

Why Does UN Humanitarian Intervention Remain Selective? As such, a complementary dynamic of escalating commitment could not unfold in the UN to push towards coercive measures. Some scholars and observers heavily criticize this practice, arguing that the selectiveness of humanitarian interventions undermines their legitimacy and ultimately their success; that the uneven response to humanitarian emergencies suggests that these interventions are motivated not by humanitarian concerns but by the military and economic interests of powerful states; and that the selective enforcement of human rights norms undermines the emerging rule of law in international politics (for examples see Archibugi 2004, Chomsky 1999). Others disagree and claim that selectivity is not only unavoidable for the UN but also desirable. The UN can be expected to take strong action—coercive measures including economic sanctions, 'robust' peacekeeping operation or (the authorization of) military action—if the extent of a humanitarian crisis (in terms of victims and internally displaced persons) is large, and if the organisation has committed substantial resources to its resolution. For one, UN members were strongly concerned by the large-scale plight of the Bosnian civilian population and the grave human rights violations committed by the parties to the conflict (ethnic cleansing, the installation of concentration camps, the siege of Sarajevo, and the massacres at Srebrenica). The dramatic levels of internal displacement and the fears of genocide, given the xenophobic politics of 'Ivoirite' that characterized the conflict, raised strong humanitarian concern in the UN. At the same time, UN members wished to prevent the conflict from spilling over to other Western African countries, most notably to Liberia which was slowly recovering from a long and brutal civil war. First, unlike the cases discussed before, Syria is more able to resist outside intervention—most notably because the Assad regime enjoys the continued support of its Russian and Chinese allies, who block any coercive measures against Syria in the UN. Second, the UN has not been substantially involved in Syria in the past and has not committed substantial resources to the resolution of the crisis. Second, the intervention was motivated by the wish to prevent the crisis from spilling over to Western European countries, most notably in form of refugee flows, and to stop a more generalized destabilization of the Balkan region. The United Nations (UN) selective response to humanitarian crises—as evidenced most recently by the organisation's uneven reaction to the conflicts in Libya and Syria—is arguably among the most contentious issues in international politics. The selectivity of humanitarian intervention, so the argument goes, reduces the risk of over commitment; it helps to maintain cooperation among the great powers; and it prevents the UN from becoming involved in ill-conceived operations (see Roberts and Zaum 2008). But what explains why UN humanitarian interventions remain selective in the first place? Why is it that the UN has taken strong action to respond to some crises, like those in Northern Iraq, Somalia, Bosnia, Sierra Leone or—more recently Libya—but not to others like those in Colombia, Myanmar, Sudan, or—currently—Syria? In addition to destabilizing effects for neighbouring Egypt and Tunisia—both of which are undergoing important political change in the wake of the 'Arab Spring'—Western UN members feared that hundreds of thousands of Libyan refugees would cross the Mediterranean towards Europe. However, the Libyan case fails to provide strong support for the previous institutional involvement explanation in that the UN did not invest substantial material and immaterial resources to the resolution of the crisis prior to the intervention. To the extent that the UN have invested time, money, and diplomatic prestige in the resolution of the crisis,

this creates the wish to protect these investments through continued or escalated involvement. A third important driver of UN intervention in Bosnia was the wish of UN member states to protect the tremendous investments both material (through humanitarian assistance and peacekeeping) and reputational (diplomatic efforts) the UN had made over the course of the conflict. Finally, outside intervention was facilitated by the inability of the Bosnian Serbs and the Serbian government to generate sufficient resistance against outside intervention by the UN (and later by NATO). This explanation has been developed and tested through a systematic comparative analysis of the UN's response to more than 30 humanitarian crises after the end of the Cold War combined with several in-depth case studies of intervention decisions in the UN Security Council. Moreover, the substantial and longstanding involvement of the UN in the country generated an additional institutional dynamic pushing towards intervention. The available evidence suggests that massive human rights violations, the spiralling violence in the country as well as the severe spill over effect of the Syrian conflict for neighbouring countries, most notably Lebanon, raised strong concerns on the part of UN members. Cote d'Ivoire Very similar motivational patterns can be observed with respect to the UN's decision to authorize military intervention in the context of post-election violence in Cote d'Ivoire in 2010. Spill over effects create a material interest to intervene.