

Rewarding Resistance: Theorizing Defiance to International Shaming

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Abstract

When does international shaming promote compliance, and when does it backfire, stimulating resistance to international norms? An emergent literature on norm resistance focuses mainly on *how* states resist international norms, but we know less about *why* and *when* they do so. This paper identifies a mechanism linking compliance pressures to norm resistance, which I term *defiance*. When compliance pressures provoke a defensive reaction in relevant audiences in the target state, leaders are penalized for complying with foreign norms and rewarded for violations. Here, international shaming is not merely irrelevant but counterproductive insofar as it generates incentives and opportunities for leaders to persist or increase norm-violating behavior. I discuss what defiance is, how defiance unfolds, and under what conditions it occurs. I then apply the framework to an original case study involving Iran's response to global shaming over its use of stoning as capital punishment. I find that political actors oppose compliance pressures even when they have no intrinsic preference regarding the norm itself. This suggests that norm violations are endogenous to international socialization in an important, but underappreciated, sense.

1 Intro

In the last four decades, scholars and activists have argued that international “naming and shaming” can effectively promote human rights around the world. A large body of work in International Relations (IR) argues that shaming compels compliance by inducing social and political costs on violating governments.¹ While this literature has gone far towards explaining the power of norms, it tends to center around successful and progressive normative change.² Recently, a burgeoning literature has emerged to correct this oversight, examining norm rejection, resistance, and contestation.³ We now know that states can and do resist compliance pressures, and may even double down or intensify violations as a response to international shaming. But while several studies demonstrate *how* states resist compliance pressures, we know less about *why* and *under what conditions* they do so. Why do some states redouble their commitment to violations in the face of global pressure? When does shaming lead to an improvement in norm compliance, and when does it backfire?

This paper develops a theoretical mechanism linking shaming to norm resistance, which I term *defiance*. Defiance refers to the increase in commitment to or incidence of norm violating behavior caused by a defensive reaction to social sanctioning. The concept builds on insights from sociology, social psychology, and criminology, which reveal how out-group shaming can backfire by driving targets to redouble their commitment to norm violations. IR scholars have often looked to these disciplines to substantiate models of norm socialization. However, by focusing predominately on the psycho-social roots of *compliance*, the literature has obscured a wealth of findings that point to the ambivalent and often counterproductive nature of shaming, especially when it occurs in intergroup contexts. In this article, I revisit the microfoundations of shaming to elaborate a theory of defiance, explaining what defiance is, how it unfolds, and the conditions under which it occurs.

In brief, defiance is a relational phenomenon operating through *intergroup* and *intragroup* dynamics. First, out-group shaming evokes feelings of status threat in target audiences, registering as a hostile attempt to denigrate the target’s moral standing. A similar mechanism occurs in the context of international norms. When relevant audiences in the target state perceive foreign condemnation as a status threat – a hostile at-

¹ DeMeritt 2012; Franklin 2008; Keck and Sikkink 1998; Murdie and Davis 2012; Ropp, Sikkink, and Risse 1999.

² Acharya 2004; Epstein 2012; Risse and Sikkink 2013; Zarakol 2014.

³ Adler-Nissen 2014; Ayoub 2014; Bob 2012; Bloomfield and Scott 2016; Búzás 2018; Cardenas 2011; Dixon 2017; Evers 2017; Nuñez-Mietz and Garcia Iommi 2017; Symons and Altman 2015; Wiener 2004; Steele 2017.

tempt to denigrate their country's reputation -- they react defensively by degrading outside criticism and transforming norm violation into an expression of national identity and resistance. This reaction alters the domestic political environment in which leaders compete for policy and influence, constraining policy-makers from the ability to comply, while rewarding those who resist international pressure. One of the major implications of this dynamic is that elites have a *strategic* incentive to oppose norms, even if they have no intrinsic preference against the norm per se. Further, I argue that variation in defiance is best explained not by essentialist group traits, such as cultural predispositions, but by the social and relational context in which shaming occurs. Specifically, shaming is likely to stimulate defiance when it emanates from a geopolitical adversary, and when elites are vulnerable to nationalist audiences. I apply this framework to an original case study involving Iran's response to global shaming over its use of stoning as capital punishment, drawing on hundreds of primary documents and semi-structured interviews.

This article makes several contributions to the study of international norms. The primary contribution is the conceptual and theoretical development of defiance. While recent studies on norm resistance touch on some aspects of this phenomenon, a detailed analysis is outside their scope. As a result, defiance remains poorly understood, generating an incomplete picture of normative pressure and its effects on state behavior. A focus on defiance also reveals important insights about norm violation and resistance in world politics. Counter-intuitively, the proposed model shows how actors may want to violate norms even if they have no intrinsic preference regarding the norm itself. To an important extent, norm violations are endogenous to international socialization in ways that have not yet been fully appreciated.

2 The Deterrence Logic of Shaming

I use the terms "shaming," "social sanction," and "normative pressure" interchangeably to refer to the public expression of disapproval over a perceived norm violation. To clarify, *shame* as a noun denotes a painful, internal emotion experienced by individuals. The process of *shaming* involves external pressure imposed by others, which may or may not generate feelings of shame in the target.⁴ Shaming can take a variety of forms: publicly exposing wrongful behavior (a news article recounting human rights violations); grading certain actors as normatively inferior (rankings or indicators reflecting poor human rights performance); expressing condemnation or concern (a UNHRC resolution); or mobilizing moral outrage within a larger community (an urgent action

⁴ Braithwaite 1989, 100.

by Amnesty International). What all of these have in common is the public expression of disapproval for failure to comply with standards of appropriate conduct.

How does shaming influence target behavior? One widely adopted view holds that shaming promotes compliance by increasing the social costs associated with norm violations.⁵ Criminologists refer to this as the “deterrence” model of social sanctioning.⁶ Beginning with Asch’s infamous line experiments, a large literature in psychology suggests that shaming – or the anticipation of shaming – motivates pro-social behavior and conformity. Invoking such logic, scholars in other fields – including criminology, behavioral economics, and law⁷ – advocate the use of shaming penalties to promote desirable behavior, such as voting or recycling.⁸ Even if such penalties fail to induce reform in the targeted offender, proponents argue they may deter other members of the community from violations, thus reaffirming community norms.⁹

The deterrence logic pervades the literature on shaming in IR, particularly in the work on human rights and transnational advocacy. Here, scholars identify two broad mechanisms by which shaming promotes compliance. First, shaming exerts pressure on governments “from above” by imposing social and reputational costs on states that violate international norms.¹⁰ For constructivists, shaming threatens the prestige, status, and identity of states as members of the “international community.”¹¹ For liberal institutionalists, states may not care about social approval per se, and yet shaming may reveal credible information on a state’s record for compliance in general, threatening beneficial forms of cooperation such as trade agreements or foreign aid.¹² A second mechanism occurs when shaming triggers *domestic* mobilization, pressuring norm-violating governments “from below.”¹³ Insofar as the “international community” commands legitimacy in the eyes of citizens in the target state, foreign condemnation sparks domestic outrage and demands on elites to comply with international standards. Both mechanisms follow a deterrence logic: shaming increases the costs associated with norm violation, whether through peer approval, foreign donors, or domestic publics.

⁵ “Compliance refers to a particular kind of response — acquiescence — to a particular kind of communication — a request... In all cases, the target recognizes that he or she is being urged to respond in a desired way.” Cialdini and Goldstein 2004, 592.

⁶ Braithwaite 1989; Sherman 1993.

⁷ Kahan 1996; Posner and Rasmusen 1999.

⁸ Gerber, Green, and Larimer 2010; Schultz 1999.

⁹ Harvard Law Review 2003, 2191.

¹⁰ The “above” and “below” analogy comes from Brysk 1993.

¹¹ Finnemore and Sikkink 1998; Katzenstein 1996; Ropp, Sikkink, and Risse 1999.

¹² Lebovic and Voeten 2009.

¹³ Dai 2005; Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 903; Keck and Sikkink 1998; Ropp and Sikkink 1999, 5; Simmons 2009, chap. 4.

Notably, the deterrence logic lingers even when shaming *fails* to induce compliance. When explaining noncompliance or unsuccessful normative change, many scholars point to domestic factors — such as regime interests or local culture — blocking transnational pressures.¹⁴ Likewise, recent work on norm resistance identifies various strategies that governments use — such as evasion, contestation, or rhetorical adaptation — that neutralize international criticism by minimizing the perception of noncompliance.¹⁵ In both camps, shaming functions as a deterrent that can be blocked, inhibited, or circumvented. Insofar as foreign criticism exerts any effect, it promotes compliance with international norms. Meanwhile, any deviation from these norms reflects a *failure* of international shaming resulting from either insufficient pressure or exogenous forces such as material interests, domestic political arrangements, or autonomous local norms.¹⁶

The deterrence logic is intuitive and valuable. However, it fails to account for cases in which shaming not only fails, but drives behavior that is *antithetical* to compliance. Indeed, regressive change or “backlash” is anathema to the deterrence logic, which assumes that shaming results in either success (compliance) or failure (*status quo ante*).¹⁷ A number of recent findings in IR challenge this assumption by highlighting potential outcomes of normative pressure that fall outside this dichotomy. For example, research on norm “antipreneurs” and rival networks demonstrate how transnational advocacy sparks counter-movements who mobilize against normative change.¹⁸ In another vein, Rebecca Adler-Nissen observe that some “deviant” states engage in strategies of “counter-stigmatization,” transforming outside stigma into an emblem of pride.¹⁹ Building on those insights, Miles Evers describes how states engage in norm transgression — the public and intentional breaches of appropriate behavior — in order to assert their identity or challenge the international normative order.²⁰ Empirically, scholars have observed backlash to international shaming in a number of domains, including whaling,²¹ sexuality rights,²² and apologies for mass atrocities.²³ Together, these works

¹⁴ Legro 1997; Checkel 2001; Gurowitz 1999. For a review, see Cardenas 2004.

¹⁵ Búzás 2018; Dixon 2017; Hurd 2005; Schimmelfennig 2001.

¹⁶ For a similar criticism, see Zarakol 2014, 313.

¹⁷ The authors of the “spiral” model reflected on this problem in Risse and Sikink 2013.

¹⁸ Ayoub 2014; Bloomfield and Scott 2016; Bob 2012; Chaudoin 2016; Nuñez-Mietz and Garcia Iommi 2017; Symons and Altman 2015.

¹⁹ Adler-Nissen 2014, 153. See also Zarakol 2010.

²⁰ Evers 2017. See also Wagner, Werner, and Onderco 2014.

²¹ Epstein 2012; Bailey 2008.

²² Nuñez-Mietz and Garcia Iommi 2017; Symons and Altman 2015.

²³ Dixon 2018; Lind 2008.

constitute an emerging consensus that the deterrence model is incomplete, and that compliance pressure can stimulate resistance to international norms.

Despite these indispensable corrections, there remains a great deal we do not know about the relationship between shaming and norm resistance. Reactions to foreign shaming – and their implications for the ways states orient themselves towards a particular norm – are neither automatic nor inevitable. Why, in the face of transnational human rights shaming, do some states double-down or even ramp up violations? When does shaming compel compliance, and when does it stimulate resistance? We cannot answer these questions until we know more about the concrete processes occurring at the individual, societal, and political levels that drive governments towards certain policies that resist compliance pressures. By theorizing the concept of defiance, this article provides additional theoretical tools to understand why, and under what conditions, shaming stimulates norm resistance and violations.

3 What is Defiance?

Defiance refers to the net increase in the commitment to or incidence of norm-offending behavior caused by a defensive reaction to social sanctioning. This definition builds on the work of criminologist Lawrence Sherman, who developed the concept to understand how the administration of criminal sanction produces subsequent offending.²⁴ Note that this concept does not exhaust the possible unintentional consequences of shaming.²⁵ Rather, defiance illuminates many important, yet neglected, dynamics surrounding shaming and international norms.

As a concept, defiance has several key components, including an independent variable (social sanctioning), a dependent variable (norm-offending) and a mechanism linking the two (a defensive reaction.) First, defiance denotes a reaction to social sanctioning and shaming, not the relevant norm *per se*. Unlike the more general case of being at odds with a norm, defiance involves the intentional and public refusal to comply with compliance demands.²⁶ It is worth noting that the word “defiance” originates from Middle English to denote the renunciation of an allegiance or friendship; to defy is to be disloyal to a person or community. Thus defiance is relational to its core, and the adversarial relationship between shamer and target is central to its logic.

Second, defiance manifests as a “net increase in incidence of or commitment to a particular norm offending behavior.” The concept reverses the causal arrow centered in

²⁴ Sherman defined defiance as, “the net increase in the prevalence, incidence or seriousness of future offending against a sanctioning community caused by a proud, shameless reaction to the administration of a criminal sanction.” (Sherman 1993.).

²⁵ For other ways shaming can backfire, see Hafner-Burton 2008; Carnegie and Carson 2018.

²⁶ Monin and O’Connor 2011.

the norms literature, whereby an actor's desire to violate results in being shamed. In cases of defiance, shaming produces the motivation to violate. The unconventional causal sequence owes to the concept's origins in labeling theory, a sociological paradigm examining the roots of "secondary deviance." Unlike primary deviance, which can arise from any number of factors and has only marginal impact for the status and life-course of the perpetrator, secondary deviance reflects "deviant behavior, or social roles based upon it, which becomes a mean of defense, attack, or adaptation to the overt and covert problems created by the societal reaction to primary deviation."²⁷ In effect, society's reaction to the original offense becomes the engine propelling future offenses. When applied to the international realm, defiance concerns events following the onset of shaming, and remains agnostic about the initial offense.²⁸ However, it suggests that certain actors may become more committed to deviance as a result of condemned for it.

Finally, defiance unfolds through *intergroup* and *intragroup* processes, which I describe in detail in the next section. In brief, foreign shaming incites psycho-social forces within the target group that undermine the ability of governments to comply. It does so by incentivizing behavior that explicitly rejects external norms – not necessarily out of an intrinsic desire to violate, but rather because violating generates social and political rewards within the target group. In other words, defiance explains norm violations that are *endogenous* to social influence: shaming stimulates opposition to the underlying norm, altering the behavior of actors in ways that would not have occurred absent outside pressure. Unlike the deterrent model, shaming here is not merely irrelevant but counterproductive insofar as it encourages further offense.

These components distinguish defiance from adjacent concepts, such as "contestation." Unlike most usage of contestation, defiance does not logically depend on any pre-established belief concerning the legitimacy or desirability of a given norm. The opposition is directed less at the content of a norm than to the structures of authority through which that norm is propagated, legitimized, or enforced. Any norm-violation that follows is an expression of that renunciation. In other words, norm opposition emerges *because*, not in spite, of shaming. The difference may appear overly theoretical, but is crucial insofar it manifests different predictions about the impact of normative pressure. Sustained shaming weakens contestation, but bolsters defiance.²⁹

²⁷ Lemert 1972, 17.

²⁸ The ontological placement of sanctioning *prior* to additional violations is also defensible by virtue of the fact that norm enforcement is driven, at least in part, by forces exogenous to actual violations (Donno 2010; Lebovic and Voeten 2006; Ramos, Ron, and Thoms 2007; Ron, Ramos, and Rodgers 2005; Terman and Voeten 2017.)

²⁹ Defiance also shares elements in common with "transgressions": "intentional and purposeful actions that publicly breach the dominant norms of the international system" (Evers 2017, 788.) The main distinction between defiance and transgression is that the former is a reaction to overt compliance pressures,

4 How does Defiance Work?

Shaming stimulates defiance in two steps. First, relevant audiences in the target state – including mass publics and elites – view transnational shaming as a *status threat*: a deliberate and hostile attempt by the shamer to denigrate the target in a social hierarchy. The experience of status threat provokes a defensive reaction that degrades outside criticism and transforms norm violation into an expression of in-group identity. Second, this reaction alters the domestic political environment in which elites compete for policy and influence. Specifically, it constrains leaders from complying with international pressure, while rewarding those who demonstrate opposition to norms. Together, these mechanisms advance the likelihood that states will not only ignore outside pressure, but *double down* on norm violations as a response.

4.1 Shaming, Status Threat, and Defensive Reactions

Defiance occurs when target audiences view international shaming as a threat to their country's status. This argument proceeds from the well-substantiated claim that people care about the status of the groups to which they belong, because our self-worth is ineluctably tied to our social identities.³⁰ Further, national affiliation and citizenship constitutes an important social identity for many individuals. States are constantly competing for status and prestige. Citizens care about their country's position in the global pecking order because it affects their own self-image and esteem.³¹ *Status threat* emerges when individuals see their group (country) being devalued, for instance by being labeled morally inferior.³² Because people derive so much of their self-worth from group identity, if they feel that their group is not doing well compared to others – that it is being stigmatized, criticized, denounced, discriminated against, or dominated – they will feel personally attacked, even when they cannot be held personally responsible for their group's behavior.³³

External shaming for norm violations arouses status threat in target audiences because it registers as a hostile attempt to denigrate the target's moral standing.³⁴ As

whereas the latter assumes no such relation. In this sense, defiance can be thought of a special case of transgression, incited by shaming.

³⁰ Group or social identity refers to “to part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his member of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership.” (Tajfel 1981, 255.)

³¹ Flockhart 2006; Mercer 1995; Ward 2017b.

³² Branscombe et al. 1999; Ellemers, Spears, and Doosje 2002; Major and O'Brien 2005.

³³ Ellemers, Spears, and Doosje 2002, 175.

³⁴ It is indicative of the strength of this association that threat paradigms now dominate modern social psychological research on stigma. Major and O'Brien 2005, 398.

Towns explains, norms do more than homogenize actors to a shared standard; they also stratify actors in a social hierarchy, ranking them as superior or inferior.³⁵ Shaming *stigmatizes* the target, imposing a label that distinguishes, devalues, and degrades the violator (and associates) in the eye of others.³⁶ This negative evaluation results in loss of status and, by extension, social resources and privileges. Indeed, the relationship between shame and domination is so intertwined that one often connotes the other.³⁷ It is important to clarify that status threat is a subjective experience, and may have only limited correspondence to objective power relations. Nevertheless, the experience of status threat arouses feelings of *harm* – the injury resulting from the deprivation of status – and *wrong* – the unfair dominance of the shamer over the target.³⁸

Threat is a reactive force. When individuals perceive external criticism as a threat to their group's status, they not only fail to internalize that criticism but react defensively against it.³⁹ A defensive reaction functions as a coping mechanism, restoring self-esteem and ameliorating cognitive dissonance arising from criticism on the basis of group membership.⁴⁰ It does so by directing a number of changes in individuals' perceptions and attitudes that are "instrumentally aimed at differentiation and group affirmation."⁴¹ In IR, an emerging body of empirical work suggests that international intervention provokes a negative reaction from target audiences, even in the human rights domain. For example, Jamie Gruffydd-Jones found that Chinese citizens reacted defensively to U.S. criticism of China's record on women's rights. This reaction fueled a "backfire" effect whereby citizens reported higher satisfaction with their government's position on women's rights. In a context of fierce geopolitical competition, criticism from a rival evoked status concerns and a nationalist response, while identical criticism from a neutral source (the African Union) generated no such effects. Other forms of international pressure, such as economic sanctions or tribunals, elicit similar reactions from domestic publics, stimulating anger and hostility towards such institutions.⁴² Together, these findings suggest that international normative pressure commonly backfires by stimulating a nationalist reaction in target audiences.

³⁵ Towns 2012.

³⁶ Goffman 2009; Link and Phelan 2001. For a discussion on stigma in IR, see Adler-Nissen 2014; Zarakol 2014; Zarakol 2010.

³⁷ Maibom 2010, 579.

³⁸ I thank Nina Hagel for suggesting this language.

³⁹ Hornsey and Imani 2004, 366.

⁴⁰ Branscombe et al. 1999, 48.

⁴¹ Ellemers, Spears, and Doosje 2002, 176.

⁴² Brutger and Strezhnev 2017; Chapman and Chaudoin 2017; Grossman, Manekin, and Margalit 2018.

Proposition 1: Out-group shaming registers as a status threat in target audiences, provoking defensive reactions.

4.2 Rewarding Violators / Constraining compliers

Status threat is not solely an *intergroup* phenomenon. It also has important consequences for *intragroup* dynamics by altering the relations between members and the intersubjective knowledge emergent from those relations. Out-group shaming engenders cultural change *within* the target group, altering the cultural valence of a disputed norm to assume a stronger role in the symbolic boundaries separating in-group from out-group. In doing so, shaming converts norm-violation into a vehicle for expressing in-group identity, anger, and resistance. To illustrate, recall when supporters of Hillary Clinton styled “Nasty Woman” t-shirts during the 2016 Presidential Election, while Trump supporters donned apparel inscribed with “Basket of Deplorables.” Before the campaign, these phrases carried very little symbolic meaning. But once hurled as epithets, these slogans were quickly re-appropriated by the very people they were designed to stigmatize, refashioned as totems of group identity. Similarly, foreign shaming for particular violations “internationalizes” the issue, suturing it to feelings of national honor, pride, and identity.⁴³ Some citizens will associate resistance to foreign criticism with a defense of their social identity, even if they cannot be held personally responsible for human rights violations, or would personally benefit from reform.⁴⁴

This cultural shift results in two consequences for the target state’s response to international pressure. First, prominent beliefs linking shaming to status threat *constrains leaders from complying* with international norms by increasing the political costs associated with “giving in” to foreign demands. When audiences associate human rights pressure with domination, it becomes difficult for politicians to acquiesce to such pressure without being perceived as kowtowing to the enemy. Even if leaders are inclined to comply with international norms on account of their foreign policy goals or genuine beliefs, they must reckon with domestic forces that attach compliance with weakness and a loss of political legitimacy. James Fearon wrote of a similar mechanism in the context of international crises with his identification of “audience costs.”⁴⁵ Whether in the context of military bargaining or other kinds of disputes, “backing

⁴³ Gruffydd-Jones 2018.

⁴⁴ Group interests often override personal interests in the context of social threat (Branscombe et al. 1999, 49.) One implication is that human rights shaming may produce feelings of threat even in those individuals who would benefit personally from an improvement in human rights conditions.

⁴⁵ Fearon 1994. Contrary to the common application of audience costs to explicit threats in military bargaining, Fearon’s original conception involved much broader affective concerns over national honor and reputation. See Dafoe, Renshon, and Huth 2014.

down” is “costly for a leader because it gives domestic political opponents an opportunity to deplore the international loss of credibility, face, or honor.”⁴⁶ In other words, a discourse on status threat amounts to an effective political constraint against those who would advocate for complying with international pressure. This resource can be used by anyone, regardless of whether they genuinely care about the norm at stake. For instance, nationalist or populist challengers can harness a defensive reaction to discredit an incumbent with a history of bowing to international pressure. In such cases, foreign shaming tips the scales in a political cleavage towards the side that appeals to nationalist discourse over international engagement, hardliners over soft-liners.⁴⁷

Second, a defensive reaction to international shaming *rewards those who oppose, resist, and transgress* foreign norms. In the context of widespread status threat, norm-violation performs resistance to foreign domination manifesting as human rights criticism. Insofar as such criticism is understood as an attack on the nation, norm violators can claim they are defending the country’s interests by standing their ground, thus accumulating political capital.⁴⁸ As a political resource, a defensive reaction benefits two kinds of norm violators. First, it empowers those who prefer to violate regardless of whether shaming took place. For example, a regime may want to imprison political dissidents in order to secure its domestic rule. A widespread defensive reaction to international pressure enables that regime by discrediting foreign criticism and rallying support around the state.⁴⁹ Second, a defensive reaction creates political opportunities for new actors to demonstrate opposition to norms in ways that would have been less attractive without foreign condemnation. Prominent discourses on status threat generate a constituency for political entrepreneurs who demonstrate resistance to foreign norms or the actors they represent. This benefits *anyone* who showcases norm resistance, regardless of whether they genuinely care about the norm at stake.

Proposition 2: Widespread feelings about status threat alters the political environment in the target state, constraining compliance and rewarding defiance.

Together, these mechanisms push leaders to resist international shaming by doubling-down on norm-violating behavior. Specifically, defiance involves two similar

⁴⁶ Fearon 1994, 581.

⁴⁷ This mechanism shares a logical resemblance to outbidding, in which intense party competition drives political entrepreneurs to adopt extremist rhetoric in order to ideologically “outbid” their opponents. See Blaydes and Linzer 2012; Horowitz 1985; Fearon and Laitin 2000.

⁴⁸ This claim is consistent with recent work on status recognition and conflict, which hold that states are motivated to initiate or sustain conflict in order to prove their resolve or maintain their status in the international system (Dafoe, Renshon, and Huth 2014; Renshon 2016; Ward 2017a.)

⁴⁹ On “rally around the flag” dynamics, see Baker and Oneal 2001; Chapman and Reiter 2004.

but analytically distinct short-term effects, one on behavior and the other on preferences. First, defiance alters state behavior by increasing the *incidence* of norm violations. This can manifest as increased human rights violations, or the adoption of new policies or laws that are antithetical to the norm in question. An example of the later would be laws that criminalize homosexuality following transnational LGBT advocacy, or policies that restrict the work of democracy promotion advocates. Second, defiance increases the *commitment* to norm violations. This may not manifest as tangible changes to law or policy, but does reflect an important shift in the preferences of policy-makers, who are now willing to suffer higher costs in pursuit of a norm violating practice. This is what people ordinarily mean when they utter the phrase “double down.”

5 When does defiance occur?

Thus far, I have described the mechanisms by which shaming stimulates defiance, but I do not claim that the former necessarily leads to the later. When does shaming stimulate defiance? One possibility focuses on the material interests of elites, who may want to manufacture defiance in order to shield themselves from criticism. Indeed, leaders who prefer to violate norms often justify their actions by characterizing international pressure as illegitimate intervention. But while elites can, to some degree, manipulate public discourse on shaming and norms, their attempts are not always successful. In other words, an explanation centering elite interests may account for the *motivation* to resist compliance pressures, but is less helpful in accounting for the *ability* to do so. The key question becomes, what makes status threat a credible frame, one that resonates with audiences and fuels a defensive reaction?

The social psychological literature suggests some fairly precise expectations concerning the conditions under which individuals view shaming as a status threat. Specifically, *the social and political relationship* between shamer and target plays a significant mediating role in norm dynamics. In controlled experiments, criticisms evoke more defensiveness when they stem from out-group members compared to an identical criticism stemming from in-group members – a phenomenon known as the Intergroup Sensitivity Effect (ISE).⁵⁰ Specifically, out-group critics were evaluated more negatively than their in-group counterparts, and participants were less supportive of the criticism when it came from an out-group member, even when it had objective merit.⁵¹ In contrast, in-group critics are viewed in a relatively positive light, even when criticizing group-specific norms. Crucially, the ISE hinges on perceptions of *motive*. In the absence of oth-

⁵⁰ Hornsey, Oppes, and Svensson 2002; Hornsey and Imani 2004; Hornsey 2005. These findings are robust and do not seem to vary with the quality of the message or the experience of the critic.

⁵¹ Hornsey, Oppes, and Svensson 2002.

er information, criticism from an out-group member is seen as driven by hostile and destructive motives to degrade the target's legitimacy and reputation, engendering feelings of status threat.

In the international context, source effects moderate the impact of human rights shaming. Terman and Voeten demonstrate that peer-review criticism in the Universal Periodic Review is less effective when delivered by a geopolitical adversary compared to an ally.⁵² Here, I take this logic one step further to propose that shaming by an adversary is not only ineffective, but counterproductive by stimulating defiance. Domestic audiences attribute criticism from a geopolitical rival to hostile intentions and react defensively, generating incentives and opportunities for leaders to double down on violations. Shaming by a geopolitical ally or friend, on the other hand, cannot be attributed to ill will in the same way, and so is less likely to stimulate status threat.

Proposition 3A: Defiance is more likely when shaming comes from a geopolitical adversary.

Still, it is important to remember that status threat is a subjective perception, not an objective condition. That means that different people in the target group will interpret shaming in different ways. Social psychologists emphasize that individuals with higher identity attachments are more likely to experience feelings of threat when faced with group-based criticism.⁵³ Applying this insight to world politics, Steven Ward proposes that nationalists are more sensitive to derogations of their country's status, and more likely to cope by championing hawkish and revisionist policies.⁵⁴ If so, foreign shaming is more likely to provoke status threat in individuals with higher nationalist sentiments. It would follow that defiance is more likely when target governments *depend* on nationalist audiences for legitimacy and political support. Thus we would expect to see defiance occur when shaming targets political organizations that explicitly brand themselves as nationalists -- or are otherwise vulnerable to nationalists groups and their demands for defiance.

Proposition 3B: Defiance is more likely when decision-makers rely on the political support of nationalists.

6 The "Save Sakineh" Campaign

⁵² Terman and Voeten 2017.

⁵³ Branscombe et al. 1999; Major and O'Brien 2005.

⁵⁴ Ward 2017a.

To demonstrate the empirical utility of the proposed framework, I analyze Iran's response to international pressure surrounding its use of stoning as capital punishment. I center the study around the 2010-11 campaign to free Sakineh Mohammadi Ashtiani, an Iranian woman found guilty of adultery and sentenced to death by stoning. The case was selected as a plausibility probe for several reasons. First, Iran's response to the "Save Sakineh" campaign presents an intriguing puzzle for conventional theories of norm dynamics. Despite intense compliance pressures, Iran resisted in bombastic ways, suffering diplomatic conflicts and the threat of further sanctions as a result. Typical explanations for state resistance remain unsatisfying, for reasons I address below. Second, the analysis advances a more satisfying explanation for Iran's behavior using the framework of defiance. I argue Iran's opposition to international shaming was motivated less by some normative commitment to stoning *per se* than by an imperative to defy foreign, especially western, demands. Finally, the study contains many observations on the variables of interest — shaming and state response — while exhibiting both synchronic and diachronic variation, making it a strong plausibility probe.

The analysis is based on original research using a variety of primary sources, including interviews with key actors, court documents, public relations materials produced by Iranian government agencies, and hundreds of press releases and articles reporting official statements and actions. Inferences are based on narrative and process tracing techniques, focusing on the timing and content of rhetorical shifts related to the campaign. Although actors may use rhetoric strategically — thus obfuscating motivational inferences — public justifications speak directly to questions of intersubjective norms and legitimacy, which are the focus of the current study. Given space constraints, exhaustive empirical testing is outside the scope of this short analysis. Rather, the purpose is to establish the relative value of the defiance framework over alternatives.

6.1 Background

Sakineh Mohammadi Ashtiani was born c. 1968 in a rural area of East Azerbaijan Province in Iran.⁵⁵ In 2005, she was found guilty of accessory to murder in connection with the death of her husband, and sentenced to maximum 10 years in prison.⁵⁶ In May 2006, apparently arising out of the investigation into her husband's murder, Sakineh was charged with "illicit relations" and sentenced to 99 lashes as per the Islamic penal code.⁵⁷ Despite this conviction, a different court re-charged her with "adultery while

⁵⁵ Following campaign materials, I refer to the subject and her son by their first names to avoid confusion.

⁵⁶ In 2009, this sentence was commuted to 5 years.

⁵⁷ Ghaderzadeh 2010.

married” – a more serious offense⁵⁸ – and, in a non-unanimous decision, sentenced her to death by stoning.⁵⁹ While the official Islamic Penal Code of Iran prescribes stoning as punishment for adultery,⁶⁰ the practice remains extremely rare due to the high burden of proof required in an adultery conviction.⁶¹ Nonetheless, Sakineh was charged under a legal loophole known as *elm-e ghazi* (or “judge’s knowledge”), enabling a guilty verdict despite the lack of evidence.⁶²

International outrage over Sakineh’s case emerged through a “boomerang” pattern of influence. In 2007, Sakineh’s son Sajjad elicited the help of Mohammad Mostafaie, an Iranian defense attorney specializing in cases of adultery and juvenile executions,⁶³ and Mina Ahadi, an Iranian dissident and human rights activist living in Germany.⁶⁴ In 2010, having exhausted domestic avenues for recourse, Ahadi and Mostafaie used their connections in the transnational human rights network to elicit global attention to Sakineh’s case. Ahadi played an especially pertinent role in delivering Sakineh’s story to a western audience. Resembling Clifford Bob’s account in *Marketing of Rebellion*, Ahadi formulated a media-savvy outreach strategy complete with a compelling narrative of horrific abuse, photos of the victim, and an emotional plea from Sakineh’s children.⁶⁵ It also helped that Iran maintained a poor reputation in the west on account of its controversial nuclear program, contested 2009 Presidential election, and overall poor human rights record. For these reasons – and despite at least eleven other individuals awaiting stoning sentences in Iran – the “Save Sakineh Campaign” became a global *cause célèbre*.

In the months following, Sakineh’s name was printed in over 300 newspapers worldwide. Protests on her behalf took place in over one hundred cities. A petition for her release collected thousands of signatures, including from celebrities such as Michael Douglas, Annie Lennox, and Lindsay Lohan.⁶⁶ Media outlets not only covered the story but assumed an activist role, starting their own petitions and letter-writing campaigns.⁶⁷ Throughout it all, few people expressed doubt over whether western pressure was

⁵⁸ Unlike “illicit relations,” which covers a range of supposedly inappropriate behavior, adultery is strictly defined in the Islamic penal code as “the act of intercourse, including anal intercourse, between a man and a woman” when one party is married.” (The Islamic Republic of Iran 1991, Article 63.)

⁵⁹ Amnesty International 2010.

⁶⁰ The Islamic Republic of Iran 1991, Article 83.

⁶¹ Terman and Fijabi 2010.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ International Committee against Stoning 2010b.

⁶⁴ Press TV 2010b.

⁶⁵ Bob 2005.

⁶⁶ Spivak 2010.

⁶⁷ Fletcher 2010.

helpful or effective towards Sakineh's case. "Our campaign has shown that we can force the regime to back down," Ahadi declared. "Our pressure is working."⁶⁸

The campaign quickly drew the attention of western governments. On 8 September 2010, the European Parliament adopted a resolution denouncing Sakineh's situation.⁶⁹ Some national leaders adopted the case as a personal cause. French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner said he was "ready to do anything to save [Sakineh]. If I must go to Tehran to save her, I'll go to Tehran."⁷⁰ First Lady Carla Bruni-Sarkozy wrote a personal letter to Sakineh, writing "France will not abandon you."⁷¹ That same week, France urged the European Union to threaten new sanctions against Iran to pressure the regime to release Sakineh.⁷² The campaign's biggest success, however, came on 31 July 2010, when Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva offered Sakineh asylum in Brazil. "If my friendship and affection for the president of Iran [Mahmoud Ahmadinejad] matters, and if this woman is causing problems there, we will welcome her here in Brazil," he said.⁷³ The announcement was surprising given Brazil's friendly relations with Iran and its reputation for non-interference.⁷⁴ Other Iranian allies followed, including Turkey and several Arab nations. By the end of the campaign, officials in at least 40 countries publicly condemned the sentence.

6.2 Iran's Response

The "Save Sakineh" campaign provoked a defensive reaction from Iranian officials, who viewed it as a hostile attempt to defame Islam and Iran in the eyes of the world (Proposition 1). This frame invoked the Islamic revolution, where western interference (especially in sexual matters) was closely tied to cultural imperialism, counterrevolution, and threats to national security. In fact, stoning was first introduced shortly after the Islamic revolution of 1979 as part of a broad "anti-corruption" campaign combating "cultural counterrevolution" by cleansing the post-revolutionary society of any infiltration of "western" gender relations.⁷⁵ As officials began to see sexual crimes (e.g. adultery) as harmful to the preservation of the Islamic family and thus the national order, foreign interference in the punishment of these crimes was recast as a threat to the existential security of Iran itself.

⁶⁸ Channel 4 News 2010.

⁶⁹ European Parliament 2010.

⁷⁰ Al Arabiya 2010.

⁷¹ RFI 2010a.

⁷² RFI 2010b.

⁷³ Barrionuevo 2010.

⁷⁴ The Economist 2010.

⁷⁵ Paidar 1997, 345.

Given this history, it is unsurprising that the “Save Sakineh” campaign mobilized a defensive reaction, particularly from hardline factions of the political elite (Proposition 3A). For hardliners, submitting to western pressure was intolerable, especially when such pressure manifested as celebrities and governments calling Iran (and Islam) uncivilized and barbaric. In fact, western condemnation of stoning was not only expected but *validating* insofar as it bolstered the narrative of Iran as an Islamic protagonist standing up to imperialist enemies. In a stump speech to his base in Gorgan in October 2010, Ahmadinejad used the “Save Sakineh” campaign to malign the United States, which manipulated “humane values as a tool to dominate other nations.”⁷⁶ After linking the campaign to America’s military campaign in the Middle East – a direct attack on Iran’s security interests and regional influence – Ahmadinejad heralded the “Iranian nation’s great revolution” leading the global resistance.⁷⁷ By framing the situation this way, Ahmadinejad and other hardliners effectively constraining the Judiciary from any move that could be seen as succumbing to western pressure (Proposition 2).

On the other hand, pressure from Iran’s allies – especially Brazil – meant something very different than pressure from Canada or France (Proposition 3A). This can be inferred by the contrasting reactions these interventions generated among Iranian officials. In response to Brazil’s offer of asylum, spokesperson of the foreign ministry Ramin Mehmanparast called Lula “a very humane and emotional person” who had been misinformed on the case.⁷⁸ In contrast, conservative *Kayhan* newspaper, considered the mouthpiece of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamene’i, responded to Carla Bruni’s involvement by calling her a “French prostitute” and a home wrecker.⁷⁹ Unlike France, Brazil was an important ally, one of the few to defend Iran’s nuclear program.⁸⁰ Lula’s interference embarrassed Iran and threatened to undermine its self-styled reputation as an anti-imperialist leader of the Global South. At the same time, Brazil’s involvement only emboldened western campaigners, generating defiance. Haleh Esfandiari summed up the conundrum:

There are those in the regime who wish this whole affair would disappear because they see it as an embarrassment for Iran, and there are those who argue that the government should not cave in to international pressure and are looking for ways to carry out the sentence and hang her.⁸¹

Faced with this conundrum, Iranian officials attempted to justify its actions and delegitimize foreign criticism, while carefully avoiding the issue of stoning directly.

⁷⁶ Islamic Republic of Iran News Network 2010b.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Associated Press 2010.

⁷⁹ Islamic Republic of Iran News Network 2010a.

⁸⁰ Leyne 2010; The Economist 2010.

⁸¹ Esfandiari 2010.

This involved a two pronged strategy. First, Iran's spokesmen attempted to normalized Sakineh's case as a *murder* conviction, thereby defending their actions as a criminal matter and not one of human rights. "This dossier looks like many other dossiers that exist in other countries,"⁸² Mehmanparast told Press TV, Iran's English language television outlet. "If in human societies we were expected to release those who commit serious crimes, we would also have to ask you to release your murderers."⁸³ To clarify, Mehmanparast and other judicial spokesmen never explicitly denied Sakineh was sentenced to stoning for adultery. But they were careful not to mention stoning directly, saying only "the verdict regarding the extramarital affairs has stopped and it's being reviewed."⁸⁴ Sakineh's "death sentence," Mehmanparast insisted, was related to her murder charges.⁸⁵

Second, Iran went on the offensive by discrediting Sakineh's advocates as hypocritical political operatives. Mehmanparast called the Sakineh Affair "a western conspiracy to interfere in international relations of countries," by undermining Brazil and Turkey's defense of Iran's nuclear program.⁸⁶ Special attention was paid to Ahadi and her past involvement with *Komaleh*, an armed Kurdish separatist group.⁸⁷ Perhaps most startling was Iran's decision to put Sakineh herself on state television on four separate occasions, given that stoning is an intensely taboo topic in the Iranian public sphere.⁸⁸ In each appearance, Sakineh confessed to aiding the murder of her husband and denounced western interferers, referring to Mostafaie and Ahadi by name. "Ms. Mina Ahadi, this is none of your business," she said in one video. "I committed a sin."⁸⁹ One particularly horrific "documentary," produced by the English-language outlet PressTV, showed Sakineh reenacting the murder of her husband in gruesome detail, with her son Sajjad playing the role of his dead father.⁹⁰ On account of these actions, Sakineh Affair was deemed "a new low in Iran's relationship with the west."⁹¹

6.3 The Shame-Defiance Spiral

⁸² Al Arabiya 2010.

⁸³ Radio Zamaneh 2010.

⁸⁴ Al Arabiya 2010; The New York Times 2010.

⁸⁵ Al Arabiya 2010.

⁸⁶ Radio Zamaneh 2010.

⁸⁷ Vision of the Islamic Republic of Iran 2010.

⁸⁸ CNN 2010; Dehghan 2010a; Vision of the Islamic Republic of Iran 2010; Press TV 2010b. Dehghan 2010b; Vision of the Islamic Republic of Iran 2010.

⁸⁹ Vision of the Islamic Republic of Iran 2010.

⁹⁰ Press TV 2010a.

⁹¹ Pendlebury 2010.

Iran's defiance outraged western activists, fueling more intense shaming efforts, which in turn generated more defiance. In this way, western shaming and Iranian defiance reinforced one another in a perverse spiral, resulting in the political escalation of a seemingly apolitical case. In the United and Europe, the Sakineh affair created a kind of media frenzy whereby the insatiable drive for content fueled a number of strategic mishaps. In one instance, the *Times* of London printed a photo claiming to be Sakineh "unveiled" but turned out to be someone else.⁹² In October 2010, two German journalists from *Bild am Sonntag*, the largest selling German tabloid, illegally entered Iran to interview Sakineh's son Sajjad and her lawyer Houtan Kian.⁹³ During the course of the interview, Iranian authorities ambushed the building and arrested all four.⁹⁴ In response to Iran's accusations of using Sakineh's case for political ends, Ahadi confirmed the campaign was an *intentional* attack on the entire Iranian regime. "This is a movement against the Islamic regime of Iran," Ahadi wrote, "which perpetrates murder and crime."⁹⁵ Informed by Ahadi, a number of outlets falsely reported in December that Sakineh had been freed, only to issue retractions when they realized their mistake.⁹⁶

These missteps damaged the credibility of the campaign, emboldening Iranian hardliners and stimulating additional defiance. Iran's publicists repeatedly gloated about the "dissemination of half-truths about the case by western officials and media outlets," which they saw as proof of the "western campaign to undermine the Islamic Republic system."⁹⁷ The more the campaign disseminated falsehoods, the less Iranian officials were willing to capitulate. Mehmanparast articulated these political stakes: "The other side is only looking for pretexts against the Islamic establishment and if... we give into their demands they will assert, so there will be nothing left of the revolution and the establishment."⁹⁸ This dynamic continued until the "Save Sakineh" fizzled in early 2011, precipitated by a decline in activism and media interest. Sakineh was eventually released on 19 March 2014 – nearly four years after the campaign started and three years since it dissolved completely.⁹⁹

6.4 Alternative Explanations

⁹² The Times 2010.

⁹³ Gebauer 2010.

⁹⁴ Marcus Hellwig and Jens Koch were charged with espionage and returned to Germany after 4 months in detention. The release was reportedly part of an orchestrated deal whereby Germany helped slip as much as \$1.5 billion in funds past sanctions to reach Iran. Marquart et al. 2011.)

⁹⁵ International Committee against Stoning 2010a.

⁹⁶ Dehghan and Black 2010.

⁹⁷ Press TV 2011.

⁹⁸ AFP 2010.

⁹⁹ Tomlinson 2014.

This section contrasts my theory of defiance with alternative explanations of the case. I expect the main challenge to my argument would dismiss defiance as epiphenomenal. What looks like defiance, critics might say, is merely leaders violating norms for reasons unrelated to foreign pressure, and then using this pressure to justify choices they would have made regardless. In other words, transnational pressure may alter the *rhetoric* people use, but not their preferences or behavior. Against this interpretation, I argue that the international shaming directly contributed to the actions of Iranian officials, and to the detriment of Sakineh and her advocates.

Here we must consider the counterfactual: What would have occurred if Sakineh's case failed to generate global attention? While it is possible she would have been executed, stoning is exceptionally rare in Iran, even for those who are sentenced. In similar cases outside the global spotlight, officials ended up commuting stoning sentences to other punishments.¹⁰⁰ Most tellingly, officials released Sakineh several years *after* transnational pressure dissipated. If Iranian officials truly wanted to stone her, they would have done so once no one was looking. Instead, international shaming seemed to fuel the commitment of Iranian officials to punish Sakineh. Further, the campaign negatively impacted Sakineh's advocates. Mohammad Mostafaie defended several cases of adultery and juvenile execution in his career, but did not experience significant persecution until one of his clients became an international incident. Sakineh's second lawyer, Houtan Kian, was tortured and imprisoned for nearly three years for his role in the case.¹⁰¹ Finally, while we did not see an *increase* in actual stonings, international shaming re-inscribed stoning as an authentic institution, and delegitimized efforts to eradicate it by associating anti-stoning activism with western domination. After revising the penal code in 2013, Iranian officials retained stoning as punishment for adultery.¹⁰²

In addition, conventional accounts of norm violation remain unsatisfying in this case. The rationalist explanation for why states violate international norms – when norms conflict with leaders' material interests – falls short because, in many ways, it *was* in Iran's interest to comply with global pressure. The Sakineh Affair occurred at a time when Iran faced mounting diplomatic conflicts over its nuclear program and contested 2009 Presidential elections. Already suffering from crippling economic sanctions for its disputed nuclear program, Iran risked further sanctions for its treatment of Sakineh.¹ Importantly, Iran alienated crucial allies – including Brazil and Turkey – due to its actions on the Sakineh case. For what did Iranian leaders sacrifice these crucial relationships? Sakineh was a provincial, apolitical figure, immaterial to security or stability concerns. Iran had little to gain from stoning her. The theory I provide here offers a

¹⁰⁰ Sadr 2010.

¹⁰¹ Kian 2011; Lawyers for Lawyers 2013.

¹⁰² Human Rights Watch 2013.

more satisfying explanation by revealing how international shaming *produced* the interest for elites to resist norms in cases where no such interest existed *ex ante*.

Neither can we straightforwardly resort to explanations invoking countervailing local norms. The norm “congruence” thesis posits that norms that conflict with the local cultural environment are viewed in more negative and threatening terms.¹⁰³ However, while stoning was certainly a local institution in Iran, it was hardly a pillar of national identity. In fact, Iranian officials took great pains to obscure this aspect of the case, in part because stoning is widely unpopular among the domestic public. Instead, it framed its resistance as defiance to symbolic domination from the west. In other words, Iran’s resistance was motivated less by some domestic commitment to stoning *per se*, than by an imperative to defy foreign shame and pressure. In general, the effects of shaming cannot be adequately explained with reference to the properties of norms or targeted states in isolation, and require attention to the social relations mediating their interaction. Taken as a whole, the evidence lends plausibility for the defiance mechanism as a distinct explanation to the Sakineh Affair.

7 Conclusions and Implications

This article elaborated a theory of defiance in world politics. I focused on defiance to international human rights pressure, demonstrating how foreign shaming unleashes social and political forces in the target state that undermine decision-makers’ ability to comply with such norms, while rewarding their willingness to violate. I rooted this argument in findings from sociology, social psychology, and criminology, which yield two main insights. First, out-group shaming provokes status threat in target audiences, driving a defensive reaction that degrades outside criticism and links norm violation to national honor and resistance. Second, this reaction alters the domestic political environment, producing incentives for leaders to resist norms as a strategy to accumulate political capital. Finally, I identified two conditions favoring defiance: when shaming emanates from geopolitical rival, and when the political structure in the target state endows nationalists with a significant amount of political leverage.

A deeper appreciation of defiance has important implications for our understanding of international norms. First, defiance provides a more complete, and complex, picture of transnational advocacy and norm enforcement. With important exceptions, the vast majority of research on international norms relies on a deterrent model of shaming. My theory of defiance challenges this logic on several fronts. To begin with, I dispute widely held claims that foreign pressure fuels domestic mobilization for human rights. *Contra* what is often assumed, domestic publics do not inevitably prefer cosmo-

¹⁰³ Acharya 2004, 243.

politan norms, and can value violation of such norms as a form of resistance to outside pressure. Second, defiance challenges the received wisdom that governments suffer social costs from foreign criticism. If foreign criticism sparks domestic outrage, leaders are *rewarded* for noncompliance. More generally, violation and compliance do not share a one-to-one correspondence with social costs and benefits. Through defiance, shaming compels governments to resist international norms, not out of an intrinsic desire to violate, but because doing so confers legitimacy and prestige in the domestic sphere. In this regard, shaming is less a deterrent than an enabler of norm violations.

If shaming backfires in the way I described, why do shamers continue to do it? Sociologists suggest that people enforce norms not only, or even primarily, to compel compliance, but also to advance their social status relative to the target by demonstrating moral righteousness. Indeed, I have argued that shaming constitutes a status threat inasmuch as it degrades the target in a social hierarchy, thereby advancing the shamer's relative position. When shaming is weaponized in this fashion -- promoting the shamer by denigrating the target -- a lack of compliance does little to inhibit further condemnation. As Erving Goffman observed:

We [normals] may perceive his [the stigmatized] defensive response to his situation as a direct expression of his defect, and then see both defect and response as just retribution for something he or his parents or tribe did, and hence a justification of the way we treat him.¹⁰⁴

In other words, defiance justifies further shaming, which only intensifies defiance. In this sense, shaming and defiance are not opposing social forces; in fact, they often reinforce one another in a perverse spiral.

Second, defiance reveals important insights about the roots of normative conflict in the international sphere. Extant work on norm resistance tends to assume that the resisting actor is motivated by pre-established beliefs about the legitimacy or desirability of a particular norm. In contrast, my model shows how actors may resist norms even if they have no intrinsic preference regarding the norm itself, and even if they would have adopted the norm in the absence of overt international pressure to do so. This suggests that norm resistance – and violations – may be endogenous to the process of international socialization in an important, yet under appreciated, sense.¹⁰⁵ If so, statistical evidence for a causal relationship between human rights violations and international shaming may need to be rethought.

¹⁰⁴ Goffman 2009, 6.

¹⁰⁵ Zarakol 2014.

To clarify, this paper did not present a normative argument against international shaming. Rather, it concerned the myriad empirical dynamics surrounding this tactic, which may or may not be normatively desirable. It is important to consider that global normative pressure may present value beyond persuading states to reform their human rights practices, or may defy instrumental logic altogether. To the extent the arguments herein have normative implications, they urge a richer empirical investigation into the consequences of transnational advocacy and pressure – both intended and unintended – as a requisite in any responsible policy.

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