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## REGULAR ARTICLE

# Partner country selection between development narratives and self-interests: A new method for analysing complex donor approaches

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## Abstract

Partner country (PC) selection lies in the centre of development policy decision-making of donor countries and institutions, and plays a significant role in shaping aid patterns. This paper proposes a comprehensive analysis contrasting donor intentions in PC selection with actual aid flows. Having analysed selected members of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, namely, the European Union, France, Germany, Japan, Netherlands, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, we suggest that (1) donors might not only be either altruistic or self-interested but also motivated by an intention to contribute to the provision of global public goods; (2) self-interest in aid provision can be an explicitly-stated strategy, contrary to what has been argued in the majority of the literature, which often treats self-interest as a non-stated donor intention; and (3) donors' self-interested intentions do not always lead to a less development-oriented donor approach.

**KEYWORDS**

Aid allocation, ODA, DAC donors, Filter approach, Partner country selection

**JEL CLASSIFICATION**

F35, F3, F53, F50, F5, F, O10, O1, O

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Partner country (PC) selection lies at the centre of development policy decision-making of donors, and plays a significant role in shaping aid allocation patterns. The existing aid literature has focused on either how aid should be (normatively) organised, or which determinants are (ex post) responsible for aid flows by examining causal relationships through regression analyses (see, for example, Chaturvedi et al., 2021; Gehring, Michaelowa, Dreher & Spörri, 2017; Pauselli, 2019). The latter, which is dominated by quantitative approaches, has helped to get a certain level of understanding of aid allocation patterns and donor motivations. Yet, it has also raised several fundamental issues, such as the inability of counterfactual-based cross-country comparisons to reveal case-specific nuances, or research driven by the availability of datasets.

Our paper proposes a comprehensive analysis contrasting donor intentions in PC selection, which inform about the specific donor approach that shapes the political economy of donors as well as development cooperation as such, with actual aid flows. We analyse the Official Development Assistance (ODA) of the most important members of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in terms of the size of their respective ODA volume, which makes up roughly 70% of total ODA flows: the European Union (EU)<sup>1</sup>, France, Germany, Japan, Netherlands, Sweden, the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States of America (USA).

Contrasting donor intentions with actual aid allocation, our mixed methods approach aims to fill a gap in the literature on donor motivation. It differs from existing quantitative comparative research that often excludes the intentions of donor governments in decision-making processes from their analysis of donor motivation, and therefore fails to explain whether actual flows reflect those intentions. Moreover, this strand of research often follows a binary approach (with few exceptions) to donor motivation based on altruism or self-interest, and therefore is not able to respond to challenges like ‘aid as a contribution to global public goods (GPGs)’ which might not be constituted by one of these donor motivations on its own, but rather by both at the same time. By including this increasing trend in our analysis, we suggest that donor motivations might not only be either altruistic or self-interested but also motivated by an intention to contribute to the GPGs provision.

The remaining part of the paper proceeds as follows: Section 2 gives a brief overview of the existing literature on donor motivations in aid allocation. Section 3 is concerned with the methodology used for this study, whereas Section 4 lays out the empirical findings from the case studies. Section 5 presents the comparative results by demonstrating a more complex reality of donor orientations in PC selection than previously assumed by the literature.

## 2 | AID ALLOCATION LITERATURE REVISITED

Allocation is the process by which resources are distributed. Typically, allocation decisions are based on an aid strategy identifying priorities or are earmarked for a particular purpose. Development aid programmes have generated a large body of empirical literature that has been a vast and fertile field of research addressing the motives of donors. It has sought to explain both how donors allocate aid, and why some countries receive more assistance than others.

The aid allocation literature, in general, has focused on various donor interests to explain actual allocation patterns, and aid selectivity aspects to reflect on development results of various aid allocation decisions. The studies by Arndt, Jones and Tarp (2010), Burnside and Dollar (1997), Carter, Postel-Vinay and Temple (2015), Gehring et al. (2017), Hoeffler and Outram (2011), Pauselli (2019) and Pietrobelli and Scarpa (1992) represent just a few examples of a vast literature on the topic.

Many papers (see detailed discussion below) try to uncover the primary motivation behind actual allocation decisions. Typically, there is a consensus that no single explanation model (e.g. geo-strategic interests, trade and investment interests, development needs of recipient countries) exclusively explains the pattern of aid flows. Influential explanation models can be grouped into the following strands:

First, perhaps the most obvious explanation has been introduced in response to objective measures of recipient needs (see, for example, Dreher, Nunnenkamp & Thiele, 2011). This strand has had a strong focus on the altruistic role of aid supporting those countries that are most in need. In addition, donors may be led to disproportionally give aid to those countries that have norms and institutions thought to enhance the effectiveness of foreign aid (Arndt et al., 2010; Burnside & Dollar, 1997; Collier & Dollar, 2002).

Second, many authors have paid particular attention to aid resulting from donors' self-interested motivations (see, for example, Bracho, Carey, Hynes, Klingebiel & Trzeciak-Duval, 2021; Klingebiel, 2014; Pauselli, 2019). According to this strand, aid has been understood as either a foreign policy tool and/or a mechanism to strengthen and secure commercial ties between donor and recipient. An important sub-strand of this literature has focused on the voting behaviour of recipient countries within the UN Security Council or General Assembly (see, for example, Dippel, 2015).

Third, several new frameworks have considered the topic from the perspective of within-donor-dynamics: Papers looked, for example, at the saliency of recipient needs. Some authors assumed that in cases where a given recipient's needs are widely reported in the press, citizen demands for action incentivises elected officials and policymakers to allocate aid (Simonsen, 2018).

Most studies do not differ significantly in terms of their design or the statistical methods used, but in the analytical focus. The majority has tested the extent to which each of these explanation patterns have helped understand variations in aid allocation by using econometric methods. Several studies attempted to explain divergences, such as a comparison of Nordic countries, Japan, the United States (Alesina & Dollar, 2000); bi- and multilateral aid (Milner & Tingley, 2013); or disaggregation by time period, such as a comparison of pre- and post-Cold War periods, or 9/11 (Bermeo, 2017; Claessens, Cassimon & Van Campenhout, 2009).

The results provided by the quantitative-oriented literature have helped gain a better understanding of aid allocation and underlying motivations. However, several issues are critical: first, the econometric approach is based on the idea that the underlying theoretical model is complete and enables explanations based on causality. This assumption is not always appropriate

because in reality donor interests might be based on various, changing, and sometimes even conflicting motivations. Second, quantitative research on aid allocation is mostly based on available datasets provided by the World Bank and/or by the OECD (Hynes & Scott, 2013). Therefore, assessments are dependent on what data are available; data and indicators might be not precise enough to mirror the complexity of donor motivations. Third, the dependent and independent variables used in the estimates made in certain theories might not always be appropriate and valid; for example, voting behaviour in UN organizations as indicators for donor self-interest. In econometric methods, basic assumptions about donor behaviour (development-oriented versus self-interested) have consequences for the variables selected as corresponding proxies. Regression analyses provide information about the strength of the corresponding relationship between independent and dependent variables. However, the number of variables is limited, whereas in reality a bunch of motivations might form the interests of a donor. Consequently, most of the existing research is limited and might not mirror the many nuances of allocation motivations.

Only a small number of qualitative comparative papers have focused on the determinants of aid-giving patterns of donors. Applying ‘small-N research design’, the contributors of these papers mostly looked at donor motivation from a domestic politics perspective, such as the nexus between the international context and domestic politics of aid decisions (see, for example, Lancaster, 2007), or domestic determinants of aid preferences based on values, partisan politics, and welfare state institutions (see, for example, Lundsgaarde, 2013). The qualitative literature has mostly conducted in-depth analyses of the domestic decision-making processes.

Our paper suggests an adjusted approach. We propose an analysis contrasting donor intentions with actual ODA flows. This differs from the existing quantitative-oriented research that excludes the donor government’s intentions in the decision-making processes. Our mixed-methods approach combines both research strands. As Brannen (2005) suggests, a number of possible outcomes gathered from both methods, which we cannot simply link to each other to reach a unitary and rounded reality, might generate a common insight by complementing each other (pp. 173–175).

We take into account the structural changes of aid allocation from geographical to thematic allocation as a main trend. Aid allocation has typically been country-based, that is, focusing first on how to distribute ODA across countries. Nevertheless, there has been a shift on the side of donors, which have started taking thematic priorities responding to GPGs (e.g. migration, diseases and climate change) as a first step of their allocation decision-making. Thematic allocation is different from traditional sectoral allocation priority setting (e.g. focusing on social sectors) which were applied by donors throughout aid history. It is a direct reflection of a donor’s motivation for providing aid resources whereas sectoral priorities might reflect priorities in line with PCs’ needs (Paulo, Janus & Holzapfel, 2017). Therefore, thematic allocation has gained much more relevance over the last 10–15 years.

In our paper we use the term GPGs, and define as commodities (health, security, etc.) that enjoy global application in terms of use, cost or both aspects. A commodity is deemed global if it provides a benefit beyond nation-state borders, or if the provision of said commodity is cross-border financed or otherwise supplied (Kaul, Blondin & Nahtigal, 2016; Klingebiel, 2018). Several other recent discussions on Principled Aid (suggested by Gulrajani & Calleja, 2019) and Global Public Investments (Glennie, 2020) overlap with the GPG discussion: they emphasise the GPGs’ character of related international cooperation approaches. It is important to underline that those debates differ from the traditional aid motivation debate which was mainly assuming a rather clear cut between self-interests of donors and development needs of PCs.

3 | METHODOLOGY

We propose a new methodology for analysing and comparing PC selection approaches of eight OECD DAC donors. We first introduce three types of donor orientations on the basis of some distinguishing criteria. Following this, we identify four donor approaches to PC selection on a continuous scale from highly development-oriented to highly self-interested, each of which corresponds to one or many of the identified donor orientations. Then, we introduce a filter approach to draw conclusions regarding the declared intentions of the donor and the actual aid flows on the basis of our conception of donor orientation. Overall, to capture a comprehensive donor approach in PC selection, the filter approach is applied to make within-case inferences by comparing a single donor's stated intention as articulated in its development policy framework with its actual aid flows. Our analysis complements the existing quantitative studies that fail to touch upon certain factors, shaping donor approach that are difficult to quantify.

3.1 | The concept of donor orientation

In this study, donor orientation is understood as an underlying motivation of a donor in PC selection. As discussed in Section 2, the donors are often considered to orient themselves towards either development of PCs (altruistic) or their self-interest. By expanding these binary approaches in the literature, we propose three types of donor orientations, which primarily yet not exclusively focus on:

- development of partner countries
- global public goods
- donor self-interests

Table 1 presents the three types of donor orientations and specific criteria identifying each of them.

TABLE 1 Three Types of Donor Orientations

Donor orientation	Criteria	
1. Development of partner countries	Poverty reduction, insufficient resources (development finance), performance-based aid allocation	
2. Global public goods	Managing GPGs (e.g. global health security, peacekeeping), and global public ‘bads’ (e.g. climate change, spread of disease)	
3. Self-interest	Security	Geopolitics, military
	Political	Influencing domestic politics of the recipients, UN voting behaviour, colonial ties
	Economic	Trade, market access, investment, natural resources
	Migration	Reducing pressure for migration

Source: Authors.

Some criteria under self-interest might have overlapping aspects: e.g., migration can be part of multiple considerations of the donor self-interests.

As can be seen in the table, trade is taken as economic self-interest. According to economic theory trading is in the interest of all partners, because they all profit from it. However, we consider that, in the strict sense, each trader focuses on its own benefits as a motive for participation.

Development of partner countries refers to a donor orientation in which recipient needs are prioritised in aid allocation decision-making. In this case, level of need is an indicator for PC selection<sup>2</sup>. We consider a donor orientation to be towards development of PCs if the donor specifically selects PCs from low-income countries (LICs), as well as sets the basic principle/formula on the level of need.

Global public goods refers to a donor orientation in which a donor addresses global challenges (e.g. contributions to global health or security, tackling climate change consequences), which affect not only developing countries but also countries across a specific region or on a global scale (Klingebiel, 2018). Today, through the inclusion of GPGs, donors not only address the problem of poverty in poor and fragile countries, but also integrate thematic areas embedded in cross-border (global and regional) problems in search for a broader agenda, such as Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). There is therefore an increasing trend in thematic aid allocation, which is usually context-dependent and contingent on the pressing global challenges as a first step of donor allocation processes: donors expand their resources for a specific global challenge (e.g. public health or climate change).

Donor self-interests refer to a donor orientation in which ODA allocation decisions are directly shaped by donor's security (geopolitics, military), political (influencing domestic politics of the PC, UN voting behaviour, keeping colonial ties) and/or economic (trade, market access, investment, natural resources) interests. Some self-interests of donors might belong to multiple categories, such as keeping colonial ties, which might also result from donor considerations for expanding its market access. Moreover, self-interest is not always explicit. When a donor allocates aid to fragile states for poverty reduction (which refers to a donor orientation towards development of PCs), this can, for instance, also serve donor interest of mitigating migration from the PCs in question. Similarly, self-interest can also be relevant to GPGs, such as fighting against international terrorism or climate mitigation.

### 3.2 | Scaling of donor approaches to partner country selection

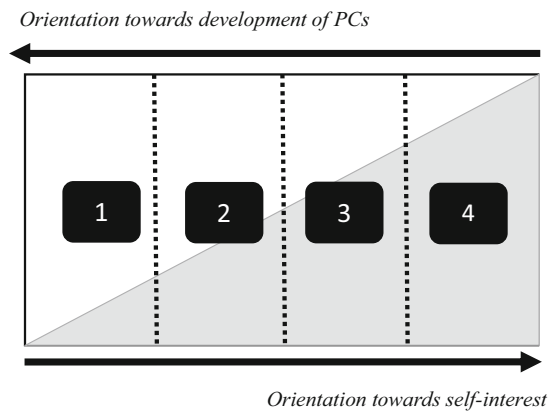
On the basis of the three donor orientations above, we identify the following donor approaches to PC selection on a continuous scale (see Figure 1):

1. Highly development-oriented
2. Moderately development-oriented
3. Moderately self-interested
4. Highly self-interested

(1) Highly development-oriented and (4) highly self-interested approaches are two extremes of a continuous scale. These correspond to the donor orientations towards development of PCs and donor self-interests respectively. Whereas the former reflects a rather altruistic donor approach, the latter refers to aid allocation that benefits certain security, political and economic interests of a donor (Baydag et al., 2018). Moderate levels mentioned as (2) and (3) are the overlaps between pure development- and self-interested approaches. These intersection areas result from the inclusion of donor-orientation towards GPGs in that of the development of PCs as well as certain levels of implicit or explicit donor self-interest.

Over time, the understanding of development (as such) has extended as a result of new (often transnational) challenges requiring inclusion of cross-border or even global actions, such as climate change, migration, global health security (e.g. fighting against COVID-19, Ebola),





**FIGURE 1** PC selection approach of a donor based on level of orientation. 1 = highly development-oriented. 2 = moderately development-oriented. 3 = moderately self-interested. 4 = highly self-interested. *Source:* Adopted from Baydag, Klingebiel, and Marschall (2018)

external effects (e.g. pollution) or governance of GPGs into the donor agenda (Kaul, Conceição, Le Goulven, & Mendoza, 2003). GPGs need to be handled through a long-term perspective that might constitute a self-interested component in donor action with the goal of not being affected (security spill over effects, cross-border spreading of diseases, etc.). Hence, an understanding of donor motivations that suggests clear-cut differentiations between development-oriented (e.g. aid provision to LICs) and geostrategic/self-interested approaches (e.g. UN voting behaviour, trade interests) are misleading. As a result, the intersection areas on the spectrum create moderate levels, as shown in Figure 1.

To begin with, a (1) highly development-oriented approach of a donor is concerned with the development of PCs. It refers to cases in which there is a strong altruistic element with a particular focus on the level of need, or least developed countries (LDCs). We therefore understand LICs as direct and main beneficiaries. Moreover, the donor's policy framework is expected to be guided by some distinguishing principles, such as level of need, fragility or pro-poor measures.

In cases where donor motivation is associated to a certain extent with a long-term development perspective of PCs, a donor might not only take recipient needs into account. Its approach might rather overlap with an orientation towards GPGs (e.g. focus on fragility to fight against Ebola). Furthermore, support for LICs can maintain implicit donor self-interest, such as keeping colonial (often described as historical) linkages or pursuing foreign policy and economic interests. In such cases, the donor approach is classified as (2) moderately development-oriented.

In some cases, donor orientation towards development of PCs is rather weak as a result of focusing on middle-income countries (MICs) from strategic partners, major developing economies or former colonies in pursuing foreign security and economic interests. GPGs are addressed mostly when overlapping with self-interests. In such cases, the donor approach is classified as (3) moderately self-interested.

Finally, where LICs are not recipients of aid, and donors do not set clear, altruistic or GPG-oriented principles, or they have explicit strategy of self-interest that guide their development policies, the donor selection approach is considered (4) highly self-interested. In such cases, the



**TABLE 2** Donor Orientations in PC Selection Approaches

PC selection approaches	Corresponding donor orientation(s)	Remarks
(1) highly development-oriented	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Development of PCs</li> <li>GPGs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* PCs selected from LICs (<i>prioritised</i>).</li> <li>* addressing global challenges from needs perspective.</li> </ul>
(2) moderately development-oriented	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Development of PCs</li> <li>GPGs</li> <li>(implicit) self-interest</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* PCs selected from LICs (<i>prioritised</i>) and MICs.</li> <li>* addressing global challenges (e.g. climate, health).</li> <li>* overlap between PCs in need/fragility and former colonies, strategic partners and/or donor interest in market access.</li> </ul>
(3) moderately self-interested	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Development of PCs</li> <li>GPGs</li> <li>(explicit) self-interest</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* PCs selected from LICs and MICs (<i>prioritised</i>).</li> <li>* overlap between PCs and donor self-interests (e.g. emerging economies selected for the provision of GPGs).</li> <li>* overlap between PCs from MICs and former colonies, strategic partners and/or interest in security, market access.</li> </ul>
(4) highly self-interested	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Self-interest</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* PCs selected from MICs (<i>prioritised</i>).</li> <li>* focus on political, security, regional stability and/or trade interests.</li> </ul>

Source: Authors.

nature of the donor approach is often non-predictable, and aid is linked to strong political, security and economic donor self-interest and aid mostly target MICs.

### 3.3 | Filter approach

Our filter approach is composed of two steps, in each of which donor approaches to PC selection is evaluated on the basis of the three donor orientations introduced in Section 3.1 (see Table 2). The first step analyses the donors stated intentions, whereas in the second step, the donors actual aid flows are assessed and compared with the stated intentions.

**Step 1:** Donor's stated intentions refers to those articulated in the most relevant policy documents that shape the donor's development policy framework, namely, strategy papers, laws on development cooperation, cabinet decisions, and official documents from the development cooperation agencies. We back our assessments by the OECD reports for the purpose of objectivity. We identify relevant policy documents for each donor on the basis of the information from the first three chapters of OECD DAC peer reviews [these are: (1) donor's global efforts for sustainable development, (2) policy vision and framework, and (3) financing for development]. For donors with relatively older peer reviews, OECD Development Cooperation Profiles (2020) and OECD DAC Mid-term Review (if applicable) are used<sup>3</sup>. We also refer to the existing literature that codifies certain donor approaches, such as providing aid to former colonies potentially indicating (implicit) donor self-interest. Accordingly, we analyse the donor's stated intentions on the basis of the three donor orientations:

- *development of PCs*: We interpret statements about the (high) importance of LICs for the allocation supported by a set of altruistic principles (e.g. poverty reduction), as well as providing a clear list of priority PCs on the basis of the level of need (e.g. LDCs) as an indication for donor orientation towards development of PCs.
- *global public goods*: We interpret statements about the (high) importance of (1) tackling the global (a) environmental (climate change), (b) security and public health challenges and/or (2) a high relevance of multilateral contributions of the respective donor as an indication for GPG orientation<sup>4</sup>. Thus, a certain PC could be selected because the donor might assume that the partner plays a relevant role for the provision of a GPG.
- *donor self-interest*: We interpret statements about the (high) importance of colonial (often described as historical) linkages, pursuing foreign policy objectives, trade and investment interests.

Summing up, qualitative assessment in step 1 starts with determining donor orientation towards LICs (or MICs), which informs about where the donor approach to PC selection in stated intentions lies on the spectrum between development-orientation and self-interest (see Figure 1). We then assess if intentions are accompanied by other factors to define moderate levels (see Table 2). Furthermore, a transparent list of priority PCs (except high in numbers) and a set of principles give a clear hint about donor stated intentions. Lack of clarity should then be considered as potential room for manoeuvre to pursue self-interest.

**Step 2:** Donor's actual aid flows informs about whether stated intentions, as articulated in development policy documents, are reflected in actual aid flows. Actual aid flows are evidenced by the OECD data on top ten recipients of the average gross disbursements of ODA in 2018–2019 (OECD, [n.d.-a](#)). Accordingly, we make the following assessments for each donor orientation:

- *development of PCs*: We interpret a share of (bilateral) ODA budget allocated to LICs of more than 50% as a high-development orientation, between 30% and 50% as a moderate level, and 30% and below as a low level of development orientation. For determining recipients' income level, we use World Bank (WB) data on GDP per capita (WB, [n.d.-a](#)). We also depict whether a specific income group or region is prioritised by assessing ODA per capita.
- *global public goods*: We interpret share of multilateral aid in 2018–2019 (out of the overall ODA resources of a donor) of more than 50% as a high level, between 25% and 50% a moderate level and 25% and below as a low level of GPG-orientation. In addition, we look at share of core contributions to the UN as a percentage of total ODA (grant equivalents, 2018–2019), as well as share of the Total Official Support for Sustainable Development (TOSSD) pillar II disbursements in 2019<sup>5</sup> to assess donor contributions to international public goods and global challenges (OECD, [n.d.-b](#), [n.d.-c](#), 2019b).

Share of multilateral aid informs a donor approach to PC selection less based on self-interest because multilateral aid reduces donor's control over aid policy. As we are interested in PC selection processes on the donor side, multilateral aid shares are used as a proxy for donor's global-orientation. An assessment of GPG-orientation of multilateral aid agencies is beyond the scope of this research. There are several limitations to this: the EU member states make mandatory contributions to the EU's aid budget. This might show their multilateral share much higher than those of non-EU donors. Moreover, aid actors like the EU or the WB might be pushed by donor self-interest given their decision-making structure. To address these limitations, we first single out share of core contributions to the UN, which is the only actor that

TABLE 3 Quantitative Assessment of Donor Orientation in Actual Aid Flows

Donor orientations in actual aid flows	High	Moderate	Low
<b>Development of PCs</b>			
LICs	>50%	50% ≥ LICs share > 30%	≤30%
<b>GPGs</b>			
Multilateral aid	>50%	50% ≥ multilateral aid share > 25%	≤25%
Core contributions to the UN	>10%	5% > UN share ≥ 10%	≤5%
TOSSD pillar II	>20%	20% ≥ TOSSD pillar II share > 10%	≤10%
<b>Self-interest</b>			
MICs share	>50%	50% ≥ MICs share > 30%	≤30%
ODA/trade correlation	> 0.5	0.5  ≥ ODA/trade correlation >  0.25	≤ 0.25
UN voting distance	<1.5	1.5 ≤ voting distance < 2.5	≥2.5

Source: Authors.

Thresholds for *Core contributions to the UN* are defined taking into consideration the maximum (14%) and minimum (1%) shares of the donors we look at. Thresholds for *TOSSD pillar II* are defined taking into consideration the maximum (27%) and minimum (0%) shares of the donors we look at. Thresholds for *The UN voting distance* are defined taking into consideration the maximum (3.4) and minimum (1.4) voting distances of the donors we look at.

receives contribution from all donors we selected, and core contributions implicitly require donors to delegate authority of PC selection to the decision-making of UN funds and programmes (which is different than earmarked contributions, in which donors control funding decisions on PCs and/or specific thematic topics or other allocation aspects). A high share of earmarked funding to the UN development actors, in contrast, poses severe negative implications for the organizational efficiency, aid effectiveness, and the UN's multilateralism (Baumann, 2020). The category of GPG in UN spending is not clearly demarcated. Share of core contributions, however, can be deemed more global in scope as they are – compared with country programs – used for strengthening the capacity and activities of several GPG-oriented UN programs, such as the World Health Organization or the UN Environment Program, needed for efficient delivery of work (Birdsall & Diofasi, 2015). Second, we use measurement based on TOSSD pillar II since it categorises donor resources allocated specifically for GPGs.

- *donor self-interest*: We interpret a MICs share of bilateral aid of more than 50% as a high level, between 30% and 50% a moderate level and 30% and below as a low level of donor self-interest. On the basis of the WB database for trade shares (WB, n.d.-b), we interpret Spearman correlation of ODA/trade in 2018–2019 (from –1.0 to 1.0) of more than |0.5| as a high economic self-interest, between |0.3| and |0.5| as a moderate level and below |0.3| as a low level of self-interest. In cases where there is a specific donor concentration in stated intentions, such as in regional stabilisation, former colonies (often referred to as historical or special ties to specific countries) or strategic partners, we interpret low voting distance with those PCs potentially indicating some donor self-interest. In these cases, we interpret donor voting distance with its top ten PCs at the UN General Assembly in 2016–2019 using the variable ‘ideal point distance’ (Voeten, Strezhnev & Bailey, 2009) of less than 1.25 as a high level, between 1.25 and 2.5 a moderate level and 2.5 and below as a low-level indication of donor self-interest (Table 3).

Summing up, quantitative assessment in step 2 is conducted as follows: The results for the three individual donor orientations (development of PCs, GPGs, self-interest) are assessed. Each donor orientation is categorised to be either low, moderate or high. For the donor orientations which are assessed with multiple proxies (i.e. GPGs, self-interest), each proxy is weighted equally. The outputs of the individual orientations – each of which is weighted equally – then feed into the assessment of the overall donor approach to PC selection in actual aid flow (highly development-oriented, moderately development-oriented, moderately self-interested, highly self-interested).

## 4 | CASE STUDIES

### 4.1 | The European Union

Step 1. The EU's development policy is guided by the objective of poverty eradication as an overall response to the SDGs and support for democracy, rule of law and human rights (Council of the European Union, 2017, p. 4). The EU's development policy prioritises LDCs (mostly in Africa) in the contexts of fragility and conflict; building partnerships with MICs in sustainable development, poverty eradication, refugee crises and other shared interests, and innovative engagement with advanced developing countries in several areas (e.g. social inclusion and human development, climate change) (Council of the European Union, 2017).

The EU's development policy focuses on diverse regions: (i) neighbourhood<sup>6</sup>; (ii) Sub-Saharan Africa; (iii) Asia and the Pacific; (iv) Americas and the Caribbean; (v) overseas countries and territories; and (vi) countries under the instrument for pre-accession assistance (Council of the European Union, 2020; European Commission, 2020). Accordingly, the EU's stated intentions are considered (3) moderately self-interested based on the three donor orientations:

- development of PCs: The EU's needs-based perspective in the context of fragility and conflict is not reflected through a clear priority list of PCs from the LICs.
- GPGs: The EU's overall approach to ODA allocation has a strong focus on SDGs.
- self-interest: The EU's PC focus is too diverse to define a concentrated approach because it includes almost all regions (no concentration) and lacks specifications on income groups. More importantly, MICs are significantly prioritised under the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) for pursuing common interests, such as trade.

Step 2. From 2018–2019, the top ten recipients with the highest average of EU gross bilateral ODA were MICs from the ENP (Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Ukraine), upper-MICs in the EU accession process (Serbia, Turkey) and emerging economies (India). Among LICs (Afghanistan, Syria, and West Bank and Gaza Strip), which made it into the top ten, the latter two countries are part of the ENP. The EU's actual ODA flows are evaluated as (4) highly self-interested as follows:

- development of PCs (Low): LICs were not prioritised (30%), nor did they receive more aid in ODA per capita terms.
- GPGs (Low): The average share of multilateral aid (in this case, to other multilateral agencies) in 2018–2019 was 2%<sup>7</sup>. The EU's core contributions to the UN as percentage of total

ODA was 0.81%. Furthermore, 24% of the total bilateral disbursements of TOSSD pillar II in 2019 was provided by the EU.

- self-interest (High): The majority of the top ten recipients were MICs (70%), part of the ENP, countries in the EU accession process as well as major economies. The EU's ODA has a moderate correlation (0.454) with trade<sup>8</sup>.

## 4.2 | France

Step 1. French development policy aims to contribute to the 'crisis zones, education, climate, gender equality and health' sectors as well as to maintain France's cultural, diplomatic and economic influence (Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs of France, 2018a, p. 1). Particular attention has been paid to political and economic cohesion of the French-speaking world (Government of France, 2018). The activities of the French development cooperation agency were pledged to be 100% compatible with the Paris Agreement (Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs of France, 2018a, p. 3).

France's geographical priorities focus on fighting poverty, reducing inequalities and protecting the planet (Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs of France, 2018b, p. 7; OECD, 2018b, p. 41). Altogether, the government defines four PC categories: (1) priority PCs<sup>9</sup>; (2) countries in Africa and the Mediterranean; (3) countries in crisis or a post-conflict phase; and (4) major developing countries.

The French government emphasises its strong cultural and linguistic ties with the majority of the priority PCs (Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs of France, 2018b, p. 19). Sixteen of those are France's former colonies in Sub-Saharan Africa. Many of these are in post-crisis or fragile situations, where French development and security objectives are pursued within the framework of 'Sahel Alliance' (Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs of France, 2018a, p. 1; OECD, 2018b, p. 13), which is considered by the government to reflect France's 'added value' in Africa (Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs of France, 2018b, p. 16). Furthermore, France's humanitarian strategy for 2018–2022 has been aligned with its overall approach to crises (OECD, 2018b, p. 18), even in situations where they do not necessarily reflect its geographical priorities (Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs of France, 2018a, 2018b). Accordingly, France's stated intentions are considered (2) moderately development-oriented based on the three donor orientations:

- development of the PCs: France's stated intentions in policy papers defines development-oriented principles as well as a clear list of priority PCs from LDCs in Africa.
- GPGs: Addressing climate change is considered an integral part of French development policy.
- self-interest: LICs and MICs from its former colonies as well as major economies are also included in the PC categories. Migration mitigation is significant part of its ODA policy.

Step 2. From 2018–2019, the top ten recipients with the highest average French gross bilateral ODA were LDCs from French former colonies in Africa (Côte d'Ivoire, Cameroon, Senegal), MICs from French former colonies in the Mediterranean basin (Morocco, Tunisia) and Asia (Vietnam) as well as other MICs and major economies (Colombia, India, Indonesia and Turkey). France's actual ODA are evaluated as (3) highly self-interested as follows:

- development of the PCs (Low): France's priorities given to LDCs in Africa were not reflected in actual flows, as LICs did not receive the majority of ODA (30%). In ODA per capita terms, the three LDCs in the top ten still received relatively more aid.
- GPGs (Moderate): The average share of French multilateral aid in 2018–2019 was 42%. France's core contributions to the UN as percentage of total ODA was 3.11%. Furthermore, 27% of the total bilateral disbursements of TOSSD pillar II in 2019 was provided by France.
- self-interest (High): The majority of ODA was allocated to MICs from former colonies in the Mediterranean basin and major economies (70%). France's ODA has a high correlation (0.736) with trade. France's UN voting distance with its top ten recipients in 2016–2019 was 1.86.

### 4.3 | Germany

Step 1. German development policy is perceived to be integral to Germany's economic, security and foreign policy interests. Its thematic priorities focus on GPGs and conflict regions (German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2020). In conflict-affected areas the government aims to halt migration flows or promote return migration (German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2018, p. 7). Whereas the African continent is considered to have 'a decisive impact on Europe's future' (German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2017, p. 11, 2018), in the areas of GPGs, emerging economies have strategic importance (German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2018, p. 5; OECD, 2018a). Moreover, the government emphasised aligning ODA with the European level (German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2018, pp. 5–6).

Germany has 60 PCs, 30 of which are categorised under three partnership schemes, whereas the rest (classic bilateral partnerships) are not specified (German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2020, p. 5)<sup>10</sup>: (i) bilateral partnerships aim at achieving long-term development goals under two sub-partnership schemes: reform partnerships to support reform-minded countries; and transformation partnerships for special support to the EU's neighbours in their political and economic transformation; (ii) global partnerships aim at protecting GPGs; and (iii) nexus and peace partnerships focus on crisis and refugee regions<sup>11</sup>. Germany's stated intentions are considered (3) moderately self-interested on the basis of the three donor orientations:

- development of the PCs: Germany's specified list of PCs consists of LDCs (42% of the total) and MICs, and the former are not necessarily prioritised. The government's LDC-focus is indicated under the pro-poor and sustainable policy.
- GPGs: German development policy addresses protecting GPGs.
- self-interest: The number of PCs with different income levels, despite reduction in numbers, is so high that it is difficult to assess Germany's overall approach. Whereas migration mitigation is a significant part of its ODA policy, major emerging economies are prioritised. In addition, German ODA aims to contribute to national as well as the EU's overall foreign policy and security interests.

Step 2. From 2018–2019, the top ten recipients with the highest average German gross bilateral ODA were mostly MICs from the list of global partners (China, India, Indonesia), nexus

partners (Iraq), and PCs which are not categorised under any of the partnership schemes (Colombia, Egypt, Jordan, Turkey)<sup>12</sup>, as well as two LICs (Afghanistan, Syria). Germany's actual ODA are evaluated as (4) highly self-interested as follows:

- development of PCs (Low): German ODA did not reflect a LDCs perspective (20%). Africa was not given priority, although stated intentions emphasised the opposite; neither did LDCs in the top ten list receive more aid than MICs in ODA per capita terms.
- GPGs (Low): The average share of German multilateral aid in 2018–2019 was 24%. Germany's core contributions to the UN as percentage of total ODA was 2.58%. Germany did not report any TOSSD pillar II contributions in 2019<sup>13</sup>.
- self-interest (High): MICs constituted an important part of the ODA flows (80%). In addition, the refugee crisis in Europe was an important consideration for German aid allocation, as refugee-affected countries, such as Jordan and Turkey, were in the top ten. Germany's ODA has a high correlation (0.588) with trade. Germany's UN voting distance with its top ten recipients in 2016–2019 was 1.89.

#### 4.4 | Japan

Step 1. Japan's development policy aims at ensuring Japan's national (security) interests (Government of Japan, 2013, 2015, p. 2). The government prioritises principles, such as poverty eradication, people-centred development, universal values, and building a sustainable and resilient international community by addressing global challenges (e.g. climate change, disaster risk reduction) as well as regional priority issues (e.g. Southeast Asia's infrastructure needs) and contributing to its 'regional vitalization' (Japan International Cooperation Agency, 2017, p. -2-9).

Japan's approach to LDCs is indicated under the 'quality growth and poverty eradication' criteria, yet not further elaborated (Japan International Cooperation Agency, 2017, p. 3; OECD, 2020a, p. 44). Its national security interests in Asia shape geographical priorities (Government of Japan, 2015, p. 7). A free and open Indo-Pacific, investing in Asia, and expanding investments in Sub-Saharan Africa are reflected in the development policy framework, whereas thematic priorities in sustainable development are linked to human security and economic growth (OECD, 2020a, p. 43). Furthermore, sustaining peace and stability in the Middle East is important for stable energy supply (Government of Japan, 2015). Japan's stated intentions are considered (4) highly self-interested on the basis of the three donor orientations:

- development of PCs: The Japanese government does not set any PC selection criteria, nor does it have a clear perspective on LDCs.
- GPGs: There is no clear indication except for some emphasis on climate change, disaster risk reduction/recovery and environmental management.
- self-interest: Japan's development policy framework is guided by its broader foreign and security policy interests of stability in Asia.

Step 2. From 2018–2019, the top ten recipients with the highest average Japanese gross bilateral ODA flows were mostly MICs from South and South-East Asia (Bangladesh, Indonesia, India, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam), followed by MICs from the Middle East and North Africa (Egypt, Iraq) and Central Asia (Uzbekistan), amongst which Iraq is an important



ODA recipient in ODA per capita terms. Japan's actual ODA are evaluated as (4) highly self-interested as follows:

- development of PCs (Low): There was no LIC in the top ten recipients.
- GPGs (Low): The average share of Japanese multilateral aid in 2018–2019 was 24%. Japan's core contributions to the UN as percentage of total ODA was 3.54%. Furthermore, 3% of the total bilateral disbursements of TOSSD pillar II in 2019 was provided by Japan.
- self-interest (High): All of the top ten recipients consisted of MICs, the majority of which were from Asia. Japan's ODA has a moderate correlation (0.478) with trade. Japan's UN voting distance with its top ten recipients in 2016–2019 was 1.43.

## 4.5 | The Netherlands

Step 1. The Netherlands' development policy builds on the policy 'aid, trade and investment' initiated in 2013 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, 2013, 2018). The SDGs provide the basis for development policy priorities (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, 2018, p. 24). Dutch ODA has several aims, such as preventing conflict and instability, reducing poverty and social inequality, promoting sustainable inclusive growth and climate action, enhancing the Netherlands' international earning capacity through investing in sectors with Dutch interest, and promoting gender equality (Government of the Netherlands, n.d.-b, p. 8; BZ, 2018). Overall, the government pursues a combined agenda for foreign trade and development cooperation (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, 2018, p. 24).

The Netherlands' geographical priorities include 28 priority PCs under three categories (Government of the Netherlands, n.d.-a)<sup>14</sup>: (1) broad-based SDGs relationships with countries with low level of development to address goals, such as education, employment, or women's rights; (2) development relationships with LICs and MICs targeting specific objectives, such as reception of refugees, reconstruction and food security; and (3) development relationships with countries as part of a broader foreign policy targeting insecurity, instability and preventing irregular migration. The Netherlands' stated intentions are considered (2) moderately development-oriented on the basis of the three donor orientations:

- development of PCs: The Netherlands' development policy follows a needs-perspective by including LDCs into its priority PCs.
- GPGs: Its development policy framework is guided by SDGs in LDCs and addressing climate change.
- self-interest: The Dutch development policy pursues strategic interests of securing market access and addressing security-related issues, such as the refugee crisis in Europe.

Step 2. From 2018–2019, the top ten recipients with the highest average of Dutch gross bilateral ODA consisted of the PCs from LICs with SDGs relationships (Afghanistan, South Sudan, Mali, Yemen, Burundi) with the exception of Rwanda<sup>15</sup>. The rest of the PCs are categorised under development relationship targeting specific objectives (Bangladesh, Iraq, Lebanon, Mozambique). Among these, Iraq and Lebanon are the only MICs, where ODA targets refugee-related issues. The Netherlands' actual ODA flows are evaluated as (3) moderately development-oriented on the basis of the findings as follows:

- development of PCs (Moderate): Half of bilateral ODA was allocated to LICs. In ODA per capita terms, priority was given to LDCs.
- GPGs (Moderate): The average share of Dutch multilateral aid in 2018–2019 was 34%. The Netherlands's core contributions to the UN as percentage of total ODA was 9.20%. The Netherlands did not report any TOSSD pillar II contributions in 2019<sup>16</sup>.
- self-interest (Moderate): Half of bilateral ODA was allocated to lower- and upper-MICs. The Netherlands's ODA has a low correlation (−0.118) with trade. The Netherlands's UN voting distance with its top ten recipients in 2016–2019 was 1.74.

## 4.6 | Sweden

Step 1. Swedish development policy is guided by three thematic perspectives – gender, environmental and climate, and conflict – which are integrated into an overarching perspective of poor people and a rights-based approach to development (Government Offices of Sweden, 2017, 2018, p. 2, 2019b, p. 7). In particular, the gender perspective reflects Sweden's feminist foreign policy adopted in 2014 with the aim of following a systemic approach to gender equality in policy areas, such as security and trade (OECD, 2019a, p. 39).

Sweden does not have a specific geographical focus, yet countries in need facing great challenges in terms of their own resources are prioritised (Government Offices of Sweden, 2019a, p. 49). 35 priority PCs<sup>17</sup> are determined under two categories: (i) countries with long-term development cooperation, and (ii) countries with humanitarian aid, the majority of which consist of LDCs from Africa (Swedish International Development Agency, n.d.). When it comes to MICs in the priority list, Sweden targets thematic goals, such as gender equality in Turkey, or environment in Russia (Swedish International Development Agency, n.d.), yet these MICs are not prioritised. Sweden's stated intentions are considered (1) highly development-oriented on the basis of the three donor orientations:

- development of PCs: Sweden has a clear agenda both in setting priority PCs and needs-based principles.
- GPGs: A needs-based approach under three thematic priorities (gender, environment and conflict) guides Sweden's development policy.
- self-interest: There is no clear indication.

Step 2. From 2018–2019, the top ten recipients with the highest average of Swedish gross bilateral ODA were primarily LICs, especially LDCs in Sub-Saharan Africa. It consisted of PCs with long-term development cooperation (Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, West Bank and Gaza), those with long-term development cooperation and humanitarian aid (DR Congo, Somalia) and Syria<sup>18</sup>. Sweden's actual ODA flows to its top ten recipients in 2018–2019 are evaluated as (1) highly development-oriented as follows:

- development of PCs (High): All of the top ten recipients were LICs. In ODA per capita terms, West Bank and Gaza, which is relatively wealthier than the rest, ranked first.
- GPGs (Moderate): The average share of Swedish multilateral aid in 2018–2019 was 35%. Sweden's core contributions to the UN as percentage of total ODA was 13.66%. Furthermore, 2% of the total bilateral disbursements of TOSSD pillar II in 2019 was provided by Sweden.

- self-interest (Low): There is no indication. Sweden's ODA has a low correlation (0.115) with trade. Sweden's UN voting distance with its top ten recipients in 2016–2019 was 1.64.

## 4.7 | The United Kingdom

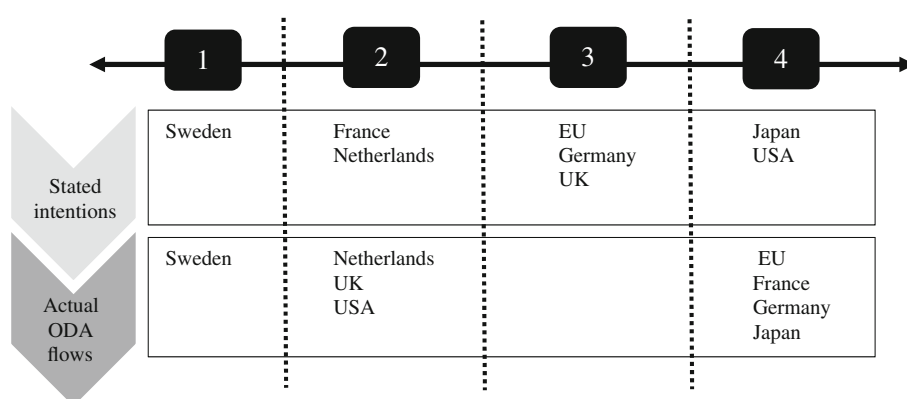
Step 1. The UK's development policy framework was adopted in 2015 (Treasury of the United Kingdom & Department for International Development, 2015, 2018). The UK does not set thematic priorities, yet emphasises root causes of mass migration and disease, the threat of terrorism and climate change, which, as the government states, 'directly threaten British interests' (Treasury of the United Kingdom & Department for International Development, 2015, p. 3). The UK's needs-based approach constitutes an integral part of its security and foreign policy in assisting poor countries to become more self-sufficient, reducing transnational threats like terrorism, and tackling global challenges (e.g. climate change) and high-level population growth (Government of the UK, 2018; Treasury of the United Kingdom, & Department for International Development, 2015). The UK has consistently allocated 50% of bilateral ODA in the context of fragility (OECD, 2020b, p. 50).

DFID defined 32 priority PCs in 2017 (Department for International Development, 2017)<sup>19</sup>. A total of 50% of the UK's ODA targets fragile states and regions in order to tackle extreme poverty and help the world's most vulnerable. Moreover, increasing aid for the Syrian crisis and the related regions is significant (Treasury of the United Kingdom & Department for International Development, 2015, p. 3). The UK's stated intentions are considered (3) moderately self-interested on the basis of the three donor orientations:

- development of PCs: The development policy has been guided by a needs-based approach and fragility with a list of priority PCs from LICs.
- GPGs: The fragile context and climate are significant thematic priority.
- self-interest: The UK government aims to reduce migration and transnational terrorism to fulfil national security interests. Threat to national interests is explicitly mentioned in stated intentions.

Step 2. From 2018–2019, the top ten recipients with the highest average UK gross bilateral ODA were primarily LDCs or LICs (Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan, Yemen, Syria) as well as lower-MICs (Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nigeria), all of which were from previous priority PCs defined by DFID (Department for International Development, 2017). On the basis of these findings, the UK's actual ODA flows are evaluated as (2) moderately development-oriented as follows:

- development of PCs (High): LICs received the majority of bilateral ODA (70%). In ODA per capita terms, LDCs received relatively more aid.
- GPGs (Low): The average share of UK's multilateral aid in 2018–2019 was 34%. The UK's core contributions to the UN as percentage of total ODA was 4.6%. Furthermore, 10% of the total bilateral disbursements of TOSSD pillar II in 2019 was provided by the UK.
- self-interest (Moderate): MICs share in the top ten was 30%. The majority of the top ten recipients were the UK's former colonies. The UK's ODA has a high correlation (0.510) with trade. The UK's UN voting distance with its top ten recipients in 2016–2019 was 2.36.



**FIGURE 2** PC selection approaches of the DAC donors in comparison. 1 = highly development-oriented. 2 = moderately development-oriented. 3 = moderately self-interested. 4 = highly self-interested. *Source:* Authors

## 4.8 | The United States

Step 1. The United States development policy priorities are based on national foreign and security interests in ‘protecting America’s security at home and abroad; renewing America’s competitive advantage for sustained economic growth and job creation; promoting American leadership through balanced engagement; and ensuring effectiveness and accountability to the American taxpayers’ (US Department of State & US Agency for International Development, 2018, p. 3). Fragile context is significant in the overall development policy objectives, which aims at preventing threats to the United States homeland, such as transnational terrorism and organised crime (The White House, 2017, p. 39).

USAID coordinates its action with the Department of State (US Department of State & US Agency for International Development, 2018). It does not have a specific geographical focus (more than 100 PCs), as USAID’s agenda is designed to be flexible according to changing national interests (US Agency for International Development, n.d.). Transitions in partnership from aid to strategic engagement is significant, such as security alliances or trade (US Agency for International Development, 2019, p. 22). Accordingly, the United States’ stated intentions are considered (4) highly self-interested on the basis of the three donor orientations:

- development of PCs: The US development policy is guided by an approach to LDCs in fragile contexts.
- GPGs: There is no clear indication.
- self-interest: The top priority in their PC selection approach has been given to the welfare of US citizens and security, and motivated by foreign policy and security interests.

Step 2. From 2018–2019, the top ten recipients with the highest average of US gross bilateral ODA were LICs (Afghanistan, Ethiopia, South Sudan, Tanzania, Yemen, Syria) as well as lower-MICs (Iraq, Jordan, Kenya, Nigeria) important to US strategic foreign policy interests. The United States’ actual ODA flows are evaluated as (2) moderately development-oriented as follows:

- development of PCs (High): The majority of the top ten PCs were from LICs (60%) important to the US strategic interests. In ODA per capita terms, LDCs did not necessarily receive more aid.

- GPGs (Moderate): The average share of US multilateral aid in 2018–2019 was 12%. The United States's core contributions to the UN as a percentage of total ODA was 3.13%. Furthermore, 12% of the total bilateral disbursements of TOSSD pillar II in 2019 was provided by the United States.
- self-interest (Moderate): MICs constituted 40% of the top ten of the PCs, and reflected some of the US strategic interests in different regions, such as in the Middle East. The United States' ODA has a moderate correlation (0.255) with trade. The United States' UN voting distance with its top ten recipients in 2016–2019 was 3.40.

## 4.9 | Findings and conclusions

Our comparative analysis focused on donor approaches to PC selection on the basis of the extent to which the actual ODA flows reflect the stated intentions. Our findings mirror to a large extent the reality of a multi-motivation system of bilateral ODA. We suggest that the majority of donors have a certain degree of self-interested motivation in PC selection, which oftentimes leads to divergences between stated intentions and actual ODA flows. As a result, how these differ is an important reference point for assessing donor motivations. Figure 2 shows our empirical results.

As Figure 2 illustrates, there are no big differences between stated intentions and actual aid flows in the cases of Japan, the Netherlands and Sweden, whereas in the cases of the EU, France, and Germany, we see shifts towards more self-interested approaches in actual ODA flows. What is striking in our results are the cases of the UK and the United States, in which actual ODA flows are more development-oriented than their stated intentions. In this regard, our findings are to some extent similar to the existing literature using econometric methods suggesting that aid often serves donor self-interests. Yet, they also point out a broader donor rationale in aid allocation, which is largely lacking in the literature:

Donors' self-interest in ODA provision can be an explicitly stated strategy, contrary to what has been argued in the majority of the literature, which often treats self-interest as a non-stated donor intention. As shown in this paper, some of the donors pursue security interests in certain regions, such as Japan's approach to Asia, or commercial interests linked to development concerns as in the case of the Netherlands. In both cases, strategies are explicitly reflected in stated intentions as well as actual flows.

Some donors, despite using a rather development-oriented narrative (e.g. Germany and France), are more self-interested when it comes to actual ODA flows. For instance, in the German case, the comparatively small share of LICs and – compared with the United States and the UK – rather small share for UN core contributions are relevant factors. Indeed, the role of MICs in the country aid allocation pattern seem to reflect a strong economic self-interest in Germany's aid system. This is also supported by other evidence, for example, showing a high proportion of KfW market funds, thus showing the relevance of better-off economies for the German aid portfolio (Bohnet, Klingebiel & Marschall, 2018).

In addition, some of the descriptive analyses in the literature might misconstrue an important point: a donor's being self-interested does not necessarily mean that the approach is less development-oriented in the sense that majority of aid flows go to MICs. In fact, there might still be intersections between development- and self-interested orientations. Our analysis reveals several surprising aspects in this regard. The UK and the United States illustrate the cases in which donor approaches to LDCs overlaps with the intention of aiding former colonies and

strategic partners respectively, as well as considering national security interests. Their overall aid motivations might be considered self-interested because of linking the needs-based approach to national interests, yet their approaches are more development-oriented in actual aid flows because of aiding LDCs compared, for example, with France and Germany. These donors' rather positive performance might be explained by several factors. One factor seems to be that security focus has been taken as a GPG for the period, especially since 9/11. This thematic focus is related to countries in need of external support because of a low level of human development. At the same time there is an overlap to the group of former colonies in the case of the UK. For EU member states, on the other hand, there is a mandatory contribution to the EU's common development policy; this fact might explain their relatively smaller contributions to the UN development system. This aspect could play a role for the US core budget contributions to the UN; however, it probably did not directly affect the UK performance in this regard (given the UK's actual end of EU membership at the end of January 2020).

Overall, the contrasting of development narratives and actual aid flows with a mixed methodological approach reveals new insights. Some results are counterintuitive, some results indicate shortcomings of traditional research. Furthermore, the larger inclusion of GPGs in aid allocation studies is highly relevant for future research.

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## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study.

## DECLARATION OF INTEREST

All authors declare that they have no financial and personal relationships with other people or organisations that could inappropriately influence this work.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> The EU is the only non-bilateral donor of the DAC. Being a supranational donor, it is a special case, qualifying for the 'multilateral actor' category to only a very limited extent. It performs a triple function by (1) making development assistance available to developing countries, (2) acting as a donor to multilateral institutions and passing the resources concerned on to them, and (3) acting as a catalyst between its member states and the Commission for coordinated approaches to multilateral institutions and PCs. Generally speaking, the EU's development cooperation should not be subsumed as part of multilateral development cooperation but seen as 'collective bilateralism' (Klingebiel, 2014, p. 26).

<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that donors might also use country performance (e.g. good governance) as criteria for the effectiveness of aid investments. However, the dimension of country performance can be viewed in many ways (ability to reduce poverty and/or to generate economic growth, capability of public institutions,

functioning public financial management systems, etc.). ‘Performance’ is typically a result of efforts and investments from some time ago. This is why the dimension does not find access in our methodological approach.

<sup>3</sup> These donors are Germany, the Netherlands and the United States.

<sup>4</sup> We assume that the challenge of migration is rather close to self-interests. This is why we do not count it here. Multilateral development cooperation is less affected by national self-interests of donors, therefore potentially informing about a donor’s need-based orientation. This is why a clear commitment is also supportive in this regard.

<sup>5</sup> 2019 is the most recent data.

<sup>6</sup> The EU’s development policy coheres with the European Neighbourhood Policy (European Union External Action Service, 2021). Its budget from 2021–2027 will be provided by the neighbourhood development and international cooperation instrument (NDICI) (Council of the European Union, 2020).

<sup>7</sup> Despite its multilateral characteristic, we do not rule out the variable ‘share of multilateral aid’ for the assessment of the EU’s GPG-orientation, because the EU, given its triple function, can act as a donor to other multilateral institutions.

<sup>8</sup> The EU is not included in the analysis of the UN voting distance.

<sup>9</sup> France’s priority PCs: Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Comoros, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Gambia, Guinea, Haiti, Liberia, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Senegal, Chad, Togo.

<sup>10</sup> The number of PCs were reduced from 85 to 60. The cooperation with former PCs is stated to have evolved into ‘supporting the work of the churches and civil society, of the EU and multilateral institutions and promoting private investment’ (German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, n.d.-b).

<sup>11</sup> Germany’s PCs included in reform partnerships: Côte d’Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, Morocco, Senegal, Tunisia; transformation partnerships: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kosovo, Moldova, Serbia, Ukraine; global partnerships: Brazil, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Peru, South Africa, Vietnam, China; nexus and peace partnerships: the Central African Republic, Chad, DR Congo, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria, Yemen.

<sup>12</sup> Except for Jordan and Turkey, these PCs were included in the previous priority PC list.

<sup>13</sup> Germany (jointly with the Netherlands) raised methodological issues regarding Pillar II of TOSSD. This is why the country does not yet (status: mid-February 2022) report contributions which might count under Pillar II. (On the basis of interviews with Dutch and German government representatives in January and February 2022).

<sup>14</sup> The Netherlands’ PCs included in broad-based SDGs relationships: Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, South Sudan, Uganda, Yemen, the Palestinian Territories, Afghanistan and Burundi; development relationships targeting specific objectives: Kenya, Somalia, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt, Tunisia, Benin, Mozambique and Bangladesh; and development relationships as part of a broader foreign policy: Chad, Mauritania, Senegal, Nigeria, Sudan, Morocco, Algeria and Libya.

<sup>15</sup> Rwanda was included in the previous PC list set in 2013.

<sup>16</sup> The Netherlands (jointly with Germany) raised methodological issues regarding Pillar II of TOSSD. This is why the country does not yet (status: mid-February 2022) report contributions which might count under Pillar II. (On the basis of interviews with Dutch and German government representatives in January and February 2022).

<sup>17</sup> Sweden’s PCs in Africa: Burkina Faso, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Liberia, Mali, Mozambique, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe; Asia: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Myanmar; Europe: Albania, Belarus, Georgia, Kosovo, Moldova, North Macedonia, Russia, Serbia, Turkey; Latin America: Bolivia, Colombia, Cuba; Middle East and North Africa: Iraq, Palestine, Yemen. SIDA notes that Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Guatemala, Ukraine and Syria are also included in the list (Swedish International Development Agency, n.d.).

<sup>18</sup> It was officially noted that Syria was missing from the PC list by the time of data collection. See: <https://www.sida.se/en/sidas-international-work>



- <sup>19</sup> The UK's priority PCs were Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Indonesia, Iraq, Jordan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Liberia, Malawi, Mozambique, Myanmar (Burma), Nepal, Nigeria, Occupied Palestinian Territories, Pakistan, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Tajikistan, Tanzania, Turkey, Uganda, Yemen, Zambia, Zimbabwe. As of September 9, 2020, the UK does not have a list of priority PCs as DFID was merged with the Foreign Office.

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