resistance to Western pressure.

Legitimizing Non-Compliance and the Reproduction of Illiberal Norms

While the previous section hinges on the potential rejection of European norms, this section addresses the adoption of alternative illiberal norms through regional organizations, which can be both formal and informal. These norms can be institutionalized in the form of what Ginsburg (2020) calls "authoritarian international law." Authoritarian regimes have developed their own forms of international law that include less democratic rules, looser cooperation, and provisions that support autocratic regime survival. Ginsburg argues that autocracies adopt the forms of democratic governance for undemocratic purposes. These laws resemble democratic institutions only superficially, containing loopholes and lacking enforcement mechanisms (Bui, 2016; Walker, 2016). They function as façades to fend off or appease democratic pressure from the West—signaling compliance without requiring real domestic change (Debre, 2021; Whelan and McWard, 2020; Hafner-Burton et al., 2024). These laws often em-

phasize cultural and historical values, which allows for relativist interpretations of human rights, and can include provisions that potentially undermine human rights protections.

These authoritarian human rights frameworks are loosely coupled with economic integration—often referenced in general terms, and not as binding conditionalities. The most prominent examples are the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration (ADHR) and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), which are referenced in the preambles or provisions of regional trade agreements such as COMESA, EAC, AEC, IGAD, ECOWAS, the Abuja Treaty, and the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU). For instance, Article 6(d) of the EAC stipulates the promotion and protection of human and peoples' rights in accordance with the ACHPR, with gender equality also mentioned in Articles 5 and 6. Human rights mandates are formally connected to economic integration processes in many African countries and the overlapping RTAs they are part of (Nwauche, 2009). However, it is notable that these RTAs reference only regional human rights laws—not universal human rights law. Many states have ratified only regional instruments, and not international ones such as the ICCPR. This suggests a form of window dressing. For example, Cameroon used regional international law to defend itself against accusations of human rights violations [5]. As of 2025, only four countries (Cambodia, Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam) from the ADHR signatories have ratified both the ICCPR and the Convention Against Torture.

The ADHR, adopted in 2012, legitimizes regional discussions of human rights and aligns with ASEAN's principle of non-intervention (Davies, 2013). The declaration includes provisions that state human rights must be understood within national and regional contexts, including historical, cultural, and social factors, which allows for relativist interpretation.[6] The declaration is not legally binding, and its relationship with ASEAN institutions is ambiguous (Davies, 2013). Article 40 further weakens the document by allowing state-centric interpretations of ASEAN's principles.[7] The emphasis on "persons" rather than "individuals" (Articles 10–25) reflects skepticism of the Western individualist approach to human rights (Clarke, 2012).

The ACHPR exhibits similar features. Article 6 includes a "clawback clause" allowing deprivation of liberty under laws determined by the state, which creates space for arbitrary restrictions. The emphasis on African family values in Chapter 2 also reflects a cultural framing that may undermine universal human rights principles (Bennett, 1999). Like the ADHR, the ACHPR lacks enforcement mechanisms, suffers from low transparency, and has a slow and inconsistent decision-making process (Isanga, 2012). Other regional instruments, such as the Revised Arab Charter, face comparable challenges (Nwauche, 2009).

[5] Amnesty International, 2013 "Republic of Cameroon: Make human rights a reality" https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/afr170012013en.pdf

[6] Article 6 states "the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms must be balanced with performance of corresponding duties..." and Article 7 says that "The realization of human rights must be considered in the regional and national context..."

[7] Article 40 states: "Nothing in this Declaration may be interpreted as implying for any State, group or person any right to perform any act aimed at undermining the purposes and principles of ASEAN."

However, the reproduction of human rights norms occurs not only through formal legislation but also via informal and less legalized means (Cao et al., 2013) . Regional identities, shaped by culture, politics, and history, contribute to social cohesion and create ideational frameworks that influence regional integration (Paasi, 2009). Debre (2021) argues that authoritarian regional organizations can provide ideational resources for regime survival, forming communities that devalue democracy and universal human rights. Examples include Russia's "Eurasianism," the "Asian Values" discourse, and ASEAN's "non-interference" norm. Africa's approach to human rights is often framed in the historical struggle against colonialism and apartheid (Heyns, 2003), and emphasizes preservation of African identity and heritage, which may not align with Western approaches (Gawanas, 2009).

The authoritarian diffusion literature emphasizes how illiberal norms spread through regional learning and adaptation (Tansey, 2016; Ziegler, 2016; Kneuer and Demmelhuber, 2016). Norms such as non-interference and sovereignty can legitimize human rights-undermining practices, helping normalize such behaviors (Allison, 2008). Local actors reinterpret global rules within regional contexts, constructing alternative norms that challenge transnational human rights standards (Acharya, 2011). States also observe and compare themselves with neighboring countries, reinforcing illiberal norms through mechanisms of praise and blame (Costa Buranelli, 2020; Houle et al., 2016).

These illiberal conceptions of human rights, both formal and informal, undermine EU normative pressures by altering the cost-benefit calculus of national leaders. Specifically, they reduce the perceived costs of non-compliance by legitimizing resistance, thereby lowering associated domestic and international reputational costs. Historically, compliance with Western human rights norms has enabled authoritarian leaders to mitigate domestic unrest and manage international reputation effectively. A robust literature underscores the relationship between compliance with human rights treaties and reputational costs (Hathaway, 2002; Von Stein, 2005; Simmons, 2010). States generally fear the reputational damage associated with international "naming and shaming" (Schimmelfennig, 2005; Hawkins and Jacoby, 2010). Rationalist interpretations of reputation emphasize a cost-benefit analysis, while normative approaches highlight compliance driven by moral obligations and the pursuit of status as respectable members of the international community (Sharman, 2007; Brewster, 2009). Drawing on both perspectives, I argue that when regional norms explicitly discourage compliance with external pressures, and domestic actors align more closely with these illiberal frameworks, the perceived costs of resistance are reduced, thus weakening the normative influence of the EU.

Internationally, illiberal human rights laws offer a shield against accusations of non-compliance with global human rights standards, reducing reputation costs. On the other hand, Von Stein (2005) notes that reputation costs for treaty non-compliance are typically high since states risk being viewed as unreliable partners. However, the presence of regional partners with shared illiberal norms partially mitigates these costs, ensuring continued recognition as trustworthy partners within that regional group. As states tend to assess their behaviors relative to neighboring states, being embedded within illiberal regional trade agreements (RTAs) reduces the sense of wrongdoing and dishonor associated with resisting ex-

ternal pressures.

Domestically, public opinion significantly influences state repressive practices, even within authoritarian regimes (Simmons, 2010; Conrad and Moore, 2010; Davenport, 2005). Nonetheless, research indicates scenarios where citizens willingly compromise on human rights (Dietrich and Crabtree, 2019; Gruffydd-Jones, 2019). The legitimacy provided by formal regional human rights laws lowers domestic audience costs associated with non-compliance . Simultaneously, the credibility of EU human rights pressures is undermined when illiberal norms resonate more strongly domestically. Studies demonstrate that diminished legitimacy of treaty bodies correlates with reduced effectiveness (Beitz, 2001). Yildiz (2022) also finds that domestic alignment with regional norms enables states to invoke regional frameworks and cite regional peers as normative justifications. For instance, a South Korean presidential candidate defended the continuation of the death penalty by referencing similar practices in neighboring Asian countries (Yonhap News, 08/05/2023[8]). Additional research shows that perceptions of Western human rights criticisms as politically motivated can decrease domestic support for reform (Gruffydd-Jones, 2019). Thus, sovereignty-based human rights narratives and institutionalized illiberal norms collectively can reduce domestic audience costs. However, the domestic costs of non-compliance likely vary by regime type (Cottiero et al., 2024; Lührmann et al., 2018) and by the strength of civil society (Neumayer, 2005), which I control for in the analysis.

Integrating these insights, this paper argues that states embedded within RTAs characterized by widespread human rights violations undermine EU human rights promotion through trade. This occurs through simultaneous rejection of liberal norms and reinforcement of illiberal alternatives, creating a mutually reinforcing feedback loop that undermines the effectiveness of EU conditionalities (Figure 3). Consistent with Risse and Sikkink (1999) and Checkel (2001), this interplay between rationalist and constructivist mechanisms illustrates how institutionalized illiberal norms increase the attractiveness of alternative alignments, while the rejection of liberal norms further facilitates acceptance of these illiberal alternatives.

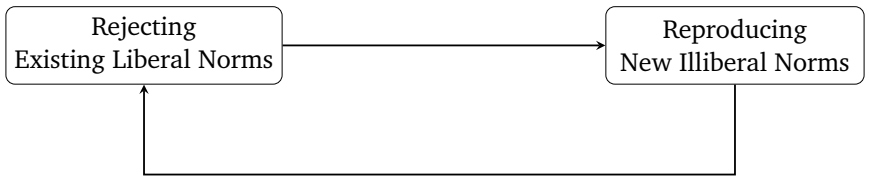


Figure 3: Feedback Loop Between Norm Rejection and Illiberal Norm Reproduction

4. Research Design

To empirically test my theoretical argument, I compile data on all EU trading partners—both with and without trade agreements—from 1991 to 2019. This comprehensive coverage addresses potential

[8] https://www.yna.co.kr/view/AKR20230805038100053

endogeneity concerns stemming from selection into agreements, totaling 134 agreements across 213 trading partners.

Dependent Variable

My dependent variable encompasses two dimensions: acceptance and effectiveness of EU trade-human rights linkage. Acceptance is first measured by the likelihood of treaty conclusion or negotiation failure. Treaty conclusion is coded as 1 if the agreement is concluded and implemented. I estimate the probability of agreement conclusion following negotiation initiation. Human rights disagreements are frequently cited as the cause of negotiation stalemates or failure (Zwagemakers, 2012; Kuznar and Menkes, 2022), notably with ASEAN, China, and India. Negotiation duration and indefinite failure are also coded as binary variables [9]. This variation is analyzed across countries that initiated trade negotiations with the EU. The failure of agreements can be a more valid measure than treaty conclusion since there are ongoing negotiations and the data is censored. Additionally, I incorporate the human rights conditionality stringency measure from Jung (2024), ranging from 0 (lowest stringency) to 5 (highest stringency).

Effectiveness is operationalized as improvements in human rights practices rather than mere compliance (Simmons, 1998). I primarily use Fariss et al. (2019)'s latent human rights scores measuring physical integrity rights, where higher scores denote better conditions. Given the multi-causal and autocorrelated nature of human rights scores, I also use the binary execution of the death penalty as a targeted measure of EU-specific human rights compliance. Data from Amnesty International codes death penalty executions annually (1 if executed, 0 otherwise). Despite not explicitly violating international human rights law, the death penalty is central to the EU's human rights agenda, thus making it a relevant measure of direct compliance.

Execution of the death penalty has always been considered a human rights violation within the EU as cruelty and torture, while it is not debated as a human rights issue in the US (Jouet, 2023). EU efforts to reduce or to put a hold on the death penalty in third countries have been quite effective, such as Yemen, Belarus, and Nigeria (Behrmann and Yorke, 2013). The EU constantly pressures countries to abolish and not execute the death penalty, threatening partners with tariff measures [10], withdrawing of trade preferences, and refusing to conclude FTAs without commitment to a moratorium (Jung and Koo, 2018). Countries indeed have abolished or put the death penalty on a moratorium with the strengthening of EU trade relations—yet in more recent years, death penalties have been reinstated in multiple countries

[9] For negotiation duration, the variable is coded as 1 when negotiations are in place, and 0 otherwise. For negotiation failures, when the EU officially states that negotiations have been failed with the partner, the variable is coded as 1 from the failed period.

[10] DW, 01/07/2019 "Sri Lanka death penalty reinstatement 'extremely disturbing" https://www.dw.com/en/sri-lanka-death-penalty-reinstatement-extremely-disturbing/a-49428391

including Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Papua New Guinea, Gambia, and Malawi. [11] Even a third of UK citizens call on bringing back the death penalty after Brexit since the UK is no longer bound by EU law [12]. Due to these reasons, explicit pressure to abolish or put the death penalty on hold from the EU is perceived as a severe intervention in internal affairs (Huong and Khoo, 2019)—Hence this measure can effectively measure even democratic countries' and their direct resistance to EU norms.

Explanatory Variable: Embeddedness into Illiberal RTAs (IHRRES)

To measure embeddedness into illiberal regional trade agreements (RTAs), I construct the Illiberal Human Rights RTA Embeddedness Score (IHRRES). This measure, inspired by previous scholarship on institutional diffusion and influence (Hafner-Burton et al., 2019; Cottiero and Haggard, 2021; Greenhill, 2010; Pevehouse, 2002), captures the extent to which a country participates in RTAs with members exhibiting poor human rights records. Unlike existing approaches focusing exclusively on authoritarian IOs, I include all comparable RTAs irrespective of regime types. This allows consideration of potential counterbalancing effects from membership in RTAs with better human rights practices.

To measure the IHRRES, I first average the human rights scores (Fariss) of all members of RTAs that the country of interest (i) at a given year (t) is included in, excluding country i to observe the impacts of neighbors and not the country itself. I do not examine agreements where the majority of the signatories are EU members—this can rule out the effects of European states that share similar values with the EU. Then I average the scores across RTAs, weighting them by the depth of the agreements, using DESTA scores (Design of Trade Agreements) developed by Dür et al. (2014). The dataset measures the depth of different types of economic integration agreements, taking into account commitments to market access, flexibility instruments, enforcement tools, and non-trade issues. The data covers all negotiated trade agreements up to 2020 and will be an indicator of how integrated and important the agreement is for country i. The universe of RTAs is also from this dataset. Using treaty depth is a more appropriate proxy for the social and economic integration of regional trade agreements than simply using trade flows. Trade flows are endogenous to the signing of RTAs in the first place. Furthermore, treaty depth is indeed associated with trade volume, the level of integration, and the within-organization intensity of trade flows (Hofmann et al., 2017). And because treaty depth also takes into account the inclusion of non-trade issues, this also can be an indirect measure of how much states are willing to cooperate on social issues, allowing illiberal norms to better infiltrate.

[11] Other states that have reinstated the death penalty after abolition or a moratorium include: Philippines (abolished in 1987 and, reinstated in 1993), Sri Lanka (moratorium in 1976 and execution in 2004), Japan (moratorium in 2011 and execution in 2012), India (moratorium in 2004 and execution in 2012), Pakistan (moratorium in 2008 and execution in 2014), Thailand (moratorium in 2009 and execution in 2018), Singapore (moratorium in 2019 and execution in 2022), Myanmar (moratorium in 1988 and execution in 2022), Kuwait (moratorium in 2017 and execution in 2022), Afghanistan (moratorium in 2018 and execution in 2022), Belarus (moratorium in 2019 and execution in 2021), UAE (moratorium in 2017 and execution in 2021), Chad (abolition in 2014, 2020 and reinstated in 2015), DR Congo (moratorium in 2003 and execution in 2023), Saudi Arabia (moratorium in 2020 and execution in 2022)

[12] Yahoo News, 3/29/2017 https://au.news.yahoo.com/brexit-one-three-brits-want-172202680.html

Hence, a country can have multiple illiberal RTAs in place, with varying levels of economic cooperation and integration which I take into account. The data is coded from 0 to 7(higher the deeper), but for weighting purposes, I add 1 to the variable. I finally multiply (-10) by the equation to intuitively interpret high IHRRES as "higher" embeddedness into illiberal RTAs:

$$IHRRES_{it} = -10 \times \frac{\sum_j \left(\frac{\sum_{k \neq i} \text{FARISS}_{kt}}{\text{MEMBER\_COUNT}_{jt} - 1} \times \text{DESTA}_j \right)}{\sum_j \text{DESTA}_j}$$

Where $IHRRES_{it}$ is the IHRRES for country i at time t. $FARISS_{jk}$ are FARISS human rights scores for country k in organization j, in which country i belongs, the inner sum is taken over all countries k in organization j, excluding country i. $MEMBER\_COUNT_j$ is the count of the number of countries in organization j, and is subtracted by 1 because of country i. $DESTA_j$ is the weight for each organization j, and the outer sum is taken over all organizations to which country i belongs.

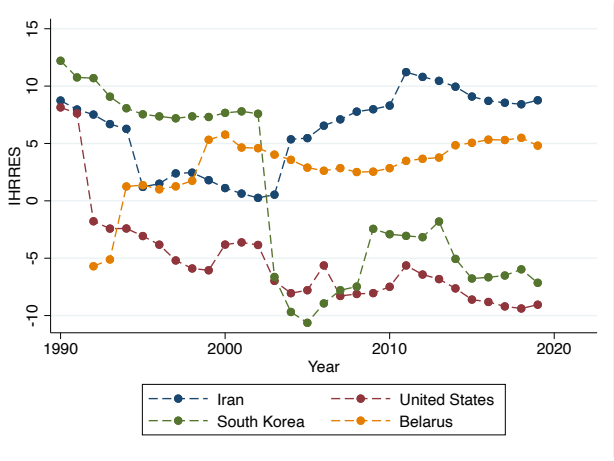


Figure 4: Variation of IHRRES over time

Figure 4 shows example states and their variation of IHRRES over time. In South Korea's (green) case, IHRRES went down dramatically in 2004 since Korea started signing new FTAs under the new regime after democratization. The United States, as a reference democratic state, has constantly low IHRRES compared to other countries. The other two examples are nondemocratic regimes (Iran and Belarus) with relatively higher IHRRES, with an upward trend over the years.

As robustness checks, I recalculated IHRRES without treaty-depth weighting and constructed an alternative measure based on centrality—the count of trade connections to human rights-abusing states. Additionally, I construct a similar embeddedness measure for non-trade illiberal international organizations using data from the Correlates of War project (Pevehouse et al., 2020), without treaty depth weighting.

To test H3 and H4, I include a binary variable for states that are highly dependent on the EU. These are states with above-median dependence level which is sustained in the last five years. The trade

partners' trade dependence on the EU is measured by using export data to the EU retrieved from the IMF Direction of Trade Statistics (CD ROM), divided by the GDP of each country in US dollars (World Bank World Development Indicators Database).

Controls

As control variables, I include export shares (%, EU to partner) taken from the Eurostat database to measure the EU's trade dependence on the partner. This is to account for the relative economic bargaining power that the EU and trading partners have. I also control for the EU's resource dependence—while the EU is mostly self-sufficient, it depends heavily on trade when it comes to energy and raw materials. This is measured by import shares (%) of energy and raw materials, also taken from the IMF database. To control for EU-side interest variables from previous studies, I use Jung (2024)'s variables on public trust in the Commission (Eurobarometer), and agreements signed after the Lisbon Treaty. These factors empower the European Parliament, a more pro-human rights institution that pushes for more stringent human rights clauses. And since compliance may be conditional on the stringency of conditionality, I take Jung (2024)'s measure of HRC stringency which is coded from 0 to 5 based on the enforceability and scope of human rights law.

I include gravity-model setting variables such as distance(distance from Brussels to the capital in km), GDP, and GDP per capita (both logged). To exclude the effect of China alone driving the outcome, I include export dependence on China (total export to China/GDP), also logged. To understand heterogeneity across regime types (Lührmann et al., 2018) and the strength of civil society (Neumayer, 2005), I include V-dem civil society scores, and V-Dem electoral democracy index (Wilson and Team, 2024) (above 0.5 of v2xpolyarchy as a democracy) transformed as an indicator for democratic regimes. I also lag human rights variables (Fariss) by 1 year. Finally, I include year and country-fixed effects for some models and cluster standard errors by country.

Empirical Strategy and Estimation

To empirically test H1, H3, and H5 regarding the selection and failure of trade agreements, I employ logistic regression models, estimating the probability of negotiation failure. Specifically, I incorporate interaction terms between IHRRES and a binary indicator for high dependence on EU trade to evaluate whether states with high embeddedness into illiberal RTAs but lower trade dependence are particularly resistant to signing agreements.

To estimate the causal effect of EU trade agreements on human rights performance (H2, H4, and H6), I adopt the Synthetic Difference-in-Differences (SDID) estimator proposed by Arkhangelsky et al. (2021). The SDID method combines the strengths of Difference-in-Differences (DiD) and Synthetic Control (SC) approaches, overcoming the parallel trends assumption required in traditional DiD and enabling panel inference. This estimator matches and reweights pre-treatment periods similarly to the SC method, providing robust identification of treatment effects in panel data settings with staggered treatments.

The dependent variable in the SDID estimation is the Fariss latent human rights score, while the treatment indicator takes the value of 1 in years when a country has a trade agreement in force with the EU.

Covariates included in the models are GDP (logged), GDP per capita (logged), distance from Brussels, EU trade dependence on the partner (export shares), the partner's economic dependence on the EU, and trade dependence on China. The central objective is to capture heterogeneous treatment effects contingent upon the level of IHRRES. To do this, I subset the sample into two groups based on their IHRRES scores: high-IHRRES states (those with above-median scores and increasing trends in the last five years of observation) and low-IHRRES states. I adopt an analogous division for embeddedness into non-trade illiberal IOs. Equation (1) below specifies the SDID estimator:

$$\hat{\tau}^{\text{SDID}} = \left(\sum_{i \in \mathscr{T}} \omega_i \sum_{t \in \mathscr{P}} \lambda_t \, \text{Fariss}_{it} \right) - \left(\sum_{i \in \mathscr{C}} \omega_i \sum_{t \in \mathscr{P}} \lambda_t \, \text{Fariss}_{it} \right) \tag{1}$$

Here, $\mathscr{T}$ denotes the set of treated countries (those with an EU agreement in place), while $\mathscr{C}$ represents control countries without such agreements. The post-treatment period is indicated by $\mathscr{P}$. The terms ω_i and λ_t represent unit and time weights, respectively, derived from pre-treatment periods to balance observed trends between treated and control groups. $Fariss_{it}$ represents the human rights score for country i in year t.

Additionally, I use logistic regression models to estimate the likelihood of death penalty executions during trade negotiations and after treaty conclusion, testing H4. The logistic regression includes an interaction between IHRRES and agreement status, as shown in Equation (2):

$$\begin{aligned} \text{logit}(\Pr(\text{DEATHP}_{it} = 1)) = {} & \beta_0 + \beta_1 \, \text{IHRRES}_{it} + \beta_2 \, \text{AGREEMENT}_{it} + \beta_3 \, (\text{IHRRES} \times \text{AGREEMENT})_{it} \\ & + \mathbf{X}'_{it} \boldsymbol{\gamma} + \delta_t + \varepsilon_{it} \end{aligned} \tag{2}$$

Here, logit(Pr(DEATHP$it = 1$)) denotes the log-odds of executing the death penalty in country i in year t. IHRRESit indicates the level of human rights reservations or resistance in the country, while AGREEMENTit is a binary indicator equal to 1 when a trade agreement with the EU is in place. The coefficient β_3 captures the interaction effect between human rights resistance and the presence of an EU trade agreement. The vector $\mathbf{X}it'\boldsymbol{\gamma}$ includes control variables, δ_t denotes year fixed effects, and ε_{it} is the error term. Standard errors are clustered at the country level.

5. Findings and Discussion

Accepting EU Norms

First, I examine the likelihood of negotiation failure (H1) among countries that have initiated trade negotiations with the EU. Table 1 presents logistic regression results, with treaty failure as the binary dependent variable. Across models (1)–(4), the results consistently support H1, showing that higher levels of IHRRES significantly increase the likelihood of negotiation failure. Specifically, in Model (3), holding other variables constant, a one-unit increase in embeddedness into illiberal RTA, as measured by IHRRES, is associated with approximately a 19% greater likelihood of treaty failure. Additionally, the results indicate that higher trade dependence on the EU reduces the probability of negotiation failure, whereas greater EU dependence on the partner country increases the likelihood of failure.

The marginal effects plot in Figure 5 further illustrates the relationship between IHRRES and negotiation outcomes. The figure shows a strong, positive association between embeddedness into illiberal RTAs and the predicted probability of negotiation failure. At lower levels of IHRRES, states exhibit relatively low probabilities of failure, suggesting that weaker ties to illiberal regional agreements facilitate agreement with the EU. However, as IHRRES increases, the likelihood of failure rises sharply, particularly beyond the midpoint of the observed distribution. Confidence intervals remain narrow across most of the range, reinforcing the robustness of this pattern. These findings suggest that states more deeply embedded in illiberal regional structures are less likely to accept the EU's normative demands during trade negotiations.

Additional analyses, presented in the appendix (Table 11), examine the relationship between IHRRES and the stringency of human rights conditionalities in concluded agreements. These models did not find statistically significant associations, suggesting that IHRRES primarily affects the likelihood of negotiation success rather than the depth of human rights provisions when agreements are reached. Finally, results from Cox proportional hazards models (Table 7) also support the main findings, showing that greater embeddedness in illiberal RTAs reduces the hazard rate of agreement conclusion. However, interpretation of these results should be treated with caution given potential biases arising from censored and truncated data.

Table 1: Logit Regression Results: Determinants of Treaty Failure

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
IHRRES	1.13***	1.17***	1.20***	1.19***
	(0.03)	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Human Rights Score (lagged)			0.60**	0.74
			(0.13)	(0.18)
Dependence on EU			0.63***	0.67**
			(0.11)	(0.12)
GDP per Capita (logged)			1.33	1.09
			(0.38)	(0.32)
GDP (logged)			0.89	1.05
			(0.17)	(0.22)
Distance			1.00	1.00**
			(0.00)	(0.00)
Resource Dependence			0.88	0.83
			(0.11)	(0.14)
EU Export Share			2.15**	2.64***
			(0.69)	(0.87)
Dependence on China (logged)			1.18	1.05
			(0.12)	(0.10)
Trust in EU Commission			1.07	1.07
			(0.06)	(0.06)
Democracy				0.52
				(0.29)
Civil Society				0.07***
				(0.07)
Year FE		✓	✓	✓
Observations	3459	3459	3019	2891
Pseudo R^2	0.089	0.104	0.201	0.264

Notes: Exponentiated coefficients; standard errors in parentheses. Clustered by country.
$^{*}p < 0.1$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, $^{***}p < 0.01$

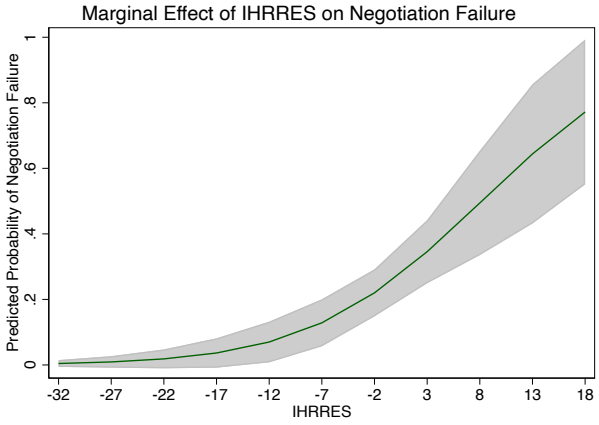


Figure 5: Effect of IHRRES on Agreement Failure

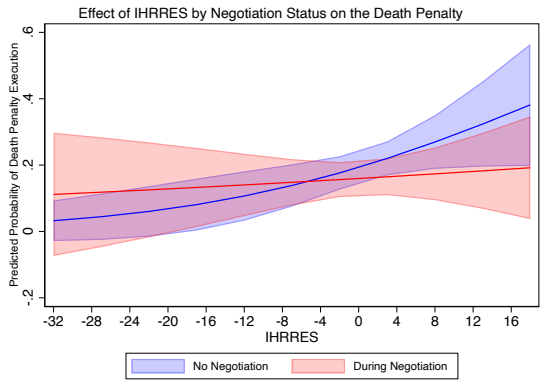
Effectiveness of EU Norms: Death Penalty

This section examines the effectiveness of EU trade agreements by analyzing the probability of death penalty executions both during trade negotiations (ex ante) and after treaty conclusion (ex post). Table 2 and Figure 6a present results for H2, which tests whether higher levels of IHRRES weaken the EU's ability to induce compliance on human rights. The regression results in Table 2 show that higher IHRRES scores are consistently associated with a greater overall likelihood of death penalty executions. However, the interaction term between IHRRES and being in a negotiation phase is negatively signed and statistically insignificant in models with control variables. This indicates that, during negotiations, states with higher embeddedness into illiberal RTAs are somewhat less likely to carry out executions relative to non-negotiating periods, although the overall level of executions remains elevated with higher IHRRES. Figure 6a visually confirms this pattern: the probability of execution is almost flat during negotiation periods compared to no negotiation.

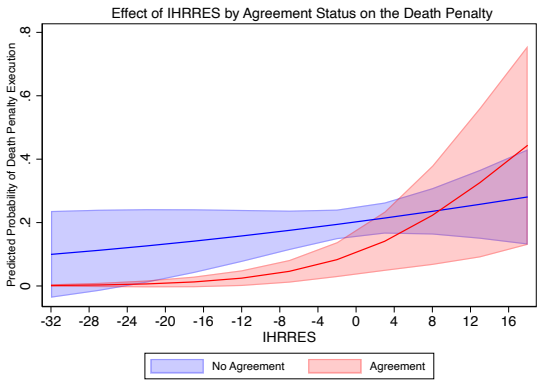
A markedly different pattern emerges after agreements are concluded. Table 16 shows that while the signing of an agreement generally reduces the likelihood of death penalty executions, this effect is conditional on IHRRES. The interaction between Agreement and IHRRES is positive and statistically significant, suggesting that for countries highly embedded in illiberal RTAs, treaty conclusion actually corresponds with an increased probability of executions. Figure 6b clearly illustrates this dynamic: among countries with high IHRRES scores, those that have concluded agreements with the EU are even more likely to carry out death penalties compared to those without agreements.

These results provide partial support for H2. During negotiations, the prospect of reaching an agreement appears to exert a moderating influence even among highly embedded states. However, after agreements are concluded, compliance incentives weaken, and states with strong ties to illiberal regional RTAs are more likely to revert to carrying out executions. This pattern suggests that embeddedness into illiberal RTAs undermines the EU's human rights leverage primarily after treaty conclusion, although the EU retains some influence in inducing behavioral changes during the negotiation phase.

In sum, the findings demonstrate that the EU's ability to promote human rights through trade agreements is contingent upon states' embeddedness in illiberal regional contexts and their economic dependence on the EU. The effects are stronger after agreements are finalized than during negotiation periods. These results imply that states strategically refrain from violating EU human rights norms while negotiations are ongoing, due to credible threats of non-conclusion, but may revert to illiberal practices once agreements are secured — consistent with Kim (2012)'s argument regarding the limits of labor conditionality enforcement.



(a) During Negotiations



(b) After Signing

Figure 6: Death Penalty Execution before/after Treaty Conclusion: IHRRES

Table 2: Logit Regression Results: Determinants of *Death Penalty During Negotiation*

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
IHRRES	11.05***	1.07***	1.10***	1.08**	1.08***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.03)
Negotiation	0.78	0.71	0.71	0.68	0.78
	(0.25)	(0.24)	(0.21)	(0.21)	(0.18)
Negotiation X IHRRES	0.94**	0.93*	0.94	0.98	0.95
	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Controls			✓	✓	✓
Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	
lnsig2u					11.16***
					(2.54)
N	3653	3653	3082	2929	2929
Pseudo R^2	0.033	0.038	0.207	0.269	

Notes: Exponentiated coefficients; standard errors in parentheses;clustered by country
$^{*}p < 0.1$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, $^{**}p < 0.01$

Table 3: Logit Regression Results: Determinants of *Death Penalty After Treaty Conclusion*

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
IHRRES	1.06***	1.05**	1.04	1.03	1.08***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Agreement	0.38**	0.44*	0.26***	0.34**	0.22***
	(0.17)	(0.19)	(0.13)	(0.16)	(0.08)
Agreement X IHRRES		1.12***	1.18***	1.12**	0.95
		(0.04)	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.06)
Controls			✓	✓	✓
Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	
lnsig2u					8.35***
					(2.64)
N	4269	4269	3674	3464	3464
Pseudo R^2	0.057	0.063	0.258	0.292	

Notes: Exponentiated coefficients; standard errors in parentheses; clustered by country
$^{*}p < 0.1$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, $^{**}p < 0.01$

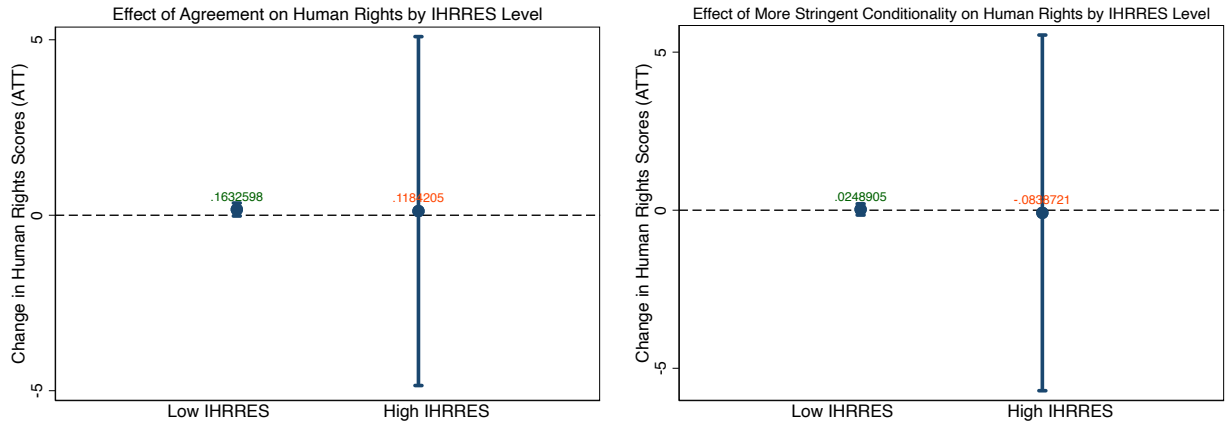
Effectiveness of EU Norms: Human Rights Conditions

To test the effectiveness of EU trade agreements on improving human rights records, I employ the Synthetic Difference-in-Differences (SDID) estimator with staggered treatments, differentiating by states' embeddedness in illiberal regional contexts (IHRRES). The dataset is divided into high- and low-IHRRES groups: countries classified as high-IHRRES have an average embeddedness score above the median (-0.22) that is increasing over the five years preceding observation. Approximately 53% of the sample comprises high-IHRRES states. The dependent variable is Fariss human rights scores, and the treatment variable captures the presence of an EU trade agreement, varying across countries by year. I include covariates such as GDP (logged), GDP per capita (logged), distance from Brussels, EU trade dependence on the partner (export share), partner's trade dependence on the EU (logged), and trade dependence on China (logged). The balance of covariates between treated and control units is presented in the Appendix (Table 5).

The results in Figure 7a show heterogeneous effects of EU agreements based on IHRRES. Specifically, the Average Treatment Effect on the Treated (ATT) for low-IHRRES countries is 0.16 and statistically significant at the 0.1 level, indicating that EU agreements lead to a marginal yet positive improvement in human rights conditions (approximately 10.5% of one standard deviation). Conversely, the ATT for high-IHRRES states is smaller (0.12) and not statistically significant, suggesting that EU trade agreements do not meaningfully enhance human rights conditions in countries deeply embedded in illiberal RTAs. Complete SDID results are provided in Appendix 15.

Lastly, considering the potential moderating role of conditionality stringency, I reanalyze the treatment effects using only agreements with stringent human rights conditions—those explicitly mentioning enforceable essential elements and international human rights law, corresponding to stringency levels above 2 in Jung (2024)'s coding. Results from this (Figure 7b) indicate even smaller and statistically insignificant effects for both high- and low-embedded countries, suggesting that the stringency of con-

ditions alone may not substantially influence the effectiveness of EU trade agreements on human rights outcomes.



(a) Agreement Conclusion as Treatment (b) Stringent Conditionality as Treatment

Figure 7: Heterogeneous Effects of EU Agreements on Human Rights Scores

Effectiveness of EU Norms: Human Rights Conditions (Case Studies)

To complement my quantitative analysis, I employ synthetic control methods (SCM) (Abadie and Gardeazabal, 2003; Abadie et al., 2010) to conduct qualitative case studies for selected countries, illustrating heterogeneous treatment effects of EU agreements conditioned by their embeddedness in illiberal RTAs (IHRRES). Though not intended for causal inference, these cases highlight key patterns consistent with my hypotheses. For clarity, I select two exemplary states—Kazakhstan, representing a high-IHRRES country, and Dominica, a low-IHRRES country—with comparable human development indices. Notably, Kazakhstan has a higher GDP and GDP per capita compared to Dominica. Existing studies indicate EU agreements have limited effectiveness in Central Asia (Hoffmann, 2010) yet show better outcomes in Latin America (Garcia, 2003). Consistently, Latin American states generally exhibit lower IHRRES compared to Central Asian states. There are other countries that show similar patterns for high IHRRES states (Appendix 16) and low IHRRES states (Appendix 15).

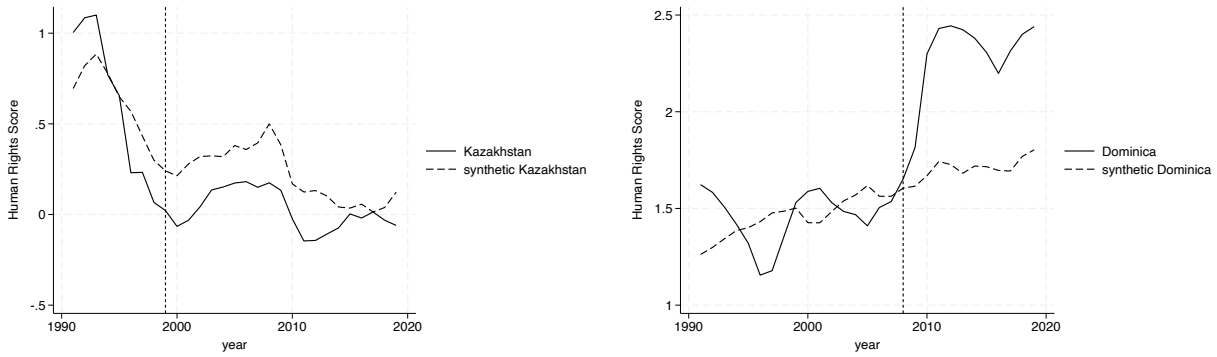
To construct synthetic controls, donor countries were selected based on similarities in GDP, GDP per capita, pre-agreement human rights records, dependence on China, and their IHRRES scores. These donor countries lack active EU trade agreements, facilitating an appropriate counterfactual scenario.

Among high-IHRRES countries, Kazakhstan serves as a notable example. It signed a Cooperation and Partnership Agreement with the EU in 1999 and has maintained an above-median IHRRES throughout the observation period. Figure 8a illustrates the SCM analysis, comparing Kazakhstan with its synthetic control group. The figure indicates that Kazakhstan's human rights trajectory does not differ significantly from its synthetic counterpart. Kazakhstan exemplifies a state deeply influenced by neighboring illiberal powers, balancing its relationships between Western influences and Russia. It is a founding

member of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), which includes states such as Russia, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, and Armenia. Kazakhstan's other trade agreements include countries like Azerbaijan, Moldova, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Vietnam, Iran, Serbia, and Singapore—most of which have poor human rights records. Although the EU is Kazakhstan's top trade partner, the EU's heavy reliance on Kazakhstan's energy resources restricts the leverage for human rights reform, explaining why progress in human rights and democratic reforms has been notably slow in Central Asia (Konopelko, 2018). Moreover, the authoritarian governance style inspired by Russian influence is prevalent, alongside a weak civil society sector which limits EU's normative impact (Hoffmann, 2010).

Conversely, Dominica presents a contrasting case with notably different outcomes (Figure 16b). Dominica signed a trade agreement with the EU in 2008 through the CARICOM-EU Economic Partnership Agreement. The country is embedded in RTAs primarily within Latin America and the Caribbean, including CARICOM, OECS, and agreements with Canada, the Dominican Republic, Venezuela, Cuba, and Colombia, most of which are characterized by better human rights records. Although Dominica legally retains the death penalty, no executions have occurred since 1986, rendering it a de facto abolitionist state. Figure 16b shows a clear divergence in human rights outcomes between Dominica and its synthetic control group following the trade agreement, indicating improved human rights conditions attributable to EU agreements in states with lower IHRRES. This improvement in human rights scores compared to its synthetic control is statistically significant at the 0.01 significance level.

These illustrative cases highlight that EU agreements yield heterogeneous outcomes influenced by countries' embeddedness in illiberal regional contexts, corroborating the quantitative findings.



(a) Low IHRRES Country (Kazakhstan) (b) High IHRRES Country (Dominica)

Figure 8: Synthetic control methods : high/low IHRRES cases

Notes: The right graph presents a comparison between Kazakhstan, a high IHRRES state and the synthetic control groups. The left is a comparison between Dominica, a low IHRRES state compared with synthetic control groups.

6. Mechanisms and Robustness Checks

First, I test the mechanisms underlying the economic outside option and norm reproduction arguments. Since outside options should be more attractive to states that are less dependent on EU trade, I posit that the effect of IHRRES on treaty conclusion and effectiveness will be conditional on a state's level of trade dependence. To test this, I use an interaction term between IHRRES and a binary indicator for high EU trade dependence.

In Table 6, while the interaction between high EU trade dependence and IHRRES is not statistically significant in the regression table, the marginal effects plot in Figure 9 reveals that agreements with states less economically dependent on the EU exhibit a notably higher predicted probability of negotiation failure at higher levels of IHRRES, compared to states with high EU dependence.

Additionally, when examining the conditional effects of EU trade dependence on treaty effectiveness, I find distinct patterns before and after treaty conclusion. Figure 11a shows that during negotiations, low EU-dependent states are somewhat less likely to execute the death penalty as IHRRES increases. However, after treaty conclusion (Figure 11b), states with lower EU trade dependence exhibit a significantly higher probability of executions at increased levels of IHRRES. These results imply that lower EU-dependent states are both less likely to accept and less likely to comply ex post with EU norms in trade when they are highly embedded in illiberal RTAs. Nonetheless, EU trade agreements remain effective in inducing behavioral change even among low-dependent countries during negotiations, consistent with the due diligence explanation.

Second, recognizing that illiberal norms can also be institutionalized through non-trade networks, I include an "Illiberal Non-Trade IO Embeddedness" score as an explanatory variable (Table 6, Models 4–6), again interacted with EU trade dependence. High embeddedness in illiberal non-trade IOs significantly increases the probability of negotiation failure. Notably, the interaction term between high EU trade dependence and non-trade IO embeddedness is statistically insignificant and directionally opposite to the IHRRES interaction (Models 1–3), suggesting that embeddedness in illiberal non-trade IOs does not interact significantly with economic dependence on the EU. This distinction likely reflects the fundamentally non-economic nature of these organizations, highlighting that trade-related linkages uniquely shape negotiation outcomes.

Regarding treaty effectiveness, Figure 10b and Table 8 show patterns similar to those observed when using IHRRES as the explanatory variable. Embeddedness in non-trade illiberal IOs significantly increases the likelihood of death penalty executions, particularly after treaty conclusion. The stronger association during negotiations (Figure 10a) compared to IHRRES likely stems from the absence of direct economic considerations in non-trade IO membership.

Finally, the SDID model using non-trade illiberal IO embeddedness (Figure 14) shows similar patterns to the IHRRES model. Low embeddedness in non-trade IOs is associated with modest improvements in human rights scores following EU trade agreements (significant at the 0.1 level), while high embedded-

ness yields no statistically significant improvements.

Together, these additional tests provide deeper insight into how economic outside options and norm reproduction through international organizations work—and how they operate in tandem to influence negotiation outcomes and treaty effectiveness.

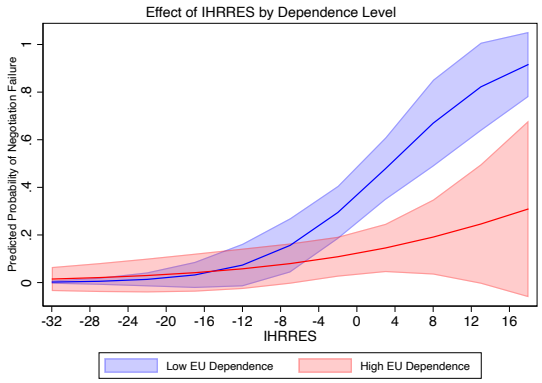


Figure 9: Effect of IHRRES on Agreement Failure by Dependence Level

On the other hand, testing how illiberal human rights laws can be used as a defensive tool against EU pressures, I coded the countries that are signatories of trade agreements that reference "authoritarian human rights law" as a binary variable in a given year. These are countries signatories to the ACHRP, ADHR, Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam, Arab Charter of Human Rights, etc. I find that EU trading partners with trade agreements that partake in these laws are more likely to execute the death penalty (Appendix 9) than those who do not. I also exploit independent variables as countries that signed EU agreements as a collective, which examines the collective bargaining power argument. The variable is coded as "Multilateral"—when the EU signs agreements with another RTA, such as ECOWAS, the members would be coded as 1. While this variable does not affect the effectiveness of human rights conditions, it does affect the stringency. I find that when trade agreements with the EU are negotiated multilaterally (not bilaterally), states end up with weaker HRCs. Multilaterally negotiated agreements are likely to end up with 1.57 unit weaker HRC, significant at a 0.05 significance level (Appendix 10).

I also interact with the stringency of human rights conditions to observe whether this influenced the level of effectiveness after the treaty conclusion. I do not find any significant statistical relations between HRC stringency and effectiveness (both death penalty and Fariss scores), even when interacting with the IHRRES variable (Appendix 11). And since states with high/low human rights scores can select into illiberal/liberal trade agreements, I use an instrumental variable that addresses some of the endogeneity that may arise. I instrument a binary variable that codes states which concluded agreements with the EU after the Lisbon Treaty in 2009, as exogenous to human rights conditions or death penalty execution. The EU concluded significantly more PTAs after 2009, yet this is not necessarily associated with better human rights records compared to states that concluded agreements pre-2009 (Jung, 2024). I find that high IHRRES for countries that signed EU agreements is associated with a higher likelihood of death

penalty execution, although not consistently significant across models (Appendix 12).

Futhermore, I also use other measures of embeddedness into illiberal IOs and observe their validity. When using the centrality and connectedness scores, the high/low connected countries are not effective in improving human rights scores (Appendix 13a).This variable likely does not capture the effect of member states in RTAs with good human rights records. For instance, South Africa and Turkey has high connectedness in Figure 1, but a low-IHRRES state with multiple RTAs with liberal states. In the SC models in Appendix 15, these states have improved human rights practices over the years. Lastly, I use a more intuitive measure of IHRRES without the treaty depth weights. I find that low-embedded states show a higher ATT than any other measures, statistically significant at a 0.01 level (Appendix 13b).

7. Conclusion

This paper examines under what conditions the Western form of human rights and trade linkage are accepted, and may or may not be effective. There are burgeoning RTAs with illiberal members and illiberal human rights norms that are mirror images of EU trade and human rights linkage but with countervailing effects. I find that states are more likely to resist EU norms when they are surrounded by, and deeply integrated with adverse human rights actors—agreements reach a deadlock, and states do not follow EU norms after signing the agreement. Yet, the effectiveness of EU trade in inducing behavioral change is not ignorable. It remains effective in multiple EU partners and also during negotiating periods, even in states that are highly embedded in these illiberal RTAs. I also find heterogeneous effects when it comes to the strength of civil society and regime types, which change calculations of domestic leaders.

Examining human rights issues in trade is crucial, as they are the leading cause of negotiation failures in EU agreements. However, the varying levels of resistance from trade partners remain perplexing. This behavior is not simply explained by human rights conditions, nor the economic bargaining powers and dependence of those countries. Overall, this study highlights the limitations of EU human rights-trade conditionalities in states significantly embedded within illiberal regional structures, especially in the absence of substantial economic leverage. This study has multiple implications to the current status LIO and the effectiveness of international organizations' efforts to improve human rights through economic integration and interdependence. It further implies under what contexts human rights conditionalities can indeed be effective, underscoring the importance of international institutional contexts. Hence there is strong policy implications for the EU in changing the incentives and enforcement mechanisms for high/low embedded states. This article further introduces a new measure and framework of linkage between economic integration and illiberal human rights norms that can be applied to different studies.

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A. Appendix

Table 4: Descriptive statistics

Variable	N	mean	sd	min	max
IHRRES	4,777	-2.84	8.71	-32.16	18.42
Human rights score	4907	0.43	1.54	-3.39	5.16
Death Penalty Executed	6,932	0.12	0.33	0	1
Agreements in place	7149	0.24	0.42	0	1
Signed after Lisbon	7149	0.07	0.25	0	1
Trust in the Commission (%)	7149	43.42	5.04	35	53
Agreement type	2051	1.93	0.47	1	3
GDP(logged)	5760	23.31	2.38	15.99	30.87
GDP per capita (logged)	5760	8.07	1.56	3.13	12.12
Partner Dependence(on EU,logged)	5358	-17.25	1.45	-26.11	-11.59
Dependence on China (logged)	4,888	-19.75	2.77	-30.78	-14.40
EU resource dependence (%)	6528	0.73	2.63	0	36.65
Distance from Brussels(km)	7147	7243.02	4013.66	320.77	18722.67
Export share to EU (%)	5808	0.2	0.65	0	8.15
Democracy	7,413	0.25	0.43	0	1
Civil Society	5,211	0.64	0.28	0.01	0.98
Negotiation Failure	4,560	0.13	0.34	0	1
Negotiation Ongoing	6,374	0.24	0.43	0	1

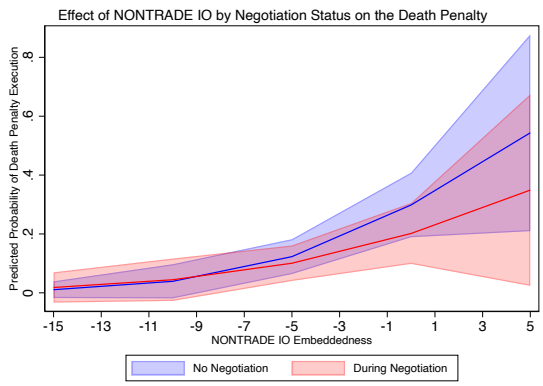
Table 5: Balance Table by IHRRES

Covariate	**Treated Mean for** Low IHRRES (SD)	**Control Mean for** Low IHRRES (SD)	**Treated Mean for** High IHRRES (SD)	**Control Mean for** High IHRRES (SD)
GDP	24.48 (2.26)	23.51 (2.81)	23.92 (1.63)	22.97 (1.86)
GDP per Capita	8.87 (0.92)	8.21 (1.28)	8.06 (1.32)	7.02 (1.44)
Distance	7609.49 (3923.39)	9249.67 (3273.58)	4490.13 (2729.74)	5909.09 (1969.59)
Export Share (%)	0.25 (0.39)	0.31 (1.04)	0.89 (0.44)	0.07 (0.20)
Dependence on EU	-15.96 (4.66)	-16.27 (4.60)	-15.93 (4.21)	-17.08 (1.84)
Dependence on China	-17.93 (5.55)	-16.35 (8.42)	-17.84 (4.88)	-18.56 (5.61)
N	554	1273	464	1624

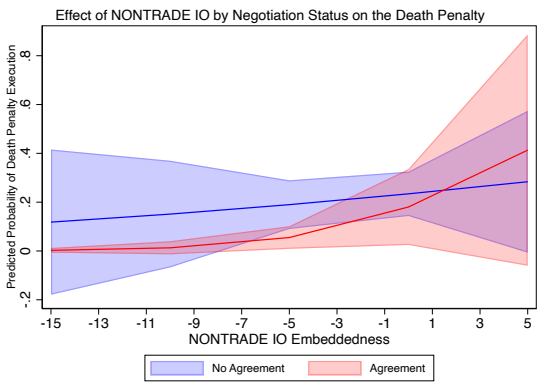
Table 6: Logit Regression Results: Determinants of *Treaty Failure*

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
IHRRES	1.18***	1.19***	1.23***			
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.08)			
Illiberal Non-trade IO				1.85**	1.80**	2.54***
				(0.53)	(0.53)	(0.77)
High Dependence	0.17***	0.18***	0.17***	0.30**	0.36*	0.27**
	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.15)	(0.19)	(0.17)
IHRRES X High Dependence		0.95	0.88			
		(0.08)	(0.07)			
Illiberal Non-trade IO X High Dependence					1.11	1.03
					(0.07)	(0.08)
Human Rights Score (lagged)			0.75			0.59**
			(0.17)			(0.13)
GDP per Capita (logged)			1.13			1.20
			(0.33)			(0.38)
GDP (logged)			1.01			0.93
			(0.23)			(0.24)
Distance			1.00			1.00*
			(0.00)			(0.00)
Resource Dependence			0.87			0.88
			(0.12)			(0.16)
EU Dependence on Partner			2.61***			4.26***
			(0.86)			(1.77)
Dependence on China (logged)			1.10			1.13
			(0.11)			(0.12)
Trust in EU Commission			1.07			10.63***
			(0.06)			(8.86)
Democracy			0.46			0.50
			(0.27)			(0.33)
Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
N	3459	3459	2891	2921	2921	2326
Pseudo R^2	0.195	0.197	0.323	0.135	0.137	0.257

Notes: Exponentiated coefficients; standard errors in parentheses; clustered by country
$^{*}p < 0.1$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, $^{**}p < 0.01$

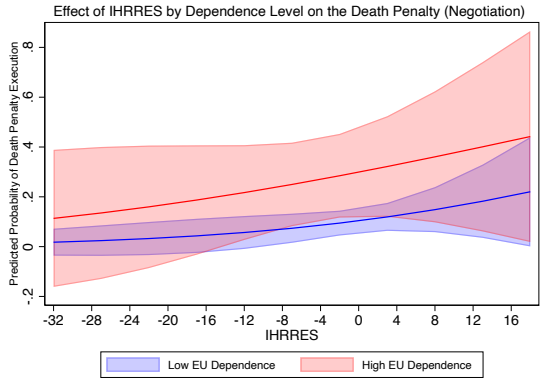


(a) During Negotiations

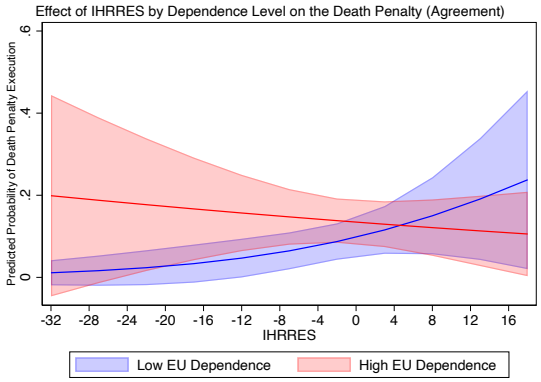


(b) After Signing

Figure 10: Death Penalty Execution before/after Treaty Conclusion: Non-Trade Illiberal IOs



(a) During Negotiations



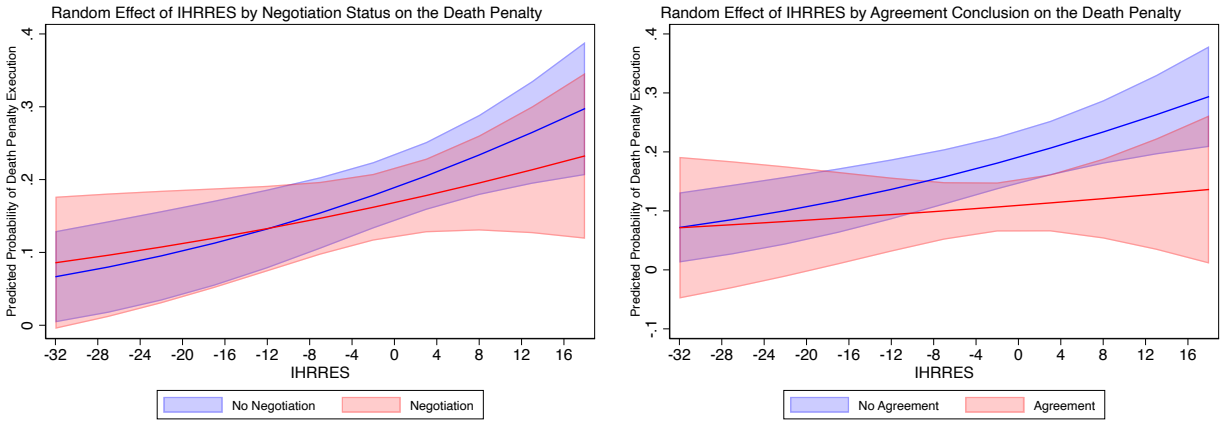
(b) After Signing

Figure 11: Death Penalty Execution before/after Treaty Conclusion: Dependence on EU

Table 7: Cox Hazard Model: Hazard of agreement conclusion

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Hazard of Agreement Conclusion			
IHRRES	0.94**	0.93***	0.95*	0.98
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.04)
Human Rights Score	1.06	1.18	1.15	0.92
	(0.11)	(0.19)	(0.21)	(0.21)
GDP per capita (logged)		0.74*	0.72*	0.97
		(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.21)
GDP (logged)		0.99	1.01	0.91
		(0.10)	(0.13)	(0.13)
Distance			1.00*	1.00
			(0.00)	(0.00)
EU Resource Dependence			1.08*	1.08*
			(0.05)	(0.04)
Export from EU (%)			1.11	1.14
			(0.26)	(0.26)
Dependence on EU			1.46***	1.31**
			(0.18)	(0.16)
Dependence on China (logged)			0.90**	0.91
			(0.05)	(0.05)
Trust in European Commission				1.02
				(0.02)
Post-Lisbon				2.96**
				(1.41)
Democracy				1.49
				(0.48)
Country Fixed-Effects				YES
N	1222	1210	1152	1152
$PseudoR^2$	0.008	0.019	0.036	0.049

Notes: Exponentiated coefficients; Standard errors in parentheses (clusterd by country); *, **, and *** indicate significance at the 10, 5, 1% levels.



(a) During Negotiation

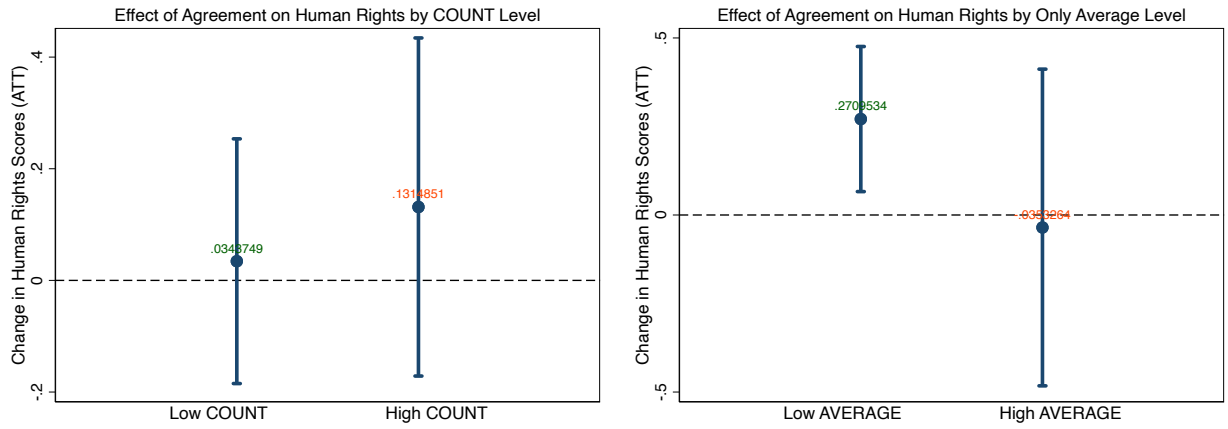
(b) After Treaty Conclusion

Figure 12: Random Effect Model: Effect of IHRRES on Death Penalty Execution

Table 8: Logit Regression Results: Determinants of *Death Penalty* and Illiberal Non-Trade IO

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Non-Trade IO	1.33*	1.36*	1.38**	1.27	1.11	1.31**
	(0.21)	(0.19)	(0.08)	(0.23)	(0.16)	(0.07)
Negotiation	0.71	0.47*	0.81			
	(0.30)	(0.19)	(0.27)			
Negotiation X Non-Trade IO	1.13*	0.91	1.02			
	(0.09)	(0.08)	(0.09)			
Agreement				0.79	0.53	0.84
				(0.45)	(0.34)	(0.48)
Agreement X Non-Trade IO				1.23*	1.28**	1.56***
				(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.25)
Controls		✓	✓		✓	✓
Year FE	✓	✓		✓	✓	
lnsig2u			7.98***			8.35***
	(1.92)	(1.98)				
N	3267	2522	2522	3624	2797	2797
Pseudo R^2	0.043	0.282	0.282	0.054	0.301	0.301

Notes: Exponentiated coefficients; standard errors in parentheses;clustered by country
*$p < 0.1$, **$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$



(a) High-Count (b) IHRRES Average without Weights

Figure 13: Heterogeneous Treatment Effects of Synthetic DID

Notes: The right graph examines the heterogeneous treatment effects of states that have high/low count of human rights-violating states in RTAs. The coefficients for both groups are not statistically significant. The left graph shows IHRRES measured without using treaty depth as weights. The ATT for low embedded states are even larger than IHRRES.

Table 9: Logit Model: Death Penalty Execution and Authoritarian Human Rights Law

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Execution of Death Penalty			
Authoritarian Human Rights Law	2.91***	1.03	1.30	1.26
	(0.96)	(0.34)	(0.52)	(0.53)
Agreement in Place	0.16***	0.09***	0.04***	0.04***
	(0.09)	(0.05)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Authoritarian Human Rights Law	4.06**	7.06***	7.98**	8.36**
X Agreement in Place	(2.70)	(4.93)	(7.50)	(8.00)
Human Rights Score		0.64***	1.15	1.14
		(0.08)	(0.21)	(0.21)
GDP per capita (logged)			0.79**	0.79**
			(0.07)	(0.08)
GDP(logged)			1.41***	1.40***
			(0.11)	(0.11)
Distance			1.00*	1.00*
			(0.00)	(0.00)
EU Resource Dependence			1.01	1.01
			(0.05)	(0.05)
Export Share to EU (%)			1.65*	1.55*
			(0.45)	(0.40)
Trade Dependence on EU (logged)			0.93	0.94
			(0.11)	(0.11)
Post Lisbon			1.15	1.11
			(0.11)	(0.11)
Dependence on China (logged)			1.04	1.04
			(0.06)	(0.06)
Democracy			0.51*	0.50*
			(0.19)	(0.19)
Civil Society			0.18***	0.20***
			(0.10)	(0.11)
Country Fixed Effects				YES
N	6932	4907	3871	3871
$PseudoR^2$	0.071	0.109	0.251	0.253

Notes: Logit estimates with with exponentiated coefficients; standard errors(clustered by country) in parentheses; *, **, and *** indicate significance at the 10, 5, 1% levels.

Table 10: OLS Model: Multilateral Trade Agreements and Condition Stringency

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
		Condition Stringency		
Multilateral Agreement	-0.36	-0.58*	-1.57***	-1.60***
	(0.33)	(0.31)	(0.32)	(0.30)
Human Rights Score		-0.31***	-0.12	-0.10
		(0.11)	(0.18)	(0.18)
GDP per capita (logged)			-0.07	-0.09
			(0.14)	(0.15)
GDP (logged)			-0.16	-0.16
			(0.14)	(0.14)
Distance from EU			-0.00	-0.00
			(0.00)	(0.00)
EU Resource Dependence			0.03	0.03
			(0.04)	(0.04)
Export Share to EU(%)			-0.62	-0.52
			(0.00)	(0.00)
Dependence on EU			-0.06	-0.07
			(0.09)	(0.09)
Post-Lisbon			0.87***	0.88***
			(0.45)	(0.40)
Dependence on China (logged)			0.17***	0.18***
			(0.05)	(0.06)
Democracy			-0.01	0.01
			(0.23)	(0.23)
Civil Society Score			-0.09	-0.20
			(0.49)	(0.50)
Country Fixed Effects				YES
N	1969	1599	1365	1365
R^2	0.013	0.113	0.312	0.320
$AdjustedR^2$	0.012	0.112	0.306	0.313

Notes: Standard errors(clustered by country) in parentheses; *, **, and *** indicate significance at the 10, 5, 1% levels.

Table 11: OLS Model: Condition Stringency as Explanatory Variable

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
		Human Rights Score		
Condition Stringency	-0.09	-0.01	0.00	0.00
	(0.15)	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.01)
IHRRES	-0.07	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00
	(0.07)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Condition Stringency	0.00	-0.00	0.00	0.00
X IHRRES	(0.02)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Human Rights Score (lagged 1y)		1.00***	0.98***	0.99***
		(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.01)
GDP per capita (logged)			0.02*	0.02*
			(0.01)	(0.01)
GDP (logged)			-0.02**	-0.02**
			(0.01)	(0.01)
Distance from EU			0.00	0.00*
			(0.00)	(0.00)
EU Resource Dependence			0.00*	0.00
			(0.00)	(0.00)
Export Share to EU(%)			0.01	0.01
			(0.01)	(0.01)
Dependence on EU			0.01	0.01
			(0.01)	(0.01)
Post-Lisbon			-0.02	-0.02
			(0.02)	(0.02)
Dependence on China (logged)			-0.00	0.00
			(0.00)	(0.00)
Democracy			0.02	0.02
			(0.02)	(0.02)
Civil Society Score			0.03	0.02
			(0.04)	(0.04)
Country Fixed Effects				YES
N	1127	1126	1001	1001
R^2	0.151	0.982	0.981	0.981
$Adjusted R^2$	0.149	0.982	0.981	0.981

Notes: Standard errors(clustered by country) in parentheses; *, **, and *** indicate significance at the 10, 5, 1% levels.

Table 12: IV Model: Human Rights Score as Dependent Variable

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
		Human Rights Score		
Agreement in Place	-2.60***	-2.58***	-1.51	-0.48
	(0.20)	(0.20)	(1.20)	(1.68)
IHRRES	0.02***	0.02**	0.03**	0.03**
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Agreement in Place	-0.12***	-0.12***	0.03	0.06
X IHRRES	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.07)	(0.07)
Human Rights Score (lagged 1y)		-0.04	-0.05	0.04
		(0.09)	(0.11)	(0.11)
GDP per capita (logged)			-0.03	-0.19*
			(0.09)	(0.11)
GDP (logged)			0.26***	0.35***
			(0.06)	(0.09)
EU Resource Dependence			-0.00	-0.02
			(0.02)	(0.03)
Export Share to EU(%)			0.10	0.000
			(0.15)	(0.18)
Dependence on EU			-0.04	-0.03
			(0.06)	(0.06)
Dependence on China (logged)			0.07**	0.02
			(0.03)	(0.04)
Distance			-0.00**	-0.00
			(0.00)	(0.00)
Democracy				-0.53***
				(0.19)
Civil Society Score				-0.82**
				(0.024)
Country Fixed Effects				YES
arthrho	1.68**	1.69*	0.27	-0.09
	(0.83)	(0.88)	(0.54)	(0.63)
lnsigma	-0.97***	-0.96***	-1.01***	-1.00***
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.04)
N	4496	4377	3827	3593

Notes: Standard errors(clustered by country) in parentheses; *, **, and *** indicate significance at the 10, 5, 1% levels.

Table 13: Logit Regression Results: Determinants of *Death Penalty* (Illiberal Non-Trade IO)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Non-Trade IO	1.33*	1.36*	1.38**	1.27	1.11	1.31**
	(0.21)	(0.19)	(0.08)	(0.23)	(0.16)	(0.07)
Negotiation	0.71	0.47*	0.81			
	(0.30)	(0.19)	(0.27)			
Negotiation X Non-Trade IO	1.13*	0.91	1.02			
	(0.09)	(0.08)	(0.09)			
Agreement				0.79	0.53	0.84
				(0.45)	(0.34)	(0.48)
Agreement X Non-Trade IO				1.23*	1.28**	1.56***
				(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.25)
GDP per Capita (logged)		0.62**	0.32***		0.62**	0.30***
		(0.12)	(0.09)		(0.11)	(0.08)
GDP (logged)		2.30***	3.17***		2.17***	2.95***
		(0.33)	(0.68)		(0.31)	(0.64)
Human Rights Score (lagged)		1.34**	1.57**		1.15	1.42*
		(0.26)	(0.28)		(0.22)	(0.24)
Distance		1.00	1.00*		1.00**	1.00**
		(0.00)	(0.00)		(0.00)	(0.00)
Resource Dependence		0.97	0.87*		0.98	0.94
		(0.04)	(0.05)		(0.05)	(0.06)
Export Share		1.47	1.65		1.40	2.02
		(0.36)	(0.71)		(0.33)	(0.92)
Dependence on EU (logged)		0.85	1.00			0.98
		(0.13)	(0.13)			(0.12)
Post-Lisbon		1.02	0.45		1.09	0.47
		(0.35)	(0.29)		(0.40)	(0.30)
Democracy		0.25***	0.35***		0.34**	0.36***
		(0.12)	(0.12)		(0.16)	(0.12)
Civil Society		0.16***	0.03***		0.16***	0.43
		(0.09)	(0.23)		(0.09)	(0.09)
Dependence on China (logged)					1.20*	
					(0.09)	
Year FE	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N
lnsig2u			7.98***			8.35***
	(1.92)	(1.98)				
N	3267	2522	2522	3624	2797	2797
Pseudo R^2	0.043	0.282	0.282	0.054	0.301	0.301

Notes: Exponentiated coefficients; standard errors in parentheses; clustered by country
*$p < 0.1$, **$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$

Table 14: Logit Regression Results: Determinants of *Death Penalty* After Treaty Conclusion (IHRRES)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
IHRRES	1.06***	1.05**	1.04	1.03	1.08***	1.11***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.04)
Agreement	0.38**	0.44*	0.26***	0.34**	0.22***	1.18
	(0.17)	(0.19)	(0.13)	(0.16)	(0.08)	(0.67)
Agreement X IHRRES		1.12***	1.18***	1.12**	0.95	1.12
		(0.04)	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.09)
High Dependence						2.12**
						(0.75)
High Dependence X IHRRES						0.88**
						(0.05)
High Dependence X Agreement						0.05***
						(0.04)
High Dependence X Agreement X IHRRES						1.02
						(0.10)
GDP per Capita (logged)			0.93	0.75	0.35***	0.73*
			(0.17)	(0.14)	(0.09)	(0.13)
GDP (logged)			1.72***	2.14***	1.88***	2.16***
			(0.24)	(0.34)	(0.38)	(0.32)
Human Rights Score (lagged)			0.89	1.08	1.26	1.18
			(0.15)	(0.21)	(0.19)	(0.26)
Distance			1.00***	1.00**	1.00	1.00***
			(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Resource Dependence			0.98	0.95	0.90**	0.95
			(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Export Share			1.08	1.30	2.39**	1.51*
			(0.22)	(0.29)	(1.04)	(0.35)
Dependence on EU (logged)			0.82	0.84	1.34***	
			(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.15)	
Post-Lisbon			0.82	1.00	0.26**	0.81
			(0.33)	(0.40)	(0.18)	(0.34)
Dependence on China (logged)			1.27***	1.17**		1.15*
			(0.10)	(0.09)		(0.09)
Democracy				0.29***	0.48**	0.37**
				(0.13)	(0.14)	(0.15)
Civil Society				0.31*	0.54	0.26**
				(0.20)	(0.34)	(0.15)
Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
lnsig2u					8.35***	
					(2.64)	
N	4269	4269	3674	3464	3464	3464
Pseudo R^2	0.057	0.063	0.258	0.292		0.321

Notes: Exponentiated coefficients; standard errors in parentheses; clustered by country

$^{*}p < 0.1$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, $^{**}p < 0.01$

Table 15: Effect of EU Agreement on Human Rights Scores (SDID Estimates)

Subgroup	**ATT**	**Std. Err.**	***p*-value**	**90% CI**
Full Sample	0.176 *	0.098	0.071	[0.015, 0.337]
High IHRRES	0.118	2.537	0.963	[–4.054, 4.291]
Low IHRRES	0.163*	0.095	0.085	[0.007, 0.319]
High Non-Trade Illiberal IOs	0.064	0.695	0.926	[–1.079, 1.207]
Low Non-Trade Illiberal I IOs	0.187*	0.104	0.073	[0.015, 0.359]
High No-Weight IHRRES	-0.035	0.228	0.877	[-0.411, 1.340]
Low No-Weight IHRRES	0.271**	0.105	0.01	[0.099, 0.443]

Notes: ATT estimates are based on the Synthetic Difference-in-Differences (SDID) method. The outcome variable is the Fariss human rights score. Covariates include log GDP, log GDP per capita, export share, dependence, log distance, and log China dependence. 90% confidence intervals and *p*-values are based on large-sample approximations.

Table 16: Logit Regression Results: Determinants of *Death Penalty* After Treaty Conclusion

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
IHRRES	1.06***	1.05**	1.04	1.03	1.08***	1.11***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.04)
Agreement	0.38**	0.44*	0.26***	0.34**	0.22***	1.18
	(0.17)	(0.19)	(0.13)	(0.16)	(0.08)	(0.67)
Agreement X IHRRES		1.12***	1.18***	1.12**	0.95	1.12
		(0.04)	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.09)
High Dependence						2.12**
						(0.75)
High Dependence X IHRRES						0.88**
						(0.05)
High Dependence X Agreement						0.05***
						(0.04)
High Dependence X Agreement X IHRRES						1.02
						(0.10)
Controls			✓	✓	✓	✓
Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
lnsig2u					8.35***	
					(2.64)	
N	4269	4269	3674	3464	3464	3464
Pseudo R^2	0.057	0.063	0.258	0.292		0.321

Notes: Exponentiated coefficients; standard errors in parentheses; clustered by country

$^{*}p < 0.1$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, $^{**}p < 0.01$

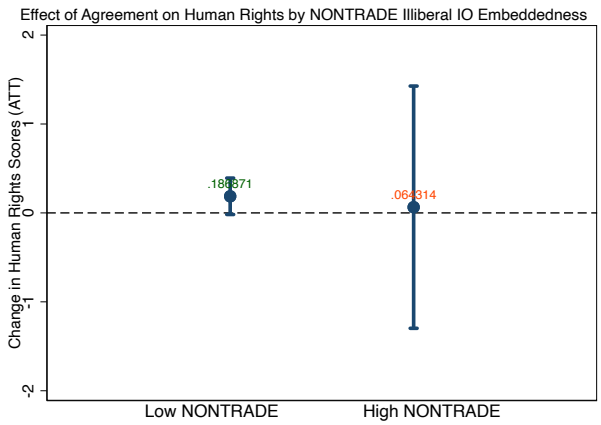
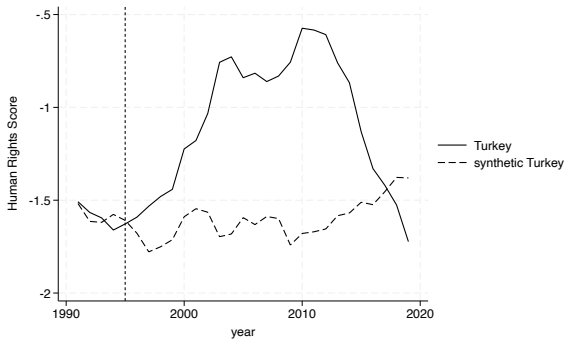
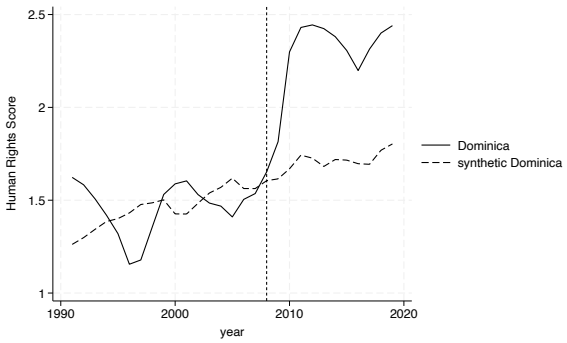


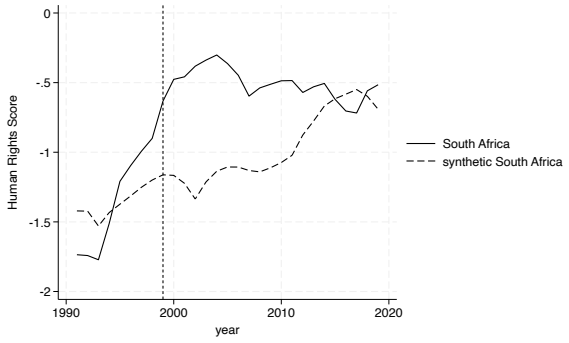
Figure 14: Effect of Non-trade IO Embeddeness on Human Rights Improvement



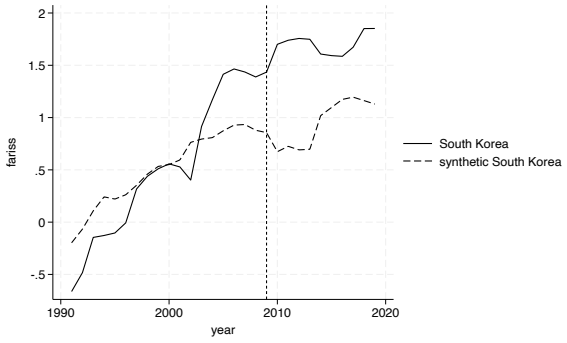
(a) Low IHRRES Country (Turkey)



(b) Low IHRRES Country (Dominica)

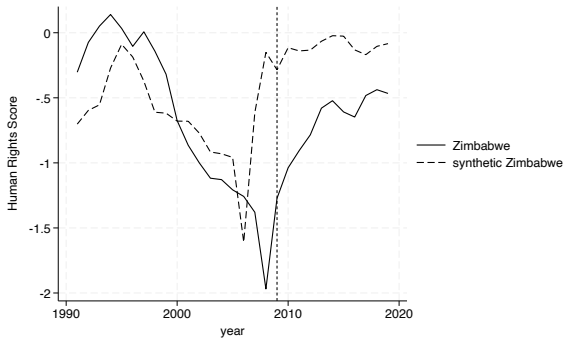


(c) Low IHRRES Country(South Africa)

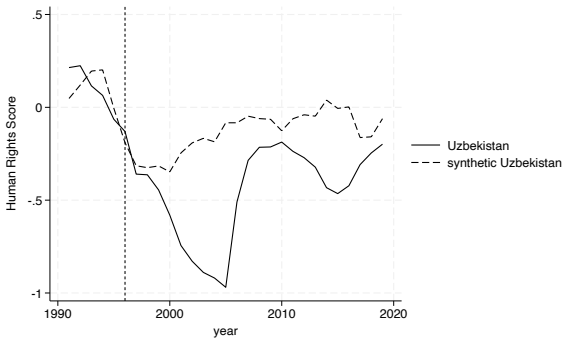


(d) Low IHRRES Country (South Korea)

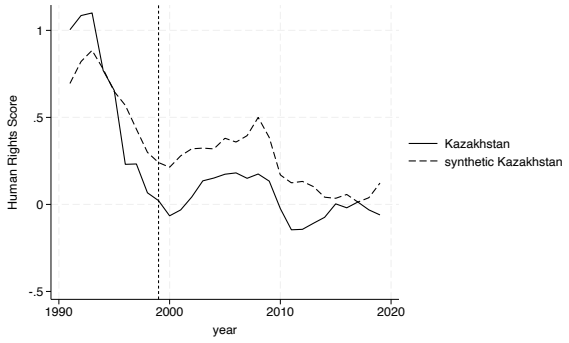
Figure 15: Synthetic Control for Low IHRRES Categories



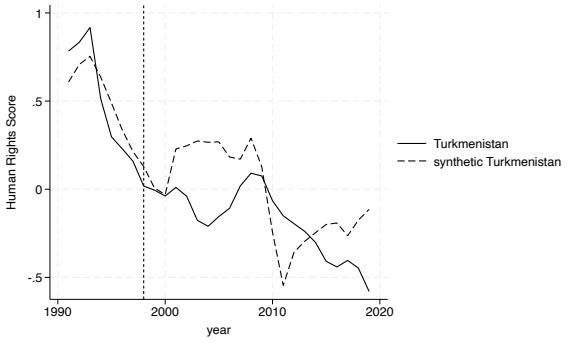
(a) High IHRRES Country (Zimbabwe)



(b) High IHRRES Country (Uzbekistan)



(c) High IHRRES Country (Kazakhstan)



(d) High IHRRES Country (Turkmenistan)

Figure 16: Synthetic Control for High IHRRES Categories