When States Break the Rules:

Membership Suspension in International Organizations

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Introduction

Notoriously weak at enforcement, international organizations (IOs) remain ill-equipped to compel states to comply with their formal rules. Yet they pursue increasingly innovative strategies to cajole and coerce. Scholars have previously debated the effectiveness of existing mechanisms, such as sanctions, social pressure, and naming and shaming techniques, but overlooked a critical mechanism of compliance: membership suspension. Since the League of Nations, the founders of international organizations have built this mechanism into most organizations’ charters as a deterrent effect to ensure states paid dues and subscribed to the organization’s mission. In practice, however, organizations have exercised suspension in “improvised” ways, interpreting their respective constitutional laws to achieve political goals rather than imposing absolute expulsion (Sohn 1964, 1424).

Long thought of as a last resort—even the American-Soviet rivalry during the Cold War did not lead to regular efforts to suspend each other’s allies from global institutions—in recent years the threat of suspension has become more prominent, though in relative terms there are still very few suspensions in practice. In part this is because of recognition of the high costs of halting or interrupting international cooperation. For organizations with economic concerns, suspension translates into a loss of revenue from trade. For environmental organizations, suspension may exacerbate the effects of climate change. For security organizations, suspension risks the alienation of states whose cooperation is needed to maintain security structures or whose anger might lead to efforts to upset the status quo by force. Nevertheless, the Arab League’s 2011 suspension of Syria and the African Union’s 2014 suspension of Egypt, among other cases, indicate that
international organizations do consider suspension a valuable tool of influence and relevance. We need, then, to consider the conditions under which international organizations choose to follow through with their rules to suspend member states.

This paper is a first-cut effort to explore this question. To this end, we revive and expand on existing scholarship on the behavior of IOs in three key ways: First, by presenting an original database of post-Cold War incidences of membership suspension; second, by identifying variation in practices across international organizations and uncovering the conditions under which specific organizations engage in the practice of suspension; and third by hypothesizing three factors that motivate organizations to suspend member states, including variation in resources, economic integration among member states, members’ political structures, great power pressure, and internal institutional legitimacy.

The paper is organized as follows. The first section discusses how a study of membership suspension expands on recent scholarship devoted to exploring how international organizations attempt to influence member states. We then present preliminary but original data on variation in contemporary incidences of suspension across three organizations, and note that further research on two other organizations is ongoing.

The next section presents three hypotheses to explain conditions under which IOs are more likely to exercise suspension. In brief, these are: One, an international organization in which member states have fewer resources should be more likely to practice suspension because states are more dependent on inter-regional trade and cannot afford to impose economic sanctions on a trading partner. Two, an international
organization in which states are more economically integrated should be less likely to suspend a member state because the removal of one state could reduce gains from trade by other states and make investors question the strength of the shared market. Three, an international organization populated by a majority of democracies will be more constrained in its capacity to exercise suspension because domestic publics and elites will resist any changes that could negatively affect them. Additionally, an organization populated by a majority of authoritarian regimes will be more able to exercise suspension because of limited domestic audience costs. The final section reviews the implications of these findings and offers conclusions and directions for future research.

**Membership Suspension in Practice**

A study of membership suspension is particularly timely given that international organizations have increasingly engaged in the practice over the past two decades, despite mixed results. The trend of publicly shaming a member state may be one of only a few sticks that international organizations have to exercise their authority, but it is one of increasing relevance. This higher frequency reflects on a broader observed trend of international organizations playing a greater role in states’ affairs (Barnett 2004).

Nevertheless, the literature has offered little attention in this period to the subject of suspension, which provides an opportunity to both describe and assess the phenomenon in the contemporary era. Identifying conditions under which states at an organization cooperate to suspend one of their own can contribute to two bodies of literature. The first consists of an emerging scholarship on *how* international organizations function in practice (Pouliot 2010; Hardt 2014) in order to open up the black box of decision-making (Barnett 2004, 9). The second consists of explaining and understanding the tools that
international organizations use to influence state behavior and incentivize compliance (Abbott 1998; Checkel 2001; Dai 2005).

This study’s focus on the practice of suspension updates previous literature that has instead studied the rules of suspension. Early literature on membership suspension is rooted in international legal studies; therefore scholars were interested in the diversity of formal rules that were an integral part of organizations’ treaties and charters. In a comparative study, Magliveras observed that international organizations struggled to reconcile two conflicting concepts of universality: “The idea that the two organizations (League of Nations and UN) should strive for the admission and retention of all or most states in the international community would appear to sit uncomfortably with the existence of expulsion or suspension clauses in their constitutional instruments” (Magliveras 1999). Although the following sections exclude global organizations, and instead focus on regional groups, member states of regional organizations can face a similar existential crisis. To what extent does excluding a member state threaten a regional organization’s claim that it represents the interests of the region in question? For example, the 2013 suspension of Egypt, Africa’s third most populous state and one of its most powerful, disrupted working methods and affected the organizational culture of the African Union.

There continues to be confusion among scholars and policymakers over when an international organization will actually implement its own policies or not. For example, the African Union suspended Madagascar for a coup d’état in 2009 but did not suspend Tunisia, Egypt, or Libya following their unconstitutional changes of government during the Arab uprisings of 2011-2012. Government officials from Madagascar quickly blamed
the organization for maintaining a double-standard (Panapress 2012). In their examination of the African Union’s Constitutive Act, some have called for clarification on this question:

Article 30 does raise crucial questions as relates to its modus operandi. In particular, who determines whether a government has taken power through unconstitutional means? What exactly is the ambit of non-participation in the Union activities? Considering that today a majority of African governments could not be described as democratic, at least by First World standards, would their overthrow by popular uprisings trigger the application of the suspension clause? (Magliveras 2008, 424).

These questions are equally relevant for all international organizations with suspension clauses. To begin answering them, we assess data on membership suspensions across multiple international organizations in order to draw conclusions about the conditions that one could expect suspension to occur.

By focusing on conditions of suspension, this study does not examine the extent to which suspensions are effective in shifting state behavior. This would move beyond the scope of this paper. Research on effectiveness of suspension is currently sparse and inconclusive but cannot be expanded without an update to the data on membership suspensions first. Sohn’s 1964 research of international organizations indicated that permanent expulsion of a member state does not help compliance on average. Contemporary research has examined other ways in which organizations have affected state behavior, but overlooked suspension. For example, Murdie and Davis introduced empirical evidence in 2011 that naming and shaming techniques by international non-governmental organizations have affected states’ decisions to shift their policies on human rights. Pevehouse’s 2002 research showed that an organization can influence domestic behavior if a state has legitimate concerns for the impact on its economy. After
Greece was suspended from its accession agreement to the European Community, Greece “suffered immediate financial consequences” and regarded exclusion from the increasingly integrating European economy as “dangerous” (Pevehouse 2002, 524). In other words, international organizations can make trade more costly through deliberate exclusion from trade agreements or other economic benefits which only members receive. Broader research on compliance can provide an initial framework for imagining the effects of suspension. Von Stein’s rational choice interpretation of compliance indicates that states should comply with rules “if the political capital and effort necessary to become a signatory are sufficiently costly ex ante” (Von Stein 2005, 621). In this context, membership suspension is not a rule but a cost that states must consider in deciding whether to be compliant or not.

Applying both Von Stein’s and Pevehouse’s research, one could posit that suspension should only affect state behavior if the economic costs are sufficiently high. However, if states succeed in acknowledging these costs a priori, they would likely not engage in errant behavior that would trigger suspension in the first place. In reality, states clearly have difficulty predicting a coup d’état or other breach of an organization’s charter, which means that states, even with the knowledge of the costs of economic consequences, have little control over their own errant behavior. In addition, sometimes states decide their national interests might trump regional interests like trade or political cooperation and “go it alone” even knowing there might be consequences such as suspension.

Instead of examining the states’ actions (initial or reactive), this study examines the actions of the international organization. This moves beyond the compliance
literature’s focus on the state to investigate broader conditions under which organizations act to punish the state and when do they choose not to do so.

**Contemporary Variation in Membership Suspension**

To begin, a brief note on methodology. The database developed in this study compiles cases of international organization membership suspension in the post-Cold War period (1991-2014) first from scholarly articles and second from top international news sources. Hypotheses are tested against cases from five leading regional organizations: the African Union (AU), the League of Arab States (LAS), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Organization of American States (OAS), and the European Union (EU), though this initial paper looks more closely first at three—the AU, OAS, and EU. This case selection allows for a global analysis as it includes the dominant regional organization from each of five regions. The United Nations was excluded due to its scope and global nature, which limit its comparability. The study tests existing theories on the autonomy of international organizations and provides an introductory analysis of suspension as a legitimate tool of influence on state behavior.

Leading international organizations may all have explicit rules regarding suspension, but organizations differ greatly with respect to enforcement. The African Union stands out as regional organization that frequently resorts to suspension as a tool of influence in contrast to the practices of other regional organizations.

An initial comparison of regional organizations’ rules regarding suspension shows that they are not only similar in tone but that the consequences all involve restricting the state’s ability to participate in the organization’s decision-making. Table 1 outlines the relevant text of each of five regional organizations’ rules on suspension by identifying the
condition under which suspension should occur, the method by which it should be executed, and the corresponding consequences of suspension.

Three of five of these organizations (AU, EU and OAS) explicitly set under which suspension occurs, including an undemocratic change of government as a condition for suspension, whereas the LAS and ASEAN more loosely set any breach of charter obligations as the condition. This reflects the importance that most regional organizations place on democratic governance. The ASEAN charter reflects a disconnect between words and reality. One of the purposes outlined in the ASEAN Charter (Chapter 1, Article 1.7) is “to strengthen democracy, enhance good governance and the rule of law,” but its membership comprises a mix of authoritarian and democratic regimes. The Charter of the Arab League does not include any mention of democracy, good governance, or citizens, which suggests that, as Sussman writes, “its mission is to protect nations, not people” (Sussman 2011). Since the Arab League does not require democratic governance, suspension would neither be threatened nor practiced because of a coup d’état or other undemocratic change of government.

With respect to implementation, the designers of the charters of international organizations intended for it to be difficult to suspend a member state. Formal rules across the five charters call for decision-making based on consensus at a minimum, if not full unanimity. Only the OAS permits suspension by a majority (two-thirds) of member states. As a member state of any of these five organizations, a state should expect to see its influence on joint decisions diminished substantially if it meets the condition for suspension described in the charter.
Table 1: Regional Organization Rules on Membership Suspension

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IO</th>
<th>LAS</th>
<th>ASEAN</th>
<th>AU</th>
<th>EU</th>
<th>OAS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Source</strong></td>
<td>Charter (1945), Article 18</td>
<td>Charter (2008), Article 20</td>
<td>Constitutive Act (2002), Article 30</td>
<td>Treaty of Amsterdam (1999), Article 7, F.1</td>
<td>Charter (1967), Chapter 3, Article 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Condition</strong></td>
<td>“any state which fails to fulfill its obligations under the Charter”</td>
<td>“In the case of a serious breach of the Charter or non-compliance”</td>
<td>A government has “come to power through unconstitutional means”</td>
<td>A member state has made “a serious and persistent breach of principles mentioned in Article F(1)”</td>
<td>A member state’s “democratically constituted government has been overthrown by force”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Method</strong></td>
<td>“unanimous decision of the states, not counting the state concerned”</td>
<td>“Matter shall be referred to the ASEAN Summit for (consensus-based) decision”</td>
<td>Peace and Security Council, decision by consensus</td>
<td>I. The EC acts by unanimity on a proposal by one-third of members or by the Commission and after obtaining assent of the European Parliament. II. The Council, with a qualified majority, may decide to suspend certain rights</td>
<td>Decision to suspend shall be adopted at a special session of the General Assembly by an affirmative vote of two-thirds of member states</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Consequences</strong></td>
<td>The state is considered separate from the League</td>
<td>Unspecified</td>
<td>“Not allowed to participate in the activities of the Union”</td>
<td>Certain rights suspended, “including the voting rights of the…Member State in the Council”</td>
<td>No “right to participate in the sessions of the General Assembly, the Meeting of Consultation, the Council… and the Specialized Conferences” or any other working group or bodies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
However, member states do not consistently follow their charter rules, meaning that an offending state may be punished or not depending on the whims of fellow member states. If fellow states do decide to continue with suspension, they follow protocol, but because there is no accountability, member states can choose to enforce or not enforce depending on other considerations. This makes the practice of implementation all the more puzzling. In order to parse out any of the conditions under which states do or do not practice suspension, we first introduce original data on membership suspensions across these five regional organizations during the post-Cold War era. Table 2 identifies cases whereby suspension occurred, as well as cases where member states threatened to suspend a fellow state but did not follow through.¹

Table 2: Contemporary Incidences of Membership Suspension: 1991-2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>AU</th>
<th>EU</th>
<th>OAS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Full Suspension</strong></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Threat of Suspension</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Hypotheses on Conditions for Membership Suspension**

The following hypotheses consider different variables that could affect whether or not the member states of a regional organization choose to suspend an offending state.

**Cost-Sensitive States**

*Hypothesis 1: International organizations are more likely to resort to suspension as a tool of influence as the least costly option to punish members and maintain the*

¹ In this initial paper, we look at the results in only three organizations; continuing research will incorporate the other two.
organization intact.

States’ access to financial resources vary widely across regions. Because member states pay the budgets of regional organizations, different regional organizations will have different degrees of affluence, from the wealthiest (i.e., EU) to the least wealthy (i.e., AU). Those organizations with fewer resources will be less able to devote them to costly tools of influence. In considering how to pressure an aberrant state into compliance, regional organizations facing greater resource constraints will likely choose the least costly tool. We hypothesize that those less wealthy regional organizations will more frequently choose suspension to punish member states because doing so entails the least expenditure of scarce resources.

Evidence for this proposition is found in the frequency with which the African Union has suspended member states compared to other IOs (see Table 2). Member states of the AU have significantly fewer financial resources relative to those of other regional organizations, which in turns affects the institution’s decision-making. Approximately 86% of all AU member states are categorized as developing economies. The per capita income of the population of Africa remains 50 percent less than that of the next poorest region, which is South Asia (Mills 2010). As a result, only half of AU member states have paid their dues to the organization. With such limited resources, AU member states are more cost-sensitive in making decisions on how to react to a state’s aberrant behavior. Just as inaction has negative consequences, choosing a low-cost option outweighs the benefits of remaining united under the norm of pan-Africanism (Murithi 2011).

Illustrating the relative low cost of suspension requires assessing the costs of alternative tools of influence. Alternatives to suspension include cutting diplomatic ties,
naming and shaming, and imposing economic sanctions. All three options carry high costs to the member states of any international organization, and thus to the organization itself.

First, political sanctions on a target member state can have negative economic consequences for the other members of the regional organization. These sanctions can vary from excluding certain individuals from public office (Nanda 1997, 389) to the downgrading of diplomatic representation, closure of embassies, and severing of diplomatic communications. Beyond politically ostracizing the member state and diminishing chances of future cooperation, such actions can affect the lives of the citizens of the member states sending the sanctions. The disruption of diplomatic ties between countries affects access to education, cultural exchange, labor, and economic growth. If citizens of sender states face restrictions in entering the target state, this can affect their social capital, employment opportunities, and limit innovation. Studies of diplomatic sanctions revealed that they lead to sender states’ incurring “a substantial loss of information and intelligence on the target state, but also a reduction in communication capacity and a diminished ability to influence the target state” (Maller 2010, 61). Moreover, many diplomats wear multiple hats. Removing them negatively affects multiple areas of interaction among countries. Political sanctions may even reduce the effectiveness of any corresponding economic sanctions.

Similarly, naming and shaming the offending member state can lead to high costs on the part of the other member states of the regional organization. Such a strategy has shown mixed results, but shaming strategies have proved most effective when the sending party has “a degree of independence from other stakeholders” (Pawson 2002,
Given the complex web of political relations among member states, it is difficult to claim objectivity on the part of the states taking the decision to name and shame. Additionally, this strategy does not carry the same external legitimacy as membership suspension because, in practice, it only involves a regional organization making a public statement criticizing or condemning the behavior of a particular member state. Relying on norms and public expectations also entails minimal costs, which a target state is likely to ignore if it thinks its offending behavior is necessary to advance its national interests. Alternately, if a new regime comes to power by force, it is obviously less interested in abiding by norms of political interaction.

Such an action risks straining relations between the state and other member states without sending a strong enough signal of the organization’s political will. In 2009, for example, the EU publicly chastised Greece for underreporting its debt and for far-exceeding the maximum 3% debt-to-GDP ratio allowed for in the Maastricht Treaty. The Greek government later revised its report to be closer to 13%. But the EU’s initial naming and shaming strategy worsened relations between Greece and other member states, particularly Germany, but failed by itself to trigger Greece’s economic reforms. It was not until the EU provided a bailout conditional on austerity measures that state behavior changed. This exemplifies the high-cost, low-reward character of naming and shaming strategies.

Economic sanctions represent another alternative to membership suspension but are by far the most costly. Sanctions hurt sender states by leading to losses in exports as firms in the sender states must comply with trade restrictions (Drezner 2003). Cost-sensitive states, such as most member states of the AU or OAS, cannot sustain these
losses in the same way that wealthier states can. As a result, organizations with less wealthy member states impose economic sanctions less frequently. Table 3 shows sanctions data collected from the TIES dataset as a means for comparison across the five organizations in question. From 1991-2005, member states of the EU have coordinated and issued sanctions 33 times more often than the next regional organization. The EU comprises some of the most developed economies in the world. The increase in use of sanctions by the EU following the Cold War also correlates with the strengthening of the European states’ economies. Other regional organizations have decreased the use of sanctions.

Table 3. Multilateral Sanctions Facilitated through International Organizations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>AU</th>
<th>EU</th>
<th>OAS</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cold War Sanctions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1945-1990)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Cold War</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1991-2005)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (1945-2005)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The data in Table 3 shows cases whereby member states have imposed multilateral sanctions against any sender state, not necessarily states from the same regional organization. More data is needed that can include specific cases whereby multilateral sanctions coordinated by the regional organization target a member state.

The alternatives to membership suspension listed above all incur high costs on the member states seeking to punish an offending state. As a result, membership suspension
is more likely to be seen as a much more attractive tool of influence. It remains a low cost option because it does not disrupt trade links, incur financial costs for sender states’ firms, or bar informal communications between the target government and members of the regional organization. The data suggests that the hypothesis needs further qualification, as suspension is more likely to be used as a tool of influence in organizations comprised of developing states with less industrialized economies.

Economic Interdependence

**Hypothesis 2:** The less economically-integrated their members are, the more likely international organizations are to resort to suspension.

Variation in regional economic integration affects the likelihood of suspension. In related research, Hafner-Burton and Montgomery (2008, 229) found that increases in bilateral trade lead to decreases in the use of sanctions within regional trade organizations. Similarly, increased trade among a group of states should disincentivize the group from punishing an individual state. The benefits of trade outweigh the cost of membership suspension, which can jeopardize future trade relations. If correct, we should expect to find a strong correlation between states with a high degree of intraregional trade and regional organizations with fewer suspensions. Equally, we should expect to find that those organizations with less intraregional trade correlate with those more frequently exercising suspensions.

Studies have shown that trade among regional organization member states positively affects political integration (Haas 1990) and peace (Copeland 1996; Martin 2008). Nevertheless, economic integration has a price. Higher regional integration can result in negative externalities. Greece’s debt crisis led to contagion (Nugent 2006)
within the EU as the shared currency weakened and investors questioned the strength of neighboring European economies. As member states become more economically integrated, from customs union to monetary union, they become more susceptible to the effects of an external shock on any one member state, which in turn leads members to be more careful about how they manage intraregional trade and political relations. Given that the EU represents the most integrated regional economy in the world, the organization should be less likely to impose suspension because actual suspension could disrupt the integrated economic area in the same way an exogenous shock would do.

Despite the lack of an existing database on organizations’ regional economic interdependence, the following evidence compiled from relevant sources supports the hypothesis that the most regionally interdependent organization, the European Union, suspends the least frequently. However, we cannot support the hypothesis that less regionally interdependent organizations suspend more frequently. Of the five organizations examined here, the member states of the African Union and of the Arab League, respectively, are the least regionally interdependent and more active in membership suspensions. A common metric for measuring economic integration within a region is intraregional trade but the most recently available intraregional trade data is for the year 2010. This does not provide evidence for intraregional trade for the entire period under consideration here (1991-2014). Nevertheless, despite failed attempts at creating an African free trade union, the member states of the African Union have consistently maintained the lowest intra-regional trade among the five organizations over the past two decades. In contrast to almost 50% intraregional trade within NAFTA states, interregional trade among African member states is between 10% and 13% (Mutiga

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2 To the best of the authors’ knowledge.
The states of the Arab League similarly exhibit low levels of intra-regional trade. Intraregional trade in the ASEAN area has increased from the creation of the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) in 2003 and subsequent lowering of import duties. Consequently, by 2010, intraregional trade among member states of ASEAN made up 23% of all trade (Okabe 2013, 7). These rising trade levels contrast sharply with levels in the OAS, where the trajectory has been in the opposite direction (e.g., Berisha Krasniqi et al., 2011).

Figure 1. Intraregional Trade as Share of Total Trade in 2010


If regional economic integration were truly inversely related to the frequency of suspensions, we would expect to see the EU suspending the least frequently and the Arab League suspending the most frequently, according to data shown in Figure 1. Instead, the
AU rather than the Arab League has led with respect to suspensions in the post-Cold War era. This suggests that those regional organizations with less trade among member states (e.g. a third or less of total trade) are less affected by this consideration in their decision to suspend member states.

Ultimately, increased intraregional trade may act as a deterrent to discourage states from resorting to suspension, but for those states that have yet to substantially integrate, intraregional trade levels do not affect their willingness to exercise it.

Member States’ Regime Type

_Hypothesis 3: The greater the number of established democracies as members, the less likely international organizations are to turn to suspension. Conversely, the greater the number of autocracies, the more likely international organizations are to suspend._

Political structure matters for state behavior, and consequently for the behavior of international organizations. The literature that explores the effects of political structure on international relations most thoroughly is the democratic peace literature. Though it has been criticized for not defining its variables clearly enough, and for ignoring specific conditions that can influence whether or not democracies go to war and with whom, the literature still provides evidence that regime type matters.

Democracies are more likely to account for the demands of the public, because decision-makers are elected and therefore accountable to voters who are likely to express their anger with governmental decisions by voting these officials out of office. Put differently, elected officials care about what the voters think and therefore are more likely
to make decisions that meet their expressed needs (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003).\(^3\)

As discussed above, IOs with high levels of economic integration and intra-regional trade are beneficial to member states. Consequently, firms, industries, and individuals within these states benefit, as well. The costs to the public of interrupting or severing these economic benefits are, therefore high. Leaders are aware of this, and are less likely to impose these costs if they can be avoided. Wealthier states and wealthier IOs, then, are likely to avoid suspension of other member states because their populations will suffer and, as disgruntled voters, impose punishment on those who made the decision to suspend.

At the same time, leaders in autocracies face less domestic audience costs. Certainly decision-makers in authoritarian states have groups and supporters to which they must answer; they could not remain in office without them. In some cases this might include constituents that depend on intra-regional trade or access to the regional economy, particularly regional energy sources and activity. But overall, these costs are lower and autocratic regimes can afford suspension since they worry less about being voted out of office.

If this proposition holds, then we would expect the African Union and League of Arab States to have the highest number of suspensions. This is borne out by the evidence, and by further evidence that the EU—the region with the largest number of entrenched democracies—has the fewest suspensions (no suspensions, in fact).

**Conclusion**

The evidence outlined above represents a first step in the process to identify

\(^3\) This is not to say that public officials cannot also shape public opinion and voting behavior under certain conditions. See, for example, Foyle (2004).
conditions under which member states choose to use membership suspension to achieve their goals and enforce their organization’s charter. It aims to inspire more empirical work on the subject so as to generate clearer predictions about how and when international organizations facilitate member state compliance. This paper also provided new data on suspension for future research.

Ultimately, regional organizations with cost-sensitive member states should be more likely to exercise membership suspension as a tool of influence because it costs little. Political and economic sanctions have negative consequences for sender states, from slowing labor flows to decreasing revenues from exports. Equally, naming and shaming can risk member states’ future cooperation with the target state by publicly ostracizing without a legitimate framework in which to do so. Suspension on the other hand carries both legitimacy and a low price tag. The act is legitimate in the eyes of the international community because it identifies the offending state in a multilateral context and according to the codified procedures of the organization’s charter. Even if a member state is suspended from a regional organization, it does not interrupt labor and trade flows or damage the other member states’ credibility. With respect to the effects of integration, regional organizations with higher levels of economic integration are less likely to turn to membership suspension as a means of influencing state behavior. Instead, regional organizations, in particular the European Union, rely on naming and shaming, backdoor diplomacy and even sanctions as a means of avoiding disrupting strong, pre-existing trade links among member states. The high cost of risking negative impacts on state economies deters such regional organizations from acting to block an individual state from participation. However, regional organizations in which states have less
intraregional trade have less reluctance to using suspension as a tool of influence. Lower levels of intraregional trade neither increase nor decrease the chances that an organization uses suspension.

States increasingly use regional organizations to isolate aberrant states through membership suspension, but they do so with careful regard for relative costs and risks to intraregional trade flows. Although suspension may be a particularly popular option, member states still prefer to first exhaust diplomatic solutions. Isolating a belligerent state can have harsh political and economic consequences for those states imposing the punishment.

Because this is only a first-cut effort to explore this question, there are other hypotheses that we are working to incorporate into the discussion. The role of external great powers and internal organizational culture are both variables that require consideration. Great powers can pressure international organizations to comply with their demands (for example, to meet their own interests) and expectations (for example, on good governance). This can manifest itself in suspensions when great powers serve also as major donors to a given IO, giving the great power leverage. Internal culture, including informal norms, matters greatly for determining how member states resolve their disagreements and what kind of punishments they may resort to. This also means that IOs with high levels of social cohesion among member states may be less likely to resort to such harsh punishments. A third consideration may be the organization’s need to demonstrate legitimacy, and prove to its members and to others that the institution matters and is deserving of support. This is particularly relevant given that we are exploring regional organization, since they operate as among the highest levels of
regional representation and therefore may want to demonstrate to constituents that they matter and can influence regional politics.

There are other questions to consider as we continue with our research. First, does length of time of suspension matter? Even if there are costs to the international organization, to member states, and to individuals or groups within these states, it might be that short-term suspension is affordable and therefore likely. This leads to a secondary question: can states know how long a suspension will last, and will they decide on suspension with that information? Again, the Arab League’s suspension of Egypt is instructive: As the largest and most powerful Arab state, Egypt was critical to the Arab world’s politics and to the advancement of common Arab norms. Yet its independent peace deal with Israel was such a violation of these norms, the League was willing to suspend it regardless of the consequences. It is not clear that this could happen under contemporary conditions.

In addition, we need to consider what the effects of member suspension are. Do member states change their behavior as a result of either the threat to suspend or actual suspension? The specific effects of membership suspension remain difficult to decipher, as we noted above. In large part, this is because of the lack of collected data, which this study aims to remedy, and because international organizations do not unconditionally suspend member states when they break the rules. Additionally, it is not clear what role external conditions can play to facilitate or undermine the decision to suspend. For example, Egypt’s suspension from the Arab League as a result of its separate peace treaty with Israel in 1979 remained in force until 1989 when changed global conditions—including the impending collapse of the Soviet bloc—and changed regional conditions—
including the end of the Iran-Iraq War—prompted Middle Eastern Arab states to want to bring Egypt back into the Arab fold. This initial study aspires to motivate research that does directly tackle the question of what are the effects of modern membership suspension on state behavior.

Finally, where do near-suspensions fit in? That is, does the threat or mere consideration of suspension matter? Is it qualitatively different from actual suspension for theoretical purposes? To answer these questions we need to examine whether member states’ behavior changed under the threat. It could be, for example, that the threat was enough to change behavior, even when actual suspension was not. One could imagine a case where a state was suspended because of a coup or other violent change of government, and therefore the new regime determines it has nothing more to lose (from the orientation of the IO) by remaining in power. In such a case, suspension would be after the fact, and therefore less likely to influence behavior.