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# After Kabul

Addressing concerns about corruption  
in donor publics by rechannelling aid

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**Abstract:** Donor governments face the challenge of securing public support when providing aid, especially to countries ruled by unsavoury regimes or with high levels of corruption – countries that also face the most urgent development and humanitarian challenges. What shapes public opinion towards development assistance in such contexts and what might donors do to secure public support? Using novel data from two surveys – an experiment, and linked data from a panel – we test how giving German respondents the option to ‘rechannel’ aid through non-governmental organizations affects support for aid to Afghanistan. The data, collected in 2021, when the Taliban returned to power, show that while most Germans support giving aid to developing countries in general, most do not support giving aid to Afghanistan specifically. Experimental data show that providing the option to re-channel aid away from the government through NGOs increases support for aid to Afghanistan, especially for respondents with concerns for corruption.

**Policy relevance:** This paper provides evidence that public support for aid to countries governed by corrupt or repressive regimes can be significantly increased when donors offer alternative delivery channels, such as non-governmental organizations. These findings suggest that policymakers can preserve or rebuild public backing for aid in politically challenging contexts by effectively communicating how funds are routed and spent.

**Key words:** foreign aid, aid channels, public opinion, Afghanistan, Germany

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## 1 Introduction

One of the most significant dilemmas for policymakers providing Official Development Assistance (ODA) is delivering it to people and communities most in need, yet are living in contexts that are corrupt, inefficient, or in countries governed by 'nasty regimes' (Heinrich and Kobayashi 2020). Where donors work with such regimes, cooperation is harder, and aid reductions or full withdrawals are used to signal disapproval and/or sanction recipient governments (Early and Jadoon 2016). As a second-order effect, aid reductions or withdrawals can create signals for citizens in donor countries, affecting their support for aid (Dasandi et al. 2022). Where concerns about corruption and waste are high, public opinion tends to oppose spending on ODA (Bahur et al. 2013; Atkinson and Eastwood 2007), hence reducing public support for aid to countries and populations that need it the most.

What factors affect support for aid in such contexts? And in terms of policy implications, what can policymakers do to preserve or rebuild public support for aid in contexts of corrupt, inefficient, or 'nasty regimes' facing urgent humanitarian and development challenges? In this paper, we test how providing individuals with alternative choices of aid channels influences public support for providing ODA.

We do this using novel data collected from the German public in 2021, at the time of the withdrawal of the allied military forces from Afghanistan, and the return of the Taliban, when the German government decided to stop aid to the country. At this time, Afghanistan received exceptionally high attention from the German public not least thanks to extensive media coverage at the time of military withdrawal, not least evidenced by more than doubling of the search term 'Afghanistan' in key German media, from 6,051 instances in 2019 to 13,766 in 2021 (POLIT-X). German aid withdrawal from the Taliban is not a lone example: other countries and donors withdrew, suspended, or rechannelled development assistance to the country as the new *de facto* (but not internationally recognised) Taliban government took power (International Crisis Group 2023). In the period since, donors have sought to reshape their relationship with Afghanistan, including aid transfers, transitioning from development assistance to humanitarian assistance and funnelling aid through non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and multilaterals (BMZ 2023; Loft 2022; Loft and Mills 2021). Groups monitoring the situation argue that limiting aid to Afghanistan has left widespread hunger and poverty unaddressed, a humanitarian crisis and balance of payments crisis (International Crisis Group 2023). Given that in 2021 ODA made up 32% of Afghan gross national income (World Bank 2023), the huge impact of stopping aid is clear.

Rechanneling aid or imposing its use for specific objectives can reduce aid effectiveness (Winters 2019). Given the high dependence of Afghanistan on aid, this poses an important question for donor countries like Germany when seeking to provide aid to what is widely held to be an unsavoury regime.

Existing literature has argued public opinion is a relevant factor affecting government decisions on aid expenditure (Baum 2013; Canes-Wrone 2015; Heinrich and Kobayashi 2020; Milner and Tingley 2013). To this end, governments and non-governmental agencies usually look at indicators of public support for aid from public opinion surveys, which ask respondents if they broadly support or oppose giving aid in general terms. In a nationally representative public opinion survey in Germany from March 2022, 62% of respondents supported giving aid to developing countries, showing the German public is generally in favour of aid. However, less is known about public opinion on aid and public support for it within specific and more challenging circumstances of countries with high levels of corruption, when intuition suggests support, broadly expressed, is less likely to materialise. We specifically seek to highlight the existence and extent of the gap between broad and general levels of support for aid and specific support for giving aid to Afghanistan, as an important case of this broader group of countries with unsavoury or corrupt governments. Moreover, we argue that if people oppose giving aid in the specific case of Afghanistan because of corruption but are otherwise broadly supportive of aid, then their support can be (re)aligned by providing the option to re-channel aid away from corrupt or unsavoury governments.

To test our argument, we use two novel datasets. First, we leverage a new experimental survey data with a nationally representative sample of respondents from Germany. In our experiment, we show that when respondents are given a simple choice to give or not give aid to Afghanistan, a majority of respondents opt not to give aid. This is the case even though a majority of respondents expressed general support for giving aid to developing countries. However, when multiple aid delivery channels are offered as an option for giving aid to Afghanistan, including some which bypass the government, the proportion of respondents who think Germany should not give aid decreases significantly. Using data from an overlapping sample who participated in a connected survey, we show that opposition to aid to Afghanistan dropped significantly for respondents who are (i) overall supportive of aid, and (ii) concerned about corruption in developing countries and its effects on aid.

This paper contributes to the literature on public opinion and aid in three ways. First, we contribute novel data on German public support for aid, and specifically to Afghanistan, including public views at the time of military withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021–22, and detailing how public preferences vary around different aid delivery channels. As argued below, we take Germany and Afghanistan to be an illustrative dyadic case that generalises to other similar choices donor countries face with respect to foreign aid policies. Second, we contribute to research on factors shaping public support for aid, allowing us to go beyond the traditional models of general support for aid, based on rational and moral factors, and engage instead with the way preferences for aid channels and goals shape public attitudes and concerns. Third, we leverage the findings to consider the policy implications of whether providing choices on aid channels can be used to build, rebuild, or preserve public support for aid in cases like Afghanistan, when ongoing humanitarian and development support for the

recipient country is essential, even if these countries experience high levels of corruption or are ruled by unsavoury regimes.

The paper is structured as follows. First, we review the literature that examines the individual-level drivers of public opinion on aid. In this section, we show that aid channels are plausible factors affecting public attitudes. We apply these arguments to the case of German aid to Afghanistan after the military withdrawal in 2021, informing our research design by focusing on delivering aid through alternative channels to the Taliban government. Second, we describe our data and approach. The third section presents our results showing public support for aid and public preferences for re-channelling it, before concluding and drawing out implications of our findings for donor governments and their non-governmental partners.

## **2 Aid support, corruption, and aid channels**

Understanding the nexus of public opinion and aid policy is important to understanding the political economy of international development, as public opinion is argued to act as a general constraint on democratic governments (Baum 2013; Canes-Wrone 2015; Heinrich and Kobayashi 2020; Milner and Tingley 2013). Previous research has provided evidence on how governments are influenced by their public (Mosley 1985; Heinrich, Kobayashi, and Long 2018). For example, Heinrich, Kobayashi, and Bryant (2016) have shown that aid budgets decrease during economic crises, but not necessarily because economic crises produce budgetary constraints, but because foreign aid becomes unpopular and offers an easy target for cuts to be enacted by politicians. More generally, public opinion has been argued to be a particularly important source of legitimacy for international development efforts given that it is effectively taxpayers' money being spent on non-citizens (Fransman and Lecomte 2004; Paxton and Knack 2012). These legitimacy concerns are accentuated by the fact that 'home-first' sentiments frequently dominate domestic aid debates and opinions (Henson and Lindstrom 2013).

What do we know about why people support giving aid? The majority of the literature focuses on identifying a series of factors driving general support for aid, while a smaller number of authors are concerned about public support in specific circumstances. Broadly, there is substantial evidence that public attitudes towards foreign aid are structured similarly to other foreign policy concerns (Heinrich, Kobayashi, and Bryant 2016; Lumsdaine and Risse-Kappen 1993). Research has also noted that public support for giving aid and tackling global poverty in donor countries might often be, famously, 'a mile wide, and an inch deep' (Bae and Kim 2016; Henson and Lindstrom 2013; Hudson and van Heerde-Hudson 2012).

Previous research has understood attitudes to be shaped by both rational, instrumental considerations, and moral considerations (Bayram 2017; Hudson and van Heerde-Hudson 2012; Henson and Lindstrom 2013; Paxton and Knack 2012; van Heerde and Hudson 2010). The perceived benefits accruing to donor and recipient countries from aid – including fighting

terrorism and reducing conflict, ensuring good governance, and general poverty reduction – have been shown to be positive drivers of support (Greene and Licht 2018; Heinrich, Kobayashi and Long 2018; Hurst, Tidwell, and Hawkins 2017; Kiratli 2020). Other factors boost opposition: research on public perceptions of aid costs have predominantly focused on how perceptions of corruption, waste and inefficiency negatively impact support for foreign aid (Atkinson and Eastwood 2007; Bauhr, Charron, and Nasiritousi 2013; McDonnell and Lecomte 2005). The literature has shown that these concerns are persistent, with citizens worrying that aid going to poorly governed countries will be ineffective as the aid might be stolen by officials at the top (Knecht 2010; Paxton and Knack 2012). These concerns are also linked to real world policy challenges, such as the need for donor governments to deal with corrupt governments, risking resources being misused, but compelled to keep aid flowing to where it is needed (Dietrich 2013).

People in donor countries care about corruption and whether they can trust recipient governments; that is, concerns over whether the aid money is directed to where it is needed most undermines support for aid (Bahur et al. 2013). Scepticism around the effectiveness of aid in reducing poverty and promoting economic growth in recipient countries further erode public support for aid (Nöel, Thérien, and Dallaire 2004; Milner 2006). More recent data show that perceptions of corruption impact support via concerns over the effectiveness of aid, aid getting to intended recipients, and waste created from inefficiencies (Hudson et al. 2020). Public opinion data suggest that a majority of the German public think that aid does not get to the intended recipients (50%), and that a lot of overseas aid from Germany ends up in the pockets of corrupt politicians in the developing world (53%) (Hudson et al. 2021). Clearly, public concerns around corruption and effectiveness can potentially act as a constraint for policymakers making decisions over where and how to distribute ODA (Allen and Flynn 2018; Nöel, Thérien, and Dallaire 2004).

However, concerns about corruption and effectiveness are not necessarily solid obstacles to strong public support, as policies themselves can shape public views (Allen and Flynn 2018; Otter 2003). Heinrich and Kobayashi (2020: 118) find that the public 'do not wholeheartedly support weakening ties with the nasty recipient' governments, as this would diminish the flows of benefits from the recipient countries to donor countries. They find that greater benefits – in particular, security benefits – increase support for aid. Scholars have also explored how the specifics of how donor countries deliver aid can address corruption concerns, specifically by choosing different channels. Bodenstein and Faust (2017) show that concerns about corruption among citizens in donor countries increase support for conditionality in aid delivery. Aid delivery channels are also of interest to the literature around bypass aid (aid channelled straight to non-state actors instead of going through recipient governments' institutions) as evidence shows that delivery through alternative channels increases the likelihood of aid reaching those who need it most (Allen, Ferry, Shammama 2024; Nancy and Yontcheva 2006). Bypass aid also matters in the domestic political sphere as it can help manage domestic public expectations (Dietrich and Murdie 2017). Looking at aid delivery channels, Dietrich (2021) shows that people in Germany and the United States when asked to

consider hypothetically giving aid to a new country, they would prefer to channel aid away from recipient countries if they suffer from poor governance. Similarly, Tidwell (2020) finds that approval for US aid increases if the public is informed of its delivery through NGOs, and Bayram and Graham (2022) find that earmarking contributions to international organizations increases support for aid delivered through them. Most recently, Aja-Eke (2023) discusses the case of bypassing government and state agencies in aid allocation to Nigeria. Through surveys, interviews, and focus groups with Nigerian respondents, Aja-Eke finds that participants prefer to bypass the Nigerian government to make aid more effective, especially in areas affected by conflict. Though, Aja-Eke also notes that decentralization of aid delivery creates policy challenges such as a loss of control from donor governments (Allen, Ferry, and Shammama. 2024; Allen and Flynn 2018).

Overall, existing evidence shows that public support for aid depends on both material and moral factors, with one of the main negative factors affecting support being perceptions of corruption within recipient governments. Newer research shows that the public also hold structured preferences for using specific channels to deliver aid. We seek to build on this evidence to address a specific angle: we consider the case of a donor country's relationship with a recipient country that has a corrupt ruling system. The donor government seeks to make choices which enjoy public approval, but, we argue, public concern about corruption means that even though the public is broadly supportive of aid it does not support providing aid to a country ruled by a corrupt or unsavoury government.

***H1. Levels of public support for aid to countries ruled by corrupt or unsavoury regimes are lower than those for aid in general***

Hypothesis 1 restates the policy dilemma facing donor governments: countries that face economic challenges and are most in need of aid can often have poor governance and higher levels of corruption. As such, public support does not materialise in cases where it is most important. The donor's policy response to corruption can include bypass aid approaches, channelling aid away from governmental channels through NGOs and other multilateral organizations. We argue that this approach also has effect on donor audiences, as it addresses their concerns about corruption. We hypothesise that offering further non-governmental channels to deliver aid is an effective way to build public support for aid amongst respondents who support aid in general terms, but still express concerns around corruption (Fisher 2015).

***H2. When individuals express support for aid in general, but oppose giving aid to countries ruled by corrupt governments, and who have high levels of concern for corruption, then providing them with the option to re-channel aid away from governments will increase their support for giving aid to these countries***

We introduce the case of Afghanistan and Germany and our empirical approach to test these hypotheses in the following sections.

### 3 Data and empirical approach

We test our argument using the case of German aid to Afghanistan, one of the most aid-dependent countries in the world, where ODA made up 32% of gross national income in 2021 (World Bank 2023). Afghanistan is also one of the poorest countries in the world, with projections showing that as many as 97% of Afghan citizens could fall below the poverty line by 2022 (UNDP 2021), experiencing the negative effects of both the conflict with the Taliban, and the 2022 earthquake. For donor countries, the choice was one of finding the right balance between providing humanitarian and development assistance, making sure resources reach those who need it the most, while avoiding direct financial support to the Taliban. Like other donors, Germany first withdrew aid from the Taliban regime and then rechannelled €527 million in aid to Afghanistan in 2022 through multilaterals, as the German government remained firm in its position to not cooperate with the Taliban. This is in stark contrast with the usual way German development cooperation has worked more generally, with official OECD statistics showing that 56% of ODA from Germany was channelled through the public sector, 22% through multilaterals, and 7% through NGOs (OECD 2023).

We collected the data for this study from two surveys, just before and after the Western military withdrawal from Afghanistan. A first survey fielded in Germany ( $n = 2,036$ ) in March 2022. The data are part of a larger study and were collected online by YouGov and weighted to be nationally representative. We connect these data to a second, previous, study fielded in October 2021, with a larger sample ( $n=6,000$ ) which included a broader set of questions, including a set capturing individuals' perception and concern for corruption. Both samples were drawn from the larger YouGov panel of German respondents ( $\sim 990,000$ ), and matched based on the respondents' unique IDs. The matched sample includes 673 respondents. Descriptive statistics for the two samples are included in the appendix (Table A1–A2).

We focus on three questions included in the March 2022 survey, plus one from the October 2021 panel sample: the first one captures support for aid in general (*support*). The item *support* provides respondents with information on current government expenditure levels on development cooperation and asking them if they want to see expenditure levels increased (a little or a great deal), kept at current levels, or decreased (a little or a great deal). From these response options, we classify respondents as supporters if they indicate they would keep or increase the current levels of expenditure, and as opponents otherwise.

In two further questions, out of which one is randomly shown to participants, we capture support for giving aid to Afghanistan, either as a binary choice (to give, or not to give, captured in *afg\_choice1*), or as a choice of different channels (to give through one of three possible channels, or not to give at all, captured in *afg\_choice2*). The three potential channel options are 'Germany should give aid to both the Afghan government and civil society groups and organizations,' 'Germany should only give development aid to the Afghan government,' and 'Germany should only give development aid to civil society groups and organizations in Afghanistan.' Our final question of interest, from the October 2021 panel survey, captures prior



levels of concern for corruption, asking respondents if they agree or disagree that the majority of aid ends up in the pockets of corrupt politicians in the developing world. The original German wording of the question is included in the appendix B. Descriptive statistics for all four questions are included in Table A3–A4.

We analyse the data in four steps. First, to test H1, we compare general support for development cooperation as captured by *support* and support in the specific case of Afghanistan as captured by *afg\_choice1*. In a second step, we compare responses to *afg\_choice1* and *afg\_choice2* for the whole sample to understand the impact of providing alternative aid channels for aid to Afghanistan on levels of support, by comparing the percentages of respondents who think aid should not be given to Afghanistan at all. In a third step, we examine differences in support for aid to Afghanistan for aid supporters and for aid opponents under the two conditions – i.e. without and with aid channels specified. This allows us to show whether offering alternative delivery channels can re-align general support for development cooperation with specific support for aid to Afghanistan. Fourth, to test H2 and to understand whether this re-alignment is explained by concern for corruption, we examine the interaction effect between general aid support and concern for corruption while varying the effect of (not) providing alternative delivery channels. We use the following estimation strategy:

$$\begin{aligned}
 &AfghanSupport_i \\
 &= \alpha + \beta_1 Channels + \beta_2 AidSupporter + \beta_3 ConcernCorruption + \beta_4 Channels \\
 &\quad * AidSupporter * Concern
 \end{aligned}$$

where *Channels* is the assignment to a condition with or without alternative aid delivery channels, *AidSupporter* is whether the respondent supports aid *in general* (1 supporter, 0 otherwise), *Concern* is the respondents' level of concern for corruption (1 concerned and 0 otherwise).

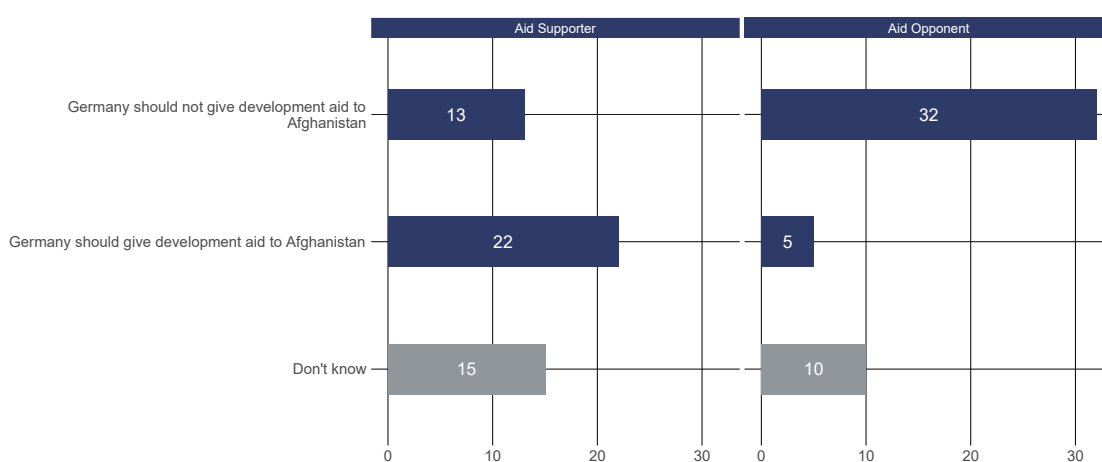
#### 4 Results

Our survey results show that while 62% of respondents are broadly supportive of aid, only 35% of respondents supports giving aid to Afghanistan. This is a substantial gap between general support for development cooperation in Germany (*support*), and the public's willingness to support giving aid to Afghanistan specifically (*afg\_choice1*). When crossing these groups between each other, we find a sizeable group showing inconsistent support: 20% of all respondents (and 32% of all general supporters) are supportive of aid, overall, but do not support giving aid to Afghanistan. A further 13% of all respondents (21% of all general supporters) expressed broad support for aid, but were undecided in the case of giving aid to Afghanistan (see Table A5 in the appendix). This aligns with our expectations captured in H1.

In a second step, we compare responses between *afg\_choice1* and *afg\_choice2* for the whole sample to understand the impact of providing alternative aid channels on support for aid to Afghanistan. Support for giving aid to Afghanistan increases when channel options are provided, as illustrated in Figures 1 and 2. Looking at Figure 1, just over a third of respondents (35%) said that aid should be given to Afghanistan, and 41% said aid should not be given, with the remaining 24% undecided. In the absence of alternative channels to deliver aid, not providing aid is the most common response from the German public. A logistic regression including demographic and party support variables (see Appendix C, Table A6), shows that while none of the demographic variables are significantly correlated with the choice to give aid, supporters of the Alternative for Germany (AfD) party are significantly more likely (+37%) to say aid should not be given at all, while Die Linke supporters are significantly more likely (+23%) to say aid should be given.

Looking at Figure 2, when different aid channels are provided, we see a significant shift towards restoring aid, with 33% of respondents preferring to provide aid through Afghan CSOs. Significantly fewer respondents (16%) preferred to give aid to both government and CSOs; and just 6% of the German public chose to provide aid to the Afghanistan government. Crucially, only 21% of respondents indicated aid should not be given at all. Comparing Figure 1 and Figure 2, we see that specifying aid channels reduces the proportion of those saying aid should not be given at all by 20 percentage points. This difference is statistically significant at the 1% level.

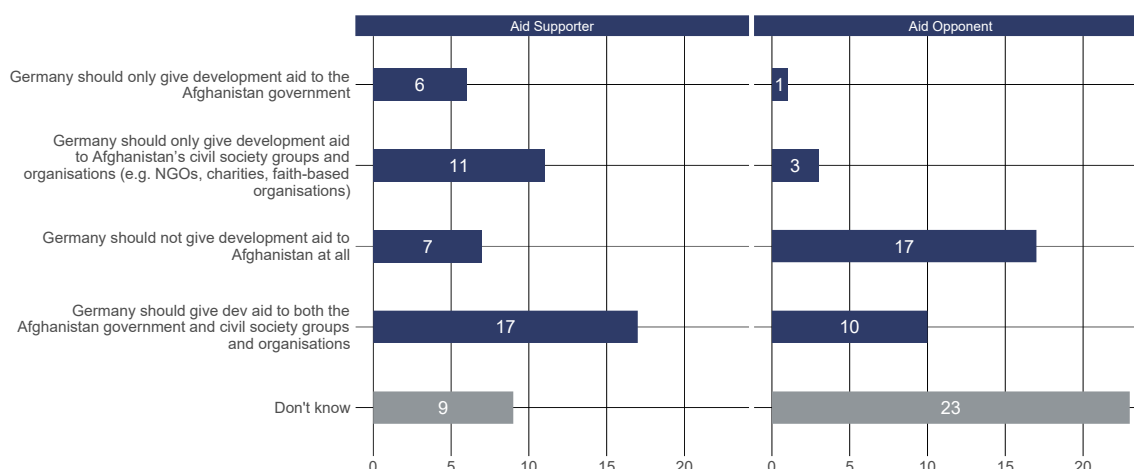
Figure 1: Percentages of support for aid to Afghanistan (Treatment group 1, No channels)



Question: Thinking about the current situation in Afghanistan and development aid from Germany, which of the following best reflects your view? | Base: DE adults | Sample size n= 2,036 | Data are weighted to be nationally representative | Fieldwork by YouGov 11 Mar - 23 Mar 2022

Source: authors' calculations and illustration based on Development Engagement Lab data.

Figure 2: Percentages of support for aid to Afghanistan (Treatment group 2 - Channels)



Question: Thinking about the current situation in Afghanistan and development aid from Germany, which of the following best reflects your view? | Base: DE adults | Sample size n= 2,036 | Data are weighted to be nationally representative | Fieldwork by YouGov 11 Mar - 23 Mar 2022

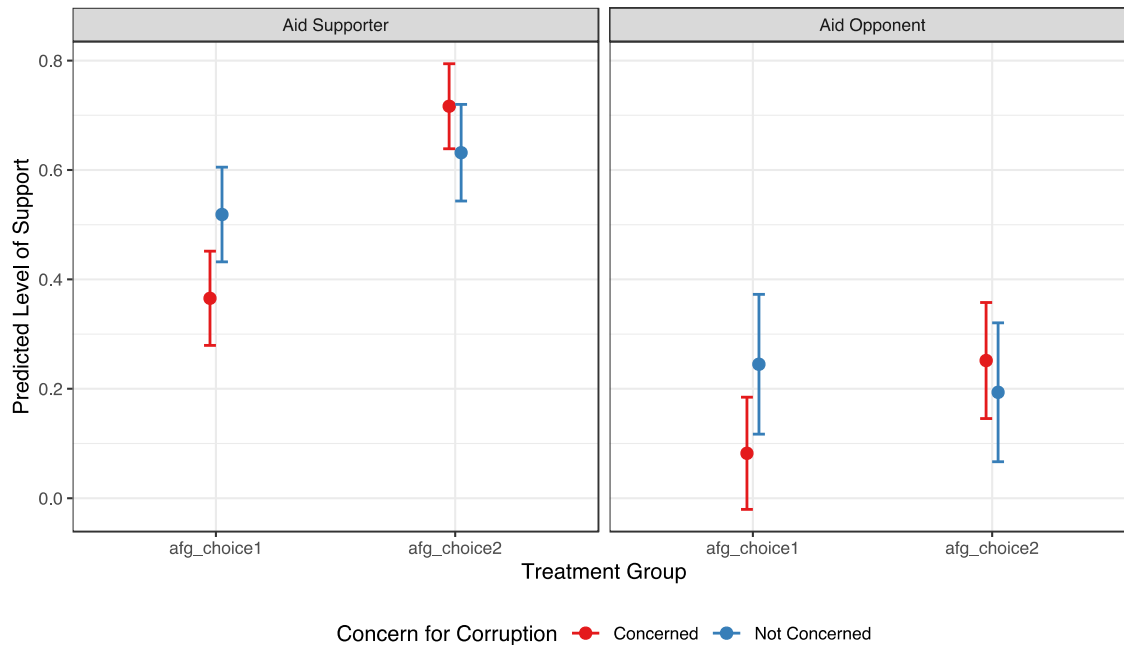
Source: authors' calculations and illustration based on Development Engagement Lab data.

A multinomial logistic regression (see Appendix C, Table A7) shows that compared to a baseline of 'should not give aid at all', older respondents, and Free Democratic Party (FDP) supporters are less likely to say aid should be channelled through the government, while supporters of Die Linke are more likely to say it should. Older aid supporters are less likely to say aid should be channelled through both government and CSOs, while FDP supporters are more likely to pick this option. Finally, more educated respondents are more likely to say aid should be channelled exclusively through CSOs, while AfD respondents are less likely to think it should.

In step three we examine the impact of aid channels for aid supporters and aid opponents, conditional on concern for corruption. Figure 3 illustrates how the difference between *afg\_choice1* and *afg\_choice2* varies by levels of support in general and concern for corruption.

The effect of providing alternative aid channels is different depending on respondents' existing levels of concern about corruption for both aid supporters and aid opponents (see Table A8 in the appendix for the results table). Looking at aid supporters with high levels of concern for corruption (left facet, red dots), the probability of supporting aid to Afghanistan increases by 26 percentage points when they are given alternative channels. The effect is statistically significant at the 1% level. Compare this to aid supporters with low concern for corruption (left facet, blue dots), where the probability of supporting aid only increases 10 percentage points when they are given alternative channels, but this effect is not statistically significant. For aid opponents concerned about corruption (right facet, red dots), the probability of supporting aid to Afghanistan increases by 23 percentage points when they are given alternative channels, with the difference significant at 5% level – a much larger effect compared to a change of 1 percentage point for opponents who are not concerned about corruption (right facet, blue dots).

Figure 3: Predicted levels of support for aid to Afghanistan



Source: authors' calculations and illustration based on Development Engagement Lab data.

Thinking about the challenge of aligning general and specific support for aid, we can infer two effects of providing alternative channels to aid supporters and opponents with varying levels of concern about corruption. First, the effect of providing aid channels is stronger for those who are concerned about corruption, regardless of whether respondents support or oppose aid in general. We can interpret this by thinking of individuals in donor countries who do not support giving aid to unsavoury regimes or countries they fear are corrupt. Re-channelling aid can, and does address part of their concerns, as we identify the largest differences in support just for those who are concerned about corruption but generally supportive respondents. Support increases only slightly, not significantly, for aid supporters who are not concerned about corruption: their concerns lie elsewhere, and remain unaddressed by newly available channel options.

Equally interestingly, among opponents concerned about corruption, the provision of channels does increase support for aid, but the majority of opponents remains opponents, as less than 30% support giving aid to Afghanistan. That said, we observe the largest upward shift in support for aid for those opponents who are concerned about corruption, showing once more that channel options are relevant to reduce concern for aid being stolen or misused.

## 5 Conclusion

Governments in donor countries are keen to have the support of their citizens when providing aid to developing countries. Evidence shows that public support for development cooperation is reduced when concerns about corruption are high. This represents a serious dilemma for policymakers when they are faced with a population that is in need of assistance but live in a country characterised by poor governance, high levels of corruption, or rule by 'unsavoury regimes'. In such cases, we find that individuals who are generally supportive of aid, are instead opposed to it when it should be given to such countries. The evidence presented in this paper shows that providing alternative channels to deliver aid can realign support among those concerned about corruption.

We contribute two key findings on the impact of aid channels and aid withdrawal to the political economy of development literature. First, we find that when channels are specified, they significantly shift German public attitudes from, on balance, not giving aid to giving aid to Afghanistan, conditional on the channel through which aid will be delivered. This finding sits alongside recent evidence showing that support for aid increases when earmarked and channelled through international organizations and NGOs (Bayram and Graham 2022).

We also argue that this demonstrates the importance of moving away from binary measurements (in academic research) and debates (in public and policy spheres) with the public on whether to give or not give aid; donor publics can support giving aid even in complicated situations, if they are given reassurance through, say, in this case, delivering resources through NGOs. It also suggests that donor publics have a sophisticated and differentiated set of views on how to deliver aid. In the case of Afghanistan, over a third prefer giving aid to Afghan civil society groups and organizations but, interestingly, a further 16% of respondents supported providing necessary aid through the Afghan government, provided it works alongside civil society organizations (CSOs). When we show both the effectiveness of channels as reassurance, and the sophistication of attitudinal structures, our findings align with other existing findings (e.g. Aja Eke 2023; Bayram and Graham 2022; Dietrich 2021; Tidwell 2020).

How far do the findings for Afghanistan extend to other country contexts? The precise issues here are distinct to Afghanistan – this was a real specific case involving the return of the Taliban to power, with abundant media coverage of many countries declaring publicly they would stop giving aid to the regime. However, evidence suggests that concerns around corruption are extremely common across donor countries (Bauhr et al. 2013). Concerns about waste, corruption, and unsavoury regimes are enduring perceptions that people in donor countries have of the developing world. This suggests that these findings and approaches will likely generalise across more donor-recipient countries' scenarios: future research can extend our results to a broader set of cases.

Afghanistan is also an intrinsically important case, with our data capturing public support for aid overall, and within different potential aid channels, in the immediate aftermath of the withdrawal of Western troops and influence in Afghanistan. As Afghanistan faces its new challenge under the renewed rule of the Taliban, re-channelling aid will shape its development trajectories in the years to come, both as it can secure the public support in donor countries to keep giving aid, but also as resources channelled through CSOs affect what is (and is not) achievable in the development of the country.

In 2022, following the United Nations' appeal for more aid to Afghanistan (UN News 2022), the German government pledged additional resources to help the country. The German government also announced they would be channelling aid away from the Afghan government and delivering it through charities, NGOs and international organizations working in the country. Our findings show that the German government's plan to use alternative aid channels is also a useful mechanism to build public support and to help shift the public away from the binary 'to give or not give aid' debate. Using (and publicising the use of) alternative channels can address long-standing public concerns about some of the 'costs' of delivering aid programmes, particularly in fragile contexts, where aid is often needed the most.

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**APPENDIX A: Descriptive statistics tables**

Table A1: Sample sizes and fieldwork dates

Sample		Sample size	Start	End
Full sample		2,036	11 Mar 2022	23 Mar 2022
Overlap sample		673		

Source: authors' calculations based on Development Engagement Lab data

Table A2: Demographic characteristics of the samples

Variable	Full sample	Overlap sample
Age (mean)	49.9	52.6
% Women	50.9	46.8
% High school certificate	33.2	21.6

Note: data on university-level degrees is not available in our dataset, hence the use of completion of high school certificates.

Source: authors' calculations based on Development Engagement Lab data.

Table A3: Outcome variables of the survey experiment on aid channels

Group 1: control	Group sample	Proportion	95% CI low	95% CI high
Should give aid	354	34.78	1.49	31.85
Should not give aid	421	41.29	1.54	38.27
Don't know	244	23.93	1.34	21.31
Group 2: treatment	Group sample	Proportion	95% CI low	95% CI high
Only to the government	63	6.25	0.76	4.76
Both to government and civil society groups organizations	164	16.15	1.16	13.88
Only to civil society groups and organizations	333	32.78	1.47	29.89
Should not give aid	216	21.28	1.28	18.76
Don't know	239	23.54	1.33	20.93

Source: authors' calculations based on Development Engagement Lab data

Table A4: Explanatory variables: support for aid and concern for corruption

Support for aid: Do you think that the government should increase or decrease the amount of money that it spends on overseas aid to poor countries?	% of respondents
Increase a great deal	6.1
Increase somewhat	17.5
Keep the same	38.8
Decrease somewhat	9.9
Decrease a great deal	13.2
Don't know	14.5

Corruption: A lot of overseas aid from Germany ends up in the pockets of corrupt politicians in the developing world.	% of respondents
Strongly agree	25.0
Agree	30.7
Neither agree nor disagree	26.9
Disagree	5.2
Strongly disagree	2.9
Don't know	9.3

Source: authors' calculations based on Development Engagement Lab data

Table A5: General aid support and support for aid to Afghanistan

Afg_choice1	Afghanistan supporter, %	Afghanistan opponent, %
Aid supporter	28.8	32.5
Aid opponent	5.9	32.7

Source: authors' calculations based on Development Engagement Lab data

## **APPENDIX B: Wording of Survey Questions (English and German)**

### **[support]**

Aus ihrem gesamten Haushaltsvolumen in Höhe von etwa 360 Milliarden Euro stellt die Bundesregierung zurzeit 3,5 Prozent — 12,6 Milliarden Euro - für die Entwicklungszusammenarbeit an arme Länder bereit. Sollte die Regierung Ihrer Meinung nach den Betrag, den sie für die Entwicklungszusammenarbeit ausgibt, erhöhen oder senken?

- <1> Erheblich erhöhen
- <2> Etwas erhöhen
- <3> Nicht verändern
- <4> Etwas verringern
- <5> Erheblich verringern
- <6> Ich weiß nicht

### **[afg\_choice1]**

Welche der folgenden Aussagen entspricht am ehesten Ihrer Meinung, wenn Sie an die aktuelle Situation in Afghanistan und die deutsche Entwicklungszusammenarbeit denken?

- <1> Deutschland sollte Entwicklungshilfe an Afghanistan leisten
- <2> Deutschland sollte keine Entwicklungshilfe an Afghanistan leisten
- <3 fixed> Weiß nicht

### **[afg\_choice2]**

Welche der folgenden Aussagen entspricht am ehesten Ihrer Meinung, wenn Sie an die aktuelle Situation in Afghanistan und die deutsche Entwicklungszusammenarbeit denken?

- <1> Deutschland sollte Entwicklungshilfe sowohl für die afghanische Regierung als auch für zivilgesellschaftliche Gruppen und Organisationen leisten
- <2> Deutschland sollte nur Entwicklungshilfe für die afghanische Regierung leisten
- <3> Deutschland sollte Entwicklungshilfe nur an zivilgesellschaftliche Gruppen und Organisationen in Afghanistan leisten (z. B. NGOs, Wohltätigkeitsorganisationen, glaubensgebundene Organisationen)
- <4> Deutschland sollte überhaupt keine Entwicklungshilfe an Afghanistan leisten
- <5 fixed> Weiß nicht

[corruption]

Inwieweit stimmen Sie den folgenden Aussagen zu Hilfeleistungen des deutschen Staates zu bzw. nicht zu?

-[cost1\_w4\_2] Ein großer Anteil der deutschen Entwicklungszusammenarbeit landet in den Taschen korrupter Politiker in den Entwicklungsländern.

<1> Ich stimme voll und ganz zu

<2> Ich stimme zu

<3> Ich stimme weder zu, noch stimme ich nicht zu

<4> Ich stimme nicht zu

<5> Ich stimme überhaupt nicht zu

<6 xor fixed> Ich weiß nicht

**APPENDIX C: Regression model results**

Table A6: Model 1: Logistic regression: control group binary choice

	Germany should not give aid
Age	0.00126 (0.00659)
Gender	-0.211 (0.192)
Education	-0.106 (0.126)
Household Income	-0.0364 (0.0358)
Party support: SPD	-0.311 (0.259)
Party support: CDU/CSU	0.0594 (0.260)
Party support: AfD	2.042*** (0.422)
Party support: FDP	0.569* (0.335)
Party support: Die Linke	-1.040** (0.453)
Constant	0.875 (0.668)
Observations	680

Note: robust standard errors in parentheses \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$

Source: authors' calculations based on Development Engagement Lab data:

Table A7: Model 2: Multinomial logistic regression: treatment group channel choice (base is 'Germany should not give aid at all')

	Government only	Government and CSOs	CSOs only
Age	-0.0201** (0.00879)	-0.0424*** (0.0145)	-0.00553 (0.00705)
Gender	-0.0346 (0.253)	-0.291 (0.390)	-0.0101 (0.214)
Education	0.0276 (0.185)	-0.397 (0.330)	0.305** (0.149)
Household Income	-0.0929 (0.0589)	-0.0635 (0.0865)	-0.0505 (0.0454)
Party support: SPD	0.309 (0.342)	0.208 (0.573)	0.234 (0.298)
Party support: CDU/CSU	0.698* (0.385)	-0.641 (0.782)	0.299 (0.338)
Party support: AfD	-1.761*** (0.490)	0.347 (0.633)	-1.543*** (0.374)
Party support: FDP	0.144 (0.496)	1.694*** (0.650)	0.494 (0.385)
Party support: Die Linke	1.260** (0.543)	0.0519 (1.154)	0.281 (0.546)
Constant	1.114 (0.825)	2.326 (1.743)	0.0971 (0.758)
Observations	690	690	690

Note: robust standard errors in parentheses\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

Source: authors' calculations based on Development Engagement Lab data

Table A8: Interaction model

	<i><b>Dependent variable:</b></i>	
	Support	
	Aid Supporters	Aid Supporters
Channels	0.113* (0.067)	-0.051 (0.081)
Corruption	-0.153** (0.066)	-0.163** (0.073)
ChannelsXCorruption	0.238*** (0.091)	0.221** (0.104)
Constant	0.519*** (0.047)	0.245*** (0.057)
Observations	445	228
R <sup>2</sup>	0.073	0.035
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.066	0.022
Residual Std. Error	0.499 (df = 441)	0.414 (df = 224)
F Statistic	11.504*** (df = 3; 441)	2.702** (df = 3; 224)

Note: \*p\*\*p\*\*\*p<0.01

Source: authors' calculations based on Development Engagement Lab data.